



EXPOSITORY

Commentary

John - Acts

ESV Expository Commentary

VOL. IX

John–Acts

EDITORS

Iain M. Duguid

James M. Hamilton Jr.

Jay Sklar



EXPOSITORY
Commentary

VOL. IX

John—Acts

John

James M. Hamilton Jr.

Acts

Brian J. Vickers

ESV Expository Commentary, Volume 9: John–Acts

Copyright © 2019 by Crossway

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design: Jordan Singer

First printing 2019

Printed in Italy

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Scripture quotation marked CSB has been taken from *The Christian Standard Bible*®. Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from *The New American Standard Bible*®. Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission.

The quotation marked NETS is taken from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, © 2007 by the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Inc. Used by permission of Oxford University Press. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NIV 1984 are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

There is also a brief citation of the *New Living Translation* (NLT).

Scripture quotations marked AT are the author's translation.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the authors.

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-4660-0

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

L	E	G	O		2	7		2	6		2	5		2	4		2	3		2	2		2	1		2	0		1	9				
1	5		1	4		1	3		1	2		1	1		1	0		9		8		7		6		5		4		3		2		1

CONTENTS

Tables	7
Preface to the ESV Expository Commentary	9
Contributors	11
Abbreviations	13
 John	 17
<i>James M. Hamilton Jr.</i>	
 Acts	 309
<i>Brian J. Vickers</i>	
 Scripture Index	 583

TABLES

John

1.1	Opening and Closing Statements of John 2:1–12 and 4:46–54	54
1.2	Time, Place, and People at Beginning and End of John 2:1–12	59
1.3	Parallels between John 3:25–36 and 3:1–21	80
1.4	Difference between Jesus and His Opponents in John 8:23	162
1.5	The Seed of the Serpent vs. the Seed of the Woman in John 8	171

Acts

2.1	Parallels between Psalm 16 and Jesus' Resurrection	359
2.2	Psalm 2:1–2 and Its Christological Fulfillment	376

PREFACE

TO THE ESV EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

The Bible pulsates with life, and the Spirit conveys the electrifying power of Scripture to those who lay hold of it by faith, ingest it, and live by it. God has revealed himself in the Bible, which makes the words of Scripture sweeter than honey, more precious than gold, and more valuable than all riches. These are the words of life, and the Lord has entrusted them to his church, for the sake of the world.

He has also provided the church with teachers to explain and make clear what the Word of God means and how it applies to each generation. We pray that all serious students of God's Word, both those who seek to teach others and those who pursue study for their own personal growth in godliness, will be served by the ESV Expository Commentary. Our goal has been to provide a clear, crisp, and Christ-centered explanation of the biblical text. All Scripture speaks of Christ (Luke 24:27), and we have sought to show how each biblical book helps us to see the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

To that end, each contributor has been asked to provide commentary that is:

- *exegetically sound*—self-consciously submissive to the flow of thought and lines of reasoning discernible in the biblical text;
- *robustly biblical-theological*—reading the Bible as diverse yet bearing an overarching unity, narrating a single storyline of redemption culminating in Christ;
- *globally aware*—aimed as much as possible at a global audience, in line with Crossway's mission to provide the Bible and theologically responsible resources to as many people around the world as possible;
- *broadly reformed*—standing in the historical stream of the Reformation, affirming that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, taught in Scripture alone, for God's glory alone; holding high a big God with big grace for big sinners;
- *doctrinally conversant*—fluent in theological discourse; drawing appropriate brief connections to matters of historical or current theological importance;
- *pastorally useful*—transparently and reverently "sitting under the text"; avoiding lengthy grammatical/syntactical discussions;
- *application-minded*—building brief but consistent bridges into contemporary living in both Western and non-Western contexts (being aware of the globally diverse contexts toward which these volumes are aimed);

- *efficient in expression*—economical in its use of words; not a word-by-word analysis but a crisply moving exposition.

In terms of Bible translation, the ESV is the base translation used by the authors in their notes, but the authors were expected to consult the text in the original languages when doing their exposition and were not required to agree with every decision made by the ESV translators.

As civilizations crumble, God's Word stands. And we stand on it. The great truths of Scripture speak across space and time, and we aim to herald them in a way that will be globally applicable.

May God bless the study of his Word, and may he smile on this attempt to expound it.

—The Publisher and Editors

CONTRIBUTORS

Editors

IAIN M. DUGUID

PhD, Cambridge University

Professor of Old Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

JAMES M. HAMILTON JR.

PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Professor of Biblical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary;

Preaching Pastor, Kenwood Baptist Church, Louisville

JAY SKLAR

PhD, University of Gloucestershire

Professor of Old Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

Authors

JAMES M. HAMILTON JR.

PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Professor of Biblical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary;

Preaching Pastor, Kenwood Baptist Church, Louisville

(John)

BRIAN J. VICKERS

PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Biblical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Assistant Editor, The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology

(Acts)

ABBREVIATIONS

General

AT	Author's Translation	lit.	literal, literally
c.	circa, about, approximately	LXX	Septuagint
cf.	confer, compare, see	mg.	marginal reading
ch., chs.	chapter(s)	NT	New Testament
d.	died	OT	Old Testament
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by, edition	par.	parallel passage
e.g.	for example	r.	reigned
esp.	especially	repr.	reprinted
et al.	and others	rev.	revised (by)
etc.	and so on	s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> (under the word)
ff.	and following	trans.	translator, translated by
Gk.	Greek	v., vv.	verse(s)
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	vol(s).	volume(s)
i.e.	that is	vs.	versus

Bibliographic

BDAG	Bauer W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NAC	New American Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
SBJT	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>

<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Books of the Bible

Gen.	Genesis	Amos	Amos
Ex.	Exodus	Obad.	Obadiah
Lev.	Leviticus	Jonah	Jonah
Num.	Numbers	Mic.	Micah
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Nah.	Nahum
Josh.	Joshua	Hab.	Habakkuk
Judg.	Judges	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Ruth	Ruth	Hag.	Haggai
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Zech.	Zechariah
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Mal.	Malachi
1 Kings	1 Kings	Matt.	Matthew
2 Kings	2 Kings	Mark	Mark
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Luke	Luke
2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	John	John
Ezra	Ezra	Acts	Acts
Neh.	Nehemiah	Rom.	Romans
Est.	Esther	1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
Job	Job	2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Ps., Pss.	Psalms	Gal.	Galatians
Prov.	Proverbs	Eph.	Ephesians
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Phil.	Philippians
Song	Song of Solomon	Col.	Colossians
Isa.	Isaiah	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians
Jer.	Jeremiah	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians
Lam.	Lamentations	1 Tim.	1 Timothy
Ezek.	Ezekiel	2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Dan.	Daniel	Titus	Titus
Hos.	Hosea	Philem.	Philemon
Joel	Joel	Heb.	Hebrews

James James

1 Pet. 1 Peter

2 Pet. 2 Peter

1 John 1 John

2 John 2 John

3 John 3 John

Jude Jude

Rev. Revelation

Apocrypha and Other Noncanonical Sources Cited

1 Clem. 1 Clement

1 Macc. 1 Maccabees

2 Macc. 2 Maccabees

JOHN

James M. Hamilton Jr.

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN

Overview

Mark's Gospel begins with John the Baptist. Luke backs his starting point up to the parents of the Baptist. Matthew's opening genealogy starts with Abraham and works down to the birth of Jesus. The first phrase of John's Gospel reaches farther back—all the way back—to the beginning, evoking the opening words of Genesis and its account of the world's creation with the phrase "In the beginning" (1:1).

After his majestic opening (1:1–18), John narrates four momentous days at the outset of Jesus' ministry (1:19–51) then presents what Jesus said and did in a cycle of events beginning and ending in Cana, framing a trip to Jerusalem and back (2:1–4:54). In chapters 5–12 the narrative shows Jesus in relation to Israel's feasts. The feast in chapter 5 is unnamed, and then Jesus is presented in relation to the Passover in chapter 6 and the Feast of Tabernacles (ESV "Booths") in chapters 7–9. Jesus is at the Feast of Dedication in chapter 10, then goes to Jerusalem for the Passover, where he will be betrayed (chs. 11–12).

There are three Passovers in chapters 1–12 (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), necessitating at least three different years for these events to unfold. Chapters 13–20, by contrast, relate the events of an eight- to ten-day period (20:26). Jesus was betrayed on Thursday night after the events of chapters 13–17, put on trial through the night into early morning, then crucified on Friday (chs. 18–19). He rose from the dead on the third day—that Sunday morning (ch. 20). Eight days later, presumably the Monday one week after the resurrection, he appeared to Thomas at the end of chapter 20. The breakfast on the beach in chapter 21 takes place on an unspecified later morning ("after this"; 21:1) prior to Jesus' ascension, which took place forty days after his resurrection (Acts 1:3).

Title

Reliable early manuscripts of John's Gospel (among which are P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵) present its title as "The Gospel according to John." Other high-quality early manuscripts (such as Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) present a shortened form, "According to John." There are no manuscripts of any NT Gospel bearing variations on this formula; all the witnesses to the titles of the Gospels have either the full title or a shortened

version. Martin Hengel¹ has persuasively argued that the uniform manuscript titles of the four canonical Gospels most likely stem from the opening phrase of Mark's Gospel, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1), and that these books would have needed titles from the time of their production and distribution. The fact that the manuscripts do not reflect a wide variety of titles but are consistent in their presentation of the one phrase or its shortened form indicates that these books *always* bore these titles.

Author

Western culture has suffered from a widespread fad in scholarship involving profound skepticism about authors and authorship.² Scholars have posited that Homer did not write the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Shakespeare did not write the plays for which he is famous, and Moses did not write the Pentateuch, Isaiah did not write his book, and John son of Zebedee did not write the Gospel attributed to him.

The evidence, however—from the titles on the manuscripts to the statements found within the Fourth Gospel itself, as well as those made about it by people nearest its time of composition—points to the conclusion that John son of Zebedee wrote the Fourth Gospel. Those positing a different author often set aside primary source data and reliable early testimony in favor of elaborate theories reflecting deep suspicion of the evidence in our possession.

No manuscript attributes the Fourth Gospel to anyone other than John. In the body of the Fourth Gospel, we find it claiming to have been written by the beloved disciple (John 21:20–25). When we investigate which disciple this could be, the evidence points to John son of Zebedee. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus took only Peter, James, and John with him to heal Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:37), to his transfiguration (Luke 9:28), and to pray on the night when he was betrayed (Matt. 26:37). Such evidence indicates that Peter and the two sons of Zebedee enjoyed unique intimacy with Jesus and one another.

In John's Gospel, Peter is named along with the sons of Zebedee in 21:2. John's Gospel also shows Peter and the beloved disciple communicating with each other at the Last Supper through signals (cf. "motioned"; 13:24), and the beloved disciple asks Jesus about the delicate issue of who would betray him (13:25). Later Peter and the beloved disciple run to the empty tomb together (20:4). Since this Gospel was never attributed to James, whom Herod killed at a relatively early point (Acts 12:2), it does not seem likely that James son of Zebedee was the beloved disciple. When joined with the universal early attribution of the Fourth Gospel to John son of Zebedee, the most natural conclusion is that John has chosen to refer to himself as the beloved disciple.

This conclusion from within John's Gospel is supported by universal testimony from the early church that John son of Zebedee wrote this book.³ Some have

¹ Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000).

² See, e.g., the Introduction in Homer, *The Iliad: Books 1–12*, ed. William F. Wyatt, trans. A. T. Murray, 2nd ed., vol. 170, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1–6.

³ See especially Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

suggested that the first-person plural statement in John 21:24 suggests something like an editorial committee or later community, but John makes a similar first-person plural statement in 3 John 12.⁴

Date and Occasion

John could have written his Gospel at any point between the resurrection of Jesus and his own death, which likely came near the end of the first century. Early church tradition held that John wrote Revelation near the end of the first century, but we have no explicit statement as to when John wrote his Gospel. John's Gospel seems to assume knowledge of the deeds and teachings of Jesus recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (cf. John 3:24 and Mark 1:14),⁵ but that does not necessarily mean John wrote after they did. After all, John was with Jesus when Jesus did and taught what the other Gospels record, and John knew and worked with Peter and other early Christians, so he would have known how they told the story of Jesus.

John states the reason he wrote in 20:31: "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 no doubt wanted unbelievers to *start* believing and believers to *continue* believing.

Genre and Literary Structure

John's interpretive perspective, which includes his understanding of the world, its problems, and how Jesus solves them, as well how to interpret earlier Scripture and write a narrative that continues its story—in short, every aspect of John's worldview—has been quarried, hewn, sculpted, and textured by Scripture. That is to say, John was a biblical theologian. John's heart, mind, and soul were enlivened by the way Jesus taught him to understand the OT's accounts of how God created and redeemed, covenanted and promised. Jesus not only taught John, he also sent the Holy Spirit (20:22), with the result that the OT's commands, counsel, and covenants, as well as its patterns, promises, and paradigms, determined how John approached the incomparably difficult task of describing what Jesus said and did, and why it matters (cf. 21:25).

All this leads to the assertion that the best phrase for describing the kind of literature found in the Gospel of John is *biblical narrative*. This category recognizes the material similarity between the narratives in the Bible that take for granted everything Moses presented in the Torah, the narratives of the Latter Prophets, and the interpretations of the same in the Former Prophets and Writings. This material similarity stems from a shared understanding of creation, man, sin, redemption, and the promise of a new creation that become the wellspring of hope and the substance of faith.

⁴ For further discussion of Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); and D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

⁵ See Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

John operates from the same worldview and employs the same literary techniques used by authors of biblical narrative from Moses to the unnamed writers of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, and his perspective is deepened by the words of OT prophets such as Isaiah, psalmists such as David, and sages such as Solomon. Thus the NT Gospels are a lot more like the OT narratives whose story they purport to continue than like Greek biographies of significant figures.

The choice to write in Greek rather than Hebrew appears to have been an out-working of the command Jesus gave his disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20). The apostles wrote in Greek not to distinguish their books from OT biblical narratives but to put the story in the lingua franca of the day, to make known God’s mighty works among the nations. The commentary that follows seeks to understand how John intended the words he used to activate a dynamic between his narrative and the OT, a dynamic that presents Jesus as the culmination, fulfillment, resolution, and realization of everything anticipated in the Law and the Prophets.

As to literary structure, a pervasive feature of biblical narrative and poetry is the arrangement of material into chiasmic shape. I am fairly confident of the chiasmic structure that will be presented below for John 1:1–18 and John 2–4. I suspect a wide-angle chiasmic structure of John 5–12, 13–17, and 18–21. More work needs to be done on these matters, and I do not consider the suggestions made in the commentary to be the last word. I would not be surprised to find that John has arranged the whole of his Gospel into chiasmic shape, but the key to that locked secret remains elusive.⁶

Theology of John; Its Relationship to the Rest of the Bible

John had the daunting task of attempting to use words to describe how the most important person who ever lived did the most important things ever accomplished, leading up to the single most important execution that has ever taken place, followed by the unprecedented resurrection of the executed innocent, in fulfillment of the most important body of literature ever written to that point in human history. John discharged his task by employing strategies utilized by previous biblical authors. The genre constraints and expectations of “biblical narrative” provide the medium for his message. These strategies, constraints, and expectations include the reuse of broad biblical categories of thought, repetition of key phrases, engagement with potent themes, and careful deployment of significant terms. Often the categories, themes, and terms evoke prior biblical writings, making the understanding of the OT that John learned from Jesus a necessary prerequisite for understanding John’s presentation of Jesus. This means John’s Gospel and the OT must be read in light of each other, each expositing and informing the other.

⁶ The arrangement proposed by David Deeks and cited by Peter Leithart fails to persuade because the points of contact highlighted in the commentary that follows prove more convincing (cf. Peter Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009], 169). See also the extensive discussion of chiasmus in John’s Gospel by John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 165–201; and John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay, eds., *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999).

In keeping with my attempt to answer the question *What Is Biblical Theology?*,⁷ this discussion of John's theology will be organized around John's contributions to the big story of the world, symbols summarizing and interpreting that story, and truths arising out of the story and its symbols, giving rise to worship, culture, and a certain way of life.

STORY

John plugs his narrative into the wider story the Bible tells by manifestly adding to what Genesis says about how everything got started. No other Gospel begins the way John does, with overt assertions that Jesus, identified as the Word (1:1–4, 14), both was with God and was God from the beginning (1:1), a statement so bold he rephrases and repeats it (1:2); and that, through Jesus, God created all things (1:3). John's prologue explores some of the implications of this new revelation about the nature of God: namely, that Jesus the Messiah is God incarnate. This revelation marches inexorably toward the Christian understanding of the tri-unity of God. John makes suggestive comments about how Jesus is the source of life and light for all people (1:4, 9); how the world did not recognize its Creator and the Jews refused to receive him (1:10–11); how the new birth leads to welcoming Jesus and receiving a new status as children of God (1:12–13); how at the incarnation Jesus tabernacled among his people (1:14); how the grace and truth in Jesus fulfills the revelation of the same in the law of Moses (1:17); and how Jesus came from the Father's bosom to make him known. Still, much of what John says is tantalizingly brief, and many things are left unexplored.

John seems content to assert the reality that Jesus has always been God and has always been with God, establishing a unity and diversity within the Godhead. From there, John tells the story of Jesus such that his Gospel is *both* a straightforward historical narrative *and* a pervasively allusive biblical-theological account whose resonance with the OT is so full and sophisticated that it takes its place as one of the great achievements of human art. The Gospel according to John is, of course, more than art, being a revelation of God himself inspired by the Holy Spirit, but it is not less. Like a symphony studied centuries after its creation, its melodies and harmonies charm those who hear only the surface, while astounding those who explore its depths.

Also like a master composer of music, John does not explicitly state what everything means, as I will try to do in this commentary. Instead, he lets the rhythms and reminiscences, signals and hints provoke his audience to worship Jesus, surpassing the wonder one might feel in response to the music of a Bach or a Beethoven. John intends his audience to stand amazed at the Nazarene.

The OT's story begins in the pristine and pure garden of Eden. There everything God made was good, but man sinned, bringing God's words of judgment, including a curse on the ground. As the narrative unfolds and the prophets and poets interpret that narrative, it becomes clear that the words of hope God spoke

⁷ James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

in Genesis 3:15 about the seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head produce an expectation that God will raise up a redeemer, seed of the woman, seed of Abraham, seed of David, through whom the adversary will be silenced and the curse rolled back, resulting in a renewal of creation, a swallowing up of death itself. God's people will enjoy God's presence in a new heaven and new earth.

That wide-angle story of exile from Eden with the hope of a return is enacted on a small scale as God makes covenants with Abraham and Israel. God promised land to Abraham in Genesis 12:7. Abraham left that land because of a famine, an outworking of the Genesis 3:17 curse on the land. But God brought Abraham back to that land and revealed himself to him (Genesis 15). Similarly, another famine forced Abraham's descendants out of the land, and Jacob and his sons went to Egypt. Once again, God brought Israel out of Egypt and restored them to the land, revealing himself to them at Sinai with words reminiscent of his Genesis 15 revelation of himself to Abraham (cf. Ex. 20:2; Gen. 15:7).

The genealogy in Genesis 5 hints at Adam's role as the son of God (Gen. 5:1–4; cf. Luke 3:38); at the exodus God identifies Israel as his firstborn son (Ex. 4:22–23), later promising that the king from David's line would be a son to him (2 Sam. 7:14). As Adam was driven from Eden for his sin, so Israel was driven from the Land of Promise for breaking the covenant. The one hailed as the "Son of God . . . the King of Israel" (John 1:49) came to succeed where Adam and Israel failed—to bruise the serpent's head, conquer death, and set in motion a new and greater exodus leading to the enjoyment of a new and better Land of Promise, a new heavens and earth.

John shows that Jesus has come as the expected son of David, the Son of God who will bring Israel's history to its anticipated climax, by presenting Jesus in relation to Israel's feasts. The relationship between Jesus and Israel's feasts invites us to consider John's development of biblical symbolism.

SYMBOL

Israel's feasts were symbolic reenactments of what God had done for them. Passover commemorated the exodus from Egypt, Tabernacles celebrated God's provision and protection in the wilderness, and Weeks seems to build on the creation week to point to the cycles of life under God's law in God's land (cf. Deut. 16:16). John mainly highlights Jesus in relation to Passover (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:39) and Tabernacles (7:2; cf. 7:1–10:21). John also includes an unnamed feast (5:1) and mentions the Feast of Dedication (10:22), which celebrated the rededication of the temple after the Maccabean revolt in 167–164 BC.

These feasts summarized liturgically God's mighty acts in the past, embedded them in present experience, and shaped expectations of the way God would fulfill his promises in the future. The yearly celebrations impressed the contours of God's character and way of acting on the consciousness of the worshiper. The symbols were used in worship to communicate a whole worldview meant to condition the hearts of those who hoped for more like this in the future.

Throughout the writings of Israel's prophets we find indications that God would do for Israel in the future what he did for them in the past; he saved Israel with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm at the exodus, and he would extend his arm a second time; he brought Israel through the Red Sea and Jordan River, and he would be with them when they passed through the waters; he gave manna from heaven, and he would prepare a table in the wilderness; he provided water from the rock, and he would make streams in the desert; he gave Israel the land, and he would make it like Eden. In all this, Israel's prophets, guided by the institution of the feasts, used the historical acts of God celebrated in the symbols to depict the way God would save his people in the future.

The repetition of patterns and events in Scripture attuned people like John to pick up on occasions recalling those repetitions. John saw Jesus do things corresponding to significant events, patterns, and symbols in Israel's Scriptures, and he interpreted Jesus as the fulfillment to which the Scriptures pointed. This is why he records the Baptist's heralding Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36), saw significance in a wedding on the third day (2:1), and recounted how Jesus discussed the manna from heaven after feeding the five thousand (6:1–71); and it is why the narrative set at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (which celebrated the pillar of fire in the wilderness and the water the people drank from the rock) has Jesus calling people to come to him if they are thirsty (7:37–39) and to follow him and not walk in darkness (8:12). John understood Jesus as the “good shepherd” who would take his people to the kingdom God has prepared for them (10:1–21).

More could be said about how symbols function in John's Gospel, but I will reserve further thoughts for the exposition in the body of the commentary. At this point we turn to consider the way that the stories and the symbols give rise to certain bedrock truth convictions.

TRUTH

Stories explaining the world give rise to foundational truths and assumptions. That is to say, the Bible does not present Moses or other biblical authors as starting with philosophical truth claims, illustrated by invented stories. Rather, Moses and the other biblical authors encountered God, heard the story of what he had done, and derived truth from the stories. We believe God to be the Creator because Genesis 1 shows him creating the world, not because we reasoned our way to a philosophical claim and then made up a story to fit.

We could go on and on listing propositions like the ones that follow, propositions we learn from the story John tells: Jesus is God. God keeps his word, enforcing commands and fulfilling promises. God made the world good and will overcome evil. Man is lost in sin and unable to save himself. The Spirit gives life to those who embrace Jesus and his teaching by faith. The OT narratives inform the Christian sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The world will respond to followers of Jesus the same way they responded to Jesus himself. Jesus has been raised from

the dead and will return to take his followers to the place he has gone to prepare for them.

To encounter Jesus in John is to encounter one who inspires us to thank and praise God. That is to say, the Gospel of John provokes the worship of Jesus.

WORSHIP

Jesus declares in John 4:23 that the Father is seeking people who will worship him in Spirit and truth. The story gives rise to symbols that summarize, interpret, and reinforce its significance, and from the story we derive truths teaching us about God and his world. What we learn from the truths and see in the beauty of the symbols about the grandeur of the story provokes our hearts to offer to God the thanks and praise due him for his incomparable love and power and goodness and, in a word, glory. We were made for this. We long to celebrate something beyond ourselves with undiluted joy over its undiminished greatness. The God who loved the world by sending his only begotten Son, whose deeds the world's books cannot contain (21:25), will never disappoint us. Our praise will never exceed his worth. John's Gospel gives ample reason for God's people to present their bodies as living sacrifices in reasonable acts of worship (Rom. 12:1–2).

CULTURE

Stories create culture, and the story of Jesus in the Gospel of John anticipates a people who will seek to imitate the character and virtue of Jesus. These people are taught by John's Gospel that Jesus will send them the Holy Spirit as another comforter; the world will treat them as it treated him; and they will be in the world but not of it as the Father protects them, just as Jesus prayed he would. The norms and values commended by the Gospel of John fit with the stories and symbols, the truths and responses prompted by the narrative, and where these expectations and principles are understood as "normal," one finds a culture generated by John's Gospel and the rest of Scripture.

WAY OF LIFE

John's Gospel presents Jesus and his followers pursuing a way of life consisting of, among other things: devotion to the living God of the OT; recognition of Jesus as God's Son, who reveals him to the world and carries forward his program; teaching others the truth so they might believe in Jesus and be delivered from God's wrath; solidarity with others who believe, a unity that transcends place of origin, ethnic identity, or anything else typically distinguishing people from each other; expectation that God will answer prayer as Jesus said he would; a habit of abiding in Christ by abiding in his words; and hope that Jesus will return to consummate what he began.

This way of life and culture grows from a worshipful response to the truths learned from the symbols that interpret and communicate the story John tells. In that way of life, we are on the path to understanding John's theology. As we proceed through the Gospel, more detail will be added to the outline sketched here.

Preaching from John

This Gospel was meant to be proclaimed. It was my own privilege to preach through the Gospel of John between August 2013 and February 2015. I heartily commend the exercise. You will never regret preaching from John.

Interpretive Challenges

There are, of course, interpretive disputes on which positions must be taken. In the commentary that follows, I depart from some reigning points of consensus. For instance, I offer an alternative understanding to the one preferred by many at present concerning Jesus' identity as the "only begotten" Son of God. These choices will be discussed further below. In addition, I am not impressed by the claim that John is interested in there being exactly *seven* "I Am" statements in his Gospel, or seven signs. There are more than seven "I Am" statements, and John does not seem to me to have been interested in enumerating exactly seven signs. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, so the exposition to follow will have to speak for itself.

Outline of John

The final arbiter of all interpretation is the question of what the author intended. While John almost certainly held a mental conception of the structure of his Gospel in whole and in part, he almost certainly did not think of it along the lines of the analytical outlines (Roman numeral I, Point A, etc.) so commonly employed in our culture.

Given the pervasive use of chiasm and inclusio and related literary devices in biblical literature, it seems likely that John's mental conception of the structure of his Gospel, in whole and in part, was probably more chiastic than anything else. For this reason, while I am presenting an analytical outline in deference to the expectations of my own culture, I am also providing what appear to me to be the chiastic structures intended by John. Corresponding parts of a chiasm often interpret and develop each other, with the center of the chiasm occupying pride of place in the author's arrangement, revealing the big idea of his presentation. The center points of chiasms sometimes function as narrative turning points, and arranging the material chiastically would serve as an aid to memory.

I will present first an overview of the analytical outline, followed by a series of chiastic structures John seems to have built into his Gospel, and conclude with a more detailed analytical outline, with subpoints.

An overview of the analytical outline:

- I. Grace upon Grace (1:1–18)
- II. Four Momentous Days (1:19–51)
- III. From Cana to Cana (2:1–4:54)
- IV. Jesus and the Feasts (5:1–11:57)

- V. The Raising of Lazarus (11:1–44)
- VI. The Hour Has Come for the Son of Man to Be Glorified
(11:45–17:26)
- VII. Denial, Death, Resurrection (18:1–20:31)
- VIII. Breakfast on the Beach (21:1–25)

John seems to have built several chiasmic structures into his Gospel:

John 1:1–18

- 1:1–5: The Word as God, Agent of Creation, Life, and Light
- 1:6–8: John the Baptist Testifies
- 1:9: The True Light
- 1:10–11: Rejected by the World and by His Own
- 1:12–13: Received by Those Born of God
- 1:14: The Glory of the Only Begotten from the Father
- 1:15: John the Baptist Testifies
- 1:16–18: The Revelation of the Father in the Son

John 2–4

- 2:1–12: Water to Wine
- 2:13–25: Passover/Temple
- 3:1–21: Nicodemus
- 3:22–36: The Baptist
- 4:1–45: The Savior of the World
- 4:46–54: Healing of a Son

John 5–11

- John 5: The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and live
- John 6: Jesus provides bread, crosses water, shepherds with his word
- John 7: Disputes over whether Jesus is good or a deceiver
- John 8: Jesus the Light of the World
- John 9: Disputes over whether Jesus is good or a sinner
- John 10: Jesus the Good Shepherd, whose sheep hear his voice
- John 11: Jesus calls Lazarus to come out from the tomb

John 12–17

- John 12: The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified
- John 13: Footwashing; One of you will betray me
- John 14: Jesus the way, truth, life
- John 15: Jesus the true vine
- John 16: Promise of the Spirit; You will be scattered and leave me alone
- John 17: The hour has come, glorify your Son

John 18–21

John 18: Peter denies Jesus three times at a charcoal fire

John 19: Jesus, King of the Jews, crucified

John 20: Jesus, raised from the dead, gives the Spirit and sends his disciples

John 21: Peter confesses love for Christ three times at a charcoal fire

A detailed analytical outline of John's Gospel:

- I. Grace upon Grace (1:1–18)
 - A. The Life-Giving Word (1:1–5)
 - B. The Baptist, the Life, the Birth (1:6–15)
 - 1. The Baptist Testifies (1:6–8)
 - 2. The True Light (1:9)
 - 3. Rejected by the World and His Own (1:10–11)
 - 4. Received by Those Born of God (1:12–13)
 - 5. The Glory of the Only Begotten from the Father (1:14)
 - 6. The Baptist Testifies (1:15)
 - C. The Only Begotten Reveals the Father (1:16–18)
- II. Four Momentous Days (1:19–51)
 - A. The Identity and Ministry of John the Baptist (1:19–28)
 - B. The Spirit Descends and Remains (1:29–34)
 - C. Come, See, and Stay (1:35–42)
 - D. You Will See Greater Things (1:43–51)
- III. From Cana to Cana (2:1–4:54)
 - A. The First Sign in Cana: New Wine at a Wedding on the Third Day (2:1–12)
 - 1. The Lack of Wine at a Wedding on the Third Day (2:1–5)
 - 2. The First Sign: Water to Wine (2:6–12)
 - B. Passover and a New Temple (2:13–25)
 - 1. Zeal for Your House (2:13–17)
 - 2. I Will Raise It Up (2:18–22)
 - 3. He Knew What Was in Man (2:23–25)
 - C. Nicodemus (3:1–21)
 - 1. You Must Be Born Again (3:1–15)
 - a. A Man of the Pharisees (3:1–2)
 - b. You Must Be Born Again (3:3–8)
 - c. The Earthly and the Heavenly (3:9–15)
 - 2. This Is How God Loved the World (3:16–21)
 - a. This Is How God Loved the World (3:16–17)
 - b. The Judgment (3:18–19)
 - c. Fleeing or Finding the Light (3:20–21)
 - D. The Baptist (3:22–36)
 - 1. The Setting (3:22–24)

2. The Dispute (3:25–26)
3. The Testimony (3:27–33)
4. The Explanation (3:34–36)
- E. The Samaritan Woman (4:1–42)
 1. Living Water (4:1–15)
 - a. The Weary Christ (4:1–6)
 - b. The Living Water (4:7–15)
 2. To Do the Will of Him Who Sent Me (4:16–42)
 - a. Go Call Your Husband (4:16–18)
 - b. Worship in Spirit and Truth (4:19–26)
 - c. Transition: No One Said (4:27–30)
 - d. Food, Harvest, Labor (4:31–38)
 - e. Many Believed (4:39–42)
- F. The Second Sign in Cana: New Life on the Third Day (4:43–54)
 1. On the Third Day in Cana, Again (4:43–46)
 2. Healing of a Son (4:47–54)
- IV. Jesus and the Feasts (5:1–11:57)
 - A. The Healing and Teaching at the Unnamed Feast (5:1–47)
 1. The Healing at Bethesda (5:1–18)
 - a. The Setting (5:1–5)
 - b. The Healing (5:6–9a)
 - c. The Sabbath (5:9b–13)
 - d. The Maker (5:14–18)
 2. Like Father, Like Son (5:19–30)
 - a. The Son Does What the Father Does (5:19–23)
 - b. The One Who Hears and Believes Has Life (5:24)
 - c. The Son Will Raise the Dead (5:25–29)
 - d. The Son Does the Father's Will (5:30)
 3. Know God: Believe the Testimony (5:31–47)
 - a. Testimony and Accusation (5:31–32, 45–47)
 - b. The Baptist's Lamp and True Glory (5:33–35, 41–44)
 - c. The Father, the Miracles, and the Scriptures Testify (5:36–37a, 39–40)
 - d. Knowing God (5:37b–38)
 - B. Feeding the Multitude, Crossing Water, and Providing Manna at Passover (6:1–71)
 1. Feeding the Multitude, Crossing the Waters (6:1–21)
 - a. Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (6:1–15)
 - (1) Time, Place, People Involved (6:1–4)
 - (2) Lots of People, No Food, No Money (6:5–7)
 - (3) Five Barley Loaves and Two Fish (6:8–9)
 - (4) Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (6:10–11)
 - (5) Twelve Baskets of Leftovers (6:12–13)

- (6) Prophet and King (6:14–15)
 - b. Jesus Walks on Water (6:16–21)
 - (1) Time, Place, People Involved (6:16–18)
 - (2) Jesus Walks on the Water (6:19–21)
- 2. The Bread of Life (6:22–40)
 - a. Time, Place, People Involved (6:22–24)
 - b. You Ate Bread but Saw No Signs (6:25–29)
 - c. The Bread of Life (6:30–35)
 - d. The Will of the Father (6:36–40)
- 3. Eat This Bread and Live Forever (6:41–71)
 - a. Grumbling and Fathers (6:41–51)
 - b. Eat My Flesh, Drink My Blood (6:52–59)
 - c. Words of Spirit and Life (6:60–71)
- C. Water from the Rock, Light for the World, Sight, and the Good Shepherd at Tabernacles (7:1–10:21)
 - 1. The Secret, Subversive Work of Jesus (7:1–24)
 - a. Sneaking into His Own Party (7:1–13)
 - (1) Time and Place (7:1–2)
 - (2) Unbelieving Brothers (7:3–5)
 - (3) The Time Has Not Yet Come (7:6–9)
 - (4) Secrecy and Muttering (7:10–13)
 - b. Subverting Lies with Truth (7:14–24)
 - (1) The Teaching of Jesus (7:14–18)
 - (2) Moses, Sabbath, and Circumcision (7:19–24)
 - 2. Rivers of Living Water (7:25–52)
 - a. Where He Comes From (7:25–30)
 - b. Where He Is Going (7:31–36)
 - c. Rivers of Living Water (7:37–39)
 - d. Is the Christ from Galilee? (7:40–52)
 - 3. The Light of the World (7:53–8:29)
 - a. [The Woman Caught in Adultery (7:53–8:11)]
 - b. The Light of the World (8:12–20)
 - c. How Not to Die in Sin (8:21–29)
 - 4. Fulfillment of the Sabbatical Years and Jubilee; Seed of the Woman and Seed of the Serpent (8:30–59)
 - a. If the Son Sets You Free (8:30–36)
 - b. Satan Kills and Lies (8:37–47)
 - c. Offspring of the Evil One (8:48–59)
 - 5. The Man Born Blind (9:1–41)
 - a. The Miracle (9:1–7)
 - b. The Rejection (9:8–34)
 - (1) The Seeing Man and His Neighbors (9:8–12)
 - (2) The Seeing Man and the Pharisees (9:13–17)

- (3) The Parents and the Pharisees (9:18–23)
 - (4) The Seeing Man and the Pharisees (9:24–34)
 - c. The Reception (9:35–41)
 - 6. The Good Shepherd (10:1–21)
 - a. Jesus Is the Shepherd and the Door (10:1–10)
 - b. Jesus Lays Down His Life for the Sheep (10:11–18)
 - c. The Sheep Know His Voice (10:19–21)
 - D. The One-with-the-Father Christ Protects His People at Hanukkah (10:22–42)
 - 1. Jesus Is the Christ (10:22–30)
 - 2. Jesus Is God (10:31–42)
- V. The Raising of Lazarus (11:1–44)
 - A. Death for the Glory of Christ (11:1–10)
 - B. That We May Die with Him (11:11–16)
 - C. The Resurrection and the Life (11:17–27)
 - D. The Weeping Christ (11:28–37)
 - E. Lazarus, Come Forth (11:38–44)
- VI. The Hour Has Come for the Son of Man to Be Glorified (11:45–17:26)
 - A. Approaching the Final Passover (11:45–12:50)
 - 1. When Jesus Wasn't Wanted (11:45–12:11)
 - a. Political Power or Jesus? (11:45–53)
 - b. Purity and Passover (11:54–57)
 - c. Money and Power or Jesus? (12:1–11)
 - 2. The King Comes for Judgment (12:12–33)
 - a. Thy King Cometh Gentle (12:12–19)
 - b. The Judgment of This World (12:20–33)
 - 3. That the Word Might Be Fulfilled (12:34–50)
 - a. While You Have the Light (12:34–36)
 - b. Isaiah Saw His Glory (12:37–43)
 - c. To Deliver from Darkness (12:44–50)
 - B. The Footwasher, the Way, the Vine, and the Giver of the Spirit (13:1–16:33)
 - 1. The Footwasher (13:1–20)
 - a. Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet (13:1–11)
 - b. Jesus Sets the Example (13:12–17)
 - c. Scripture Will Be Fulfilled (13:18–20)
 - 2. Treachery, Love, and Denial (13:21–38)
 - a. The Traitor (13:21–30)
 - b. The Commandment (13:31–35)
 - c. The Denials (13:36–38)
 - 3. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:1–14)
 - a. The Way to the Father (14:1–6)

- b. Jesus Represents the Father (14:7–11)
 - c. The Disciples Represent Jesus (14:12–14)
 - 4. The Indwelling Spirit (14:15–31)
 - a. He Will Be in You (14:15–17)
 - b. I Will Come to You (14:18–21)
 - c. My Father Will Make a Home with You (14:22–24)
 - d. The Spirit Will Teach You (14:25–31)
 - 5. Abide in Christ (15:1–17)
 - a. Abiding in Christ (15:1–8)
 - b. That Your Joy May Be Full (15:9–11)
 - c. Love One Another (15:12–17)
 - 6. The Haters and the Helper (15:18–16:4a)
 - a. The Haters (15:18–25)
 - b. The Helper (15:26–16:4a)
 - 7. Jesus Will Send the Spirit (16:4b–15)
 - a. Jesus Leaves to Send the Spirit (16:4b–7)
 - b. The Spirit Will Convict the World (16:8–11)
 - c. The Spirit Will Glorify Jesus (16:12–15)
 - 8. Your Sorrow Will Turn to Joy (16:16–33)
 - a. The Death and Resurrection of Jesus (16:16–22)
 - b. A New Access to the Father in Prayer (16:23–28)
 - c. Jesus Has Overcome the World (16:29–33)
- C. The Lord's Prayer (17:1–26)
 - 1. Knowing God (17:1–8)
 - a. Jesus Wants His People to Know God (17:1–5)
 - b. Jesus Makes God Known (17:6–8)
 - 2. Jesus Prays for Unity and Glory (17:9–26)
 - a. Jesus Prays for His Followers (17:9–19)
 - b. Jesus Prays for Those Who Will Believe through His Followers (17:20–23)
 - c. Jesus Prays for His People to See His Glory (17:24–26)
- VII. Denial, Death, Resurrection (18:1–20:31)
 - A. Jesus Gives Himself Up (18:1–11)
 - 1. The Time and Place (18:1–2)
 - 2. Jesus in Command (18:3–6)
 - 3. Let These Men Go (18:7–9)
 - 4. Shall I Not Drink the Cup? (18:10–11)
 - B. Jesus Arrested and Betrayed (18:12–40)
 - 1. Jesus Arrested (18:12–14)
 - 2. Peter's First Denial (18:15–18)
 - 3. Jesus and Annas (18:19–24)
 - 4. Denials Two and Three (18:25–27)
 - 5. Jesus and Pilate (18:28–40)

- C. Look at How They Treated Him (19:1–16a)
 - 1. Mock Homage (19:1–3)
 - 2. The Condemnation of the Guiltless (19:4–8)
 - 3. Authority and Sin (19:9–11)
 - 4. Caesar or Jesus? (19:12–16a)
- D. They Crucified Him (19:16b–30)
 - 1. The King of the Jews (19:16b–22)
 - 2. The Soldiers (19:23–24)
 - 3. The Family (19:25–27)
 - 4. The Finish (19:28–30)
- E. The Rock, the Lamb, the Tomb (19:31–42)
 - 1. The Rock (19:31–35)
 - 2. The Lamb (19:36–37)
 - 3. The Tomb (19:38–42)
- F. The Empty Tomb (20:1–18)
 - 1. John and Peter at the Tomb (20:1–10)
 - 2. Mary at the Tomb (20:11–18)
- G. Peace Be with You (20:19–31)
 - 1. The Risen Christ Gives the Spirit (20:19–23)
 - 2. The Risen Christ Convinces Thomas (20:24–29)
 - 3. Written That You Might Believe (20:30–31)
- VIII. Breakfast on the Beach (21:1–25)
 - A. The 153 Fish (21:1–14)
 - B. The Restoration of Peter (21:15–19)
 - C. The Beloved Disciple (21:20–25)

JOHN 1:1–18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life,¹ and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own,² and his own people³ did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his

name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son⁴ from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.⁵

¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God,⁶ who is at the Father’s side,⁷ he has made him known.

¹ Or *was not any thing made. That which has been made was life in him* ² Greek *to his own things*; that is, to his own domain, or to his own people ³ *People* is implied in Greek ⁴ Or *only One*, or *unique One* ⁵ Or *grace in place of grace* ⁶ Or *the only One, who is God*; some manuscripts *the only Son* ⁷ Greek *in the bosom of the Father*

Section Overview: Grace upon Grace

Could there be a more profound opening to a book than the one to John’s Gospel? One could search the great ideas of mankind and probe the ponderings of the philosophers and the poetry of the artists and find no idea higher than God, nor a more concise—yet expressive—statement about him, than the one John makes at the beginning of his Gospel. John profoundly links his Gospel to the creation account in Genesis 1 with the words “In the beginning” (John 1:1a) before launching into the world’s most economical articulation of the everlasting relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

The first statement of John’s Gospel is a bomb of meaning that goes off without warning, erupting suddenly, and the sublime and inexpressible, the infinite and unsearchable, the personal and ineffable reality of God comes exploding onto the consciousness of John’s audience in the words of John 1:1–5.

John 1:1–5 proclaims the Word as God, through whom the world was made, in whom is life, and who is unquenchable light. John will return to statements about the unparalleled Christ in 1:16–18, and within the outer frame of 1:1–5 and 1:16–18 are matching statements about John the Baptist testifying to Jesus in 1:6–8 and 1:15. Within the words about the Baptist are descriptions of the light and glory of Jesus (1:9, 14), and at the center of this chiastic structure are statements of how Jesus was rejected by the world and by his own people (1:10–11) but was received by those born of God (1:12–13). John 1:1–18 can thus be depicted chiastically as follows:

1:1–5: The Word as God, Agent of Creation, Life, and Light

1:6–8: John the Baptist Testifies

1:9: The True Light

1:10–11: Rejected by the World and by His Own

1:12–13: Received by Those Born of God

1:14: The Glory of the Only Begotten from the Father

1:15: John the Baptist Testifies

1:16–18: The Revelation of the Father in the Son

Section Outline

- I. Grace upon Grace (1:1–18)
 - A. The Life-Giving Word (1:1–5)
 - B. The Baptist, the Life, the Birth (1:6–15)
 - 1. The Baptist Testifies (1:6–8)
 - 2. The True Light (1:9)
 - 3. Rejected by the World and His Own (1:10–11)
 - 4. Received by Those Born of God (1:12–13)
 - 5. The Glory of the Only Begotten from the Father (1:14)
 - 6. The Baptist Testifies (1:15)
 - C. The Only Begotten Reveals the Father (1:16–18)

Comment

1:1–5 *The Life-Giving Word.* Having asserted that the Word was in the beginning (v. 1a), John differentiates the Word from God by saying, “and the Word was with God” (v. 1b), before identifying the Word *as* God with the final phrase of verse 1, “and the Word was God.” Behold the mystery of the Trinity: within the one God are three persons sharing one nature forever. The Word was *with* God and the Word *was* God. Something so beautiful and glorious, so complex and simple, must be admired. John is like a man holding out a diamond to a viewer who, after the initial awe-inspiring presentation, begins to turn the stone so that all its facets might be admired from various angles. In verse 2, he restates what he said in verse 1: “He was in the beginning with God.”

The Word is the communication of the Father. He is the rational force of Fatherly fulsomeness overflowing in infinite goodness. That Word was no impersonal force but a full person, alongside the Father at the principal moment of all things. The Word was both *with* God and *was* God. Was and with. What God was, the Word was. The Word was God, and the Word was with God. Coequal, indistinguishable, yet distinct.⁸

John declares the mystery of the Trinity in the fewest words possible. Could more be stated with less? These two verses, John 1:1–2, invite us to contemplation and meditation. We must repeat these statements until they are etched on our minds, then ponder them, read about them, and respond to them by worshiping the incomparable God these words describe.

John has chosen to use a philosophically loaded term, *logos*, in these references to the “Word.” John ministered in Ephesus, so his audience probably would have been at least vaguely familiar with the use of the term in Greek philosophical discussion. There were probably also some ethnic Jews in John’s audience who might have been aware of the use of “word” (Aramaic *memra*) in various Jewish traditions. Two factors, however, are most significant for understanding what John

⁸ For syntactical refutation of the New World Translation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 41, 266–269.

meant when he chose to use *logos*, “the Word,” as a way of referring to Jesus: first, the use of “word” in the OT; and second, the way John fills out the meaning of the term through his descriptions of Jesus in this Gospel. In other words, if we want to understand what John means by referring to Jesus as “the Word,” we should not allow our thoughts to be controlled by Greek philosophy or Jewish tradition but by the OT and John’s own Gospel.

John has invoked the creation account in Genesis 1 with the opening phrase of John 1:1, so when he continues in verse 3 with the statement, “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made,” it would seem that he has in mind the way God spoke creation into existence in Genesis 1. John seems to indicate that God created *by* speaking, and that Jesus was the Word through whom God made the world.

When John writes that “without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3b), he asserts that God the Father through the Son is responsible for all that is. Nothing has slithered into the world apart from the sovereign purpose of the world’s Creator (cf. Isa. 45:7). John asserts without equivocation or qualification: all was made through Jesus; without Jesus nothing was made.

The Word was in the beginning (John 1:1–2). Through the Word the Father created (v. 3). And the power of animation that makes created things alive was in the Word, as John puts it in verse 4: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Life was in Jesus. That life is the source of any light leading to any perception by any man. John here asserts that creation and life came from God’s direct activity in Christ. This excludes the possibility of a random process of natural selection in which life simply happened. There can be no more rapprochement between belief that God created the world and belief in evolution than there could be between Churchill and Hitler, fidelity and adultery, or ultimate significance and morose nihilism.

God created through the Son, without whom nothing could exist (v. 3). Life was in the Son, and light comes from this life (v. 4). The origin of light (“Let there be light”) is the life force pulsating in the very Word of God, and darkness will neither overcome nor comprehend that Light. John writes in verse 5, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” The term rendered *overcome* could just as well be rendered “comprehended” (NASB) or “understood” (NIV 1984). The term bears both meanings, and John likely employs it as a double entendre: the darkness will not prevail over Jesus, and even if the forces of darkness kill him, he will rise. Life is in him. Nor can people in darkness understand that light unless they are born of God (1:13). Darkness can no more overcome the light than creation could overcome its Creator. And those who flee from the light to hide their evil in darkness (cf. 3:20) need the words of spirit and life (6:63) to give them the ability to see and enter the kingdom (3:3, 5).

1:6–15 *The Baptist, the Light, the Birth.* As noted above, 1:1–18 is structured chiastically. The structure of 1:6–15 can be simplified and summarized in these few words:

1:6–8: Testimony

1:9: Light

1:10–11: Rejection

1:12–13: Reception

1:14: Glory

1:15: Testimony

The way John the Evangelist describes John the Baptist is significant for both the Evangelist's self-understanding (cf. 20:31) and that of his audience. John does not present the last old covenant prophet as an end in himself; rather, the man named John, "sent from God" (1:6), "came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him" (v. 7). John the Baptist came as one who testifies. What he testified to was the Light, the light that is the light of men (v. 4), which the darkness will neither comprehend nor overcome (v. 5).

John the Evangelist probably intends to present John the Baptist as heralding the fulfillment of passages such as Isaiah 8:20–9:2. There, "gloom of anguish" and "thick darkness" (Isa. 8:22) symbolize the curse of the covenant and exile from the land, while "dawn" (Isa. 8:20), making "glorious the way of the sea" (Isa. 9:1), and "great light" (Isa. 9:2) all symbolize what God will do for his people at the new exodus and return from exile. The light to which the Baptist testifies, then, is the hope of Israel for the glorious eschatological restoration God promised his people through the prophets. John bears witness to the light—the way Jesus will bring the dawn of salvation—"that all might believe through him" (John 1:7). John bears witness to the fulfillment of the OT promises in Jesus, and the response he seeks from his testimony is belief—faith.

Lest anyone be distracted by the extraordinary stature of the prophet sent from God, or the God-given clarity and power in which he ministers, John says that the Baptist relates to Jesus the way the moon relates to the sun: "He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light" (v. 8). The renewal of prophecy in John's ministry, apparently dormant since Malachi, is not the point. The point is the light to whom the prophet points: Jesus.

We must understand John 1:9, "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world," in near and broad context. In the near context, Jesus is clearly the true light (1:4–5, 7). In the broad context, we see the sense in which Jesus "gives light to everyone" from 3:19–21 and other passages such as 8:12, where Jesus asserts that he himself is the "light of the world."

In 3:19–20 we read that some people responded to the light by loving the darkness and fleeing from the light. In chapter 8, after Jesus declares himself the "light of the world" (8:12), the Pharisees immediately object that his testimony to himself is not true (8:13). These instances show that the use of the verb rendered "gives light" in 1:9 is closer to the use of the same verb in Revelation 18:1 than to its use in Ephesians 1:18. In Ephesians 1:18, when Paul speaks of the eyes of the hearts of believers having been enlightened, the metaphorical enlightening of the

eyes of the hearts is related to spiritual insight and ability to believe. By contrast, in Revelation 18:1 the earth is enlightened in the sense that it is made bright by the angel who descends from heaven. Those who flee from the light in John 3:20 and accuse Jesus of false testimony in 8:13 have not had the eyes of their hearts enlightened. Rather, the light has shone on them, exposing them, and they respond by hating the light.

I contend, therefore, that in the context of John's Gospel, 1:9 does not support the notion of prevenient grace, as though by his coming Jesus has given light to everyone in the sense of somehow lifting them out of deadness in sin to have the opportunity to believe. John explains what does that in verse 13—not the coming of Jesus to give prevenient-grace-light to all, but the new birth. What separates those who receive Jesus from those who reject him is the new birth (cf. vv. 10–13).

John 1:10 joins with 1:9 to stand against the idea that Jesus by his coming wrought some kind of prevenient-grace change on all people. John puts into words the shocking irony that the Light of the World, the true light that gives light to all (v. 9), the light that is the life of men (v. 4), the light that the darkness cannot overcome (v. 5), “was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him” (v. 10). The world here has not been lifted out of deadness in trespasses and sins to perceive reality. Rather, the world is so darkened within itself that it does not recognize the light, even though the world was made by that very light!

Lest anyone think this darkened condition applies only to the Gentile world, John adds in verse 11, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” The Jewish people are not exempt from deadness in trespass and sin. The Jewish people, though hoping for the Messiah, did not receive Jesus (cf. Acts 13:27). One of the proofs of John's skill in writing this Gospel—to say nothing of God's skill in crafting the story John retells—is the ability to make this convincing. We never recoil from the idea that the Jewish people would reject the one for whom they had hoped so long. John tells what happened in such a way that it rings true to life.

In the chiasmic structure proposed for this passage, verses 10–11 and 12–13 stand at the center of the chiasm. John seems to be indicating hereby that everything depends on how one responds to Jesus.

“The world did not know him” (v. 10), the Jewish people as a whole did not accept him (v. 11), but some did receive him. John explains, “To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (v. 12). John here explains that those who “receive” Jesus are those who “believed in his name.” In context, believing in Jesus' name (v. 12) will entail believing the testimony of the Baptist (v. 7), and believing the Baptist means believing Jesus has brought to pass what was prophesied in the OT (vv. 6–8).

Believing and receiving make one a child of God, and in verse 13 the concept of being a “[child] of God” (v. 12) is elaborated upon through the concept of being “born . . . of God.” In verse 14 Jesus will be presented as the “only begotten from

the Father” (AT), as he is “begotten” of God in a way distinct from all others who are “born of God.”

Why would John speak in verse 12 of the “right to become children of God”? God chose Israel and declared to Pharaoh, “Israel is my firstborn son” (Ex. 4:22). John has just related how the people of Israel did not receive Jesus (John 1:11), and now he relates that those who do receive Jesus are given the *right* to stand where Israel should have stood: as God’s children.

These new children of God, John explains in verse 13, “were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Not being born of blood probably relates to how the Israelites were constituted God’s people under the old covenant: by genealogical descent from Abraham. Under the old covenant, the people of God were born of blood—God’s people were a physical nation descending from Abraham through Isaac. Not so in the new covenant. The second phrase in verse 13, “nor of the will of the flesh,” seems aimed at human desire, perhaps encompassing base instincts and passions with the term “flesh” (same term used, however, in verse 14, “the Word became flesh”). The third phrase in verse 13, “nor of the will of man,” may direct things away from flesh to other, perhaps more rational, expressions of human desire. In any case, John presents a twofold negation of the idea that people are born into God’s family because of human choice, whether by instinct or reason. These three clauses state that people are born into the family of God and given the right to be children of God not because of who their parents are, any desire they felt, or any choice they made. How, then, do these people experience this birth? The last words of verse 13 state that those who receive Jesus, who believe in his name, are born “of God.”

The logic of these statements seems to indicate that the birth of God these people have experienced happened prior to their reception of and belief in Jesus. If the choice to believe in Jesus resulted in the birth, it would be difficult to see how John could say that they “were born” neither “of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man” (v. 13). From other statements in John’s Gospel (cf. 3:3, 5; 6:63), it appears that this birth of God gives people a new ability to perceive what God is doing in Jesus. This new ability to perceive reality naturally results in faith, because Jesus is convincing.

Only now, at 1:14, is it specified that the Word is Jesus, as John writes, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” In verse 1 John had articulated the divinity and eternity of the Word, as well as his distinguishability from the Father, and now he communicates the profundity of the incarnation. The Word became flesh. God became man. Jesus did not cease to be the Word when he became flesh. The phrase “dwelt among us” could just as well be rendered “tabernacled among us.” John uses the cognate verb for the noun used in Greek translations of the OT to refer to the tabernacle, thus recalling the way God dwelt in the tabernacle in the midst of the people of Israel, and this is the first of a number of ways John will communicate how Jesus fulfills the temple and its ministry.⁹

⁹ See James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006).

In verse 14, John writes of himself and others who were born of God, received Jesus, and believed in his name: “We have seen his glory.” There seems to be a connection between Jesus as the light (vv. 4–5) and display of his glory (v. 14), bolstered by how verse 14 balances verse 9 in the chiasmic structure of this passage. Those who are born of God are enabled to see the work of God in Christ (cf. 3:3), so rather than flee the light they perceive it as glorious (1:14; 2:11; 3:21).

John describes the glory further in verse 14: “glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (AT). The phrase “only begotten” translates the Greek μονογενής (rendered in the ESV as “only Son”). I render the phrase this way because of the immediate context and the way John uses this term to distinguish Jesus from the rest of the children begotten of God. John has just referred to those “born [*gegennēthēsan*] . . . of God” in verse 13, and now, in verse 14, he refers to Jesus as the “only begotten [*monogenous*] from the Father” (AT). Similarly, in 1 John 4:7 John asserts, “Whoever loves has been born [*gegennētai*] of God,” and then in 4:9, “God sent his only begotten [*monogenē*] Son into the world” (AT). Using different terminology for the same concepts, John writes in 1 John 5:18, “We know that everyone who has been born [*gegennēmenos*] of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born [*gennētheis*] of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.” Clearly, “everyone who has been born of God” refers to believers, while “he who was born of God” is Jesus. Thus John uses *monogenēs* to differentiate God’s unique begetting of Jesus (his “only Son”) from his begetting of the elect.

The glory, then, that John and those with him have seen is the glory of the “only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14 AT). John will return to these ideas of glory, grace, and truth in verses 16–18, and when we take what he says there with these references to glory in verse 14, it appears he has Exodus 33:18–34:8 in mind.

These words of John 1:15 are in parentheses in the ESV because of the way this note about John’s testimony interrupts the flow of thought regarding grace and truth and glory that moves from verse 14 to verses 16–18. The location of verse 15 can be accounted for by the chiasmic structure of the passage, in which these words balance the reference to the Baptist’s testimony in verses 6–8.

John the Baptist was born before Jesus (cf. Luke 1:36), so more than physical age is in view when he asserts, “He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me” (John 1:15). John the Evangelist has already asserted, “In the beginning was the Word” (v. 1), and this testimony from the Baptist matches other things the Evangelist will present him as saying later (3:27–30), things that point to Jesus’ unmatched status (3:31).

1:16–18 *The Only Begotten Reveals the Father.* Resuming the reference to how the glory of Jesus is “full of grace and truth” (v. 14), John writes in verse 16, “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” John is probably using this reference to “his fullness” in a way corresponding to the references to the “fullness” of God’s glory in Christ in Paul’s writings (Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13; Col. 1:19; 2:9).

In view of what John will say in John 1:17, receiving “grace upon grace,” likely refers to the grace given to the people of God under the old covenant being added to and surpassed by the grace God gives to his people in Christ. John explains in 1:17, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” This does not imply that the law was not a gracious gift. No other nation was shown the kind of grace God gave to Israel when he gave them the good gift of the law. Still, the revelation God makes in Christ is better than what God gave Israel in the law (cf. Heb. 1:1–3). Moreover, John seems to be reflecting here on the gracious revelation of himself that God made to Moses in Exodus 33:18–34:8.

Moses asked to see God’s glory (Ex. 33:18); John asserts, “We have seen his glory” (John 1:14). When God proclaimed his name to Moses, he asserted himself to be “merciful and gracious . . . abounding in steadfast love and truth” (Ex. 34:6 AT). Similarly, John asserts the glory of Jesus to be “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), and “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (v. 16). God told Moses, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious” (Ex. 33:19), and to God’s gracious revelation of himself to Moses he has added the gracious revelation of himself in Christ.

When John says in John 1:18, “No one has ever seen God,” God’s assertion in Exodus 33:20 comes to mind: “You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” On that occasion, Moses did see God’s back (Ex. 33:23), and Exodus 33:11 and Deuteronomy 34:10 both say that God spoke with Moses “face to face.” The issue in Exodus 33:20 is not what is possible but what is not permitted for Moses. He is allowed to experience a degree of God’s self-revelation, but he is not permitted an unlimited experience of God, for it would be fatal to him. Along these lines, what is being stressed in John 1:18 is more than mere physical sight. The point of John 1:18 is that Jesus has an unparalleled intimacy with the Father and is revealing him in an unprecedented way. Thus, John says in verse 18, “The only begotten God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (AT). Similarly, Jesus will declare in 14:9, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (cf. 12:45).

Jesus is the only begotten of the Father, and there is in John the concept that, as Jesus relates to the Father, so the disciples of Jesus relate to him. We see this in part in the description of Jesus being, literally, “in the bosom of the Father” (1:18, cf. ESV mg.). The same phrase will be used to describe the disciple “whom Jesus loved, . . . at Jesus’ side” in 13:23. The phrase “at Jesus’ side” can be rendered literally “in the bosom of Jesus” (13:23, cf. ESV mg.). As Jesus relates to the Father, so the beloved disciple relates to Jesus. It seems to follow from this that, as Jesus has revealed the Father, so John has revealed Jesus.

Response

The only begotten of the Father makes the Father known. Could we hope for better access to the Father? Who has had more time with the Father? Who has seen more of his work and character, seen him in more situations of judgment, merriment, or

forgiveness? Who would have a more intimate view? Who could more accurately relate these truths? Who could more fully identify with the emotional depth of the Father's love? In the Son we have a perfect revelation of the Father.

Would you give something so precious to people like us? Would you be as generous as God is in giving so much to those who deserve so little? Those who deserve wrath? God has given the light. The light has come into the world. The darkness will neither comprehend nor overcome that light: it killed him but could not keep him dead. How are you responding to the light? Rejecting or receiving?

We have also considered the testimony of the Baptist. John the Baptist no longer lives, but in John the Evangelist's Gospel he continues to testify. Are you accepting or rejecting his testimony? John bore witness to the light. Do you believe that the light has dawned in Jesus?

For those of us who believe that Jesus is the light, we should note that John the Evangelist has joined John the Baptist in bearing witness so that others will believe (20:31). Those of us who believe should join these two Johns in the great work of bearing witness for belief. Testify that the light has dawned. Call others to faith in Christ.

Behold the glory of Jesus, only begotten of the Father, Word before all worlds, light that gives life, fullness of grace and truth, Son revealing his Father, to whom be glory forever.

JOHN 1:19–51

¹⁹And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²²So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight¹ the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

²⁴(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³²And John bore witness:

“I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son² of God.”

³⁵The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.³ ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus⁴ was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). ⁴²He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter⁵).

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” ⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” ⁴⁹Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you,⁶ you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

¹Or crying out, ‘In the wilderness make straight’ ²Some manuscripts *the Chosen One* ³That is, about 4 P.M.

⁴Greek *him* ⁵*Cephas* and *Peter* are from the word for *rock* in Aramaic and Greek, respectively ⁶The Greek for *you* is plural; twice in this verse

Section Overview: Four Momentous Days

John 1:19–51 covers four days in the early ministry of Jesus. On day one, we see the interaction between John the Baptist and priests and Levites sent by the Pharisees in Jerusalem (vv. 19–28). This interaction focuses on the identity of the Baptist preparing the way for the one to come, and on his ministry of baptizing in water for repentance and cleansing in hope of fulfillment of OT promises. On day two, the Baptist testifies of the Spirit coming down to remain upon Jesus, by which he recognized Jesus as the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (vv. 29–34). On day three, disciples of John become disciples of Jesus (vv. 35–42). And on day four, Jesus is shown to be the surprising fulfiller of OT expectation (vv. 43–51).

Section Outline

- II. Four Momentous Days (1:19–51)
 - A. The Identity and Ministry of John the Baptist (1:19–28)
 - B. The Spirit Descends and Remains (1:29–34)
 - C. Come, See, and Stay (1:35–42)
 - D. You Will See Greater Things (1:43–51)

Comment

1:19–28 *The Identity and Ministry of John the Baptist.* John's location on the Jordan River was not far from the shores of the Dead Sea, but even if it were on a main thoroughfare, it would still have been sparsely populated. What would it take to gather a crowd to such a place? Located twenty-five miles from Jerusalem, today it would be about a forty-minute drive. A preacher would have to generate quite a buzz to bring about a situation where "Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him" (Matt. 3:5). While many have become suddenly famous only to have their lives turn into train wrecks, we see something very different, and for very good reason, in the case of John the Baptist. John the Baptist knows who he is and what his life is for.

John the Evangelist has introduced John the Baptist's testimony in John 1:6–8 and 15, and now he elaborates on that testimony in verses 19–36. The Baptist's testimony results in his disciples leaving him to follow Jesus, which is exactly why he is testifying (v. 7; cf. 3:30).

Priests and Levites from Jerusalem have been sent to the Baptist in the Trans-jordan to ask him two questions: Who are you? and, Why are you doing what you are doing? John recounts the exchange in the form of a dialogue, and his portrayal of John's location and answers to the questions is crucial for understanding John's identity and activity.

The situation is introduced in verse 19, as John relates the Baptist's testimony "when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?'" From his response in verse 20, it is evident the Baptist knows what they are really asking, and in the way John sets up the Baptist's answer, we see him stressing the point: "He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed." In twice stating that the Baptist confessed, with the assertion that he did not deny inserted between, the Evangelist shows there was no doubt or confusion in John the Baptist's confession. He did not deny but confessed the truth.

Consider what it is that John is confessing, the testimony he is bearing. Verse 7 stated his purpose: "to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him." As a result, people will leave the Baptist's influence to become disciples of Jesus. John presents John the Baptist as one who feels no conflict with, nor hesitation about, pointing away from himself to Jesus. John presents this as exemplary behavior to be imitated.

The content of the Baptist's confession reflects expectation for a coming Messiah, an expectation prompting the inquiry into the Baptist's identity. This

expectation is apparently so pervasive, so taken for granted, that the question does not even need to be articulated to prompt the reply, “I am not the Christ” (v. 20). Taken together, the insistence that the Baptist confessed—and did not deny, but confessed!—that he was not the Christ evokes our awareness of others who at that time were claiming “to be somebody” (Acts 5:36).

The activities of these other figures indicate they were putting themselves forward as men God would use to bring to pass what was promised in the OT. Their activities were patterned after the activities of significant OT figures through whom God did mighty things for his people. Josephus writes of several figures who sought to lead people across the Jordan into the wilderness, promising to lead the people once again through the Jordan on dry ground for a new conquest of the Promised Land. These figures were claiming to enact the prophesied new exodus and new conquest, leading to the enjoyment of the new Eden (cf. Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 2.258–260, *Antiquities* 20.97; 20.168–170; 20.188; cf. also Matt. 24:26). In contrast with these charlatans, John is claiming *not* to be the Messiah or anyone else, even though the Lord has sent him as the one who prepares the way for the prophesied new-exodus salvation.

Even if the Baptist is not the Messiah, there are other possibilities: “They asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No’” (John 1:21). The question about Elijah arises from Malachi 4:5: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” John’s negative reply is likely intended at the literal level: Elijah was taken to heaven, and the Baptist is saying that he is not that same Elijah returned to earth. Nevertheless, in what he is about to say of himself (John 1:23), John indicates that, typologically speaking, he plays the role of the prophesied Elijah, and this is likely what Jesus means when he identifies John as the Elijah who was to come (Matt. 11:10; cf. Mal. 3:1; Matt. 11:14). The question whether John is “the Prophet” arises from Deuteronomy 18:15–18, and since this is asked after John has said he is not the Messiah, the question reflects some uncertainty as to whether the Prophet and the Messiah would be the same individual.¹⁰

The Baptist’s terse replies to these messengers leave them at a loss: “So they said to him, ‘Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’” (John 1:22). This reply, with the information in verse 24, seems to indicate that the power players themselves have not come out to see John. A figure such as Nicodemus (cf. 3:1) has not come on this errand, but only those who will answer to those with more stature.

I suggested above that in 1:6–8 John the Evangelist was presenting the Baptist as heralding the fulfillment of the coming light prophesied in Isaiah 8:20–9:2. Now John presents the Baptist as fulfilling what was prophesied in Isaiah 40:3: “He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord,” as the prophet Isaiah said’” (John 1:23). In Isaiah, this statement

¹⁰ Compare, however, John 6:14–15, where the crowd’s recognition that Jesus is the Prophet (v. 14) seems to prompt Jesus’ recognition that they intend to make him king (v. 15).

heralds the return of Yahweh to Zion after the exile, once the new exodus has been accomplished and the people are enjoying the glorious eschatological restoration. John thus presents the Baptist as the one preparing the way for Yahweh's return to Zion in the person of Jesus. He is, therefore, figuratively speaking the "Elijah who is to come" (Matt. 11:14), even if, literally speaking, he is not the historical Elijah (John 1:21).

The answer concerning the Baptist's identity would have been understood by the messengers from Jerusalem: John was claiming to prepare the way for the new salvation God would accomplish on behalf of his people. Having received that answer, the messengers move to questioning the meaning of the Baptist's actions. John the Evangelist provides more information concerning the messengers in verse 24—"Now they had been sent from the Pharisees"—before narrating their next question in verse 25: "They asked him, 'Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?'" The repetition of the Messiah, Elijah, and the Prophet serves to reinforce lines of OT expectation for a new prophet like Moses, a Messiah from the line of David, and a new Elijah before the coming of the day of the Lord. To this point, nothing has been said in the Gospel about John's baptizing. The fact of his doing so is revealed in the question posed by the messengers from the Pharisees in Jerusalem.

The Baptist's reply to this question shows a laser-like focus on his mission to testify to the light, "that all might believe" (v. 7), thus exalting Jesus and making less of himself (cf. 3:30). John takes a question about why he is baptizing and turns it into an opportunity to speak of the greatness of the One whom the Baptist himself, by comparison, does not deserve to serve. For John the Baptist, when asked why he baptizes, the important thing is not to explain the typological significance of what he does—at which John the Evangelist hints in 1:28—but rather to make much of Jesus. The Baptist states, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie" (vv. 26–27).

The Baptist asserts that Jesus stands among them, but they do not know him (v. 26), just as the light was unknown and unreceived (vv. 10–11). The phrase "he who comes after me" in verse 27 harks back to verse 15, where the same description was used by the Baptist as he asserted that Jesus outranked him. Here too, in verse 27, the Baptist stresses the exalted status of Jesus—so high is he that John is unworthy even to perform for him the lowly task of unstrapping his sandal.

We get a hint of the significance of the Baptist's work as John notes, in verse 28, "These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing." John seems to have crossed the Jordan in order to position himself for symbolically significant immersions in water. These immersions probably represented a cleansing ritual needed for reentering the land. Those who partook of John's baptism were confessing their sins and enacting their repentance (cf. Matt. 3:2, 8; Mark 1:5). They sought consummate cleansing from the defilement of exile to sin and went to the place where Joshua's conquest began, anticipating a new

conquest. They actively sought to purify themselves in an effort to prepare the way of the Lord.

1:29–34 *The Spirit Descends and Remains.* The coming of the light recalls Isaiah's promise that the light would dawn (vv. 4–9). In verse 23, the Baptist had identified himself with the words of Isaiah 40:3. And now in John 1:29 he identifies Jesus as the lamb of Isaiah 53: "He saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" The wise servant of Isaiah 52:13 bore the griefs of the people (Isa. 53:4), was pierced for their transgressions and chastised for their peace (v. 5), and was led like a lamb to the slaughter (v. 7). Isaiah compares the servant to a lamb because he is proclaiming a new exodus for Israel (e.g., Isa. 11:15–16), and in Isaiah 52:7–53:12 he describes the new Passover Lamb who will redeem God's people at that new exodus. John the Baptist makes the profound assertion that Jesus is that servant, that lamb (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). He also asserts, in keeping with Isaiah's announcement that God would save not just Israel but the nations (e.g., Isa. 49:5–7), that the new Passover Lamb redeeming the people at the new exodus will take away not just Israel's sin but that of *the world*.

We saw in John 1:9–13 that only those born of God receive Jesus. On the basis of the Baptist's words in verses 31–34 within the wider context of chapter 1, we can also say that the only people who *know* Jesus are those to whom God makes him known—"the world did not know him" (v. 10), the Baptist tells the Jews from Jerusalem that they do not know him (v. 26), and he even asserts that he himself did not know him (v. 31).

In verses 32–34 the Baptist states how he came to know Jesus, why he was baptizing with water, and what his ultimate mission was:

I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

Characteristically, the Baptist testifies to what he saw. The phrase "I myself did not know him" in verse 33 is an exact repetition of the same phrase in verse 31. John divulges how he came to know Jesus as he testifies to a revelation made to him from the one who sent him. The text does not state it, but God sent the Baptist, so the last words of verse 33 relate what God revealed to the Baptist: "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." On the basis of this revelation, the Baptist recognized Jesus when the Spirit descended upon him to remain (vv. 32–33).

This scene evokes another episode involving two prophetic figures at the Jordan River: Elisha's requesting a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Kings 2:1–15; recall the mention of Elijah in John 1:21). In contrast with the periodic empowerment of the judges, David, and Ezekiel when the Spirit came upon them,

the Spirit came upon Jesus to “remain” (v. 33). And whereas Elisha requested a double portion of Elijah’s spirit, John declares that God gives the Spirit to Jesus “without measure” (3:34).

The parallel between the Baptist’s ministry of baptizing people in water (1:26, 31, 33) and the one who would “[baptize] with the Holy Spirit” (v. 33) indicates we are to understand the one in light of the other. The confession of sins, repentance, cleansing, and commitment to living before God that the Baptist ministers in water, Jesus will minister in the Holy Spirit. This parallel suggests that Jesus is the one who fulfills what is prophesied in the OT about the Davidic seed being fully endowed with the “Spirit of the LORD” (Isa. 11:2), ministering the Spirit more broadly to God’s people (Isa. 32:15) so that they are empowered to obey (Ezek. 36:27).

Having seen what he was told he would see, the Baptist punctuates his testimony with the assertion, “This is the Son of God” (John 1:34)—a profound synthesis of OT expectations. John the Baptist himself, bearing witness to the light in verse 7 (cf. Isa. 8:20–9:2), is not the Christ, the Messiah (John 1:20). The Baptist is, however, the one who prepares the way for Yahweh’s return to Zion (Isa. 40:3) in John 1:23, and he is obviously preparing the way for Jesus in John 1:31, suggesting that Jesus is Yahweh (cf. John 1:1). Simultaneously, Jesus is the Isaiah 53 “Lamb of God” (John 1:29) on whom the Spirit comes down to remain, making him the Lord’s anointed (vv. 32–33; cf. Isa. 11:2) who will usher in the prophesied new age of the Spirit (cf. Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 36:27). Moreover, this Jesus is the one of whom God said in 2 Samuel 7:14, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (cf. Ps. 2:7). This the Baptist asserts by referring to the suffering servant, the Lamb of God, the Lord’s anointed, with the title of the Davidic King, “Son of God” (John 1:34). He is the one on whom the hopes of God’s people rest. He is the long-expected one, the Word, the life, the light, the only begotten Son of the Father, who takes away the sin of the world.

1:35–42 *Come, See, and Stay.* John 1:35–36 is very similar to verse 29; both speak of “the next day” and depict the Baptist seeing Jesus and declaring, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” Verses 29–34 detail how the Baptist recognized Jesus: the Spirit descended and remained upon him. Now that Jesus has been identified as “the Son of God” (v. 34), verses 35–42 show a three-part disciple-making process. First, the testimony of the Baptist caused his disciples to follow Jesus (vv. 35–37). Second, those who followed Jesus sought to *remain* with him (vv. 38–39). Third, even as they remained with Jesus, they sought to convince others to follow Jesus with them (vv. 40–42).

There is a natural progression in this passage: the Baptist came to prepare the way (vv. 19–34), resulting in his own disciples leaving him to follow Jesus (vv. 35–37). John’s disciples understood what he was proclaiming: Jesus is the light (v. 7); the one in whom Yahweh was returning to Zion (v. 23); the one so great that the Baptist was not worthy of unstrapping his sandal (v. 27); the one who would fulfill Isaiah 53 as the new Lamb of the new exodus (John 1:29, 36); the one who

would initiate the new age of the Spirit (v. 33), baptizing with the Holy Spirit for repentance, cleansing, and power to conquer. John 1:37 shows that to understand the message of the Baptist is to become a follower of Jesus.

In verses 38–39 we see an initial encounter between Jesus and two of those who left John the Baptist to follow him. One of these will be identified as Andrew in verse 40. Perhaps the other is the author of the Gospel himself, the beloved disciple, John son of Zebedee.¹¹ Throughout the Gospel of John, the author never overtly names himself, so the fact that the other disciple of the Baptist goes unnamed would match the way John son of Zebedee deals with his own presence elsewhere in this Gospel.

In verse 38 Jesus turns and sees these disciples, asking them, “What are you seeking?” Think for a moment of the possible ways the Baptist’s disciples could have answered that question:

- We seek God’s kingdom.
- We seek to rid the land of the Romans.
- We seek the fulfillment of OT prophecies.
- We seek the king from David’s line.
- We seek the truth.
- We seek the way.
- We seek life.

Instead they ask, “‘Rabbi’ (which means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’” (v. 38). When they come to Jesus, they come to him as their teacher, and their main concern is to *be with him*. The verb rendered “staying,” one of the most significant verbs in this Gospel, is rendered elsewhere in John as “abide” or “remain.” It is used twice in verse 39, as Jesus answers, “‘Come and you will see.’ So they came and saw where he was *staying*, and they *stayed* with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.”

It seems John the Evangelist wants his audience to see that these who would become Christ’s disciples were mainly interested in being *with Jesus*, and that his response is to invite them to come to him and see. Again, while these words may seem small and insignificant, upon reflection, the disciples do come to Jesus, and Jesus will call others to come to him as the narrative progresses (e.g., 7:37). John has already said that they *saw his glory* (1:14), and at the end of chapter 1 Jesus declares they “will see greater things than these” (v. 50).

The disciples want to know where Jesus *abides*. He invites them to *come and see*. Then they saw where he was *abiding*, and they *abided* with him (vv. 38–39). This, I submit, is what John the Evangelist wants his audience to desire. He wants his audience to inquire about Jesus, to go to Jesus, to behold what it is like to abide with Jesus, and then to abide with him. What John depicts next shows one of the effects of being with Jesus.

¹¹ For the evidence that John son of Zebedee is the Gospel’s author, see the Introduction. Either John son of Zebedee experienced these events with Andrew, or Andrew and/or the other unnamed disciple reported what happened to John.

Andrew's immediate response is to find his brother, Peter, and bring him to Jesus. This indicates that the correct response to the Baptist is to follow Jesus, and that beholding Jesus results both in a desire to *abide* with Jesus and a desire to bring others to Jesus. Andrew says, "We have found the Messiah" (v. 41). If there was any doubt about the identity of Jesus as the king from David's line promised in the OT, this claim removes it.

Jesus then gives Simon the name "Peter" (v. 42). John wants his audience to believe the testimony of the Baptist about Jesus and to respond to that testimony by following Jesus, with the purpose of remaining with him. Those who behold Jesus will not fail to call others to go to him also, and those who go to Jesus will find him transforming their identity.

1:43–51 *You Will See Greater Things*. On the first day, John the Baptist explained his identity and ministry (vv. 19–28). On the next day, he identified Jesus (vv. 29–34). On the day after that, Jesus invited two disciples to come and see (vv. 35–42). Now, on the fourth day of this chapter, Jesus begins to hint that what he brings goes beyond what those who follow him have begun to expect (vv. 43–51).

In verses 40–42, Andrew had brought Peter to Jesus. Now, in verse 43, Jesus summons Philip with the words "Follow me," and in verses 44–46 Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus. There are indications that Peter had made a home in Capernaum (cf. Mark 1:21, 29), so perhaps Bethsaida, Philip's hometown, was "the city of Andrew and Peter" (John 1:44) in the sense that they were born there.

Andrew's first recorded act as a follower of Jesus was to herald Jesus as the Messiah to his brother Peter (v. 41). Similarly, having been summoned to follow Jesus in verse 43, Philip's first act is to find Nathanael and proclaim, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (v. 45). Like the interchange between the Baptist and the priests and Levites in verses 19–20, Philip's statement evidences a universally assumed expectation that the Torah and the Prophets had promised a coming redeemer.¹²

Whereas some might have objected to the notion that Moses and the Prophets wrote of the Messiah, Nathanael objects only to the idea that he comes from Nazareth!¹³ He asks Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (v. 46). The OT expectation was that the Messiah would be, in a sense, unexpected. For instance, the prophet Isaiah had declared, "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa. 53:2).

¹² In various publications I have sought to trace out how the hopes reflected in the NT really can be found in the OT; see James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *SBJT* 10/2 (2006): 30–54; "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," *TynBul* 58 (2007): 253–273; "The Messianic Music of the Song of Songs: A Non-Allegorical Interpretation," *WTJ* 68 (2006): 331–345; "Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah? Tracing the Typological Identification between Joseph, David, and Jesus," *SBJT* 12 (2008): 52–77; "The Typology of David's Rise to Power: Messianic Patterns in the Book of Samuel," *SBJT* 16 (2012): 4–25; *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); *What Is Biblical Theology?*

¹³ The reference to Jesus being "of Nazareth" (John 1:45–46), in view of his birth in Bethlehem, shows that there is some flexibility in the way birth cities and cities of residence are referenced, informing also how we understand Peter and Andrew as being "from Bethsaida" (1:44). I was born in Arkansas and grew up there, studied and taught in Texas, and now live in Kentucky. I have described myself as "from" all three places.

Philip's reply to Nathanael in John 1:46, "Come and see," is instructive at several levels. For one thing, Philip evidently believes that, for Nathanael, beholding Jesus for himself will be more compelling than anything Philip might say in an effort to convince him. For another, Philip's invitation in verse 46 echoes Jesus' words to the two disciples of the Baptist in verse 39 (there are slight differences in the two statements in Greek, but both phrases use the same terms); those who come to Jesus begin to speak and act as he does.

When Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus, "Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!'" (v. 47). Nathanael's astonished reply ("How do you know me?"; v. 48) indicates that Nathanael does not know Jesus, but Jesus has accurately described Nathanael's guileless, straightforward character nevertheless. Nathanael presumably expects Jesus to relate ordinary human means of how he knows him, but Jesus surprises him by answering, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (v. 48b).

In the OT, to sit under one's own vine and fig tree is associated with enjoyment of the blessing of God under the righteous reign of the king from David's line (1 Kings 4:25; cf. Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10). Some suggest that Nathanael had just been in prayer and meditation under a fig tree, and while the text does not say so, this would explain Nathanael's reply, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49). Nathanael has gone from skepticism arising from Jesus being from Nazareth (v. 46), to surprise that Jesus knows him (v. 48), to confessing that he is the Son of God and King of Israel (v. 49; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14). What has apparently convinced him is the reality that Jesus knows his character though they have not met, combined with Jesus' ability to have "seen" him before Philip called him. Everything about the narrative suggests that Nathanael has become convinced of the identity of Jesus because Jesus has shown himself to have supernatural knowledge.

Having wowed Nathanael in this way, Jesus promises more in John 1:50–51:

"Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Having reviewed the cause of Nathanael's confession, Jesus promises Nathanael that he "will see greater things than these" (v. 50). In verse 51 Jesus hints at the sort of "greater things" Nathanael can expect. Jesus alludes to the episode in Genesis 28 when Jacob had fled his home, having stolen the birthright and blessing from Esau. Jacob dreamed of "a ladder. . . . And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!" (Gen. 28:12). Yahweh himself appeared, promising to Jacob the blessing of Abraham (Gen. 28:13–14). Jacob responded that the place was "none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:17). The "ladder" or "flight of steps" Jacob saw may have been an ancient Near Eastern

ziggurat, a point of connection between earth and heaven. Jesus puts himself in the place of that temple-like object. The reference to the Word “tabernacling” in John 1:14 is now joined by this indication in verse 51 that Jesus, the Son of Man, will be the point of connection between earth and heaven. Thus verses 14 and 51 both contribute to the theme in John’s Gospel that Jesus is the replacement of the temple. Moreover, the Genesis passage addresses the blessing of Abraham, a blessing that will be realized in and through Jesus.

In addition to the obvious connections to Genesis 28, the idea of “heaven opened” and the reference to the “Son of Man” in John 1:51 call to mind the vision in Daniel 7, where the Ancient of Days is enthroned (Dan. 7:9–10) and the “one like a son of man” receives everlasting dominion (Dan. 7:13–14).¹⁴ Thus, in John 1:51, Jesus suggests to Nathanael that he will be the point of connection between heaven and earth, that through him the blessing of Abraham, passed down to Isaac and Jacob, will be realized, and that he himself is the Son of Man who will exercise everlasting dominion.

John 1 is a bountiful bonanza of titles for Jesus: the Word, Life, Light, Lamb of God, Anointed of the Spirit, Rabbi/Teacher, Messiah/Christ, one of whom the Law and Prophets spoke, Son of God, King of Israel, Son of Man. John has exalted Jesus as the one who will fulfill the promises of the OT. He has presented the Baptist as the one preparing the way for Jesus. He has shown disciples coming to Jesus as their teacher, that they might abide with him. He has shown Jesus giving a new identity to Peter. He has shown Jesus behaving in unexpected ways. He has presented Jesus as God, with supernatural knowledge of people and the ability to see them, such that any questions they have are answered.

Response

John the Baptist knew the majesty of God, knew the depth of the problems facing God’s people, and thereby knew something of the greatness of the one needed to solve those problems. Concentration on these realities created the reflexive response we see in the Baptist, the instinct to exalt the one to come. Is this our response? Could we hope for anything better than Jesus? How could someone be more for us than what Jesus is? Thus, like John, we must worship Jesus. We must trust him. We must call upon his name. Let us marvel at his invitation to abide with him. Praise be to God, the Lord Jesus does not feel that we are a burden or a bore, a drag or drain. He has every right to think so, but instead he loves us. He gives himself to us.

¹⁴ For discussion of Daniel 7, see chapter 6 in James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 135–154.

OVERVIEW OF
JOHN 2:1–4:54

John 2 opens a section of the Gospel that begins and ends in Cana of Galilee. The clear parallels between 2:11 and 4:53–54 join with the setting of 2:1–11 and 4:46–54 in Cana to form an inclusio around John 2–4.

The opening and closing of statements of 2:1–12 match the opening and closings statements of 4:46–54 (table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1: Opening and Closing Statements of John 2:1–12 and 4:46–54

2:1	4:46
On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee.	So he came again to Cana in Galilee.
2:11	4:53–54
This, the <i>first of his signs</i> , Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples <i>believed</i> in him.	The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself <i>believed</i> , and all his household. This was now <i>the second sign</i> that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

Within the brackets created by these opening and closing statements of John 2–4, the concept of the “third day” is a strong theme in this section of the Gospel. In 2:1 the wedding is “on the third day.” In verses 13–22 Jesus says he will rebuild the destroyed temple “in three days.” Then, in 4:40 Jesus stays with the Samaritans “two days,” and in 4:43 we read, “After the two days he departed.” This indicates, implicitly, that the official’s son is raised on the third day (4:46–54; cf. “yesterday” in 4:52). Thus, in John 2–4, water is turned to wine at a wedding, Jesus speaks of his death and resurrection in terms of the destruction and rebuilding of the temple, and he raises a son from the dead, all on the third day. In addition to these “third day” events, Jesus speaks with Nicodemus about the new birth, the Baptist testifies that Jesus is the bridegroom, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman of questionable past at a well, and the Samaritans herald Jesus as the Savior of the world. In these chapters Jesus attends a wedding, is called a bridegroom, and meets a woman at a well, recalling how Abraham’s servant found Rebekah at a well; Jacob and Moses also met their wives at wells (Gen. 24:11–15; 29:1–10; Ex. 2:15–21). The new birth by water and spirit that Jesus describes to Nicodemus points to the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36, and the Samaritans seeing Jesus as the Savior of the

world anticipates the ingathering of the Gentiles. These chapters are thus thick with OT fulfillment.

John 2–4 has clear units that seem to match each other thematically, and the direct enumeration of the “first” (2:11) and “second” (4:54) signs provides the outer frame for what appears to be a chiasmic structure of this section of the Gospel:

- (A) 2:1–12: Water to Wine
- (B) 2:13–25: Passover/Temple
- (C) 3:1–21: Nicodemus
- (C') 3:22–36: The Baptist
- (B') 4:1–45: The Savior of the World
- (A') 4:46–54: Healing of a Son

John has built his narrative to herald Jesus as the one who fulfills the old covenant and brings in the new. The fulfillments John depicts are intertwined and multilayered, overlapping and spilling into one another, as though John has too much to write in too little space (cf. 21:25). These themes will be explored more fully as each section is explicated, but the brief comments here will orient the discussion.

The old covenant was understood as a marriage between Yahweh and Israel (e.g., Jer. 31:32, “my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband”). Yahweh promised that the restoration of his people would be like a new marriage between him and his people (e.g., Hos. 2:19, “I will betroth you to me forever”).

Alongside these wedding themes are a number of significant “third days” in the OT:

- Abraham went to sacrifice his beloved son on Mount Moriah on the third day (Gen. 22:4).
- Yahweh came down on Mount Sinai to speak the commandments of the covenant with Israel on the morning of the third day (Ex. 19:11, 15, 16).
- At the end of three days (Josh. 3:2), the Israelites prepared to cross the Jordan on the next day (Josh. 3:5).
- David defeated plunderers, rescued his family, and gave gifts to men on the third day (1 Sam. 30:1, 17–20, 26–31).
- Though sick unto death, Hezekiah heard from Isaiah that Yahweh would raise him up to worship at the temple on the third day (2 Kings 20:1–5).
- Hosea said the exile would be like a lion (Yahweh) striking down a man (Israel), but after two days Yahweh would revive his people, raising them up on the third day (Hos. 5:14; 6:2).
- “Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17).
- Esther interceded for the lives of her people after they fasted “three days,” with Esther going before the king “on the third day” (Est. 4:16; 5:1).

These instances shed light on the symbolic fulfillments in John 2–4, as we will see:

(A) 2:1–12: Water to Wine

On the third day Jesus goes to a wedding and turns water into wine. God's covenant with Israel was a marriage. The new covenant is a new marriage. After buying his bride with his blood on the cross, Jesus will rise from the dead on the third day to claim her triumphantly. The wine from the water "sign-ifies" the new and better covenant about to be brought out of the old.

(B) 2:13–25: Passover/Temple

After bringing something new and better (wine) out of the inferior (water) when the old has run out, Jesus is described as the Passover Lamb of the prophesied new exodus (cf. 1:29, 36). This Passover Lamb drives the animals of sacrifice out of the temple (2:13–17). He is not only the lamb; he is also the one who has become flesh and tabernacled (1:14), replacing the temple as the dwelling place of God, where sacrifice for atonement is made. His death will fulfill the visitation of wrath typified when Solomon's temple was destroyed; thus he speaks of his death as a destruction of the temple. In three days the Jesus-temple will be rebuilt. He will rise, and the connection with the matching section describing his encounter with the Samaritan woman (B', 4:1–45) teaches that his death and resurrection in fulfillment of the Passover makes him the Savior of the world.

(C) 3:1–21: Nicodemus

To enjoy the new wine of the new covenant, to benefit from the sacrifice of the new Passover Lamb, to worship in the new temple by entering the kingdom Jesus brings, one must be born again. This is what Jeremiah and Ezekiel were referring to when they spoke of circumcision of the heart (e.g., Jer. 6:10; 9:25–26) and the removal of a heart of stone to be replaced by a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26). Nicodemus interacts with Jesus from an unbelieving perspective. Jesus explains that he must be born again.

(C') 3:22–36: The Baptist

John the Baptist testifies about Jesus from a believing perspective. The text picks up the wedding themes from 2:1–12 as John proclaims Jesus to be the bridegroom (3:29). The OT prophets had pointed to a day when God's people would have a new and fuller experience of the Spirit (e.g., Isa. 32:15; Joel 2:28–32), and the Baptist announces that, to Jesus, God "gives the Spirit without measure" (John 3:34). Those who believe in the Son have eternal life.

(B') 4:1–45: The Savior of the World

Jesus meets this non-Jewish woman at a well, just as Isaac (through his father's servant), Jacob, and Moses met their wives at wells (Genesis 24: 29:1–10; Ex. 2:16–17). This is in fact Jacob's well (John 4:5), and the woman asks Jesus if he is greater than Jacob (4:12). There are many OT indications that the Gentiles would be brought into the new covenant (e.g., the nations stream to Zion in Isa. 2:1–4; cf. 49:6), and in this passage the Samaritans come streaming to Jesus (John 4:30), calling him the Savior of the world (4:42).

(A') 4:46–54: Healing of a Son

Having stayed two days with the Samaritans (4:43), Jesus returns to Cana (4:46), where he does “a second sign” (4:54) that, like the first (2:11), prompts faith in those who see (4:53). The prophets had announced that the glorious eschatological restoration would be like resurrection from the dead (e.g., Ezekiel 37; Hos. 5:14–6:2), and Jesus comes with power to roll back the curse of death, healing a son “at the point of death” (John 4:47).

From Cana to Cana: Jesus goes to a wedding on the third day, fills jars used for purification rites when the wine runs out, and brings out a new and better wine. From there he shows himself to be both the new-exodus Passover Lamb and the true temple that will be destroyed under God's wrath but rebuilt in three days. Then he explains that those who would see and enter the kingdom he brings must be born again, while the Baptist identifies him as the bridegroom who must increase. Jesus then interacts with a Samaritan woman of a speckled past at a well, demonstrating he is greater than Jacob, who also met a woman (Rachel) at a well. After all this, he heals a son at the point of death after two days. The marriage feast of the Lamb will be like resurrection from the dead, like water to wine, like new birth.

JOHN 2:1–12

2 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.¹ ⁷Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸And he

said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it.⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

¹²After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers² and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

¹Greek *two or three measures (metrētas)*; a *metrētēs* was about 10 gallons or 35 liters ²Or *brothers and sisters*. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, the plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated “brothers”) may refer either to *brothers* or to *brothers and sisters*

Section Overview: The First Sign in Cana: New Wine at a Wedding on the Third Day

What happens in this scene is as simple and straightforward as it is profound and thought-provoking. Jesus attends a wedding on a third day. When the host lacks wine, Jesus’ mother approaches him with the problem. Jesus asks what this has to do with him, then gives instructions to fill six stone jars with water, draw out some of the water, and take it to the host. The host then calls the bridegroom and praises the water-turned-wine as the best wine at the party. John identifies this as the first of Jesus’ signs and notes that, in response, his disciples believe in him.

Section Outline

III. From Cana to Cana (2:1–4:54)

- A. The First Sign in Cana: New Wine at a Wedding on the Third Day (2:1–12)**
 - 1. The Lack of Wine at a Wedding on the Third Day (2:1–5)**
 - 2. The First Sign: Water to Wine (2:6–12)**

This passage has a concentric structure that can be depicted chiastically:

2:1–2: Time, Place, and People Involved

2:3: The Lack of Wine

2:4–5: Jesus, His Mother, and His Hour

2:6–8: The Wine Jars and the Instructions of Jesus

2:9–10: Tasting the Wine, the Best Saved for Now

2:11: First Sign, Glory Manifested, Disciples Believed

2:12: Time, Place, People Involved

Comment

2:1–5 *The Lack of Wine at a Wedding on the Third Day.* Details of time, place, and people involved are given in 2:1–2, and similar information will be given in 2:12, marking the close of this section (table 1.2).

TABLE 1.2: Time, Place, and People at Beginning and End of John 2:1–12

Time	2:1	on the third day	2:12	a few days
Place	2:1	at Cana in Galilee	2:12	to Capernaum
People	2:1–2	Jesus, his mother, his disciples	2:12	Jesus, his mother and brothers, his disciples

From Bethany across the Jordan (1:28), Jesus and his disciples have removed to Galilee (1:43) and now attend this wedding in Cana. Jesus' mother is also at the wedding (2:1). Just as the beloved disciple is never overtly named "John son of Zebedee" in the Gospel according to John, so the mother of Jesus is never overtly named "Mary, wife of Joseph." John may have chosen not to use his own name nor the name of the mother of Jesus in his Gospel as a way of insisting that his audience look at Jesus, not at Mary or John.

John 1:19–51 had presented a series of days:

Day 1: The Baptist interacts with those sent from the Pharisees (1:19–28).

Day 2: "The next day" (1:29), the Baptist bears witness to the Spirit descending on Jesus to remain (1:29–34).

Day 3: On "the next day" (1:35), two of the Baptist's disciples follow Jesus.

Day 4: "The next day" (1:43), Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael (1:43–51).

This means that when we arrive at 2:1 "on the third day," this "third day" is also the seventh day, seven being a number of fullness or completion. John does not overtly name the seventh day, but as we consider whether such information is significant, we should bear in mind that John has not haphazardly included details about days, nor has he randomly selected an event that took place at a wedding. This event is included in John's Gospel because of how the third day and the wedding sign-ify fulfillment of the significant patterns of third days in the OT and new-covenant-wedding connotations (cf. Overview of John 2:1–4:54).

The initial report that wine is lacking provides the occasion for the mother of Jesus to look to him to resolve the situation (2:3). This lack of wine affords Jesus an opportunity to provide, and thereby he "manifested his glory" (v. 11). By calling the event and the interactions related to it a "sign" (v. 11), John indicates that the details point beyond themselves to the broader salvation-historical significance of the coming of Jesus.

Mary's statement, "They have no wine" (v. 3), shows that she expects her son to do something about the problem. Her concern may reflect the deep shame the hosts of a wedding would experience if the supply of wine failed, but John focuses not on the family's shame but on Jesus' doing a sign to manifest his glory (v. 11). Jesus' reply, "Woman, what does this have to do with me?" (v. 4), is somewhat abrupt (cf. the usage of the same Greek phrase in the Greek translation of Judg. 11:12; 1 Kings 17:18; 2 Kings 3:13; 2 Chron. 35:21; and in Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28),

but it invites reflection on the significance of this event for Jesus, a significance broader than the need for wine at this wedding.¹⁵

Jesus then says, “My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). This is the first of a number of references in John to Jesus’ “hour” (7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1; cf. also 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 16:21, 32). The idea of the fulfillment of a particular time is present in other Gospels (e.g., Mark 1:15; Luke 1:20; 2:6) and grows out of OT passages (e.g., Ezekiel 4; Dan. 9:24–27) describing particular amounts of time being completed before the restoration would arrive. This reference to the hour that has not yet come (John 2:4) is matched later in the passage by the statement that the best wine has been saved “until now” (v. 10).

The description of the water jars, the instructions of Jesus, and the implication from verse 9 that those instructions have been fully and completely obeyed comprises the central moment of this event that John calls a “sign.” The water jars were for “Jewish rites of purification” (v. 6; cf. Mark 7:3), most likely rites approved by the Pharisees. If each jar held “twenty or thirty gallons” (John 2:6), filling six jars meant Jesus made between 120 and 180 gallons of wine—lavish provision. Indeed, John reports that “they filled them up to the brim” (v. 7), pointing to the completion of God’s intention for such old covenant regulations. Jesus then gives instructions for the servants to draw from the jars and serve the master of the feast.

Rather than narrate that Jesus was obeyed, John goes straight to the master’s response in verse 9. From the master of the feast’s response when he tastes the wine, we see that Jesus has done something extraordinary. John does not explore how it happened. He does not even narrate the servants’ obeying the instructions Jesus gave. John notes that the master of the feast “did not know” where the wine came from (v. 9), but the master proclaims it “the best” (v. 10 NIV). Thus the master of the feast experiences what happens when Jesus invites others to eat and drink of what he offers (e.g., 4:10; 6:54; 7:37); they may not know Jesus’ identity, but the fruit of his work is beyond compare.

John calls this “the first of his signs” (2:11). Jesus has turned water into wine, but John makes it clear that the supernatural transformation of water to wine is eclipsed by the broader redemptive-historical implications of what has happened. The old covenant was a marriage between Yahweh and Israel, and at a wedding on the third day, the wine ran out. John notes these details to signify that the old covenant has been exhausted. Water jars used for the keeping of the regulations of the old covenant are filled, pointing to the fulfillment of the allotted time and intended purpose of the old covenant and its purification rites. Out of the old is drawn something new and better: the best wine. John does not call these supernatural things Jesus does “mighty works,” as the other Gospel writers do. Calling them “signs,” John has carefully selected and framed his presentation to bring out

¹⁵ Mary’s statement to the servants in John 2:5 reflects utter confidence in Jesus; the wording is very close to Genesis 41:55, where the Pharaoh told the famished Egyptians to do whatever Joseph told them. This allusion to the Joseph narrative contributes to the way the NT authors present Jesus as the fulfillment of all that was typified by Joseph. For discussion, see Hamilton, “Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah?”

the ways in which Jesus is effecting the shift of the ages, the movement from old covenant to new, from water to wine.

At a wedding on the third day Jesus made the best wine, and through these details John illustrates the way that Jesus came “at the right time” (Rom. 5:6), “when the fullness of time had come” (Gal 4:4), when the old covenant had run its course. Jesus called for the water jars to be filled to the brim (John 2:7), as though he wanted to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15), and then he provided new wine (cf. Matt. 9:14–17), pointing to the new covenant.

2:6–12 *The First Sign: Water to Wine.* When John says that, having done “this, the first of his signs,” Jesus has “manifested his glory” (John 2:11), John’s audience is reminded of the claim in 1:14, “We have seen his glory.” John 2:1–12 also depicts what John summarized in 1:16–18: Jesus has given “grace upon grace” at this wedding, abundantly supplying at the point of need. When the water jars used for old covenant purification rites were filled and the best wine was drawn from them, 1:17 is enacted: “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” And this manifestation of glory expositis what John said in 1:18: Jesus has made known the Father. God gives grace upon grace: the law of Moses was a good gift God gave to Israel, and from its fulfillment God gives the best wine of the new covenant to his new covenant people.

The abundant provision of wine in this episode also hints at the fulfillment of passages like Genesis 49:8–12, where the vine will be so fruitful that the coming king from Judah will not bother to keep his donkey’s colt from eating freely, he will use the plentiful wine to wash his clothing, and his eyes will be dark and healthy like the wine itself (Gen. 49:11–12). Among others, Amos uses the same imagery to point to the messianic age, the glorious eschatological restoration, as he describes the plowman overtaking the reaper, the mountains and hills dripping and flowing with wine, and the people planting vineyards and drinking the wine they produce (Amos 9:13–14).

In response to this sign, “his disciples believed in him” (John 2:11). On the one hand, the belief of the disciples is a natural response to a mighty work: Jesus did the sign, and the disciples believed in him. On the other hand, some will see the signs Jesus does and believe in him, but Jesus will not entrust himself to them (2:23–25). This may indicate that the disciples had begun to perceive what the signs signified, which Jesus was committed to revealing to them (cf. 17:8).

John opened this unit with information about the time, place, and people involved (cf. table at the beginning of this section), and he closes the unit (2:12) with information again related to the time, place, and people involved: from Cana (v. 1) to Capernaum (v. 12); along with Jesus, his mother, and his disciples (vv. 1–2), Jesus’ brothers now join the cast of characters (v. 12); and, whereas the wedding happened “on the third day” (v. 1), they will now stay in Capernaum “for a few days” (v. 12) as Passover draws nigh (v. 13).

Response

We must not think of Jesus as merely a moral teacher or miracle worker. The authors of the Gospels and Acts¹⁶ have selected, included, and presented the mighty works done by Jesus because of the way they advance the narrative and communicate the significance of what God has done in Christ. His life, death, and resurrection comprise the fulcrum of the ages—he has fulfilled the old covenant and initiated the new. John presents Jesus as “him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote” (1:45) and depicts Jesus accomplishing many-layered fulfillments of the OT. Understanding these things deepens our faith, informing our understanding of our Lord and ourselves in the grand scheme of redemptive history—and deepened understanding deepens love (Phil. 1:9). We want to understand the Bible so that we can understand the Father and the Son by the power of the Spirit. Understanding the redemptive-historical significance of John 2:1–12 will prompt faith, compel worship, and empower love for God and neighbor.

John 2:1–12 shows that God layers good gifts onto good gifts, bringing out the best at the right time: to the gracious gift of the old covenant God has added—grace upon grace—the new (1:16–17). Satan suggests that God withholds good gifts from his people, but as Jesus makes the Father known (1:18) by facilitating plentiful celebration at a wedding, he exposes Satan as a liar. The God of the Bible is revealed by his Son, Jesus, to be one who ensures abundant wine for the wedding feast.

JOHN 2:13–25

¹³The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

¹⁴In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

¹⁸So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple,¹ and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²²When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

¹⁶ Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke’s Account of God’s Unfolding Plan*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 151–159.

²³Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

¹Or *This temple was built forty-six years ago*

Section Overview: Passover and a New Temple

At the Feast of Passover, Jesus drives animals to be used for sacrifice out of the temple, then speaks cryptically of his own death. John notes that Christ's disciples understood what he had said only after the resurrection, and also indicates that Jesus saw through the superficial support some gave to his actions. The most stunning feature of this passage is that, despite Jesus' awareness that he will be killed, he nevertheless steps forward confident that he will rise from the dead. The passage shows us the love and courage of Jesus: courage that sends him to the cross, and love that motivates him to do so.

Section Outline

III.B. Passover and a New Temple (2:13–25)

1. Zeal for Your House (2:13–17)
2. I Will Raise It Up (2:18–22)
3. He Knew What Was in Man (2:23–25)

Comment

2:13–17 *Zeal for Your House.* Just as 2:1 and 2:12 were marked with details of time and place, so at the opening of this new section (2:13–22) John gives details of time and place (v. 13). To summarize the places mentioned to this point in the Gospel: Bethany beyond the Jordan (1:28) was likely in the south, near Jerusalem; from there Jesus went to Galilee (1:43). He then went to the wedding at Cana (2:1) before staying “for a few days” in Capernaum (2:12). All males in Israel were commanded to go to Jerusalem thrice yearly for the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Booths (Deut. 16:16) in order to commemorate the Lord's deliverance of them from Egypt, his provision for them through the wilderness, and his goodness to them in the Land of Promise. In obedience to that requirement, Jesus now goes to Jerusalem as Passover draws near (John 2:13).

Deuteronomy 14:22–27 had provided for the possibility that people living too far from Jerusalem to carry everything required for observance of a feast would need to convert their goods into money, which was then used in Jerusalem to acquire what was necessary, including “oxen and sheep and pigeons” (John 2:14). An industry of “money-changers” had sprung up around and in the temple to facilitate these transactions, but Jesus was so incensed by their presence in the temple that he made a “whip of cords” and “drove them all out of the temple,

with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables” (v. 15).

Jesus probably used the whip to encourage large animals of sacrifice, such as sheep and oxen, to lumber out of the temple courts, knowing their keepers would have to follow. Jesus then upends the brokers’ tables and pours out their coins, making clear what it is that offends him when he orders, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade” (v. 16). The temple was to be consecrated, set apart as holy, precisely because it was the house of God. As such, the type of transactions being carried out should not have been taking place within the temple precincts. Those who were doing business in the temple, even business necessary for the worship of God, were misusing his dwelling place.

Jesus is not arrested at this time, nor does John describe any immediate follow-up concerning Jesus’ actions, indicating that the authorities and the public basically agreed with Jesus on this point. They knew the temple was not supposed to be turned into a marketplace, but they had done nothing about it. When a blameless man stands up and does what everyone agrees should be done, the words of Proverbs 24:25 are proven true: “Those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them.” Jesus will be asked about his authority in John 2:18, but the righteousness of what he has done goes unchallenged.

John makes a suggestive observation in verse 17: “His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’” When did they remember this? The disciples of Jesus may have remembered this on the spot. Alternatively, in light of the way verse 22 refers to what the disciples remembered after the resurrection of Jesus, their memory of Jesus’ statement here may also have come upon further reflection in light of his death and resurrection, through the prism of the OT.

When David wrote, “Zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me” (Ps. 69:9), he was likely referring to how his desire to build the temple (2 Sam. 7:1–7) had “consumed him,” and how as a result of his pursuit of God’s cause the nations raged not only against the Lord but also against him (cf. Ps. 2:1–3). As David’s heir, Jesus shares his vigilant passion for the temple. In view of how the passage goes on to address Jesus’ death and resurrection (John 2:19–22), this reference to being consumed by zeal for the house of God suggests a fervent passion that will consume his very life.

2:18–22 *I Will Raise It Up.* As noted above, the authorities do not challenge what Jesus did, but they do seek proof that he has the authority to do it: “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” (v. 18). In asking for a “sign,” the Jews were most likely seeking prophetic credentials from Jesus. “Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’” (v. 19). Jesus has just driven the merchants and their merchandise out of the temple, so with this conversation most likely taking place nearby, the reference to “this temple” would be taken to

refer to the building that dominated Jerusalem. Naturally, therefore, “The Jews then said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’” (v. 20).

After relating this mistaken conclusion the Jews had drawn from Jesus’ words, John explains in verse 21, “But he was speaking about the temple of his body.” Just as the consuming zeal in verse 17 hinted at the death of Jesus, so do Jesus’ words concerning the destruction of his body. This time, however, confidence of a subsequent resurrection is also stated, a point realized by the disciples only after the promised death and resurrection took place: “When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken” (v. 22). Here again the disciples are portrayed as remembering the words of Jesus after his death and resurrection and reflecting on them in light of Scripture.

God had saved Israel from Egypt through the exodus, a deliverance commemorated at the yearly celebration of the Passover. Every year at Passover, those who celebrated the feast killed and ate the Passover lamb. Now Jesus, the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), has spoken of his own death. But why does he do so in terms of the destruction of the temple? Because the crucifixion of Jesus was the climactic visitation of the covenant curses and God’s just wrath against sin. Israel’s prophets had warned of the visitation of the curses of the covenant, and the ultimate manifestation of those curses was the destruction of the temple and exile from the land, to be followed by an exodus of a faithful remnant back from exile into the land. Little wonder that the Lamb of God who would bring to pass that prophesied new exodus should expel other sacrificial animals from the temple precincts. Little wonder that the disciples of Jesus would see him resurrected and believe both what he said and *the Scripture* (2:22). God kept his promises through the death and resurrection of Jesus, who is the new and better Passover Lamb accomplishing a new and better exodus, after a more devastating destruction of the temple and a more impressive rebuilding of it on the third day, in his resurrection.

2:23–25 *He Knew What Was in Man.* Just as verses 1 and 12 bracketed the episode at the wedding on the third day with details of time and place, so verses 13 and 23 bracket the temple cleansing with details of time and place. Verse 23 states that, while Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover, “many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.” Since the only “sign” John has mentioned to this point was the changing of water to wine in verse 11, and since the healing of the official’s son will be enumerated as “the second sign” in 4:54, it would appear that these other “signs” in 2:23 (and 3:2) are signs John does not narrate.¹⁷ John states in 20:30–31, “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in

¹⁷ Pace Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 102n6, who argues that the temple cleansing is the second sign in John’s narrative.

his name.” The disciples believed in response to the sign in 2:11, and many others believed in response to the un-narrated signs mentioned in verse 23.

Verses 23 and 24 display a word play on the verb “believe”: many “believed” in Jesus (v. 23), but Jesus did not “entrust” (lit., “believe”) himself to them (v. 24). What does John mean? In what sense did Jesus not *entrust* himself to those who were *believing* in him because of his signs?

John explains that it was because Jesus “knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man” (vv. 24–25). Because Jesus “knew all people,” he knew their need of the new birth (cf. 3:3, 5), and he knew that some would receive the new birth while others would not (cf. 17:6, 9), and thus who would receive and who would reject him. Even if those who were not given to him by the Father were temporarily attracted to him because of the signs, Jesus did not entrust himself to them, for he knew the status of their hearts (cf. 6:2, 26, 30, 64–66).

Response

What outward signs distinguish those to whom Jesus would, and those to whom he would not, entrust himself? Jesus says difficult things to those following him in chapter 6, and as a result “his disciples were grumbling” (6:61). Jesus then declares to his disciples,

“There are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. (6:64–66)

In this fascinating passage, Jesus knows that some “disciples” “did not believe,” and once he starts saying things that do not scratch their itching ears, they stop walking with him. How do we respond if this describes us? The answer is in the next two verses—“Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’” (6:67–68). No matter how difficult Jesus’ words were, Peter knew they were words of eternal life. Jesus entrusts himself to those who regard his words as Peter did. If your response to Jesus truly matches Peter’s, you know you have been born again. The Father has given you to Jesus, and Jesus will entrust himself to you.

David was consumed with zeal for building a house for God’s name. That same zeal consumed Jesus, resulting in his death on behalf of God’s people so that he could build them into a house for God’s name. What consumes your life? What passion dominates you? For what would you give your blood and treasure? Is what you are devoted to worthy of your life? God’s kingdom and the gospel are worth your life. Have you been gripped by the knowledge that there is only one name by which man may be delivered from the yawning cavern of hell’s dark hole? Do

you see that there is only one way to know God, only one way to find soul-deep satisfaction, one way to live a life worth everlasting deliverance?

Ponder the mysteries. Roll around on your tongue the new wine of the way God has fulfilled his promises in Jesus; savor the fullness, the depth, and the surprising and fresh glory of what God has done. Drink deeply of God's glory and be intoxicated with the goodness of what he has brought to pass. All his promises are "Yes" and "Amen" in Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20). This is better than any novel, better than any drama, better than any fantasy. This is the true tale of how the prince born with neither throne nor crown showed that he loved his bride enough to die for her; and by dying for her he regained his rightful throne, was crowned as king, and liberated his bride from the oppressive powers holding her captive. There is no better story than the true one.

JOHN 3:1–21

3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus¹ by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again² he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.³ ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You⁴ must be born again.' ⁸The wind⁵ blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you⁶ do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.⁷ ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.⁸

¹⁶"For God so loved the world,⁹ that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the

judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

¹Greek *him* ²Or *from above*; the Greek is purposely ambiguous and can mean both *again* and *from above*; also verse 7 ³The same Greek word means both *wind* and *spirit* ⁴The Greek for *you* is plural here ⁵The same Greek word means both *wind* and *spirit* ⁶The Greek for *you* is plural here; also four times in verse 12 ⁷Some manuscripts add *who is in heaven* ⁸Some interpreters hold that the quotation ends at verse 15 ⁹Or *For this is how God loved the world*

Section Overview: Nicodemus

John 2 ended with many believing in Jesus because of the signs he did at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem (2:23), but Jesus was not entrusting himself to those people because he “knew what was in man” (vv. 24–25). Insight into these enigmatic statements comes in chapter 3, which opens with a scene meant to illustrate 2:23–25. In 2:25, Jesus “needed no one to bear witness about *man*, for he himself knew what was in *man*.” In 3:1 we read, “Now there was a *man* of the Pharisees. . . .” Similarly, 2:23 speaks of people believing “when they saw the *signs* that he was *doing*,” and in 3:2 Nicodemus says to Jesus, “no one can *do* these *signs* that you *do* unless God is with him.”

Why would John connect these passages? Why would he mention people believing in response to signs, then say Jesus did not need testimony about man, and then present a man who came to Jesus in response to signs? It seems that the people to whom Jesus did not entrust himself needed to hear what he says in 3:7: “You must be born again.” The “you” in his statement is not singular, as though addressed only to Nicodemus, but is plural.

Many of the themes of John’s Gospel were introduced in 1:1–18, including the theme of the new birth under consideration in 3:1–15. John 1:12–13 spoke of those who received Jesus, who “believed in his name,” who were given the “right to become children of God” because they were *born* of God. John now presents this dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus to elaborate on what that new birth entails.

There is great drama in this passage. Nicodemus is a member of the Jewish people, a Pharisee and “ruler of the Jews” (3:1). He comes to Jesus knowing that God must be with Jesus, empowering his signs (v. 2). Nicodemus was no doubt aware of the many hopes and expectations reflected in 1:19–51. He brought his hopes and expectations and his preliminary conclusions to Jesus, and the subsequent conversation holds instruction for all generations, showing Jesus making wide and deep claims of how he brings OT promises to fulfillment.

Section Outline

III.C. Nicodemus (3:1–21)

1. You Must Be Born Again (3:1–15)
 - a. A Man of the Pharisees (3:1–2)

- b. You Must Be Born Again (3:3–8)
- c. The Earthly and the Heavenly (3:9–15)
- 2. This Is How God Loved the World (3:16–21)
 - a. This Is How God Loved the World (3:16–17)
 - b. The Judgment (3:18–19)
 - c. Fleeing or Finding the Light (3:20–21)

Comment

3:1–15 *You Must Be Born Again.* Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a ruler (v. 1), probably a member of the Sanhedrin, and a teacher (v. 10—“teacher” may designate him as a preeminent authority). In 7:50–52 Nicodemus is shown to be open-minded and just, and in 19:38–42 he joins Joseph of Arimathea in the risky and expensive venture of providing the crucified Jesus a proper burial. The least we can say is that, across John’s Gospel, Nicodemus is interested in and favorably disposed toward Jesus. From the care he and Joseph of Arimathea show to Jesus after the crucifixion, it would seem that John presents Nicodemus and Joseph as taking the side of Jesus. They are certainly not on the side of those opposed to Jesus, and they seem more than merely neutral as they put themselves in danger and expend considerable wealth to place the body of Jesus in a tomb.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus in chapter 3, and Jesus tells him he must be born again. Nicodemus does not understand. In chapter 7 Nicodemus sees the hypocrisy and wickedness of his colleagues in their rejection of Jesus. Then in chapter 19 Nicodemus joins Joseph in burying Jesus. This is an encouraging progression, involving many factors and experiences. John presents Nicodemus on a journey of sorts, making his way to becoming one who sides with Jesus. The progression we see in Nicodemus shows that some people may have an initial confusing encounter with the message of Jesus; as events unfold, perhaps they will be disabused of their doubt, bringing about a time when they may risk their lives and treasure for the sake of Christ.

There are different assessments of the fact that Nicodemus “came to Jesus by night” (3:2). Some conclude that the reference to night in verse 2 is akin to 13:30, where Judas leaves to betray Jesus and John adds with laconic symbolism, “And it was night,” reinforcing the idea of the wider context that the “light of the world” is about to go dark (e.g., 8:12; 12:35–36). Others observe that night is frequently referenced in the Psalms as a time for the study of Scripture, and there are indications that Jewish rabbis discussed the Scriptures together at night. On the whole, Nicodemus goes directly to Jesus (rather than simply talking about him and making assumptions) and engages him in forthright, respectful conversation. It would seem, then, that though Nicodemus does not understand what Jesus says to him in this passage, John presents him as a sympathetic character rather than as hostile or adversarial.

That Jesus will address Nicodemus as “the teacher of Israel” in 3:10 colors Nicodemus’s addressing him as “Rabbi” in verse 2 with humility and deference.

Moreover, Nicodemus has come to a positive conclusion about the power at work in Jesus' ministry. Unlike those who attribute it to dark forces (cf. Mark 3:22), Nicodemus says, "We know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." The opening statement from Nicodemus gets the conversation started, and Jesus grants the truth of what Nicodemus has said and tells him more.

In his reply to Nicodemus, Jesus both affirms and expands what Nicodemus has said. Jesus begins rather solemnly, saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you." This phrase occurs only in John's Gospel, always on the lips of Jesus (3:3, 5, 11; 13:38; 21:18; etc.). Much more frequent in the Gospels is the shorter phrase "Truly, I say to you." Only John presents Jesus speaking this way—repeating the word "truly" (Gk. *amēn*)—perhaps reflecting a unique sensitivity to this expression.

Jesus continues in 3:3, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The word rendered "again" here is another double entendre, as it could also mean "from above." A birth "from above" recalls the birth in 1:12–13—the reader of the Gospel will recognize this concept, but Nicodemus at this point does not. Nicodemus comes favorably disposed to Jesus, but he has not yet experienced the new birth. Thus he serves as an illustration of the kind of person described in 2:23–25, one drawn to Jesus because of the mighty works but to whom Jesus will not yet entrust himself. Nicodemus has seen the signs, but if he has not been born again, those signs have not revealed to him the kingdom of God. When those who have experienced the new birth see the signs, they glimpse the glory of Jesus (cf. 1:14; 2:11), which reveals God's kingdom to them (3:3; cf. 1:18).

The words of Nicodemus in 3:4 show that he knows only the physical birth that humans experience, as he replies, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus, however, is describing a spiritual rather than physical birth, a spiritual birth that brings to fulfillment OT expectations related to the return from exile and the resurrection from the dead.

Jesus, using OT terms, then elaborates on what it means to be "born again" (v. 5; note that vv. 3 and 5 are essentially parallel), describing the new birth using imagery drawn from Ezekiel 36–37. Ezekiel 36:24 describes God's gathering his exiled peoples from the nations and restoring them to their land. The phrase "born of water and the Spirit" in John 3:5 seems to have in view the "water" in Ezekiel 36:25 and the s/Spirit in 36:26–27.¹⁸ The Lord had said in Ezekiel 36:25, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you." This statement seems to inform the phrase "born of *water* and the Spirit" (John 3:5). The cleansing function of the new birth shows it to be conceptually equivalent to regeneration, which also has a cleansing function (Titus 3:5). One aspect of the new birth, then, is that people are washed clean as they are "born of water" (cf. Ezek. 36:25; John 3:5; Titus 3:5):

¹⁸ For discussion on translation of the phrase *ex hydatos kai pneumatos* ("of water and the Spirit") in verse 5, see Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 58–63.

the new birth cleanses those who experience it (cf. Eph. 5:26). Baptism does not automatically produce the new birth, but the waters of baptism do symbolize this cleansing, and may be used by God for that purpose.

Ezekiel 36:26 speaks of God's giving his people "a new heart, and a new spirit," and then in verse 27 the Lord promises, "I will put my Spirit within you." These statements seem to inform Jesus' reference to those who are "born of water and *the Spirit*" (John 3:5). The meaning, then, is that the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:27) produces a changed human spirit (v. 26). This understanding is also confirmed by Titus 3:5, where Paul says that the Lord "saved us, . . . by the washing of regeneration and *renewal of the Holy Spirit*."

Jesus next elaborates on these concepts to help Nicodemus understand (John 3:6–8). Nicodemus had spoken of physical birth in verse 4, while Jesus had spoken of the spiritual birth in verse 5. Jesus then contrasts these two births: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (v. 6). The physical birth brings one into the realm of the flesh, while the spiritual birth, produced by "the Spirit," brings one into the realm of the spirit. Those born of their mothers are flesh; those "born of God" (1:13) are "born again" (3:3) "of the Spirit"—they are spirit not in the sense that they become the Holy Spirit but in the sense that they belong to and partake of his realm. This is also how they are able to "worship . . . in spirit and truth" (4:23–24).

When Jesus says, "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" (3:7), the first "you" is singular, addressing Nicodemus, while the second "you" is plural, indicating that the need for the new birth is general. The plural "you" may indicate that others were there with Nicodemus, but it certainly shows that Nicodemus is not the only person who needs to be born again. Notice also that to "be born again" is passive. People do not cause themselves to be born physically, nor do they cause themselves to be born spiritually.

Jesus had alluded to Ezekiel 36:25–27 in John 3:5, seeking to show Nicodemus that the prophesied renewal was being accomplished. Now in verse 8 Jesus alludes to Ezekiel 37, where Ezekiel prophesied of the "breath" (Ezek. 37:9) that would give life to the formerly dead dry bones (37:10). The Lord then promised to open the graves of his people and put his Spirit in them (37:14). The Spirit/wind/breath ambiguity of the Hebrew word *ruakh* is true also for the Greek term *pneuma*, and this ambiguity is evoked when Jesus states, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). That the Spirit "blows where it wishes" points again to the reality that no one can cause himself to experience the new birth.

Jesus' echo of the blowing of the wind/breath/Spirit that gave life in Ezekiel 37 also indicates that the new birth is something like the resurrection of the dead's breaking into present reality. This forges another connection between the new birth and regeneration, as the term rendered "regeneration" in Titus 3:5 is used to speak of the renewal of all things, the "new world," in Matthew 19:28, when

believers will enjoy resurrection bodies. Furthermore, the new birth can also be referred to as being “made . . . alive” out of deadness to sin (Eph. 2:1–3, 5), a foretaste of the resurrection from the dead made possible by union with Christ in his resurrection. The Holy Spirit cannot be controlled or summoned, but like the wind its life-giving power can be discerned.

Jesus has explained to Nicodemus that in order to perceive and enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5), one must be born again. This new birth grants the *ability* to see and enter the kingdom. This is not an ability that pertains to the flesh but a spiritual ability to understand the significance of Jesus (vv. 5–6). In response to all of this, Nicodemus asks in seeming wonderment, “How can these things be?” (v. 9). In his reply, Jesus is relentless. He is aghast at the amazement of Nicodemus, asking in verse 10, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” Jesus seems to expect Nicodemus to understand that he claims to bring the fulfillment of what was prophesied in Ezekiel 36–37. As he continues to speak, however, Jesus indicates that the problem is not merely one of understanding.

Jesus says in John 3:11, “Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.” At this point Jesus is speaking on the basis of the reality that he is the Messiah. More than that, he is God incarnate. He has just explained how he is fulfilling the OT to Nicodemus, who is both confused and unconvinced. Jesus responds in accordance with the way things are: Nicodemus should accept what Jesus has said. What Jesus has said is true, whether Nicodemus understands and believes or not. Jesus is God. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is fulfilling the OT. He has explained it, and that ought to be enough for Nicodemus.

When Jesus says, “We speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen,” he testifies to his knowledge and perception of how the new birth is necessary for people to see and enter the kingdom. He has explained how the new birth fulfills Ezekiel’s prophecies of a new heart, new experience of the Spirit, and new life. When Jesus explains something to hearers who do not accept it, the problem is not merely that they do not understand but that they do not believe his testimony.

Jesus indicts Nicodemus for not receiving his testimony in verse 11, and he continues in verse 12, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” This statement seems to serve as a transition, with the reference to earthly things looking back to what Jesus has said to this point concerning the Spirit’s work in the new birth, and the reference to heavenly things looking forward to what Jesus will say in verses 13–15 (perhaps extending through v. 21). The indictment, “you do not believe,” in verse 12 draws out the implication of Nicodemus’s not receiving Jesus’ testimony in verse 11. Nicodemus had asked in verse 9, “How can these things be?” and Jesus has answered in verses 10–12 that if Nicodemus has not believed what he has said to this point, further explanation will hardly help. Even so, Jesus makes two statements in verses 13–15 designed to give further insight into how he fulfills the OT. These statements speak to the identity and mission of Jesus.

There is some discussion of whether the switch from the second person (you) in verse 12 to the third person (no one) in verse 13 indicates that Jesus has stopped talking and John has begun commenting. Others think, since Jesus normally refers to himself as the Son of Man, that perhaps Jesus speaks through verse 15, with John commenting in verses 16–21. Given the way that Jesus is regularly presented in John's Gospel as making explosive statements he does not go on to explain (e.g., 1:51; 2:19), it seems Jesus is the one making the profound and complicated assertions of 3:13–15. Because there is no overt indication that Jesus has stopped talking, the ESV appears correct to put verses 10–21 in red (or within quotation marks in non-red-letter editions), with verse 22 clearly marking a new departure.

Jesus' statement in verse 13 asserts his unique identity on the basis of OT anticipations of the coming Son of God. He picks up ideas from Proverbs 30:4 and Daniel 7:13 to identify himself to Nicodemus. These assertions are meant to announce his identity to Nicodemus, to summon him to a decisive moment of acceptance or rejection of the claims Jesus makes.

In Proverbs 30:4 Agur son of Jakeh asks, "Who has ascended to heaven and come down? . . . What is his name, and what is his son's name? Surely you know!" Jesus, having revealed to Nicodemus his need in terms of OT expectation, seems to be offering the answer to Agur's question: "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man" (John 3:13). The reference to the Son of Man offers Nicodemus another OT context whereby he can understand the identity of Jesus. Jesus has implicitly declared himself to be the Son of the one who is in heaven by means of the allusion to Proverbs 30:4, and he then identifies himself as the Daniel 7:13–14 Son of Man. Having just referenced his ability to declare heavenly things in John 3:12, and having asserted that he testifies to what he has seen and known in verse 11, the words of Jesus in verse 13 amount to a declaration that he himself is simultaneously the Son of the one who is in heaven and the Son of Man; he is the one who has descended *from* heaven (Prov. 30:4), and the only one who has ascended *to* heaven (Dan. 7:13–14). Nicodemus should believe Jesus because of his unparalleled status. Because he descended from heaven, Jesus can declare heavenly things. Because he can declare heavenly things, Nicodemus should believe the earthly things he has explained.

Having declared his identity to Nicodemus by means of these OT allusions, Jesus next tells Nicodemus what he has come to do, again in OT terms: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (3:14–15). Jesus puts two OT texts together in these words. The word translated "lifted up" is the same term used in the Greek translation of Isaiah 52:13 to describe the wise servant being lifted up and exalted—the servant who bears the sin of the people in Isaiah 53. Several times in John's Gospel the term from Isaiah 52:13 will be used to describe Jesus' being lifted up (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34).

There also is the obvious comparison to the incident with the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:4–9, as Jesus presents himself as the typological fulfillment of that

event. In Numbers 21:6, the people are dying because of the serpents whom the Lord has sent among them as a judgment on their sin. John later presents Jesus as the one to whom judgment has been entrusted (John 5:27), and those who do not believe in Jesus face wrath (3:36). In Numbers 21:8 the Lord instructs Moses to make a bronze serpent, depicting the means whereby judgment was visited, and to lift it up. Just as an instrument of judgment, the serpent, was lifted up in the wilderness, so the great agent of judgment, Jesus, will be lifted up on the cross. In Numbers 21:8–9, those who look at the bronze serpent are delivered from the serpent's bite, and in the same way, those who see the glory of Jesus when he is lifted up are delivered from the judgment he will execute. However, whereas the bronze serpent merely extended the physical lives of those who looked on it, those who believe in Jesus enjoy eternal life (John 3:15).

John presents Jesus as claiming to fulfill the OT in dense and various ways in this passage:

- He claims to bring in the promised kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5).
- He claims to bring the cleansing and renovation of attitude prophesied in Ezekiel 36:24–26 through the new birth (John 3:5–6).
- He claims that this renewal partakes of the resurrection blowing of the Spirit prophesied in Ezekiel 37:1–14 (John 3:8).
- He claims to be the ascending and descending Son of the one who is in heaven from Proverbs 30:4 (John 3:13).
- He claims to be the Daniel 7:13–14 Son of Man (John 3:13–14).
- He claims to be the wise servant who will be exalted from Isaiah 52:13 (John 3:14).
- He claims to be the typological fulfillment of the bronze serpent from Numbers 21:4–9 (John 3:14).

3:16–21 *This Is How God Loved the World.* In 2:23–25, John reported that there were people at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem who were believing in Jesus because they saw the signs, but that Jesus was not entrusting himself to these people because he “knew what was in man.” John follows this in chapter 3 with an example of just such a man, Nicodemus, who comes to Jesus because of the signs (vv. 1–2). Nicodemus, however, needs to be born again, as Jesus explains to him in verses 3–8. This indicates that the people to whom Jesus was not entrusting himself also needed to be born again (cf. the plural “You must be born again” in v. 7). Jesus explains the new birth to Nicodemus in terms of the cleansing and renewing work of the Holy Spirit described in Ezekiel 36:24–27 (John 3:5) and the resurrection of the dry bones by the blowing of the Holy Spirit wind in Ezekiel 37 (John 3:8).

Nicodemus responds in perplexed confusion (v. 9), and Jesus faults him not only for not understanding (v. 10) but also for not receiving his testimony (v. 11). Jesus indicts Nicodemus for not believing what he told him about earthly things (v. 12) and proceeds to tell him heavenly things concerning his identity and mission. Jesus identifies himself as the Daniel 7:13 Son of Man and the answer to the riddle of

Proverbs 30:4 (John 3:13). Jesus describes his mission to accomplish the typological fulfillment of the lifting up of the bronze serpent in the wilderness (v. 14), but when Jesus is lifted up, those who believe in him will have eternal life (v. 15).

Jesus then offers further explanation to Nicodemus in verses 16–21. Because a clear break comes in verse 22, it seems that Jesus continues to speak through verse 21, and thus verses 16–21 are a clarification and elaboration from Jesus for Nicodemus. Specifically, in verses 16–17 Jesus clarifies for Nicodemus what he said in verses 14–15 about how he will be lifted up like the bronze serpent. Then in verses 18–19 Jesus elaborates on the relationship between his being lifted up and the judgment. The teaching continues in verses 20–21 with Jesus explaining why some flee the light while others do all they can to find it. This points back to what Jesus said about the new birth in verses 3–8 and the way that new birth was introduced in the prologue to the Gospel in 1:12–13.

The marginal reading for the first clause of the ESV's translation of John 3:16 captures the sense of the text: "For this is how God loved the world." Having just told Nicodemus in verse 14 that the Son of Man must be lifted up like the snake in the wilderness, Jesus now tells him that God loved the world by giving his Son to be lifted up on the cross. In verse 14 Jesus refers to himself as the "son of man" from Daniel 7:13, and in John 3:16 he describes himself as the "only begotten Son" of God (AT). The Son of Man in Daniel 7:13 is both the Davidic king and a member of the heavenly court, and Jesus communicates this dual nature by referring to himself in several ways:

- as the Proverbs 30:4 Son of the one who is in heaven, who ascended to heaven and came down (John 3:13);
- as the Son of Man (3:13–14);
- and as the only begotten Son of God (3:16).

The outcome of the lifting up of the Son in verses 14–15 is the same as that of God's giving the Son in verse 16: "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (v. 15). The only changes from the wording of the last phrase of verse 15 to the same phrase in verse 16 are the use of a different preposition (ἐν in v. 15; εἰς in v. 16) and the addition in verse 16 of the phrase "should not perish."

In what way did God love the world? God loved the world in this way: he gave. God gave his Son. God gave his only begotten Son. There is no one else like Jesus. No one else is both God and man. No one else could be lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness so that those who believe might have life. Only Jesus would answer. God gave Jesus.

The words of Jesus in verse 17 continue to explain the reference to the lifting up of the Son of Man in verse 14 and the giving of the only begotten Son in verse 16. Nicodemus and other Jews of the time were familiar with OT prophecies of a coming king from David's line who would conquer (e.g., Psalm 110). In Acts 5:36–37 Gamaliel speaks of two men—Theudas and Judas the Galilean—who rose up and gathered a following, but whose movements came to nothing when

they were killed. When Paul says that the cross is a stumbling block to the Jews (1 Cor. 1:23), part of what he has in view is how the Jews expected the Messiah to conquer and thus interpreted crucifixion as proof of failure. Jesus seems to be addressing this expectation when he says to Nicodemus in John 3:17, “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

If the Son had first come to conquer, he would have brought condemnation on the world: his enemies would have been judged, and all sinners would have been consigned to perdition forever. But God did not send his Son to condemn the world. God did not send Jesus to conquer and condemn but to die and save. Jesus is explaining to Nicodemus why he will not be raising an army and going to war to drive the Romans out of the Holy Land. Jesus is explaining why he will be lifted up like the snake in the wilderness (v. 14), what it means that God gave the Son (v. 16), and how it is that those who believe in him will have eternal life (vv. 14–15, 16): those from the world who believe will “be saved through him” (v. 17).

That last phrase of verse 17, “saved through him,” indicates that those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life (vv. 15, 16) because they will be saved through Jesus. Saved from what? Verse 36 will describe the wrath of God remaining on those who do not obey the Son. Saved how? As the Son is lifted up like the snake in the wilderness (v. 14). Once again, the reference to his being “lifted up” comes from Isaiah 52:13. Christ saves through his death on the cross. Though not explicitly stated in this passage, the logic undergirding the statements found here, as seen from statements elsewhere in John, holds that the death of Jesus on the cross propitiated the Father’s wrath against sin, just as the bronze serpent was the answer to God’s wrath toward rebellious Israel.

God loved the world by giving Jesus to die in its place. There was nothing the world needed more than for God’s wrath to be assuaged, nothing more valuable to the Father than Jesus. There was no greater length to which anyone could go to show love, no way for greater love to be more convincingly demonstrated, than for ultimate value to be sacrificed for ultimate need to accomplish ultimate salvation.

Jesus is simply explaining to Nicodemus the salvation he has come to accomplish. God loved the world by giving the Son (John 3:16). The Son has come to accomplish the mission and be lifted up on the cross (v. 14). Only those who believe will be saved from condemnation, as Jesus explains in verse 18: “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” A form of the word translated “condemned” also appears in the Greek translation of Isaiah 53:8 as “judgment”: “by oppression and *judgment* he was taken away.” The first clause in John 3:18, then, means that whoever believes in Jesus is not judged because Jesus was judged in his place. The rest of verse 18 explains that those who do not believe have been judged “already,” because they have “not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” This indicates that those who do not believe in Jesus are “already” under judgment, even before they encounter him. The only thing that

delivers from judgment is belief in Jesus. Those who have not believed in Jesus are under the judgment that has stood over all people since Adam's sin, because of his sin and theirs.

Jesus provides proof of that judgment in verse 19: "This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." If unbelievers were not under judgment, they would not prefer the darkness to the light. Their preference for darkness shows their guilt; the coming of the light manifests their judgment as their response shows their spiritual state. As Adam hid from God in the garden, so sinners seek darkness when the Light of the World arrives. One's response to the light reveals one's spiritual state, as Jesus goes on to say in verses 20–21.

As he talks with Nicodemus, Jesus seeks to prove to him that the lifting up of the Son (v. 14) and the Father's giving of the Son (v. 16) are necessary for the world's salvation (v. 17). Nicodemus might think that the Jews would not need such an extreme sacrifice in order to be saved, but Jesus shows from the Jews' response to him that they need not only his sacrifice but also the new birth described in verses 3–8. The Jews should recognize what Nicodemus said in verse 2, that no one could do what Jesus has done apart from God. But they do not recognize this; instead, as Jesus states plainly in verse 19, they love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

Jesus articulates utter moral clarity in verse 20: "Everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed." Notice that those who do evil are neither merely indifferent to the light nor simply uninterested in it. No, they "[hate] the light." This hatred is self-protective, arising from a desire to keep one's wicked deeds from being exposed. Those who encounter Jesus as he is in the Bible encounter him as he is. It is not possible to be neutral toward him. He will be either hated or loved.

This kind of response to the light should be expected. Sinners do not like to have their sin exposed. Counterintuitively, however, God loves people enough to shine the light on their sin. The coming of the light exposes sin and begins the process of wooing people out of darkness into the light. Sinners may not feel loved when their sin is brought to light, but this is how God loved the world. He sent his Son to be the Light of the World, to be killed by the world, that the world could be saved through him.

John stated in 1:12–13 that those who received Jesus were born of God, and Jesus tells Nicodemus that those born again are able to see and enter the kingdom. These earlier statements inform 3:21: "Whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." In order to do what is true, such actions must be "carried out in God." Such works will be done by those who are "born of the Spirit" and thereby *are* spirit (3:6, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit"). Those who are born again are enabled to see and enter the kingdom; they partake not only of the realm of the flesh but also of the realm of the Spirit, and thus their works are wrought in God.

Because of the new birth, those who see the kingdom and believe in Jesus are not repelled by the light but do all they can to enter it. They do what is true, perceiving reality as it is because they have experienced the new birth. They come to the light not for credit for what they have done but so that the light will demonstrate that what they have done has been produced by God's power.

In this conversation Jesus has brought Nicodemus to a point of decision. He has done so by explaining what must happen to him: he needs to experience the new birth, the resurrection renewal that Jesus brings in fulfillment of Ezekiel 36–37. Nicodemus needs to see Jesus as the answer to OT riddles and the fulfillment of OT patterns. He needs to understand Jesus as the manifestation of the Father's love.

Jesus presses the decision on Nicodemus by setting forth the binary nature of reality. Nicodemus needs to understand that there are opposite possibilities: he will either perish or have eternal life (John 3:16). To woo him, Jesus states that he has come not to judge but to save (v. 17); that those who believe will not be judged, while those who do not believe are already judged (v. 18). People love either darkness or light (v. 19). There are those who do wicked things, and there are also those who do the truth; some hate and flee the light, while others come to it (vv. 20–21).

Response

Jesus is the key to understanding the OT. Jesus fulfills its prophecies. He matches and exceeds what was typified. Archetype and resolution of the patterns, interpreter of mysteries and himself the solution of them, Jesus is the culmination of the centuries and the *telos* of the ages. There can be no other response than to commit one's soul to him, to come to his light. To do so means to leave the darkness, to leave the wicked things the darkness hides, to repent of sin.

Such repentance is possible only if one has received the new birth. To turn from the deeds of darkness and come to the light is a work wrought by God. It means God's power is at work. Repentance leads to exposure and shame, but it also is the only path whereby one will be saved, forgiven, cleansed, and empowered to fight sin. Furthermore, others will bear witness to the change that God has worked, and they will testify to his power. The new birth is the only portal to eternal life.

We transgressed, defiled and raged,
And he gave his Son.
For our filth and shame, staining sin,
He sent the pure one.

Bloodied hands and bloodsoaked lands,
The Lamb—he held his tongue,
His blood was spilt; the church was built,
Because he gave his Son.

Now free from chains and all your pains
To living waters run

For cleansing life where Jesus reigns,
The risen, ruling Son.

Worthy he of all our praise,
Honored as his name we raise,
Constant through all time he stays,
Jesus all who trust him saves!

JOHN 3:22–36

²² After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. ²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized ²⁴ (for John had not yet been put in prison).

²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."¹

³¹ He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. ³³ Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

¹ Some interpreters hold that the quotation continues through verse 36

Section Overview: He Must Increase

John 3:1–2 opened with Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night, and verses 19–21 closed with Jesus' description of those who come out of darkness to the light. Verses 22–24 introduce a related section with details that convey time, setting, people involved, and their actions. The transitional material in verses 22–24 is matched by the transitional material in 4:1–4, where again we will find details that convey

time, setting, and people involved. In addition, several references to the baptizing ministries of Jesus and John in 3:22–24 are echoed by another reference to the baptizing ministries of Jesus and John in 4:1–2.

The many parallels in the interactions between Jesus and Nicodemus in 3:1–21 and between the Baptist and a Jew with whom his disciples dispute in verses 25–36 indicate these passages are to be read together. Table 1.3 shows the similarities between the two episodes.

TABLE 1.3: Parallels between John 3:25–36 and 3:1–21

John 3:25–36	John 3:1–21
3:25: Dispute over purification between John's disciples and a Jew.	3:1–2: Nicodemus comes to Jesus.
3:26: All going to Jesus for baptism.	3:5: Jesus tells Nicodemus of the cleansing birth of water and spirit.
3:27: The Baptist says a man cannot <i>receive</i> anything unless it is given him from heaven.	3:11: Jesus charges Nicodemus with not <i>receiving</i> his testimony.
3:28–29: Christ the bridegroom will initiate the new covenant.	3:3–8: The new covenant will be marked by regeneration and cleansing of the Spirit.
3:31: Contrast between what is from earth and what is from heaven.	3:12: Contrast between what is from earth and what is from heaven.
3:31: Jesus is the one who has come down from heaven.	3:13: Jesus is the Son of Man descended from heaven.
3:32: Jesus testifies to what he has seen and heard, and none receive his testimony.	3:11: Jesus testifies to what he has seen and knows, but his testimony is not received.
3:33: Those who receive Jesus' testimony set their seal that God is <i>true</i> .	3:21: Those whose works are wrought in God do what is <i>true</i> .
3:34: Jesus utters the word of God because God gives him the Spirit without measure.	3:3–8: Jesus describes the new birth that the Spirit brings about (cf. 6:63).
3:35: The Father loves the Son.	3:16: God loves the world.
3:36: Those who believe Jesus have life; those who disobey Jesus have the wrath of God remaining on them.	3:15–21: Those who believe Jesus have life; those who do wicked things are condemned.

These similarities present the audience of John's Gospel with an exercise in comparison and contrast. The comparisons and contrasts are embodied in the different perspectives of Nicodemus and John the Baptist. For instance, Nicodemus is part of the establishment in Jerusalem, while the Baptist stands outside the power structures, in the Judean countryside. Nicodemus needs to be born again and does not understand what Jesus says to him, but the Baptist understands who Jesus is and speaks of Jesus in the way that Jesus speaks of himself. Nicodemus does not receive the testimony of Jesus. The Baptist not only receives the testimony of Jesus; he proclaims it. Nicodemus has come to the light out of the darkness, so there is hope for him; the Baptist, meanwhile, knows that Jesus must increase while he himself must decrease.

Section Outline

III.D. The Baptist (3:22–36)

1. The Setting (3:22–24)
2. The Dispute (3:25–26)
3. The Testimony (3:27–33)
4. The Explanation (3:34–36)

Comment

3:22–24 *The Setting.* John consistently marks the beginning of episodes with time references:

- 1:29: “the next day”
- 1:35: “the next day”
- 1:43: “the next day”
- 2:1: “on the third day”
- 2:13: “The Passover . . . was at hand”
- 3:2: “by night”
- 3:22: “after this”
- 4:1: “when Jesus learned . . .”

In addition to the time references are references to locations:

- 1:28: “in Bethany across the Jordan”
- 1:43: “to Galilee”
- 2:1: “at Cana in Galilee”
- 2:13: “Jesus went up to Jerusalem”
- 2:23: “when he was in Jerusalem”
- 3:22: “into the Judean countryside”
- 3:23: “at Aenon near Salim”
- 4:3: “he left Judea”

In addition to the references to time and place, John regularly makes note of *the characters involved* (cf. 1:29, 35, 43; 2:1–2, 12, 14, 23; 3:2, 22–24; 4:1–8). In 3:22 we are given the time, place, and characters involved as we learn what Jesus and his disciples were doing. John next introduces the activities of the Baptist (v. 23) before situating these events as being prior to the imprisonment of the Baptist (v. 24), indicating that all the events to this point in his Gospel precede Mark 1:14.¹⁹ Having observed that, like Jesus and his disciples, the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon near Salim (John 3:22–23), John introduces a dispute that prepares for the Baptist’s testimony to Jesus.

3:25–26 *The Dispute.* The baptizing ministry of John the Baptist had previously been a cause of inquisition: “Why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ,

¹⁹ For discussion, see Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” (1:25). John notes that the Baptist “was baptizing” in 3:23 and then relates, “A discussion arose between some of John’s disciples and a Jew over purification” (3:25).

The context indicates that the baptizing of the Baptist provoked this discussion about purification (1:23–25). To understand the debate, one must recall that when God made man and woman upright and planted them in Eden, they needed no purification. Purification was necessary only when they defiled themselves with sin and were expelled from the presence of God, the realm of life. When God took the new Adam—the nation of Israel—and planted them in the Land of Promise, he gave them rites of purification by which they could keep themselves clean in his presence. As they defiled themselves with their sin, they, like Adam from the garden, were driven from the land. As we saw in 3:5, Ezekiel prophesied that when the Lord restored his people, he would sprinkle clean water on them and cleanse them from their filth (Ezek. 36:25).

The Jew with whom the Baptist’s disciples discuss this matter might have inquired about the relationship between the cleansing rituals prescribed in the Torah and John’s baptism. The disputants take the matter to the Baptist himself in John 3:26, and he speaks to the issues in verses 27–33.²⁰ Given the statement in verse 26, the disciples of John seem concerned that many of their number were deserting them for Jesus. Their alarm arises from ignorance of God’s plan, the Baptist’s place in it, and how the whole scheme reveals the identity of Jesus and provides a setting for his heroics. The Baptist’s reply addresses: (1) the relationship between the Baptist and Jesus; (2) the identity of Jesus and his role in God’s unfolding plan; and (3) the significance of the baptisms John and Jesus were performing—what they were for and what was at stake.

3:27–33 *The Testimony.* The Baptist’s reply to the disputants falls into a chiasmic structure, highlighting the declaration, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (v. 30). This central statement is bracketed by contrasts of the Baptist and Jesus in verses 29 and 31 and by statements about bearing witness in verses 28 and 32 and about what people receive in verses 27 and 33:

3:27: “A person cannot *receive* even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”

3:28: “You yourselves *bear me witness*, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’”

3:29: “The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.”

[Note the contrast between the Baptist and Jesus.]

²⁰ The ESV sees the words of the Baptist stopping after John 3:30, with a note stating that some see the words of the Baptist continuing through verse 36. The chiasmic structure of 3:27–33 has convinced me that verses 27–33 are the Baptist’s reply, with verses 34–36 being an explanatory comment from John the Evangelist.

3:30: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

3:31: “He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.”

[Note the contrast between the Baptist and Jesus.]

3:32: “He *bears witness* to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.”

3:33: “Whoever *receives* his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.”

The Baptist’s reply to the dispute over purification and to the concern that all are going to Jesus is a study in humility and salvation history. The Baptist’s humility comes from his understanding of himself, Jesus, and the roles they each play in God’s plan. John articulates at least fifteen truths here that constitute what he knows about himself and Jesus, knowledge that enables him “not to think of himself more highly than he ought” (cf. Rom. 12:3):

1. *Man’s inability*: “A person cannot receive even one thing” (John 3:27a)
2. *The source of faith*: “unless it is given him from heaven” (v. 27b)
3. *John’s identity*: “You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ’” (v. 28a)
4. *John’s role*: “but I have been sent before him” (v. 28b)
5. *Jesus’ identity*: “The one who has the bride is the bridegroom” (v. 29a)
6. *John’s relationship to Jesus*: “The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him” (v. 29b)
7. *The proper response to Jesus*: “rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete” (v. 29c)
8. *Christ-centeredness*: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (v. 30)
9. *Jesus’ origin*: “He who comes from above” (v. 31a)
10. *Jesus’ preeminence*: “is above all. . . . He who comes from heaven is above all” (v. 31b, e)
11. *John’s origin*: “He who is of the earth belongs to the earth” (v. 31c)
12. *John’s manner*: “and speaks in an earthly way” (v. 31d)
13. *Jesus’ testimony*: “He bears witness to what he has seen and heard” (v. 32a)
14. *The improper response to Jesus*: “yet no one receives his testimony” (v. 32b)
15. *The essence of faith*: “Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true” (v. 33)

Pride comes from thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought. By recognizing that he is not the Messiah, the Baptist understands he is not Israel’s king, its champion, or its savior. John knows who he is and who he is not. John knows his purpose: to prepare the way for Jesus. John knows his own origin: he is from earth, not heaven. John knows he possesses nothing he has not received (1 Cor. 4:7), and whatever he has received has come from God (John 3:27).

As a result of what he knows, John is not threatened by everyone's going to Jesus. He knows the new covenant was spoken of as a new marriage between God and his people (Hos. 2:14–23), and he knows Jesus is the bridegroom who will initiate God's new covenant with his people.

In John 3:27–33 the Baptist speaks to the concern of his disciples about everyone's going to Jesus (cf. v. 26) and to the dispute with a Jew about purification (v. 25). If that dispute had to do with the relationship between the cleansing rites prescribed in the Torah and John's baptism, John's answer has declared that both his baptism and the Torah's cleansing rites have their fulfillment in the cleansing Jesus brings. Jesus spoke of that cleansing to Nicodemus when he referenced the prophesied birth "of water and the Spirit" (v. 5). That water will cleanse people in a way that fulfills everything intended and anticipated by the Levitical system. It will restore people to life in God's presence. The purification Jesus brings thus creates a new relationship between God and his people, a new covenant that is like a marriage, with Jesus as the bridegroom.

The Torah's cleansing rituals, the cleansing prophesied by the prophets, and the cleansing enacted in John's baptism all pointed forward to the cleansing Jesus makes possible for his people. All reality exists for God to display the amazing greatness of his love and power and mercy and justice in the salvation he achieves in Christ.

3:34–36 *The Explanation.* The Baptist has testified in verses 27–33, and from the end of verse 31 Jesus is the subject of the statements. Even though the speaker changes at verse 34 to John the author of the Gospel, Jesus remains the subject of the statements.²¹ The Baptist has just stated, "Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true," and John explains, "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure" (vv. 33, 34). Jesus is the one God has sent, and to him God gives the Spirit without measure.²²

God sent Jesus, and when Jesus speaks he speaks God's words. This makes explicit something hinted at by the Baptist's testimony about Jesus as he spoke of hearing the bridegroom's voice (v. 29), the one from heaven bearing witness to what he has seen and heard (v. 32), and that testimony being received (v. 33). When the bridegroom spoke, he spoke God's words, which gave the friend of the bridegroom joy (v. 29). When he bore "witness to what he [had] seen and heard" (v. 32), he spoke God's words. Those who set their seal that God is true have received testimony, the content of which is the very word of God (vv. 33–34).

John explains the ability of Jesus to speak the words of God in a short phrase that communicates the profundity of the triune God: "He gives the Spirit without measure" (v. 34). The Father gives the Spirit to the Son, enabling the Son to speak the words of God. Jesus is greater than Elisha, who received a double portion of the spirit of Elijah at the Jordan River. Jesus has been baptized by John in the

²¹ The point that Jesus is being described here stands even if one thinks the Baptist's words stop at John 3:30 and the Evangelist comments from 3:31 forward.

²² For discussion, see Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 112–114.

Jordan, at which point the Spirit descended on Jesus to remain. Fully God, infinite in being, Jesus is able to receive the fullness of the Spirit because of his matchless capacity and utter holiness. No sin to grieve the Spirit. No limited being to leave some remainder of the Spirit unaccommodated. As a result, there is no error in what Jesus says, no misplaced emphasis, no incorrect nuance, no bad word choice. Because he is the Word made flesh, he can receive the Spirit without measure, and when he speaks, God speaks.

Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man in 3:13, and in Daniel 7:13–14 the “one like a son of man” is presented before the Ancient of Days to receive everlasting dominion. The Baptist then referred to Jesus as the bridegroom in John 3:29, addressing the dispute over purification. This dispute likely concerned the relationship between prescriptions of the law of Moses and John and Jesus’ actions. If Jesus is the Daniel 7:13 Son of Man, if he is the bridegroom who will initiate the new covenant, if he is the 2 Samuel 7:14 Davidic Son of God, then the cleansing in the baptism of John and his disciples fulfills everything anticipated by the cleansings Moses prescribed. When Jesus speaks, God speaks (John 3:34), and Jesus will reign over all because the Father “has given all things into his hand” (v. 35). This is not some mechanical exchange or begrudged transfer of power. “The Father loves the Son” (v. 35). The Father does not become so focused on holding everything together and accomplishing his purposes that he becomes an unfeeling machine. He is not a manipulator of marionettes. God loved the world (v. 16) and loved his Son by giving him “all things” (v. 35).

Verse 36 reveals what is at stake in one’s response to the Baptist’s testimony to Jesus: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” Verses 14–15 have stated that the Son will be lifted up like the bronze serpent in the wilderness so that those who believe in him might have eternal life. Verse 16 has stated that God gave the Son so that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life. Verse 18 spoke of the condemnation of those who do not believe. Those who believe have eternal life, but those who do not believe—and notice how verse 36 describes these as not obeying the Son—will be condemned and will perish under the wrath of God (vv. 16, 18, 36).

Why do unbelievers face God’s wrath? Because of God’s love for the world and for his Son, the world’s rightful King who received the Spirit’s measure and spoke God’s words. Because the Baptist gave credible testimony to Jesus, we owe him our trust, our allegiance, our obedience, our lives.

Response

Pascal accurately diagnosed the condition of our hearts when he said, “We are so presumptuous that we should like to be known all over the world, even by people who will only come when we are no more. Such is our vanity that the good opinion of half a dozen of the people around us gives us pleasure and satisfaction.”²³ One

23 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1995), 31.

reason we are not humble is that we have not experienced greatness. We have not encountered majesty, so in our ignorance and lack of experience we begin to think we are grander and greater than we really are. We begin to overestimate our own importance. John the Baptist, on the other hand, has experienced greatness, majesty, authority, and incomparability in the person of Jesus. He knows that Jesus is the bridegroom (John 3:29) “who comes from heaven” (v. 31).

One manifestation of our pride is the assumption that we will succeed where others have failed. What keeps John from that pride? He knows there has never been a better witness than Jesus, “yet no one receives his testimony” (v. 32). No one has a better perception of reality than Jesus. No one has more right to be heard than Jesus. No one could communicate more clearly than Jesus. But his testimony was not received.

If one does not receive the testimony of Jesus, he is calling God a liar. Rejection of Jesus, refusal to trust him, is a claim that God is not true. One cannot receive what has not been given. No one else is the Messiah. We are not from heaven but from earth. We are not the world’s Savior. We were created to reflect the glory of the image of the invisible God. We were made for Jesus, not the other way around. Therefore, we should echo what John articulates about himself and Jesus in verse 30, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

How do we grow in humility? We experience the greatness of Jesus. No one has more authority. No one else has come down from heaven. No one else has received the Spirit without measure. No one else is the Word made flesh. No one else brings the cleansing that fulfills all OT rituals. No one else is the bridegroom. No one else *must* increase.

With whom do we identify in this passage? Are we like the Jew disputing with the disciples of the Baptist, not believing what the Baptist says about Jesus? Are we in the place of John’s disciples, in need of further clarity to understand the significance of the one whose way the Baptist prepares? Or are we in the place of the Baptist, who understands who Jesus is and thereby understands his own role?

JOHN 4:1–15

4 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ²(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.¹

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.² The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

¹ That is, about noon ² Greek *forever*

Section Overview: Living Water

As we have noted, the transitional sections in John’s Gospel are marked by details of time, place, and people involved. John 4:1–6 marks such a transition as Jesus and his disciples leave Judea to go to Galilee (v. 3), stopping at a town in Samaria called Sychar (vv. 4–5). This movement takes place once Jesus becomes aware that the Pharisees have heard of his baptisms outpacing John’s (vv. 1–2). We are also told that Jesus rested at Jacob’s well at the sixth hour, around midday (v. 6). At this point a Samaritan woman arrives to draw water and a most fascinating conversation begins (vv. 7–15).

Section Outline

- III.E. The Samaritan Woman (4:1–42)
 - 1. Living Water (4:1–15)
 - a. The Weary Christ (4:1–6)
 - b. The Living Water (4:7–15)

Comment

4:1–6 *The Weary Christ.* Verse 1 seems to indicate that, just when the ministry of Jesus begins to take off, he leaves for Galilee. It seems he leaves Judea for Galilee because the Pharisees hear that more people are being baptized by Jesus than by John. Rather than rejoice that people in high places are hearing of his influence, Jesus leaves for Galilee. This parallels the Synoptic Gospels, in which Jesus attempts to keep word of his miraculous deeds from traveling too far too fast. This is also in keeping with Jesus’ declaration that his hour has not yet come (2:4).

Perhaps because of the danger that those baptized by Jesus himself might take pride in or be esteemed for it (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14–15), John adds that “Jesus himself did

not baptize, but only his disciples” (John 4:2). Significant for the ensuing narrative are the following details: (1) Jesus goes into Samaria and interacts with Samaritans; (2) Jesus encounters a non-Jewish woman at Jacob’s well; and (3) John notes that Jesus was “wearied . . . from his journey” (v. 6).

The hostility between Jews and Samaritans is famous and is reflected in verse 9: “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.” Acts 8 records the progress of the gospel to the Samaritans, and that narrative emphasizes that the Samaritan believers received the baptism of the Spirit only after the Jerusalem apostles arrived and prayed for them (Acts 8:14–17). Luke’s narrative emphasizes that there was to be no Samaritan Christianity, unlike how there had been a Samaritan Judaism.²⁴ John’s Gospel lays the foundation for unity between Jews and Samaritans in the church by narrating Jesus’ transcending the ancient divide. Jesus was a Jew, but he surprised the Samaritan woman by treating her with dignity (John 4:7–9); he then stayed in Samaria and ministered, and many believed in him (vv. 39–42).

Jesus did not keep himself aloof from the scorned Samaritans. He went to where they were, interacting with them and surprising a despised woman by respecting her and asking her for water to quench his thirst. This presents the reader with a stunning picture of the humility of Jesus: it is humbling to show your need to others, and even more humbling to ask a lowly person to meet that need. The holy Christ begged for water from an adulteress. The creating Word (1:3) communicated his need to a defiled creature.

Jesus’ willingness to reveal his need opened a door of ministry. The need Jesus revealed was real. Jesus did not fake thirst to set this woman up for a conversation he wanted to pursue with her. John records the surprising fact in 4:6 that Jesus was “wearied.” To this point in his Gospel John has presented Jesus in exalted terms:

- “the Word was God” (1:1)
- “the Word became flesh . . . and we have seen his glory” (1:14)
- “the only begotten God . . . has made [the Father] known” (1:18 AT)
- “at Cana . . . [he] manifested his glory” by turning water to wine (2:11)
- he declared he would raise the torn down temple in three days (2:18–21)
- he claimed to be the Son of Man who has ascended and descended (3:13)
- the Baptist announced him as the one “above all. . . . who comes from heaven” (3:31)

Thus this episode in chapter 4 raises profound theological questions. How can Jesus be weary? How can he be weakened by a journey? The only explanation is that the fully-God Jesus is also fully man. John does not explore this theological profundity in theoretical discussion. Instead he depicts the raw humanity of the incarnate Jesus.

John notes in 4:5 that Sychar was “near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph,” and then says in verse 6, “Jacob’s well was there.” Jacob will be mentioned

²⁴ Cf. Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, 191–193.

again in verse 12, when the Samaritan woman asks, “Are you greater than our father Jacob?” The scene at the well of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, allows the Samaritan woman to raise the question of whether Jesus is greater than the patriarch who gave his name to God’s people.

This location and question invite comparison between Jesus and Jacob. In Genesis, Jacob journeys to the east (Gen. 29:1) and arrives at a well (vv. 2–5). When Rachel arrives, Jacob is so moved by her that he rolls away the stone and waters her sheep before going to the home of Laban (vv. 6–14) and eventually marrying Rachel (vv. 15–30).

Like Jacob, Jesus has journeyed and arrived at a well, and there he will meet a non-Jewish woman with whom he will discuss marital realities. Unlike Jacob, Jesus has not hoodwinked his father and stolen from his brother. Yet John highlights the location and mentions Jacob and Joseph to show how the past is being reworked in the ministry of Jesus, who is fulfilling patterns and types, reversing Jacob’s failures in the fulfillment of Jacob’s story.

4:7–15 *The Living Water.* That Jesus and the woman are alone at the well may indicate that this woman who has had five husbands and is now with a sixth man (John 4:18) has come for water at a time when she knows she will not encounter other people. She had no idea she would meet Jesus at the well and is clearly surprised when this Jewish man speaks to her. She was a woman, a Samaritan, and her history with men granted her no esteem in that culture.

Not only does Jesus ask her for a drink (v. 7), he does so in spite of the fact that no one else is present (v. 8; cf. v. 27). Jesus would do what was right, no matter the circumstances, even if the circumstances lent themselves to misinterpretations, suggesting he might be in the wrong (cf. v. 27). So often people see the right they should do, recognize it could be misinterpreted, and allow fear to prevail over courage. One aspect of Jesus’ greatness of character is that fear of man never prevailed over what virtue prompted him to do.

The Samaritan woman communicates her surprise (v. 9), and Jesus’ reply invites her to consider his unmatched stature and significance (v. 10). The words of Jesus declare that he is no ordinary Jewish man who happened to be sitting at a well: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The references to “the gift of God” and “who it is” are no doubt mysterious to the Samaritan woman. She obviously has no idea she is talking to the Son of God whom the Father has given as his love-gift to the world (cf. 3:16; 4:19, 29). John’s audience, however, should connect “the gift of God” to the way God loved the world by giving his only Son (3:16). Moreover, John’s audience knows “who it is” that speaks with this woman: Jesus, the Word made flesh (1:14).

This Jesus offers the woman “living water.” Sometimes the phrase “living water” (often translated as “fresh water” or “spring water” in the OT) refers to potable water necessary to sustain life: “Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and found there

a well of spring water” (Gen. 26:19). At several points in the OT, living water is associated with cleansing from sin:

- Leviticus 14:5: “The priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water.”
- Leviticus 14:50: “. . . shall kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water . . .”
- Numbers 19:17: “For the unclean they shall take some ashes of the burnt sin offering, and fresh water shall be added in a vessel.”

Jeremiah twice refers to Yahweh as “the fountain of living water”:

- Jeremiah 2:13: “My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”
- Jeremiah 17:13: “O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water.”

Zechariah 14:8 depicts living water flowing from Jerusalem in the eschatological restoration: “On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem.” And in Song of Solomon 4:15 the king compares the bride to “a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.”

At a well whose waters are necessary for life, Jesus offers living water, associated with cleansing from sin, to a woman. Moreover, Jesus is God incarnate and is himself the fountain of living water. However, as in both his conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:3–5) and his declaration that he would raise the temple in three days (2:19–21), Jesus has made a figurative and spiritual statement that is taken literally and materially. The Samaritan woman clearly thinks Jesus is talking about literal water from Jacob’s well (4:11).

She then asks whether Jesus is greater than Jacob (v. 12). This question seems to arise from the Samaritan woman’s thinking at the physical level. Jacob gave the well, and Jesus has just offered living water that she appears to interpret as a spring-fed stream, prompting her to question whether he claims to be greater than the great patriarch. Both John’s narrative and Jesus’ answer affirm that he *is* greater than Jacob. Jesus answers, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (vv. 13–14). If the Samaritan woman drinks the water Jesus gives, she will become like the bride in the Song of Solomon, “a well of living water” (Song 4:15), because the “fountain of living water” (Jer. 2:13; 17:13) flows in her. This is in keeping with Isaiah 58:11, which promises, “The LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.”

Whoever drinks the water of Jesus will never thirst again, for his water will well up to eternal life. Thus Jesus' reference to drinking the water he provides is a figurative way of speaking of repentance from sin and trust in Jesus, thereby benefiting from his death and resurrection. The promise of living water means life. Humans cannot live without water. Living water is clean, fresh, flowing; it is not stagnant, stale, or squalid. Living water tastes good and brings refreshing relief that enables renewal of effort with joy and gratitude. This is what Jesus offers. Jesus offers a life-giving cleansing that tastes good, satisfies thirst, and makes those who drink life-givers themselves.

In her reply to Jesus, the Samaritan woman demonstrates that she still thinks Jesus is referring to literal water: "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water" (John 4:15). Jesus did say that those who drank his water would never thirst again, but he was not talking about physical thirst. The woman thinks Jesus can give her some special type of water to make her trips to the well unnecessary.

As good as literal living water is, Jesus offers something better. Jesus offers living water that enables a better life in a body that will not die, a cleansing that no defilement can stain, an ability to give life that no killer can take away.

Response

The crux of these verses is when Jesus laments to the Samaritan woman, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is . . ." (4:10). Do we know Jesus? He is the Word made flesh, the only Son of the Father, the one who ascended and descended, changer of water to wine, rebuilders of the torn-down temple, bringer of the new birth, bridegroom, man from heaven, giver of living water, prophet, Messiah, Christ, king, healer of the sick and lame, bread of life, light of the world, giver of sight to the blind, resurrection and life! To know him is to live eternal life. To know him is to know the one who is like no other, cleansing, refreshing, sweeter than honey to the taste, purest truth to the mind, loveliest of longed-for sights to the eyes.

Do you know who it is who spoke to the woman? God gave him as a gift, and he himself gives the gift of living water. The only response is to go to him for that water, so that he can give us "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (v. 14). We must come to him, that he may make us clean, give us life, let us taste his goodness, refresh and enable us by what only he can give, making us givers of life.

O God, living Christ, give us the water only you can provide: living water!

JOHN 4:16–42

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” ¹⁹The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” ²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

²⁷Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” ²⁸So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” ³⁰They went out of the town and were coming to him.

³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” ³²But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

³⁹Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

Section Overview: To Do the Will of Him Who Sent Me

Jesus told the woman in John 4:10–14 that if she knew who he was and what God was doing in him, she would be making requests of him and he would meet her deepest need by giving her eternal life. Jesus spoke of this in terms of giving her living water that would make it so that she would never thirst again: “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (v. 14). In verse 15 the woman says, “Give me this water,” indicating she thinks Jesus is talking about literal water. Although they are at a well, where Jesus has asked her for a drink, he was not offering literal water when he spoke of “living water.” To direct the woman to the kind of water of which he speaks, Jesus informs her that she must deal with her sin (vv. 16–18).

Changing the subject, she then asks him a religious question about where people should worship—because, she asserts, she recognizes him to be a prophet (vv. 19–20). Jesus responds by announcing that the time has come when God will be worshiped no longer at a mountain but in spirit and truth, and he affirms that he is the Messiah (vv. 21–26). At this point the disciples of Jesus return and the Samaritan woman goes back into Sychar to summon the townsfolk, who respond by going out to Jesus (vv. 27–30).

As the Samaritans make their way to Jesus, he and his disciples have a conversation about food, Jesus again directing them beyond physical concerns to spiritual food (vv. 31–34). He explains to them that the Samaritans are part of the harvest: others have done the sowing, and the disciples will enter into the labor of reaping (vv. 35–38).

This section closes with a report that Jesus ministered there for two more days, seeing many come to faith as the Samaritans recognized Jesus as the Savior of the world (vv. 39–42). The salvation Jesus brings is not merely for Jews but extends to Samaritans and to all people. God loved the world, and Jesus is the Savior of the world (3:16; 4:42).

Section Outline

- III.E.2. To Do the Will of Him Who Sent Me (4:16–42)
 - a. Go Call Your Husband (4:16–18)
 - b. Worship in Spirit and Truth (4:19–26)
 - c. Transition: No One Said (4:27–30)
 - d. Food, Harvest, Labor (4:31–38)
 - e. Many Believed (4:39–42)

Comment

4:16–18 *Go Call Your Husband.* John does not tell us how Jesus knew this woman’s history. Even if we surmise that the circumstances indicted her, that she was at the well by herself at an inopportune time in an effort to avoid other people, this does not account for the specifics of what Jesus says. He not only gets the issue right when he tells her to go call her husband (v. 16); when she denies that she has a husband, he affirms her response and ups the ante by stating she has had

five husbands and the man she has now is not her husband (vv. 17–18). This could mean she had been with five men who were husbands to other women, or perhaps she herself had been married to five different men and now is with a man to whom she is not married. Regardless, Jesus addresses the woman's sin.

She has asked for the living water he offered (v. 15), and Jesus in essence tells her that in order to receive such water she must deal with the sin in her life (v. 16). She denies that she has sin, but Jesus proves the point with devastating accuracy (vv. 17–18).

The woman's reply, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet" (v. 19), shows that Jesus was right. It also serves as a segue for her to attempt to dodge the issue. The Samaritan woman has questions, and rather than do what Jesus has said, she raises one such question. In doing so she shifts the attention away from herself and raises a legitimate issue. Jesus was obviously Jewish. She was Samaritan. Could he answer the questions at the heart of the divide between the two peoples? If he could, she might have to reckon with his indictment of her sin. He could answer the question, and he did. She then accepted his claims and testified to his identity.

4:19–26 *Worship in Spirit and Truth.* What caused the woman to recognize that Jesus was a prophet (v. 19)? His accurate recounting of her history (vv. 16–18, 29, 39). In response to this, the woman makes a statement to Jesus that raises the question about the root of the divide between Samaritans and Jews: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship" (v. 20).

In his reply, Jesus avers that the issue she has raised is irrelevant because the times have decisively changed with his coming (v. 21). Jesus then affirms the Jews and Jerusalem as the people and place of God (v. 22) before elaborating on the new situation that results from his coming (vv. 23–24). The woman indicates that she is aware that a promised Messiah is on the way, one who will decide such disputes (v. 25), and Jesus asserts that he is the one of whom she speaks (v. 26).

In questioning where people should worship God, the woman asks whether her people, the Samaritans, or the people of Jesus, the Jews, are in the right (v. 20). Jesus responds, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father" (v. 21). Jesus points beyond the dispute itself to a new state of affairs that will make the claims made by both sides obsolete. This reply diffuses some of the tension inherent to the dispute by showing that it has only temporary significance.

Having lowered the temperature of the issue, Jesus then affirms that God chose Jerusalem and the Jews: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (v. 22). Jesus has told this woman that she is a sinner (vv. 16–18), and now he tells her that her people are in the wrong and their loathed enemies are in the right (v. 22). Some are unwilling to tell people the truth, truth they need to hear. But Jesus is unafraid. He softens the truth by showing that worship in Jerusalem is not ultimate (v. 21), but he does not shrink

from affirming the truth while setting it in its wider context: Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship, but it will not be so forever, as he explains in verses 23–24.

Jesus had said “the hour is coming” in verse 21, and he repeats it in verse 23, adding, “and is now here” (cf. 5:25). A new state of affairs is on the way and has arrived with his coming, as a shift in salvation eras has now been set in motion. How have things changed? Deuteronomy 12:5 and many other texts instruct Israel to worship Yahweh at the place where he would choose to set his name, and God eventually chose Jerusalem (cf., e.g., Ps. 68:15–16). In this passage, then, Jesus announces that something God commanded in the OT has come to an end, namely, worship in Jerusalem at the temple.

Behold the greatness of Jesus: who else but Jesus could declare that a commandment of God had expired? Who else but Jesus could do this righteously, with no sin, with no abrogation of God’s authority, with God’s approval, with the result that the standard for obedient worship shifts from what *God* said in the OT to what *Jesus* says in the NT. As Jesus does this, John intends for us to understand that God’s authority is enacted in Jesus as the Word who is God (John 1:1, 14). Thus there is no conflict between Jesus and God. Jesus exercises God’s authority to declare that the time has come for a fundamental change in the nature of worship.

Because worship will be “neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (4:21) but “in spirit and truth” (v. 23), it seems the phrase “in spirit and truth” should be understood as a new kind of place—not a literal place but the realm of the Spirit. Rather than worshiping in Jerusalem at the temple, in the new covenant that Jesus brings true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit, partaking of the realm of the Spirit wherever they find themselves.

Those who are born again belong to the realm of the Spirit: “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (3:6). And those who are born again into the realm of the Spirit will worship in that same realm: “True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (4:23). How do people get into that realm? Jesus says in 6:63, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

Jesus further declares, “The Father is seeking such people to worship him” (4:23). This is not a self-centered need for praise from an insecure artist. This is the one who is worthy, who is seeking to give us the joy of doing what we were made to do: enjoy him. We seek and strive and yearn and grope for greatness, and there is nothing more awe-inspiring, more challenging to all our capacities, more demanding of everything we are as humans, than knowing God. We were made for God. We were made to experience him and respond in praise. God wants what is best for us, and there is nothing better he can give us than himself. All who seek happiness need to know: God seeks worshipers who will worship him in spirit and truth. Many claim to seek truth. Many claim to seek a higher sphere of existence. They strain and grasp for something to ease the ache and satisfy the longing. Jesus speaks in verse 23 of people’s finding supreme joy celebrating the greatness of God in spirit and truth.

Jesus goes on to say, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (v. 24). That God is spirit seems to assert that he is not material. This statement also emphasizes that God belongs to the realm of the Spirit. No images are to be made of God because he is spirit and transcends all that is material. True worshipers must worship God in accordance with who and what he is: true worshipers must worship “in spirit and truth.” Imagine the Samaritan woman trying to process on the spot all that Jesus has said to her. He surprised her by asking for a drink (vv. 7–9) before offering her living water (vv. 10–15). He then indicted her sin with specifics (vv. 16–18) and announced that a shift was taking place in salvation history that would render localized worship obsolete, declaring that the hour had come when true worshipers, the kind sought by the Father, would worship him in spirit and truth (vv. 19–24). What is she to make of this man? How is she to comprehend all he said?

She made an assertion that was a question in verse 20, and that may be what she does again in verse 25, “The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.’” In saying this, she may be fishing for the kind of reaction that was elicited from her comment back in verse 20. If that’s what she is doing, it works. Jesus replies, “I Am—the one speaking to you” (v. 26 AT). In the context of John’s Gospel, these words resonate with other places where Jesus declares, “I Am.” He is the Messiah and is to be identified with the one who revealed his name to Moses at the burning bush.

4:27–30 *Transition: No One Said.* We have seen that transitions in these chapters of John contain information about time, place, and people involved. At this point the disciples return and the Samaritan woman leaves to summon the townsfolk. There are indications that rabbis of antiquity discouraged interaction with women. Even if those indications do not reflect the time of Jesus or the circles in which he moved, eyebrows rise in cultures that value chastity and marital fidelity when a man is found conversing alone with a woman whose reputation is not above reproach. In spite of the shady circumstances, no one raised any questions about what was happening (v. 27).

Jesus is our inspiration and our example. It is inspiring to see how he engaged everyone according to the two great commandments. Never did he interact with people based on what he stood to gain from them. Jesus models love for God and neighbor, leaving an example for those who follow him—that we love everyone we encounter, seeking their best instead of what we can take from them.

4:31–38 *Food, Harvest, Labor.* As the Samaritans make their way to Jesus, the newly returned disciples of Jesus urge him to eat the food they went away to obtain (v. 31; cf. v. 8). Jesus has not eaten, and the text does not tell us whether he received the drink he asked of the Samaritan woman. Even if he had not been refreshed by that drink, the rest at the well and the invigorating conversation seem to have renewed his energies.

When tempted by Satan to turn stones to bread in Matthew 4, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, answering, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Reflecting that perspective, Jesus tells his disciples in John 4:32, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” Apparently Jesus found it strengthening and satisfying to do the will of God, which was “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10; cf. John 10:16). Doing the Father’s will satisfied his own hunger and quenched his own thirst (cf. John 4:14; 6:27).

Several times we have seen Jesus make spiritual statements misunderstood as referring to physical realities: concerning the temple (2:19–20); the new birth (3:3–4); the living water (4:10–11); and here, the food he has to eat (4:32–33). Jesus has spoken of food the disciples know not of, and they mistakenly ask if someone has brought him food (v. 33). As on previous occasions, when the misunderstandings afforded Jesus an opportunity to state his true meaning, he explains, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (v. 34). At one level, Jesus is unique as the one sent by the Father, and his work can be accomplished by no one else. At another level, those who know Jesus, those who trust him, must follow his example. Those who follow Jesus and obey the Father can expect to experience this kind of nourishment. They will experience strength and joy multiplying when they do the will of God. They will be happy when obeying.

Having spoken of the nourishing joy of doing the work that God sent him to do (v. 34), Jesus goes on to speak of the harvest (vv. 35–38). The food of which he spoke was obedience, and the harvest of which he speaks is a harvest of souls: “gathering fruit for eternal life” (v. 36). There is scholarly discussion over whether the opening statement of verse 35 (“Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?’”) references an unattested proverb or merely reflects common agricultural knowledge. Either way, Jesus makes this statement to redirect the conversation to the spiritual harvest. The last words of verse 35 refer not to a literal harvest but to people: “Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.” Verse 30 said that the Samaritans “were coming to him,” and perhaps if the disciples lifted up their eyes, they would see the Samaritans on the way to them.

When Jesus says, “Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life” (v. 36), he himself is likely the reaper receiving wages—the praise of those who trust in him, who themselves are the “fruit for eternal life” (cf. 1:49; 2:11). The reaper, Jesus, gathers fruit—people who believe in him. He receives wages—the praise of the redeemed, who are gathered so that they may have eternal life. Thus when Jesus continues, “so that sower and reaper may rejoice together” (4:36), the “sower” in view is likely the Baptist, who has been preparing the way for Jesus and rejoicing at his voice (3:29). When Jesus brings in the harvest sown by the Baptist, the two of them will rejoice together. This would seem to be summarized in Jesus’ next statement, “For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps’” (4:37). Again, on this understanding, the one who sows is the Baptist, while the one reaping is Jesus.

This reading seems to be further confirmed as Jesus tells his disciples, “I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor” (v. 38). This labor is the work for God and his kingdom that the Baptist and the OT prophets who preceded him performed to prepare the way for Jesus. The sowing done by those who prepared the way now finds its complement as Jesus the reaper comes, sending his disciples to reap, to enter into the labor of others.

4:39–42 *Many Believed.* The way Jesus confronted the Samaritan woman’s sin in 4:16–18 caused her to recognize him as a prophet (v. 19) and provided the content of what she told her fellow Samaritans in verse 29. Her testimony is mentioned again as many Samaritans believed in Jesus because of it (v. 39). As a result, the Samaritans desire more of Jesus, so he stays two more days with them (v. 40). This seems to substantiate the idea that Jesus has demonstrated supernatural knowledge of the woman’s history. The Samaritans believe because of the remarkable power Jesus demonstrated in telling the woman all she ever did.

Exposure to Jesus is even more convincing than testimony to Jesus, and John recounts, “Many more believed because of his word” (v. 41)—the word rendered “testimony” in verse 39 (λογος) is rendered “word” in verse 41, indicating that it refers to the teaching and testifying of Jesus concerning what God sent him to do. The Samaritans believed because of the woman’s word in verse 39, and more believed because of Christ’s word in verse 41.

What Jesus has communicated to the Samaritans leads them to declare to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (v. 42). These people encounter Jesus and conclude that he is the Savior—not merely of the Jews but of the world. They likely experienced the same kind of sin-confronting, OT-affirming-and-fulfilling, audacious claims that Jesus makes elsewhere in the Gospel of John.

Response

When we recognize the goodness of what God offers in Christ and have been drawn to it, we must realize that we cannot have Jesus if we want to keep our sin too. Jesus will see through any sleight of hand used in any attempt to conceal our sin. At one level the Samaritan woman spoke the truth, even as she knew that under the surface was the rot of falsehood. She had no husband. True, but she had had five, and the one she had at that moment was not her husband.

What sins do we prevaricate about? Jesus is not fooled. He sees, and he knows. He will confront us, and we will have to confront our sin. We will either wallow in our sin or leave it behind as we drink the living water Jesus offers. The choice seems so obvious in the abstract but is impossible without the regenerating grace of God.

But once we have this regenerating grace, we become true worshipers, worshipping the Father in spirit and truth. We worship the Father because he sent the Son

as life-giving water. We worship the Father because he has transformed our hearts into obedient vessels of his will. To obey is to worship, and worship is to the soul what water is to the body.

Doing God's will fills the body.

Transgressing God's commands leaves us empty.

Doing God's will makes us strong.

Sinning against the Lord leaves us weak.

Doing God's will increases optimism and joy.

Committing iniquity leaves us deflated and depressed.

JOHN 4:43–54

⁴³ After the two days he departed for Galilee. ⁴⁴ (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) ⁴⁵ So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.

⁴⁶ So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. ⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, "Unless you¹ see signs and wonders you will not believe." ⁴⁹ The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.

⁵¹ As he was going down, his servants² met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour³ the fever left him." ⁵³ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household.

⁵⁴ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

¹ The Greek for *you* is plural; twice in this verse ² Or *bondservants* ³ That is, at 1 P.M.

Section Overview: The Second Sign in Cana: New Life on the Third Day

The healing of the official's son in John 4:43–54 serves as a bookend to the turning of water into wine in 2:1–12. Both events take place in Cana on the third day. Both are called signs, the healing in 4:43–54 identified as the second (4:54), water to wine the first (2:11). Both begin with a request that Jesus initially rebuffs; in both, Jesus speaks a command; both are reported through what other characters say instead of through narration; and both result in belief. As the water to wine

at a wedding on the third day was portentous, so is the healing of the beloved son of a royal official on the third day.

Section Outline

III.F. The Second Sign in Cana: New Life on the Third Day (4:43–54)

1. On the Third Day in Cana, Again (4:43–46)
2. Healing of a Son (4:47–54)

Comment

4:43–46 *On the Third Day in Cana, Again.* John now marks another transition with information about time, place, and people involved (vv. 43–46). Having related that Jesus stayed with the Samaritans two days (v. 40), John now states, “After the two days he departed for Galilee” (v. 43). This means that what takes place in this episode—the healing of a beloved son who was at the point of death—happens on a third day.

Verse 44 explains why Jesus now goes to Galilee: “For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.” Jesus has been identified as “of Nazareth” (1:45–46; cf. 7:27, 52), so the hometown in view is neither Bethlehem nor Jerusalem but Nazareth in Galilee. Why would the statement “a prophet has no honor in his own hometown” (4:44) be given as the explanation for this trip to Galilee? This move is in keeping with what we see from Jesus in the Gospel of John:

- He left for Galilee after his baptism by John and John’s testimony to him (1:43).
- He left for Galilee once the Pharisees had heard of his growing influence (4:1–3).
- He disappears into the crowd after the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda (5:13).
- He withdraws when a crowd intends to make him king (6:15).
- He went to the Feast of Booths privately (7:10).
- He hid himself and avoided stoning (8:59).
- He is not to be found after healing the man born blind (9:12).
- He cannot be arrested (7:45–46; 10:39).
- The disciples think Jesus walks into certain death (11:16).
- Jesus does not move in the open (11:54–57).
- Again he hides (12:36).

None of this hiding happened because Jesus was afraid. Rather, Jesus hid because he had an appointed “hour” that was coming, and he sought to avoid conflict and unnecessary controversy before that hour had come. Nor, obviously, is Jesus seeking the easy way. Prophets are not honored in their hometowns. Jesus will go to his hometown nonetheless. Jesus did not seek to maximize his exposure. He did not seek the enthusiastic throngs. Jesus went where he would not be honored.

In doing so he embraced the role of the servant: “He was despised and rejected by men, . . . and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isa. 53:3).

As briefly noted in the overview above, there are several points of contact between John 4:43–54 and John 2. In 4:45 we read of the Galileans’ receiving Jesus, with John adding that they had seen what Jesus did at the feast. This recalls 2:23–25, where those who saw the signs believed in Jesus, but he did not entrust himself to them. The connection between 4:45 and 2:23–25 colors the reception Jesus receives in Galilee. By reminding his audience of 2:23–25, John implies that the Galileans welcoming Jesus are not the kind of people to whom Jesus entrusts himself. This impression is immediately confirmed by the interaction between Jesus and the royal official in 4:46–48.

Verse 46 reports, “So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine,” overtly referencing 2:1–12. John likely points this out to draw attention to how the interaction between Jesus and the official is uncannily similar to the episode of turning water into wine. As there,

- a need is communicated to Jesus (4:47; cf. 2:3),
- but he initially rebuffs the petitioner (4:48; cf. 2:4).
- When the petitioner responds in faith (4:49; cf. 2:5),
- Jesus gives a command that is obeyed (4:50; cf. 2:7–8),
- at which point the need is met (4:51–52; cf. 2:9–10).
- These are then identified as the first and second signs, in response to which people believe in Jesus (4:53–54; cf. 2:11).

John continues in 4:46, “And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill.” This term translated “official” (Gk. *basilikos*) connotes royalty—the man may have been a member of the Herodian royal family or perhaps was a Roman royal official or adviser. Luke 8:3 reports that Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, was among the women who provided for Jesus. Chuza is the type of man who would be referred to with this term rendered “official.”

John has juxtaposed accounts in which Jesus interacts with very different people. He begins with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews (John 3:1), then, after the Baptist testifies to Jesus (3:25–36), Jesus interacts with the Samaritan woman (4:7) and now with this royal official (4:46). All kinds of people need Jesus. The religious establishment needs Jesus: Nicodemus went to Jesus because he saw signs and knew God had to be with Jesus (3:2). Society’s outcasts need Jesus: the Samaritan woman was convinced of the identity of Jesus because of his ability to address her sin (4:18–19, 29, 39). And those powerful in the eyes of the world need Jesus: this official comes to Jesus because his son is “at the point of death” (v. 47).

4:47–54 *Healing of a Son.* The royal official hears that Jesus has arrived in Galilee from Judea, and in verse 47 he makes two requests of Jesus. He wants him to (1) come down from Cana to Capernaum, and (2) heal his son, who is at the point

of death. As we consider how Jesus replies to these requests (v. 48), it is important to note that he does so in the plural (cf. ESV mg.). That is, Jesus responds here not to the official alone but to all those who have “welcomed him” in Galilee (v. 45). Jesus’ reply is similar to his reply to his mother when she told him of the need for wine: “Unless you [people] see signs and wonders you will not believe” (v. 48; cf. 2:4). From this we can see that Jesus has no intention of doing an act that will merely win him attention or gather a crowd.

Consider how different this is from so many who are ready to do almost anything to be famous and make money. When we see famous men degrading themselves, we should ask whether they believe their dignity to be worth no more than the money they stand to make or the attention they stand to receive. Jesus will not make such bargains. Jesus knows what his mission is, and he can tell who is on board with the mission and who is merely wowed by a wonder-worker.

The words of Jesus bring out the desperation of the royal official, who responds, “Sir, come down before my child dies” (4:49). This request allows Jesus to bring the royal official to a moment of decision. This is one of those times when Jesus gives a command that can be obeyed only if the person hearing the command trusts Jesus absolutely. We see another such command when Jesus tells the rich young ruler to go sell all he has, give to the poor, and return to follow Jesus. By refusing to obey the command, the rich young ruler shows he trusts his money more than Jesus (Mark 10:17–22). This royal official in John 4:50 is given a similar command when Jesus answers him: “Go; your son will live.”

The royal official’s begging of Jesus shows his despair. Proud and powerful people do not naturally humble themselves to ask help from homeless, uneducated wonder-workers. This royal official has likely exhausted his options with doctors, respectable religious figures, and other possible solutions. He probably comes to Jesus as his last hope. That last hope has now dismissed him with the promise that his son will live. If he leaves to return home without Jesus, there is probably not enough time to seek help from anyone else. If he does not believe Jesus can speak the word and the healing come to pass, he will be inclined to stay and plead with Jesus to come to his son. He can depart in peace only if he believes Jesus can say the word and make his son well.

This father clearly loves his son. He has shown more regard for the life of his son than for the dignity of his office or for the safety of his reputation. He so loves his son that he would rather be savaged by his elite friends than forsake the opportunity to get help from Jesus. As a result, “The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way” (v. 50). He did not know how the situation would play out, but, “As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him’” (vv. 51–52).

Consider the situation of this royal official: he had a deep need that he took to Jesus. Jesus spoke an authoritative word to him. Though the man had no

evidence that the word Jesus had spoken would prove true, he trusted Jesus, believed him, and did what he said to do. Once he began to obey, the man received proof that what Jesus said was so. As a result, his obedience and faith had implications beyond his own life or that of his son: “The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, ‘Your son will live.’ And he himself believed, and all his household” (v. 53). We are twice told that the man believed, but there is no redundancy here. Those things that convinced us are those that continue to do so. Those things that we keep on believing are things we grow in knowledge about, a growth in knowledge that does not overturn but rather confirms our faith.

This reference to “all his household” believing with him likely refers to his son, wife, and servants who met him on the way (v. 51). All these people are exposed to the greatness, the lovingkindness, the trustworthiness of Jesus, and they all become convinced and believe.

Verse 54 joins with verse 46 to point back to 2:1–12. The turning of water to wine in 2:1–12, referenced in 4:46, was numbered in 2:11 as “the first of his signs.” Now the healing of the official’s son is numbered as “the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee” (4:54).

Response

Jesus gave a royal official an opportunity to trust him, and by trusting Jesus, the man had his need met *and* he experienced the lovingkindness and trustworthiness of God in Christ. Such is possible for us if we obey the commands of Jesus, even if they don’t make sense at the time, even if we have no evidence that they are right.

Most fundamentally, if we heed the call to turn away from our sin and trust in Christ for salvation, we will begin to receive the kinds of evidences and assurances the royal official received—proofs that the word of Christ is true. This is the case when trusting Christ for salvation and equally so when obeying the instructions Jesus gives for our Christian walk. It holds for both saving faith and sanctifying obedience.

The royal official may have come to Jesus because of what he had heard about him. In his encounter with Jesus, it became clear that this man understood Jesus to be the one on whom life depended. Jesus was the difference between life and death. We likewise must see Jesus as the difference between life and death. We ought to come to the Bible and to prayer as if our life depended on it, for our life and the lives of those we hold most dear *do* depend on Jesus.

OVERVIEW OF
JOHN 5:1–11:57

John presents Jesus as the one from whose “fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:16–17). God graciously liberated Israel from slavery via the exodus from Egypt and entered into covenant with them at Sinai, then provided for them on their pilgrimage through the wilderness to the Land of Promise. The grace of the OT prototypes is fulfilled in Christ. Jesus enacts the fulfillment of the exodus as he dies as the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world and accomplishing the liberation of God’s people. Jesus also fulfills the covenant made at Sinai as he brings his people into the new covenant made in his blood, and John depicts the ministry of Jesus prior to the cross in such a way that the people of God are assured that Jesus will bring about the fulfillment of the pilgrimage to the Land of Promise, shepherding the captives he liberated to the new Jerusalem, leading them through green pastures by still waters.

Israel’s feasts were instituted to commemorate what God had done for them at the exodus (Passover), how he had provided for them in the wilderness (Tabernacles), and the good life in the good land under the good law he gave them (Weeks). John 5 is set at an unnamed feast, but the healing accomplished there points to a restoration that enables worship. Chapter 6 is set at Passover, and feeding the multitude, ascending the mountain, crossing the water, and teaching the people all point to how Jesus fulfills what was typified in the OT. Chapters 7–9 are set at Tabernacles, which celebrated how God gave water from the rock and led his people through the wilderness by pillars of fire and cloud. Chapter 10 takes us to the intertestamentally instituted Feast of Dedication, likely pointing to how Jesus will bring about the fulfillment of the rededication of the temple. And in chapter 11 we arrive again at Passover, where Jesus will make his sacrifice. We see the centrality of Passover in John’s narrative as the whole of chapters 2–11 is bounded and centered on the Passover Feasts of chapters 2, 6, and 11, and chapters 12–20 are set at that final Passover introduced in chapter 11.

It seems that John 5–11 is structured to present a thematic chiasm, with corresponding parts mutually interpreting one another (the words of Jesus in chapter 5 about the dead hearing the voice of the Son of God and coming to life are realized in the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11; Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand in

chapter 6 illustrates his comments about the Good Shepherd in chapter 10; and the disputes in chapters 7 and 9 afford John's audience an opportunity to evaluate objections to Jesus), with the whole architectural structure being designed to spotlight the chiastic center point: Jesus as the world's true light, the radiant I Am, in chapter 8.

John 5: The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and live.

John 6: Jesus crosses water, provides bread, shepherds with his word.

John 7: Disputes over whether Jesus is good or a deceiver.

John 8: Jesus the Light of the World.

John 9: Disputes over whether Jesus is good or a sinner.

John 10: Jesus the Good Shepherd, whose sheep hear his voice.

John 11: Jesus calls Lazarus to come out from the tomb.

John's narrative not only relates Jesus' actions during his earthly ministry prior to the cross; it also points forward to how Jesus will shepherd his people and provide for them once he has liberated them at the new exodus through his cross and resurrection. Luke in Acts 2 will present the fulfillment of the Feast of Pentecost (Weeks) as the Spirit is poured out from on high.

OVERVIEW OF

JOHN 5:1–47

John 5 finds Jesus once again in Jerusalem. He encounters a lame man who has vain hopes based on unreliable superstition, and Jesus heals him. This healing on a Sabbath provokes controversy (vv. 1–18), to which Jesus responds that, if God can work on the Sabbath, so can he (v. 17). Jesus asserts that he does what the Father does, that he will raise the dead, and that those who believe him will have eternal life (vv. 19–30). Knowing he has made claims difficult for his opponents to embrace, Jesus points to the testimony about him from the Baptist, the Scriptures, and the Father, asserting that those who know God will believe the one God has sent (vv. 31–47).

JOHN 5:1–18

5 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ²Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic¹ called Bethesda,² which has five roofed colonnades. ³In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.³ ⁵One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” ⁷The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” ⁸Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” ⁹And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰So the Jews⁴ said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” ¹¹But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” ¹²They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” ¹³Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. ¹⁴Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

¹⁸This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

¹Or Hebrew ²Some manuscripts *Bethsaida* ³Some manuscripts insert, wholly or in part, *waiting for the moving of the water*; ⁴for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had ⁴The Greek word *loudaioi* refers specifically here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, who opposed Jesus in that time; also verses 15, 16, 18

Section Overview: The Healing at Bethesda

On a Sabbath day Jesus encounters a lame man nursing a vain hope in an unbiblical superstition. Jesus speaks a powerful word that accomplishes the restoration of this broken piece of creation, healing the lame man; in response, those who should have been celebrating him instead object and persecute him because he did such things on the Sabbath. Jesus tells them God is working and he will too, and they understand him to have made himself equal with God and thus seek to kill him.

Section Outline

IV. Jesus and the Feasts (5:1–11:57)

A. The Healing and Teaching at the Unnamed Feast (5:1–47)

1. The Healing at Bethesda (5:1–18)

- a. The Setting (5:1–5)
- b. The Healing (5:6–9a)
- c. The Sabbath (5:9b–13)
- d. The Maker (5:14–18)

Comment

5:1–5 *The Setting.* Once again we find a transitional section in John’s Gospel that tells us of time, place, and people involved. These aspects of the setting are seen in verse 1, which describes Jesus’ attendance at an unnamed feast in Jerusalem. Verses 2–5 provide more specifics along these lines, introducing the pool of Bethesda (v. 2), where many sick and lame lie (v. 3). Among the sick was one who had been there thirty-eight years (v. 5). The verse enumerated as verse 4 is typically found in footnotes (so ESV) because the best and most reliable manuscripts do not include it.

Jesus had been in Jerusalem for the Passover feast from 2:13 to 3:21, entering the Judean countryside in 3:22. He then left for Galilee in 4:3, visited Samaria on the way (4:4–42), and arrived in Galilee in verse 46. At the time of the feast, 5:1 says that Jesus again “went up to Jerusalem.” Providing more information on the setting of this episode, John narrows the focus from the city of Jerusalem to a particular location: “. . . by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades” (v. 2). A colonnade was a series of pillars supporting one side of a roof. Among these five colonnades, John explains, “lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years” (vv. 3, 5).

John has thus introduced the setting: in Jerusalem, at the pool of Bethesda. He has also introduced the people involved: Jesus, and the man thirty-eight years in his weakness. The scene is now set for the key figures in the drama to encounter one another.

5:6–9a *The Healing.* The two individuals John has introduced now connect: “Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time” (v. 6). Jesus then speaks to a man whom most in his position would have overlooked, saying, “Do you want to be healed?” (v. 6). This question could be a way for Jesus to ask if the desire for healing is why the man is lying there beside the pool. It could also be a prompt for the man to consider whether lying there at the pool is likely to result in such healing.

The ESV footnotes verse 4, which was most likely not originally part of John’s Gospel but sought to explain why people were at the pool. (The information in verse 4 could be inferred from verse 7.) The man apparently hoped to be healed

by being first into the waters after an angel stirred them. By means of waiting and watching for something he had no reason to think would happen, he sought the restoration of his own health.

Make no mistake about it: this man deserves our pity. The Bible nowhere indicates that God set up pools in Jerusalem so that people could be healed in this way. The Bible nowhere teaches that angels came down and stirred up waters so that the first person into the pool would get better. John endorses no such belief. We are to understand, then, that this poor man has vain hopes based on ignorant superstitions, and when Jesus gently prods his vain hopes, he is so immersed in them that he does not question their validity.

How has Jesus prodded him to recognize the vanity of his hopes? Imagine someone happening upon a child huddled over a mud puddle, Matchbox car in one hand, washcloth in the other. He dips the washcloth in the mud and furiously scrubs the car. One might ask, Are you trying to clean that car? The question is both an inquiry and an invitation to the child, asking him to examine his actions and evaluate whether they will be effective. The question indicates there are better ways to clean toys. In this way, when Jesus asks in verse 6, “Do you want to be healed?”, it seems to indicate that Jesus is not impressed with the method of waiting by the pool, seeking to be first into the water when it ripples.

The sick man answers the question in a way that reminds us of other replies to questions from Jesus in John’s Gospel, times when Jesus has not been understood: “The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me’” (v. 7). John, however, shows what brings true healing, and the only remedy for the man by the pool is the only remedy for us: “Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, take up your bed, and walk.’ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked” (vv. 8–9a). The man did not need to be the first into the water in order to be healed. He needed the one who spoke the world into existence to say the word and make it so. He did not need some false tale about angels doing a trick with the water. He needed Jesus to say the word. That is all it took.

There seem to be creation and completion-of-work connotations here, for John also notes, “Now that day was the Sabbath” (v. 9b). God spoke the world into existence, and when he had completed his work he rested on the Sabbath day. God rested not because he was weary but because his work was complete and whole; with that accomplished, he rested to relish what he had made. Jesus has now made a man whole, and has done so on the Sabbath, which provokes the controversy John narrates in verses 10–13.

5:9b–13 *The Sabbath*. How should people respond when they see God perform a surprising and generous work of joyful restoration? Should not hearts soar to see God’s love in action? Or should the authorities start thinking about rules, policies, commandments, and regulations? Jesus has in 5:6–9a just healed a man afflicted with a debilitating illness for thirty-eight years, but look at the response: “The

Jews said to the man who had been healed, ‘It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed’” (v. 10).

Why do they respond this way? Their concern for law-keeping, which is a good concern, has eclipsed their concern for this poor, sick man. Their impulse is to quote commandments first and ask questions later. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord; the second is to love people. These Jews are suspicious of Jesus, and John probably intends his audience to associate them with the Pharisees, who sent priests and Levites to question John the Baptist in 1:19–24. For these Jews, the big idea is not love for God and neighbor but strict obedience to the letter of the law. The Jews do not love this man and rejoice in God’s work in his life. They love conformity to what the law requires, at the expense of regard for people and their situations. This poor man was afflicted for thirty-eight years, but they are worried merely because he has taken up his bed (5:10).

The man answers them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk’” (v. 11). This could be rendered more literally, “The man who made me whole” (cf. KJV, NASB). Jesus did not simply heal this man; Jesus *made* him healthy. The “making” here is significant because Jesus made the man well in the same way God made the world: by speaking it so. The one through whom all things were made (1:3), who spoke the word and it was so (5:8–9a), commanded this man concerning what to do on the Sabbath. The man was right to do what Jesus said. As the one who made the world, as the one who made this man well, Jesus has authority to command obedience on the Sabbath.

The Jews respond, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” (5:12). Notice that these Jews, fixated as they are on the law and its demands, do not ask about “the man who healed me” (v. 11a) but about what Jesus told the man to do on the Sabbath: “Take up your bed and walk” (v. 11b). They are more concerned about regulation than about restoration. They are more concerned about adherence to the law than about the healing of the body. They care more about the letter than about the Lord. They care more about obeying commands than enjoying the presence of the one whose character the commands convey.

Just as Jesus went to a place where he would not be honored in 4:43–44, so now he slips away into the crowd. John explains, “Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place” (5:13). Jesus has a mission and an “hour” (7:30; 8:20; 12:23, etc.), and he does not intend to preempt God’s purposes. He does, however, follow up with the man, as John narrates in 5:14–18.

5:14–18 *The Maker*. Verse 14 mentions a slightly new time and place for the interaction to follow: “afterward” provides the time and “in the temple” describes the place. Under the old covenant, those with physical deformity could not serve as priests (Lev. 21:17–23), and those with certain conditions had to remain outside the camp. Any kind of physical imperfection was a result of the fall, the ramifications of which could not be tolerated in the presence of God. But now this man

who had been physically debilitated for thirty-eight years could enter the presence of God at the temple. He had been restored to wholeness by Jesus, and he entered God's presence to worship at the temple.

Jesus found him in the temple and exclaimed to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you" (John 5:14). Sin is cause for exclusion from God's presence, and those who continue in unrepentant sin are eternally separated from God. Jesus made this man whole, enabling him to return to God's presence, and now Jesus warns him not to continue in unrepentant sin lest he experience everlasting separation from God.

It is difficult to imagine that one who had been healed by Jesus would intend him harm, so perhaps the man reported Jesus to the Jews because he felt obligated to the authorities and did not realize their intentions against Jesus. In any case, his report leads to the authorities' "persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath" (v. 16). The law is here turned against the Lawmaker: Jesus, being very God of very God, was the source of the commandment about the Sabbath, which ultimately finds its realization in the rest that Jesus will provide for those who trust him (Hebrews 3–4). And yet the Jews are so blind that they think it righteous to use God's command to condemn incarnate God because of what he did on the Sabbath.

What is ironic and tragic about this is that the Sabbath itself concerns the wholeness God meant for his image-bearers to enjoy in his completed creation. Jesus exposes this irony: "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5:17). He asserts the fact that God the Father continues to work, and the context seems to imply that even though the Father rested on the seventh day of creation, Jesus is not constrained on the seventh day of each week. After all, the universe continues to be held together by God's power on Sabbath days. Jesus adds to this that he too is working.

This understanding of the logic of Jesus' assertion in verse 17 seems to be the Jews' understanding as well: "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (v. 18). In the opinion of the Jews, Jesus was in the wrong because of what he did on the Sabbath. The argument Jesus made in verse 17—that he had the right to do as he pleased on the Sabbath because God does as he pleases—did not persuade them that Jesus was innocent but rather convinced them that he was even more guilty. After all, in their view Jesus was not God, and anyone who claimed to be God was blaspheming. This is clearly how they understood Jesus.

Jesus created wholeness for the lame man and gave him instructions relieving him of his burdened condition, even as he used his new abilities to take up his bed and walk. Ironically, obeying the commands of Jesus is more of a fulfillment of the Sabbath than doing nothing. Obedience is restful.

The man then went into the temple in his restored state. The Jews, meanwhile, used God's law to attack God's Son. The Jews sought to persecute and kill the one John's Gospel has identified as the Word incarnate. Clearly the Jews loved the

commandment more than they loved the man who had been healed, and they clearly loved the commandment more than they loved the God who gave the commandment.

Response

Jesus is the Word made flesh. Jesus is incarnate deity. Jesus is the only Son of the Father, on a mission to save the world. Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem, the ancient city his ancestor David conquered, to celebrate a feast of which he is the fulfillment. Jesus is the one to whom everyone should look. He is the one who deserves the attention of all in Jerusalem. He has just healed the royal official's son from a distance (4:46–54), having been recognized by the Samaritans as the Savior of the world (v. 42).

If we were Jesus, would we notice a man in his sickness? Would we take the trouble to speak to someone lying among the pillars, waiting for the waters to be moved? Would we bother with someone living in the vain hope of an ignorant superstition? We are far more like the lame man than like Jesus. We foolishly expect superstitions or popular beliefs to work. If Jesus happened by and saw the way we live, he would ask, “Is it satisfaction you seek? Are you looking for purpose and significance? Are you sitting by a pool, cherishing a false belief about angels doing something the Bible never says they do, eager to engage in some activity you have no reason to think will accomplish anything?”

JOHN 5:19–30

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father¹ does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. ²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out,

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

³⁰“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

¹Greek *he*

Section Overview: Like Father, Like Son

Jesus has justified his healing on the Sabbath (John 5:16) with the assertion (v. 17) that he works because the Father is working. John explains the Jews’ reaction to this statement (v. 18) before presenting Jesus’ elaboration on how he does exactly what the Father does (vv. 19–30).

In verses 19–30 Jesus explains that the Father has shown the Son what he himself does and has authorized the Son to do likewise. The Son learns what to do from the Father and receives authority to do what the Father does as a gift from the Father.

John explains in verses 16–18,

This was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

The Jews are upset with Jesus for two reasons: (1) he has healed this man on the Sabbath; and (2) in his justification for doing so, Jesus has equated himself with God by using what the Father does on the Sabbath to legitimize his own action on the Sabbath (vv. 17–18).

Jesus does not backpedal in verses 19–30. He has asserted his right to act on the Sabbath because of what the Father does on the Sabbath. The Jews do not recognize this right claimed by Jesus. They do not acknowledge that he is equal with God, and therefore they are not content with the defense of himself that Jesus has offered. The Jews and Jesus are operating in different versions of reality. The Jews think they are doing what is right. They do not think Jesus is equal with God, so they do not think he should heal on the Sabbath. They think that what Jesus has done is sinful and that his justification of what he has done is blasphemous. This is their understanding of reality, informing their reaction to Jesus.

Jesus, of course, is operating in the real world. In the real world, Jesus is God. In the real world, the fact that the Father works on the Sabbath authorizes Jesus to do the same, because the Father has given this right to Jesus. In the real world, Jesus is in the right, and anyone who questions or challenges him is in the wrong.

Section Outline

IV.A.2. Like Father, Like Son (5:19–30)

a. The Son Does What the Father Does (5:19–23)

- b. The One Who Hears and Believes Has Life (5:24)
- c. The Son Will Raise the Dead (5:25–29)
- d. The Son Does the Father's Will (5:30)

John 5:19–30 has a chiastic shape:

5:19: The Son is not able to do anything from himself.

5:20–23: Resurrection, judgment, honor.

5:24: The one who hears and believes has life.

5:25–29: Resurrection, judgment, honor.

5:30: I am not able to do anything from myself.

Comment

5:19–23 *The Son Does What the Father Does.* This passage is bracketed in verses 19 and 30 by statements of what the Son of God cannot do. Jesus asserts, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing” (v. 19). These “Truly, truly” statements guide us to the flow of thought in the passage. Jesus will explain himself in verses 19–23, make a “Truly, truly” statement in verse 24 and another in verse 25, and then explain himself in verses 25–29 before restating verse 19 in verse 30.

Jesus speaks of himself in the third person in verse 19, “The Son is not able to do anything of himself” (AT), and then makes the same statement in the first person in verse 30, “I am not able to do anything of myself” (AT). In verse 19 Jesus comments on what he *sees* the Father doing. In verse 30 he comments on what he *hears*.

The theology here is so exalted and profound we could get dizzy, but what Jesus says is really quite simple and easy to understand. The simple truth here is that sons learn life from their fathers. A son learns to walk by watching his dad walk: how to carry his shoulders, how to point his toes, how to angle his head—all of this comes straight from his dad. Fathers are profoundly important to their children. And this truth applies more broadly to those whose examples we follow in other areas of life. We for the most part do not blaze new trails. We do what we see that other people have done; we say what we have heard others say; we desire what we have seen others value or benefit from. This is the simple truth that Jesus is stating here. He is not a maverick, doing whatever he pleases. He does what he has seen his Father do.

In asserting that “the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing” (v. 19), the eternal second person of the Trinity, the pre-existent Son of God, the one through whom all things were made, declares that he has learned everything from the first person of the Trinity. The Son does what the Father does and nothing else.

Helping us in our weakness and insufficiency, Jesus continues to explain these incredible truths: “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may

marvel” (v. 20). In the first part of this statement, Jesus explains that the Father’s instructional relationship with the Son springs from the Father’s love for the Son. The Father discloses everything he does to the Son because he loves him. This is a unique love that the Bible indicates exists only between Father and Son, for only the Son can be worthy of such love, and only the Son can sustain such love. The infinite being of the Son and his infinite intelligence and capacity make him uniquely able to enjoy this relationship with the Father.

Because the Father loves the Son, and because the Son is capable of receiving the disclosure, the Father “shows him all that he himself is doing.” The second part of verse 20 tells us *what else* the Father will do for the Son, and *why*: “Greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.” The work referred to is the healing on the Sabbath in verses 1–18. The greater work Jesus will go on to describe is the resurrection of the dead, and the healing in chapter 5 and the statements Jesus makes in this passage seem to anticipate the raising of Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11.

Why does the Father show Jesus what he does? Why does the Father authorize Jesus to heal on the Sabbath? Why will the Father show Jesus greater things? Why will the Father authorize Jesus to raise the dead? The answer is at the end of 5:20: “So that you may marvel.” There is no one like Jesus, and God wants all to know it. God desires this so much that he will show Jesus *even greater things* so that all will be awed by his incomparable majesty.

What Jesus says in verses 21–23 shows that the greater things Jesus has just mentioned the Father showing him in verse 20 pertain to resurrection and judgment. Jesus explains in verse 21, “As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.” There is a connection in the Gospel of John between spiritual life and resurrection life, the one being a foretaste of the other. Jesus will assert in 17:3, “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” To know Jesus and God is to have eternal life. But Jesus is talking here about resurrection life. Eternity will be an *embodied* eternity. Man is not destined for wispy existence in the clouds but for resurrected bodies that will be perfectly fitted either to enjoy the new heavens and new earth or to endure the eternal and almighty wrath of God. After the fall, man does not live this life *for* this life. He lives this life *for that* life.

Jesus asserts in 5:21 that the Father and the Son raise the dead. Moreover, they give life to whomever they please. Life is God’s gift. Jesus exercises a prerogative given to him by the Father in the exercise of his will in giving life “to whom he will.” This last phrase of verse 21, concerning the Son giving life to whom he pleases, is similar to the statement Jesus makes in Matthew 11:27: “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” God does not owe himself to anyone. If men, women, and children know God, it is because God has mercifully revealed himself to them. John 17:6 indicates that Jesus gives life to those whom the Father has given to him.

The Father has given Jesus the ability to raise the dead, and he has also given him authority to judge, as Jesus states in 5:22: “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.” These statements about resurrection and judgment in verses 21–22 will be elaborated on in the matching section of verses 25–26, but the purpose statement is clear: “that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father” (v. 23). God gave Jesus the ability to raise the dead and entrusted all judgment to him so that all would honor Jesus. In verse 20, we learn that the Father will show Jesus greater works “so that you may marvel.” In verse 23, Jesus declares that the Father gives him all judgment so “that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.” God the Father wants people to honor God the Son. God the Father wants people to marvel at Jesus.

God is not selfish to seek his own glory. The Father shares his glory with the Son. Further, it is not selfish to give people the most satisfying thing they could possibly enjoy. There is nothing more marvelous than Jesus, so to have people marvel at anything else would be to give them something less than the absolute best. There is no one more honorable than the Father and the Son, so to have humans honor someone else would be for the Father to put some other god before his people. God is not an idolater. God is a *satisfier*. God will have his people satisfied. God will have man’s thirst for glory, for splendor, for variety, for beauty, for satisfaction, *quenched* as believers enjoy the all-sufficient goodness of the Lord Jesus.

Some people think it possible to be rightly related to God the Father apart from conscious faith in Jesus. Jesus rejects that possibility in the last words of verse 23: “Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” Verse 20 states that the Father loves the Son. To reject the Son is to reject the Father’s beloved, which will not please him.

5:24 *The One Who Hears and Believes Has Life.* How are people to please the Father? What must one do in order to avoid the Father’s wrath (3:36)? How can anyone avoid the judgment the Father has entrusted to the Son (5:22)? John provides the answer to these questions in the words of Jesus in 5:24: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

The solemn phrase “Truly, truly” means “in truth, really, indeed.” Jesus is giving his solemn oath to this. The statement that he is about to make is prefaced by a formula, this “Truly, truly,” asserting the absolute reliability of these words. This is no idle declaration, and it is addressed to “whoever hears my word.” All who are exposed to the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John are among those who hear his word.

Then follows an astonishing declaration: “. . . and believes him who sent me has eternal life.” What does it mean to “believe him who sent” Jesus? Jesus is presenting the truth about reality. He is describing the real world. If anyone accepts the version of reality that Jesus presents—his claims that God the Father, maker of heaven and earth, sent his Son, Jesus, and that God the Father has given to Jesus the ability to do what he himself does—then he believes the one who sent Jesus.

Look at what follows: those who hear the words of Jesus and believe the God who sent Jesus *have* eternal life (v. 24). This is similar to 17:3—to know God and Christ *is* eternal life. If anyone believes, he does not have to wait for eternal life. He can enjoy its effects in the present, in the midst of afflictions and sorrows, diseases, distresses, and the deaths of babies and parents and spouses and dear friends. We have eternal life if we hear the words of Jesus and believe the one who sent him.

Jesus develops the implications of this in the final statement of 5:24: “He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” Anyone who believes in the God who sent Jesus will not be condemned, will not stand trial, will not “come into judgment.” Death has no claim on him. God’s justice does not threaten him. The curse of the law is removed from him. The almighty and everlasting wrath of God does not hang over him.

5:25–29 *The Son Will Raise the Dead.* Jesus had spoken of giving life to the dead and exercising judgment in verses 20–23, and he elaborates on resurrection and judgment in verses 25–29. It is hard not to think of the resurrection of Lazarus (ch. 11) when Jesus says that the hour is “now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (5:25).

In addition to the particular resurrection of Lazarus about to take place, Jesus references the general resurrection at the end of all things when he says that the “hour is coming” (v. 25) when this will happen. That this is the end-time resurrection prior to judgment can be seen in verses 28–29: “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

Once again we see the connection between spiritual life upon *hearing* Christ’s word (v. 24) and resurrection upon *hearing* Christ’s word (vv. 25, 28). Verse 26 shows why Jesus has this ability, as he himself explains: “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.” This statement elaborates on John 1:4: “In him was life.” If the Word “was in the beginning with God” (1:1–2), then there never was a time when this gift was not being given.²⁵ The Father has *always* been granting the Son “to have life in himself” (5:26), and the Father has always loved the Son and shown him what “he himself is doing” (v. 20). If this were not so, there would have been a time when Jesus did not have life in himself, when he was therefore less than the Father. If that were so, Hebrews 13:8 could not say that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever,” Paul could not speak of Jesus being “in the form of God” (Phil. 2:6), and Jesus would have no business saying things like “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). This is often described theologically as the *eternal generation of the Son*. The Son receives the gift of life in himself from the Father, but it is an eternal gift, with the result that the Son has always been equal with the Father.

²⁵ My thinking on these matters is decisively shaped by D. A. Carson’s preaching and writing.

Jesus has the power to raise the dead because the Father gave him life in himself (5:25–26), and Jesus will judge because he is the Daniel 7:13 Son of Man, as John 5:27 makes clear: “he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.” In the Daniel 7 throne room scene, “The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened” (Dan. 7:10), then “one like a son of man” received dominion and a kingdom (Dan. 7:13–14). In that scene there is no separation of powers. The head of state is the supreme court. The king is the judge, as we see in Isaiah 11, where the shoot from the stump of Jesse will judge (Isa. 11:1–5). Isaiah 33:22 similarly declares, “The LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us.” The prophet declares that “the LORD,” Yahweh, is the executive, legislative, and judicial authority. He is the supreme monarch of the universe, the world’s true King, the commander in chief of the triumphant armies of heaven. That Jesus is the Daniel 7:13 Son of Man means that Jesus is the King who will receive dominion and execute judgment. No court stands over the Lord.

The allusion to Daniel 7:13 in John 5:27 is accompanied by an allusion to Daniel 12:2 in John 5:29, where the fate of the resurrected righteous and unrighteous is stated: “those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” There is clearly a connection here between doing good and avoiding judgment, but Jesus has just stated in 5:24 that the one who believes God does not enter judgment. Therefore, resurrection of life comes to those who are justified by faith. The ground of their justification is the work of Christ on the cross, by which they are saved through faith. The evidence that they are saved, justified, born again, adopted children of God is that they do good works—their works are wrought in God (3:21).

5:30 *The Son Does the Father’s Will.* In the whole of this passage Jesus has been explaining to his opponents why it was *right* for him to heal on the Sabbath. He asserted that the Father is working, so he works (5:17). They wanted to kill him for what they viewed as blasphemy (v. 18), but Jesus stood up and explained reality to them. He has outlined how he does only what he sees the Father doing, how he raises the dead because he has life in himself, how he will judge because he is the Son of Man, and how those who believe the one who sent him have eternal life and do not come into judgment, while those who do the evil of rejecting him face resurrection unto judgment.

How will the opponents of Jesus respond? They did not like it that Jesus was “calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (v. 18), and Jesus exacerbated the problem by asserting himself to be the eternally generated Son of the Father through whom God will raise the dead and judge the wicked. Jesus has also informed his adversaries that the only way for them to honor the Father, which they think they are already doing, is to honor the Son, Jesus (v. 23), whom they are ready to kill (v. 18).

Jesus’ opponents probably thought he was delusional or demon-possessed (cf. Mark 3:21–22). At any rate, from what John narrates in his Gospel it is clear that

the opponents of Jesus continue to reject him. As if anticipating this, Jesus asserts that he is not acting of his own accord: “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30).

The opponents of Jesus thought he was impudently transgressing the Sabbath. The claim that he was authorized to work on the Sabbath because God the Father works on the Sabbath would have only increased their tightly wound indignation at what they perceived to be blasphemy. They would have thought him a self-willed, self-exalting blasphemer. This is precisely what Jesus denies as he asserts that he seeks not his own will but the will of him who sent him. He further asserts that, as he exercises judgment, he judges as he hears, not on his own but justly. The implication in verse 30, as in verse 19, is that the judgment Jesus executes is the judgment willed by the Father.

Response

To reject Jesus is to reject the Father. To reject his message is to refuse to believe the one who sent Jesus, the only living and true God, because Jesus does only what he sees the Father doing, says only what the Father wishes him to say, and judges only as he hears on the authority of the Father. In 5:31–47, Jesus will buttress his argument by showing that the Father, the Baptist, the mighty works Jesus does, and the Scriptures all testify to him.

On the other hand, Jesus declares in verse 24 that those who hear his word and believe have eternal life. The only logical response is to hear the word of Christ and believe the one who sent him. To allow the voice of the Son of God to give life as his words in this Gospel are heard and read. To feel the freedom from condemnation. To embrace the relief from fear of punishment that he offers. To take from his hand this “Truly, truly” promise he makes. To live in the eternal life man can truly *have* if he would only believe.

In response to these words of Jesus, we must believe the one who sent Jesus, marvel at Jesus, honor Jesus as we honor the Father, and gain eternal life.

JOHN 5:31–47

³¹ “If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. ³³ You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴ Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the

Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. ³⁹ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. ⁴¹ I do not receive glory from people. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

Section Overview: Know God: Believe the Testimony

In order to know God, one must accept the testimony to the truth given by the Baptist, the Father, the miracles, the Scriptures, and Moses, all of whom testify that Jesus is the one sent by the Father. To bring out the inner connections within this section of John's Gospel, here is my translation of the text, reflecting its chiastic structure:

5:31–32: If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. Another is the one who testifies about me, and I know that true is the testimony that he testifies about me.

5:33–35: You sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you chose to be rejoiced for an hour in his light.

5:36–37a: But I have testimony greater than John's, for the works which the Father has given me that I might complete them, the works themselves that I am doing testify about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me, he has testified about me.

5:37b–38: You have never heard his voice, nor have you seen his form, and you do not have his word remaining in you, because him whom he sent, in this one you do not believe.

5:39–40: You search the Scriptures because you think by them to have eternal life, and those are the ones who testify about me. And you do not choose to come to me that you might have life.

5:41–44: I do not receive glory from men, but I know you, that the love of God you do not have in yourselves. I have come in the name of my

Father, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, that one you will receive. How are you able to believe receiving glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

5:45–47: Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father. Moses is the one who accuses you, on whom you have hoped. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?

We can summarize the chiastic structure of the passage as follows:

- 5:31–32: True Testimony
- 5:33–35: The Baptist, Light, Rejoicing
- 5:36–37a: The Father and the Miracles Testify
- 5:37b–38: You Know Not God
- 5:39–40: The Scriptures Testify
- 5:41–44: Glory, Love, Belief
- 5:45–47: True Accusation

For the purposes of this discussion, we will walk through the passage according to the matching sections of this chiastic structure as follows:

- 5:31–32, 45–47: Testimony and Accusation
- 5:33–35, 41–44: The Baptist's Lamp and True Glory
- 5:36–37a, 39–40: The Father, the Miracles, and the Scriptures Testify
- 5:37b–38: Knowing God

Section Outline

- IV.A.3. Know God: Believe the Testimony (5:31–47)
 - a. Testimony and Accusation (5:31–32, 45–47)
 - b. The Baptist's Lamp and True Glory (5:33–35, 41–44)
 - c. The Father, the Miracles, and the Scriptures Testify (5:36–37a, 39–40)
 - d. Knowing God (5:37b–38)

Jesus healed on the Sabbath the man who had been at the pool of Bethesda thirty-eight years (5:1–9), which incensed the Jews (vv. 10–16). Jesus explained that he could work on the Sabbath because the Father works on the Sabbath (v. 17); in response, the Jews wanted to kill him (v. 18).

Jesus responded by explaining that he does only what the Father does (v. 19), and that the Father will give him the greater works of raising the dead and executing judgment (vv. 20–30).

These are audacious claims, and Jesus knows the skeptics are not likely to believe him. Therefore, in verses 31–47 Jesus details how the Baptist, the miracles, the Father, the Scriptures, and Moses all testify to him as the one sent by the Father. This evidence that Jesus is the one sent by the Father supports Jesus' argument that people must hear his word and believe the one who sent him and thereby enjoy eternal life, avoid judgment, and pass from death to life (v. 24).

Comment

5:31–32, 45–47 *Testimony and Accusation.* Jesus seems to recognize that he is making claims his accusers do not believe, and so he states, “If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true” (v. 31). He seems to be acknowledging that his claims are difficult to believe and that people should demand strong evidence before believing his claim that he is “equal with God” (v. 18), and strong evidence is exactly what Jesus begins to provide: “There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true” (v. 32). There are six references to “bearing witness” and four references to “testimony” in verses 31–39. Throughout this passage Jesus is adducing witnesses who testify that he is the one sent by the Father.

In addition to emphasizing testimony to the truth in verses 31–32, an accusation will be brought against the guilty in verses 45–47. Just as Jesus recognizes that his own testimony is disputed and thus brings witnesses on his behalf (vv. 33–39), so also he recognizes that since he himself stands accused by the Jews (cf. v. 18), they will not countenance his accusations against them. Accordingly, Jesus asserts that Moses—whose authority they recognize—will accuse them (vv. 45–47).

Just as he acknowledged the disputed nature of his testimony (v. 31), so also Jesus acknowledges the disputed nature of his accusation: “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father” (v. 45a). And just as he had stated that another testifies (v. 32), so also he states that another accuses: “There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope” (v. 45b). The Jews have set their hope on Moses in the sense that they think the Mosaic law stands against Jesus and for them. Jesus turns what they thought was evidence for their case into evidence against them and *for* him, asserting, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me” (v. 46). Here Jesus claims that the whole string of promises beginning in Genesis 3:15, moving through Genesis 5:29 to 12:1–3 to 49:8–12, and continuing on to Numbers 24:17 and Deuteronomy 18:15–18 and many points elsewhere finds its fulfillment in him.²⁶

Jesus asserts, “If you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” (John 5:47). Here Jesus acknowledges that his opponents do not interpret the Pentateuch in a way that finds its promises fulfilled in him. Jesus regards this as *unbelief*. He speaks of this not as a difference in interpretation but as a refusal

²⁶ For more on these texts from this perspective, see Hamilton, “Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman”; Hamilton, “Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham”; Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*.

to believe what Moses wrote. If they do not believe what Moses wrote, they will not believe the claims of the one of whom Moses prophesied.

5:33–35, 41–44 *The Baptist's Lamp and True Glory.* Jesus has mentioned another who bears witness about him (5:32), and then builds toward the assertion that the Father bears witness to him (v. 37) by beginning with the testimony of John the Baptist: “You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth” (v. 33). This sending to John is probably the encounter in 1:19–28. The truths to which John bore witness are that Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (1:33), that the Father sent Jesus, and that believing the one who sent Jesus delivers from judgment (5:24).

Jesus explains why he appeals to John the Baptist: “Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved” (v. 34). Being the Word made flesh, Jesus does not need the testimony of the Baptist. He is moving toward testimony that comes from the Father, not man, which he will explain in verses 36–37. But here Jesus is seeking to convince those who do not believe his claims, and to do so he appeals to the testimony of the Baptist.

Jesus speaks of John the Baptist's role in verse 35: “He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.” The Baptist was not the light, but he bore witness to the light (1:7–8). The light that came from the Baptist in his role as a “burning and shining lamp” (5:35) was pointing to the “the true light” (1:9), “the light of the world” (8:12): Jesus. Jesus indicates that his opponents enjoyed the Baptist's light for a short time.

John the Baptist's light pointed to Christ's radiant glory. Just as Jesus said, “I do not receive testimony from man” (5:34 AT), so now he says, “I do not receive glory from people” (v. 41). Jesus is neither *authenticated* by the Baptist's testimony nor *made glorious* by the light from the Baptist's lamp. Jesus *is* authentic. Jesus *is* glorious.

Jesus next states the reason his opponents reject his testimony and do not believe: “I know that you do not have the love of God within you” (v. 42). Those who love God will not merely enjoy the Baptist's lamp for a short while; they will allow the Baptist to point them to Jesus (cf. 1:35–37). Those who love God will love the one whom God sent, not try to kill him (cf. 5:18).

As proof that his opponents do not love God, Jesus explains, “I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him” (v. 43). Jesus seems to be describing how people are believed when they give their word of honor, when they base their claims on their own integrity. Jesus has based his claims on the honor and integrity of the Father. The Father sent him—he has come on behalf of the Father—yet they have not received him. Jesus has come from God, and that his opponents do not receive him is proof that they place the opinion of men over the opinion of God.

Jesus then asks, “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” (v. 44). Those

who allow the esteem of other humans, the opinions of men, to inform their value system *will not be able to believe what they cannot see*. So much of what the Bible teaches must be taken on faith (in the full, not trite, sense of the phrase). Those who accept the arguments Jesus makes in this chapter take his word that the Father, whom they cannot see, has sent Jesus, and so they believe him. Jesus here says that those who care primarily about glory from other people will be unable to believe.

In order to believe that God the Father sent Jesus, that Jesus is indeed God the Son, one must “seek the glory that comes from the only God” (v. 44). That is to say, one must care more about the glory of God than about the glory of people. The glory that comes from people is temporary; the glory that comes from God is forever. The glory that comes from people is often false, based on mistaken impressions, unwarranted, or unearned. The glory that comes from God is true, for God never makes mistakes, never fails, never operates on false impressions or wrong estimations; everything that God does inspires awe. The glory that comes from God is worth infinitely more than the glory that comes from people.

5:36–37a, 39–40 *The Father, the Miracles, and the Scriptures Testify*. Jesus has spoken of another who bears witness about him (v. 32) and has mentioned John the Baptist’s testimony (vv. 33–35). He then declares, “The testimony that I have is greater than that of John” (v. 36a). This indicates that it was not the testimony of the Baptist that Jesus referenced in verse 32. He continues, “For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me” (v. 36b). This statement shows that the dispute from earlier in the chapter has continued, and Jesus is arguing the truth of verse 24—believing that the Father sent Jesus results in salvation.

In verse 36 Jesus explains that his ability to heal the lame man (vv. 1–9) ought to validate the goodness of what he is doing. It ought to prove to his opponents that he comes from God, that God sent him, and that God’s power is at work in him. The works that Jesus does show that God has sent him (v. 36; cf. v. 24).

The works bear witness, as does the Father. Jesus continues, “The Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me” (v. 37a). The Baptist bore witness in 1:32–33 that the one who sent him to baptize informed him that the one on whom the Spirit would come down and remain would baptize with the Holy Spirit. The Father bore witness about Jesus by sharing these truths with the Baptist and by sending the Spirit to Jesus.

The Father testified to Jesus by sending the Spirit to remain upon him, and the Father also testified to Jesus by the Spirit’s inspiration of the Scriptures that are fulfilled in Christ. Jesus explains, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (5:39–40). The Jews search the Scriptures but do not find God’s testimony to the seed of the woman, of Abraham, of Judah and David, who would accomplish salvation. They seek life from the Scriptures

but do not realize that the Scriptures testify to Jesus, that only by believing in the one the Father sent could they have the life they seek (cf. Acts 13:27).

The opponents of Jesus base their hope on the Bible, the OT (John 5:39, 45), but they have missed the point of the Bible, that God will raise up the seed of the woman to kill the dragon and rescue his bride, to crush the head of the serpent and save his people through judgment for his own glory. This Jesus fulfills. This the opponents of Jesus fail to see.

5:37b–38 *Knowing God.* At the end of verse 37 Jesus puts his finger on his opponents' problem, and his words continue through verse 38. This statement is at the center of the chiasmic structure of 5:31–47. What Jesus says here explains much: why his opponents react negatively to his healing on the Sabbath; why they reject his argument that the Father's continuing to work validates what he himself does on the Sabbath; why they reject his explanation that he does only what the Father does; and why they reject the testimony of the Baptist, the miracles, the Father, and the Scriptures. Ultimately, what Jesus says in verses 37–38 explains why his opponents will crucify him.

Jesus had referred to the way the Father bore witness to him at the beginning of verse 37, and he continues by saying, "His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent" (vv. 37b–38). What Jesus says at the end of verse 37 and the beginning of verse 38 is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 4:12: "The LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice." Whereas those who experienced what Moses described had heard God's voice when he spoke the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai, the opponents of Jesus have neither seen God's form nor heard God's voice.

If they had heard God's voice in the Scriptures, they would have believed the one who sent Jesus (cf. John 5:38–39, 45–46). If they had seen Jesus for who he was, they would have seen the image and likeness of God (cf. 14:9; Col 1:15). If they had believed Jesus, they would have abided in his word, and God's word—Jesus—would have abided in them (John 15:4–7).

The opponents of Jesus do not believe him. Thus, they do not hear the voice of God—for when Jesus speaks, God speaks! They do not see the form of God—for Jesus is the image of the unseen God. They do not have God's word—the written word in the Scriptures and the living Word, Christ—abiding in them.

Response

The testimony of Jesus is true. The accusations of Moses are devastating. We should believe Jesus, and we should believe that what Moses wrote has been fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus has given the authoritative interpretation of the OT. To reject his reading of the OT is immoral and rebellious. In a day when truth is increasingly viewed as relative and people are hesitant to declare interpretations to be right or wrong, what Jesus says about the interpretation of the OT plants the flag that

his reading is the true one, the right one, and any objection to his interpretation is damnably rebellious.

The opponents of Jesus take the word of honor given by men but reject the one who comes in the name of the Father. In response, Jesus argues that his opponents care more about men than about God. They honor men more than God. Whose opinion is determinative in our lives? The opinions of other people? Or the opinions of God? Do we live to please man or God?

If one wants to know the Father, one must believe Jesus, must believe that the Father sent him. Do we want to hear the voice of God? We must listen to Jesus and to Scripture. When Scripture speaks, God speaks. To grow in faith, our opinion of God must eclipse our opinion of other humans. Do we want to see God? We must look Christ full in the face. He who has seen Jesus has seen the Father (14:9).

JOHN 6:1–21

6 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ²And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii¹ worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” ¹⁰Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” ¹³So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

¹⁵Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles,² they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were

frightened.²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”²¹ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

¹A *denarius* was a day’s wage for a laborer ²Greek *twenty-five or thirty stadia*; a *stadion* was about 607 feet or 185 meters

Section Overview: Feeding the Multitude, Crossing the Waters

John introduced his Gospel with words high and deep, clear and searching in 1:1–18. Then he narrated four momentous days in the life of Jesus in 1:19–51. After that he took his audience on a journey starting from and returning to Cana in chapters 2–4. The wedding at which Jesus turned water into wine was the first stop, in 2:1–12. Then, in 2:13–25, John took us to the first Passover in the Gospel, at which Jesus said he would raise the temple three days after his enemies destroyed it. Jesus told Nicodemus he needed to be born again (3:1–21), and then the Baptist bore witness to Jesus (3:22–36). Jesus then met the Samaritan woman at a well, and her people recognized him as the Savior of the world (4:1–45). Back in Cana in 4:46–54, Jesus healed the royal official’s son from a distance.

At the unnamed feast of chapter 5, Jesus healed the man lame for thirty-eight years (5:1–18), then explained that he was sent by the Father to do the Father’s work, to raise the dead, and to execute judgment (5:19–30). Anticipating the charges against him, Jesus adduced witnesses for his defense in 5:31–47, explaining how the Baptist, the miracles, the Father, the Scriptures, and Moses all testify to him.

In chapter 6 the narrative is set at the time of Passover, and to understand John’s narrative we must appreciate what Passover commemorated. When God saved Israel from Egypt through the exodus, the people went on dry ground through the waters of the Red Sea and ate manna from heaven in the wilderness, and then Moses went alone up Mount Sinai. When Israel faced exile from the land, the OT prophets announced that God would save them from exile as he had saved them from Egypt. These prophets pointed to a future day when God would save his people through a new exodus and a new deliverance through the waters (e.g., Isa. 11:15; 43:2).

In John 6 John shows Jesus reenacting the history of Israel. As the Lord provided manna from heaven for Israel after the exodus, so in the season of the Passover Jesus feeds the five thousand before discussing the manna from heaven. As the Lord brought Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground, so Jesus walks on the sea as on dry ground. The people will recognize Jesus as the promised prophet like Moses (John 6:14; cf. Deut. 18:15, 18) and will seek to make him king (John 6:15). Then, just as Moses went up Mount Sinai alone, so Jesus will withdraw to the mountain by himself (v. 15).

The point of all this is that Jesus is the new and better Moses, the promised Prophet, the hoped-for King. Jesus is the one who will bring to pass the prophesied new exodus and return from exile. Jesus will accomplish God’s plan of salvation. Jesus will shepherd his people across the waters and through the wilderness, providing them with the bread of life.

Section Outline

IV.B. Feeding the Multitude, Crossing Water, and Providing Manna at Passover (6:1–71)

1. Feeding the Multitude, Crossing the Waters (6:1–21)
 - a. Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (6:1–15)
 - (1) Time, Place, People Involved (6:1–4)
 - (2) Lots of People, No Food, No Money (6:5–7)
 - (3) Five Barley Loaves and Two Fish (6:8–9)
 - (4) Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (6:10–11)
 - (5) Twelve Baskets of Leftovers (6:12–13)
 - (6) Prophet and King (6:14–15)
 - b. Jesus Walks on Water (6:16–21)
 - (1) Time, Place, People Involved (6:16–18)
 - (2) Jesus Walks on the Water (6:19–21)

Comment

6:1–15 *Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand.* As we have seen elsewhere in John, this transition to a new section in the Gospel is marked by statements of *time*, “After this. . . the Passover . . . was at hand” (vv. 1, 4); *place*, “the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. . . on the mountain” (vv. 1, 3); and *people involved*, “Jesus. . . a large crowd. . . with his disciples” (vv. 1, 2, 3).

In chapter 5, Jesus was in Jerusalem interacting with his opponents, while the disciples of Jesus were last mentioned in 4:33. Now in chapter 6 Jesus is across Galilee with his disciples and a gathering crowd.

The gathering crowd poses a problem for Jesus to solve, a problem Jesus takes upon himself: “Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?’” (v. 5).

We might ask why Jesus believes it is his responsibility to feed these people. He has not invited them, nor has he sought to gather a crowd, but when the people of Israel gather to the King of Israel, he proves himself to be their Shepherd (cf. Mark 6:34). Jesus assumes responsibility for these people because he is good, because he loves, because he came not to be served but to serve. No crowd is too big for Jesus to feed.

John lets his audience in on the secret: “He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do” (John 6:6). In view of this reality, we do well to ponder the question that Jesus asked Philip. If Jesus was fishing for a certain kind of answer from Philip, what kind of answer did he seek?

It would seem that Jesus here invites Philip to recall the way the Lord had made a table in the wilderness for his people (cf. Ps. 78:19). Jesus likely would have been very pleased had Philip responded that he did not know how the people would be fed, but surely God would be able to provide for his people in the wilderness just as he had done in the time of the exodus. Instead, “Philip answered him,

“Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little” (John 6:7). This is a big crowd, whose needs apparently surpass the resources at hand.

Another disciple, Andrew, comes to Jesus to report, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” (v. 9). These two statements seem to communicate hopeless effort. On the one hand, it seems Andrew is trying to help. On the other hand, he plainly sees the futility of the meager food in the face of massive need.

In response, Jesus gives instructions for the five thousand to be seated (v. 10; cf. Matt. 14:21), and the way John words his description of Jesus’ next actions seems intended to evoke a later occasion in which Jesus will break bread and give thanks: “Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated” (John 6:11). The phrase “when he had given thanks” is also found at the institution of the Lord’s Supper in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as in Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians 11:24. Further, in John 6:53 Jesus refers to those who eat his flesh and drink his blood. John seems to mean for his audience to connect the provision Jesus makes for the five thousand with the provision he makes for all who trust him at the Lord’s Supper.

Notice how Jesus distributes the bread and fish: he gives the people “as much as they wanted” (v. 11). Those who go to God to get their needs met will not find him stingy. God will give as much as is wanted of what we need. This does not mean we will have everything we want according to sinful desire, but it does mean that God will meet the needs of his people. Christ is enough and more to satisfy forever and always.

As happened when Elisha fed what seemed like too little bread to too many men and yet they had some left (2 Kings 4:42–44), so here we read of the plenteous abundance of the provision Jesus made (John 6:12–13). The twelve baskets parallel the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles. Jesus will provide for all his people.

The people’s response to the sign in verse 14 indicates Jesus has convinced them he is the prophesied prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18:15–18. This response would seem to indicate that they recognize the correspondence between the manna from heaven under the ministry of Moses and the multiplied loaves from the hands of Jesus. They see in Jesus the prophet like Moses. Jesus realizes this, “perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king” (John 6:15). The crowds concluded that Jesus fulfilled what was spoken of in Deuteronomy 18:15–18, and Jesus knew this would prompt the crowd to identify him as the coming king from David’s line. Like Moses, David was a shepherd. Like Moses, David was a prophet. And the crowds seem prepared to recognize the prophet like Moses as the king like David.

In response to his perception of the crowd’s intentions, “Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself” (John 6:15). Moses had gone up Mount Sinai and remained alone on the mountain with God forty days and forty nights (Ex. 24:18); and like Moses, Jesus withdrew by himself to the mountain.

Jesus is the prophet like Moses. Jesus is the offspring of David. How do we know? Jesus is the feeder of the multitude, healer of the sick, Savior of the world, bringer of new birth by the Spirit, builder of the torn-down temple, maker of wine from water, and walker who treads the waves.

6:16–21 *Jesus Walks on Water*. In John 6:16–18 John once again tells us about *time*, “evening. . . . It was now dark” (vv. 16, 17); *place*, “the sea, . . . started across the sea to Capernaum. . . . The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing” (vv. 16, 17, 18); and *people involved*, “his disciples. . . . Jesus had not yet come to” (vv. 16, 17). These details set the scene for what Jesus does next.

The Sea of Galilee is about seven miles wide at its broadest, so if the disciples “had rowed about three or four miles” (v. 19) they were right in the middle of the lake. At that point, “they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened” (v. 19). Naturally! Job 9:8 says that God “alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea.” Who could walk on the sea? Water does not hold together under the weight of mortal man. It separates, and we sink when we step on it. Not so with Jesus.

In response to the fright of the disciples, Jesus “said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid’” (John 6:20). Those words “It is I” could just as well be rendered, “I Am.” And he is. Jesus has been announced as God (1:1), and he has asserted his equality with God (5:17; cf. 5:18). He does what only God could do by walking on water (6:19), and now he identifies himself as Yahweh, the one who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, by announcing God’s own covenantal name as his means of self-identification (cf. Mark 6:48; Ex. 34:6).

Jesus is the prophet like Moses (John 6:14). He is the son of David (v. 15). And he is the incarnation of Yahweh (v. 20). He has fed the five thousand in the wilderness with the Passover near, fulfilling the pattern of provision in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. Like Moses, he withdrew to the mountain alone. And just as Israel went through the Red Sea on dry land, Jesus has walked the waves of Galilee as one treads the turf of terra firma.

Psalms 107:25–30 speaks of a storm at sea (v. 25), in response to which God’s people call on his name (v. 28) and he calms the storm (v. 29). “Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven” (v. 30). Similarly, after the strong wind blew on the sea in John 6, we read, “Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going” (v. 21). From the middle of the lake to the shore of their destination, Jesus brought them to “their desired haven.”

Response

We may not know how the Lord is going to meet our needs today, but he met his people’s needs on the day he brought them out of Egypt, and he met his people’s needs on the day Jesus took it upon himself to feed the big crowd. We can trust God to meet whatever needs we have by giving us what is for our best.

Consider the situation when Jesus fed the five thousand: the needs surpassed the resources. What the disciples had in the moneybag was insufficient for their need. In the presence of Jesus, money is not the answer. Human innovation is not the answer. Leadership and initiative from the disciples were not what was needed. The situation called for Jesus. We are inadequate, and that is the point. He can make five barley loaves and two fish enough for five thousand, and he can make our stumbling inadequacy enough to meet the need.

Promises in him are yes and amen. Patterns find fulfillment. Prophecies come true. Hopes are realized. Yearnings of yore are satisfied at last. Jesus has come, the new Moses, the new David, prophet, priest, king, incarnate Word who walks on water. Well indeed did Isaiah prophesy,

When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and through the rivers,
they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire
you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
your Savior.
(Isa. 43:2–3a)

JOHN 6:22–40

²²On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

²⁵When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” ²⁸Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” ²⁹Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” ³⁰So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we

may see and believe you? What work do you perform? ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Section Overview: The Bread of Life

In John 6:1–21, Jesus fed the five thousand, prompting the crowds to recognize him as the prophesied prophet like Moses (v. 14). Jesus understood that they meant to make him king, apparently because they had connected the promise of “the Prophet” (cf. 1:21) to the promise of a king from David’s line (6:15a). As Moses went up the mountain by himself, so Jesus went up the mountain by himself (v. 15b). As Moses led Israel through the Red Sea as on dry land, so Jesus walked on the waves of Galilee as on dry land (vv. 16–21).

As the crowd regathers around Jesus on the following day (v. 22), apparently finding him in the synagogue (v. 59), Jesus seeks to direct their attention away from the food that sustains physical life to the food that sustains eternal life. In this passage John teaches his audience not to be so distracted by physical needs as to fail to see what God is doing in the world to save his people and accomplish his purposes.

Section Outline

IV.B.2. The Bread of Life (6:22–40)

- a. Time, Place, People Involved (6:22–24)
- b. You Ate Bread but Saw No Signs (6:25–29)
- c. The Bread of Life (6:30–35)
- d. The Will of the Father (6:36–40)

Comment

6:22–24 *Time, Place, People Involved.* As we have seen repeatedly in John, transitions are marked by descriptions of time, place, and people involved. Having crossed the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum with his disciples in vv. 16–21, Jesus is again surrounded in verse 22 by the crowd that had been present at the feeding. John

relates how they realized Jesus was not there but knew he had not gotten into the boat with his disciples (v. 22). Not finding Jesus, when other boats come from the Capernaum side of the lake they use them to cross over as well (vv. 23–24).

6:25–29 *You Ate Bread but Saw No Signs.* The crowd does not know how Jesus got across the lake. They were not there to see him walk on the water, and, “When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’” (v. 25).

Jesus does not answer their question but addresses their motivation for seeking him: “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves” (v. 26). The crowd had been following Jesus “because they saw the signs” (v. 2), and then they saw him feed the five thousand and responded by recognizing him as the Prophet and wanting to make him king (vv. 14–15). So at one level, the people have seen the signs Jesus has done. At another level, however, they are *not* seeing the signs for what they signify.

Jesus understands they are selfish and concerned with life in this world, so he tells them they seek him not because they saw signs but because they ate their fill. They are going to Jesus to get their needs met, but they are seeking him to meet the wrong needs. They have prioritized their bellies over God’s purposes in sending his Son. Yes, Jesus wants people to come to him to have their needs met. However, this passage shows that Jesus wants people to come to him to have the *right* needs met. Motives matter in those who seek Jesus. Jesus is not flattered by those who seek him without understanding *who* he is and *why* he has come.

The signs ought to show the crowds that Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT promises, that through him God will bring to pass his purposes. Instead of seeing what the signs communicate, however, the crowd sees only a way to get their bellies filled. Paul’s words in Philippians 3:19 are apt here as well: “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

Jesus, however, directs the people away from what will perish to what will last: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal” (John 6:27). The *work* in view pertains to their seeking of Jesus, their preoccupied thoughts, and their actions to attain what they desire. The *food that perishes* is the bread and fish Jesus provided to the five thousand. They saw that sign and thus wanted to seek Jesus for what he could do for them, but their hearts were not focused on what they really needed him to do: give them food that abides unto eternal life (v. 27). Jesus calls the crowd to lift its eyes from bodily needs of the immediate present to the greater need for someone to overcome death, conquer the curse, and give abiding provision by God’s authorization.

Jesus told them not to “work for the food that perishes” but to seek “the food that endures to eternal life” (v. 27), prompting the crowd to respond, “What must

we do, to be doing the works of God?” (v. 28). This is a natural question. Jesus told them what *not* to work for and told them what *to* work for, but his statement was abstract. How, exactly, does one work for food that endures to eternal life? So the crowd asks him to give them action steps. They ask, “What must we *do* that we might *work* the *works* of God?” (v. 28 AT).

Jesus answers that it is not about *doing* but about *believing*: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (v. 29). Jesus tells the crowd the same thing he told his opposition in Jerusalem in 5:24: believe. Rather than being interested in what they stand to gain (cf. 6:26), they should believe that God has at last sent the Savior. Rather than attempting to make him king by force (6:15), they should believe and trust that God will do what is right and best. Rather than seeking glory for themselves from one another (5:44), they should believe. Rather than drawing the false conclusion that Jesus has blasphemed and violated the Sabbath (5:18), they should believe.

6:30–35 *The Bread of Life*. John 6:30–31 would be humorous if it were not so tragic. The people have just seen a “sign” (v. 14), but Jesus told them they did not learn what the sign communicated (v. 26). Now that he has told them to believe (v. 29), they ask for a sign (v. 30) and then reference the manna from heaven (v. 31). Jesus told them to believe, and so they ask for proof that they should: “What sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?” (v. 30). The day before, he had fed five thousand people from five barley loaves and two fish, and yet they still ask for a sign. Their next words show their obliviousness to the obvious, which is so common to us humans: “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’” (v. 31). They seem to say this because they are looking for Jesus to provide this kind of evidence so that they may indeed believe him. They do not seem to remember that he had performed precisely this sort of sign the day before.

What was typified when Moses led the people through the sea, when manna was provided, and when Moses went up the mountain was fulfilled when Jesus fed the five thousand, went up the mountain, and walked on water. Just as those Moses led did not understand, forgot what the Lord had done for them, and grumbled against Moses (Ex. 16:2, 7–8), so also this crowd that Jesus fed has failed to understand, has forgotten what Jesus has done, and will grumble against him (John 6:41).

The crowd’s reference to the manna in the days of Moses shows they do not understand what Jesus said in verse 27. So in response Jesus teaches them about the bread that abides to life eternal: “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (vv. 32–33). Jesus means to compare and contrast the life that resulted from manna and the life that results from the true bread from heaven. Moses gave manna that sustained life for a short period of time, until the next

meal was needed. God has now provided bread from heaven that will sustain life forever.

Jesus identified “the bread of God” as “he who comes down from heaven,” but the crowd did not understand what he meant: “They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always’” (v. 34). This response repeats the mistake made when Jesus said he would rebuild the temple in three days (2:19), when Jesus told Nicodemus he needed to be born again (3:3), and when Jesus offered living water to the Samaritan woman (4:10). In each case, Jesus used something material to teach a spiritual truth, and those who heard his words thought he was talking about the material, physical thing.

Jesus was obviously concerned about people’s real physical needs. He did, after all, feed the five thousand (6:1–13). Jesus knows, however, that there is a deeper hunger, a deeper thirst, than what we feel for food, and he cares about meeting that need. So, here Jesus refers to himself as “the bread of God . . . who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (v. 33). Jesus knows that our spiritual hunger, our spiritual thirst, is greater than our need for food and water. This crowd with which Jesus interacts has been so distracted by their physical needs that Jesus has had some difficulty getting them to understand what he is telling them about their spiritual need.

What is that spiritual need? That spiritual need is for God to introduce the long-awaited hero to the plot of the world’s story. Jesus is that hero. The spiritual need is for God to keep his promises about defeating evil and renewing creation and causing life to triumph over death, blessing to overwhelm cursing, justice to be done on evildoers, recompense given to those who knew their God, stood firm, and took action. Central to all this is the reality that people stand guilty before God, condemned for their evil deeds. Our spiritual need is such that if God’s wrath is not satisfied by a substitute, if God’s justice is not established through the death of a sufficient sacrifice, we will face the everlasting displeasure of the Almighty. Jesus meets that need. He has come down from heaven to give life to the world. We need him to live spiritually just as we need bread to live physically. Apart from Jesus we will die. Jesus has come to give life. He is the hero. He brings about the story’s resolution. He meets our spiritual needs so that those who come to him hunger and thirst no more, ever.

Jesus speaks of “whoever comes to me” and “whoever believes in me” (v. 35). This does not mean that people have to attain some standard in order to be satisfied. He is not teaching that people must arrive at their goals for growth in personal holiness to be saved. Jesus is everything anyone will ever need. Jesus is altogether adequate, satisfying, nourishing, life-giving. Those who go to Jesus and believe in him need nothing else. He is enough.

6:36–40 *The Will of the Father.* When Jesus says, “I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe” (v. 36), he seems to be referring back to the way he had said to them, “You are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate

your fill of the loaves” (v. 26). This seems to illustrate what John wrote in 2:23–24, that people believed in Jesus when they saw the signs, but Jesus did not entrust himself to them. This kind of belief seems to be the kind of belief that Nicodemus shared: an understanding that God was at work, but as of yet no faith that Jesus was fulfilling and would fulfill what God had promised in the OT.

This crowd in chapter 6 has come to Jesus because they believe he can meet their physical needs, but the signs they have seen have not taught them that Jesus meets their more important spiritual needs. They have seen Jesus, they have seen the signs, but they have not seen the signs the way they need to see them. The signs have not signified for them that in Christ the Father is keeping and fulfilling his promises about the Prophet, the King, the new exodus, and the atonement that makes reconciliation possible.

Jesus explains why some see and do not believe. Jesus will say in verse 44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (cf. v. 65). Those who come to Jesus believe in Jesus and will neither hunger nor thirst (v. 35). Who will come to Jesus? Jesus asserts, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (v. 37). This statement indicates that the Father has given people to Jesus, that those whom the Father has given to Jesus *will* go to Jesus and believe, and that Jesus will not reject any of them. Jesus had spoken of how he does not his own will but the will of him who sent him (5:30), and now he says again, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (6:38). Following the statement about those whom the Father has given to Jesus (v. 37), the words about doing the Father’s will (v. 38) indicate that Jesus means to carry out the Father’s plan.

The Father has planned to give certain people to Jesus, and Jesus says that he does the Father’s will by coming to save those people. Thus Jesus explains his understanding, articulated in verse 36, that not everyone will see and believe. In keeping with this, Jesus says, “This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day” (v. 39). The Father gives people to Jesus, Jesus does the Father’s will and comes to save those people, and the Father also wills that none of those whom he has given to Jesus will be lost. If the Father has given someone to Jesus, that person is *eternally* secure. Those whom the Father has given to Jesus will, in accordance with what Jesus said in 5:28–29, be raised from death to life.

Notice the strong emphasis on the Father’s will, with Jesus referring to it in 6:37, 38, 39, and again in verse 40: “This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Consider the contrast between verse 36, “You have seen me and yet do not believe,” and verse 40, “. . . everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him.” What does Jesus mean by this? Jesus told Nicodemus, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (3:14). There we observed that the word “lifted up” is the same term used in Isaiah 52:13. Jesus then said, “. . . that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:15). Right

before saying that he would be the typological fulfillment of the bronze serpent, Jesus had said, “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man” (3:13).

In 6:38 Jesus again says, “I have come down from heaven” (cf. 6:33; 3:13), and the statement concerning eternal life for “everyone who looks on the Son and believes” (6:40) calls to mind the words concerning the bronze serpent in 3:14–15. In Numbers 21:8–9, “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.” Jesus will be lifted up like the serpent (John 3:14) so that everyone who looks on Jesus will live, just as those who looked on the serpent lived (3:15; 6:40; Num. 21:8–9).

Response

The crowd wanted Jesus to meet their physical needs, but Jesus would not be used by the crowd for their purposes, and he will not be used by us either. Why do we seek Jesus? So that he can meet our immediate needs? Or so that he can do God’s will, overcome death, and meet our eternal needs by giving life? Our spiritual needs are of infinitely greater consequence than our physical needs. If we hunger and thirst physically, the worst-case scenario is that we starve or die of thirst, that our physical lives come to a painful end. If our spiritual hunger and thirst are not satisfied, however, the worst-case scenario never comes to an end.

God sent Jesus so that those who come to him shall not hunger, that those who believe in him shall never thirst. We must turn from sin. We must behold Jesus and believe. We will be saved, secured, raised, and restored. Jesus speaks in 6:37 of those whom the Father gave him. How do we know whether the Father has given us to Jesus? Here is the question: when we look at Jesus, do we believe in him or not?

If we look at Jesus and do not believe, we should panic. We should be very afraid. We should cry out to God to give us to Jesus, to give us faith in Jesus, to enable us to believe in Jesus, and, in the words of John 6:44, to draw us to Jesus. If we feel that panic, that worry, and begin to pray, it is a very good sign. If we look to Jesus and believe, it means that in eternity past the Father ordained that we would belong to Jesus. It means the Lord Jesus has carried out the Father’s eternal plan and come from heaven to seek us and to save us, and he will raise us from the dead. Our redemption is as certain as our Redeemer is reliable.

JOHN 6:41–71

⁴¹ So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” ⁴³ Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— ⁴⁶ not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread¹ the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

⁵⁹ Jesus² said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” ⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” ⁷¹ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

¹ Greek lacks *the bread* ² Greek *He*

Section Overview: Eat This Bread and Live Forever

With the Passover near (John 6:4), Jesus fed the five thousand, withdrew to the mountain by himself, and then walked on water (vv. 1–21). The next day, in the synagogue at Capernaum (v. 59), Jesus urged the crowd not to be so fixated on their bodily needs that they failed to see their spiritual need (vv. 26–29). When the crowd asked Jesus for a sign and referenced the manna from heaven after the exodus, Jesus asserted that he himself was the fulfillment of that bread from heaven (vv. 30–35). He went on to explain that those who did not believe had not been given to him by the Father (vv. 36–40).

In 6:41–71, John presents Jesus in dialogue with a rambunctious and contentious crowd. This crowd is murmuring with discontent over the claims Jesus has made about being the “bread” of life (v. 41), so Jesus challenges them with assertions about his identity, his origin, and the way he fulfills the Scriptures (vv. 41–51). This only provokes more questions from the unsatisfied crowd (v. 52), so Jesus reiterates and elaborates on the shocking statements that anticipate the way he will fulfill the Feast of Passover, as pictured in the Lord’s Supper (vv. 52–59). The radical claims of Jesus result in some of his disciples turning away from him, but Peter asserts on behalf of the Twelve that Jesus has the words of eternal life and that there is nowhere else to go (vv. 60–71).

Section Outline

IV.B.3. Eat This Bread and Live Forever (6:41–71)

- a. Grumbling and Fathers (6:41–51)
- b. Eat My Flesh, Drink My Blood (6:52–59)
- c. Words of Spirit and Life (6:60–71)

Comment

6:41–51 *Grumbling and Fathers.* In response to Jesus, “The Jews grumbled about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They said, ‘Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” (vv. 41–42). The Jews had grumbled about Jesus’ claiming to be the bread from heaven in verses 33 and 35, and they grumbled about his references to his Father in verses 32, 37, and 40. Now, as if to refute the claims Jesus has made, they speak of how they know his mother and father (v. 41). They are incredulous that he would claim to have come down from heaven.

John has shown others responding with surprise to the claims Jesus makes. In each case, Jesus answers the surprise of those who have heard him with even more shocking claims. Nicodemus was surprised at the words of Jesus (3:4, 9), so Jesus spoke to him of ascending and descending from heaven (3:13). The Jews were scandalized that Jesus claimed he could work on the Sabbath because the Father is working (5:17), so Jesus told them that the Father shows him all he does, that the Father gave him life in himself so that he could raise the dead and execute judgment (5:19–30; cf. also 1:45–51; 2:18–22).

Now Jesus has claimed to be the bread from heaven given by God the Father (6:33, 35), asserting that everyone God the Father gives him will come to him and believe what he says (vv. 36–40). As before, when Jesus' statements provoke and vex, he does not accommodate his message to his audience's ability to understand or accept but instead *exacerbates* the problem.

"Jesus answered them, 'Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day'" (vv. 43–44). Questioning his claim to have come down from heaven, the crowd had referenced his earthly father, Joseph (v. 42), but Jesus goes right on referencing his *heavenly* Father, connecting the crowd's unbelief (v. 36) to the fact that the Father has not given them to him (v. 37) by asserting that no one can come to him unless the Father draws him (v. 44). The repetition of the final phrase of verses 39 and 40 at the end of verse 44, "And I will raise him up on the last day," shows the strong connection between the ideas in verses 36–40 and verse 44.

John has shown the crowd's recognizing Jesus as the prophet like Moses (6:14; cf. Deut. 18:15, 18), Jesus' knowing that they will attempt to make him king by force (John 6:15; cf. 2 Sam. 7:13–14), and Jesus' typologically reenacting the events of the exodus from Egypt by providing food in the wilderness and miraculously crossing the water (John 6:1–21). Jesus had then asserted that he himself is the fulfillment of what was typified by the manna from heaven: he is the bread that comes down from heaven to give life to the world (v. 35). Attempting to help his audience process how he accomplishes this fulfillment of God's OT promises, Jesus next asserts, "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me" (v. 45).

The statement that Jesus quotes from Isaiah 54:13 comes from a passage full of glorious promises concerning God's end-time new exodus and restoration of his people. The idea that all God's people will be taught by God (Isa. 54:13) parallels the idea in the new-covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:33–34 that all God's people will know him. By quoting this passage from Isaiah, Jesus claims that he is bringing about the fulfillments of those prophecies; he is bringing about the end-time new exodus and return from exile of God's people. By not limiting this to one prophet but instead referring to "the *Prophets*" (John 6:45), Jesus synthesizes the message of all the prophets. Jesus uses this text to bolster his claims that all those whom the Father gives him will come to him (v. 37), that none of those given to Jesus by the Father will be lost (v. 39), that they will all believe (v. 40), and that the Father will draw them all to Jesus (v. 44) because the Father will teach them all and they will therefore all go to Jesus (v. 45).

The crowd asserted in verse 42 that they knew Jesus' father, Joseph, and in verse 45 Jesus replied that those taught by his heavenly Father would come to him, adding, "not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father" (v. 46). God declared to Moses that no one could see him and live (Ex. 33:20). Stressing the unique intimacy Moses enjoyed with God, however, Deuteronomy 34:10 asserts, "There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like

Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.” There is no conflict between Exodus 33:20 and Deuteronomy 34:10. To see God face to face is to know him intimately and does not require the kind of unhindered direct eye contact with God that no human could endure. No human can take in everything God is and survive the experience. Moses knew God face to face in a way that surpassed all others until Jesus.

The crowd grumbled about Jesus’ claiming to be the bread that came down from heaven, so he told them that if they were drawn by the Father and taught by God, they would come to him (John 6:44–45). Then he topped that off with the announcement that even those taught by God have not seen God; only the one who has come from God—which Jesus is claiming to have done—has seen God (v. 46). The crowd has difficulty with the idea that Jesus is the fulfillment of the manna from heaven, so he tells them that he has seen God in a way Moses never did. When John presents Jesus as referring to himself as “he who is from God” (v. 46), he resumes an idea introduced in 1:18. Jesus claims in 6:46 to have seen the Father, just as he told the Jews in 5:37 that they had *not* seen God.

In 6:46 Jesus asserts that he alone has seen God. He claims unparalleled experience of the Father. He has experienced what no other human has experienced and has come from where no other human has come from. Who among his audience would believe such claims? Who would believe that Jesus came down from heaven and had seen God? To believe those claims, one would have to be so impressed by what Jesus had done that he was prepared to believe these unverifiable words. The alternative would be to conclude that Jesus did not do what John’s Gospel claims he has done, or that he did these things by some power other than God’s.

Jesus forces the question of belief on his audience: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life” (v. 47). Those who believe Jesus are trusting the one who has exclusive and unique access to the Father, the only one who has seen the Father, the one who has come down from heaven, the one who raises the dead and can guarantee life.

Jesus had asserted himself to be the “bread” of life (vv. 33, 35), prompting the Jews to grumble (v. 41). He told them not to grumble (v. 43), explained that only those drawn by the Father would come to him (vv. 44–45), asserted his unique relationship to the Father (v. 46), and promised that those who believe him have eternal life (v. 47), and in verse 48 he repeats: “I am the bread of life.”

Jesus had contrasted the manna given by Moses with the Father’s provision of bread of life in the one who came down from heaven (vv. 32–33), and he returns to and elaborates on that contrast in verses 49–50, “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.” Jesus had spoken of his Father in heaven (v. 40), the people had responded that they knew his father, Joseph (v. 42), and Jesus went right on speaking of his heavenly Father (vv. 44, 45, 46). In verse 49 Jesus speaks of *their* fathers, their ancestors, whom the manna did not keep alive forever. The manna from heaven was food that sustained life the same way all food sustains

life. They needed manna daily, and the manna did not enable those who ate it to live forever. Jesus contrasts that manna from heaven with himself. Jesus is bread that “gives life to the world” (v. 33), “so that one may eat of it and not die” (v. 50). Verse 50 is the first reference Jesus has made to *eating* the bread of life that he is claiming to be. He spoke in verse 35 of people coming to him and believing in him, but beginning in verse 50 Jesus speaks of *eating* the bread of life.

He continues, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (v. 51). Note the four parts of the statement Jesus makes here. First, Jesus claims to be the living bread, probably in contrast with the manna. Second, Jesus asserts that he has come down from heaven, against the skeptical references to his human parentage made by the crowd (v. 42). Third, Jesus promises that those who eat him will live forever. Fourth, Jesus declares that his flesh is the bread he will give for the life of the world.

6:52–59 *Eat My Flesh, Drink My Blood.* What is Jesus talking about? The eating of human flesh was abhorrent to the Jews, as can be seen in their astonished reaction: “The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’” (v. 52). Why would Jesus make such a shocking statement? Once again Jesus has said something outrageous, as he did when he declared, “destroy this temple,” or, “you must be born again.” Once again Jesus has used something physical to teach a spiritual truth. What spiritual truth is Jesus teaching?

He continues, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink” (vv. 53–55). What is Jesus talking about? Look again at the last portion of verse 51: “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” This is similar to the reference in Hebrews 10:20 to the “new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.” John 6:51 and Hebrews 10:20 are describing the way that the flesh of Jesus, the body of Jesus, was crucified to give life to the world and open the way to the Father’s presence. Jesus gives his flesh for the life of the world in the sense that he gives himself up to be crucified on behalf of sinners.

Why does Jesus speak of people needing to eat his flesh? Jesus knows *that* he has come to accomplish the prophesied new-exodus salvation for God’s people, and these words in John 6 show that Jesus knows *how* he will accomplish God’s new-exodus salvation for his people. On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and said, “This is my body, which is for you” (1 Cor. 11:23–24).²⁷ Jesus

²⁷ The significance of the words of Jesus at the institution of the Lord’s Supper must not be missed: Jesus was eating a Passover meal with his disciples, and he took up unleavened bread that symbolized Israel’s hasty departure from Egypt (Deut. 16:3). In essence he declared that the unleavened bread no longer commemorated something about the exodus from Egypt. Instead, that unleavened bread would commemorate something about the new exodus, namely, the body of Jesus broken for his people. Jesus transformed the symbol, replacing the celebration of the Passover with the celebration of the cross. For further discussion, see James M. Hamilton Jr., “The Lord’s Supper in Paul,” in *The Lord’s Supper*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matt Crawford, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010), 68–102.

appears to know how he will transform the Passover meal into a celebration of his death on behalf of his people. The words of Jesus here anticipate his institution of the Lord's Supper.

Jesus is obviously not calling people to eat his literal body and drink his literal blood. Christians are not cannibals. Jesus does not want Christians to be cannibals. Jesus *is* calling people to come to him and believe what he says (John 6:35, 40, 44–45, 47). Believing Jesus includes trusting that his death on the cross, the crucifixion of his flesh, propitiated the Father's wrath and made forgiveness possible. Believing Jesus includes trusting that being united to him by faith brings one into a new relationship with the Father, a new covenant in his blood.

Why did John not make the connection between what Jesus says here and the Lord's Supper that Jesus will institute more explicitly? Why does John not have a narrative of the institution of the Lord's Supper at the end of his Gospel? The celebration of the Lord's Supper was pervasive among early Christians (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7). At every Lord's Day gathering of early Christians, the Lord's Supper was celebrated; as John wrote his Gospel in that context, he probably assumed that the connections between Jesus' teaching in John 6 and the Lord's Supper were obvious.

Although Jesus speaks here of the manna from heaven, not the Passover meal, the two have features in common. First, the instructions in Exodus about both the Passover and the manna specify that nothing was to be left until morning (Ex. 12:10; 16:19). Second, the Passover meal precedes the death of the firstborn, and the provision of manna from heaven immediately follows it. Third, Jesus is the fulfillment of so many different aspects of the exodus from Egypt that it is no trouble for him to present himself as the fulfillment of *both* the unleavened bread of the Passover *and* the manna from heaven. Finally, John significantly includes language used in the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper as he describes Jesus' feeding the five thousand (John 6:11, 23), coloring this narrative with a Lord's Supper hue.

Neither the crowd nor the disciples would have understood what Jesus was saying, but John has indicated elsewhere that the disciples came to understand the words Jesus spoke after he was raised from the dead (2:22; 12:16; 20:9). That is probably the case here as well. Understanding what Jesus says here about eating his flesh and drinking his blood as anticipating what he will do at the Last Supper is validated by what he says in 6:56: "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." Those who eat the Lord's Supper in remembrance and proclamation of Jesus' death in their place, who drink the cup in celebration of the new covenant into which Jesus has brought us with the Father—these people *abide* in Jesus and he in them. The presence of Christ is *mediated* to us and *maintained* among us as we believe his word and enjoy what he has given us in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Jesus restates truths explained in 5:26 and adds a connection to those who believe in Jesus when he says, "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me" (6:57). Jesus here

likens the way the Father gives life to him to the way he gives life to his disciples. Jesus is vital to our relationship with the Father. We cannot live without Jesus. We will not be reconciled to the Father without Jesus. The feeding on Jesus in view here is not a cannibalistic feeding on his physical body but a spiritual feeding, a trusting in his death and resurrection that inaugurates the new covenant. The spiritual nourishment Jesus speaks of here is enjoyed by believers who celebrate the Lord's Supper.

In 6:58 Jesus restates the comparison made earlier in verses 32–33 and elaborated on in verses 49–50 between himself and the manna from heaven in the days of Moses. The exodus from Egypt brought God's people out of physical slavery in Egypt. The new exodus Jesus accomplishes brings God's people out of spiritual slavery to sin. The manna from heaven after the exodus from Egypt sustained the physical lives of God's people in the wilderness. The Bread of Life, Jesus, gives eternal life to God's people.

John 6:59 notes that the discussion between Jesus and the crowd in verses 25–58 took place “in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.”

6:60–71 *Words of Spirit and Life.* John 6:60 shows us that the disciples would need further revelation from Jesus in order to understand what he had said in verses 25–59. These things would not become clear to them until they experienced his institution of the Lord's Supper, saw him crucified and raised, and had their minds opened to understand (Luke 24:45). Jesus knows they are perplexed and, like the crowd, grumbling. Rather than explain it, however, he speaks to them as he had spoken to Nicodemus (John 3:13), saying to his disciples, “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” (6:61–62). Jesus refers to the Son of Man's status in the heavenly court in Daniel 7:9–14.²⁸ The “son of man” seen by Daniel in his vision of heaven has become flesh. Whether or not people understand or accept that fact, Jesus operates in reality.

The confusion of the disciples does not prompt Jesus to back away from saying things they do not understand. Instead, he asserts more truth they do not understand in order to challenge them to align their thinking with the reality of who he is. They must think their way through the depths of the incarnation to the heights of the heavenly place from which Jesus came and to which he will return.

These things cannot be understood by mere human faculty; as Jesus declares, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63). If people are to understand Jesus, the Spirit must give them life, must cause them to experience the new birth (3:3, 5, 6, 8). The unregenerate flesh will not receive what Jesus has said (cf. 1:11–13). The words Jesus speaks communicate life, and they are the words the Spirit uses to awaken faith, to cause the new birth. The words of Christ come to the person dead in sin, and the Spirit gives life at the hearing of the word of Christ (cf. Rom. 10:17).

²⁸ See Hamilton, *Daniel in Biblical Theology*.

Jesus, however, knows that not all of those there with him have been given to him by the Father (cf. John 6:37), so he declares, “There are some of you who do not believe” (v. 64). John then explains, “For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.” Jesus next reminds his disciples of what he had said previously (v. 44), explaining, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father” (v. 65).

In response, those not given to Jesus by the Father begin to drift away: “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (v. 66). In contrast, John shows the attitude of those given to Jesus by the Father: “So Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God’” (vv. 67–69). This is John’s first reference to “the twelve” (cf. vv. 70, 71; 20:24). John does not narrate the naming of the Twelve the way Matthew, Mark, and Luke do. He seems to assume his audience will know who the Twelve are, just as he has assumed earlier in this passage that his audience will be familiar with the Lord’s Supper.

This statement from Peter (6:68–69) shows that even though the disciples do not understand what Jesus has said, they trust him. They are prepared to stay with Jesus no matter how offensive or scandalous his statements become. They know he is the one God sent to save the world. They know they have nowhere else to go.

Once again, Jesus recognizes that not everyone present has been given to him by the Father, so he says, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil” (v. 70). John then explains this enigmatic statement: “He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him” (v. 71).

Response

John 6 is rich with correspondences to the pattern of events associated with Israel’s exodus from Egypt:

- the death of the Passover lamb is hinted at in the statement Jesus makes about giving his flesh for the life of the world;
- the fulfillment of the Passover meal is anticipated in the references Jesus makes to the way that, at the Lord’s Supper, those who believe will abide in him by eating his flesh and drinking his blood;
- like Israel crossing the Red Sea, Jesus walks on water and brings his disciples to their destination;
- like Israel enjoying the manna from heaven, Jesus feeds the crowd of five thousand;
- like Moses ascending the mountain alone, Jesus withdraws to a mountain by himself;
- like Israel grumbling against Moses, the crowd grumbles against Jesus.

These correspondences, however, are not merely matching points. At every point Jesus is better than what typified him in the OT, not least in the way that he is the

bread that gives *eternal life* to those who eat. There is nothing we need Jesus to give us more than what he provides: himself. There is nothing more precious than what Jesus gives us: himself. There is nothing more able to save than what Jesus gives us: himself. There is nothing more satisfying than what Jesus gives us: himself. He is the Bread of Life. He has life in himself. By eating his flesh and drinking his blood, we abide in him. The Father gave life to Jesus, and he gives life to us.

Are we prepared to believe the claims Jesus makes? Are we so impressed by what Jesus has done that we are prepared to believe whatever he says? Are we prepared to stay with Jesus no matter how he offends the people of our culture? Do we recognize that Jesus is the Holy One of God? Jesus is the one with the words of eternal life, and there is no one else who can help us. Let us praise God, because he is the one who gave us to Jesus, drew us to Jesus, and gave us life by the Spirit through the words of Jesus.

JOHN 7:1–24

7 After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews¹ were seeking to kill him. ²Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. ³So his brothers² said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing." ⁴For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵For not even his brothers believed in him. ⁶Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. ⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. ⁸You go up to the feast. I am not³ going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." ⁹After saying this, he remained in Galilee.

¹⁰But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private. ¹¹The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" ¹²And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." ¹³Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.

¹⁴About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. ¹⁵The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning,⁴ when he has never studied?" ¹⁶So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. ¹⁷If anyone's will is to do God's⁵ will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. ¹⁸The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. ¹⁹Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" ²⁰The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who

is seeking to kill you?” ²¹Jesus answered them, “I did one work, and you all marvel at it. ²²Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. ²³If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s whole body well? ²⁴Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

¹Or *Judeans*; Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time ²Or *brothers and sisters*; also verses 5, 10 ³Some manuscripts add *yet* ⁴Or *this man knows his letters* ⁵Greek *his*

Section Overview: The Secret, Subversive Work of Jesus

Imagine a great king building a palace for the honor of his son, the crown prince. Prophets informed this great king that past triumphs of the kingdom would culminate in the victory of the crown prince. The crown prince’s conquest, moreover, would be according to the pattern of the past triumphs. To celebrate these past triumphs, and to anticipate the future victory of the crown prince, the king decreed celebrations of the past triumphs in the palace built for the crown prince. The celebrations and the palace and the anticipation and the commemoration of the past were all for the glory of the crown prince.

Imagine how ironic and appalling it would be if the palace came to be occupied by enemies of the crown prince, if his enemies intended to use the celebrations in honor of the crown prince as opportunities to capture and, if possible, kill the crown prince—as though the crown prince’s birthday party in his father’s house might be the time to murder him. Imagine how wrong it would be if the crown prince had to sneak into the palace built in his own honor at the time of the celebration given in his honor in order to attempt to subvert the rebels who had taken over in his home.

God made this world. God became man when Jesus was born of Mary. In John 7:1 we read that in this world that exists for God’s glory, people are trying to kill God’s Son, the Word made flesh. The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated God’s provision for Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness, living in tabernacles, on their way to the Land of Promise. This feast was celebrated yearly because Israel needed to learn that the way God had saved them in the past would be the way he would save them in the future. The prophets declared that God would complete a new exodus, fulfilling the Feast of Passover, and that God would once again provide for his people as they journeyed through the wilderness to the Land of Promise, fulfilling the Feast of Tabernacles. He would bring about these culminating instances of salvation through the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the king from the line of Judah, the son of David, fulfilling the promises to Abraham and David.

Jesus comes as the son of David through whom God would save his people. The temple was built by Solomon, the son of David, and by tabernacling among man Jesus fulfilled the temple. The temple was about Jesus. The Feasts of Passover and

Tabernacles were about the salvation Jesus would accomplish. And the shocking irony of chapter 7 is that Jesus has to go to the feast in secret because the rebels against God want to kill him. At the feast, Jesus tells the truth in an attempt to subvert the false narrative the rebels would use to kill him.

Section Outline

IV.C. Water from the Rock, Light for the World, Sight, and the Good Shepherd at Tabernacles (7:1–10:21)

1. The Secret, Subversive Work of Jesus (7:1–24)

- a. Sneaking into His Own Party (7:1–13)
 - (1) Time and Place (7:1–2)
 - (2) Unbelieving Brothers (7:3–5)
 - (3) The Time Has Not Yet Come (7:6–9)
 - (4) Secrecy and Muttering (7:10–13)
- b. Subverting Lies with Truth (7:14–24)
 - (1) The Teaching of Jesus (7:14–18)
 - (2) Moses, Sabbath, and Circumcision (7:19–24)

Comment

7:1–13 *Sneaking into His Own Party.* Jesus went from Cana to Jerusalem for Passover in John 2, was in Jerusalem in chapter 3, and then passed through Samaria to return to Cana in chapter 4. In chapter 5 Jesus again went to Jerusalem for a feast (5:1), and after he healed on the Sabbath (and explained his right to do so) John notes that the Jews were trying to kill him (5:18). After the controversy in Jerusalem, Jesus went in chapter 6 to the other side of the Sea of Galilee in Passover season (6:4), where he fed the five thousand and then walked on water. Chapter 6 concluded with Jesus' teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum (6:59).

John 7:1 explains that Jesus was walking about in Galilee, avoiding Judea because the Jews were still seeking his life (cf. 5:18). The Passover was celebrated in the first month (Lev. 23:5), Tabernacles in the seventh (Lev. 23:34), and Dedication in the ninth (John 10:22). In 6:4 it was the season of the Passover, and now 7:2 tells us that we have arrived at the season of Tabernacles, six months later.

In 7:10 Jesus will go up to Jerusalem, and we do not read of another trip to Galilee in the rest of the Gospel. In 10:40 he crosses the Jordan before returning to Bethany, just two miles from Jerusalem, in 11:1–44. He goes to “a town called Ephraim,” which was in “the region near the wilderness,” in 11:54 before returning in 12:1–19 to Bethany on his way to Jerusalem for the Passover at which he would be crucified.

After the mention of Tabernacles in 7:2 (seventh month), the next time indicator comes at the mention of the Feast of Dedication in 10:22 (ninth month). It thus appears that John 7:1–10:21 is a continuous narrative set in and around Jerusalem between the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication.

Chapter 1 had announced Jesus as the Word-become-flesh from the bosom of the Father, and 7:1 contains the shocking statement that the Jews sought to kill him. Jesus is the King of the Jews, the son of David, the Light of the World, who “came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (1:11).

Jesus’ brothers urge him to go to Jerusalem so his disciples and the world can see the works he does, apparently assuming that he “seeks to be known openly” (7:4). John explains their counsel in verse 5 with the note that his brothers did not yet believe in him.

The statement of Jesus’ brothers could be taken in at least two ways. They could be scorning and mocking Jesus in open hostility to him. Alternatively, they could be responding positively to Jesus without understanding his agenda. They see the mighty works he does, understand he is the Messiah, and assume he should go public, as reflected when they counsel, “If you do these things, show yourself to the world” (v. 4).

This second option seems to fit both the words of the brothers and what Jesus says in response. Jesus seems to speak in an explanatory tone here, not a defensive or rebuking one. If this is correct—if the brothers of Jesus are not being derisive and hostile to him—how are we to understand John’s comment that they were not believing in Jesus? It appears they do not understand what the signs signify, that his hour has not yet come, or what that hour will entail.

The brothers of Jesus would know the purity of his life. They would have seen the supernatural things he was doing. They would know their status in the line of David. They perhaps understood that their brother was the long-awaited Messiah, but they shared with their contemporaries a set of wrong assumptions and expectations about what he had come to do. As a result of their truncated understanding of his mission—they think he has come to conquer rather than to suffer and *then* conquer—they give bad advice that Jesus rejects.

If we are correct thus far about Jesus’ brothers, we have more insight not only into the nature of their advice but also into the sense in which Jesus rejects it. Jesus’ brothers tell him to go up to the feast (v. 3), he says he is not going (v. 8), but then he goes (v. 10). We might think something amiss here if we fail to understand what the brothers are suggesting and what Jesus is saying he is not going to do. The brothers of Jesus seem to suggest that he should go up to the feast and enter Jerusalem in the very manner he will in fact follow when his hour comes, when the crowds wave branches of palm and cry “Hosanna!” (cf. 12:12–15). The brothers are not simply suggesting that Jesus go to the feast; they are suggesting he parade in with the streaming crowds to be celebrated so that the movement can build momentum.

This understanding of what the brothers of Jesus have suggested explains why Jesus answers that his time has not yet come (7:6), and it allows us to see no contradiction between Jesus’ saying he is not going up to the feast in verse 8 and his going up to the feast privately in verse 10. Jesus does not mean he is not going at all. He means the time has not come for him to enter Jerusalem in triumph to

thrill the throngs and marshal thousands for the taking of the kingdom. Jesus does not go to the feast in the way his brothers urge him to. They do not believe because they cannot, and they cannot believe because they do not understand his mission.

The Jews sought to kill Jesus (v. 1), and his brothers did not understand his purpose (v. 5). If ever someone deserved the esteem of his kinsmen, it was Jesus. If ever someone deserved the sympathetic understanding of his family members, it was Jesus. Rather than receiving what he deserves from countrymen and kinsmen, however, Jesus was met with hostility and unbelief, with wrong assumptions and misguided expectations.

Jesus explains himself and answers his brothers in verses 6–8. He states that he will not take the unbelieving advice of his brothers and go up to Jerusalem because his time has not yet come. While his brothers can go up, the time for Jesus to do so publicly has not yet arrived. That time will arrive at the triumphal entry narrated in 12:12–19, when Jesus will declare that the hour had come (12:23).

Jesus also speaks to the hostility of those who seek to kill him (7:1; cf. 5:18), explaining that the world hates him “because I testify about it that its works are evil” (7:7). Since “the Jews were seeking to kill him” (v. 1), when Jesus speaks of the world hating him (v. 7), he thereby identifies the unbelieving Jews as belonging to “the world.” By his *presence*, by his *purity*, by his *power*, and by his *prerogative*, Jesus testifies that the world’s deeds are evil. The world hates Jesus because he is the light and the world loves darkness.

The brothers of Jesus were calling for him to go public, for him to go to the feast so that his disciples and the world could see the things he was doing (vv. 4–5). Jesus asserted that he was not going up to the feast in that way for that purpose (v. 8). Rather than joining the swarming hordes entering Jerusalem for all to see (v. 9), Jesus went to the feast in private (v. 10), avoiding those who were eager to find him (v. 11).

The various statements John reports in verses 11–12 show the uncertainty of the time. On the one hand are the reports of the mighty deeds of Jesus and what seems to be the power of God at work, but on the other hand is the hostility of the establishment. Whom should the people trust? This uncertainty arose from a mix of expectation, assumption, and concern of different groups responding to Jesus. The Jews were disputing over whether he was good or a deceiver (v. 12), but because of the intimidation of the authorities, no one felt free to speak openly about him (v. 13).

How can such uncertainties be resolved? John presents the resolution for us in the structure of his narrative. He lets Jesus stand up and speak for himself. Those who want their uncertainty about Jesus resolved need only to listen to what he says.

7:14–24 *Subverting Lies with Truth.* As Jesus begins to teach (v. 14), the crowds inquire about his qualifications for doing so (v. 15). The traditional channels have not authorized Jesus, so the people want to know the source of his insight and authority.

Jesus details the source of his authority, the goal of his teaching, and the method people can use to test the validity of his teaching. What Jesus says in verses 16–18 is very similar to what he said in 5:43–47. In both places Jesus asserts that he teaches not on the basis of his own authority but in the name of the Father; in both places he speaks of the difference between seeking glory from people and seeking God’s glory; in both places he appeals to Moses.

Jesus states the *source* of his teaching in 7:16 and its *authority* in verse 18. The teaching, Jesus says, is not his own but that of the one who sent him, God the Father (v. 16). Jesus speaks not in his own name, seeking to make himself great, but seeks the glory of the one who sent him, the Father.

In his teaching, the *goal* is to seek “the glory of him who sent him” (v. 18), and this can be *validated* by anyone who desires to do God’s will (v. 17). Jesus declares that anyone who comes to him in good faith—not seeking to trap or trick him—can learn the truth. Anyone who truly seeks to please God by doing God’s will—not seeking to gratify one’s own selfishness or pride—can know with certainty whether Jesus is to be trusted. Anyone who comes to Jesus and hears what he says and heeds it will know that what he says comes from God.

That Jesus seeks the Father’s glory (v. 18) shows there is no selfishness in the teaching of Jesus, no corruption, nothing that would make what he says untrue. If we begin to suspect that people are trying to make a name for themselves, we grow skeptical. We begin to wonder if they really care for us or if they are merely tickling our ears. We begin to wonder if they really believe what they are saying or if they have merely discerned which way the winds are blowing. We begin to wonder if they really have our best interests at heart, if they are really committed to serving us and doing what they can to love us and provide what is best for us, or if they are merely using us as a stepping-stone to the fame and renown they seek for themselves.

Jesus declares that he seeks not his own glory but the glory of the one who sent him. He is not making a name for himself. He is not trying to grow the crowd or cause word of mouth about him to spread or multiply his Twitter followers or sell more books. Jesus seeks the glory of the Father, and the way he does so is by loving people and telling them the truth. Jesus is prepared to do so regardless of what it costs him, knowing it will cost him his life. Jesus is prepared to do so regardless of whom it sets against him, knowing he will be rejected. Jesus is thus to be believed because he is “true, and in him there is no falsehood” (v. 18). No growing influence or stature will cause Jesus to alter his message or nuance his declarations. There will be no crowd-pleasing from Jesus: his heart is pure. His words are true. His hour is appointed. His purpose is set. He will love God. He will love his people. He will go to the cross. He will finish his course.

In 5:1–16, the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath. As Jesus explained himself, he asserted that if his opponents believed Moses, they would believe Jesus too, because Moses wrote of Jesus (5:39, 45–46). The Jews were seeking to kill Jesus for healing on the Sabbath and calling God his

own Father (5:18), and they still seek to kill Jesus for those reasons in chapter 7 (vv. 1, 7).

Jesus once again addresses their opposition to him based on Moses by asserting that Moses in fact supports his cause. Jesus indicts his opponents for not keeping the law (v. 19), asking why they seek to kill him. Jesus knows that keeping the law involves not murdering, and it also entails receiving his message rather than rejecting him. How would receiving and believing in Jesus amount to keeping the law? Not only because the law prophesied of his coming, but also because their believing in Jesus would result in fulfilling the law the same way Abraham did: Abraham believed, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). Because Abraham believed, it was declared that he had kept the law (Gen. 26:5).

Jesus declares that the Scriptures testify about him (John 5:39), that Moses wrote about him (5:46–47), and that trying to kill Jesus is a failure to keep the law (7:19). Christ is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4), so to reject the Christ is to fail to keep the law.

The crowd is shocked at the assertions made by Jesus, declaring that he has a demon and demanding to know who seeks his life. The narrative makes plain that the enemies of Jesus are seeking his life (John 7:1, 7; cf. 7:25, 30, 32), so even though the crowd may be shocked, the narrative shows that the words of Jesus are true.

Jesus then explicitly addresses the animosity from 5:18 when he references the “one work” in 7:21 and then deals with healing on the Sabbath in verse 23. Jesus shows that his opponents do not understand the weightier matters of the law, nor do they understand the purpose of the law itself. Their opposition to him is only superficial (v. 24).

Jesus points out that if the eighth day of a male child’s life happens to fall on a Sabbath, the child is nevertheless circumcised. This shows that keeping the regulation about circumcision on the eighth day does not conflict with keeping the regulation about resting on the Sabbath (v. 23). And if it is right to circumcise a man on the Sabbath, then how could it be wrong to make a man’s whole body healthy on the Sabbath? The law enabled people made unclean by sin and death to dwell in a clean state in the presence of God. Circumcision was part of what made a man fit to live in God’s presence. By healing the man lame for thirty-eight years, Jesus has done something far more significant than circumcision in order to make this man hale and whole to enter God’s presence. He has no more broken the Sabbath than a priest would who performed a circumcision on the Sabbath.

The allegation that Jesus had transgressed the Sabbath by healing on the Sabbath was thus shown to be a superficial quibble with no grounding in the law of Moses. In fact, rightly understood, the law of Moses supported what Jesus did when he healed on the Sabbath. The law of Moses, moreover, looks forward to the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the king from Judah’s line who would reopen the way to the garden of Eden. The law of Moses pointed forward to Jesus. Jesus was in the process of fulfilling the law of Moses, and those who saw him doing so and desired to keep the law of Moses should have believed Jesus.

Response

Every detail of this passage is about how Jesus fulfills the OT and deserves to be believed. The Feast of Passover in John 6 is about Jesus. The Feast of Tabernacles in chapter 7 is about Jesus. The public procession of the worshipers at the feast is for the glory of Jesus. The temple in which these events take place is about Jesus. The rite of circumcision is about the promised seed, Jesus. The observation of the Sabbath and keeping it holy is about the rest Jesus brings. The healing of a lame man is about the power and glory of Jesus. Keeping the Torah is about believing Jesus. The Torah of Moses is about the coming Redeemer, Jesus. Making a right judgment is about seeing the trustworthiness of Jesus.

We can also learn from this passage to look past superficial arguments that fail to understand the issues under discussion and search out the true meaning of things. This is what Jesus did as he undermined the false narrative of his opponents and supplanted it with the truth.

And we should identify with Jesus. The establishment's response to Jesus prefigures the persecution of the church throughout its history down to today. We can take comfort from the way that the bride of Christ has been treated like her Lord.

JOHN 7:25–52

²⁵ Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, “Is not this the man whom they seek to kill?” ²⁶ And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? ²⁷ But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.” ²⁸ So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. ²⁹ I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me.” ³⁰ So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. ³¹ Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, “When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?”

³² The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. ³³ Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴ You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.” ³⁵ The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?” ³⁶ What does he mean by saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and, ‘Where I am you cannot come?’”

³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as¹ the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

⁴⁰ When they heard these words, some of the people said, “This really is the Prophet.” ⁴¹ Others said, “This is the Christ.” But some said, “Is the Christ to come from Galilee? ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” ⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

⁴⁵ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why did you not bring him?” ⁴⁶ The officers answered, “No one ever spoke like this man!” ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, “Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸ Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ⁵¹ “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” ⁵² They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.”

¹ Or let him come to me, and let him who believes in me drink. As

Section Overview: Rivers of Living Water

There are some things that humans cannot live without. We cannot live without water. We cannot live without food. We cannot live without light. It would be hard to live without hope. When Israel lived in booths in the wilderness, the Lord provided water that kept them alive. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus promised that the thirsty who came to him to drink would enjoy a river of living water. John explains this as a promise of the Holy Spirit. In the context of Passover (John 6) and the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7), this indicates that after Jesus accomplishes the new exodus, he provides a river of living water, the Holy Spirit, to sustain his people for their journey to the new and better Land of Promise.

At the time of the Passover (6:4), Jesus provided food in the wilderness and then walked on water, matching the manna from heaven and the Red Sea crossing. He then spoke in the synagogue in Capernaum (6:59) of how the Passover meal would be fulfilled in the Last Supper he would institute, as eating his flesh and drinking his blood would give people life (6:35–58).

Passover celebrated Israel’s exodus from Egypt by Yahweh’s strong hand and outstretched arm, and the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated Yahweh’s preservation of the people as they lived in tabernacles during their years of wilderness wandering on the way to the Land of Promise. These feasts celebrated what God had done for his people in the past and anticipated the pattern of God’s future salvation, which he would accomplish through the promised seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the expected king from the line of Judah (Gen. 49:8–12), who would

be the prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15–18) and the priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4).

At Tabernacles, Jesus came secretly and subverted the false narrative his enemies used against him by telling the truth. They alleged that he had broken the Sabbath by healing a man (John 5:1–16). Jesus showed that if circumcision on the eighth day could be done on the Sabbath, it was right to heal a man's whole body on the Sabbath as well (7:23). Jesus also continued his argument that the Scriptures testify about him (5:39, 46–47) as he asserted that those who seek to kill him fail to keep the law (7:19).

The argument Jesus made about circumcision on the Sabbath seems to have settled the question of whether it was right for him to heal on the Sabbath. The Jews continue to seek his life, but the Sabbath healing ceases to be referenced as the reason for their pursuit. Moreover, in the discussion that follows in chapter 7, the question is no longer whether it was right for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath. In verses 25–52, the focus of the dispute over Jesus shifts to the question of where he comes from and where he intends to go.

Section Outline

IV.C.2. Rivers of Living Water (7:25–52)

- a. Where He Comes From (7:25–30)
- b. Where He Is Going (7:31–36)
- c. Rivers of Living Water (7:37–39)
- d. Is the Christ from Galilee? (7:40–52)

Comment

7:25–30 *Where He Comes From.* Jesus successfully subverts the false narrative that he is breaking the Sabbath (7:21–24), as reflected in the mutterings of the crowd (vv. 25–26). The people, aware that the authorities seek to kill Jesus, marvel that there is no opposition to his teaching. Some in the crowd begin to wonder if the authorities think Jesus is the Messiah. The crowd appears to have been convinced by the argument Jesus made about how it was right for him to heal on the Sabbath, so they turn to their next question, which has to do with where Jesus comes from.

At long last the seed of the woman, the scion of David, the anticipated Messiah has come. At long last Yahweh is on the move to deliver his people. At long last the many prophecies of the Scriptures are being fulfilled, but the crowd here speaks as though they have gotten their information from Satan's ministry of propaganda. That is to say, the crowd has bad information that gives an incomplete picture that leads to false assumptions. Some in the crowd have evidently not gotten the word that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1–20), and they assume that the fact that Jesus was raised in Nazareth means he was born there: "We know where this man comes from" (John 7:27). Moreover, it seems that the Malachi 3:1 reference to the Lord's *sudden* appearance in the temple has given rise to the idea that

the Messiah's origin will be unknown: "And when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from" (John 7:27b).

Those with the patience to examine the facts could easily discover where Jesus was born, and they could also learn to read Malachi 3:1 in light of Micah 5:2. Those who will not examine their assumptions are at the ruthless mercy of misinformation. If the truth were known, everyone would see the authenticity of Jesus.

Jesus is not afraid of falsehood. He stands up and challenges the misinformation in a thought-provoking way in John 7:28–29. He takes the issue of his birthplace as a point of departure for asserting his deeper, earlier, true point of origin from the Father's side. Jesus had asserted in 5:37 that his opponents had not experienced God, and now he declares that they do not know God (7:28). Jesus himself, by contrast, came from the Father, was sent by him, and knows him as no one else does (v. 29; cf. 1:18).

Jesus has told the truth, and his opponents do not like it. They seek to arrest him, but just as Saul sought David but could not kill him because of God's protection of David, so the opponents of Jesus can do nothing against him until the appointed hour (7:30).

7:31–36 *Where He Is Going.* Verse 31 shows that some people are examining the evidence and thinking for themselves. These people recognize the impressive signs Jesus has done and come to the conclusion that he cannot be outdone. In verse 32, the Pharisees hear the crowd's mutterings and join with the chief priests in trying to arrest Jesus. It would take something as objectionable as Jesus to unite the chief priests and the Pharisees.

The crowd was questioning where Jesus came from (v. 27), and Jesus tantalized them with references to his heavenly origin (vv. 28–29). He intrigues them further in verses 33–34 by referring to his heavenly destination. For Jesus to assert that he is going to the one who sent him is to assert that he is going to the Father (v. 33). His opponents will not share his risen and ascended body, and they will not ascend to the Father, as Jesus will (v. 34).

The enemies of Jesus are naturally perplexed by what he says and speculate as to what he means, questioning whether he will leave the Land of Promise to teach the Greeks (vv. 35–36). The opponents of Jesus cannot overcome his arguments, and they cannot comprehend his statements: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:5).

7:37–39 *Rivers of Living Water.* The celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in the time of Jesus likely included both a water-pouring ceremony and a lighting of candles (cf. *m. Sukkah* 4:9–5:3). This background seems to inform Jesus' asserting himself as the source of living water (John 7:37–39) and the "light of the world" (8:12).

The Jewish texts describing the water-pouring ceremony at the Feast of Tabernacles do not comment on what it symbolized. It may have commemorated the Lord's provision of water from the rock for the people in the wilderness as they tabernacled their way to the Promised Land. If so, the water Jesus describes

as flowing from himself in 7:38 would be a fulfillment of the water from the rock in the wilderness. The Lord stood before Moses on the rock when he struck it (Ex. 17:6), implying that Moses struck the Lord when he struck the rock. On the cross, the soldier struck Jesus, and blood and water flowed from him. Many interpreters have connected the water that flowed from Jesus on the cross with the water from the rock in the wilderness. All this likely informs Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 10:4, "They drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."

Israel was thirsty in the wilderness and disputed with Moses (Ex. 17:1–3). At the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7, spiritually thirsty people are disputing about where Jesus came from (7:25–30) and where he is going (vv. 31–36). Moses struck the rock and water flowed to quench the people's thirst. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus offers living water to those who come to him. Jesus is the Rock. Jesus will be struck. Water will flow from Jesus, and Jesus will give the Holy Spirit to sustain his people on their journey to the Promised Land.

Jesus presented himself as the source of thirst-quenching living water when he spoke with the Samaritan woman (4:10–14). He asserted that all who believed him would have eternal life (5:24). He identified himself as the "bread of life" (6:35), and he said that anyone who wanted to do God's will would know his teaching was from God (7:17).

Now, in the midst of a dispute over where he has come from (7:25–30) and where he is going (vv. 31–36), Jesus calls all who thirst to come to him and drink (v. 37). The drinking is immediately identified as believing (v. 38), and Jesus promises that those who come to him will experience what was promised in Scripture and will drink of the rivers of living water flowing from him (v. 38). Saying this at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus implicitly offers the fulfillment of what the feast enacted.

John's explanation that Jesus said this about the Spirit (v. 39) reflects passages in the OT prophesying that the rise of the Messiah to accomplish glorious eschatological restoration will be accompanied by a new and deeper experience of the Spirit of God, and some of these texts associate the Spirit with water (cf. Isa. 32:1–2, 15; 44:3; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–29; Zech. 12:10; 13:1). Jesus is teaching in the temple in John 7 (vv. 14, 28), and several OT texts speak of water flowing from the temple when God restores his people (Ezek. 47:1–12; Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8).

John clearly states here that people who have believed in Jesus, people who have experienced the new birth (John 1:13; 3:3–8) by the life-giving power of the Spirit (6:63), have not yet received the Spirit (7:39). The reason stated is that Jesus had not yet been glorified (cf. 12:23–24; 13:31; 17:1). This would indicate that prior to the giving of the Spirit in 20:22, believers were regenerated by the Spirit but not indwelt by him.²⁹

²⁹ See further Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*.

In the midst of this controversy Jesus again offers the crowd a way to validate his claims: come and drink. Come believe. Jesus makes this offer in confidence that those who come to him will be swept up by his overwhelming goodness, freed by the one who is truth, set right by the one who is the way, and made alive by the one who is life (cf. 14:6).

7:40–52 *Is the Christ from Galilee?* John 7:40 shows that some people went to Jesus as he urged them to do (v. 37) and became convinced that he was indeed the prophet like Moses (cf. 6:14), while others recognized Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ (7:41a). Even as some have gone to Jesus and become convinced, the last words of verse 41 show that some are still stuck in the fog of misinformation, thinking that Jesus comes from Galilee, evidently ignorant of his birth in Bethlehem. They thus cite the very promise that was fulfilled when Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) as evidence against the argument that he is the Christ. The result of the ignorance and misinformation is division (John 7:43), with some wanting to arrest Jesus but no one able to do so (v. 44). The hour has not yet come (v. 30).

In verses 45–52, John shifts from the divided crowd's response (in vv. 40–44) to the return to the chief priests and Pharisees by the officers sent to arrest Jesus (cf. v. 32). The chief priests and Pharisees want Jesus arrested (v. 45). The officers have not done so because they recognize Jesus as a unique phenomenon (v. 46), which the Pharisees regard as their having been deceived (v. 47). That none of the authorities or Pharisees has believed in Jesus is provided as proof against Jesus, which is nothing more than an intellectually snobbish appeal to authority. To their thuggish logical fallacy they add contempt for the crowd, which they view as ignorant of the law (v. 49). Ironically, those who believe Jesus are believing the one who fulfills the law, the one to whom the law points. The Pharisees assert that the crowd is cursed, when in reality the faction of the crowd that has believed in Jesus is blessed.

Nicodemus shows his fair-mindedness when he objects that they should at least give Jesus a fair hearing (vv. 50–51). The dogmatism of the closed-minded enemies of Jesus can be seen in their foregone conclusion that Jesus is from Galilee and in their insulting question of whether Nicodemus also hails from that backwater in the boondocks.

Response

Truth will not aid the enemies of Jesus. Investigation of the facts will not advance their purposes. Logic will not move their arguments forward. Sound words will not make their song sing. The case against Jesus depends on misinformation. The rejection of Jesus is sustained by a refusal to examine the evidence. Arguments against Jesus exemplify fallacious reasoning, distorted perception, and ad hominem attacks. God's creatures oppose him by perverting what God himself has given them: thought, reason, speech, and emotion. The right use of these will lead to a river of living water.

Jesus came from heaven, and after his death and resurrection he returned to the Father in heaven. Jesus offered rivers of living water to those who came to him to drink, those liberated by the fulfillment of the Passover by the death of the Lamb of God. As those redeemed and freed by Jesus travel through the wilderness, the living water he provides for them is the Holy Spirit. Come to Jesus. Come to the waters. Drink. Believe. Live.

The Spirit flows from Jesus into the people of Jesus. If we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit indwells us. If the Holy Spirit indwells us, we have everything we need for life and godliness.

JOHN 7:53–8:29

[THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS DO NOT INCLUDE 7:53–8:11.]¹

8⁵³ [[They went each to his own house, ¹but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” ⁶This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”]]

¹²Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” ¹³So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” ¹⁴Jesus answered, “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. ¹⁶Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father² who sent me. ¹⁷In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. ¹⁸I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” ¹⁹They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” ²⁰These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

²¹ So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” ²² So the Jews said, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’” ²³ He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” ²⁵ So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. ²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” ²⁷ They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. ²⁹ And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”

¹ Some manuscripts do not include 7:53–8:11; others add the passage here or after 7:36 or after 21:25 or after Luke 21:38, with variations in the text ² Some manuscripts *he*

Section Overview: The Light of the World

The double brackets around the text of John 7:53–8:11 indicate that the editors of the text are not convinced this passage is original to John’s Gospel. It is not in the best manuscripts, interrupts the flow of John’s narrative, and contains fourteen words John uses nowhere else in his Gospel. I am convinced that John did not intend what is numbered as 7:53–8:11 to be part of his Gospel,³⁰ and I understand my task to be that of interpreting what John intended to communicate, and will proceed accordingly.

If we pass over 7:53–8:11, we find that the setting and situation of the rest of chapter 8 matches the setting and situation of chapter 7. As we move to 8:12, Jesus continues to speak at the temple (7:28; 8:20) on the last and greatest day of the feast (7:37).

Not only is the setting of chapter 8 the same as that of chapter 7; the points under discussion are the same as well. Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of the water-pouring ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles in 7:37–39. That water-pouring ceremony likely commemorated the water from the rock in the wilderness (Ex. 17:1–7; Num. 20:2–13). In addition to the water-pouring ceremony, there was also a ceremonial lighting of candles, likely commemorating the Lord’s leading Israel’s way through the wilderness by the pillar of cloud and flame. In John 8:12, Jesus will assert that he is the “light of the world.” Other points of contact between chapters 7 and 8 include the following:

- testimony (7:18, 28; 8:13);
- where Jesus comes from and where he goes (7:25–30, 31–36; 8:14, 21–22 [esp. 7:34–35 and 8:21–22]);

³⁰ James M. Hamilton Jr., “John 7:53–8:11 Should Be in a Footnote, Not in the Text,” *For His Renown*, March 30, 2014, <http://jimhamilton.info/2014/03/30/john-753-811-should-be-in-a-footnote-not-in-the-text/>.

- righteous judgment (7:24; 8:15);
- the Jews don't know God (7:28; 8:19, 55);
- the seeking of glory (7:18; 8:50, 54).

Section Outline

- IV.C.3. The Light of the World (7:53–8:29)
- [The Woman Caught in Adultery (7:53–8:11)]
 - The Light of the World (8:12–20)
 - How Not to Die in Sin (8:21–29)

Comment

[7:53–8:11 *The Woman Caught in Adultery*.] John 7:53–8:11 does not appear to have been original to John's Gospel. As the note above the passage in the ESV states, the earliest manuscripts do not include it. As the footnote in the ESV text states, some manuscripts contain this passage here, while others have it after 7:36 or 21:25 or even Luke 21:38. In addition to the manuscript evidence indicating that John most likely did not put this passage here, we can also observe how the passage interrupts the flow of thought in this section of the Gospel. The opponents of Jesus are ready to kill him (5:18; 7:19–20, 25). They seek to arrest him (7:30, 32) and are frustrated when the officers do not bring him in (vv. 45–47). Their minds are made up. They have just rejected Nicodemus's counsel that they investigate Jesus (v. 51); they are past the point of testing Jesus or seeking further proof against him.

There are accounts in other Gospels similar to this one about the woman caught in adultery, but not in John. The passages most similar are the ones depicting the scribes and Pharisees disputing with Jesus over someone who is in need. Interestingly, the two accounts closest to this one involve the healing of the paralytic and of the man with the withered hand. Mark places both of those incidents (Mark 2:1–12; 3:1–5) prior to the Pharisees' fateful decision to seek to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6).

John always refers to the opponents of Jesus as "the Jews." The only instance of the word "scribes" in John's Gospel is in this interpolated passage, at 8:3. There are fourteen words in this passage that occur nowhere else in John's Gospel.

The manuscript evidence, the unique language, and the interruption of the narrative's flow argue against the originality of the passage. If John did not write this passage, we have no reason to think that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. My task is to explain John's Gospel, and in pursuit of that task we pass on to what is numbered as John 8:12.

8:12–20 *The Light of the World*. In 7:37–39 Jesus claimed to be the source of living water. He said this at the Feast of Tabernacles, a feast that included a water-pouring ceremony. Jesus is the fulfillment of the rock from which the Israelites drank in the wilderness (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4). John explained that the living water Jesus would give to his followers to keep them alive in the wilderness on their way to the Land of Promise was the Holy Spirit (John 7:39).

Along with the water-pouring ceremony, the Feast of Tabernacles also included a lighting of candles. The Jewish texts describing these ceremonies do not explain their purpose, but the likeliest rationale is that they commemorated the water from the rock and the pillar of fire and cloud during the Israelites' wilderness wanderings, which the feast remembered.

Jesus came to fulfill the Passover, to be the Lamb of God who sets his people free at the new and better exodus. Jesus came to fulfill Tabernacles, to tabernacle himself among his people (1:14), to give them the Holy Spirit to sustain them in the wilderness as Israel was sustained by water from the rock (7:37–39), and to light their way as the pillar of fire and cloud led Israel (8:12).

Those who are born of God (1:13) are liberated by the exodus that Jesus accomplished, set free from sin because they trust in Christ (cf. 8:34–36). They were slaves, but Christ set them free. According to the imagery Jesus uses, these liberated, born-again believers are now making their way through a wilderness to a home promised to them in the new heavens and new earth (cf. 14:2–3). How are they to find their way there? The same way the Israelites found their way from Egypt to the Land of Promise: by following the pillar of fire and cloud. How does one do that? By looking at Jesus, the Light of the World. Jesus intends for his followers to be guided by him through the wilderness the same way Israel was guided by the pillar. He is, after all, “the way” (14:6). Those who do not follow Jesus in this way will walk in darkness. Those who do not follow him do not know where they are going or how to get there.

The best part about that land to which believers are going is that God dwells there. Those who follow the Light of the World to that land have the best part of that land now because, along the way, they can abide with Christ. This is what that last phrase of 8:12 means when it says that those who follow Jesus “will have the light of life” (cf. 1:4).

The Pharisees seem to understand the massive claims Jesus is making, and so they challenge his testimony to himself (8:13). Jesus had explained in 5:31–47 how the Father, the Baptist, the signs, and the Scriptures bear witness about him. He had asserted in 7:16–18 that the source and authority of his teaching was the one who sent him. His opponents remain unconvinced, so Jesus makes the case that his testimony should be accepted.

In 8:14 Jesus asserts that, even though he is not the only one bearing witness about him (cf. 5:31–47), even if he were, his testimony should nevertheless be believed because he knows what his opponents do not: where he came from and where he is going. These questions were hot topics in 7:25–36, and Jesus appeals to his direct knowledge of the truth as a reason his testimony should be believed.

Jesus had called his opponents away from their erroneous judgments based on superficial, shallow misinformation in 7:24, and along those lines he asserts that they judge “according to the flesh” (8:15). When Jesus says, “I judge no one,” he seems to mean, *I judge no one according to the flesh, the way you do*. This would make sense of why he goes on to assert that when he judges, his judgment is true (v. 16),

because, as he explained in 5:19–30 (esp. v. 30), he renders the Father’s judgments according to the Father’s will, not according to the flesh.

Jesus then asserts that he and his Father fulfill the law’s requirement for two witnesses (8:17–18), prompting his opponents to ask where his Father is, in response to which Jesus declares that they know neither him nor his Father; if they knew Jesus, they would know the Father too (v. 19).

Ponder the profundity of what Jesus has just asserted: God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and God the eternal Son, through whom the world was made and redeemed and will be renewed, join together to bear witness to creatures they made. And the testimony of the Father and the Son is rejected by the people they made and endowed with the power to think and decide for themselves.

John notes again that no one arrested Jesus, as he taught in the treasury at the temple, because “his hour had not yet come” (v. 20).

Why does John give another account of Jesus’ verifying the testimony about him, speaking of his true judgment, and then appealing to the Torah? We have seen arguments like this from Jesus already in chapters 5 and 7; why would John repeat them? It seems that the claims Jesus has made and is about to make in 8:21–58 are so world-shaking that John gives Jesus multiple opportunities to validate his claims. In John’s Gospel, Jesus is the new Lamb of God, the prophet like Moses, the bread of life, the rock that gives living water, and the pillaring light of the world. In addition to these exodus fulfillments, Jesus identifies himself the same way that Yahweh identified himself to Moses on the eve of the exodus: I Am (Ex. 3:14).

8:21–29 *How Not to Die in Sin.* In John 8:21 Jesus restates something he already said in 7:34, adding a comment about the plight of humanity when he says, “You will die in your sin.” Jesus goes to the Father. His opponents cannot go there, and unless they stop rejecting Jesus and embrace his lordship over their lives, they will die in sin.

After Jesus spoke of going away in 7:34, the audience speculated about where he was going (v. 35). They do the same now as Jesus has again referenced going away in 8:21 and the crowd wonders if he intends to kill himself (v. 22). The death of Jesus is in view when he speaks of going to the Father—but by crucifixion, not suicide.

Jesus sets out the difference between himself and his opponents in 8:23, and the contrasts are instructive (table 1.4).

TABLE 1.4: Difference between Jesus and His Opponents in John 8:23

Jesus	The Crowd
from above	from below
not of this world	of this world

The only way for sinners to avoid dying in their sin is for them to be born “from above” (3:3 ESV mg.), to receive Jesus and believe in him (1:12–13). Jesus presses

this truth when he asserts, “Unless you believe that I Am, you will die in your sins” (8:24 AT).

Jesus identifies himself the same way that God identified himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14. The only way to escape death in sin, Jesus claims, is to believe that he is God, the God who appeared to Moses, the God who made the world, the God whose mighty deeds were celebrated at the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles.

It is no surprise that the crowd responds by asking, “Who are you?” (John 8:25). Jesus replies, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning,” referring to how he had made “himself equal with God” by “calling God his own Father” (5:18) and then went on to explain that the Father shows him all he does (5:19–30). The crowd seems surprised that Jesus would identify himself as “I Am” (8:24), and Jesus tells them this is what he has been saying all along.

Jesus again warns them that he will judge them, that the Father who sent him is true, and that the judgment he renders will be the Father’s judgment (v. 26), but the crowd fails to apprehend that Jesus has been speaking about the Father (v. 27). Perhaps it was too much for them to conceive that he could possibly be identifying himself as the God of the Bible.

Jesus responds to the crowd’s failure to understand the same way he responded to Nicodemus’s failure to understand: by speaking of the lifting up of the Son of Man (v. 28). The verb used to describe this lifting up is the verb used in the Greek translation of Isaiah 52:13 (“he shall be high and lifted up”), and the reference to the Son of Man recalls Daniel 7:13–14. By the phrase “lifted up the Son of Man,” therefore, Jesus brings together the expectation that the Messiah would suffer with the expectation that he would reign.

Jesus asserts that the cross will show the crowd that he is “I Am,” that he does nothing on his own authority but speaks what the Father taught him. The cross will make the opponents of Jesus know that Jesus does the Father’s will. Jesus then tells the crowd that the Father is with him and has not left him because, Jesus says, “I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:29). The Father is with Jesus because Jesus *always* does what pleases the Father. This means that Jesus never sins, but it means more than that, too. It means not merely that Jesus never fails or transgresses but also that he always *does* what is right. Jesus is never moving in a negative direction away from the Father, but he is not sitting in neutral, either. Jesus is always moving in a positive direction. Always he does what pleases the Father, because always he does the Father’s will.

Response

The Light of the World will never lead us wrong. If we follow Jesus, we are following the one who is “I Am.” He is equal with the Father (5:18). He is one with the Father (10:30). He does what pleases the Father. He teaches what the Father taught him. He judges according to the Father’s will. This is the one who offers himself as the Light of the World, promising to lead those who follow him, to provide them the light of life. We who have been made alive by the word of Jesus,

liberated by the exodus he accomplished, sustained on the manna of his flesh, quenched by the living water of the Spirit he gives, must follow him as he fulfills the pillar of fire that leads his people to the land.

JOHN 8:30–59

³⁰As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

³¹So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” ³³They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’”

³⁴Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave¹ to sin. ³⁵The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. ³⁸I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

³⁹They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, ⁴⁰but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” ⁴²Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. ⁴³Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

⁴⁸The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” ⁴⁹Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” ⁵²The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’” ⁵³Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” ⁵⁴Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’” ⁵⁵But you have not known him. I know him.

If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” ⁵⁷So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”³ ⁵⁸Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” ⁵⁹So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

¹For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see ESV Preface; also verse 35 ²Some manuscripts *your God* ³Some manuscripts *has Abraham seen you?*

***Section Overview: Fulfillment of the Sabbatical Years and Jubilee;
Seed of the Woman and Seed of the Serpent***

John 7:2 places the narrative of that chapter at the time of the Feast of Booths. Verse 10 says that Jesus went up to the feast in private, verses 14 and 28 present Jesus’ teaching in the temple at the feast, and verse 37 takes us to the last and greatest day of the feast. There is no indication of a change of time or place as we turn to John 8.³¹ Thus in chapters 7 and 8 Jesus is teaching in the temple at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Jesus claimed in 7:37–38 to be the new and better rock that would provide new and better water—the Holy Spirit—for the liberated pilgrims making their way to the new and better Land of Promise. Then in 8:12 he claimed to be the new and better pillar of fire and cloud—the “light of the world”—leading the people on a pilgrimage. Moreover, in verses 24 and 28 Jesus asserted his identity with the one who declared to Moses in Exodus 3:14, “I AM WHO I AM.”

Jesus claims to be Yahweh, who brought Israel out of Egypt (John 8:24, 28, 58; cf. Ex. 20:1–2). Jesus claims to be the “bread of life,” fulfilling the manna from heaven (John 6:31–35). Jesus claims to be the source of living water, fulfilling the role of the rock in the wilderness (7:37–39; cf. Ex. 17:1–7; Num. 20:10–13). Jesus claims to be the source of light leading through the darkness, fulfilling the role of the pillar of fire and cloud (John 8:12).

Jesus is, therefore, the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles and what it celebrated: Israel’s pilgrimage through the wilderness to the Land of Promise (cf. Lev. 23:42–43, “You shall dwell in booths [tabernacles] . . . that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths [tabernacles] when I brought them out of the land of Egypt”). The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated in Israel in the seventh month, beginning on the fifteenth day and continuing for seven days, followed by an eighth day of solemn rest (Lev. 23:34–36, 39, 42–43). The seventh month was a busy one in Israel’s celebration of what God had done for them:

- The first day of the seventh month was a day of solemn rest with a blast of trumpets, a holy convocation, and a presentation of a food offering to the Lord (Rosh Hashanah; Lev. 23:23–25).

³¹ Following the evidence, of course, that John did not include 7:53–8:11 in his Gospel.

- The tenth day of the seventh month was the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26–32).
- The Feast of Booths was celebrated during the seven days from the fifteenth through the twenty-first of the seventh month, followed by the eighth day of solemn rest (Lev. 23:33–44).
- Every seventh year was to be “a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land” (Lev. 25:4), a year in which Israel did not work the land (vv. 1–7). After seven weeks of years, or forty-nine years, Israel celebrated the Year of Jubilee (vv. 8–22). The celebration of the Year of Jubilee began “on the tenth day of the seventh month” (v. 9), on the Day of Atonement, with a loud trumpet blast.

This background is relevant to John 8 as it narrates what Jesus said and did at the Feast of Tabernacles, which immediately follows the Day of Atonement. The topics of slavery and freedom in the Bible evoke Israel’s slavery in Egypt. The Lord delivered them from that slavery and gave them the Land of Promise, which was divided into tribal allotments.

On the sabbatical years in Israel, outstanding debts owed by one Israelite to another were canceled (Deut. 15:1–11), and Israelites who had sold themselves into slavery to other Israelites went free (vv. 12–18). After seven sabbatical cycles, in the Year of Jubilee, land any Israelite had sold to another was returned to its original owner (Lev. 25:10). The liberation of the slaves in the sabbatical year is compared to the liberation of the slaves from Egypt in Deuteronomy 15:15, with the added reality in the Year of Jubilee that the slaves not only went free but also received the land that God had apportioned to them (Lev. 25:13–17; cf. v. 23).

The sabbatical years and the Year of Jubilee, therefore, looked back to the exodus from Egypt. The regular repetition of the freeing of the slaves and the return of the land would also have created the expectation that God would again free his people and give them their land. This means that the sabbatical years and the Year of Jubilee looked *back* to the exodus from Egypt and *forward* to the prophesied new exodus.

All this puts us in position to understand the significance of the one who fulfills the feast, declaring that those whom he sets free are free indeed (John 8:30–36). The ensuing discussion concerning Satan’s work to kill and enslave (vv. 37–47) and how to know who belongs to him (vv. 48–59) flows out of the claims Jesus has made.

Section Outline

- IV.C.4. Fulfillment of the Sabbatical Years and Jubilee; Seed of the Woman and Seed of the Serpent (8:30–59)
 - a. If the Son Sets You Free (8:30–36)
 - b. Satan Kills and Lies (8:37–47)
 - c. Offspring of the Evil One (8:48–59)

Comment

8:30–36 *If the Son Sets You Free.* As Jesus speaks at the Feast of Tabernacles, claiming to fulfill the rock from which water flowed and the pillar of flame and cloud that led Israel through the wilderness, 8:30 records that many believed in him (cf. 7:31). John has shown that Jesus did not entrust himself to some who believed in him (2:23–25) and that some disciples no longer walked with Jesus because of the hard things Jesus said (6:60–66). How do those who profess belief become those to whom Jesus entrusts himself, those who recognize that he has the words of eternal life?

In 8:31–32 Jesus describes how those who have professed belief must live if they are to be true and lasting disciples: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” The difference between a “believer” to whom Jesus does not entrust himself and a true disciple who does not grumble at what Jesus says comes down to *abiding in the word of Jesus*. What does it mean to “abide” in the word of Jesus? Those who embrace his teaching continue to hold to it, and they abide in it in the sense that they live in or dwell in the world as the word of Jesus defines it.

Jesus states the result of abiding in his word: “You will know the truth” (v. 32). John has been presenting Jesus’ teaching concerning what it looks like to abide in his word since chapter 5; to abide in the word of Jesus is:

- to hear the voice of the Son of God and live (5:25);
- to experience his words as spirit and life (6:63);
- to believe God, who sent Jesus (6:29);
- to go to Jesus, the “bread of life,” and never hunger again (6:35);
- to go to Jesus, the source of living water, and never thirst again (7:37–39; 6:35);
- to experience the satisfaction of hunger and thirst through faith in what Jesus has said (6:35);
- to follow him through the darkness because he is the “light of the world” (8:12);
- to know that he is to be identified as “I Am” (8:24, 28, 58);
- to know that he is the Son of Man who will be lifted up (8:28).

Those who abide in the word of Jesus will know that the word of Jesus *defines the world as it is* because it was the word of Jesus *through which the world was made* (1:3). For those who abide in the word of Jesus, that word determines not only *what the world is* but also *how to live in that world*.

John 8:31 teaches that remaining in the word of Jesus makes disciples out of those who profess belief, and verse 32 teaches that remaining in the word of Jesus results in knowing the truth, which sets people free. How does the truth set people free? Proverbs 5:22 states that a wicked man “is held fast in the cords of his sin.” Those who abide in the word will find that the Bible speaks to them, argues with them, warns them, and frees them from the cords of their own sin.

Jesus has addressed his comments in John 8:31–32 to those Jews who had professed belief in him, and they respond to the last words in verse 32 about how the truth will set them free by stating, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” (v. 33). In response to the words of Jesus, the crowd appeals to something distinctive about themselves—their descent from Abraham. They are enslaved and do not even realize it. Jesus offers them freedom, but the news that they can be free offends them because they detect the implication that they are enslaved. This shows that the crowd does not realize their need for the freedom Jesus brings.

Here again Jesus has articulated a spiritual reality that is mistaken for a physical reality. Even at the physical level, however, their claim never to have been enslaved is problematic. The crowd seems to have forgotten that the descendants of Abraham were in fact enslaved in Egypt. They also seem to have forgotten how Israelites who became *enslaved* to one another were granted freedom in the sabbatical and Jubilee years. The people in the crowd somehow think they have never been enslaved, but Jesus clarifies in verse 34 that he speaks of a spiritual slavery. Jesus asserts that everyone who sins is a slave to sin. The Bible teaches that there is no one who does not sin (1 Kings 8:46; Rom. 3:10–18), which means that everyone but Jesus has been a slave to sin.

Paul develops what Jesus asserts here when he explains that humans are slaves to the one they obey (Rom. 6:16). The words of Jesus in John 8:35 may also inform what Paul says in Galatians 4:4–7. In Deuteronomy 15 we find the sabbatical year provisions for slaves within Israel, including the release of Hebrew slaves in the seventh year (Deut. 15:12–15), with the allowance for the slave to remain in the household of his master as a permanent slave if he did not desire to be free (Deut. 15:16–17). Jesus seems to be reminding the crowd of these realities when he says in John 8:35a, “The slave does not remain in the house forever.”

In contrast, Jesus points out, the son remains in the house forever (v. 35b). This leads to the deduction in verse 36 that those whom the Son sets free are free indeed. The argument Jesus is making is that he himself is the Son, while all who have sinned are enslaved to sin. Just as the son in the household has authority to free slaves, so Jesus himself, God’s sinless Son, has authority to free those enslaved to sin. This argument is elaborated upon by Paul in Galatians 4:4–7, where the coming of Christ lifts slaves out of bondage and grants them sonship.

8:37–47 *Satan Kills and Lies.* Having addressed in 8:34–36 the crowd’s assertion (v. 33) that they had never been enslaved, Jesus takes up their claim to be seed of Abraham, saying, “I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you” (v. 37). Having acknowledged that they descend *physically* from Abraham, Jesus begins to argue that they are *spiritually* unrelated to Abraham by pointing out their desire to kill him. The reason they want to kill him is that his word has no place in them. They do not understand what Jesus has said and done; they are swept up in public opinion.

Jesus sets people free as they abide in his word (vv. 31–32, 34–36). The word of God made the world, and it is to shape our thinking as well. The freedom Jesus offers is for the Word of God to determine one's thinking, apprehension, perception, and processing of the world and what takes place in it. Those who are free abide in the word of Jesus, which molds our thinking and enables us to understand from the Scriptures what the world is and how to live in it. That is what it means for the Son to set us free. Slaves to sin are not free to love God and neighbor, and they are not free to speak the truth. They are enslaved to sin.

Jesus will argue that these physical descendants of Abraham have Satan as their spiritual father because, like him, they kill and lie (vv. 37–47). Jesus begins in verse 38 with the assertion that, just as he is telling the truth that he learned from his Father (cf. 1:18), so they are doing what they learned from *their* father. In 8:38 Jesus explains that he *speaks* of what he has *seen* as an eyewitness with the Father: he is telling them the truth. The crowd, by contrast, *does* (seeking to kill Jesus; v. 37) what they have *heard* from their father. Jesus is building the case that the crowd is the seed not of the woman but of the serpent.

In the first phrase of verse 39 the crowd responds to Jesus by insisting that Abraham is indeed their father, but Jesus in turn provides proof that he is not. Jesus tells the crowd that if they were Abraham's children, they would do what Abraham did. In light of the fact that Jesus said that they wanted to kill him because they did not receive his word (v. 37), recall Abraham's response to God's word: God commanded Abraham to go in Genesis 12, and Abraham went. God commanded Abraham to circumcise himself and his household in Genesis 17, and Abraham did so. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22, and he did just as he was commanded. Abraham believed, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). If this crowd were composed of Abraham's seed, they would be receiving the words of Jesus and believing.

In contrast with the way Abraham believed, obeyed, and worshiped, in John 8:40 Jesus again asserts that the crowd seeks to kill him, even though he is telling them the truth he has heard from God. Abraham did not seek to kill the messengers from God who came to him in Genesis 18. He showed them hospitality. Jesus has come from God to the crowd to tell them the truth, yet they want to kill him. At the end of John 8:40 Jesus states simply, "This is not what Abraham did," and in verse 41 he continues, "You are doing the works your father did." This reinforces verse 38, where Jesus said that they do what they heard from their father, the Devil.

Jesus will assert in verse 44 that the Devil is a murderer and a liar. Jesus has already stated that the crowd seeks to kill him (v. 37), and now they respond to his words with lies. Given their rejection of Jesus and the hostility they show toward him, their response to Jesus that they were not born of sexual immorality but have one Father, God (v. 41), may reflect rumors about the birth of Jesus. The facts of his conception prior to the marriage of his parents had to be explained somehow. For those who found the virgin conception of Jesus preposterous, the easy explanation was sexual immorality. The crowd's response in verse 48 may

reflect similar rumors—if Joseph was known to have been righteous, perhaps a Samaritan impregnated Mary. And the suggestion that Jesus has a demon (v. 48) may be the crowd's way of saying that Jesus is the seed of the serpent. Like their father (the Devil), they lie and seek to kill.

Jesus said in verse 39 that if the crowd were Abraham's children, they would do what Abraham did, and now that they have claimed God as their Father, he says in verse 42 that if God were their Father, they would love him and rejoice over the one God sent. Jesus goes on to claim that he came from the Father not of his own accord but because the Father sent him. The different works done by God and Satan are obvious: the latter kills and lies; the former loves and tells the truth.

Jesus asks the crowd why they do not understand what he says, and then he answers his own question: "because you cannot bear to hear my word" (v. 43). The word of Jesus has no place in them (v. 37) because they are unable to hear it (v. 43). Since the crowd is hearing the sound of the voice of Jesus, we know that Jesus is talking about hearing that occurs at a deeper, spiritual level. The spiritual ability to hear comes from the Spirit, who gives life (6:63). When the Spirit gives such life, the new birth comes with a new ability to see and enter the kingdom (3:3, 5), because such persons have been born of God (1:13), enabling them to receive Jesus (1:12).

The case Jesus has been making against the crowd—showing them the nature of their actions and contrasting those actions with the way God acts and the way Abraham responded to God—culminates in 8:44 when Jesus tells them, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." Jesus here tells them that, even though they descend physically from Abraham, they are seed not of the woman but of the serpent. The proof is seen in what they desire to do—they want to do what Satan wants to do.

Jesus then says that Satan was "a murderer from the beginning," likely referring to Cain's murder of Abel. Moses established a literary connection between Satan and Cain in Genesis 3 and 4. In the words of judgment God spoke in Genesis 3:14–19, only to Satan does God say, "cursed are you" (Gen. 3:14), and then after Cain murders Abel, God says to Cain, "you are cursed" (Gen. 4:11), using the same Hebrew expression. This establishes a link between Satan and Cain, identifying Cain as seed of the serpent. The seed of the serpent are not literal baby snakes but spiritual baby snakes: they act the way their father acted.

When Jesus says that the Devil does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him, the way Satan directly challenged—then contradicted!—God's word as he tempted Eve comes to mind (Gen. 3:1, 4). Jesus goes on to say that when the Devil lies, he speaks out of his own character as the Father of Lies, just as he lied to Eve about God's character and intentions (Gen. 3:5).

Paul writes in Titus 1:15, "To the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled." Unbelief and sin produce cynicism and skepticism. This matches what Jesus says in John 8:45, where, having spoken of the lies of the Devil, he states, "Because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me." Attempting to prod them to think, to undermine their baseless

opposition to him, Jesus asks, “Which one of you convicts me of sin?” (v. 46). Jesus is inviting the crowd to take an honest, scrutinizing look at what he does, to evaluate it, hold it up to the standard of God’s Word, and bring any charges his actions may warrant. Knowing that none of them will have any proof that he has ever done anything wrong, Jesus asks, “If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?” (v. 46b). Jesus has already answered this question when he said that they were not able to hear his word (v. 43). Now he is trying to burst the bubble of popular opinion by urging people to press through their surface impression that he deserves to die, to the bedrock reality that he comes from God and deserves to be honored and believed, received and obeyed.

Jesus then states that the seed of the woman will receive his teaching, and the fact that the crowd rejects him shows they are seed of the serpent: “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God” (v. 47). This passage is replete with descriptions of these distinct categories of people and ways of acting. People belong either to God or to Satan, as is repeatedly articulated in different ways (table 1.5).

TABLE 1.5: The Seed of the Serpent vs. the Seed of the Woman in John 8

	Seed of the Serpent	Seed of the Woman
8:23	from below of this world	from above not of this world
8:38	your father	my Father
8:40	kill	tell truth
8:41	your father	8:47, of God
8:44	murderer liar	8:42, love 8:45, truth

8:48–59 *Offspring of the Evil One.* We have seen in 8:30–36 that Jesus frees people and in verses 37–47 that Satan kills and lies, and now in verses 48–59 we see that the Jews rejecting Jesus are ready to lie and kill, showing themselves to be offspring of the Evil One. The lies begin in verse 48 with the accusations that the father of Jesus was a Samaritan. That is a clear lie. Jesus was born of a virgin—John does not relate this fact but assumes his audience will know it from other Gospel accounts (Matt. 1:25; Luke 1:34). The next lie is that Jesus has a demon. In reality, Jesus has the fullness of the Holy Spirit (John 3:34).

Jesus answers the lies in 8:49 by denying that he has a demon and affirming that he honors his Father, while this brood of vipers dishonors him. In verse 50 Jesus declares that he does not seek his own glory, but the Father, the Judge, does. Thus Jesus tells the crowd that if they continue in their opposition to him, the Father will avenge him. Having threatened them with judgment in verse 50, Jesus holds out an offer of salvation, reconciliation, and everlasting life in verse 51. He has explained that they seek to kill him because his word has no place in them

(v. 37) and they are unable to hear his word (v. 43), and now he solemnly proclaims, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (v. 51).

The Jews respond to this claim as we expect a hostile crowd would. They understand what Jesus is saying. They counter his claims with the assertion that both Abraham and the prophets died, asking Jesus if he is greater than Abraham, asking just who he thinks he is (v. 53). The Jews understand that Jesus is claiming to be greater than Abraham, because Abraham died; greater than the prophets, because the prophets died. They fully understand that Jesus is claiming that his word will give life.

In response to their questions about who he thinks he is, Jesus says that his glory is not based on his own assertions about himself (v. 54). Rather, the Father is the one who glorifies him, the very Father they claim as their God. What Jesus is claiming is not suspended on his mere assertions but hangs on the Father’s own purpose to seek the glory of Jesus (v. 49) and indeed to glorify him (v. 54).

The fact that the Jews’ purpose—to kill Jesus and tell lies about him (vv. 37, 41, 48)—is at odds with the Father’s purpose of glorifying Jesus (vv. 50, 54) shows that they do not know God. Jesus tells them that they do not know the Father, but he does; moreover, if he were to say that he did not know God, he would be as much of a liar as they are (v. 55). Jesus knows God and keeps his word.

Jesus is working up to an answer to their question from verse 53, “Who do you make yourself out to be?” On the way to his answer, however, he provokes them in verse 56, telling them that their father Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Jesus, that Abraham “saw it and was glad” (v. 56). Jesus is telling them that Abraham understood there would be a redeemer, a seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent; Abraham looked forward to his descendant through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). Jesus tells his opponents that Abraham looked forward to the fulfillment of what God had promised, and he rejoiced over the one through whom it would happen. And Jesus claims to be that one.

The Jews do not understand what Jesus has said. In view of what Jesus will go on to say, his words to this point probably connote not merely that he himself would be the one to bring about the fulfillment of what God promised to Abraham, but also that Jesus himself has always existed with the Father, and that after Abraham died he rejoiced to encounter Jesus in God’s presence. The Jews do not understand these things—contributing to the pattern in John’s Gospel of the ways people misunderstand Jesus—and they ask incredulously how Jesus, who is not yet fifty years old, has seen Abraham.

In response Jesus states, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). He has again asserted his identity as the one who appeared to Moses at the burning bush (cf. vv. 24, 28) and identified himself as “I AM WHO I AM.” The Jews understand exactly what Jesus means, and in verse 59 they take up stones to kill him. They think he has committed blasphemy. But Jesus hides himself and leaves the temple.

Consider again the wider context of this passage. At the time of the Passover in chapter 6, Jesus fed the multitude, was identified as the Prophet, knew the crowd meant to make him king, ascended the mountain alone, miraculously crossed the water, and claimed to be the “bread of life,” the fulfillment of the manna from heaven. Then, in chapter 7, at the time of Tabernacles, Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of the rock from which water flowed in the wilderness and the pillar of fire that led the people to the Land of Promise. When Jesus speaks of the Son’s setting people free in 8:32 and 36, he is claiming to be the fulfillment of the liberation of captives in the exodus from Egypt, in the sabbatical year, and in the Year of Jubilee. All this Jesus fulfills as he brings about a new exodus, a new pilgrimage through the wilderness on the way to a new inheritance of a better Land of Promise. Crowning all of this, Jesus has three times (vv. 24, 28, and 58) identified himself with the One who appeared to Moses in the burning bush.

Response

Jesus frees people. He frees them by telling them the truth, in which the free must abide. If we abide in the words of Jesus, the story Jesus is telling, with himself as God, liberator, provider, shepherd, light, bread, prophet, king, and I Am, becomes the story in which we live. In our own personal narrative, God is redoing the history of redemption. He has liberated us from slavery to sin and is sustaining us with the fulfillment of the manna from heaven, water from the rock, and pillar of fire. God will bring us to that happy land. We must abide in Christ and his word. There is no better story, no better ending, no better Savior, and no better way to live. Abide in Christ. To abide in Christ, we must abide in his Word. We must read it, memorize it, share it, meditate on it.

Note again the way the crowd responded when Jesus offered them freedom. They were offended at the suggestion that they were enslaved. As we share the gospel, we can expect to meet the same response. Like the crowd to which Jesus spoke, our contemporaries are enslaved to sin but do not realize it (8:34). Those who are enslaved to sin are unable to hear God’s word (v. 43). They need the Spirit to give them life (6:63), to enable them to see and enter the kingdom (3:3, 5) by the new birth. They need to be born of God (1:13). As we preach the gospel, God’s Spirit must give life to those who hear. We must preach and pray, plant and water, but God gives the growth (1 Cor. 3:6–7).

The truthfulness of Christianity stands on the purity of Jesus. Christianity does not stand on the purity of churches or the pope or Billy Graham or anyone other than Jesus. There is no one who can convict Jesus and no one who will (John 8:46). Jesus will never fail us. We will never need to apologize for Jesus or be embarrassed about something he did. Other Christians may embarrass us, but never Jesus.

Jesus claimed the divine name for himself, identifying himself as I Am. It is not uncommon for people to say that Jesus never claimed to be God. Anytime we encounter such nonsense, we can think of John 8:58, where Jesus says “I Am” and

the Jews pick up stones to stone him for blasphemy. Those who claim that Jesus never identified himself as God are either uninformed or are openly contradicting what John presents Jesus saying of himself.

JOHN 9:1–41

9 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ²And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud ⁷and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸The Jews¹ did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. ²¹But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²²(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus² to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) ²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know,

that though I was blind, now I see.”²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”²⁸ And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.”²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”³⁰ The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.”³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.”³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³ ³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt;⁴ but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”

¹ Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verse 22 ² Greek *him* ³ Some manuscripts *the Son of God* ⁴ Greek *you would not have sin*

Section Overview: The Man Born Blind

At a feast in Jerusalem Jesus healed a man lame thirty-eight years (John 5). Then, with the Passover Feast at hand, Jesus fed the multitude, ascended the mountain, crossed the water, and identified himself as the fulfillment of manna from heaven (ch. 6). With the Feast of Tabernacles at hand, Jesus identified himself as the fulfillment of the rock from which the waters flowed in the wilderness, giving the Holy Spirit in place of water (ch. 7), and he also asserted himself to be the “light of the world,” fulfilling the pillar of flame and cloud (ch. 8). Jesus did not shrink from asserting his identity as the one who appeared to Moses in the burning bush: I Am (8:24, 28, 58).

These OT fulfillments establish Jesus as the one who brings about the prophesied fulfillment of both the exodus from Egypt *and* the prophesied new exodus and return from exile. The exile resulted from Israel’s sin, and Isaiah was commissioned to harden hearts, stop ears, and close eyes until Israel went into exile (Isa. 6:10–12). This hardening was to be lifted when the Lord gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and understanding to the heart (e.g., Isa. 32:3–4); even the lame would be healed (Isa. 35:5–6; cf. John 5).

Jesus came to accomplish the fulfillment of what the exodus from Egypt typified and the prophets prophesied about a new exodus and return from exile. To set that in motion, Jesus gave sight to the blind, doing a new-creation work (9:6–7) that resulted in his being worshiped (9:38; cf. 1:9–13).

Section Outline

- IV.C.5. The Man Born Blind (9:1–41)
 - a. The Miracle (9:1–7)
 - b. The Rejection (9:8–34)
 - (1) The Seeing Man and His Neighbors (9:8–12)
 - (2) The Seeing Man and the Pharisees (9:13–17)
 - (3) The Parents and the Pharisees (9:18–23)
 - (4) The Seeing Man and the Pharisees (9:24–34)
 - c. The Reception (9:35–41)

Comment

9:1–7 *The Miracle*. Jesus has been in the temple for the Feast of Tabernacles throughout chapters 7–8. Having gone out of the temple, where many sought to stone him (8:59), Jesus encounters a man blind from birth (9:1). The disciples assume that some sin of either the blind man or his parents resulted in his being born blind (v. 2). Jesus explains that the man's blindness resulted neither from his sin nor from that of his parents but was given so that God's works could be manifested in him.

In verses 4–5 Jesus speaks of working while it is day, refers to himself as the one “sent,” says that “night is coming,” and declares, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” The *day* in which Jesus says it is necessary for him to work is thus to be understood as the duration of his ministry prior to the cross. The *night* that comes will be the darkness following the departure of the Light of the World, Jesus.

God “formed the man of dust from the ground” in Genesis 2:7, so when John 9:6 says that Jesus “spit³² on the ground and made mud with the saliva,” there might be an overtone of the one through whom all things were made (1:3) doing a new-creation work in this blind man's life. In addition, the blind man will become a follower of Jesus, and the Jews will begin to treat the blind man the same way they treat Jesus. For this reason, when John relates that Jesus “anointed [*epechrisein*] the man's eyes with the mud” (9:6), there may be an overtone of the man's becoming like the Anointed One, the Christ (cf. 1 John 2:20, 27).

Then, just as Elisha sent Naaman to wash in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:10), Jesus sends the blind man to “‘wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing” (John 9:7).

The darkness and light in verses 4–5 recall the prophecy of “distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish” and “thick darkness” in Isaiah 8:22, followed immediately by the prophecy of the “great light” seen by “those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness” (Isa. 9:2), which results from the child born as the Prince of Peace sitting on the throne of David (Isa. 9:6–7). Just prior to those statements, Isaiah had spoken in 8:6 of how “this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently.” The Hebrew place name “Shiloah” is cognate to the verb *shalakh*, meaning sent,

32 This Greek word, *eptysen*, is an example of onomatopoeia.

and that name, “Shiloah,” in Isaiah 8:6 is translated “Siloam” in the Septuagint. This seems to forge a connection between “Siloam” (John 9:7) and the one “sent.”

Peter Leithart has written, “The blind man is being healed by the Sent One in the pool of sending, and thereby becomes one sent, a type of an apostle. He is plunged into the pool “Sent” by the One Sent, immersed in the Sent One’s sending.”³³

Jesus is the great light that has dawned, the Light of the World. Jesus is a new and better Elijah. Jesus knows God’s purposes and works, and Jesus can do what no one else can. As the Bread of Life, Jesus fed the five thousand. As the Light of the World, Jesus gave sight to one blind from birth.

9:8–34 *The Rejection.* John presents the reaction to the giving of sight to the man born blind. The blind man’s neighbors respond to his sight (vv. 8–12), then take him to the Pharisees (vv. 13–17). The Pharisees call in his parents (vv. 18–23) and then interact again with the man born blind (vv. 24–34):

- the seeing man and his neighbors (vv. 8–12);
- the seeing man and the Pharisees (vv. 13–17);
- the parents and the Pharisees (vv. 18–23);
- the seeing man and the Pharisees (vv. 24–34).

In each of these episodes, the question of *how* the blind man now sees is raised and addressed (vv. 10, 15, 19, 26). There also seems to be a progression in the way Jesus is referenced from one episode to the next:

- “the man called Jesus” (v. 11)
- “he is a prophet” (v. 17)
- “if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ” (v. 22)
- “if anyone is a worshiper of God [or, a pious man] and does his will” (v. 31)

These increasingly honorific ways of speaking of Jesus continue into the next section, verses 35–41, where Jesus identifies himself as “the Son of Man” and the man given sight responds by worshiping him (vv. 35, 38).

Just as the ways of referring to Jesus grow more and more reverent across the passage, so does the hostility to the man born blind grow more and more fierce. The first two interactions, with neighbors (vv. 8–12) and with Pharisees (vv. 13–17), are fact-finding conversations, and it is revealed that the miracle took place on the Sabbath (v. 14), which does not bode well for Jesus (v. 16). The third interaction (vv. 18–23) opens with the declaration that the Jews did not believe the man’s testimony (v. 18) and concludes with the disclosure of the Jewish intimidation policy, in which they threaten that anyone who confesses Jesus as Messiah will be expelled from the synagogue (v. 22). At the end of the fourth

³³ Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 102.

interaction (vv. 24–34), the seeing man is cast out (v. 34), apparently expelled from the synagogue.

The neighbors and those aware of the blind man recognize that he now has sight, and in verses 8–9 they begin to dispute the identity of the man, reflecting how unexpected and surprising his new sight is. As the man's identity is questioned, with some asserting that he is not the man who was born blind, he insists, "I am the man" (v. 9). The man uses the same phrase Jesus used of himself in 8:58, "I am" (Gk. *egō eimi*). Jesus and the man born blind are not using the assertion "I am" the same way, but the reuse of the very words of Jesus does identify the man with Jesus. Jesus is the Anointed One, and he has anointed the blind man's eyes (9:6). Jesus is the I Am, and those who follow Jesus become like him—they do not become divine like Jesus, but they are rejected like Jesus and begin to speak and act like him.

The neighbors ask how the man sees (v. 10), he rehearses the details (v. 11), and they ask where Jesus is, which the man cannot answer (v. 12). No one knows where Jesus comes from or where he goes (cf. 8:14).

The neighbors take the now-seeing man to the Pharisees, and it is revealed that Jesus performed the new-creation work of giving sight on the Sabbath (9:13–15). This provokes the same reaction that the healing of the man lame for thirty-eight years did (5:1–16), and they assert that Jesus can be neither good nor from God because "he does not keep the Sabbath" (9:16a). Other Pharisees, however, ask how such a sign could be done by a sinner doing sin, reflecting division in Pharisaic opinion (v. 16b).

When they ask the seeing man what he thinks of Jesus, he asserts that Jesus is a prophet (v. 17). This conclusion is natural given the similarity between Elisha's healing of Naaman by washing in the Jordan and the healing of the blind man by washing in the pool of Siloam.

Not satisfied with the man's answer, the Pharisees call in his parents and ask them whether the man is their born-blind son and how it is that he now sees (vv. 18–19). The man's parents acknowledge him as their son, but they deflect the question concerning how he now sees because they fear being put out of the synagogue (vv. 20–23).

The Pharisees who have rejected Jesus seem to have prevailed when the man born blind is again brought before them. Ironically, they assert, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner" (v. 24). The Pharisees have it backwards. The man is giving glory to God, and Jesus is not a sinner but always does what pleases God (8:29).

The man born blind has been transformed. He was a blind beggar (9:8), but when Jesus gave him sight, he also transformed his character. This man now boldly stands before the religious authorities and confesses truthfully (v. 25). The Pharisees again ask how he came to see (v. 26), but the man recognizes their pretense and hypocrisy. He seems to recognize that the opponents of Jesus are not looking for facts but are trying to intimidate him, so he asserts that he has already

answered but they did not listen. Then he sarcastically asks whether they want to become disciples of Jesus (v. 27).

John has presented how Jesus shows that Moses wrote of him, and that those who believe Moses believe Jesus (5:46; cf. 5:39; 7:19). The Pharisees nevertheless assert that their disagreement with the blind man and Jesus arises from their adherence to Moses (9:28). The opposition to Jesus is incoherent and self-contradictory. The crowd in Jerusalem had said in 7:27, “We know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from,” but the Pharisees now assert, “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from” (9:29).

The man born blind sees right through the specious, self-defeating arguments of the Pharisees. This man can see physically, and he can also see spiritually. He agrees with Jesus that if the Pharisees really followed Moses, they would know that what Jesus does is obviously of God (v. 30). He reinforces the truth that God does not listen to the prayers of sinners, whereas God hears the prayers of the righteous (v. 31). By healing a man born blind, Jesus has done something otherwise unheard of (v. 32), and, like Nicodemus (3:2), the man knows that Jesus could do nothing if God were not with him (9:33).

The Pharisees cannot refute the arguments of this man who now sees physically and spiritually, so they pursue an *ad hominem* attack. They allege that he was “born in utter sin” and appeal to their own authority when they ask how he dares to think that he can teach them (v. 34a). Unable to refute his arguments with either logic or Scripture, they can only expel him from the synagogue (v. 34b).

In reality, the Pharisees had no problem with the formerly blind beggar. Their problem was with Jesus. Only when the man born blind was given sight by Jesus did he begin to be rejected by those who rejected Jesus. The man born blind was anointed, as Jesus was (v. 6; cf. 1 John 2:20, 27), and he began to talk like Jesus (John 9:9; cf. 8:58). As he became like Jesus, he began to see through hypocrisy and sin as Jesus did (9:27, 30–33). And as he became like Jesus, those who rejected Jesus began to reject him as well (v. 34).

The man’s parents were afraid they would be cast out of the synagogue (vv. 22–23), but the man realized that if Jesus was not in the synagogue, it would be left to thugs and thieves. Better to be cast out by rebels because of association with Jesus than to renounce Jesus in order to maintain one’s place among killing liars who do the deeds of their father, “the devil” (8:44).

9:35–41 *The Reception.* In 9:35, Jesus comes to this man whom his enemies have rejected, and a remarkable dialogue ensues between them. It becomes clear that this man’s theological and biblical understanding has yet to catch up with what he has experienced. Jesus healed his physical and spiritual blindness, but the man still lacks a full understanding of Jesus.

Jesus asks him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (v. 35). What takes place in the rest of the passage indicates that this question pertains to the Daniel 7:13–14

Son of Man, the Most High who will receive everlasting dominion. From his reply in John 9:36, it seems the man understands that Jesus refers to Daniel 7:13–14, but he does not know that Jesus is the one there described. Jesus answers the man born blind (John 9:37) in a manner reminiscent of his answer to the Samaritan woman (4:26).

The Samaritan woman responded rightly to Jesus' disclosure to her that he was the Messiah (4:25), immediately going and telling others about Jesus (vv. 28–29). The man born blind likewise responds rightly to Jesus' disclosure that he is the Daniel 7:13–14 Son of Man: "He said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped [Jesus]" (John 9:38).

This is the only place in John's Gospel where someone *worships* Jesus (but cf. 20:28). What is this man doing *worshipping* Jesus? If he knew and understood Daniel 7, he would know that in that vision Daniel saw a preexistent heavenly being identified as the "son of man," a figure simultaneously identified with and distinguished from the Ancient of Days, who would be enthroned alongside the Ancient of Days in fulfillment of Psalm 110, a figure who would receive everlasting dominion.³⁴

Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man, and the right response to that revelation is to worship him. Jesus does not refuse to receive worship, as angels do in Revelation (cf. Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9). Jesus is God. Jesus is to be worshiped. Jesus is to be trusted. Jesus is Lord.

In John 9:39, Jesus makes a statement that brings out the meaning of the healing of the man born blind. Jesus gave that man physical sight, and that new physical sight is a picture of the spiritual transformation that has taken place in him, as a result of which he speaks the name of Jesus (v. 11), recognizes him as a prophet (v. 17), knows that he comes from God (v. 33), and worships him as the Son of Man (vv. 37–38). Along the same lines, Jesus brought judgment into the world, "that . . . those who see may become blind" (v. 39). The Pharisees have physical sight but are blind to the glory of Jesus, as becomes clear in verses 40–41.

When Jesus says the Pharisees would have no guilt if they were blind (v. 41), he seems to mean that they would not have been exposed to the things Jesus had done among them. They would not be guilty of the sin of beholding Jesus and, rather than worshipping, going to war against him. This seems to explain why he says, "Now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains" (v. 41). They claim to perceive the truth. They claim to understand. They have come, however, to the wrong conclusion, which merely establishes their guilt.

Response

Jesus revealed that this man's blindness was for the works of God to be displayed in him (9:3). How easily we forget that God is sovereign over everything we are and have, and that he intends to display his power in our lives. God does not want us

³⁴ See the discussion of the Son of Man in Hamilton, *Daniel in Biblical Theology*.

to be omniscient, self-sufficient, self-reliant. God wants us to need him. We are broken. Our lives are not whole. Only God has the power to make us whole, to put us back together.

We ought to reflect on how the Jews could have, and should have, responded to this episode. When Jesus brought in a great catch of fish in Luke 5:1–11, Peter recognized his own sinfulness. In response to the healing of this man blind from birth, the Jews had an opportunity to repent of their sin. Instead, they alleged that Jesus was a sinner (John 9:16, 24).

Jesus healed a man born blind! Was anything impossible for him? The Pharisees not only fail to repent of their sin; they also reject Jesus and show no concern for the man born blind. They do not rejoice with him who now sees. They do not celebrate Jesus as the one who can do what has never before been done. They do not consider how other blind and lame people could benefit from Jesus. They show no interest in how Jesus could help others, correct their own mistaken thinking, and bring to fulfillment what the OT had prophesied.

The opponents of Jesus are concerned only with themselves, their own agenda, their own authority, their own control of the people. As a result, the judgment Jesus brought into the world stands against them. He came into the world as light, and they loved darkness because of their evil works (3:19–20).

JOHN 10:1–21

10 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ²But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know

my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

¹⁹There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.

²⁰Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?”

²¹Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

Section Overview: The Good Shepherd

Micah 2:13 prophesies concerning the new exodus and return from exile: “He who opens the breach goes up before them; they break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king passes on before them, the LORD at their head.”

At the exodus from Egypt, Israel was liberated following the Passover, when their homes were covered by the blood of the lamb. They crossed the Red Sea on dry land, and then the Lord provided manna from heaven and water from the rock in the wilderness. Moses went up the mountain to receive the law, and the pillar of fire and cloud led Israel to the Land of Promise.

Prior to Israel’s exile from the land, Isaiah was commissioned to stop ears, blind eyes, and harden hearts until the exile (Isa. 6:9–13). The Lord also promised through Isaiah that when he worked the new-exodus salvation, the lame would be healed and the blind would see as the Lord once again liberated his people and led them to the Land of Promise.

John presents Jesus as the fulfillment of these prophecies. John the Baptist announces Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36). In chapter 2, Jesus, the Lamb of God, drives animals of sacrifice out of the temple; *he* will replace them. In chapter 3, Jesus speaks with Nicodemus about the new birth (cf. Ezek. 36:25–27). In John 4, Jesus offers living water, is recognized as Messiah and Savior of the world, and heals the sick. In chapter 5, the lame walk. In chapter 6, the multitude is fed, the water crossed, the mountain ascended. Then Jesus reveals that he is the fulfillment of the manna from heaven. In chapter 7, Jesus asserts that he is the fulfillment of the rock from which the water flowed, but he gives something better than water: the Holy Spirit. In chapter 8, Jesus is the pillar of fire, the Light of the World. In chapter 9, the blind see.

If the people of Jesus are to reach the river Jordan to cross over into the Land of Promise, they need not only to be liberated, made alive, healed, given sight, and provided with bread and water. They also need to be *shepherded*. Timothy Laniak describes the duties of a shepherd:

One of the most pressing challenges for shepherds is to provide food and water. . . . A shepherd needs to keep within a 32-kilometre (20-mile) graz-

ing radius of an adequate water source in cold weather and within 15–20 kilometres (10–12 miles) in the summer. . . .

Sheep are typically *led* from in front, though they are occasionally *driven* from behind. . . .

Rest is not only a function of being well provided for. It is a state of security that comes from the shepherd's protective presence. . . . Neglecting the mothers and young, or driving the flocks too hard can bring on fatalities (Gen. 33:13). Protection is provided most fully each night as the shepherd leads his flock into some kind of pen.

The wide range of activities involved in shepherding is determined by the daily and seasonal needs of the animals. Consequently, attentive and careful shepherds became endeared to their flocks. Responsible shepherds know every member of their flocks in terms of their birth circumstances, history of health, eating habits and other idiosyncrasies. It is not uncommon to name each goat and sheep and to call them by name. . . . One of the most striking characteristics of the shepherd-flock relationship is that control over the flock is exercised simply by the sound of the shepherd's voice.³⁵

Who could possibly shepherd the people of God on their pilgrimage to the Land of Promise? No wonder Moses was so frustrated with the job. Praise be to God that no one less than Jesus himself is the Chief Shepherd of the people of God. In John 10, Jesus explains what makes him the true shepherd, how his sheep will recognize him, why none of them will be led astray, and where he means to take them.

Section Outline

IV.C.6. The Good Shepherd (10:1–21)

- a. Jesus Is the Shepherd and the Door (10:1–10)
- b. Jesus Lays Down His Life for the Sheep (10:11–18)
- c. The Sheep Know His Voice (10:19–21)

Comment

10:1–10 *Jesus Is the Shepherd and the Door.* There is no indication at the end of chapter 9 or the beginning of chapter 10 that there has been a change of time, setting, or people involved. John seems to present what Jesus says in chapter 10 as following directly from what happened in chapter 9, in which Jesus gave sight to the man born blind. That miracle was an incomparable display of power and goodness that could never be reciprocated, repaid, or replicated by anyone else. Jesus gave sight to a man who had never seen, a superlative gift to one bereft of hope. In response, the Pharisees are angry that Jesus has created seeing eyes for this man on the Sabbath.

At the end of chapter 9, Jesus sees the Pharisees in their blindness. In chapter 10 he sees through their outward show of concern for the law to the heart of

³⁵ Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, NSBT 20 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 54–57.

their concern to benefit themselves at the expense of others. What Jesus says in verse 1 creates a mental picture of a sheepfold. The flock has been brought into an enclosed space, surrounded by a fence or rock wall. Then an intruder breaches the idyllic scene of safety, climbing in rather than coming through the gate. That person is up to no good. He is a thief and robber, not a shepherd, who can move openly, freely, entering by the door.

Jesus is responding to the Pharisees. By refusing to acknowledge the power and glory of what Jesus did by giving the blind man sight, they show their purblind spiritual deformity. Worse, they show that they are not shepherds but thieves and robbers. They care not for the Lord's flock, the sheep of his pasture. They care only to indulge their own selfish rapacity, even if it means stealing and killing sheep.

Jesus explains in verse 2 that the shepherd does not need to climb over walls and sneak around using intimidation and attempting to convince others that good things, such as giving sight to a blind man, are actually sinful acts. The shepherd can walk right through the gate. The difference between Jesus and his opponents is well stated by Proverbs 28:1: "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."

Jesus goes on in John 10:3 to describe how both sheep and gatekeeper accept the shepherd. The gatekeeper opens to him, and the sheep recognize his voice. The shepherd has specific knowledge of which sheep belong to him. He has named them. He calls them by name. They willingly follow him. Imagine several flocks of sheep in a pen, each belonging to different shepherds. When one of the shepherds arrives and summons his flock, calling them by name, all the sheep will hear the voice of the shepherd. Only those who belong to that shepherd, the ones whose names he calls, respond to him. The metaphor continues in verse 4, as Jesus depicts the shepherd bringing out all of his own, going before them, and the sheep following him because they know his voice. The alternative is articulated in verse 5, where Jesus asserts that the sheep will not follow the stranger because "they do not know the voice of strangers."

Jesus is the Shepherd. The Pharisees and those opposed to Jesus are thieves and robbers. The sheep who hear the voice of Jesus, the ones he calls by name and leads out, are the sheep of his flock. The sheep who do not know his voice do not belong to him. Jesus is explaining why some in the crowd see him heal the blind man and believe that he is the Messiah and say so, even if it gets them tossed out of the synagogue (9:22), while others see him do the same thing and think he is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath (9:16). The sheep who belong to Jesus know the voice of Jesus, and they will not be misled by the voice of the Pharisees. All of this imagery, moreover, indicates that Jesus is the one who brings to pass the new exodus and return from exile. He will shepherd his flock all the way to the green pasture by still water in the Land of Promise.

When Jesus takes another run at explaining this in 10:7–10, he alters his own position in the metaphor to make himself even more significant than the shepherd. In verses 1–6, Jesus was clearly the shepherd, but in verses 7–10 Jesus

names himself as the door, indicating that any true shepherd of God's people will enter by him.

When Jesus says that all who came before him were thieves and robbers (v. 8), he refers to the abusive leaders of the people in his own day and throughout Israel's history. Jeremiah castigated false prophets (Jer. 23:9–40), as Ezekiel did wicked shepherds (Ezek. 34:1–24). Obviously, the leaders of God's people who honored and feared the Lord, men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other faithful men in Israel's history, are not included when Jesus condemns "all who came before me" as "thieves and robbers" (John 10:8).

The sheep, Jesus goes on to assert in verse 8, did not listen to the thieves and robbers. The true people of God will not be misled by charlatans.

The picture in verse 9 communicates the safety of the sheepfold. In order to be protected from wolves and thieves for a night of rest in the sheepfold, the sheep must enter through the door, Jesus. The sheep in the fold will be saved from danger. Similarly, to leave the fold and find pasture, nourishment, water, and exercise, the sheep must exit through the door, Jesus. In verse 10 Jesus again contrasts himself with the thieves, who only steal, kill, and ruin, while Jesus came to give life.

10:11–18 *Jesus Lays Down His Life for the Sheep.* In verse 11 Jesus states both that he is the "good shepherd" and what the good shepherd does: he gives his life for the sheep. The good shepherd does not steal, slaughter, or ruin the sheep for his own ends. Instead, the good shepherd sacrifices himself to protect and provide for the sheep. Jesus helps us understand the shepherd's risk and resolve by showing how the hired hand flees danger (v. 12), leaving the sheep for the wolf to ravage. The hired hand cares for himself more than for the sheep (v. 13), unlike the good shepherd, who cares for the sheep more than for himself.

Having spoken of how the good shepherd sacrifices himself for the sheep, Jesus speaks of the bond between the sheep and the shepherd in verses 14–16. Jesus characterizes the relationship between himself and his sheep in the most intimate and fulsome way possible, comparing it to a relationship closer even than that between man and wife. He had spoken of the sheep's knowing the shepherd's voice in verse 4, and now in verse 14 he asserts that as the good shepherd, he knows his own and they know him. The comparison Jesus uses in verse 15 beggars description and outstrips the possible: Jesus asserts that he knows his own and his own know him "just as the Father knows me and I know the Father."

The relationship between the omniscient Father and the omniscient Son is the ultimate example of shared personal knowledge between two parties. No shared history goes further back or contains more shared joy and grief than that between the eternal Son and his eternal Father. No emotions could be more sincerely felt or expressed than what the Almighty Father and Son feel for each other and communicate to each other. This is a relationship whose depths are unsearched by the most sublime expressions of art, music, or poetry. And this same depth of intimacy, Jesus declares, may be found in the relationship Jesus shares with his sheep, his people.

Jesus asserts in verse 16 that he has other sheep that are not of this fold, likely a reference to the Gentiles he will call to himself in addition to the Jews he drew to himself during his earthly ministry. There will be one flock under him, and one shepherd, sharing a unity that goes beyond racial distinction, cultural background, or societal preference.

In verse 17, Jesus explains why the Father loves him: because he dies on behalf of the sheep and will rise from the dead. When we see someone make sacrifices for another, our respect and appreciation and esteem grows for the one making the sacrifices. Jesus seems to be saying that the Father loves him because of the self-giving love Jesus will demonstrate for the sheep on the cross. When Jesus says that he lays down his life “*that* [he] may take it up again,” he speaks of his death and resurrection. Jesus will die, giving everything he has to give in his earthly life so that he can rise from the dead to a glorified and indestructible life. The Father’s love for Jesus multiplies from the Son’s delight in and agreement with this plan of salvation that he is willing to give everything to accomplish.

In verse 18 Jesus makes it clear that this is not a mop-up job. That is, this explanation of his death and resurrection is not damage control. It is not that something has gone wrong and Jesus is attempting to make defeat look like victory. No, Jesus willingly gives his life. No one is taking from him something he is attempting to keep. The statement at the end of verse 18, “This charge I have received from my Father,” applies to the two things Jesus says he has authority to do: lay down his life and take it up again.

The Father authorized the Son to go and die for the sheep. The Father authorized the Son to rise from the dead. The Father loves and admires the self-giving love of the Son.

10:19–21 *The Sheep Know His Voice.* John depicts another division among the Jews in these verses (cf. 7:43; 9:16). This division is caused by the reaction in 10:20 of those sheep who do not belong to the Good Shepherd, who have not recognized his voice, who have not heard him call them by name, lead them out, or give his life for them. Those who do not belong to Jesus not only do not recognize him; they even think he is evil, attributing his power to demonic influence (v. 20; cf. 7:20; 8:48, 52).

Meanwhile, in 10:21 we see the reaction of those the Shepherd calls to himself. They recognize that no demon would seek the good of a blind man (cf. 9:16). Demons want to steal, kill, and destroy, not give sight. Jesus does not speak like one under demonic influence, and his actions do not match what a demon would have him do. People who understand this are experiencing Jesus’ calling them to himself.

Response

Consider again what Jesus says about the Father’s knowledge of and love for him in 10:15 and 17. In no relationship could the parties involved be more fully aware of one another than in that between the omniscient Father and the omniscient

Son. No shared history goes farther back or contains more shared joy and grief than that between the eternal Son and his eternal Father. Emotions more powerful could not be more sincerely felt or expressed than what the Almighty Father and Son feel for each other and communicate to each other.

Think what this comparison says about the relationship between Jesus the good shepherd and those so mercied as to belong to his flock. No one could know us better than Jesus, who knows every time we have hated, everything we have contemplated, and the filth we have articulated. And he loves us anyway. No one has been with us longer than Jesus, who with the Father knitted us together in the womb of our mother. No one has been truer to us than Jesus, telling us what we did not want to hear, always true to the truth. No one has shown more commitment to our good than Jesus, traveled further to redeem us, suffered more indignity, endured greater pain, made better promises, and in every way shown himself worthy of all we have and are. Oh, how he loves us!

And we owe no one more. We can have no suspicions about the motives or intentions of Jesus. We cannot distrust him. We cannot resent him. The love we have for Jesus ought to be the nearest thing there is to crystal clear purity in this murky world. This is a world of uncertainty, but we can be certain about Jesus. His body and blood bought our lives, and his body and blood bear us up on the journey to the land where he is King. This is our Shepherd. This is our Friend. This is the one who knows us, the one who lays down his life for us. All that is required of anyone who would be loved by him is that they turn to Jesus from sin.

In a 2012 interview with *Rolling Stone*, Bob Dylan explained that he couldn't identify with the 1960s, and he communicated his frustration with those who wanted to use him as the spokesman for their radical politics. Then there is a telling exchange where the reporter asserts that Dylan's audience loves him. Dylan, however, knows that what the audience loves is not him but what they think he is, what he means to them:

The flip side is, there's also the audience that really loves you.

Of course. They think they do. They love the music and songs I play, not me.

Why do you say that?

Because that's the way people are. People say they love a lot of things, but they really don't. It's just a word that's been overused. When you put your life on the line for somebody, that's love. But you'll never know it until you're in the moment. When someone will die for you, that's love, too.³⁶

³⁶ Mikal Gilmore, "Bob Dylan Unleashed," *Rolling Stone*, September 27, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/bob-dylan-unleashed-a-wild-ride-on-his-new-lp-and-striking-back-at-critics-20120927>.

JOHN 10:22–42

²² At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me,¹ is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” ³³ The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.” ³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? ³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken— ³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? ³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; ³⁸ but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” ³⁹ Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.

⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. ⁴¹ And many came to him. And they said, “John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” ⁴² And many believed in him there.

¹ Some manuscripts *What my Father has given to me*

Section Overview: The One-with-the-Father Christ Protects His People at Hanukkah

In the first part of John 10 Jesus presented himself as the good shepherd who will lead God’s flock, the sheep the Father gave to him, safely home from exile. That dialogue seems to have taken place as Jesus was leaving the Feast of Tabernacles, which he had gone to Jerusalem to celebrate in 7:10. Chapters 7–8 took place at the feast, and the healing of the man born blind took place as Jesus left the temple after the Jews picked up stones to stone him (8:59). The question asked by some Pharisees after the healing of the blind man (9:40) apparently prompted Jesus to explain his role as the good shepherd and his relationship to his sheep (10:1–21).

Passover was celebrated in the first month of the year. Booths/Tabernacles was celebrated in the seventh month. At verse 22 we are notified that time has passed, and what follows takes place in Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication, which was celebrated in the ninth month (cf. *1 Macc.* 4:36–59).

There will be one more Passover in John's Gospel, the one at which Jesus will be crucified (11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28). Before that, John narrates this encounter at the Feast of Dedication (10:22–42) and the raising of Lazarus (11:1–54).

In 10:22–42 we learn that the safety of God's people is ensured by their good shepherd, who is no one less than Christ himself. Moreover, Christ himself is one with the Father. God's people could not have a better shepherd. God's people could not be safer.

Section Outline

IV.D. The One-with-the-Father Christ Protects His People at Hanukkah (10:22–42)

1. Jesus Is the Christ (10:22–30)
2. Jesus Is God (10:31–42)

Comment

10:22–30 *Jesus Is the Christ.* The Feast of Dedication (v. 22) is now called “Hanukkah” (from the Hebrew term *hnh*, meaning “to dedicate”), and it usually falls in December. As Jesus walked in the temple, the Jews gathered to see if he would declare himself to be the Messiah (vv. 22–24).

Jesus asserts that the problem is not that he has not identified himself as the Messiah but that the Jews did not believe him when he did (v. 25a). John has not presented Jesus as directly declaring, “I am the Christ,” but he has presented Jesus as being heralded as the Messiah (1:41), as acknowledging that he is the Christ to the Samaritan woman (4:25–26), and as asserting many things about himself that amount to his being not only the promised descendant of David but also much, much more (cf. 8:24–25, 53–58).

What Jesus has said of himself to this point in the Gospel of John is important for understanding what he says in this passage. Jesus has repeatedly spoken of how he was in heaven with the Father before the Father sent him to earth, and he has said that he would return to the Father. In addition, Jesus has asserted his identity and equality with God the Father, has claimed to be a unique link between heaven and earth, and has announced that he holds the power to ensure that those who believe him have eternal life:

- Jesus told Nathanael that he would see heaven opened and the angels “ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (1:51).
- Jesus told Nicodemus that the Son of Man had descended from heaven (3:13).

- Jesus referred to his Father in a way that made the Jews realize he was “calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (5:17–18).
- Jesus spoke of doing what he saw and heard the Father doing (3:11; 5:19, 30).
- Jesus asserted that the Father had given him life in himself (5:26).
- Jesus said that the Scriptures bear witness about him (5:39).
- Jesus said that he had come in the Father’s name (5:43).
- Jesus said that Moses wrote about him (5:46).
- Jesus claimed to be the “bread of life” (6:35).
- Jesus said that he had “come down from heaven, . . . to do . . . the will of him who sent me” (6:38).
- Jesus said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven” (6:41; cf. 6:42).
- And again, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven” (6:51).
- Jesus asked how people would respond if they saw “the Son of Man ascending to where he was before” (6:62).
- Jesus said that his words were spirit and life (6:63).
- Jesus said that his teaching was not his but was from the one who sent him (7:16).
- Jesus came from the true one and said he would go where his opponents could neither find him nor go themselves (7:28, 34, 36).
- Jesus called himself the “light of the world” (8:12; 9:5).
- Jesus claimed to be from above, not of this world (8:23; cf. 3:31).
- Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I Am” (8:28 AT; cf. 8:24).
- Jesus said, “I came from God. . . he sent me” (8:42).
- Jesus said those who keep his word would not taste death (8:52).
- Jesus said, “before Abraham was, I am” (8:58).
- When the formerly blind man asked Jesus who the Son of Man was, Jesus said, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” Then the man worshiped Jesus (9:35–38).
- Jesus said that the Father had given him authority to lay down his life and to take it up again (10:18).

Unbelieving scholars sometimes claim that Jesus never said such things, but they can only maintain that position by assuming that John has not presented what Jesus actually said. John, however, claims to be presenting what Jesus said, and John claims to be telling the truth. Only by accepting John’s testimony that Jesus said these things can we understand what John presents Jesus as arguing in this passage. In addition to what Jesus has said, which amounts to an assertion that he is the Messiah and more, he also points to what he has *done* as proof that he is everything he claims to be (10:25b):

- He turned water to wine (2:6–10).
- He did things that convinced Nicodemus that God had to be with him (3:2).

- He promised to give living water (4:10–14).
- He told the Samaritan woman all she had ever done (4:29).
- He healed the man lame for thirty-eight years (5:1–16).
- He fed the five thousand (6:1–13), prompting the people to recognize him as the Prophet and to seek to make him king (6:14–15).
- He walked on water (6:16–21).
- He healed a man blind from birth (9:1–7).

Jesus appealed to the testimony of the works the Father gave him to do in chapter 5 (vv. 20, 36), and in John's Gospel people have repeatedly recognized his works as signs (2:11, 23; 3:2; 4:39, 45, 53–54; 6:2, 14, 25; 7:31; 9:16; cf. 4:48; 6:25–26, 30). People have asked whether anyone would do more signs (7:31) and have asserted that no one ever spoke like Jesus did (7:46).

It is amazing that people who saw what Jesus did could fail to recognize his goodness. It is blasphemous that some would assert that the power in him was demonic (7:20; 8:48–49, 52; cf. 8:44; 10:10). Anyone who heard what Jesus said and saw what he did *should have believed* that he was from God, that he was the Messiah, that he had power to save.

Why did they not believe? Jesus explains in 10:26 that they do not believe because they are not his sheep. This explanation of why they do not believe builds upon what Jesus taught in verses 1–18 and matches what he said about no one being able to come to him unless the Father draws him (6:44), about those taught of God coming to Jesus (6:45), and about no one being able to come to Jesus unless the Father grants it (6:65). In the same way, Jesus explains in 10:27 that his sheep hear his voice, he knows them, and they follow him (cf. 10:3–4, 14, 16).

Jesus makes three assertions in verse 28. First, he states that he gives eternal life to his sheep. Second, he states that his sheep will never perish. And third, he says that no one can take his sheep from him.

As if that were not enough, Jesus makes three more assertions in verse 29. First, he says that the Father has given the sheep to him. Second, he says that his Father is greater than all. Third, he declares that no one can snatch the sheep out of the Father's hand. When Jesus says that the Father gave the sheep to him, we receive more insight into Jesus' statement that "All that the Father gives me will come to me" (6:37). God the Father has given certain people to Jesus. Those people are his sheep, for whom he lays down his life (10:11, 15), the ones he calls by name (v. 3), the ones who hear his voice and know him (v. 14), the ones who follow him (vv. 4, 27).

Because the Father is greater than all, the sheep can be certain that no one can take them from the Father. There is no power in heaven or on earth greater than the power that keeps those who believe in Jesus. There is no demon, no deceiver, no antichrist, no Satan that will prove stronger, more persuasive, more compelling than the Father.

Note that Jesus says no one will snatch the sheep from *his* hand in verse 28, and then says that no one will snatch the sheep from *the Father's* hand in verse 29.

Then Jesus asserts in verse 30, “I and the Father are one.” Jesus and the Father are one in essence, one in what they are as God. And Jesus and the Father are united in the great task of saving the sheep. The Father has given the sheep to Jesus (v. 29), and Jesus lays down his life for the sheep (vv. 11, 15).

10:31–42 *Jesus Is God.* Verses 31–39 describe the shock waves emanating from Jesus’ asserting his oneness with God the Father (v. 30); for some his words cause everything to fall into place, while for others they are an explosion provoking a counterattack.

The sheep will hear the words of Jesus and know his voice, and everything will make sense to them. Those who are not the sheep will do what the Jews do in verse 31, where they pick up stones to stone him. Jesus mercifully reasons with those who would stone their God and King. He reminds them that he has done many good works that are not the work of demons or Satan but reflect the character of the Father. Then he asks if he is being stoned for one of these good works (v. 32).

The Jews explain that they are stoning Jesus not for a good work but for blasphemy. They charge him with blasphemy because he has claimed to be God (v. 33). This charge is very similar to the one in 5:18, where the Jews intended to stone Jesus for making himself equal with God.

Jesus answers his opponents with an argument from Scripture, quoting the Psalms but referring to them as “Law,” reflecting the way “Law” (reflecting the Greek translation *nomos* of the Hebrew *torah*) came to be used as an umbrella term for all of Scripture. The argument is simple, even if we have lingering questions concerning the passage Jesus quotes (Ps. 82:6; cf. John 10:34). The argument goes like this:

Premise one: God calls beings other than himself “gods” in the OT.

Premise two: Scripture cannot be broken, so everything it says is true.

Premise three: God consecrated Jesus and sent him into the world.

Conclusion: Jesus does not blaspheme when he claims to be the Son of God.

The OT uses the word “god/s” to refer to more than just Yahweh, so it is not blasphemous for Jesus to say he is God’s Son. But what of the lingering questions prompted by Psalm 82? Some understand God to be addressing humans in Psalm 82, perhaps the nation of Israel. In that case, this would be a biblical instance of human beings being called “gods,” and therefore Jesus is not blaspheming to call himself the Son of God (cf. Ex. 7:1).

The other possibility is that God is addressing heavenly beings in Psalm 82. I am inclined to this view because all through the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of himself as having come down from heaven. If God calls other members of the divine council “gods,” and if, as Jesus indicates in John 10:36, Jesus himself was part of that divine council from which he was consecrated and sent, then there is nothing blasphemous about Jesus’ being called God. This view comports well with

Daniel 7, where the “one like a son of man” is present in the heavenly council prior to his reception of the kingdom.³⁷

Jesus says here that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35), something even his opponents agree with. This indicates that Jesus believes every word of Scripture to be totally true and trustworthy, reliable, unbreakable. Followers of Jesus must think about the Bible the way he does.³⁸

Having proven in verses 34–36 that he has not blasphemed, Jesus points again to his works in verses 37–38. By framing his works as the works of his Father in verse 37, Jesus invites his audience to compare the character of his works with the character of the Father. He argues in verse 38 that if the works he does match the character of the Father, then even if people are skeptical of him they should be convinced by his works.

What do the works show? The works show that Jesus and the Father are one (v. 30), which Jesus phrases another way in verse 38, “The Father is in me and I am in the Father.” Jesus and the Father are one. They are united and yet distinct. This is the mystery of the Trinity, the glory of the Godhead, the supra-rational reality of the eternally triune God who exists as one nature in three persons.

How do the Jews respond to their God? They seek to arrest him (v. 39). It is a futile attempt, as he escapes them.

John 10:40–42 is similar to 2:11 and 4:53–54 as it speaks of belief in response to signs.

Response

How do we respond to God? Will we submit to him or vainly try to stone him? Will we believe what he says or try to arrest him for it? The right response to God’s revelation of himself is faith and trust, praise and worship, thanks and celebration.

Perhaps we would like to respond to God in this way, but our sin makes us think God would never receive us, or perhaps it causes us to struggle with assurance concerning salvation. We must look away from ourselves and look at God the Father and God the Son. The triune God is the one who saves. God the Father is all-wise and all-powerful. God the Son is all-convincing and all-satisfying. God the Father and God the Son have the power to save us. God the Spirit will work the fruits of true salvation into our lives as we bear his name. His name is at stake in our salvation.

Christ is our Shepherd. Christ is God. God is our Shepherd. We are safe.

³⁷ For discussion, see Hamilton, *Daniel in Biblical Theology*.

³⁸ See Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God At His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

JOHN 11:1–44

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So, when he heard that Lazarus¹ was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” ⁹Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” ¹¹After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” ¹²The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” ¹³Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, ¹⁵and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶So Thomas, called the Twin,² said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

¹⁷Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles³ off, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” ²³Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.⁴ Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

²⁸When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here,

my brother would not have died.”³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved⁵ in his spirit and greatly troubled.³⁴ And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”³⁵ Jesus wept.³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.”⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

¹ Greek *he*; also verse 17 ² Greek *Didymus* ³ Greek *fifteen stadia*; a *stadium* was about 607 feet or 185 meters

⁴ Some manuscripts omit *and the life* ⁵ Or *was indignant*; also verse 38

Section Overview: The Raising of Lazarus

Death is the most fearful enemy we face. It is final. It hurts because we love people, and when they die we are robbed of their lives. The more someone has sacrificed for us, the more we love them. The more we have sacrificed for someone, the more dear they are to us. In John 11, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, showing his empathy with those who suffer the ravages of death, as well as his power to defeat it.

Jesus turned water to wine on the third day (2:1–11). He said he would raise the torn-down temple in three days (2:12–25). He spoke of the new birth to Nicodemus (3:1–21), and the Baptist testified that Jesus was the bridegroom (3:22–36). The Samaritans recognized Jesus to be the Savior of the world (4:1–42), and then, having stayed with the Samaritans two days (4:40), Jesus healed the official’s son after the two days (4:43–54). Chapters 2–4 seemed to reflect a chiasmic structure:

- 2:1–12: Water to wine on the third day
- 2:13–25: Cleansing the temple at Passover
- 3:1–21: Nicodemus and the new birth
- 3:22–36: The Baptist and the bridegroom
- 4:1–42: The Samaritans and the Savior of the world
- 4:43–54: Healing of the official’s son on the third day

Often the turning points in John’s Gospel are marked not only by changes in time, place, and people involved but also by statements that people saw and heard Jesus or perceived that he was doing signs and therefore believed (cf. 1:49–51; 2:11, 23–25; 4:53–54; 10:40–42; 11:47–48; 12:18–19, 37, 42).

After the unit in John 2–4, what follows seems to be bracketed by framing references to the resurrection in chapters 5 and 11. Having healed the man lame thirty-eight years in chapter 5, Jesus said that a time was coming when the dead would hear the voice of the Son of God and live (5:28–29). In chapter 11, after the mutterings of how Jesus could have healed Lazarus (11:37), the dead man heard the voice of Christ and lived (11:43–44).

John seems to have carefully structured the narratives between the resurrection frame in chapters 5 and 11. At the time of the Passover in chapter 6, Jesus told his people that he would feed them the true manna from heaven. Then, at the Feast of Dedication in chapter 10, Jesus explained that he was the Good Shepherd. Within the shepherding narratives in chapters 6 and 10, chapters 7–9 present three episodes at the Feast of Tabernacles: Jesus claimed to fulfill the rock from which the water flowed (7:1–52); he claimed to fulfill the pillar of cloud and flame as the “light of the world” (8:12–59); and he gave sight to the blind (9:1–41).

After the narratives in John 1–10, we might ask what could be left of OT patterns and prophecies for Jesus to fulfill? Elijah and Elisha both raised the dead, and Ezekiel prophesied that the return from exile would be like a resurrection from the dead.

Like chapters 2–4, chapters 5–11 seem to have a chiastic structure:

John 5: Healing and resurrection

John 6: Passover and manna from heaven

John 7: Tabernacles and water from the rock

John 8: Tabernacles and the Light of the World (pillar)

John 9: Tabernacles and sight for the blind

John 10: Dedication and the Good Shepherd

John 11: Healing and resurrection

As noted above, 10:40–42 speaks of people believing in response to the signs Jesus did, just as other transitional sections do. The raising of Lazarus in chapter 11, unlike the preceding narratives, which have been set at feasts, does not seem to have taken place in a festal season. Having narrated the raising of Lazarus (11:1–44), John depicts the Jewish response (vv. 45–53) before relating that Jesus withdrew to the wilderness to stay for an unspecified period of time with his disciples (v. 54). After that, John narrates what took place at the time of the final Passover of his Gospel (v. 55). Thus, while the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11 relates to chapter 5 thematically on the point of resurrection, it differs from the narratives of chapters 5–10 in that John does not record that it took place at the time of a feast.

Section Outline

V. The Raising of Lazarus (11:1–44)

A. Death for the Glory of Christ (11:1–10)

B. That We May Die with Him (11:11–16)

C. The Resurrection and the Life (11:17–27)

D. The Weeping Christ (11:28–37)

E. Lazarus, Come Forth (11:38–44)

Comment

11:1–10 *Death for the Glory of Christ.* We are not told the names of the people at whose wedding Jesus turned water to wine in chapter 2. We are not told the name of the Samaritan woman or of the official and his son in chapter 4, nor of the man lame thirty-eight years in chapter 5, nor of the man born blind in chapter 9. But in chapter 11 we learn the names of Lazarus and his sisters.

John mentions Mary's anointing the feet of Jesus and wiping them with her hair (11:2). Since he will not narrate that event until 12:1–8, John seems to assume his audience would be familiar with that episode from the accounts of it in the other Gospels (Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9).

For the first time in John's Gospel, we read of Jesus' *loving* people. Surprisingly, there is no mention of love in John 1:1–18. God loved the world (3:16). People loved darkness (3:19). The Father loves the Son (3:35; 5:20; 10:17). Those who have God as their Father love Jesus (8:42). Now in 11:3, however, Lazarus is identified as a man Jesus loves, and in verse 5 we are told, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (cf. v. 36).

Jesus responds to the news that Lazarus is ill (v. 4) in a manner reminiscent of his response to the question concerning the man born blind in 9:3. The similarity between these accounts suggests that all afflictions are "that the works of God might be displayed" (9:3)—indeed, that all deaths are "for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified" (11:4).

An objection could be raised to the assertion that all affliction and death serve these purposes. It could be claimed that the cases in chapters 9 and 11 are different, because Jesus gave the blind man sight and raised Lazarus from the dead. How can other afflictions display God's works, how can other deaths glorify Jesus, when those suffering have been neither healed nor raised? One answer lies in the fact that the healing of the blind man signals the removal of blindness in the age to come. The raising of Lazarus placards the resurrection of the righteous for the eternal reign of Christ. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:24–25, "In this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." God and Christ mean to be glorified through affliction, illness, and death.

What Jesus does in this episode seems calculated to teach his followers to wait and hope, to trust him as he lets them linger on the tenterhooks of life. Consider the connection between John 11:5 and verse 6: Jesus loved them, so when he heard, he waited; Jesus loved them, so he left them in the lurch. The sisters will each say that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died (vv. 21, 32), but Jesus has already explained himself in verse 4. Jesus is not going to leave those he loves in a lasting lurch, but he will leave them there for a time in order to lengthen the lasting glory he means to lavish upon them.

The wording of verses 6–7 is similar to that of 4:40, 43. In both accounts Jesus remains two days, after which he goes and raises up the sick. By referencing the attempt to stone Jesus at the Feast of Dedication in 11:8 (cf. 10:31), John places the raising of Lazarus between the Feast of Dedication in December and the Feast of Passover in March/April (cf. 11:54–55).

Jesus answers his disciples' concern of his being in danger (v. 8) with a statement that there are twelve daylight hours in which a man can see clearly to walk, while those who walk in darkness stumble (vv. 9–10). This recalls what Jesus said in 9:4–5, where he asserted himself to be the “light of the world,” saying that he would be that light as long as he was in the world, and explaining that night was coming. Informed by 9:4–5, what Jesus says in 11:9–10 seems to mean that Jesus is confident that his opponents can do nothing to him until the “day” (the appointed time of his ministry) ends and the “night” (the time after the “light of the world” leaves the world) comes.

11:11–16 *That We May Die with Him.* In verses 11–13 we have yet another misunderstanding: Jesus says Lazarus has fallen asleep and that he is going to wake him. No one has told Jesus this, so clearly he is able to know things of which he has not been informed. The disciples' response in verse 12 is explained in verse 13: they thought Jesus spoke of “the sleep of slumber” (AT), but in fact he had spoken of the death of Lazarus.

Jesus clarifies his meaning in verses 14–15, explaining that he is glad he was not there when Lazarus died because what he plans to do will benefit the disciples, giving them the opportunity to believe in response to what he will do. The words of Thomas in verse 16 (“Let us also go, that we may die with him”) seem pessimistic, but John likely meant for this to be heard by his audience as a suggestive, thought-provoking statement.

Thomas may mean that Jesus will surely be stoned (v. 8), so the disciples might as well go with Jesus to die with him. Or perhaps Thomas means that Lazarus has died, and going to the region of Jerusalem will result in the death of Jesus and the disciples, so they will all die with Lazarus. Either way, the statement takes on deeper implications in view of what Jesus will do in the rest of this passage and in the rest of the Gospel.

To die with Jesus is to rise with Jesus. If Thomas has the death of Jesus in view, then even if he is speaking pessimistically, the disciples are called to take up their crosses and follow Jesus (cf. Mark 8:34). If, on the other hand, Thomas has the death of Lazarus in view, then to die with Lazarus is to die with one who will be raised from the dead by Jesus. Thomas thus ironically makes a statement concerning the disciples' being identified with Jesus and raised from the dead with him. The only way to have eternal life with Jesus is to be ready to die with him.

11:17–27 *The Resurrection and the Life.* Apparently Jesus was “across the Jordan . . . where John had been baptizing at first” (10:40; cf. 1:28) when Mary and Martha sent the message to him that Lazarus was sick (11:3). If Lazarus died the day the

message was sent and Jesus waited two days after receiving the message, then when he arrived on the *third* day, Lazarus could have “already been in the tomb four days” (v. 17).

Unlike the “Bethany across the Jordan” where John was baptizing (1:28), the Bethany of Mary and Martha was but two miles from Jerusalem (11:18). The proximity of Jerusalem meant many mourners could make the trip (v. 19), and when Martha heard of the approach of Jesus, she left the crowd and went to him, Mary staying in the house (v. 20). Given the fact that Lazarus had likely died by the time the message that he was ill had made its way to Jesus, there may not be a reproach in Martha’s statement that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would have lived (v. 21). In keeping with verse 22, Martha seems to be communicating her utter confidence that Jesus could have healed Lazarus. In view of her reaction in verse 39, however, verse 22 should not be taken to indicate that she expects Jesus to raise Lazarus right away.

Along these lines, when Jesus tells Martha that Lazarus will rise (v. 23), her response indicates that she expects Lazarus to be raised when everyone else will be raised, “on the last day” (v. 24). Jesus then speaks words that not only affirm a resurrection on the last day but also assert that he himself *is* the resurrection and the life (vv. 25–26).

What does it mean for Jesus to be the resurrection and the life? The other “I am” statements Jesus makes in John can help us understand this one. When Jesus called himself the “bread of life” (6:35), he presented himself as the fulfillment of the manna from heaven in the wilderness. Anticipating the way he would transfer to himself at the Last Supper the spiritual significance of the unleavened bread of Passover, Jesus asserted himself to be what God’s people would subsist on after the new exodus as they journeyed to the new heaven and new earth.

Similarly, when Jesus called himself the “light of the world” (8:12), he presented himself as the fulfillment of the pillar of fire and cloud that would lead God’s people to the Land of Promise. And when he boldly declared, “I am” (8:24, 28, 58), Jesus identified himself with the one who appeared to Moses at the burning bush to initiate the exodus from Egypt. In keeping with these fulfillments of OT pattern and prophecy, when Jesus called himself the “good shepherd” (10:11), he presented himself as the fulfillment of the prophesied new Moses, the new Davidic leader who would shepherd God’s flock.

The resurrection was also part of the prophesied picture of Israel’s restoration. Hosea 6:2 and Ezekiel 37 depict the return to the Land of Promise after the exile as resurrection from the dead. Jesus now asserts that he himself is the fulfillment of the promised resurrection from the dead. He has life in himself (John 1:4; 5:26), and as such he himself *is* the resurrection.

Believing in Jesus is the means by which people are joined to his resurrection life. To believe in Jesus is to be plugged into the life that guarantees resurrection. To believe in Jesus is to be united to the one who has life in himself, the one whom death cannot keep down. Those who believe in Jesus may experience physical death, but it will not be permanent, and those who believe will not undergo the

second death (cf. Rev. 20:6). This is what Jesus means in John 11:26 when he says that those who believe in him will never die.

From what takes place in the rest of this narrative, we see that Martha did not comprehend all of these glories. Jesus asks her if she believes (v. 26), and she affirms that he is “the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (v. 27). This affirmation means she believes Jesus to have been preexistent, to have been expected, to have descended from David, to be uniquely God’s Son. But from her reaction in verse 39 we see that she has not worked out all that Jesus meant in verses 25–26. Jesus has explained this in greater depth in 5:19–30, and he will illustrate his words in what he will go on to do.

11:28–37 *The Weeping Christ.* Taking Martha at her word in 11:28 would lead to the conclusion that John has not recorded every word that passed between Jesus and Martha, something to keep in mind as we read the Gospels. Whereas Martha left the crowd to go to Jesus in verse 20, when Mary rises from the house at Martha’s words, others intend to go with her (vv. 29–31). Martha and Mary spoke virtually the same words to Jesus (vv. 21, 32), but whereas Martha went to Jesus and spoke to him, John notes that Mary “fell at his feet” (v. 32). From what we see of these sisters here and elsewhere (cf. Luke 10:38–42), it appears that Martha was more expeditious and businesslike while Mary was more emotional and contemplative.

If the truths of John 11:33–36 were not recorded in Scripture, we could draw mistaken conclusions about Jesus. We could be tempted to think this whole scenario was a setup. We could coldly conclude that the events had been arranged for the glory of God (v. 4), that Jesus waited for Lazarus to die to increase dramatic tension (v. 6), that all of this was carefully stage-managed for Jesus to show off his power. There is a grain of truth in these statements, but insofar as they imply an unloving puppet-master using people, they are dead wrong.

Sometimes we are tempted to think that God does not care, that Jesus does not care. We could wrongly apply the knowledge of God’s sovereignty as follows: God has foreordained these events for our good, so we cannot let them bother us. We must stay above the flow, must be emotionally aloof, because everything is going to turn out for God’s glory. This way of thinking is a bad application of the knowledge of God to our own lives, and often we project our own coldness onto God himself, as if the fact that God has written the end of the story has made him emotionally uninterested in the plot or characters.

That is not at all how the Bible presents God. From the earliest pages we read that God is emotionally involved in the narrative of history and that he cares about his created beings (Gen. 6:6–7), and throughout the Bible we see the same thing. Here in John 11 we see that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (v. 5). The fact that Jesus knows exactly what is going to happen does not keep him from reacting emotionally to the facts of death and pain. Jesus knows he is going to raise Lazarus from the dead (vv. 11, 23). That does not make him cold to the realities involved.

Sin is awful, and death is its terrible consequence. The woe and misery of death troubles Jesus (v. 33). He is no heartless judge, withdrawn from the pain people feel, clucking that they got what they deserved. John tells us that Jesus was “deeply moved” and “greatly troubled” and that he wept (vv. 33, 35). No one knows better than Jesus what is going to happen in this episode. No one is better at mourning with those who mourn than Jesus. Jesus loves people, so he weeps with them, and over them.

11:38–44 *Lazarus, Come Forth.* When Elijah and Elisha raised people from the dead (1 Kings 17:17–24; 2 Kings 4:18–37), Scripture indicates that only a short interval of time had passed between death and resurrection. Lazarus, by contrast, “has been dead four days” (John 11:39).

John again describes Jesus as “deeply moved” (v. 38) and then describes the tomb with a stone in front of it, a scene surely very familiar to John’s readers as they recalled the stone rolled in front of the tomb of Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:60). Both tombs will have their contents emptied.

Jesus gives the word for the stone to be removed (John 11:39), and again we see a misunderstanding. It appears from her reaction that Martha thinks Jesus wants only to weep over the body of Lazarus. When Jesus replies to Martha in verse 40, we get another indication that he has said more to her than John recorded (cf. vv. 21–27). Jesus has asserted that the illness of Lazarus was for God’s glory (v. 4), and now in verse 40 he reminds Martha that he told her that if she believed, she would see the glory of God. When Jesus speaks of God’s glory, he means that death will be overcome, a beloved brother and friend will be restored to life, and Jesus will be seen as one who loves and is able to help.

The relationship between Jesus and his people is not a sham enacted to give Jesus opportunities to show off. Jesus loves his people and weeps with them and for them (vv. 5, 33, 35, 38). Nor is the relationship between Jesus and the Father a bogus pretense. Jesus prays to the Father in verses 41–42, and his words do not reflect a mindless going-through-the-motions but rather afford a glimpse into a vital ongoing relationship. Jesus simply communicates aloud what is constantly passing between himself and the Father.

Jesus next commands Lazarus to “come out” (v. 43), and in doing so the voice through which the worlds were made, by which babies are knitted together in their mothers’ wombs, by which all things hold together, by which everyone will be judged, cries out words that will roll back the deepest, darkest curse we know: by his word he made the world, and by his word he undoes death.

Lazarus comes out, and Jesus gives the command: “Unbind him, and let him go” (v. 44).

Response

Recall what Jesus said about the man born blind and the death of Lazarus: Jesus will receive glory from our suffering. We must wait on him to heal us.

In returning to Judea to help Lazarus, Jesus faced the murderous Jews of Jerusalem. What made him so bold? Jesus was confident in God's plan for him. We must learn from Jesus and imitate his courageous daring, grounded on God's sovereign plan.

John shows no interest in having Lazarus testify to his experience. Lazarus does not speak, nor does he write a bestselling book about his experiences while dead in the tomb. What is John interested in? The fact that Jesus overcame death. He is interested in the ability of Jesus to speak the word and give life. John is interested in exalting Jesus. Unless Jesus comes back before we die, we will all find out for ourselves what lies beyond the veil. In the meantime we should be interested in what John is interested in: Jesus.

Because of what John shows us of Jesus, the fearful finality of death for ourselves and those we love has been softened by the empathy of Jesus, and we face death in hope, due to our confident expectation of resurrection.

JOHN 11:45–12:11

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ⁴⁶ but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

⁵⁴ Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.

⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ They were looking for¹ Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?" ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclin-

ing with him at table. ³Mary therefore took a pound² of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii³ and given to the poor?” ⁶He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it⁴ for the day of my burial. ⁸For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

⁹When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus⁵ was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

¹Greek *were seeking for* ²Greek *litra*; a *litra* (or Roman pound) was equal to about 11 1/2 ounces or 327 grams ³A *denarius* was a day's wage for a laborer ⁴Or *Leave her alone; she intended to keep it* ⁵Greek *he*

Section Overview: When Jesus Wasn't Wanted

In the first part of John 11, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. In 11:45–12:11 John shows us what people choose when they do not want Jesus. Some opt for political power while others value money. John writes so that his audience will feel the appalling injustice done to Jesus as he depicts this most shocking outrage.

Section Outline

- VI. The Hour Has Come for the Son of Man to Be Glorified (11:45–17:26)
 - A. Approaching the Final Passover (11:45–12:50)
 - 1. When Jesus Wasn't Wanted (11:45–12:11)
 - a. Political Power or Jesus? (11:45–53)
 - b. Purity and Passover (11:54–57)
 - c. Money and Power or Jesus? (12:1–11)

Comment

11:45–53 *Political Power or Jesus?* John transitions from the raising of Lazarus to the plot against Jesus by showing how the spread of belief in Jesus (11:45) led to word getting back to the Pharisees concerning the raising of Lazarus (v. 46). The report in verse 45 that many believed in Jesus contributes to our understanding of why the Pharisees will do what they do.

The Pharisees were often at odds with the chief priests, but the two parties come together against Jesus in the Sanhedrin to consider what to do in response to the “many signs” Jesus has performed (v. 47). Their concern is simple: if they do not take action against Jesus, he will win universal approval (v. 48). Everyone will accept him and his cause. The Pharisees seem to fear that Jesus will be acclaimed as the longed-for king (cf. 6:15), which could lead to revolt against Rome. The leadership wants to avoid what would eventually happen in AD 70, when the

Romans destroyed the temple, and in AD 132–135, when the Romans flattened Jerusalem.

The Sanhedrin discusses what to do about Jesus to keep the Romans from taking away their “place,” perhaps referring to the temple, and their “nation,” which is subservient to Rome (11:48). The Jewish leadership has the opportunity to embrace a leader who could free them from Rome, in addition to everything else he could do for them. Instead, they choose to maintain the status quo, in which their *nation* is subject to Caesar. They choose to protect a building, the *temple*, whose significance derives from its connection to the hope of God’s kingdom. Instead of welcoming the ruler of this kingdom, they desire to kill him.

Caiaphas rudely insults his cohorts (v. 49) and then speaks better than he knows (v. 50). In verse 51, John explains that in his statement that one man should die for the nation (v. 50), Caiaphas was prophesying.³⁹ Caiaphas rejects Jesus and seeks to pursue his own cause by killing Jesus. Inadvertently, Caiaphas predicts the fulfillment of God’s cosmic purpose to accomplish salvation in Jesus, not just for the Jews but for all of God’s people (v. 52). John then tells us that, from that point forward, the Jewish leaders sought to have Jesus executed (v. 53).

Whom does Caiaphas damage by rejecting Jesus and seeking to have him executed? Caiaphas does not succeed against Jesus, whom this chapter of John’s Gospel has shown to be more powerful even than death. Caiaphas only hurts himself. He excludes himself from God’s salvation, robs the *place* and *nation* of what would make them truly sacred and significant, and accomplishes God’s purposes, even against his own intentions.

11:54–57 Purity and Passover. “Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews” (v. 54) because he knew what was being privately plotted. John does not tell us how Jesus knew what was being plotted against him, but John has already established that Jesus knows things he has not seen with his eyes or heard with his ears (4:16–18).

In 11:55 John states that the third Passover in his Gospel is at hand, and this will be the last one. There is probably significance in the fact that he joins the detail that many went to Jerusalem to purify themselves with the detail that “They were looking for Jesus” (v. 56). What Jesus will do at this Passover purifies those who seek him.

The disputes about whether Jesus will come to the feast and the orders from the authorities that information should be given concerning Jesus (vv. 56b–57) are reminiscent of the speculations in 7:11 and the attempt to arrest him in 7:32.

12:1–11 Money and Power or Jesus? John has shown us how those who rejected Jesus chose *place* and *nation* rather than Jesus (11:45–53), and now in 12:1–11 he shows us how those who *followed* Jesus respond to him. Surprisingly, the response to Jesus

³⁹ John here uses the same verb that Jude employs to say that Enoch prophesied (Jude 14). This seems to indicate that Jude thought Enoch had said something prophetic rather than indicating that Jude considered *1 Enoch* to be prophecy.

among those who followed him was not universally positive. In fact, the positive occasions the negative.

John 12:2–3 is a beautiful picture of Jesus with his friends. Jesus restored Lazarus to life, and now he reclines at table with him. Martha saw Jesus raise her brother from the dead, and now she serves him. Mary, who threw herself at the feet of Jesus (11:32), now anoints those feet with expensive ointment (12:3). Those who love Jesus are ready to give everything for him. Mary's expression of devotion and love is lavish, extravagant, and fragrant. The beauty of this right response to Jesus remains untainted until Judas begins to speak in verse 4.

Every time Judas Iscariot is mentioned in the NT, he is either named as the one who betrayed Jesus or is being depicted *as* betraying Jesus. Amid this beautiful scene of devotion, fragrant with the result of Mary's expression of her gratitude, respect, and love for Jesus, Judas opens his insincere mouth.

Judas is introduced as the traitor in verse 4, his question of why the ointment was not sold and the money given to the poor is recounted in verse 5,⁴⁰ and his real concern is stated in verse 6. Judas did not care about the poor. He pilfered cash from the moneybag. Judas was concerned for himself. The Jewish leadership wanted to maintain its political power in 11:45–53, and now Judas wants to enrich himself in 12:4–6. Consider the implications of what John depicts: Judas values money above Jesus.

Jesus rebukes Judas in verse 7, announcing that Mary has anointed him for burial. Jesus knows what is coming. In verse 8 he points out that the poor will still be around long after he is gone.

The raising of Lazarus prompted the Jews to seek to put Jesus to death (11:45–53), and that issue returns after the dinner given for Jesus in 12:1–8. A crowd gathers to see Jesus and Lazarus—John again noting that Jesus raised him from the dead—in verse 9. This prompts the chief priests to plan to kill Lazarus as well, because of the way his life convinces people to believe in Jesus (vv. 10–11). The Jewish leadership would have had an unparalleled opportunity in embracing Jesus. What other nation has ever had a leader who could raise the dead? They also could have embraced Lazarus. What other nation could point to someone their leader had raised from the dead? Yet, rather than celebrate Lazarus, they want to kill him.

Response

How do we respond to the work of God in the lives of others? Does it make us want to embrace them, or to obliterate them? We must celebrate the work of God that we see in people's lives. Whether it is faith, patience, joy, perseverance, growth in holiness, abstaining from some past sin, willingness to sacrifice for others in imitation of Jesus and from devotion to Jesus—whatever work of God that we

⁴⁰ Specifically, Judas asks, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" Assuming this is not hyperbole, we can attempt to translate the value into today's terms. A footnote in the ESV text observes that a denarius was a day's wages. A worker today earning \$10 an hour for eight hours would earn \$80 (I will not attempt to account for what he might pay in taxes and other sorts of fees and withholdings). If he made \$80 for 300 days, his gross pay would come to \$24,000. Even if Judas spoke hyperbolically or otherwise exaggerated the ointment's value, Mary's gift was an expensive one.

see in the lives of others, our response must be to celebrate it. Sinful jealousy has no place in the Christian heart.

Think of the choice made by the Jewish leadership and Judas. What are we choosing instead of Jesus? What do we fear we will lose if we accept Jesus? Do we think we will succeed by rejecting Jesus? Will what we try to keep for ourselves ever compare with what God promises to do for us? If we acclaim Jesus in faith, everything in our lives will deepen in sacred significance. If we reject Jesus, we will unwittingly aid God in the accomplishment of his purposes, yet we will only harm ourselves.

Judas loved money more than Jesus, but money is not God. Money is not alive. Money cannot raise the dead. Money cannot love you back. Money is meant to represent value. It is currency. We gain money for what we provide or how we serve, and then we exchange the reward we gained by our ingenuity or effort for things we need or want. Money will not shepherd us. Money will not teach us truth. Money will not give itself in our place. Money is not at the right hand of God interceding for us. Money will not give us its righteousness so that we are justified before God. Mary understood this. Judas did not. Money is a means to an end. Jesus is an end in himself.

JOHN 12:12–33

¹²The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” ¹⁴And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

¹⁵ “Fear not, daughter of Zion;
behold, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. ¹⁷The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. ¹⁹So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew;

Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

²⁷ “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Section Overview: The King Comes for Judgment

The crowd intended to make Jesus king in John 6:15, and now that he has raised Lazarus from the dead, they hear of his coming to Jerusalem and greet him with the words of Psalm 118:25–26, shouting, “Hosanna,” blessing the one who comes in the name of the Lord, and hailing him as king (John 12:12–13). Jesus adds to their enthusiasm by enacting the fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, entering Jerusalem on a donkey (John 12:14–15). John notes that the disciples perceived the significance of the events after the glorification of Jesus (v. 16) and again highlights the significance of the raising of Lazarus (vv. 17–19).

The king has arrived in Jerusalem, “the world has gone after him” (vv. 12–19), even Greeks (vv. 20–21), and he announces that the hour of his glorification has arrived (v. 23), explaining that this will be the hour of his death (vv. 24–27), praying for the Father to be glorified (vv. 28–30), and explaining that this means judgment on the world and the drawing of all men to himself (vv. 31–33).

Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph to take the condemnation of his people on himself. In doing so he dethrones Satan, casts him out, and brings judgment on the world.

Section Outline

- VI.A.2. The King Comes for Judgment (12:12–33)
 - a. Thy King Cometh Gentle (12:12–19)
 - b. The Judgment of This World (12:20–33)

Comment

12:12–19 *Thy King Cometh Gentle.* The day after Mary anointed Jesus for his burial (12:1–8), the crowd that had gathered for Passover and debated whether Jesus would come to the feast (11:56) hears the news that Jesus will come to Jerusalem (12:12). They gather palm branches to wave as they welcome him. Palm branches

are mentioned only in conjunction with the Feast of Tabernacles in the OT (Lev. 23:40), but the purification of the temple in 164 BC was celebrated “in the manner of the Feast of Booths” (2 *Macc.* 10:5–7). Later, having again cleansed Jerusalem in 142 BC, Simon Maccabeus’s entrance into the city was celebrated with palm branches (1 *Macc.* 13:49–51).

The crowd in John 12 is waving palm branches because they seek the fulfillment of the scene depicted in the passage they quote, Psalm 118:25–26. There the conquering king of Israel is welcomed into the city by a crowd shouting hosanna (“Save us, we pray”), blessing him because he comes in the name of Yahweh.

How long had Israel yearned for the promised Redeemer? Adam and Eve were told of the seed of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15). Noah’s father named him in a manner showing he was looking for a rollback of the curse of painful toil (Gen. 5:29; cf. 3:17–19). Abraham was told that kings would come from him (Gen. 17:6). Moses recorded the oracle of Balaam concerning the scepter and the star (Num. 24:17). David was promised that his seed would sit on the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:1–14). The line of Davidic kings on the throne ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, yet at the return from exile there were hopes for a scion of David. God’s people had been waiting for millennia for this moment.

The crowd in John 12 is attracted to Jesus partly because of the raising of Lazarus (v. 9). They understand what Jesus can do, and they rightly apply Psalm 118:25–26 to him (John 12:13). Jesus also understands the situation, understands what the crowd is doing, and understands the OT. He deliberately enacts the fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9–10 in John 12:14–15. His intentionality can be seen as John reports that, “Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it” (v. 14).

The disciples did not fully understand what was happening. They believed Jesus was the Messiah. They believed he was the king from David’s line. They believed those OT texts were about him. They did not understand what was happening, however, because they did not know how Jesus would be “glorified,” that is, crucified (cf. 12:23–24, 27–28; 13:31–32; 17:1).

Notice that John asserts here in 12:16 that Psalm 118:25–26 and Zechariah 9:9–10 were “written about him”—that is, about Jesus—and that these things were “done to him,” that is, the fulfillments were enacted during Jesus’ Passion Week. Any Christian reading of the OT has to account for John’s statement that such passages from the OT were “written about him” (John 12:16). An apostle of Jesus, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is teaching followers of Jesus how to understand the OT.

John’s statement in verse 16 that these OT texts were written about Jesus is in keeping with Philip’s statement that Jesus was the one “of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote” (1:45) and with Jesus’ assertions that the Scriptures bear witness about him (5:39) and that Moses wrote of him (5:46). Understanding how these texts are about Jesus requires knowing how Jesus will be glorified, and it is significant that these references to Jesus’ being “glorified” use the same term

found in the Greek translation of Isaiah 52:13 to describe the servant's being lifted up and "glorified." Jesus will be glorified by his crucifixion and resurrection, and, apart from those events, his disciples cannot understand the fulfillment of the OT. Nor can anyone else.

John narrates how the crowd that saw Lazarus raised continued to testify to Jesus (John 12:17–18) and how the Pharisees were again prompted to act in response to the growing popularity of Jesus (v. 19). John prefaces his depiction of "some Greeks" seeking Jesus (v. 20) with the Pharisees' lament, "The world has gone after him" (v. 19; cf. also v. 32).

12:20–33 *The Judgment of This World.* In a scene reminiscent of the interactions between Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael in 1:40–49, some Greeks seek Jesus through Philip, who tells Andrew, and together Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. The Pharisees referenced the world's going after Jesus in 12:19, and now apparently non-Jewish Greeks come to Jesus in verse 20.

In verse 14, Jesus found a donkey in order to fulfill Zechariah 9:9–10, and it does not seem he would have done so if the awaited hour were not at hand. Jesus knew Mary was anointing him for burial (John 12:7) and knew he was entering Jerusalem in provocative fashion (v. 14). So when Philip and Andrew tell him of the Greeks' seeking him (v. 22), Jesus announces that the hour has come for him to be glorified (v. 23).

As Jesus continues to speak, the way in which he will be glorified comes into focus: he describes a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying (v. 24); he says his soul is troubled (v. 27); and he speaks of himself being "lifted up" (v. 32). John explains in verse 33, "He said this to show [lit., "signifying"] by what kind of death he was going to die." All of this means that Jesus will be glorified through his death on the cross.

How does the crucifixion of Jesus glorify him? In verse 24 he likens his death and resurrection and its results to a grain of wheat falling to the earth and dying, that it might bear fruit. If the grain of wheat does not die, no fruit comes. If Jesus does not die, no one will be saved. But if the grain of wheat dies, fruit results. The death of Jesus will result in salvation for the world.

As Jesus continues in verse 25, he makes plain the futility of a selfish approach to life: the one who loves his life loses it. When Jesus speaks of hating life in this world, he does not mean hating the goodness of God enjoyed in this world. After all, Jesus loved Lazarus, wept over his death, and restored him to life in this world (11:3, 33–36, 43–44). Jesus received Mary's extravagant gift when she anointed him with pure nard (12:1–8). If Jesus does not mean that we should hate God's goodness in this world, what does he mean?

We must understand the last phrase in the statement, "Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (v. 25). The word "keep" carries connotations of possessing or retaining eternal life, as though we must hate life in this world if we want to *have* eternal life in the next. The Greek word used here, however, is

less about keeping in the sense of *having* or *retaining* and more about keeping in the sense of *protecting* or *guarding*. The one who loses his life because he loves his life is the one who lives as though life in this world is ultimate and therefore is to be protected, retained, and maximized as one's fundamental purpose. By contrast, the one who guards himself for eternal life by hating his life in this world is the one who sees his life in this world as being like a grain of wheat that has to fall into the ground and die so that it can bear fruit in the resurrection.

Guarding oneself for eternal life, therefore, means protecting oneself against the temptation to think and live as though this life is all there is. If we think this life is all there is, we will not want to lay down our life for other people. When Jesus speaks of the need of those who would serve him to follow him (v. 26), he means that, just as he will be a grain of wheat that dies to bear fruit (vv. 23–24), so must his followers be (vv. 25–26). We do not lay down our lives in a fatalistic way, as though our death was the end of all experience. We lay down our lives because we are guarding them for eternal life.

Jesus continues in this vein when he speaks in verse 26 of how those who would serve him must follow him. Jesus lives to die because he dies to live. He is guarding his own life for eternal life and is thereby opening the way to eternal life for others. Living to die and dying to live ensures that we are following Jesus and ensures that we will be where Jesus is because we are serving him. The Father will honor those who serve Jesus (v. 26).

No one should be glib about how easy it is to lay down one's life. It troubled even the soul of Jesus, as we see from his first words in verse 27. Jesus explains that he will not seek the Father's deliverance from the hour of his death—and the excruciating pain it will involve—on behalf of others, for his very *purpose* in life was to arrive at that hour and be slain for others.

Because Jesus knows why he has come, he prays as he faces death for the Father to glorify his own name (v. 28). He does not pray to be delivered from making the sacrifice. Rather, he prays that the Father would be glorified in the way that Jesus makes his sacrifice, in the way he conducts himself, in the way he endures.

The Father answers the prayer of Jesus in verse 28, asserting that he has glorified his name, and will do so again. John records the crowd's varied response to the voice of the Father (v. 29), and then presents Jesus' explanation that the audible sound was for the benefit of the crowd, not for him (v. 30). This implies that Jesus knew what the Father's reply would be (cf. 11:41–42).

Among the reasons why life in this world is not to be loved as an end in itself (12:25) are the facts that this world is broken because of sin and that dominion over the world has been usurped by Satan. Jesus speaks to this in verse 31 when he says that, at his cross, the world will be judged. The cross of Christ judges the world as it condemns the world's sin, showing how awful sin is—so awful that nothing less than the death of the second person of the Trinity could pave the way to salvation from sin. The cross of Christ judges the world because it exposes the selfishness of the world, showing how the world was made to be a place where

people unselfishly lay down their own desires for the benefit of others. The cross of Christ also judges the world because it condemns worldly ways and brings an end to Satan's dominion over the world, showing that Satan's usurpation and rebellion will not succeed against the Almighty.

Jesus articulates this when he asserts that the ruler of this world will be cast out (v. 31). Jesus unseats the usurper by showing that he is the one who will give himself for others, exposing and condemning the selfishness of Satan, breaking his fierce power, and piercing the darkness with the light of his self-giving love.

The Greeks came to Jesus in verses 20–22, and Jesus responded by declaring the hour had come for him to be glorified (v. 23), using a term from the Greek translation of Isaiah 52:13. Now Jesus uses another term from the Greek translation of Isaiah 52:13 when he speaks in John 12:32 of his being “lifted up,” going on to say that when he is lifted up, all men will be drawn to him. The background to the promise that all men will be drawn when Jesus is lifted up is also found in the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah 5:26 prophesies, “He will raise a signal for nations far away, and whistle for them from the ends of the earth.” Isaiah 11:10 declares, “In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious,” and the next verse asserts, “In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains” (Isa. 11:11).

The Lord extended his hand the first time at the exodus to redeem Israel. The second time he extended his hand was at the new exodus, when Christ the Lamb of God died in a new and better passing-over of death so that his blood could cover his people, sheltering them from the avenger. The lifting up of Jesus at his crucifixion signals him as the prophesied root of Jesse, the sign and signal for the nations to inquire of him.

Response

What kind of king entered Jerusalem in triumph? Not the kind of king who would take from his people to enrich himself, use his people to protect himself, deploy his people to defend himself, or neglect his people to entertain himself. No, the kind of king who entered Jerusalem in triumph is the kind who makes himself poor so that his people can be rich, puts himself between his people and the danger they face, defends his people at the cost of his own life, and concerns himself always with the needs of his people.

For what do we live? John Gardner writes about novelists, “Every true apprentice writer has, however he may try to keep it secret even from himself, only one major goal: glory.”⁴¹ Whatever else we may be living for, let us consider the exhilaration of living for the honor that the Father will bestow on those who serve Jesus (John 12:26). Considering our self-interest in this way is different from being selfish. To be selfish is to live for this life only. To consider our true self-interest is to

41 John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers* (New York: Random House, 1984), 200.

recognize that the Father will honor those who lay down their lives for others, to see that such a life is the best and most honorable kind of life we could possibly live, and to lay down our life in this world in order to guard it for life in the next. May we live for the Father to honor us.

JOHN 12:34–50

³⁴ So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵ So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. ³⁷ Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, ³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
lest they see with their eyes,
and understand with their heart, and turn,
and I would heal them.”

⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

⁴² Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

⁴⁴ And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. ⁴⁷ If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸ The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”

Section Overview: That the Word Might Be Fulfilled

Jesus announced in John 12:23 that his hour had come. What he says here at the end of chapter 12 constitutes his final public appearance and words before the cross. He will speak to his disciples in chapters 13–16 and to the Father in chapter 17 and will then be arrested and tried in chapter 18, crucified in chapter 19, and raised from the dead in chapter 20 before a final private meeting with his disciples in chapter 21.

Jesus spoke of the grain of wheat in 12:24, then of how those who would serve him must lose their lives in order to guard their lives for eternal life (vv. 25–26). He called on the Father to glorify his name—with the Father answering from heaven in verses 27–28. Jesus then responded to the crowd’s wonder (vv. 29–30) before announcing judgment on Satan (v. 31) and asserting that he would draw all people to himself by being crucified (vv. 32–33).

In response to the crowd’s queries, Jesus urges them to believe in and obey him while they have opportunity (vv. 34–36). John provides a Scriptural explanation of their unbelief (vv. 37–43), and Jesus makes one last public statement about why he came (vv. 44–50).

Section Outline

- VI.A.3. That the Word Might Be Fulfilled (12:34–50)
 - a. While You Have the Light (12:34–36)
 - b. Isaiah Saw His Glory (12:37–43)
 - c. To Deliver from Darkness (12:44–50)

Comment

12:34–36 *While You Have the Light.* In light of what Jesus has said in verses 23–32, the crowd responds with theological questions (v. 34). They start with the assertion that the OT, which they designate with the term “Law,” tells them that “the Christ remains forever.” The language used in this phrase is very similar to the Greek translation of Psalm 89:36, and the statements in Psalm 89 are based on promises made to David in 2 Samuel 7.

That the crowd raises this point shows they understand Jesus’ claims to be the Christ. The question they pose also shows that they understand what he has said about being “glorified” (John 12:23) and “lifted up” (v. 32)—they know he means he will be killed. The OT does teach that the seed of David “shall endure forever” (Ps. 89:35–36; 2 Sam. 7:13), so it is natural for them to seek more information concerning how Jesus, if he is the Christ, can say he is going to die.

Their final question in John 12:34 indicates the crowd may seek some resolution to the mystery of the fact that Jesus referred to himself as “the Son of Man” in verse 23. The crowd does not understand that Jesus will be crucified and then raised to endure forever, and the disciples do not understand it either (cf. 2:22; 12:16; 20:9). John indicates that the glorification and resurrection of Jesus later enabled the disciples to understand (2:22; 12:16; 20:9), so the crowd is probably

asking a valid question whose answer they cannot yet fully comprehend. Rather than answering their question or entering into a theological discussion, however, Jesus tells them that they have enough information to repent and believe, and that they should do so.

Jesus is the light (cf. 8:12; 9:5), and he urges the crowd to recognize that he will be with them only “a little while longer,” and so they should walk while they have the light (12:35). That is, they should turn from their sin and unbelief and trust him before he is taken from them; and when he warns, “lest darkness overtake you” (v. 35), Jesus uses the same terms that John employed in 1:5: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” The one who walks in the light of Jesus is not overcome by darkness, because the darkness cannot overcome Jesus, but, “The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going” (12:35).

Rather than explaining all of the mysteries the crowd wants to understand, Jesus warns them that the time is short. He has declared, “The light is among you for a little while longer” (v. 35), and then has referenced the opportunity to repent “while you have the light” (v. 35) and believe “while you have the light” (v. 36a). Then John states, “When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them” (v. 36b). This is the crowd’s last chance. The light is fading; night is falling; darkness spreads. The crowd has light for a few more moments, and while they have it, Jesus urges, “Believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (v. 36). By believing in the light, they will belong to the light and thereby be sons of light. If they trust Jesus, the light of Jesus will enter them, never to leave, and the darkness will not overcome them (v. 35) because it cannot overcome Jesus (1:5).

12:37–43 *Isaiah Saw His Glory.* Given all that Jesus did — feed the hungry, heal the sick, walk on water, raise the dead — how could he be rejected? John explains in 12:37–43 that Jesus was rejected in fulfillment of Scripture.

In spite of all that Jesus did, the crowd did not believe in him (v. 37), in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:1. In the quotation from Isaiah, the first question reflects the way the prophet was rejected in his day. The people did not embrace his message or obey his call to repent and believe. The second question references the way that the Lord brought Israel from Egypt “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm” (Ps. 136:12; cf. Ex. 6:6). The mention of the revelation of the Lord’s arm in Isaiah 53:1 ties the suffering servant discussed in the rest of Isaiah 53 to the new exodus that Isaiah heralded to his contemporaries. The suffering servant did indeed bring about the new exodus, as the Lamb of God took away the sins of the world.

Having referenced Isaiah 53:1, John says of the crowd, “Therefore they could not believe” (John 12:39). Adding support to this conclusion, John prefaces a quotation of Isaiah 6:10 with the words, “For again Isaiah said” (John 12:39). In Isaiah 6 the prophet relates his vision of the enthroned King of Israel, the Lord himself, with his robe filling the temple, surrounded by seraphim proclaiming him to be thrice holy (Isa. 6:1–8). The Lord then commissioned Isaiah to perform the tasks that John quotes in John 12:40 (Isa. 6:9–10), and when Isaiah asked how long

such tasks were to continue, he was told they would continue until the exile, after which there would be a seed that would sprout from the chopped-down trunk of the tree of Israel (Isa. 6:11–13; cf. 11:1; 53:2).

Having quoted these two passages—Isaiah 53:1 and 6:10—John makes a stunning assertion: “Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him” (John 12:41). John says that Isaiah saw Jesus when he saw both the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 and the enthroned and exalted king of Isaiah 6, and John says that Isaiah wrote of Jesus in these two chapters.⁴² For John, the OT is about Jesus (cf. John 12:16).

It is not difficult to establish that Isaiah did indeed envision a king from David’s line who would be closely identified with Yahweh, and through whom Yahweh would accomplish the hoped-for new exodus that would bring about the return from exile (cf. Isa. 9:6; 11:1–16). Nor is it difficult to establish that Isaiah conceived of that Davidic future king’s bringing about the new exodus through his own personal suffering, according to the pattern of the suffering of Joseph, Moses, and David, after which he would be exalted and would bring deliverance.⁴³

John’s interpretation of Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6, therefore, and his application of these passages to the rejection of Jesus, is perfectly in keeping with Isaiah’s intention. Jesus is the king from David’s line through whose suffering and exaltation God has accomplished the new exodus and initiated the return from exile, and thereby the arm of the Lord has been revealed in Jesus (Isa. 53:1), who has set in motion the redemption that will culminate in the removal of the hardening described in Isaiah 6 (cf. Rom. 11:25–32). Yet in spite of all he did, the people did not believe in Jesus. Remarkably, even their unbelief was a part of OT fulfillment.

John narrates a further tragic reality in 12:42–43. Jesus convinced many, even from the authorities, with the result that they believed in him, but they were unwilling to confess because they feared the Pharisees. Confession in this context must refer to a public indication that one believes Jesus to be the Christ and a willingness to be persecuted along with him. We see that persecution in the statement in verse 42 of what those who did not confess avoided—they avoided expulsion from the synagogue (cf. 9:22).

Those who refused to confess were confronted with a choice: confess Jesus or be accepted in the synagogue, and they chose to be accepted in the synagogue. They were false to themselves, false to Jesus, false to those in the synagogue whose favor they kept, and false to the truth.

John explains the wretched motivation for their choice in 12:43: they loved the glory they received from human beings more than the glory of God. They preferred their reputation among people to being right with God and enjoying his munificence. They chose the temporary rather than the eternal, the paltry instead of the substantial, the unworthy instead of the worthy, folly instead of wisdom,

⁴² It is worth noting, too, that John believed Isaiah to be the *seer* and *speaker* in both passages. That is to say, as far as John son of Zebedee was concerned, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah of Jerusalem wrote the whole of the book of Isaiah.

⁴³ See Hamilton, “Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah?”

sickness rather than health, failures instead of the Almighty, sinners instead of the holy, the fickle instead of the faithful, the squalid in favor of the splendid, and death rather than life.

12:44–50 *To Deliver from Darkness.* John related at the end of verse 36 that Jesus had hidden himself, but apparently Jesus surfaced briefly to make one final statement (vv. 44–50). As he did in 5:19–30, Jesus asserts his unity with the Father: to believe Jesus is not merely to believe him but is to believe the Father as well, for, as Jesus explained in 5:19–30, he does only what the Father has commissioned him to do.

In 12:45 Jesus articulates a truth he will restate to Philip (14:9), asserting that the one who sees him sees the Father. Those who see Jesus need no imagination or speculation of what it would be to see the unseeable God. Here again the statements Jesus makes about himself provide the foundation for things John said about Jesus in the prologue to his Gospel (1:1–2, 18), and here too is the foundation for Paul's description of Jesus as "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and the author of Hebrews's statement that Jesus is "the exact imprint of [God's] nature" (Heb. 1:3).

A shroud of darkness fell over humanity and all creation when Adam sinned and Satan usurped dominion. Jesus came as light to pierce the darkness, with the result that all who believe in him are freed from having to remain in darkness (John 12:46; cf. 1:4–5, 9; 3:19–21; 8:12).

Jesus had stated the purpose of his incarnation in 3:17: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him," and he reasserts that reality in 12:47. It was his purpose to come not as judge but as Savior. Those who hear his words but do not keep them (v. 47) will have his word as their judge "on the last day" (v. 48). Jesus has asserted that he will execute judgment at the resurrection (5:27–29), and those who reject him will have his word judge them at the resurrection on the last day (12:48). As in chapter 5, in 12:49 Jesus declares that his message comes from the Father. The Father sent Jesus to speak words of spirit and life (6:63), so when the Father commanded Jesus to speak (12:49), the commandment was eternal life (v. 50). He speaks as instructed by the Father.

Response

In this final public statement, Jesus warns those who hear him that the time is short, so they should repent and believe (12:34–36). John explains that their unbelief fulfilled Scripture (vv. 37–43). And Jesus closes out his public teaching in John's Gospel by asserting again that, in everything he says and does, he is one with the Father (vv. 44–50; cf. 10:30).

Jesus urges people to believe while they have the light (12:36). The people alive when Jesus first spoke those words had an opportunity to believe, just as everyone exposed to these words has the opportunity to believe. The time is short. The

“while” is not long and will not last forever. We must believe, walk in the light, and thereby escape the darkness.

Verse 43 describes some who refused to confess Jesus because they loved the glory of man more than the glory of God. If we love the empty glory we stand to gain from worldly people for worldly reasons, we cannot have the glory that comes from God. But if we love God’s glory, we will consider the world’s glory to be rubbish.

JOHN 13:1–20

13 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him, ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” ⁷Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” ⁸Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” ⁹Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet,¹ but is completely clean. And you² are clean, but not every one of you.” ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

¹²When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you?” ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant³ is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. ¹⁸I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled,⁴ ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ ¹⁹I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. ²⁰Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”

¹ Some manuscripts omit *except for his feet* ² The Greek words for *you* in this verse are plural

³ Or *bondservant*, or *slave* (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see ESV Preface)

⁴ Greek *But in order that the Scripture may be fulfilled*

Section Overview: The Footwasher

Jesus gives his disciples a preview of the cleansing he will accomplish for them on the cross as he washes their feet (John 13:1–11). He then calls his disciples to follow the example he has set by this humble act of service: as he has served them, so they are to serve one another (vv. 12–17). Jesus warns that one of his disciples will betray him, predicting this betrayal in order to strengthen the disciples' faith in him when he is indeed betrayed (vv. 18–19). He concludes by declaring that whoever receives his apostles receives him, and whoever receives him receives the Father (v. 20).

Section Outline

VI.B. The Footwasher, the Way, the Vine, and the Giver of the Spirit
(13:1–16:33)

1. The Footwasher (13:1–20)
 - a. Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet (13:1–11)
 - b. Jesus Sets the Example (13:12–17)
 - c. Scripture Will Be Fulfilled (13:18–20)

Comment

13:1–11 *Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet.* Everything John writes in 13:1–3 is calculated to make verses 4–5 shocking. John first tallies up the reasons why Jesus should be served (vv. 1–3) before showing Jesus instead humbling himself and serving those who should have served him (vv. 4–5). To our great surprise, the highest makes himself the lowest.

John piles up indications of the significance and goodness of Jesus in verse 1. Passover is greatly significant across the OT, and at earlier Passovers in John's Gospel Jesus cleansed the temple (2:13–22) and fed the multitudes (6:1–71). John has now brought his audience to the climactic Passover, the night on which Jesus will be betrayed, and this scene takes place before the meal that very night. Further, John has spoken of the heavenly origin and destination of Jesus, and he does so again in 13:1 when he specifies that the time has come for Jesus to leave the world and go to the Father. And to all these indicators of Jesus' significance, John adds that Jesus has loved his people in the world and will now love them to the end.

In verse 2 John magnifies the goodness of Jesus by way of contrast. The cosmic spiritual significance of these events is brought out by John's reference to the Devil's putting it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. This note allows John to juxtapose his description of the best man who has ever lived (v. 1) with a description of the most evil instigator of the most treacherous act ever committed (v. 2). This sets the beauty of Christ in relief against the ugliness of evil.

John adds in verse 3 that Jesus was fully aware that the Father had "given all things into his hands": Jesus is the supreme ruler of all creation. He is the High

King of heaven and earth, the commander of the heavenly hosts, the holder of winds, calmer of storms, judge of the living and the dead, sovereign Lord of land and sea. All things are in his hands. At the end of verse 3, John restates the heavenly origin and destination of Jesus as he mentions that Jesus came from and was returning to God.

We have clear expectations for people who matter as much as Jesus, and those expectations do not include setting their hands to menial acts usually left to the lowest of servants. Against everything we expect, Jesus enacts an epitome of his whole life in verses 4–5. Just as Jesus laid aside his glory and took the form of a servant when he set out to obey unto death (cf. Phil. 2:5–11), so here Jesus laid aside his ordinary clothing, girded himself with a towel, and took up a washbasin. He then began to wash the feet of those who followed him. This was a world where air conditioning had not been invented, roads were not paved with concrete or asphalt, and shoes were not closed-toed. These were the smelly, dirty, grimy feet of men who walked everywhere they went, on roads covered in dust and animal waste.

In the interaction between Jesus and Peter in John 13:6–11, John shows that Jesus is concerned with something deeper than dirty feet. Jesus meets no objection until he reaches Peter, who finds it in himself to ask how Jesus could wash his feet (v. 6). Jesus hints at the symbolic significance of what he is doing as he tells Peter that, even though he does not understand now, he will later (v. 7), making the footwashing like other things the disciples could not understand until after the cross and resurrection.

Appalled that his Messiah, the king from David's line, the best person he has ever known, would stoop to such a task, Peter asserts that he will never permit it (v. 8). At this point Peter is like Nicodemus, who thought Jesus was speaking of physical birth in chapter 3. Peter is like those in chapter 6, who thought Jesus was demanding that people literally eat his flesh and drink his blood. Peter does not understand because he is focused on the physical reality of the footwashing, failing to grasp its spiritual or symbolic significance. When Jesus replies that, if Peter will not be washed by him, Peter will have no part with him, Jesus communicates that the footwashing is the shadow, while the cleansing Jesus will accomplish on the cross is the substance.

Peter impulsively asserts that he wants his whole body washed by Jesus, not just his feet (13:9). Jesus replies that what Peter requests is unnecessary because the disciples are clean, with one exception (v. 10). John then explains that Jesus knew Judas would betray him, and as a result Jesus acknowledged that not every person whose feet he washed was clean (v. 11).

This connection between uncleanness and the abiding guilt Judas carries for his unrepentant sin further establishes the symbolic value of the footwashing. By washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus has given an enacted preview of what he will do for his people when he makes them clean through his death on the cross. Jesus, the greatest, will do for the world what it does not deserve. If anyone does

not receive the cleansing Jesus provides, he has no part with Jesus. What Jesus does for his disciples will cleanse them completely.

13:12–17 *Jesus Sets the Example.* Having washed his disciples' feet in order to symbolize the way he will cleanse them by his death on the cross, Jesus goes on to instruct them that they are to serve one another as he has served them. This call is akin to his command to take up the cross and follow him (Matt. 16:24). Thus instructed by Jesus, the apostles will go on routinely to use the atoning death of Jesus as the pattern of Christian behavior (e.g., Phil. 2:5–11; 1 Pet. 2:21–25). Only the death of Jesus has atoning, cleansing power, but those who follow Jesus are to give their lives in service to others as he did. Only Jesus is the King who washes the feet of his disciples, but his disciples are to serve as he did.

Jesus begins to make this point as he dons his outer garments and returns to his place, asking the disciples if they understand what he has done (John 13:12). He goes on to acknowledge his role as their teacher and Lord (v. 13) before attacking pride and self-importance with his contention that if he as teacher and Lord has served them, then they ought to serve each other (v. 14). The argument is simple: if Jesus is not too important to serve them, then they are not too important to serve one another. Jesus does not think it too much to expect them to imitate him, as he makes plain that his conduct sets an example for the disciples to follow (v. 15).

The relative importance of the disciples as those sent from Jesus—his own apostles—does not exempt them from service, since Jesus himself, the master, teacher, and sender, has also served. Servants are not greater than their masters, messengers are not greater than those who send them, and the disciples are not greater than Jesus (v. 16). Those who both know and do what Jesus has taught will be blessed (v. 17).

With this instruction, Jesus has not established footwashing as a sacrament. Sacraments are means of grace Jesus instituted for the disciples to emulate and for the church to do as well. Jesus instituted baptism and the Lord's Supper, and in the writings that constitute the rest of the NT, the apostles instruct the churches to continue baptizing and partaking of the Lord's Supper. The apostles never instruct the churches to continue the practice of footwashing, though they do instruct the churches to be servant-hearted, indicating that what Jesus meant was for his followers to serve one another in all ways necessary. Footwashing is a symbolic act of service reflecting a heart willing to serve others according to their needs. That is what the action means when Jesus performs it and when Paul refers to it (1 Tim. 5:10).

13:18–20 *Scripture Will Be Fulfilled.* Having washed the feet of the disciples (13:1–11) and called them to follow his example (vv. 12–17), Jesus announces in verse 18 that the one who was not clean (vv. 10–11) would nevertheless do his part to fulfill Scripture. Just as Jesus had said that not all of them were clean (v. 10), now he says that he does not speak of all of them (v. 18). This seems to indicate that

Judas is excluded from what Jesus has said about the blessing of doing as Jesus has instructed (vv. 12–17). The others will follow the example of Jesus and be blessed, but Judas will not do so.

The statement Jesus makes in verse 18 about knowing those whom he has chosen could be taken in two ways. On the one hand, Jesus has chosen those who will in fact keep his word, bear fruit (15:16), and not be lost (17:12). On the other hand, Jesus did choose to include Judas among the Twelve, and Jesus did so knowing that Judas was “the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (17:12). So he may mean that he knows what Judas will do.

Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9, and that one verse is meant to evoke the wider context of the psalm, which in turn evokes a wider theme across not only the Psalter but also the whole OT. This theme is the pattern of the righteous sufferer, the man who does what is right but suffers unjustly at the hands of the wicked until the Lord vindicates him. In Psalm 41 David presents himself as the righteous sufferer, like Joseph and Moses and others before him, and Jesus fulfills the pattern of this theme when Judas betrays him.

Jesus explains that he has predicted this to the disciples in order to increase their confidence and faith in him (John 13:19; cf. Isa. 48:5). He will make similar predictions in John 14:29 and 16:4, bolstering their faith in this final night with them before his death. Here in 13:19 Jesus says that when what he has described takes place, his disciples will “believe that I Am” (AT). This statement is very similar to what Jesus told the Jews in 8:24: “Unless you believe that I Am, you will die in your sins” (AT; cf. 8:28, 58). Jesus is in the process of fulfilling Scripture, and he tells his disciples about it before he does so—not only so that they will trust him, but also so that they will believe he is to be identified with the one who declared his name to be “I AM” (Ex. 3:14).

In keeping with his identity with the Father, Jesus again says that the one who receives him receives the one who sent him (John 13:20; cf. 12:44). Furthermore, those who reject the followers of Jesus also reject Jesus himself. Jesus hereby forges a connection between himself and his disciples parallel to the connection between himself and his Father: the one who receives the one Jesus sends receives Jesus, just as the one who receives Jesus receives the one who sent him—the Father.

Response

We who live in the modern world would be loath to leave our luxuries and return to the standard of life of the ancient world. And yet Jesus left heavenly luxury for premodern squalor. Jesus left the aroma of heaven for the stench of unwashed masses, loving his people enough to take their feet into his own hands and wash them clean.

The one who could declare himself to be “I Am” could also lay aside his outer clothing, gird himself with a cloth, fill a washbasin with water, and wash the feet of his disciples. The lamb of God, maker of wine from water, healer of the lame, feeder of the sick, walker on water, source of living water, light of the world, giver

of sight to the blind, good shepherd, raiser of the dead, rider of a donkey—he is also a footwasher. He calls us to follow him. He is worthy. We must heed his call.

What Jesus does in washing the feet of his disciples has cosmic, pervasive significance. It means that *everyone* who follows Jesus is to be a servant. The most exalted and influential Christians, those who work the levers of power, know all the inner stories, have all the powerful friends, and receive the choicest opportunities, are to follow the footwasher in the way they exercise influence and do ministry. Just as the lofty are called to serve in all their loftiness, so also the most menial and lowly servant has his dusty duties dignified by the humility of the Master. The fact that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples means that those who wipe down tables and sweep floors and change diapers and clean toilets for the church are engaging in the exalted lowliness of Christlike service.

JOHN 13:21–38

²¹ After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side,¹ ²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus² of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

³⁶ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.” ³⁷ Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸ Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.”

¹ Greek *in the bosom of Jesus* ² Greek lacks *Jesus*

Section Overview: Treachery, Love, and Denial

Having washed the disciples' feet and warned that he would be betrayed (John 13:1–20), Jesus reveals the identity of the traitor to Peter and the beloved disciple (vv. 21–30). He then speaks of how he and the Father will be glorified and articulates a “new commandment” (vv. 31–35). Peter presses the issue of where Jesus is going, and when Jesus says Peter cannot follow, Peter insists on his devotion, in response to which Jesus prophesies Peter's looming threefold denial of Jesus (vv. 36–38).

Section Outline

VI.B.2. Treachery, Love, and Denial (13:21–38)

- a. The Traitor (13:21–30)
- b. The Commandment (13:31–35)
- c. The Denials (13:36–38)

Comment

13:21–30 *The Traitor.* Jesus has just told his disciples that the pattern of the righteous sufferer will be fulfilled when the one who breaks bread with him lifts his heel against him (13:18–20), and he quoted Psalm 41:9 in John 13:18 as an umbrella statement to evoke the broader theme of the righteous sufferer found in the Psalms and the rest of the OT. Jesus knows what is about to happen to him, and he knows that one in his intimate circle will betray him. Should we expect Jesus to be stoical about his fate? Should we expect him to be dispassionate about the traitor, or perhaps even angry or vindictive toward him?

John writes that, having spoken of the looming treachery, “Jesus was troubled in his spirit” (13:21). The term “troubled” will also appear in 14:1 (cf. 11:33; 12:27; 14:27) when Jesus says to his disciples, “Let not your hearts be troubled,” urging them toward trust in spite of the fact that he has just predicted Peter's denials (13:36–38). As in 14:1, the reference to being “troubled” comes in regard to the events that Jesus discloses are about to take place, like threatening storm clouds gathering to burst.

Jesus appears to be troubled for the same reasons he wept over Lazarus (11:33). Jesus loved Lazarus, and he was not detached or unengaged from the sorrow resulting from the death of his friend. Likewise here Jesus is fully engaged in the flow of events. He is not attempting to stay above the fray, as though he could not be bothered with the petty concerns of mere mortals. We can safely say, too, that in spite of what Jesus knows Judas will do, Jesus loves Judas. Both the evil of treachery—the tragic choice of one with whom he has spent considerable time—and the unpleasant experiences awaiting him trouble Jesus.

In 13:21b Jesus says explicitly what he had hinted at in verses 18–20, that one of his disciples would betray him. Those who are loyal and faithful will always be surprised when someone on the inside breaks faith, betrays trust, and changes loyalties: this is why the disciples respond as they do in verse 22. The disciples are

right to be shocked. Jesus is no doubt the best friend each of them has ever had. He is their justly admired leader, and this is cruel and horrific treachery. Given what they believe about Jesus, this is to them a betrayal of the nation, a betrayal of the hope of the Scriptures, a betrayal of their king, a betrayal of God.

At this point John gives us insight into a more intimate inner circle around Jesus, a circle that includes only Peter, James, and John. The arguments for John, son of Zebedee, being the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (v. 23) are very strong. Jesus named twelve as disciples. Jesus is likely with only the Twelve at the Last Supper, and evidence from other Gospels shows that Peter, James, and John enjoyed unique intimacy with Jesus (cf. Mark 5:37; 9:2). In John’s Gospel we see a close relationship between Jesus, Peter, and the beloved disciple here at the Last Supper (13:23–26), when Peter and the beloved disciple go to the tomb (20:2–8), and when Jesus appears to them after his resurrection (21:20–23).

The note in 13:23 that the beloved disciple “was reclining at table at Jesus’ side” employs an expression very similar to the statement in 1:18 that Jesus was “at the Father’s side.” That John uses an expression in 13:23 so similar to the one in 1:18 advances the message of what Jesus said in 13:20: “Whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” As Jesus relates to the Father, so the disciples relate to Jesus: the Father sends Jesus, who was at his side, and Jesus sends the disciples, one of whom was at his side. To receive the disciples is to receive Jesus, and to receive Jesus is to receive the Father. This establishes Jesus as the mediator between himself and the disciples, and the disciples in turn mediate the knowledge of Jesus to the world through their testimony. The only faith authorized by Jesus is the one led by the men he sent.

Once Jesus makes his startling announcement that one of his disciples would betray him (v. 21), Peter motions to the beloved disciple, who asks Jesus the identity of the traitor (vv. 23–25). This is a bold question, a request for sensitive, inside information. That Peter and the beloved disciple feel at liberty to ask such a question shows how close they feel to Jesus, and that Jesus answers the question shows his willingness to share privately with them.

Jesus answers the question in verse 26 in a way that enacts the fulfillment of his quotation of Psalm 41:9 in John 13:18. In Psalm 41:9 David speaks of how he was betrayed by one who shared his bread. Jesus quotes the passage as an emblematic statement of the way he will fulfill the pattern of the righteous sufferer, and then he creates the historical correspondence by sharing bread with Judas in John 13:26b. This is obviously not the first time Jesus and Judas have shared bread, but the quotation of Psalm 41:9 in John 13:18, followed closely by Jesus’ enacting the sharing of bread, intensifies the sense of fulfillment.

John revealed in 13:2 that the Devil had put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. In verse 27 John explains that after Judas took the morsel, Satan entered him. Apparently because Satan has entered Judas, Jesus can say as Judas approaches in 14:30, “The ruler of this world is coming.”

Having given Judas the morsel, Jesus instructs Judas to do what he has to do quickly (13:27), and John relates the suspicions of the disciples about the various tasks Jesus might be sending Judas to do (vv. 28–30). The speculations of the disciples are related to various things Jews did at Passover, whether in feasting itself or in giving to the poor (v. 29).

Jesus has been emphasizing that he is the “light of the world,” that the time of his ministry is the time to work while it is day, because night is coming (9:4; 12:35–36, 46). Once Judas has gone out to betray Jesus, John writes, “It was night” (13:30). “The day” is over. The time of the public ministry of Jesus has ended. The plot marches inexorably to the cross. Jesus has loved his disciples to the end by washing their feet, by staying the course that leads to crucifixion, and by loving Judas even as Judas refuses that love and repays it with an attempt to enrich himself, even if it costs Jesus his life.

13:31–35 *The Commandment.* With Judas gone, Jesus begins to speak of how he and the Father will be glorified (13:31). How can he say such things as he faces the cross? Because he knows that God works all things for good for those who love him (Rom. 8:28), and works all things for his own glory as well (Rom. 11:36). Jesus has just announced that one of the Twelve will betray him, has washed that man’s feet, and has broken bread with him. And now the man has left to join those conspiring against Jesus. Jesus knows that God is working good for those who love him, that Jesus will be glorified by these events, and that God will be glorified as well.

The “glory” in view is the cross, where Jesus will be glorified (John 13:31) in the display of his unique ability to satisfy the wrath of the Father, to bear the sin of his people, and to accomplish salvation. The Son of Man will be glorified at the cross because his infinite worth will be seen in the complete satisfaction for sin that he achieves. God will be glorified at the cross (vv. 31–32) because his unyielding justice will be upheld as he demonstrates his absolute commitment to righteousness through the punishment of sin. Simultaneously, God’s incomparable mercy will be made possible as Jesus makes propitiation for sin, and God’s matchless love will be demonstrated in his comprehensive commitment to saving his people. God does not spare Jesus, because he loves his people.

The remaining time Jesus has with his disciples will end shortly, when Judas returns with troops at his heels. Jesus knows this will take place in just “a little while,” and he tells his disciples what he has told the Jews: he is going where they cannot follow (v. 33; cf. 7:34, 36; 8:21).

On the eve of the new Passover sacrifice (the crucifixion of Jesus), the sacrifice that will accomplish the new exodus, initiate the new covenant, and open the way to the new pilgrimage to the new and better Land of Promise, Jesus announces a “new commandment” (13:34). This new commandment functions as the fulfillment of the old commandment, which could be summarized under the headings of love for God and love for neighbor. That Jesus issues a new commandment for his disciples to love one another, which John describes elsewhere as both new *and*

old (1 John 2:7–11), means that this one statement formulates the duties of those who would participate in the new covenant that Jesus initiates in his death and resurrection.

In the rest of the NT, the disciples show that this means the old covenant has been made “obsolete” (Heb. 8:13). Never in Acts or the Epistles do the apostles teach a church to celebrate the feasts of the old covenant, to circumcise their sons or new converts, to observe the sabbatical year, to keep kosher, or to engage in levirate marriage. The old covenant and the Mosaic law were a unified whole, and they have been nullified with the passing away of the Israelite theocracy and the institution of Christ’s worldwide kingdom. The righteousness of God displayed in the old covenant is likewise displayed in the new, but the stipulations and terms of the new covenant are not like the covenant God made with Israel when he brought them out of Egypt (Jer. 31:32; Hebrews 8–10).

The disciples of Jesus are to love one another as he has loved them (John 13:34), and that love is to mark them, to distinguish them as their most notable feature, so that all people recognize the Christlike love of those who follow Jesus (v. 35).

13:36–38 *The Denials.* Jesus told the disciples they could not follow him (v. 33), and so Peter wants to know where Jesus is going (v. 36). Jesus responds by stating that Peter cannot follow now but will do so later, prompting Peter’s question concerning why he cannot follow now and his assertion that he would lay down his life for Jesus (v. 37). Peter desires to show the greatest love (cf. 15:13) for Jesus. Sadly, in his weakness he will not be able to do so in the immediate future. Jesus tells Peter that he will deny him three times before the rooster crows (13:38).

Response

Are there ways we have betrayed Jesus? He has reached out to us in kindness, but have we turned away from him to join his enemies in their conspiracies to unseat him as king and have their own way?

We can repent of failing to love, and turning to Jesus means committing ourselves to loving as he loved. It means leaving whatever place of privilege and luxury we enjoy in order to serve, just as Jesus left heaven. It means a willingness to do what God’s people need to have done for them, irrespective of how lowly or menial or humiliating the need might be, just as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. It means laying down our lives for one another the way that Jesus laid down his life for us.

This kind of love compels those who teach the children at church, those who drive students to and from church, and those who clean up after fellowship meals. This kind of love compels those who listen attentively, those who know a conversation with someone else is not an opportunity to show off or exalt oneself. This kind of love compels those who pray for the things they are asked to pray for, those who give to support the ministry. This kind of love prompts nursery coordinators

to serve parents and children, nursery volunteers to show up on time, and parents to respond with gratitude and service of their own.

We must be known for our love. We must love unborn children and speak on their behalf. We must love mothers in bad situations, contemplating abortion. We must love singles who are not sure how they fit in. We must love visitors by noticing new people who seem to be alone. We must love one another.

We should not mock Peter, nor should we smugly consider ourselves superior to him. Peter had the best intentions and the best desires, but he failed to live up to them, as we so often do. Jesus will restore Peter in John 21, telling him that in the future he will have the opportunity to lay down his life for Jesus (21:18–19). Both Peter and Judas failed Jesus. Judas chose to give up. Peter failed to live up to his best intentions, but he loved Jesus. Later he got another chance and was faithful. Who is more to be loved than Jesus?

JOHN 14:1–14

14 “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God;¹ believe also in me.
²In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?² ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.”³
⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. ⁴From now on you do know him and have seen him.”
⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”
⁹Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹²“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me⁵ anything in my name, I will do it.”

¹ Or You believe in God ² Or In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you ³ Some manuscripts Where I am going you know, and the way you know ⁴ Or If you know me, you will know my Father also, or If you have known me, you will know my Father also ⁵ Some manuscripts omit me

Section Overview: The Way, the Truth, and the Life

The exchange at the end of John 13 was naturally troubling to the disciples, so in 14:1–6 Jesus commands the disciples not to be troubled, explaining that he goes to prepare a place for them, promising to come and take them to be with him, and declaring that he himself is the way, the truth, and the life. To help the disciples understand what he has said and what it means, in verses 7–11 Jesus reveals that he is the visible image of the Father, that the Father is doing his work through the words Jesus speaks, and that the disciples are to believe what he is telling them. Then, to increase their confidence in his purposes for them, in verses 12–14 Jesus explains how they will do greater works than those he has done and how he will answer their prayers in his name.

Section Outline

- VI.B.3. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:1–14)
 - a. The Way to the Father (14:1–6)
 - b. Jesus Represents the Father (14:7–11)
 - c. The Disciples Represent Jesus (14:12–14)

Comment

14:1–6 *The Way to the Father.* The flow of discussion in verses 1–6 indicates that while the admonition not to be troubled in verse 1 applies to Jesus' prediction of Peter's denials, what is mostly in view is Jesus' destination. He told the disciples they could not yet go with him (13:36), prompting Peter's plea (v. 37) that led to Jesus' prediction of the denials (v. 38). Jesus has been clear that he is going away, that night is coming (9:4; 13:30), and that at present he must go alone (13:36; cf. 7:33–34; 8:21).

John had stated in 13:1 that the hour had come for Jesus to leave the world and go to the Father. Jesus had come from the Father's side (1:18), descending from heaven (3:13), and now he will ascend to where he had been before (6:62). The disciples are troubled that they cannot go with Jesus (13:36–37), and Jesus seeks to allay their concerns in 14:1–6—not only by telling them to trust him but also by explaining to them where he is going, what he will do, and how they may rejoin him.

Jesus tells the disciples what they should and should not do: the disciples are not to be troubled but are to trust God and him (14:1; cf. 13:21; 14:27). Anxiety's antidote is active trust. As Jesus continues to speak, he tells the disciples precisely what they are to trust him to do: he will go to prepare a place for them (v. 2). The fact that Jesus mentions the Father's house indicates the heavenly temple is likely in view, of which the earthly temple was but a faint copy. The house Jesus goes to prepare is the new temple, the new Jerusalem, the new heaven and new earth. Jesus assures his disciples that there is room enough for them in the new temple, for there are many rooms in the Father's house (v. 2). Jesus is going to prepare a place for his followers there (v. 2), and the fact that he does so guarantees that he will return for them and take them to be with him (v. 3).

The disciples, then, are to trust that, even though they cannot follow Jesus at present, he is actually serving them by going away. They are to trust that Jesus is leaving them in order to go prepare a place for them. They are to trust that he will come for them and take them to be with him. Believing these points, trusting what Jesus says, will make it so that their hearts are not troubled by the fact that they cannot follow him where he is going.

Jesus had earlier likened his glorification to a grain of wheat falling to the ground and dying in order to bear much fruit (12:23–24). Jesus will be glorified at the cross (13:31–32), and part of the fruit his death will bear is the place he will prepare for his disciples by means of his death. This includes both a temporary place and an eternal place. The temporary place is the church: the death of Jesus propitiates the Father's wrath against sin, sanctifying the living stones that will be built into God's new temple, the church. After his death, Jesus will ascend to the Father's right hand, where he will reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (cf. Psalm 110; 1 Cor. 15:20–28). This prepares the eternal place: the new temple of the new Jerusalem in the new heavens and new earth.

To understand the sense in which Jesus is the *way* to the Father (John 14:6), we must bear in mind that his going to the Father includes his death as a substitute for his people (cf. 10:15, 17). Jesus tells the disciples in 14:4 that they know the way to where he is going because he has told them that the Son of Man will be lifted up (12:23, 32) so that the grain of wheat might fall to the ground and die (12:24). The way to the Father goes through the cross.

As so often in John, the words of Jesus are misunderstood and taken literally. Jesus speaks symbolically of his death as the spiritual route to the Father. In 14:5 Thomas thinks Jesus has spoken of a literal place, and Thomas asserts that he and his fellow disciples do not know where Jesus is going and thus cannot know the way. The reply of Jesus binds the context together and shows that Thomas has not grasped his spiritual meaning.

Jesus is going to the Father, and his disciples want to follow him there. Jesus is the way to the Father, and “no one comes to the Father except through [Jesus]” (v. 6) in the sense that the death of Jesus on the cross is the only avenue by which man can be reconciled to God.

The death of Jesus is the way to the Father also in the sense that all who would serve Jesus must follow him (12:26), taking up their crosses (Mark 8:34) and following in his footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21). The way to the Father is the way of humbling ourselves and serving others in the way he humbled himself, washed his disciples' feet, and then paid for their lives with his own. The way to the Father is the way of being cleansed by Jesus (John 13:8–10) and following his example (13:15–17).

Furthermore, Jesus is the truth: everything he says corresponds to reality, including these utterances. And Jesus is the life: life was in him (1:4), God granted him to have life in himself (5:26), his words are Spirit and life (6:63), and the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and live (5:28–29).

14:7–11 *Jesus Represents the Father*. Jesus has repeatedly stated that he does only what he sees the Father doing (5:19) and says only what the Father would have him say (5:30). Jesus has asserted himself to be the “I Am” (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19) and has declared that whoever sees him sees the Father (12:45). Thus he says in 14:7 that if the disciples had known him, they would have known the Father, and further, now that he has spoken this reality, they do in fact know the Father.

Here again something that Jesus has said prompts a response that is off-target, giving Jesus the opportunity to clarify. In response to what Jesus said concerning how the disciples have seen and known the Father because they have seen and know Jesus (v. 7), Philip asks him to show them the Father, saying that it would be enough for them. Is Philip asking for Jesus to show them something like what Moses experienced at the burning bush or at Mount Sinai?

God has been pleased to reveal himself in his Son, Jesus Christ. Those who do not find God’s revelation of himself in Christ sufficient to prompt their faith are not likely to be satisfied by the Father’s revelation of himself in some other manner. Jesus explains this in verse 9, and the wording of his statement communicates some disappointment that Philip is not satisfied with what he has seen of Jesus. Jesus indicates that Philip has been with him long enough to understand this, again asserting that those who have seen him have seen the Father (cf. 12:45). Having asked Philip how he can make such a request (14:9), Jesus asks him if he does not believe what he has been taught (v. 10).

Jesus had said in 10:38 that the works he performed granted people the ability to know and understand that the Father is in him and that he is in the Father. The fact that the Father is in the Son and vice versa is a profound, mysterious, unique reality. Jesus can speak this way because, as 1:1 states, “the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Jesus and the Father share one divine essence, one divine nature. They are both God. And yet Jesus is not the Father, nor is the Father Jesus. They are distinct persons. That they are *in* one another seems to speak to how their shared nature and knowledge, programs and purposes result in constant communion, ongoing intimacy, unfaltering fellowship.

Because of the way that each is in the other—Father in Son and Son in Father—each surrounds the other while also holding the other within himself. This has been described with the Greek term *perichōrēsis* (*peri*, around; *chōrein*, to make room for/contain), which was translated into Latin as *circumincession* (*circum*, around; *incedere*, to go, step, approach). The reality has been depicted in Christian art with the Borromean rings (three interlinked circles), the *Scutum Fidei* (a triangular diagram demonstrating that each member of the Trinity is God but is not to be confused with the other two members), the *valknut* (three interlocked triangles), and the *triskelion* (three interlocked spirals).

As a result of this relationship, Jesus explains, the Father is doing his work in the words that Jesus speaks (14:10). By means of the words Jesus speaks, the Father works, just as he spoke the world into existence through the Word (1:3).

Jesus commands his disciples in 14:11 to believe that he is in the Father and that the Father is in him. Christ commands his followers to believe what we now

refer to as the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all God, but each is not the other. If the disciples find this hard to understand or believe, Jesus goes on to say that they should believe on account of the works he does. Jesus hereby offers help to those who would understand, instructing them to consider the way that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all do what only God can do. In John's Gospel, Father, Son, and Spirit all give life (3:6, 8; 5:21–26; 6:33, 63; 17:3), proclaim the future (1:33; 13:19; 16:13), and indwell believers (14:17, 20–23).⁴⁴

14:12–14 *The Disciples Represent Jesus.* Christian theologians have understood the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to be the origin of human community. God created us as persons who are able to interact with one another because of the way that Father, Son, and Spirit have always existed in communion with one another. John's Gospel has much to say on these points. We have seen Jesus speak of the way that his relationship with the disciples parallels his relationship with the Father in 13:20 and 23, and he does so again in 14:12–13.

Jesus has just said that the Father who dwells in him does his works through the words Jesus speaks (v. 10). Now Jesus says that those who believe in him will do the works that he does (v. 12). Belief in Christ is not something that Jesus speaks of as merely cerebral. Jesus says that those who believe in him will do what he does. Believing in Jesus means becoming like Jesus. If someone is not becoming like Jesus, the implication is that they do not believe in him.

Jesus says that the Father does his *works* through the *words* Jesus spoke (v. 10). This indicates that the primary contextual meaning of the *works* Jesus does in verse 12 is also *words* that will be spoken. The works of Jesus in view would seem to be accomplished by the true words about Jesus that the disciples will speak. This helps us to understand how Jesus can go on to say at the end of verse 12 that those who believe in him will do *greater works* because he is going to the Father. Jesus will go to the Father by dying on the cross. The works his disciples will do will be greater for the same reason that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11): because Christ will have accomplished the long-anticipated salvation on the cross. Because Jesus goes to the Father, those who believe in Jesus will benefit from the full and final revelation of God's climactic and triumphant salvation and the outpouring of his Spirit (cf. John 14:15–31).

That the words of the disciples are in view in verse 12 guides our understanding of verses 13–14, where Jesus says he will do whatever his disciples ask in his name. The two controlling modifiers of what Jesus promises are (1) that the requests be in the name of Jesus and (2) that they result in the Father's being glorified in the Son. A request in the name of Jesus is a request that is in keeping with the character and mission of Jesus. The Gospels tell us what Jesus sets out to accomplish: that the Father's name would be hallowed. Jesus does not promise to grant requests that are out of step with his character and his purposes—chiefly, magnifying the glory of the Father.

⁴⁴ See Table 2, "Actions of God in John," in Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 56.

Response

Jesus has startled his disciples with the announcement that he is going where they cannot yet follow (13:36). He then instructs them that they are not to be troubled in heart over this but are to trust him and the Father, explaining the content of what they are to believe. Disciples of Jesus are to believe that by going away to the Father, Jesus is accomplishing salvation and preparing the new creation and will one day return to take them to be with him. Jesus himself is the way to the Father. His words are true and life-giving. Jesus is the way to the Father because the cross reconciles us to the Father and models the kind of self-sacrificial life that those who follow Jesus are to live.

In addition to giving them the way, Jesus gives his disciples Trinitarian truth: he is in the Father and the Father is in him. On top of this intimate information, Jesus promises to answer all the prayers of those who seek to fulfill the tasks he gives them to do.

We are to believe Jesus. We are to believe what Jesus taught about the way that he is God, the Father is God, and he is in the Father and the Father is in him, and yet he is not the Father and the Father is not Jesus. We are to believe the Trinity. If rationalistic materialists or faithful adherents of other religions mock us, we must find what Jesus says more compelling than their logic or dogma. We gladly embrace the reproach of Christ and rejoice in the knowledge of the truth, waiting for his return by doing the works he has done and offering the prayers he has invited.

JOHN 14:15–31

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper,¹ to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be² in you.

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will

teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.”

¹Or *Advocate*, or *Counselor*; also 14:26; 15:26; 16:7 ²Some manuscripts *and is*

Section Overview: The Indwelling Spirit

Jesus has announced his departure and has begun to explain what the disciples will continue to do in his name once he has gone. In John 14:15–31 Jesus promises to send the Spirit of truth to those who love him and keep his commandments. The Spirit will indwell them, establishing them as the place of God’s presence (vv. 15–17). Jesus also promises to manifest himself to his followers after his resurrection (vv. 18–21) and explains that the Spirit will mediate both his and the Father’s presence (vv. 22–24), teaching them and reminding them of all that Jesus has said (vv. 25–31). The indwelling presence of the Spirit will empower the followers of Jesus to love him and to do all that he has commanded.

Section Outline

VI.B.4. The Indwelling Spirit (14:15–31)

- a. He Will Be in You (14:15–17)
- b. I Will Come to You (14:18–21)
- c. My Father Will Make a Home with You (14:22–24)
- d. The Spirit Will Teach You (14:25–31)

Comment

14:15–17 *He Will Be in You.* Jesus told the disciples that he was going where they could not follow (13:33), and then he gave them the new commandment to love one another (13:34–35). Peter reacted boldly to Jesus’ statement that he was going where he could not be followed (13:36–38), and in 14:1–14 Jesus told his disciples to trust him (v. 1) by explaining where he was going (vv. 2–6), describing his unity with the Father (vv. 7–11), and promising that they would continue his work as he answered their prayers (vv. 12–14).

In verse 15, Jesus returns to the love command from 13:34–35, explaining that if his disciples love him, they will keep his commandments. The commandments most nearly in view are those to love one another (13:34–35), to trust him (14:1), and to believe that he is in the Father and the Father in him (v. 11). Our actions demonstrate what we truly care about. Jesus declares in verse 15 that the actions

of his followers will show whether or not they love him. If they love him, they will obey him.

Jesus also promises that he will intercede with the Father on behalf of those who love him (v. 16). The specific request Jesus will make of the Father will result in the Father's giving the disciples "another Helper." This implies that Jesus has been their helper, and with Jesus' departure the Spirit will be sent to be with them forever. Jesus has just referred to himself as "the truth" (v. 6), and so when he identifies the other helper as "the Spirit of truth" (v. 17), he implicitly declares that those who love him will receive his Spirit.

Jesus intercedes for those who love and obey him, with the result that the Father gives them the Spirit (vv. 15–16). The world does not love or obey Jesus, and Jesus does not intercede on its behalf (cf. 17:9). In keeping with this, the world cannot receive the Spirit that Jesus promises to his followers (14:17). Just as those who have not been born again cannot see the kingdom of God (3:3), so also those who have not been born again can neither see nor know the Spirit (14:17).

The Spirit came down upon Jesus to remain upon him (1:33), and by being with Jesus the disciples have been with the Spirit. That is the sense in which the Spirit dwells with them (14:17). Whereas the world cannot receive the Spirit (v. 17), when Jesus appears to his disciples on the day of the resurrection in chapter 20, he will breathe on them and tell them to receive the Holy Spirit (20:22). This Spirit will take up residence within them, constituting them the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 14:23).

Jesus has just promised the disciples that they will continue to do the works he has done, and even greater ones, because he goes to the Father (v. 12). In verses 15–17 Jesus explains that not only will his answering their prayers enable them (vv. 13–14); his own prayers will result in the Father's giving the Spirit to indwell and remain with the disciples of Jesus.

14:18–21 *I Will Come to You.* Having spoken of what the disciples will do while he is gone (vv. 12–14) and of the Spirit that will indwell them during that time (vv. 15–17), Jesus again asserts that he will come back for his disciples (v. 18), saying that he will not leave them as orphans (cf. vv. 2–3).

Jesus explains that after he is crucified, the world will not see him, but the disciples will (v. 19), and from what he says at the end of verse 19 about his disciples' living because he does, he seems to be referring to the way he will appear to his disciples but not to the world after the resurrection. Verse 20 also seems to refer to the time after the cross when Jesus has been raised. John indicates at several points that the disciples were enabled to understand after Jesus completed his work (2:22; 12:16; 20:9), and in keeping with this, Jesus says that the disciples will understand what he has been teaching "in that day" (14:20). The day in view is the day when the disciples see him again, after his resurrection. At that point the disciples will understand the relationship between Jesus and the Father, between Jesus and themselves, and between themselves and the Spirit. Specifically in verse 20, they

will know that Jesus is in the Father, that they are in him, and that he is in them. Here again Jesus mediates the kind of relationship he has with his Father to his disciples (cf. 1:18 and 13:23; 13:20).

In 14:20 Jesus indicates that the disciples will understand the Trinity and their own union with Christ. In the Trinity, three persons share one nature. In Christ, one person shares two natures, human and divine, and Jesus says in verse 20 that just as he is contained in the Father, so the disciples will be contained by Jesus yet also will contain him at the same time. The Spirit of truth will be in the disciples (v. 17), mediating the ongoing presence of Jesus to them. The indwelling Spirit will create a living, continual, empowering relationship uniting Jesus to his disciples.

In verse 21 Jesus restates the thought of verse 15: Those who love, trust, and believe what Jesus taught will also do as Jesus taught, thereby demonstrating their love for him. Those who love Jesus will be loved by the Father. God is pleased by those who obey, those who love, those who trust, those who believe what Jesus taught. In the same way, those who obey Jesus will be loved by him. There is no greater motivation for obedience than the love of God. If the love of God does not motivate us to obey, nothing will.

Jesus does not say these things because people must *earn* God's love. This is not the way love works, and it would be against the logic of 3:16, where God loves a hostile world by sending his Son to save it. Rather, Jesus is communicating the outcome of obedience in order to motivate obedience. We understand this by analogy to our own experience. Anyone with responsibility for other people appreciates those who follow instructions. We grow in affection for those who make sacrifices for the causes we lead. We feel love for those who trust us and take risks because they believe what we have said. The same holds in this case: those who love Christ and obey him win the favor and love of God and Christ.

Jesus also promises at the end of 14:21 that those who love him and keep his commandments will receive further revelation of Jesus: he will manifest himself to those who love him. The way to experience more of Jesus is to obey his commandments.

14:22–24 *My Father Will Make a Home with You.* In verse 22, the not-Iscaiot Judas asks Jesus about the final words of verse 21. The manifestation in view includes the promise that “you will see me” (v. 19), and there too Jesus had said that the world would not see him. What Jesus says about how he will manifest himself to those who love him (v. 21) applies first to his resurrection appearances to the disciples (cf. John 20–21). Beyond that, however, because Jesus has spoken of the disciples’ being in him and he in them (14:20), and because he will speak of himself and the Father as making a home with those who love Jesus (v. 23), the manifestation of Jesus in view goes beyond the resurrection appearances and includes the spiritual relationship between Jesus and those who love and obey him.

It seems that the Father and Jesus make their home with those who love and obey them (v. 23) by means of the indwelling Spirit of truth (vv. 16–17). Those

who are indwelt by the Spirit are indwelt by the Father and the Son as well. The term used to describe the “home” of the Father and Son in verse 23 is the same term used for the “rooms” of the Father’s house in verse 2. Jesus goes to the Father to prepare the Father’s house, by means of his death and resurrection. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit will indwell those who love and obey Jesus, constituting them the Father’s house, the temple of the Holy Spirit (v. 23).

The connection with the temple helps us understand why Jesus promises to reveal himself to those who love and obey: under the old covenant, the sacrificial system at the temple allowed the holy God to live among a sinful people. The sacrifice of Christ fulfills the old covenant sacrifices, but God is still holy. If God is to live among his people, to be present with them, they must keep the commands of Jesus and love, trust, and believe what Jesus has taught.

In verse 24, Jesus explains why people disobey him; they disobey because they do not love him. We choose what we desire most. Those who love Jesus are motivated by an overwhelming desire to love him and please him by their actions, and so they obey. Those who do not love Jesus are motivated by any number of other concerns, all of which result in disobedient sin.

Once again Jesus communicates his unity with the Father (v. 24), saying that the word he has spoken is in fact the Father’s own word. When Jesus speaks, the Father speaks.

14:25–31 *The Spirit Will Teach You.* The Spirit will not only be with the disciples to empower them by mediating God’s new covenant presence to them; he will also teach them. Jesus develops the idea of the Spirit as “another Helper” (v. 16), explaining that while he is with them he is teaching them (v. 25), but when he goes away, the Helper, the Holy Spirit, will teach them (v. 26). Just as Jesus instructed the disciples to pray in his name (vv. 13–14), so will the Father send the Spirit in his name (v. 26). This means that the Holy Spirit will continue to minister in accordance with the message, purpose, and character of Jesus as he reminds the disciples of all that Jesus said.

Because Jesus has fully disclosed his destination and purpose (vv. 1–6), revealed the fullness of his relationship with the Father (vv. 7–11), and assured the disciples they will continue his ministry as he answers their prayers (vv. 12–14) and provides the presence and power of the Spirit (vv. 15–26), Jesus can say to them that he leaves peace with them (v. 27). This is a peace the world could never offer. Because of the unique provision Jesus makes for them and its surpassing quality, he again urges them not to let their hearts be troubled (v. 27; cf. v. 1).

Returning to the idea of his departure, Jesus says that if his disciples loved him, they would rejoice that he goes away (v. 28). This reference to Jesus’ going to the Father again alludes to the cross and the accomplishment of salvation. Jesus adds that the Father exceeds even him in greatness. Jesus seems to mean that if the disciples loved him, they would focus on all that God would accomplish by his

departure—which would have prompted them to rejoice—instead of focusing on what they stood to lose by his departure.

Jesus again tells the disciples that he has predicted the future in order to strengthen their faith in him when his predictions come true (v. 29; cf. 13:19). In doing so, Jesus emulates the Father, who asserted his unique ability to declare the future, challenging the false gods to do the same while knowing full well that they never could (cf. Isa. 44:6–8).

Although there are three more chapters of Jesus’ speaking in John’s Gospel (chs. 15–17), he tells the disciples that he will not speak much more with them (14:30). In comparison with the three years he has spent with them, there is not much time left before he will be betrayed and arrested. Jesus alludes to this when he speaks of the ruler of this world’s coming (v. 30). Satan entered Judas (13:27), and with Judas on the way, Satan is on the way.

Jesus then asserts that Satan has no claim on him (14:30), and the only reason Jesus will be taken is that he is obeying the Father and demonstrating to the world his love for the Father by laying down his life (v. 31; cf. 10:17–18).

Perhaps at this point the Passover meal (which Jesus transformed into the Lord’s Supper) has ended, so that when Jesus invites his disciples to rise and depart they begin to make their way to the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, where Judas and the soldiers will find him (“Rise, let us go from here”; 14:31). If this is the case, prior to the prayer in chapter 17, which Jesus perhaps prayed in Gethsemane, the content of chapters 15 and 16 could have been spoken with the disciples en route.

Response

The message of Jesus in 14:15–31 is that the disciples will enjoy the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit as he comes to them and teaches them, mediating the presence of the Father and the Son. The Father and Jesus are in absolute agreement concerning holiness, love, trust, belief in what is true, and obedience.

To be a temple of the Holy Spirit, to have Jesus manifest himself to us, we must love Jesus, and we should. We must obey the commands of Jesus, and we will never regret doing so. How are we to obey? How are we to love Jesus and keep his commands? Jesus has promised to answer prayers offered in his name (vv. 13–14) and has promised the Spirit of truth as “another Helper” (vv. 15–17). The power of the Holy Spirit and prayer in the name of Jesus are more than enough to enable us to love and obey.

JOHN 15:1–17

15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants,¹ for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”

¹Or *bondservants*, or *slaves* (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see ESV Preface); likewise for *servant* later in this verse and in verse 20

Section Overview: Abide in Christ

Having washed his disciples’ feet and announced his departure (John 13), then having comforted them by calling them to trust him (ch. 14), Jesus now teaches his disciples to abide in him (ch. 15). He opens in verses 1–8 with a metaphorical presentation of himself as the true vine, with his disciples as the branches and the Father as the gardener. In verses 9–11 he calls his disciples to abide in his love by obeying his commands, and in verses 12–17 he helps them to understand the meaning of his command that they are to love one another.

Section Outline

- VI.B.5. Abide in Christ (15:1–17)
 - a. Abiding in Christ (15:1–8)
 - b. That Your Joy May Be Full (15:9–11)
 - c. Love One Another (15:12–17)

Comment

15:1–8 *Abiding in Christ.* The OT regularly uses plant, tree, or vine imagery in symbolic descriptions of God’s people. For instance, the Lord speaks of “planting” his people in the land (2 Sam. 7:10). In Psalm 80:8 David describes the Lord’s bringing a vine out of Egypt and planting it in the land. In Isaiah 5:1–7 Isaiah likens Israel to a vineyard the Lord planted and tended.

This OT background informs what Jesus says in John 15. When Jesus declares himself to be the “true vine” in verse 1, he identifies himself as the true Israel. By adopting this imagery and applying it to himself, Jesus declares that one’s standing in the people of God depends no longer on genealogical descent from Abraham but on one’s vital connection to himself. To be part of the vine, one must be connected to Jesus. Whereas the Father formerly tended ethnic Israel as his vine, he now tends those who are united to Christ by faith.

In verse 2 Jesus explains the Father’s work as the vinedresser: he removes branches that do not bear fruit and prunes those that do, so that they might bear more fruit. What would keep a branch of a vine from bearing fruit? To grow and bear fruit, a vine needs sunlight, the right soil, pollination, and water. When God orchestrates the universe so that the climate, wind, rain, and soil are all in the right balance, the vines grow and bear fruit.

Jesus is not a literal vine, but he uses the metaphor to liken himself to a vine, and in verses 3–4 he provides some insight into why there might be, as described in verse 2, a branch that fails to bear fruit. In verse 3 Jesus says his followers are already clean, and the word “clean” in verse 3 is related to the verb “prune” in verse 2. An un-pruned vine will not bear fruit. Jesus said in verse 2 that the Father prunes the vines that bear fruit, so that they might bear more. In verse 3 Jesus says the disciples are already clean, already pruned, because of the word he spoke to them. This would indicate that, just as the Father did his works through the words of Jesus (14:10), so has the Father cleansed the disciples through the words of Jesus (cf. 13:10).

Whereas vines need sunlight, pollination, water, and soil, the people of God need Jesus. Jesus explains in 15:4 that the disciples are to abide in him. In the context of the vine metaphor, this invites us to think of a branch’s staying connected to the vine so that it benefits from the living root. Jesus says as much in verse 4 as he compares branches that can bear fruit only by abiding in the vine to disciples who can bear fruit only by abiding in him.

What does it mean to abide in Christ? It means to relate to Jesus in the same way that a branch relates to the vine. Jesus explains this in verse 5, saying that

those who abide in him will bear much fruit, while apart from him his followers can do nothing. Sever the connection between branch and vine, and there will be no fruit. Sever the connection between the Christian and Christ, and there will be no Christlikeness.

In verse 6 Jesus explains what happens to those who begin to follow him but do not abide in him: They are like branches severed from the vine. They wither. They are gathered. They are burned. This elaborates on the first part of verse 2, where Jesus spoke of the Father's taking away branches that do not bear fruit. Does this indicate that salvation can be lost if a Christian fails to abide in Christ? Given the audience Jesus is addressing at this point, it would seem we should think of Judas as a branch that did not abide in the vine. Given the way Jesus refers to Judas in 17:12, it would seem that Judas was never vitally connected to the vine. He was attracted to Jesus, but he was never "cleansed" (13:10), never born again.

If a man is not bearing fruit, it is because he is not abiding in Christ. If a man is not abiding in Christ, he has no grounds for confidence that he has been born again. If a man has been born again, he is a branch that enjoys a living connection to the vine. He abides in Christ. He will bear fruit. Notice that in 15:3 Jesus tells the disciples they are already clean because of the word he spoke to them, and then in verse 4 he commands them to abide in him. Disciples are not connected to Jesus because they obey commands. The words of Jesus do the miraculous work of cleansing disciples and connecting them to Jesus, and then, having made them alive, he commands their obedience.

Jesus commands his disciples to abide in him (v. 4), but what exactly does that call them to do? If we commanded a literal branch to abide in a literal vine, what would we want the branch to do? Jesus explains what the disciples are to do in verse 7 when he speaks of the disciples' abiding in him, his words' abiding in them, and their prayers' being answered. Jesus invites his disciples in verse 7 to ask whatever they wish, promising that it will be done for them, precisely because those who abide in him and in whom his words abide will wish what he wishes. Those who abide in Jesus will want what Jesus wants. Those in whom the words of Jesus abide will pray for what Jesus has declared he will accomplish. Jesus can therefore guarantee to them that their prayers will be answered.

Thus the command to abide in Christ in verse 4 calls the disciples to several specific steps:

1. The disciples are to be conscious of their need for Jesus. They need him in the same way that a branch needs a vine, which demands that they live in perpetual reliance upon Jesus. Insofar as they drift from their awareness that they need Jesus, they drift from abiding in him.
2. Jesus speaks of his words' abiding in his disciples, which requires them to be exposed to the words of Jesus, to examine, analyze, give attention to, and consider his words until they understand them, and to take pains to retain them. Steps 1 and 2 are related, for those who keep the

words of Jesus fresh in their minds will be aware of their ongoing need for Jesus, even as awareness of the ongoing need for Jesus prompts them to expose themselves to the words of Jesus.

3. Step 3 flows naturally out of steps 1 and 2, as those who abide in Jesus and in whom the words of Jesus abide are invited to ask whatever they wish. The disciples are commanded, then, to pray just as Jesus taught his disciples to pray: your will be done. This is not a resignation to whatever some detached, deistic, unconcerned Fate has determined. Rather, this is a declaration of war on unrighteousness, injustice, unbelief, disobedience, and dishonor. To pray for God's will to be done is to pray for his name to be hallowed and his kingdom to come, requiring the crushing of idols, the tearing down of strongholds, and the charging of the gates of hell.

By commanding his disciples to abide in him, Jesus commands them to live in a state of reliance upon him, to keep his words active in their minds, and to pray for what reliance on him and the teaching of his words causes them to desire. Jesus tells his disciples that such prayers will be answered (v. 7), and their abiding in him will glorify the Father, with the result that they will bear much fruit and show themselves to be his disciples (v. 8).

15:9–11 *That Your Joy May Be Full.* In verse 9 Jesus tells his disciples that he has loved them just as the Father has loved him, and he then commands them to abide in this love. How has the Father loved Jesus? Jesus has previously stated that the Father loves him and shows him all he does (5:20). Jesus has said that the Father gave him what only he, the Father, had—life in himself—thereby sharing himself with Jesus (5:26). Jesus, in response, has loved his disciples the way the Father has loved him. He has revealed the Father to his disciples (1:18). He has commanded the disciples to remain in vital communion with him by abiding in him (15:4). He has told his disciples that they will continue his work and do greater works than he has done (14:12).

Jesus commands his disciples to abide in his love (15:9), explaining that if they keep his commands, they will abide in his love, just as he has kept the Father's commands and thereby abides in the Father's love (v. 10). Consider again the commands Jesus has given to the disciples in this context: love one another (13:34–35); trust God and Christ (14:1); believe what Jesus has taught them of his relationship with the Father (14:11); abide in him (15:4); ask whatever they wish (v. 7). Obeying these commands of Jesus will enable the followers of Jesus to abide in his love.

Jesus explains his motivation for saying these things to his followers: he wants them to know his joy, and to know it to the full (v. 11). There is an indissoluble bond between self-sacrificial love and joy. Truly caring for others produces self-sacrificial love for them, and benefiting others brings the joy that Jesus himself shares. If sacrifice of oneself does not bring joy, it may be because the sacrifice is

motivated by something other than love for another. Self-sacrifice motivated by self-concern will not produce joy. Jesus desires his people to experience his joy, and the joy of which he speaks comes not from gratifying himself at the expense of others but from sacrificing himself to benefit others.

15:12–17 *Love One Another.* If the connection between abiding in the love of Jesus, experiencing his joy, and loving one another was not already explicit, Jesus makes it so in verse 12. Just as he commanded his disciples to serve one another the way he served them by washing their feet (13:14–15), so as he approaches the cross he commands his disciples to love one another as he has loved them (15:12). The cross is clearly in view in verse 13 as Jesus says there is no greater love than when someone lays down his life for his friends. Jesus spoke of the cross in precisely these terms—laying down his life—in 10:11, 15, and 17.

Jesus lays down his life for his friends (15:13), and those whom Jesus befriends become like him and do what he says to do (v. 14). This indicates not that obedience to Jesus earns his friendship but that friendship with Jesus transforms his people, with the result that they obey.

Jesus elevates the status of his disciples in verse 15. No longer do they occupy the place of servants who do not know what their masters do. Jesus has made them friends and related to them what he has heard from the Father. To be a friend of Jesus is to know what he has revealed of the Father. Those who reject what Jesus revealed of the Father cannot be among the friends of Jesus.

Why would Jesus at this point tell his disciples that they did not choose him but that he chose them (v. 16)? The second half of the statement provides the necessary clue: he not only chose them but also appointed them to go and bear fruit. The fruitfulness of the followers of Jesus is rooted in Jesus' choosing them. It is not dependent upon a choice they make or on their effectiveness or attractiveness or anything else about them. It has been established in the fact that Jesus chose them and appointed them.

The fruit they will bear is not temporary but abiding (v. 16). The followers of Jesus will accomplish real results, with eternal ramifications. These are not short-term gains that will be overturned by the next round of elections. What the followers of Jesus accomplish will last forever as people experience everlasting deliverance from sin.

Once again Jesus promises his disciples that requests made to the Father in his name, the name of Jesus, will be granted (v. 16; cf. 14:13; 15:7).

Jesus then continues by stating that he has given his commands so that his disciples will love one another (v. 17). This reinforces the love command in 13:34–35 and brackets 15:12–17 as a unit that opens and closes with commands to love. In the flow of thought of verses 12–17, it would appear that the statements Jesus has made—concerning how they are to love as he has loved (v. 12), how he loves (v. 13), how they are his friends (vv. 14–15), and how he chose them to bear fruit (v. 16)—have all been made to free the disciples to love one another.

Response

Jesus says in verse 8 that glorifying the Father will result in much fruit. Do we want to bear fruit? Then we must glorify the Father by abiding in Jesus as we rely on him, remain in his Word, and pray. Jesus also teaches that glorifying the Father will result in believers' proving themselves to be his disciples, which is reminiscent of what he said in 13:35, that love for one another would show his disciples to be just that (cf. 13:34). By extension, therefore, glorifying the Father will result in the disciples of Jesus loving one another. God is glorified when we abide in Christ. This means that God is glorified when we rely on Jesus, meditate on his Word, pray as his Word teaches us, and love one another.

Jesus called his disciples friends. The ironic thing is that there is no one greater than Jesus, no one more worthy of servants, no one whose followers are less worthy of being regarded by him as *friends*. And yet Jesus surpasses all both in his humility and in his ability to exalt those who follow him. Thus it is easy to understand why John would write in 1 John 4:7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."

JOHN 15:18–16:4a

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin,¹ but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'

²⁶ "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

16 ¹ "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ^{4a} But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you."

¹ Greek *they would not have sin*; also verse 24

Section Overview: The Haters and the Helper

Having told his disciples of his departure at the end of John 13, Jesus has sought in chapters 14–15 to equip them to deal with his absence. He warns them of the world's hatred (15:18–25) but also promises to give them the Spirit of truth, who will help them to bear witness to him (15:26–27). Jesus further explains that his teaching will help to keep them from falling away in the face of persecution (16:1–4a).

Section Outline

VI.B.6. The Haters and the Helper (15:18–16:4a)

- a. The Haters (15:18–25)
- b. The Helper (15:26–16:4a)

Comment

15:18–25 *The Haters*. Having told the disciples that he was going where they could not follow (13:33), what his destination was, what he would be doing there, and that he would return for them (14:2–3), Jesus instructs his disciples concerning how to live until he returns (14:4–15:17) before warning them that the world will treat them as it has treated him (15:18–25). In verse 18 Jesus tells his disciples how to cope with the world's animosity: they are to remember that the world hated him first.

Jesus goes on to explain to the disciples what would make the world love them (v. 19): if the disciples were of the world, the world would love them. Presumably, if Jesus were of the world, the world would love him too. Agreement with the world's false beliefs and participation in and endorsement of the world's sinful actions would win the world's love. The way the world loves is clearly not the kind of love that Jesus described in verse 13, demonstrated in laying down one's life for others. The world loves only those who join it in delusional beliefs and destructive behaviors, which in effect means that the world loves itself. The world's kind of love is the selfish kind of love that does not deserve to be called love at all. It may be enthusiastic approval and acceptance, but it is not love.

We can see in verse 19 that the disciples belonged to the world, and what removed them from the world was the fact that Jesus chose them out of it (cf. v. 16). The disciples were part of the world, but the Father gave them to Jesus (17:6), who rescued them from the clutches of the world (15:16, 19).

The words of Jesus in verse 20 warn the disciples not to presume that they will be able to navigate disputed issues better than Jesus did. They will not be able to produce a more nuanced position that will mollify the world — not if they are faithful. They will not be more able than Jesus was to finesse the fine points and make them acceptable to ideological opponents. Jesus is the master, the greatest. They are his servants and thus are not greater than he. The world rejected the master, and the servants will not succeed in propitiating the world's wrath. Jesus frankly tells his disciples that if they follow him, the world will treat them as it treated him.

There is a positive side, however, which Jesus mentions at the end of verse 20. Those who keep the words of Jesus will also keep the words of his disciples. This is not only an encouragement to the disciples that they will not be universally rejected; it is also a statement about those who receive the words of Jesus. Those who receive the words of Jesus also receive the words of those Jesus sent, his apostles. Those who claim to receive Jesus but reject his disciples have actually rejected Jesus, however they may protest that they love Jesus even though they hate the Scriptures. Those who would keep the word of Jesus must keep the word of his apostles, inscripturated on the pages of the Bible.

Jesus states exactly why the disciples will be hated and persecuted (v. 21): on account of his name. This means that as the disciples live and teach in accordance with the character and mission of Jesus, people will know that the disciples do so because of Jesus, and they will hate them for it. Why does persecution on account of Jesus' name amount to persecution for those living out the character and mission of Jesus? Because Jesus taught his disciples to live as he lived, and he told them that their task was to teach others what he taught them. Why would people reject the character and mission of Jesus? Jesus explains: because they do not know the one who sent Jesus, the Father. Why do people hate Jesus and persecute his followers? Because they do not know God.

What does Jesus mean when he says in verse 22 that if he had not come and spoken to them, those who hated him would not have had sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin? Jesus cannot mean that only those who see and hear him are made guilty. The wrath of God remains on those who do not obey the Son (3:36), and Jesus is the only way to the Father (14:6). The point of this verse seems to be that Jesus *convicted* of their sin those who heard his words and saw his works. If they had not seen and heard Jesus, their own perversity would not have been apparent to them. By revealing how people should live and by loving everyone truly, Jesus exposed the corruption and filth of men. Now their sin is undeniable and they are left without excuse. Rather than pleading for mercy and turning from sin, they hate Jesus for how he exposed them. Because hating Jesus is hating what is good and true and right and godly, to hate Jesus is to hate the Father (15:23).

Jesus adds in verse 24 that the works he has done—works no one else could do—confirm that he is righteous. Jesus has done works demonstrating his ability to do what only God can do. The confirming power of the works should convince people of his deity and of their need to be reconciled to him through repentance and faith. Rather than turning from sin and trusting him, however, his opponents respond with hatred for Jesus and the Father.

Jesus has presented a convincing case for the truth of his claims. There is no reason anyone should hate him. He is ready to love and help everyone. But the pattern of the righteous sufferer, Jesus explains, must be fulfilled, and he quotes another phrase that engages and typifies that pattern (v. 25), using language from both Psalm 35:19 and 69:4 (cf. the similar quotation of Ps. 41:9 in John 13:18). Hatred of Jesus is groundless, fulfilling the pattern of the unjustly hated righteous sufferers in the OT.

15:26–16:4a *The Helper*. Jesus has been telling his disciples that he is going away (13:33) and that the world is going to hate the disciples because they will convict the world of its sin in the same way he has done (15:18–25). How does Jesus equip the disciples for this daunting reality? By once again telling them of how they will have a new and greater experience of the Holy Spirit (vv. 26–27). Later he will elaborate on the way in which the Spirit will convict of sin (16:8–11).

Jesus had told the disciples that the Spirit would be with them, indwelling them, never to leave (14:15–17). Now he tells them that the Spirit will be sent to help them bear witness (15:26–27). Jesus has been their helper, and now that he is leaving he promises to send “another Helper” (14:16). In this context, the help they need stems from the fact that Jesus sends them to testify to a hostile world, to those who will hate them because of the love they show (cf. 15:18–25). The Spirit will help them by bearing witness (15:26). Jesus again refers to the Helper as “the Spirit of truth,” which means that his testimony will be true.

Jesus had said in 14:16 that the Father would *give* the Spirit at his request. In 15:26 Jesus provides more information on the coming of the Spirit, stating that he himself will *send* the Spirit. Then he describes the Spirit as one who *proceeds*, or *goes out*, from the Father. Given by and going out from the Father, and sent by the Son, the Spirit of truth will testify to Jesus.

Jesus says that his disciples will testify because they have been with him “from the beginning.” His later reference to “the beginning” in 16:4 (“I did not say these things to you from the beginning”) shows that “the beginning” refers to the start of his public ministry (cf. Acts 1:21–22). Having witnessed all of Jesus’ earthly ministry, his followers must testify, even if the world hates and persecutes them for it. They testify to the character of Jesus, the mission of Jesus, and the message of Jesus. Jesus later commands his followers to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything he commanded (Matt. 28:18–20). The disciples of Jesus cannot shrink from anything he taught, and neither can those taught by the apostles back away from what Jesus teaches through them.

Jesus asserts in John 16:1 that he has told his disciples these things to keep them from falling away. In this context, falling away would include not testifying (15:27), perhaps to avoid the world’s hatred (15:18–25). This would be a failure to bear fruit (15:16), stemming from a failure to abide in Christ or to have his words abide in them (15:7). Falling away would also entail a failure to love as Christ has loved (13:34; 15:12), a failure to trust God (14:1), or a failure to believe what Jesus taught (14:11). Jesus teaches in order to keep his followers from falling away.

The immediate context of the world’s hatred and persecution (15:18–25) is reinforced by Jesus’ warning that his followers will be put out of the synagogues, while those who kill them will think they are serving God (16:2). This would indicate that Jesus envisions the “falling away” of 16:1 as possibly resulting from persecution. As in 15:21, Jesus here asserts that the persecutors have known neither the Father nor himself (16:3). Jesus had said in 14:26 that the Spirit would help them remember what he said, and now he asserts that he and the Spirit are

working together to enable the disciples to remember (16:4). In particular, Jesus desires his disciples to remember his teaching when the “hour” of their persecution, or even martyrdom, comes.

Response

Jesus said that he chose his people out of the world (15:16, 19). How do we know whether he has chosen us? If we have rejected the world’s false explanation of what the world is, having become convinced that God made the world; if we have rejected the world’s wicked ways, having become convinced that God has revealed what is right; and if we believe that Jesus is the world’s true Lord; then we have good reason to think that Jesus has chosen us out of the world.

How do we respond to Jesus? When we are convicted of our sin, do we fall before him like Peter when he urged the Lord to go away from him because he was a sinful man? Or does the fact that his goodness shines the light on our badness anger us? Christians must choose between acceptance by the world and faithfulness to Jesus. This choice simply asks what we would rather have: the approval of the world or the help of the Holy Spirit; the self-focused “love” of rebels who face the wrath of God or the opportunity to bear witness to the truth; the failure of falling away or the joy of being preserved by the power of the Word of God through the Spirit of God to be like Jesus in the world.

Let us make no mistake about it: if we are like Jesus in the world, those who crucified him will want to crucify us. But if we are like Jesus in the world, he has gone to the Father for our advantage, has given the Spirit as our Helper, has spoken his words so that we will not fall away, and will be with his own to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

JOHN 16:4b–15

^{4b}“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will

speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Section Overview: Jesus Will Send the Spirit

Jesus has been preparing his disciples for his departure by telling them both where he is going and whom he will send when he leaves: the Holy Spirit. He has just spoken of how the world will treat them as it treated him (John 15:18–25), but the Spirit will testify and enable them to bear witness (15:26–27). He has explained that his words are intended to keep them from falling away (16:1), even when they are put out of the synagogue or killed by those who think they are serving God by persecuting the followers of Jesus (vv. 2–3). Explaining that he intends his disciples to remember this teaching when that persecution comes, he tells them again what his leaving will accomplish (vv. 4–7) and what the Spirit will do when he comes (vv. 8–15).

Section Outline

VI.B.7. Jesus Will Send the Spirit (16:4b–15)

- a. Jesus Leaves to Send the Spirit (16:4b–7)
- b. The Spirit Will Convict the World (16:8–11)
- c. The Spirit Will Glorify Jesus (16:12–15)

Comment

16:4b–7 *Jesus Leaves to Send the Spirit.* Jesus explains that, since he himself has been present with the disciples, he has not yet needed to address the things he has been discussing (v. 4b). Now that he is departing, however, he has begun to prepare the disciples for the time when the Spirit is with them but he is not (cf. 13:33; 14:15–17, 25–26).

Jesus again asserts that he is going to the Father, adding that none of the disciples ask where he goes (16:5). In view of the fact that where Jesus is going has been discussed (14:5–6), it would seem that when Jesus says they are not asking where he goes, he refers to the fact that they are not asking about his departure in terms of what it will accomplish. The disciples are too troubled by the fact that Jesus will not continue with them to explore the question of what his leaving will achieve. This would seem to be supported by what Jesus goes on to say, as he explains to the disciples that, though the thought of his departure saddens them (16:6), it is for their benefit (v. 7). Jesus intends to lay down his life for his friends (15:13), and by doing so he will accomplish redemption as the fulfillment of the Passover lamb and righteous sufferer.

The OT prophesied that the new age would be characterized by a new experience of the Spirit (Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 36:26–27; Joel 2:28–32). The advantage Jesus

articulates for his disciples in John 16:7 is precisely that if he goes away, he will send the Spirit to them. If Jesus does not go away, the Father's wrath is not propitiated, the disciples are not cleansed and sanctified as the new temple of the Holy Spirit, and the OT and the old covenant are not fulfilled, which in turn means the new age and the new covenant will not be inaugurated. For all these reasons Jesus says that if he does not go away, the Spirit cannot come to them (v. 7). If Jesus goes to the Father, he makes it possible for the disciples to enjoy the new age of the Spirit.

Jesus does not rebuke the disciples sternly here, but by commenting on their lack of interest in where he is going and what it will accomplish, and by noting the way sorrow has filled their hearts, Jesus does address the way their own concerns have eclipsed their interest in what God is doing. Because they are focused on themselves, they fail to see the way in which God is working for their benefit.

16:8–11 *The Spirit Will Convict the World.* Jesus has told the disciples that those who hated and persecuted him would do likewise to his followers (15:18–25). He has explained that the world has hated him because he made them aware of their sin (v. 22). He has promised the help of the Spirit to enable the disciples to bear witness (vv. 26–27), and his own words have been spoken in order to keep them from falling away (16:1–4). He has just stated that his going away is to their advantage (vv. 5–7) before returning to the idea that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin (vv. 8–11). The world has hated Jesus because he has convicted them of their sin, and the world will hate his disciples because through them the Spirit will further convict the world of sin.

The Spirit in the disciples will show that the world has sin. The disciples are not righteous in the way Jesus was righteous, but they do have the righteousness that comes through faith. Moreover, the disciples will bear witness to the coming judgment (v. 8), in which the world will be condemned for its refusal to believe in Jesus (v. 9). Earlier Jesus had declared, "Whoever believes in [the Son] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (3:18).

Remarkably, the term "righteousness" (*dikaïosynē*) occurs in John's Gospel only at 16:8 and 10 (but cf. "righteous" [*dikaïos*] in 5:30; 7:24; 17:25). The righteousness of God is established and displayed through the cross of Christ (16:10; cf. Rom. 3:25–26). That Jesus is going to the Father (John 16:5) means that he is going to the cross, where righteousness will be demonstrated.

The casting out of this world's ruler by the cross (cf. 12:31) guarantees that all who rebel against Jesus will face judgment (16:11). The cross puts true righteousness on display, exposing and condemning wickedness as God's holiness and love are portrayed (v. 10). The cross condemns the rebel, Satan, because it shows him to be an unrighteous usurper whose rebellion was unjustified and will be unsuccessful.

Those who receive Jesus (1:12–13) are those who formerly belonged to the world but are now not of the world precisely because they have been convicted

by the Holy Spirit of the sin of unbelief (16:9). They were convicted by the Holy Spirit of the righteousness of God in Christ on display through the death of Jesus as the substitute for God's people, the ransom for sinners, the propitiation of God's wrath, and the satisfaction of God's holiness (v. 10). The Holy Spirit has brought the conviction that Satan, the architect and founder of those who would live for themselves, has been weighed and found wanting, judged by the Lord Christ, unseated from his dark throne, and cast out (v. 11; 12:31).

Followers of Jesus are those who have been convinced by the Holy Spirit that Jesus should be believed, that Jesus established righteousness at the cross, and that Jesus triumphed over that despicable rogue who betrayed the one who is true and beautiful and good. Christians have seen that they deserve to be punished along with Jesus, have turned from the way that leads to death, and have thrown themselves at the feet of the Conqueror, who has shown them mercy.

16:12–15 *The Spirit Will Glorify Jesus.* In 16:12 Jesus acknowledges that his time is running out. He has much more to say, but there is not time for the disciples to deal with it all emotionally and intellectually. Jesus, however, has just said that he will send the Spirit if he goes away (v. 7), and he now says that the Spirit will help them by leading them into “all the truth” he has to reveal to them (v. 13). The “all . . . truth” into which the Spirit will lead them is directly connected to the “many things” Jesus has to say that they “cannot bear . . . now” (v. 12).

The Spirit will behave as Jesus has done. Just as Jesus has neither acted nor spoken on his own authority (7:17–18; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10), neither will the Spirit speak on his own authority (16:13). Just as Jesus declared what he heard from the Father (8:26; 15:15), so the Spirit will speak what he hears (16:13). Jesus adds that the Spirit will reveal “the things that are to come” (v. 13), and in the book of Revelation John is indeed carried along by the Spirit (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21) to prophesy all that Jesus reveals to him (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10–12).

Jesus then adds that the Spirit will reveal what belongs to Jesus (John 16:14), indicating that the Spirit will hear and speak things that pertain to Jesus (v. 13). Jesus goes on to say that the Father has shared with him all he has (v. 15), indicating that as the Spirit seeks the glory of Jesus, he will also glorify the Father because Jesus and the Father share everything. By taking what belongs to Jesus—the truth about who he is, what he has done, what he will do, and how it fulfills all that was written in former days—and declaring it to the disciples, the Spirit glorifies Jesus (v. 14).

The purpose of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to glorify Jesus. If something does not glorify Jesus, it does not come from the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls on the Father to glorify him and states his intention to glorify the Father (e.g., 17:1), but nowhere do we ever read that the Father or the Son seek the glory of the Spirit. Father and Spirit seek the glory of Jesus. Jesus and the Spirit seek the glory of the Father. But the Father and Jesus are never said to seek the glory of the Spirit. This indicates that within the Trinity, although there is perfect equality and shared

divine nature, there are distinct roles and functions gladly embraced. The Spirit does not begrudge the fact that Father and Son do not seek his glory but, rather, gladly gives himself to seeking *their* glory.

Consider what Jesus has said to his disciples concerning the Holy Spirit throughout these chapters. Having told them that he is going away (13:33), Jesus tells the disciples that he will petition the Father, who will send them the Spirit to be with them forever (14:15–17). Having told the disciples that he will manifest himself to those who love and obey him, and that he and the Father will make a home with such people (14:21, 23), Jesus says that the Father will send the Spirit in the name of Jesus, and the Spirit will teach them everything and remind them of all that Jesus has said (14:26). Having warned them that the world would hate them just as it hated him (15:18–25), Jesus assures the disciples that he will send the Spirit, who goes out from the Father, to bear witness and to enable the disciples to bear witness as well (15:26–27). Returning to their sadness at his departure (16:4–6), Jesus reminds the disciples that his going away makes it possible for him to send the Spirit to them (v. 7) in order to convict the world of sin (vv. 8–11). Having said that he has more to communicate to them than what they can presently handle (v. 12), Jesus promises that the Spirit will come to glorify Jesus by guiding the disciples into all truth concerning Jesus and by remaining true to the Father and the Son (vv. 12–15).

In 14:16, 26; 15:26; and 16:7, Jesus refers to the Spirit as the *paraklētos*, which the ESV and NASB render as “Helper,” the KJV as “Comforter,” the CSB and NIV 1984 as “Counselor,” and the NIV 2011 as “Advocate.” All of these connotations can be demonstrated from the word *paraklētos*: the Spirit is God’s indwelling covenant presence to the disciples (comforter; 14:16), their teacher and reminder (helper; 14:26), a witness enabling them to testify (counselor; 15:26), and the one who convicts the world and glorifies Christ (advocate; 16:7–15).

Response

The sorrow of the disciples eclipsed their concern for what Jesus was about to accomplish (16:5–6), even though what Jesus was leaving to do would enable him to send the Spirit to them (v. 7). This teaches us that when we face undesired developments, we can be confident that God has a plan involving his conforming us to the image of Christ and resulting in his being glorified. Thus we can always trust in God’s wisdom and hope in his goodness.

Consider the paradox in this passage: as the Spirit glorifies Jesus, the world is convicted of sin. Precisely as the Spirit takes what belongs to Jesus and the Father and makes it known to the followers of Jesus, who proclaim the realities of what Christ has accomplished on the cross, the world is convicted of its unbelief in Jesus, of the righteousness Jesus established by going to the Father, and of the judgment of the ruler of the world.

We can put the paradox in a nutshell: the Spirit glorifies Jesus, and the world persecutes Christians. Thus we may take heart when we face persecution, when

people respond the way sinners do when they face conviction of sin. The Spirit is glorifying Jesus in and through us: that is cause for rejoicing.

If we do not know the comfort of the Holy Spirit, we must meditate on John 14:15–17, contemplating the fact that if we believe in Jesus, the Spirit is with us and will never leave us. If we do not know the help of the Holy Spirit, we must ponder John 14:26, praying for God to help us by the Spirit to understand and remember all that Jesus said. If we do not know the counsel of the Holy Spirit, we must think long on John 15:26–27 in context, considering how the Spirit will testify to Jesus and how Jesus deserves to have us bear witness to him.

If we do not know the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we must consider Jesus and his cross (16:7–11). Let us ask God to give us eyes to see the way the Spirit glorifies Christ through what is written about him by the inspired authors of the NT (vv. 12–15). Let us ask the Father in the name of Jesus to cause the Spirit to enable us to see the glory of Christ.

JOHN 16:16–33

¹⁶“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” ¹⁷So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father’?” ¹⁸So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” ¹⁹Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’?” ²⁰Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²²So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. ²³In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ²⁴Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

²⁵“I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.” ²⁸I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

²⁹ His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.”

³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

¹ Some manuscripts *from the Father*

Section Overview: Your Sorrow Will Turn into Joy

Having described how he will go away so that he can send the Spirit, who will continue his ministry and glorify him (John 16:4–15), Jesus prepares the disciples for his death by promising them joy at his resurrection (vv. 16–22). He adds that they will enjoy a new and deeper access to the Father in prayer (vv. 23–28) and commands them to take heart because he has overcome the world (vv. 29–33).

Section Outline

VI.B.8. Your Sorrow Will Turn to Joy (16:16–33)

- a. The Death and Resurrection of Jesus (16:16–22)
- b. A New Access to the Father in Prayer (16:23–28)
- c. Jesus Has Overcome the World (16:29–33)

Comment

16:16–22 *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus.* There are seven references to “a little while” in verses 16–19. Jesus introduces the idea in verse 16, the disciples discuss it in verses 17–18, and then Jesus asks them if they are discussing it (v. 19). Jesus gives more explanation in verse 20 and illustrates his point in verses 21–22.

Jesus begins by stating, “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me” (v. 16). There are at least two possible meanings to this statement: Jesus could be talking about the disciples’ not seeing him because he has ascended to heaven, and then seeing him again at the second coming; or Jesus could be talking about the disciples’ not seeing him when he is dead and buried, and then seeing him again after his resurrection. The rest of the passage helps us decide between these possibilities.

In verses 23–28 Jesus will speak of the new access to the Father the disciples will have in prayer once they have seen Jesus again. This indicates that after they have seen him again, their lives will continue, as they continue to pray. This would not seem to reflect changed circumstances after the second coming, but it would fit the changed circumstances after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, it seems that Jesus is referring to the disciples’ not seeing him while he is in the tomb but then seeing him again after the resurrection. Once he is raised from the dead, they will rejoice (v. 22) and will enjoy new access to the Father in prayer (vv. 23–28).

A further consideration against the idea that Jesus speaks of his ascension and second coming is the fact that he speaks of these events taking place in “a little while.” What he has in view seems to be the immediate future.

The disciples are clearly puzzled by these words of Jesus, restating and discussing them in verses 17–18. Whether because of his keen powers of observation or because of his divine omniscience, Jesus knows the disciples desire to pursue the matter, so he inquires of their discussion (v. 19).

Jesus then predicts the emotions the disciples will feel when what he is describing comes to pass (v. 20). These emotions confirm that Jesus is speaking of his death and resurrection, not his ascension and return. The disciples will weep and lament because they see Jesus crucified and buried. Meanwhile, the world will rejoice over the death of Jesus, thinking they have rid themselves of one who has convicted them of sin (cf. Rev. 11:7–10). Jesus transitions at the end of John 16:20 to the way the disciples will feel after he is raised from the dead: their sorrow will turn to joy.

Jesus compares his death and resurrection to childbirth in verses 21–22. Just as a woman undergoes a painful delivery, the disciples will feel the anguish of the crucifixion of Jesus (v. 21). But just as the pain of childbirth is eclipsed by the joy of a newborn baby, so the disciples’ sorrow over Jesus death will be eclipsed by their joy at his resurrection (vv. 21–22). The joy the disciples feel when they see Jesus again will be such that no one can take it from them (v. 22b).

Why does Jesus use this comparison to childbirth? Just as new life comes when a baby is born, so the death and resurrection of Jesus brings new life to the world. Just as a woman endures the curse of Genesis 3:16—the curse of “pain in childbearing”—so Jesus will endure the judgment of the cross and thereby conquer the curse of death when he is resurrected.

16:23–28 *A New Access to the Father in Prayer.* Having discussed the way the disciples’ sorrow will turn to joy (16:16–22), Jesus next reveals more ways in which his going away will benefit his followers (vv. 23–28). In addition to making it possible for the Helper to come to his followers (v. 7), the departure of Jesus will open new access to the Father in prayer.

When Jesus states what will take place “in that day” (v. 23), he clearly refers to the time after the disciples’ sorrow has turned to joy (vv. 20, 22). Each time Jesus speaks of the disciples’ praying in his name, he speaks of such prayer as taking place after his departure (14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–24, 26). Jesus thus envisions the disciples’ enjoying an access to the Father in prayer through the name of Jesus that they did not have prior to his death and resurrection. In keeping with this, he states, “Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (v. 24).

The cross of Christ cleanses his followers from sin and guarantees the salvation of God’s people. Jesus laid down his life for the sheep, and he will call his sheep by name. Jesus sent his disciples to bear fruit, and part of that fruit-bearing will

entail their prayers in the name of Jesus—prayers in keeping with the character and mission of Jesus. Jesus will certainly answer such prayers, for he will certainly save all his people, transform them into his own image, and lead them to glory. Jesus means to give full joy to his people, the joy he himself experiences (v. 24; cf. 15:11). Full joy comes only through love, and love means sacrificing oneself for the benefit of others.

Jesus acknowledges that he has been speaking in “figures of speech” (16:25), a term used also in 10:6 to describe the way Jesus spoke of himself as the good shepherd. What is in view is the way in which Jesus has not explicitly stated that he will be crucified and risen but has hinted that he at first will *not* be seen but later *will* be seen (16:16); and also the way in which he has stated that when the disciples do not see him, they will mourn, but their sorrow will turn to joy when they see him again (v. 20). Probably the comparison to childbirth is another of the “figures of speech” in view (vv. 21–22).

Jesus promises that the hour is coming when he will stop speaking in a veiled way and instead will tell them openly of the Father (v. 25). We see some of this in chapters 20–21, when Jesus has been raised from the dead. Then in the book of Revelation Jesus pulls back the veil to show John what must take place. Luke also records that Jesus “opened [the] minds” of his followers after the resurrection (Luke 24:45) and taught them prior to his ascension (Acts 1:3). Jesus may also have in view the way the Spirit will bring what he said to remembrance and lead the disciples into all truth (John 14:26; 16:12–15).

The departure of Jesus will benefit the disciples because it will enable him to send the Spirit (v. 7), grant them new access to the Father through prayer in the name of Jesus (v. 23), and bring about the time when Jesus will speak openly with them about the Father (v. 25). In addition, Jesus speaks of a deepened intimacy with the Father (vv. 26–27).

What Jesus states in verses 26–27 seems to indicate that the Father will himself hear prayers in the name of Jesus made by the followers of Jesus. Jesus appears to be saying that the disciples should not think the success of their prayers depends on Jesus’ taking their requests to the Father, for the Father is well disposed to them already. Jesus makes this plain as he explains that the Father loves them (v. 27). The Father’s love for them and favorable disposition toward them is based on the fact that they have loved Jesus and believed that he came from God (v. 27). Once again, John is clear that the Father has initiated love (cf. 3:16), and that we love because he first loved us (cf. 1 John 4:19). John is not saying, therefore, that people earn the Father’s love but is describing the grace in which believers stand because they love Jesus and believe his claims (cf. Rom. 5:1–2). It is, after all, because Jesus goes away to the Father that the day will come when the Father himself will hear prayers made in the name of Jesus (John 16:26–27).

In verse 28 Jesus himself summarizes his first coming: he came into the world from the Father, and now he leaves the world to go to the Father.

16:29–33 *Jesus Has Overcome the World.* It seems that the clear statement of verse 28 prompts the disciples' response in verse 29 that Jesus is speaking plainly rather than with figurative speech. The disciples go one step further in verse 30, apparently concluding from the open statement of his divine origin in verse 28 that Jesus knows all. When they add that he needs no one to question him, they seem to be responding to the way that Jesus knew what they wanted to ask him apart from their actually stating it (v. 19). This convinces them that Jesus came from God, and it may indicate that when John noted, "Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him" (v. 19), he meant that Jesus knew not because he was an observant man but because he possessed supernatural knowledge as one who came from God.

In 13:38 Jesus asked Peter a question before predicting his denials. Now in 16:31–32 Jesus asks the disciples a question before predicting that they will abandon him. Their belief that he came from God (vv. 30–31) will not keep them from scattering from him to save their own skin (v. 32). Jesus knows, however, that even if all humans desert him, he is "not alone, for the Father is with [him]" (v. 32).

The last words Jesus says to his disciples before he begins to address the Father in prayer summarize everything he has spoken to them since he washed their feet in chapter 13. He has spoken in chapters 13–16 in order for his followers to have peace in him (16:33). Though he is leaving, if they believe what he has said in chapters 13–16, they will have peace. In the world, as he has warned them, they will have tribulation. They will face the same woes he himself has faced. They will fulfill the appointed suffering, completing the messianic woes. They are to take heart not because Jesus promises that they will live hassle-free lives with no suffering but because he has declared that he has overcome the world (16:33).

What does it mean that Jesus has overcome the world? It means that he was tempted in every way yet was without sin (Heb. 4:15). It means that he "loved not [his life] even unto death" (cf. Rev. 12:11). It means that he "fought the good fight, . . . finished the race, . . . kept the faith," and "fulfilled [his] ministry" (cf. 2 Tim. 4:5, 7).

Response

Jesus tells his disciples that when they see him raised from the dead, they will experience a joy that no one can take from them (John 16:22). The enemies of Jesus can take our possessions, our loved ones, our freedoms, our rights, and our jobs. But they cannot take our joy. Why not? Because Jesus has been raised from the dead, and that means he has conquered. He has overcome the world.

That Jesus has overcome the world means that those who trust him and remain faithful to him can do likewise. That Jesus has overcome the world means that even if they put believers out of the synagogue or kill them, even if the world treats believers like it treated Jesus, believers can overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, not loving their lives, even unto death (Rev. 12:11).

That Jesus has overcome the world means sin has no claim, death has no victory, and Satan has no chance of success.

Jesus promised his disciples that the Father himself loved them and would hear their prayers (John 16:26–27). How do we respond to requests made by people who have offended and mistreated us? Compare that to the way in which we would respond to our own beloved children. Are we availing ourselves of the access to the Father that prayer in the name of Jesus makes possible because of his death and resurrection? Are we relishing the intimacy with the Father that Jesus made possible through the cross? The Father himself will hear and answer the prayers we offer in accordance with the character and mission of Jesus. Are we living for what Jesus gave his life to accomplish? Are we relishing all that the full measure of Christ's devotion made possible for us?

JOHN 17:1–8

17 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

⁶“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.”

Section Overview: Knowing God

Jesus has just finished his most important conversation with his disciples and now offers what is arguably the most important prayer in the Bible (John 17:1–26). This is the longest prayer of Jesus included in Scripture, and he prays it before the most difficult and climactic moments of his life: his betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

This prayer instructs those who would be like Jesus. As Jesus faces the most harrowing moments of his own life, he has forgotten himself entirely and instead is focused on his Father and his followers. In verses 1–5, we see what Jesus wants for his followers: for them to know God. Then, in verses 6–8, we see that Jesus himself works to see his own prayer answered: he makes God known.

Section Outline

VI.C. The Lord's Prayer (17:1–26)

1. Knowing God (17:1–8)

- a. Jesus Wants His People to Know God (17:1–5)
- b. Jesus Makes God Known (17:6–8)

Comment

17:1–5 *Jesus Wants His People to Know God.* Having completed his discourse to his disciples, Jesus turns his attention to the Father and prays words matching his announcement of 12:23: “the hour has come.” These references to “the hour” in chapters 12 and 17, along with the prayers voiced in 12:28 (“Father, glorify your name”) and 17:1 (“Father, . . . glorify your Son”) serve to bracket chapters 13–16. The “hour” and the “glory” in view in 12:23–28 were clearly the cross, as can be seen by how Jesus spoke of the grain of wheat falling into the earth and dying so that it could bear fruit (12:24); of the judgment of the world and the casting out of its ruler (12:31); and of his being lifted up to draw all people to himself (12:32), showing “what kind of death he was going to die” (12:33). The “hour” is the cross in 12:23, and the “hour” is the cross in 17:1. So also in both 12:28 and 17:1, the glory is the glory that will be displayed at the cross.

Facing the most severe stress of his life, the cross, Jesus responds by praying to the Father, “Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you” (v. 1). How does this dynamic work? Jesus is asking the Father to glorify him at the cross (cf. 13:31–32). How will Jesus be glorified at the cross? The cross will display his ability to satisfy the almighty wrath of the Father, whose worth and dignity and authority and justice are comprehensive. In order for Jesus to satisfy the Father’s justice against sin—justice owed for all the sins of all his people at all times and in all places—the worth of Jesus must equal that of the Father himself.

The cross not only demonstrates the incomparable worth of Jesus; it also demonstrates his incomparable love. Jesus does not satisfy the Father’s wrath because he himself has violated the Father’s holiness, *but because his people have*. Jesus places himself under God’s displeasure against sin because he loves his people. Jesus does this not for himself but for others.

Jesus prays for the Father to glorify him so that, in turn, he can glorify the Father. How does the death of Jesus glorify the Father? The cross glorifies the Father because at the cross God keeps his word. God shows that if he says that sin will lead to death, it does. Humans are often tempted to bend the rules when they become inconvenient. God, however, shows that he will not bend the rules, change the boundaries, or redefine the terms. God is so committed to his own holiness that he does not spare his own Son but freely gives him up for us all (Rom. 8:32).

This demonstration of God’s holiness is simultaneously a demonstration of his incomparable love for his people. God puts Christ forward as a sacrifice of propitiation because his people’s sins must be punished (Rom. 3:25–26). God glorifies Jesus at the cross so that his people can be saved from the penalty of their sin.

There is a beautiful, logical connection between John 17:1 and verse 2: Jesus has just prayed for the Father to glorify him at the cross in verse 1, and in verse 2 he states the reason he desires to be glorified and the purpose he will achieve once he is glorified. The reason is, “since [or “even as”] you have given him authority over all flesh.” The logic goes like this: the Father gives Jesus authority over all flesh, and so Jesus desires to lay down his life for that flesh. Jesus is in control, and desires to give his life for those over whom he has authority.

The reason Jesus desires the Father to glorify him at the cross is that he has all authority, and the purpose he hopes to achieve through the Father’s glorifying him at the cross is the granting of eternal life to all whom the Father has given to him (v. 2). Jesus will be able to give eternal life *because* his death will pay the penalty for sin—the penalty of death. To whom will Jesus grant eternal life? To those whom the Father has given to him. In 6:37 Jesus declared that all whom the Father gave him would come to him. In verse 39 he asserted that the Father’s will was for him to lose none of those the Father gave to him. In 10:27–29 Jesus said that his sheep hear his voice, he gives them eternal life, they will not perish, and no one can take them from him, because the Father, who gave them to him, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand. Jesus repeatedly references these people in John 17 (vv. 2, 6, 9; cf. 18:9).

Jesus seeks to give his people eternal life, and he defines that eternal life as knowing God and knowing *him*, the one whom God sent (17:3). Jesus went to the cross so that his people could know God. What Jesus wants for his people is better than what they want for themselves.

Jesus asserts in verse 4 that he has glorified the Father by completing the work the Father gave him to do. Jesus was entirely faithful. He never failed but succeeded at every point. By doing this, Jesus demonstrated that his Father was most important to him. That he did what the Father gave him to do showed that the Father mattered more to him than anything that would have kept him from doing what the Father gave him to do. And when this work is completed, Jesus will return to the Father’s side (v. 5), sharing his glory forever.

17:6–8 *Jesus Makes God Known.* Jesus asserts in verse 6 that he has manifested the Father’s name to those whom the Father had given him. Jesus has lived in such a way that those who saw him saw the Father (12:45; 14:9). Jesus put the character of the Father on display and lived in accordance with the Father’s priorities. In that sense, Jesus manifested the Father’s name, but Jesus manifested the Father’s name in another prominent way as well. Across John’s Gospel, Jesus has identified himself using the name God used to identify himself to Moses at the burning bush: I Am.⁴⁵

- “But he said to them, ‘I Am. Do not be afraid’” (6:20).
- “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I Am you will die in your sins” (8:24).

⁴⁵ The following five quotations are my translation.

- “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I Am” (8:28).
- “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I Am” (8:58).
- “I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I Am” (13:19).

Jesus will say in 17:12 that he kept his people in the Father’s name, which the Father gave to him. This seems to indicate that just as the Father granted the Son life in himself (5:26), he also granted the Son his own name. All of this expounds what John declared in 1:18: “No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (AT).

By making his own character and purpose known to his followers, by living out what the Father sent him to do and accomplishing it all (17:4), Jesus has manifested the Father’s name to them, making the Father known to them. Jesus acknowledges that before the Father gave the disciples to him, they belonged to the Father. This seems to indicate that the Father claimed them from the world as his own and entrusted them to Jesus. What proof does Jesus give that this has happened? They have kept God’s word.

Because Jesus knows that his disciples have kept the word he spoke to them (cf. v. 8), he can say that they know the profound Trinitarian truth he asserts in verse 7: “Everything that you have given me is from you.” The Father entrusted judgment and authority to the Son (5:22, 27). He granted the Son to have life in himself (5:26). He gave the Son works to do (5:36), and the Son accomplished them all (17:4). The Father gave his own name to the Son (v. 12), and the Son has repeatedly identified himself by that name (6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19).

In addition to all this, Jesus states in 17:8 that the Father gave him words, truths he was to teach. Jesus taught what the Father wanted him to teach (7:16, 28; cf. 5:30; 6:38). The disciples have kept God’s word (17:6) by receiving the words that the Father gave to Jesus to teach them (v. 8). They have embraced the teaching of Jesus precisely because they believe that Jesus came from God. Jesus, after all, had said that the work of God was to believe in the one God sent (6:29).

Response

We do not know what to wish for, but Jesus knows what we need most. He is committed to giving us what is best for us: the revelation of God, the disclosure of God’s name, the clear picture of God’s character and purpose and mission that we see when we look at Jesus as presented in the Gospels. To know God is best, most satisfying, everlasting, ongoing, never-failing, transforming, life-affirming, death-defeating, world-conquering, sin-forgiving, stain-cleansing, holiness-teaching, and life-saving.

Jesus said that those whom the Father gave to him kept his word (17:6). Do we seek to know whether we belong to the world or to God the Father and Christ the Son? Do we keep the word of God? This does not require absolute perfection.

Repenting when we fail is an aspect of keeping God's word. Do we love God's word? Do we resonate with Peter's statement that Jesus has the words of eternal life? Do we know the word as a light for our path, hope for our despair, strength for our weakness, help in our need, correction for our wrongs, and joy greater than all our sorrow? What a blessing to have God's word!

JOHN 17:9–26

⁹“I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.¹ ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them² in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself,³ that they also may be sanctified⁴ in truth.

²⁰“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

¹Or *from evil* ²Greek *Set them apart* (for holy service to God) ³Or *I sanctify myself*; or *I set myself apart* (for holy service to God) ⁴Greek *may be set apart* (for holy service to God)

Section Overview: Jesus Prays for Unity and Glory

In his prayer thus far (John 17:1–8), Jesus has stated his desire for his disciples to know God and has acknowledged to the Father that he himself has made the

Father known to those the Father has given him. In verses 9–26 Jesus prays for his followers to be unified and to see his glory: in verses 9–19 he prays for his disciples, in verses 20–23 for those who will believe through his disciples, and in verses 24–26 for people to see his glory.

Section Outline

- VI.C.2. Jesus Prays for Unity and Glory (17:9–26)
 - a. Jesus Prays for His Followers (17:9–19)
 - b. Jesus Prays for Those Who Will Believe through His Followers (17:20–23)
 - c. Jesus Prays for His People to See His Glory (17:24–26)

Comment

17:9–19 *Jesus Prays for His Followers.* Jesus loves his people. He is the “good shepherd” who lays down his life for the sheep (10:14–15). As Paul puts it in Ephesians 5:25, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” In keeping with these truths, Jesus asserts in John 17:9 that he is praying for his people, clarifying that he is not praying for the world at large. This is somewhat surprising—that Jesus would exclude the world from his prayers. Yet Scripture recognizes that Jesus bears a special, devoted, husband-like love for those whom the Father has given him, those who have believed.

In verse 10 Jesus states that those who believe belong to him and to the Father, and he himself is glorified in them. Then in verse 11 we see that, just as Jesus has promised his disciples that he would send the Spirit to be with them when he goes away (16:7; 14:15–17), so now, on the verge of his departure, he petitions the Father to preserve his disciples. The Son promises to send the Spirit, and he petitions the Father to preserve. There is profound agreement between the members of the Trinity as they work together for the salvation and preservation of the people of God.

Specifically, Jesus asks the Father to keep these people in the name that the Father gave to Jesus (17:11). The fact that Jesus and the Father share a name points to their identity, their unity with one another. This unity between the members of the Godhead is the basis for the unity Jesus asks the Father to create among his followers: “that they may be one, even as we are one” (v. 11). This unity flows from the generosity of the Father, who gave his own name to Jesus. The unity that Jesus prays for his disciples to enjoy, then, is a unity that will be marked by personal generosity manifested in self-giving love reflecting the character of God himself in the pursuit of a shared purpose and mission. Because followers of Jesus desire the same things, they sacrifice themselves for one another for the glory of God.

The Father, Jesus, and the Spirit are united in the purpose of saving everyone whom the Father has given to Jesus. The Father gave these people to Jesus so that Jesus would give them the words the Father gave him, that they could be saved.

Jesus now prays for these people, that the Father will keep them now that he is going away.

Jesus says in verse 12 that he has been keeping his people while he was with them and has successfully guarded them. No one has been lost except Judas. The way that Jesus identifies Judas—as “the son of destruction”—indicates that Judas has not been born “from above” (cf. 3:3 mg.). Judas is therefore not a son of the kingdom or a child of God (cf. 1:12). The reason Judas has not been regenerated, guarded, or kept is “that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (17:12). The choosing of Judas, therefore, did not represent election unto salvation. His falling away should not be interpreted as implying that some who belong to God and are chosen by him may fall away.

How is the Scripture fulfilled through Judas? God has prophesied the end and appointed the means. The Scriptures say that the Christ will suffer, and Judas is the means whereby Jesus will be handed over to suffer. God is sovereign over all these things being accomplished. Judas, however, has freely chosen his course of action. No one forced him to do something he did not want to do. Judas is responsible for what he chose to do. We see again the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Jesus explains in verse 13 why he speaks this prayer in the world before his departure: that his disciples might have his joy fulfilled in themselves. The joy Jesus possesses flows from his oneness with the Father in character, purpose, and self-giving love. Jesus desires his followers to enjoy this life that can be had only by those who become imitators of the God who sacrifices himself for others, who humbles himself to lift others up, who takes on the pains of others to free them from penalty. Oneness of character and purpose, unity of devotion and lifestyle, are the producers of the joy Jesus has, which he prays will be fulfilled in those who follow him.

In verses 14–16 Jesus speaks of what distinguishes his people from the world: the word of God. By giving his people the word, Jesus has created an unworldly way of thinking, living, and being for his followers. This word-created unworldliness prompts the world to hate them (v. 14a, b) because they no longer agree with the world in thought, action, or way of life—they are no more of this world than Jesus himself was (vv. 14c, 16).

Jesus clarifies that he is not asking the Father to remove his followers from the persecution, affliction, or difficulty that will exist for them in the world (v. 15). Rather, he is asking the Father to keep them from Satan and from evil. Jesus prays that the Father would preserve his followers in the world, not take them out of the world. Jesus desires his followers to be like him, for them to be as unworldly as he himself has been (v. 16).

Just as the word that Jesus gave his disciples made them unworldly (v. 14), Jesus prays to the Father in verse 17 that the truth of the Father’s word would set them apart, make them holy, sanctify them as they continue in the world. How does Jesus expect his disciples to remain in the world and be protected from evil?

By the sanctification the Father will accomplish in them by means of the truth of his word.

Jesus once again articulates the similarities between himself and his disciples. Jesus was in the bosom of the Father and was sent by the Father to make him known (1:18). The beloved disciple was in the bosom of Jesus (13:23), and just as the Father sent Jesus, Jesus is sending his disciples (17:18).

Jesus states again in verse 19 that he has set himself apart, consecrating himself to a holy life and a sin-bearing death, for the sake of his disciples. That Jesus does this on their behalf, for their sake, makes it possible for them to be sanctified in the truth. Christ set himself apart for the cross so that his people could be cleansed from sin and set apart for good works, set apart to go into the world as he came into the world: communicating the love of God and the good news that sinful rebels can be reconciled to the holy God through repentance and faith.

17:20–23 *Jesus Prays for Those Who Will Believe through His Followers.* To this point Jesus has been praying for his disciples, but in verse 20 he begins to pray for those who will believe in him because of the testimony of these disciples. Jesus sends his disciples into the world as the Father sent him (v. 18), and Jesus knows that just as his word has created unworldliness in his disciples (v. 14), the word of his disciples will create unworldliness in others (v. 20).

What does Jesus pray for those who will believe through the word of the disciples? The same thing he requested for the disciples: unity, oneness, agreement (v. 21a). Once again, the unity Jesus prays for is modeled on the unity he enjoys with the Father. Just as he and the Father are *in* one another—connoting shared identity, nature, and purpose—Jesus prays for those who will believe to be united by faith to one another and to the Father and the Son through the indwelling Holy Spirit (v. 21b).

Jesus states the tremendously important purpose of the unity of those who believe: “that the world may believe that you have sent me” (v. 21c). Jesus expects the unworldly unity of his followers to have an evangelistic impact on the unbelieving world. This means that Jesus expects the unity of the church to be convincing to the world.

When Jesus speaks of the glory that the Father has given him (v. 22), he seems to have in view the way that the Father has given to him his own nature and identity, which Jesus has revealed as he has displayed the glory of the Father (cf. 1:14, 18). In our study of John’s Gospel we have seen that glory to be concentrated in the justice and mercy of the Father on display as Jesus went to the cross.

What does Jesus mean when he says that he has given this glory to his followers? As the Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8–11) and Jesus reveals the glory of the Father, people’s concepts of justice and of right and wrong are transformed. We begin to agree with God about what is right, and the revelation of the glory of God redefines our understanding of holiness. This in turn revolutionizes our understanding of mercy, forgiveness, and salvation. When Jesus

speaks of giving his disciples the glory the Father gave him, then, he seems to mean that the revelation of the Father's justice and mercy through Christ's death on the cross now grips those who believe in Jesus and produces unity among them (17:22).

Just as the unity that Jesus prayed for his disciples to share had an evangelistic purpose (v. 21), so the unity that Jesus prays for in verse 22 and the beginning of verse 23 is to be evangelistic as well. The disciples are in Jesus (v. 23a). The Father is in Jesus (v. 23b). Thus believers' union with Christ produces union with one another (v. 23c), and this unity is in order for the world to know both that God really did send Jesus (v. 23d) and that God loves his people just as he loved Jesus (v. 23e).

What an unexpected grace from God, that he would love us just as he loved Jesus! Jesus deserves God's perfect love. By virtue of our union with Christ by faith through the Spirit, the Father loves us as he loves Jesus. Those who experience such love cannot but be transformed by it, and those who experience such transformation will be noticed by the world. The world, in turn, will be convinced that God sent Jesus because of the transforming love of God they observe creating unity among the people of God.

17:24–26 *Jesus Prays for His People to See His Glory.* In verse 24 Jesus prays for the realization of what he had promised in 14:1–3. There he said that he was going to prepare a place for his disciples and would return and take them with him. Now in 17:24 he communicates to the Father his desire for his people to be with him where he is, so that they might enjoy the incomparable glory the Father gave to the Son before the foundation of the world.

This is a glory anticipated by everything lovely, approximated by anything good, and surpassed by nothing in all of creation. This glory of God in Christ is the consummation of God's purposes, the full display of his character, the outshining of his radiance, the manifestation of his love. Jesus prays for the consummation of God's purposes when he prays that those who believe because of the word of his disciples will see the glory he had with the Father before the foundation of the world.

The world fails to recognize the revelation of the Father in Christ, but those who believe that the Father sent Jesus do see it (v. 25). Jesus has manifested the name of the Father to his people and will continue to do so precisely so that the people of Jesus will experience the love of God (v. 26). This love with which the Father has loved Jesus, giving himself to Jesus so that he could in turn give himself to us, is the love we experience when we know that God sent Jesus, that Jesus died for us, that by the indwelling Spirit Jesus is with us even now, and that because the Son has petitioned the Father to keep us, he will preserve us to the end. There is no better love.

Response

In this section Jesus has prayed for unity, sanctity, and glory. This is what Jesus seeks for us. This is what the Spirit inspired the biblical authors to accomplish. This is what the Father will use the Word to do: To make us unified. To sanctify

us. To show us his glory. God is sovereign. He will do it. The Word will make us unworldly. The Word will set us apart to the Father and make us holy for him.

The Father is able to bring this to pass. Are we putting ourselves in position for the Word to do its work in our lives? Are we doing our part to contribute to the unity of the church? Is the purpose for which the Father sent Jesus, for which Jesus came, lived, prayed, and died, the purpose for which we live? Is the church's purpose our purpose?

There is no other love like the love of God in Christ, none so unselfish and pure and cleansing and transforming and renewing and saving and preserving and completing. What can we do but serve one another, love one another, and strive to agree with one another, that we may be one as the Father and Christ are one, that the world may believe in Jesus (17:21)? How could we respond in any other way than with lives of worship that show the world that God sent Christ and thereby loved his people as he loved Jesus himself (v. 23; cf. 3:16)?

JOHN 18:1–11

18 When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ²Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” ⁵They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” ¹Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶When Jesus² said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁸Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.” ⁹This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.” ¹⁰Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant³ and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

¹Greek *I am*; also verses 6, 8 ²Greek *he* ³Or *bondservant*; twice in this verse

Section Overview: Jesus Gives Himself Up

One student of the rise of secularism has written,

Every person, and every society, lives with or by some conception(s) of what human flourishing is: what constitutes a fulfilled life? . . .

Does the highest, the best life involve our seeking, or acknowledging, or serving a good which is beyond, in the sense of independent of human flourishing? . . .

It's clear that in the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition the answer to this question is affirmative. Loving, worshipping God is the ultimate end. . . .

Flourishing is good, nevertheless seeking it is not our ultimate goal. But even where we renounce it, we re-affirm it, because we follow God's will in being a channel for it to others, and ultimately to all. . . .

I would like to claim that the coming of modern secularity . . . has been coterminous with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option. I mean by this a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing. Of no previous society was this true.⁴⁶

The selfishness of our secular age is in stark contrast with the self-giving love of Jesus. He declared in John 10:18 that no one took his life from him; he laid it down of his own accord. John 18:1–11 is the opening scene of the last act in John's Gospel, in which Jesus will lay down his life of his own accord. This passage shows Jesus in full command of the situation; even in his arrest, the essence of the life of Jesus is on display as he commands those arresting him to take him and let his followers go free. Jesus gives himself up for others.

Section Outline

VII. Denial, Death, Resurrection (18:1–20:31)

A. Jesus Gives Himself Up (18:1–11)

1. The Time and Place (18:1–2)
2. Jesus in Command (18:3–6)
3. Let These Men Go (18:7–9)
4. Shall I Not Drink the Cup? (18:10–11)

Comment

18:1–2 *The Time and Place.* Jesus was with his disciples for the Passover in 13:1. At the end of chapter 14, having washed their feet and instructed them, he declared, "Rise, let us go from here" (14:31). Perhaps they took their time, allowing for the speaking of chapters 15–17 prior to their arrival at the garden in 18:1. Perhaps a slow walking pace allowed the conversation to develop as they made their way across the Kidron to enter the garden.

Jesus had dismissed Judas to his awful work in 13:27. If Jesus intended to thwart the efforts of Judas to betray him, going to a garden known to the traitor was not the way to do it. Jesus, however, was not trying to avoid the hour for

⁴⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 16–18.

which he had come (cf. 12:27). Going to a garden known to Judas was part of the way that Jesus enacted his own words in 10:18 concerning laying down his life of his own accord.

Even in the smallest details, Jesus made choices that reflected his courage and resolve.

18:3–6 *Jesus in Command.* The force Judas led to the garden joined three divided factions against a common enemy, Jesus: a Roman band of soldiers, officers from the chief priests, and some from the Pharisees. The “band of soldiers” (v. 3) was a Roman cohort, a tenth of a legion. Legions consisted of 3,000 to 6,000 men, so a cohort would probably have been 300 to 600 men (cf. BDAG, s.v. σπεῖρα). If that number seems excessive, we can compare it with Acts 23:23, where the Romans prepared 470 men to escort Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea.

Why would there be such concern over Jesus? He has caused an uproar in the temple (John 2:13–22), done provocative things before in Passover season (6:4–59), beguiled those sent to arrest him (7:30, 32, 45–46), slipped away when they tried to stone him (8:59), and escaped their hands when they tried to arrest him (10:39). In addition to proving difficult to pin down, Jesus has asserted in public, to crowds expecting a conquering king from David’s line, that “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (12:23) and that the world’s ruler would now be cast out (v. 31). John’s audience knows that Jesus refers to the way he will be glorified at the cross, but the opponents of Jesus likely thought he was referring to a more worldly form of glory in a kingdom of this world.

The Jewish opponents of Jesus would have understood that Passover commemorated God’s delivering Israel from Egypt. They understood that the prophets had promised a new-exodus deliverance for God’s people. Now this Jesus, whose arguments they could not defeat, whose physical person they could not entrap, had begun talking about how the time had come for the glorification of the Daniel 7:13 Son of Man. What were they going to think? They would naturally expect trouble. They probably expected an attempt to overthrow the existing power structures in an effort to replace them with the fulfillment of the prophesied Davidic kingdom. Why they opposed such a thing is part and parcel of the shocking mystery of the Jewish rejection of Jesus.

Ironically, what the opponents of Jesus feared was exactly what was going to happen, but not in the way they expected. Rather than leading an armed revolt, Jesus would disarm his enemies with a willing surrender. Rather than attacking worldly regimes, Jesus would cast out the ruler of this world (John 12:31) by laying down his life for his sheep. Jesus would thereby crush the kingdoms of the world, establish his right to sit at the right hand of God, and show himself to be the world’s true king. The armies of Rome will be no more successful against him than the armies of Pharaoh were against the Red Sea.

The huge force comes with “lanterns and torches and weapons” (18:3) because they think they are coming against a mortal pretender, a revolutionary. They seek

to vanquish what they expect to be a worldly rebel, and they plan to do it in a worldly way.

Look at the courage John records Jesus as showing in verse 4. He knows he has been betrayed. He knows they have come for him. He knows that cruelty, scorn, agony, and death loom large before him. What does he do? He steps forward to confront the darkness that will put to death the Light of the World. Jesus asks whom they seek (v. 4). When they reply, “Jesus of Nazareth” (v. 5), he uses the name the Father gave to him (17:11, 12; cf. 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19). With Judas standing there, Jesus asserts, “I Am” (18:5).

In a garden in the darkness, the multitude armed with weapons of the flesh is turned back and stumbles to the ground by the power of the one who stood alone. The Light of the World asserts his identity, and the “evildoers . . . stumble and fall” (cf. Ps. 27:2), the “enemies . . . turn back” (cf. Ps. 56:9). By laying low his enemies, Jesus demonstrates that he could overcome them on their terms. By neither pressing his advantage to victory nor using it to escape, he demonstrates his purpose to carry out the Father’s plan. He will lay down his life for the sheep.

18:7–9 *Let These Men Go.* Jesus has taken the offensive against those who have come to arrest him and has gained the advantage over them. His intent, however, is not to attack nor to flee to fight another day. With his enemies on the ground, Jesus again asks whom they seek (v. 7) and again asserts, “I Am,” before securing his objective: “If you seek me, let these men go” (v. 8).

The enemies of Jesus operate from worldly concerns in worldly ways and pursue a worldly agenda. The ability of Jesus to overcome his enemies in the worldly ways they understand does not distract him from his heavenly concerns. Jesus is the Savior, and Jesus is the example. If Jesus had not given himself up to secure the freedom of his disciples, they would likely all have been arrested in the sweep to find Jesus. If Jesus did not give himself up to secure the freedom of all who follow him, we would have had to face almighty justice on our own merits. And we could never stand. What looks like worldly success does not distract Jesus from his purpose. However others might be tempted from their purpose when they experience worldly success, Jesus is undistracted when he gains the upper hand.

Jesus resolutely, courageously does what the Father sent him to do. Jesus has repeatedly spoken of those whom the Father has given him (6:37; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 9, 24), and he has also repeatedly spoken of how he will not lose any of them (6:39; 10:28; 17:12). John asserts that Jesus’ putting himself into the hands of his enemies so that they would allow his followers to go free fulfills what Jesus said about not losing any of those whom the Father gave him (18:9).

18:10–11 *Shall I Not Drink the Cup?* What Peter does in verse 10 shows the confusion and frustration of all the disciples. Peter loves God, loves Jesus, and hates the wickedness of a world that would treat one so good as a criminal and a threat. Thus Peter takes action. He seeks to align himself with all that is true and right, but he

fails to understand God's purpose. If anyone has ever found himself trying to do the right thing for the right cause, only to do the wrong thing in the wrong way, he can identify with what Peter does here.

Peter was probably not aiming to cut off merely an ear; he was prepared to fight. Whether it was his intention to defeat the foe or only to create a distraction that would allow Jesus the chance to escape, consider the odds Peter confronted. He could no doubt tell from the many torches that a horde of enemies was at the garden after Jesus. Peter was clearly ready to die in his attempt to deliver Jesus (cf. 13:37). He failed to understand; he was ignorant of God's plan (in spite of all that Jesus had taught).

Jesus' telling Peter to stop (18:11) would have only increased his bewilderment. Jesus rebuked him and reaffirmed his own resolve to "drink the cup that the Father" had given him. For Jesus to drink the cup was to subject himself to the just wrath of the Father (e.g., Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15–16). This reference to the cup that Jesus would drink establishes that Jesus was not merely giving himself to these officers so that his disciples could go free that night. Jesus was delivering his followers not merely from temporal, earthly capture; he was delivering them from the Father's eternal, divine punishment that stood over them. By offering himself up in their place, Jesus drank the cup of wrath that God had righteously prepared in response to sin. By drinking that cup in their place, Jesus made it so that God could be "just" and the "justifier" of those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

Response

Jesus believed in something worth living for, which meant it was also something worth dying for. He believed that obedience to his Father for the good of his people was worth more than his continuing to flourish, and so he gave himself up for that greater cause. He thought it was worth it. The question is whether we agree with him.

Jesus knocked down his opponents, then gave himself up to them. How do we respond when we experience what looks like worldly success? When we gain an opportunity to press a worldly advantage, are we distracted from our pursuit of Christlikeness, from our endeavors to give ourselves for others, from our concern for the glory of God?

Our salvation is secure because Jesus is infallible, undefeatable, indestructible, and un-distractable. He has all power, and he is all loving. He will save those for whom he gave his life. There is no better Savior, no better act of salvation, no better atonement for sin, no better reward for those who repent, and no better God to whom we could be reconciled.

JOHN 18:12–40

¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews¹ arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The servant girl at the door said to Peter, “You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” ¹⁸ Now the servants² and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.” ²² When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?” ²⁴ Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” ²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” ²⁷ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

²⁸ Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor’s headquarters.³ It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor’s headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?” ³⁰ They answered him, “If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.” ³¹ Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” The Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.” ³² This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

³³ So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” ³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you

over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” ³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” ³⁸ Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. ³⁹ But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” ⁴⁰ They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.⁴

¹ Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verses 14, 31, 36, 38 ² Or *bondservants*; also verse 26 ³ Greek *the praetorium* ⁴ Or *an insurrectionist*

Section Overview: Jesus Arrested and Betrayed

This passage continues the narrative of the greatest tragedy ever enacted in human history, as the only perfect man ever to live is persecuted, hunted, betrayed, and arrested.

Yet, despite, the chaos and treachery, God’s plan was enacted. Jesus stood undefiled, uncorrupted, undissuaded, and undefeated. When the faithful flee, the bold betray, the pure are defiled, and the just are corrupted, Jesus will remain. He will never fail us.

Section Outline

VII.B. Jesus Arrested and Betrayed (18:12–40)

1. Jesus Arrested (18:12–14)
2. Peter’s First Denial (18:15–18)
3. Jesus and Annas (18:19–24)
4. Denials Two and Three (18:25–27)
5. Jesus and Pilate (18:28–40)

Comment

18:12–14 *Jesus Arrested.* Jesus subdued his enemies (v. 6), then gave himself up so his followers could go free (vv. 8–9). John relates in verse 12 how the triumphant Conqueror is bound and hauled off by the outmatched foe. No one has taken Christ’s liberty from him: he has given himself up voluntarily (cf. 10:18).

Annas had been high priest from AD 6 to 15, when the Roman prefect Valerius Gratus deposed him. Thus, although John acknowledges that Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, was high priest at the time (18:13), John nevertheless refers to Annas as “the high priest” (vv. 15, 16, 19, 22). This is probably analogous to the way ex-presidents of the United States continue to be addressed as “Mr. President” or referred to as “President Bush,” for example, even though someone else currently holds the office.

Anticipating both what will take place and its significance, John reminds his audience of the prophecy spoken by Caiaphas about how advantageous it would be for one man to die for the people (v. 14; cf. 11:49–52).

18:15–18 *Peter's First Denial.* In the first half of the book of Acts, Peter played a leading role among the followers of Jesus. His speech in Acts 1 led to the selection of Matthias as the replacement of Judas (Acts 1:15–26). Peter then preached on the day of Pentecost in chapter 2 and was the apostles' spokesman again in chapters 3 and 4. The Lord confronted the sin of Ananias and Sapphira through Peter in chapter 5, and Peter remained at the center of the narrative of Acts until the focus shifted to Paul in the latter part of the book.

There is no indication anywhere that Peter sought to suppress the story of how he had denied Jesus three times. We all sin, but whose sin can be compared to Peter's? The Lord Jesus himself—the most important person ever to live—was on trial, and Peter, one of his closest disciples, denied him three times when he was at his most lonely and vulnerable moment. And for the rest of Peter's life—indeed, for the rest of history—his greatest failure has been rehearsed at every telling of the story most central to our faith.

John tells us in 18:15 how Peter got in position for the unfolding scene. With another disciple, he followed Jesus. Since John has no problem naming other disciples, it would seem that once again he himself is the unnamed disciple. It would fit what we see elsewhere for Peter and John to be together (cf. Acts 3:1), and if this disciple is John, then we know where his Gospel got these seemingly inconsequential details. The fact that this other disciple was known to the high priest does not add to our understanding of what happens to Jesus but is the kind of personal, eyewitness detail that one who participated in the events might continue to relate.

In 18:15–16 John relates how this unnamed disciple was able to gain access for Peter to the high priest's courtyard. The other disciple speaks to the servant girl at the door in verse 16, and in verse 17 the servant girl at the door speaks to Peter, asking him if he is not one of the disciples of Jesus. Whereas only a few verses earlier Jesus had courageously asserted, “I Am” (vv. 5–6), Peter “negates” himself, contradicts his whole life, and forsakes his deepest commitments with the words, “I am not” (v. 17).

Why would Peter do this? Did he have time to rationalize, or did he only react? Surely Peter had no reasonable hope of freeing Jesus, of breaking him out, because Jesus had just willingly given himself up (vv. 4–9). Peter had to have known that, even if he were to find a way to rescue Jesus, Jesus would likely have refused any chance to escape. Thus Peter's denial cannot be justified as the subterfuge of a spy infiltrating enemy territory.

Nor is it likely that Peter had engaged in a philosophical reflection that led him to conclude that if Jesus would not resist, Peter had no obligation to tell the truth. Such a conclusion would be impossible for him at that moment, and, in view of

the foundational ethical and philosophical assumptions of that time, it would not seem to be a plausible theory.

We seem to be left with the conclusion that Peter's instinct for self-preservation overrode his commitment to Jesus and the truth. In his fear and confusion and shock at these unexpected developments, Peter failed. He denied his connection to Jesus.

18:19–24 *Jesus and Annas.* When Annas asks Jesus about his disciples and his teaching in verse 19, it seems likely—given his worldly expectations of what Jesus seeks—that he wants to know what kind of force Jesus has gathered and what kind of instructions he has given them. Is there an organized army, a chain of command with regimental divisions, instructions concerning how to move and when?

Jesus responds in verse 20 by asserting that he has spoken openly, in public, to all who could hear; his ministry has not been conducted in secret. What he has said, he has said to all. Annas is fishing, but Jesus says there are no fish in that pond. To back up his claim to innocence, Jesus invites Annas to verify his claims by asking anyone who has heard him teach (v. 21). We then see two alternative ways of looking at the world (v. 22). John clearly presents the official's slapping of Jesus as an offensive disregard for the dignity of Jesus that results from a hasty, mistaken conclusion. From the official's point of view, however, it is the dignity of the high priest that has been disregarded. Jesus challenges the justice of the official's slap (v. 23), maintaining that he has done nothing wrong and should not have been struck.

Unbeknownst to the official and the high priest, the dignity of the high priest derives from the dignity of Jesus. The high priest holds a sacred office only because God is sacred. The sacred and holy God stands trial before those made sacred by what he has given them, and they hold their own dignity more dearly than his. Indeed, they do not even acknowledge his identity.

They hate God and slap Jesus because what God has made sacred—the high priesthood—is more precious to them than God himself. This is a common error with God's gifts. God gives a good and holy gift, such as sex, authority, or the stewardship of resources, and humans exalt their pleasure, their power, and their money over God himself. They refuse to worship God because they are intent on making idols of his gifts.

Annas has tried to elicit incriminating evidence from Jesus but has failed. His henchmen have treated Jesus as a criminal who disrespects authority, and Jesus has rebuked them with moral authority. His efforts fruitless, his justice challenged, Annas can only bundle Jesus off to Caiaphas.

18:25–27 *Denials Two and Three.* With Jesus on the way to Caiaphas, John shifts back to Peter, who in verse 25 is still standing with the enemy, warming himself at their fire. The question posed to him in verse 17 confronts him word-for-word in verse 25, and this time Peter denies his discipleship before again “negating” himself with the words “I am not.” Peter can assert that he is no disciple of Jesus,

but his insistence will not change reality. Reality confronts Peter in verse 26 when a relative of Malchus (cf. v. 10) asks about having seen Peter in the garden. When Peter denies this, the rooster spoken of by Jesus (cf. 13:38) crows on cue.

Why is Peter denying Jesus? For physical safety? To prolong his life? To maintain his freedom from incarceration? To protect his family (cf. Mark 1:30)? If Peter could see clearly, if he could rightly estimate what matters and what is valuable, he would know that it would be better for him to be in danger than for him to deny his Lord. Better for him to be jailed, even killed; better for his sons that their father die a heroic martyr than live as a coward. Better for his wife to be the widow of a noble man who kept faith with the one who matters most than to have a husband alive because he denied Jesus. Better for his life to end in honor than to continue in shame.

Peter failed to see clearly. The moment was too much for him. He denied the Lord, and so he lived the rest of his life with the story being told over and over, down to this day, long after his death. Perhaps Peter had not thought it through. Perhaps if he had, he would have done better. It had seemed from his earlier certainty (even saying that he was ready to die for Jesus) that he had thought it through (John 13:37). But in the moment, what mattered most was not what weighed most on his heart.

18:28–40 *Jesus and Pilate.* While Peter was denying Jesus for the second and third times (vv. 25–27), Jesus arrived at the home of Caiaphas, and from there he is sent to the Roman governor, Pilate (v. 28). The amount of time these events have taken to unfold is indicated in John's note: "It was early morning" (v. 28).

From the Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples had gone to the garden, where Jesus was arrested. Jesus has had a sleepless night of interrogation, being transferred from one place to another. Thus the exhaustion of an all-nighter can be tallied with the list of difficulties Jesus underwent.

John highlights another point of irony in the second half of verse 28. The opponents of Jesus are in the process of bringing about the fulfillment of the Passover by having Jesus put to death. Jesus is the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), and when he dies with unbroken bones, John will assert that the pattern of the Passover Lamb has been fulfilled in the death of Jesus (19:36; cf. Ex. 12:46; Ps. 34:20). Yet here in John 18:28 the enemies of Jesus refuse to enter the governor's headquarters because doing so would make them unclean. They seek to be pure for the Passover even as they reject its fulfillment.

The opponents of Jesus have missed the whole point of the celebration of the Passover meal. The purpose of Passover was to point forward to a new-exodus salvation that would eclipse the exodus from Egypt in its significance for God's people. In other words, the Passover pointed forward to the salvation God is about to accomplish in Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7).

By rejecting Jesus, the chief priests and Pharisees and all the Jews aligned with them have rejected God. By rejecting Jesus, they reject the salvation God

accomplishes in him in fulfillment of the Passover. Their rejection of both God and the Passover's fulfillment empties of any significance their concern for ritual purity. They disregard what matters most as they show concern for something that does not matter at all apart from its greater significance.

When Pilate accommodates their concern for cleanliness and goes out to ask what charge they have against Jesus (John 18:29), rather than answering the question they appeal to their own certitude (v. 30), as though that should be enough for Pilate. Perhaps reflecting his own uncertainty, Pilate urges them to deal with Jesus themselves according to their own law. The Jews reject this because the Romans do not permit them to practice capital punishment (v. 31). John sees this exchange as bringing about the fulfillment of what Jesus had said about how he would be lifted up (v. 32; cf. 12:32–33).

John does not note where Pilate got the idea to ask Jesus if he was the “King of the Jews” (18:33). Once Pilate has asked, however, Jesus asks him for the source of his question (v. 34). Perhaps rumors growing from expectations and hopes had reached Pilate (cf. 6:15), or perhaps the accusers of Jesus had communicated their concerns to Pilate. Rather than answer Jesus directly, Pilate refers to the fact that the chief priests and Jews have handed Jesus over to him and follows with a question as to what Jesus has done (18:35). This may indicate that the charge had come from the accusers of Jesus.

In his reply (v. 36) Jesus manages to alleviate Pilate's concern while not denying his identity as the true king of Israel. He does so by explaining that his servants are not fighting because his kingdom is not the earthly kind. This addresses Pilate's worldly concerns. He wants to avoid a rebellion by minimizing riots among the Jews. He is concerned about Rome and his status in the empire. Jesus notes that his followers have not fought and thereby satisfies Pilate's concerns.

Pilate recognizes that Jesus has not denied the charge and follows up on his initial question (v. 37a). In his reply, Jesus seems to say that kingship is not his concern, stressing that his purpose in life is to bear witness to the truth (v. 37b), asserting that everyone who is of the truth hears his voice (v. 37c). Jesus is the truth (14:6), and his sheep hear his voice (10:3, 16). Everyone taught of the Father comes to Jesus (6:45).

Pilate shows that he is deaf to Jesus and to the truth when he asks, “What is truth?” (18:38). It seems anachronistic to understand Pilate's question as akin to postmodern cynicism about absolute truth. He may be genuinely puzzled, asking a real question, but if so his responsibilities crowd out his opportunity to pursue the matter.

Pilate tells the Jews that he has no concerns about Jesus (v. 38). This seems to indicate that Pilate does not view Jesus as a threat to Rome. Pilate then brings up the Passover tradition of the release of a prisoner and asks if they would like to have Jesus released (v. 39). Rather than Jesus, however, the Jews cry out for Barabbas. John notes that, unlike Jesus, Barabbas was in reality a guilty man. Barabbas is called a “robber” in the ESV, with a footnote stating that the term could also be

rendered “insurrectionist.” John likely means to evoke this connotation, as it would portray the Jews’ crying for the release of a man guilty of the very crime of which they accuse Jesus. The Jews ask Pilate to crucify Jesus as a threat to Rome (cf. 11:48–51), but their desire for Barabbas to be released shows they are no more concerned for Rome than they are for justice. Their hatred of Jesus has blinded them to justice, truth, goodness, and beauty.

Response

Peter stood by the fire warming himself. Are we prepared for the way that publicly identifying ourselves as followers of Jesus in the presence of those who hate him will bring down their wrath? Are we prepared for the way that identifying with Jesus will make it so that we cannot stand in peace with his enemies or warm ourselves at their fires? Are we prepared to take up our cross and follow him?

Peter was apparently not as prepared for the moment of trial as he had thought he was. Are we prepared? Have we thought it through? Have we prayed to be delivered from evil, prayed that the Lord would not lead us into temptation? Are we convinced that it is better to live in purity, forsaking the fleeting pleasures of sin, than to defile ourselves for sin’s momentary pleasure and everlasting regret? Better to live in integrity, embracing the culture’s scorn, than to deny the Bible’s teaching and shatter the unity between what we know to be true and what we are willing to say in order to get along. Better to be a poor man who walks in the truth than to gain the world but make our souls schizophrenic through multiplied compromises.

Consider the powerful gospel that enabled Peter to move past his denials of Jesus. Do we know that gospel in its power? If our worst failure were recorded in the Bible and rehearsed every time the world’s most important story was revisited, would our experience of God’s grace in Christ enable us to stand, allowing the story to go forth, sharing the account with everyone we could? This is the grace Peter knew. This is what kept him alive after his failure. That grace can save the worst of cowards. If Peter can retell this story—and we know that he did—then we can be appropriately vulnerable concerning our own sin.

When even his boldest disciple denied him, Jesus stood fast. When those who claimed to care for purity defiled themselves in the dirtiest frame-up in the history of the world, Jesus was silent as a lamb led to the shearers. When Roman justice and concern for truth was crowded out by a shameful compromise to keep the peace, Jesus maintained his integrity, harbored no bitterness, and completed the most important project the Father gave him to accomplish.

Friends may fail us, religious people may show themselves to be selfish and impure, and the justice system may prove itself to be corrupt. But Jesus will never let us down. As David Wells has said, the last defense against evil held.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 171.

JOHN 19:1–16a

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. ²And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. ³They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.” ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” ⁶When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.” ⁷The Jews¹ answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.” ⁸When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. ⁹He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” ¹¹Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

¹²From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.” ¹³So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic² Gabbatha. ¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour.³ He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!” ¹⁵They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” ^{16a}So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

¹Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verses 12, 14, 31, 38 ²Or *Hebrew*; also verses 17, 20 ³That is, about noon

Section Overview: Look at How They Treated Him

This passage is so shocking that words refuse to communicate how offensive it is.

Who deserved to be welcomed by the people of Israel more than Jesus? For whom had they waited so long? To whom did their Scriptures testify? On whom were their hopes pinned? Would there come another who could do what he did or teach as he had? Would there come another who could raise the dead and give sight to the blind, living water to the thirsty, heaven’s bread to the hungry? Would there come another who would love God as Jesus did, who would love neighbor as self the way he had?

There would never come another like Jesus. And they swapped him for a known criminal (John 18:40). What man deserves to be treated with honor by his fellow man? Is there any human being on whom a crown and a robe of purple should be placed, before whom subjects should bow? If ever a man deserved to be so treated, Jesus did. If ever a man deserved the respect of his fellow man, Jesus did. Not only because of who he was, but also because of how he had behaved and to what he was committed. Jesus deserved to be crowned, robed, honored, and obeyed. How cruelly they used him.

Section Outline

VII.C. Look at How They Treated Him (19:1–16a)

1. Mock Homage (19:1–3)
2. The Condemnation of the Guiltless (19:4–8)
3. Authority and Sin (19:9–11)
4. Caesar or Jesus? (19:12–16a)

Comment

19:1–3 *Mock Homage.* Pilate had announced that he found no guilt in Jesus (18:38). Perhaps he has Jesus flogged in 19:1 in order to bring the Jews around to reason, to sober them up a bit, to keep them from wanting Jesus dead. His having Jesus flogged might have in fact been an attempt to save the life of Jesus; Pilate decided to abuse the innocent man in an attempt to avoid executing him.

John, the author of this Gospel, has presented Jesus as not only the rightful King of Israel but also the incarnation of Israel's God (e.g., 1:1, 49; 6:15; 10:30). Here John confronts his audience with palpable irony: the one who will be crowned King of creation is crowned with a mock crown of thorns. The one who will wear the festal robes of the High Priest-King of Israel—indeed, of all nations—is with disdain and contempt treated to a purple array meant to proclaim him as but a pretender (19:2).

Then, raucous soldiers profane his presence and slap him. The one before whom every knee shall bow (Phil. 2:10), whose lordship every tongue shall confess (Phil. 2:11), whose “wrath is quickly kindled” (Ps. 2:12), is approached by brigands and scoundrels who sarcastically hail him as the “King of the Jews,” accompanying their disrespectful words with audacious hands (John 19:3). The one who shaped and formed the human hand is confronted with that miracle of engineering used against him as a weapon.

19:4–8 *The Condemnation of the Guiltless.* Secure in his arrogance, the might of Rome enforcing his position, Pilate has treated the High King of heaven and earth with impudence. The soldiers in their turn have lampooned the idea that Jesus deserved to be treated with respect, putting on him a thorn crown and robe of purple. Perhaps Pilate thought that parading Jesus in this way would alleviate any concerns the Jews had about him (v. 4). What revolutionary leader's prestige

could recover from such shameful treatment? How could he maintain standing among his followers? How could his opponents continue to fear him after such indignity was done to him by a Roman overlord?

When Pilate says he finds no guilt in him (v. 4), he probably means he does not perceive Jesus as a threat to Rome. According to Pilate, Jesus is not guilty of sedition. Pilate does not think Jesus will provoke rebellion. Jesus does not strike him as a rabble-rouser, one who will threaten the peace, the *pax Romana*. Pilate's mistaken conclusion here demonstrates the finite limitations of all human rulers, judges, and governments. Pilate is correct that Jesus bears no guilt. But on the question of whether Jesus is a threat to Rome, whether Jesus is a king about whose threatened conquest he should be concerned, Pilate could not be more wrong.

Pilate may not fear him, the soldiers may boldly sneer at him, but even as they do so they follow the script in which he will rise to power by lowering himself unto death. He could not be less threatening as he obeys his Father, like a lamb silent before its shearers, and yet there exists no greater threat to all impudent human rulers who refuse the warning to "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry" (Ps. 2:12).

John 19:5 may contain the greatest display of humility, patience, self-control, restraint, and nobility ever seen in human history. Solomon declared in Proverbs 19:11, "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense." Never was more glory seen. Never was one worthy of more honor treated with more infamy. Never was more power restrained in the face of more provocation. Never was one with more authority treated with more disregard by those dependent upon his goodwill and kindness.

And who would expect the Jews to respond to their King, the incarnation of their God, the way they do in John 19:6? They see him and they cry, "Crucify." The pagan Roman is disgusted with this and tells them to do the injustice for themselves. The Jews had objected that they were not permitted to execute (18:31), so they need Rome do to this for them. These Jews are in the act of seeking the death of the one whose life results in law, the one whose existence makes law understandable and necessary, and as they try to kill him they pretend to be concerned about law.

As the basis for Rome executing Jesus, they falsely assert that Jesus has committed a crime that their own law would punish with death (19:7); they would use the law against its giver and rationale. They charge Jesus with "[making] Himself out to be the Son of God" (v. 7 NASB). Such a claim has various connotations. It communicates that one is the king from David's line, since God told David that his seed would be as a son to God himself (2 Sam. 7:14). It also communicates divinity, since we have seen this taken to mean that Jesus was making himself equal with God (John 5:18; 10:30–31). But to Pilate's Roman ears, this assertion that Jesus made himself out to be the "Son of God" may have been heard as something like what Homer had said about Achilles or Virgil about Aeneas; Pilate's fright in 19:8, therefore, may have resulted from an unwillingness to risk angering whatever god Jesus may or may not have had on his side.

Pilate has asserted in 18:38, 19:4, and 19:6 that he found no guilt in Jesus. The Jews assert that he should die because he has made himself out to be the Son of God. They do not believe that he is, so they think he should die for blasphemy. John's perspective, however, is that Jesus is precisely what he has claimed to be.

19:9–11 *Authority and Sin.* Frightened by the charge that Jesus was making himself out to be the Son of God (vv. 7–8), Pilate reenters the headquarters, apparently taking Jesus out of public view (cf. vv. 5–6), to ask him whence he came. Jesus does not answer the question (v. 9). Jesus had said to the Jews, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world” (8:23). In 18:36 Jesus had said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world,” then he spoke in verse 37 of how he was born for the purpose of bearing witness to the truth. Now, however, in 19:9, he gives no answer to Pilate.

Indignant that Jesus will not answer, Pilate makes a statement meant as a threat to elicit an answer, asking whether Jesus realizes that he, Pilate, can either release him or have him crucified (v. 10). In response, Jesus first says that Pilate has authority over him only because it has been granted from above (v. 11a). This asserts God's sovereignty over the proceedings. In what Jesus goes on to say, however, he affirms human responsibility, and as he speaks, a most unexpected development occurs: the one on trial pronounces judgment on the criminals conducting the proceedings against him. Jesus moves from being the defendant to his true role as judge. Reasoning from the fact that Pilate has authority over him only under the sovereignty of God, Jesus concludes that the one who has handed him over to Pilate has the greater sin (v. 11b).

The logic at work here implies that Jesus sees a distinction between what Pilate is doing and what the Jews are doing. The Jews are maliciously seeking Christ's death, whereas Pilate is an unprincipled coward faced with undesirable choices. Jesus can see that Pilate recognizes his innocence but does not know how to placate the Jews pressuring him. Pilate's sin, therefore, is the sin of collusion with murderers. He is misusing his authority and allowing himself to be corrupted by the pressure the Jews bring to bear upon him. That is sin. The worse sin, however, is that of which the Jews are guilty: they actively seek the death of Jesus. Pilate merely goes along with the program.

19:12–16a *Caesar or Jesus?* Pilate has tried to bully Jesus and has failed (vv. 9–11), so now he seeks to act on his conviction that Jesus is not guilty (18:38; 19:4, 6) by attempting to secure his release (v. 12a). In response, the Jews bully Pilate with the threatening charge that to release Jesus would be disloyal to Caesar, for Jesus has asserted his kingship in opposition to Caesar (v. 12b).

The royal connotations of Jesus' making himself out to be the Son of God (v. 7) can be seen in the charge in verse 12 that he made himself king. The worldly Pilate failed to recognize Jesus as a threat to the Roman Empire. Remarkably, the Jews, who would have been expected to seek the kingdom of God,

profess zeal for the kingdom of Rome. All to be rid of Jesus, bringer of the kingdom of God. They are so committed to destroying Jesus that they mouth concern for Caesar.

The Jews executed this maneuver to force Pilate's hand against Jesus, and it worked. In response, Pilate takes his place on the judgment seat and brings Jesus up for sentencing (v. 13). Jesus and his followers celebrated their Passover meal together on Thursday evening, and now the "day of preparation" in view in verse 14 is the day of preparation for the Sabbath, Saturday. Thus these events take place on Friday of Passover week.

In 18:28 we read that the Jews had taken Jesus from the home of Caiaphas to Pilate in the "early morning." John relates in 19:14 that now "it was about the sixth hour," which would be around 12:00 p.m. Mark 15:25 states that "it was the third hour when they crucified him," which would have been around 9:00 a.m. Both D. A. Carson and Andreas Köstenberger explain this apparent discrepancy as arising from the inexact methods for computing time prior to universal access to wristwatches and other timepieces.⁴⁸ Time was apparently reckoned in three-hour increments, determined by the sun, so that one person might judge the sun to be overhead, or close enough, and call it the sixth hour, while another might judge it to be nearer the mid-morning mark and refer to it as the third hour. If so, either John did not know Mark's Gospel by heart or, if he did, was not bothered by this detail from Mark and went with his own remembrance of the time of day.

Pilate had presented Jesus with the words, "Behold the man!" (John 19:5), and now he presents him with the words, "Behold your King!" (v. 14). Because Pilate thinks Jesus innocent and wants to release him, his presentation of Jesus as the King of the Jews can only be viewed as a sarcastic insult directed at the murderous Jewish mob.

The Jews had cried out for Jesus to be crucified in verse 6, and they cry out for him to be crucified all the more vehemently in verse 15. When Pilate taunts them, asking if they want their king to be crucified, they assert that they have no king but Caesar (v. 15). Pilate clearly has no respect for either Jesus or the Jews, but in their reply the Jews repudiate the promises of the OT concerning the kingdom of God and the king from the line of David. Repudiating God's kingdom and God's King is tantamount to a repudiation of God himself.

Pilate delivers Jesus to be crucified, and they take him away (v. 16a).

Response

What kind of king do we want—one who will destroy us (Caesar) or one who loves us enough to be destroyed on our behalf?

They put Jesus, the Judge, on trial, but even then he pronounced judgment on the wicked. To whom will we entrust ourselves? Do we want to rely on human

⁴⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTC (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 605; Köstenberger, *John*, 538.

judges, human rulers? Or do we want a just judge? Do we want one who will judge in accordance with righteousness? If we seek a righteous judge, the only one available is Jesus.

JOHN 19:16b–30

^{16b} So they took Jesus, ¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.

¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic.¹ But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

“They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

¹ Greek *chiton*, a long garment worn under the cloak next to the skin

Section Overview: They Crucified Him

John narrates the crucifixion of Jesus, who was hailed as king at Golgotha, or “Skull Place” (John 19:16–22). John relates how the Scriptures were fulfilled unwittingly by the soldiers (vv. 23–24), how those who loved Jesus stood with him at the cross (vv. 25–27), and how Jesus finished the work the Father had given him to do (vv. 28–30).

Section Outline

VII.D. They Crucified Him (19:16b–30)

1. The King of the Jews (19:16b–22)
2. The Soldiers (19:23–24)
3. The Family (19:25–27)
4. The Finish (19:28–30)

Comment

19:16b–22 *The King of the Jews.* Roman soldiers take Jesus to be crucified (v. 16b), and John notes something about how and where they went (v. 17). Often, highly respected figures have people to carry their luggage, papers, or other items they might need. This scene depicts the Word, the one through whom the worlds were made, the one who will reign, going not to a place where he will be treated with dignity but to his own execution. And he goes carrying his own cross. Could the Lord Jesus have demonstrated any greater long-suffering humility?

As for their destination, John notes that the place in Greek was called “The Place of a Skull.” The Latin word for the Greek term rendered “skull” (*kranion*) is *calvaria*; our English word *Calvary* is a transliteration of that Latin word. The Greek term *golgotha* is itself a transliteration of a Hebrew term perhaps brought to Greek through Aramaic. The Hebrew is *gulgolet*; the otherwise-unknown Aramaic term would be *gulgota*. This Hebrew term was used to describe Abimelech’s crushed skull in Judges 9:53, and many think that perhaps the topography of the place resembled a skull.

In John 19:18 stand the devastating words, “There they crucified him.” John does not pause to explore this on an emotional, spiritual, or theological level. He states what happened and keeps marching forward. Yet there is Jesus, utter goodness, against whom they could find no indictment, no accusation, the essence of innocence, pinned to a cross by the might of Rome: the Light of the World beaten and bloody between two criminals being crucified alongside him (v. 18). If ever there was an injustice in the world, it was Jesus on that cross. If ever there was a justice system that perpetrated a great evil against an innocent citizen, if ever a group of people aligned with a man murdered by the state had cause for grievance, if ever man had reason to think that hopes for a better world were so much wishful thinking, it was when they put Jesus on that cross.

And in the midst of all that evil, injustice, rebellion, jealousy, hatred, and wickedness, the man who flipped the switch, the man who had the power to release the innocent and condemn the guilty, the man who repeatedly declared that he found no guilt in Jesus (18:38; 19:4, 6), only to crucify him anyway (v. 16), that man makes a true statement in verse 19 when he puts an inscription on the cross declaring Jesus to be “King of the Jews.” The pagan Roman tells the truth as he mocks God and the nation of Israel. Assuring himself of the eternal glory of Rome, he shames the one whose fame will last forever.

Jesus is not only King of the Jews; he is King of the world. As he was unjustly crucified, dying to take the punishment due his people for their sin, the announcement of his kingship was put up in scorn. Those words, however, were the truest statement Pilate ever made, declared in the Semitic tongue, in Latin, and in Greek, placed prominently so that all could see (vv. 19–20).

The rebels and liars who foolishly rejected him and falsely accused him come protesting that he is not the true king but only a pretender (v. 21). But Pilate rejects their plea (v. 22). The truth stands in spite of the best efforts of renegades and rascallions.

19:23–24 *The Soldiers.* John juxtaposes Jesus' dying for others and the soldiers' living for themselves in verses 23–24. The salvation of the world is being accomplished before their eyes, and they gamble for his garments. Dividing up his clothes, selfishly seeking spoils from his victory, the soldiers find his tunic to be seamless. This quality apparel indicates that Jesus saw the value of well-made clothing and affirmed the value of good work. The stripping and killing of Jesus, his garments to be used by others, invites reflection on the way that others are covered by his righteousness. As Jesus dies on the cross, the clothing he wore in life is being taken from him to cover others. The seamless and complete tunic suggests that his righteousness is whole and indivisible. Those covered by it will stand unashamed in the holy presence of the Father.

We have seen John quote psalms that contribute to the theme of the righteous sufferer (e.g., in 13:18), and in 19:24 he does so again. In Psalm 22 David speaks of the way that his enemies and adversaries intend to conquer and plunder him. He figuratively depicts his own historical experience in the poetry of Psalm 22:18, understanding that the pattern of the righteous sufferer would find its ultimate fulfillment in *the* righteous sufferer, Jesus. John understands what happens to Jesus as the fulfillment of what David describes in Psalm 22:18.

19:25–27 *The Family.* The King of the world is dying on the cross for the sins of his people. The soldiers executing him are stealing his clothing. And the King is thinking not of himself but of his mother. Peter has fled and is not to be found, but the mother of Jesus is there with her friends. People probably knew, or could discern easily enough, that she was his mother. They probably would have pointed, whispered, and wagged their heads. Yet this woman loves her son too much to let him die alone.

She must have been a good woman, a woman whose sister and friends could probably not think of letting her go alone to such a place at such a time (v. 25).⁴⁹ These women no doubt loved Jesus too. They loved him enough to bear the reproach. They loved him enough to risk guilt by association. They loved him enough to take on the shame of standing with the crucified and his mother.

And what a son that mother has! There he is, dying on the cross, yet he looks after his mother (vv. 26–27). Jesus lives out the meaning of the commandment to

⁴⁹ Matthew 27:56 indicates that the mother of the sons of Zebedee was also there.

honor father and mother (Deut. 5:16). Those who would be like Jesus will be more concerned about others than about themselves. Those who would be like Jesus will see that their mothers' needs are met. That Jesus provides for his mother by entrusting her to the care of the beloved disciple, most likely John, indicates that Mary's husband, Joseph, has died.

That Jesus entrusts his mother to John also indicates that he means for his mother to be cared for by those who belong to the family of faith. The brothers of Jesus did not believe in him in John 7:5, and Paul mentions that Jesus appeared to his brother James after he rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:7); perhaps James and Jude and the others were not converted until after the resurrection. If so, as he dies Jesus entrusts the care of his mother to one who loves him, one who recognizes him as Israel's rightful King and Messiah.

19:28–30 *The Finish.* How can John write about what Jesus knew as he died on the cross (v. 28)? Perhaps he discussed these events with Jesus before Jesus ascended into heaven (cf. Acts 1:1–3). Perhaps such a conversation gave John additional insight into how Jesus declared his thirst in order to bring about the fulfillment of Psalm 69:21, another psalm contributing to the theme of the righteous sufferer. Jesus declares his thirst knowing they will offer him sour wine, and he prompts them to give him sour wine to provide yet another instance of the fulfillment of the pattern of a righteous sufferer.

Jesus knows he has finished his course (John 19:28). He knows he has completed the work the Father gave him to do (cf. 17:4). Having accomplished the fulfillment of Psalm 69:21, Jesus makes the sweetest, most triumphant, most comforting declaration human ears could ever hear: “It is finished” (John 19:30)—in Greek, *tetelestai*. The righteous life has been lived. The greatest demonstration of humility and love has been accomplished. Exact obedience to every righteous requirement of the Father has been maintained. The full measure of the Father's wrath has been poured out. The cup has been drained to the dregs. The penalty for sin has been paid. The substitute has taken the place of his people. Atonement has been made for every one of their innumerable transgressions. The stains have been made clean, the Father's wrath propitiated, the law's demand fulfilled, the pains of the people taken, guilt forgiven, old made new, salvation accomplished, love demonstrated, truth upheld, mercy lavished, brokenness healed, evil unplugged, Satan defeated, the promise of life made. It is finished.

Jesus did not expire. He did not reach a place where he could no longer maintain himself—not in John's presentation of these events. John presents Jesus as finishing his work, fulfilling the Scriptures, bowing his head, and giving up the ghost (v. 30). John writes that Jesus “gave up his spirit,” using an active verb to communicate that Jesus was the actor in his death. As Jesus declared in 10:18, they did not take his life from him; he gave it up on his own terms and as he had decided to do.

Response

What response could there be to such an event? Love Jesus, and hate the sin that brought down the Father's wrath.

Admire Mary and John and those who stood with them as he died. The world is ready to treat those who follow Jesus the same way it treated him (15:20).

Are you with those who crucify, or with the crucified? Are you with those who kill to protect themselves, or with those who get killed to protect and bless others? Do you live for yourself, a miserable existence, or do you live to die for others, the path just as much to true joy as to salvation by faith in Jesus? Trust him. He can save you.

JOHN 19:31–42

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus¹ by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds² in weight. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴² So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

¹ Greek *him* ² Greek *one hundred litras*; a *litra* (or Roman pound) was equal to about 11 1/2 ounces or 327 grams

Section Overview: The Rock, the Lamb, the Tomb

Having narrated the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death of Jesus, John here presents what happened after Jesus died on the cross, both while he was still on it and when he was taken down and buried.

Section Outline

VII.E. The Rock, the Lamb, the Tomb (19:31–42)

1. The Rock (19:31–35)
2. The Lamb (19:36–37)
3. The Tomb (19:38–42)

Comment

19:31–35 *The Rock.* The issue of breaking the legs of those crucified is prominent in verses 31, 32, and 33. John presents this scene to explain why the legs of Jesus were not broken—and what happened instead, in verses 34–35.

Some have suggested that the references to the day of preparation in John are not to preparation for the Sabbath but to preparation for the day when the Passover Feast would be eaten. The suggestion is further made that John means to present Jesus as dying when the Passover lambs were slain, and a corollary of this view is that John does not mean to present Jesus as having a Passover meal with his disciples in chapter 13. Against this view, 19:31 shows that John's presentation matches that of the Synoptic Gospels; here we see that he means for his audience to understand that Jesus was crucified on Friday, for the next day is the Sabbath. Jesus and his disciples apparently ate the Passover on Thursday night (chs. 13–17), and later that same night Jesus was arrested (ch. 18). He was kept up all night through the various trials and then crucified Friday morning.

Because the Jews do not want the Sabbath to be defiled by the criminals on the crosses, they request Pilate to expedite the executions by breaking the legs of the criminals, hastening their deaths and thus allowing the corpses to be removed before nightfall (19:31). John seems to suggest that the Jews' concern arises from Deuteronomy 21:22–23, which stipulates,

If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

Once again we have great irony: The Sabbath rest was a sign pointing to the rest God's people would enjoy by faith in Christ, and it is the death of Christ that fulfills all requirements for cleansing. The Jews have missed all this and wrongly think that the cleansing corpse of Jesus would defile the Sabbath. The reality, however, is communicated in the words of Paul: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13). Jesus has fulfilled the law, and in his death he removed the curse of the law.

In response to the request of the Jews, the soldiers break the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus (John 19:32), but they do not break the legs of Jesus.

When they get to him, they find him already dead (v. 33); he had given up the ghost (v. 30). This realization that the legs of Jesus were not broken sets up three things: what did happen to Jesus (v. 34), John's asseveration that his eyewitness testimony is true (v. 35), and John's teaching that this was for the fulfillment of both the exodus pattern and the prophecy of Zechariah (vv. 36–37).

Since Jesus was already dead (vv. 30, 33), "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water" (v. 34). John likely expected his readers to connect the flow of blood and water from Jesus at the cross both to the statements Jesus had made about his blood and about water earlier in the Gospel and to the role of blood and water at the exodus from Egypt. In the exodus, the blood of the lamb on the lintel caused the angel of death to pass over the homes of the Israelites, and Jesus here fulfills the role of the Passover lamb. Anticipating the way he would transform the Passover meal into the Lord's Supper, Jesus spoke in 6:53–56 of how his blood would give life to those who trusted him. The Israelites drank water from the rock in the wilderness after the exodus, and Jesus offered living water to the woman at the well (4:10–14) and to anyone who was thirsty (7:37–39).

The flow of blood and water from the piercing of Jesus' side fits with his identity as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29, 36). Jesus is also the fulfillment of the rock in the wilderness, providing something better than water to keep his people alive in their pilgrimage—the Holy Spirit (7:37–39). The OT prophets and psalmists had pointed forward to a new exodus and return from exile, and Jesus fulfills what they prophesied: "They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and the water gushed out" (Isa. 48:21).

Jesus is the Lamb of God: his death provides cleansing blood for his people. Jesus is the rock: those who thirst will drink of the living waters that flow when it is struck, will experience the Holy Spirit, and will be satisfied. Jesus is the resurrection and the life: he guarantees the defeat of death and the enjoyment of the abundant life God will give his people.

The biblical authors often speak of themselves in the third person, and John does so in 19:35, asserting that he himself saw these events and has given his authoritative eyewitness testimony concerning them. John asserts that he is telling the truth, so that his audience will believe. His authorial intent is to convince others of the truthfulness of his own eyewitness testimony.

19:36–37 *The Lamb.* In verses 36–37 John states how the events he has narrated took place to bring about the fulfillment of two different strands of OT teaching, referencing these strands by quoting a representative passage addressing each one. The first strand of OT expectation fulfilled through Jesus' death is that of the new exodus. John the Baptist heralded Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), and John the Evangelist presents Jesus' dying as the fulfillment of the Passover lamb by means of his quotation of Exodus 12:46: "Not one of his bones will be broken" (in John 19:36).

In its OT context, that statement is not a prediction of something that would happen to the Messiah in the distant future; it merely addresses how the Israelites were to treat the lamb they killed and ate at Passover. John quotes this statement from the exodus narrative in keeping with the way that later OT authors likewise quoted bits of the exodus narrative. For instance, in order to point to a prophesied new exodus, Hosea quotes a phrase from Exodus 1:10 in Hosea 1:11. Even closer to what John does here is what David writes in Psalm 34:17–22. In that text, David seems to present himself as the one whose bones would not be broken (Ps. 34:20, alluding to Ex. 12:46), apparently presenting himself in the place of the Passover lamb. When David is preserved through difficulty with unbroken bones, those who have aligned themselves with him will be “redeemed,” while his enemies and their allies will be condemned (Ps. 34:21–22). Jesus is the fulfillment of the new exodus prophesied by Hosea and is the new and better David who fulfills the role of the Passover lamb. John was taught by Jesus to read Exodus the way that Hosea and David read it, but whereas Hosea and David were pointing forward to the new salvation God would accomplish, John recognizes that Jesus has brought it to pass.

In 19:36–37 John sets the statement about the fulfillment of the new exodus next to a statement concerning the fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy of a pierced one (Zech. 12:10), which appears in a context (Zechariah 11–13) that is relevant to the death of Jesus. In Zechariah 11, Zechariah appears to become the Lord’s appointed shepherd of his people, but in what seems to be an enacted parable, the people reject Zechariah (11:8), the covenant is annulled (11:10), and the people pay Zechariah off with thirty pieces of silver (11:12). The Lord tells Zechariah to throw this money to the potter in the house of God and speaks of it as the value Israel put on the prophet (11:13). Jesus fulfills this enacted parable of the Lord’s shepherd, rejected at the price of thirty pieces of silver, which is thrown to the potter (Matt. 26:15; 27:9–10, citing Jeremiah as well).

Then, in Zechariah 12 judgment on the nations is announced (12:1–5), but deliverance is promised for David and Judah (12:6–9). The Lord next says that he will pour “out a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only son, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn” (12:10 AT). Zechariah goes on to reference “the mourning in Jerusalem . . . for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo” (12:11). This seems to allude to the events narrated in 2 Chronicles 35:22–25, in which Josiah is slain at Megiddo and Israel laments his death, led by the prophet Jeremiah. Zechariah appears to present a situation in which the king of Israel, Yahweh’s earthly representative, will be pierced in a battle (Zech. 12:10) in which God’s enemies are destroyed and his people saved (12:1–9), resulting in a mourning over the pierced king akin to the mourning over Josiah (12:11). This victory opens a fountain of cleansing from sin and uncleanness for the house of David and Jerusalem (13:1).

By quoting Zechariah 12:10, John presents Jesus in 19:37 as the pierced king of Israel from the line of David through whom God will judge the nations and

deliver his people, through whom the fountain of cleansing will be opened, and over whom they will mourn like the mourning for a firstborn son. Zechariah's prophecy builds to an emotional catharsis: after the hard-fought triumph the people seek the battle's hero, the king who led them, who stood fast, whose valor brought victory—the firstborn son, the scion of David, whose right it would now be to ascend the throne. But the battle has been bought with blood. The king has been pierced and will not survive his wounds.

Jesus fulfills Zechariah's prophecy at every point. He is the Lord's "good shepherd" (cf. John 10). He is the true king from David's line, firstborn of his mother (1:49; 7:42). He was valued at thirty pieces of silver, money that was thrown to the potter in the house of God. The sword was awakened against the one who stood next to Yahweh. The shepherd was struck. The sheep scattered. He was pierced. They looked upon him.

19:38–42 *The Tomb.* In the world the Romans ruled, it would have been dangerous to be associated with people who were crucified. Even to sympathize with the crucified against those doing the crucifying could raise questions, particularly if the crucifiers themselves were not certain about the justice of what they had done. They might decide to handle their own doubts about the rightness of their actions by crucifying anyone who reminded them that the person they executed was a decent human being.

John notes that to this point, Joseph of Arimathea has kept his allegiance to Jesus secret for fear of the Jews, but when Joseph asks Pilate for the body of Jesus in 19:38, he takes a massive risk. To do this is very much to go public with his sympathy for Jesus. Taking a similar risk, going public in a similar way, is Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus by night in chapter 3 and then had spoken in defense of Jesus in chapter 7. Now he brings a very expensive weight of precious ointment for the dead body of the crucified pretender whose contaminated reputation is radioactive, unstable, and therefore deadly (19:39).

These men, Joseph and Nicodemus, have evidently decided that Jesus deserves a decent burial no matter what it costs them. They are probably disgusted with the evil of the Jews who resorted to crucifying this man whom they could not answer. Their moral revulsion at the wickedness of those who were supposed to be "holy to the Lord" makes it so that they cannot stay on the sidelines. They must act. They regard as nothing the risk to their reputations, their standing in the community, and their future safety. Their social standing, to say nothing of the precious ointment, is of no worth compared to the one they will honor.

Having prepared his body (v. 40), they place him in a new tomb in a nearby garden (v. 41). It seems fitting that he is buried in a garden, for his suffering and death resulted originally from a transgression in a garden (cf. Luke 3:38–4:3; Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22, 45–49). The time—probably near dark, when the Sabbath began—and the proximity of the tomb made this burial convenient (John 19:42).

Response

What a God, to give us such a book! That Zechariah would present something so poetic and glorious, and that God would then work in Christ to bring it all to fulfillment; that the Spirit would inspire John to record it with such clarity and economy—it all redounds to the glory of Jesus.

Even better than the book is its main character: Jesus. When we consider him, what do we see? He is no myth, for who would tell such a tale of a hero? He is no invention, for how could such a fiction be conceived? He is the Christ: born to bring salvation, slain to open a fountain of cleansing. Let us look on him, the one they pierced. He is the Lamb of God; his blood can cover us, and no other sacrifice remains. We must turn from what would defile us. We must flee to the place where the blood of the Lamb is on the lintel, hiding there while the avenging angel passes over, then girding up our loins for this pilgrimage on which we will be sustained by his broken body, given as the bread of life, and his blood, shed to make the new covenant. Let us fix our minds on the destination: the new heaven and new earth, where the King will reign in righteousness.

JOHN 20:1–18

20 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ ¹ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom

are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic,² “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

¹ Greek *his* ² Or *Hebrew*

Section Overview: The Empty Tomb

Arguments can be made defending the notion that Jesus was raised from the dead, and those arguments have their place.⁵⁰ What John gives us in 20:1–18 is more testimony than argument, more narrative than exposition. Arguments are aimed at our reason, at our heads. Testimony and narrative, on the other hand, often work on our gut-level emotions, at our sense of how things are—our senses that work when we are not reasoning through a syllogism but responding to experiences. John testifies in this chapter that Jesus was raised from the dead. John presents the world as the kind of place where a dead man, an executed man who was certifiably dead, comes striding out of the sepulcher to speak peace to his people.

Section Outline

VII.F. The Empty Tomb (20:1–18)

1. John and Peter at the Tomb (20:1–10)
2. Mary at the Tomb (20:11–18)

Comment

20:1–10 *John and Peter at the Tomb.* John 20:1–18 shows that neither Mary Magdalene nor Peter and the other disciple expected the tomb to be empty. If we can clear away our familiarity with the fact that it was, we can perhaps begin to feel how surprising the empty tomb was to everyone that morning. Consider how the followers of Jesus must have felt: they knew that what had happened to Jesus was unjust. Whatever else they may have been thinking in the face of such injustice, they do not seem to have expected Jesus to do what he repeatedly said he would do: rise from the dead on the third day (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:33).

Perhaps they were shocked and discouraged, ashamed of themselves for leaving Jesus when his hour came, concerned about whether the authorities would press the case against them. Yet Mary Magdalene cannot stay away. Luke 8:2 tells us that seven demons had gone out of her. She stood by the mother of Jesus as he

⁵⁰ See, e.g., N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

died (John 19:25). And now she comes to the tomb in the pre-dawn darkness of the first day of the week.⁵¹

Mary Magdalene is likely acting at a visceral level. It seems she is drawn to the tomb to weep and pray, and probably has not much of a plan beyond that. She is so shocked by the fact that the stone has been rolled away (20:1) that she runs to Peter and the beloved disciple, likely John himself (v. 2). Her words to the effect that someone has moved the body of Jesus to an unknown place show that Jesus' resurrection is not on her radar. She thinks someone has taken away the body of Jesus. She probably regards the Jewish or Roman authorities, the coalition of crucifiers, as the likeliest candidates.

This is a woman who was one of “many” who traveled with Jesus and provided for him “out of their means” (Luke 8:1–3). She almost certainly would have heard him speak of how he would be killed but then rise on the third day, yet from the time of her arrival at the tomb to her flight to Peter and John (John 20:1–2), and then in her return to the tomb and lingering there (vv. 11–15), she has only one theory: someone has removed the body of Jesus. She does not appear to have conceptualized the possibility that he had been raised from the dead.

Peter and the beloved disciple both start running for the tomb, but the beloved disciple outpaces Peter and arrives first (vv. 3–4). He stoops to look, sees the linen grave clothes, but does not enter (v. 5). Peter arrives and—unsurprisingly, given what we know of him—enters the tomb (v. 6). There he sees the grave clothes and the face cloth, which has been folded up and placed by itself (v. 7). At that point the beloved disciple also enters the tomb, and, having seen, he believes (v. 8).

What did he believe? What the beloved disciple saw in that tomb convinced him that Jesus had been raised from the dead, as verse 9 makes clear. John then explains that to this point he and Peter, and probably the other disciples as well, had not yet processed the OT indications that it was necessary for Jesus to rise from the dead. What Scripture had they not yet understood? We saw in 2:17 that the disciples remembered Psalm 69:9, “Zeal for your house will consume me” (cf. comment on John 2:13–17), and we saw that Jesus had invoked the visitation of God's wrath at the destruction of the temple and the three-day motif when he said in 2:19, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” John then explained in 2:22, “When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.”

51 Each of the Gospels notes that the resurrection of Jesus took place on the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19). Luke states that “on the first day of the week” Christians “gathered together to break bread” (Acts 20:7), and Paul instructs the Corinthians to set money aside “on the first day of every week” (1 Cor. 16:2). John refers to “the Lord's day” in Revelation 1:10, and the fact that he does not need to spell out which day he means indicates that he assumed his audience would know: the first day of the week. Taken together, these statements indicate that the day of the week on which Jesus rose from the dead was so significant for the early church that they referred to it as “the Lord's day” and came together on that day to worship the risen Christ in song, to partake of the Lord's Supper, and to hear the word of God read and taught. From this evidence of the earliest Christians in the NT, Christians around the world and across history have typically gathered to sing God's praise, to partake of the Lord's Supper, and to receive instruction from Scripture on the first day of the week.

John does not cite a particular Scripture that the resurrection brought into focus for him, likely because he has in view broad themes and many texts, such as those related to the fulfillment of the exodus pattern in the death of Jesus (cf. comment on 19:36–37) and the fulfillment of the righteous, suffering servant-shepherd-prophet (cf. comments on 12:37–43 [at v. 38]; 13:18–20 [at v. 18]; 15:18–25 [at v. 25]; 19:23–24 [at v. 24]; 19:28–30 [at v. 28]; 19:36–37 [at v. 37]).

John 20:10 states, “then the disciples went away again to them” (AT). Since we find the disciples together in one place in verse 19, verse 10 does not seem to indicate that the disciples dispersed to their homes in their various cities of origin. Rather, this verse seems to indicate that Peter and John (“the disciples”) returned to “them,” which seems to refer to other disciples.

John “shows and tells” in these ten verses. He shows Mary coming first to the tomb and testifying that the body of Jesus is not there. The testimony of women was not highly regarded in John’s context, so if someone were inventing a fictional account to deceive people, he would not make a woman his first witness. Further, if an account were being invented, it probably would not cast the disciples of Jesus in such a bad light. They are surprised to find that Jesus did what he said he would do (i.e., rise from the dead), and they are very slow to understand both Jesus and the Scriptures (cf. Luke 24:25). There is a paradoxical validation of the historical reliability of this account in its *weakness*. Mary, a woman, is a weak witness. Peter and John, surprised and slow to understand, do not come off as great champions of the cause. As eyewitness testimony, however, the narrative carries the ring of truth.

John shows exactly what happened in order to let the historical facts stand for themselves. The disciples were as elated by the resurrection of Jesus as they had been devastated by his crucifixion. The crucifixion crushed them; the resurrection surprised them. This turning point is on display in the Gospel of John: the resurrection of Jesus is the fulcrum of history, the moment when a crucified failure is revealed as the triumphant King. The resurrection of Jesus testifies that God has once and for all triumphed over death, and nothing will ever again be as it once was.

20:11–18 *Mary at the Tomb.* Peter and John left the tomb to return to the other disciples (v. 10; cf. vv. 2, 19), but Mary lingers at the tomb, weeping and stooping to look into it (v. 11). There she sees two angels where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the feet (v. 12). It is as though the place where the body of Jesus was laid in the tomb has become the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place, overshadowed by cherubim on either side (cf. Ex. 25:10–20). Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest of Israel took the blood of a slain bull and goat, entered the Most Holy Place, and sprinkled the blood over the mercy seat to make atonement for the Holy Place, cleansing the tabernacle (Lev. 16:14–16). Now these two angels station themselves at the fulfillment of the mercy seat, where the true blood of atonement was sprinkled, blood that cleanses what the tabernacle and temple symbolized: the whole world.

If it is correct that the angels place themselves where they do in order to show that the empty tomb has fulfilled the role of the Most Holy Place, then when Mary looks in and interacts with them, she goes where only the high priest could go under the old covenant. It is as though this scene enacts the way that the crucified body of Jesus has opened the new and better way for us to go behind the veil (Heb. 10:20), entering the presence of God.

Whereas the high priest had to do exactly what was prescribed “so that he does not die” (Lev. 16:13), the death and resurrection of Jesus have made it so that Mary interacts with these angels in complete safety. They ask why she weeps, and her response shows that she still has not processed the resurrection but is thinking that the corpse of Jesus has been moved (John 20:13).

Mary then turns and sees Jesus but does not recognize him (v. 14). This would seem to indicate that the resurrected body of Jesus was more like the body of an ordinary human being than like that of an angel: Mary seems to have known that she was speaking to angels in verses 12–13 (they are called angels in v. 12), but when she starts talking with Jesus in verses 14–15, she thinks he is the gardener.

Jesus asks her why she weeps and whom she seeks. John relates that Mary thought he was the gardener, and she asks if he has moved the corpse of Jesus (v. 15). He has, of course, but not in the way her question assumes!

In verse 16 Jesus does not cause his glory to be manifest in a theophany to reveal himself to Mary; he speaks her name. When he does so, she recognizes him and names him as her teacher. That John chooses to include the Semitic term,⁵² *Rabboni*, which he then translates, seems to add a note of intimacy, devotion, and affection to the way that Mary addresses Jesus.

The reply of Jesus to Mary in verse 17 holds her at arm’s length even as it beckons his people near. He tells Mary not to cling to him because he has not yet ascended to the Father. He seems to be saying that his work is not yet done; before long, he will ascend, so Mary should not think she could hold onto him in a permanent way. When he sends Mary to his “brothers,” however, he shows that he holds no hostility toward them and once again elevates their status. The disciples of Jesus had abandoned him; Peter had denied him. Nevertheless, he sends Mary to them and refers to them as his brothers. In 15:15, he had said they were no longer slaves but friends, and here in 20:17 he draws them another degree closer, calling them brothers. With this, he says that his Father is their Father; his God is their God. These statements hint that the death and resurrection of Jesus have made it so that those who trust Jesus share the same standing before God the Father that he himself enjoys.

Response

Some of our longings go deeper than our ability to put them into words. We have pre-reflective desires, pre-conceptual yearnings, things that we love and long for at the gut level, before we ever start thinking about them. These longings and

⁵² The ESV and NIV render *Hebraisti* as “Aramaic,” while the NASB renders it as “Hebrew.” The terms are similar, but in this case there are forms in the Aramaic Targums very similar to what we find here in John, indicating that the Aramaic dialect spoken at the time is likely what he references with the term *Hebraisti*.

yearnings are usually connected to our ideas about the good life, about the way we would like things to be. To have the standing before God the Father that Jesus himself has is precisely one of these pre-reflective desires, an ultimate one.

For the risen Lord Jesus to say these words—that those who turn from their sin and trust him are his brothers, that they have the standing before the Father that he himself has, and that the Father is his Father and their Father—operates at a level that arguments cannot penetrate. These statements are meant to grab us by the gut, to connect with us at a visceral level, to show us that we are accepted, that we are family.

JOHN 20:19–31

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,¹ Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin,² was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

¹ Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time ² Greek *Didymus*

Section Overview: Peace Be with You

Jesus appears to his disciples on the evening of the day of his resurrection (John 20:19–23). Then he comes to them again eight days later and convinces Thomas,

who had been absent when Jesus visited the others (vv. 24–29). John asserts that he wrote his book so that people would believe that Jesus is the Christ and thereby have life (vv. 30–31).

Section Outline

VII.G. Peace Be with You (20:19–31)

1. The Risen Christ Gives the Spirit (20:19–23)
2. The Risen Christ Convinces Thomas (20:24–29)
3. Written That You Might Believe (20:30–31)

Comment

20:19–23 *The Risen Christ Gives the Spirit.* The first phrase of verse 19 establishes that the events of verses 19–23 took place on the day Jesus rose from the dead. John explains that fear of the Jews has caused the disciples to hide behind locked doors. The Jewish authorities have executed their widely popular and innocent leader, and now his tomb is empty. The disciples are probably fearful not only because of their association with Jesus but also because the authorities will view them as the most likely suspects in the case of the missing body of Jesus.

John then narrates in verse 19 that Jesus stood among them and spoke peace to them. How startling his appearance must have been! Not a corpse, but alive and standing, somehow, in their midst even though the doors were closed. John depicts the resurrected, glorified Christ as one who can be mistaken for a gardener (v. 15), which indicates that he appears human enough, and when he speaks, he is recognizably similar to his pre-resurrected form (v. 16; cf. vv. 19–20, 26–28). Remarkably, however, he also has this ability to enter locked rooms. Jesus has defied normality all through this Gospel: multiplying food and walking on water (ch. 6), giving sight to a man born blind (ch. 9), and raising Lazarus from the dead (ch. 11). Still, it was no doubt startling to the disciples for him to enter their locked room in his resurrected body.

Most of these disciples had last seen Jesus right before they fled as he was being arrested, and so they might have expected him to rebuke them upon his unexpected return to bodily life. Yet he bears no animosity, makes no accusations, and rehearses no failures. He loves these men, and he announces to them what his death on their behalf has accomplished for them: peace. Jesus has propitiated the wrath of the Father, crushed the head of the serpent, absorbed the sting of death, and opened the gates of life. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the risen Lord can speak peace to those who know him.

Having spoken peace to their hearts (v. 19), Jesus makes an appeal to their heads (v. 20): he shows them his hands and side to verify that he indeed suffered in the body and has been raised in the body. In response, the disciples go from glum to glad. Their fears of the Jews are gone. Their anxiety about the corpse of Jesus is over. Jesus has spoken peace to their hearts and proven his resurrection to their heads. They rejoice.

Jesus renews the peace in verse 21, adding that the shalomic stability he speaks into their lives is for the benefit of others. Having again announced to them the peace he has made possible, Jesus asserts that he is sending his disciples in the same way in which the Father sent him. In view of what Jesus will say in verses 22–23, I would suggest that here he is referring most specifically to the way in which the Father sent Jesus as the bearer of his presence on earth and as the means by which forgiveness for sin would be made possible.

This means that when Jesus breathes on the disciples and mentions the reception of the Holy Spirit (v. 22), then tells them that anyone they forgive is forgiven, while anyone they do not forgive is not forgiven (v. 23), he is telling the disciples that they are his replacement as the place on earth where God is present and forgiveness is found.

John has noted that the Spirit would not be given until Jesus was glorified (7:39), and Jesus told his disciples that if he did not go away, the Spirit would not come to them (16:7). Jesus was glorified at the cross, and because of the atonement Jesus made at the cross, the Spirit will take up residence in his temple—believers—where no sacrifices for sin are offered because the sacrifice of Jesus has already been made (cf. 7:39; 14:15–17).

Jesus had previously spoken of the reception of the Holy Spirit, who would remain with them forever (14:16–17). As he breathes on his disciples, he tells them to receive this Holy Spirit (20:22). Under the old covenant, the Holy Spirit indwelt the temple. At Jesus' baptism the Spirit came down on him to remain on him, and now Jesus imparts the indwelling Spirit to his disciples. At Pentecost the Spirit's arrival will publicly announce the followers of Jesus as the people of God.⁵³

Jesus has spoken peace to his disciples. They are the men through whom those who do not know him will encounter God. They are the men who, by welcoming others into their midst, confer forgiveness of sins because of what Christ accomplished for all who would repent and believe. They are also the men who, by preserving a firm dividing line between themselves and the world, make known that anyone outside the church is outside of Christ and will therefore stand before God without Christ, unforgiven.

20:24–29 *The Risen Christ Convinces Thomas.* John has structured his narrative such that his evangelistic purpose is obvious. He has just presented the empty tomb, the risen Christ, the giving of the Spirit, and the power to forgive. Next he seeks to counter the objection that dead men do not rise by presenting one of the disciples of Jesus who was not there on the evening of his resurrection in verses 19–23.

Any member of John's audience who doubts the resurrection is represented by Thomas in this episode, and John presents those doubts as being overcome by the reality of the risen Christ. Thomas was not present when Jesus spoke peace to the

⁵³ Besides John 7:39, the only two places in John where we find the concept of *receiving* the Holy Spirit are 14:16–17 and 20:22. Because of the stress in 14:16–17 on the Spirit being with the disciples forever, the reuse of the terminology of receiving the Spirit in 20:22 indicates that the disciples here receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For further discussion of these issues, see Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*.

disciples on the day of the resurrection (v. 24), so he is understandably skeptical about their claims to have seen him (v. 25). In verse 25 Thomas insists on being convinced the same way the disciples were in verse 20: by experiencing the reality of the risen body of Jesus through contact with his wounds.

John relates the repeat performance of Jesus in verse 26. Once again the disciples are together—this time with Thomas—once again the doors are locked, once again Jesus enters the room somehow, and once again he announces the peace he has made possible for them. Behold the kindness of Christ (v. 27): he does not rebuke Thomas; he does not chide or chasten him; instead, he invites Thomas to feel his wounds, commanding him to believe.

John does not record that Thomas actually touched Jesus, leaving us instead with Thomas's awed response (v. 28). John had opened with the declaration that the Word was God (1:1), and now, near the end of the Gospel, Thomas names Jesus as his Lord and his God (20:28).

Jesus neither corrects nor repudiates the way Thomas has addressed him. Instead he pronounces a blessing on those who do not share the experience granted to Thomas, of seeing so that they might believe (v. 29). Jesus here states that the willingness to take the report of him *by faith* is a blessed condition. This does not denigrate the way Thomas sought evidence, but it does commend a certain posture to the audience of this Gospel: John's audience hears from the lips of Jesus that they are blessed if they hear and believe, though they have not seen (cf. 1 Pet. 1:8; Rev. 1:3).

20:30–31 *Written That You Might Believe.* John's purpose in this Gospel has been clear, from his extravagant claims about Jesus in the prologue (1:1–18) and others' asserting the unique identity of Jesus, to his identification of him as Messiah at the beginning of the Gospel (1:41) and Thomas's addressing him as God (20:28) near the end. John has also portrayed Jesus as doing signs and asserting that life comes only from believing in him. What John writes in verses 30–31, then, neatly summarizes what he has been seeking to do in this entire Gospel.

In verse 30, John declares that Jesus did many other signs. The mighty deeds John has narrated are loaded with fulfillment of Scriptural themes. Thus it seems that John has selected those mighty works of Jesus that best *sign*-ify that Jesus is the one for whom the OT looked. John's statement that "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book" commends not only the other Gospel accounts but also other verbal testimony from the disciples.

No one should think that John makes claim to an exclusive account of what Jesus did. No one should press differences between John's account and those of the other disciples. John has been selective for a purpose; he has an agenda, stated in verse 31: he selected and arranged the signs in his book to provoke people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed king from the line of David, and therefore the Son of God promised in 2 Samuel 7:14.

Response

Believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, means embracing an understanding of the world in which it makes sense for God to promise a Messiah who would come because a Messiah was needed. This requires looking at the world and recognizing that it is broken because of human sin and recognizing that, because God is good and loving, he means to heal what is broken. The way that God chose to bind up the world's wounds was by promising to send the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the seed of Judah, the seed of David.

Jesus is the promised one, John contends, and because of his death and resurrection, those who believe this about Jesus have life in his name. John does not use the phrase “salvation by grace through faith,” but that is what he teaches. God graciously sent Jesus because he loved the world (John 3:16). Jesus has called people to believe in him as the one God sent (6:29), offering eternal life to those who do (5:24), stating that they would recognize who he is upon his being lifted up (8:28).

Do we realize how much God loves his people? God loves us so much that by his Spirit he inspired no less a person than the apostle John, beloved of Jesus himself, to serve us by writing this Gospel so that we would be persuaded to believe that Jesus is the Christ. This after the demonstration of the love of God in the sending of the Son! Do we believe? Make no mistake about it, if we believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, we must also believe that God made the world good, that sin and death are in the world because of man's sin, that God's answer to the demands of his own justice was the sending of Jesus to die on the cross, and that the resurrection of Jesus entails the resurrection of everyone—the righteous by faith and the wicked in unbelief—and the renewal of creation in the new heaven and new earth.

Recall how Jesus responded to the doubts of Thomas. Do we think our doubts trouble Jesus? Do we think skepticism is a surprise to him? Our honest thinking will not offend him. He can handle any question we have. We can bring him any challenge that wells up from our analysis of his claims. He will answer every inquiry.

Believing in Jesus is not acceptance of an isolated fact. No, believing in Jesus arises from believing the testimony of John (and Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude). Accepting such testimony means trusting that the Bible is telling us the true story of the world.

JOHN 21:1–25

21 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ²Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. ⁷That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards¹ off.

⁹When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” ¹⁹(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

²⁰Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” ²¹When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” ²²Jesus said to him, “If it is

my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”
²³ So the saying spread abroad among the brothers² that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

²⁴ This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

¹ Greek *two hundred cubits*; a *cubit* was about 18 inches or 45 centimeters ² Or *brothers and sisters*

Section Overview: Breakfast on the Beach

We will best understand the import of John 21 if we consider what the disciples faced at this time. The disciples of Jesus had been swept up in the fervor of the messianic figure who had filled the land with his teaching and healing, winning a great name for himself. They saw his love, heard his promises, and left all to follow him. Jesus never let them down.

Then he was betrayed, crucified, and dead—but, to their great surprise, he came back from the dead. Naturally, the fact that Jesus was alive would be a great comfort, but two things he said to them would cause great consternation. When he appeared to them after his resurrection, he told them he was sending them as the Father sent him (20:21). Furthermore, he continued to maintain that he was not staying with them physically but was ascending to the Father (20:17).

Thus consider the plight of these poor Galilean fishermen who comprised the inner circle of Jesus of Nazareth. They are to make disciples of all nations, but Jesus is going away. What do they need from Jesus in order to accomplish this task? They need exactly what he gives them here in chapter 21. They need assurance that he will know where they are even if he is not physically present. They need assurance that he can provide for them, that he is indeed alive from the dead, that Peter’s betrayal has not disqualified him. They need to know that Jesus knows and controls their destinies and that they should indeed continue to follow him.

Section Outline

- VIII. Breakfast on the Beach (21:1–25)
 - A. The 153 Fish (21:1–14)
 - B. The Restoration of Peter (21:15–19)
 - C. The Beloved Disciple (21:20–25)

Comment

21:1–14 *The 153 Fish.* Jesus takes the initiative to reveal himself in verse 1, and throughout this episode he possesses comprehensive knowledge and is in total control of what happens. John does not tell us how much time has passed since the resurrection, but the disciples have clearly departed Jerusalem and returned

to Galilee. At some point they must have then returned to Jerusalem, and Acts 1:4 indicates that Jesus told them to stay there until the Spirit came upon them in power.

Seven of the disciples are together in John 21:2. Peter is listed first, and the way he leads and takes action in chapter 21 fits with the leader we see him to be elsewhere. Thomas, who was absent from the other disciples in 20:19–23, then convinced when present in verses 24–29, is there too, along with Nathanael. Also present are the sons of Zebedee, referenced by their father's name for the first time in John's Gospel, and two unnamed disciples.

John does not provide enough information by which we could criticize Peter and the others for going fishing (21:3). There is no indication that by doing so Peter and the others meant to abandon the task Jesus had given them. Since we have not been given an exhaustive account of everything Jesus or the disciples said and did (cf. 20:30), we are not in a position to suggest that their fishing shows that they have lost faith or are neglecting their calling. Waiting for Jesus to send the Spirit in power, they go fishing to provide for themselves and their families until their new responsibilities become clear.

John describes the events in this chapter such that anyone familiar with the similar events in Luke 5:1–11 would be invited to compare and contrast the two occasions. As in Luke 5:5, in John 21:3 the disciples catch nothing in a night of fishing. The dim light of the early morning scene (v. 4) seems to explain, at least in part, the disciples' uncertainty as to whether or not they are in fact encountering Jesus (cf. vv. 7, 12). Verse 8 relates that the disciples were about a hundred yards from shore. The distance and darkness keep the disciples from discerning that the man on the shore is Jesus (v. 4). Jesus asks if any fish have been caught, and he receives his answer in verse 5. As in Luke 5:4, in John 21:6 Jesus provides instructions about letting down the nets again for a catch. As in Luke 5:5–6, where nets are let down and a great haul of fish is brought in, in John 21:6 the nets are let down and so many fish are caught that the nets cannot be brought into the boat.

The parallels with the Luke 5:1–11 episode may very well have enabled John to recognize Jesus in John 21:7. He no sooner informs Peter than Peter girds himself and dives into the water to swim ashore. The others drag the net ashore (v. 8).

This narrative presents Jesus in resurrection power. He knows where the fish are and knows what his disciples need to do in order to catch them. He speaks a word of command to his disciples, they obey, and the net is filled with fish. When the disciples arrive at the shore, they see that Jesus has made preparations for them. The charcoal fire that Jesus has readied (v. 9) recalls the only other charcoal fire seen in John's Gospel, the one at which Peter denied Jesus (18:18). Jesus has fish and bread ready for the disciples, and he invites them to bring some of the fish they caught as well (21:10).

Just as Peter sprang into action when he realized Jesus was on shore, so when Jesus says to bring fish from the fresh catch, Peter drags the full net ashore. The fish were evidently counted, and John provides the number: 153. Various explanations

have been offered for this number, but the most straightforward and reliable one is that John is merely providing an accurate historical detail.

Whereas the great catch of fish in Luke 5:6 caused the nets to break, this time the nets hold unbroken (John 21:11). In verse 12 Jesus invites the disciples to come and dine, and John relates that the disciples are somewhat uncertain as to his identity. It seems they know it is the Lord but would like to have that fact confirmed, yet they dare not ask. Perhaps the darkness has prevented the removal of all their doubt, or perhaps they are yet to get their minds around his resurrection. In verse 13 Jesus distributes the bread and fish to them, and John notes that this event is the third time Jesus has appeared to the disciples after his resurrection from the dead, following his two appearances in the locked room in John 20 (vv. 19–23, 24–29).

As everything must be confirmed by two or three witnesses (cf. 2 Cor. 13:1–2), the three postresurrection appearances of Jesus in the Gospel of John attest that he is indeed alive and in the flesh. Just as the text implies that Thomas could have physically touched Jesus (John 20:27), so 21:12 implies that Jesus physically ate breakfast (cf. v. 15; Luke 24:41–43).

21:15–19 *The Restoration of Peter.* After the enormous catch of fish in Luke 5:6–7, Peter fell at the feet of Jesus and said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (5:8). Jesus then replied, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men” (5:10). Luke relates that when they (Peter and his partners, the sons of Zebedee; 5:10) got ashore, “they left everything and followed him” (5:11). The sequence is similar in John 21: a great catch of fish is followed by an interaction between Jesus and Peter, with John making an appearance, concluding with Jesus’ calling Peter to follow him.

Jesus seeks to reverse at this charcoal fire (John 21:9) what happened at the other one (18:18). There Peter denied Jesus three times (18:17, 25, 27), and here Jesus will have him affirm his love three times. The question that Jesus puts to Peter at first seems odd: Jesus asks Peter if Peter loves him more than the other disciples do (21:15). The comparison seems out of place until we consider the way that Jesus calls Peter to express that love. Jesus is not asking Peter to boast that he is more devoted than others. Rather, Jesus affords him the opportunity to affirm his surpassing love and then tells Peter how that love must be shown: by feeding the lambs that belong to Jesus. If Peter loves Jesus as much as he claims, he will see that the lambs that belong to Jesus are fed.

Jesus then asks Peter again if he loves him, and when Peter answers in the affirmative and states that the Lord knows he does, Jesus tells him, “Shepherd my sheep” (v. 16 AT). A third question grieves Peter, and Peter confesses that Jesus knows everything, including Peter’s love. In his reply Jesus mixes terms from the first two replies, saying, “Feed my sheep” (v. 17).

The “lambs” and “sheep” that belong to Jesus are the people whom the Lord Jesus will call to himself (cf. 10:3, 11, 16). The “feeding” and “shepherding” that Jesus calls Peter to do is the work of pastoral ministry, the work of teaching the Bible, leading

the flock, and caring for the sick or wounded. What Peter later writes in 1 Peter 5:1–4 indicates that he gladly embraced and discharged the duties of a pastor.

Some have drawn attention to the fact that Jesus asks the first two questions using the verb *agapaō* for “love,” with Peter answering that he loves Jesus using the verb *phileō*. The third time Jesus switches to the verb *phileō*, Peter again answering that he loves Jesus using *phileō*. Nothing, however, should be made of this interchange of synonyms. John typically varies the terms he uses, and the Father is said to love the Son using both verbs (e.g., John 3:35; 5:20), just as the love Jesus has for the beloved disciple is described with both verbs (e.g., 20:2; 21:7). The idea that *agapaō* is used for God’s special love does not stand up to analysis. After all, Amnon’s rapacious love for Tamar is described using *agapaō* in the Greek OT (2 Sam. 13:1, 4, 15).

Peter had denied Jesus three times, and Jesus now gives him the opportunity to confess his love three times. That this was grievous to Peter (John 21:17) does not mean it was not good for him. The opportunity to match his denials with professions of love grants to Peter an experience that matches and neutralizes the poisonous effects of his betrayal of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus makes plain to Peter that his love of Jesus is to be exercised in love for the people who belong to Jesus. Jesus also tells Peter that Peter’s love for him will result in Peter’s giving his life for him (vv. 18–19). Having told Peter that his destiny is to follow Jesus’ example by expending himself in the service of the people of God, then explaining that the self-giving lifestyle Peter is called to as a pastor of God’s flock will culminate in his own martyrdom, Jesus says, “Follow me” (v. 19). Such a direct statement from Jesus would have no doubt made a profound impression on Peter, precisely the kind of impression that would result in Peter’s writing what we find in 1 Peter 2:20–21.

21:20–25 *The Beloved Disciple*. Only at this point does it become apparent that, having finished breakfast (v. 15), Jesus and Peter have gone for a walk, during which Jesus has allowed Peter thrice to affirm his love. That they were on a walk comes out in verse 20, when Peter turns and finds the beloved disciple following them. The intimacy of this moment is not tainted by the presence of this beloved disciple, because the beloved disciple is close enough to both Jesus and Peter for neither to mind his being with them at such a time. This intimacy is communicated by the reminder in verse 20 that Peter had given a private signal to the beloved disciple at the Last Supper (cf. “motioned”; 13:24), and that the beloved disciple had been close to Jesus.

From what we see in the four Gospels, the only candidate who fits the description of the beloved disciple is John, son of Zebedee. Throughout the Gospels, Peter, James, and John are close with one another and with Jesus (these three were with Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration and when he withdrew to pray on the night when he was betrayed), and from what we see in John especially we find that Peter and John were close to one another and to Jesus.

Jesus has just prophesied Peter's destiny in 21:18, and given the closeness of their relationships, it does not seem out of place for Peter to communicate concern for John's destiny (v. 21). Jesus tells Peter that John's future is not for him to worry about; instead, he should concern himself with following Jesus (v. 22). The way Jesus communicates this asserts his sovereign control over the world: "If it is *my will* that he remain until I come . . ." (v. 22). These words imply that whatever happens to Peter and John shall be what Jesus has willed for them. Jesus tells Peter that he himself is in control, so Peter does not need to worry about the future. Peter is thus liberated from worry and can focus on following Jesus.

John explains in verses 23–24 that a misunderstanding arose in response to what Jesus said, and he clarifies that Jesus did not guarantee that John would not die. Peter was granted martyrdom, while John was granted a long life in which he could serve many, not least by writing his Gospel, three epistles, and Apocalypse. But what made both of their lives significant was the fact that for them to live was Christ, which made death gain (cf. Phil. 1:21).

The first-person plural "we" in John 21:24 does not demand that someone else has written these words. John himself wrote similarly in the first-person plural in, for example, 3 John 12: "We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true." John can be speaking of himself, therefore, in the words of John 21:24, which assert that the beloved disciple is the one who has testified in this Gospel. The assertion that he both *bore witness* and *wrote* declares that John authored this material, shutting out other theories about the composition of the Gospel. John claims that he wrote it, and that in writing it he bore witness.

John claims, moreover, that his testimony is true, and he words the claim so as to draw the audience into this acknowledgment of the truthfulness of his testimony. To reject what John has written is to reject his eyewitness testimony. To reject what John has written is to declare him a liar. To accept what John has written, however, is to believe, and by believing to have life in the name of Jesus (20:31).

John concludes his Gospel with a lovely statement. The words of 21:25 tell us that everything Jesus did goes beyond John's ability to describe, beyond the world's capacity to contain the books that would be written if it were all set down. John is asserting that what Jesus did just might be infinite in scope and significance. Think how massive the world is and how small, in relation to the size of the whole world, the Gospel of John is. How limitless and profound must the work of Jesus be!

Response

John's Gospel begins with a man from a town with a bad reputation, but it ends with a man whose deeds are so many and magnificent that the world cannot hold the volumes necessary to describe them all. John shows that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lamb of God, the Rabbi, the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, the Son of God, the King of Israel. He is the temple, destroyed and rebuilt in three days. He is the bridegroom, the one greater than Jacob, the prophet like Moses, the Savior of the world. Jesus is the one sent of the Father, the judge, the giver of

life, the bread of life, the giver of living water, the light of the world, the I Am, the giver of sight, the good shepherd, the door, the resurrection and the life.

John has presented Jesus as the fulfillment of the temple, the Lamb of God who fulfills the role of the Passover lamb, the bread of life who fulfills the manna from heaven, the Rock who fulfills the rock in the wilderness, giving the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the sinner's friend, the soul's shelter, the one who paid our debt, removed the Father's wrath, died in our place, and rose to shatter the fearsome grip of death.

To know Jesus and believe in his name is to have eternal life. To follow him is to walk in the abundant life he came to give, never thirsting, never hungering, because the soul is satisfied in him, because all who follow him love one another, forgive one another, and join together in transcendent unity to seek the glory of God together.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Brian J. Vickers

INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

Overview

The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the beginning of a new age: the age of the Spirit. This is the last age, the last chapter, so to speak, of God's work of salvation. This age will continue until the return of Jesus, the King. That is the big picture of Acts.

More specifically, in Acts Luke takes up where he left off in his Gospel. The Gospel of Luke narrates the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Luke demonstrates that Jesus is the one who welcomes sinners and who came to forgive sins in accordance with God's promises, culminating in Jesus' own crucifixion and resurrection. This is where the books of Luke and Acts overlap. At the end of Luke, the resurrected Jesus is with his disciples. He teaches them to read the Scriptures in a new way, showing them that Moses and the Prophets were pointing to him and his suffering and glory (Luke 24:26–27). This is not a “new” reading in the sense that Jesus invented a new interpretation or that the Scriptures were not pointing to him all along. Luke records that Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (24:45). He was training them for the work he was about to give them; correctly reading and understanding the Scriptures was to be of core importance to their work of taking the message of salvation in Christ to the world. Armed with a new way to read the Scriptures, they needed the power to carry out the work he gave them.

Acts begins by filling in details of the last meeting between Jesus and the disciples before his ascension into heaven. Prior to this event, Luke says that Jesus taught the disciples about the kingdom of God for forty days. These forty days correspond to Jesus' teaching them to understand the Scriptures at the end of Luke's Gospel. Soon after, Jesus tells them exactly what they will do. They will witness to him—that is, preach the gospel—beginning in Jerusalem and then going to the ends of the earth (1:8). As in the Gospel, Jesus tells them to go back to Jerusalem where they will receive the power they will need to fulfill that calling. This power is the promised Holy Spirit.

The rest of Acts is about how the apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, take the message of Jesus to the world. This ministry begins with one of the most unique days in the history of the world—maybe the most unique: the Holy Spirit

of God fills the disciples with power, and everyone around them hears the witness to Jesus in his own language. At this point, Peter preaches the first Christian sermon; from there the story unfolds and hundreds repent and believe. In the meantime, the church flourishes in unity, prayer, and worship—though not without a shadow of things to come. The church will face problems from within.

From Jerusalem, the gospel spreads north, propelled in part by persecution that erupts after Stephen's murder (ch. 7). Before he dies, Stephen delivers a biblical-theological history of the rejection of God and his servants including Jesus himself—whom Stephen's own accusers betrayed and killed, just as their ancestors did to the prophets. Contrary to their belief in themselves and in the temple—where God does not live, according to Stephen, who cites the OT as proof—they are unfaithful to God and his covenant; they are lawbreakers. Their rejection of Jesus is the evidence of this fact. When Stephen is stoned to death, Jesus stands at the throne as his witness and, by implication, stands in judgment over Stephen's murderers. This is a major turning point in Acts and in the entire NT.

All along the way we see events, people, and even nature lined up against the gospel. Entering the kingdom comes with difficulty. Rather than deterring or diminishing the apostolic gospel, suffering and obstacles become means of its spreading. The word of Jesus reaches Samaria and beyond, and a man from Africa believes and receives baptism in Jesus' name. The march to the ends of the earth continues. At Stephen's death, Luke introduces us to a man who is probably the most unlikely candidate to join the story. A young, educated, and zealous man from Tarsus named Saul begins his career by persecuting and terrorizing Christians. In one of history's most remarkable turns of events, however, Jesus chooses him to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

On the heels of that event, Peter is led to the house of a man named Cornelius, a Gentile. Before he goes there, however, Peter receives a vision that challenges the worldview and core beliefs passed down for generations. The upshot is that old ways of dividing the world between clean and unclean are over and done with (in the greater story, this will include the temple and cherished traditions). God declares all things clean. It turns out that food is the least of his concerns—God is concerned about people. Peter arrives at Cornelius's house and the vision is fulfilled: Gentiles believe and receive the Spirit, fully and without question. The church offers a mixed response to the inclusion of the Gentiles. We read of both rejoicing and questions—big questions. Not everyone is pleased with the news. As Paul and Barnabas go on their first missionary journey and Gentiles come to faith, the questions heat up even more. So much so that the apostles eventually call the first council meeting in church history. Based on testimony from Peter and Paul and a confirming word from James, everyone agrees: yes, God includes the Gentiles in his salvific plan.

The council meeting in Acts 15 overlaps with what we usually associate most with Acts: Paul's missionary journeys. Beginning from Antioch, the northern center of Christian ministry at that time, the apostle to the Gentiles travels back

and forth through the Mediterranean world, usually speaking first in synagogues before moving on to evangelize Gentiles. Along the way he encounters fierce rejection from many Jews—including some from Asia who will condemn him and falsely accuse him before the Jews in Jerusalem—but he continues demonstrating from Scripture (just as Jesus taught) that Jesus is the Christ. As the story continues, unbelieving Gentiles prove to be just as dangerous as Paul's Jewish enemies. During Paul's travels, new centers of ministry develop in places such as Corinth and Ephesus as the gospel moves westward. Riots, mobs, beatings, and imprisonments follow Paul along the way too.

In the last major section of Acts, Luke takes us back to where it all began. Paul is in Jerusalem to bring gifts from his Gentile churches—a collection to help the Judean Christians. His enemies are there too. In no time Paul is seized by a mob so fierce that, if not for the intervention of Roman soldiers, it would surely have killed Paul. In any case, Paul will never again be free in Acts. He speaks boldly before the governors Felix and Festus—neither of whom can find a reason to charge him—and finally King Agrippa. Paul's message, in short, is that it is he and the Christians who are faithful to God and the Scriptures. Paul is sent to Rome after appealing to Caesar. His conflict with the Jewish leaders is over.

To get to Rome, Paul survives a year of sea travel and also a shipwreck. Along the way he and his travel companions encounter a storm that should mark their end—but God's providence and promise are put on display, and everyone is saved. Jesus told Paul he would witness in Rome, and no storm, terrified crew, or deadly threats will get in the way. Although chapter 27 and most of 28 are largely overlooked by many readers, Luke spends more time in that travel narrative than in any other narrative in Acts. As readers, that should get our attention.

The story ends with Paul in custody in Rome. This might look like an anticlimactic ending to some readers, but not to those familiar with Luke's story. This is precisely how Jesus' word reaches the nations—through the most unlikely characters and means. Though in prison, Paul preaches the kingdom and teaches about Jesus from Scripture. The gospel has moved all the way to Rome, which was then the capital of the ends of the earth. The rest of church history is all about what happens after Acts 28.

Title

A discussion of the title of the book is a good place to consider some of its content and purposes as well. As with the Gospels, the title to Acts came later, no later than the third century, and there is good textual evidence for it in the manuscript traditions. The more interesting question is whether the title is appropriate. The title "The Acts of the Apostles" does not sit well with many readers. For one, only a small handful of the apostles feature in the narrative. The first several chapters are mostly about Peter, with John often accompanying him, and the other disciples are usually just referenced as "the apostles." They are named in a list (1:12–14) along with the others gathered with them before Pentecost, but apart from the

narratives of the naming of the new apostle (Matthias) and of the death of James (John's brother), the other apostles do not receive a great deal of personal attention. In the early chapters of Acts, Stephen and Philip (not the apostle but the man who meets the eunuch in chapter 8) receive more attention than every apostle except Peter. Furthermore, two apostles, and one in particular, receive quite a bit of attention even though they are not part of the original Twelve. First is James, a brother of Jesus who, after disbelieving his brother during his lifetime, later rises to the position of greatest prominence in the Jerusalem church. Then there is Paul, the former Saul of Tarsus, who goes from anti-Christian terrorist to divinely appointed apostle to the Gentiles. More than half of Acts is mostly devoted to his ministry.

Furthermore, although the apostles are the focus of the narratives, it is abundantly clear that God is the main character. The apostles are carrying out the commission of the Lord (1:8), and he directs them through visions, events, and prophecy. In addition to the more obvious divine leading, the underlying current of divine supervision is unmistakable. If it had been only the apostles and early Christians at work, the whole enterprise would have failed because of persecution, death, or at least religious or social censure. The book is a record of God's acting through the apostles.¹

Nevertheless, there is no compelling reason to suggest a different name for the book. Besides the centuries-long use of the title "The Acts of the Apostles" and the practical and historical issues involved with implementing a different title, we should also consider Luke's own introduction to his work. Addressing Theophilus, the recipient of the book, Luke shows how Jesus passes the baton to his disciples. Luke begins by declaring why he is writing a second volume (the first being his Gospel): "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen" (1:1–2). Luke then goes on to recount how Jesus equipped, directed, and commissioned the apostles up until the moment he ascended into heaven. The book of Acts is all about how the disciples carry out the ministry Jesus has given them. True, the orders are from Jesus, and clearly he is the driving force (through the empowering of the Spirit) in the book, but the book focuses on *how* the gospel of Jesus Christ spreads *through* the ministry of the disciples.

Ultimately there is no real distinction between the acts of Jesus and the acts of the apostles. They are all equally the works of God and a witness to his purposes in the world. Making a sharp distinction between the work of Jesus and that of the apostles is akin to claiming the red letters in the Gospels (in a red-letter edition) are God's but the words in black are man's. We should also recall how Jesus accuses Saul of persecuting *him*, even though Saul has been persecuting the *church*—there is an organic connection between Christ and his followers. In

1 There are very good reasons why Alan J. Thompson titled his book *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan* (NSBT 27 [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011]). In my opinion this is the single best resource for understanding the theological narrative of Acts, with an equal appeal for general readers, students, pastors, and scholars. Of all the books I have read on Acts, this one was the most influential.

Luke's Gospel, we see the incarnated Lord himself at work, a major part of which includes calling and preparing his followers. In Acts, Luke shows how these followers, instructed by Jesus under the divine revelation and empowerment of the Spirit, carry on his work.

Author

Debates and discussions about the authorship of Acts have been commonplace in scholarly circles for some time. Important questions such as its date and historical reliability are attached to at least part of this discussion, but outright doubt that Luke, the companion of Paul, wrote Acts is a fairly modern phenomenon. Lukan authorship was accepted among all of the early church fathers. This commentary is written under the presupposition that Luke, the author of the Gospel bearing his name, was the author of Acts as well. Luke was one of Paul's companions, and much of the book (though not all) is written from an eyewitness perspective. The author is part of the "we" mentioned as traveling with Paul in 16:10–17; 20:5–16; 21:1–18; and 27:1–28:16. We know that Luke was Paul's friend and accompanied him on his missionary journeys, being present when Paul wrote some of his letters from prison. Luke is the "beloved physician" (Col. 4:14), is included among those sending greetings to Philemon (Philem. 24), and was present during the last days of Paul's life (2 Tim. 4:11).

The same biblical observations and church history support the belief that Luke was the author of the third Gospel as well. Of course, proof that he wrote Luke would not prove that he wrote Acts, but considerations based on style, on theme, and on introductions addressed to one Theophilus (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–2) seem to make it clear that the same man wrote both books.

Date and Occasion

Plausible dates for when Luke wrote Acts span from the early 60s AD to around 90.² We may assume that Luke wrote the book after his Gospel but before Paul's death. That narrows the window down to the 60s or early 70s. The temple in Jerusalem was overrun by the Romans in AD 70. It would be curious, to say the least, for Luke to leave out such a dramatic event that would serve to underscore one of the core themes in the book—God does not reside in temples of any kind, including the one in Jerusalem, but is revealed once and for all in Jesus. If the Jerusalem temple were gone, why leave out such a big piece of circumstantial evidence? This argument is, admittedly, made from silence. Some silence, however, is louder than other silence. It is possible that Luke wrote after the destruction of the temple and that it serves as the climactic backdrop for the events, themes, and theology of Acts, with his readers being well aware of the significance of, for instance, Stephen's commentary on the temple (7:44–50). This is *possible*, but, as with the letter to the

² There are plenty of suggestions for dates far past AD 90, but such views are based largely on critical presuppositions too numerous to unpack here. As important as it is to address those issues, that is not the purpose of this work.

Hebrews, it seems almost impossible that Luke would not mention a historical event that so radically proved what Stephen, and later Paul, preached.

The best early estimate is that Luke completed Acts c. AD 62, when Paul was still in prison in Rome, which accounts for the ending at chapter 28. The events of Paul's life after AD 62 are not certain, and scholars hold various views regarding a possible second Roman imprisonment and the possibility that Paul eventually made it as far as Spain. In any case, regardless of what happened after 62, it is reasonable to conclude that Luke simply finished his narrative while in Rome with Paul. Even if he waited until later in the 60s to write the book, however, there is no material impact on the interpretation of Acts if one holds to either an early or a late 60s date for the writing of the book.

Genre and Literary Structure

Besides taking up large sections of commentaries, introductions to the New Testament, and books on NT theology, the genre of Acts is the subject of entire volumes. Often, such studies will largely refer to Semitic or Greco-Roman backgrounds as examples to answer the question. Such studies certainly have a place and can be helpful, but the best way to categorize the genre of Acts is to judge it in its most immediate and important context: the Bible. The simple answer is that the genre of Acts is *biblical narrative*.³ That is, Acts follows in the tradition of the narratives found in the OT and taken up in the Gospels. Acts is consciously a continuation of that story. Biblical narrative, like other biblical genres, of course overlaps with and is similar to contemporary nonbiblical narrative. The Gospels, for example, are something like Greco-Roman biographies, but *not exactly*. The laws in the Pentateuch are something like other ancient Near Eastern law codes, but *not exactly*.

Reasons for the differences include the main character of the Bible and the shared, foundational theme that spans the entire Bible: God and his mighty works. Whatever genres may appear in the Bible, they all have the same foundation, theme, and goal. This makes the genres found in the Bible different and in fact makes the Bible its own genre: a collection of various types of literature gathered in one place for the same purpose. Biblical narrative is the literary means of preserving, interpreting, and bringing forward the story of God and his mighty works. Luke, writing a historical, biblical narrative, is influenced by the flow of that story, particularly the fulfillment of that entire story in Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah who came as the fulfillment of the OT story and promises. Luke takes up that story in his Gospel and continues it in Acts. The Acts of the Apostles is the capstone and climax of all biblical narrative. It is *a* story about the fulfillment of *the* story.

One final thing about biblical narrative, including Acts: it is a real, living story that is to be taken up and followed by its readers. Acts is not just a story about the first Christians who lived a long time ago, with a record of the events surrounding

³ See also Introduction to John: Genre and Literary Structure.

them. Like all biblical narrative—like the Bible itself—Acts invites us to take part, to understand ourselves, our history, our future, our whole worldview in light of this story. We should find in its pages a message that (1) challenges our perspectives and values; (2) corrects and shapes our views of God and his work in the world; (3) encourages us in the face of a world set against the kingdom of Jesus; (4) teaches us the difference between living by faith and by sight; (5) motivates us to carry, with total confidence, the message of the risen King to those around us; (6) instructs us to view and handle suffering through the knowledge (by faith) that suffering is the only way to enter the kingdom; and (7) shows us how to live as those who know that the same Jesus who ascended before the apostles will return exactly as they saw him go. We are, after all, living in the era that began with Acts: the era of the Spirit, in which we wait for the return of the Lord to bring this part of the story to an end and to begin a new world without end. The truth is that we already take part by faith and the Spirit in the world to come—it is the Spirit himself who joins this age to the next and guarantees God’s future.

It is both easy and difficult to identify the literary structure of Acts. The difficulty is that Luke tells a very complex story with overlapping events, characters, and themes. Happily, this complex story can be distilled into an overarching picture that divides along major lines of connected events and transitions in scenes and people. For the purpose of teaching and preaching, the big picture of Acts is the place to begin. A large and detailed outline of Acts precedes the commentary section of this volume, but the best way to grasp the large structure of Acts is through the short outline below.⁴ This breakdown of Acts finds its basis in 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

- I. Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria (Peter and the Twelve) (1:1–12:25)
 - A. Commission and Jerusalem (1:1–8:4)
 - [Ends with Stephen (6:8–7:60) and the scattering of believers (8:1–4)]
 - B. First Expansion beyond Jerusalem (8:5–9:31)
 - 1. Samaria (8:5–25)
 - 2. Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26–40)
 - 3. Paul’s Conversion (9:1–31) [foreshadow of part II]
 - C. Northward Expansion (9:32–12:25)
 - 1. Aeneas and Dorcas (Hellenistic Jews) (9:32–43)
 - 2. Cornelius (God-fearer) (10:1–11:18)
 - 3. Gentile Church in Antioch (11:19–30)
 - 4. Persecution in Jerusalem (12:1–25)

⁴ This outline is based on the overview of Acts in Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 98–99. I have modified their structure in several places. Although far more detailed outlines of the structure of Acts are available, in my view there is not a better *simple* presentation of the big picture of Acts for readers just beginning to study the book than this one.

- II. The Ends of the Earth (Paul) (13:1–28:31)
 - A. Phrygia and Galatia (13:1–15:35)
 - 1. First Missionary Journey (13:1–14:28)
 - 2. Jerusalem Council (15:1–35)
 - B. Macedonia (15:36–21:16)
 - 1. Second Missionary Journey (15:36–18:22)
 - 2. Third Missionary Journey (18:23–21:16)
 - C. To Rome (21:17–28:31)
 - 1. Prison in Jerusalem (21:17–23:35)
 - 2. Prison in Caesarea (24:1–26:32)
 - 3. Voyage to Rome (27:1–28:15)
 - 4. Preaching the Kingdom (28:16–31)

Various other large-scale structures of Acts can be identified, but the outline presented above has the benefit of simplicity. Two figures, Peter and Paul, and the expansion of the kingdom form the basis of the structure. There can be no doubt that Luke's two main characters in Acts are Peter and Paul, or that his *main goal* is to show God's mighty works commissioned by the risen Jesus and carried out by the Spirit-empowered apostles.

Theology of Acts; Its Relationship to the Rest of the Bible and to Christ

As with all biblical narrative, Acts is written at the crossroads of theology and history. Luke is a historian who records historical people, events, conversations, teaching, and speeches basically in chronological order. Like all good storytellers, he is at liberty to overlap events and to allow one part of the story to move ahead before he returns later to pick up an earlier thread. When a story has as many characters and events as does Acts, it is impossible to relate all of these elements in perfect chronological order, especially multiple events that may have been roughly simultaneous. Besides, Luke is not only writing a story (not even a historical one); he is also writing theology.

Luke informs Theophilus at the beginning of his Gospel that he intends to “write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3–4). And Luke demonstrates from the beginning of Acts that his goal is to present a historical record that resumes the storyline of his Gospel. Having presented an account of the ministry of Jesus and of what he did and taught (Acts 1:1), Luke takes up where that story left off. His focus is now on the period beginning with Jesus' postresurrection appearances, including the forty days in which Jesus taught the disciples about the kingdom of God (1:2–3). Thus we find a basically unbroken line from the Gospel of Luke to the Acts of the Apostles. At its core, Acts is the historical account of how the apostles received and carried out Jesus' commission to reach the world with the gospel (1:8). Thus Acts is a special sort of history: it is not a blow-by-blow account of general events but a specialized account of the apostles' carrying out of a specific task. Luke's history, like all historical writing, is selective

and structured, and the included content fits the purpose of his writing. Luke has a history to tell, but it is a profoundly *theological* history. It is theological because it is a story, a history, about God's work in the world.

If Acts is theological, then Luke is a theologian. He writes history from a theological perspective, with a theological purpose. From that perspective he interprets the events he records, revealing their theological significance. Just as importantly, Luke's theological perspective is not just a matter of explanations about, or observations on, the things that happened (like one might find in a commentary on a biblical book). Instead, he is actively writing theology shaped by the worldview and teaching of the OT, the traditions he knows about Jesus, and what he learned from Paul. In Luke's theological history of the ministry of the apostles we find multiple themes and emphases, many of which will be taken up and treated in the commentary on the text, but a few stand out that will help us to navigate our reading of Acts.

PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT

In Luke's theology, the theme of promise and fulfillment is the umbrella under which all other themes and emphases join together. This is, moreover, the most fundamental level at which the entire NT operates.

Continuing the focus of the Gospel of Luke, Acts is about Jesus as the fulfillment of the messianic promises.⁵ Every aspect of the theology of Acts flows from the death, burial, resurrection, and enthronement of Jesus. Part and parcel of that fulfillment is the coming of the Spirit. Peter begins the first recorded sermon after Jesus' ascension by telling the people in Jerusalem that the astonishing thing they are witnessing at the feast of Pentecost is nothing less than "what was uttered through the prophet Joel" (2:16). He then goes on to show, immediately citing the OT, that the coming of the promised Spirit flows from the events that recently took place involving Jesus of Nazareth. Every major speech in Acts shows from Scripture that Jesus is the Christ.

The disciples learned how to interpret the OT in this way (promise and fulfillment) from Jesus. In Luke 24, two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus meet, unbeknownst to them, the resurrected Jesus. When he hears their astonishment about how events have transpired, or their disappointment that Jesus was evidently not the long-awaited Messiah, he exclaims, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:25–26). He then goes on to interpret "to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Jesus teaches these men to read the OT with himself as its fulfillment. Presumably, Jesus' teaching on the kingdom during the forty days he spent with

⁵ The relationship between the Gospel of Luke and Acts is well documented. Rather than giving an exhaustive list of connections and themes here (which would take a great deal of space), I have chosen to bring those connections out in the text of the commentary, both by pointing to texts and themes in Luke's Gospel and by giving priority to citations from Luke. Luke is often cited alone even when parallel texts appear in Matthew or Mark. When I do cite parallel texts from multiple Gospels, I usually cite Luke first (e.g., "Luke 9:20; cf. Matt. 16:16; Mark 8:29") instead of following canonical order. Of course, the Gospel of Luke is the next layer of context for Acts (the first being Acts itself), but I have tried to keep the focus on Acts.

the disciples before the ascension included his showing them how he was the goal and fulfillment of Scripture (Luke 24:44–47). And this is precisely what the apostles do in Acts: they go from place to place showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised King. For example:

- Acts 8:35: “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture [Isaiah 53] he told him the good news about Jesus.”
- Acts 17:2–3: “Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’”
- Acts 18:27–28: “When [Paul] wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.”

Another aspect of the promise-fulfillment theme is found in Stephen’s speech, a dramatic presentation of a theological reading of Scripture with Jesus at the center. As with Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, in which he showed that the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus were according to God’s plan and in fulfillment of Scripture, Stephen also makes clear that the rejection of Jesus was itself a fulfillment of Scripture and the culmination of a longstanding national sin, namely, Israel’s rejection of God. Beginning with Abraham, Stephen works his way to Moses and then highlights Israel’s unfaithfulness, rebellion, and rejection of God and his servant (7:35, 39). Stephen ends his speech by accusing the crowd of being just like their ancestors, who resisted the Spirit and killed the prophets who foretold the coming of the “Righteous One,” Jesus, whom Stephen’s hearers “betrayed and murdered” (7:52). Paul will take up this theme in his own speeches, particularly before the crowd in Jerusalem (ch. 22) and before Felix (ch. 24) and Agrippa (ch. 26), showing that it is his accusers who are unfaithful to God. It is Paul, and the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, who are faithful to God. So, not only does Luke highlight Jesus as the fulfillment of the messianic promises, he also highlights the rejection of Jesus, which in turn is connected to another major theme in Acts: the inclusion of the Gentiles.

THE GENTILE QUESTION

The conversion of Gentiles to Christianity presents a major problem for some people in the early church, and Luke openly records the issues and divisions that this “problem” brings. What Luke makes clear is that the inclusion of the Gentiles is exactly what God has promised all along. In contrast to the rejection of Jesus on the part of many Jews, many Gentiles turn to him and are saved. The book of Acts makes a discernible shift as the gospel goes increasingly to Gentile areas. For the early Jewish Christians, something of a seismic shift in worldview is needed.

Before Cornelius, a God-fearer (a Gentile who follows Jewish laws and customs except for circumcision), receives the Spirit and is saved, Peter receives a vision that challenges his long-held beliefs and traditions. When he sees a vision of all sorts of animals on a sheet descending from heaven, including those forbidden as food under the Mosaic law, and is told to eat, he refuses, basing his decision on the law (10:12–14). God replies by telling him that he is mistaken—God has made everything clean (10:15). It takes three times for the epic truth to sink in. It is not about food but about people: the Gentiles are joining the people of God.

When Peter meets Cornelius, hears his story, and preaches the gospel to him and his household, and they respond in faith and receive the Spirit, Peter understands it all. God makes no distinction between people in salvation—whichever believes in Jesus is fully welcome. This event comes near the turning point in Acts, when Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, heads off to the ends of the world. The irony is that the staunchest Jewish traditionalist, the fiercest enemy of the first Christians, will be God’s chosen instrument to reach the Gentiles (9:15; 13:2–3; 22:21). In Paul’s ministry there is a definite link between Jewish rejection and Gentile reception of the gospel (13:46; 18:6). When handling this theme, readers must bear in mind, however, that all of the first Christians were, like Jesus, Jews. The condemnations of unbelieving Jews in the speeches in Acts are all spoken by Jews. The historical trajectory of unbelief is what Luke emphasizes, and in the narrative of Acts (as in the Gospels) the unbelief of the leaders—the theologically educated—is far and away the focus.

THE APOSTOLIC PREACHING

Many years ago, C. H. Dodd identified what he determined to be the fundamental content in the preaching of the apostles. According to Dodd, their basic message has six parts: (1) the time of fulfillment promised in the OT has come; (2) that time has come in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth; (3) Jesus is now enthroned as king because of his resurrection from the dead; (4) now that Jesus is enthroned, the Spirit is his power at work in the world; (5) Jesus will return and bring this age to its end; and (6) hearers must repent and be forgiven in response to gospel preaching.⁶ Examples of this apostolic preaching occur mostly in the first half of the book (2:14–39; 3:11–26; 4:8–12; 5:29–32; 10:34–44; 13:16–41). Dodd’s work identifies the basic themes and theology of the apostolic message and demonstrates how gospel preaching was based on established content. This does not mean the message was absolutely fixed in terms of presentation, or that every part was present every time (or needed to be), or much less that the six parts constitute a template for a model sermon. More times than not, all six parts do not appear in a single sermon in Acts. Nevertheless, these six points do *summarize* the core message about Jesus as presented by the apostles, who were not afraid that theological preaching would lose their audiences.

⁶ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 21–24. Dodd’s work includes presuppositions and conclusions about sources and developments with which I do not agree. Nevertheless, I find his summary of the basic content of preaching in Acts to be helpful.

Acts, like all of the NT, must be read in context of the whole Bible. This is a biblical-theological task as we attempt to read and understand the Bible as a single book of Scripture. As noted above, Acts takes up and continues God's story of salvation that begins in OT narrative and wends its way to the fulfillment of that story in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, recorded in the Gospels. Acts is the final chapter of that story and is also the beginning of the new age of the Spirit, in which we live today. The coming of the Spirit is probably *the* main point of contact and relationship to the rest of the Bible. What happens in Acts 2 and beyond is all about God's keeping his age-old promise.

In Deuteronomy 9, Moses prepares the Israelites to cross the Jordan and take possession of the land. Up to this point, Moses has recounted Israel's history, putting special emphasis on their unfaithfulness to God over against his continual grace and salvation since bringing them out of Egypt. At the center, and as a climax to their history, was their idolatry with the golden calf (cf. Exodus 32)—even while Moses was on the mountain receiving the law from God (Deut. 9:9–21). He continues in Deuteronomy 10, recounting their journey, pointing to the future, and bringing it all to this climax:

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. (Deut. 10:12–15)

Moses then tells them exactly what they need in order to follow and obey the Lord their God: they need a new heart. "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn" (Deut. 10:16). To be the true people of God, to walk in his ways and receive the fulfillment of his promises, they must be renewed from the inside out. No amount of sacrifices or law keeping will help them if they do not change their hearts. Ultimately, there is no law keeping apart from a new heart.

Later, in Deuteronomy 28, Moses tells them of their coming exile in later generations that will take place because of rebellion and disobedience. This section of Deuteronomy includes the blessings that will come for obedience and the corresponding curses for disobedience. God promises them a day in which he will rescue them yet again. Their salvation from the curses will go hand in hand with their faithfulness and obedience:

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you

today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. (Deut. 30:1–3)

How will these people, with their history of rebellion, repent and obey him heart and soul? Where will they find the heart they need for this? God, who commanded them to circumcise their hearts (that is, have a new heart), will give them what he commands:

And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (Deut. 30:6)

With this divine gift of a new heart, they will follow and live by all of God's commands. This is the promise that stands through a long history of disobedience, rebellion, and national disaster.

Centuries later, however, in the midst of suffering the curses of disobedience, with the land destroyed, countless killed, and more exiled to Babylon, the promise of Deuteronomy is repeated, with more specific detail. Recall that the result of a new heart would be obedience to God's commands and statutes (Deut. 30:8). The prophet Jeremiah brings news of God's work to fulfill that promise once and for all:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer. 31:31–34)

The Lord will give them exactly what is needed; he will do a remarkable work in his people. They will be a new people, with new hearts.

At roughly the same time as Jeremiah's promise, the prophet Ezekiel, speaking to people in exile and reminding them of how their sin and rebellion has brought them to where they are now, gives a word of hope and promise. The Lord will act for the honor and greatness of his own name, and when he does, his people will receive all of the benefits. They will be a new people, with a new gift:

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you

shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek. 36:24–27)

The Spirit promised by Ezekiel will write the law on the new heart foretold by Jeremiah, and this will fulfill God's promise to circumcise the hearts of his people (Deut. 30:6). And we must notice that the gifts of the Spirit and of a new heart come with repentance and forgiveness.

Finally, the prophet Joel takes up the promise of the Spirit and tells of the day in which the Lord will pour out his Spirit on all:

And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. (Joel 2:28–32)

This very text, which Peter quotes in Acts 2 to explain what is taking place at Pentecost, is the last in a long line of OT promises that the Lord would provide a heart for his people, renew them, and forgive their sins. He would give them his Spirit. The book of Acts is all about the beginning of that work of fulfillment. The Spirit empowers the work of the gospel, manifests and confirms the ministry of the apostles, fills the followers of Jesus with power to speak, and is in all who have faith in Jesus—whether Jew or Gentile. Through the Spirit, all become the people of God.

Preaching from Acts

Preaching Acts, like preaching all narrative texts, requires special effort and planning. One of the most important questions to answer concerns how to divide the book up into suitable portions of text for preaching. There are issues of repetition (e.g., Paul's conversion stories), long speeches (e.g., the sermon at Pentecost or Stephen before his accusers), the reception of the Spirit at various times and ways, many baptisms, and a long story about a year at sea along with a shipwreck, just to name a few. The first step for preaching Acts is to read it from front to back several

times. Before opening a commentary, looking at outlines, reading backgrounds, or doing anything else except praying, the preacher of Acts *must* be intimately familiar with the book. Only in-depth knowledge of the content can guide the preacher through the task of planning sermons and dividing up the text.

Second, the preacher of Acts must be ready to deal with longstanding and often highly controversial subjects such as speaking in tongues, spiritual gifts, and prophecy. Anyone preparing to preach through Acts ought to make it a first priority to *stick to the text and context of Acts* rather than dealing with such difficult issues as abstracted, general topics of theology. In other words, we must first preach the text of Acts as Acts—Luke’s divinely inspired account of the early years of the church. So, for instance, when preaching about Pentecost, the able preacher must not simply preach a topical sermon on tongues or spiritual gifts in general. The text about Agabus the prophet is not first and foremost a springboard for settling the issue of NT prophecy. Our questions about these things, as good and as important as they may be, are not precisely Luke’s, or the early church’s, questions. We must preach the text in context first, then deal with the larger theological and contemporary issues later. After all, the only legitimate way to approach theological questions is to have a thorough grasp of how the Bible presents and speaks to the questions on its own terms. One of the many reasons we never seem closer to settling such issues is because we do not always deal thoroughly with the texts of Scripture in the context of Scripture.

Finally, preachers ought to be ready to be continually surprised, and often overwhelmed, by the personal, biblical, and theological richness of Acts. Like most narratives, it is not our first choice for preaching. But this tendency can be easily changed through reading and studying more biblical narrative. After some time spent reading, wrestling with, and thinking through Acts, we should want to preach it.

Interpretive Challenges

One of the greatest challenges in interpreting the book of Acts, one with which every reader must wrestle, is in determining whether the narrative portions of the book are descriptive or prescriptive. That is, is Luke merely describing what took place but not implying or showing that the event or action is meant to be repeated, or is he prescribing continued expectation, practice, or repetition of the events described? A prescriptive narrative will always be descriptive, but a descriptive text does not have to be prescriptive. The careful reader must consider what might be intended as a model or response even when no exact prescription (or command) is given.

I comment on this interpretive dilemma extensively for several texts throughout the commentary, but a prime example is found in the life of the early church in Jerusalem. In Acts 2:44–45, Luke writes, “All who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” Does Luke intend, as

some conclude, that Christians must share all they have and sell everything and share the proceeds among the church? There is no indication from this text, and certainly not from later texts in Acts—or in the Epistles, for that matter—that Scripture intends to prescribe this as mandatory church practice. Some, thinking that it does, have gone so far as to suggest Christian versions of communal living. Based on the context of Acts 2, however, such a reading misconstrues Luke’s intention (cf. comment on 2:42–47).

Centuries of “restoration” movements have attempted to build a church based on a so-called golden era, which usually means the era of the church at Jerusalem. As I make clear later, the era of the Jerusalem church was no more a golden era than was any other era in Acts or elsewhere. Of course, we can and should learn from that era, but this does not mean we must always copy it. At the same time, we cannot allow description to stop application. Many conservative evangelicals would easily agree with my interpretation against communal living and against a prescribed repetition of some of the practices in the Jerusalem church. The lack of prescription, however, does not mean the text has no life significance or implication. It is not sufficient to dismiss the notion of the church as a collective society or Christian co-op and thus practically to dismiss the text as having little application for believers’ lives today. Even when a particular action or event is not prescribed, we nevertheless must seek to understand what underlying principle or instruction for the Christian life might be involved. In this case of Acts 2:44–45, the text points to radical, other-centered generosity as a natural outflow of receiving the Spirit. By implication, the text also holds a potentially devastating challenge to the way we view our possessions and money. In other words, we must be careful that we do not use the label “descriptive” to reduce a text down to simple historical or theological information. Just because no clear prescription is present does not mean that no intended response or application is present. This challenge of interpretation appears many times in Acts, concerning issues such as the giving of the Spirit, the exercise of spiritual gifts, signs and wonders, and prophecy, just to name a few.

Closely connected to the descriptive/prescriptive question is the nature of the unique era recorded in Acts. The story of Acts takes place during the transition between the old and new covenants.⁷ Theologically we can assert, on the basis of Scripture, that Jesus’ cross establishes the new covenant. And inextricably linked to the cross is the resurrection. And with an even wider lens we can conclude that the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, and the coming of the Spirit establish the new covenant.

Of course, strictly speaking, Jesus’ death and resurrection—the once-and-for-all sacrifice for sins—establish the new covenant, but this covenant includes the

⁷ Scholars, readers, and preachers have long wrestled with both issues. For example, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 418–422. They discuss the issue of the transitional nature of Acts under the heading “Normative or Descriptive,” offering good directions for addressing the challenges. They also note that while the prescriptive/descriptive issue is a general aspect of the NT, it is of particular importance in Acts.

promises that flow from the finished work of Jesus. So, whether we are speaking of that which “establishes” or that which “inaugurates” or “provides for” or “applies” this new covenant, we are describing a theologically complex event with many necessary aspects without which it would not exist. There is no new covenant without the Spirit, or without the resurrection, the ascension, etc. Thus, even when speaking theologically in the abstract, describing the change from old to new covenants is not as simple as it at first seems. It is only simple when we conceive of it in terms of a linear, big-picture presentation of the history of redemption—with neat, well-demarcated lines signifying beginnings, endings, promises, and fulfillments. Such things are extremely helpful for teaching, and the NT writers certainly speak in unequivocally, definite terms about the cross of Christ.

However, when it was all taking place for the first time, when the new covenant was first enacted in the lives of real people, with different backgrounds, knowledge, social and cultural identities, and other human variables, the lines and boundaries were often far less clear. Not a great deal has changed in two thousand years. On the other hand, some things have changed quite a bit. For instance, it would be extremely rare, though I suppose possible, to find a group of people who identify themselves as disciples of John the Baptist, who do not know of Jesus specifically by name, and who have never heard of the Holy Spirit. Yet in Ephesus Paul finds just this sort of group (19:1–7). To put it simply, these men are old covenant believers: they live between the times, still waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promise. They are the last recorded group who fit that category, the last of a line that included Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Amos, and Simeon (Luke 2:25). They are not believers in Jesus who later receive the gift of the Spirit. Paul asks about when they believed because it is the best way to discern if someone is a believer.

Another, earlier example is the conversion of the Samaritans. They believe but do not receive the Spirit until Peter and John come to investigate this new thing: belief in Jesus outside Judaism (being half-Jewish does not count). John and Peter are satisfied, they pray, and the Samaritans receive the Spirit (Acts 8:14–17). This is not the typical pattern in Acts but is something that occurs in a brand-new situation as the gospel spreads outside Judea. This narrative is a good example of the intersection of covenantal transition and the question of prescription versus description.

Finally, in Acts we encounter the challenge that comes every time we read biblical narrative: how do we read and apply it? For applicatory Scripture we typically gravitate to Paul, the Gospels (their teaching sections, mostly), a handful of psalms, and selected portions from Moses and the Prophets. Narrative, on the other hand, is typically stripped down to our favorite stories, relegated to Sunday school lessons, or just largely ignored. It is odd that we should pay so little attention to biblical narrative when the Bible, from beginning to end, is so full of stories. When reading narrative we must come with the assumption that narrative has as much to teach us as an epistle; it is merely going to teach us in a different way. In addition, we ought not worry about boiling down a narrative to three (or however many) points.

Luke is not Paul in disguise. Finding the themes and purposes of a narrative is not the same thing as tracing main points and lines of an argument. Finally, reading the narrative of Acts is more—far more—than a stripping away of the historical events in Luke's stories in order to find a kernel of eternal truth or abstracted points of theology and practice. There is plenty of eternal truth, theology, and practical teaching in Acts, but we need to respect that in Acts, God willed to give us a story. If God thought it right to give us a story, who are we to argue?

*Outline*⁸

- I. Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria (1:1–12:25)
 - A. Preparing the Apostles (1:1–26)
 1. Introduction to Theophilus (1:1–2)
 2. Forty Days with Jesus (1:3–5)
 3. Jesus Ascends into Heaven (1:6–11)
 4. Matthias Joins the Apostles (1:12–26)
 - B. Witness Begins: Pentecost and Fellowship (2:1–47)
 1. The Disciples Receive the Spirit (2:1–4)
 2. The Age of the Spirit Begins (2:5–13)
 3. The First Christian Sermon (2:14–41)
 - a. Let This Be Known (2:14–15)
 - b. The Fulfillment of Joel (2:16–21)
 - c. Jesus Is the Messiah (2:22–36)
 - d. Repentance and Forgiveness (2:37–41)
 4. The First Christians (2:42–47)
 - C. Signs, Wonders, and Results (3:1–5:42)
 1. Peter Heals a Lame Man (3:1–10)
 2. What the Miracle Means (3:11–26)
 - a. Peter Preaches Jesus (3:11–16)
 - b. Offer of Repentance in Jesus (3:17–26)
 3. The Council Responds (4:1–4)
 4. Peter Responds to the Council (4:5–12)
 5. Questions and Unbelief (4:13–22)
 6. Prayer, Praise, and Community (4:23–37)
 - a. Prayer for Boldness (4:23–31)
 - b. Unity in Community (4:32–37)
 7. Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11)
 8. Summary: Signs and Wonders (5:12–16)
 9. Persecution Begins (5:17–42)
 - a. The Apostles Arrested (5:17–26)
 - b. The Apostles before the Council (5:27–32)
 - c. The Council Issues a Warning (5:33–42)

⁸ This is the outline I use when teaching Acts, built on an original version given to me by my colleague Tom Schreiner when I began teaching at Southern Seminary. Although I have modified it in places, it is essentially the same outline.

- D. The Greek-Speaking Jews Emerge (6:1–8:40)
 - 1. The Disciples Choose Seven Servants (6:1–7)
 - 2. The First Christian Martyr (6:8–8:3)
 - a. Stephen Arrested (6:8–15)
 - b. Stephen's Speech (7:1–53)
 - c. Stephen Martyred and Believers Scattered (7:54–8:3)
 - 3. Judea and Samaria and Beyond (8:4–40)
 - a. Philip Goes to Samaria (8:4–8)
 - b. Peter and John Go to Samaria (8:9–25)
 - c. The Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26–40)
- E. The Conversion of Saul (9:1–31)
 - 1. The Road to Damascus (9:1–19a)
 - a. Saul Meets the Risen Jesus (9:1–9)
 - b. Ananias Ministers to Saul (9:10–19a)
 - 2. Saul Goes to Jerusalem (9:19b–31)
 - a. Saul in Damascus (9:19b–25)
 - b. Saul in Jerusalem (9:26–30)
 - c. The Church Grows (9:31)
- F. The Gospel Goes North (9:32–11:30)
 - 1. Aeneas and Dorcas (9:32–43)
 - 2. Cornelius the God-Fearer (10:1–11:18)
 - a. Cornelius's Vision (10:1–8)
 - b. Peter's Vision (10:9–16)
 - c. Peter Travels to Cornelius (10:17–33)
 - d. Peter Preaches the Gospel (10:34–43)
 - e. The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (10:44–48)
 - f. Peter's Report (11:1–18)
 - 3. The Gentile Church in Antioch (11:19–30)
- G. Persecution in Jerusalem (12:1–25)
 - 1. The Death of James and Arrest of Peter (12:1–19)
 - a. The Murder of James (12:1–5)
 - b. Peter's Rescue (12:6–11)
 - c. Answered Prayers (12:12–19)
 - 2. The Death of Herod (12:20–25)
- II. To the Ends of the Earth (13:1–28:31)
 - A. The Mission to the Gentiles, Part 1 (13:1–15:35)
 - 1. Paul and Barnabas's Missionary Journey (13:1–52)
 - a. Antioch Launches the Mission (13:1–3)
 - b. Barnabas Takes the Lead in Cyprus (13:4–12)
 - c. Paul Takes the Lead in Pisidia (13:13–52)
 - 2. Iconium, Lystra, and Back to Antioch (14:1–28)
 - a. Ministry in Iconium (14:1–7)
 - b. Ministry in Lystra (14:8–18)

- c. The Stoning of Paul (14:19–23)
 - d. Back to Antioch (14:24–28)
- 3. The Jerusalem Council (15:1–35)
 - a. Troubling of the Gentiles (15:1–5)
 - b. Salvation Has Come to the Gentiles (15:6–21)
 - c. The Council's Letter to Gentile Christians (15:22–35)
- B. The Mission to the Gentiles, Part 2 (15:36–21:36)
 - 1. Paul and Barnabas Split Up (15:36–41)
 - 2. Paul's Ministry in Macedonia (16:1–40)
 - a. Timothy Accompanies Paul (16:1–5)
 - b. The Macedonian Vision (16:6–10)
 - c. The Conversion of Lydia (16:11–15)
 - d. Paul and Silas in Prison (16:16–24)
 - e. The Philippian Jailer Is Saved (16:25–34)
 - f. Paul and Silas Released (16:35–40)
 - 3. Ministry in Thessalonica (17:1–9)
 - 4. Ministry in Berea (17:10–15)
 - 5. Paul with the Philosophers (17:16–34)
 - a. Athens (17:16–21)
 - b. The Areopagus (17:22–34)
 - 6. Ministry from Corinth to Ephesus (18:1–28)
 - a. Corinth (18:1–17)
 - b. Returning to Antioch (18:18–23)
 - c. Apollos in Ephesus (18:24–28)
 - 7. Ministry in Ephesus (19:1–41)
 - a. Disciples of John the Baptist (19:1–10)
 - b. The Power of God and the Sons of Sceva (19:11–20)
 - c. Money and Idolatry: A Riot in Ephesus (19:21–41)
 - 8. Final Farewells (20:1–38)
 - a. Paul in Greece (20:1–16)
 - b. Paul's Goodbye to the Ephesian Elders (20:17–38)
 - 9. Paul Goes to Jerusalem (21:1–36)
 - a. Paul Meets a Prophet (21:1–16)
 - b. Paul Shows His Freedom (21:17–26)
 - c. Paul Arrested in the Temple (21:27–36)
- C. Paul Addresses the Mob in Jerusalem (21:37–22:29)
 - 1. Paul's Request to Speak (21:37–39)
 - 2. Paul Testifies to His Conversion and Calling (21:40–22:29)
- D. Paul's Defense before the Sanhedrin (22:30–23:35)
 - 1. Paul Speaks to His Accusers (22:30–23:11)
 - 2. The Jews Vow to Kill Paul (23:12–35)
- E. Paul before Felix (24:1–27)
 - 1. Paul Makes His Case (24:1–21)

- 2. Paul Remains in Custody (24:22–27)
- F. Paul Will Go to Caesar (25:1–27)
 - 1. Paul Appeals to Caesar (25:1–12)
 - 2. Festus Refers Paul to Agrippa (25:13–27)
- G. Paul before King Agrippa: Who Is True to the Covenant?² (26:1–32)
 - 1. Paul Introduces Himself (26:1–8)
 - 2. Paul Testifies (26:9–23)
 - 3. True and Rational Words (26:24–32)
- H. To Rome (27:1–28:31)
 - 1. Sailing for Rome (27:1–12)
 - 2. A Dark and Hopeless Storm (27:13–38)
 - 3. Saved by a Shipwreck (27:39–44)
 - 4. Doing Good to All on Malta (28:1–10)
 - 5. Finally to Rome (28:11–16)
 - 6. The Kingdom to the Ends of the Earth (28:17–31)

ACTS 1:1–26

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴And while staying¹ with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with² the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” ⁹And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter

and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.³

¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” ¹⁸(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong⁴ he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰“For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

“‘May his camp become desolate,
and let there be no one to dwell in it’;

and

“‘Let another take his office.’

²¹So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” ²³And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

¹Or *eating* ²Or *in* ³Or *brothers and sisters*. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, the plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated “brothers”) may refer either to *brothers* or to *brothers and sisters*; also verse 15 ⁴Or *swelling up*

Section Overview: Preparing the Apostles

Luke addresses his work to a man named Theophilus, directly linking this work to the book Luke sent Theophilus earlier: what we refer to as the Gospel of Luke. Luke’s purpose here is to take up where he left off: at Jesus’ postresurrection appearance to the disciples that culminated in the promise of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:36–49).

In this section, Luke transitions quickly from the ministry of Jesus to the ministry of the apostles—that is, from Jesus’ personal ministry to his ministry through the apostles by the power of the Spirit. Jesus spends forty days teaching them about the kingdom of God. Finally, before ascending, Jesus gives his disciples a final overarching directive that shapes the contour of Acts and by which the

world will hear the gospel. The first order of business for the apostles after Jesus' departure is choosing a replacement for the traitor Judas Iscariot.

One unique feature of Luke and Acts is that both begin with what scholars call a “literary prologue,” indicating that Luke writes with a literary purpose, most likely directed to an educated audience.⁹

Section Outline

- I. Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria (1:1–12:25)
 - A. Preparing the Apostles (1:1–26)
 - 1. Introduction to Theophilus (1:1–2)
 - 2. Forty Days with Jesus (1:3–5)
 - 3. Jesus Ascends into Heaven (1:6–11)
 - 4. Matthias Joins the Apostles (1:12–26)

Comment

1:1–2 *Introduction to Theophilus.* From early in the church's history, Luke has been widely accepted as the author of Acts, even though he does not mention himself by name. Despite a relative handful of scholars who argue against Lukan authorship, no convincing arguments have been advanced that either refute his authorship or plausibly suggest someone else. The same is true for the Gospel that goes by his name.

As for Theophilus, he was almost certainly well-to-do, he was probably a believer, and he perhaps even provided money for Luke to research and complete his work. A role as Luke's patron would explain why he is singled out as the recipient of Luke's writings. Since Luke never comments on their relationship, however, the idea is merely speculative. Even if Theophilus were Luke's patron, this would not mean that the book is not for all Christians.

Readers for centuries have pointed out that the name *Theophilus* is a compound Greek word derived from *theos*, meaning “God”/“god,” and *phileō*, “to love.” However, it is unlikely that Luke seeks to convey a symbolic message by this name. *Theophilus* is a common enough Greek name and, regardless of etymology, should be understood as simply that—a name.

Luke recounts that in his Gospel he narrated Jesus' acts and teaching up until the day he ascended into heaven (v. 2). The central role of the Holy Spirit in this book is already prominent, as Luke notes that it was “through” the Spirit that Jesus issued commands to his chosen followers. The word “chosen” connects to a theme that acts as an undercurrent in Acts—not usually emphasizing eternal election (as Paul does in 13:17, or as conveyed by “appointed” in 13:48) but rather God's choosing believers for particular acts of service or ministry (1:24; 9:15; 10:41). Such “choosing” is a recurring theme throughout the book: God provides both salvation itself and the means—his people chosen for the task—by which to spread its good news.

⁹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC (Nashville: Holman, 1992), 78.

1:3–5 *Forty Days with Jesus*. Jesus is with the disciples forty days between his resurrection and ascension. The number forty recalls other significant periods in the Bible. Most importantly, the number recalls times of preparation:¹⁰ Moses spent forty days on Sinai receiving the law (Ex. 34:28); Elijah visited Horeb on a forty-day journey, being refreshed before returning to work (1 Kings 19:8); and Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness undergoing temptation before beginning his ministry (Luke 4:2). So now Jesus spends forty days teaching the disciples, preparing them for the new ministry about to begin.

Jesus focuses on two things during this time: (1) providing the disciples with proof that he is indeed alive and (2) teaching them about the kingdom of God. Apostolic ministry is grounded in the eyewitness testimony of the disciples. When they seek to choose a replacement for Judas, Peter insists that it be “one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:21–22). Besides the original disciples, Luke is careful to show that Paul’s ministry is no less founded on a personal encounter with the risen Lord (9:4–5, 17; 26:15–16).

Resurrection from the dead was no less controversial, and no easier to believe, in the first century than it is today. When Paul speaks of the resurrection at the Areopagus at Athens, he is mocked for it (17:32). However, the truth of Jesus as King, the resurrected Lord who came to fulfill the OT promises and who suffered, died, and arose and now reigns in heaven, is vital for proclaiming the message of the gospel. This is no spiritual, disembodied *idea* of a resurrection; Jesus was raised from the dead as a physical man. Although his resurrection body is different, as it is somehow not subject to physical obstacles but transcends common, mortal existence (cf. Luke 24:31, 36, 51; Acts 1:9), it is still a real, physical body.

At the end of Luke, when the disciples are frightened by his appearance, Jesus reassures them, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). Jesus even ate in front of them (Luke 24:42–43). Although we do not know all of the details of the resurrection body, we should grasp the fact that after the resurrection, Jesus is “*more* than ordinarily embodied, not less.”¹¹ In the resurrection, Jesus is the vanguard of a new, transformed, immortal humanity. It is on this foundation that the disciples undertake the ministry to which Jesus the risen King calls them.

Luke does not specify the content of Jesus’ teaching regarding the kingdom, though there is a hint in the final question the disciples ask him (cf. comment on Acts 1:6–11). We can infer from the Gospels that Jesus likely speaks to them about the nature of the kingdom, perhaps reminding them of his parables and how he has showed signs of the kingdom in his miracles. In addition, we likely should connect this teaching to Luke’s Gospel account of Jesus teaching the disciples to

¹⁰ Ibid., 82.

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1–12* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 3.

read the Scriptures with himself as the center (Luke 24:27). We should also note how the term *kingdom* bookends the book of Acts: Luke identifies the kingdom as one of the two themes of the forty days Jesus spends with the disciples, and at the very end of Acts the theme receives explicit emphasis again, this time in the ministry of Paul, who at the end of the book is described as “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31). Thus, although the exact terms *kingdom* and *kingdom of God* appear only seven times in Acts, this kingdom is nevertheless one of the book’s main themes. The kingdom is that which Jesus speaks about before his ascension and is the way in which Luke summarizes the content of Paul’s teaching.

As in the Gospels, *kingdom of God* refers to the Lord’s rule and reign. This kingdom is not localized with borders or made up of particular people connected politically, culturally, or ethnically, but is established in the lives of men and women through the power of the gospel. It is a mustard-seed kingdom (Luke 13:18–19) that appeared insignificant at its beginning but will have an unimaginable ending. The key is to see that unimaginable ending even amid the insignificance of the kingdom’s beginning; such vision comes from faith alone. This kingdom features a leader who suffers and who preaches nonviolence and self-deprecation, urging his followers to give up the right to their own lives and live instead for his sake and for that of others. This kingdom is initially led by a group of his followers who for the most part do not come from high-income or particularly educated families. The one who does have personal and educational pedigree (Paul) is apparently less than impressive in person, even if he can write a letter with flair (cf. 2 Cor. 10:10). Yet, if the beginnings of this kingdom appear insignificant, this is nothing compared to its unimaginable power: the King rises from the dead, ascends to the throne, sends his power into the lives of his followers, and enables and emboldens them to speak openly of him and to offer free entry into his eternal kingdom. Those who believe the message enter the kingdom that will one day be revealed as uncontainable in time or space when the King returns. This is the kingdom Luke traces out in Acts.

In Acts 1:4–5 Jesus issues a direct command to his disciples: stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Father to fulfill his promise to send the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 24:49), as proclaimed by John the Baptist. This is truly a climactic moment. John said that his baptism was for preparation, to ready people for what was coming, a baptism “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). In Luke’s Gospel, John declares that it is Jesus himself who will baptize with the Spirit. Thus the “baptism” of the Spirit refers to the gift of the Spirit from the risen and ascended Lord, not to a special second blessing or second gift of the Spirit to people who have received him previously.¹²

By mentioning the Spirit, Luke has drawn together the three main themes that will shape the book of Acts. Jesus appears offering proofs of his physical resurrection, providing a foundation for the apostles’ witness. The primary, or summary,

¹² There will be plenty to say about the Spirit in the coming chapters!

theme of that witness is the kingdom of God. That witness of the kingdom, as the kingdom itself, is through the Spirit. Jesus rose from the grave and lives; the disciples are his witnesses; the Spirit empowers their witness. If pressed to summarize the content of Acts, one could do so in three words: resurrection, witness, Spirit.

1:6–11 *Jesus Ascends into Heaven*. After Jesus has been with the disciples for forty days, teaching them about the kingdom, the disciples ask him if the time of the kingdom has come. It is common for interpreters to see this question as yet another foul-up on the part of the disciples. But it is not. For starters, we do not know exactly what Jesus taught them over those forty days, so we cannot simply assume that they have misunderstood a specific teaching. In fact, despite forty days of hearing from the resurrected Jesus on the kingdom, we should not be surprised if all of his teaching has not yet sunk in. There was quite a bit to take in, and long-held perceptions take time to change. If one's perceptions and views are deep-seated enough, with their roots in a developed cultural and sociopolitical worldview, then a supernatural event may be the only thing powerful enough to force a tectonic shift in thinking.¹³ Such events are the hallmark of Acts.

If we consider the disciples' actual question, we will realize that it is a legitimate biblical query, one for which Jesus does not rebuke them. To the contrary, he provides them with a very biblical answer.¹⁴ The restoration of the kingdom to Israel is the first order of business in God's plan for the future, according to the OT prophets. A first-century Jew would likely have been familiar with Isaiah and Ezekiel on this score. Ezekiel, after promising the eschatological cleansing of the Spirit and a return from exile (Ezekiel 36), receives a dramatic vision of dry bones coming to life through God's Spirit (37:1–11) and learns that the bones are the "whole house of Israel" (v. 11). God then directs Ezekiel:

Son of man, take a stick and write on it, "For Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him"; then take another stick and write on it, "For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him." And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. And when your people say to you, "Will you not tell us what you mean by these?" say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him. And I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand. (Ezek. 37:16–19)

Joining the northern and southern kingdoms into one kingdom goes hand in hand with the eschatological promise of the Spirit. If Jesus had been teaching the disciples about the kingdom for forty days, it does not take a great deal of

¹³ My language and ideas in this section reflect my reading of many commentators; most importantly, Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 61–67; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 75–80; Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, Part 1, 6–7.

¹⁴ I am deeply indebted to Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 106–107, for his interpretation of the text, including the OT background and application to the nature of the disciples' question and Jesus' response. Although he is not cited continually, this section draws heavily from him.

creativity to imagine that a biblical text such as Ezekiel 37 would have come up in conversation.

Likewise, the prophet Isaiah not only promises a restored kingdom but also weds the idea to the new, restored Israel serving as a “light for the nations.” The servant of the Lord will bring the two kingdoms together for a purpose:

Now the LORD says,
 he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
 to bring Jacob back to him;
 and that Israel might be gathered to him —
 for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD,
 and my God has become my strength —
 he says:
 “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
 to raise up the tribes of Jacob
 and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
 I will make you as a light for the nations,
 that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isa. 49:5–6)

Once we read the disciples’ question against this background, we realize that it is a legitimate question asked by Israelites in the presence of the resurrected Messiah—Israelites who have particular expectations about the future and who are now being confronted with that future.¹⁵

This background sheds great light on Jesus’ response as well. The Lord does not rebuke the disciples for asking the question. He tells them that they do not or cannot know the time in familiar terms; only the Father knows the exact time. He redirects their question to the more important issue that focuses the disciples on a different idea of time. The disciples are thinking in regard to the consummation, the final establishment of the kingdom. They are also likely thinking of a decisive event. But Jesus directs them away from a specific day and instead focuses on the situation that exists as a result of his resurrection. The kingdom is being restored and will continue to be restored through the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, who will empower the disciples. The restoration begins now.

Jesus’ answer follows the lines of Ezekiel and Isaiah and also provides one of the most memorable and oft-quoted verses in the book of Acts:

It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:7–8; cf. Luke 24:47)

Jesus, the true servant of Yahweh, will unite Israel and be a “light for the nations” (Isa. 49:6) through the witness of his Spirit-empowered disciples. Knowing

¹⁵ Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, Part 1, 6–7.

the specific timeline is outside the apostolic brief; the “times or seasons” rest with the Father. It does not seem to take long for the disciples fully to understand and embrace what Jesus is saying. Soon after, while speaking on Solomon’s Portico, Peter urges his hearers to repent so that “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (Acts 3:19–21). The timing of the consummation of the age is known by God alone, and he will bring it about according to his divine counsel. The NT teaching in regard to our strictly limited knowledge of the end of this age lands us squarely in the arena of faith (Matt. 24:36; 25:13; 1 Thess. 5:2). Only by believing that the time is set by God can the disciples go out with both confidence (God is in control) and urgency (God will certainly bring everything to his appointed end).

The disciples will not receive heavenly navigation software to map the route of the end times; they will receive something better. The last recorded words from Jesus in Luke’s Gospel concerned witness and the coming of the Spirit. There Jesus said, “You are witnesses of [my saving ministry]. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:48–49). They will shortly “receive power” (Acts 1:8) from the Spirit. More precisely, the Spirit himself is the power they will receive. We will see many aspects of the Spirit’s work in Acts. At Pentecost, Peter proclaims that what is occurring is exactly what God promised would happen: he would pour out his Spirit (2:18). Later believers also receive the Spirit (8:17; 10:44; 15:8; 19:6). The Spirit also empowers signs and wonders performed by the disciples. Luke will use the word translated “power” in 1:8 (Gk. *dynamis*) when referring to miracles performed by the disciples (2:22; 3:12; 4:7; 8:13; 19:11).

Jesus’ promise of the Spirit includes all of these aspects, at least by extension, but the main focus here is on receiving the Spirit to empower gospel witness specifically. And this is exactly what occurs in chapter 2, when the disciples and others gathered together receive the Spirit at Pentecost. Similarly, Luke connects the early explosive growth of the church to the “great power” of the apostles’ preaching (4:33). Further, not only is Stephen filled with “grace and power,” doing signs and wonders; his opponents are no match for him because “they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” (6:8–10).

The fulfillment of the promise made in 1:8 is not the first time in Luke’s writings that we find a special anointing of the Spirit for particular equipping and witness.¹⁶ The Spirit comes down upon Jesus, the servant of Yahweh who will himself bring the Spirit (cf. comment on 1:3–5 [at vv. 4–5]), at his baptism, as the Father speaks a word of loving acceptance and unqualified approval (Luke 3:22). Immediately after recounting Jesus’ Adamic lineage, Luke notes how Jesus returns from his baptism “full of the Holy Spirit,” the same Spirit who immediately ushers him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan; Jesus stays *forty days* (Luke 4:1–2).

16 See David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 110.

The true Adam goes into the wilderness, and, where the first Israel failed, the true, Spirit-filled Israel (Jesus himself) succeeds.

Soon after, in his inaugural sermon at Nazareth, Jesus picks up the scroll of Isaiah and reads from Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18–19)

Luke includes Jesus' interpretation of the text, leaving the reader little reason to doubt the implication: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Jesus places himself unequivocally in the place of the anointed one who will bring the old covenant promises to fulfillment. Now, in Acts, the disciples will receive the Spirit from Jesus to equip them to be his witnesses: the Anointed sends his anointed witnesses. They will reach the world with the same message: that Jesus has come but has now died, risen, and ascended to heaven.

Jesus also tells the disciples where they will take this Spirit-empowered witness. His geographical trajectory is more than a series of concentric circles that map mission work (though not less than that). Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria represent the divided kingdom of Israel and the disciples' target as they go to fulfill Ezekiel and Isaiah, restoring the kingdom and lighting up the world as the ambassadors of King Jesus. Israel's split (cf. Isa. 9:21; 11:13; Ezek. 37:16–17; Zech. 11:14) serves as one of the main, and tragic, reminders that the OT storyline never finds a stopping place or point of resolution. In fact, it just gets worse over time, as Israel's behavior raises more questions than answers. It is the prophets of Israel, largely rejected in their own time, who point forward to a new day in which the Lord will fulfill all his promises of a new heart, a new people, and a new place, all focused on a new king.

Jesus tells his disciples that they are on the cusp of nothing less than the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, with themselves as a symbolic restored Israel (cf. comment on Acts 1:12–26 [at v. 26]) that will come with a predicted but hard-to-fathom twist. The kingdom will be a new kingdom, filled with new people. He, the true Israel, sends the newly constituted Twelve (Matthias will be added soon), and this symbolic new Israel will need to be made whole again. Yes, there are more than twelve people involved in the early chapters, and many more will be added, but here Jesus is speaking specifically to the apostles—his specially called heralds and ambassadors of the kingdom, whose preaching will be the only standard of teaching in the kingdom.

Luke is the only Gospel writer who inarguably includes an ascension narrative.¹⁷ A lack of ascension records in the Gospels, however, should not cause

¹⁷ Mark 16:19 also refers to the ascension, but the majority of the best early texts do not contain Mark 16:9–20.

concern, for several reasons. First, the Gospels were written after the fact, well after. Many, if not most, of the NT Epistles were written before or around the same time as the Gospels. In the case of John, he likely wrote well after all of the NT Epistles were written. The Gospels' concern is to provide a theological narrative of the life, teaching, and mission of Jesus of Nazareth. Their emphasis, therefore, is on the two to three years of his active ministry, most especially on his passion and resurrection. Second, each Gospel—with the possible exception of Mark, depending on where his Gospel ends—includes postresurrection appearances at which Jesus interacts with and teaches the disciples. These postresurrection narratives, read together with the rest of the NT, assume the ascension. Third, Luke includes the ascension both in his Gospel and here in Acts. There has been no significant doubt about Luke's authenticity, including that of his ascension accounts.¹⁸ Fourth, in the early centuries of the church, Luke was quickly and broadly received without controversy. Along with this, all orthodox, early Christian witnesses affirm the ascension. Even if one rejects the long ending of Mark (16:9–20) as original, in any case the mention of Jesus' being "taken up into heaven" in Mark 16:19 affirms an early ascension tradition, whether related by Mark or by someone shortly after him.

The account of the ascension in Acts resembles closely the description in Luke, except for the disciples' reaction. In Luke, after Jesus ascended, the disciples "worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52). In Acts the account itself is similar. Jesus speaks to the disciples about their mission, and then immediately, right in front of them, "he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). The difference is in the disciples' reaction. In Luke they worship; in Acts they are awestruck. These two accounts are quite compatible.

In response to Jesus' ascension, the disciples look up and keep on looking. They have witnessed a supernatural event unlike any before or since—not even the departure of Enoch or of Elijah could compare. Thus angels must come and summon their attention: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (v. 11). It is at this point, once the disciples gather themselves, that I can imagine them worshipping Jesus. Thus Luke 24:52 and Acts 1:10–11 fit quite well together.

We should note the appearance of a cloud at Jesus' ascension. This biblical symbol calls to mind other times in which heaven and earth met—clouds in Scripture are often symbolic of God's presence. For example, in the exodus narrative, a cloud leads the Israelites by day in their journey from Egypt to Sinai (Ex. 14:19). God speaks to Moses from a cloud on Sinai (19:9; 24:15). A cloud covers the tent of meeting when God's glory fills the tabernacle (40:34). When it is time to move the tent, the cloud is taken up, and when it is time to stop, the

¹⁸ Although some modern scholars have called Luke into question, their arguments have not gained great traction even in scholarly communities. Further, I am not taking into account the argument that Luke was a later concoction of the church. Such a conclusion is based largely on historical-critical presuppositions rather than on exegesis.

cloud stays put (40:36–37). The very last verse of Exodus refers to the “cloud of the LORD” (40:38).

Such symbolism is not lost on the Gospel writers. The climactic meeting of heaven and earth takes place around the midpoint of Jesus’ ministry, when attention is shifting toward Jerusalem and the cross. At the transfiguration, with nothing less than the divine, heavenly dimension breaking into the earthly sphere, a cloud descends on Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and the disciples, and from it comes a voice: “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” (Luke 9:35; cf. Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7). Further, Jesus’ second coming is described as “the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27; cf. Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26). Later, Matthew includes an auspicious mention of clouds during Jesus’ trial. When asked if he is the Christ, Jesus, though he does not say “yes,” puts his answer to Caiaphas the high priest in unmistakable words: “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64). What Jesus means, and how he is heard, is evident in Caiaphas’s response: “Then the high priest tore his robes and said, ‘He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy’” (Matt. 26:65). Clearly these references to clouds point to the divine presence, just as in the exodus narrative.

Luke’s mention of “heaven” calls all sorts of images to mind. Given our perception and experience, it is natural to think of “heaven” first as a place. There are biblical reasons for this conclusion, as heaven is mentioned as the place of the Father, of reward, and of the afterlife (Matt. 3:17; 5:12, 16; 6:9–10, 20; 17:5; Mark 1:10–11; 12:25; Luke 3:22; 6:23; 15:7). In Acts 1, the word “heaven” appears four times in two verses. Jesus is “lifted up,” and the disciples are left staring “into *heaven*” (v. 10) before the angels draw their attention: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into *heaven*? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into *heaven*, will come in the same way as you saw him go into *heaven*” (v. 11). In the first instance, “heaven” is clearly used directionally: Jesus was “taken up” (Gk. *analēmphtheis*) and went “into heaven” (Gk. *eis ton ouranon*), with the direction (“taken up”) seen as descriptive, just as “a voice from heaven” describes a source from above. This does not mean, however, that Jesus rode a cloud all the way up to his throne or that Luke only means the skyward direction. Jesus went up *and* ascended to the presence of the Father, in heaven. We are faced with a description of a supernatural event, namely, the meeting of heaven—the place where God himself dwells—and earth. Whereas the cloud denotes God’s presence in the exodus, here we not only see a cloud depicting God’s presence; the incarnate Lord is himself present. At the ascension, a way is made from the earthly realm to the heavenly realm. How Jesus moves from one to the other is beyond our perception and experience, but it is clear that Scripture speaks of heaven as a place, *God’s place*, that will one day be joined with a new heaven and a new earth. Here the focus is on heaven as the destination to which Jesus ascends as the divine King. It is a place of finality and authority from which King Jesus directs his kingdom work on earth.

1:12–26 *Matthias Joins the Apostles.* Verse 12 notes that the ascension took place on “the mount called Olivet,” commonly referred to as the Mount of Olives. Luke mentions that this was a “Sabbath day’s journey” from Jerusalem, likely referring to the distance allowed by Jewish tradition for traveling on the Sabbath, a little over half a mile.¹⁹ In his Gospel, Luke says that the ascension took place around Bethany (Luke 24:50), which adjoined the Mount of Olives. That hill is a frequent setting for Jesus and his disciples, most famously so for the “Olivet Discourse,” where Jesus taught the disciples about both the destruction of the temple and his second coming (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Zechariah describes the Mount of Olives as the place from which God would fight against the nations that exiled Jerusalem:

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. (Zech. 14:4)

The place of Zechariah’s apocalyptic vision of judgment against the nations is now the sending point for bringing blessing to the nations through the gospel.

Acts 1:13–15 records who was present between the ascension and Pentecost, reminding us that in the Gospels many people besides the twelve disciples accompanied Jesus. The Eleven are named here as they are in Luke 6:14–16, minus Judas Iscariot, with the subtle difference that Andrew is now listed fourth, leaving the three most prominent in Acts—Peter, John, and James—at the head of the list. Luke mentions Mary the mother of Jesus and other women. The prominent place of women in Jesus’ ministry is a theme in Luke’s Gospel, for they are present at vital times, most particularly at the cross and at the tomb (Luke 23:49, 55–56; 24:2–11). Luke here also mentions Jesus’ brothers. According to Mark, Jesus had at least four brothers: James, Joses, Judas, and Simon (Mark 6:3). Some traditions hold that Jesus’ brothers were not Mary’s children—the idea being that Mary stayed a perpetual virgin—but the evidence in the NT argues against such claims. Speculation that these were half brothers from a previous wife of Joseph or were “cousins” or some other relations who could be called “brothers” in first-century Jewish society is based more on maintaining Mary’s virginity than on anything found in Scripture. The scriptural arguments for Mary’s perpetual virginity came after the formulation of the doctrine. There is no reason to doubt that these four were his blood brothers on his mother’s side. All or some of them *could* have belonged to Joseph from an earlier marriage, but to assert that they surely were so is impossible.

As in the life of Jesus, prayer is a hallmark of both the disciples and the early church. We know from Luke that the group met not only in the upper room but also in the temple (Luke 24:53). Here Luke concentrates his narrative on the events

¹⁹ Bock, *Acts*, 76. Bock points out that the distance is disputed.

that take place in the upper room before Pentecost. After that, the disciples go public; in chapter 2 the scene switches to the temple. Here Luke notes that they “with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). Luke uses the term *homothymadon*, here translated as “with one accord,” nine other times in Acts (2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29). The term stresses their unity, their “togetherness.” The picture is of the group praying together continually (which does not have to mean around the clock). Even though Jesus promised them the Spirit (cf. Luke 24:49) and a role as his witnesses, the group nevertheless gave themselves constantly to prayer, awaiting the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise.

Luke does not reveal how Peter knew that the disciples needed to fill Judas’s spot; likely, Jesus told them to do so during his forty days or else the Spirit led Peter to stand up and speak. That they needed to fill the spot and bring their number back to twelve was likely evident to the disciples. What is clear from the text is that Judas’s actions fulfilled Scripture, specifically Psalms 69:25 and 109:8. Peter’s announcement is one of the clearest statements in Scripture regarding its inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Through David, the Spirit prophesied concerning Jesus’ betrayal.

The ESV’s parentheses around verses 18–19 indicate that here Luke is providing a narrative explanation of what happened to Judas, inserted into the middle of Peter’s speech. Such insertions are common in NT narrative and are included in order to provide the reader a fuller picture of an action or teaching event well beyond what could be gained by reading only the account.

The NT includes two accounts of Judas’s death. In Matthew 27:3–10, Judas, undoubtedly wracked with guilt, brings the thirty pieces of silver back to the council of priests and elders. He even confesses his sin: “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood” (Matt. 27:4). The Jewish leaders could not care less; they have gotten what they paid for. Judas throws the money down, and Matthew says simply that “he went and hanged himself” (Matt. 27:5). Not wanting to put the blood money in the treasury, the chief priests use it to buy a potter’s field for burying outsiders. Matthew notes that this all took place to fulfill Jeremiah 19:1–13; he combines the main prophecy with an accompanying prophecy from Zechariah 11:13.

The account in Acts is quite similar at many points. The money is used to buy a field, the field is called “Field of Blood,” Judas’s remorse and hopelessness is explicit in Matthew and implied in Acts when Luke says that Judas fell headlong (Acts 1:18), and Judas dies violently. A slight issue in the accounts arises when comparing Matthew’s account with what Luke says in Acts 1:18. According to Luke, “This man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness.” A simple explanation is that Luke is saying it was Judas’s money—not Judas himself—that bought the field. Another surface difference is that, while Matthew simply notes that Judas hanged himself, Luke states that “falling headlong [Judas] burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.” Suggestions that Judas hanged himself near a cliff and that the tree broke and Judas fell to the bottom are only speculative attempts to harmonize the accounts. A more likely solution is that Luke is providing more

details of the hanging. Perhaps Judas's body hung until decomposed—but we cannot really know. The ESV footnote indicates that *prēnēs genomenos*, translated as “falling headlong,” could also mean “swelling up,” but this is merely a possibility.

While Matthew focuses on Judas's death as suicide, Luke particularly highlights his death as punishment. The theme of divine punishment is underscored by the fact that the field is forever known as “Field of Blood.”²⁰ Judas received his inheritance of thirty pieces of silver by denying and betraying Jesus—he gave up everything for a few pieces of silver. And yet he lost the money, the field, and, ultimately, his life.

Describing in full the events surrounding Judas's death is not possible based on these texts alone. Matthew and Luke provide accurate information that is sufficient for their own purposes, but neither purports to offer a full blow-by-blow account. It is likely that Matthew gives a shorter account of Judas's suicide, omitting the time between Judas's returning the money and his death. Precisely lining up the two accounts is not necessary, and the questions that remain are not significant. We should avoid stretching the limits of interpretation to include unfounded speculation (which we never tolerate from those who oppose us and the Bible) that causes us to go beyond God's revelation in an effort to protect the Bible from critics—or from itself, for that matter. God did not choose to give us precise details, perhaps because the details of Judas's death are not what drive the narrative. The important thing is that the two accounts emphasize Judas's horrid sin, the punishment for that sin, and the fact that his betrayal of Jesus was foretold by the Spirit.

In verse 20 Luke cites clear biblical warrant for finding a replacement for Judas: “Let another take his office” (cf. Ps. 109:8). This leads to choosing Matthias as Judas's replacement. For the replacement, having been an eyewitness to Jesus is a must. It is worth noting that James, the brother of Jesus, is not in the running. This is likely because he, like his brothers, was late in coming to faith. In Luke 8:19–21 (cf. Matt. 12:46–50; Mark 3:31–35), Jesus' mother and brothers come to Jesus when he is teaching in an overcrowded house at the height of his popularity, and they do not seem to come simply to hear him, as a disciple might. And John 7:5 is unmistakable: “Not even his brothers believed in him.” Although James will rise to prominence in the early church, he is not in the running to join the apostles at this point. Barsabbas (Justus) and Matthias are chosen as candidates.

This text calls to mind the casting of lots in Leviticus 16:8 and Joshua 18:6; 19:51, when the portions for the twelve tribes of Israel are decided by lots. So here the new symbolic Israel is fulfilled by lots, though this is probably more a mere observation than a certain textual connection. The apostles' action is not prescriptive of Christian decision making but a specific, symbolic act of constituting the church of God, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). Casting lots does not continue in the

²⁰ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 33.

NT as a practice for discernment, nor do NT writers ever instruct the churches concerning how, when, or why to cast lots.

It has been suggested that the call of Saul/Paul later in Acts indicates that the selection of Matthias is misguided, or even a mistake. But this is absurd. The original Twelve are the reconstituted tribes of Israel, founded on Jesus Christ the Lord. They will be tasked primarily to take the gospel of Jesus the Messiah to the Jews (Gal. 2:6–10). The choice of Matthias is based on prayer, devotion, and waiting on God. There is no indication that it is in any way wrong or turns out to be an error. The fact that Matthias is never mentioned again in the NT means nothing in this or any other regard. Of the Twelve, only Peter, James, and John are mentioned after Acts 1:13. Matthias is no different than the majority of the Twelve. The addition of Matthias also paves the way for the fulfillment of Scripture, Jesus' promise, and the in-breaking of the future kingdom through the Spirit at Pentecost. The eyewitnesses are in place before the witnessing begins. Finally, the addition of Paul as an apostle—"one untimely born" (1 Cor. 15:8), to use his words—is part and parcel of the *new* thing that is happening. He is the apostle to the Gentiles. The kingdom is not restricted to twelve apostles just because the old covenant was with the twelve tribes. There is both continuity and discontinuity between the OT and NT. With Paul, a mystery that was hidden is revealed. Namely, the Jews and the Gentiles are now one people in Christ (Eph. 3:6). Something new is happening, and while it is connected to the old, it supersedes and extends beyond it.

Response

Believers ought to consider their lives in light of Jesus' commission to the apostles in Acts 1:8. For those who believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord, their lineage—their genealogy of faith—began the day Jesus sent the apostles into the world, equipping them with his Spirit. When we read Acts, we are not merely reading of all the wondrous and miraculous things God did in the early days of the NT church, about how his church grew and his Word spread—though all of that is certainly true. We are reading a story in which we take part. And God calls us to live out that story as witnesses to Jesus in the world.

Believers ought also to consider their lives in light of the angels' words to the apostles in Acts 1:11: Do believers today live in light of the return of Jesus? The sure return of Jesus is meant to give strength to carry out his will in daily life. The writers of the NT are consumed with the future—God's future, when Christ returns and definitively establishes the kingdom once and for all. This focus is not simply wishful thinking or a booster shot of hope for getting through life. The future is ours because Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Believers may follow in the footsteps of the apostles, boldly sharing the gospel in the face of ridicule, danger, and unbelief, persevering in the face of all the unlooked for and unwanted setbacks, disappointments, and suffering, only by believing in God's future. If we truly believe that Jesus will return just as he went up from the apostles, then through God's grace we can face whatever comes

and witness to Jesus without fear. God's promises concerning the future kill any worldly fear.

The disciples' prayer in light of Christ's promises (v. 14) is a good reminder that divine promises and prayer for fulfillment go hand in hand. Yes, God makes promises, and those promises are certain; but he also calls us to a life of dependence in relationship with him. God calls believers to ask of him as their Father. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13). Perhaps that very promise was at the heart of the apostles' prayers.

We should not quickly pass over the Judas story as simply a detail in the narrative that shows that everything works according to God's plan. At the same time, we should not simply have disdain for Judas and go about our business. We do not need to sympathize with Judas in order to read his story and look for ourselves in it. Our own betrayals of Jesus, though less dramatic and prophetic, are betrayals nonetheless. Every time we reach for something beyond or besides Jesus in order to satisfy a longing and desire—which always means reaching for something far less than him—we are asking for our own version of thirty pieces of silver. Judas is an example of trying to gain the world at the expense of one's soul. As Luke puts it in Acts 1:25, Judas went "to his own place," which points to his position apart from the others and his eternal punishment.²¹ He is a signpost of warning. If we do not see the warning in the story, then we have exchanged assurance for presumption. It is doubtful that Judas knew all along that he would betray Jesus, and we should keep that in mind too.

Theologically, we feel tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. It was no surprise to Jesus that Judas, whom he chose, would betray him (Matt. 26:50; Mark 14:18–20; John 17:12). Judas's character is on display when he grumbles about the money wasted when Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, washes Jesus' feet with expensive oil (John 12:4–6). We can never have access to the inner counsel of God; we can only ever know what God reveals to us. In the case of Judas, we know his inner motives and his behind-the-scenes activities only because those things are revealed in the Bible. Because of Scripture, we know more about it than everyone living at the time, except Jesus. But we never have such privileges in our own lives. More importantly, we know Judas's acts were foreordained only because Scripture says so. The Bible does not, however, always answer our questions about the relationship between sovereignty and responsibility. God only reveals that both phenomena are at work.

In our daily lives and interactions, we can only see the actions taken by ourselves and others. We do not know every motive—often not even our own. But we do know that God declares that he, and he alone, knows the end from the begin-

21 Bock, *Acts*, 89. Bock also points out that in the early church, "the place" became a term for eternal judgment in hell (as in, "went to his own place"). Schnabel also comments that the language of this account emphasizes God's judgment on Judas (*Acts*, 99).

ning. Our calling is to live by faith, believing what God says in the Bible at every point. The tension in the life of Judas should drive us to test our own faithfulness, our own actions, and our innermost thoughts and desires, inquiring how closely our outer and inner lives match. We should consider all this from the perspective of those who know that the sovereign God not only has told us what he requires but also has provided for it through Christ's death and resurrection. Why waste time on endless speculation, bordering on sin, about God's total knowledge and his eternal plans when we could be living by faith in Christ alone? Whatever else there is to say, we must recognize that Judas did not believe in Jesus. Although his unbelief took on an extreme response, does it ever come down to anything more or less than that—unbelief?

ACTS 2:1–47

2 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested¹ on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹²And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.² ¹⁶But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷“And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;

- ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.
¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.
²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of
the Lord shall be saved.’

²²“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³this Jesus,³ delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵For David says concerning him,

- “‘I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.
²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.
²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

²⁹“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³²This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ³⁴For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

- “‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool.”’

³⁶Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” ⁴⁰And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them,

saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe⁴ came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

¹Or *And tongues as of fire appeared to them, distributed among them, and rested* ²That is, 9 A.M. ³Greek *this one*

⁴Or *fear*

Section Overview: Witness Begins: Pentecost and Fellowship

Acts 2 begins a new chapter in the story of the new covenant and its eclipse of the old. Now that Jesus has ascended into heaven and is seated on the throne, he sends his Spirit, just as he had promised. The shadows, promises, and prophecies unfold in dramatic fashion as the disciples receive the Holy Spirit, who empowers them to speak the gospel of the risen Christ for the first time. The coming of the Spirit also lifts an ancient curse as the nations begin to be reunified, not by one language but by one Spirit. In fact, languages are transcended. Peter preaches the first Christian sermon, the first public speech in Acts, and through the power of the message of the death, burial, resurrection, and enthronement of Jesus, many are brought to repentance and faith. In one remarkable day the church grows dramatically.

Chapter 2 is the starting point of the NT apostolic ministry. Everything contained in the rest of Acts and the Epistles begins here: the new apostolic age, the age of the Spirit, the last days, the days in which we ourselves live. For the sake of grasping the importance of that day, we can think of the Bible and history as a calendar with just four days: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation. These days, of course, are linked together. The day of Pentecost is part of that third day and opens the way to the fourth and final day—the fulfillment of all of God’s purposes and promises. The coming of the Spirit as a result of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension begins the end of this present era, the days in which we ourselves live.

Section Outline

I.B. Witness Begins: Pentecost and Fellowship (2:1–47)

1. The Disciples Receive the Spirit (2:1–4)
2. The Age of the Spirit Begins (2:5–13)
3. The First Christian Sermon (2:14–41)
 - a. Let This Be Known (2:14–15)
 - b. The Fulfillment of Joel (2:16–21)

- c. Jesus Is the Messiah (2:22–36)
- d. Repentance and Forgiveness (2:37–41)
- 4. The First Christians (2:42–47)

Comment

2:1–4 *The Disciples Receive the Spirit.* Right from the beginning, Acts 2 is concerned with new structures and dynamics that bring the old structures and dynamics to their appointed end. The chapter occurs at Pentecost, the second annual feast of the Jewish year, celebrating God’s provision for his people. Also known as the Feast of Weeks in the OT (see Lev. 23:15–21; Ex. 34:22; Num. 28:26–31; Deut. 16:9–12), Pentecost came fifty days after Passover. Passover commemorated the coming of the angel of death, the last plague, to Egypt. On that night, the Israelites were told to sacrifice a lamb and spread its blood over their doorpost. The angel, seeing the blood, would pass over the Israelites but would inflict destruction on Egypt by taking its firstborn sons. This could have been avoided had Pharaoh and his court listened to Moses and freed Israel. But they refused and so paid an ultimate price for their sin against God. In the aftermath, the Israelites, having survived because of the lamb’s blood, left Egypt. God redeemed them, as promised.

Fifty days later, Israel was at Sinai, receiving God’s law through Moses. When they entered the land, they were to keep a feast, or festival, in which they were to bring their firstfruits (bread made from new grain) as an offering to God. The firstfruits offering stood both for hope in the coming of the full harvest and as a sign of thanksgiving for God’s provision. Pentecost was inseparable from Passover and was marked specifically from the date of Passover (Lev. 23:16). It could come only as a result of God’s previous work. Thus it was not simply about agriculture but about redemption as well. Israel offered her firstfruits to God, who saved her from slavery in Egypt. The underlying idea in the symbolism of Pentecost was that if God was able to redeem his people from Egypt, then he would be able to provide for their lives too, just as he had promised.

In Acts 2, Jews in Jerusalem are still celebrating Pentecost, but this Pentecost is different. It is, in fact, the last Pentecost. It must be the last, because the final Passover took place fifty days earlier when Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, was crucified for the sins of God’s people. This was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices (see Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 28; 10:10). Redemption from Egypt, and the Passovers that remembered it, was a shadow of something greater. Passover is fulfilled, and now it is time for the fulfillment of Pentecost. With Jesus now in heaven—a vital point for what follows—this fulfillment is precisely what happens next.

The disciples are together, and something happens that can be explained only by analogy, not from past experience: “Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind,” and “divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them” (Acts 2:2, 3). The words “like” and “as” are important for understanding Luke’s quintessentially biblical way of describing the scene. Commentators are divided as to whether there was an actual gust of wind accom-

panied by the sound, or whether there was just a sound. Whether the disciples felt a wind is unimportant. What took place is described not exactly as natural phenomena but “like” it. This is common in Scripture, particularly in texts and passages that describe heavenly scenes or times when the heavenly and earthly realms come together: gates and walls are “like” precious stones, heavenly scenes generally are described as “like” earthly analogies, and visions include things “like” wheels, fiery messengers, or various animals that sometimes combine more than one species. These are attempts to convey supernatural visions and experiences—real, experienced events, but beyond what can be described fully. In this case it sounded something like a great wind. I have an image in my mind of the apostles hearing something like the sound of wind from the inside, with walls and roofs creaking, windows rattling, and the sound of rushing air shaking everything in its path, straining to get past. Maybe to us it would have sounded like an oncoming train.

What is important is what the wind-like sound and the appearance of tongues like fire indicate: both point to the presence of God (cf. 1 Kings 19:11–13). Thus the prophet Ezekiel is led by the Spirit to a vision of dry bones that take on human form and are brought to life when the Spirit commands: “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live” (Ezek. 37:9). The image is of God’s bringing Israel back from exile, redeeming them as in a new exodus, with this great exception: this time he promises to give them his Spirit (Ezek. 37:14). Likewise, the image of fire in Acts 2 is unmistakable. It may be compared to the Lord’s appearing to Moses in a burning bush (Ex. 3:1–6) or to the people of Israel as a pillar of fire, leading them at night in their desert wanderings (Ex. 14:19–20; Num. 11:25; 12:5; 14:14; 16:42; Deut. 1:33). The fire could also be an echo of Isaiah 6:4–7, where the prophet’s tongue is cleansed with a burning coal.

The presence of God in Acts 2 is also accompanied by an act of God. His presence is confirmed by the direction from which the sound comes: from heaven, the place of God. This is the second time in short order that heaven and earth intersect. Jesus went into heaven; now the Spirit from heaven will invade the earthly realm, filling the apostles for witness.

When the apostles receive the Spirit here, this is not the moment they are “saved” or regenerated. In fact, it is not the first time they receive the Spirit. After his resurrection, Jesus appears to the Eleven and breathes on them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). They are also, as a result, given authority to forgive sins on his behalf (John 20:23). The reception of the Spirit in Acts 2:2 is for carrying out Jesus’ commission to witness. The apostles’ experience of the Spirit is, by necessity of their era, different than it is for every succeeding generation. This is not to say their experience is *totally* different or unconnected to the receiving of the Spirit seen after Peter’s sermon, only that this instance is a special equipping for a special group of people.

While he was on earth, Jesus was directly present with his followers, who, even with their obvious shortcomings, did provide evidence of believing in him to

whatever extent was possible (“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” “You are the Christ.” “I believe; help my unbelief.”). There is no clean and easy way to determine the exact point in which the disciples became believers in the sense we use the term. They did “believe” when Jesus was alive, but their faith was not complete until the resurrection, just as Christ’s work of redemption was not complete. The disciples were sanctified by the word of Jesus while he was with them (John 13:10; 15:3; 17:17), but they would not receive the Spirit as the power of the risen Christ until after the resurrection (as promised in John 14–17). By historical and experiential necessity, the disciples occupy a different place in salvation history than we do.

In Acts 2:33 Peter says that Jesus “received” the Spirit from the Father specifically for the pouring out received at Pentecost. On the other hand, at 8:17 some Samaritans receive the Spirit when Peter and John lay hands on them. In 10:47, Peter declares that because Cornelius and other Gentiles “received” the Spirit just as Jewish believers did, there is no way to deny them baptism. The Spirit “fell” upon all gathered as Peter spoke, and those with Peter were amazed that the Spirit was “poured out” on the Gentiles just as he was on Jewish believers (10:44–45). Thus it is clear that the language for receiving the Spirit, whether for particular empowerment or for regenerating power, does not consistently distinguish between the work of witness and that of belief. All of these works—apostolic witness, signs and wonders, and regeneration—are entirely the doing of the Spirit. How the Spirit is working and what he is bringing about depends on the context.

The Spirit came and “rested on each one” at Pentecost (2:3). This is an outward manifestation of what is taking place among them, as all those gathered in the room are “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 4)—what Jesus promised them at his ascension now takes place. It is impossible to quantify what it means to be “filled with the Holy Spirit.” We should not think of the Spirit as some sort of heavenly gasoline that fills our spiritual tank. Luke seems to be speaking in the sense of capacity (“filling” language), but how do we think of capacity when the receptacles are people and the substance is the Holy Spirit? Can someone be filled a quarter of the way with the Spirit? At what point is one “full” of the Spirit in terms of quantity? Paul tells the Ephesian believers, who already have the Spirit, nevertheless to “be filled with the Spirit” rather than to be drunk on wine (Eph. 5:18).

In his Gospel, Luke uses the word “filled” in the sense of filling to capacity, as when the disciples’ boats are so full of fish that they begin to sink (Luke 5:7), or figuratively, as in “filled with great fear” (Luke 2:9) or “filled with fury” (Luke 6:11). He also uses the term to mean “fulfill” or “end,” as in to reach an appointed conclusion. Zechariah goes back home “when his time of service [as a priest] was *ended*” (Luke 1:23). The destruction of Jerusalem foretold in the Olivet Discourse is described as “days of vengeance, to *fulfill* all that is written” (Luke 21:22). Importantly, the angel tells Zechariah that his son, John, “will be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:15); Elizabeth sees Mary and is “filled with the Holy Spirit” and begins to praise (Luke 1:41); and Zechariah is, once again, “filled with the

Holy Spirit” and begins to prophesy and to praise God for what he is about to do in Israel according to his promises (Luke 1:67).

We find similar texts in Acts as well. Peter is filled by the Spirit and speaks to a crowd (Acts 4:8), and soon after the believers are filled with the Spirit through prayer (4:31). When the seven are chosen to look after the widows among the Greek-speaking Jews, one of their criteria is that they are to be filled with the Spirit (6:3). Ananias tells Paul he will “be filled with the Holy Spirit” (9:17). These texts, along with those in Luke, determine what the phrase means in 2:4 and in Acts generally. In most cases, to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” means to be empowered for service, usually that of proclamation or mission. This does not imply an initial lack but merely communicates a special experience of the Spirit in order to carry out the mission from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and the ends of the earth. The Spirit’s work in salvation does not take second place in Acts—reception of the Spirit is the primary reason Gentiles must be baptized and recognized as full-fledged members of the new covenant (15:8–9)—but at Pentecost specifically the disciples are filled with power for the great work of that day.

As a result, those in the room “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (2:4; cf. 10:45–46; 19:6). The meaning of the word translated “tongues” (Gk. *glōssai*) is disputed. Many Christians understand this verse to mean that the disciples begin to speak in a heavenly language transcending human linguistic structures—unlike any language on earth. In such an interpretation, those who hear the disciples speaking in different languages (2:6) do so because some kind of divine translation is taking place that causes the “tongues” to be heard as languages. Often in this interpretation the miracle of tongues is accompanied by a miracle of hearing. Texts such as 1 Corinthians 13:1, where Paul mentions speaking in the “tongues of men and of angels,” are cited in support (cf. 14:2, 18–23, 27). Others, however, understand the disciples to be speaking in different languages, those represented in the room that day. In this interpretation there is no need for a miracle of hearing. Typically, this reading is accompanied by reading the term “tongues” in the NT as always referring to known human languages. First Corinthians 13:1 does, however, seem to distinguish human and heavenly speech. Pressing *glōssai* to mean “languages” in every instance in the NT seems strained. A third option is to understand the word “tongues” as being used in the NT both for human languages and for heavenly speech, with both manifestations being works of the Spirit.

At Pentecost the tongues seem to be languages, and thus the miracle is one of speaking, not likely one of hearing. Luke here uses the word *apophthengomai* (“utterance”; Acts 2:4), which recurs twice more in Acts in regard to speaking God’s word. It is clear that the Spirit empowers the disciples’ speaking, but, as seen in the upcoming verses, there is no similar indication of Spirit-empowered hearing. Throughout Acts (as demonstrated already), the Spirit works in believers to empower them for service. The Spirit does work in unbelievers, but this is part of God’s work of salvation, “having cleansed their hearts by faith” (15:9). Such is why

it is important first to establish what “filled” means in this verse before considering the miracle of speaking that follows: it provides the context for understanding this highly disputed text.

2:5–13 *The Age of the Spirit Begins.* During the major Jewish feasts, the population of Jerusalem would double or even triple. Besides those who lived in Jerusalem and Judea, people from all over the Mediterranean world would make pilgrimage to the feast. This fills the scene in Acts 2 with excitement and jostling, even apart from the miraculous event that would take place that day. In spite of the commotion typical to Pentecost, something so astonishing happens that it gains attention. Suddenly, 120 people begin speaking in foreign languages—people from all over the world hear their native tongues. Even in the hustle and bustle of the feast, a voice in one’s own language would win attention. Pilgrims nearby or walking past hear something very familiar, except that they all hear the same thing in their respective languages (2:6, 8).

The source gets their attention too. Not every single listener would be able to identify the background of the speakers, but enough could. And the word spreads: those speaking are Galileans (2:7). Calling them out as Galileans is probably not a commentary on their educational background and therefore not connected to the council’s later identification of Peter and John as “uneducated” (4:13). The surprise is that a group of people from a known place in Israel, where locals speak Aramaic and Greek, is suddenly speaking multiple other languages and dialects.

The breadth of representation stands out in Luke’s list of nationalities, spanning most of the Roman and Parthian Empires: from Rome to the Caspian Sea in the north and from North Africa to Mesopotamia in the south. The path from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth begins to be paved at Pentecost. Those mentioned are Jews, but some are proselytes (2:11), Gentiles fully converted to Judaism.

Thus both the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3) and the means of that fulfillment begin in earnest here. The nations are gathered, and each hears the “mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11) in its native language. The ultimate “blessing” to the nations is the gospel of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19–20; Luke 24:46–49; Gal. 3:8), a blessing carried through his people.

This event, at least implicitly, also overturns and overcomes an ancient curse. Before the promise for the nations made to Abraham in Genesis 12, Scripture records how the nations were separated. As a punishment for ongoing and increasing sinfulness, particularly pride and independence from God, man’s one language was turned into many languages, which created immediate confusion and led to separation into groups and, ultimately, distinct nations (Genesis 10–11). This confusion and separation, fueling the estrangement between human beings that began at the fall (Genesis 3), led to untold and unimaginable war, suffering, and barbarism throughout history. Alexander the Great attempted in the fourth century BC to unite the world through the spread of Greek culture and language. He

had some success, providentially creating a common trade language that assisted the spread of the gospel. Humanly speaking, however, the tragedy at Babylon (the Tower of Babel) could not be overcome. Yet the miracle of tongues and the proclamation of the gospel at Pentecost reunites people with a power greater than language or culture, creating a bond that transcends any such barrier. The separation of the human race by language, and all that such separation entailed, is mended by the Spirit. The gospel, empowered by the Spirit, creates one new multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural people of God.

It is unlikely that anyone at Pentecost thought immediately of the Tower of Babel or reflected on its biblical-theological connections; Peter clearly interprets the event from Scripture but does not mention Genesis 11. They *do* understand, however, that people are miraculously speaking other languages and that native speakers are hearing them—something outside of daily experience is taking place; something of unique significance is happening. For the second time, Luke describes their reaction: “All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2:12; cf. v. 7). Some, whether because they only hear a confusing blend of words that sound like nonsense or because they refuse to believe their own ears, can only chalk it up to one thing—they accuse the people of being drunk (v. 13). There is no way anyone can know what is taking place, because there is no precedent for this day, no analogue from history. What has happened is so astounding that it defies common description. Only a particular kind of biblical language can even begin to convey the story.

2:14–15 *The First Christian Sermon: Let This Be Known.* Luke presents here the first and in some ways most important speech in Acts; Peter preaches the first Christian sermon, the first apostolic interpretation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. As noted in the introduction, speeches are central to the book of Acts as they present the basic Christian proclamation, or *kerygma*, of the early church. As David Peterson points out, these sermons appear in various settings and contain very similar content, but that content is contextualized without compromise for each setting.²² Peter interprets the astounding events that have taken place this day, and if the events are astounding, the interpretation is even more so. Peter’s proclamation establishes his apostolic authority as he presents the meaning and fulfillment of OT messianic prophecy.

Peter takes the accusation of drunkenness as his cue to step up and “address” the crowd. Luke uses the same word here that he just used for the disciples speaking in tongues: *apophthengomai*. Paul uses this term when he says to Festus, “I am speaking [*apophthengomai*] true and rational words” (26:25). In the NT only Luke uses this term, and only at these three times in Acts. The term probably indicates something more pointed than “address”—such as “declare”—as each time it is connected to speaking about the acts of God.

²² Peterson, *Acts*, 144. He cites the similarities in content found in 3:13–26; 4:10–12; 5:30–32; 10:36–43; 13:23–41.

As it is only nine in the morning—the time of the first prayer of the Jewish day—no one is drunk; rather, they are filled with the Spirit. Even though visitors are present from all over the Mediterranean world, Peter addresses the “men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem” (2:14). This is best explained by the fact that he is in Jerusalem, the feast is in Jerusalem, and, most importantly, the crucifixion took place in Jerusalem and the assigned mission begins there. Peter’s introductory words fit thematically in the trajectory of Acts and bear a theologically practical aim. In the course of his sermon, Peter will indict the men of Jerusalem for the death of Jesus (v. 23), and in so doing he indicts Jerusalem, the heart of Judaism, as well. The city’s time as the center of God’s activity has come to an end. That is not an anti-Jewish statement but merely a reality of salvation history. The rejection of Jesus in Jerusalem and Judea is well documented in the Gospels (Matt. 16:21; 20:18; Luke 13:33; John 11:55–57), and the full extent of that rejection plays a part in Peter’s sermon. His goal, however, is not simply to condemn but also to reveal the grievous sin that took place in the city just fifty or so days earlier. Condemnation for the death of Jesus and announcement of the coming judgment of God are meant to drive his listeners to the gospel. This is a consistent pattern in Peter’s early speeches (3:19, 23; cf. comment on 2:37–41 [at v. 40]).

2:16–21 *The First Christian Sermon: The Fulfillment of Joel.* Peter begins his interpretation of what it means for the disciples to be speaking in all of these languages. This is not merely an attention-grabbing phenomenon but serves as the next act following the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. What is more, the prophets foretold this event. Peter steps into an authoritative role as spokesman and authoritative interpreter of the OT. The apostle of the Messiah explains what the messianic prophet meant: what the people have witnessed is exactly what Joel said would happen. Familiarity and modern sensibilities dull our senses for grasping just how astonishing and audacious Peter’s sermon really is. The promises of God for saving his people, sending his Spirit, and taking that blessing to the nations are the core of Peter’s sermon. He looks at the people and says, “This is it. The time has come. The promises are fulfilled.”

Peter’s citation of Joel 2:28–32 includes his authoritative modifications that explicitly link Joel’s prophecy to the event of Pentecost. At the beginning, Peter replaces “afterward” (Joel 2:28) with “in the last days” (Acts 2:17; cf. “in those days,” Joel 3:1). The era of “the last days” has begun. Although some tend to associate “the last days” solely with the time closer to the return of Jesus (under certain interpretations of such passages as 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3), the term can refer to the entire period between Pentecost and Jesus’ return (cf. Heb. 1:2). These are not mutually exclusive uses of the phrase—the last days have begun and are leading up to the very day of Christ’s return. This is the perspective of Peter’s application of Joel generally.

The first line of Peter’s citation heralds the fulfillment of one of the OT’s greatest promises: God will pour out his Spirit on everyone. Seminal texts from

Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 likewise hark back to a covenant promise found in the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy 10 contains a recitation of the Lord's greatness as creator, his sovereign choice of Israel, and his continual love and care. The covenant relationship between the Lord and Israel begins with and absolutely rests on him, but, as a covenant, it contains two sides to the relationship. For their part, the people are to fear, love, serve, and obey the Lord. However, an internal obstacle keeps them from upholding their covenant responsibilities: they lack the right heart to follow and obey the Lord. Circumcision does not make them truly the people of God; it is only a sign. So the Lord tells the people, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn" (Deut. 10:16). As Deuteronomy predicts Israel's failure to do this very thing, it also offers a promise: God will give them the very thing they lack in order to be his true people—a new heart. When he acts once again to rescue them, he will act finally and decisively by re-creating them when he brings them back to the land: "The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deut. 30:6).

The prophets take up and repeat this promise. Through Ezekiel, God guarantees the exiles not only rescue from Babylon but something even greater—a new heart, cleansed by the Spirit:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek. 36:25–27)

The text of Jeremiah 31 promises the new covenant, with the giving of a new heart at the center. Similar to Joel, Jeremiah refers to the coming days in which God will act on Israel's behalf. A new covenant will be made with Israel and Judea (cf. "Jerusalem . . . Judea . . . Samaria"; Acts 1:8), but, unlike the old covenant written on stone tablets, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). The heart promised in Deuteronomy, the heart inscribed with God's law, will be given through the promised Spirit.

Jeremiah's prophecy also sheds light on the mention of sons and daughters, young and old men, and male and female servants in Joel: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17–18). The new covenant cuts across all social boundaries, because "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jer. 31:34). It is not necessarily the case that Joel had Jeremiah in mind—though he may well have—or that Peter intended to find support from Jeremiah—though he likely did—but taken together these passages provide a comprehensive view of the fulfillment of these related new covenant

promises. Even if every group mentioned in Joel is not taking part in the Pentecost event, Peter nevertheless has a ready-at-hand text to explain what is happening. The Spirit is being poured out on all, just as God promised. The specific referent of prophecy in Joel is fulfilled through men and women speaking of “the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11).

The Joel citation then moves to the “not yet” of the last days. There is no clean demarcation between Pentecost and the apocalyptically described events in 2:19–20, because it is all presented as a piece. The outpouring of the Spirit is tightly connected to cosmic upheaval. In fact, the Spirit of the living God coming upon human beings is in many ways more astonishing than dark suns or bloody moons. Verses 19–20 do, however, convey a separate though connected event. The language describes the final day of the last days—most importantly, the judgment of that day. Similar phenomena in the natural world were witnessed at the recent display of God’s judgment at Calvary: the death of Jesus was marked by earthquakes and darkness (Matt. 27:51; Luke 23:44). The Gospel accounts of Jesus’ death generally share language similar to that used by Joel.

Joel’s apocalyptic vision is not localized but final and all-encompassing as God’s ultimate judgment falls on the world. Jesus himself used similar language to describe events leading up to his coming, including “signs in sun and moon and stars” (Luke 21:25). This is a scene of ultimate finality, the end of what began at Pentecost. There is hope, however, as Peter concludes the quotation from Joel by stating, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). Remarkably, “the LORD,” *Yahweh* in Joel 2:32, refers now to Jesus of Nazareth. The OT promises have been expanded into a new covenant, with better promises founded on the Messiah. The stone of stumbling is about to be laid down.

2:22–36 *The First Christian Sermon: Jesus Is the Messiah.* Peter now addresses the crowd as “men of Israel” and more specifically as those who either were eyewitnesses to Jesus’ ministry and crucifixion or knew of it secondhand (v. 22).²³ Peter takes advantage of the public character of the life and death of Jesus and links it to what these people have just witnessed. His audience, to a large degree, must know about what happened to Jesus of Nazareth and thus must assume his story to be over. But what they have just witnessed is the ongoing story of Jesus, who not only lives but also reigns as the Davidic king and is the source of the Spirit whose work and presence has just been manifested.

The “mighty works [Gk. *dynamisin*] and wonders [*terasin*] and signs [*sēmeiois*]” associated with Jesus served primarily as proof that God was at work (v. 22). Luke’s Gospel is driven by the premise that what took place in the life and ministry of Jesus was in fact the fulfillment of the OT promises and the establishment of God’s

²³ It is common to point out that the speeches in Acts, like the Sermon on the Mount/Plain and other teaching sections in the Gospels, were likely longer than what is recorded in the Bible (cf. 2:40). That observation is probably right in most cases but is of little value for interpreting a text. The Bible is literature—what is in the pages is what we have, and this is evidently the way God intended it.

kingdom. For example, in Luke 11:20 (alluding to Ex. 8:19), casting out demons is positive proof of the fact that God’s work and kingdom now centers on Jesus. Such accompanying proofs will continue to serve as witness to the authenticity of the apostolic ministry.

Acts 2:23–24 is commonly associated with the issue of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Jesus died because it was God’s plan and because those in Peter’s audience crucified him with the help of the Romans (“lawless men”; v. 23). Peter’s point, however, is not to iron out the complexities of sovereignty and responsibility. The Bible in general presents sovereignty and responsibility as a reality, something that *is*. In this text, for instance, what is clearly presented is God’s sovereignty and his divine use of means to accomplish his will. Jesus’ death occurred on the basis of God’s “definite plan and foreknowledge” and through the actions of the Jewish leaders, who themselves used the Romans as the direct means of crucifixion. Both parties are guilty of murder. Peter is presenting this information not for debate and speculation but for conviction leading to repentance.

Jesus died according to God’s plan, and so too God raised him from the dead—the implication being that this was also part of the plan (v. 24). The grave could not hold him because he is the true King, the promised son of David. This is Peter’s point in citing Psalm 16:8–11 (Acts 2:25–28). Like the Joel text, Psalm 16 is not simply a handy example but according to Peter was pointing all along to the recent events. The apostles do not use Scripture as proof texts to make their point but rather show from Scripture that their teaching is in keeping with such Scripture and is its fulfillment as well. Peter introduces the quote by stating, “For David says concerning him,” indicating that David prophesied the resurrection of the Messiah. He calls David a prophet explicitly in verse 30. Jesus of Nazareth is the “Holy One” who was not abandoned in the underworld but knows “the paths of life” and is in the presence of God (vv. 27–28; cf. vv. 31–33). David was not talking ultimately about himself—how could he have been? Peter’s hearers all know David is dead and where his tomb is located (v. 29). The apostle draws explicit parallels from Psalm 16 to Jesus (table 2.1).

TABLE 2.1: Parallels between Psalm 16 and Jesus’ Resurrection

Acts 2:27–28, citing Psalm 16:10–11	Acts 2:31–33
“you will not abandon my soul to Hades” (v. 27)	“he was not abandoned to Hades” (v. 31)
“or let your Holy One see corruption” (v. 27)	“nor did his flesh see corruption” (v. 31)
“You have made known to me the paths of life” (v. 28)	“This Jesus God raised up” (v. 32)
“full of gladness with your presence” (v. 28)	“exalted at the right hand of God” (v. 33)

Peter closely links Jesus’ death and resurrection with the outpouring of the Spirit. What Peter’s audience witnessed at Pentecost was the result of the enthronement of King Jesus, which was possible only because he defeated death. When Peter says

that Jesus “received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:33), he does not mean that the Father caused the Spirit to dwell in Jesus in the same way in which he dwells in believers. Rather, Jesus, as the exalted King, bears the authority to send the promised Spirit. The Spirit-gift of the new covenant comes only through the once-and-for-all sacrifice that inaugurated the new covenant. Jesus the King lives and, as a result, can give the life-giving Spirit. Jesus himself promised that his going away would be better in every way for his followers, and this fulfills that promise (John 14:16–17, 26; 15:7).

Peter concludes his sermon by quoting from what would become one of the favorite OT texts of the early church: Psalm 110. “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Acts 2:34–35, citing Ps. 110:1). Peter thus underscores the fulfillment of Scripture in the resurrection of Jesus. He also returns to a theme evident in the Joel text: judgment. Jesus is enthroned as King, and, according to Psalm 110, the only remaining act is the final judgment of God’s enemies. Peter draws out this inference when he declares, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). The point is clear: Jesus of Nazareth was no ordinary Israelite, and yet they killed him. By highlighting their guilt at the beginning (v. 23) and end (v. 36) of his sermon, Peter underscores the reality that they have crucified the Messiah; they are the enemies of God.

2:37–41 *The First Christian Sermon: Repentance and Forgiveness.* Peter’s sermon hits home and demonstrates the power of the gospel. Luke is graphic: “They were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (v. 37). Peter’s answer is simple yet immeasurably profound: repent and be baptized in Jesus’ name. This is the way to forgiveness, by which Peter summarizes salvation (cf. 10:43; 13:38–39; 26:18). We should not shy away from using the word *forgiveness* in this comprehensive way. Although there is no explicit mention of faith in this text, it is clearly implied, for repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ imply belief. Further, baptism is the public expression of faith in Christ, of participation by faith in his death and resurrection. The point in this narrative is that God grants forgiveness even to those who rejected and killed Jesus.

We should note the difference here between this offer of the Spirit and the previous outpouring of the Spirit on the disciples. Verse 38 refers to the reception of the Spirit for salvation, not the imparting of the Spirit for particular gifting, such as the Spirit-given power to speak in other languages. We also see that the promise is to both Jews and Gentiles, those who are “far off” (v. 39). Thirdly, the mention of children in the promise, along with “all who are far off” must be read in the light of the last phrase, “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” This text should not be used to argue either for or against the infant baptism of covenant children, although it can be applied to the larger question by implication; proponents on both sides will have to look elsewhere for more texts to support their case. One must beg the question—that is, presume the support or

rejection of infant baptism—in order to read this text as providing textual support for or against infant baptism. The question is complex and requires a great deal of careful study, and clearly Christians have disagreed, and will continue to disagree, over it, but faithfulness to the text requires emphasizing what the text emphasizes.

Peter's main point concerns the inclusion of sinners in God's work of salvation. Even with the emphasis on the various means of salvation on display in Acts, the fundamental truth is that salvation belongs to God, and he has chosen both those who will be saved and the means by which that will take place. When reading salvation narratives in Acts, it is well to keep 13:48 in mind: "As many as were appointed to eternal life believed."

Luke informs his readers that Peter continued to speak and evangelize the crowd, summarizing Peter's message with a note of impending judgment: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (2:40). This exhortation does not imply some sort of cooperation in salvation; it is a picture of the dynamic of preaching the gospel vis-à-vis the law. The term *law* can be used in terms of a condemning principle (cf. Rom. 7:21). Thus to preach the law is to highlight the principle of condemnation rising from evidence of personal inability to save oneself, stressing one's hopelessness in the face of God's work and the certainty of divine punishment. Such preaching, like Peter's, seeks to drive the hearer to the hope of the gospel, the promise of God's total provision of forgiveness in Christ. Thus the unbelievers are urged to "save yourselves," that is, to fly to the offer of Christ and thus be saved. True NT preaching must include both a word of judgment (law) and the hope of the gospel.

The result of the first Christian sermon is the creation of three thousand new believers (Acts 2:41). Dramatic increase of believers is a hallmark of the first part of Acts, leading up to the persecution that causes many believers to flee Jerusalem following the stoning of Stephen (8:1).

2:42–47 *The First Christians.* Here Luke offers a snapshot of the practice of this first group of believers in Acts. Although they are not yet labeled the "church," this is not to say that nothing here applies to churches, much less that the early believers in Jerusalem were not yet concerned with the "church." In fact, these verses are both descriptive and prescriptive—that is, they describe the situation and also leave us with patterns we are meant to follow. As always in Acts, the trick is distinguishing the two, as we will see.

Clearly, their fundamental ongoing pattern was to gather around the apostles' teaching (v. 42). Luke also notes that they were devoted to meeting together ("the fellowship") and "to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Though not explicitly stated, it is likely that "breaking bread" implies a shared meal including the Lord's Supper (in contrast to 27:34–35). The "prayers" likely included times of prayer both at the temple and elsewhere (cf. 2:46). Teaching, prayer, fellowship, and the Lord's Supper are all aspects today's church can and should emulate.

Other aspects, however, are more difficult to apply in explicit ways. For instance, the believers were filled with awe as a result of the “many wonders and signs” (v. 43) performed by the apostles. Such wonders and signs most certainly included healing (cf. 3:7) and perhaps also other gifts, such as those manifested at Pentecost. Whatever was included, it is difficult to see a pattern here established for later Christian gatherings. Only the apostles performed wonders and signs, establishing their authority and their continuity with the ministry of Jesus. Just as with Jesus, the miracles attested to the reality and authenticity of the kingdom. Such miracles, especially healing, pointed to the fulfillment of kingdom promises and to the holistic and eschatological nature of the new covenant kingdom—an idea taken up directly in the next chapter.

Further, there is no ongoing pattern throughout Acts that either indicates or stipulates signs and wonders as either normal or typical for believers’ gatherings. Miraculous events amid Christian gatherings are certainly not *impossible* after this, but there is no basis for concluding that they will necessarily take place based on the text of Acts.

Verses 43 and 44 have caused a great deal of controversy over the years, as well as well-meaning, but misguided, interpretation. These verses are not an example, and certainly not a prescribed pattern, of some form of Christian socialism. The believers performed these deeds voluntarily (cf. 2:42); they were not commanded to do so. Later, Ananias and Sapphira are condemned for lying, not for withholding a portion of their goods (5:4). Some fringe groups, misreading the distinction between description and prescription, have established communities or cults on the basis of this text. But these believers did not give up all of their possessions and property. To the contrary, they still owned property, continuing to meet in homes. In addition, it is evident from the later portions of Acts and from the Epistles that early Christians did not sell everything and move into communes or compounds (cf. 12:12; 16:15; 18:7–8; 21:8, 16; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15). Paul, for instance, recommends that believers with sufficient means should eat at home, rather than eating from a common meal, so that those in need will not go without (1 Cor. 11:22). The practice reported in Acts 2 and 4 seems to be a phenomenon most common in Jerusalem in the early period of Christianity. This may have been due to the monetary situation of many believers there; perhaps by becoming believers in Christ they were ostracized by their fellow Jews. Whether the case, it nevertheless remains true that there is no command given explicitly, nor does the narrative imply a command, to sell everything and move in together.

It is telling that twice Luke mentions sharing among the early believers in places at which he summarizes dramatic additions to the community (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–37). Such generosity is one of the clear manifestations of the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers, as they begin to live for the sake of others and not only for themselves. This other-centeredness is a fundamental tenet of the faith (cf. Phil. 2:5ff.), as it manifests obedience to the great commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39). Taken together with

fellowship around the apostles' teaching, common meals, and prayer, the practice of free sharing is evidence of salvation through the power of the Spirit. Believers are not only brought to agree with teaching about Jesus; they are fundamentally changed in the way in which they live, demonstrated in extraordinary generosity and concern for the well-being of others.

It is easy for evangelicals to affirm the descriptive nature of this text but then ignore the fact that the text does provide a general pattern we should emulate. Generosity from the heart, holding possessions lightly, and putting the needs of others first is prescribed throughout the NT and supported by the experience of these Jerusalem believers.

The believers had “favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). At this point the gospel was not yet an offense—a situation that would not last. As with Jesus' ministry, in which early amazement was replaced quickly with opposition, especially from the Jewish leadership, so the Jerusalem believers enjoyed favor “with all the people” for a time, no doubt in part due to their behavior so evident in the community, but they quickly faced opposition from the Jewish leadership.

Response

The great import of this text is the fulfillment of the promise of the Spirit and the beginning of a new era in salvation history: God is now dwelling among and in his people. Whatever position one takes on tongues, it is far more important to realize that what unfolds at Pentecost is a manifestation of the new age of the Spirit that dawned that day and continues until the return of Christ.

What do we rely on when we preach and evangelize? Great time and effort is spent teaching and learning how to prepare and deliver sermons, how to connect with listeners, and how rightly to apply the truth of the Bible—all important and necessary considerations—but it is not the preaching by itself, much less the preacher or his education and preparation, that brings salvation. It is the power of the Spirit in and through preaching that convicts and saves. Not even Peter's sermon could save apart from the Spirit. Every time we open our mouths to share the good news of Jesus, we can do so with confidence that it is precisely, and only, the power of the Spirit in the words spoken and heard that brings sinners to Christ as Savior and Lord.

The last verses of chapter 2 reveal a community filled with the Spirit, growing in numbers, overflowing with gratitude and charity—a beautiful picture of the transforming power of the Spirit through gospel ministry. This is also a picture, a foreshadowing, of the life to come. In the community empowered by the Spirit, the eschatological kingdom breaks into the present, much in the same way that heaven and earth meet in the risen Christ. A believing community—focused on the gospel, praising God, praying, and gladly putting the needs of others first—experiences, and shows to the world, the reality of heaven here and now. Luke leaves us a model not for how to “do” church but for what the people of God should look like in terms of priorities, actions, service, and practice.

ACTS 3:1–5:42

3 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.¹ ² And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. ³ Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. ⁴ And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

¹¹ While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s. ¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant² Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus³ has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

¹⁷ “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. ²² Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. ²³ And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ ²⁴ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. ²⁵ You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ ²⁶ God, having raised up his

servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

4 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ²greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

⁵On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹This Jesus⁴ is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.⁵ ¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men⁶ by which we must be saved.”

¹³Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” ¹⁸So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” ²¹And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. ²²For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

²³When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵who through the mouth of our father David, your servant,⁷ said by the Holy Spirit,

“‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed⁸—

²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

5 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. ³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you⁹ sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” ⁹ But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

¹² Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico. ¹³ None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

¹⁷ But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸ they arrested the apostles and

put them in the public prison. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” ²¹And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²²But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³“We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” ²⁴Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. ²⁵And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” ²⁶Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

²⁷And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” ²⁹But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

³³When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. ³⁴But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, ⁴⁰and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ⁴²And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

¹That is, 3 P.M. ²Or *child*; also verse 26 ³Greek *him* ⁴Greek *This one* ⁵Greek *the head of the corner*

⁶The Greek word *anthropoi* refers here to both men and women ⁷Or *child*; also verses 27, 30 ⁸Or *Christ*

⁹The Greek for *you* is plural here

Section Overview: Signs, Wonders, and Results

This lengthy, focused narrative begins with a miraculous event that leads to immediate conflict with the Jewish authorities, a conflict that spreads throughout the

rest of Acts. Beginning from Jerusalem, enmity follows the spread of the gospel through the Mediterranean world and ends right back in Jerusalem near the end of the book. In this part of the narrative, the suspicion and unbelief of the Jewish leaders comes to the forefront when Peter and John are summoned to give an account of what happened outside the temple. The boldness and authority of the apostles is evident, and the picture is clear: God's people have new leaders. When these leaders do their work, moreover, it does not take place in the temple. The former leaders, on the other hand, are entrenched in unbelief and rejection of God's work in Jesus the Messiah.

This section is concerned with responses to the gospel and the work of the apostles. The negative response of the Jewish leaders is contrasted with the apostles' response to their admonition and orders, as well as the response of the Jerusalem Christians upon the apostles' release from custody.

Luke provides a remarkable account of life among Christians in Jerusalem. This community is united by the Spirit, putting the needs of others before their own. They share everything and donate generously to the needs of the community. In the midst of this bright beginning, however, the story takes a dark turn when Ananias and Sapphira put on a show of generosity, lying to the apostles and ultimately to the Spirit. It is quickly apparent that this is no golden era. Nevertheless, the miraculous work of God through the apostles' ministry continues and grows in the wake of Ananias and Sapphira's sin.

When this section comes to a close, the apostles are again arrested and brought before the council. Peter tells the Jewish leaders plainly that he and the apostles are loyal to Jesus, the risen Messiah—the Jesus the leaders killed but whom God raised and exalted. Peter's testimony leads to the first death threats in Acts. Gamaliel, a member of the council, advises a wait-and-see approach to the situation. Adopting this proposal, the leadership beats, warns, and frees the apostles. The apostolic response is counterintuitive:

They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. (Acts 5:41–42)

Section Outline

I.C. Signs, Wonders, and Results (3:1–5:42)

1. Peter Heals a Lame Man (3:1–10)
2. What the Miracle Means (3:11–26)
 - a. Peter Preaches Jesus (3:11–16)
 - b. Offer of Repentance in Jesus (3:17–26)
3. The Council Responds (4:1–4)
4. Peter Responds to the Council (4:5–12)
5. Questions and Unbelief (4:13–22)

6. Prayer, Praise, and Community (4:23–37)
 - a. Prayer for Boldness (4:23–31)
 - b. Unity in Community (4:32–37)
7. Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11)
8. Summary: Signs and Wonders (5:12–16)
9. Persecution Begins (5:17–42)
 - a. The Apostles Arrested (5:17–26)
 - b. The Apostles before the Council (5:27–32)
 - c. The Council Issues a Warning (5:33–42)

Comment

3:1–10 *Peter Heals a Lame Man.* The Jerusalem Christians continue to meet and pray at the temple. They understand themselves to be the followers of the Messiah, the one promised by God through the prophets; as inheritors of the promise, true children of Abraham through faith in Jesus, they continue to frequent the central place in Jewish life. They are not, however, continuing in temple worship per se; there is no record of the Jerusalem believers going up to the temple with sacrifices, for example. It is hard to discern how aware they are that the eclipse of the temple is occurring so dramatically and quickly. Jesus did clearly predict the destruction of the temple in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:1–25:46; Mark 13:1–37; Luke 21:5–36), and it is likely that the temple and its future were a topic of discussion during the forty days of kingdom instruction between Jesus' resurrection and ascension. In any case, the narrative is clear that the kingdom is surging through the ministry of the disciples and that the temple is not necessary for this to occur. The miracle narrated here occurs outside the temple, which should catch the reader's attention.²⁴

As Peter and John approach the temple, a man unable to walk since birth sits at the temple's Beautiful Gate. This is a well-trafficked area; anyone living or traveling in East or South Asia, for instance, is accustomed to people with various afflictions sitting near the entrances of temples, shrines, and stupas, where worshipers might be freer with their pockets than people elsewhere. Luke highlights how Peter and John look directly at the man, underscoring the immediate level of personal involvement. Peter says, "Look at us" (Acts 3:4). The man no doubt expects money; what he receives is so much more. He does not need money, primarily; he needs Jesus.²⁵

Peter's gift to the lame man is Jesus, for it is in his name that Peter takes the man by the hand and pulls him to his feet (vv. 6–7), illustrating the sort of "wonders and signs" done by the apostles (2:43). Invoking the name of Jesus is not a magical incantation but testifies to the source of the healing. The inclusion of

²⁴ Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, Part 1, 52.

²⁵ We should not take from this scene that it is never appropriate to give money to the needy, supposing that we should rather only share the gospel. It can be appropriate to give money in Jesus' name. Luke does not narrate this event to set a precedent that would exclude Christian charity. This text is not about alms but about the power and in-breaking of the kingdom of God. Further, the scene sets up the interpretive word in 3:11–26.

Jesus' hometown of Nazareth confirms that the same Jesus known to those living in Jerusalem and Judea and known to have been crucified is still at work. Peter's speech in the following text takes up this theme; healing was a major part of Jesus' own ministry, through which he manifested the presence of the kingdom of God and his identity as the Messiah (cf. Luke 7:22). These manifestations of the kingdom continue in the ministry of the apostles (cf. Acts 14:8–10), but it is Jesus who continues to work the miracles.

The healing is instantaneous and dramatic. The man not only stands but leaps up and begins to walk into the temple with Peter and John, "walking and leaping and praising God," filled with joy and praise to God for what he has done for him (3:8). He is like the Samaritan leper, the one out of ten healed men who glorified God and fell before Jesus in gratitude (Luke 17:15–16). The word translated "leaping" (Gk. *hallomai*) in verse 8 appears only here in the NT. Luke's use of the word in this context is suggestive, especially in light of the references to Isaiah and to eschatological fulfillment in Peter's upcoming speech. In a picture of eschatological blessing, Isaiah 35 prophesies concerning God's coming to save his people and judge his enemies, with the Greek Septuagint using the same word that Luke uses here. The people of God can take hope and solace because God will judge and save:

Be strong, you weak hands
and feeble knees!
Give comfort,
you who are faint of heart and mind!
Be strong; do not fear!
Look, our God is repaying judgment;
yes, he will repay;
he himself will come and save us.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf shall hear;
then the lame shall **leap** [*haleitai*] like a deer,
and the tongue of stammerers shall be clear,
because water has broken forth in the wilderness
and a gully in a thirsty land. (Isa. 35:3–6 NETS)

Such eschatological promises began to be fulfilled in Jesus' ministry and continue to find fulfillment in the ministry of his disciples. This new eschatological era of fulfillment founded on Jesus the Messiah is central to Peter's message to the witnesses of this miracle.

3:11–16 *What the Miracle Means: Peter Preaches Jesus.* Verse 10 noted that the people were "filled with wonder and amazement" and verse 11 further emphasizes their "utterly astounded" reaction as they raced to Solomon's Portico—an area just to the left of the Beautiful Gate if facing the temple—to see Peter, John, and the formerly crippled man. As at Pentecost, Peter takes advantage of the situation and

speaks to the crowd, and once again he begins with “Men of Israel” (v. 12). Peter will offer these Israelites an opportunity to be included in God’s new covenant through Jesus the Messiah. This speech, like the one in Acts 2, offers an interpretation of a miraculous public event.

Peter’s introduction is simple and to the point, though surprising in light of what just happened: “Why do you wonder at this . . . ?” (v. 12). If they had remained faithful to the God of their fathers, they would not have been surprised at such signs. They would have recognized God’s working. Peter identifies God in verse 13 using the name by which the Lord introduced himself to Moses at a burning bush, where he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6). The God who appeared to Moses to save his people from slavery, according to his faithfulness to his promise to Abraham, is the one who once again has kept his promise to save, now ultimately in Jesus, whom Peter’s hearers had killed by the hand of Pilate. Their sin is rejection of Jesus, and thus of God—a major theme in both Acts and Luke’s Gospel.

Peter’s accusation cuts to the bone. His listeners rejected Jesus, but God glorified him, his servant. Peter’s words recall the anguished servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53:11. The depth of the people’s rejection is unthinkable; they preferred a condemned murderer on the day they yelled out, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas” (Luke 23:18). Not even the Gentile Pilate found Jesus guilty or deserving of death. Pilate would have spared him, but the people rejected “the Holy and Righteous One” (Acts 3:14), a reference to Jesus as Messiah (see 4:27, 30; 7:52; 22:14). The layers of accusation are thick and underscore the people’s total renunciation of their own Messiah. They saved a murderer but killed the “Author of life” (3:15). “Author” (Gk. *archēgos*) is rendered “Leader” in 5:31 and “founder” in Hebrews 2:10; 12:2. Using analogous (but not synonymous) language, Paul calls Jesus “the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18). Jesus is the one who brings life from the dead. The message is clear: the source of life is stronger than any cross or tomb, even the cross and tomb made possible by those who saw the lame man walk. Jesus is not dead. God raised him, and it is in his name, established by his death, resurrection, and ascension (see Acts 3:20–21), that the man walks.²⁶ Jesus is the “Author of life,” that is, the one who gives resurrection life.

Verse 16 explicitly mentions “faith”: the man walks because of faith in Jesus. But *whose* faith—Peter’s or the lame man’s? The answer is both. The initial “by faith in his name” refers to Peter’s faith that Jesus would heal the man, through Peter, in Jesus’ name. Peter goes on to say that “the faith that is through Jesus” has given this man perfect health. We are not given access to the lame man’s thoughts, but, given the way that faith on the part of the healed is noted at times in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 9:28; John 9:35) and in light of the man’s reaction to the disciples after he is healed (cf. the Samaritan leper in Luke 17:11–19), there is reason to see the faith of Peter, John, and the lame man as all being referenced by Peter.

²⁶ Again, Jesus’ death and resurrection are at the heart of all of the speeches in Acts, just as they should be in all of our preaching (see 2:23–24; 4:10; 5:30–32; 10:39–41; 13:28–31; 17:31; 26:23).

3:17–26 *What the Miracle Means: Offer of Repentance in Jesus.* Ignorance does not excuse evil actions. Neither the people nor the rulers understood that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but that does not exonerate them of his murder. In fact, their ignorance was the means of fulfilling God's word through the prophets (v. 18). But, if the people did not know Jesus was the Messiah, why are they condemned for his death? For one, ignorance can hardly be an excuse for demanding the death (in exchange for a murderer) of a man whom Pilate found not to be guilty. Furthermore, they had ample evidence of Jesus' messiahship through his miracles and teaching, as well as the Scriptures that foretold his coming. Their lack of understanding is itself enough to condemn them.

But if this were God's plan all along, how could the people be guilty? Once again Peter lays out both responsibility and sovereignty without resolving the tension (recall 2:22–24). He is presenting not a philosophical question but an assertion concerning God's plan and the means of fulfilling it. That plan is not to leave people in their guilt, caught between God's sovereignty and their responsibility, but to stress a hopelessness that drives to repentance. We cannot forget that salvation through Christ's death is the fulfillment of God's plan. Confrontation with both responsibility for sin and a sovereign God causes everyone to face judgment, and in doing so they find God's intention to save.

With that, Peter calls for repentance, to "turn back, that your sins may be blotted out" (3:19). They have been unfaithful to the God of the covenant, most particularly by rejecting Jesus. But repentance is the gateway to inheriting God's eschatological promise. Peter then speaks of "times of refreshing" that come from the Lord, and he focuses the fulfillment of those times on the return of Jesus (v. 20). The refreshing flows immediately from the "presence of the Lord" (v. 20), where Christ has taken his place as the risen King. Through Christ the repentant are refreshed, made new, and he will return for them when the time comes for "restoring all the things" (v. 21). The renewal by the Spirit is not just a placekeeper until Christ's return but is a means of taking part already in the final consummation of all things. Turning to God through Christ means leaving the old way behind and entering a new realm, the new reality God promised through his prophets. Believers begin to enjoy this new reality in the meeting of God's realm and the earth through the Spirit, sent from the risen and reigning Christ. The vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1) is the culmination of these times of refreshing.²⁷

Acts 3:22–26 reinforces Peter's point that what the hearers are witnessing is the culmination of centuries of anticipation. Peter anchors his speech in the two biggest names of the OT, Moses and Abraham, thus coming full circle from verse 13. Jesus, the Christ (v. 20), is the very Prophet promised by Moses in Deuteronomy 18. Peter cites not only this promise but also the command to listen to the coming Prophet as well as the warning to any who reject him (Deut. 18:15, 19), thereby affirming that Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise and underscoring further

²⁷ Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, Part 1, 57–58.

the consequences of rejecting him (Acts 3:23). Not only did Moses prophesy about Jesus; so did all of the prophets from Samuel onward (v. 24). This means not that every word of every prophecy was “about” Jesus but that the general trajectory of their messages points to him. Every promise of coming salvation and every warning for rejecting God finds its endpoint in Jesus.

The final portion of Peter’s speech puts all of the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth in the context of the foundational covenant promise to Abraham. God’s act in Jesus was for the children of Abraham and in fulfillment of God’s word. The people in Peter’s audience “are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers” (v. 25). Peter quotes Genesis 22:18, which promises, as a capstone to the initial promise in Genesis 12:3, that through Abraham’s children all of the families on earth will be blessed. The main promise that formed Israel, that initially distinguished Israel from the nations and created its very identity, has come true in Jesus. God sent Jesus to them first, both in the incarnation and now through the Spirit, to make good on his promise of blessing (Acts 3:26).

It is clear that simply being Jewish does not establish anyone’s covenantal faithfulness. One cannot claim faithfulness to the covenant and its God *and* reject the Messiah. The past generations of Israelites who rejected God’s prophets were not faithful (see Gen. 37:11–24; Ex. 2:14; 16:3; 32:1, 33; Num. 14:4; 1 Kings 19:10; 2 Chron. 36:16; Jer. 2:30). By rejecting the prophets, they rejected God. In the same way, to reject Jesus is to reject God (Stephen makes the same point in Acts 7). The inheritors of the promise *must* show allegiance to the covenant God. The passion narratives and Peter’s early speeches prove the truth of Paul’s statement: “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom. 9:6). The true children of Abraham are children by faith, not by bloodline (Gal. 3:6). When Peter calls his listeners “sons . . . of the covenant” (Acts 3:25) he is pointing them to repentance by showing God’s faithfulness and his mercy to them—but they must accept Jesus. In Jesus, but only in Jesus, God intends “to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness” (v. 26).

Peter notes that God sent Jesus to the Jews first (v. 26). Jesus’ primary focus on the “house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6; 15:24) and Paul’s phrase “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16) fit this same redemptive trajectory. Peter’s comment connects to the initial plan for the apostles to go to the ends of the earth and ties this plan to the Abrahamic promise to the nations. Ironically, the unfolding of that part of God’s plan will lead to more rejection as the church struggles to accept God’s plan for the inclusion of the Gentiles.

4:1–4 *The Council Responds.* The commotion of the healing and Peter’s speech to the crowd draws attention, and a veritable who’s who of Jewish leadership comes out to see what is happening, “greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (vv. 1–2). The priests were those assigned to current duties in the temple; the “captain of the temple” was in essence second in command behind the high priest; and the Sadducees, who denied

the possibility of bodily resurrection (Matt. 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27), had a political hold on the priesthood. The wealthy and powerful Sadducees also cooperated with the Romans, seeking to maintain their own power and influence. They feared that talk of a messiah, a rival king to Caesar and one who purportedly rose from the dead, would ruin a good financial and political arrangement.

The authorities respond by quickly arresting John and Peter (Acts 4:3). It is in their best interests to squelch the excitement before the Romans get involved. However, a pattern begins here that is repeated in Acts: persecution cannot stop the kingdom but often goes hand in hand with its growth. In spite of the arrest, the hope of the gospel takes root in many people. This is the third time Luke records numerical growth in Acts. In 1:15 he mentions 120 disciples; in 2:41 he reports that the number of believers increased to 3,000 at Pentecost; and now he records that the number of believers has swelled to about 5,000 men (4:4). Singling out “men” implies women and children have joined the kingdom too—thus some commentators estimate as many as 10,000 believers at this point. The explosive growth of believers because of the gospel gets our attention. Preaching of the gospel and accompanying signs and wonders—both empowered by the Spirit—bring people to faith in Jesus.

4:5–12 *Peter Responds to the Council.* The next day, the entire council meets to address the situation. As in the Gospel of Luke, Annas is identified as the high priest (Luke 3:2), though Caiaphas is the official high priest (cf. Matt. 26:3; John 18:13). The priests named (Acts 4:6) had a dynastic, longstanding hold on the priesthood. Their question gets right to the point: “By what power or by what name did you do this?” (v. 7). They likely know that Peter invoked the name of Jesus in healing the lame man and are attempting to get Peter and John to admit this publicly. Later they recognize the apostles as followers of Jesus (v. 13), and Peter’s reply (v. 9) implies that the council has some knowledge of what has transpired.

As Jesus promised (Matt. 10:19–20; Luke 12:11–12), in the face of persecution Peter is aided in his speech to the authorities—he is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:8) to speak with courage and boldness. Jesus will not abandon his apostles but through the Spirit will aid them in what to say in defense of the faith in the face of persecution.

Peter is direct with the council, admitting that the power to heal came from Jesus. He not only answers their question but goes on to (1) identify who Jesus really is, (2) condemn the council for rejecting the Messiah, and (3) preach the gospel. For the third time in three addresses (cf. Pentecost and the apostle’s speech at Solomon’s Portico), Peter lays the blame for Jesus’ death at the feet of his audience. Peter references “Jesus Christ of Nazareth” (v. 10), the exact title he used in the healing of the lame man. He is now addressing not a crowd of everyday people but the people more immediately responsible for this man’s crucifixion: many of those listening would have sat in the same place at the rigged trial of Jesus, condemning him for blasphemy and deeming him worthy of death. For this, Peter condemns them and

asserts that though they were against Jesus, God was on his side. The healed man standing right in front of them is irrefutable proof of Jesus' vindication.

Peter does not speak explicitly of God's plan or foreknowledge in regard to Jesus' death (as he had done at Pentecost); he simply references Scripture to make the same point. Psalm 118:22 reads, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and Peter interprets this verse in light of Christ's coming: "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone" (Acts 4:11). Jesus is the cornerstone; and they rejected him, just as the psalmist foresaw. In crucifying Jesus they sinned against God and fulfilled Scripture.

Peter then lays the truth out simply: salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone (v. 12). Having condemned his listeners' sin, Peter offers them the gospel. The name of Jesus is not simply a power-wielding slogan for healing; it is the name, the only name, that leads to salvation. The healing of the lame man in Jesus' name points to something greater. If the name of Jesus heals, then the name of Jesus forgives sin. The Jewish authorities should know this. Jesus had challenged the scribes and Pharisees on this very point:

"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." (Luke 5:23–24; cf. Matt. 9:5–6; Mark 2:9–11)

Jesus' healing of this paralyzed man proved he had authority to forgive sin. Similarly here, the healing of the lame man is proof that the name of Jesus saves—this is an implicit call for the council to believe. When Peter told the crowd at Pentecost to repent (Acts 2:38), he was calling on them to believe the truth of their sin and of Jesus' power to forgive. Peter brings their sin before them and offers them life in Jesus alone.

4:13–22 *Questions and Unbelief.* The council notes three things about Peter and John: they are bold, uneducated, and followers of Jesus. Boldness is a characteristic of apostolic ministry in Acts (cf. 4:29, 31) and is mentioned in Luke's final word about Paul's preaching the kingdom under arrest in Rome. The boldness of the apostles should not be confused with brash self-confidence. Their confidence is not in themselves but in God, relying on him to make them bold (cf. 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27–28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31). Peter and John are uneducated in that they are not theologically schooled, like the scribes. Unlike Paul and some members of the council, they have no rabbinic training—which makes their boldness even more remarkable. John and Peter were trained by Jesus and empowered by the Spirit. There is no suggestion here for discounting theological education when available, but it is not theological training or lack thereof that counts but the Spirit. The council's recognizing the apostles as Jesus' followers should be connected to their boldness and uneducated background. He had been their teacher, and the council recognized his teaching in them.

The council is at a loss for what to do. A formerly lame man is standing in front of them (4:14), and there is no denying the miracle. They know it, and, more importantly, so does everyone else in Jerusalem (v. 16). The council’s motivation is to stop this movement before more people join. They have just been invited to join the kingdom of God but choose to ignore the invitation, keeping their position as political and religious leaders and remaining in opposition to the very God they claim to serve. Their solution is to censure the apostles, forbidding them from talking about Jesus. The apostles, however, cannot agree, no matter the circumstances. They reply, in effect, “Do we obey God or you? What would you do with such a choice? We must tell people what we know about Jesus” (cf. vv. 19–20). In seeking to silence the apostles, the council is opposed to God himself, but the apostles are under a higher authority. All the council can do at this point is to threaten. They fear punishing the apostles because the people are praising God for the healing (v. 21).

4:23–31 *Prayer, Praise, and Community: Prayer for Boldness.* The Jerusalem Christians respond with prayer and praise when Peter and John report on what had happened before the priests and elders. There is no hint of fear or of wringing of hands; the believers simply recognize and confirm that Scripture has been fulfilled. In response “they [lift] their voices together to God” (v. 24). They address God as creator and “Sovereign Lord,” that is, Yahweh, the one covenant God, and pray Psalm 2:1–2, interpreting it christologically. The correspondence is easy to spot (table 2.2).

TABLE 2.2: Psalm 2:1–2 and Its Christological Fulfillment

Acts 4:25b–26, citing Psalm 2:1–2	Acts 4:27
Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed .	for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed , both Herod and Pontius Pilate , along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel .

These believers clearly recognize Jesus as the anointed Messiah and all who oppose him as enemies of the covenant God. Among such enemies are the “peoples of Israel,” those who are sure they are the people of God but who reject their own Messiah. What is taking shape in Acts is a community that sees itself as the true people of God, heirs of the prophets, and followers of the Messiah.

Furthermore, everything Herod, Pilate, the Romans, and the Jewish people did to Jesus was according to God’s will: he “predestined” all of this to happen (4:28). God’s predestination of events and actions is a basic presupposition among the early Christians, serving as a key to their confidence. They do not confuse sovereignty or predestination with fatalism, as many do in our day. Sovereignty—understood biblically as God’s working out the hidden mystery of his eternal, divine knowledge—is a cause for assurance and hope. Those who know God

through faith in Christ embrace God's sovereignty as part of his revelation of himself. For the early Christians, God's sovereignty is foundational to their belief in Jesus as the Messiah: he died on the cross according to the Scripture—that is, according to God's will. His enemies murdered him according to God's predetermined plan. God raised him from the dead according to the Scripture. Alongside all of this is their conviction that people are responsible for their sins and that the gospel message of forgiveness through Jesus is *the* way people are saved. Sovereignty fuels their preaching because they fully embrace both God's will and his means of fulfilling that will.

The prayer moves to supplication as the people ask God for boldness in the face of the council's threats (v. 29). Although the council is threatening them, the community does not respond by asking God to judge it. Instead they are resolved to continue their witness to Jesus, recognizing their reliance on God to equip them for the task. Along with boldness, they pray for God to continue to support their witness through miracles in the name of Jesus (v. 30), continuing what he started at Pentecost. Taken all together, this is something of a model prayer. It begins by addressing God as Lord and King, expresses confidence in his will and actions, exhibits faith and hope in their current situation, and ends with bringing requests to God. The prayer exhibits a theological flow: God is Sovereign Lord, and as such he has always kept his word, continuing to show himself faithful among his people; therefore they can trust him fully to provide for them.

It is overwhelmingly evident that God hears their prayer: the Spirit comes with such power that they sense it physically as the building shakes as in an earthquake. This fledgling community regularly experiences dramatic revelations of the Spirit accompanying and supporting their witness. For the most part, the signs and wonders reported in Acts take place in direct relation to apostolic witness. Thus any discussion of the ongoing place of miraculous signs must take into account their explicit relationship to the apostles in Acts, specifically the link with verbal witness to the gospel.

4:32–37 *Prayer, Praise, and Community: Unity in Community.* This section provides a narrative summary similar to the one found in 2:42–47. Both appear after a dramatic Spirit-event and serve to demonstrate the growth of the new covenant community. Both speak of the community's sharing its money and possessions (cf. comment on 2:42–47), and thus the question of whether these summaries are normative for all Christian communities or only descriptive of the first Christians in Jerusalem receives much attention. But both are true: Luke is describing, not prescribing, Christians' sharing together, demonstrating the life-changing, transforming power of the Spirit. Yet this text also provides fundamental principles for living a true Christian life. Such a life is so rooted in the joy of God's salvation, what he is doing in the world, and his sure promises for the future that it gives generously, shows hospitality, and shares with those in need—in short, it lives for both God and neighbor.

In narrative, description and prescription can never be totally separated, since the story itself conveys the teaching. Further, the normative nature of this text is confirmed by the teaching found in both the Gospels and the Epistles (Phil. 2:2–4 is but one example). The selfless, seemingly unconscious mutual love and generosity demonstrated in this text should win the reader's attention; these believers are truly living out Jesus' teaching:

Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money-bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12:33–34; cf. Matt. 6:19–21)

Followers of Christ are called to be selfless, generous, caring, and unified. The believers' example in Acts 4 is one way to fulfill Jesus' teaching, even if it is not the only way.

Through this text, Luke is showing a remarkable fulfillment taking place, as well as a remarkable shift.²⁸ These believers are demonstrating a marked change from the old covenant people of Israel as they become a Spirit-filled community, with God's Word written on their hearts. Through their actions they fulfill the second great command to "Love your neighbor as yourself," which summarizes the Mosaic law and becomes a hallmark of the fulfillment of the new covenant (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19; cf. Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8). These are people filled with the Spirit, and from the greatest to the least they exhibit the law written on the heart (cf. Jer. 31:33–34)—this is what the new covenant looks like. As noted earlier, God admonished the Israelites to circumcise their hearts (Deut. 10:16; cf. Introduction: Theology of Acts; Its Relationship to the Rest of the Bible and to Christ: The Apostolic Preaching) and later promised to do the very thing he commanded (Deut. 30:6). The promise of a new heart is the promise of the Spirit, and the texts containing this promise emphasize doing what the Lord commands. Here in Acts we see the Christian community manifesting the new heart created by the Spirit.

As N. T. Wright points out, these believers exhibit explicit fulfillment of the OT in other ways as well. In Deuteronomy 15:4, in the context of forgiveness of debts in the sabbatical year, Moses remarks, "There will be no poor among you." In Christ the sabbatical year has been fulfilled (cf. Luke 4:18–19). Jesus' fulfillment of these OT foreshadowings, as predicted by Isaiah, goes beyond erasing poverty, releasing captives from exile, healing physical ailments, or relieving the oppressed—in him sins are forgiven and a covenant relationship with God is established. But the new covenant reality does not separate the physical from the spiritual, based as it is on the consummation of a new heavens and a new earth. In these verses in Acts we see believers transformed by the Spirit and meeting physical needs. The Jerusalem believers experience the times of refreshing (Acts 3:20–21) in the present. This too is normative for believers in all times.

²⁸ Ibid., 73–78. My comments here are influenced greatly by Wright.

At this point Barnabas (“son of encouragement”), who will come to play a major role in Acts, appears as a personal example of one who shares his possessions with the apostles, to be used as needed (4:36–37). Barnabas is the one who later vouches for Paul amid doubts and fears of the Jerusalem believers regarding Paul’s conversion (9:27), and he travels with Paul on the apostle’s first missionary journey, which begins at Cyprus, Barnabas’s homeland (13:4; cf. 4:36). Barnabas remains with Paul until the two separate after a disagreement concerning John Mark’s involvement in the ministry (15:39). More immediately, Barnabas stands in stark contrast to Ananias and Sapphira, whose grave sin is narrated in the next section.

5:1–11 *Ananias and Sapphira*. The account of Ananias and Sapphira causes understandable trouble for readers. Some believe their punishment to be “harsh,” exceeding the principle of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Matt. 5:38; cf. Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21). However, we should read this account in the context of the description of the believing community that begins at Acts 4:32. This community is living proof of the Spirit’s indwelling in fulfillment of new covenant promises. The believers are living for one another in unity, voluntarily sharing what they have, devoted to prayer, and committed to the apostles. Barnabas provides an example of the kind of other-focused ethos that prevails among the Jerusalem Christians.

Ananias and Sapphira, in contrast, sell a field and secretly keep back some of the money but bring their gift as though it was all of the proceeds. It was their field and money, and they could do with it as they pleased. They were under no compulsion to sell it, nor to bring all of the proceeds, as Peter makes clear (5:4). But Sapphira’s lies are a clear indication that the couple intends to mislead Peter and the rest of the community (v. 8). Instead of prayer and praise to God, the couple engages in falsehood (vv. 3–4). Instead of being filled with the Spirit, they are “filled” with Satan (v. 3). There is more involved here than telling a lie.

The new covenant context is key to understanding this text. The Spirit dwells in the community: God is present in and with them. Thus in the apostles and community we see the true people of God. The place and role of the temple and of the Jewish leaders are eclipsed by the church—they are not replacing but fulfilling national Israel, through faith in Israel’s Messiah and in fulfillment of Israel’s Scripture according to the plan and foreknowledge of Israel’s God. God now dwells not in a building made by human hands, as Stephen puts it later (ch. 7), but with his people. Lying to the community and the apostles is, thus, lying to God himself (5:4). The community itself, as Wright puts it, is sacred.²⁹

Once again we see a narrative description of truths taught in propositional form in the Epistles. Some years later Peter writes to believers, citing OT texts such as Psalm 118 (cf. Acts 4:11), and says:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as

²⁹ Ibid., 80.

a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

and

“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet. 2:4–10)

The Jerusalem Christians are a living example of Peter’s description of the church. It is in this context that Ananias and Sapphira sin. Like the OT examples of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10), Achan (Joshua 7), and King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26), in which people are punished for sins related to both temple and community, so Ananias and Sapphira are punished for bringing sin into the new covenant sanctuary.³⁰

Another new covenant aspect involves the issue of lying specifically.³¹ Zechariah prophesied a time in which God would turn to do good to Judea and Jerusalem (Zech. 8:6–8), a time of eschatological blessing in which “many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD” (Zech. 8:22). It is in this prophetic context that God commands the people, “Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD” (Zech. 8:16–17). Truth telling is a characteristic of the new covenant and of the relationships its members are to have with one another. Thus Paul tells the Ephesians, while encouraging them to renewal and spiritual vitality, “Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another” (Eph. 4:25). Ananias and Sapphira bring falsehood to a place in which there should

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Truth telling as a mark of the new covenant was brought to my attention by my colleague Peter J. Gentry, in particular his “Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4:15): Life in the New Covenant Community,” *SBJT* 10/2 (Summer 2006): 70–87. The views expressed here are thoroughly influenced by that article and by personal discussion.

be only truth, and their particular form of lying at this place and time witnesses to the fact that they are not truly a part of the new community.

Furthermore, Luke's ongoing emphasis on the Spirit's filling of believers, making it clear that their actions are Spirit-driven, stands in contrast to Peter's statement that Satan, the Father of Lies (John 8:44), filled Ananias to lie (Acts 5:3). Spirit-filled prayer, praise, and gospel declaration come from the mouths of the believers, but Satan-filled lies come from this couple. Instead of living waters flowing from their hearts, in fulfillment of the promise of the Spirit (John 7:38), evil deception flows instead. These are not believers punished for lying but unbelievers filled with Satan and bringing wickedness into the covenant setting as a satanic attack. The contrast between the Spirit and Satan leads to the conclusion that Ananias and Sapphira are not lapsed believers, nor do they lose their salvation. They are like Judas, deceived by Satan and in rebellion against God. And like Judas, they meet with a decisive, fatal end (Acts 5:5, 10).

Thus Luke is not first and foremost describing how to deal with lying in the church. Ananias and Sapphira are not church members disciplined for their sin. Their sin, against the overwhelming Spirit-filled context, points to their unbelief. They betray the community and show their true nature. Furthermore, just as the miracles and boldness of the apostles is a manifestation of God's working through them, so here the judgment of death originates not with Peter or the community but with God. Peter is merely the agent and messenger of God's verdict over the couple.

Peter tells Ananias that he has lied to the Holy Spirit (v. 3) and then repeats the idea with a slight but important change: "You have not lied to man but to God" (v. 4). Thus lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God—which implies that the Spirit *is* God. The divinity of the Spirit is also alluded to in Peter's words to Sapphira: he asks her why she and Ananias "agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord" (v. 9). This language is reminiscent of OT texts concerning Israel's testing of God (e.g., Ex. 17:2; Num. 14:22; Deut. 6:16; Pss. 95:9; 106:14). Peter either believes the Spirit is divine or is not being careful or mindful of what he is saying. The second option seems impossible, to say the least.

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira provide more evidence of the shift from the old covenant to the new. Judgment is carried out not on the temple grounds or in the council of Israel's leaders but in the community of believers led by the apostle Peter. He is the one with the authority to speak on God's behalf, and through him comes God's judgment for unfaithfulness. God is with the believers in both salvation and judgment. The word "fear" appears after both deaths (Acts 5:5, 11) and connotes the healthy fear of the Lord that comes from knowing who he is and recognizing what he is able to do. This fear now grows in the company of believers, apart from the temple and those who rejected Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

5:12–16 Summary: Signs and Wonders. The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira is bounded on either side by summaries of the believers' activity. Here Luke

emphasizes the ongoing and increasing signs and wonders performed by the apostles: the work of the Spirit is on display. Verse 13 refers either to the fact that the believers do not join the apostles while they perform signs and wonders, because only the apostles are ministering—and the Jews have high regard for them—or to the fact that people outside the community dare not join with believers (perhaps because they are afraid to do so publicly) but still look on them favorably. The Greek could be understood either way. Verse 14, however, notes that “more than ever believers were added to the Lord,” which would be strange if Luke had just said the general population refused to join with the believers. Furthermore, verses 15–16 highlight the great expectation people have that Peter could heal them, as well as how people from all over Judea with various infirmities are healed. Given that the work of the apostles is the main topic in these verses, it is best to read “them” in verse 13 as referring to the apostles: the other believers do not presume to heal and minister like the apostles and so do not stand right beside them. The signs and wonders at the portico are the work of the apostles alone, as far as Luke tells us, not the large group of Christians.

From 4:32 to 5:16, Luke particularly underscores the authority of the apostles as the leaders of the new community. People bring their money to the apostles, Peter judges Ananias and Sapphira, and the summary text in 5:12–16 emphasizes the ongoing signs and wonders done by the apostles and their increasing public regard. People hope merely that Peter’s shadow would pass over them (v. 15). This account of apostolic activity and ministry is bounded on either side by texts narrating the Jewish authorities’ persecuting and arresting the apostles. Luke draws a contrast of leadership: one group, unfaithful and obsolete, is eclipsed by the other. The old guard of Jewish leaders, the same ones who put Jesus to death, stands in clear opposition to the kingdom, thinking they speak for God and believing themselves to be the heirs of Abraham and Moses as the rulers and powerbrokers of Israel. The apostles, on the other hand, follow the testimony of the prophets and the teaching and commissioning of Jesus. They are the ones filled with the Spirit to speak for God, judging and condemning unbelieving Israel, including the council, for conspiring with Gentiles in the death of Jesus. They also proclaim the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus’ name. These are God’s spokesmen, the leaders of the new covenant.

The apostles’ notoriety points to the work of the Spirit, which is evident in the signs and wonders and also in the conversion of new believers—“More than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (v. 14). The kingdom is growing and spreading, just as Jesus had said. The excitement and commotion surrounding the apostles is reminiscent of Jesus’ ministry (Matt. 4:23–25; 8:16; 14:35; Mark 6:53–56). With this growth, however, comes increasing persecution.

5:17–26 *Persecution Begins: The Apostles Arrested.* Once again the signs and wonders accompanying the gospel lead to an arrest. This time all of the apostles, not just

Peter and John, are arrested—opposition is increasing. As before (4:1), the high priest and Sadducees are the main culprits. Rather than being filled by the Spirit, they are “filled with jealousy” (5:17) and put the apostles in jail.

However, a miraculous event occurs that further confirms the apostles and the church as the true people of God: “an angel of the Lord” appears and frees them from prison (vv. 19–20; cf. 12:7–10). The “angel of the Lord” is a well-known OT figure, one whose identity is at times difficult to ascertain—interpreters often assert that the angel in the OT is the preincarnate second person of the Trinity. However, by and large there is no reason categorically to assert that the angel of the Lord is the preincarnate second person of the Trinity. The angel of the Lord appears as a mediator through whom God speaks. For instance, Exodus 3 states that “the angel of the LORD appeared” to Moses (Ex. 3:2) and also states that God spoke to Moses (Ex. 3:4; cf. Stephen’s speech in Acts 7:30–34). Thus we see that the angel is the Lord’s messenger who speaks directly for him. The same is true in Acts. Luke is able to distinguish clearly between appearances of Jesus and those of angels: Jesus appears in Acts to Saul on the road to Damascus (9:5; cf. 26:15–16), while an angel appears to him in a vision before the shipwreck at Malta (27:23). Angels appear to others in Acts as well (8:26; 10:3–6; 12:23).

Clearly the angel of the Lord is as active in Acts as he was in the OT, and there is no more reason to assume that the angel in the OT is the second person of the Trinity than there is here—he is not. Just as the angel of the Lord appeared to Israel in times of need, guided them, watched over them, and protected them (Num. 22:27; Judg. 13:3; 1 Chron. 21:12; Ps. 34:7; Dan. 3:28; 6:22), so he does so here for the early Christians.

God heartily confirms the determination of the apostles to continue in ministry despite the warnings and threats from the Jerusalem leaders. The angel sends them straight to the temple to “speak to the people all the words of this Life,” undoubtedly a reference to the gospel as preached several times so far (Acts 5:20). As people come to the temple first thing in the morning, the disciples are there too (v. 21).

When the priests and the council find Jesus’ disciples not only missing from jail but very much present and back at it in the temple (vv. 22–25), they are again confronted with a choice of faith or rejection. There is no way to deny what has happened, but no amount of proof alone can bring faith. Instead the leaders are worried about their public standing: they are forced to ask nicely for the apostles to come along, lest the people stone the leaders (v. 26). The apostles have favor among the public, and as with Jesus, the leaders know it is unwise to anger the populace (Matt. 14:5; Mark 11:32; Luke 20:6)—they must keep the peace or face possible repercussions from the Romans. And yet these upstart, ragtag followers of a crucified Nazarene are working miracles in Jesus’ name, claiming all of the covenant promises for themselves and anyone who believes that Yahweh has raised Jesus from the dead, and holding out the offer of forgiveness. Now they cannot even be kept in jail, and the people want to hear them. Yet the leaders are unmoved. The ultimate rejection of the Messiah is nearly complete.

5:27–32 *Persecution Begins: The Apostles before the Council.* The apostles are charged with teaching in Jesus' name in spite of being warned and with blaming the council for Jesus' death (vv. 27–28). The council is particularly annoyed that their teaching has spread like wildfire. The council does not ask about their teaching or its truthfulness—they have reached a conclusion on that score. They attempt to censure the teaching regardless of what it takes to do so.

It is difficult to determine whether the response in verses 29–32 is Peter's words alone, a hybrid statement of different things said by the apostles, or a summary of their response—but the response is clearly from the leading of the Holy Spirit, in any case. The apostles' reply is not an act of civil disobedience in the popular modern sense. They are not responding to injustice in hope of making a change to stop the injustice. True, injustice abounds on the council's part, but it is not the cause of, nor does it lead to, the decision to speak in Jesus' name. The apostles hope for change, but the change they seek is faith and repentance, not freedom of speech. In fact, they apparently do not even need freedom to speak—they will continue to speak regardless, for an angel of the Lord has told them to do so. This is a matter of obedience to God (v. 29).

What follows is a significant statement on covenant realities, centered on the actions of the “God of our fathers”—they are speaking of Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This covenant God raised from the dead Jesus, “whom you killed by hanging him on a tree” (v. 30, citing Deut. 21:22–23 [cf. Acts 10:39], which describes a particular punishment reserved for crimes punishable by death). This is also the context in which Moses stipulates that a drunken and rebellious son who refuses to honor his parents should be taken outside the gates and stoned (Deut. 21:18–21). In Matthew 11:19, when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of being a drunkard and a glutton, they are stating that he is worthy of death in light of this law. While they cheer his execution, the irony is this very death establishes the new covenant, from which they are excluded.

Peter declares that “God exalted [Christ] at his right hand” (Acts 5:31), repeating his proclamation from Pentecost (2:25, 33, 34) that was taken from Psalms 16 and 110 to assert that Jesus is the rightful heir of David's throne. The word translated “Leader” (Acts 5:31) is the same term (Gk. *archēgos*) translated “Author” in 3:15. Jesus is primary, the one who leads, the source and origin, as in Hebrews 2:10 (“*founder* of their salvation”) and 12:2 (“*founder* and perfecter of our faith”). This term can also include a royal connotation of Jesus' preeminence (cf. “Prince”; Acts 5:31 KJV, NIV).

Peter declares that Jesus was also exalted as “Savior.” In the OT, Yahweh is the Savior of Israel—the *only* Savior. As Isaiah records, “I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. . . . I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior” (Isa. 43:3, 11; cf. 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8; 2 Sam. 22:3; Pss. 17:7; 106:21; Jer. 14:8; Hos. 13:4). Thus by declaring Christ to be “Savior,” the apostles equate him with Yahweh. And they proclaim that this exalted Savior came “to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31), which the prophets promised

all along: a time of repentance and forgiveness in which God would establish a new covenant with his people (Jer. 31:34; 33:8; 36:3).

Finally, Peter adds that “we are witnesses to these things” (Acts 5:32). The OT requires two or three witnesses for legal credibility (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15), an idea taken up in the NT as well (Matt. 18:16; John 8:17–18; Heb. 10:28). Peter calls not only the apostles but the Holy Spirit also as witnesses to everything he has said. Thus the witness of the Spirit and his indwelling presence are connected, as he is the one “whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:32). The gift of the Spirit and obedience are closely connected in OT prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (cf. Introduction: Theology of Acts; Its Relationship to the Rest of the Bible and to Christ: The Apostolic Preaching).

Here obedience refers to faith and repentance—which are also both gifts of God—that follow from hearing the gospel. Peter does not mean that God gives the Spirit to those who keep the law or do works—such an understanding ignores the pattern already evident in Acts and is contrary to the general teaching of Scripture. God promises the Spirit in Ezekiel 36 *in spite* of the hard-heartedness and rebellion of the people, not in response to any effort on their part. This is not to say that faith and obedience are synonymous. But obedience is impossible apart from faith, and true faith is evident in obedience. The overriding emphasis of this section of Acts is the need to accept the message about Jesus of Nazareth and receive the Spirit and forgiveness in his name. To “obey” in this context is to believe in Jesus.

5:33–42 *Persecution Begins: The Council Issues a Warning.* As they did with Jesus in the Gospels, the leaders take a short route from inquiry to the death penalty. They are carried away by their emotions and become “enraged and [want] to kill them” (v. 33). They likely would have done so except that in God’s providence one man steps in and saves them from their folly. Gamaliel, a leading scholar, Pharisee, and teacher (he taught the apostle Paul; 22:3), is the only thing standing between the council and the apostles. Up to this point, Luke has specifically identified the high priests and officials as largely being Sadducees. Gamaliel, as a Pharisee, would not have much in common with the high priests. His concern was with Torah and the traditions, not politics. Gamaliel advises caution and will not rule out the possibility that these men have God’s blessing. There is no indication that he is particularly sympathetic or inclined toward the apostles, but he is wise.

Gamaliel mentions two other troublemakers from recent memory. Theudas came making some sort of claim about himself (perhaps messianic, but surely political) and led a small group of men, but he wound up dead, and his group disappeared (5:36). There is no independent record of this rebel; all we know is what is recorded here. The second, Judas the Galilean, is known to history apart from the Bible. The Jewish historian Josephus tells of a tax revolt led by this man (*Antiquities* 18.1–10). His success was no greater than that of Theudas; he died, and his followers dispersed. In light of this history, Gamaliel says in effect, “We have seen this sort of thing before, so let us wait this out and see what happens.”

It is possible that Gamaliel senses something more in this new band of Galileans. He knows about the signs and wonders, he has heard Peter and the apostles speak on two occasions, and he surely has not missed all the OT references and allusions in their speeches. Something has given him enough pause to conclude that perhaps God is behind it. At the same time, if this is merely a human movement, it will fail like the others did. There is reason to be patient, because if this is God's work, they cannot stop it. Moreover, they may find themselves on the wrong side (v. 39). Gamaliel is, if nothing else, pragmatic. His argument works, but the council will still have its pound of flesh, so they beat the apostles and warn them again "not to speak in the name of Jesus" (v. 40).

As is typical in Acts, persecution leads not to hiding or fear but to even more boldness. The apostles and the early church are convinced they are on God's side, so much so that they do the unthinkable: they respond to a horrible beating with rejoicing. As Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!" (Luke 6:22). Christ also warned his disciples that persecution would come before he returned (Luke 21:12). Rejoicing in the midst of suffering is a unique theme of the Christian faith, flowing from the knowledge that suffering for Jesus' name means God is on one's side and that he is sanctifying and perfecting those who suffer (Rom. 5:3–5; 1 Pet. 1:6–8; James 1:2–4). No amount of persecution can shake the apostles, who are Christ's witnesses and have received his promises and his Spirit. They believe he is the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's word to Israel and the world. Thus they rejoice and continue to preach Jesus everywhere in Jerusalem (Acts 5:41–42).

The narrative of Acts is nearing a turning point. This is the last somewhat controlled interaction between the authorities and the believers, and the Jerusalem-focused part of Jesus' plan has nearly come to an end. This is not to say that the work is finished in Jerusalem—the outward expansion continues to cycle back and forth as the narrative continues. Moving from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth is not a series of completed tasks but the story of an ever-expanding theater of operations, with each successively larger stage receiving emphasis.

Response

The early Christian presence at the temple is not an argument for, nor an example of, what are commonly called "insider movements," practiced and promoted in some mission contexts today. In short, insider movements advocate, to varying degrees, the ongoing participation of Christian converts in their previous religious contexts. For instance, a Muslim convert to Christianity might be encouraged to continue to attend a mosque, not necessarily to evangelize but to continue in prayer times, though now privately praying to God the Father instead of Allah. In some cases, the distinction between the God of the Bible and Allah of the Qur'an is severely blurred. At best, the motivation is to preserve the new convert from persecution. At worst, Christian missionaries advocate co-opting terms such as *Islam*

or *Muslim* and insist on so-called linguistically based definitions of terms such as *peace* or *fully submitted*. The Jerusalem Christians were not “insiders” in this sense at all. Socially, they were outsiders who faced serious persecution for their open belief in Jesus as the Messiah and the exclusive way of salvation.

Although Peter’s statement about this exclusivity (4:12) is true generally and is a central truth of biblical Christianity, he is not merely stating a theological proposition; he is holding out the hope of the gospel to the council. Peter’s boldness and his unapologetic assertion of salvation in Christ alone is a pattern for us to follow. Though exclusivity has never been an easy pill to swallow, we are living in a time of unprecedented resistance to the idea that Jesus is the only way to eternal life. Many might be willing to accept Jesus as one of many good moral guides, but we must be ready to assert clearly that he is the only Savior. Such a claim will lead inevitably to charges of arrogance and pride; it may even be labeled “hate speech.” The claims of Christ also offend because they imply that if one rejects him, he or she is lost in sin: to proclaim a savior is to proclaim that people are sinners in need of salvation. This will seem particularly hateful and offensive to others. Our hope, however, is in the Spirit-empowered truth of the gospel—the same Spirit and truth we see at work in Acts. When we stand up for the truth of our faith, we present the hope of that truth, doing so trusting that the same Spirit who filled Peter fills us as well.

It belittles the courage of the apostles to call their response to the council’s injunction mere civil disobedience. Civil disobedience identifies an injustice in a governing authority and sets out to oppose it—even if to do so means breaking the law—in hopes of stopping the injustice. The apostles do not identify a problem and then develop a plan to oppose it. They are not an underground association or a group of insurgents. Such groups *form* because of unjust governments or leaders, but the apostles, as members of the kingdom of God, *find* themselves at odds with the Jewish leaders over the truth of Jesus the Messiah. They do not set out to oppose the leadership; their allegiance to Jesus the King makes such opposition necessary. Antiestablishment movements arise *in response* to governments, authorities, or groups perceived as oppressive. The Christian movement arises as a result of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. The gospel should cause us to take social and cultural stands in opposition to oppression of various kinds. And the kingdom of God is against this present world and its establishments, which are in rebellion against God. The gospel is God’s response to human rebellion, but couching it mainly in terms of political activism (whether conservative or liberal) is a misinterpretation and misrepresentation of how God brings his kingdom.

We should note here how different types of biblical literature teach us as readers (cf. Introduction: Genre and Literary Structure). The NT Epistles prescribe, for lack of a better phrase, the “normal Christian life” in relation to secular rulers. In their letters, Peter and Paul instruct their readers concerning daily life amid social and political realities (cf. Rom. 13:1–7; Titus 3:1–2; 1 Pet. 2:13–25). They do so because holiness, faithfulness, and witness relate to every area of life. The

political environment across the Mediterranean was less than welcoming to the early Christians, making the commands to be obedient, respectful, and prayerful all the more important. Meanwhile, the narrative of Acts 4 demonstrates how to respond when governing authorities seek to hinder Christians' expression and witness of Jesus Christ. There is no contradiction between the apostles' behavior here and the instruction in their epistles. Thus we must differentiate typical and extraordinary experience. But whatever the circumstances, the issue is faithfulness to God. Sometimes this takes the form of opposing governing authorities; sometimes it takes the form of submitting to them. Christians, particularly those living outside the West, know full well the consequences of standing up for Christ in the face of government pressure. Peter strikes the balance when he writes, "What credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God" (1 Pet. 2:20). And yet, both Peter and Paul are more than willing to disregard orders that compromise their faith (Acts 16:35–39; Phil. 1:12–14; 2 Tim. 1:8–12).

What the NT has to say about believers' responsibility to submit to leaders and to be faithful to Christ can be applied here. The apostles are specifically warned not to speak about Jesus. As a rule, Christians are to live in harmony with their governments, praying for everyone, including the authorities, and pursuing a peaceful life (1 Tim. 2:1–2). Christians are explicitly called to "honor the emperor," or the king, president, chancellor, or governor (1 Pet. 2:17). We must recognize that governments, even the most secular ones, are placed here by God, and our responsibility is to obey them as God's instruments for carrying out the law. Disobeying them puts us under God's judgment (Rom. 13:1–3). Believers' obedience to civil authorities is a sign of their greater obedience to the King. But when believers' obedience to authorities would mean disobeying God, when their profession of Christ is in danger, when they are threatened with punishment for standing up for their faith, they must join Peter and John and declare, "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20), regardless of the circumstances. Believers do not set out to oppose authorities, but their faith in Jesus may cause the authorities to oppose them. It is at that point that believers' allegiance must be clear.

What about signs and wonders? Christians disagree concerning the type, scope, and duration of the manifestations described in Acts. It is important, however, for believers to find grounds for agreement on central issues. On this side of heaven, Christians will likely never agree totally on tongues and prophecy, which are not first-order issues. Manifestations in Acts are always in support of, and signs of, the work of God in the Spirit through the ministry of the gospel. Those taking a *continuationist* view (which holds that these gifts are available and to be practiced throughout the entire church age) must never let that fact slip their minds. Whatever one decides regarding the issue of ongoing manifestations of the Spirit, even a full *cessationist* (one who believes the gifts essentially stopped after the apostolic era, or perhaps continued until the final formation of the NT canon) cannot deny that God still continues to answer prayer powerfully and to make his presence

known through the Spirit in dramatic fashion, even if it is something less than an earthquake. The history of revivals is replete with dramatic examples of great conversions and times of blessing and “refreshing,” accompanying extraordinary devotion and commitment to community prayer.

One example is the eighteenth-century English revival led by John Wesley and others. In his biography of Wesley, C. E. Vulliamy writes concerning the practice of the “holy club”:

The members of the Club spent an hour, morning and evening, in private prayer. At nine, twelve and three o’clock they recited a collect, and at all times they examined themselves closely watching for signs of grace, and trying to preserve a high degree of religious fervor. . . . One hour each day was set aside for meditation. . . . They fasted twice a week, observed all the feasts of the Church, and received the Sacraments every Sunday. Before going into company they prepared their conversation, so that words might not be spoken without purpose. The Primitive Church, in so far as they had knowledge of it, was to be taken as their pattern.³²

Many of us read such descriptions and focus on the possible excesses, the tendencies toward trusting in works, and whatever other theological pitfalls we perceive. But, even though their prayers and piety were no more the cause of revival than were the prayers and piety of the church in Acts, we must recognize that they *were* the divine means for bringing about God’s mighty work of salvation. Through these means, God prepared his people, and the Spirit fired them for devotion and service to the gospel of Christ.

We ought not dismiss outpourings of the Spirit as merely historical when we ourselves are not faithful to pray together or to believe that God truly is the Sovereign Lord who reveals himself in Jesus the resurrected King through the power of the Spirit. It is one thing to profess but another to *believe* that the God revealed in Acts still keeps his promise of salvation and eternal life and uses his people to bring about the fulfillment of his new covenant and kingdom promises. Are we longing for (and seeing!) revival sweep our lands like those Christians did? Do we meet to pray for revival? Do we think our secular culture is less receptive to the gospel than was the culture in which Wesley preached? Do we truly believe what we profess, that the gospel is God’s power for salvation and that we must trust in God and his Word alone to do the work? Do we take seriously the connection between our own spiritual life and sanctification and our ministries and outreach? Or do we expect God to pour out his blessing on us because we know all the right theological answers, listen to all the right preachers, and read all the right books? Acts demonstrates that believers can have great theology *and* take care to live a Christ-honoring life *and* give their time, effort, and resources to reaching the lost for Christ.

³² C. E. Vulliamy, *John Wesley* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1931), 55.

Concerning Ananias and Sapphira: although they are punished not as believers but as the instruments of Satan, this does not lessen the seriousness of lying nor the need for truth telling to be a mark of the new covenant community. Too often we brush off lying as a minor offense, excusable if it is a “fib.” But when we lie, we create an alternate reality and reject the circumstances in which God places us. Lies attempt to shape our circumstances into the way we want them to be rather than the way they truly are. Lies present a false version of God’s world. Worst of all, when we lie, we deny God’s plan for the new covenant, that is, his plans for the character of the new heavens and the new earth when his kingdom is established eternally.

Finally, in regard to miraculous interventions, we should remember that, although they are common in the Bible, not every person in Scripture is saved from persecution and suffering. Elijah’s colleagues are murdered (1 Kings 19:10), Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern (Jer. 38:6), Paul is imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28), and, most of all, Jesus, in whose footsteps we follow (1 Pet. 2:21–25), endures the agony of Calvary. Church history contains countless examples of God’s delivering his people from danger, and just as many or more examples of suffering and martyrdom. No one knows ahead of time if deliverance will come in this life, and we are not promised knowledge of the reasons for the suffering we endure. When we repeat, “All things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28), we can do so only as a statement of faith, not of sight. But we have this confidence: whether or not God rescues us from danger in this life, he has saved us completely in Jesus. In Acts 4–5 he rescues the apostles because they have work left to do.

ACTS 6:1–8:40

6 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists¹ arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.³ Therefore, brothers,² pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

⁸And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. ¹⁰But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. ¹¹Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” ¹²And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, ¹³and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, ¹⁴for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” ¹⁵And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

7 And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” ²And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’ ⁴Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. ⁵Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. ⁶And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. ⁷‘But I will judge the nation that they serve,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.’ ⁸And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

⁹“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him ¹⁰and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. ¹¹Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. ¹²But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. ¹³And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph’s family became known to Pharaoh. ¹⁴And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. ¹⁵And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, ¹⁶and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

¹⁷“But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. ¹⁹He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. ²⁰At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God’s sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father’s house, ²¹and when he was exposed, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. ²²And Moses was

instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

²³“When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. ²⁴And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. ²⁵He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. ²⁶And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?’ ²⁷But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?’ ²⁸Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

³⁰“Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. ³¹When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: ³²‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. ³³Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’

³⁵“This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. ³⁷This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ ³⁸This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. ³⁹Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, ⁴⁰saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ ⁴¹And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. ⁴²But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

“‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices,
during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?

⁴³ You took up the tent of Moloch
and the star of your god Rephan,
the images that you made to worship;
and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.’

⁴⁴“Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. ⁴⁵Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, ⁴⁶who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.³ ⁴⁷But it was Solomon who

built a house for him. ⁴⁸Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,

⁴⁹“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord,
or what is the place of my rest?

⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things?’

⁵¹“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵²Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

⁵⁴Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together⁴ at him. ⁵⁸Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

8 And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

⁴Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵Philip went down to the city⁵ of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

⁶And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸So there was much joy in that city.

⁹But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” ¹¹And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹²But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles⁶ performed, he was amazed.

¹⁴Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵who came down and

prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall⁷ of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." ²⁴ And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south⁸ to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁷ ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

¹ That is, Greek-speaking Jews ² Or *brothers and sisters* ³ Some manuscripts *for the house of Jacob* ⁴ Or *rushed with one mind* ⁵ Some manuscripts *a city* ⁶ Greek *works of power* ⁷ That is, a bitter fluid secreted by the liver; bile ⁸ Or *go at about noon* ⁹ Some manuscripts add all or most of verse 37: *And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

Section Overview: The Greek-Speaking Jews Emerge

Acts 6 is a brief but important portion of the narrative, though its significance is sometimes overlooked. It is easy to focus on the nature of apostolic ministry (prayer and preaching) and the need for servants in the church to take care of day-to-day work. Thus the beginning of chapter 6 is associated with the larger discussions of ministry, ecclesiology, and the beginnings of the office of deacon. The word “deacon” does not appear, but these men’s job description and the use of *diakoneō* (“to serve”), the verbal cousin of the noun *diakonos* (“deacon”), lead to that discussion.

However, we should also notice the hint, only in seed form, of a major point of distinction and dissension in the narrative. Here the Greek-speaking Jews and the Hebrew Jews are distinguished (cf. comment on 6:1–7). Although there is apparently no intentional bias or discrimination against the Hellenistic (Greek) Jews, the distinction comes to the surface over a practical matter. We should also note how the explicit introduction of the Greek-speaking Jews leads to the narrative of Stephen as the next major section of Acts. From that point on, Luke’s focus will be on the expansion of gospel witness from Jerusalem to the larger Greco-Roman world.

Stephen’s martyrdom is one of the most well-known portions of Acts. The narrative falls into three parts: his ministry and arrest (6:8–15), his sermon (7:1–53), and his execution (7:54–8:1a).³³ Stephen provides the first comprehensive presentation of a Christ-centered interpretation of the OT, recounting and interpreting the history of Israel and highlighting its continual rejection of God that culminated in its final rejection of God in Jesus Christ. On a larger scale, Stephen’s is the third trial in Jerusalem, each with severer consequences than the last. The authorities warn Peter and John at the first trial (4:21), at the second they beat the apostles (5:40), and they kill Stephen at the third (7:60).³⁴ In the greater context of Acts, this section is the gateway to the rest of Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. At the canonical level, this paves the way for blessings to flow to the nations—persecution is the catalyst for the movement. At the textual level, Luke introduces Saul of Tarsus, the least likely man for the task of bringing the gospel to the nations.

Chapter 8 recounts the spread of the gospel beyond Judea and ethnic Judaism. First to receive the gospel are the Samaritans, who live in what was once the northern kingdom of Israel and who are half-Jewish (more or less). What occurs in Samaria is enough to cause Peter and John to go and see for themselves, leading to the absolute acceptance of the Samaritans. They receive the Spirit. The kingdom is being restored—the very thing the apostles asked Jesus about before his ascension (1:6). Then an Ethiopian eunuch, puzzling over the text of Isaiah, hears the Word proclaimed. He believes and is baptized on the spot. In both cases, the minister is a Greek speaker that Luke introduced in 6:5. Philip, one of the seven servants (not an apostle), takes the gospel outside Jerusalem as it begins its way to the ends of the earth.

³³ Bock, *Acts*, 267.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, citing Polhill, *Acts*, 183.

Section Outline

- I.D. The Greek-Speaking Jews Emerge (6:1–8:40)
 - 1. The Disciples Choose Seven Servants (6:1–7)
 - 2. The First Christian Martyr (6:8–8:3)
 - a. Stephen Arrested (6:8–15)
 - b. Stephen’s Speech (7:1–53)
 - c. Stephen Martyred and Believers Scattered (7:54–8:3)
 - 3. Judea and Samaria and Beyond (8:4–40)
 - a. Philip Goes to Samaria (8:4–8)
 - b. Peter and John Go to Samaria (8:9–25)
 - c. The Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26–40)

Comment

6:1–7 *The Disciples Choose Seven Servants.* Anyone who has experienced a growing church, family, or business knows that with growth comes new challenges. The early church faces a good problem: it has grown so much and so fast that taking care of all its members grows increasingly difficult. Funds are available as believers sell their possessions and property and give the proceeds to the apostles, but someone has to distribute the funds. The apostles cannot preach and perform signs and wonders *and* distribute the money as needed. They are in a situation similar to that of Moses when Jethro came to warn that he was overextended in his multitasking and needed help in governing Israel (Ex. 18:14–23). Jethro advised Moses to choose “able men” (Ex. 18:21) to share the load. Likewise, to accomplish the extended ministry of the gospel in the community, the apostles need help.

The apostles do not appoint helpers themselves but give the responsibility of choosing helpers to the people. They do, however, provide guidance about what sort of man should be chosen to organize the distribution. They must be (1) of good repute, (2) full of the Spirit, and (3) full of wisdom (Acts 6:3). That is, they must be well respected and known among the community, show clear evidence of Spirit-given faith, and know what needs to be done and how to do it. Although their ministry is subordinate to the apostles’, their expected personal requirements are second to none. Later, this model of Christian leadership and community structure will be reflected in the churches (1 Tim. 3:8–10; Titus 2:2–6).

Some interpreters claim that this description of choosing helpers for the apostles is not normative for the later church, arguing that the unique nature of the Jerusalem church sets it apart from that which follows. There are clear differences and also similarities between Jerusalem and the later churches. First, the apostles, chosen by Christ, are the primary leaders in Jerusalem, whereas later churches have pastors chosen by the church—but later in Acts even the Jerusalem church will have elders. Second, although the seven chosen in Acts 6 are not called “deacons,” they are appointed to serve. They are distinct in their primary role from the leaders who preach and teach, just as later deacons will be. Likewise, their personal qualifications will be echoed by those for later deacons (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:8–13).

Unlike later deacons, however, both Stephen and Philip perform works outside the realm of service (Acts 6:8; 8:5–8, 26–40)—although later deacons are not barred from such behavior, they are not expected to perform such activity either.

Thus the major difference between early Jerusalem and the later churches is the presence of the twelve apostles and the seven servants, combined with the fluid nature of the early narrative—things change dramatically after chapter 9.³⁵ Functionally, the roles of leadership in the early chapters are quite similar to those in the later church, even though their designations are different. The offices are not, however, identical. After believers, including apostles, scatter from Jerusalem because of persecution, the church there seems to take on more typical NT characteristics. While the apostles remain, Jerusalem is unique in the history of the NT church.

It bursts on the scene as a result of Pentecost and the Spirit-driven ministry of the apostles. Thus it is best to think of Jerusalem as the birthplace of the NT church, the foundation for the local church and church governance. There *is* a church in Jerusalem before believers are scattered in chapter 8—but not one that can be duplicated exactly. There can only be one beginning.

Of the seven men appointed, Stephen and Philip have prominent roles in the narrative, whereas the others are not mentioned again. Stephen, one of the Greek-speaking Jews, will soon deliver to the ruling elite a biblical-theological lesson on the realities of the new covenant as fulfillment of Scripture. He will place them squarely in a long history of those who have rejected the very God they claimed to serve—a line of unbelief and unfaithfulness stretching back to the founding of the nation. That a Hellenistic Jew, not a trained rabbi from Israel, delivers such a message is remarkable.

The last man listed is Nicolaus, whom, importantly, Luke points out is a “proselyte of Antioch” (6:8). A proselyte, unlike a “God-fearer,” is a Gentile fully converted to Judaism, keeping the law of Moses *and* undergoing circumcision. A proselyte takes on the sign of the covenant and becomes a covenant member. He becomes a Jew outwardly as a sign of his inward conversion but is still by race a Gentile. This early believer, appointed as a servant of the followers of Christ, is not a Hebrew, not from one of the twelve tribes, not physically a child of Abraham. He is from Antioch, the place in Acts where Gentiles first believe in Jesus and the launching point for Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, to go to the nations. The diverse makeup of the kingdom is subtly beginning to take shape even in Jerusalem. Before long all subtlety is gone and reality shines through: it is not nationality, race, or any other social or cultural distinction that makes one a Christ-follower, but the Spirit and faith.

As for the apostles, they give themselves fully “to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (6:4). There must be no mistake about the fundamental task of Christian ministry, namely, proclamation of the gospel. All else, however necessary,

³⁵ Interestingly, Luke tells us nothing else about the other five helpers and never mentions the office/service again.

is subordinate to this and flows from it. Prayer in this context of Acts is connected directly to the work of the Spirit and the ministry of the apostles (cf. 1:14; 4:24–30). Prayer accompanies gospel ministry, a pattern set by Jesus himself when, for example, he spent the night in prayer before choosing the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12) or woke up before dawn to pray before extending his Galilean ministry (Mark 1:35). This does not detract from the importance of personal prayer for loved ones, those suffering or in need, or any other legitimate subject, but Luke focuses on the ministry of the apostles, and thus by extension any application of this text should follow the pattern of ministry-related prayer. This pattern points to absolute reliance on God to lead, provide for, protect, and further the effect and spread of the gospel. Nothing underscores our total dependence on God more than prayer, especially in ministry.

Acts 6:7 provides another summary of the flourishing of the gospel (cf. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 6:7; 12:24; 13:49; 19:20) and also serves as a literary transition from Jerusalem to the expansion of the gospel outside Judea. Luke notes particularly that many priests come to faith in Jesus. In light of the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish authorities, it is easy to forget that people in positions of leadership do believe in him, such as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (Luke 23:50–51; John 19:38–39; cf. Matt. 27:57; Mark 15:43), as well as Saul/Paul (Acts 9). Pharisee believers are present at the Jerusalem council (15:5), and Crispus, ruler of the synagogue in Corinth, believes the gospel (18:8). Priests were descendants of Aaron who lived in various places and made their way from time to time to Jerusalem to fulfill their priestly service—most were not part of the ruling class. Their inclusion in the community of faith demonstrates the reality that believers come from every strata of society.

6:8–15 *The First Christian Martyr: Stephen Arrested.* From the outset it is clear that Stephen possesses gifts beyond those that equip him to manage the distribution of money. He is “full of grace and power” (v. 8), which in context indicates the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised the apostles (1:8). Stephen performs “wonders and signs” (6:8), as did the apostles. There is no way to know the extent to which this sort of spiritual gifting is common beyond the apostles. But it is clear that signs and wonders serve to accompany the gospel as confirmation of the preached word.

Once again the ministry of the gospel is met with opposition. However, this opposition comes not from Jews in and around the temple but from Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews. His audience includes members of the “synagogue of the Freedmen” and others from opposite sides of the Mediterranean (v. 9). “Freedmen” refers to Jews who at some point had been slaves but have gained their freedom. Present also are Cyrenians and Alexandrians from North Africa and Jews from Cilicia and Asia (modern Turkey). It is difficult to determine whether these are all members of the synagogue of the Freedmen or if multiple synagogues are represented. Whatever the case, these are Jews of the Diaspora, the scattering of Jews

to areas outside Judea going back to the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles (722 BC and 586 BC).

Despite their zeal for the Jewish faith, these men are no match for Stephen—or rather, they are no match for the Spirit working through him (v. 10). They cannot refute him, but they want to be rid of him, so they “secretly” secure false witnesses for their case (v. 11). The scheme succeeds in getting all of the usual suspects involved—crowds, leaders, and Torah scholars—and they arrest Stephen and bring him to the temple. Ironically, by accusing Stephen of speaking words against the law (v. 13), the false accusers themselves break that very law (Ex. 20:16; cf. Rom. 2:23). Apparently Stephen has shared Jesus’ teaching, for the accusations against him are strikingly similar to those leveled against Jesus (cf. Mark 14:58, 63–64). As with Jesus, Stephen’s teaching is misconstrued, taken out of context, and also simply misunderstood.

Luke records how the council “saw that his face was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15). This likely refers to a calm, unaggressive expression, the opposite of what might be expected of someone facing false, perhaps deadly, charges. In the OT, after an angel appears to Samson’s mother, she tells her husband, “A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome” (Judg. 13:6). Luke is perhaps alluding also to the face of Moses, shining with glory when he comes down from meeting with God (Ex. 34:29; cf. 2 Cor. 3:13). Jesus at his transfiguration likewise has an unearthly appearance (Luke 9:29; cf. Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2). This biblical imagery communicates the presence and power of God in Stephen through the Holy Spirit.³⁶

7:1–53 *The First Christian Martyr: Stephen’s Speech.* This speech, the longest in Acts, begins in answer to a simple question: “Are these things so?” (v. 1). Stephen never answers “yes” or “no” to the question; he never defends himself against his accusers. Instead he launches into a careful appropriation and interpretation of Israel’s history, beginning with Abraham and ending with the murder of Jesus. As with Peter’s earlier sermons, Stephen shows how the Law and Prophets point to Christ, as Jesus began teaching the disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke 24). Stephen is quite selective, and there are too many theological, exegetical, and thematic issues to sort through here. But a few fundamental, often recurring, themes stand out.

First is God’s sovereign *choice* of his people. Second, but no less important, is the *promise and fulfillment* theme that runs through the entire speech. Promise and fulfillment is arguably the most fundamental interpretive paradigm linking the OT and NT and is the driving element in Stephen’s speech. The third theme is God’s *salvation* of his people, and, as always, biblical salvation is linked to judgment—the two go hand in hand.³⁷ The fourth theme is Israel’s *rejection* of God and his actions on their behalf. The theme of rejection carries with it the related aspects of unbelief, rebellion, and unfaithfulness. Finally we see the theme of the

³⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, 351.

³⁷ For a large-scale treatment of this vital biblical theme, there is nothing better than James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

temple, one of the main issues in Stephen's contention with his accusers. Rather than recount or restate the entire speech, the commentary will move through it by focusing on these themes and the key points of each of its four major sections.

7:2–8 Stephen begins with Abraham, the father of Israel, who was just another man living in the land of the Chaldeans when God revealed himself to him. Stephen starts with God's choice of Abraham. This is not a mere history lesson, and he is not telling them something they do not already know. Abraham's home in the land of the Chaldeans is important, however—I Israel's experience with God did not begin with a temple or even in the land of Canaan. God called Abraham while he was part of what we call "the nations," before the nation of Israel even existed. From the land of the Chaldeans Abraham went to Haran and then finally to the land of Canaan. Still, God did not grant Abraham his inheritance there, "not even a foot's length" (v. 5). What Abraham did receive was a promise to him and his children (see Genesis 12), even though Abraham yet had no children. The rest of Israel's history is the story of the unfolding of that promise. The fulfillment of the promise of land would have to wait four hundred years while Abraham's children languished in slavery. God would eventually save them from slavery and judge their captors and bring Abraham's descendants to the land in which they would worship him. To seal this promise, God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision—the covenant mark of the people of God. This short section of Stephen's address ends with a confirmation that God indeed began to fulfill his word to Abraham, who bore Isaac and marked him with the covenant sign. Isaac in turn was the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of twelve sons, the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. So the story of Israel begins with God's call and promise to Abraham, but the story does not end with him.

7:9–16 The next section of Stephen's speech highlights the experience of Joseph (see Genesis 37–50). The account of Joseph begins with a note of treachery: his brothers, patriarchs of Israel, sell him into slavery (Acts 7:9). The history of Israel's unfaithfulness, a theme of Stephen's address, begins here. The next few verses are a short commentary on Joseph's well-known words to his brothers: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20). In Egypt, God showed favor to Joseph and caused him to prosper. The underlying theme is God's promise to Abraham: Joseph, persecuted by his brothers, becomes their savior, bringing them to Egypt to escape famine, and through him the promise continues on. In this part of the narrative, the nations (here Egypt) become a place of refuge and salvation for God's people. Around seventy descendants of Abraham go into Egypt (Acts 7:14). There, not in the Promised Land, they multiply and become a nation. By the time they gather around the tabernacle in the wilderness they number six hundred thousand men, plus women and children (Numbers 1–2).³⁸

³⁸ See Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 110.

Questions have been raised concerning the names and places mentioned by Stephen. He says that the patriarchs “were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem” (Acts 7:16). In Genesis, however, Abraham buys a field in Canaan from the Hittites (Gen. 23:16). It is Jacob who buys the land in Shechem (Gen. 33:19) where Joseph is later buried (Josh. 24:32). It is important to note that in Stephen’s speech the story is conflated and summarized. Luke is not writing a biblical history paper for a seminary assignment but is paring down and shaping the history to that which is needed for his purposes. This is common among NT writers, who rarely tell the *whole* story because there is neither space or need to do so. Indeed, this is true of any historian. To tell the complete history of the Thirty Years War, for instance (to select one example at random), would take (at least) thirty years! No one would want to read that book. This observation does not cast any doubt on the historical reliability of Scripture but is simply an acknowledgement that biblical narrative is not a blow-by-blow account of history. A good dose of common-sense reflection on the text and context, including how the biblical authors tell their stories and recount history (in a way not all that different from what we do ourselves), is the first and best tool for reading and interpreting biblical narrative.

In Genesis 12:6, just after God calls him, Abraham travels through the exact place Stephen mentions (though quite some time passes between when he leaves Haran and when he comes to the land). As he goes through what will later be part of Israel, God appears to him and promises him that land, and there Abraham builds an altar (Gen. 12:7). Long before Jacob buys the piece of land, Abraham stakes a claim there. Jacob later negotiates for that same piece of land. It is not far-fetched to think that Stephen and other first-century Jews knew more about the story than what they read in Genesis, and it could be that Abraham himself bought the land originally. It is also possible that Stephen is using the name of Abraham but referencing the patriarchs generally.³⁹ The first explanation—Abraham himself bought it, and Stephen knows of the purchase—seems best, but whatever the case, this text does not present a problem without reasonable (and commonsense) solutions. In any case, the conclusion of the Joseph section of Stephen’s address is plain: the patriarchs, including Jacob, all die outside the land, so the story of the promise goes on.

7:17–34 The section concerning Moses (vv. 17–43) is the longest in the speech, and Stephen’s themes continue and expand throughout it. The narrative of Moses’ life up until the burning bush is told in three sections each separated by forty years. Verses 17–22 take place in Egypt; verses 23–29 describe the journey from Egypt to Midian; and verses 30–34 narrate the Sinai years. With Moses comes the fulfillment of the promise, at least in terms of people and land. Stephen’s account of Moses begins, as with Joseph, with a comment concerning persecution. It escalates from

³⁹ Peterson, like other commentators, suggests that Luke has “telescoped various biblical traditions about the burial sites of the patriarchs,” cross-referencing Genesis 23:10–19; 33:18–20; 49:29–32; 50:13; Joshua 24:32 for support (*Acts*, 253).

Joseph's being sold into slavery to the Egyptian king's plan to kill the babies of Israel by abandonment (v. 19). As in Acts, from persecution comes salvation, this time through the birth of Moses. God's choice is again at the forefront, as Stephen notes that Moses "was beautiful in God's sight" (v. 20). He makes the point that Moses was protected for three months, and he recounts the story of Moses' rescue by Pharaoh's daughter and his subsequent Egyptian education. Moses' Egyptian education is not mentioned explicitly in the OT, but it is possible that Stephen is familiar with Jewish traditions that support the idea.⁴⁰ Stephen is not simply providing background information about Moses that his hearers do not already know but is underscoring a part of the story that no one would have scripted—a man raised and educated in Pharaoh's house was God's choice to deliver the Israelites from slavery.

In the second section (vv. 23–29), Stephen retells the incident of Moses killing an Egyptian for beating an Israelite (Ex. 2:11–12) to show that the relationship between Moses and the people of Israel was strained from the very beginning. In the Exodus account, when Moses confronts an Israelite for hitting a fellow Hebrew the day after Moses has killed an Egyptian, the man retorts, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Ex. 2:14, cited by Stephen in Acts 7:27–28). Interestingly, Stephen adds that Moses thought the Israelites would know that "God was giving them salvation by his hand" (v. 25). The account in Exodus does not mention Moses' understanding that God was working through him, but, according to Stephen, Moses did have a sense of God's calling. The Israelites, however, rejected Moses' involvement, and he ran for his life. Because of this rejection, Moses "became an exile in the land of Midian" (v. 29), setting up the next part of the Moses narrative.

The third section of the story (vv. 30–34) tells of Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. Stephen simply states that Moses was in Midian forty years. This number, whether in years or in days, is frequently linked to significant salvation events. For instance, Moses spends forty years in the wilderness before God sends him back to Egypt. Israel would wander around the desert forty years before entering the Land of Promise (v. 36). Much later, Jesus would spend forty days in the wilderness, taking his place as the true Israel, before coming back to the land and announcing the kingdom of God (Mark 1:12–15). Here in Acts, Jesus spends forty days with the disciples, preparing them for his departure and for Pentecost (Acts 1:3–5).

Most important for Stephen's purposes is what happens at the end of Moses' forty years. Stephen's hearers are reminded that the revelation that began the most significant event in Israel's history took place outside the land (as was the case with Abraham). This is the covenant God who had made a promise to Abraham and intended to keep it. Stephen includes God's telling Moses to take off his shoes

40 I. Howard Marshall states, "Although the Old Testament does not expressly relate it, Stephen follows the tradition, attested in Philo, that Moses would naturally be given a thorough Egyptian education" (*Acts*, TNTC [Leicester: IVP Academic; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans], 139). Bock cites several Jewish traditions that speak of Moses' education (*Acts*, 290).

“for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (v. 33). It is easy to pass over this as simply part of the story, but Stephen includes it to show that it is God who makes a place holy. Wherever God is, that place is holy, and he is not limited to any one place. Comments concerning the temple started this trial in motion, and later Stephen’s word about the temple will lead to his death. The groundwork is laid for the climax of Stephen’s speech, in which he will warn his listeners that they are gravely wrong in regard to the temple.

7:35–43 The theme of rejection takes center stage in the next several verses, as Stephen focuses on how Israel’s rejection of God—by rejecting Moses—began right in the midst of the greatest event of salvation in the OT. The people rejected Moses as “a ruler and a judge,” but God made him “both ruler and redeemer” (v. 35). The phrase “by the hand of the angel” in regard to the burning bush is not to deny that God himself confronted Moses, as Stephen says in verse 31 and as recounted in the Exodus narrative. Angels served as intermediaries between God and Moses both at the burning bush and in the giving of the law (v. 53; cf. Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). This in no way diminishes the revelation of God to Moses or to Israel. The constant refrain “this Moses/man” and similar phrases emphasize the people’s rejection. Stephen is saying in effect, “Moses, the one you claim to follow—*this* is the very one your fathers rejected.” The point will soon be clear: just as the Israelites rejected Moses, so they rejected God once again by rejecting Jesus.

The salvation brought by Moses was accompanied by “wonders and signs” (v. 36). The parallel with Stephen’s day is hard to miss: though Moses performed signs and wonders, the Israelites ultimately rejected him, just as the rulers and leaders reject the signs and wonders performed by the followers of Jesus—and just as they rejected the same from Jesus. It was this same Moses who promised that another prophet like himself would come (v. 37), the implication being that the prophet to come was Jesus, and they rejected him too. In verse 38, Luke uses the word *ekklēsia*, translated here as “congregation,” in reference to Israel.⁴¹ This Greek term for “assembly” or “congregation” is commonly used for Israel in the Septuagint. Given that this is the common word for “church” in the NT, the parallel is seen between the place of Moses in the assembly of Israel and the place of Jesus in the new covenant assembly.⁴² This same Moses also gave the divine law to Israel (“living oracles”; v. 38; cf. Deut. 32:47; Rom. 3:2). However, in spite of all of these gifts, the Israelites began to think that life was not so bad back in Egypt, and they turned to idolatry (Acts 7:39–40).

The climax of Israel’s early rejection of God was the worship of the golden calf while Moses was on the mountain receiving the law (Exodus 32). If any OT event attests to the fact that God’s promise to Abraham could not be fulfilled by Israel on its own, it was the pagan idolatry festival at the foot of Sinai. Two words sum

41 The common idea that *ekklēsia* means “called-out ones,” based on the two parts of the Greek word, is misguided. Theologically, the idea is fine, but the significance of the NT church is found in the NT generally, not in the morphology of the word in Greek. This was simply the best word Greek writers and translators had to use.

42 Polhill, *Acts*, 199.

up the incident: idolatry and works. As Stephen puts it, they “offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands” (Acts 7:41). In the face of God’s gift and grace in the exodus from Egypt, they turned to a homemade idol.

In response, “God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven” (v. 42). Stephen compresses Israel’s history by citing God’s verdict over the nation in Amos 5:25–27. In the exodus narrative, God punished the people severely, but because of Moses’ intercession and God’s promise to Abraham, the Lord gave Moses his word that he would continue to go before them into the Promised Land and drive out their enemies. The Amos quote is from several centuries later, but Stephen connects it to the wilderness idolatry. The worship of the golden calf began a pattern of long-standing idolatry, and by quoting Amos, Stephen implies that Israel was headed for exile in Babylon right from their leaving Egypt.

Stephen’s comment that God “gave them over to worship the host of heaven” is similar to Paul’s comment concerning the sins of the Gentiles: “God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves” (Rom. 1:24). In both texts idolatry is the sin that brings the ultimate punishment of God, giving human beings over to follow their darkest and most inhuman desire: to worship things other than him.

The quote from Amos also summarizes this history of idolatry, highlighting particular instances of Israel’s worshiping other gods. Moloch was a Canaanite god, but the identity of Rephan is difficult to know, though possibly it is a reference to an Egyptian god. Stephen is citing some Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, accounting for the difference readers will find when comparing Acts to Amos. Also, in the Hebrew OT, God says he would send the people in exile beyond Damascus, which the Greek translator cited by Stephen interprets as “exile beyond Babylon” (Acts 7:43). These translation issues aside, the message of Amos in both the Hebrew OT and the Greek translation cited by Stephen is clear: altogether, from the golden calf to life in the land, the history of Israel is marked by a rejection of the God who had made a promise to their forefathers.

7:44–50 Moving from the Moses section of the speech, Stephen compares tent and temple. The “tent of witness” (v. 44), or tabernacle, was designed and ordered by God and was part of Israel’s life until the time of King David. The period to which Stephen refers was the era of the united kingdom—the two halves of which were the initial target Jesus assigned to the disciples to evangelize (see 1:8). David desired to build the temple, but it was Solomon whom God allowed to do so. Stephen does not so much criticize either the building or existence of the temple but instead condemns his audience’s perspective on the temple. In all their veneration and zeal for the temple, they have missed completely the God who they presume dwells there. Joining with Solomon (1 Kings 8:27), Stephen reminds his listeners that “the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands” (Acts 7:48), and then he quotes Isaiah 66:1–2 to show the impossibility of containing

God, the creator and king of all, in a physical or permanent building. The people's concern is earthly, but God's throne is in heaven. Readers will remember that from the beginning of Acts, Luke has established that Jesus is now ruling and reigning from heaven. This last quote sets up the final part of Stephen's speech.

7:51–53 Borrowing OT language, Stephen calls his hearers “stiff-necked” and “uncircumcised in heart and ears” (v. 51). In other words, “You just do not get it at all, not in the slightest bit.” The language is altogether justified. They also “resist the Holy Spirit,” evidence of which has piled up since chapter 2. The entire accusation and condemnation amounts to this: “You are unfaithful, unbelieving, and do not know God.” They are no different than their fathers, who killed God's prophets. Stephen is exactly in line with Jesus, who condemned unbelieving Jews for the same thing (see Luke 13:34; Matt. 23:31–32, 37). The final straw was the crowning achievement of centuries of unbelief: they killed the Messiah. This charge, taken up by Peter several times in his sermons, marks the final chapter in the old covenant. This covenant, and the temple and law that went with it, have been eclipsed.

Several more speeches follow in Acts, but Stephen's marks the final verdict on the old covenant, a verdict that will be repeated throughout. Stephen began with the story of their father Abraham and brought the narrative to the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Jesus. The sections of his speech describing Abraham and Jesus are like bookends, with the story of Israel's old covenant experience in the middle. From the rejection of Moses (vv. 25, 35) to the murder of Jesus, the story of the old covenant comes to an end. God's choice of Abraham and his promises to him have reached their appointed end in Jesus of Nazareth.

7:54–8:3 *The First Christian Martyr: Stephen Martyred and Believers Scattered.* With his final comment, Stephen brings his hearers to a breaking point. Their teeth-grinding and rage turn into full-fledged mob rule when Stephen, “full of the Holy Spirit” (the same Spirit they reject), declares he sees Jesus “standing at the right hand of God” (7:55–56). This is another dramatic event in which heaven—God's realm and domain—breaks into the earthly realm. Other such instances include the baptism of Jesus, his transfiguration, and his ascension. In this scene, Jesus is standing rather than sitting at God's right hand (Ps. 110:1; cf. Acts 2:34). It is often suggested that, in this way, Jesus is standing as a witness to Stephen's speech and impending martyrdom. The crowd gets up, too, and rushes at Stephen in a frenzy. There is debate over whether this is an official stoning or out-of-control mob violence. It is both—even if the council does not direct the action, Stephen is standing before them, and it is impossible to think that the mob is doing anything the council wishes to stop. Some council members are likely part of the mob. The catch is that, as with Jesus (John 18:31), the council cannot legally put anyone to death. They are clearly complicit in Stephen's death.

Stephen is taken outside the city (ironically, in keeping with the law; Lev. 24:14–16) and stoned to death. A yet-unknown young man named Saul, who is serving as the coat checker, looks on with approval (Acts 7:58; 8:1). Readers of the

NT know that this is just the beginning, the ironic start, of Saul's story, and he himself will have reason later in life to recall this day (Acts 22:20). Stephen's death is as remarkable as his life and his sermon. In the midst of agony, he echoes his Savior. From the cross Jesus cried, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46) as he died, and just before that he had called out on behalf of his executioners, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Likewise Stephen calls for the Lord to "receive my spirit" and not to hold his enemies' sin against them (Acts 7:59–60). His death is a model for all Christians facing persecution. Luke shows the difference between a desperate, enraged defense of condemned tradition and the strength and contentment of rest and peace in Christ.

What began as a rebuke and increased to beating and imprisonment now escalates to execution, and a new chapter in the Acts story begins. The methods of wiping out the Jesus movement have a reverse effect—it spreads. Things probably look less positive to the believers then than they do to us now, but Luke shows that what men meant for evil God means for good. Stephen's murder whets the appetite for those who wish to end this Jesus nonsense once and for all. Persecution breaks out all over Jerusalem that day, and it has the most unlooked-for outcome. The Christians go through Judea and Samaria to get away from the persecution, and in so doing move to part two of Jesus' command: to be witnesses in those places (1:8).

The following two verses serve as a transition from one major section of Acts to another as the story of Stephen ends, launching the spread of the gospel according to Jesus' plan in 1:8. They also further introduce Saul, who will become the main character for much of the rest of Acts.

Saul goes from looking after coats at Stephen's murder to "ravaging the church," forcing his way into Christian homes and taking people off to prison (8:3; cf. 9:13). In our day we would say he was "radicalized": he hated the followers of Jesus and wanted to see the movement wiped out. As an apostle, Paul himself never forgot his past, mentioning it in his speeches in Acts and in his letters (Acts 22:4–5; 26:10; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13, 23; Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:13). It is important not to conceive of Paul as faithful according to the old covenant. Before his conversion, Paul was *not a faithful Jew*. One cannot be faithful while rejecting the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. However, Paul does highlight the unexpected nature of God's way of carrying out his plan for the world. From choosing an idol worshiper in Ur for the fulfillment of his ultimate promises and an Egyptian-educated man in Pharaoh's court to save Israel from slavery, to raising up imperfect judges who keep the nation afloat during a horrible era of apostasy and suffering and a boy who kills a giant with a slingshot and becomes king—not to mention coming as a carpenter from Nazareth who tells people the greatest thing they can become is a servant and who dies, cursed, on a cross—no one but God would write this script.

8:4–8 *Judea and Samaria and Beyond: Philip Goes to Samaria.* Persecution pushes the early church on its way. As they go, they preach the Word. Philip appears in the list of the seven chosen to take care of the practical concerns of the Hellenistic widows

in Jerusalem. He is named second, after Stephen (6:5). The direction “down to” (8:5) is fairly common regardless of the direction people travel from Jerusalem, as it refers to the city’s higher elevation rather than to a direction on a map. Philip goes to the third place named by Jesus in 1:8, Samaria. The Samaritans were more or less half-Jews living in and around the former capital of the northern kingdom. Some of their ancestors settled there during the Babylonian exile, and when the Jews returned, they stayed. Over time they became a distinct ethnic group. The Samaritans followed a version of the Torah and had their own temple on Mount Gerizim (John 4).

Between the Samaritans and the Jews, there was little love lost. During Jesus’ ministry he and the disciples encountered much opposition, but when some Samaritans rejected Jesus, James and John asked, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54). Elsewhere in the Gospels, the Samaritans play a fairly regular, if unexpected, role. The parable of the good Samaritan shows what it means to be a neighbor after a priest and a Levite pass by a half-dead man on the road to Jericho but a Samaritan does not (Luke 10). When Jesus heals ten lepers on his way to Jerusalem, only one returns to thank him, and he is a Samaritan (Luke 17:15–16). In John 4 Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well, teaching her about the gift of the Spirit and calling her out on her adultery. Despite all the times Jesus refuses to be identified as the Messiah (or at least with popular ideas of what that means), or gives vague responses when asked about it, he straightforwardly tells this Samaritan woman that he is the Messiah (John 4:26). Now in Acts, after persecution has driven most of the believers out of Jerusalem, Samaritans accept the gospel gladly. Like Stephen, Philip is empowered to do signs and wonders. Also as with Stephen, the signs he performs—casting out spirits and healing the paralyzed and lame—are not independent gifts but rather witnesses to the message he preaches about Jesus (Acts 8:6–7).

8:9–25 *Judea and Samaria and Beyond: Peter and John Go to Samaria.* The Samaritan Simon has made a name for himself through the practice of magic and has likely earned a living doing so. He also thinks highly of himself and his talents. Magic, sorcery, divination, and the like are roundly condemned in both the OT and the NT (Lev. 19:26, 31; Deut. 18:10; Mal. 3:5; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). In many parts of the world, such manipulation of evil powers to achieve some desired benefit for oneself or others or to wreak havoc in another’s life is commonplace and is often a serious threat.

It is hard to say exactly what the Samaritans mean when they say, “This man is the power of God that is called Great” (Acts 8:10), but it is reasonable to assume that Simon’s audiences, probably prompted by his own claims, believe Simon’s powers to be from God. Things begin to change, however, when Philip comes to town with his own signs and wonders and proclaims Jesus. The Samaritans embrace the message and, like their Jerusalem counterparts, are baptized. For the first time, public confession and identification of believers with the death and resurrection of Jesus occurs outside Israel proper. In what looks like a dramatic conversion,

Simon the magician not only believes and receives baptism but starts to follow Philip as well. Luke adds that what really gets Simon's attention are the "signs and great miracles" done by Philip (v. 13). Just as the Samaritans were "amazed" by Simon's magic (v. 11), so Simon is "amazed" by what Philip can do (v. 13). This sets the scene for his coming encounter with Peter and John.

The apostles are still *the* authority in the church at this time. Although Philip does signs and wonders, preaches the gospel effectively, and baptizes those who believe, Peter and John set out for Samaria when they hear what has happened (v. 14). They pray that the Samaritans would receive the Spirit because, even though they were baptized in Jesus' name, the Spirit "had not yet fallen on any of them" (vv. 15–16). At Pentecost, the offer was to repent and be baptized in order to receive the Spirit (2:38), but the Samaritans believed and were baptized yet *did not* receive the Spirit. Luke offers no explanation but tells the story as though nothing is strange about this occurrence. God waits on the arrival of his appointed apostles to impart the Spirit to the Samaritans. No exact pattern has yet been established, for in a few verses an Ethiopian will believe and be baptized, and there is no account of the apostles' going to him (and no account of his receiving the Spirit, either, for that matter), and later the apostles will encounter people who have believed and received the Spirit apart from their direct ministry.

Again Luke presents a descriptive event that is not meant to imply a pattern or prescribe a continual practice. The provisional nature of Acts, particularly its early chapters, cannot be set aside. We must look for patterns but also acknowledge when those patterns change. Furthermore, the emphasis we put on order and sequence is not always an issue in Acts. Salvation's components, not its exact order, is the issue. In Acts, the general pattern is that believers receive the Spirit and are baptized. That is the rule, but there are exceptions. A few times, believers are baptized, then receive the Spirit, but there is no indication of such a pattern in the rest of the NT. In every case, only believers receive both the Spirit and baptism—the one constant is faith. In the narrative, faith comes first. Discussions about regeneration preceding or following faith are for a later century.

The presence of Peter and John is for the authentication of the event. In this first instance of belief in Jesus outside a Jewish community, the presence of the apostles at the giving of the Spirit stands as proof positive that the new covenant is open to all who believe in Jesus. Everyone who believes receives the Spirit, and no amount of background or ancestry guarantees *or* excludes anyone from the covenant. Later, apostolic witness by Peter to the reception of the Spirit among the Gentiles will be the most important evidence presented to the Jerusalem council (ch. 15).

Simon Magus's⁴³ heart is revealed when the apostles lay hands on the believers (v. 17), which evidently produces some perceptible display of the Spirit's presence. Simon requests the opportunity to purchase the power to convey the Spirit as well (vv. 18–19). Peter is clear in his response to Simon, in the process revealing the nature of Simon's supposed belief. His most pointed comment comes in verse 21,

⁴³ Simon is traditionally known by this name. *Magus* means "magician."

where he tells Simon he has “neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.” “Part” and “lot” are biblical terms used in reference to an inheritance or a share (cf. Neh. 2:20). Simon has no place among the believers, nor a future in the kingdom of God, as things stand. The phrases “gall of bitterness” and “bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23) reflect OT language referring to idolatry, temptation, and sin, as well as the experience to which they lead (Deut. 29:18; 32:32; Prov. 5:22; Lam. 3:19). Peter also tells Simon to repent and pray for forgiveness so the Lord might possibly forgive him.

Taken separately, these comments from Peter are devastating, though in certain contexts they could be said to a believer. But together the call to repent and ask forgiveness, Simon’s wrong heart, the denial of his share among believers together, and Peter’s rebuke, “May your silver perish with you” (Acts 8:20), lead to the conclusion that Simon was not a genuine believer. His reaction to the Spirit and his motivation stand in stark contrast to those who have believed up to this point. Simon is not like those who believed at Pentecost, those added to the church after later proclamation, or those who believed after signs and wonders by the apostles, nor does he display the unified and other-focused character of the Christian community so evident in the narrative. However uninformed or ignorant he is, he is nevertheless seeking the gift of the Spirit for personal gain, a chance to have and display even more power. It is *possible* that he merely wants to confer the Spirit to believers out of good motives, but it is highly unlikely, and such a conclusion is naive and runs against the flow of the narrative. Simon is “amazed” at Philip, just as the Samaritans were “amazed” by the magic he performed (vv. 11, 13), he offers the apostles money, and he asks for “this power” as though the power belongs to the apostles and they can give or sell it to whomever they chose (v. 19). Simon does not act like a believer, and Peter does not treat him like one.

The Simon narrative ends, however, on an unresolved note. He asks the disciples to pray that what Peter says of him would not come true (v. 24), but readers are left to wonder what becomes of Simon. He seems remorseful, but what Luke includes sounds more like fear of what might happen than like confession and repentance. False believers have participated, and still do, in Christian communities since the apostolic era. The evidence leans toward Simon’s being one of the first such false believers. Even in the midst of a dramatic move in the trajectory of the gospel, an obstacle arises, a reminder that the church is moving toward the fulfillment of the kingdom but has not yet reached it fully. Gospel successes go hand in hand with misunderstandings, false belief, and potential heresy. Even the best of times are encumbered by ideas and forces that threaten the kingdom. This pattern is borne out in the rest of Acts.

In the larger narrative framework extending from the ascension of Jesus, the flow of the narrative of witnesses going to the nations continues. Not only do Samaritans believe as a result of Philip’s ministry; Peter and John also preach in Samaritan villages as they make their way back to Jerusalem. They take advantage of every opportunity.

As this narrative ends there is also the inkling of a discernable pattern established over time in Acts. Before leaving, the disciples stay to witness and teach further the “word of the Lord” (v. 25). As the gospel begins to spread into new areas, particularly predominantly Gentile areas, where biblical knowledge is nonexistent, the apostles frequently travel back to places they evangelized earlier. They not only reach them with the gospel but make great efforts to teach them as well.⁴⁴

8:26–40 *Judea and Samaria and Beyond: The Ethiopian Eunuch.* Though there is no reported plan (such as a map) for the early Christians’ taking the gospel to the world, here is another example of God supernaturally orchestrating the mission. An angel appears to Philip and tells him to head south on the road to Gaza, near the border with Egypt. Later Paul will have a vision calling him to Macedonia. These are special acts of God to fulfill the mission of 1:8. We do not know how far down the road Philip goes, but Gaza is fairly remote, a last stop before going into a desert, something like traveling in the American West and seeing a sign that says, “Last Gas for 200 Miles.” It becomes immediately clear that Philip is sent for a very specific task—why go to Gaza otherwise?

Philip meets an Ethiopian eunuch who is on his way back home after visiting Jerusalem to worship. Eunuchs were common court officials in the ancient world, and this one, a treasurer in the court of Candace, queen of Ethiopia, also happens to have a particular devotion to the Jewish religion. As a eunuch (an emasculated servant), he could not become a full convert to Judaism, so he appears to be something like a “God-fearer” (cf. comment on 10:1–8), but Luke, obviously familiar with that term, does not identify him as such. The Ethiopian is one step further removed from ethnic Judaism than the Samaritans and is thus another example of the widening orbit of the gospel.

Still under the Spirit’s guidance, Philip rushes over to the eunuch’s chariot, finds him reading aloud (common in the ancient world) from Isaiah, and asks him if he understands what he is reading (8:30). “How can I, unless someone guides me?” is his now-famous reply (v. 31). This text is overflowing with providential events. Philip is led to a certain place, a man is reading Scripture, he asks for help understanding it, and he is reading from what is probably the best-known OT text related to Jesus, Isaiah 53. Specifically, he is reading Isaiah 53:7–8, which speaks of the unjust suffering of the servant of Yahweh. Prompted by the eunuch’s question, Philip starts with that text and goes on to tell him the “good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

Philip opens up the story of the OT as it focuses on Jesus. This is the primary interpretive scheme used by the apostles and disciples in Acts. They learn it from Jesus, who began teaching this way on the Emmaus road in Luke 24:13–27. Over and over again in Acts, the OT story is retold by its defining center, Jesus Christ. Peter does so in his early sermons, Stephen traces a particular OT history to the

⁴⁴ For an excellent study of this apostolic pattern, and motivation for following it, see M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody, 2010).

rejection of Jesus, and later Paul will show from the OT that Jesus is indeed the Messiah (Acts 17:1–4; 28:23). Very early on, Christians begin using the grand narrative of Scripture to open the good news to their hearers. We tend to think of and read the Bible, not surprisingly, according to verses and chapters, often focusing on the trees rather than on the forest. There is clearly an important place for reading the Bible that way, but Scripture is more than a sourcebook of verse collections; at its most important level, it is a story of everything, particularly of God's creation and redemption through Jesus.⁴⁵

The Isaiah text read by the eunuch is particularly interesting in light of its context. Isaiah 53 focuses on the suffering servant, while Isaiah 54 promises a future time of unmatched blessing when the children of the barren one (Israel) "will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities" (Isa. 54:3). The chapter points to a new covenant, in which "my covenant of peace shall not be removed" (Isa. 54:10) and "children shall be taught by the LORD" (Isa. 54:13). In the end, God declares, "In righteousness you shall be established" (Isa. 54:14). In the NT context, as seen in Acts already, these promises are not limited to ethnic Israel but will be fulfilled along with the promise to the nations.

The following chapter, Isaiah 55, is a call to take part in the great work of God, connected directly to the promised "word" of God that accomplishes everything he intends (Isa. 55:11 is one of the best backgrounds for understanding John 1:1). And this is all cast in a vision of a new creation (Isa. 55:12–13). Thus there is a servant who will atone for his people (Isaiah 53), a new covenant (Isaiah 54), and a new creation (Isaiah 55).⁴⁶ Then in Isaiah 56 we read promises to outsiders, who will be fully accepted in the days that are coming. Specifically, the text names foreigners *and eunuchs*. It is worth citing a large portion:

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say,

"The LORD will surely separate me from his people";

and let not the eunuch say,

"Behold, I am a dry tree."

For thus says the LORD:

"To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,

who choose the things that please me

and hold fast my covenant,

I will give in my house and within my walls

a monument and a name

better than sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name

that shall not be cut off.

"And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,

to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,

⁴⁵ See the discussion in Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 1*, 134.

⁴⁶ I was pointed in this direction by *ibid.*, 135.

and to be his servants,
 everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,
 and holds fast my covenant—
 these I will bring to my holy mountain,
 and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
 their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
 will be accepted on my altar;
 for my house shall be called a house of prayer
 for all peoples.”
 The Lord God,
 who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,
 “I will gather yet others to him
 besides those already gathered.” (Isa. 56:3–8)

What richness is added through context! Isaiah promises a time in which foreigners and eunuchs will receive an eternal inheritance and an equal place in the house of the Lord along the outcasts of Israel. This not only is important for shedding light on the narrative of Philip and the eunuch; it also opens up greater understanding of this transition in Acts from Jerusalem to the nations, not least with the impending conversion of the apostle to the Gentiles.

In his description of Jesus, Philip evidently mentions Christian baptism, for as soon as they come upon water, the eunuch asks to be baptized. The text implies faith on the part of the eunuch, of which Philip is evidently sure, and therefore he baptizes him. There is no mention of the eunuch receiving the Spirit, but we can assume that he does. This is perhaps the best way to track the baptismal pattern in Acts: the basic salvation event includes faith, repentance, the Spirit, and baptism. The baptism question looms large in Acts, and we will return to it again in chapter 10.

With the eunuch's baptism, the kingdom takes a crucial step toward the nations. The Spirit's primary role in orchestrating the movement takes dramatic form at the end of chapter 8. The Spirit immediately removes Philip up the coast to Azotus (Acts 8:39–40). Why the Spirit directs Philip to trek down toward Gaza but then supernaturally transports him away is a mystery; he simply does.

Response

When we read the narrative of Stephen's trial and execution, we should not be too quick to point fingers at Stephen's accusers, as though we would have done much better than they. Without defending Stephen's persecutors in the least (or any others who reject the gospel in Acts), surely all of us can think of a time in which our security, or cherished ideas, or ways of thinking and acting were threatened. We often do not like new things, especially when they come with a bracing criticism of whatever they threaten to alter or replace. We do not like to be accused of being wrong, and it is extremely hard for most of us to admit when we *were*

wrong. It is even harder to admit that our traditions, upbringing, or ancestors (personal or national) were wrong. We do and believe things about the world because “that is the way we have always done it” and because we have never looked at the world in different ways beyond our own narrow perspectives. New ways require relearning, admitting we were not quite right, and admitting we do not know everything. Change does not come easy, and when change is religious in nature, it is even harder.

At the end of the day, every human being is a fundamentalist at some level—and that is not all bad—but we must be ready to submit our views to examination, particularly on issues more closely associated with our cultures and traditions than with clear biblical evidence. We must hold up antagonists in the Bible—wicked kings and prophets, unbelieving people, Pharisees and Sadducees, mobs at Ephesus—and ask, “What do I see of myself in them? Would I have really done something different?” Is the rebellion that wells up in our hearts against God and our brothers and sisters in Christ related to the thoughts and judgments of those who stoned Stephen? We should not be too quick to identify only with Stephen (though hopefully we do, and would by God’s grace stand as he did if called to do so) without asking ourselves why we are so sure we would not have opposed him if we were in the synagogue of the Freedmen or members of the council. While turning attention to a speech that ends with a stern condemnation of rebellion and unbelief, each of us should, with the Spirit’s guidance, seek out those places of rebellion and unbelief in our own hearts and lives. Maybe the death of rebellion and unbelief can be found this way.

On another note, we must never forget that although those rejecting Jesus were Jews, so were the people who received the Spirit, believed, and proclaimed him. It is historically dangerous, and biblically wrong, to accuse Jews generally of crucifying and rejecting Jesus. They did crucify him, but “they,” speaking generally, also believed in him. The apostles were Jews, and the early believers were Jews. Jesus was born a Jew. All of the characters so far in Acts are Jews (Nicolaus was a convert). The Jewish rejection of Jesus seen in the Gospels, here in Acts, and expounded by Paul in Romans 9–11 is part of the rebellion set in motion with Adam, continued through Israel and the nations and into the NT. It fits into the covenantal shift that takes place in the crucifixion, resurrection, and enthronement of Jesus. The Jewish rejection of Jesus is paradigmatic for the rejection of Jesus by the world. Just as the Jewish experience with the law of Moses and their inability to keep it exposes the human heart—the heart of both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 3:19–20)—and therefore condemns the whole world, so the rejection of Jesus by most of the Jews in Israel and beyond is symptomatic of the whole world’s rejection of him. Though the trajectory of the kingdom in the new covenant moves clearly toward Gentiles, all Jews are invited to enter the new covenant through faith in their Messiah.

Should Christians mourn and weep when believing friends and loved ones die? Luke notes, “Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him” (Acts 8:2). In many evangelical circles these days, funerals are more about

“celebrating” than about grieving—at least that is what people try to say. It is absolutely true that the death of a Christian is different than that of an unbeliever. We die with hope, and those of us who live on after the loss of a believing loved one do so with hope in the resurrection. We have hope because Jesus has defeated death and the grave (1 Cor. 15:56–57). It is also true that when a Christian dies, there is cause for celebrating his or her life, a life redeemed by Christ. Death, however, is not a cause for celebration, and efforts to make it so are, frankly, ridiculous, not to mention unbiblical. Death is horrible, unnatural, an affront to God’s intention in creation, and a result of human unbelief and disobedience. Moreover, there is no tradition of celebrating death in the Christian church. Such practices exist among macabre, pagan rituals.

For the most part it is an evangelical—particularly an American evangelical— notion that grieving and lamenting is a bad thing to be avoided. This is reflected in our penchant for victorious, triumphant hymns and a rejection of hymnody we think is “depressing” or “too slow.” At this point we have been invaded by the larger culture. We avoid death and talking about death, even at funerals. I am always amazed at the number of Christians who have never, or rarely, been to a funeral. Brothers and sisters in our churches die, and we do not go to a service because we do not have time or do not want to be depressed. In spite of humorous anecdotes and shallow platitudes, families and friends grieve. Wives, husbands, children, parents—all grieve. Telling them they should not—whether with a smile or with the most dramatic, feigned gravity—merely loads them with a greater burden of guilt. It also focuses the living on themselves rather than on the dead. Christians in the NT grieve, though they do not grieve as those without hope (1 Thess. 4:13). The men who buried Stephen “made great lamentation over him” (Acts 8:2).

Stephen’s final comment in his speech, concerning his listeners’ failure to keep the law (7:53), is not simply a general statement on law keeping, nor yet another independent piece of evidence of their unfaithfulness; it is tied specifically to the crucifixion. Their history of lawbreaking culminated in the murder of the Messiah. It was the ultimate breaking of Torah. Murder, much less murder of the Messiah, does not jibe with keeping the law. Too often, the OT law—and biblical commands in general—are approached from the wrong direction. All commands are about faithfulness to and love for God, but many Jews in Stephen’s day practically removed obedience from the God-centered intent of the Bible and made it about the commands themselves, just like we do today. When this is done, the focus turns to “doing” rather than to believing and loving. This is the death knell for obedience. All attempts to keep commands for any purpose other than for love of God and neighbor—whether upholding traditions or looking for evidence of faith through works rather than in the works of our God—result in abject failure: failure to see God at work in Jesus, and failure to trust God’s finished work in Jesus.

It is essential that we read and are able to share the Bible as a story, showing how it fits together and how we fit into that story. The early Christians did this very

thing. Of course, often there is time only to share a few verses with people, but this does not mean our main task should not be to understand the “big picture” of the Bible so that we can read it for ourselves and our own lives and share it with others. We should be able to show how it all fits together, beginning from any single point in the Bible, with Jesus as the beginning, middle, and end of the story. This is probably the greatest way to share with unbelievers, particularly those in places where there is little or no biblical background. When I travel to such places, sharing the “big picture” is far and away the primary thing I spend time on.

One word of caution is in order. There is more emphasis than ever before among evangelicals today on the “big picture,” with a huge number of books and resources that can help us understand this big picture. But we must be extremely cautious that our big picture, always a reconstruction of the Bible, does not replace the actual text of Scripture. Yes, we have tended to spend more time on trees than the forest, but it is an equally defective interpretation that sees the forest but never identifies all of the different trees constituting it.

Believers today cannot expect the Spirit to transport us around in whatever way he moved Philip, but we *can* count on the fact that he is at work in and through us. His work is not usually so explicitly revealed, but he is no less present. In addition, we must remember that the spread of the gospel is in the hands of God. He uses various means to direct the gospel sovereignly to the nations. Some, through misunderstanding, forgetting, or choosing to ignore the place of God’s divine use of human means to carry out his mission to the world, claim that such statements undercut missions and evangelism. But, based on the Bible, and also church history, it is undeniable that the greatest works of missions from the first century onward have been carried out by those who believe in God’s sovereignty. At the same time, we are not marionettes moved around by divine strings. We go out because God intends for people to hear that he keeps his promises. He normally does not will to tell them through personal, internal guidance—though that may happen from time to time—but through the Spirit-filled proclamation of his people.

ACTS 9:1–31

9 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” ⁵And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

⁶But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” ⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹²and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” ¹³But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” ¹⁷So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹and taking food, he was strengthened.

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” ²¹And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” ²²But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

²³When many days had passed, the Jews¹ plotted to kill him, ²⁴but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, ²⁵but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall,² lowering him in a basket.

²⁶And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists.³ But they were seeking to kill him. ³⁰And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

¹The Greek word *Ioudaioi* refers specifically here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, who opposed the Christian faith in that time ²Greek *through the wall* ³That is, Greek-speaking Jews

Section Overview: Saul Believes

Although readers are generally familiar with the story of Paul's conversion, one thing that is not always noticed is the long period of time covered in Acts 9:1–31. This is a period of over three years, if the Jerusalem visit recorded in verses 26–30 is the same as the visit with the apostles recorded in Galatians 1:18–19. As such, the chapter contains the period of time Paul spent in Arabia (Gal. 1:17). The story of this period of Paul's life begins on the Damascus road and ends with him in Tarsus in the province of Cilicia, which borders on Syria (Gal. 1:21).

Paul's experience on the Damascus road is a special, supernatural, divine event. It is not a typical conversion story, nor is it repeated with others in Acts. Saul/Paul encounters the true revelation of Yahweh in Jesus of Nazareth, and his conversion is directly connected to his apostolic call. As we read the rest of Acts, we should keep in mind that the apostle to the Gentiles started out as a vicious persecutor of God's people. Paul never forgot this past, and he tells the story of this conversion more than once.

Another believer outside the specific apostolic circle takes central stage in this section—as Philip and Stephen did in Acts 6–8. As noted, Ananias is a disciple (9:10), not an apostle or even a servant/deacon like Stephen or Philip. Yet it is through him that Jesus fills Paul with the Holy Spirit. Ananias tells Paul that the Lord sent him to heal and bring the Spirit (v. 17). For the first time recorded in Acts, someone besides an apostle is the means through which the Spirit is given. There is likely a practical reason for this: Saul has a miraculous encounter with Jesus, who has immediate plans for him, and Jerusalem, where the apostles are located, is over 130 miles (210 km) away.

Section Outline

- I.E. The Conversion of Saul (9:1–31)
 - 1. The Road to Damascus (9:1–19a)
 - a. Saul Meets the Risen Jesus (9:1–9)
 - b. Ananias Ministers to Saul (9:10–19a)
 - 2. Saul Goes to Jerusalem (9:19b–31)
 - a. Saul in Damascus (9:19b–25)
 - b. Saul in Jerusalem (9:26–30)
 - c. The Church Grows (9:31)

Comment

9:1–9 *The Road to Damascus: Saul Meets the Risen Jesus.* Saul, called Paul in 13:9, continues his persecution of Christians that began immediately following Stephen's death; he is "still breathing threats and murder" toward believers, seemingly having made persecution of Christians his full-time vocation. All of this makes the upcoming events all the more dramatic.

In verse 2, Luke refers to believers as those "belonging to the Way." "The Way" is an early self-description of believers that appears several times in Acts, particularly

in Paul's defense speeches (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). In 16:17 a slave girl in Philippi refers to the "way of salvation," and in 18:25 Luke refers to Apollos's instruction "in the way of the Lord." The Greek word *hodos* can refer metaphorically to how something is done or to a way of life. Thus we can take the term as referring to the Christian life generally—living in the *way of Jesus*—similar to how we use the term *believers*. It points to "the way of salvation as a way of and to life."⁴⁷ Saul's connection to the Way is simple: he seeks to stamp it out, to obliterate it. But God has another plan, for it is clear that the plan to reach the world through a persecutor and murderer of the church could come only from God.

Acts records three accounts of Paul's Damascus road experience. Besides in chapter 9, the story is told also in chapters 22 and 26. Readers will notice the differences between the accounts, and some opponents of the historical reliability of Scripture mention these differences as evidence for their view. In chapter 9, a heavenly light flashes, Paul falls to the ground and hears Jesus say, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (v. 4), Jesus identifies himself and tells Paul to go to Damascus, and Paul's companions hear the voice but see no one. In chapter 22, addressing a crowd of Jews in Jerusalem, Paul recounts how around noon a light from heaven appeared, Jesus asked him the same question and revealed himself as Jesus, and Paul's companions saw the light but did not understand the voice (22:4–9). Standing before King Agrippa in 26:9–18, Paul gives a version that is longer than the two earlier accounts. He says that at midday he saw a light brighter than the sun, which covered him and his companions. He fell to the ground, then heard a voice in "the Hebrew language" asking the same question but adding, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (26:14). Paul describes how Jesus identified himself, and here the apostle includes a substantially longer account of what Jesus had planned for Paul. There is no mention of his companions hearing or not understanding the voice.

The differences between the accounts are easily accounted for by considering that each version is told in a different context, with different purposes and audiences. The first is Luke's narrative account in the flow of Acts. The second and third accounts are Luke's retelling of Paul's addressing different audiences. The details given reflect the needs of the contexts. The content of the later accounts will be considered in due course in this commentary, but a few of the details that seem to change are worth considering. In 9:7 the companions "hear" the voice, but in 22:9 they do not "understand the voice." The second account explains the first. In both they hear something, but chapter 22 explains that they do not "understand." There is no reason to suppose that in chapter 9 they understand what they hear. In this way, the accounts are similar to Jesus' quoting Psalm 22:1 from the cross, when some people think he is calling for Elijah (Mark 15:34–35; cf. Matt. 27:46–47). A close parallel is when God the Father speaks to Jesus and some think they hear thunder, while others say it is an angel (John 12:27–30).

The differences in length of Paul's conversion stories do not present a problem either, since none of the content conflicts in the three passages. The difference

⁴⁷ Bock, *Acts*, 356.

is simply in the level of detail. If Luke plans to include two instances in which Paul recounts this experience, there is no necessary reason to include it all in chapter 9. Luke is writing in retrospect, not as a reporter jotting down notes as events happen. Certainly he planned Acts from beginning to end before writing, or at least knew what he intended to include. Furthermore, the absence of any mention of the companions hearing the voice in chapter 26 underscores the real point of the narrative—it is about Paul’s conversion; his companions play only a supporting role. Although it is Paul’s special experience, it is not private, even if his companions do not understand all that happens. They see a light, hear something, and know that Paul is knocked to the ground and afterward cannot see. The companions serve as documented witnesses of a dramatic event that is essential both for the subsequent life and ministry of the apostle Paul and for the story of Acts.

Is it right to say that Paul is “converted”? This is not the word used to describe the event in Acts, nor does Paul use it later when recounting the story. He does refer in Galatians to his “former life in Judaism” (1:13), which acknowledges a change but not necessarily “conversion” in the way we use the word. If, however, conversion means a change from one worldview to another, abandoning a former sinful way of life, and turning to a different life with new values, goals, and fundamental beliefs, then what other term better describes the Damascus road? Phrases such as “getting on a new path” or “beginning a journey” are trendy and have a certain cachet these days, but they hardly capture the radical event that took place that day—or when anyone comes to faith in Jesus, for that matter.

Although there is no explicit mention of Paul repenting or believing, the following chapters of Acts, as well as Paul’s epistles, make clear that both take place. Narrative often, if not usually, teaches by showing and telling rather than by making propositional statements. In Genesis 22, for instance, there is no explicit mention of faith (but see Gen. 15:6), yet Abraham’s obedience stands as evidence of his faith in God. The same is true in Acts; Paul’s life and ministry after his Damascus road encounter point to his repentance and faith. He is also baptized, and Ananias is told to go see Paul so that he might receive the Spirit (Acts 9:17–18). All the signs of conversion are here, whether implicitly or explicitly.

The larger question of Paul’s conversion has to do with his Jewish background, and thus this question extends to everyone who comes to believe in Jesus in the first several chapters of Acts, with the possible exceptions of the Samaritans and the Ethiopian, but even they are close to Judaism in their own ways. The essential issue is over the continuity and discontinuity between the old and new covenants, and it is extraordinarily important for understanding Acts and the NT. The old covenant is the historical covenantal relationship between God and Israel. As a covenant, it came to an end in Jesus. Its fundamental structures of law, temple, and priesthood were fulfilled, brought to their intended completion in Jesus. The covenant administered by Moses was the means of bringing forward the covenantal promise to Abraham to be the head of a great nation and through him to bring

blessing to the entire world. It provided the curse under which Jesus died to secure Abraham's promise (Gal. 3:10). The Mosaic covenant, specifically the law, which cannot be separated from it, is the public evidence that convicts the world of sin—the Jews had the law and knew the law but could not keep it, and their failure to do so revealed their hearts, which were no better or worse than all other human hearts. All people, therefore, are shown to be guilty through the Jews' experience with the law. If they could not keep what they knew, what chance does the rest of the world, living apart from the law that reveals God and what he desires of humanity, have of finding righteousness before God, which was never to be found through the law in the first place? None (cf. Rom. 1:18–3:20).

The Mosaic covenant was a shadow of what was to come, a shadow of a heavenly reality that became incarnate in Jesus (Heb. 8:5; 10:1–10). It pointed to something greater; when that something greater came, there was no more pointing to do. Paul and the writer to the Hebrews make two things clear about that covenant, which lead to a final implication. First, the old covenant was never meant to save in and of itself, nor could it (Gal. 3:19–22; Heb. 10:1–4, 11). Second, its time as a covenant has passed (Gal. 3:23–29; Heb. 8:13). The devastating implication for anyone wishing to be right before God on the basis of the covenant law is that if no one could save himself by keeping it when it was in place, the prospects of succeeding on the basis of it now that Jesus has come lie somewhere between impossible and hopeless. When the sun reaches noon, all shadows disappear.

When Jesus appears to Saul on the road to Damascus, all of the structures and values he has lived for and based his existence upon are demolished, not simply to be rebuilt from the rubble but to be built anew, with Jesus of Nazareth as the foundation. Saul sees the physical manifestation of what shines now in the heart of every believer, “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). The light and the voice recall encounters with God in the burning bush, on Mount Sinai, at the tabernacle and the temple, and supremely in the transfigured Jesus, in whom God is now revealed. The work of the old covenant is accomplished.

The “righteous” in the Mosaic covenant were such because they believed God and believed that he keeps his promises. They were old covenant members saved through faith in God. Now that every promise finds its “Yes” in Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20), the days of fulfillment have come, and faithfulness to God must be demonstrated through faith in Jesus. Paul had to walk away from his false understanding of the ways in which the temple, the priesthood, and the Mosaic stipulations served as ways of relating to God during a time of promise. This is nothing short of conversion—no other term captures the reality.

Acts 9:4–6 briefly describes what Jesus says to Saul. Saul discovers that the object of his hatred—Jesus—is the very one revealed in God's glory before him. Jesus' words are to the point, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” and all that Luke tells us is that Jesus commands Paul to get up and go to Damascus. The encounter with Jesus leaves Paul blinded, and when he gets to Damascus he fasts for three days, whether from devotion or from being awestruck (vv. 8–9)—Paul

has been stunned by his encounter, for in a matter of seconds the rabid persecutor of the church has been left blind, with his life turned upside down.

9:10–19a *The Road to Damascus: Ananias Ministers to Saul.* Luke describes Ananias as a disciple, a believer in Jesus. In these verses Ananias undergoes a veritable Samuel-like experience with God. God calls him by name, and Ananias replies, “Here I am, Lord” (v. 10; cf. 1 Sam. 3:4). God calls the enemy of the church his “chosen instrument” and says that Paul will suffer for the sake of his name (9:15). The one speaking to Ananias is Jesus (v. 17). Here in this brief encounter, and in just a few words, the text points to the divinity of Jesus as he takes on the role and manner of God, speaking personally to one of his people.

We can forgive Ananias for being a little incredulous and not immediately excited when he hears about Saul. His doubt is such that he even questions God. But we should sympathize with Ananias, and we should also recognize that God does not rebuke him but rather tells him again to go see Saul and fills him in on some of the plans he has for Paul. We should also learn from Ananias the lesson of obeying God, loving our neighbor, blessing those who curse us, and praying for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:7–9, 43–47; 22:34–40; Rom. 12:14–21).

In Acts 9:15 Luke includes a summary from the Lord concerning Paul’s future life. He will be a witness for Jesus to the whole world, that is, before the Gentiles, royalty, and those in high office (“kings”), and also to his own people, the Jews, the “children of Israel.” All of the aspects of this witness are recorded in Acts, and though Paul is thought of as the apostle to the Gentiles (and calls himself as much in Rom. 11:13), his ministry in Acts is not limited to Gentiles.

Saul is immediately baptized after he is physically restored; faith in Jesus is not described but is implicit in the narrative. Luke does not say that the Spirit fills Saul, only that Jesus sends Ananias for that purpose and to heal him. Saul is healed and then baptized; surely the implication is that he also receives the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 7:40). In the conversion of Saul, belief and baptism are tied together, as in the aftermath of the early speeches in Acts, and the reception of the Spirit is implied.

One more sign of conversion is present in the text. Although Saul’s eyes are opened after he loses his sight (Acts 9:8), they are covered by some sort of scalelike substance (v. 18). The Greek word *lepis* is unusual in the NT, but outside the NT it appears in reference to husks, shells, and fish scales. It is also possible that the word is used as a metaphor for spiritual blindness. When Paul recovers his sight, something “like scales” falls from his eyes. Unbelief covers our spiritual eyes like scales cover fish. When we believe, our spiritual blindness is healed and we can see. It is as if our eyes had been covered in scales.

9:19b–25 *Saul Goes to Jerusalem: Saul in Damascus.* It does not take long for Saul to get his ministry started. He goes straight to the synagogues and proclaims Jesus as the Son of God (v. 20). His educational background and training are brought to bear in the service of the kingdom as he “confounded” the Jews of Damascus, “proving that Jesus was the Christ” (v. 22). He overwhelms them with his arguments from

Scripture. The word “Scripture” is not used here, as it is when Luke tells of Paul’s going to the synagogue in Thessalonica, for example, explaining and proving the crucifixion of Jesus Christ from the Scriptures (17:1–3). But it would be hard to assume any other basis for Paul’s “proving,” given that one chapter ago Philip used Scripture to do just that. Likewise, Peter’s sermons were based on Scriptures that show God’s sovereign will at work in and through Jesus. Using Scripture this way becomes Paul’s standard practice in Acts. Further, Paul’s letters are chock-full of OT references to support what he teaches about Jesus and how believers ought to live. Even though Paul will learn far more about Jesus from the Scripture, presumably spending three years in preparation in Arabia, from the beginning his confidence is based on Scripture. Effective evangelism strategies are important, but our confidence must rest not on our plans or skills but ultimately only on Scripture.

The early Christians are not the only ones surprised by Saul’s conversion—so are the Jews. Luke reports that Jews in the synagogues are “amazed” at how, seemingly overnight, their champion against the Jesus followers has become one of them (9:21). After several days of putting up with Saul’s preaching, they have had enough. And so they come up with a familiar plan: they seek to kill Paul, just as they killed Jesus and Stephen. They even involve Gentile authorities (2 Cor. 11:32), just as the Sanhedrin involved Pilate and the Romans against Jesus. But, in spite of their best efforts, Saul escapes.

The apostle Paul reacts variously to threats of persecution throughout his life. Here he escapes; at another time he invokes his Roman citizenship to avoid further beating (Acts 22:25), then later appeals to Caesar, which saves him from death in Jerusalem (25:11) but ensures that he is kept under arrest and transferred to Rome. At no point does Paul seek out persecution. He does not shrink from persecution, but it is not his goal, nor is it the Lord’s. The Lord plans for Paul to be his witness, and fulfilling that role will certainly include suffering and persecution. Suffering is a means, not an end in itself. Reading the narrative in light of the end—as good Bible readers must do—we know that ultimately Paul escapes those seeking his life in Damascus because God has plans for him to travel all the way to Rome.⁴⁸

9:26–30 *Saul Goes to Jerusalem: Saul in Jerusalem.* Although on the surface there might appear to be a seamless flow from Saul’s escape at Damascus to his visit to Jerusalem, there is actually a three-year gap between these two events. God keeps Saul under wraps, as it were, for a fairly long period after his conversion. The timeline is at times difficult to follow, and readers ought to reference Galatians in order to put these verses in chronological context. It is from Galatians 1:17 that we learn of the three-year gap between Saul’s conversion and this visit to Jerusalem, which the apostle relates in Galatians 1:18–19. Paul’s account of meeting only Peter and James also fits with Luke’s account in Acts 9:27.

⁴⁸ There is benefit to reading Scripture as first-time readers, especially because it can revitalize our wonder and surprise in God’s work in Christ and, more importantly, cause us to rethink our conclusions, but for interpretation, teaching, and preaching, we should allow the end of the story to shed light on earlier texts. This principle can and should be applied throughout the Bible.

Saul intends to meet the disciples in Jerusalem, but they fear him. This provides a picture of the negative impact his persecution caused—he has been out of commission for three years, but when he comes to Jerusalem the believers have not forgotten him. It is Barnabas, the encourager (4:36), who brings Paul and the apostles together and relates Paul’s conversion story and his subsequent ministry in Damascus (9:27). This is enough to win the apostles over, and whatever lingering doubts remain are put to rest by Paul’s preaching in Jerusalem and his disputes with the Hellenistic Jews (vv. 28–29).

The Hellenists mentioned here are much the same in background as the Hellenist believers from whom the seven servants were chosen (6:1–6), including Stephen and Philip. Their closer counterparts in the narrative of Acts, however, are the Cyrenian, Alexandrian, and Cilician Jews who sought to argue with Stephen but were no match for him. Thus Paul’s opponents here could have been some of the same Hellenistic Jews who dragged Stephen out to be killed, meaning that the last time some of these people saw Paul, he was looking after their cloaks while they took part in murdering Stephen. Then he cheered them on; now he takes them on, presumably from the Scriptures and undoubtedly over Jesus as Messiah. Their reaction to Paul certainly matches their reaction against Stephen, as Luke reports that they decide to kill Paul (9:29).

Once more the offense of the gospel is met with the threat of death, and once more Paul escapes. Disciples take him to Caesarea, and from there he sets off for his hometown of Tarsus, in Cilicia. Once in Tarsus he spends the next eight years ministering in Cilicia and Syria, where he will stay until Barnabas comes looking for him (11:25). With this, Luke’s introduction of Saul of Tarsus comes to an end.

9:31 *Saul Goes to Jerusalem: The Church Grows.* Luke records another summary statement at the end of a dramatic movement in the life of the early Christian community, a statement that serves as a pivot back to Peter and the others as the gospel spreads up the Mediterranean coast. Most importantly, Luke alludes to Jesus’ plan for the disciples (1:8). The church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria is growing and enjoying a time of peace. This is the first mention of the kingdom’s impact to the north, in Galilee, though it is not surprising, given the presence of believers as far north as Damascus and surrounding areas. As grand as Luke’s story is, there is a lot more going on that he does not include. Believers are present in many places, with no account of how they got there beyond the fact that the disciples scattered and went out preaching the gospel immediately after Stephen’s death.

Luke includes all believers in the singular “church.” The singular is used in the NT for house churches but also for the collective body of believers. The KJV has “churches,” but earlier and better NT manuscripts have the singular, and those are followed in the ESV, NIV, NLT, and NASB. Here the term refers to what we call the “church universal,” that is, all believers worldwide.

“Walking in the fear of the Lord” refers to living with an awareness of God’s greatness and power. As in the rest of the Bible, the term “fear” is common in Acts

(2:43; 5:5, 11; 10:2; 13:26; 16:29; 19:17). Walking in the fear of God means living with the knowledge that the God who loves us and gave his Son for us is also the creator and judge of the world. As Proverbs says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). Some readers shy away from such language, thinking it inappropriate to the new covenant, but the God of the Bible is worthy of fear in any era (cf. Heb. 12:29). Jesus is “gentle and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29), but he is also the ruling and reigning king of the universe, pictured in John’s vision with a sword coming from his mouth, a symbol for judgment (Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21). He is on our side, and whoever opposes us opposes him.

Luke associates walking in this “fear” with living “in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.” The early years of the church are tumultuous, often dangerous, sometimes life-threatening, but through the power of the Spirit the believers have assurance and confidence. What Luke describes as “fear” and “comfort” is a healthy Christian life—made healthy not by circumstances but by God, regardless of the circumstances. In this condition the church continues to grow and make good on Jesus’ promise.

Response

Most of us agree that God can save anyone; no one is out of his reach. If pushed, however, we can all think of people for whom salvation seems far more unlikely than it does for others. This is true on a personal level and also regarding those whom we have never met, such as terrorists and powerbrokers in regimes that single out Christians for persecution and murder. Such is certainly something like what the early Christians thought of Paul. It probably did not cross their minds that he would be saved. And when he was saved, most people were not convinced when they heard about it. But his conversion is proof positive that God can save anyone.

The fact that Paul does not limit his ministry in Acts to Gentiles challenges us as believers, who too often, especially when serving in some ministry capacity, pigeonhole ourselves into one role and thus, either by mistake or purposely, ignore other opportunities for ministry around us. I have a friend who spent several years consumed with preparing to go to a city with a particularly dense Muslim population surrounded by a predominantly Hindu majority. He is one of the only workers among millions of Muslims in the city—it is enough to keep him busy. What strikes me when I am around him is how much I learn about his interactions and relationships with Hindus even in the midst of spending several hours every day with Muslim converts and unbelievers. Another example is Jim Elliot, the missionary speared to death by the very Huaorani tribesmen he spent years trying to reach. Elliot was sure of his calling to go overseas, but it took quite a few years for this to happen. In the meantime, he did not sit around waiting to start his work in Ecuador but traveled around the United States, preaching and evangelizing.

Sometimes following Jesus means following him to death—as it meant finally for Paul. When to stand and when to escape can be decided only in the moment.

It is impossible to devise plans for every situation that might arise, but there is one plan for persecution we can adopt from Paul and the Christians in Acts: they never stopped speaking in the name of Jesus just to avoid persecution. Paul never escaped by fading into the background in silence. We may avoid persecution if we can, but we must never avoid it by silence, regardless of what might happen next.

ACTS 9:32–11:30

³²Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. ³³There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. ³⁴And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose. ³⁵And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

³⁶Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas.¹ She was full of good works and acts of charity. ³⁷In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ³⁸Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, “Please come to us without delay.” ³⁹So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics² and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. ⁴⁰But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴²And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

10 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ²a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³About the ninth hour of the day³ he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” ⁴And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.” ⁷When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour⁴ to pray. ¹⁰And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹and saw the heavens opened and something

like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹²In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air.

¹³And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” ¹⁴But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” ¹⁵And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” ¹⁶This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

¹⁷Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon’s house, stood at the gate ¹⁸and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, ⁵for I have sent them.” ²¹And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” ²²And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.” ²³So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” ²⁷And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. ²⁸And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

³⁰And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, ⁶and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing ³¹and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³²Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ ³³So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

³⁴So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by

God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

⁴⁴While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

11 Now the apostles and the brothers⁷ who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party⁸ criticized him, saying, ³“You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” ⁴But Peter began and explained it to them in order: ⁵“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. ⁶Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. ⁷And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ ¹⁰This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. ¹²And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ ¹⁵As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” ¹⁸When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

¹⁹Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists⁹ also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²²The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, ²⁴for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). ²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers¹⁰ living in Judea. ³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

¹ The Aramaic name *Tabitha* and the Greek name *Dorcas* both mean *gazelle* ² Greek *chiton*, a long garment worn under the cloak next to the skin ³ That is, 3 P.M. ⁴ That is, noon ⁵ Or *accompany them, making no distinction* ⁶ That is, 3 P.M. ⁷ Or *brothers and sisters* ⁸ Or *Jerusalem, those of the circumcision* ⁹ Or *Greeks* (that is, Greek-speaking non-Jews) ¹⁰ Or *brothers and sisters*

Section Overview: The Gospel Goes North

This passage is one of the most significant narratives in Acts—indeed, in the whole Bible. It reveals a major step forward in the progress of God’s revelation and his plan for redeeming the world. Not surprisingly, this is the longest single narrative in Acts. An angel appears to a Roman soldier named Cornelius while he is praying and instructs him to send for Peter. Meanwhile, as he also is praying, Peter receives a vision so dramatic, so world-changing, that it must be repeated two more times for Peter finally to accept the message that one of the last, most deep-seated vestiges of the old covenant has come to an end. With the vision fresh in his mind, Peter arrives in Caesarea, and Cornelius informs him of the angel’s visit. Peter preaches the gospel, ending by alluding to Jeremiah 31:34 and declaring “that everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43). The shocking revelation is that this “everyone” includes Gentiles. Not long from this point, however, the inclusion of the Gentiles will spark a major debate in the early church.

It does not take long for this news to reach Judea. The initial response recorded by Luke is from the “circumcision party” (11:2), which meets Peter with criticism because he has not only gone to the Gentiles but also has eaten meals with them. Peter retells the whole story, from his vision to the Spirit falling on Cornelius and other Gentile believers. With that, everyone recognizes that God has welcomed the Gentiles. This conclusion, however, is far from the last word on the issue. The inclusion of the Gentiles is one of the major themes in the rest of Acts and is reflected in many of Paul’s letters as well, including Galatians, Philippians, and Romans.

This section of Acts also shifts the action north, to Antioch. Although Jerusalem remains a central place in the narrative, the new base of operations, the place from which Paul launches his three missionary journeys, is Antioch.

Section Outline

- I.F. The Gospel Goes North (9:32–11:30)
 - 1. Aeneas and Dorcas (9:32–43)
 - 2. Cornelius the God-Fearer (10:1–11:18)
 - a. Cornelius’s Vision (10:1–8)
 - b. Peter’s Vision (10:9–16)

- c. Peter Travels to Cornelius (10:17–33)
 - d. Peter Preaches the Gospel (10:34–43)
 - e. The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (10:44–48)
 - f. Peter's Report (11:1–18)
3. The Gentile Church in Antioch (11:19–30)

Comment

9:32–43 *Aeneas and Dorcas*. Sandwiched between two of the most dramatic passages in Acts—Paul's conversion and Peter's vision on the rooftop—these verses often do not receive the attention they deserve. In this passage Luke transitions back to Peter, with a link to verse 31, as “among them all” in verse 32 refers to the church in “Judea and Galilee and Samaria” (v. 31). Peter goes “here and there” visiting the believers. Although Paul is the most well known for doing so, Peter also travels around to visit believers, presumably doing what we would call “discipleship training.” Throughout Acts we see the apostles and their coworkers making great efforts to visit and spend time with new converts. The apostles do not put off discipleship until later or simply leave the converts to go it alone while the apostles go share their story and plant churches. The early believers no doubt take it upon themselves to make disciples, but, unlike in some mission paradigms today, it is not an either/or proposition, *either* providing the converts training in the gospel *or* teaching them to evangelize. It is abundantly clear from the Epistles, particularly 1–2 Timothy and Titus, that the apostles see teaching and equipping believers as a first priority.

In his travels Peter comes to Lydda, a village standing a little under 25 miles (40 km) northwest of Jerusalem. Here he finds a man named Aeneas, who has been bedridden for eight years. In a manner reminiscent of Jesus' healings, Peter simply says, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed” (v. 34), and the result is immediate. The command “make your bed” is akin to Jesus' telling the man lowered down through the roof, “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home” (Luke 5:24; cf. Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:11). Peter is the instrument of the healing, but Jesus is the source. As Peter says, “Jesus Christ heals you.”

The next scene is another example of an event that is descriptive rather than prescriptive. There is no promise in Scripture that believers will be empowered to raise the dead. Like the Aeneas narrative, the raising of Tabitha (Dorcas) calls to mind narratives from the Gospels, such as those of Jesus bringing a synagogue official's daughter back to life (Mark 5:41), raising the son of a widow from Nain (Luke 7:14), and, especially, raising Lazarus (John 11:43–44). Disciples from Joppa, about 11 miles (18 km) from Lydda, come seeking Peter because a believer named Tabitha (“Dorcas” in Greek) has recently died (Acts 9:36–38). Apparently they believe Peter can raise her from the dead, urging him to come quickly.

Luke notes that Tabitha “was full of good works and acts of charity” (v. 36), and it is obvious she is loved, as evidenced by the group of widows mourning her death (v. 39). It is possible that Tabitha was a widow herself, and even more probable that

these widows have been the benefactors of her charity. Widows, particularly in those days, struggled to get by and often had no personal means of income, instead relying on family and friends. These widows have the clothing Tabitha made and are showing the pieces as a memorial to her work—this clothing is likely related to the “good works and acts of charity” mentioned in verse 36, as she probably provided for people with what she was able to create with her hands.

Peter’s actions are direct and to the point. There is no question in the text as to what will happen next. He sends the mourners out, kneels down, prays, and speaks, “Tabitha, arise”—and she gets up (v. 40). The news of her raising spreads, and as a result “many believed in the Lord” (v. 42). These events on the Mediterranean coast also serve as a bridge to a major turning point in Acts and in the dawning of the new covenant. After raising Tabitha, Peter stays on in the house of Simon the tanner. There he will have an experience that will change the course of the church forever.

Response

Often in our desire and quest for spiritual gifts we focus on ourselves—not unlike the way in which Simon Magus sought power for himself (8:19). But we must ask ourselves, “Why do I want these gifts?” Desiring such gifts is not wrong, but our motive must be love and service to others, not personal gain or recognition. Without love, the exercise of such gifts is nothing but noise (cf. 1 Corinthians 13). Our gifts are not properly “ours.” They do not begin and end with us but are in a sense on loan. We are stewards of the gifts God gives us, but the gifts are his and his alone. He gives and can take away. This is true in regard to “spiritual” gifts and also to the various gifts God gives us to pursue our callings, such as preaching, teaching, parenting, working with numbers or machinery, making music, or whatever else. The gifts are for service and witness, always. Even the healing of Aeneas by the apostle Peter is not merely an exercise in showing the Spirit’s power but, like so many instances in Acts, leads to conversions. People see and hear what has happened to Aeneas and as a result come to faith in Jesus (Acts 9:35).

It is easy to overlook most people at work or at church or at school. It is also easy to rate the significance of others in terms of who is most likely to be the subject of a biography or who has the most potential to contribute to our lives in some way. In the kingdom, however, Tabitha means as much to the King as does Paul or Peter. Faithful Christians, working to make ends meet, maintaining hope amid the grind of daily life, witnessing to the power of Jesus in their works and words, are every bit as important to God as the best-known preacher on earth. Most of God’s people are simply believers dealing with all sorts of hidden and unhidden illnesses, temptations, and personal struggles, and to many their faith seems imperceptible at times—even to themselves. Yet God knows them as well as he knows anyone else, without distinction or partiality. One of Luke’s themes that stretches from his Gospel through Acts is God’s care and concern for society’s outsiders. Whether in regard to a young mother and her family, women in general, shepherds, Jews living outside the Mosaic covenant, tax collectors, lepers, or

Samaritans, Luke shows clearly that Jesus did not come to spend time with the most important people in society, the people who had the most to offer, or those who were most like him. Yes, Luke writes about miraculous works done through the Spirit, but these are works done to (and through) everyday people. Peter is not on a big stage, standing near the temple, or walking the streets of Jerusalem; he makes the trip to look after a believer in relative obscurity and certainly out of the limelight. We can learn from both Tabitha and Peter.

In God's providence, this one woman, known to her friends for her love and kindness, becomes the means through which people believe in Jesus. Her passive witness, as the object of the Spirit's unlimited power, is really no different than our own witnessing. She was dead and raised, and her story became a means of faith for others. We were dead in our trespasses and sin but raised to life in Jesus (Eph. 2:1–10), and our witness points to his work in our own lives. Our stories are probably not as dramatic as hers, but they are no less about the gracious work of God in bringing people to faith in Jesus.

10:1–8 *Cornelius the God-Fearer: Cornelius's Vision.* As a centurion, Cornelius commands one hundred men of the Italian Cohort, a unit of six hundred men—or more, in some cases. Luke describes him as one who “feared God” (v. 2). The men he sends to Peter describe him as “an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation” (v. 22). A “God-fearer” was a Gentile who followed the Jewish religion but was not a proselyte or convert. He prayed and gave alms according to Jewish custom but was not circumcised. *God-fearer* is a descriptive rather than technical term; God-fearers did not constitute a specified social group, as did the Pharisees or Sadducees. Although Cornelius is close to Judaism, he is not a Jew. He likely attends a synagogue, but if he went to Jerusalem he would not be allowed to enter past the court of Gentiles—the outer area where Jesus drove out the money-changers. Luke notes that Cornelius's whole household shares his piety. Typically, “household” refers not only to immediate family but also to whatever extended family might live in the house, and to servants as well.

The “ninth hour” is approximately 3:00 p.m., a time designated in Jewish tradition as one of prescribed prayer. This occasion for prayer turns out to be something quite different. When the angel appears to him in a vision, Cornelius is, understandably, terrified. Angels are awe-inspiring heavenly beings who speak for God. When people see them, the usual reaction is fear and, often, falling to the ground (see, e.g., Isa. 6:1–7; Ezek. 1:4–28; Dan. 8:17–18; 10:9–15).

The angel tells Cornelius that his prayers and almsgiving “have ascended as a memorial before God” (Acts 10:4). This is not an example of God helping those who help themselves, meeting someone halfway, or acting because he recognizes good works and identifies Cornelius as a good candidate for the kingdom. The term “memorial” is connected to sacrifices in the OT: the priests would burn a part of the grain offering “as its memorial portion on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD” (Lev. 2:2). “Pleasing aroma” is repeated numerous

times in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers⁴⁹ to signify when the Lord recognizes and accepts a sacrifice. That Cornelius's prayers and alms are a "memorial" points to the reality that God is interested not primarily in grain—or sheep and cattle for that matter—but in the heart of the one who brings the sacrifice. An Israelite could bring sacrifices all day long, but if the worshiper was not faithful to the Lord, then his sacrifices would mean nothing (Jer. 6:20). True sacrifice is "a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart" (Ps. 51:17). This Gentile soldier is closer to God than were all of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem who offered sacrifices, kept traditions, and killed the Messiah. It is fitting that the true nature of acceptable sacrifice to God is tied to the end of the Mosaic food laws and to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God. Cornelius's prayers and alms, however, do not save him. God directs him to Peter for that.

10:9–16 *Cornelius the God-Fearer: Peter's Vision.* The scene shifts to Peter, who is staying at the house of Simon the tanner (9:43). This in itself is worth noticing because Simon is a Jew, but as a tanner (one who prepares animal hides for use) he would frequently be in a state of uncleanness under the law due to his contact with dead animals. Again Luke highlights prayer, noting how Peter goes up to the roof at midday (the sixth hour) to pray. Whatever we make of dreams and visions from God, we should note that both visions in this chapter occur when people are already praying.

It is around lunchtime, and Peter becomes hungry. What happens next turns the tide in the coming of the kingdom. Luke describes how Peter falls "into a trance" and "something like" a sheet appears from heaven and comes down to earth (10:10–11). In the sheet are animals of all sorts, including reptiles and birds. Next, Peter hears a command: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat" (v. 13). Peter refuses, explaining that in his life he has never eaten anything forbidden by the Mosaic law—centuries of understanding of what it means to be faithful to God and his covenant are on the line. The vision is repeated two more times.

Even though Peter has been taught personally by Jesus, has received the Spirit, has powerfully preached the gospel, and has performed miraculous signs in the name of Jesus, taking this next step in the kingdom challenges him to the core of his being. To be Jewish meant to follow strictly the code of what to eat and what to avoid. An entire chapter of Leviticus spells these things out in detail (Leviticus 11). It has not occurred to Peter that following Jesus would mean a new way of looking at virtually everything he holds dear. As a boy, Peter would have heard the OT story of the exodus, sung the Psalms, and attended synagogue constantly. Only food authorized by the law has ever touched his lips. Now the same God who set those rules tells him to eat everything.

The reason for the reversal amounts to a radical change in the way God relates to his people. The old ways served their purpose, but everything they pointed

⁴⁹ See Ex. 29:18, 25, 41; Lev. 1:9; 2:2, 9, 12; 3:5, 16; 4:31; 6:15, 21; 8:21, 28; 17:6; 23:13, 18; Num. 15:3, 7, 10, 13, 14, 24; 18:17; 28:2, 6, 8, 13, 24, 27; 29:2, 6, 8, 13, 36.

to has been fulfilled. It is not as though God is speaking out of both sides of his mouth when he tells Peter, a Jew, “What God has made clean, do not call common” (Acts 10:15). God has not changed his mind, nor has he come up with a plan B. His unified plan included a time when God’s people would eat only certain foods, offer sacrifices, and be exclusively marked by circumcision, but that part of the plan has come to an end. Some things have to be cleared out of the way so that the one people of God, unified by faith in Jesus, can fellowship together. This new reality is difficult for Peter and will prove to be a major sticking point in much of the rest of Acts and in many of the NT Epistles. There will be recriminations, long speeches, pleas, a major council, riots, false accusations, and general confusion over what is revealed in Acts 10.

10:17–33 *Cornelius the God-Fearer: Peter Travels to Cornelius.* After the vision, Peter does not know exactly what he has seen or what it means, but he will soon discover that God is not really concerned with food, which is just the tip of a much bigger iceberg. The timing of the vision matches the arrival of the men sent by Cornelius (v. 17). Peter is still on the roof, attempting to ascertain what has just happened, when the Spirit himself tells him that three men are looking for him and that he is to leave the roof and depart with them as soon as possible. For the second time in the chapter, Luke relates Cornelius’s vision as the men describe it to Peter.

When they leave the next day for the 30-mile (48-km) trip to Caesarea, some of the Jewish believers from Joppa go with them—which will prove to be important for the sake of having witnesses to what is about to happen. Cornelius’s response when he sees Peter is evidence of the respect and high regard afforded the apostles. But, as respected as they are, the apostles are not objects of worship. Peter tells Cornelius to get up because he is a man, just like Cornelius (v. 26). To be clear, Cornelius does not worship Peter as though he mistakes him for God; the act is a sign of reverence. There is always, however, a thin line between reverence and idolatry. Respect and appreciation for well-known leaders is entirely appropriate; googly-eyed fawning is something else altogether. Peter lifts Cornelius up and speaks to him face to face, man to man. There is no place for inaccessible, aloof leaders among Christians; it violates completely the teaching of Jesus that servants are the greatest in the kingdom—a message directed to the disciples, with Jesus himself as the prime example (Luke 22:25–27; cf. Matt. 20:25–28; Mark 10:42–45).

In speaking to Cornelius, it does not take long for Peter to understand his vision. It is important to grasp the weight of what happens in this text; nothing will ever be the same after this point. Boundaries and walls are torn down, enemies reconciled, and the way to God opened as the ancient promise to Abraham reaches the nations for the first time at this moment in Caesarea. There will be fits and starts and serious obstacles, but there is never any doubt in Acts or the rest of the NT about what must follow this event.

Peter tells them what they already know: he is breaking the law, or at least contemporary interpretations of it, by entering the house. Whether “unlawful”

(Acts 10:28) refers to the law itself or to tradition is beside the point. God has just showed him that the ceremonial law is no longer functioning now that the kingdom of Jesus is here. What matters is the conjunction “but” (v. 28). “Yes,” Peter says in effect, “you know what it means for me to be here in regard to Jewish purity, *but* God has declared all of that obsolete, a thing of the past. Its time has come to an end.” The food issue is secondary; the primary issue is people. In the vision, Peter heard, “What God has made clean, do not call common” (v. 15), and he interprets what that means: “God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean” (v. 28). God and people are the subjects here, not food. The food laws were never ultimately about food itself but about faithfulness to God. They were a covenant expression of holiness, living a life wholly devoted to God at every level, including diet. The eclipse of these laws is the end of a certain expression of devotion and faithfulness. Of course, the food laws were always meant to be about God and neighbor, but that idea was generally lost from the golden calf incident onward.

Luke includes Cornelius’s vision for the third time in verses 30–33, this time as Cornelius relates it to his Jewish guests.⁵⁰ Perhaps this serves as a kind of Christian apology for the apostolic view of the Mosaic law and the inclusion of the Gentiles. But whether or not it is intended as an apology, the repetition makes at least two things clear. First, by now it is unmistakable that all of this has taken place through the providence and plan of God. It is God himself who has directed Cornelius to Peter. Even the short version told to the men who come for Peter makes mention of the angelic source of the vision. Second, the other element mentioned all three times is Cornelius’s piety. This does not underscore Cornelius’s good works but rather highlights God’s acceptance of a Gentile. His alms and prayers matter to God even though he is clearly outside the Mosaic covenant. The Gentile Cornelius demonstrates what kind of memorial God desires and accepts.

If one begins with the point that God accepts Gentiles, it should be crystal clear that their acceptance in the church is beyond doubt. If God calls them clean, they are clean. As Peter says later, “Who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (11:17). The next section supports this understanding, and how far God’s acceptance of the Gentiles goes will be revealed in a few verses. The last thing we hear from Cornelius is a statement of confidence and trust. He and those with him recognize that God is present with Peter and that he is there to bring them God’s word—“all that you have been commanded by the Lord” (10:33). God has prepared them for hearing the gospel.

10:34–43 *Cornelius the God-Fearer: Peter Preaches the Gospel.* Peter expands his interpretation of the vision, saying that he understands now “that God shows no partiality” to anyone, regardless of ethnic or cultural background (v. 34); “nation” refers primarily not to lines on a modern map but to sociolinguistic groups (v. 35). Thus “every nation” refers to every group of people on earth. Their racial pedigree

⁵⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, 498.

does not matter; what counts is living in fear of God and doing what pleases him. These are what mark the people whom God accepts, not food or ethnicity. Verse 35 strikes the same note as the testimony about Cornelius: God accepts everyone who “fears him and does what is right” (cf. vv. 2, 4, 22, 31). As before, this does not introduce the idea of salvation by works or some sort of mix of works and grace but rather highlights the fact that God welcomes all people in the gospel. This is not a systematic comment about the basis of salvation at large, and the word “accept” should not be pressed to mean more than it does in this particular context. Cornelius was not saved before Peter arrived (11:14). The idea is simply that God welcomes all people “on the same basis as the Jews.”⁵¹ Neither is there a hint of pluralism, as though Peter implies that even apart from Christ God accepts anyone who “does what is right.” After all, Peter will end the sermon by declaring that forgiveness of sins comes through faith in Jesus (10:43).

Peter begins to preach the gospel, and he includes all the major components of early Christian proclamation. Right from the beginning, however, Luke includes an aside in Peter’s sermon, “he is Lord of all” (v. 36), which comes on the heels of the introduction of the gospel as “the word that [God] sent to Israel.” This is subtle, but we should note a healthy bit of contextualization of the message. Nothing is changed or compromised, but for this presentation of the gospel to the Gentiles, Jesus’ universal lordship gains special notice. Although the idea is present in the earlier sermons, here for the Gentiles it is explicit.

Peter’s sermon is a summary of the life and ministry of Jesus. The audience is already familiar with what happened not long before, as the news about Jesus has already traveled everywhere in Judea and beyond. Did Peter say more than this? It is possible, but as in the earlier sermons, whatever else may have been said is beside the point for Luke’s readers. Peter’s recounting of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is bracketed by the apostolic ministry of the gospel (vv. 36, 43), with a familiar emphasis on the eyewitness testimony of the apostles and their commission to preach.

Luke includes a brilliantly compressed account of Jesus’ life constructed around key points: Jesus’ baptism and anointing, his ministry witnessed by the disciples, his crucifixion, and his resurrection, which was also witnessed by the disciples. The climax of the sermon is a note of judgment: Jesus commanded the apostles “to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge” (v. 42). This command is not part of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20), nor is it mentioned before this point in Acts. It is possible that Jesus issued this command during his forty days with the disciples before the ascension, but the exact timing of the original command is not the issue. The more important issue concerns the reason Peter mentions it here. The Gentile context is key.

Peter has just finished recounting how those in Jerusalem “put [Christ] to death by hanging him on a tree” (Acts 10:39). Peter and Stephen have previously laid this at the feet of their Jerusalem audiences, condemning them for the death

⁵¹ Peterson, *Acts*, 335.

of Jesus. At Pentecost and later, outside the temple, this note of judgment led to repentance for those who believed by driving them to the gospel. At Cornelius's house, Peter cannot make the same direct, personal application of guilt in connection to the crucifixion, so the message of judgment is expanded to proclaim Jesus as the appointed "judge of the living and the dead" (v. 42), not merely of those who crucified him. The next verse holds out the prophetic hope "that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (v. 43). Verse 42 provides judgment, while verse 43 provides the good news. There is also an implication of guilt in the offer of forgiveness: why offer forgiveness if there is no guilt?

Support for this interpretation comes from Paul's sermon at the Areopagus in chapter 17. Paul tells his philosopher audience that God will no longer overlook their ignorance but now "commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (17:30–31). Although neither audience (in chs. 10 and 17) is personally guilty of the crucifixion in the sense of being present at the time, these Gentiles are nevertheless guilty before God and in need of repentance. The principle of Romans 3:19–20 is at work again: whatever guilt the Jews have incurred before God exposes the guilt of the world. The world is under God's condemnation, and Jesus is the way of repentance and forgiveness to all, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. The apostolic proclamation announces judgment, but, like all preaching, it cannot describe the entire biblical picture in detail. The larger biblical worldview, however, undergirds and provides for the proclamation.

10:44–48 *Cornelius the God-Fearer: The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit.* Now comes the turning point. These verses constitute a sort of Pentecost for the Gentiles. While Peter preaches, the Holy Spirit "[falls] on all who heard the word" (v. 44). The Greek word for "fall on," *epipiptō*, is different than that used in 2:4 (*pimplēmi*, "fill") but amounts to the same thing. The difference certainly does not imply that the Gentiles receive the Spirit in some sort of different or lesser way; in both instances the reception of the Spirit is confirmed by the speaking of tongues (10:46; cf. 2:4). The Jewish believers with Peter are "amazed" when they see the Gentiles receiving the Spirit. It is hard to imagine the shock they must feel. The Holy Spirit enters in dramatic fashion—and upon uncircumcised Gentiles, no less. Peter's previous remark, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality" (10:34), has been proven beyond a shadow of doubt. There is no denying it, for the Gentiles begin to speak in tongues, just as the believers did at Pentecost.

This is not necessarily only the speaking in other languages. Unlike at Pentecost, the place is seemingly not filled with people who speak other languages and dialects (cf. 19:6). Some interpreters believe that "tongues" always refers to human languages, although that cannot be proven by this particular text; instead it must be inferred by the parallel to Acts 2. The hermeneutical principle of Scripture inter-

preting Scripture, of clear texts interpreting difficult texts, is a sound method of interpretation. Applied here it also follows the “hermeneutical circle” of moving outward in Scripture in an ever-increasing circle (some prefer “spiral”) of context. The “circle,” however, turns in both directions. Some interpret Paul’s reference in 1 Corinthians 13:1 to “the tongues of men and of angels” (cf. 1 Cor. 14:5, 13) as a reference to heavenly, spiritual language, while others understand him to be speaking hyperbolically in verses 1–3.

There is a great deal of disagreement among Bible-believing Christians on this issue, so a dose of humility is in order when making a case. It is difficult to see the significance of Cornelius and the others bursting out in Hebrew, Latin, Syriac, or whatever other language, although it could be a sign of the gospel’s going to the whole world. Some kind of spiritual, heavenly utterance may be hard to accept, but our experience cannot be the final guide. The best way to read “tongues” here alongside the faith of the Gentiles is as including ecstatic, Spirit-given speech that comes upon these believers as undeniable evidence that the Gentiles have indeed received the Spirit just as Jewish believers have.

The issue of tongues can cause us to miss that the Gentiles are “extolling God” (Acts 10:46). In fulfillment of the prophets, Gentiles are worshiping and praising the one true God. One of the key eschatological signs of the day of the Lord is fulfilled in Cornelius’s house this day. The ingathering of a faithful remnant of Jews is foretold alongside the inclusion of the nations, and the fulfillment of that promise begins to unfold in this text.

Peter understands what the next step must be: the Gentiles must be baptized. The early church did not separate believing and being baptized. The decision to baptize is clearly because the people have received the Holy Spirit, just as the Jewish believers had (v. 47). The command to baptize “in the name of Jesus” (v. 48) is not at odds with the command to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). In baptism, Cornelius identifies specifically with Jesus. The “name of Jesus” does not exclude the Father or the Spirit, for the shared triune nature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit falls under the single “name” of Jesus, since his nature and name cannot be separated. In addition, “name of Jesus” is a favorite of Luke’s, appearing eighteen times in Acts. Jesus is the source of healing, power over evil spirits, and forgiveness, all of which take place in his name. Jesus is the Messiah, and the true people of God, whether Jew or Gentile, are saved and united only through him.

As for *who* is baptized, Luke notes that the Spirit “fell on all who heard the word” (Acts 10:44); he has already mentioned how “many persons gathered” when Peter went into the house (v. 27) and how Cornelius and all his household (family and servants) “feared God” (v. 2). The household, those gathered when Peter came in, may have included children when the Spirit fell on all in the room. The reception of the Spirit is clearly linked to believing in Jesus—that being the last thing recorded before the Spirit falls on the hearers. Whatever the ages of those baptized, they are the ones who have believed and received the Spirit, which are

the two clear prerequisites for baptism here. There is no conclusive evidence that this baptism includes infants; Luke does not say one way or another.

Response

Cornelius's encounter with the angel of the Lord is not the typical way God chooses to communicate with mankind. This is a unique situation, a turning point in salvation history. However, observations about this encounter can be applied today. Cornelius receives what can legitimately be called "special revelation," but this revelation is not for salvation itself but points Cornelius to the person who can show him the way. In our day, stories abound of people receiving dreams or visions from God, particularly in areas lacking Christian witness. From a distance it is difficult to sort out legitimate from counterfeit stories, but that such events occur is well documented.⁵² Some Christians dismiss such stories out of hand because they represent extrabiblical revelation. But such stories are similar to Cornelius's experience and are in that sense quite biblical. It is better to say that personal visions and dreams are not typical—nor are they typical in the biblical narrative, for that matter. Instances of the Lord or an angel of the Lord meeting and speaking with people typically involve the main character of a narrative (e.g., Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, the OT prophets, Joseph, Mary, Peter, Paul). Most believers mentioned in the Bible do not receive special revelation but relate to God only by faith.

In this respect, things have not changed from the very beginning until now. One of the hallmarks of legitimate dreams and visions today is that they direct the recipient to go somewhere and find a certain person or to receive a man or woman coming to their village or region. The majority of accounts deemed legitimate are not about people coming to faith in Jesus through a dream but about people being directed to someone who tells them about Jesus, just as in Cornelius's vision (cf. 11:14). Thus these experiences do not constitute special revelation. Generally speaking, Cornelius's experience is unusual both in the Bible and anytime since.

What is required for baptism? In many churches, this question is considered alongside church membership. The answer includes belief that Jesus is Lord and that in him the repentant can find forgiveness of sins—in other words, belief in the gospel. At Cornelius's house, Peter witnessed visible evidence, a clear manifestation of the Spirit's presence, that led the apostle to conclude that these Gentiles should be baptized, just like believing Jews. But there is little evidence in church history that what happened at Pentecost, in Samaria, and at Cornelius's home is what typically occurs when people believe. Public profession of Jesus, along with a personal interview confirming said profession, should be interpreted as repentance and a true work of the Spirit. If someone can credibly confess that she knows her sin and guilt before God, has repented for forgiveness of sin through the death of Jesus, and submits to him as Lord, then she should be baptized.

⁵² George H. Martin, "The God Who Reveals Mysteries: Dreams and World Evangelization," *SBJT* 8/1 (Spring 2004): 60–72.

Local churches must decide how to handle confessions of faith of children and in special cases, but we must be extremely careful not to withhold baptism based on anything unrelated to faith in Jesus. Regardless of a person's background, former actions, behavior, or lifestyle, if he confesses Christ he should be baptized. We must guard against external matters, or issues of personal and cultural discomfort, becoming barriers for recognizing the work of the Spirit. And, regardless of false conversions—and, sadly, we all know of too many—we must not allow our (sometimes) well-placed concerns designed to protect the church to become harmful barriers by which we justify the rejection of sincere new believers in Jesus. If there is no reason to doubt a person's sincerity, yet based on “wisdom” and experience we set arbitrary walls, we are like the circumcision party, which made unrealistic and sinful demands of the Gentiles. Our responsibility for the one confessing Christ is greater than our responsibility to any tradition.

For preachers, teachers, and evangelists, the gospel presentation in Peter's sermon at Cornelius's house provides a framework for teaching the Bible and theology and sharing the gospel. First, John the Baptist serves as a gateway to the ancient story, leading to the incarnation of Christ. As John is the last of the messianic prophets, we can begin with him and work our way back to the OT prophets, to Moses, and to the law these prophets taught and applied. This places us in the trajectory of promise and fulfillment—in which John firmly stands. Second, Jesus' anointing by the Spirit can lead to a discussion of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise and how through Christ's death and resurrection the Spirit is now at work in believers, or more generally to theological discussion concerning the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit. Moreover, Peter's mention of anointing, right on the heels of speaking of John the Baptist, connects to Jesus' own baptism, which opens the door to discussing the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity. Third, a presentation of the story in the Gospels can be built on the summary statement of Jesus' life and ministry: “He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (10:38).

11:1–18 *Cornelius the God-Fearer: Peter's Report.* It should come as no surprise that many Jews do not take easily to the radical change that, almost overnight, turns centuries of tradition on its head. In rather sudden fashion Gentiles believe in Jesus, receive the Spirit, and undergo baptism. This would be hard enough to process, but it immediately goes a step further: the early Christian leaders, Jews one and all, enter Gentile houses and eat meals with them. Some, like Peter, see (though it takes a thrice-repeated vision) that if Gentiles have the Spirit, then God accepts them fully, so to resist the Gentiles is to resist God. Peter himself will have his own moment of struggle over this, at least until Paul sets him straight (see Galatians 2).⁵³ If the early Christians refuse the Gentile believers, they will be no different than the Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus. Their rejection of Jesus was a rejection of God,

⁵³ For Peter, it is social pressure that causes his momentary lapse of theological reason when men from James come to Antioch. For Paul, the reasons do not matter—one aligns with Jesus either fully or not at all.

just like their fathers' rejection of the prophets. This fact never changes: one cannot be faithful to God and simultaneously refuse to accept what he is doing in the world.

"Brothers" in verse 1 certainly includes women as well (cf. ESV mg.). The news spreads, Luke notes, "throughout Judea"; together with "the apostles and the brothers," this is a way of stating that everyone hears of the inclusion of the Gentiles. Verse 2 introduces a group, the "circumcision party," that will play a large, and often infamous, role in the NT. These are Jewish believers who have issues with the Gentile believers. They are Jews with a high regard for the ongoing place of the ceremonial law, including the laws regarding food and circumcision. They are willing to welcome the Gentiles only if these new believers undergo circumcision. Until then they are critical of Peter not only for going to the Gentiles ("uncircumcised men") but also for eating with them (v. 3). From their viewpoint, to eat with someone, to share table fellowship, is to accept and identify with them, not to mention to come into contact with unclean things and people restricted by the Mosaic law. These Gentiles were born unclean and remain so. Their food is unclean, as are their houses and basically everything about them.

We cannot be sure how many of the "circumcision party" ever came around to a full understanding of the reality of the new covenant. In this text Peter does convince his audience. Later, at the Jerusalem council, those with objections and reservations will also gladly accept the decision addressing how to handle Gentile believers. That this is an ongoing issue in the NT, seen in Galatians and Philippians, for instance, indicates that some never warm to the idea. There is no way to tell whether any of the Judaizers who trouble Paul and his churches are among those who hear Peter's report or attend the Jerusalem council in chapter 15. The Judaizing ethos does, however, clearly leave something of a legacy. Early church history includes Jewish groups that identify with James, reject Paul, and form their own sort of Christianity. The heretical Ebionites are a later example of such a sect. It seems likely they are an offshoot of the circumcision party, or at least share a similar ethos, but we cannot connect all the dots. Later trajectories of trends seen in the NT are not an indication of the exact beliefs of those in the NT era, even when some clear connections are evident. The fact of the matter is that all heresy begins in orthodoxy. Every falsehood is rooted in some truth—otherwise no one would believe it.

Verses 5–15 include the second narrating of Peter's rooftop vision and its interpretation. Like the repetition of Cornelius's story, this second mention emphasizes the importance of the event. This version is combined with Peter's recounting of the delegation's coming from Cornelius and a short, direct summary of the coming of the Spirit on the Gentiles. Then Peter's reflection and interpretation follow in verses 16–17. Besides reinforcing the importance of the event in the biblical history of salvation, as well as serving to record accurately what actually happened, this repetition also lets readers in on a private meeting between Peter and the circumcision party, whose objections are made clear. The basics of their view will prove to be important information for understanding later events in Acts

and the rest of the NT—later objections and hesitations will be read against the background of this encounter.

The events at Cornelius's house are now public knowledge, and there are witnesses to testify to it. It is easy to miss that right in the middle of the retelling we learn that "some of the brothers from Joppa" (10:23) means precisely "six brothers" (11:12): there are abundant witnesses to support Peter's story. This fits with the importance of the eyewitness theme in Acts.

Peter adds, without qualification, that he went because the Spirit told him to do so (v. 12). Coming from Peter, whose work and ministry is by now well-attested and witnessed, the claim that "the Spirit told me" carries a great deal of weight.

In addition to the explicit number of men who came from Joppa, another piece of the Cornelius story is not revealed until now. When the angel appeared to Cornelius, he told him to summon Peter from Joppa, but he also told Cornelius that Peter would "declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (v. 14). This locates the time of Cornelius's salvation as the time at which Peter was preaching and the Spirit fell. Cornelius the God-fearer was saved when he believed in Jesus and received the Spirit. This means that his vision was preparatory, directing him to the fulfillment of what he looked for in Judaism. Some might take Cornelius as already believing before he met Peter, similar to how OT saints were saved by believing in God's promises, fulfilled ultimately in Jesus. Cornelius, however, lived not in a time of looking forward but in a time after the fulfillment of the promise, or at least in a transitional time. Whatever we make of Cornelius's status before Peter came to Caesarea, the phrase "by which you will be saved" is transparent enough. It is true that God appeared to Cornelius and had favor on him. But that does not have to—and does not—mean that he was already saved. The text does not refer to the means "by which you will be directed to take up the path of Jesus," for instance. He was told how he would be saved. There is no reason to take this differently than what the Philippian jailer means when he asks Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" (16:30), or what Peter meant when he said, "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (4:12).

Peter's foundation for understanding what happened in Caesarea is his own experience, shared by the Jewish believers, of the Holy Spirit. When he reports that "the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning" (11:15), he refers to something tangible, a manifestation confirming the presence of the Spirit. In this case, speaking in tongues is the most likely confirmation. Thus the outward sign acts as a sort of witness to the inner truth of receiving the Spirit. When people see the manifestations of the Spirit, they become witnesses to his presence in the lives of believers. This can apply to lesser, or at least more difficult to measure, signs of the Spirit. Of course, a large-scale spiritual gift such as speaking in tongues can be faked, but it does have the advantage of being rather immediate. Other evidences of the Spirit, such as changed lives, actions, desires, motivations, and the like, often take time to recognize and evaluate.

Peter's interpretation reaches back to the Gospels, in which John the Baptist predicted this very thing. John baptized in water, but the baptism promised from Jesus was the Spirit (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5), which is exactly what the Gentiles receive, just as the Jewish believers did when they "believed in the Lord Jesus Christ" (11:17). Peter's conclusion is simple: If the Gentiles have the Spirit, just like the Jewish believers do, then it is case closed. Again, belief and reception of the Spirit are directly tied together. Even the apostles received the Spirit when they believed in Jesus.

Determining the occasion of that event in the life of the apostles is more difficult. It was not at Pentecost when they believed but evidently at some point after the resurrection. Textually, the best possibility is when Jesus breathes on them, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). The experience of the apostles and first disciples is different than that of the majority of people who believe later in Acts, including the Gentiles. Believing and receiving the Spirit are linked in Acts. The manifestations of the Spirit—e.g., tongues—are different in various contexts. For Peter and the disciples, that particular sign of the Spirit comes at a point after they believe and have the Spirit. For Cornelius and the other Gentiles in Caesarea, however, believing, receiving, and showing all take place at once. This makes sense of what Peter says in verse 16 alongside what he says in verse 17. Receiving and showing are inseparable but not identical.

Verse 17 refers to refusing or preventing (Gk. *kōlysai*, "stand in . . . way") the baptism of the Gentiles. This is the same verb the Ethiopian eunuch uses in asking, "What prevents [*kōlyei*] me from being baptized?" (8:36), and that Peter uses when asking, "Can anyone withhold [*kōlysai*] water for baptizing these people?" after seeing the Spirit fall on the Gentiles at Cornelius's house (10:47). Baptism is an outward sign of membership in the new covenant, the inward sign being the reception of the Spirit (Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36; John 3). Granting baptism to Cornelius and others means recognizing that they believe in Jesus and have received the Spirit. Anyone who receives the Spirit must be allowed to receive baptism.

Peter's retelling hits home with his Jewish audience. They are speechless for some time before glorifying God (Acts 11:18), that is, acknowledging him to be right and speaking the truth about him, who he is, and what he does. These Jews are convinced. There is no reason to suppose these same people waffle later and change their position on the Gentiles—though some could (as Peter does later for a time in Antioch)—but this does help us understand that "circumcision party" does not refer to a carefully organized, delineated group but serves as a blanket term for Jewish believers who want Gentiles to accept Judaism alongside accepting Jesus. Peter's hearers are not the entire "circumcision party" but are part of a larger, generalized group. When we come to the Jerusalem council in chapter 15, we will see other Jewish believers who hold similar views.

We must not miss the church's early unity on this issue. At times, especially in modern scholarship, we allow the disunity experienced over the Jew–Gentile relationship in the new covenant to overshadow the harmony enjoyed by many in the early church, but that is not what the text of Scripture indicates. Without

diminishing the importance and weight of the issue, we must not forget how Luke emphasizes, time and again, the unity of the church. These Jewish believers in Acts 11 rejoice over what has taken place. Those at the Jerusalem council (at least those we hear about) will rejoice at the decisions of that council (as will Gentile believers outside Judea).

The Jewish believers conclude that “God has granted repentance that leads to life” (v. 18). Given the immediate and larger context related to believing, baptism, and receiving and showing the Spirit, as well as the fact that repentance is used early in Acts in the context of salvation (see 2:38), all the evidence points to 10:44–45 as being a description of what we would call “being saved”—that is, the experience of salvation that occurs upon one’s faith in Jesus.

11:19–30 *The Gentile Church in Antioch.* In these verses Luke introduces his readers to the other center of early Christian activity. Luke does not follow a strict order of events but places these events immediately after the narrative of Cornelius. Antioch and Jerusalem are the geographical focal points for the spread of the kingdom throughout the world. The church at Antioch arises in direct connection to the persecution following Stephen’s death. The “men of Cyprus and Cyrene” (v. 20) are Jews living outside of Israel. They come and speak to the “Hellenists,” a flexible word that here refers to Gentiles. Luke used the term earlier to refer to Greek-speaking Jewish believers (6:1) and to unbelieving Greek-speaking Jews (9:29). The conclusion that these Hellenists in chapter 11 are Gentiles is based on the reaction of the Jerusalem church—why send Barnabas to check on the conversion of Greek-speaking Jews? Believers receive word in Jerusalem similar to the way they heard about the conversion of Cornelius (11:1). This situation is also similar to the conversion of the Samaritans—believers hear about it in Jerusalem, and Peter and John go to investigate (8:14). Now they hear of Gentile believers at Antioch, so they send Barnabas to check on things.

Once in Antioch, Barnabas without hesitation rejoices to see the grace of God at work. He sees what is happening and encourages these new believers to stay faithful. Once again, Barnabas’s character is explicitly described; he is “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (11:24). The apostles called him Barnabas, “son of encouragement” (4:36; his name was Joseph), and it is clear that he has risen to prominence in leadership. His rise is related to his character and sets up the coming narrative of the first missionary journey taken by Barnabas and Paul.

Barnabas is well aware of Saul/Paul, who was last mentioned in Luke’s narrative at 9:30, and Barnabas knows where to find him. It was Barnabas who introduced Paul to the apostles and told them his story (9:27), and now he goes to the man he saw preach so boldly in Jerusalem and engage Jewish unbelievers—so much so that they wanted to kill him (9:28–29). A partnership that will last years begins here. Together they stay for one year, teaching in Antioch.

Whether “first called Christians” (11:26) refers to self-reference or to a label from others is disputed. The more likely conclusion is that the name is first given

by others to distinguish the believers from competing groups.⁵⁴ In Jewish settings these believers are considered a sect, a splinter Jewish group (24:5, 14; 28:22), and Gentiles probably view them in relation to Jews. In Antioch, however, Gentiles have joined these Jewish followers of Jesus of Nazareth. They are not Jews, though they socialize with them sometimes, and they have also changed and left their former lifestyles and practices. Such a group needs a new name. And the name sticks.

The chapter ends with a character who will appear again later, a prophet named Agabus (11:28; 21:10–14). Unlike the OT prophets, Agabus comes simply foretelling, by the Spirit, what is going to happen; he includes no call for repentance nor commands a particular behavior in response to his prophecy. He simply foretells a famine coming to Jerusalem. Both the Scriptures and extrabiblical historical accounts confirm that a famine occurred during the reign of Claudius in the mid-first century. The important point for Acts is that Christians in Antioch immediately elect to send help to the Christians in Judea, choosing Paul and Barnabas to deliver the gift. Collecting donations for Jerusalem frames Paul's ministry. It begins here and will bring Paul back to Jerusalem later, when he will bring money collected from the churches planted among the Gentiles during his missionary journeys.

Response

We should seek to understand the struggle the early Christians faced over the Gentile question. Some may say, "If these Jews understood the OT, the inclusion of the Gentiles would not have surprised them." Jesus, after all, made similar observations about the Jews' lack of understanding (e.g., Luke 16:31). But are we so enlightened, so advanced beyond personal and cultural prejudices, so unaffected by things such as traditions, habits, culture, or social pressures, that we never do things for which Jesus would reprimand us and ask in effect, "Don't you know better than that?" What would early believers say about our ideas and behaviors that make no sense after two thousand years of church history? What about the OT saints, who died having only the promise of faith (Hebrews 11)? What would they think of us and our track record so many centuries after the fulfillment they longed for but died without receiving? Are we really all that different from the early Jewish believers who struggled to understand the epic events unfolding before them?

Regardless of how well we grasp things theologically, it is hard to recognize and shake off prejudices, dispositions, and habits. We never have the luxury of assuming we are past all error or misjudgment. Sin is ever present and will be until the Lord returns. We should, therefore, have some patience and understanding for those in error, especially if our aim is to win them over. The goal is not to replace arrogance or complacency with an easygoing acceptance of virtually any error based on a slipshod interpretation of "judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). Neither am I commending a lowest-common-denominator view of the faith. The goal is to go deeper into the story personally, to see ourselves in its various characters, both good and bad, and to allow the Spirit to take the text of

⁵⁴ Peterson, *Acts*, 356.

the Bible and dig down to our core to open up and expose the dark corners and shadows that keep us from being transparent with ourselves and others. The power of story comes from taking in the story—all of it, not just the good parts—and taking part in it. This is how we learn the way in which narrative teaches and the way to read it and interpret it. The problem for some of the early believers was accepting the gospel alone, apart from their own prejudices, expectations, and beliefs. The gospel needs, and accepts, no additions or subtractions—holding to that truth proves to be just as difficult for us as it was for them.

ACTS 12:1–25

12 About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.² He killed James the brother of John with the sword,³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.⁴ And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

⁶ Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his hands.⁸ And the angel said to him, “Dress yourself and put on your sandals.” And he did so. And he said to him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.”⁹ And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.¹⁰ When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him.¹¹ When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.”

¹² When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.¹⁴ Recognizing Peter’s voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.¹⁵ They said to her, “You are out of your mind.” But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, “It is his angel!”¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.

And he said, “Tell these things to James and to the brothers.”¹ Then he departed and went to another place.

¹⁸ Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

²⁰ Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king’s chamberlain,² they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king’s country for food. ²¹ On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.

²² And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!”

²³ Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

²⁴ But the word of God increased and multiplied.

²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from³ Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

¹ Or *brothers and sisters* ² That is, trusted personal attendant ³ Some manuscripts *to*

Section Overview: Persecution in Jerusalem

The dramatic inclusion of the Gentiles in the church is followed by a reminder that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Herod kills James and arrests Peter, with a plan to bring him before the Jews by the end of Passover. His plan means nothing to God, who sends an angel to release Peter from prison. Herod’s arrogance and idolatry does, however, matter to God, and Herod dies horribly in the midst of his man-made glory. The narrative ends with a familiar theme: increased persecution leads to church growth. This short chapter is a turning point in the narrative of Acts, as Luke turns to Paul’s missionary journeys over the next several chapters.

Chapter 12 continues the narrative cycle of growth followed by persecution, which leads to more growth. It also highlights the truth that no one, regardless of worldly power or influence, can stand against the will of God. Finally, Luke continues his trend of including the presence and actions of angels in the unfolding of God’s redemption of his people.

Herod, according to historical sources, died in AD 44. Thus the first twelve chapters of Acts cover at least twelve years. This might surprise readers who are used to thinking of narrative as a blow-by-blow account. But Luke is clearly not concerned to tell the whole story but provides the inspired, essential account and interpretation of the early church.

Section Outline

I.G. Persecution in Jerusalem (12:1–25)

1. The Death of James and Arrest of Peter (12:1–19)

a. The Murder of James (12:1–5)

- b. Peter's Rescue (12:6–11)
- c. Answered Prayers (12:12–19)
- 2. The Death of Herod (12:20–25)

Comment

12:1–5 *The Death of James and Arrest of Peter: The Murder of James.* The apostles are at the center of Luke's persecution narrative. Up to now this has included censure, imprisonment, beatings, and at least one death at the hands of the Jewish authorities. Just as the church will grow in ever-increasing geographical circles radiating from Jerusalem, so too will more persecutors join the fight against the church. This particular Herod is Herod Agrippa I, one of Herod the Great's grandsons. He grew up in Rome and was friends with Caligula (Gaius) and Claudius, both Roman emperors. His territory, much like his grandfather's, stretched from the Dead Sea past Galilee to Caesarea Philippi. To this he added land north of Damascus. Herod Agrippa was a powerful ruler and like all Roman provincial rulers had a personal interest in keeping his region stable. Judea was an imperial territory, which means it was directly under the emperor's purview. This was typical of all hotspots in the Roman Empire. More settled and calmer areas came under the senate's jurisdiction, but the appointed rulers (kings, governors, etc.) in places known for trouble, like Judea, had to answer directly to Caesar.

This reality undoubtedly influenced Pilate's decision to hand Jesus, whom he believed to be innocent, over to the Jews. He sought to appease them and keep the peace. Herod likely knows ahead of time that persecuting the church will make the Jews happy, but he may sense some threat to his own power.⁵⁵ It is likely that a man like Herod has mixed motives for persecuting the church. Whatever his personal motives, it is clear that persecution is building on all levels. Increasingly in Acts, others besides the Jewish leaders are aligning themselves against the church.

Herod "laid violent hands" on believers, even having the apostle James killed. James, brother of John, is the first of the apostles to die for the faith. Jesus predicted, albeit vaguely, the deaths, or at least the suffering, of both James and John: "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized" (Mark 10:39). Only two apostolic deaths are recorded in Scripture, and one of them (Paul) is only implied as imminent. Besides James and John, Jesus also spoke of Peter's death (John 21:18–19) and clearly indicated that some would die for his sake (Luke 21:16). Church tradition includes narratives of the martyrdom of the apostles, and there is little reason to doubt their veracity. Killing the leaders of a movement is the best way to end it. This is one of the main reasons that so many kings, emperors, presidents, and sectarian leaders have been assassinated over the course of human history. In many cases the assassination of leaders has the desired effect, but in others it creates unifying symbols that embolden and strengthen resolve among members of a country or group.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 361.

In the case of the church, persecuting leaders has led overwhelmingly to the second outcome. For instance, Paul says that because of his imprisonment believers preached the Word all the more (Phil. 1:14), because in the church it is the life and promise of Jesus that impels the church to move forward even in the worst instances of persecution. Jesus foretold the possibility of dying for his sake, but he included a promise that only he could make: Christians may be arrested, put on trial, betrayed by family and friends, hated, and even killed, but ultimately they will be delivered (Luke 21:12–19).

Killing James pleases the Jews, so Herod arrests Peter as well. All this takes place at roughly the same time of year at which Jesus' execution took place, which looms in the historical context. The "days of Unleavened Bread" are the seven days after the Passover meal, and the whole period of time is called Passover. It is clear that Herod means to kill Peter, for he plans to bring Peter before the people after Passover. Luke mentions "the people," not just the Jewish leadership, likely deliberately bringing out the similarities with the arrest and trial of Jesus. Just as ruling authorities and the public came together against Jesus, so are they aligned against Peter.⁵⁶ During the seven days after the Passover meal it was illegal (according to Jewish tradition) to put someone to death, and Luke's mention of the time frame implies that Herod means to execute Peter too. Like all Roman prisoners, Peter is under guard to prevent escape. "Four squads of soldiers" may sound extreme but refers simply to one squad (four soldiers) for each night watch of three hours—standard procedure. But neither Herod nor his guards are any match for God.

12:6–11 *The Death of James and Arrest of Peter: Peter's Rescue.* Not only is Peter in jail, he is in chains between two guards, with more guards at the door. The situation is hopeless, as is so often the case in biblical narrative—such as with an old man from Ur past his sell-by date, with a barren wife, who is supposed to be the father of a great nation (Gen. 11:27–30; 12:1–3). The presence and actions of angels is a key theme in Luke and Acts. From an angel's appearing to Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, and Zechariah in Luke's Gospel and angels' telling the disciples to go back to Jerusalem after the ascension to angels' featuring in Stephen's recounting of the Moses narrative, an angel's directing Philip to the Ethiopian, and another's appearing to Cornelius, Luke highlights the role of angels.

Angelic activity sounds strange to us these days, and it has never been commonplace. As much as angels appear in the Bible, there is no instance of someone seeing an angel and acting as though it were an everyday occurrence. We tend to think of angels as round-faced children with wings, carrying bows and arrows or maybe floating here and there with harps and trumpets, but in the Bible angels are powerful, sometimes dreadful beings in the service of God. The typical human reaction in the OT upon seeing angels was to fall facedown, but there seems to be a different character to the encounters between angels and the apostles.⁵⁷ This does

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ I first encountered this observation when reading Peterson, *Acts*.

not make their appearance ordinary, but angels do relate differently to the new covenant people. Is it because their sins are cleansed, forgiven once and for all, by the sacrifice of Jesus? Perhaps the difference is that angels now encounter people accepted fully by God through faith in Jesus the risen King—although this is not something that can be asserted with total confidence.

During the intertestamental period (roughly from the time of Nehemiah to AD 70), interest in angels increased dramatically, especially as centuries passed with no perceptible, direct word from God (see *1 Macc.* 9:27); this is seen in the rise of apocalyptic literature in which angels play a central role as mediators between God and his people. The NT displays an emphasis on the servant role of angels and on their inferiority to Jesus and even to human beings (Hebrews 2) while bearing witness to the continuity between the activity of angels in the OT and the NT. God sends angels to carry out his will and protect and warn his people; beyond that, neither the NT nor the OT goes into much detail concerning angels. There is similarity between first-century interest in angels and that of today, but both eras miss the primary role of angels as mediators and servants of God and the salvation of his people.

The title “angel of the Lord” (v. 7) recalls various occasions in the OT of God’s powerful deliverance of his people. The presence of God in the burning bush is mediated by an angel (Ex. 3:2), and God is present via an angel with his people through the wilderness as well (Ex. 14:19). Later, an angel mediates the giving of the law (Acts 7:38) and fights for Israel when they are hopelessly outnumbered (Ex. 23:20, 23). Defeating a large Canaanite army is just as dramatic as what the angel does in releasing Peter from prison.

Peter supposes that what is happening to him is a vision (Acts 12:9), which speaks to the nature of both angelic visitations and visions. The visions God provides in the NT (to Cornelius, to Peter, to Paul, to John on Patmos) may not be three-dimensional events that fill created space; they are supernatural experiences beyond anything encountered day to day. Such occurrences are nothing short of the intersection of heaven and earth, something external to our relatively small perception of space and time but somehow intermingling with it. Biblical visions do not seem to take place merely in one’s mind, but neither are they subject to the natural laws governing the world in which we live—much like a flaming bush that is not consumed. Such visions, like Peter’s, are divine interventions in time that communicate and activate God’s power on behalf of his people. Such occasions are more common in Acts than at any other point in the Bible outside the exodus narrative—and certainly than at any time since the first century AD.

Each step of Peter’s escape includes a miraculous event: his chains fall off, he passes guards without their waking, and an iron door opens on its own. Nothing can stand in the way of God’s will and purpose. He still has plans for Peter, and neither Herod nor his guards, nor even chains or an iron door, can stand in the way. Once outside, it becomes clear to Peter that his experience has been more than a mere vision.

Verse 11 confirms that Herod has acted not solely on his own but in accord with Jewish unbelievers. This verse also underscores that even the apostle Peter—witness to Jesus’ miracles and resurrection, one who has himself witnessed the outpouring of the Spirit and mass conversions, a leader who has worked miracles himself and already experienced one heavenly vision—does not consider these events commonplace. To us, the narrative can seem mundane from familiarity, but to Peter and Luke this is nothing short of a miraculous intervention by God.

12:12–19 *The Death of James and Arrest of Peter: Answered Prayers.* Upon release from prison, Peter makes his way to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (a man who will appear several more times in the NT; cf. Acts 12:25; 13:5, 13; 15:37, 39; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24; 1 Pet. 5:13). Believers are gathered together, presumably to pray for Peter, when he comes to the door. He knocks, and when Rhoda hears the knock and then Peter’s voice, she is overwhelmed with excitement, so much so that she does not open the door but rather runs back to tell the others. Rhoda cannot believe that Peter could have been released, and thus she acts like someone who cannot believe her own eyes (or at least ears), who has experienced something “too good to be true” and perhaps something a little frightening. Rhoda is not another Thomas, refusing to believe what is happening in front of her. She may be beside herself, but Luke is not highlighting a refusal to believe. The others accuse her of being “out of your mind,” but she is so insistent that another finally concludes that if someone is at the door, it must be Peter’s “angel” (Acts 12:15). What is meant by “his angel” is not exactly clear; the statement has led some to see this as evidence of “guardian” angels (see also Matt. 18:10, possibly providing some basis for that conclusion). It is also worth noting that though they have been praying, these gathered believers can hardly believe their prayers have been answered.⁵⁸

Peter continues knocking until someone finally opens the door. By now readers are used to the reaction: “they saw him and were amazed” (Acts 12:16). Peter settles them down and retells the story, and also asks them to let “James and . . . the brothers” know before he wisely moves on to another place (v. 17). James, the brother of Jesus, is now prominent in the Jerusalem church (cf. ch. 15; Galatians 1–2). Peter, on the other hand, moves on. The original Twelve, and also Paul, are not primarily attached to a single place, and it does not take long even for Peter not to be the central character in Jerusalem any longer. The apostles move about preaching the gospel and making disciples (per Jesus’ brief), while others, such as James, take on local leadership roles. Peter and John eventually find themselves far from Jerusalem, writing letters to people living far from Jerusalem (1–2 Peter; 1–3 John; Revelation).

Understandably, there is “no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter” (Acts 12:18). It is not hard to imagine the pit in their stomachs when it dawns on them that he really is gone. Now they have to answer to Herod, which goes very much the way they probably expect. Herod looks for Peter

⁵⁸ Ibid., 363.

but cannot find him, and so he executes the guards. After this debacle, Herod goes north to put some space between himself and Judea. But the God of Judea is in Caesarea, too.

12:20–25 *The Death of Herod.* This chapter began with Herod out to kill the apostles. He succeeded in murdering one, but the other got away. Now he has regrouped and returned to the business of being king. He is dealing with the people of Tyre and Sidon, who have come to appease his anger and plead for food. Herod sets himself up as a divine provider: he is on his throne dressed in robes, and when he speaks the people shout, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” (v. 22). Rulers in Herod’s days did not shy away from receiving divine status; the Roman emperors at times demanded it. It is doubtful the crowd believes he is a god, but they are savvy enough to know exactly how to curry favor with Herod. The Jewish historian Josephus mentions this very event, noting that Herod’s robes were shiny and silver and caught the light of the sun (*Antiquities* 19.343–350). Luke gets to the point: the angel of the Lord reveals that there is no other god, striking Herod dead because “he did not give God the glory” (Acts 12:23; cf. 10:25–26).

Herod, the supposed king of the Jews, dies a death as ignoble as that of many wicked kings of the OT, such as Ahab (1 Kings 22:34–38). The event is swift and decisive: Herod keels over immediately upon receiving praise from the people. Luke states that the king “was eaten by worms and breathed his last” (Acts 12:23). It is possible that the worms were the means of his death,⁵⁹ but this is not the only way to understand Luke’s meaning. The Greek word *exepsyxen* (“breathed his last”) is immediately preceded by a participle and a predicate (*genomenos skōlēkobrōtos*, “being eaten by worms”). The ESV’s “and” (“and breathed his last”) is a defensible interpretative addition, but when “and” is removed, the verse could be understood as stating, in effect, “He died, and like all mortals, even kings, he became food for worms.” In spite of his godlike persona, the powerful Herod ends up like all other people, dead and buried.⁶⁰ There are no distinctions in the grave.

Herod’s death is a pivot in Luke’s narrative. Herod is partly Jewish, though mostly Gentile, and the puppet ruler of Israel. In spite of whatever the Jewish leaders, including priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, and Herod, sought to do, “the word of God increased and multiplied” (v. 24). With that summary Luke brings the first half of his narrative to a close. The word of God had spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and has also made its first inroads to the Gentiles. For the next several chapters, Luke turns the action to “the end of the earth” (1:8). The story of Jerusalem is not over, but it is no longer the focus.

The unlikeliest apostle of all will now take center stage. Saul has moved in and out of the narrative since the death of Stephen, but now that he and Barnabas have finished bringing aid to Jerusalem (12:25), God’s story of reaching the world

⁵⁹ Schnabel notes that the phrase is a “Greek expression that is not a medical, technical term” but that does describe a “particular illness” (*Acts*, 543).

⁶⁰ See the commentary on the death of Judas for a similar discussion. I am not suggesting that modern translations ought to switch to paraphrasing this verse, but translations *are* interpretations that themselves must be interpreted.

through the “apostle to the Gentiles” begins in earnest. Taking John Mark, Saul and Barnabas head back to Antioch, the staging point for the first major Christian mission.

Response

Despite Peter’s miraculous escape, there is no reason to think that God will always deliver his people from danger in this life. Only a few verses prior to Peter’s escape, Luke reports the death of James—not to mention the stoning of Stephen or Paul’s later imprisonment. We know from the rest of the NT that Peter’s work is not yet done, but this is hindsight based on the continuing story of the Bible. In the moment, even in the early apostolic moment, there is no way to know exactly when and where God will miraculously intervene to save his people. One thing we can be sure of, however, is that whether he delivers in the moment or allows suffering, his promise never changes—the promise ultimately to save all of his people from the trials and sufferings of this present age.

The believers whom Peter meets were praying for him at the time of his escape. Luke is not building an invariable cause-effect model of prayer, but he is clearly connecting the two events. The message is not that if we pray in big enough numbers and with fervency, God will hear our prayers and answer according to our desires. God *always* hears and answers prayer. We say, “I had an answer to prayer,” usually only when God answers prayer in the way we desire. There is nothing wrong with saying such things, but we should remember that a different answer or no apparent answer is still an answer when God is the recipient of our prayers (consider Paul in 2 Corinthians 12). We do not know the content of these saints’ prayers, but Rhoda’s reaction, as well as that of the entire group, implies that they are not expecting Peter to appear. Or perhaps they are merely overwhelmed by God’s answer—such a human reaction to his action is not hard to imagine.⁶¹ Whatever the case, in the midst of increasing persecution, they meet to pray. One apostle is dead, Peter is in prison, Herod is on the warpath, and their fellow Jews are set against them. Amid fear and anxiety, they meet together to pray. They clearly believe that God is trustworthy and that they can depend on him even in such dire straits.

After meeting these fellow believers, Peter moves on—to where, Luke does not say. This is wise: a king is killing apostles, Peter has just escaped from a Roman jail, and now the authorities will be hunting him. He does not hang around to see what might happen; he leaves. Peter knows that God is on his side (12:11), but he still does what wisdom dictates and keeps moving. It would have been presumptuous, and spectacularly unwise, to stay right where the authorities would first look for him, since God clearly wanted him out of jail. There is a time and place for everything, even for going to (or staying in) prison when it might otherwise be avoided (e.g., Paul’s appeal to Caesar), but there is no prearranged formula.

⁶¹ Peterson, *Acts*, 364.

Biblical wisdom is knowing what to do in any situation and then actually doing it. Knowing without acting, or acting against knowledge, is foolishness. The apostles leave us models of how to act wisely, whatever the action wisdom guides us to take.

Herod's death reminds us that the kingdom of God cannot, and will not, be defeated, even if it looks as if all of the odds are stacked against it. God's kingdom is, after all, possessed now only by faith. This is an important insight for brothers and sisters who face real, violent, and powerful persecution. How often in Acts does it appear as if the whole enterprise is doomed to failure? Sharp disagreements, persecution, death, riots, prisons, divisions, and shipwrecks mark the followers of the Way. In the moment—where we live most of the time—these things are threatening and frightening, even deadly. They are all, however, powerless to stop the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Herod's death is also a stark reminder that no amount of power, fame, or money can ward off the final enemy, death. The grave truly does come for us all; death is the ultimate equalizer. We know this, but how often do we look at our possessions, status, accomplishments, or family and view them as though our security and identity rest in those things? One does not even need to be rich or powerful to suffer from this temptation: any little bit of self-assurance will do. If we trust in anything, if we boast in anything besides Christ and him crucified, we stand on sinking sand.

ACTS 13:1–15:35

13 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger,¹ Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

⁴So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. ⁶When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ⁷He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?" ¹¹And now, behold, the hand of the Lord

is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

¹³ Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, ¹⁴ but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” ¹⁶ So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:

“Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. ¹⁷ The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. ¹⁸ And for about forty years he put up with² them in the wilderness. ¹⁹ And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. ²⁰ All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. ²¹ Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²² And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ ²³ Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. ²⁴ Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵ And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’

²⁶ “Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. ²⁷ For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. ²⁸ And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹ And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰ But God raised him from the dead, ³¹ and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. ³² And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, ³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

“‘You are my Son,
today I have begotten you.’

³⁴ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

“‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

³⁵ Therefore he says also in another psalm,

“‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’

³⁶For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, ³⁷but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. ³⁸Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹and by him everyone who believes is freed³ from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

⁴¹“Look, you scoffers,
be astounded and perish;
for I am doing a work in your days,
a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.’”

⁴²As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. ⁴³And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵But when the Jews⁴ saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

“‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

⁴⁸And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. ⁵⁰But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ⁵¹But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. ⁵²And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

14 Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. ²But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.⁵ ³So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, ⁶they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, ⁷and there they continued to preach the gospel.

⁸Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. ⁹He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well,⁶ ¹⁰said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up

and began walking. ¹¹ And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ¹⁵ “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” ¹⁸ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. ²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. ²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

²⁴ Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵ And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, ²⁶ and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. ²⁷ And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they remained no little time with the disciples.

15 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. ³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.⁷ ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”

⁶ The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ⁷ And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke

on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

¹² And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

¹⁶ “After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen;
I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will restore it,
¹⁷ that the remnant⁸ of mankind may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,
says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸known from of old.’

¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

²² Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, ²³ with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers⁹ who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you¹⁰ with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, ²⁵ it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

³⁰ So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. ³² And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. ³³ And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them.¹¹ ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

¹ *Niger* is a Latin word meaning *black*, or *dark* ² Some manuscripts *he carried* (compare Deuteronomy 1:31)

³ Greek *justified*; twice in this verse ⁴ Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verse 50 ⁵ Or *brothers and sisters* ⁶ Or *be saved* ⁷ Or *brothers and sisters*; also verse 22 ⁸ Or *rest* ⁹ Or *brothers and sisters*; also verses 32, 33, 36 ¹⁰ Some manuscripts *some persons from us have troubled you* ¹¹ Some manuscripts insert verse 34: *But it seemed good to Silas to remain there*

Section Overview: The Mission to the Gentiles, Part 1

Most of the rest of Acts—except for the lengthy legal trials in Judea—takes place in the northern Mediterranean, where Europe and Asia meet—what we today call Turkey and the Balkans. Although the ministry of such familiar characters as Peter, James, and John is far from over, new figures such as Simeon, Lucius, Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos are introduced. The church is moving onward, but even though cultures, names, and places change, the content of the message does not. These new realities, however, require adjustments, and growing up is never easy. The rumblings of the first half of Acts over what to do about the Gentiles will require a conference to sort out.

Acts 13–14 narrates Paul’s first missionary journey, describing his travels as far as Galatia. Paul begins in Antioch and travels to Cyprus and Perga before continuing on to the Galatian towns of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe and then backtracking to Perga and Antioch. The pattern of evangelism followed by discipleship, seen in the first part of Acts, is now well established. In fact, Paul will return to these same places in his next journey. His strategy is to begin in the synagogues of each new town, which, ironically, will be a means of setting the Gentile mission in motion. Although they gain many Jewish converts, Paul and Barnabas meet great resistance to the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. Chapter 13 ends with Paul and Barnabas enacting the apostolic sign of condemnation taught by Jesus several years before (13:51). John Mark does not last long on the trip and leaves for Jerusalem by the time the group reaches Perga (13:13). This is the beginning of an issue that will eventually lead to Paul and Barnabas going their separate ways (15:36–40).

Acts 13 contains Paul’s first extended sermon in Acts, a brilliant piece of biblical-theological exposition on the topics of king and kingdom. This section ends (15:1–35) with believers gathered in Jerusalem to settle questions concerning the Gentiles. The apostles are agreed: Gentiles are full members of the people of God and need not undergo circumcision. The assembly at Jerusalem also issues instructions for the Gentiles concerning their new lives as Christians: they must make a clean break with their past idolatry and be aware of and sensitive to the Jews living around them.

Section Outline

- II. To the Ends of the Earth (13:1–28:31)
 - A. The Mission to the Gentiles, Part 1 (13:1–15:35)
 - 1. Paul and Barnabas’s Missionary Journey (13:1–52)
 - a. Antioch Launches the Mission (13:1–3)
 - b. Barnabas Takes the Lead in Cyprus (13:4–12)
 - c. Paul Takes the Lead in Pisidia (13:13–52)
 - 2. Iconium, Lystra, and Back to Antioch (14:1–28)
 - a. Ministry in Iconium (14:1–7)
 - b. Ministry in Lystra (14:8–18)

- c. The Stoning of Paul (14:19–23)
- d. Back to Antioch (14:24–28)
- 3. The Jerusalem Council (15:1–35)
 - a. Troubling of the Gentiles (15:1–5)
 - b. Salvation Has Come to the Gentiles (15:6–21)
 - c. The Council's Letter to Gentile Christians (15:22–35)

Comment

13:1–3 *Paul and Barnabas's Missionary Journey: Antioch Launches the Mission.* Chapter 13 begins by naming the leaders of the church at Antioch. During the past few years, the church at Antioch has grown and now has its own prophets and teachers. Besides Saul and Barnabas, Luke lists two men from northern Africa, Simeon and Lucius, as well as Manaen, whom he calls a *syntrophos* of Herod—something like “foster brother.” This is a diverse group, but one absolutely united in the Spirit. Despite the difficulty we have already seen with Gentiles’ entering the church, this largely Gentile church displays a remarkable degree of unity and sense of purpose.

The group is worshiping and fasting when the Spirit instructs them to send Saul and Barnabas on a mission: “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (v. 2). Although only the leaders are named, it seems likely that the entire congregation are the ones worshiping and fasting. Luke makes no distinction between Jesus’ choosing and commissioning Saul and the Spirit’s doing so; here the Spirit has “called” him for a particular work, whereas Jesus in chapter 9 describes Saul as “a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles” (9:15). Later Paul will inform a crowd in Jerusalem that Jesus had said to him, “You will be told all that is appointed for you to do” (22:10). Later still, speaking to Herod Agrippa II, Paul recounts Jesus’ words to him after his conversion:

I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (26:16–18)

A word from Jesus and a word from the Spirit carry the same weight. They are one in nature yet two in person—both divine.

Once those in Antioch hear from the Spirit, they again fast and pray, this time for the upcoming journey, just as they had done prior to the Spirit’s word. They also lay their hands on Saul and Barnabas. Mark is present too, but not explicitly named. Laying on of hands is an act of commissioning a person or persons for a particular service. There is no one method prescribed in the OT or the NT. The apostles lay hands on the first servants (6:6), and much later Paul will speak of

elders' laying hands on Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14). Paul also warns Timothy not to lay hands too quickly (1 Tim. 5:22). In the OT, Moses lays hands on Joshua, as directed by God, to commission him for leadership (Num. 27:18).

There is no indication that something, whether power or anything else, is automatically transferred by the laying on of hands. When Paul writes that Timothy's gift was given to him by the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14), it is the "prophecy" of his gifts that is directly connected to the laying on of hands, not the gift itself. At the commissioning of Joshua, God tells Moses to "invest him with some of your authority" (Num. 27:20), but there is no indication that the act itself transfers any authority. Instead the entire event invests Joshua with Moses' authority in the eyes of the people. The laying on of hands is a symbolic, public declaration that someone has been recognized as worthy of some task and has the blessing of God and whoever is involved. In Acts, similar commissioning-type events occur involving fasting and prayer with no mention of the laying on of hands (cf. Acts 14:23), but the primary goal of the laying on of hands is recognition and commissioning for service.

13:4–12 *Paul and Barnabas's Missionary Journey: Barnabas Takes the Lead in Cyprus.* Although Barnabas and Saul are commissioned, Luke again makes the divine direction evident: they are "sent out by the Holy Spirit" (v. 4), reinforcing Luke's constant insistence that the early church grows through the power of the Spirit working through the apostles.

Paul and his colleagues apparently do not spend much time in the port city of Salamis, but Luke does mention their first destination: the synagogues. The Gentile mission does not exclude Jews, neither then nor now. Luke also adds that at this point John Mark is still on board with Saul and Barnabas (v. 5)—a relationship that will prove short-lived.

Verse 9 is where Luke notes his switch from referring to the apostle to the Gentiles as "Saul" to referring to him as "Paul," which is more or less the Roman version of Saul. Moving into the larger world of the Roman Empire, where everyone speaks Greek and many Latin, Saul prefers to be known by his Romanized name for the sake of his message—any obstacle suggested by the name "Saul" is removed.⁶² Paul does not begin to identify himself as a Gentile after his conversion; this is an example of contextualization in ministry. Paul neither changes his name to avoid persecution nor shucks his Jewish background; much less does he become a pioneer of the so-called insider movements of today. Recognizing his situation, Paul adapts in order to suit the preaching of the gospel best without compromising its message. Anything we can do, subtle or overt, that removes any possible obstacle to the gospel or any distracting personal stumbling block should be done for the sake of Christ. By definition, gospel ministry entails plenty of obstacles and distractions; we should seek to minimize the ones we bring along ourselves.

Paul's encounter at Paphos (vv. 6–12) parallels Philip's in Samaria (8:9–13). Like Philip, Paul meets a magician, this one being a "Jewish false prophet named

⁶² Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 375–376.

Bar-Jesus,” also known as Elymas (13:6, 8). Bar-Jesus is “with” Sergius Paulus, meaning that he basically works for the proconsul (v. 7). When Sergius Paulus summons Barnabas and Paul to come speak the word of God, Bar-Jesus opposes them, presumably because he knows that if Sergius follows these Christians, whatever livelihood he earned from Sergius will dry up.

Filled with the Spirit, Paul condemns Elymas: “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?” (v. 10). Here Paul echoes Micah 3:9 and its context, in which false prophets (cf. Acts 13:6) and seers are condemned and judged. In contrast to those who lead Israel astray, the prophet proclaims, “As for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD [cf. Acts 13:9], and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin” (Mic. 3:8). Not only does Paul condemn Bar-Jesus specifically, and dark magic and false prophecy generally, he also provides a model of how to read the OT in the NT, taking into consideration not only the text cited but also its original context.

Paul declares that the Lord is against Elymas, who is blinded immediately. The irony is obvious: the magic seer is blinded by the “hand of the Lord,” a phrase pointing to God’s power at work on behalf of his name and people (Acts 13:11). The display of God’s power has the desired effect, as Sergius Paulus sees what has occurred and believes in the Lord. It is not the sign itself but the teaching confirmed by the sign that elicits belief, “for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (v. 12). This conversion may seem to affirm the cliché “I will believe it when I see it,” but the overt displays of the Spirit through the apostles are provided to establish the church of Jesus in the world. As so often, this text points to the particular descriptive elements in Acts mixed with prescriptive elements. Luke prescribes how Christians should consider and react to evil powers, and how we should rely on the Word of God to do its work, but he also shows dramatic pictures of this unique period of the church. In this narrative a man is converted, but the emphasis is first and foremost not on his experience but on the power of God over all other powers. Given the context of Acts, however, we can safely assume all the elements present in a typical conversion (e.g., faith, repentance, reception of the Spirit) are present for Sergius Paulus as well.

Importantly, the narrative of Bar-Jesus highlights the conversion of a Gentile Roman official; the gospel is penetrating to every level and strata of society. Even prominent, seemingly unreachable public figures are within reach of the Spirit through the Word of the Lord. As with Saul of Tarsus, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that, even though conversion is possible for anyone, it is unlikely for many even if they hear the gospel. But the book of Acts dispels any such reservation concerning the power of the good news of Jesus Christ.

13:13–52 *Paul and Barnabas’s Missionary Journey: Paul Takes the Lead in Pisidia.* Verses 13–14 serve as a transition from Cyprus to Perga, with Luke also mentioning John Mark’s departure. (This will lead later to a split between Paul and Barnabas,

longtime friends and partners, when Barnabas seeks to recruit his cousin back to the ministry; cf. comment on 15:36–41.) Pisidian Antioch was a major Roman colony and home to many Jews. One Sabbath, Paul and Barnabas enter the synagogue, and, after readings from the Law and the Prophets, they are asked if they have a “word of encouragement for the people” (13:15). This recalls Jesus’ experience in Luke 4:16–30, often referred to as Jesus’ inaugural sermon as it is the first event recorded by Luke after Jesus’ temptation. Though this is not the beginning of Paul’s ministry, what takes place is no less dramatic than what happened with Jesus in Nazareth that day.

Reading from the Law and the Prophets was standard synagogue practice, something similar to the lectionary readings common in many churches today. Paul has no shortage of truths to share. His sermon can be divided into three sections: verses 16–25 cover OT material, with verses 23–25 focusing on the fulfillment of the Davidic promises in Jesus; verses 26–37 discuss the ministry and work of Jesus; and verses 38–41 extend application and invitation to Paul’s hearers.

In typical apostolic fashion, Paul begins with the OT. His exposition is brief, with four verses given to the multiple centuries from the exodus to Samuel (vv. 17–20) and two verses to the period from David to Jesus (vv. 22–23). In verses 17–20 Paul highlights OT themes familiar from other sermons recorded in Acts: God’s choice of Israel, his saving act in Egypt, Israel’s disobedience and rebellion (“for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness”; v. 18), and God’s fulfillment of his promise of land. These verses highlight God’s sovereign rule over Israel, from the birth of the nation to its redemption and establishment in the land. If readers know the story (and Paul’s hearers certainly do), then Paul’s approach in verses 21–22 becomes clearer, revealing his brilliance as a reader, interpreter, and expositor of the OT.

Rather than focusing only on God’s choice of David, Paul also mentions Israel’s first king, Saul. The request for a king was a national and spiritual debacle. In demanding a king, the Israelites rejected God’s kingship, wishing instead to have a king on the throne, as did the pagan nations surrounding them. The desire for a king was an obvious choice of sight over faith. Yet, as with so much of Israel’s history, this desire for a king in order to be like the nations was foreseen in Deuteronomy. God knew his people would make this choice, and he even declared that they would have a king—but one he would choose (Deut. 17:15). Deuteronomy then lists the traits required of this ideal king; most importantly, the king must read, copy out, and do all of the statutes of the Mosaic law (Deut. 17:18–19). Such a king and his offspring would continue on the throne perpetually.

This description of the ideal king finds a parallel in Psalm 1. This psalm speaks generally to the “blessed man” and finds universal application, but this is not the core of its message. The psalm’s parallels to Deuteronomy 17:14–20 are undeniable. The law requires the king to “read in [the law] all the days of his life,” and by reading, copying out, and doing the law, the king will “learn to fear the LORD his God” (Deut. 17:19). The king will be devoted to the law, “that his heart may not be

lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel” (Deut. 17:20). Devotion to the law requires devotion to God, doing his will; it is more than simply keeping commands.

Psalm 1 proclaims, “Blessed is the man . . . [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:1–2). The ideal king will prosper on the throne as a result of his devotion to God, and the blessed man who delights in the law will likewise prosper: “He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers” (Ps. 1:3). A royal reading of Psalm 1 is also supported by its placement alongside Psalm 2, a key royal psalm.

The ideal king and blessed royal figure are summed up in only one OT figure, David—and that is precisely to whom Paul goes. It is not just the choosing of David that matters but God’s evaluation of him: “I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will” (Acts 13:22, citing Ps. 89:20 and 1 Sam. 13:14). To do “all my will” is to read, keep, and meditate on God’s law. But David was far from perfect, and his kingdom split only one generation after his death. Thus the complete fulfillment of these themes was not found in him but pushed forward to Christ. Taking the main themes from the first part of his sermon, therefore, Paul develops them in relation to Jesus—especially the themes of kingship and kingdom. Paul does not make general comments about the OT and then haphazardly make a beeline to Jesus. Though expansive, his sermon is quite streamlined, and as such it serves as a model for us.

On the heels of his OT citations regarding David, Paul moves right to Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise to David (Acts 13:23). The underlying text is the promise to David that he would always have a descendant on the throne (2 Sam. 7:12–13). Jesus is the son of David, his offspring, God’s “Savior” of Israel. It may strike us as unusual that Paul then mentions John the Baptist at this point, but we must not miss John’s vital place in the flow of redemptive history. He was a transitional figure, the one who prepared the way of Jesus in accord with the prophecies of Isaiah. John was also the last of the messianic prophets, and with him an old era came to an end.

Roughly four hundred years passed since the close of the OT, with no direct word from God, before John, looking and sounding a lot like Elijah, appeared, proclaiming the coming of the Lord and offering a baptism of repentance in preparation for the great work God was soon to do. This is exactly what the OT prophets did: preach repentance (unlike the prophet Agabus in Acts). They proclaimed how God would act according to his promises (either to bless or to curse), and they preached repentance in the face of these impending acts. Thus John the Baptist was a mouthpiece of the Lord, announcing that the ultimate time of fulfillment was at hand. He was an indispensable part of the story, God’s prophetic witness. As with the wilderness generation and with Samuel and David, John’s role was to point forward to the great one coming after him. Paul’s point is that John was part

of God's keeping his word to Israel: God promised salvation, and he promised one (John) who would announce it when it came.

Addressing his listeners as "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God" (i.e. "God-fearers," like Cornelius), Paul applies the ministry of John the Baptist and preaches for his hearers' conversion. Speaking to Jews in the Diaspora, Paul describes how their fellow Jews in Jerusalem rejected Jesus because they failed to understand the prophets. The message of the gospel is coming to Jews in Pisidian Antioch precisely because in rejecting Jesus, the Jews in Jerusalem fulfilled the words of the very prophets they misunderstood (Acts 13:27, 29). This is similar to Peter's telling the Jerusalem Jews that they acted "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (2:23). There are familiar themes in Paul's message: fulfillment of God's plan, Jesus' innocence, involvement of the Romans (Pilate). Paul also notes how men "took [Jesus] down from the tree and laid him in a tomb" (13:29). The "tree" recalls Paul's word to the Galatians that Jesus died under the curse of the law, for "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). Even though Paul's main point is different here than in Galatians, he nevertheless grounds Jesus' death on the cross in Scripture, further underscoring God's sovereignty in the crucifixion. The idea of God's "definite plan" (Acts 2:23) continues as Paul recounts the resurrection and the eyewitnesses of the risen Christ.

Now Paul brings his listeners hope: "We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus" (13:32–33). Paul then cites Psalm 2:7, connecting God's begetting of Jesus to the resurrection. The discussion concerning Jesus' being "begotten" is complex, but the basic idea here involves God the Father's raising Jesus from the dead, making him the "firstborn of the dead" (Rev. 1:5).

Jesus' sonship cannot be separated from his kingship, as he is the royal son of David who could not be contained by death ("corruption"; Acts 13:34). Paul strings together Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 55:3; and Psalm 16:10 as scriptural support. Each text is taken from a context that asserts God's faithfulness in relation to his promise to David, a promise of an "everlasting covenant" (Isa. 55:3), a promise to "make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (Ps. 2:8), and a promise of eternal life: "At your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). The resurrection is not merely a historical instance of God's keeping his promise; it is his means of salvation. It is through the resurrected Jesus that "forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38–39).

Once again in Acts, salvation is summed up as the forgiveness of sins, which is through belief in Jesus. The word behind "freed" is the same word often translated "justified." Paul's theology of the law, expounded in Romans, Galatians, and Philippians, is founded on the realization that the Mosaic law that brings condemnation was not meant for salvation. This condemning function of the law points mankind to God as their only hope. Although the law has other functions, in terms

of salvation this is its most important role (along with pointing to Christ). The law reveals God and his righteousness, along with the righteousness he desires in his people, but the law does not provide what it demands. The law cannot change the heart; to the contrary, when it confronts the human heart, it reveals the depths of sin. When one is commanded not to steal but then steals anyway, the law shows that the intent to steal was there all along. Does this mean that God gave Israel a law he knew they could not keep? Yes—in order to reveal the hopelessness of humanity apart from him.

Paul is not attempting a detailed discussion of justification such as those he offers in Romans 3:21–5:21 and Galatians 3, and we should avoid seeking to make more of his statement here than the apostle intends. In Acts 13 Paul is focusing on bondage under the curse of the law and the inability of the Israelites to be freed from that curse on the basis of the law. Whatever implications there might be for a larger biblical-theological discussion, it is imperative not to sidestep Paul inadvertently by downplaying the biblical fact that forgiveness of sins is the most common way that the writers of Scripture summarize salvation. This does not make forgiveness the *whole* of salvation, but no other word is used as often in the Bible as shorthand for God's work of redemption through Jesus on behalf of his people. In the context of Acts 13, as Paul highlights the sin of rejecting God in Jesus Christ, in the rejection both of the prophets who told of his coming and of Jesus himself, he makes clear that the only remedy for such rejection is the fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus and the forgiveness found through faith in him. Only belief in Jesus brings freedom from the curse of sin.

Paul brings his sermon to a close with a word of warning (vv. 40–41). His recounting of the Jerusalem Jews' rejection of the Messiah was intended not only to explain what happened to Jesus; it also serves as an object lesson. Just as Jesus came to those Jews in fulfillment of God's promise, so now he comes through the preaching of the gospel (cf. Paul's statement of Jesus' being "portrayed as crucified" "before your eyes" in Gal. 3:1, referring to the proclamation of the gospel). Rejecting Paul's message is no different than rejecting Jesus himself in Jerusalem, as the Jewish leaders did. Paul quotes Habakkuk 1:5, ending on an ominous note of prophecy concerning the failure to believe God's work "in your days . . . even if one tells it to you" (Acts 13:41). Paul has just preached about God's work in Jesus in those days, and now it is his witness in preaching that they must believe. Although we usually think of condemnation as preceding the gospel, here Paul ends on a note of warning. Perhaps he said more, but that means little to us as readers of Acts. This note of warning and prophesied rejection serves an important function, setting up the next scene in the story: another turning point.

Verses 42–43 should be read as the narrative conclusion of Paul's sermon. His teaching has a positive effect on many of his hearers: some want him to come back the next week and go over the whole thing again, and others, both Jews and also Gentile converts to Judaism, follow Paul and Barnabas, who encourage them (the Jews and converts) to "continue in the grace of God" (v. 43). Luke's comments do not

seem to describe conversion, but at the very least these listeners are sympathetic and interested. Luke does not typically speak in veiled language nor make hints when it comes to conversion; that they “followed” the apostles does not assert saving faith. When Paul instructs them to “continue in the grace of God,” he is perhaps encouraging them to continue on to Jesus. Perhaps they believe, but if they do they are in a clear minority of the Jews in Pisidian Antioch.

Verses 44–52 function almost as a narrative version of Paul’s teaching in Romans 10–11:

I ask, did Israel not understand?⁶³ First Moses says,

“I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;
with a foolish nation I will make you angry.”

Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

“I have been found by those who did not seek me;
I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”

But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.” (Rom. 10:19–21)

The reception one week later is not as warm as the first visit, at least not “warm” in the same way. One way or another, “almost the whole city” (Acts 13:44) arrives to hear Barnabas and Paul, whose allusion to and application of Deuteronomy 32:21 and Isaiah 65:1–2 in Romans 10:19–21 is acted out in real life. We can be certain this crowd is largely Gentile, for several reasons. For one, Pisidian Antioch is a Gentile-majority city. In addition, the reaction of the Jews when they see the crowds, and the resultant impact this event has on Paul’s future ministry, strongly suggest that the group described as “almost the whole city” is largely Gentile.

The Jews are “filled with jealousy” when they see all of the people listening to Paul and Barnabas; their preaching of Jesus is clearly the issue, because the Jews “began to contradict” Paul (Acts 13:45). Luke clearly shortens the event, distilling it to its theological core. He does not record Paul’s exact words at this point, only that the Jews are contradicting and “reviling” him. “Reviling” translates a form of the Greek word *blasphēmeō*, from which the English word *blaspheme* derives. The ESV adds the pronoun “him” (absent in the Greek text), making Paul the object of the blasphemy or reviling. While this word can be used in reference to speaking against one’s fellow man, Luke uses this term elsewhere in Acts in relation to God (18:6 is ambiguous, as here; 19:37 is used in reference to a foreign god; 26:11 is clearly used in reference to God), and here his use of the term likely implies that the Jews’ contradicting and rejecting Paul and his message amounts to blasphemy against God.⁶³ Such a reading is supported by the reality, prevalent throughout

⁶³ Peterson, *Acts*, 397; Polhill, *Acts*, 307. Schnabel comments that they do indeed slander Paul, but he notes that it “may have involved the utterance of blasphemies, probably against Jesus, presumably pronouncing the curse of Torah (Deut. 21:22–32) upon Jesus” (*Acts*, 587).

Acts, that to reject Jesus as the Messiah—to reject the apostolic gospel—is to reject God. The Jews do revile and slander Paul, and in doing so they blaspheme. The irony, of course, is that they believe Paul to be the blasphemer. Paul's next words further support this understanding of Luke's meaning.

Paul and Barnabas respond with a devastating condemnation from Scripture. The tide of salvation history has turned, and the long-awaited day—the day of salvation for some and of condemnation for others—has arrived. Because of God's promise to the patriarchs, to Moses, and to David, the gospel came to the Jews first, but now their rejection of that message has reached its full measure. They have no one to blame but themselves and the many generations of God rejecters, and as a result, Paul reveals, “we are turning to the Gentiles” (13:46). This epic declaration is supported by Isaiah 49:6, which promises that a “light for the nations” (cf. “Gentiles”; Acts 13:47) will come and that salvation will be made available to everyone on earth. But the Jews in Pisidian Antioch reject God by rejecting Paul's gospel of Jesus, and they do so openly.

Acts 13:48 highlights God's sovereignty in salvation, a predominant theme throughout Acts. Many Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch are converted to Christ, despite the efforts of the Jews. The gospel spreads as the Word does all that God intends (Isa. 55:11). With no biblical background, no training, no known preparation, the Gentiles hear the gospel and receive it with joy. Luke immediately explains how the preached Word is able to accomplish that which sounds impossible: “As many as were appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

For evangelism and missions, these are some of the greatest words of encouragement in the Bible. Luke does not say that Paul and Barnabas know ahead of time who, if anyone, will believe. He does not say that the knowledge of God's appointing of people to eternal life has any effect on Paul's decision to preach that day. How does anyone know whom God has appointed? There is only one way to know: those appointed come to faith. Knowledge of the identity of the elect lies with God alone and is the guarantee that God's Word will do its work. Those appointed to eternal life are called in only one way: through the witness of the gospel. The Word is the God-appointed means for calling his people. Like the other biblical writers, Luke does not stop to speculate or seek to delve into the depths of what is known eternally only to God.

Luke next provides another summary statement, similar to the others in that it follows a dramatic event in the life of the early church. Amid ongoing persecution from multiple levels of society, Paul and Barnabas are driven out of town by the Jews, but not before the gospel takes root among the Gentiles and begins to spread throughout the area (vv. 49–50). In a symbolic act of judgment taken from Jesus' instructions to his disciples sent out among Israel (Matt. 10:14), Paul and Barnabas shake the dust off their feet as they leave Pisidian Antioch. This is a dramatic action that says in effect, “You have sealed your own judgment, and we are witnesses.” Rather than being overwhelmed by anxiety and fear, the “disciples”—presumably the believers in Antioch—are “filled with joy and with

the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52). The conversion narratives and the experience of the Spirit among the Gentiles fit the pattern established among the Jews in the early chapters. Whether Jew or Gentile, all believers in Jesus are Spirit-filled disciples.

14:1–7 *Iconium, Lystra, and Back to Antioch: Ministry in Iconium.* The events in Iconium, a city in central Galatia, are a kind of microcosm of the apostolic experience of gospel ministry. Multiple conversions are followed by immediate opposition from unbelieving Jews; supernatural signs and wonders accompany and confirm the ministry; the apostles stay on for a time in the midst of increasing hostility; and finally the apostles decide to leave town when they learn of a plan to stone them.

When Paul declared, “We are turning to the Gentiles” (13:46), he did not mean they were abandoning the Jews. After all, Paul will later write, “I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3). Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles, but not to the exclusion of the Jews. His desire for his fellow Jews to embrace their Messiah never wanes, even though they are the source of some of his worst persecution and even though he does not shy away from speaking about their historical unbelief and rejection of God (Rom. 10:5–21; 1 Thess. 2:14–16).

In the Greco-Roman world, as true up to the present day, synagogues functioned as enclaves hosting various social and political activities.⁶⁴ Paul was new to these Galatian cities, and in the ancient world travelers did not have the luxury of smartphones telling them where they could stay, eat, and fill up the tank, nor were hotel chains available. So a synagogue provided a point of entry, a familiar setting in an unfamiliar place, and, of course, an opportunity to share how God had kept his promise to Abraham in Jesus of Nazareth.

Luke records that many Jews and Greeks believed the gospel (Acts 14:1; cf. the language to 13:43). “Greeks” could refer to proselytes and God-fearers, as Paul and Barnabas minister in the synagogue. However, from the specific mention of the “Jewish synagogue” and the separate mention of “Greeks,” as well as the summary nature of the verse, Luke is likely referring to unbelieving Greek residents of Iconium.⁶⁵ Notice that Luke switches to “Gentiles” in verses 2 and 5 when he speaks of opposition. That is not to say that “Greek” is a technical term for Gentile believers or that “Gentile” always refers to unbelievers. The term “Greek” is used here as in Romans 1:16 (“to the Jew first and also to the Greek”): as a simple way of differentiating believers from two different backgrounds.

Immediately, unbelieving Jews instigate trouble and also rile up Gentiles in opposition to Paul and Barnabas. In spite of this, however, the two remain in Iconium, preaching the gospel. In a little while they will pursue different action in the face of persecution. In the meantime, their preaching is accompanied by the witness of the Lord himself. “Word of his grace” (Acts 14:3) refers to the good news of salvation in Jesus, who empowers them to perform “signs and wonders,” which

⁶⁴ Noted in N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 13–28* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 25–26.

⁶⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, 603.

likely include at least healing and perhaps speaking in tongues as well (cf. 2:4). As with Peter and the Jerusalem apostles, the Spirit is present in the preaching of Paul and Barnabas as well.

Some in Iconium side with the Jews against Paul and Barnabas, while others are on their side (14:4), even if they are not necessarily believers—later, in Athens, unbelievers will show interest in the message and invite Paul to come speak again (17:32). Luke refers to Paul and Barnabas as “the apostles.” Even though this term can mean “one who is sent” in a general sense—even Jesus is called an “apostle” in this sense in Hebrews 3:1—the overwhelming use of the word in the NT refers to the original Twelve (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:14; Luke 9:1; Acts 1:2) and to Paul, who saw the risen Lord Jesus and was appointed by him personally (Acts 9). Thus there is no legitimate ground for claiming apostleship since the days of the apostles.

Paul refers to his specific apostolic call and ministry several times in his letters,⁶⁶ as does Peter;⁶⁷ the term is used also for James the brother of Jesus, leader of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:19). In Acts 15 a distinction is made between “the apostles and the elders” (15:22, 23). In the case of James, it is clear from Luke and Paul that the other apostles recognize his apostleship. Although there is no recorded direct commissioning of James by the risen Jesus, he is nevertheless recognized by the apostles. But what about Barnabas? *Disciple* is used commonly for the Twelve in the Gospels, and the term can be used generally for followers of Jesus (e.g., Acts 6:1, 2, 7; 9:1, 19). The fact that *apostle* is reserved almost exclusively for the Twelve, Paul, James, and a few others argues for a more technical use by Luke to refer to one appointed personally by Jesus or recognized as an apostle by other such apostles led by the Spirit. It is possible that Barnabas had such an appointment, although Scripture does not say as much.

Perhaps the best explanation is that Luke calls Barnabas an apostle because, along with Paul, he was commissioned and set apart by the Holy Spirit and the church in Antioch (13:2–3) and traveled side by side with Paul, teaching and preaching. Generally speaking, Barnabas is a prominent figure of authority in the early church. Peter, John, and James give the “right hand of fellowship” to both Paul and Barnabas and recognize them both as called to the Gentiles, just as the other apostles were called to the Jews (Gal. 2:9). Barnabas befriends Paul and makes introductions between Paul and the apostles (Acts 9:27), and the apostles send Barnabas to check on the happenings at Antioch (11:22). When Paul becomes angry over hypocrisy at Antioch, he singles out Peter and “even Barnabas” among all of the Jewish believers (Gal. 2:13).

Thus Barnabas is recognized as having a special, prominent ministry in the early church. His position is greater, at least according to the language used of him and the number of times he appears in various contexts, than other prominent NT characters such as Stephen (though he was martyred early), Philip, and even

⁶⁶ Rom. 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor. 1:1; 9:1, 2; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; 12:12; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1.

⁶⁷ 1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1.

Paul's other traveling companions, Timothy, Titus, and Epaphroditus. In other words, there is no one else like Barnabas in Acts or the rest of the NT except for James. Like James the brother of Jesus, Barnabas shares the apostolic stature of the Twelve and Paul. Though we may not have the whole story, Barnabas was likely an apostle in the technical sense of the word, which is why Luke calls him as such here (Acts 14:4).

When opposition turns life-threatening, Paul and Barnabas leave town. This is another example of the apostles' willingness to escape persecution if possible. Later we see examples of Paul's inability to escape, and when he is told what will certainly happen, he faces it with conviction. But there does not seem to be any divine warning at Iconium. Luke just records that they find out about the plan of a mixed group of Gentiles, Jews, and city leaders to stone them. Just like converts to the gospel, its opponents come from all social, ethnic, and political backgrounds. As Paul and Barnabas make their way further through Galatia, they continue preaching the gospel wherever they go (v. 7), and in doing so they will face further danger.

14:8–18 *Iconium, Lystra, and Back to Antioch: Ministry in Lystra.* Lystra, less than 20 miles (32 km) southwest of Iconium, is the most thoroughly Gentile context encountered by the apostles up to this point. The passage begins with an incident quite similar to Peter and John's experience outside the temple in chapter 3. Just as Peter looked at the lame man in Jerusalem and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (3:6), so in Lystra Paul notices the blind man listening to him and says, "Stand upright on your feet" (14:10). And, as in chapter 3, the man in Lystra "sprang up and began walking" (14:10). Whereas the man in Jerusalem was begging for money, this man is listening to Paul, who recognizes his faith, likely through the insight of the Spirit. In Jerusalem the signs and wonders done by the apostles were the Spirit's witness to the world about Jesus the Messiah; this miracle is a Spirit-induced way of opening the door to a Gentile community.

The Gentile crowd is just as astonished as were the Jews in Jerusalem at the miraculous healing. But they have a quick explanation: "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men" (v. 11). Specifically, they think that Zeus (as Barnabas), the king of the gods, and Hermes (as Paul), his son and the messenger of the gods, have come to Lystra. There is a logic to their conclusion, as local legend holds that the two gods had visited as human beings once before.⁶⁸ The situation spins quickly out of control as priests of Zeus attempt to make sacrifices in light of the supposed divine visit.

The contrast between Herod's reaction to the crowd's call of "the voice of a god, and not of a man" (12:22), and Paul and Barnabas's reaction to the Lystrans is impossible to miss. The apostles immediately tear their garments, typically a sign of lament and grief.⁶⁹ Paul immediately avers that he and Barnabas are men, "of like nature with you" (14:15). The situation calls for fast action, and Paul gets

⁶⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, 314.

⁶⁹ There are too many texts to cite, but tearing garments is seen in a number of contexts (e.g., Gen. 37:29; Ezra 9:3; Matt. 26:65).

right to the point. He answers with an assertion of monotheism and a straightforward plea to repent. From the start he challenges a core part of their worldview, namely, their polytheism. Not only is there only one God; in addition, that God is the creator of everything—a strike against their idolatry. Paul then implies that they are answerable to the God of whom he speaks.

Paul's next words draw comparisons with the longer discourse at Mars Hill (chapter 17) and his discussion of what we refer to as “natural revelation” in Romans 1. Everything the Lystrans have, from rain and food to the good times and contentment they experience, is from the one God (cf. Matt. 5:45). Paul points to common human experience as evidence of God. As in Romans 2, he does not say that God is revealed personally through these things, but he does make clear they do witness to God (Acts 14:17). All this follows and develops verse 16, in which Paul states that up to this point God has let people go their own way. The idolatry of the nations, which God allowed (Rom. 1:24), is a sign of their innate knowledge of him (Rom. 1:19–20), and even though they do not know him personally through these good gifts, they nevertheless owe their entire existence to him (Acts 17:28).

This is a brief, and brilliant, presentation of the truth of the Bible. It is not a complete presentation of the gospel—there clearly was not time—but an opening foray in evangelism to people with no biblical background. Paul links their way of life and common human experience to the truth of the Scripture. With this Gentile crowd he does not cite biblical passages (as he and others do with Jewish audiences) but summarizes theological content in a way that connects with his hearers—another example of legitimate and able contextualization. Although he does not finish his sermon in Luke's account, Paul returns to Lystra on his way home (14:21). The groundwork for future ministry is laid, even if, as far as the narrative seems to indicate, Paul is not able to preach the entire gospel. It is possible that Luke shortens the account (as he does elsewhere) and leaves off Paul's witnessing to Jesus, but that does not seem to fit Luke's typical pattern.

It is not clear whether people come to faith during this first visit. Though Luke mentions other “disciples” taking up Paul's presumed dead body in verse 20, this could refer to converts from Lystra. These disciples could also be other believers who followed from places such as Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, or perhaps unnamed companions who have been there all along.⁷⁰ We do not know how much time passes between verses 18–19, so Paul could have preached and called for repentance, perhaps even several times. Luke does not record people's belief, however, as he usually does (e.g., 13:48; 14:1). At some point, at least on the way back through (v. 21), believers are found in Lystra, including Timothy (16:1), who comes to faith through Paul's ministry.

14:19–23 *Iconium, Lystra, and Back to Antioch: The Stoning of Paul.* Saul of Tarsus once hunted down and persecuted Christians for the sake of his Jewish heritage. Now,

⁷⁰ Paul has many and various traveling companions in his journeys: Barnabas (Acts 13:1–2); John Mark (13:13); Silas (15:40); Timothy (16:1–3); Luke (16:10).

in fulfillment of Jesus' words to Ananias regarding Saul ("I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name"; 9:16), the roles are reversed, as Jews from Antioch and Iconium track the apostles down in Lystra, and Paul is nearly killed. Pisidian Antioch is around 100 miles (160 km) from Lystra, and, apparently, men from that city stop in Iconium and pick up others to join their mob. Given the closeness of the Jewish communities and the relative ease of travel and sending messages, it is not out of the realm of possibility to think that Jews from Antioch and Iconium (80–90 miles/129–145 km apart) have communicated with each other about the danger of these fanatics proclaiming a false messiah from Nazareth, disrespecting the law of Moses, and sinning against God (as unbelieving Jews thought Christians were doing).

This is but the beginning of Paul's sufferings, and it is vicious. The Jews turn the crowds, already stirred up after the Zeus and Hermes incident, against the apostles, and the mob takes hold of Paul to stone him to death—or so they think. Unlike with the practice of going outside the camp prescribed in the Mosaic law (Num. 15:35), this takes place inside the city before they drag Paul's body outside the city. It seems the Jews do the instigating and the Gentiles do the stoning; unbelieving Jews are unafraid to collaborate with unclean Gentiles against the Christians, just as they did regarding Jesus (Luke 23:1–25; John 18:28–32; 19:12–16). We can only guess why Barnabas is not stoned, though we know that Paul did most of the preaching (but cf. Acts 13:46; 14:3), especially at Pisidian Antioch and Lystra—the Lystrans called Paul "Hermes," the messenger and spokesman of the gods. Whatever the reason, Paul is singled out for death, assumedly because they perceive him to be the more serious threat. Paul's injury is such that they drag him outside the city thinking him dead—making his itinerary the next day all the more surprising. Barnabas and the other disciples must be in absolute shock and horror. God, however, was not finished with Paul.

By the grace of God, Paul survives. The Lystrans had taken him out of the city, "supposing" he was dead, but the disciples bring him back in the city for the night. Somehow, Paul is able to leave the next day, presumably on foot (though not necessarily), for Derbe, roughly 60 miles (96 km) away. He must have experienced divine healing or protection from injury during the stoning in order to make this walk the next day (cf. 2 Tim. 3:11). There is no regrouping or rethinking the mission—Paul has been set apart by Jesus as an apostle to bear witness and set apart by the Spirit for this very trip, and nothing will stop his completing this task.

The visit to Derbe, the furthest point reached in the first missionary journey, is described very briefly, with Luke noting the making of "many disciples" as a result of Paul's preaching (Acts 14:21). The pattern of growth in the midst of persecution holds true. It is now clear that persecution is not limited or particular to the Jewish mission of the church, as Gentiles are now taking full part. But they are also taking full part in salvation through faith in Jesus.

Paul and Barnabas retrace their steps, visiting the churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. With Paul's recent experience at Lystra in mind, his message "that

through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (v. 22) would have held great significance. The early Christians will increasingly follow in the footsteps of the apostles by experiencing suffering, and Paul prepares them as one speaking from experience.

There is little gap between the planting of the first churches and the establishing of their leadership. Luke concludes his narrative of Paul’s first missionary journey by noting how Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders for them in every church” (v. 23). Although Luke does not go into detail, we can say from Acts that the basic pattern found in Jerusalem (11:30; 15:2; 21:18) is copied in the other churches as well (20:17). In Paul’s writings he describes the qualifications for the office of elder (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), but Luke is only concerned here to reveal Paul’s concern for leadership in the churches. Combined with Paul’s epistles, this is enough to establish a distinct and repeatable pattern of leadership arising from Acts.

We cannot say for certain whether there were one or many churches in places such as Lystra or Iconium, though it is perhaps safe to assume that these were small gatherings, maybe small enough to be limited to one church in each place. Regardless of the number of churches in a single city or region, there is no ground for understanding “in every church” to imply only one elder in each church, as is the practice of many Christian churches today. Luke uses the plural form (*presbyteroi*) of the Greek word typically translated “elders” and a Greek phrase translated aptly as “in every church.”

14:24–28 *Iconium, Lystra, and Back to Antioch: Back to Antioch.* On the way back to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas stop at Perga to minister the gospel (v. 25). This is a town visited only briefly on the outward leg of the journey, the town at which Mark decided to return home (13:13). From Attalia they leave for Antioch, their home base, where they report the events of the journey, especially how God “had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (14:27). God’s initial work among the Gentiles marks a major step toward the “end of the earth” (1:8) and also leads to the first and greatest controversy in the early church, as the inclusion of the Gentiles is not met with enthusiasm by everyone.

Response

In Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles we see subtle but effective forms of what we today call contextualization. We all contextualize to some degree—something as simple as choosing whether to wear a tie or a T-shirt to church is an act of contextualization if the choice is made based on what is appropriate in a given church. There are, however, legitimate concerns with various forms of contextualization. In our day there is even a scale for it: C1 (no contextualization) to C5 (full-on contextualization that renders one practically anonymous). Some Christians are encouraged to call themselves “Muslim” in a Muslim context—a linguistic sleight of hand in which the speaker slyly pretends both he and his hearers (who are not clued in beforehand) assume the same meaning for “Muslim,” despite such not being the

case. This is faulty, and sometimes devious, contextualization. Similarly, some suggest that indigenous tribes in places lacking sheep or even the knowledge of such animals should use “pig” or some other term instead of “lamb” in Bible translation.

Such “contextualization” ignores the biblical reality of new life in Christ, but these are extreme examples. We must be reasonable and understand that contextualization need not mean the compromise or even the blurring of the gospel. Contextualization, properly applied, has more to do with the ones bringing the gospel and how they go about it. It is also about carefully considering how to remove unnecessary obstacles in the cause of the gospel. The key is to do so without losing the gospel message itself.

Magic, for many of us, seems remote, the stuff of fantasy novels, illusionists, or card tricks. Sleight-of-hand games are nothing, but what Barnabas and Paul encounter is something different. This sort of dark magic exists today as well, even if most in the West have little experience with it. As noted in the narrative of Simon Magus in chapter 8, the Bible roundly condemns magic of all sorts as the manipulation, real or imagined, of nature for power and personal gain. At its root, magic is a form of idolatry. Magicians, shamans, witch doctors, seers, and sorcerers do not typically work for free. They offer some benefit, real or imagined, to their customers for a price. Even though most Westerners reject nearly anything supernatural, and the postmodern worldview is rooted in doubt and skepticism, nevertheless many display an openness to the occult or to alternative “spiritualities.”⁷¹ While such interest points to the innate human sense of something or someone bigger than us, there is something about magic that lends itself easily to a post-fall world—each individual can tailor his own experience according to his own personal desires, moods, inklings, or whims. Dabbling in magic, or astrology, or whatever else requires little personal commitment or life change. Each person can have it the way he or she chooses. Even those who pursue magic arts “full time” are basically answerable to no one but themselves. It is all gain with little investment. The sinister truth is that magic that bears any potency is a spiritual power that flows not from the Spirit but from evil.⁷²

The sovereignty of God and the call to evangelize and pursue missions must be maintained together. God’s election of his people is a good reminder to us in our impatience to see immediate fruit and, more importantly, in our anxiety over whether we have said enough, or said all the right things, or had enough time to present the gospel fully in evangelistic encounters. The salvation of souls is God’s work, and he will use us as much or as little in any given circumstance as he needs. We can never know when a word of truth, however imperfect or partial, will be a seed planted for a later harvest. Paul’s later words to the Corinthians serve as an apt commentary: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth”

71 Wright makes the same observation (*Acts for Everyone*, Part 2, 5).

72 I do not include illusionists doing acts for entertainment in the same category as Simon Magus or Bar-Jesus. Making objects seem to disappear or knowing what card someone picks out of a deck requires a great deal of practice and skill, but is not necessarily associated with occult practice. As with many forms of entertainment, Christians are free to decide, based on carefully applied biblical wisdom and according to conscience, what they can and cannot condone personally.

(1 Cor. 3:6). Anxiety over evangelistic fruit can be a sign of unbelief in the power of God or of forgetting that God does everything according to his will and in his time. Whether conversion is immediate or years in the making, it is God's work from start to finish. Our only concern is to be faithful with the time, gifts, and opportunities he gives us.

15:1–5 *The Jerusalem Council: Troubling of the Gentiles.* The major theological controversy in the early church is over the core issue of the faith: What is required for salvation? In fact, this is the major theological issue for all times and eras: What does it mean for a person to become a Christian and part of God's people? In this question, both the individual and the group aspects of the Christian faith come to the fore. The answer comes down to one of two ways that are absolutely incompatible. The first is basically this: to be a Christian requires faith in Jesus and something else—in this case, circumcision. The second way is this: to be a Christian requires faith in Jesus alone. The first has a hidden clause, and once a second requirement is established, there is no end to the implications, because the second requirement—circumcision—is part of the Mosaic law. If circumcision is required on the basis of its being part of the law, then the rest of the law must be required as well. The Mosaic law does not come with a partial option of obedience; it is all or nothing. The circumcision party in the early church knew this; they said that Gentiles had to be circumcised and made to keep the law (v. 5). The apostles replied: “No, they only need faith in Jesus alone.”

The issue is how one relates to God. Does one do so through a law that the history of Israel proves impossible for sinful men and women to keep? Or is it through faith? Visitors from Judea put the issue on the table, basically telling the Gentiles they can either be circumcised and keep the law or else leave the church (v. 1). These men are likely either the same as, or at least related to, those who criticized Peter for eating with Gentiles after the Cornelius incident (11:2–3). Their connection to the Judaizers Paul speaks of in Galatians and Philippians is not clear, and there is no way to say with certainty that they are the same people. We know that the council will end with everyone satisfied with the results, but apparently there are some hotheads who remain unconvinced—even in the face of overwhelming agreement among believers, the Gentile question does not disappear after this council.

By this point, plenty of uncircumcised Gentiles have shown evidence of receiving the Spirit—of being saved. Apparently, however, to some of the Jewish believers, having the Spirit, while good and necessary, is not sufficient. They argue that the Gentiles must become Jews in order to be welcomed as full members of the people of God. In the flow of redemptive history, the inclusion of the Gentiles is earth-shattering, standing against centuries of tradition and clearly hard to swallow in light of generations of Jewish suffering at the hands of Gentiles. Early Jewish believers have already had to come to terms with the Messiah's being a carpenter from Nazareth who took issue with much that they were brought up to believe. Now the Christian leaders are baptizing Gentiles, eating with them, living

among them, and saying all they have to do is believe. This is a lot to take in—but it does not excuse their demanding the circumcision of the Gentiles.

Those campaigning for circumcision are, as far as we can tell, believers in Jesus. Nevertheless, the talks are heated; Luke remarks how there is “no small dissension and debate” (15:2). We know from Paul’s letters that this is not an issue he takes lightly. Conversation with Paul and Barnabas does not settle the issue, but everyone agrees that the issue *does* need to be settled. This leads to the first church-wide conference.

Along the way, the pro-Gentile movement picks up steam in Phoenicia and Samaria, where accounts of conversions are met with rejoicing (v. 3), but when the delegates arrive in Jerusalem and relate the news, some believing Pharisees make their position plain: the Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law (v. 5)—they must become Jewish. The NT church has faced some fairly strong ethnic and nationalistic undercurrents from the beginning. The first ripples were seen when Hellenistic Jewish believers noticed that their widows were not receiving the same treatment as others were receiving (6:1); even when everyone involved was Jewish, issues of exclusivity, perhaps even priority, began to arise. Although not an issue of salvation, this concern did point to the kinds of social and cultural issues faced by the early believers. The inclusion of the Samaritans brought the tension closer to the surface. Then came Cornelius, then Antioch, and then a two-year missionary journey that resulted in multitudes of Gentiles coming to faith. Now it has all come to a head, and the church, led by the apostles, must iron it out.

15:6–21 *The Jerusalem Council: Salvation Has Come to the Gentiles.* The Gentile question, which is in reality a question of what it means to be a Christian, is of such importance that nearly every major character in Acts takes part.⁷³ The main speakers are Peter, with his experience of being present for the first large-scale Gentile conversion; Paul and Barnabas, with their experiences in Antioch and on their missionary journey; and James, who emerges as the main leader of the Jerusalem church. Even a brief scan of their words shows the absolute unity of the apostles concerning the realities of the new covenant and its implications for all believers. Their ability to arrive at a solution, together with the whole body, that settles the main question, is to be commended. Not to be missed is their pastoral sensitivity, seen clearly in directives meant to build unity among all believers. Rising above all is their absolute insistence that Gentiles must be welcomed as full members of the people of God without first becoming Jews.

Peter begins by reminding the assembly of the events surrounding Cornelius’s conversion (10:1–11:18), which occurred roughly ten years prior to this meeting. Peter also highlights that the inclusion of the Gentiles was not a plan hatched by the apostles in secret or merely a curious bend in the road; it was God’s design in specifically choosing Peter to preach to the Gentiles (15:7). The apostle then calls

⁷³ For summary and evaluation of the wider discussion, see Peterson, *Acts*, 424–446; and Schnabel, *Acts*, 641–651.

on God as the primary witness for what has taken place: he is the one who gave the Gentiles the Spirit (v. 8), just as he did for Jewish believers such as themselves. Not only that, the Gentiles have been saved by faith—God “cleansed their hearts by faith” (v. 9)—just as the Jewish believers have been. Thus God has made no distinction between Jewish or Gentile believers (v. 9). This reality would have been jarring for many of those gathered there that day, though it will become foundational in Paul’s message of God’s salvation and judgment (see Rom. 1:16; 2:9, 10; 3:29–30; 10:12; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). Peter himself faced a similar question years earlier and concluded that if God accepts Gentiles and gives them the Spirit, who is he to “stand in God’s way” (Acts 11:17)?

Peter’s next statement speaks to the seriousness of the issue. The circumcision party is in danger of doing exactly what Israel did time and again—to its own downfall and demise. By suggesting circumcision, they are asking something of the Gentiles that God, as seen clearly over the past ten years, has not required. In doing so they are “putting God to the test” (15:10). A fundamental principle of life as God’s people is stated in Deuteronomy 6:16: “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.” To put God to the test is to know what God desires and requires but to decide nevertheless to go another way, or at least push the boundaries of what he requires. At its core, to test God is to exhibit unbelief. Reflecting on the wilderness generation’s experience, the psalmists reference Israel’s testing of God as a way of summarizing the nation’s unbelief and disobedience (Pss. 78:18, 41, 56; 106:14).

Peter then brings the entire experience of Israel under the law to bear on the question. Not only would requiring circumcision and law keeping demand something of the Gentiles that God has not required, it would burden the Gentiles with something that the Jews themselves could never bear (Acts 15:10). This burden is the Mosaic law, which Peter labels a “yoke.” Paul will use similar language with the Galatians, calling the law a “yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1). Peter’s conclusion offers important commentary regarding the law. As a way of relating to God, the law will not work. One of Peter’s main arguments has been that the Gentiles received the Spirit in the same way as did the Jews. The same type of argument can be applied negatively to the law: “Neither you, nor your parents, nor any of our ancestors have ever kept the law fully, but now you ask the Gentiles to keep it? God himself is witness to our failure to keep the law. He did not save you by your law keeping, just as he did not save the Gentiles by their law keeping.”

Peter then brings his argument to a conclusion. The law has not, and cannot, save anyone. There is only one thing that saves, and they all know what it is: “the grace of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11). If one thing is clear in the NT, it is that the law, or works of any kind, can never save. This realization leads to the good news that God has intended salvation not by doing but by believing. The salvation of every race is “through the grace of the Lord Jesus.” The verb “will be saved” encapsulates all of salvation. This is the manner in which anyone, at any time, will be saved. This verb also points to the future orientation of salvation, which refers not merely to

the day one comes to faith but also to the future day of fulfillment. From first to last, salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus.

After Peter concludes, Paul and Barnabas speak. Luke does not record their words, but they undoubtedly share their experiences in Antioch, Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, and elsewhere. Perhaps they describe how Jews came from Iconium and Antioch, stirring up the crowds and leading to the stoning of Paul. It may be that Luke highlights the words of Peter and James because they are associated with Jerusalem. Perhaps Peter and James have greater influence there than does Paul, whose view on the matter of the Gentiles is already abundantly clear (13:46–47), and the circumcision party obviously has problems with what he and Barnabas have been up to (15:1–2). So, as Luke narrates the proceedings (which likely take far longer than what he records), he focuses on Peter and James, showing they are on the same page as Paul.

Following Paul and Barnabas, James speaks. His central place as leader in the Jerusalem church is plain. Although, as with Barnabas, there is no record of a personal, postresurrection commission from Jesus, James is recognized among the apostles. The brother of Jesus, who at one point showed signs of disbelief along with others in his family (Luke 8:19–21; John 7:5), is now one of the “pillars” (Gal. 2:9) of the apostolic church. He categorically refutes the circumcision party’s view concerning the Gentiles and the Mosaic law. His words are an example of how the Mosaic law functions in the new covenant, demonstrating the freedom to keep whatever aspects of the law do not impede the primacy of faith in Christ alone.

James goes beyond a discussion of apostolic agreement to show how what they have witnessed over the past ten years is exactly what the OT prophets foretold. This is not the first time, and certainly will not be the last, that the OT is cited as evidence for the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God. Paul quotes the OT at Pisidian Antioch (13:47), and Peter’s vision in Joppa (10:9–16) is filled with OT imagery and themes. Here James cites a portion of Amos 9:11–12, along with Isaiah 43:7, which both tell of a future day in which the restoration of Israel will go hand in hand with the inclusion of the nations. Indeed, Israel and the nations have now been brought together in Jesus. These citations pair nicely with Jesus’ commissioning of witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the world (Acts 1:8). There is no restoration of Israel apart from the Gentiles, or vice versa.

This adds additional weight to Peter’s insistence that God shows no partiality and saves all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, by grace through faith in Jesus. This also underscores his warning about testing God (15:10). What is taking place is exactly according to God’s Word through the prophets. The recent history in Jerusalem of rejecting God by rejecting Jesus and then his apostles provides the background for the seriousness of what the apostles insist: Gentiles’ coming to faith is the expressed will and purpose of God, and to put obstacles in front of them amounts to acting contrary to God.

As James continues, there is a clear distinction between insisting that the Gentiles must keep the Mosaic law in order truly to be saved and the four directives

James and the apostles offer (vv. 19–21). In addition, there is a further distinction to be made between the four points themselves—e.g., it is obvious that James would not simply “suggest” that Gentiles abstain from sexual immorality. In verse 21, James provides the reason behind the four things they ask of the Gentiles in verse 20. He points out that there are Jews in virtually every city in the empire, and he is not referring to Jewish believers. This is absolutely vital to see—James and the council are not compromising with the circumcision party. The issues raised by the circumcision party cause the apostles to consider the impact of Gentile believers on all Jews, not only on believing Jews. The four requests are placed in the context of the effect Gentile believers in the Jewish Messiah will have on the larger Jewish population. These four items are not so much restrictions as they are responsibilities placed on formerly pagan, Gentile believers. The Gentiles should do nothing that will needlessly cause offense or create obstacles for the Jews. Recognizing the function of verse 21 is essential for understanding the decision of the council.

James requests that Gentiles abstain from four things: food offered to idols, sexual immorality, meat from strangled animals, and blood. These are apostolic guidelines for the newly converted Gentiles to follow; they are not new laws outlining what must be done in order to be saved. Further, James is not saying, “You can skip the Mosaic law on circumcision, but there are other parts of the Mosaic law you have to keep.” That these four elements are connected to both moral and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic law has nothing to do with some NT “application” of the old covenant law, though they are all rooted, not by coincidence, in the Mosaic law.

James asks the Gentiles to be aware of their witness to the Jews living around them. He is also informing them that there are certain absolute breaks with their old lifestyle, particularly concerning idolatry, that must be made. These two aspects go hand in hand: decisively leaving their pagan past and living as Christians among Jews. For Jews, blood caused immediate defilement, according to the law, and consuming blood was strictly forbidden (Lev. 7:26; 17:12). Thus two of the four requests—abstaining from anything strangled (which meant the blood was not drained) and from blood itself—are two things Gentiles can do for the sake of their Jewish neighbors.

Idol worship was a typical source of meat in the Roman Empire, and meat was quite uncommon otherwise, except for the very rich. It is not that the meat was somehow magically tainted by idols but that it was associated with such idols—and that was enough. The Gentiles should avoid it.

Avoiding sexual immorality may sound like a “no-brainer,” but that was not the case for people coming from centuries of pagan practice. While some schools of thought stressed strict control of the body and a denial of physical pleasure, such views were not held by the majority. For the most part, Gentile cultures and societies did have at least some restriction on sexual misconduct, though not a great deal. This is similar to most cultures today. For instance, while divorce was not very common among the Roman elite, sexual relations with mistresses and

slaves of both genders was commonplace. Roman women of high status were not above such dalliances, either. On a civic level, some temples included ritual prostitution, a practice that dated back centuries and was condemned in the Mosaic law (Deut. 23:17). The OT contains references to pagan ritual prostitution in Israel, particularly in the days of the kings prior to the exile (1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7). Such immorality was a constant temptation in ancient Israel, as it was surrounded by nations practicing fertility rites involving sexual acts of various kinds with both men and women. As for Israel generally, the OT is filled with examples of sexual immorality in spite of strong condemnation in the law.

First-century Gentiles could not have been expected to come by biblical, sexual morality naturally; it would have represented an entirely new way of living for the Gentile believers. But James calls all of these points “requirements”⁷⁴ (cf. comment on 15:22–35). Abstaining from sexual immorality is not a requirement for being saved, though it is a requirement for the Christian life. Avoiding sexual immorality does not turn a nonbeliever into a believer, nor does it guarantee salvation or provide assurance. At the same time, the NT does not hold out spiritual security and assurance as a safety net for sexual immorality. An act of sexual immorality does not imply that one cannot be, or is not, a Christian, but it is characteristic of those who do not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19–21). Jesus alone saves by faith, and such faith in Jesus transforms our thinking and behavior.

Interpreters and readers will continue to disagree over the council decision (not to mention Paul’s implementation of it), but there are at least three keys that should serve as foundational for interpretation: (1) We must understand the four requirements in the context of the new situation of Gentile believers living among both believing and unbelieving Jews. (2) We must regard these new behaviors as definite breaks from a pagan past. (3) We must not treat these requests as new covenant requirements for being saved.

Thus the council sweeps away the concerns of the circumcision party. Peter equates their insistence on the Mosaic law with opposition to the very plan and will of God. Requiring the law for the Gentiles introduces burdens that God knew even the Jews would not keep. Gentiles are saved by faith, and God confirms this by giving them the Spirit—just as with the Jewish believers. As for the Gentiles, they must bear in mind that they live among Jews and thus ought to live in such a way that will introduce no unnecessary obstacles. In connection to that reality, they must make a decisive break with their idolatrous past.

The council introduces a way for Gentile believers in the Jewish Messiah to live among Jews without causing added offense or creating extra obstacles; the council also instructs these Gentiles in the Christian life. The circumcision party’s concerns are basically dismissed, and no compromise or effort to placate them is offered by the apostles or the council at large. This is evident in the next section,

⁷⁴ The NT frequently condemns sexual misconduct (e.g., Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3, 5; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 12:16; 13:4; Jude 7; Rev. 2:14, 20; 21:8; 22:15). Peter, almost certainly reflecting specifically on past pagan worship practices, writes, “The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry” (1 Pet. 4:3).

in the letter they write to the churches: the council refers to the circumcision party as having “troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions” (Acts 15:24). They have no authority and find no support whatsoever from the apostles. For the time being, there is unity among the majority of early Christians. This unity will be put to the test, and some will break it altogether by continuing to insist on law keeping for Gentiles. Peter notes that the effort to implement the law puts God to the test, but when this effort continues and grows even stronger, Paul will call it a “different gospel” and anyone who preaches it “accursed” (Gal. 1:6–9).

15:22–35 *The Jerusalem Council: The Council’s Letter to Gentile Christians.* Luke’s narration of the letter writing reveals the total unity of the apostolic church on the matter of the Gentiles. The congregational nature of the early church—which began back with the choosing of the seven servants in chapter 6—is evident again here. Though the apostles take the lead, both the elders and the “whole church” are involved in accepting James’s proposal and sending men back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to carry the letter. At the same time, we should not read into this more than Luke indicates. He does not present the council as an open congregational meeting in the modern sense. The congregation in Jerusalem is in on the decision, but there is no evidence that the letter is drafted jointly by the apostles, elders, and everyone else gathered there. Further, the believers in Antioch did not send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to see what believers at large thought about the Gentile question; they sought the opinion of the apostles and leaders.

The sending of Judas and Silas with the apostles to Antioch serves as confirmation that the “brothers” in Jerusalem are fully behind the decisions made at the council (15:22). The letter recounts James’s proposal, confirmed and accepted by the church, and is written from the “brothers” in Jerusalem to the “brothers” in the Gentile churches. The simple use of *brother* is all the commentary needed on the unity of the church. This unity does not extend to the circumcision party (v. 24), which has never represented the thought of the Jerusalem church (cf. comment on 15:6–21). It does, however, extend to Paul and Barnabas, who have “risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 26). Suffering for the sake of the gospel is exactly what Jesus promised was in store for Paul, and it will be foundational for his apostolic defense later in his ministry (e.g., 2 Corinthians). To the Jerusalem church, Paul and Barnabas are “beloved” brothers (Acts 15:25). It is unknown whether grumbling about Paul’s authority is already fomenting among the circumcision party, but there is no question regarding the Jerusalem church’s support and affirmation of him and his ministry.

Concerning the requirements for the Gentiles, cf. comment on 15:6–21. In recounting these requirements, Luke states what was only implied before: the council’s decision has been directed and accepted by the Holy Spirit (v. 28). This is more than a divine stamp of approval on a decision reached by deliberation among attendees; it is an acknowledgment of the Spirit’s filling. This does not

necessarily imply an audible or otherwise sensory-based affirmation; it is just as likely that through the means of prayer and mutual counsel the attendees are absolutely convinced that the Holy Spirit has provided the directives. However they are convinced, the important point is that those in Jerusalem are confident that God is with them in their decision.

The believers at Antioch “rejoiced because of [the letter’s] encouragement” (v. 31). They had wanted to know what the leaders and church in Jerusalem thought about the inclusion of the Gentiles (v. 2), and when they hear the restrictions, they are happy and satisfied. As healthy believers, they do not view these things as an undue burden. The letter’s statement that those in Jerusalem wanted “to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements” (v. 28) is akin to Jesus’ saying that “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). This is not a comment on the relative discomfort of a Christian’s burden versus that offered by the circumcision party; it is a recognition that the only “burden” they must bear is their responsibility to outsiders and the responsibility to conform their lives to a new code of conduct as those filled with the Spirit.

Luke notes that both Judas and Silas stay a while in Antioch ministering to the church (Acts 15:32–33)—further evidence of the unity among the believers. Both men are called “prophets,” meaning they have a special gift of the Spirit to speak a divine word to the church. Unlike the OT prophets, the NT prophets do not preach judgment for the sake of repentance, announce the Messiah, or carry the same authority. There is no “Thus saith the LORD” attached to the words of NT prophets. Their gift is for building up the church and delivering a word from the Holy Spirit, and there is no evidence whatsoever that it goes beyond that. There is also no evidence of the gift continuing beyond the apostolic era (despite attempts to prove otherwise; cf. comments on 11:19–30; 21:1–16 [at vv. 10–14]).

Verse 34 is not included in the ESV or any other modern translation. All of the best and earliest Greek NT texts do not include what was once labeled verse 34 (to renumber the verses would wreak havoc on previously printed resources that cite verses 35–41). It seems that at some point during the transmission of the text, most likely a few centuries after the original text was penned, various efforts were made to fix the apparent tension between verses 33 and 40. In verse 33 Silas returns to Jerusalem, while in verse 40 Paul chooses Silas for his second missionary journey. There is no real tension, however, if we remember that Luke is not providing a minute-by-minute account of the history of the early church; there is no particular reason why Silas could not travel to Jerusalem and then return to Antioch.

Luke is not overly concerned with a precise timeline at this point. Judas and Silas “spent some time” in Antioch before going back home (v. 33). Then “after some days” Paul suggests the second missionary journey to Barnabas (v. 36). Luke indicates that all of this takes place in a relatively short period of time, but nothing beyond that. Further, it is impossible to know how much time elapses between Paul and Barnabas’s falling out and their going their separate ways (vv. 39–40). Moreover, just because Luke immediately follows Barnabas’s sailing for Cyprus

with Paul's departure with Silas does not mean they leave on the same day or even the same week. There is plenty of time for Silas to return from Jerusalem.

When NT copyists and scribes over the centuries attempted to “fix” perceived problems of chronology and other issues, they were not necessarily driven by disregard for the text—it is more likely that just the opposite is true. Discussions and debates over inerrancy and such issues were foreign to them. At the end of the day, we cannot know the motivations that drove some copyists to make minor changes here and there. Such motivations were probably as varied as the scribes who made the changes. Copyists were not required to be biblical scholars but merely adept with a stylus and ink. Talent for creating beautifully ornate texts probably went further in a monastery job interview than did a background in biblical studies! Nevertheless, making changes was not standard practice of the majority of copyists through the centuries. Most took their jobs very seriously, with many devoting their lives to the transmission and preservation of the Bible. Scribal errors, whether additions, subtraction, or copying errors, are by far the most common forms of textual variant, and textual critics are adept at identifying them. These errors in copying should not cause readers undue concern or anxiety when defending the validity and trustworthiness of the Bible.

Response

Christians who believe in salvation by faith alone must be always on the lookout for subtle ways we might add to what it means to be a Christian. When it comes to salvation, it is Jesus alone, not “Jesus and . . .” The requirements added to Christ differ from place to place and from culture to culture, but they are equally dangerous everywhere. The issues we encounter are rarely as decisive and blatant as the circumcision-for-salvation problem in the early church. Ours are typically less drastic and not so momentous; it might be “Jesus . . . and this confession” or “. . . and not watching movies” or “. . . and this translation.” Not many draw the line in the sand between faith and non-faith based on those sorts of distinctions (and there are countless numbers of them), but such distinctions do tend toward the issue addressed in Acts 15. Anything we add to Jesus is always dangerous. For example, when we define and identify Christianity along ethnic, cultural, regional, or racial lines, we are claiming that to be a Christian is to be like us. This is exactly the error of the circumcision party.

At the same time, teaching that faith in Jesus alone is all that is needed for salvation does not mean that how we live as Christians is of secondary importance, much less simply a matter of personal preference. Our salvation and new life in Christ, led by the Spirit in accordance with the teaching of the Bible, are inseparable. The Gentiles in Acts were directed to live in particular ways in response to both their sinful past and their Christian witness. The council was not promulgating new covenant ways to become Christians but rather was issuing requirements for how these new covenant believers were to live their Christian lives in their own context. Faith in Jesus without faithfulness to his teaching is not faith at all.

OVERVIEW OF
ACTS 15:36–21:36

THE MISSION TO THE GENTILES, PART 2

This next section of Acts narrates Paul's second and third journeys, which contain some of the most well-known portions of Acts. Paul's call to Macedonia, the conversion of the Philippian jailer, Paul's speech in Athens, and the riot in Ephesus all take place in the following chapters. As the gospel moves toward the ends of the earth and people turn to Christ and his kingdom, so too does opposition spread. Paul and his companions face increased opposition from Jews and also from Gentiles. One of the twists in Paul's story is how unbelieving Gentiles frequently serve as the means of his survival.

Many of the churches associated with Paul's letters are planted during these journeys, as the gospel comes to such cities as Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, and Corinth. Along the way, a longstanding partnership between Paul and Barnabas breaks up over a controversy, but soon afterward a new companion joins Paul, one well known from later in the NT: Timothy.

Although it is common to separate Paul's second and third journeys, the turnaround between the trips is very fast (Acts 18:22–23), and there is nothing like the major event of the Jerusalem council separating the two trips. Thus it makes some sense to read these westward movements, which begin with one more trip through Galatia and Phrygia, together as a large unit, thus combining the second and third missionary journeys.

This section of Acts ends with Paul's fated trip to Jerusalem. He goes to Jerusalem to deliver an offering from the Gentile churches to the church there. He will not leave Jerusalem a free man. The opposition fomenting among Jews all across the Gentile world will follow him to Jerusalem and will lead up to his arrest at the temple, as he is charged with speaking against the Mosaic law, the temple, and the Jewish people and their traditions.

ACTS 15:36–17:34

³⁶ And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” ³⁷ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

16 Paul¹ came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brothers² at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ And when Paul³ had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the⁴ district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by

fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”

¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. ²⁰ And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹ They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” ²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹ And the jailer⁵ called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

³⁵ But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, “Let those men go.” ³⁶ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.” ³⁷ But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.” ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

17 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” ⁴ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews⁶

were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷ and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” ⁸ And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. ⁹ And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

¹⁰ The brothers⁷ immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. ¹⁴ Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵ Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?” ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,⁸ ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for

“‘In him we live and move and have our being’;⁹

as even some of your own poets have said,

“For we are indeed his offspring.”¹⁰

²⁹ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

¹ Greek *He* ² Or *brothers and sisters*; also verse 40 ³ Greek *he* ⁴ Or *that* ⁵ Greek *he* ⁶ Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verse 13 ⁷ Or *brothers and sisters*; also verse 14 ⁸ Greek *made by hands* ⁹ Probably from Epimenides of Crete ¹⁰ From Aratus’s poem “Phainomena”

Section Overview: Ministry in Macedonia and Greece

After Paul and Barnabas separate after a disagreement concerning Mark, Paul continues on with Silas as his new partner in ministry. What follows are some of the most well-known events in Paul’s missionary travels: the circumcision of Timothy, a night-time vision calling Paul to ministry in Macedonia, the conversion of Lydia, a dramatic earthquake that frees Paul and Silas from a Philippian jail, the subsequent conversion of the Philippian jailer on the brink of suicide, a violent mob in Thessalonica, the noble reception of the gospel by the Bereans, and Paul’s magnificent condemnation of idols and exaltation of Christ among the pagan intellectuals of Athens.

Throughout these events we see the miraculous power of the gospel against great obstacles. Many are converted—rich and poor, young and old, male and female—through means both ordinary and extraordinary, in the face of opposition from a demon, from officials, from bars of iron, and from those considered the wisest men on earth.

Section Outline

II.B. The Mission to the Gentiles, Part 2 (15:36–21:36)

1. Paul and Barnabas Split Up (15:36–41)
2. Paul’s Ministry in Macedonia (16:1–40)
 - a. Timothy Accompanies Paul (16:1–5)
 - b. The Macedonian Vision (16:6–10)
 - c. The Conversion of Lydia (16:11–15)
 - d. Paul and Silas in Prison (16:16–24)
 - e. The Philippian Jailer Is Saved (16:25–34)
 - f. Paul and Silas Released (16:35–40)
3. Ministry in Thessalonica (17:1–9)
4. Ministry in Berea (17:10–15)

5. Paul with the Philosophers (17:16–34)
 - a. Athens (17:16–21)
 - b. The Areopagus (17:22–34)

Comment

15:36–41 *Paul and Barnabas Split Up.* Acts 15, a celebration of theological and missional unity in the church, also contains a report of disagreement—serious disagreement—between brothers. Paul and Barnabas, friends and colleagues since Barnabas took Paul to Jerusalem to introduce him to the other apostles (9:27), reach an impasse over what to do with John Mark. The dispute is so sharp that they either cannot reconcile or else decide the only way to reconcile is to separate.

While in Antioch after the Jerusalem council, Paul decides to return to the field. Specifically, he proposes a follow-up trip to check on those who came to faith during their first journey. The pattern of evangelism followed by discipleship is so clear by now it barely needs mentioning, though we ought never lose sight of the fact that teaching is just as important as reaching for those commissioned by Jesus to take the gospel to the world. The Great Commission, after all, commands teaching and baptizing as necessary components of disciple making (Matt. 28:19–20).

Barnabas agrees but has a suggestion of his own. He desires to take Mark along. Paul, however, will have nothing to do with Mark (also called John; Acts 12:12), who backed out and went home early in the first missionary journey (13:13). Paul has no interest in taking him on the second trip, and the two apostles cannot come to terms on the issue. The Greek word translated “sharp disagreement” (*paroxysmos*; 15:39) means to be provoked (here to irritation; in a positive sense in Heb. 10:24).

What do we make of an irreconcilable disagreement among apostles? Although Paul’s writing and teaching carries the authority of the Holy Spirit, does that same infallibility apply to his decision to reject Mark? If so, does that mean that Barnabas, acknowledged in Acts as an apostle, was simply wrong, or at least horribly unwise? Paul later changes his mind about Mark and near the end of his life asks Timothy to bring Mark to him “for he is very useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11), which seems to vindicate Barnabas’s judgment. It is possible (and this does not endanger his authority or his teaching) that Paul was mistaken, or at least too rigid, in his judgment about Mark. He could not see the future, when Mark would make a turn-around. It is also possible that Paul should have given Mark another chance. Paul, as great as he was, was not perfect or infallible—those attributes belong to God alone. We know that Barnabas was an encourager by nature (Acts 4:36), and perhaps this made him shortsighted in his decision to take Mark along. Maybe Mark was not ready yet and Paul was right to say, “No, not this time.” On the other hand, perhaps Barnabas recognized something in John Mark that Paul did not. Finally, maybe neither of the apostles was absolutely right or wrong about John Mark.

What we can say with certainty is that while Barnabas and Paul cannot get over their disagreement, both of them continue their work. The theological and missional unity of the church is maintained by both apostles. In the providence

of God, both are used for building and strengthening the church in spite of their disagreement. We do not hear much more about Barnabas, though up to this point he has been one of the most important figures of the early church. After he sails with John Mark, however, we read no more of him in Acts. Paul, on the other hand, becomes the major figure in the narrative. Paul is not better than Barnabas—or Peter, James, or John for that matter—he is simply different. He is chosen by God for specific purposes, and the results will reach down through the centuries to this day. Yet the dispute with Barnabas is not on the highlight reel of Paul's ministry, even though God uses it for good.

The chapter ends at the beginning of the second missionary journey, which will fill Luke's narrative through 18:22. The church will soon expand dramatically, and Paul will continue to learn the depth of Jesus' words concerning the suffering he will face for the gospel, as well as that of his own words concerning entering the kingdom only "through many tribulations" (14:22).

Response

There is no exact pattern provided here for handling disputes among Christians, though in the long run it appears Barnabas was right to give Mark another chance. At the same time, this text does not require the giving of second chances to everyone in every situation. There are times when we have to say, with Paul, "enough is enough" according to our best judgment at the time. Unless we are knowingly sinning, we must use and trust our best judgment in making decisions. Sometimes that may mean disagreeing with those closest to us. But we must also be aware that we cannot see what the future will bring or the full impact our decisions might have.

Nevertheless, disputes like this are a rarity in the NT; unity is the overwhelming shared emphasis in the Epistles. No other single teaching on Christian living matches the frequency with which unity is addressed in the NT. Regardless of any dispute, we cannot let anything hinder the work of reaching the world with the gospel. Brothers and sisters may have to agree to part ways from time to time, but we must always agree that we will pursue the good of the kingdom of Christ regardless of the way we take.

16:1–5 *Paul's Ministry in Macedonia: Timothy Accompanies Paul.* These verses depict Paul's wisdom in distinguishing between things that can impinge upon the gospel, such as requiring law keeping for Gentiles, and other things that can remove obstacles to the gospel, such as circumcising Timothy. Some readers of Acts struggle with the apparent contradiction between the Jerusalem council's decision not to require circumcision and Paul's decision to have Timothy circumcised. The two scenarios are different. One is the circumcision of a believing Jew for evangelistic purposes; the other is the requirement of circumcision for a Gentile's salvation. Paul is not requiring Timothy to obey the ceremonial law here; he is tearing down barriers between his fellow Jews and the gospel.

It may appear that Paul is picking and choosing from the Mosaic law, in contradiction to his later words that “every man who accepts circumcision . . . is obligated to keep the whole law” (Gal. 5:3). In fact, what Paul does is to display the ultimate freedom with which he views the law. A friend and mentor once said to me, “Paul’s view of the law is the most radical of all. Keep it if you want to, or not, but do not think for a minute that it saves you or distinguishes you from others.”⁷⁵ This, it seems to me, is what Paul teaches in Romans 14:3, 5, 17 and Colossians 2:16.

Luke tells us that Timothy is half-Jewish (Acts 16:1). His mother was a Jewish believer, making Timothy a Jew, but his father was a Gentile. Timothy’s mother is an excellent example of the influence of a believing parent (later in life, Paul will recall the heritage of belief in Timothy’s family; 2 Tim. 1:5). A believing parent does not guarantee salvation for children, but the benefit of being raised in a new covenant household, with Christ at the center, cannot be denied. It is safe to assume that it was the influence of his father that kept Timothy from being circumcised as a child.

Paul’s own relationship with Timothy is well documented in his letters. Timothy became a near-constant companion to Paul in his travels, and Paul speaks to him as a parent does to a child, even calling him “my true child in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2; cf. 1:18). Some argue that Timothy was converted under Paul’s ministry, but such does not seem to be the case. We can at least assume, however, that Timothy’s grandmother and mother (2 Tim. 1:5) were converted during Paul’s first missionary journey, and so the apostle was the indirect means of Timothy’s faith. It is also the case that we may be reading more into the phrase “child in the faith” than is necessary. This need not refer specifically to Timothy’s moment of salvation but could encompass discipleship and growth in the faith. The emotional impact of Paul’s comments about Timothy is not lessened if he was not the direct means of Timothy’s faith.

Luke does not record Timothy’s view of his own circumcision, which perhaps reflects his trust in Paul’s wisdom and judgment. More likely, Timothy’s point of view is not included because it is not important for the narrative. Whatever the case, Timothy is circumcised, and the reason is crystal clear: unbelieving Jews know Timothy’s father was Greek (Acts 16:3). Although he can legally claim Jewish status, Timothy must be circumcised to avoid a shadow of doubt. Paul and Timothy are motivated by concern for the spread of the gospel. His circumcision clears away an obstacle to ministry to the Jews and guarantees that the missionaries can continue Paul’s pattern of going into synagogues when entering new towns. It is only because Timothy is a Jew that Paul circumcises him. Later, when Jews protest that Titus, a Gentile, is not circumcised, Paul will not consider their complaints

⁷⁵ It should be obvious that such a statement does not mean we may or may not choose to steal, lie, commit murder, or commit adultery. All moral commands fall under loving God and loving neighbor. Instead my colleague’s comment is related to, for instance, deciding whether to set aside a day or to abstain from eating something or, in Timothy’s case, to practice circumcision. One can keep a day, abstain from foods, choose to dress in certain ways, or any number of other things—but linking personal practice to salvation or to marks of what identifies a believer beyond faith in Jesus is sin.

(Gal. 2:3). With Titus, circumcision would be inconsistent and hypocritical. With Timothy, circumcision is purposeful and useful.

This is not the last time Paul will be willing to go along with old covenant regulations for the sake of removing unneeded offense (cf. comment on Acts 21:17–26 [at v. 24]) in a way that does not compromise the gospel. But Paul never advocates keeping the Mosaic law as covenant law. In fact, he will categorize the law as part of the “elementary principles of the world” (Gal. 4:3). Paul is willing, however, to “become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). This is what the law becomes (not *only* this, of course) for Paul: another means that might be used in some contexts for the salvation of others. This is a radical new covenant view of the law.

Paul, Silas, and now Timothy continue to visit churches and to share the decision of the council, which Luke notes specifically has come from the apostles and elders (Acts 16:4). It is telling that Luke sees no need to justify Paul’s actions regarding Timothy’s circumcision while also announcing the council’s decision. As Paul and his colleagues visit the disciples throughout the region, Luke sounds a familiar note: strengthening of the churches goes hand in hand with more conversions. The making of disciples does not end with conversion but must continue into strengthening and training—what we call discipleship.

16:6–10 *Paul’s Ministry in Macedonia: The Macedonian Vision.* This section of Acts contains some of the most unusual parts of the narrative. The Spirit prevents ministry. Luke does not say how Paul, Silas, and Timothy know that the Spirit is keeping them from Bithynia (v. 7), nor why the Spirit chooses to do so. The commonsense conclusion is that God has other plans and is uninterested in providing us reasons for why it is not a good time to go to those places. We *can* be certain that it is a good time for Paul and his associates to go to Macedonia; the “Macedonian vision,” as it is often called, redirects the journey in that direction. Paul’s vision is similar to Peter’s after Herod placed him in jail (ch. 12). Luke does not describe whether the vision occurs while Paul is awake or asleep. What is important is the message of the vision, which is clear enough that the travelers conclude that they must travel to Macedonia (16:10). The stay in Troas is thus brief. This is not the last time Paul comes to Troas, nor the last time he does not stay long. In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul recounts how he went to preach at Troas but, when he found that Titus was not there, went instead to Macedonia looking for Titus even though there was an open door at Troas (2 Cor. 2:12–13).

Leaving Troas, the mission team travels to Philippi. Now that he has joined Paul and his colleagues (notice the switch in pronouns in Acts 16:10), Luke provides details orienting the reader to their route and providing a good sense of the time frame involved. The travelers reach Philippi, leading to one of the most eventful experiences in Paul’s life.

16:11–15 *Paul’s Ministry in Macedonia: The Conversion of Lydia.* The westward spread of the gospel begins at Philippi, a major city and Roman colony. The missionaries

are in uncharted territory, but the narrative shows that unreached people are not an obstacle for God. The missionaries go to the riverside to find a place of prayer on the Sabbath, suggesting that there is no synagogue in Philippi, or at least not one Paul wishes to visit (v. 13). There they meet a businesswoman named Lydia, a “worshiper of God” (v. 14). She is likely a Gentile who, like Cornelius, follows the Jewish religion but is not a full convert. Lydia sells purple clothing, meaning she is undoubtedly well off—purple cloth was prized in the ancient world and very expensive and time consuming to produce. The process involved boiling loads of a particular kind of sea snail that itself was not purple but when boiled produced chemicals that could be made into purple dyes. Thus, though wealth is singled out in Scripture as a particularly significant obstacle for the gospel, Lydia demonstrates that the wealthy are certainly not out of God’s reach.

Paul’s brief encounter with Lydia is a powerful example of the ways and means of evangelism. The apostle speaks to Lydia and the other women, and God “opened her heart to pay attention” (v. 14)—God sovereignly controls salvation but uses human means for its accomplishment. Lydia’s conversion marks both the expansion of the gospel in the Roman Empire and also the establishment of a base of operations for the missionaries, who go to stay at her house. Hospitality (not to be confused with entertaining) is a major issue for the early Christians traveling from place to place.

When Luke reports how Lydia and “her household as well” are baptized (v. 15), some take this to include not only family and servants, but also infants (if present). But proponents and opponents of infant baptism both have to deal with Luke’s silence on the matter directly. He does not say that infants either *were* or *were not* present in the Acts households. He is, however, not silent about the fact that believers who receive the Spirit are baptized (9:17–18; 10:44–48; 19:1–10). We should remember that Luke does not always mention receiving the Spirit and baptism in every conversion story, but he never explicitly describes baptism for anyone without the Spirit.

16:16–24 *Paul’s Ministry in Macedonia: Paul and Silas in Prison.* In Acts, money and the gospel often come into conflict in various contexts, from Ananias and Sapphira (ch. 5) to Simon the magician (8:18) and Bar-Jesus (13:8), from the slave girl here in chapter 16 to Demetrius the silversmith at Ephesus (19:24). Money in general is not in conflict with the gospel but rather greed and false motives for profit. There is a certain irony in the narrative: the rich woman Lydia accepts the gospel and uses her status to help the apostles, and then these events follow. The offense of the gospel is severe enough for most people, but, when combined with financial loss, the offense doubles. In Philippi is a slave girl who tells fortunes, making money for her owners. For a price, people seek to hear about their prospects for marriage, wealth, success, or whatever else. This is not the first time that preachers of the gospel confront supernatural powers and gifts (cf. Simon the magician), and here Luke reveals that such power is due to the girl’s being possessed by a spirit (16:16,

18). Not only does she have an evil spirit controlling her; she is also a major annoyance, following the missionaries around for several days.

From hearing Paul, the slave girl identifies him and his colleagues as speaking for God and preaching salvation. It is likely that she speaks far more than she knows or realizes when she refers to “the Most High God” or “the way of salvation” (v. 17). There is more going on here, however, than merely a girl speaking; a spirit speaks through her. The parallels with the Gospels are unmistakable. When the Gerasene demoniac (see Luke 8:26–39; cf. Matt. 8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20) saw Jesus coming and said, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” (Luke 8:28), it was the spirit within him, not the man, who knew Jesus’ true identity. So, while the girl in Philippi might not comprehend “Most High God” or “salvation” in the full biblical sense, there is no reason to doubt that the spirit within understands at least as much as the spirits understand Jesus in the Gospels. Evil spirits do not get everything right, but they at least understand when a rival, stronger power comes on the scene. Thus the girl and her owners, as well as the evil spirit, will experience the power of the gospel in different ways.

Eventually Paul has had enough and casts out the demon in the name of Jesus (Acts 16:18). Paul’s use of Jesus’ name is not a magic incantation (even if it was heard that way by the Philippians) but a declaration of Jesus’ power and victory over the forces of evil. The “Most High God” has an incarnate name: Jesus. Unlike with many of the exorcisms in the Gospels, Luke does not mention the girl again—but her owners are another matter.

The owners apprehend Paul and Silas only (v. 19), despite the presence of others with them (“we”; v. 16). That they seize Silas indicates that he is known as a leader and likely a spokesman alongside Paul. The slave girl’s owners know enough to identify Paul and Silas as Jews (v. 20), which reveals that even though the Jewish population in Philippi is apparently small, the city nevertheless has some knowledge of Judaism. It is also clear that Paul and Silas preach the apostolic gospel of Jesus of Nazareth: when the owners take Paul and Silas to the magistrate (the typical Roman official in a colony), they do not mention (or at least Luke does not) the incident with the slave girl but instead charge them with undercutting Roman customs by their teaching (v. 21).

Their teaching of customs “not lawful for us as Romans” cannot include simply monotheistic claims subverting the polytheistic practices of Rome. Jews, after all, were known monotheists in the Roman Empire.⁷⁶ Perhaps something in the message went against the emperor, but this is merely a hypothesis—we must not overplay the anti-imperial message of Luke. The early Christians were not insurgent, counter-imperial rebels reacting against the government. Such a view puts the cart before the horse. The gospel is not a reaction to Rome comparable to the response of underground groups to oppressive governments. Take away

⁷⁶ Peterson writes, “The Philippians were proud of their Roman citizenship and customs . . . and it was easy to present [Paul’s] new teaching as a threat to the existing social order” (*Acts*, 466). He also notes that Judaism was a legal religion in the Roman Empire.

an oppressive government, and underground movements and rebellions vanish. The Christian faith is not dependent on Rome or any other government for its purpose or fuel.

On the other hand, Christianity is countercultural because it is based on an entirely different worldview. Sometimes that worldview is compatible with a secular government; often it is not. The gospel will eventually run contrary to every earthly government because no earthly government will ever share entirely the Christian worldview. The only rule that will ever do so will be the one in the new heaven and new earth, where Jesus will reign forever as king. No representation or democracy will ever secure a place for Christians on this earth, not when we are created ultimately for divine monarchy.

In Philippi, the charges seem to boil down to this—Paul and his associates are endangering the Roman way of life, which must be preserved at all costs. This accusation is enough to win over the crowds and the authorities; the magistrate has Paul and Silas brutally beaten with rods (vv. 22–23), specifically bundles of smaller rods symbolizing authority, and placed into stocks (v. 24)—a detail that further enhances the dramatic events to follow. Amid this fervor to preserve a Roman way of life, there does not seem to be any opportunity for Paul and Silas to speak in their own defense (at least Luke does not mention it). This treatment is illegal under Roman law, as the magistrate will find out soon enough.

16:25–34 *Paul's Ministry in Macedonia: The Philippian Jailer Is Saved.* In prison, Paul and Silas sing hymns, with the other prisoners overhearing. Their response mirrors that of Peter and John, who rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (5:41). The scene becomes even more unusual when an earthquake hits—one strong enough to open all of the prison doors and unlock the prisoners’ shackles (16:26). This is clearly an act of God. The prisoners, against every natural human impulse, do not run through the open doors to escape Philippi. The jailer, of course, would never guess that the prisoners would stay in jail, so he decides to do what he knows the authorities will do to him as soon as they find out what has happened (v. 27). But before he can take his own life, Paul cries out and stops him (v. 28).

The jailer’s famous response is the dream of every evangelist: an unbeliever who asks how to be saved (v. 30). What does the jailer mean by asking, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” His understanding of what it means to be “saved” is perhaps influenced by what he has heard about Paul and Silas from others and what he himself heard of their singing and prayers. The jailer, like the possessed slave girl, does not have centuries of background before the fact, like the Jews, or after the fact, like us. There is no need to underestimate or overestimate what he means by “saved,” however, because Paul immediately fills whatever gaps may have been present in his understanding. Asking too many questions about private motivations and thoughts of narrative characters results in overemphasizing what is behind or under the text rather than what is in the text. If we are serious about authorial

intent, our first concern is what the author means, and whatever he or his characters think or know is known to us only insofar as the author tells us. Luke shows us a man at the end of his emotional rope, having experienced an event from which life cannot go back to normal; he senses that these Jewish prisoners have the answer.

Paul and Silas's response (v. 31) is a profound and elegant summary of the gospel. Paul begins with the blunt presentation of the gospel, and then he and Silas speak "the word of the Lord" to the jailer and his household (v. 32). If we learn one thing about missions and evangelism in Acts, it is that the only nonvariables are the message and God's sovereign use of human means; the times, methods, contexts, and opportunities are endless.

The gospel has an immediate effect on the jailer. He cares for Paul and Silas's wounds—which would have been significant—and receives baptism. This is the second household baptism in Philippi, and Luke is more specific in stating how "he and all his family" are baptized (v. 33). Some take this as further support for infant baptism, a conclusion based on theological presuppositions and an assumption that there are infants or toddlers in the house—or any children that have not yet reached a point where they could make a conscious profession of faith in Jesus. It is impossible to determine whether or not infants are present at this time in the jailer's household, but it seems to me that the greatest textual obstacle in Acts to infant baptism is the frequent connection between the reception of the Spirit and baptism.

What surely began as a fairly typical day in the life of a Gentile jailer ends with faith and new life through Jesus of Nazareth and yet more progress of the gospel into the world. From one point of view, a man such as the Philippian jailer may seem out of reach, one unlikely to hear, much less receive, the gospel. Yet, as Acts makes clear, there is no one, regardless of financial, economic, or social status, outside the reach of the gospel. As Luke has already stated (13:48), those who come to faith are appointed by God to do so.

16:35–40 *Paul's Ministry in Macedonia: Paul and Silas Released.* Luke does not record why the magistrates decide to release Paul and Silas. What is important is Paul's response: the jailer brings the news, but Paul decides to take steps to ensure that all Philippi will know that it is not his goal to subvert the empire. He invokes his rights as a Roman citizen (v. 37), which he will twice do later in Jerusalem (22:25–29; 25:11). The only ones actually guilty of breaking the laws of the state are the people and authorities in Philippi. By law, a Roman citizen had a right to trial before being condemned. Here we see Paul acting according to his views concerning civil government (see Rom. 13:1–7). He respects governing officials but also calls them to perform their God-given responsibility of doing what is right for those under their rule, reserving punishment for only those who do wrong (Rom. 13:4). Paul will not hesitate to suffer at the hands of the state when it comes to his gospel witness, but otherwise he is a law-abiding citizen who exercises his own rights under the law.

Upon hearing of their mistake, the magistrates come personally—as demanded by Paul—to let the prisoners go. They offer apologies and ask them kindly to leave Philippi. Paul declines to take his rights a step further and see the magistrates punished for their injustice to him and Silas. He accepts the invitation to leave, and the companions set off, stopping along the way at Lydia's to minister to the believers before pressing further into Macedonia. By his actions, Paul leaves the Christians in Philippi in a stable situation, having shown that the Christian mission is not to overthrow Roman customs and laws, at least not in the way they have been accused of doing.

Response

In some circles it is common to associate the “Macedonian vision” and the call to missions. More than one Christian has waited on God to grant a similar go-ahead toward a ministry goal. But when Paul sees the vision of the man from Macedonia, he is already hard at work in ministry. He is not sitting at home, pining away for a supernatural vision or asking endless questions about what God wants him to do. The text does not promise visions or the kind of certainty Paul and his friends have about where to go next, but it should cause us to rethink notions of God directing us while we sit and wait for the next big thing. This text is not the end-all for knowing God's will or for making ministry decisions, but a little less conversation and a little more action would not hurt the modern church. Further, we should realize that the vast majority of evangelistic and missionary endeavors in Acts occur apart from special dreams or visions. The word from Jesus to go to the nations is enough.

This text teaches us that our witness involves not merely an evangelistic encounter but a combination of living as an example as well as speaking. How we live shows what is in our hearts. The way we speak and how we cope with trials in everyday interactions with people leaves an impression on those around us. Of course, without verbal witness to the gospel all life-witness goes undefined. Unfortunately, we are rarely skilled at doing both. For many, merely the mention of so-called lifestyle witness sends up red flags. There are, of course, Christians who offer various excuses for their own lack of verbal witness, but as in so many other areas of the Christian life, the two aspects of witness are not choices but rather dual requirements. Verbal witness is primary, but if our ordinary speech, actions, and choices show no connection to our proclamation, then what good is our verbal witness? God can and does use imperfect people who make imperfect life choices to share his Word, but we must not lean on this fact as an excuse or justification for living out a less-than-Christian witness.

Paul's political context is more or less similar to modern-day contexts, depending on where one lives. What is universally true is that there are no perfectly just governments, merely some that are more just than others. The key is understanding how to apply NT teaching on the relationship between Christians and their governments in different contexts. A Christian in one context cannot and should

not always prescribe behavior for Christians in a different political context. The general rule of thumb is that Christians are to submit to their governments except when they cannot in clear conscience because of loyalty to Christ (Acts 4:19–20; 5:29). Christians must be careful not to claim persecution at the hands of the authorities when in fact it is their own lack of wisdom and judgment that has gotten them in trouble in the first place. Yet we must also be willing to take stands that include exercising whatever rights we have as citizens, even going beyond those rights for the sake of Christ and kingdom when called to do so.

There are many times when taking a stand or submitting is a matter of conscience. This does not mean that every time we claim to act on the basis of conscience we are doing what is right, but in many ethical (political) contexts there may be more than one way of acting or reacting as a Christian. Acts is not a guidebook for political action, but Luke does show us that the early Christians do not intend to subvert the government. They conform to it except when the gospel is at stake. The Christians in Acts do not show great concern for what their actions may mean in terms of the Roman Empire. Their concern is to take the gospel to every class of citizen in the empire and to those in every nation under or outside Rome's influence. Politics has a place, but the gospel is eternal.

17:1–9 *Ministry in Thessalonica.* The reception of the missionaries by the Jews in Thessalonica rivals that of the Jews in Pisidian Antioch and Iconium. Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia, located less than 100 miles (160 km) from Philippi. In spite of the treatment Paul and his companions receive, we know that the gospel takes a firm hold in the city, based on Paul's writings in 1 Thessalonians. This epistle also reveals that the majority of believers in Thessalonica were Gentiles (1 Thess. 1:9), though Luke does record that some Jews and many God-fearers believed (Acts 17:4).

As usual, the first stop is a synagogue. Paul and his companions attend for three weeks, during which time Paul opens the Scriptures (the OT), proclaiming Jesus as the Christ and declaring that Jesus' suffering (specifically his death) was precisely according to Scripture (vv. 2–3). Unlike elsewhere, Luke does not record the specific Scriptures Paul expounds, but one could assume that texts quoted previously in Acts by the apostles, such as Isaiah 55:3 (cited in 13:34) and Psalm 16:10 (cited in Acts 2:27, 31; 13:35), would have been used. Paul's scriptural proof, however, would have been not simply a matter of listing some verses but more likely a comprehensive theological reflection on the OT in general. Such a large-scale presentation would obviously include specific verses, but the biblical doctrine of the death and resurrection of Christ is supported by a broad spectrum of OT texts.

Paul's scriptural arguments are enough to win over many of his hearers. Luke reports that "some of [the Jews] were persuaded," along with God-fearers ("devout Greeks") and some "leading women" (17:4). The women could be Jews or God-fearers, but the Greek text strongly favors understanding these women to be Gentile God-fearers. That they are "leading women" means they hold prominent

positions in society, probably involved in commerce as was Lydia in Philippi (ch. 16). In his narration of the second missionary journey, Luke includes many references to women becoming believers (16:15, 40; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:2, 18, 26).⁷⁷ Believing women are prominent in Luke's narrative generally, just as women have a special role in his Gospel.⁷⁸

The unbelieving Jews become “jealous” (17:5) and stir up a mob that wreaks havoc in an attempt to get to Paul and Silas. They are jealous over Paul and Silas's winning people to Christ because such conversions threaten their tradition and history (ignoring the fact that their tradition and history have come to fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth). This is a narrative version of Paul's teaching in Romans 11 that the Jews in general are not lost forever but in God's plan of salvation have reached a climactic point in their sin and rejection of God in their rejection of Jesus. Because of this, the gospel has gone out to the Gentiles. But “did [the Jews] stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous” (Rom. 11:11)—using a word (“jealous”) directly related to the one used in Acts 17:5. What Paul writes to the Romans is exactly what he himself experiences in his ministry to the Jews.

The Jason in Thessalonica (17:6–7, 9) is likely the same one noted by Paul in Romans 16:21. Failing to find the ringleaders, the Jews bring Jason and other believers to the city authorities. They likely know that the authorities will not concern themselves with issues related to the Jewish religion (as typically seen from Roman authorities in similar situations elsewhere). Instead they bring a charge that would get the attention of any Roman—the Christians are disobeying Caesar's laws and claiming another king—Jesus (Acts 17:7). This is not the first time such a tactic has been used by the Jews. During Jesus' ministry, the Pharisees sought to ensnare him over his views on allegiance to Caesar (Luke 20:20–25), and later they told Pilate that he forbade giving tribute to Caesar but claimed kingship for himself (Luke 23:2). There were many ways to guarantee trouble with the Romans, especially by denying Caesar's kingship. Everyone in the empire had to swear allegiance to Caesar.

The early Christians worship Jesus as king and have no greater allegiance, but they are not bent on the political overthrow of the Roman Empire; they are certainly not “anti-imperial,” if that implies some underlying motive of toppling Rome from power. Paul and Silas do not proclaim Jesus as first an anti-imperial message. These are not insurgents or underground freedom fighters. On the other hand, the message that Jesus is King is subversive in the sense that while Christians are always called to submit to and respect secular authorities, they have no such responsibilities when obedience to the state means disobedience to Christ the King.

The authorities at Thessalonica are “disturbed” (Acts 17:8), but apparently not to the point of punishing Jason and the others beyond charging a fine (v. 9). Luke

⁷⁷ Peterson, *Acts*, 479.

⁷⁸ Examples of the prominent role of women in Luke's Gospel include the reports at 1:5, 6, 13, 24–25, 26–38, 41–45, 46–56; 2:19, 51; 7:37; 8:1–3, 43–44; 10:38–39; 23:49; 24:10.

does not record that Paul and Silas are ordered to leave; either this is implied or else it is the case that the believers recognize that the travelers ought to leave for safety's sake. Thessalonica proves to be a rough place to visit, but the impact of the gospel is clear from 1 Thessalonians, one of Paul's first letters. He recalls how the gospel took hold and the report of the Thessalonians' faith spread throughout the early Christian communities (1 Thess. 1:8). Gentile conversions followed in the wake of the visit as well, as Paul recounts that they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9).

17:10–15 *Ministry in Berea.* Various Christian groups are fond of referring to themselves as "Bereans." The word has become synonymous with a priority and concern for Bible study, originating from this section of Acts. The missionaries come to Berea and, as is their custom, attend a synagogue. Luke calls the Jews in Berea "noble" (Gk. *eugenēs*), a word that often refers to social status but can be used more broadly as a characterization of one's demeanor. These Jews are more upright and honorable than the troublemakers at Thessalonica. They gladly hear Paul and Silas and test their message against Scripture. As a result of studying the Scripture, many determine that the gospel message is right, and so they believe. The implication, given the Spirit's constant role in conversion since chapter 2, is that the Spirit has opened the eyes and hearts of the Bereans to understand Paul and Silas and the biblical foundation for their preaching. Scripture is the divine means of the Spirit's work—as well as being the divine revelation of God in Christ.

Luke mentions once more that the many believers include "women of high standing as well as men" (17:12; cf. v. 4). Again, the gospel takes root not only among the lowly and outcasts of society but also among those who have fewer perceived needs in this life. Such converts must be considered when reading Jesus' statement, "Only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:23–24). The difficulty for the rich is in seeing past their money and possessions to their need of God. This is difficult, even impossible, on their own, but not too difficult—and certainly not impossible—for the divine word of the gospel.

The peace at Berea does not last long. Jews from Thessalonica hear of what is happening and travel to Berea, intent on putting a stop to the missionaries (Acts 17:13)—increasingly, sustained and calculated resistance to the gospel appears in Luke's narrative, for as the gospel spreads, so does opposition and persecution. At this point, the missionaries split up: Silas and Timothy stay in Berea, but Paul is put on a boat headed to the intellectual and cultural center of the Greco-Roman world—Athens. Once there he sends word to Silas and Timothy to join him immediately (v. 15). As Paul later records in 1 Thessalonians 3, he is confident of his prospects in Athens (1 Thess. 3:1). Once Silas and Timothy join him, he quickly sends Timothy to Macedonia to check on the fledgling churches (1 Thess. 3:1–2), again indicating the apostles' emphasis on discipleship and training.

Response

The Bereans' understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture is every bit as important today as it was then. Although we are historically far removed from the apostles, we have their divinely inspired apostolic message in the Bible, which is no less powerful or authentic than the apostle Paul himself standing before us. In comparison to the Bereans, or to anyone else in the first century, how much better off are we, who have the entire canon of Scripture? The key is to trust the sufficiency and authority of the Bible, grounded in the power of the Spirit. The Bible is the Word of God, and we should be like the Bereans and like Luther, who declared, "Unless I am convinced from Scripture, I cannot recant my teachings." We cannot afford to lose the Berean—and Reformational—principle that the Bible can be read and understood by anyone who reads or hears it. This is not to say that there are no difficulties in Scripture, or that every text is equally easy to understand, but the message of God's salvation in Christ is crystal clear for anyone who reads it with the eyes of faith. The world changes, but there is no historical, cultural, political, or social gap large enough to nullify the sufficiency of the Bible.

17:16–21 *Paul with the Philosophers: Athens.* As Paul walks through this cultural capital of the Greco-Roman world, he is disturbed by the overwhelming idolatry all around him: "his spirit was provoked" (v. 16), referring not to the Holy Spirit but to Paul's conscience. He experiences something like a gut reaction, a physical sensation stemming from seeing or hearing something deeply upsetting. Athens is full of some of the best art and architecture in the known world, and a vast part of it consists of depictions (mainly statues and reliefs) of the gods and temples dedicated to them. It is not the multiple idols in and of themselves ("an idol has no real existence"; 1 Cor. 8:4) but the pervasive hold that idolatry has over the people that upsets Paul.

As usual, it does not take long for Paul to get to work. His skill at reaching people of various backgrounds is on full display. He is equally at home in the synagogues of Jews and God-fearers ("devout persons") and in the marketplace with Gentiles (Acts 17:17). Luke mentions specifically the Epicureans and the Stoics, two of the leading philosophical schools of the day. In the Greco-Roman world, people did not go to a university to study; students, for a price, would attach themselves to well-known philosophers. There were also general adherents and followers of particular philosophical traditions, as well as a great deal of mixing and matching of various points of view. Syncretism, the blending of different philosophies, religions, and worldviews, was the order of the day—as it is in our own times as well.

Epicureans sought what we would call the "good life," searching out how to live peacefully and to be content and satisfied in the world. For them the gods were, at best, remote. Stoics, on the other hand, believed basically in what we might call fate and that the best way to live was for each individual to take responsibility for self-discipline and to avoid extremes in all directions. In the face of an impersonal force moving the universe along, only strict ethical codes and virtuous living

could bring order to life. Neither group believed that the gods were involved in the day-to-day world.

Despite the uniqueness of Epicurean and Stoic philosophies, Paul presents the same message about Jesus of Nazareth that he has preached throughout his ministry. The Epicureans and the Stoics are closer to agnosticism than to anything else.⁷⁹ This is in fact true of many, if not most, Greco-Roman philosophical schools. Greek mythology is already centuries old, and the Roman versions (often the same as the Greeks' gods and myths but with different names) are well established by the time Paul comes to Athens. Yet it is clear that honoring the gods and the traditions is still very much a part of life in Athens; even if Paul's audience are not fervent adherents of those myths, they are still "very religious" (v. 22).

Whatever else they believe, some of them can agree on one thing: they are not impressed with Paul. They call him a "babbler" (Gk. *spermologos*; v. 18), literally someone who, sort of like a chicken pecking around on the ground, hunts and pecks at various ideas he does not even understand.⁸⁰ In their eyes Paul is a novice, an amateur out of his league. Still, others work out that he is a preacher of some foreign religion. All of this is because Paul includes the resurrection in his proclamation of the gospel. Telling unbelievers about the resurrection does not receive any better response in Paul's day than it does today, a fact that should encourage us not to hold back when it comes to that seminal truth of the gospel: no bodily resurrection, no gospel.

Paul's ideas are interesting enough, however, for the people to bring him to the Areopagus (v. 19), or "hill of Ares/Mars." This is the religious and civil center of Athens. Paul's interaction there, though not exactly a trial, is more than merely a free exchange of ideas. Wright points out that Socrates was once put on trial for charges similar to the accusation lodged against Paul: he is a "preacher of foreign divinities" (v. 18).⁸¹ However, the fact that "all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new" (v. 21) indicates a degree of real interest, or at least curiosity, in what Paul has to say. Finally, when Paul finishes his speech by reemphasizing the resurrection, there is no riot, no imprisonment, no charges (vv. 31–32). By Luke's account, he is free to go on his way. In short, the interaction on Mars Hill is less than a trial but more than a debate.

17:22–34 *Paul with the Philosophers: The Areopagus.* Paul's speech at the Areopagus is remarkable on many levels, but we should not view it as an exercise merely in academic apologetics. Paul is not making a case for the faith generally, nor only offering "proofs" for Christian beliefs, such as the resurrection of Jesus, but is presenting the gospel to Gentiles so that they might believe. All good apologists recognize that faith in Jesus is the endgame of apologetics, but sometimes in the

⁷⁹ Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 2*, 87. For a solid, and brief, overview of Epicurean and Stoic thought, see Schnabel, *Acts*, 724–725.

⁸⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, 367.

⁸¹ *Acts for Everyone, Part 2*, 84.

pursuit and study of the discipline the evangelistic goal is downplayed. This is decidedly not the case with Paul.

The Areopagus, situated near the acropolis, the Parthenon, and the agora, provides a dramatic backdrop for Paul to proclaim that God does not live in man-made temples. Paul's address, almost certainly shortened and edited by Luke (it is hard to imagine that Paul spoke only a few minutes), is the most brilliant presentation of the message of Christ to Gentiles in the NT. Using Scripture as his fundamental, unapologetic foundation, Paul weaves in physical and cultural surroundings, religious and philosophical backgrounds, and his knowledge of Greek literature to build a seamless presentation of the one true and living God as both judge and redeemer of all people. It is astonishing in its profound simplicity.

Paul begins with a common touchstone, making a connection with his hearers through their familiar surroundings. They are "very religious" (v. 22), and Paul capitalizes on this point. Of all the statues and temples, he focuses on an altar inscribed, "To the unknown god" (v. 23). Paul is not simply filling in a gap in their religion, nor saying that all they must do is grasp that the God he preaches is exactly the unknown god mentioned on the altar. This is not a case of Paul's saying, "You are really close to the truth, and now I will fill you in," nor, "You are almost there; now I am going to bring you all the way." Paul uses the altar as his inroad but then proceeds to dismantle their idolatry. The "unknown god" of the altar is not the Lord God, but the presence of the altar along with all the others points to their innate knowledge of the divine, a knowledge rooted in creation and God's providential ordering of the world and history toward an ultimate goal.

Paul asserts that there is one God, who made everything that exists; he is the King, the "Lord of heaven and earth" (v. 24). Paul's address is relentlessly monotheistic. This is the anchor of the address, and the following points flow from it. Paul's monotheism would not have gone unnoticed by the Athenians.

This one God is self-sufficient, needing neither man-made temples nor sacrifices (vv. 24–25). This comment is similar to Stephen's proclamation to his Jewish audience (7:48–50), applied here in a different context. Of all Paul's statements in Acts, this may be the most radical, or perhaps it is better to say that Paul's statement in Athens makes Stephen's all the more radical. These Greek idols and their temples are no more the dwelling place of the God of the universe than is the postresurrection temple in Jerusalem. Worship in such temples is idolatry. Unlike the various gods of Greco-Roman mythology, the one true God needs nothing from, nor cooperation with, human beings—yet he is no impersonal cosmic force, either. He is personal, providentially ordering the history of the world, including the times and places of all nations (17:26). He needs neither temples nor sacrifices "since" he is the creator of the world and all people, beginning with a single man (vv. 25–26). Though Paul does not name Adam explicitly, he is setting the stage for the climax of the address, which will end with an assertion concerning another man (v. 31). There is essential unity among the human race; regardless of our background, race, or ethnicity, we all spring from a common ancestor.

Paul is not merely stating theological facts about God in order to prove his existence. He shows that the one God, as creator, Lord, and sustainer of the world, has done all of this for a particular purpose: “that they should seek God” (v. 27). What Paul says next may cause confusion about what he expects mankind, apart from special revelation, to be able to do to find the one true God. But the verbs translated “feel their way” (Gk. *psēlaphēseian*) and “find” (Gk. *heuroien*) are in the optative mood, indicating the possibility of looking, not the probability of succeeding. In other words, the pervasive idolatry in Athens is a sign of an attempt to find God—not specifically an inquisitive or investigative search for the revealed God of the Bible but a search for someone or something divine, outside themselves.

Such a search is rooted in creation—it is hardwired, so to speak, into human beings to find the God who made them. Always falling short, we land on idols of various kinds as a substitute. In Athens, the idols were visible in temples and artwork, but the same holds true of all that humans pursue and give themselves to in the absence of the one true God. Physical idols as well as the reckless pursuit of things such as money, power, sex, prestige, or fame are all attempts at feeling around for something greater, something more. Paul is not concerned with building a theory about what theologians call “natural theology” but is driving home the gospel through the common experience of the Athenians and, by extension, all people. The best key for interpreting this is Romans 1, where Paul writes that what can be known about God is plain to everyone, but, since in a fallen world these things cannot ultimately lead to God, we turn what we see in creation into idols for worship in lieu of the God of creation. But the sense of something greater, the innate sense of God experienced by people made in his image but ruined by sin (not exactly the way Paul unpacks it in Athens), is what drives idolatry.

Paul makes a further connection with the Athenians and their innate sense of the divine. Not only is it seen in their idols; it is found in their literature as well. Paul quotes two Greek poets (Acts 17:28), the first likely being Epimenides (c. 600 BC; the same poet he quotes in Titus 1:12): “In him we live and move and have our being”; and the second being Aratus (c. 300 BC): “For we are indeed his offspring.” The truth of the altar to the unknown god is seen in the words of the poets. They are correct, though they speak of more than they know. Aratus was a Stoic, and by “his offspring” he spoke not in the sense of human beings as the children of a living God but in the sense that all people (or at least all Stoics) are bound by the same cosmic force in the universe. Paul is, again, capitalizing on the common human experience of the sense of the divine, of something greater that exists beyond us and our control.

Readers may wonder whether it is right to quote these Greek poets as Scripture, but when we quote these lines we are not quoting the poets directly nor affirming anything about their inspiration. We do not quote *them*; we quote *Paul*, and in doing so we quote Scripture. We are not simply quoting a piece of poetry that happens to line up with the teaching of the Bible; we quote pieces of Greek poetry that through the apostle have been recontextualized (put into a new context that

by necessity affects meaning) and included in Scripture. What we affirm by quoting them is not the meaning of the poets in their original context, much less any idea of divine inspiration in the poets themselves, but rather Paul's meaning in using them in his address.

An analogy is Jude's usage of nonbiblical Jewish traditions.⁸² Unlike the OT, the intertestamental writings were not held by first-century Jews to be inspired nor put on par with the OT. Yet Jude could nevertheless cite them as a given and known tradition, even a tradition that he and others believed to be true. The truth of a source, whether a statement or a historical event, is not at all a question of divine inspiration. Not everything true is divinely inspired. So Paul, like Jude, can cite nonbiblical sources without raising a question of the previous inspiration of his sources. What's inspired is Paul's use and Luke's inclusion.

Paul makes a brilliant move from his quote of Aratus to his final condemnation of idolatry. Since everyone is God's offspring, how could we think to create idols of gold, silver, and stone and call them gods (Acts 17:29)?⁸³ Although he does not quote it, the tragic irony of Isaiah 44 echoes in Paul's words. With this statement, Paul has deconstructed idolatry. The great lie of idolatry is that all idols are created by those who worship them. Just as with the man who takes a piece of wood, carves some of the wood into an idol, and uses the rest to make a fire to bake his bread before falling down on his knees to proclaim the idol as his god, so all are blind who worship anything but the true and living God.

Paul reaches the goal of his address in verses 30–31. The times of acting in ignorance are over. God has not yet judged idolatry, but he will, and now the Athenians know it. Paul calls them to repent, but he has not mentioned personal sin or reasons for condemnation, as he has done in earlier speeches in Acts. The only difference, however, is the basis for judgment. In earlier apostolic speeches the Jews were the primary audience, and in those contexts the specific sin was the rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah, which amounts to rejection of God. Such is not the specific sin of the Gentiles in Athens. Paul has called them to account for their sin of idolatry, presenting the message of the one true God and the impossibility of idolatry. The call to repent is based on a basic implied choice, rooted in personal monotheism. They can either stay in their idolatry, against which Paul has made a devastating case, or turn to the one true God. In addition, the call to repent is based on what Paul says next: the day is coming in which this one God will judge the world (v. 31).

Readers may note that Paul says "by a man" and does not mention Jesus by name, but the whole Areopagus scene started "because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection" (v. 18). There is no idea here of Paul as vague or unspecific about Jesus with his Gentile audience. Luke does not record the entire speech, and there is no reason to doubt that Paul has referenced "Jesus" a number of times, just as he has done elsewhere in Acts. Even if he did not, his hearers would have very poor memories if they had already forgotten the reason they brought Paul to

⁸² Jude 9 probably draws from *The Testament of Moses*, and verses 14–15 engage material found in 1 *Enoch*.

the Areopagus in the first place. We do not share the context of the people in the narrative, only the literary context of the narrative of Acts, in which the identity of the “one man” is explicit—just as it must be in all of our evangelism.

Paul’s Gentile audience would not have heard in the word “righteousness” all of its OT background, but they would have understood that God will judge the world with justice—that is, he will be just in his judgment and the grounds for that judgment. The ground for the judgment will be the one man who rose from the dead. With this, Paul brings all the ideas from verse 22 onward to a final point. The resurrection of Jesus is the end goal of the one God’s work in creation. God created the human race through one man (v. 26) and will judge his creation in the one man he raised from the dead. There is both warning and hope in Paul’s words.

Paul’s arguments do not convince everyone, but some, including Dionysius “the Areopagite” (a member of the officials gathered there), Damaris, and others, believe (v. 34). Paul’s most brilliant piece of apologetic evangelism does not end with mass conversion, but in the larger narrative we know that the numbers, large or small, are determined by God’s choosing (13:48) and his providence in bringing his people to himself. What we are left with is a model of evangelism to apply in our own world, which is both similar and distinct from Paul’s. We are also left with an even better understanding of the gifts and abilities of the apostle to the Gentiles. As much irony as there was to the call of Saul the persecutor of the church as an apostle, it is clear that this is the man for the job. Paul’s knowledge of Greek literature is impressive and informative for our own engagement in evangelism.

ACTS 18:1–28

18 After this Paul¹ left Athens and went to Corinth. ²And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” ⁷And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰for

I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” ¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

¹² But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews² made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, ¹³ saying, “This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.” ¹⁴ But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. ¹⁵ But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.” ¹⁶ And he drove them from the tribunal. ¹⁷ And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

¹⁸ After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers³ and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. ¹⁹ And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. ²¹ But on taking leave of them he said, “I will return to you if God wills,” and he set sail from Ephesus.

²² When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. ²³ After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit,⁴ he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷ And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

¹ Greek *he* ² Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verses 14 (twice), 28 ³ Or *brothers and sisters*; also verse 27 ⁴ Or *in the Spirit*

Section Overview: Ministry from Corinth to Ephesus

As the second missionary journey continues, Paul arrives at Corinth, one of the most famous—and infamous—cities mentioned in the NT. He meets Aquila and Priscilla, with whom he develops a close working relationship. It is here that Silas and Timothy rejoin Paul, who is already deeply involved in ministry in Corinth. Ministering at first, as usual, in the synagogue, Paul receives such strong opposition that for the second time he declares that his focus from now on will be on the Gentiles. In spite of opposition, many converts are won, and Paul is told in a vision from the Lord himself to continue ministering, because “I have many in this city who are my people” (Acts 18:10). As a result, Paul stays in Corinth for a year and a half.

The second part of the chapter narrates both the end of Paul's second journey and the beginning of the third. Luke's record of the time between the journeys is quite short but filled with important geographical detail outlining the routes Paul takes to Antioch and then out again. The turnaround between arriving at and leaving Antioch covers only two verses.

As Paul leaves Antioch, Luke turns his attention to Ephesus, where Paul had visited briefly on the way back to Antioch. Not only does Luke set the scene for Paul's arrival some time later after revisiting churches from the first two journeys, he also introduces one of Paul's most important companions, Apollos from Alexandria.

Section Outline

II.B.6. Ministry from Corinth to Ephesus (18:1–28)

- a. Corinth (18:1–17)
- b. Returning to Antioch (18:18–23)
- c. Apollos in Ephesus (18:24–28)

Comment

18:1–17 *Corinth*. When we think of centers of early Christian activity, Jerusalem and Antioch immediately come to mind. In the story of Acts, however, three other cities serve as key points through which Luke traces the fulfillment of Christ's command "to the end of the earth" (1:8): Corinth (introduced here in ch. 18), Ephesus (ch. 19), and Rome (ch. 28). Paul stays in Corinth a year and a half (18:11), placing it second only to Ephesus in terms of consecutive time Paul spends freely in any one place (19:8, 10). The amount of time Paul spends in Corinth helps us to understand the depth of his knowledge of the Corinthians and some of the issues he addresses in 1 and 2 Corinthians.

Five elements, including some that appear for the first time, are connected to Paul's ministry in Corinth.⁸³ For the first time, Luke shares that Paul makes money as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). In our day Paul would be labeled bivocational, describing one who pursues another calling alongside pastoral ministry in order to make a living. Second, Paul maintains the pattern of preaching first to Jews before moving to Gentiles. The third aspect is a new wrinkle that comes as a result of continued rejection in the synagogues and by the Jews generally, namely, the rise of house-church meetings (v. 7). Another development is the extended period of time Paul stays in one place. Finally, in the Corinth narrative Luke indicates that Christians at this time are still considered by the secular authorities to be part of Judaism and therefore still under a certain protection (v. 15). Roman authorities do not make a distinction between Jews and Christians but see the controversies over the place of the law and the person of Jesus as in-house disputes.

In Corinth Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla, who have come to Corinth because of Emperor Claudius's decision to drive the Jews from Rome in AD 49 (an event

⁸³ These five aspects of Paul's ministry in Corinth are identified in James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 239.

documented in extrabiblical sources as well). Luke does not describe the conversion of Aquila and Priscilla, and thus it is likely that they were converted before “recently” (v. 2) leaving Rome. As previously mentioned, at this time there is no distinguishing between Jews and Christians from a Roman perspective—the couple was expelled from Rome with the other Jews.

Soon the proconsul Gallio will hear the case against Paul and conclude it is a Jewish dispute (vv. 15–17). Later the tribune Claudius Lysias (23:29) and the governor Festus (25:19) will come to similar conclusions. The distinction between Judaism and Christianity, as evident as it will become in subsequent generations, is not yet fully understood outside the church in the first century. In Acts we see a trajectory of division, beginning with the separation from the temple, then from Jerusalem to Antioch and later Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome, and then from the synagogues to house churches. Measured against history, the division happens nearly overnight, but in the life of those in the narrative it takes some time. As the church moves outward from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and into the world, the difference becomes more evident. What might at the time seem like minor squabbles over laws and traditions are in fact the distinction between believing in or rejecting the Messiah promised to the Jews.

Following his typical pattern, Paul spends time in the synagogue seeking to convince, on the basis of Scripture, both Jews and God-fearing Greeks to believe in Jesus as the Messiah (18:4). This is followed by a shift to what become the typical meeting places for the early church: house churches (v. 7). As usual in Luke’s story, persecution leads to the change in setting. The increase in Gentile believers also accounts for the movement to house churches. Paul has withstood persecution and attacks on his preaching in virtually every place. Here in Corinth, however, the rejection is such that he not only declares, as he did in Pisidian Antioch (13:46), his turn to the Gentiles but also symbolically condemns their unbelief by shaking out his clothes and declaring, “Your blood be on your own heads!” (18:6). This is Paul’s way of stating that he has done his job and has been faithful to bring the gospel, but they are responsible for their unbelief and will be judged for it. The same gospel message that saves also condemns those who hear and refuse to believe (cf. 2 Cor. 2:16).

What may seem like a setback immediately bears fruit as Paul moves to the house of Titius Justus. Crispus (the synagogue leader), his household, and many others believe and receive baptism (Acts 18:8). As is usually the case, belief and baptism go hand in hand. Luke notes that Crispus’s “entire household” is baptized. Paul recalls this baptism in 1 Corinthians 1:14. The term “household” refers to both his immediate family and the servants living under Crispus’s care. In light of the Cornelius narrative, “entire household” could imply only those who believed and received the Spirit (Acts 10:44–48). Subsequent household baptisms of Lydia’s (16:15) and the Philippian jailer’s (16:33) do not mention the reception of the Spirit, although they seem to follow the pattern at Cornelius’s house. With Lydia, Luke says the Lord “opened her heart to pay attention,” and after that she and her household were baptized (16:14). There both belief and receiving the Spirit are

reasonably implied, at least for Lydia. Paul emphasizes the necessity of belief for baptism when speaking to the jailer (16:31), but the Spirit is not mentioned even though he was surely present. So here with Crispus, the reader of Acts can assume both faith and the Spirit at conversion. Whether the baptism includes infants who by nature cannot yet believe is ambiguous from the term “household.”

Paul’s extended stay in Corinth, in spite of the rough reception and general unrest on account of the gospel, is based on a certain word he receives from the Lord, appearing to him in a vision: “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people” (18:9–10). Paul is not given a special divine vision regarding who will believe but is encouraged to persevere in Corinth because the Lord’s “people” are there. Divine providence in election is not revealed in terms of mechanics or specifics—both known only to God—but is revealed to us in the Bible as something that lies with God completely and as something we may confidently believe. There is no hint of fatalism, much less a decreased motivation for preaching and evangelism. From what the Lord tells Paul, he may stay and preach with confidence.

We also see that the necessary means of salvation are not separated from the divine grounds of salvation. God’s sovereignty in salvation is realized through the spoken word of the gospel. People are appointed, but they must believe (13:46). Whether God could bring saving knowledge of Jesus in some other way, or whether someone could be saved on a remote island with no chance of hearing the gospel, are not questions the Bible poses or even suggests that we explore. Our knowledge of God’s election is limited to knowing that the Bible teaches God’s sovereignty in salvation and that we have evidence of it only when people believe. This knowledge is not for speculation but for confidence to preach the gospel to all people in all circumstances.

Paul’s eighteen months in Corinth end in another uproar. The Jews there bring him to the proconsul, Gallio, on charges that he has taught worship of God that is “contrary to the law” (18:13). The irony is that such a charge reveals that they understand neither Paul nor their own law. In this instance, Paul does not even speak. Gallio could not care less about the case and tells them to settle their own issues themselves. Once again, Luke shows the providential protection extended to Paul through Gentiles. More importantly Gallio’s response—to drive the Jews out of court (v. 16)—confirms the Lord’s promise to keep Paul safe.

Out of what appears to be pure spite, the Jews grab Sosthenes, the synagogue ruler, and beat him (v. 17). The implication is that Sosthenes, who presumably took over as synagogue ruler after Crispus became a believer, has also become a believer.⁸⁴ The Jews beat Sosthenes somewhere within sight of the tribunal—the seat from which Gallio would judge the cases brought before him—but Gallio “paid no attention to any of this” (v. 17). Rome is not yet an open opponent to the gospel, but

⁸⁴ Though it is not certain, it makes sense to think that this Sosthenes is the one mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1.

neither is it a particular defender of the first Christians. When Roman officials in Acts defend Christians such as Paul, they are protecting the laws and customs of the Roman Empire. Although the Jews were opponents of the early church, the believers suffer just as much, and soon far more, at the hands of Gentiles (see 1 Thess. 2:14).

18:18–23 *Returning to Antioch.* This section brings Paul's second missionary journey to a close by quickly tracing his trip from Corinth to Antioch and just as quickly narrating the beginning of his third journey. Priscilla and Aquila depart with Paul—it is clear that Paul usually has a team with him on his missionary travels, and Priscilla and Aquila's important role in the narrative comes shortly. Luke also records that Paul is “under a vow,” presumably a purification vow, although he does not state why (v. 18). All we can conclude is that Paul took the vow because he chose to do so and that it did not compromise his view of the old covenant and its law. As Paul makes clear in his epistles, believers can do (or not do) or keep (or not keep) whatever they want according to their consciences, as long as they realize that the doing (or not doing) does not make them special in the eyes of God (cf. Gal. 6:15).

Perhaps Paul took the vow for personal reasons—it is possible he did so as an act of becoming a Jew for the sake of Jews and being “all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:20–23). It is conceivable he did so in anticipation of his upcoming trip to Jerusalem, which is likely implied in Acts 18:22; there Luke says that after landing in Caesarea Paul “went up and greeted the church,” which almost certainly refers to the church in Jerusalem. Although there is no way to know exactly why Paul took this vow, we should conclude that, whatever the reason, the vow was not inconsistent with either the Jerusalem council's decision (ch. 15) or Paul's teaching.

Paul's declaration to turn to the Gentiles (18:6) once again does not imply never again entering a synagogue. When he arrives in Ephesus for a short visit that foreshadows chapter 19, he goes straight to a synagogue to “[reason] with the Jews” (18:19). Paul and his gospel enjoy some degree of acceptance, and he likely makes converts in Ephesus, judging from the request for him to stay and also from his promise, if God wills, to return (vv. 20–21). These verses point forward to the third missionary journey, in which Ephesus will be the longest stop on that trip around the Mediterranean world. These verses also speak to the dynamic nature of how Paul fulfills his calling. Sometimes he is led directly by the Spirit or through a vision, and other times Luke simply shows Paul making a decision to stay or leave a place without mention of further deliberation or special revelation.

Luke moves quickly to Paul's return to Caesarea and back to Antioch. In between those cities Paul “went up and greeted the church” (v. 22). Most commentators believe this to be the church in Jerusalem, although some question why Luke does not mention that city by name even though he does so elsewhere. There is no reason to suggest that the city goes unnamed because of increasing tension between Gentile and Jewish believers or because Luke is purposely diminishing the status of Jerusalem. Because of the central place and importance of the city in Acts, Luke does not have to mention it by name here.

Just as quickly as Paul returns to Antioch, he again sets out and, as before, returns to areas of previous ministry, namely, Galatia and Phrygia. Luke likely mentions these places because they are part of the region that the Spirit kept Paul from visiting on his second journey (16:6). But now Paul is able to return, further teaching and encouraging the churches.

18:24–28 *Apollos in Ephesus*. The narrative moves to Ephesus, as Luke introduces one of the more remarkable characters of the NT. Apollos is from Alexandria, one of the leading intellectual cities in the world at the time, and he is noted as an “eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures” (v. 24). We know from 1 Corinthians that Apollos becomes one of the more important and effective ministers of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:5; 4:6), and Luke makes Apollos’s gifts and abilities evident as well. But how can a powerful teacher who teaches “accurately the things concerning Jesus” only know about the baptism of John the Baptist (Acts 18:25)? This points to the transitional nature of this time and the dawning of a new era in Acts. Unlike the disciples of John the Baptist whom Paul meets in chapter 19 (cf. comment on 19:1–10), Apollos has been taught about Jesus, knows him as the Messiah, and could show this identity based on Scripture, but his knowledge does not include Christian baptism.

It is not at all difficult to imagine that the whole message did not reach Apollos in Alexandria; there were likely a multitude of people with incomplete knowledge of “the Way” who nevertheless believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Conclusions about Apollos, however, cannot be based on events behind Luke’s narrative, regardless of how likely they seem or whether they are based on commonsense observations. Luke does not fill in all the gaps, and we are left with yet another character in the first generation of the church whose background is incomplete.

Unlike the disciples of John in chapter 19 or the Samaritans in chapter 8, Luke does not say that Apollos lacks the Spirit but implies that he is a believer.⁸⁵ At the same time, as seen throughout Acts, belief, baptism, and the Spirit are connected, and Luke explicitly says that Apollos knows only John’s baptism. He knows Jesus “accurately,” yet things are explained to him “more accurately” (18:26). Readers can and should assume from the narrative of Acts that Apollos is baptized after he hears of Christian baptism from Priscilla and Aquila, but Luke does not mention the giving of the Spirit. The story of Apollos describes unique circumstances that do not match up exactly with any of the other characters introduced in Acts. His story is not a pattern but a special case in a narrative filled with unique characters and events. Apollos, like the believers north of Jerusalem in the early chapters of Acts, points to a larger trajectory of the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth. The spread of the message was not then, nor is it now, neat and clean and theologically precise at every point. That is why Luke is always underscoring the ongoing business of teaching and training in the church.

Luke’s main concern is to show that whatever is lacking in Apollos is filled up through the teaching of Priscilla and Aquila. The ordering of their names here, as

⁸⁵ Bock makes a persuasive case for Apollos as a believer and also refutes views to the contrary (*Acts*, 591–592).

in verse 18, with Priscilla first (unlike verse 2, where Aquila is first) should neither alarm complementarians nor encourage egalitarians. Why does Luke change the order? No one knows. The point is that the couple, fresh from a year and a half with Paul in Corinth and knowledgeable in the faith, hear Apollos and take him aside and fill him in on the whole story. Luke does include Priscilla in the teaching of Apollos, and he does not distinguish anything beyond that. He does say “they took him aside” (v. 26), implying that the teaching is not public and thus not contrary to what Paul will later write to Timothy regarding women not teaching men in a church setting (1 Tim. 2:12). At the same time, there is nothing in this text to support the idea that Priscilla communicates only through her husband and does not address Apollos directly, or merely sits there in reverent silence. In any case, Apollos, carrying a letter of endorsement, goes to Achaia (the region of Corinth) and both teaches believers and refutes the Jews from Scripture. With that the story returns to Paul, who is meanwhile making his way back to Ephesus.

Response

Paul’s ministry in Corinth teaches that every minister of the gospel must remember that the same word that brings life is the word that will be an instrument for judgment to those who hear and reject it (Acts 18:6). Another implication from this narrative is that the minister’s only responsibility is to be faithful and let the results lie with God—rejection of the message does not necessarily imply an error in planning or presentation.

Luke has already recorded Gentile opposition to the gospel, and the best example is yet to come in Ephesus. The point to take away from Acts in general is that the message of the gospel is not naturally at home, or more or less accepted, in any cultural or social setting; nor is its success assured through even the best examples of contextualization. Its power and success are neither dependent on nor conditioned by context.

ACTS 19:1–41

19 And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland¹ country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples.² And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”³ And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.”⁴ And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.”⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in² the name of the Lord Jesus.⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them,

the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

⁸ And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.³ ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

¹¹ And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” ¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all⁴ of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. ¹⁸ Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹ And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

²¹ Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” ²² And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

²³ About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. ²⁴ For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. ²⁵ These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. ²⁶ And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷ And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”

²⁸ When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” ²⁹ So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel. ³⁰ But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. ³¹ And even some of the Asiarchs,⁵ who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. ³² Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. ³³ Some

of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. ³⁴ But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

³⁵ And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, “Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky?” ³⁶ Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. ³⁷ For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. ³⁸ If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. ³⁹ But if you seek anything further,⁷ it shall be settled in the regular assembly. ⁴⁰ For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.” ⁴¹ And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

¹ Greek *upper* (that is, highland) ² Or *into* ³ Some manuscripts add *from the fifth hour to the tenth* (that is, from 11 A.M. to 4 P.M.) ⁴ Or *both* ⁵ That is, high-ranking officers of the province of Asia ⁶ The meaning of the Greek is uncertain ⁷ Some manuscripts *seek about other matters*

Section Overview: Ministry in Ephesus

Acts 19 continues the story in Ephesus from chapter 18, beginning with Paul’s arrival. Immediately readers are faced with one of the more puzzling stories in Acts: Paul encounters “disciples” who neither possess nor have heard of the Holy Spirit. All they know is the baptism of John.

Of all the cities Paul visits in his journeys, he stays the longest in Ephesus. Luke focuses on two main events during Paul’s nearly three years there. The first is an encounter with the seven sons of Sceva, Jewish exorcists using the name of the Lord Jesus to drive out demons. They find out in short order that at least one evil spirit is not impressed with their authority or power. In one of the stranger episodes recorded by Luke, the evil spirit testifies to the authority of Jesus and Paul, and as a result the name of Jesus is praised and a revival of sorts breaks out among believers involved in different kinds of magic.

Verses 21–41 record a riot in Ephesus incited by a silversmith named Demetrius, who along with others takes a substantial financial hit as a result of Paul’s evangelizing and turning numbers of people away from idolatry. A melee breaks out in the name of the goddess Artemis (Diana), and two of Paul’s companions are swept up by the crowd. Luke captures the confusion and rage of the people, who shout for two hours, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:34). Paul, on the counsel of friends, never becomes directly involved. Then, in a surprising turn of events, the town clerk, using commonsense reason, quiets the mob and sends them home. This is one of the most remarkable stories of the preservation of gospel witness in Acts.

Section Outline

II.B.7. Ministry in Ephesus (19:1–41)

- a. Disciples of John the Baptist (19:1–10)
- b. The Power of God and the Sons of Sceva (19:11–20)
- c. Money and Idolatry: A Riot in Ephesus (19:21–41)

Comment

19:1–10 *Disciples of John the Baptist.* On the heels of his introduction of Apollos, Luke introduces another group with less than perfect knowledge of Jesus. When Paul arrives at Ephesus he meets “some disciples” (v. 1), which seemingly refers to them as followers not of Jesus but of John the Baptist. Like Apollos, this group knows about John’s baptism only, and they have never heard of the Spirit. That they do not know much about Jesus is clear in Paul’s short recap of John’s ministry (v. 4). Recalling John’s role as witness of the one to come, Paul tells them about Jesus. Luke does not indicate the length of their discussion but only mentions that when they hear they are “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 5), implying that they believe in him. Similar to the experience of the Samaritans in chapter 8 with Peter and John, these believers receive the Spirit when Paul lays hands on them. Also like the Samaritans and as at Pentecost (ch. 2) and Cornelius’s house (ch. 10), the reception of the Spirit is manifested in speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Readers find this narrative to be one of the more confusing episodes in Acts. These people are called “disciples,” and Paul asks if they received the Spirit “when you believed” (19:1–2). The text makes it clear that they are disciples of John the Baptist, but what do we make of the other issues? We should perhaps not assume that the phrase “when you believed” is an assertion that they are in fact already believers in Jesus—Paul’s question is a legitimate inquiry. If one wants to discern if someone else is a believer, the best place to begin is probably to ask. Paul is getting to the bottom of the issue, beginning with the most basic question. As the conversation progresses, Paul learns that they have never even heard of the Spirit. That he goes on to proclaim Jesus specifically as the goal of John’s ministry shows that he discerned that these “disciples,” unlike Apollos, were not yet full disciples of, or believers in, Jesus.

Nowhere in Acts is the overlap between covenantal ages more clear than here. These disciples of John the Baptist are old covenant believers. Just as John was the last of the messianic prophets and was himself a turning point from the old to the new covenant, so these disciples of his are living in a time of overlap between the old and the new. Jesus ushered in the new covenant through his death and resurrection, but it is the coming of the Spirit after his ascension that establishes or applies the covenant to believers. If we imagine the covenants only as operating along a perfectly straight horizontal line, clearly divided by a single vertical line of the cross, then the story in Acts 19 is hard to grasp. The NT makes clear, in both proposition and narrative, the definitive break between the covenants but

equally shows the practical outworking taking time. These followers of John are believers just like John himself was, or any other OT saint—Abraham, Moses, Rahab, David, and down through the prophets. They believe that God is keeping his promise of salvation and, without seeing its fulfillment (see Hebrews 11), continue waiting in faith. They are the last of the old covenant faithful remnant, living in an absolutely unique, never-to-be-seen-again time when the old is fading and the new dawning.

Luke mentions that “there were about twelve men in all” (Acts 19:7). Although the number twelve may catch the reader’s eye—there were twelve tribes of Israel and twelve disciples of Jesus—usually a number is just a number. There is nothing numerically significant here. Luke gives no clue that the number should be read as anything more than a number. He does not say “twelve” like the way he reports Jesus’ being in the wilderness “forty days” (Luke 4:2) in order to draw a parallel with Israel’s wandering in the wilderness forty years (there are many significant groups of forty in the story of Israel). This reference in Acts 19, as much as it may entice our imaginations, is different and does not point to anything beyond itself. The biblical parallel between the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve disciples is a clear referent, but in Ephesus there just happened to be somewhere around twelve followers of John the Baptist who became followers of Jesus.

Luke refers explicitly to the “kingdom of God” only a few times, and the narrative of Paul in the Ephesian synagogue is one such time (v. 8; cf. 1:3; 8:12; 28:23, 31). The relatively small number of explicit references to the kingdom, as in Paul’s epistles, does not indicate small interest. After the ascension, Jesus is the ruling and reigning King (2:24–36; 13:30–37), and the kingdom of God is established. So, just as in Paul’s epistles, where the apostle refers to Jesus’ fulfillment of the Davidic promise (Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8), his exaltation as Lord (Phil. 2:9), and his rule at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1), so in Acts the kingdom of God is a central theme even though the explicit term is not as frequent as it is in the Gospels.⁸⁶ The kingdom is the biblical and theological backdrop for reading Acts and the rest of the NT. Luke does use the explicit phrase at the beginning of the book, in reference to Jesus’ teaching the disciples (1:3); when the gospel first goes beyond strictly Jewish boundaries to the Samaritans (8:12); at the end, as Paul preaches under house arrest in Rome, effectively bringing the message “to the end of the earth” (1:8); and here, at the beginning of Paul’s longest ministry in a single place. Four references is not many by counting but is significant when considering their placement.

Paul again begins in the synagogue, but after three months he meets enough resistance to the gospel among the Jews that he moves on with his followers to a Gentile location, the “hall of Tyrannus” (v. 9). Luke highlights another irony in Paul’s ministry: just as Paul tracked down and persecuted those “belonging to

⁸⁶ As for explicit references, there are fourteen occurrences of “kingdom” or “kingdom of God” in Paul’s letters—not a small number given the size of Paul’s letters. See Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 1:13; 4:11; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18.

the Way” (9:2), so now he, the leading missionary of the faith he tried to destroy, leaves the synagogue where he has taught for three months because unbelieving Jews are maligning “the Way” (19:9).

19:11–20 *The Power of God and the Sons of Sceva.* Paul’s ministry in Ephesus calls to mind the early ministry of the other apostles. Just as the apostles preached with power and performed signs and wonders (3:6–8; 4:33; 5:12, 15–16), so God works miraculous signs to accompany Paul’s ministry. Luke makes it clear that God, not Paul, is the source of the power. Just as people hoped for the shadow of Peter to pass over them (5:15), so people in Ephesus touch Paul with cloth and bits of clothing that are then taken to sick and possessed people for healing and exorcism. As with Peter and the others, these are not magic tricks or shows of power for the sake of impressing audiences but are signs of God’s working through the apostolic preaching and ministry.

The incident with the sons of Sceva is another in a series of confrontations between the power of God and the powers of evil (8:9–10, 18–24; 13:6–11; 16:16–19). In Samaria, Simon Magus sought the power he thought rested in the apostles, and apparently the sons of Sceva know of Paul’s works in the name of Jesus. Guessing that the power is in the name used as in a magic spell or incantation, they presume to use that power to exorcise demons. These men are traveling exorcists, which apparently must have been a viable line of work. In his Gospel, Luke does not record shock or surprise about either demon possession or that Jesus would drive them out. What does surprise the demons, of course, is that he has the authority to cast them out. So exorcism is not unknown. What Luke does note is that the demons (in contrast to their reaction to other exorcists) listen to and obey Jesus (Luke 4:36). Likewise, exorcism accompanies the apostles’ own ministry (Acts 5:16; 8:7). The important point is that these seven men who do not believe in Jesus attempt to use his name to drive out demons.

There is nothing funny about demons or demon possession; the modern West does not take demons seriously enough, with most in the West not even believing in demons at all.⁸⁷ This is in stark contrast to believers in other parts of the world, where skepticism or belief based only on empirical evidence are not the only ways of looking at the world. There is, nevertheless, something humorous in the sons of Sceva story. When the sons attempt to use the name of Jesus, the evil spirit retorts, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” (19:15), and the possessed man proceeds to beat them to the point that they escape literally with not even the shirts on their backs.

The last remark in this section is also the last time Luke provides a summary statement of the ongoing triumph of the gospel in the face of constant opposition (v. 20; cf. 6:7; 12:24). This comment also sets up the final recorded conflict that Paul and his companions face in a Gentile setting.

⁸⁷ As Wormwood told Screwtape, the best thing for demons is people who do not believe in them in the first place; see C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*.

19:21–41 *Money and Idolatry: A Riot in Ephesus.* Verses 21–22 provide another geographical and chronological marker for the narrative, laying out the general path Paul will take until he arrives at Rome at the end of Acts. He plans to revisit Macedonia—where Berea, Philippi, and Thessalonica are located—and Achaia, the province containing Corinth. He then intends to visit Jerusalem before moving on to Rome. Prior to all of this, however, a climactic event of the gospel confronting pagan idolatry takes place in Ephesus.

In this narrative Luke shows many forces at work simultaneously against the gospel. This is not simply a matter of God versus the gods of pagan idolatry, for there are also financial, social, and cultural forces at work here. Luke remarks, “There arose no little disturbance concerning the Way” (v. 23), as those who followed Christ were known (19:9; 22:4; 24:14). Whatever else might be involved, the believers in Ephesus who have turned away from idols pose a financial threat to the commerce surrounding the worship of Artemis. If people do not buy idols, the idol-makers’ income will disappear.

The spark that starts the riot in Ephesus is similar to the event in Philippi in which the owners of a slave girl with the power of divination become greatly upset after Paul drives the demon from her and so eliminates their source of income (16:16–24). Demetrius and other craftsmen who make their living selling home shrines to Artemis take action to protect their business. News of Paul’s preaching against idols has previously reached Ephesus, and they are duly concerned for what it means for them personally. The issue is not just money; there is real concern for what the Way might mean for their beloved temple and goddess Artemis. It might “be counted as nothing, and . . . she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship” (19:27). The Ephesians are concerned for the preservation of their culture and religious worship. The gospel faces such opposition today in many parts of the world where the dominant religion in a country or region is rooted in culture and history. Converting to Christianity is often not only a switch of religious worship but often also a total shift in cultural identity.

Parallels can be seen between the conflict surrounding the Way and the Artemis temple and the conflict over views regarding the temple in Jerusalem and temples in Greece. Demetrius is well aware of Paul’s message that “gods made with hands are not gods” (v. 26). This obviously applies to Artemis and her temple. Stephen reminded his persecutors that God “does not dwell in houses made by hands,” supporting his statement with Scripture (7:48–50). Paul has made the same point with the philosophers in Athens (17:24–25). The early Christian message is unequivocal: God is no longer known or worshiped in temples, whether Jewish or Gentile. Biblically, the impact of this idea bears the most weight in regard to the Jerusalem temple. With the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as the gift of the Spirit that localizes the dwelling place of God anywhere believers are present, the time and place of the old covenant temple—past, present, or future—is eclipsed. Any thought of maintaining or returning to the Jerusalem temple is on par with turning to a pagan temple. Either way, there is no god there.

It takes no time for the irritated crowd to form a mob caught up in the emotion and outrage, even if most are not even sure of the reason for the riot (v. 32). Paul is kept out of the melee by some of the disciples (v. 30), but two of his companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, are not so fortunate (v. 29). Luke mentions a group called the “Asiarchs” and notes that they are friends of Paul who likewise seek to keep him out of danger (v. 31). These men are Roman officials who exercise authority in councils and preside over various civic events and activities and celebrations.⁸⁸ Luke does not claim that they are believers; the most we can say is that they are high-ranking Romans who likely want to protect Paul because protecting him means preserving the peace.

A Jew named Alexander is put forward by some in the crowd to speak to the mob. His grounds for potential defense is unclear (v. 33); perhaps he intends to speak against Paul and the Christians and to recount the Jews’ grievances against them and so take advantage of the situation. Or perhaps he wants to make clear that these followers of the “Way,” despite their Jewish origins, should not be confused with the Jews who have synagogues all over the empire. In any case, he probably does not have the best interests of Paul and his companions in mind. But when the crowd sees that he is a Jew, they will have nothing to do with him. (As mentioned earlier in regard to Priscilla and Aquila and the expulsion of Jews from Rome, at this point the typical Roman on the street would not differentiate between Jews and Christians.) The fervor and wild-eyed nature of the mob is clear when they recognize Alexander as a Jew: they shout “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” for two hours (v. 34).

The town clerk, mediating between the city and the Roman officials, understands the danger involved and finally wins the crowd’s attention. His argument is simple: everyone knows Ephesus to be the center of Artemis worship, and there is nothing or no one that could threaten that fact. He urges the crowd to calm down, because they have no legal grounds for persecuting these men, who have done nothing wrong (v. 37); if Demetrius and his friends want to pursue the matter, they can take it up with the courts (v. 38). The clerk is concerned that the people not be charged with rioting (v. 40). Like the magistrates in Philippi (16:35–39) and Gallio in Corinth (18:14–17), this clerk is the instrument that provides protection for the disciples. As in the other two instances, he is motivated not by an interest in the message of Paul but in maintaining civic peace and keeping Roman law. Yet it is clear to the reader of Acts that through many providential acts God is superintending the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Response

Despite Paul’s “extraordinary miracles” (19:11), there is no promise given or implied in the text that Luke is prescribing or predicting that similar signs and wonders will always or even usually accompany gospel ministry. This is an account

⁸⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, 806.

of the establishment of the kingdom in power, and while the content of the proclamation never changes, its accompanying signs can and do change. Such displays of power do not even accompany every story of ministry in Acts. Luke shows how signs and wonders accompany gospel ministry to different degrees in the first years of the church. In other words, the signs performed in Jerusalem, Ephesus, and other places are not prescribed or normative from the very beginning of the church in the one, single piece of writing that narrates the story of the apostles in the first Christian generation. Thus we should not demand their presence today.

ACTS 20:1–38

20 After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.

²When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. ³There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews¹ as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. ⁵These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, ⁶but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

⁷On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. ⁸There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. ⁹And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. ¹⁰But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, “Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.” ¹¹And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. ¹²And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

¹³But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. ¹⁴And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. ¹⁵And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and² the day after that we went to Miletus. ¹⁶For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

¹⁷Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. ¹⁸And when they came to him, he said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.³ ²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by⁴ the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵ And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God,⁵ which he obtained with his own blood.⁶ ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. ³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

³⁶ And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸ being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

¹ Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verse 19 ² Some manuscripts add *after remaining at Trogyllium* ³ Some manuscripts omit *Christ*

⁴ Or *bound in* ⁵ Some manuscripts of the Lord ⁶ Or *with the blood of his Own*

Section Overview: Final Farewells

Acts 20 serves as a bridge between Paul’s third missionary journey and his final recorded trip to Jerusalem in the book of Acts. This chapter begins what many scholars note as a parallel to the ministry of Jesus, who in his last year turned south from Galilee to travel to Judea and Jerusalem. Paul leaves Ephesus and travels through Macedonia and Greece. Luke includes the names of several travel companions not yet mentioned in Acts. Paul had planned to sail back to Syria from Greece, but, after hearing of a plot against him by the Jews in Greece, he makes his way to Troas instead. Here we find the first explicit reference in Scripture to Sunday worship.

Verses 7–12 describe the well-known narrative of Eutychus, who falls asleep while Paul is preaching and tumbles out of a third-story window. Paul descends, brings Eutychus back from the dead, goes back upstairs, and continues speaking until sunup. Luke relates the narrative in remarkably matter-of-fact terms.

Verses 17–38 record Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders—the only extended speech in Acts directed solely to Christians. The address is similar in many ways to the Pastoral Epistles—although Paul does not know exactly what will happen, he does know from the Holy Spirit that he will not see these elders again (vv. 22–25). The apostle offers earnest encouragement to watch over the church, warning of coming heresies and reminding them of his own ministerial example. Paul also sums up a core value of Christian ministry in previously unrecorded words from Jesus: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (v. 35). With that, this missionary journey comes to a tearful yet confident end.

Section Outline

II.B.8. Final Farewells (20:1–38)

- a. Paul in Greece (20:1–16)
- b. Paul's Goodbye to the Ephesian Elders (20:17–38)

Comment

20:1–16 *Paul in Greece.* Paul's journey to Jerusalem takes him through many familiar places, and these verses contain a great deal of geographical, chronological, and personnel details. Among the specific places mentioned by Luke is “Greece,” also known in Acts as Achaia, the region of Corinth (v. 2). There Paul spends three more months ministering to the churches (v. 3). From there he hopes to go to Syria, but a Jewish plot against him causes him to travel to Macedonia instead. What no doubt seems like a setback, as he is eager to get to Jerusalem, works out for the benefit of more believers from Macedonia to Philippi, Troas, and Miletus. Paul's personal visit to Troas was cut short by a vision leading him to Macedonia (16:8–10), but now he is able to spend a full week with them. Without the plot against Paul, there might well have been no farewell meeting with the Ephesian elders in Miletus (20:17–38), another example in Acts of plans that people mean for evil and God intends and uses for good.

Luke names seven coworkers of Paul (v. 4), perhaps as a parallel to the choosing of seven workers to support the ministry of the apostles in the early Jerusalem ministry (6:1–6).⁸⁹ Readers should not make too much of the number seven beyond what is indicated in the text, though the significance of the number, unlike the twelve or so disciples of John in Ephesus (19:7), is somewhat compelling. It is enough to note that the seven are representatives of the churches planted by Paul during his travels and are now accompanying him and assisting in ministry, sometimes traveling to places on his behalf. They will accompany him as he brings

⁸⁹ Parsons suggests that the men witness to Paul's Gentile mission and indicate a “certain completion or fullness of the same” (*Acts*, 286).

the collection from the Gentile churches to the struggling believers in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:3–4).

At Troas, Luke notes that the saints gathered “on the first day of the week . . . to break bread” (Acts 20:7); in other words, they met together to share the Lord’s Supper on Sunday. This is a clear indication that the early Christians met together on Sunday, the first day of the week, the day of resurrection. This establishes the precedent for Sunday being the special day of new covenant worship.

As the saints gather to worship, a “young man named Eutychus” falls asleep while sitting in an open third-story window. He plummets out of the window and is “taken up dead” (v. 9); there is no reason to assume that Luke means “as if he were dead” or that the people merely *think* he is dead. But Paul takes the young man in his arms and says, in effect, “Fear not; he is alive” (cf. v. 10). When they later take the boy away alive, they are “not a little comforted,” another indication that he was not merely knocked unconscious (v. 12). It is remarkable that Paul has Elijah- and Jesus-like power over the dead, and it is also remarkable that after this dramatic event they eat together and Paul continues teaching until sunrise. This gives us some idea of Paul’s desire to equip believers for living the Christian life, as well as his willingness to go without rest or sleep for the sake of others (2 Cor. 11:27). Luke presents Paul as giving much encouragement to persevere in ministry and as a sterling personal example of faithfulness in ministry.

20:17–38 *Paul’s Goodbye to the Ephesian Elders.* Paul’s goodbye to the Ephesian elders is a testimony to his own faithfulness in ministry, a word of encouragement to fledgling pastors, and a warning of things to come in the churches. Readers familiar with Paul’s Pastoral Epistles (1–2 Timothy and, especially, Titus) will hear echoes of those letters in this address. Luke provides an introduction to the speech in verse 17 and relates the emotional farewell scene in verses 36–38. The address itself can be divided many ways, but the simplest breakdown is as follows:

Verses 18–27: Paul’s Testimony, Expectations, and Confidence

Verses 28–30: Pastoral Charge and Warnings of Things to Come

Verses 31–35: Paul’s Example of Ministry

While in Miletus, Paul calls the Ephesian “elders” to come to him (v. 17).⁹⁰ He begins with a word of reminder about how he himself lived while ministering

⁹⁰ There is no reason to doubt that these men are elders of the type described in the Pastoral Epistles (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:5)—Luke already established that appointing elders in the churches was part of Paul’s ministry from the beginning (Acts 14:23). Any notion that such an office could develop only later in the church is based on philosophical and historical ideas that assert that the developed ecclesiology found in the Pastoral Epistles could only develop over time. Such conclusions can only be reached by coming to the Bible with presuppositions rooted in the idea that the “church” of the Pastoral Epistles and in parts of Acts must be a later development. But Paul and the apostles follow OT precedent; though obviously not identical to the NT church elders, the practice of eldership is rooted in old covenant experience and practice. The “elders of Israel” are recognized as part of the experienced leaders of the people. Examples are far too numerous to cite, but just a cursory glance at the OT, even limited to the Pentateuch, shows the central importance of “elders” at various historical points and practical levels (e.g., Ex. 3:16; 19:7; Lev. 4:15; 9:1; Num. 11:16, 25; Deut. 5:23; 29:10). Elders are well established in the Jerusalem church as well (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18), just as they were among the Jews (4:5, 8, 23; 6:12; 23:14; 24:1; 25:15). I am not suggesting that the elders of Israel and the elders appointed by the apostles are exactly the same—the new covenant context radically changes the nature of the role of the elders. Nevertheless, elder leadership is borrowed from the old covenant

throughout Asia (v. 18). Calling his own experience to mind is a common practice in Paul's epistles (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:1–10). The apostle paints a picture of hardship in ministry, underscored by opposition he has faced from the Jews (Acts 20:19). Paul is neither complaining nor attempting to gain sympathy from his hearers; he offers his own experience in ministry as a testimony to his authenticity and faithfulness as well as an example for the Ephesian elders to follow. His ultimate point is not simply to recount his sufferings but to remind the elders why he underwent such trials: for the sake of the gospel. Regardless of what he has faced, Paul has never hesitated to preach, teach, and share the gospel (vv. 20–21).

In Acts, Luke depicts Paul mostly as moving from town to town and, within that larger story, from synagogue to synagogue. Here Paul not only relates his public ministry but specifically mentions going “from house to house” (v. 20). The early church quickly became a house-church movement out of necessity. Paul boils down the foundation of his ministry to repentance and faith in Jesus, which he has proclaimed to both Jews and Greeks (v. 21). Although the presentation would vary somewhat in Jewish and Gentile contexts, Paul's message has been consistent: everyone, regardless of background, must turn from their old ways, whether religious or pagan, and turn to Christ. A description of the gospel can be more expansive, but it cannot be less than repentance and faith. These two elements are present in the apostolic gospel from Peter's sermon at Pentecost (ch. 2) through the rest of Acts. Contexts and speaking gifts may vary, but preaching the gospel of repentance and faith is the foundation of apostolic ministry.

Paul's intention to go to Jerusalem has already been made clear in Acts, but here he indicates the reason for his certainty and confidence to make the trip: the guiding of the Holy Spirit (20:22). This is no mere impression, for the Spirit “constrains” him to go and also informs him of the sufferings awaiting him in Jerusalem (v. 23). Luke does not indicate how the Spirit has testified to Paul; there are clear examples elsewhere of Paul's receiving special revelation (9:5; 16:9; 18:9), though those are not identified explicitly as direct revelation from the Spirit. It is not a stretch, however, to understand Paul as saying that the Spirit has spoken to him directly—in whatever form that might have taken—and it is also possible that prophets have shared a similar word with Paul. Whatever the case, his mission is clear: the Spirit has told him to go to Jerusalem. Regardless of what awaits him, he will obey God.

The relational character of Paul's ministry comes to the forefront as he tells the Ephesian elders, with the same confidence with which he goes to Jerusalem, that this is the last time the brothers will see him in person (20:25). He is not merely saying goodbye, however; he is also pointing to the Ephesian elders' responsibility for the future of their church. Paul has done all he has been given

and implemented with significant changes in the new. Neither the apostles nor the early Christians had to wait for a complex ecclesiology to develop—they had the OT at their disposal. For further discussion, see James M. Hamilton Jr., “Did the Church Borrow Leadership Structures from the Old Testament or Synagogue?,” in *Shepherding God's Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014), 13–31.

to do, and now the responsibility to persevere in ministry lies with the elders. He describes his ministry among them as “proclaiming the kingdom,” another shorthand for gospel ministry. If repentance and faith are the condensed form of the content of the gospel, then “kingdom” is the one-word description of the entire apostolic message. In this, Paul, like the other apostles, follows in the steps of Jesus (Mark 1:15).

Preaching the kingdom, though not explicitly mentioned as often in Acts or the Epistles as in the Gospels, nevertheless remains the essential core of apostolic ministry. As noted above (cf. comment on Acts 19:1–10), the term is central to Acts as well as to the theology of the entire NT. The lack of explicit uses of the term *kingdom* outside the Gospels in no way implies a lack of emphasis. After the inaugurating ministry of Jesus and then his ascension, the kingdom of God is the ultimate universal context, all under Christ the King. Arguments prevalent among scholars and teachers of all theological stripes that the theme of the kingdom either fades with the apostles or is replaced with other theological themes such as justification are based merely on the counting of words. Words are important, of course, and we must not build a theology unsupported by biblical words. But the word *kingdom* does appear in Acts and in the Epistles, always with contextual significance. More importantly, the kingdom of God is not simply a phrase but is a concept and theme—one present through the entire Bible.

Paul’s mention of the “whole counsel of God” (20:27) refers to the content of the gospel, the OT background on which it is built, and the application of that content in apostolic preaching. Readers of Acts must mine the depths of Paul’s epistles, not to mention the rest of the NT, to grasp the length and breadth of the term. By preaching this counsel, Paul can leave the Ephesians with a clear conscience, “innocent of the blood of all” (v. 26). Whether rejected or accepted, Paul has faithfully carried out the ministry of the gospel. The faithfulness of a minister is measured by the content of his message, given in its entirety; the results lie with God. Because Paul has been faithful, he is no longer responsible for the lives and doctrine of his hearers. Whatever failures may come in the content or practice of their ministry, such failures cannot be laid at Paul’s feet.

Paul next turns to the elders and their future ministry. Ministers must keep watch over themselves and their people (v. 28). This basic description of ministerial responsibility is similar to what Paul will write later to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:11–16; 2 Tim. 2:1–6). As with Paul’s own ministry, all pastoral ministry is established by the Spirit. It is the Spirit, not the elders themselves—nor the church—who makes them “overseers.”

The phrase “obtained with his own blood” is difficult, because “his” is most closely associated with “God” in the sentence (Acts 20:28). Some early scribes, seeing the difficulty of the phrase, emended the verse to read “the church of the Lord, which he obtained with his own blood” or “the church of God, which he obtained with the blood of his Own” (that is, his own Son; cf. ESV mgs.). Although such emendations are unnecessary, the ancient scribes’ theology was correct. Paul is not

making a Trinitarian assertion about the blood of the Father, much less offering a foundation for the suffering of the Father—what later theologians referred to as patripassianism, an error made by Praxeas in the third century, as well as many others. That error is linked to ancient and related heresies known as modalism, Sabellianism, and monarchianism. Modern versions of this ancient heresy are found in various “oneness” theologies.

In short, patripassianism is based on the idea that the three members of the Trinity are not three distinct persons but are simply different manifestations, or modes, of the one-person God. If the Son suffers and dies, so do the Father and the Spirit. Such a view does not stand up under the scrutiny of the rest of the NT, even if Acts 20:28 is offered in support of it. The rest of Paul’s teaching makes clear that the “blood” through which the church was obtained was the blood of Jesus (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25, 27; Col. 1:20).

Paul is certain that it will not be long before the Ephesian church will experience what God’s people have experienced throughout the ages: threat from within. “Fierce wolves,” teachers of false gospels, will seek to lead believers away from the apostolic gospel (Acts 20:29–30). By this time Paul has seen such assault happen among the churches he has planted (cf. Galatians). The Pastoral Epistles contain many such warnings (2 Tim. 2:16–18; 3:1–9), and at one point Paul indicates that the Spirit himself has made clear to him that some will fall from the faith, pursuing evil spirits and the “teachings of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). The NT writings and church history down to our own day confirm that Paul is not wrong in his warnings.

Paul then returns to his own example for the Ephesians to remember. Over against the deceivers who will rise up to harm and destroy the church, Paul desires the Ephesians to remember the care and concern he showed them for three years; the ministry on which the Ephesian churches were founded was one of tireless self-giving. He mentions his tearful admonishments (Acts 20:31). Paul is not commending weepy, sappy ministry, with ministers crying at the drop of a hat in order to add emphasis to their message. This is, rather, an image similar to the way a father or mother, concerned for the future of a child, will lovingly plead with her to remember how she was raised and the dangers awaiting her around every corner. Such love and concern is part and parcel of true apostolic ministry. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul compares his care for the church to that of a “nursing mother” (1 Thess. 2:7). He was willing to give even his own life for the young and persecuted believers there. Like a father, he and his companions “exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God” (1 Thess. 2:12). If a minister wonders how he should think of and care for his people, he should treat them as fathers and mothers treat their children.

Despite all of his justified concern for their future well-being and all of the certain trouble they will face, Paul is not wringing his hands in anxiety. His confidence is in the power of the Word of God to protect and preserve (Acts 20:32). The ultimate care for the church is not in the hands of ministers or leaders but in the Word of God. Paul’s letters are full of encouragement, warning, admonishment,

and instruction, but he knows that his people are finally in God's hands (Rom. 16:25; 2 Cor. 9:8).

Under the new covenant, the "inheritance" (Acts 20:32) of God's people is not the land of Israel but the final inheritance of the kingdom of God. This inheritance is certain, obtained and held by those God has sanctified; it is possessed already through faith and the Spirit, the guarantee of that inheritance (Eph. 1:14). Although we usually think of sanctification as an ongoing process, Paul uses words such as "sanctified" or "saints" (the words are related in Greek) to speak of something already accomplished by God (as here; cf. Acts 26:18; Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11). Believers are already definitively sanctified through faith in Christ. That does not mean that sanctification is not also "progressive." What theologians refer to as "progressive sanctification," the ongoing work of the Spirit to conform believers to Christ, is derived from the multiple commands and teaching in the NT concerning the Christian life and perseverance to the end. Sanctification is both the definitive and the progressive work of God.

Paul ends his pastoral counsel by returning to his own example among the Ephesians (Acts 20:33–35). He was never a burden on them but provided for himself and showed them how to "help the weak" (v. 35). Paul is not issuing a command for pastors to be bivocational, but neither should such ministry be considered second rate or something to avoid. Paul's point, however, is not to speak directly to the question of bivocational ministry but rather to underscore that he displayed his genuine concern for them the whole time he was with them by taking care of his own needs rather than asking for support. Paul is setting his example before them so that they may remember how he treated them and what the true nature of pastoral ministry is meant to be. His example is set against the troublemakers and false teachers who will surely make their way into the churches. This whole address is concerned with pastoral care, not standards and practices for pastoral remuneration.

It is difficult to know who precisely Paul means by "the weak" (v. 35), but the reader can infer that he has in mind the poor or those otherwise in need of assistance and unable to care for themselves. This conclusion is based on his citation of a statement from Jesus known only from this text. Throughout the Gospels Jesus shows his concern in both word and action. The weak need not just a "good word" but real and devoted attention and care. Offering a blessing, however orthodox and true, instead of real help to those in need is a sign of counterfeit faith (James 2:14–17). Paul is not making this optional but declares, "We must help the weak" (Acts 20:35). Questions arise over whether such NT exhortations should be reserved to the church only or to those outside the church as well. The NT includes examples of both. Acts seems to focus on the former: Paul takes up a large offering specifically for believers in Jerusalem; in the early Jerusalem church the believers shared their resources, and servants were chosen to take care of widows.

Jesus' ministry, however, was not limited to those on the inside; he constantly gave of himself, his time, and his energy to those apart from his nearest followers—though he took care of them too. In Galatians 6:10 Paul instructs his readers

to “do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” There is a distinction in the recipients of our care and support, and priority is given to believers, but followers of Jesus are to do good to everyone. This is Paul’s very last word to the Ephesian elders.

Every Christian goodbye is always a “see you later,” but this realization does not take away the real pain and sorrow that comes from parting with loved ones, especially when they know that they will probably not see each other again in this life. The elders and Paul pray together (Acts 20:36), with everyone crying (v. 37), and then they walk Paul to his ship (v. 38). This is the last time Paul and the elders will see each other. With that he makes his way to Jerusalem, knowing what awaits him there.

Response

We have all experienced long church services, but nothing compared to the day and night in Troas described in 20:7–12. This narrative is not a moral tale or lesson on the importance of staying awake and giving our full attention to the teaching of the Word. There is not even the beginning of a hint that Eutychus does anything morally wrong. Occasionally a preacher or teacher will urge his hearers not to be a Eutychus but to come to church rested and ready to listen. Such an application is off the mark. Who has not from time to time been overwhelmed by uncontrollable sleepiness—even in the middle of an excellent and stimulating sermon? Luke merely states that Eutychus “sank into a deep sleep” and was “overcome by sleep” (v. 9). He assigns no moral culpability; nor does Paul.

Paul does not separate church planting from the establishment of church governance. Planting churches for Paul means planting *healthy* churches, and healthy churches need leadership. There are situations, particularly among unreached people groups with no Bible background, in which implementing church leadership may take a relatively long time; but we ought to bear in mind that Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years and also spent long periods of time in other cities and regions, continually revisiting the young churches.

Many Christians today argue that we should follow the early practice of meeting in homes for worship (cf. v. 20), sometimes even suggesting or implying that meeting in designated church buildings is not warranted from the NT. However, we should view house churches not as a prescriptive but as a descriptive part of the history of the church. There is no explicit or implicit command in either Acts or the rest of the NT concerning meeting in homes—or in designated buildings, for that matter (such a thing was not possible in the Roman world of the early church). Context must decide, and cultural, social, practical, and political factors will play a role in determining where believers meet together. Whether a house, auditorium, conference room, storefront, school, space shared with some other organization, or formal church building, what makes a church is not a building but a group of people who believe the gospel and meet together for worship, the Word, and being equipped for living and sharing the Christian life.

Paul's ministry practice embodies the theology of the cross, following Jesus in the path of suffering for the sake of others (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). The sufferings of this life are nothing to Paul in comparison to the call to preach the gospel (Phil. 1:22). Reading of Paul's desire to "finish my course" (Acts 20:24) becomes even profounder when read along with his farewell words found in 2 Timothy. By that point, all of the events Paul speaks of to the Ephesian elders are past. His ministry and calling have reached their appointed end, and Paul says:

I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:6–8)

ACTS 21:1–36

21 And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.¹ ²And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed ⁶and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

⁷When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers² and stayed with them for one day. ⁸On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. ¹⁰While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews³ at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" ¹²When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

¹⁵ After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.

¹⁷ When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, ²¹ and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. ²² What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. ²³ Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; ²⁴ take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. ²⁵ But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled,⁴ and from sexual immorality.” ²⁶ Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

²⁷ When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸ crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” ²⁹ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. ³⁰ Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. ³¹ And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. ³² He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³ Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. ³⁵ And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, ³⁶ for the mob of the people followed, crying out, “Away with him!”

¹ Some manuscripts add *and Myra* ² Or *brothers and sisters*; also verse 17 ³ Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time ⁴ Some manuscripts omit *and from what has been strangled*

Section Overview: Paul Goes to Jerusalem

Paul’s farewells continue through the first part of Acts 21. The apostle sails on several different ships from Miletus to Syria. Along the way he stops at Tyre, where some disciples tell Paul “through the Spirit” that he should not go to Jerusalem

(v. 4); later, in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus prophesies Paul's arrest (v. 11). These events raise important questions concerning NT prophecies and authority; a distinction must be made between prophecy as an authoritative word from God and Spirit-led foretelling. Most of these questions can be answered by commonsense observations based on Paul's response and actions.

Paul arrives at Jerusalem and visits James and the elders, who are encouraged to hear of all that has happened during Paul's journeys (vv. 17–19). They in turn tell Paul of the “thousands” of Jews who have come to faith (v. 20). Issues concerning the law of Moses—particularly Paul's perceived disregard of it—continue on, however. So Paul agrees to submit to ceremonial purifying for the sake of peace and unity (v. 26). This passage is rich in both practical principles and questions.

Jews from Asia, still upset because of their earlier encounters with Paul, follow the typical pattern of stirring up a mob with sensationalist lies (v. 28). A wild uproar begins, but, ironically, Paul's life is saved by Romans in the Jewish capital (vv. 32–36).

Section Outline

II.B.9. Paul Goes to Jerusalem (21:1–36)

- a. Paul Meets a Prophet (21:1–16)
- b. Paul Shows His Freedom (21:17–26)
- c. Paul Arrested in the Temple (21:27–36)

Comment

21:1–16 *Paul Meets a Prophet.* Just as the four Evangelists devote extensive space to Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and the events leading up to and including his crucifixion, so Luke in great detail narrates Paul's journey to Jerusalem and all that takes place upon his arrival. In short order Luke describes Paul's itinerary from Asia to Tyre, where the apostle finds disciples and stays for a week (v. 4). At Tyre, Paul receives a message from the believers gathered there: he should not travel to Jerusalem.

Paul had told the Ephesian elders that he was traveling to Jerusalem, being “constrained by the Spirit” (20:22–23). Before that, on his way to Ephesus, Paul was “resolved in the Spirit to . . . go to Jerusalem” (19:21). Whether Paul will or should go to Jerusalem is already settled in the narrative. We also know, from Paul's letters, that Paul is determined to take the offering from the Gentile churches to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, there was still a question over whether he himself would go (1 Cor. 16:3–4), but that epistle was written before Romans (which was probably penned during Paul's third journey, while he was in Corinth), in which Paul states clearly that he will take the offering to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25). There is no doubt that before the third journey was over, Paul's mind was made up to go to Jerusalem.

The disciples understandably do not want Paul to go—but why do they do so “through the Spirit” (Acts 21:4)? It is possible that these disciples are prophesying

in a manner similar to Agabus, described in the next section of Acts. The hesitation to call them prophets, however, is due to the fact that, unlike with Agabus, Luke does not label these disciples “prophets.” On the other hand, the presence of the Spirit and similarities with the Agabus narrative lend support for seeing these disciples as prophets. But their identity does not affect the interpretation of the text; it is enough that they are described as speaking “through the Spirit.”

There seems to be a conflict of interest here: the Spirit is clearly leading Paul to Jerusalem, where these disciples are telling Paul through the Spirit not to go. The phrase “through the Spirit” is difficult to interpret, but there is no indication that the Spirit is speaking audibly through them or giving a command. It is far more likely that the Spirit has given them insight into what Paul will experience in Jerusalem, similar to Agabus’s prophecy in verse 11. It is entirely possible that the disciples understand exactly what the Spirit is indicating but misinterpret the meaning or intent of what they sense. It is even possible that they understand or interpret their Spirit-led knowledge as a command. But how they understood the Spirit, or the application of what the Spirit has indicated to them, is not the issue. They neither command Paul nor expressly forbid him to go; they only express their wish for him not to go, based on whatever the Spirit has communicated to them.

Paul clearly does not consider their message to be authoritative; he resumes his journey shortly after receiving their warning. These disciples love Paul; they know where he is headed and what will happen, and they do not want him to go. Elsewhere Luke makes clear when God is directly leading people in Acts, but this is not one of those times. These disciples are simply expressing their God-given knowledge of what Paul will encounter in Jerusalem, and how they wish Paul to respond—something Paul already knows (20:23) and may have even shared with them.

Paul continues to Caesarea and meets Philip. Luke calls Philip “the evangelist” and makes clear that he is the same Philip from earlier in Acts (21:8; see 8:26–40, esp. v. 40). Philip has four daughters “who prophesied” (21:9). Peter’s quotation of Joel—“Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (2:17; cf. Joel 2:28)—comes immediately to mind. Luke probably means that they are known for their gift of prophecy, though he is possibly indicating that they have received prophecies concerning Paul similar to those of Agabus. It is enough to note that prophecy is a known gift in the early church (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2; 14:1; 1 Thess. 5:20–21).

In Acts 11:28 Agabus had prophesied a worldwide famine. Here he delivers a direct word for Paul about what will soon happen. His prophecy accords with what the Spirit has already shown Paul (20:23): arrest and prison are in his future. Agabus uses a belt to demonstrate to Paul that he will be bound and handed over to the Gentiles (this need not imply an actual leather belt used by the authorities). This prophecy will prove to be accurate.

Agabus declares, “Thus says the Holy Spirit,” and informs Paul that the Jews will arrest him in Jerusalem (21:11). Some read this text and conclude that Paul

ignores Agabus's prophecy or, worse, disobeys it. But there is no command to obey here. Agabus tells Paul nothing he does not already know. Although the Romans bind Paul, the Jews are the immediate cause, and they seize Paul when Jews from Ephesus stir up the crowd against him (vv. 27, 30). That in itself is enough to fulfill the prophecy. Many readers of Acts find it disturbing to think that Agabus could be a legitimate prophet, claiming to speak on behalf of the Spirit, and yet not communicate in exact detail. Perhaps Agabus was not given the entire message or a sense of all the details; perhaps he was given the general outline but put the picture together himself. The Spirit is infallible, not Agabus. When it comes to understanding the NT gift of prophecy, it is Paul who commands, "Test everything" (1 Thess. 5:21).

Luke provides the key to Agabus's prophecy in his Gospel. In Luke 18:31–32 Jesus tells his disciples, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon." Paul will follow the path of Jesus. From the road to Damascus onward, Paul is told of all the suffering he will face. Luke records such suffering as Paul travels on his journeys. Along the way the apostle receives more affirmation, in increasing detail, that his path of suffering will lead him back to Jerusalem. As he approaches the city, a prophet meets him with a message unmistakably mimicking Jesus' words about his own suffering. The point is not whether Paul will be bound in a belt or with chains, or whether he will be bound by the Jews or by the Romans. Luke's aim is to show that Paul follows Jesus in the way of suffering and the cross. Agabus confirms the story with a visually illustrated prophecy.

Paul's friends are understandably concerned when they hear Agabus's message (Acts 21:12). They plead with him, but Paul's reply is both touching and plain: they are breaking his heart (v. 13). This is a show of sincere love and friendship. He is heartbroken not over their lack of understanding about why he is going to Jerusalem, but because his friends are upset and crying over him. He is ready for prison, and even death, for the sake of Jesus (v. 13). At this point Paul knows beyond a shadow of doubt what he must do. He is no maverick out to go his own way, flouting good brotherly counsel, but is following the leading of the Spirit. His friends recognize that Paul will have it no other way, so they all agree: "Let the will of the Lord be done" (v. 14). With those words, Luke closes Paul's public ministry in Acts, and the story turns to Jerusalem.

21:17–26 *Paul Shows His Freedom.* As evident throughout Acts, despite tension between some believers in Jerusalem, the leaders, including James, are fully on board with Paul. They are glad to see him and rejoice to hear of his ministry among the Gentiles. There are, however, serious concerns about Paul and his teaching. For the most part, these concerns are based on misinformation (v. 21). It seems aspects of what Paul and the other apostles have taught concerning the Gentiles are being misunderstood. Their misgivings are directed only toward Paul's teaching in regard

to Jewish believers—they either do not care what is happening with the Gentiles or, more likely, know about the council’s decision (v. 25) and are fine with Gentiles’ remaining uncircumcised.

The Jerusalem elders are concerned over what some of the Jewish believers will do when they hear that Paul is in Jerusalem. They reach a solution designed to stave off controversy and, hopefully, allay doubts and fears. The elders are not condoning the false ideas or giving them any credence—the group opposing Paul based on misinformation is wrong and creating dangerous tensions. But the elders’ plan shows real pastoral care and concern for the unity of the church, and Paul is willing to go along.

The vow in question (v. 23) appears to be a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6), involving shaving one’s head as well as abstaining from wine or anything else from grapes. An offering would be presented by those taking the vow. The elders ask Paul to pay the expenses of four others taking the vow and to undergo the purification rites himself (Acts 21:24). Paul agrees, in an example of his desire to be “all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22), in this case specifically for the sake of Jewish believers, and also as an example of his concern for weaker brothers. This is not the first time Paul takes a vow in Acts—he cut his hair for what was probably a similar vow in Cenchreae (Acts 18:18). Here Paul shows the greatest expression of Christian freedom, namely, living for the benefit of others. As a new covenant believer, Paul is free from the necessity of taking vows according to the Mosaic law. He is, however, compelled to love his neighbor and free to keep some aspects of the law if doing so is beneficial to others. Going along with the plan means unity for the Jerusalem church, so Paul agrees.

James states that when Paul takes the vow, all will see that he lives “in observance of the law” (21:24). We should not overread the scope of what James is saying—he is not claiming that Paul keeps the entire ceremonial law, as James and the apostles know that believers are no longer required to do so. James means that Paul’s actions will quell the rumors that he teaches against the law: if Paul takes the vow, how could he be teaching against the law? Next, James confirms that the situation regarding the Gentiles has not changed; the decision of the council stands (v. 25). This puts his comment about observance of the law into perspective: keeping the law is not a matter of salvation in Jesus, and the Gentiles need concern themselves only with turning from their pagan past and avoiding practices especially offensive to Jews. There is no double standard in the apostolic teaching. No one is saved by keeping the law, and believers are, by definition, not under the law. In this new covenant context, there is only belief in Jesus and living for others. Paul’s taking the vow is neither hypocritical nor deceitful.

21:27–36 *Paul Arrested in the Temple.* However much the vow allays the fears of the Jewish believers, Paul faces new troubles from old enemies. The “Jews from Asia” (v. 27) are likely from Ephesus, for they recognize Trophimus, an Ephesian with Paul in Jerusalem (v. 29). What follows is a riot similar to that in Ephesus, again

centered on a temple. These Jews immediately rile up the people and seize Paul (v. 30). Their accusations are plain: Paul teaches against the people (Jews), the law, and this place (the temple). Compounding their irritation is their belief that Paul has taken Trophimus into the temple. The temple is divided into sections: the outermost area is the court of Gentiles, beyond which no Gentile is permitted to go, upon pain of death. The Jews falsely accuse Paul and Trophimus of breaking that prohibition.

In no time the whole city is in an uproar, and the people take hold of Paul, drag him out of the temple, begin to beat him, and plan to kill him. There is little evidence of devotion and observance of the law on the part of Paul's accusers—another parallel with the suffering and trial of Jesus. Again Gentiles come to Paul's rescue. A tribune in the Roman garrison on the Temple Mount hears of the melee, and he and his soldiers intervene and arrest Paul, assuming he has committed some sort of crime deserving of the crowd's actions (v. 33). When the tribune is faced with the uproar, he takes Paul back to the barracks, no doubt to decide what to do and to protect Paul from the crowd (v. 34). From this point on, Paul will spend the rest of Acts under arrest.

Response

Living for the good of others is both our highest calling (in the context of loving God) and probably the least natural thing we can do. Truly fulfilling the biblical command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18) can be done only through the Spirit. Living for the good of others is also the greatest example of Christian freedom. What Paul does for James and the leaders with regard to those concerned with his teaching shows that he lives out the kind of freedom he teaches in his letters. Paul is free from the law and free from taking any sort of vow and could have said, “No, I will not do that—do you not know that we are free from the law? Do you not remember the council we held here years ago?” He does not say this, however, and of course James and the elders remember the council. They ask Paul to forgo his freedom and to do something for the sake of these brothers with an uneasy conscience regarding the law. Paul accepts. This truly is an act of Christian freedom. To forgo one's own freedom for the sake of others is the highest form of Christian freedom and the fulfillment of love for one's neighbor.

ACTS 21:37–22:29

³⁷ As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, “May I say something to you?” And he said, “Do you know Greek?³⁸ Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?” ³⁹ Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.” ⁴⁰ And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language,¹ saying:

22 “Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.”

² And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language,² they became even more quiet. And he said:

³ “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel³ according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵ as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶ “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. ⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ⁸ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ ⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand⁴ the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’ ¹¹ And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

¹² “And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, ¹³ came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. ¹⁴ And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; ¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

¹⁷ “When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about

me.’¹⁹ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you.’²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’²¹ And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

²² Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.”²³ And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴ the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.²⁵ But when they had stretched him out for the whips,⁵ Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?”²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.”²⁷ So the tribune came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” And he said, “Yes.”²⁸ The tribune answered, “I bought this citizenship for a large sum.” Paul said, “But I am a citizen by birth.”²⁹ So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

¹Or the Hebrew dialect (probably Aramaic) ²Or the Hebrew dialect (probably Aramaic) ³Or city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated ⁴Or hear with understanding ⁵Or when they had tied him up with leather strips

Section Overview: Paul Addresses the Mob in Jerusalem

This section, straddling Acts 21 and 22, is devoted to Paul’s speech before the hostile Jews in Jerusalem. He first recounts briefly his personal history in Judaism, summing it up in two major periods. He was trained by Gamaliel and zealous for the law and for God and then became a persecutor of Christians. These two periods are linked, as they are in Paul’s description of his spiritual background in Philippians 3.

Paul then moves on to describing his Damascus road experience. At the center is his encounter with the risen Jesus, “whom you are persecuting” (Acts 22:8). Paul recounts that he was not alone when he encountered Jesus, and even though his companions neither saw Jesus nor understood what he said to Paul, they did see the light surrounding Jesus and later took Paul to Damascus.

The next section (vv. 12–16) recounts Paul’s meeting Ananias. He specifically points out that he was a “devout man according to the law,” with a good reputation among his fellow Jews. Through Ananias, Paul regained his sight and received revelation about his calling. Jesus is identified as “the Righteous One,” an explicit description of his identity as Messiah. Through the name of Jesus, Paul’s sins were forgiven.

Next Paul reveals a revelation he received during his visit to Jerusalem (narrated in chapter 9). Paul’s mission to the Gentiles was revealed to him from the beginning of his ministry.

Enraged by the mention of Gentiles, the crowd calls for his death, and the Roman tribune takes Paul to be beaten. Once again Paul exercises his rights as a Roman citizen, and once again he is saved from death by secular authorities.

Section Outline

II.C. Paul Addresses the Mob in Jerusalem (21:37–22:29)

1. Paul's Request to Speak (21:37–39)
2. Paul Testifies to His Conversion and Calling (21:40–22:29)

Comment

21:37–39 *Paul's Request to Speak.* Historically speaking, the followers of the Way were merely a minor sect of Judaism, which itself was hardly the center of attention in the Roman Empire. During the first century, only Jews and Christians understood the massive difference between themselves. Thus it should not surprise us that the Roman tribune does not know who Paul is and assumes he must be a certain infamous Jew from Egypt who had led four thousand terrorists (v. 38). The Assassins were a particular sect known as the Sicarii, “dagger-men.” The tribune is surprised to know that Paul speaks Greek—perhaps indicating that Judean Jews did not typically speak Greek—but he sees that there is more to Paul than meets the eye, and he allows Paul to speak.

21:40–22:29 *Paul Testifies to His Conversion and Calling.* Paul immediately wins the crowd's attention by stepping up, motioning to them, and speaking to them in Aramaic (22:2; “the Hebrew language” means the language of the Hebrews, which had been Aramaic for a long time). Luke notes that this quiets the crowd even more. Paul addresses them as “brothers and fathers,” showing his respect for them and underscoring their shared covenantal heritage (22:1).

Paul begins by describing his background before narrating his conversion. His testimony here differs in some details from the account in chapter 9, which is Luke's retelling of the event, while this is the testimony of Paul himself. The apostle's summary of his Jewish background and experience as a persecutor of the church is reminiscent of Philippians 3:4–6; here Paul adds that he was taught by Gamaliel—the same Gamaliel that spoke up and urged the council to show caution in their treatment of Peter and the apostles (Acts 5:34–39). The “strict manner of the law” (22:3) refers to the Pharisaic tradition in which Paul was trained. He is letting his listeners know that he is one of them and, in fact, outdoes most of them in his Jewish pedigree. He is an expert in the law, something they should keep in mind when they charge him with breaking it.

As in Philippians 3, Paul links his former persecution of the church with his zealous background. In Philippians this link serves to show the false zeal and righteousness from the law that Paul relied on before his conversion. That idea is likely present here too, but his main purpose is to tell the crowd that he was once standing where they are now when he persecuted Christians before his conversion.

If they do not believe him, the Jewish elders, including the high priest, can validate his claim, because he was working for them the day Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:5). The irony here is that just as Paul now stands before them in custody, so he himself once set out for Damascus to arrest Christians and “bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.”

The “great light from heaven” (22:6) indicates the presence of God, a detail hardly missed by his Jewish audience, as God’s presence revealed in visible light of various kinds occurred throughout Israel’s history. Such revelations of God in light are particularly connected with, though not limited to, major covenantal events (e.g., Gen. 15:17; Ex. 3:2–3; 19:18; see also Ex. 13:21–22; 14:24; Num. 14:14). In a covenantal context, a voice speaking out of light recalls Deuteronomy 5:24, where Moses recalled the experience of God’s revelation at Sinai. This time, the voice coming out of the light is the Lord Jesus. Paul’s description of his conversion, read against its larger biblical background, strongly suggests the divinity of Jesus, for Jesus spoke to him just as Yahweh spoke to Moses and the Israelites.

As in Acts 9:4 and later in 26:14, persecuting Christians means persecuting Jesus: the people of Jesus are his body. The differences in the experience of Paul’s companions in the account in chapter 9 and Paul’s version here are easily reconciled. Acts 9:7 describes them “hearing the voice” but “seeing no one,” whereas in 22:9 they “saw the light” but could not “understand the voice.” They heard the sound of the voice but did not understand what was being said. They perceived the light but saw no one speaking to Paul. None of the accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts (chs. 9; 22; 26) ever mentions Paul seeing a human form on the Damascus road—only that he saw a light and heard a voice. The conversion accounts are remarkably similar and contain no discrepancies. The differences in detail are simply due to the differences in the way humans tell stories, depending on the occasion and reason for the telling. The main reason Luke and Paul mention the traveling companions is to point to eyewitnesses who can confirm the event (Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28).

Paul fills in further detail concerning his encounter with Ananias. The account in Acts 9 highlights Ananias’s caution and hesitancy over Paul, in keeping with the emphasis of growth through persecution in that portion of the narrative. This version focuses more directly on Paul’s experience of God’s revelation to him in Jesus and his commission to be a witness for Christ. Paul points out that Ananias was a “devout man according to the law,” with a good reputation (22:12). This underscores the legitimacy of Paul’s story and also provides yet another level of confirmation: if there is any lingering doubt about the divine encounter from heaven and the voice Paul heard, the recounting of Ananias’s word to Paul removes it. Ananias tells Paul what the Lord directed him to communicate in 9:11–16, with more detail added. Paul recounts how Ananias explained the experience as nothing less than an encounter with their covenant God, who revealed the promised Messiah (“the Righteous One”; 22:14) and appointed Paul as his witness.

Any question of whether Paul was converted or simply put on the right road to becoming a truly faithful Jew in acceptance of Jesus as Messiah is answered unequivocally in this text. Ananias instructed Paul to be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (22:16). The message for Saul, a law-abiding Pharisee who at one point lived to kill Christians, is the same as Peter's answer to those gathered on Pentecost: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (2:38).

Common threads tie conversion in Acts to Paul's experience. Soon after Pentecost, standing before the Jewish rulers, Peter declares, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (4:12). Though Ananias did not say "be saved," he did say "wash away your sins" (22:16), another way of referring to salvation. The same sort of language associated with coming to faith in Jesus, being converted from either Jewish or Gentile unbelief (16:31), in the name of Jesus, is exactly the kind of language Paul recounts when he relates his own testimony. This is not a story of getting on some sort of journey with God; it is an account of a sinner saved through the name of Jesus.

Paul continues by revealing previously undisclosed events (22:17–19). His trance in the temple almost certainly occurred during his first trip to Jerusalem as a believer (ch. 9). The temple, though its time in redemptive history is over, remains a focal point for Christians in Jerusalem. However, there is no particular link between Paul's receiving a direct word from the Lord and his being in the temple. With this exception, every special revelation Paul receives occurs outside Jerusalem. If one thing is clear from Acts, it is that God is at work seemingly everywhere but inside the temple in Jerusalem.

But the fact that Paul's vision and his word from the Lord occurred in the temple would be of importance to his Jewish audience. The temple is precisely the place where one might receive a word from God. More importantly, the Jews accuse Paul of speaking against the temple (21:28). Like the other apostles, Paul does not speak against the temple. They do, however, teach that the presence of God is not limited to, and no longer resides in, the temple. God does not live in man-made buildings, and the old covenant era, and therefore the temple, has come to a close with the fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus the Messiah. In fact, venerating the Jerusalem temple is a form of idolatry. Paul and the other apostles hear from God anywhere and everywhere—in jail cells (5:19–20), on rooftops (10:9–20), and while traveling far from Jerusalem and the temple (13:2). It is through the apostles that the Lord speaks to those who believe in the Messiah, Jesus. The temple and all that took place there are, like the priests and the leaders of Israel, eclipsed by Jesus.

This is not the only depiction in Acts of an apostle falling into a trance. Peter had a similar experience on the rooftop in Joppa, where he saw a vision of animals on a sheet (10:10–16). That vision revealed how everything was now clean to eat, the ultimate significance being that the Gentiles, beginning with Cornelius, were to be fully accepted and included in the new covenant people of God. Similarly, the

word of the Lord to Paul while in a trance at the temple is that his mission would be to the Gentiles. We take it for granted that the Gentiles are fully included; at the outset, however, it took special revelation (as well as many years of evidence, controversy, setbacks, and perseverance) to reach that point.

Paul never forgot his former role as persecutor of the church (Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:13). He viewed himself as an unworthy latecomer, the least of all the apostles, “because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor. 15:9). In the early days he was, understandably, concerned with what Christians would think of him. The former persecutor who wanted believers dead was now preaching the gospel (Gal. 1:23). He was also apparently aware of what his former Jewish colleagues would think of him. When the Lord warned him to leave Jerusalem because the Jews would not listen to him (Acts 22:18), Paul responded in a way that sounded like he knew exactly why they would reject him: they would think him a hypocrite. Paul replied, in effect, “Of course they will reject me, and I will tell you why: I used to be one of them when I was hunting down your people, and I cheered on those who killed Stephen” (cf. 22:19–20).

Paul recounts these events especially because his former life played a providential role in his becoming the apostle to the Gentiles—and, subsequently, in his ending up in custody in Jerusalem. The Lord, like Paul, knew that Jerusalem and Israel generally were not Paul’s best field of mission in light of his former public life as a persecutor. So Paul went to the Gentiles instead (22:21). It is his ministry among and with Gentiles that has led to the accusations against him. Paul began by persecuting the church; after his conversion he became the apostle to the Gentiles, and largely because of his ministry among the Gentiles he is persecuted by the Jews. Paul tells his accusers plainly that not only did the Lord speak to him; the Lord is the one behind his ministry to the Gentiles.

Paul’s mention of his ministry to the Gentiles is more than the crowds can stand. Their verdict is clear: Paul must die (22:22). They work themselves into a frenzy, taking off their cloaks and throwing around dust. These are strange reactions to us but were expressions of lament, condemnation, and anger in that cultural context (22:23). The tribune seeks to defuse the crowd, but his primary goal is to get the truth out of Paul by beating him. Once again, however, Paul’s Roman citizenship saves the day (cf. 16:37–40). It is illegal to beat a Roman citizen without a trial and a judgment of guilt. The tribune and soldiers understand the consequences of unlawfully beating a Roman citizen, and so they back off.

Response

This narrative puts God’s providence in sustaining Paul and fulfilling his purpose for Paul on display. The Jewish crowd is in a frenzy to kill Paul as a covenant breaker and traitor against Israel. The mob shows no sign of conscience regarding how to question and judge Paul according to covenant law (much like Jesus before the council). A Roman tribune, no friend of the Jews, gets Paul away from his Jewish countrymen in order to find out, by torture, exactly what is going on.

Then, just as a Roman centurion is about to interrogate him with a whipping, Paul asserts his Roman citizenship and gets off without a scratch. And all of this takes place because the Messiah, the Lord Jesus of Nazareth, revealed himself to Saul, the persecutor of the church, in a way that clearly alluded to the revelation of God in the OT. This same Lord would later speak to Paul again and commission him as his witness to the Gentiles. No one, apart from God in his wisdom, would come up with such a plan.

ACTS 22:30–23:35

³⁰ But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

23 And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.”

² And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?” ⁴ Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?” ⁵ And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

⁶ Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” ⁷ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. ⁹ Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ party stood up and contended sharply, “We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?” ¹⁰ And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

¹¹ The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”

¹² When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. ¹³ There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. ¹⁴ They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were

going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near.”

¹⁶ Now the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷ Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him.” ¹⁸ So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, “Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you.” ¹⁹ The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, “What is it that you have to tell me?” ²⁰ And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. ²¹ But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent.” ²² So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, “Tell no one that you have informed me of these things.”

²³ Then he called two of the centurions and said, “Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night.¹ ²⁴ Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor.” ²⁵ And he wrote a letter to this effect:

²⁶ “Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. ²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. ²⁸ And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. ²⁹ I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. ³⁰ And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him.”

³¹ So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. ³² And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him. ³³ When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. ³⁴ On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵ he said, “I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.” And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod’s praetorium.

¹ That is, 9 P.M.

Section Overview: Paul’s Defense before the Sanhedrin

The Roman tribune brings Paul to the council in order to find answers regarding the accusations against Paul. Immediately a conflict arises between the high priest (Ananias) and Paul. The priest orders Paul to be struck, and Paul responds by calling him a “whitewashed wall” who does not know the law he is meant to enforce (Acts 23:3). Paul divides the council of Pharisees and Sadducees by mentioning the resurrection, insisting that he is on trial because of his belief in that doctrine.

This causes a heated split between the Pharisees, whose scribes find Paul innocent, and the resurrection-denying Sadducees. For the third time in as many chapters, a Roman tribune comes to Paul's rescue.

In collusion with the chief priests and Jewish elders, forty men swear to murder Paul by deceiving the Romans about their intentions (23:12–15). Paul's nephew warns the centurion of the plot, and Paul, under the guard of 470 soldiers, cavalry, and spearmen, is sent to Felix, the current governor of Judea (23:22–24). Felix reads a letter from the tribune concerning Paul and agrees to hear him and his accusers (23:25–35).

Section Outline

II.D. Paul's Defense before the Sanhedrin (22:30–23:35)

1. Paul Speaks to His Accusers (22:30–23:11)
2. The Jews Vow to Kill Paul (23:12–35)

Comment

22:30–23:11 *Paul Speaks to His Accusers.* The Roman tribune brings Paul to the priests and the council in order to get to the bottom of the controversy (22:30). His motivation is not so much Paul's best interests as his own. He has just come within an inch of beating a Roman citizen—an offense for which he would certainly have been punished—but he still has a job to do, so he goes looking for answers. It is also in his interests to keep Paul safe, which is what he does when the meeting turns into a melee (23:10). The apostle to the Gentiles is protected from his own countrymen by a Gentile.

Paul goes before the council and says in effect, "I am innocent of whatever charges you might bring. I have done what God has called me to do" (cf. 23:1). Paul is not claiming to be perfect; he is speaking only in regard to his confidence in his calling from God and his faithfulness in carrying out that calling. But Ananias will hear nothing from this perceived traitor of the covenant, the Jewish people, and their traditions. He views Paul as a blasphemer and orders his cronies to punch Paul in the mouth (23:2).

Paul responds by calling Ananias a "whitewashed wall" (23:3). Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees, among many other things, "whitewashed tombs" (Matt. 23:27), and John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees a "brood of vipers" (Matt. 3:7). John and Jesus stood firmly in a line of faithful Jews who denounced faithless and corrupt Jewish leaders (e.g., Jer. 12:10; Ezek. 34:8, 10; Zech. 10:3). On the other hand Jesus, when standing before his accusers, said nothing in response to abject humiliation, abuse, and savage treatment. Paul himself wrote that "when reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat" (1 Cor. 4:12–13). Thus there appear to be biblical grounds for both of Paul's responses (in Acts 23:3 and 5).

A reasonable interpretation is that Paul erroneously lashes out in strong anger at first, then checks himself upon finding out that Ananias is high priest.

Another possibility, one that is perhaps more persuasive, is that Paul's message for the Jewish leadership is not an insult hurled in anger but a strong word of judgment and condemnation similar to Jesus' words quoted above.⁹¹ Paul, taking a bold stand against the hypocrisy and unbelief of the Jewish authorities, speaks a justified word of judgment upon the high priest in a manner similar to the OT prophets, who spoke against the corrupt rulers, priests, and prophets in Israel. Such strong language against those who should be faithful to God and fulfilling their role as shepherds of the people is common in the OT (e.g., Jer. 2:8; 10:21; 23:1–2; Ezek. 34:2–10).

Readers may express surprise that Paul claims not to know that it is Ananias the high priest speaking to him (Acts 23:5). Some scholars argue that Paul had poor eyesight, basing this conclusion on Paul's statement in Galatians 4:15 or his discussion of his "thorn . . . in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12:7. Others argue that Paul is speaking ironically: he knows full well that Ananias the high priest was speaking to him but refuses to acknowledge his authority due to the corruption of the priesthood and Ananias's rejection of Paul's message. However, this does not seem to accord with the apostle's citation of Exodus 22:28.⁹² Still others argue that Paul simply does not know that Ananias is the high priest. He has been away from Jerusalem for a long time, perhaps eight or more years. Possibly he is simply not aware of the current leadership, and Ananias's attire might look no different than anyone else's on the council. This view has the benefit of being the simplest reading and probably the best.

What Paul does next is both clever and shrewd, a stroke of genius. He was once a "Pharisee of Pharisees" (cf. Phil. 3:5) and thus understands the political situation from the inside out. When he realizes there are both Sadducees and Pharisees in the room, he knows exactly how to defuse the situation. The Pharisees were conservative traditionalists who wanted to be free to follow Torah and their own traditions. Though there are exceptions, they are largely criticized and condemned in the NT for their insistence on law keeping without scruples and law keeping apart from devotion or loyalty to God. Jesus identified their OT counterparts as those who killed and persecuted the prophets (Matthew 23). Some of the harshest condemnations in the Bible are aimed at the Pharisees. They did, however, know the law and thoroughly believe in a future resurrection.

The Sadducees were hellenized, wealthy, basically secular Jews who controlled the priesthood and enjoyed political power, at least to the degree that it was granted by those above them in the Roman Empire. In reaching these heights of wealth and privilege, these Sadducees jettisoned many orthodox beliefs, such as belief in the resurrection, angels, or spirits (Acts 23:8; Luke 20:27).

Paul goes straight for the issue that he knows already divides the Pharisees and the Sadducees—the possibility of bodily resurrection. "Some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party" (Acts 23:9) defend Paul less out of a conviction that he is right

⁹¹ Polhill, *Acts*, 468.

⁹² Peterson, *Acts*, 614.

and more because of their dislike of the Sadducees, who deny the resurrection that Paul teaches. Thus for a second time (cf. 5:33–40) the Pharisees become unwitting instruments for protecting the gospel. The Roman authorities also continue to protect Paul. The tribune saves Paul from harm when the “dissension” between the Pharisees and the Sadducees becomes “violent” (23:10).

After this tumult, Christ appears to Paul in order to strengthen his resolve, declaring, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome” (23:11). This confirms Paul’s own understanding of his calling, expressed in 19:21, and also echoes Christ’s words to Ananias concerning Paul’s mission, recorded in 9:15. Regardless of well-intentioned warnings from prophets such as Agabus, pleadings of friends, plots and schemes of the Jews, the force of the entire Roman Empire, or even the power of the sea, the Lord has a mission for Paul, and it will be fulfilled.

23:12–35 *The Jews Vow to Kill Paul.* More than forty men swear to neither eat nor drink until they kill Paul (vv. 12–14; evidently these men either die from starvation or break their oath!). They are upset with Paul over his teaching concerning Jesus and the Mosaic law, yet they themselves will not blink to break the law at any point to murder Paul, even going so far as to encourage a miscarriage of justice (v. 15), which the council agrees to pursue (v. 20). This is not simply the action of a group of outlying radicals but an orchestrated assassination attempt with the support and blessing of some, perhaps most, of the Jewish authorities. Some of the elders may have refused (cf. Luke’s language in 23:14 with that in 22:30), especially among the Pharisees—consider how some Pharisees warned Jesus that Herod Antipas wanted to kill him (Luke 13:31), the Pharisees Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea supported Jesus in the Gospel of John, Gamaliel the Pharisee has previously urged moderation in dealing with Christians (Acts 5:33–40), and Acts 15:5 mentions “believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees.” However, these are clearly in the minority.

However the events work out behind the scenes, it is clear that opposition to Paul from his Jewish countrymen reaches its climax here in the narrative. At this point his nephew enters the scene (23:16; we know nothing about Paul’s family apart from this text). The exchange between Paul, his nephew, and the tribune is straightforward (vv. 18–22). It is not clear how the nephew knows of the plot against Paul, but what *is* clear is that once again God providentially provides Paul a way out of danger. It is likely that by this time the tribune and the other local Roman authorities have little trust in the Jewish leaders and their charges against Paul. They take the threat to Paul’s life seriously and are determined to keep this Roman citizen safe from harm.

The tribune is so concerned to protect Paul that at 9:00 p.m. he sends a large portion (more than half) of the military force from Jerusalem to accompany Paul to Antipatris, and from there seventy horsemen take him the rest of the way to Caesarea (vv. 23–24, 31–32). The tribune sends a letter with the armed guard to

explain the situation to Felix. Luke makes clear that his account is not an exact quotation of the letter but a summary received from Paul or another source (v. 25). The letter essentially provides an account that explains why the tribune is sending Paul to Felix. The tribune reports he rescued Paul from the Jews because he discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen (v. 27). This is true, from a certain point of view. The letter condenses the story and omits how Lysias discovered Paul's citizenship only after his soldiers were ready to interrogate him with whips when Paul brought the subject up himself (22:23–24). It is absolutely true that Lysias did save Paul from certain death from the mob and then later when he heard about the assassination plot. Most importantly, he tells Felix that Paul comes to him with no official charges against him other than from an intramural Jewish squabble over their law.

The tribune's actions serve both to shift responsibility for Paul to the governor and to ensure that Paul remains safe from his Jewish countrymen, while also fulfilling the Lord's promise to Paul that he will testify in Rome (23:11). At the end of chapter 23, Paul stands before Felix, who, satisfied that Paul is under his jurisdiction (vv. 34–35), agrees to hear him once his Jewish accusers arrive. Caesarea will be Paul's home for the next two years.

Response

Paul's imprisonment—which covers the rest of Acts from this point—is not the script that any one of us would write for history's greatest missionary and theologian. If ever we need evidence that God's ways are not our ways, that his judgments are unsearchable and his paths beyond what we can trace (Rom. 11:33), we need go no further than a plain reading of Acts. The text in Romans just alluded to is Paul's conclusion upon reflecting and teaching on the inclusion of the Gentiles alongside the rejection and ultimate return of Jews who will believe in Jesus as Messiah. Who but God would have planned it like that?

We ought to practice putting ourselves in the story. It is worth taking time to consider just what it must have been like for the early Christians—particularly all those who begged Paul, in tears, not to go to Jerusalem—to hear what happened there as Paul was imprisoned. They would not have taken the events with the matter-of-fact nonchalance that comes from historical familiarity. As modern readers who know the story, we have to work at regaining and maintaining a sense of awe as we read a story that we ourselves would never have written. Paul had Jesus' promises and believed them, of course, and one of Luke's goals is to show God's relentless faithfulness to his promises and mission—and we are right to emphasize such considerations. Yet we should also consider the unsearchable wisdom of God, whose plan in Acts is nothing like what we would devise, nor likely what the early Christians expected.

ACTS 24:1–27

24 And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. ² And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:

“Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, ³ in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. ⁴ But, to detain¹ you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. ⁵ For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶ He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him.² ⁸ By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.”

⁹ The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.

¹⁰ And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied:

“Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. ¹¹ You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, ¹² and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. ¹³ Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. ¹⁴ But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, ¹⁵ having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. ¹⁶ So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. ¹⁷ Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. ¹⁸ While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia — ¹⁹ they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. ²⁰ Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, ²¹ other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’”

²² But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.”

²³ Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

²⁴ After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

²⁵ And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present.

When I get an opportunity I will summon you.”²⁶ At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him.²⁷ When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

¹Or weary ²Some manuscripts add *and we would have judged him according to our law.* ⁷But the chief captain Lysias came and with great violence took him out of our hands, ⁸commanding his accusers to come before you.

Section Overview: Paul before Felix

Ananias and his henchmen come from Jerusalem and accuse Paul of being the leader of the “sect of the Nazarenes,” causing riots—which would get Felix’s attention—and profaning the temple (Acts 24:5–6). Paul in turn openly affirms that he is indeed a follower of “the Way” and as such is, in fact, a true follower of the Jewish Law and Prophets (vv. 14–15). He flatly denies being responsible for riots or profaning the temple (v. 18). Felix has Paul put under protective custody (v. 23).

Felix is sympathetic with Paul, and on many occasions for two years he and his wife listen to Paul speak of what it means to be Christian. Felix is not, however, Paul’s ally. He keeps the apostle imprisoned, pleasing the Jews, and hopes for a financial kickback from Paul. At the end of the two years Felix is replaced by Festus (vv. 24–27).

Section Outline

II. E. Paul before Felix (24:1–27)

1. Paul Makes His Case (24:1–21)
2. Paul Remains in Custody (24:22–27)

Comment

24:1–21 *Paul Makes His Case.* Ananias brings along a spokesman, something like a prosecuting attorney, named Tertullus. His name may indicate a Gentile background, but he could simply be a Jew with a Greek name. His tone and words are full of flattery. He thanks Felix for the peace and reforms the Jews enjoy under his rule. Felix’s tenure as governor was, in fact, hardly peaceful, and he was disliked by the Jews. Tertullus is doing what any lawyer would do to gain a judge’s favor, but his introduction compares unfavorably to Paul’s respectful and forthright address in verse 10, in which the apostle acknowledges Felix as governor and expresses gratitude for the chance to defend himself against the charges (cf. 26:2–3, 25–29).

When Paul was before the Jewish council, the interaction broke down over the issue of the resurrection. Thus Paul will claim that he is really on trial over that issue. But Tertullus brings three charges against Paul: (1) he starts riots everywhere (v. 5), (2) he is a leader of a sect called the “Nazarenes” (v. 5), and (3) he profaned the temple (v. 6). The third charge reflects the accusation in 21:28 that Paul teaches against the temple, Moses, and the Jewish people. According to Tertullus he was doing this very thing in Jerusalem when the Jews subdued him. Paul’s reply comes

in the next paragraph, but it is already clear from the text that there is no evidence for the charge. The first charge is equally baseless. Paul has seen several riots, and though he may have been the cause for rioting, whether in Ephesus, Corinth, or Jerusalem, he has not instigated or fomented uprisings. In every case he has been the innocent victim of violent men who would have killed him if the various governing authorities in each place had not intervened.

Concerning the second charge, this is the first time that Luke records an official recognition, and an implied condemnation, of the “sect of the Nazarenes.” They are called Nazarenes because their leader is Jesus of Nazareth, whom their opponents believe to be a messianic pretender and enemy of the Jewish nation who died on a Roman cross. Tertullus is not simply naming the sect but charging Paul with leading it. This is yet another example (cf. 18:1–17) of how Christianity is not yet viewed, even by the Jews, as an independent religion. To the Jews, the Nazarenes are a wayward group of heretics following a false, dead messiah; they are wayward enough to be wiped out like their leader. Of the three charges, Paul willingly accepts only this one as true (24:14–15), and he will take its implications even further than the charges. Tertullus is so confident in his ironclad case that he is sure that Felix’s questioning of Paul will bear out its truth (v. 8). The other Jews present at the trial unsurprisingly affirm all of the charges (v. 9).

Paul, unlike Tertullus, does not pander to Felix but simply acknowledges his authority to judge the case (v. 10). Paul’s defense can be summarized in eight points, all of which he affirms can be verified:

1. I went to the temple to worship, a fact easily verified (v. 11).
2. I was neither arguing nor causing trouble (v. 12).
3. The Jews have no proof of the charges (v. 13).
4. I am a follower of “the Way,” which they call a “sect” (vv. 14–15).
5. I came to Jerusalem with a gift and offerings (v. 17).
6. I was purified in the temple when they found me (v. 18).
7. The Jews from Asia who stirred up trouble are not here now (vv. 18–19).
8. My accusers know the only issue is the resurrection of the dead (vv. 15, 20–21).

These eight points are self-explanatory, but a few deserve special notice. For one, Paul admits that he is, in fact, a follower of “the Way,” though he does not use all of the terms of his accusers. He asserts that “the Way” is the way of worshipping God that stands in the line of the patriarchs, the Law, and the Prophets (v. 14). In other words, the Jesus followers are the heirs of the promises. The implication is that the so-called sect is in reality the faithful community of the people of God. Paul then returns to the issue of resurrection—the point he maintains as the only reason for the trial. Paul reveals the presence of Pharisees at the trial (“these men”; v. 15)—thus it appears that representatives from both groups from the council are present—though it is unclear if these are the same men who found no reason to prosecute Paul (23:9).

Another point to highlight is Paul's biblical observation that the Jews from Asia who originally accused him of wrongdoing and were responsible for stirring everyone up in the first place (21:27) should be at the trial in person. This point surely gets Felix's attention and just as importantly underscores the biblical principle requiring witnesses for prosecution (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; cf. Heb. 10:28). But, since the Asian Jews are not there, Paul confronts the accusers that are present, asking in effect, "What, exactly, have I done wrong? The only reason I am here is because I preach the resurrection of the dead" (cf. Acts 24:20–21).

Paul is not referring to resurrection in the abstract or simply as a point of theological discussion. For him, the resurrection of the dead is specifically the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, which foreshadows the resurrection of all believers. Paul is admitting in effect, "I am on trial here because I preach Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. He is the true goal of the Law and the Prophets. In him God's resurrection promise is fulfilled. Only those who believe in him are faithful to God. True belief in the resurrection is belief in Jesus." In short, Paul is on trial for preaching the gospel; the resurrection he teaches is "according to the Way" (v. 14).

24:22–27 *Paul Remains in Custody.* Because Felix has "rather accurate knowledge of the Way"—that is, knowledge of Christian teaching—he delays judgment, telling Paul's accusers to wait until Lysias the tribune arrives (v. 22).⁹³ Either Lysias never comes or Felix knows the Jews will eventually give up and go home. In either case, Paul spends the next two years under arrest in Caesarea. The imprisonment has certain freedoms, as Paul's friends are allowed to come and go (v. 23)—perhaps Paul's Roman citizenship earns him this right, or perhaps Felix understands Paul to be innocent of the accusations (even though he still has a vested interest in placating the Jews to some degree, thus keeping Paul in prison). The provision ensures that Paul's needs are seen to and is likely connected to Felix's hope that he will make money from the situation (v. 26).

Felix has enough interest to send for Paul, who speaks to him "about faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 24), specifically "righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment" (v. 25)—likely shorthand for the entire gospel. That is, "righteousness" refers to justification, or what it means to be saved, which undoubtedly includes the death and resurrection of Jesus; "self-control" is related to the promise of, and the living of, the Christian life through the Spirit; and "the coming judgment" is concerned with the warning of judgment for those who refuse, but also with hope for those who believe. No doubt Paul personalizes the message for Felix—perhaps in speaking of self-control he refers to or implies something about the questionable background of Felix's marriage to Drusilla, daughter of Herod Agrippa I (the king who put James to death and himself died an ignoble death during a remarkable

⁹³ We do not know how Felix had become familiar with Christian teaching, though it is possible that his Jewish wife, Drusilla, told him of the sect. Schnabel adds that with Judea under his jurisdiction, Felix would know about the followers of Jesus (*Acts*, 963). Schnabel also notes: "On a literary level, the comment shows Luke's readers that the favorable judgments of representatives of highest Roman officials about the Christians attesting their political innocuousness are grounded in fact."

display of pride and arrogance; 12:1–2, 20–23). Apparently Felix played a large part in arranging Drusilla's divorce from her first husband.⁹⁴

Paul does not sugarcoat the gospel for Felix, who is “alarmed” by the message (24:25)—Paul's message gets his attention and disturbs him, leaving him unsettled, and so he sends Paul away. Luke's picture of Felix is of a man with at least mixed motives. He already has some knowledge of Christian beliefs and perhaps genuine curiosity to hear more from Paul. But he is also hoping for a bribe from Paul, presumably either to release him or to ensure his safety. Legally Felix cannot take bribes, but the practice was nevertheless rampant among Roman officials of the time. So it is possible that from the very start what he really saw was a chance to enrich himself. Most likely, however, Felix is interested both in Paul and his message and also in lining his own pockets. But any ulterior motive did not deter Paul from preaching the gospel.

The narrative of Felix in Acts ends with no response of repentance on his part. More than that, it ends on a note of injustice. Though he never explicitly states as much, Luke implies that Felix, like the tribune Lysias, believes Paul to be innocent of the charges brought by his accusers. At the same time, he is unwilling to release him. History shows that Felix struggled with keeping the peace during his tenure, and thus he seeks to pacify the Jews by keeping their enemy in jail. Paul remains in prison two years until a new governor, Porcius Festus, comes to Judea. This new governor will be willing to do what Felix is not—release Paul—but Paul himself will guarantee that this never happens. He is bound for Rome, and Festus becomes the means to that end.

Response

Like Paul, we should look for every opportunity to share the gospel with whomever God puts in front of us at any given time. We should be especially aware when someone is *open* to hearing the gospel—not only when a person is genuinely interested in hearing what we have to say but in situations in which someone has, at best, mixed motives. Maybe he or she seeks to refute what we say, or perhaps desires to win us over to another view. The background, intentions, and motivations of others are of no consequence in regard to whether we share the gospel, but such factors should influence *how* we share. Regardless, we should seek to be clear and forthright with the complete message of the gospel—salvation in Christ, new life in Christ, hope in Christ.

Whether or not Drusilla's background was in Paul's mind as he shared with Felix, we should look for and be sensitive to specific areas of contact, behaviors, words, or beliefs that may serve as segues into personalized evangelism, specifically those areas that provide an opportunity to apply the reality of both condemnation and salvation in personal ways. To be saved is to be saved *from* something:

⁹⁴ As every major Acts commentary notes, the Jewish historian Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, records how Drusilla, lured away by Felix, left her first husband, Gaius Julius Azizus, priest-king of Emesa. Felix is blamed for causing her to break the law.

sin. It is not enough to present the benefits of following Jesus. Following Jesus comes only through repentance and faith, and a gospel presentation must include the weight of condemnation and guilt that leads to hope in Christ. The more we can do this in personal, specific ways, rather than in vague, general ideas about sin, or evil, or hopelessness in the world (unless we plan on bringing those general principles to bear on a personal level), the more we present the real, biblical Jesus to people as their potential Savior who saves them from their sin and offers them hope.

ACTS 25:1–27

25 Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. ²And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, ³asking as a favor against Paul¹ that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. ⁴Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. ⁵“So,” said he, “let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.”

⁶After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. ⁷When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. ⁸Paul argued in his defense, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.” ⁹But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?” ¹⁰But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. ¹¹If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” ¹²Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

¹³Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. ¹⁴And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying, “There is a man left prisoner by Felix, ¹⁵and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. ¹⁶I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense

concerning the charge laid against him. ¹⁷ So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. ¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. ¹⁹ Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. ²⁰ Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. ²¹ But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar.” ²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” said he, “you will hear him.”

²³ So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. ²⁴ And Festus said, “King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵ But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. ²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. ²⁷ For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him.”

¹ Greek *him*

Section Overview: Paul Will Go to Caesar

This chapter begins with Festus in Jerusalem and the Jews urging him to bring Paul back to Jerusalem (Acts 25:1–3). They are seeking not a trial but an opportunity to kill him. Festus asks the Jews to come to Caesarea if they have charges against Paul (v. 5). There they bring false charges against Paul, who denies all of them. They apparently also charge Paul with a crime that is sure to win the attention of the Roman authorities (as it did with Pontius Pilate): treason. In an attempt to pacify the Jews, Festus asks Paul if he desires to be tried in Jerusalem, but Paul again exercises his Roman rights (vv. 9–10). He knows what will happen in Jerusalem, so he appeals to Caesar (v. 11).

Festus relates Paul’s story to King Agrippa and also notes that he considers Paul to be innocent of any charges that should concern Roman authorities. The issues are over Jewish religious issues and the resurrection of a man named Jesus. Once again, the differences between the Jews and Christians are seen by the authorities as in-house debates. Clearly, Festus is at a loss as to how to handle the situation. Agrippa decides he would like to hear Paul for himself. This chapter sets the stage for Paul’s last recorded defense in Acts, in chapter 26. What appears to some as a minor religious dispute between a few Jews is actually the most important issue in the history of the world: the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Section Outline

II.F. Paul Will Go to Caesar (25:1–27)

1. Paul Appeals to Caesar (25:1–12)
2. Festus Refers Paul to Agrippa (25:13–27)

Comment

25:1–12 *Paul Appeals to Caesar.* Two years do nothing to lessen the Jewish leaders' hatred of Paul. On Festus's first trip to Jerusalem—only three days after his arrival to the area—the Jewish leaders immediately take up their case against Paul. Their motives have not changed at all: they want Paul brought to Jerusalem so that they can kill him (v. 3; cf. 23:12). Festus himself has not yet met or heard from Paul, and he is wise, or shrewd, enough not to go along with their terms. If they have something against Paul, they are welcomed to come to Caesarea and make their case. Later Luke notes that Festus desires to do a favor for the Jews (25:9; cf. 24:27), but not at the expense of compromising his own position and authority. The longstanding pattern of Gentile protection of Paul against the Jews continues with Festus, as God continues to make good on his promise to bring his Word to the ends of the earth.

It is clear that the Romans have more interest in upholding their own laws and practices than the Jewish authorities do in upholding the law of Moses. Granted, officials such as Gallio (18:12), the tribune Lysias (23:26), Felix, and Festus have a vested personal interest in upholding Roman law, and they are not above cutting corners (e.g., Felix's hope for a bribe). Nevertheless, they show far more loyalty to Rome than the Jewish leaders do to Moses and the covenant. The arrest and trial of Jesus was a previous example of this sad reality.

Verses 6–12 return to Caesarea, with Festus taking his place as judge. The Jews bring “many and serious charges” against Paul, but they have no evidence (v. 7). They stand around Paul making their accusations—we can imagine Paul standing calmly in their midst, with deep sadness (cf. Rom. 9:3), as they rant and rave with all of their false accusations, each baseless charge building up more evidence of their own rejection of the Messiah and the covenant God they claim to serve.

Luke does not quote the accusers this time—readers are already familiar with their charges. But he does include a brief report of Paul's reply that summarizes their case (Acts 25:8). Besides denying any crime against the law or the temple, Paul mentions a supposed wrongdoing unmentioned in the narrative since the uproar in Thessalonica (17:2–7): offense against Caesar. It is a fair assumption that these Jews have charged Paul with the same kind of treason alleged by the Jews in Thessalonica: “acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus” (17:7). The same issue is likely raised here. Perhaps Paul's Jewish opponents believe they have found a way to use his Roman citizenship against him. Rather than swearing allegiance to Caesar, Paul's allegiance is to Jesus of Nazareth, whom he calls King and Lord.

There is precedent for this charge. In the Gospels, the Pharisees and Herodians attempt to trap Jesus with a question concerning Caesar's authority (Matt. 22:17;

cf. Mark 12:14; Luke 20:22). Likewise, the Jews apply pressure to the Roman governor Pilate by reminding him, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar” (John 19:12). The same Jews also cry, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15)—an astonishing thing for a Jew to say, but one that provides readers of Acts insight into the depths of the Jewish rejection of Jesus and their subsequent rejection of his disciples. The Jewish leaders out to stop Paul are not faithful to Yahweh; they were unfaithful to him when they killed Jesus, just as their fathers were unfaithful when they persecuted his prophets (Matthew 23).

Festus’s job is to keep the peace, but it becomes clear to Paul that he himself is in a potentially dangerous situation. Festus desires to do the Jews a favor (Acts 25:9; cf. Felix in 24:27), but he does not rule against Paul. Instead he asks him if he wants to make his case in Jerusalem. Paul chooses to invoke his citizenship instead, pointing out that he is right where he is supposed to be: at a Roman tribunal (25:11). He turns the issue back to Festus, pointing out that he knows Paul has not committed anything against the Jews (v. 10). In other words, this is purely a Roman matter, and he is quite willing to face the consequences if he is guilty of anything deserving of death in a Roman context.

Paul must sense that Festus is not above emulating Pontius Pilate and washing his hands of the whole situation. He points out that if he is not guilty regarding the Jews, then no one, not even Festus, can turn him over to them. His appeal to Caesar must have been completely unpredicted and absolutely stunning to Festus. Roman citizens had a right to appeal their cases all the way to the emperor. Luke does not record the Jews’ response (no doubt they have objections), but he does note that the request is enough to force Festus to step aside and confer with his advisers. He returns to the proceedings in what is probably a mix of confusion (see 25:26) and perhaps, at least in the short term, relief. He does what he has to do as a Roman official: he grants Paul’s request. With that, the direction of the rest of the narrative is set. The Jewish leaders and enemies are out of the picture for Paul. Paul’s way was chosen by Christ Jesus, and the apostle to the Gentiles will be sent, under Gentile authority, to the very heart of the Gentile world. In one fell swoop, Paul sheds these accusers forever. The major point of tension in Acts, Jewish unbelief and opposition to the gospel, evaporates.

25:13–27 Festus Refers Paul to Agrippa. Herod Agrippa II, son of Agrippa I (12:1ff.), does not rule Judea, but he does have authority over the temple, including the authority to appoint priests. By this time the Romans have taken back Galilee, Perea, Samaria, Judea, and Idumea, all of which were under the rule of Agrippa I at one time.⁹⁵ Agrippa II is, nevertheless, still quite powerful and influential and, more importantly, “familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews” (26:3). When he and his sister Bernice come to Caesarea, Festus wastes no time recounting the recent events. Festus may no longer have to worry about the Jews,

⁹⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, 492–493.

but he does not want to send Paul to the emperor without explanation (25:26–27). He lays out the history of the case, careful to show both that he has done everything by the book (vv. 15–17) and also that Paul’s accusers have brought baseless charges. They have simply argued over points of the Jewish religion and the man Jesus, whom some say is dead even though Paul claims he is alive (v. 19). Festus recounts how Paul declined to go to Jerusalem but appealed to Caesar instead (vv. 20–21).

Although Gentile rulers and authorities are the means of saving Paul on a number of occasions throughout Acts, they never know quite what to make of him. Felix had an interest in him, including hope for profit, but he left Paul in limbo, never reaching a conclusion in his case. Likewise, Festus clearly does not know what to do with Paul. He had attempted to shift responsibility for him to the Jews, but Paul halted that attempt by appealing to Caesar. His confusion over Paul continues as he seeks help from Agrippa. What every Gentile authority in the book of Acts recognizes, however, is that whatever the charges, Paul is innocent of anything deserving of death. Kings, rulers, and authorities at various levels see this all as a dispute between a few Jews, but in reality it is a dispute over loyalty to the true King, Jesus of Nazareth.

Agrippa apparently has the same flair for pomp and circumstance that his father had (and died over). Dignitaries and military personnel assemble—the most powerful and influential people in that region of the empire—and Paul is ushered in (v. 23). He stands and listens as Festus both repeats the events that have led to this moment (vv. 24–25) and also reveals the real reason he wants Agrippa to hear the case: Festus now has the responsibility to send a prisoner, a Roman citizen who has appealed to Caesar, to the emperor, and he does not want to do so without a legitimate charge (vv. 26–27).

Response

As Christians, those who believe in Jesus the Jewish Messiah, we must always take care over the way we speak of “the Jews” in the NT, particularly in the Gospels and Acts. The unbelief of the Jews, their OT history and NT continuance of rejection and rebellion against God, is a reflection of the hearts of all Gentiles as well. Paul makes this point in Romans 3:19–20: the experience of the Jews under the law provides public evidence that no one is righteous. The law’s condemning function is on full display in the OT, as those with the law cannot and will not keep it. This is how the law leaves everyone in the world speechless, without defense. I could summarize it this way: “See how Israel broke the law continually? See their idolatry in the face of a God who reveals himself and his promises? See their rejection of their Messiah? We would do the same.”

ACTS 26:1–32

26 So Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:

²“I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴“My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. ⁵They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. ⁶And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! ⁸Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

⁹“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

¹²“In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ¹‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’ ¹⁶But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

¹⁹“Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. ²¹For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. ²²To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what

the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

²⁴ And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” ²⁵ But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. ²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” ²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” ²⁹ And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”

³⁰ Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. ³¹ And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.”

³² And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

¹Or the Hebrew dialect (probably Aramaic) ²Or In a short time you would persuade me to act like a Christian!

Section Overview: Paul before King Agrippa: Who Is True to the Covenant?

Paul is glad to speak before Agrippa, since he is “familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews” (Acts 26:3). This chapter contains the most extensive testimony from Paul in Acts. As in his defense at Jerusalem, Paul mentions his personal background and presents himself—and, by extension, the Christian faith—as the proper expression of the Jewish religion. Again he emphasizes the resurrection, the issue at the heart of the charges against Paul. He then recounts how he himself was once a persecutor of the followers of Jesus, implying that his former actions were wrong in the same way that his accusers’ now are (vv. 4–11).

Paul next recounts his conversion; what Luke includes here is not quite the same as the earlier accounts in Acts, though there are no contradictions. One striking difference is how Paul tells Agrippa that Jesus sent him to turn the Gentiles “from the power of Satan to God” for forgiveness (v. 18), affirming the equal place Gentiles have in the people of God. This is the main issue: Paul’s teaching on the resurrection includes a message to and about the Gentiles that his enemies cannot accept.

Paul goes on to tell Agrippa that he preached in obedience to Jesus first in Damascus, then to Jerusalem, Judea, and finally to the Gentiles. Paul’s ministry is itself a fulfillment of Jesus’ original commission in 1:8. He has faithfully preached only what Moses and the prophets prophesied. This is the reason the Jewish authorities want him dead (26:19–21).

The chapter ends with Paul appealing to the king to “become such as I am—except for these chains” (v. 29). As for the secular authorities and King Agrippa, they find Paul innocent of all charges. If he had not appealed to Caesar, he could

be set free. As it stands, Paul will travel to Rome, the journey Jesus promised over two years before (23:11).

Section Outline

II.G. Paul before King Agrippa: Who Is True to the Covenant? (26:1–32)

1. Paul Introduces Himself (26:1–8)
2. Paul Testifies (26:9–23)
3. True and Rational Words (26:24–32)

Comment

26:1–8 *Paul Introduces Himself.* Agrippa knows more about Jewish issues than have Paul's previous interlocutors, so the apostle provides a more detailed account of his conversion—which explains why this version of Paul's testimony differs at some points from his former accounts in Acts. This text is also a fulfillment of Jesus' words to Ananias at the time of Paul's conversion: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (9:15). Paul has been witnessing to everyone in every place since that time, but each of the three groups singled out by Christ are present in the context beginning in chapter 22. Paul spoke before Israelites in Jerusalem (chs. 22–23), the Gentiles Felix and Festus (chs. 24–25), and now King Agrippa.

As he does in Galatians 1:13–14 and Philippians 3:4–6, Paul recounts his Pharisaic history. He does so here in order to set up an ironic point: his accusers know full well who he is, where he came from, and what his religious background includes. He was a Pharisee and now is on trial for what all Pharisees believe: resurrection (Acts 26:4–7). Why should his accusers be so shocked that God raises the dead, since they all believe in resurrection (v. 8)?

Paul is aware, of course—as are readers of Acts—that the real point (except for the Sadducees) is not whether there is a resurrection but that Paul preaches the resurrection of Jesus from Nazareth, which establishes him as the Messiah. It is not, furthermore, simply that God raised Jesus but that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the hopes and promises of Israel. It is *this* resurrection that is at issue. For Paul there is no distinction between believing in a resurrection and proclaiming Jesus; he is the resurrection, the hope of the twelve tribes of Israel (v. 7). Essentially, Paul is on trial for believing in and being faithful to God.

26:9–23 *Paul Testifies.* Paul's next testimony could be broken down into three parts:

1. What I was (vv. 9–11)
2. What changed (vv. 12–18)
3. What I now am (vv. 19–23)

The differences between this description of Paul's conversion and his testimony before the Jews in chapter 22 or the original account in chapter 9 are neither troublesome nor surprising. Everyone tells a story differently depending on the

audience, circumstances, and context: certain details are left out or added; others are expanded or shortened; timespans expand or contract. Further, a literary setting such as Acts offers a narrated account, not an audio recording.

Besides adding the minor detail that everyone fell to the ground when the light from heaven appeared, Paul also mentions that the voice was in “Hebrew”—probably the Aramaic dialect (cf. ESV mg.; 22:2)—and included a proverb (26:14). Paul does not mention the language to find corroboration from other witnesses, who did not “understand the voice” (22:9). Perhaps he mentions it to explain his other name, Saul,⁹⁶ or to underscore that his encounter was with the Lord of *Israel*.

The maxim Jesus cites refers to the sharp stick (goad) that ox drivers use to keep oxen under control. By application, Paul can no longer fight against or resist God. Why the phrase is left out of the other accounts is unknown, but there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. Paul was not a faithful Pharisee doing his lawful duty until he came to find Jesus to be the answer and the fulfillment of every OT promise. Paul did not shift allegiance to a new or better or clearer revelation of God; he was converted from a life of revolt against God to membership in the people of God by faith in Jesus Christ. No one who rejects the Messiah is a faithful member of the covenant, old or new.

Paul is on trial for his belief in resurrection, and he provides an extended account of his encounter with the risen Jesus. Luke picks up an undercurrent that goes back explicitly at least to chapter 22 and implicitly throughout Acts. Paul may be on trial over the resurrection, but close to the heart of the matter is his relationship to the Gentiles (26:17, 20–21). In 21:28–29 the Jews from Asia accused Paul of defiling the temple by bringing Greeks inside, having seen Trophimus with him in Jerusalem. Paul’s dealings with the Gentiles were hardly secret. Not only does he teach that Jesus rose from the dead and is the Jewish Messiah; he is the Messiah for the Gentiles as well. It is not surprising that the Jews never mention their agitation over Paul’s association with Gentiles when they bring charges against Paul before Gentile authorities.

Paul was appointed to witness to the revelation he received, and would receive, in Jesus (26:16), specifically as a witness to the Gentiles (v. 17). Paul chooses to mention that in his commissioning Jesus promised to deliver him from the Jews and send him to the Gentiles—the very thing now happening in the narrative. Paul’s account is reminiscent of his epistles as well as themes from the Gospels. “Turn from darkness to light” (v. 18) is similar to his reminding the Ephesians, “You were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). He tells the Thessalonians, “You are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness” (1 Thess. 5:5).

This also connects to a theme found in Luke’s Gospel, in which Elizabeth is told that her son (John the Baptist) will be a prophet of God, who will soon “give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:79). A year or so later, Simeon will pick up the baby Jesus and declare him to be a “light for

⁹⁶ Peterson, *Acts*, 665.

revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32). This light for the Gentiles is also “for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32), the very point Paul will make in Acts 26:23: Jesus is for both Jews and Gentiles.

Deliverance from Satan (v. 18) is not a common theme in Acts, but in the context of the book, Jesus’ commission describes bringing the Gentiles from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God. Coming to Jesus means leaving one realm for another. Satan and his activity are common Pauline themes.⁹⁷ Colossians 1:13–20 ties the themes of this passage together. There Paul speaks of God’s rescuing us “from the domain of darkness” and moving us “to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). This exchange of kingdoms is linked to forgiveness (v. 14) and reconciliation of all people to God through the blood of Christ (v. 20).

Jesus’ commission next mentions forgiveness and inheritance for the Gentiles (Acts 26:18), which go hand in hand. Paul ties these themes together in his own ministry in multiple places, nowhere more thoroughly than in Ephesians 1:7–14. There he makes clear that forgiveness in the sight of God is through Christ’s work, and through that work both Jews and Gentiles have an equal share in the blessings of God in Christ.

Finally, Jesus mentions “those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18). Here “sanctified” is used as a summary of salvation, not in a systematic sense but in the sense specifically of being forgiven (which is itself frequently used in the Bible as a summary for the whole work of salvation; cf. Acts 20:32; Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 2:11). Although believers tend to emphasize progressive sanctification, that is, the ongoing work of God to conform believers to Jesus through various means, here the word refers clearly to a status already given: those who “are sanctified.” Today we are also accustomed, moreover, to the doctrine of justification by faith but rarely speak of *sanctification* by faith. Faith is no less the instrument in sanctification than it is in justification. “Sanctified” here refers to the people of God who by faith are forgiven, delivered from Satan’s kingdom, and brought into God’s kingdom. The phrase is not an abstracted theological point, and to treat it as such misses the author’s intention. The dramatic point is that the Gentiles are included; they have full inheritance among God’s people (cf. Acts 10:44–48; 11:17; 15:7–11; Rom. 4:9–12; 11:11–12, 25; Gal. 3:7–9; Eph. 3:6). And they have all of this through believing in Jesus: the people of God are defined by allegiance to him.

Paul’s recounting of his encounter with the resurrected Jesus sends a clear message. All along he has asserted that he *does* in fact follow Moses, he *does* believe the promises, and he *is* faithful to God and the covenant. As was Saul of Tarsus, Paul’s *accusers* are the ones resisting and rejecting God by refusing to believe in Jesus. They are the ones who ultimately reject the resurrection because the promise of

⁹⁷ In Paul’s letters, Satan is a real presence and the ultimate enemy of God and his people. Unbelievers were once under his power (“prince of the power of the air”; Eph. 2:2). Christians must be on guard lest they be led astray by Satan (1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11). Satan is an active enemy (2 Cor. 12:7; 1 Thess. 2:18) who has led people astray and continues to do so (2 Cor. 11:14; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Tim. 5:15). Paul speaks of turning over to Satan unrepentant sinners and those who reject the apostolic gospel and authority (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

resurrection is fulfilled in Jesus. They are the ones who kick against the goads. Their outrage over Paul's dealings with the Gentiles is further proof of their disbelief in the God they claim to know. Paul describes the Jews in Judea who cause trouble for the Jerusalem church and the apostles in particular in 1 Thessalonians 2:15–16: “[They] killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!”

This theme of true faithfulness to God continues in Acts 26:19. Because of the encounter on the Damascus road, Paul obeyed; the “heavenly vision” of the Lord convinced Paul that the revelation was a direct word from God. Once again, it is clear that Paul was not simply becoming a better Jew or finally getting on board with God's plan. Rather, he experienced a true conversion from unbelief and disobedience to faith and obedience—he was saved. The rest of the account underscores this truth by showing Paul's bearing the fruit of true repentance. What Paul says about the Gentiles in the following verses proves the point.

Paul personally participated in the fulfillment of Jesus' commission to the disciples in 1:8. From Damascus, he headed to Jerusalem, through Judea, and to the Gentiles. His description is brief and to the point: he pressed people to repent, turn to God, and perform “deeds in keeping with their repentance” (26:20). The allusion to John the Baptist's message to the Jews is unmistakable (Luke 3:8). The same word John preached to the Jews in preparation for the Messiah is preached to the Gentiles after the resurrection of the Messiah. Everyone, including Jews, Paul, and the Gentiles, must repent and believe in Jesus and show their new (covenant) relationship through obedience to him. Repentance and obedience to Jesus demonstrate who is loyal to God. Although resurrection has been at the center of the discussion since Paul stood before the Jews (Acts 23:6), the underlying issue is that faithfulness to God means accepting Jesus as Lord. That was why the Jews took Paul and attempted to kill him (26:20–21).

Paul underscored the reality of Jesus as the fulfillment of all that had come before by standing in front of everyone, both “small and great,” proclaiming exactly what “the prophets and Moses said would come to pass” (vv. 22–23). The reference to “small and great” evokes Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy that when the Spirit came, all would know the Lord: “No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34).

Paul, like the other disciples, knows Jesus, including his suffering and resurrection, as the fulfillment of the Scripture (e.g., Acts 2:25, 34; 3:18, 21–25; 10:43; 15:15; 24:14). These references also provide a summary of the gospel sketch Paul offers in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, which also features the promise-fulfillment motif. The connection to 1 Corinthians 15, and Paul's theology generally, is evident from Paul's conclusion as he connects Christ's resurrection and the proclamation of the

gospel (Acts 26:23) and also alludes again to his birth narrative: “Being the first to rise from the dead, [Jesus] would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (v. 23).

26:24–32 *True and Rational Words.* The gospel is life to those who believe but death to those who reject it (2 Cor. 2:16). Festus clearly wants nothing to do with Paul’s gospel. His reaction is similar to those in Athens who called Paul a “babbler” (Acts 17:18). Festus’s charge that Paul is “out of your mind” is met with a virtual quote of 2 Corinthians (in content, if not in terminology): he is both sane and speaking “true and rational words” (Acts 26:25), which is remarkably similar to Paul’s claim that “if we are beside ourselves, it is for God” (2 Cor. 5:13). Paul is not claiming to present a “rationalistic” argument of proofs or asserting that his message rests on its pure rationality. Rather, Paul’s experience, his gospel ministry, and his defense “agree with the rationality of human reason”⁹⁸—that is, they are “reasonable.” The gospel Paul preaches is not “rational” in the sense that to believe or accept anything else is, therefore, irrational. This is not a battle of apologetic wits.

While it could be argued that it is God who defines what is “rational,” or that the gospel is the true, rational message, Paul is not making a subtle stab at secular definitions of rationality or logical coherence, though his message does challenge unbelieving worldviews. It does so, however, not simply by proving counter worldviews to be wrong but through conviction, condemnation, and subsequent hope (cf. Peter’s sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2, for instance). The reasonable nature of Paul’s defense is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18–31), which to Festus seems foolish.

The evangelistic intent of Paul’s speech is explicit when he turns to address Agrippa. Paul knows Agrippa is aware both of the events that have taken place in Israel and also of the teaching of the Bible (Acts 26:26). Is Paul taking a chance on Agrippa’s being, deep down, a believer in God? Agrippa is a Gentile but is closely tied to Judaism.⁹⁹ Regardless of Paul’s estimation of Agrippa’s spiritual state, he equates believing in the prophets with believing in Jesus (v. 27). In other words, if one truly believes the old covenant prophets—the prophets of the messiah—then one should believe Jesus, who fulfills the promise of the prophets. Again, this is not a defense in the sense that Paul is arguing his case in hopes of being found not guilty and then being set free. The die is cast: he is going to Rome, and so he takes this opportunity to carry out the commission Jesus has had in store for Paul from the beginning: “to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (9:15).

Agrippa fully understands that Paul is pressing him to believe. But instead of answering the question, he asks one of his own. There is considerable discussion concerning how the Greek text of 26:28 should be rendered. “In a short time” could be translated as “with so little effort” or “with so few words,” but Paul’s

⁹⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, 1015.

⁹⁹ Peterson, *Acts*, 674.

reply in verse 29 (“whether short or long”) seems best understood as a response to “in a short time.” The point is that Agrippa knows Paul is hoping to persuade him to be a Christian. The term “Christian” appears only one other time in Acts (cf. 11:26), where it was presumably coined by unbelievers at Antioch. Its usage by Agrippa perhaps implies that, unlike most in the narrative, he understands there to be a distinction between the followers of Jesus and the Jews, although this cannot be proved.

It is fitting that Paul’s last extended speech in Acts concludes with an appeal to all. He desires all to believe as he does, and also hopes that all will be spared his suffering (“except for these chains”; 26:29). Agrippa confirms the judgment of other officials: Paul has done nothing wrong and deserves to be set free (v. 31). But he has appealed to Caesar, and there is no going back (v. 32).

Many commentators and interpreters highlight the parallels between Jesus’ inevitable trip to Jerusalem and Paul’s inevitable trip to Rome. Luke is clearly depicting Paul as following in Jesus’ footsteps, presenting Paul in his own “passion.” But the primary reason he recounts Paul’s experiences in chapters 21 and following is because this is exactly how it happened. In this account we see God’s hand of providence guiding Paul to fulfill the apostolic commission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth—a trajectory that spans the narrative from beginning to end.

Response

Paul preaches the gospel in any situation and to any person, regardless of social standing, power, or education. Clearly, in God’s providence, Paul is the exact man for the job. Luke, however, highlights not Paul’s education or gifts but his simple and direct manner of speaking about his experience and the truth of Christ. Paul is not ashamed to speak about the resurrection to the highly educated in Athens or to men in authority. He is unafraid to be called a “babbler” or “insane”; he wants only to preach Christ. This does not mean that Paul is superhuman or the only man since Jesus never to feel fear or hesitation at the prospect of witnessing. Paul knows his weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:29–30), but more importantly he knows that it is precisely his weaknesses that make the gospel shine brighter (2 Cor. 12:10; 13:4).

Paul believes, further, that the simple words of the gospel are power and truth (Rom. 1:16–17; 1 Cor. 2:4). Believers can spend too much time worried that someone might make fun of them, reject them, or beat them in an argument. We should stop worrying—we *will* be made fun of, rejected, and beaten in arguments. The pressure is removed when we stop fretting and realize the inevitable. For many believers around the world, the stakes are much higher, putting such considerations to shame. Whoever and wherever we are, the gospel we preach is able to save everyone, from family members to friends or strangers, from enemies to people in the highest positions of power. We cannot wait until we no longer fear or feel embarrassed—we would wait forever before such emotions disappeared. We must also ignore demographic studies about when, how,

or at what age people are likely to believe. Such observations may be interesting reflections, but they are often completely useless otherwise. We ought to be like Paul, living fully in and understanding our context and those around us. We must live a life that reflects our belief in Jesus, sharing him with everyone we can, fearing no one but God.

ACTS 27:1–28:31

27 And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. ²And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. ³The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. ⁴And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. ⁵And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. ⁶There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. ⁸Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

⁹Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast¹ was already over, Paul advised them, ¹⁰saying, “Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” ¹¹But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. ¹²And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

¹³Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. ¹⁴But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. ¹⁵And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda,² we managed with difficulty to secure the ship’s boat. ¹⁷After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear,³ and thus they were driven along. ¹⁸Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. ¹⁹And on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

²¹ Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. ²² Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴ and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ ²⁵ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. ²⁶ But we must run aground on some island.”

²⁷ When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. ²⁸ So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms.⁴ A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms.⁵ ²⁹ And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. ³⁰ And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship’s boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, ³¹ Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” ³² Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship’s boat and let it go.

³³ As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. ³⁴ Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength,⁶ for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.” ³⁵ And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶ Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷ (We were in all 276⁷ persons in the ship.) ³⁸ And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

³⁹ Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. ⁴⁰ So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. ⁴¹ But striking a reef,⁸ they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. ⁴² The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. ⁴³ But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, ⁴⁴ and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

28 After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. ² The native people⁹ showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. ³ When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. ⁴ When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice¹⁰ has not allowed him to live.” ⁵ He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead.

But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

⁷Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. ⁸It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. ⁹And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. ¹⁰They also honored us greatly,¹¹ and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

¹¹After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods¹² as a figurehead.

¹²Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. ¹³And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. ¹⁴There we found brothers¹³ and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. ¹⁶And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

¹⁷After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, “Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. ¹⁸When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. ¹⁹But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. ²⁰For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.” ²¹And they said to him, “We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. ²²But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.”

²³When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ²⁴And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. ²⁵And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:

²⁶“Go to this people, and say,
“You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

²⁷ For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed;
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears

and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.’

²⁸Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”¹⁴

³⁰He lived there two whole years at his own expense,¹⁵ and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

¹That is, the Day of Atonement ²Some manuscripts *Clauda* ³That is, the sea-anchor (or possibly the mainsail) ⁴About 120 feet; a fathom (Greek *orguia*) was about 6 feet or 2 meters ⁵About 90 feet (see previous note) ⁶Or *For it is for your deliverance* ⁷Some manuscripts *seventy-six*, or *about seventy-six*

⁸Or *sandbank*, or *crosscurrent*; Greek *place between two seas* ⁹Greek *barbaroi* (that is, non-Greek speakers); also verse 4 ¹⁰Or *justice* ¹¹Greek *honored us with many honors* ¹²That is, the Greek gods Castor and Pollux

¹³Or *brothers and sisters*; also verses 15, 21 ¹⁴Some manuscripts add verse 29: *And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, having much dispute among themselves* ¹⁵Or *in his own hired dwelling*

Section Overview: To Rome

Around AD 60 Paul sets out for Rome along with other prisoners under the charge of a centurion named Julius and along with Luke (“we”) and Aristarchus. From the beginning, their small ship is against the wind up the Mediterranean coast and across to Crete, where they spend the winter. After leaving Crete, the ship runs into gale-force storms, and the situation on board becomes nearly hopeless. But Paul has a word for the terrified sailors and all on board: God has told him that they will not sink but will run aground (Acts 27:26). The harrowing storm lasts fourteen days, and Paul continues to encourage his traveling companions. As Paul predicted, they hit a reef, and as soldiers plan to kill all the prisoners to prevent escape, Julius steps in and saves Paul’s life. Chapter 27 ends with everyone safely ashore.

Readers will be struck by Luke’s attention to detail. He devotes forty-four verses to this one voyage, giving his readers a picture of God’s sovereign protection of Paul and his plans for him to carry on Jesus’ mission. This is a narrative filled with drama and fascinating turns. The journey, storm, and shipwreck constitute the vast majority of these last chapters, a narrative often wrongly ignored by readers, despite its presence in the inspired Word of God.

As the book reaches its end, Paul undertakes a climactic meeting with Jews in Rome, a meeting that sounds one last note of rejection coupled with the familiar note of hope for the Gentiles (cf. 18:6). In many ways this text marks the terminus of all biblical narrative. It ends on a biblical-theological grand scale, as the history of salvation moves on toward fulfillment among the Gentiles. Luke’s narrative closes with what might appear, apart from the previous parts of Acts and the rest of the Bible, to be an unlikely final scene. Paul, the focus of the narrative for over half the book, and undeniably one of the three main leaders of the early church, is in prison. From a worldly perspective, this is hardly a triumphal ending. From the perspective of Acts and Scripture at large, however, this is precisely how the kingdom grows and ultimately reaches fulfillment (cf. the “wisdom of God” in 1 Corinthians 1). Acts concludes with chapter 28, but on one level the story does

not end there. The apostolic age comes to a close, but the age of the Spirit and of the gospel to the ends of the earth continues to this day.

Section Outline

II.H. To Rome (27:1–28:31)

1. Sailing for Rome (27:1–12)
2. A Dark and Hopeless Storm (27:13–38)
3. Saved by a Shipwreck (27:39–44)
4. Doing Good to All on Malta (28:1–10)
5. Finally to Rome (28:11–16)
6. The Kingdom to the Ends of the Earth (28:17–31)

Comment

27:1–12 *Sailing for Rome.* Chapters 27–28 testify to the accuracy of the Lord’s word to Paul while in Roman custody in Jerusalem: “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome” (23:11). In his record of Paul’s missionary journeys, Luke moves the apostle from place to place relatively quickly, but now, as he sets off on his final trip in this book, the travel narrative slows down, as the dramatic year-long journey is recorded in detail. Luke’s attention to detail about winds, sea routes taken, times of year, people involved, conversations, and gear, rigging, and sails serves to underscore the authenticity of the account and to draw the reader into the drama of the story. Only an eyewitness could write with such specific detail. In Acts, Luke sets out to develop the theology and themes surrounding the first generation of Christians, but he does so as a historian. Nowhere is that role more evident than in the final chapters of Acts. As in the Gospels and other biblical narratives, here theology and history are inseparable. In fact, the theology of the Bible is necessarily historical. For the theology of the Bible to matter, for theology to be true, it must be historical. These things must have taken place; otherwise, our faith is nothing more than wishful thinking.

Luke mentions Aristarchus’s presence on the journey (27:2). His first appearance in the narrative was at Ephesus, where he was seized by a mob (19:29). He survived the riot and appeared again as part of the group traveling with Paul as he made his way to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey (20:4–5). By naming him here, Luke includes another eyewitness to the eventful trip to Rome. Aristarchus is one of the handful of men who remain faithful to Paul to the end. Paul mentions him as his “fellow prisoner” in his letter to the Colossians (4:10) and again at the end of Philemon (vv. 23–24), where Paul also mentions Luke, Mark, Epaphras, and Demas, who later abandoned Paul for whatever the world had to offer (2 Tim. 4:10). As Paul sails for Rome, he is accompanied by at least two men who have been his loyal companions for years and will remain so to the end.

One prominent shipmate is the Roman centurion Julius (Acts 27:1), a member of the Augustan Cohort (a regiment of at least six hundred men, and sometimes

more). Julius plays a vital role in the narrative and, in the providence of God, will be instrumental in Paul's survival (vv. 31, 43). His first act is to allow Paul to see friends at Sidon who take care of his needs (v. 3). Prisoners in the empire relied on friends and family for their well-being.

Verses 4–12 recount the travelers' slow progress from the very beginning. The inclusion of so many place names emphasizes the difficulty: many delays, redirections, and stops. Luke notes that the time of "the Fast was already over" (v. 9), a reference to the Day of Atonement celebrated in the fall. After that time of year, travel on the Mediterranean is hazardous. The discussion Luke records regarding whether to stay or to make for Phoenix is not merely background detail (vv. 10–12)—it provides a reason for the decisions that will be made in the upcoming storm and subsequent shipwreck.

Paul believes it best to winter in Fair Havens on the south of Crete, an opinion not shared by most of the others. The mention of the pilot and the ship's owner alludes to the financial concerns regarding the safe passage of the ship. Conventional wisdom says "we need to go" in spite of the possible danger, but Paul—who has experience with shipwrecks (he mentions no fewer than three in 2 Corinthians 11:25)—advises them to stay. But, understandably, they choose not to listen to a prisoner who is on his way to Caesar because of his involvement in some obscure Jewish sect. But they will soon regret ignoring Paul's advice and will learn not to make the same mistake twice. By including this discussion in the narrative, Luke provides grounds for Julius's listening to Paul later, when their lives are on the line.

27:13–38 *A Dark and Hopeless Storm.* Luke's details draw readers into the terror of a typhoon at sea. He speeds up or slows down according to the portrayed action, adding detail upon detail about the efforts made by the sailors to save the ship, thus emphasizing their desperation amid dire straits. He mentions sailing under the lee of Cauda for temporary relief, hoisting the ship's boat on board, securing the hull with cables, dropping a sea anchor ("gear"; v. 17),¹⁰⁰ and, soon after, throwing the "ship's tackle" overboard. In doing so, Luke draws his readers into the danger and near hopelessness of the situation.

Verse 13 begins optimistically: "the south wind blew gently," and so they assumed it was safe to leave. "But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along" (vv. 14–15). They are "violently storm-tossed" (v. 18) and so throw over the cargo and later the tackle to lighten the load—the financial loss is nothing compared to a potential loss of life. The climax of the storm comes in verse 20 when, overtaken by darkness, the sun, moon, and stars disappear. This is not an apocalypse, but the intensity of the description is

¹⁰⁰ Luke uses two related words in verses 17 and 19, *skeuos* ("gear"; v. 17) and *skeuē* ("tackle"; v. 19). The latter probably refers to ship's gear in general and could refer to rigging and masts. A popular suggestion for the meaning of *skeuos*, and one that makes sense both nautically and in the chain of events recorded by Luke, is "sea anchor." A sea anchor in that era was a basketlike device, used especially in bad weather, that acted like an underwater parachute, or brake, creating drag and helping to keep the ship directed into the wind.

apocalyptic in its affect. There are few, if any, natural disasters more terrifying than being in the open sea, in a hurricane, in near total darkness. No way to escape or hide; no apparent way to survive.

The OT conception and symbol of the sea as a dangerous, deadly, chaotic force, home to the monster Leviathan (see especially Job 41), and controlled only by the God who created it, provides the biblical and theological background for Acts 27 (cf. Job 38:8–11; Ps. 104:24–26; Isa. 51:15), as Luke and especially Paul were likely aware. The intensity of the descriptions, the hopelessness of the storm, and Paul's total confidence in the outcome allow the whole chapter to come across as a real-life narrative of chaos, the sea, versus the Creator. However, just as in the OT, the outcome in Acts 27 is certain.

The harrowing narrative is broken in verse 21 with what amounts to an “I told you so.” Just in case they forgot, Paul reminds the traveling party that he had warned them not to leave Crete in the first place. However, he is not speaking vindictively or holding this fact over their heads; he is simply stating a fact and also laying a foundation for trusting him the next time, which is exactly what happens. Paul's confidence that no one will perish, though the ship is doomed, is based on a word he receives from God. An angel appears to Paul, confirming the earlier message from the Lord that he would speak in Rome (cf. 23:11). Paul is a human being, in need of encouragement and reminder. He likely feels what any human would feel in extremely dire and frightening circumstances: fear. But one can have faith and fear simultaneously.

Paul immediately comforts his shipmates by revealing why he is so confident—“for I have faith in God” (v. 25)—and telling them exactly what will happen next. When facing certain death at sea, running aground may not sound like much of a reprieve, but they will survive (v. 26). The strain and anxiety of a fourteen-day storm at sea (v. 27), as well as the likelihood of hitting rocks (v. 29) is, however, too much for some of the sailors, who attempt to make their way in a lifeboat and leave the others to die (v. 30). Their frantic, though understandable, desire to save themselves stands in contrast to Paul's faith in God. Paul's proven track record, coupled with his calm assurance that everyone on board will live, makes an impression on Julius—this time he listens.

Julius is now confident enough in Paul that he and the soldiers cut the ropes holding the boat, which falls into the sea (v. 32). Although other explanations are possible, what best fits the flow of the story is to understand that Julius, reflecting on what happened the last time he ignored Paul, and having witnessed Paul's faith in God in the face of death, believes he should take Paul's advice. Thus we see God ensuring the fulfillment of his own promise. He does not merely whisk the traveling party supernaturally to safety on angels' wings; divine promises come with divinely appointed means of fulfillment. God gives the promise, Paul believes it, and Julius becomes the means of fulfilling God's promise.

At this point Paul essentially becomes the leader of the traveling party—perhaps “captain” is more fitting. He encourages everyone to eat and reassures

them of their safety (vv. 33–34). The food is a practical consideration and an example of his genuine concern for their well-being. Paul has a sure word from God that everyone would survive, and he provides the means for its fulfillment. It is not enough to know that they will live; he uses the real means available and necessary for their survival. Again, divine promises are fulfilled by appropriate and appointed ways and means. Although the language in 27:35–36 is similar to NT descriptions of the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23–26), this is not a description of that meal. The closer parallel is Luke 24:30. On the ship Paul reenacts the scene with Jesus, Cleopas, and the other disciple on the evening they walk to Emmaus. That event likewise sounds like the Supper, but Luke does not indicate as much. They say a blessing and give thanks, as Christians and Jews do, before eating.¹⁰¹

Perhaps Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus receive this like the Lord's Supper (though it is unlikely, and unimportant to the narrative), but it is not presented to the ship's company, or in the narrative, in that way. The Supper, as a church ordinance, is a symbol of faith in Jesus' work on the cross and a proclamation of his coming—a ceremony for believers. Luke is not presenting a group of 276 believers (Acts 27:37), much less arguing for public Communion. Giving thanks to God and then breaking bread with those aboard ship is a public witness and testimony both to Paul's faith in God and to the God in whom he believes. Such is the event Luke links to the general change of heart and mind onboard the ship.

Verses 36–37 are the first climax (there are two) of the narrative—the point where the tension in the story reaches a breaking point, the point at which something has to give and the tension is released.¹⁰² When the ship's company eats its fill and throws the rest overboard, it is time for the story to take a final turn. The ship's company, numbering 276 persons, “all were encouraged” (vv. 36–37). Paul's faith in God creates calm in the middle of a hurricane, as attested by the confident throwing overboard of the last of the food (v. 38). There is no need to suppose the 276 people become Christians, but their newfound confidence springing from Paul's word is linked to action. Verse 42 will certainly show that “all” are not permanently confident in Paul. If they do believe in the moment, some quickly forget.

Nevertheless, the ship's company as a whole has gone from hopelessness in total darkness, furiously throwing everything in sight overboard, pulling out all of the nautical stops to keep control of the ship, and in some cases attempting to abandon ship to eating a meal together and then further lightening the load by getting rid of the last human hope of survival. The pervasive power of faith and hope in God completely transforms the voyage for the time being. For Paul and his friends (and for believing readers of Acts), the action is analogous to the Israelites' not holding

¹⁰¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 1046.

¹⁰² This is not the first time I have used the term *climax* and similar terms related to literary analysis. Such language is based on discerning narrative plot arcs (or trajectories) in stories, how aspects such as background, scene, action, and characters move toward a climax, then resolution to resulting circumstances. This general literary plot appears in both large and small storylines. We could discern a plotline for the entire book of Acts as well as multiple smaller plotlines inside the larger narrative. See Daniel Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996), 65–72. I use this method, along with modifications made by myself and my colleague Jonathan Pennington, in teaching the basics of interpreting biblical narratives.

back manna for the next day but trusting God to do what he had said and to provide for tomorrow; it is analogous to allowing the fruit on the tree to be dedicated to God for a year (Lev. 19:23–25), trusting God rather than the tree for food—the same principle of faith stands behind these multiple examples. Throwing the last bit of food overboard is possible only if one believes that God will keep his word.

27:39–44 *Saved by a Shipwreck.* Shipwreck and salvation do not typically go hand in hand, but they do so here. The tension has abated and it seems like the drama will resolve—land is sighted; a plan to gain the beach is hatched—but then the story takes one last turn. Luke provides more technical detail concerning the last morning at sea, highlighting the sailors’ skill and experience. In spite of all their efforts to run ashore, however, the front of the ship is lodged on a reef, and its stern begins to break into pieces. Then the Roman soldiers, probably acting according to protocol, decide to kill the prisoners, lest they escape. The soldiers are seeking to avoid the sort of fate suffered by the guards on duty the night Peter escaped, who were ordered to be executed by Herod (Acts 12:19). This is another point of climax in the narrative.

The tension only lasts for one verse, however, as Julius once again steps in to save Paul. This serves as yet more evidence of the compatibility and necessary relationship between divine promise and the means of its fulfillment. Julius views Paul as more than just another prisoner—he has been kind to Paul since the beginning of the trip (cf. 27:3). In all likelihood he is a genuinely congenial man; perhaps that is unusual for a centurion, which is why Luke mentions his disposition toward Paul. But Julius must also recall Paul’s prediction that they would survive but run aground (vv. 25–26), as well as his word that unless everyone stayed on the boat, Julius would not be saved (v. 31). Whatever he remembers, believes, or knows, he saves Paul’s life, and this is the unmistakable theme in this portion of Acts. The chapter ends with the survivors—all 276, as promised—floating to shore on whatever wreckage scraps are available. They are safe, though still a long way from Rome.

28:1–10 *Doing Good to All on Malta.* The sailing party learns it has washed ashore on Malta (v. 1). They are greeted and welcomed by indigenous or “native people” (Gk. *barbaroi*, v. 2; cf. ESV mg.; to translate with the English word “barbarian” is misleading because it implies those who are uncivilized and backward, whereas Luke is simply distinguishing the Maltese from Greek speakers). Shortly thereafter, Paul is bitten by a snake (v. 3), which he quickly shakes off into a fire (v. 5). The locals immediately assume anyone who survives a shipwreck only to be bitten by a snake is not just having a bad day but is being punished for his crimes (v. 4), as other legends taught.¹⁰³ Thinking Paul is a criminal, they believe that Paul has not escaped “Justice” (v. 4; capitalized as referring to a Roman goddess who ensured that criminals got what they deserved).

¹⁰³ Polhill, *Acts*, 532.

The locals are understandably surprised when Paul does not swell up and die. Some modern scholars have pointed out that there are no poisonous snakes on Malta today, although it is impossible to say with any certainty what species of snake inhabited Malta two millennia ago or may have otherwise been present in a stack of kindling. The Maltese in the narrative, who would know better than anyone else, clearly believe the snake to be dangerous enough to kill Paul. Thus they are surprised when he survives, and for the second time in the narrative Paul is identified as a god because of a supernatural event (v. 6; cf. his experience at Lystra, where he and Barnabas are called Hermes and Zeus because Paul heals a man with lame feet; 14:9–12).

The text does not explicitly state that Paul disputes the claim, but readers of Acts should have no doubt that Paul denies personal divine power or identity. At Lystra a mob developed that almost offered sacrifices outside the temple of Zeus as an act of worship toward Paul and Barnabas. Here no worship is offered, and it is safe to assume from Paul's behavior elsewhere in Acts that he goes on to explain the situation to the locals during the time he spends with them.

Verses 7–10 illustrate the first part of Paul's command to "do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10) while also demonstrating the potential and necessity for gospel-influenced ministry alongside gospel proclamation. The good news of the risen Lord Jesus who brings life to the dead must also be shown in action. Paul no doubt shares the gospel verbally with the Maltese (none of the apostles perform works but leave people to interpret those works however they will), but Luke makes no record of preaching on the island. He always mentions the apostles' preaching ministry when recording any significant interaction or exposure with local people groups—the only times preaching is not mentioned in the book is when Luke is narrating travel itineraries, and even then it is common for him to mention Paul or the others encouraging and strengthening the churches. But why not here?

We should consider how Paul's ministry on Malta mirrors most clearly the ministry of Jesus, especially when the Gospel writer—particularly Luke—put special emphasis on his acts of healing, exorcism, and feeding in the greater context of his teaching ministry (e.g., Luke 4:38–41; 5:12–16; 7:1–17; 8:26–39, 40–55; 9:10–17, 37–43; 13:10–17; 18:35–43). In Jesus' ministry, miracles serve as signs confirming his authority and messiahship. But that does not discount the real emphasis on Jesus' ministering to the real, physical needs of those around him, nor does it make the miracles mere window dressing for his teaching. His miracles confirm his teaching and identity as necessary signs of fulfillment.

In Jesus' inaugural sermon (Luke 4:14–30) he quotes Isaiah 61:1–2, which explicitly links proclamation of the good news with signs of the new era: he is called "to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19). "Liberty" has a larger spiritual connotation, as does "recovering of sight," but the signs Jesus works are not performed merely for their spiritual

significance. In fact, Jesus does not make the spiritual/physical distinctions that we tend to make, and he certainly does not worry that his good works for the poor, sick, and demon-possessed might cross the line into social gospel. For Jesus, the two go hand in hand.

Signs are also explicitly named in Luke as essential parts of Jesus' messiahship when John the Baptist, in prison and wondering about Jesus, sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he is really the one, the Messiah (Luke 7:18–35). Jesus answers with evidence, immediately healing all sorts of people and then giving John's envoys a message: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (Luke 7:22–23). Rather than serving as simple proofs, these miraculous signs are integral elements of the coming of the promised Messiah and the kingdom of God.

Miraculous signs continue in Jesus' ongoing work through the apostles in Acts, such as Peter's healing a lame man outside the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:2) or the multiple other healings performed by the apostles in Jerusalem (5:12–16), which include others' bringing their sick to the apostles for healing, just as the Maltese bring their sick to Paul. Paul's ministry includes miracles as well (16:18; 20:10–12), and on Malta that aspect receives special emphasis. Luke focuses here specifically on Paul's works likely because by now proclamation is always implied, and he is placing Paul firmly in the gospel-ministry pattern set by Jesus and the other apostles. Although it is easy to skip over these verses quickly and regard them as simply more miracles, they are far more than that. When placed in the context of Jesus' and the apostles' ministry, these miracles are signs of continuity and power, testifying to the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ, who came to proclaim the fulfillment of God's promise and then rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, commissioning his disciples to follow in his footsteps by preaching his gospel and doing good to all.

Even after many harrowing days and weeks at sea, a shipwreck, and a snake bite, Paul continues to minister. Any of those events might cause us to think that some time off is more than justified. But Paul has an opportunity to help a horribly sick local leader, and he takes it. He prays over him (no doubt explicitly and aloud), lays hands on him, and heals him, which leads to all sorts of opportunities to do the same for others (28:8–9). These locals provide an example of a welcoming people group. Not only do they welcome and help the survivors (v. 2); they repay Paul's kindness with honor and provisions (v. 10). Paul recognizes this kindness and openness as an open door for ministry. Luke notes no conversions, but he does make clear that they leave an excellent impression. History does not record the full story of the events on Malta or if other Christians arrived soon after. If they did, they no doubt found a welcoming and receptive audience. The seeds, at least, were planted by Paul.

28:11–16 *Finally to Rome.* Luke notes that the ship that takes them from Malta sports on its "figurehead" the twin gods Castor and Pollux (v. 11), Greek gods

believed to protect sailing ships, provide good winds, and help shipwrecked sailors. In legend, they were onboard Jason's fated ship the *Argo*. Luke has made it abundantly clear that it is God who has protected the ship's company because of his faithfulness to his promise that Paul would travel to Rome, and he notes the irony of the image of twin gods on the ship bound for Rome. No credit is due to fate or the gods. It is the Lord who has promised, provided for, and protected them on the trip to Rome, in spite of the difficulties.

Several stops on the itinerary are mentioned, as is the relative ease with which they now move along (vv. 12–13). Luke also notes the presence of believers at Puteoli (v. 14). It is unknown how these believers have come to be there; perhaps they were part of the expulsion from Rome under Claudius that brought Aquila and Priscilla to Corinth (18:2), or perhaps other Christian missionaries reached them. We know there is a significant population of believers in Rome, for Paul sends them a major letter; Luke mentions such Roman Christians who come out to greet them as they approach the city (28:15). Thus the gospel has already traveled throughout the Mediterranean all the way to the capital of the Roman Empire, the political, social, and cultural center of the Western world—practically speaking, the ends of the earth.

28:17–31 *The Kingdom to the Ends of the Earth.* In Rome, Paul is placed under house arrest, guarded by one soldier (v. 16). This allows him to welcome visitors and preach openly. According to the church historian Eusebius, writing in roughly the first quarter of the fourth century AD and citing traditional accounts, Paul was released from this first imprisonment and later arrested again and subsequently martyred (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.22, 25). This tradition is perhaps supported by the first letter of the early church father Clement, which implies that Paul went further than Rome (1 *Clem.* 5:7). This epistle is dated before the end of the first century, lending credence to the account. Church historians differ in their interpretations of these early documents, but as helpful as they are, the text of Acts itself (and whatever light the rest of the NT sheds on it) is the chief concern of the Christian preacher.

Neither First Timothy nor Titus mentions the same dire circumstances described in 2 Timothy 4, nor do the other letters associated with Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). Philemon implies, at the very least, that Paul anticipates being released (v. 22). The larger NT witness is most significant for dealing with questions of historical reliability, coherence, and timeline, but from a literary standpoint—which should always be the primary focus of interpreters and preachers, as God chose to give his people the book of Acts as literature—it is Luke's text that matters most. As important as these other questions may be, and as much as they have their place, they should not distract from greater concerns.

Paul has his last meetings with Jews in Rome. He recounts his experience in Jerusalem, pointing out his innocence in committing no wrongs against his fel-

low Jews or Jewish teaching. He even reveals that the Roman authorities found nothing for which to charge him with a capital offense; the only reason he is in Rome is because he was forced to appeal to Caesar to avoid the baseless charges of the Jews (Acts 28:17–19). Paul, in the tradition of Jesus, has refused to bring counter charges against his accusers. He notes what Luke makes clear—the Jews opposing Paul are the ones breaking the law, for it is they who do not understand or believe the Scriptures. They bring baseless charges and blatantly break their own legal procedures in their efforts to persecute, seize, and ultimately kill Paul. For his part, he will not turn the tables on them and bring charges.

Paul's goal with the Roman Jews is to bring his side of the case before them, not simply to clear his name but to present the gospel. Thus his strategy in Rome is basically the same as it has been elsewhere: to begin with his Jewish countrymen. But since he cannot go to the synagogue, he brings the synagogue to himself. Not only does he mention that “it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain” (v. 20); he desires to uphold Jesus as the fulfillment of all of the Scriptures (v. 23). Jesus' teaching on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24), which was learned and followed consistently by all of the apostles in Acts, is the driving focus to the end of the narrative. This observation should inform and instruct all who would follow in the preaching tradition of the apostles.

For the first time in years, Paul meets Jews who have no knowledge of his experience or history, nor firsthand knowledge of his teaching. They have only heard of this “sect” that is condemned elsewhere, and they want to hear Paul's teaching (Acts 28:22). Even without the background, however, the results are the same: some believe, while others do not. Paul, following the example of Jesus (Luke 8:10; cf. Matt. 13:14–15; Mark 4:12), cites Isaiah 6 to account for this disbelief. The disbelieving Jews have eyes to see the signs and ears to hear the message, but their hearts are dull—hard—so they do not see or hear the work of God right in front of them. They will not repent, though God is willing to heal them. Acts ends in a triumph known and measured only by faith, but before it does there is this note of horrible tragedy.

In terms of biblical narrative, this is the end of the line. Acts 28:28 is attached to the Isaiah quotation to capture not only the pattern of Acts but also the larger biblical-theological reality Paul develops in his letter to the Romans. The Jews' rejection of God reaches a climax that both leads to and is accelerated by the promise going to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11, 18–19). There is ultimate hope for a remnant of the Jews, but the Jews' rejection of God is a necessary part of the plan for saving the Gentiles. The story of the good news of Jesus with regard to the Jews throughout Acts, which is a continuation of the story that began in the Gospels, ends with a dramatic statement of condemnation. It is a narrative form of exactly what Paul describes in Romans 9–11. In Acts we find a final, conclusive word about the Jews' rejection coupled with a word of hope for the Gentiles. This ending is similar to that of the parable of the prodigal son, in which the elder brother is outside, refusing to come in and join the party welcoming his younger brother.

The story does not end here, however. Salvation will go to the Gentiles, and they will accept it. The journey to the ends of the earth will continue. The story also ends with a particularly biblical view of victory. What might appear on the surface as a note of hopelessness—imprisonment for one of the main characters in the narrative and one of the main leaders of the new “sect”—is interpreted as entirely positive and even victorious. Paul spends his imprisonment “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31). Acts began with the teaching, establishing, and proclaiming of the kingdom of God. Throughout the narrative the kingdom prospers in spite of persecution, violence, murder, imprisonment, official and unofficial opposition, mobs, hurricanes, and shipwrecks. That is not the whole story, however. The kingdom does not grow merely in *spite* of suffering; it succeeds and is fulfilled *through* suffering. Suffering is the entrance to the kingdom of God, a kingdom that continues in “boldness and without hindrance” until the return of the King.

Response

Paul in 2 Corinthians counts all of his physical trials (shipwrecks included) as suffering for the gospel and as part of the opposition to that same gospel (2 Cor. 11:25–27). On the return trip to Antioch after their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas stop in churches to encourage and strengthen the brothers and sisters, “saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). In Acts, as in 2 Corinthians, “many tribulations” is not limited to danger at the hands of enemies but includes all trials and troubles that come with ministry. All of our troubles, setbacks, and dangers (excluding some of those which we bring on ourselves through our sin) are not just random obstacles but constitute real opposition to the kingdom—opposition that is under God’s sovereign hand and through which we enter his kingdom.

It is all too easy to live for the future. I am referring not to living a life of faith today because God promises and secures the future, but letting days, weeks, months, and years go by waiting for life to smooth out so that we can “really get to work” doing ministry. This false idea takes all sorts of forms: as soon as summer gets here, as soon as this semester ends, as soon as I get through this project, as soon as I feel better. . . . It is often the case that we assume that geography, a change in scenery, will make a difference: as soon as I get overseas on the mission field, as soon as school is over and I get my first church, as soon as we have a better place to meet. . . .

This is not the way Paul thinks. It is also not the way the kingdom of God works. Whether amid beatings, delays, life-threatening storms, or imprisonment, Paul, secure in his faith that the future lies with God, never waits until tomorrow, or next year, to get on with the business of ministry. Given a choice, he would surely walk out of prison and take off for Spain. He certainly does not exult in the glories of house arrest. Prison, however, like all of the other suffering he has

faced as a result of Jesus' call, is not a defeat or an end. Paul continues preaching the kingdom and even sees a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness to the most elite military personnel on earth at the time—the Praetorian Guard (cf. Phil. 1:13). The best measure we have for future ministry is what we do today with the time and circumstances God gives us. This should not lead to guilt and remorse about the time we wasted, but neither should we sit around waiting for the next big thing, for whatever is just around the bend. The future belongs to God alone; we must look around and see what he has put before us today.

Nothing in the story of Acts, be it prison, sickness, life-threatening disasters, vicious enemies, unfavorable governments, self-absorbed and arrogant rulers, beatings, threats, disagreements among believers, horrible theology, magic, mobs, lies, misunderstandings, ignorance, or stubborn unbelief, is able to stop or even to hinder the kingdom of God. The guarantee of the kingdom is this: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), and, “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (1:11).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. BECNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.

A comprehensive treatment that includes exposition, exegesis, and section-by-section overviews.

Peterson, David G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. PNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009.

An excellent commentary on the text of Acts, grounded in its theological setting.

Polhill, John B. *Acts*. NAC. Nashville: Holman, 1992.

A clear, accessible commentary rooted in solid exposition of the text.

Schnabel, Eckhard J. *Acts*. ZECNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.

Careful exegesis of Acts combined with thorough attention to historical backgrounds and setting.

Thompson, Alan J. *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*. NSBT. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011.

A masterful treatment of the theology of Acts in both its immediate (Luke-Acts) and larger biblical-theological contexts. A must-read for preaching and teaching Acts.

ESV Study Bible. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

In addition to the helpful study notes, cross-references, and charts, this study Bible provides many maps for Acts. Given Luke's careful attention to geographical detail, a good set of maps is essential for studying Acts.

SCRIPTURE INDEX

Genesis

1.....25, 35, 37
2:7.....176
3.....170, 354
3:1.....170
3:4.....170
3:5.....170
3:14.....170
3:14–19.....170
3:15.....24, 121, 153, 208
3:16.....254
3:17.....24
3:17–19.....208
4.....170
4:11.....170
5.....24
5:1–4.....24
5:29.....121, 208
6:6–7.....200
10–11.....354
11.....355
11:27–30.....448
12.....169, 354, 400
12:1–3.....121, 354, 448
12:3.....172, 373
12:6.....401
12:7.....24, 401
15.....24
15:6.....151, 169, 419
15:7.....24
15:17.....540
17.....169
17:6.....208
18.....169
22.....169, 419
22:4.....55
22:18.....373
23:10–19.....401n39
23:16.....401
24.....57
24:11–15.....54
26:5.....151
26:19.....90
28.....52, 53
28:12.....52
28:13–14.....52
28:17.....52
29:1.....89
29:1–10.....54, 57
29:2–5.....89
29:6–14.....89
29:15–30.....89
33:13.....183
33:18–20.....401n39
33:19.....401
37–50.....400
37:11–24.....373
37:29.....470n69
41:55.....60n15
49:8–12.....61, 121, 153

49:11–12.....61
49:29–32.....401n39
50:13.....401n39
50:20.....400

Exodus

1:10.....290
2:11–12.....402
2:14.....373, 402
2:15–21.....54
2:16–17.....57
3.....383
3:1–6.....351
3:2.....383, 449
3:2–3.....540
3:4.....383
3:6.....371
3:14.....162, 163, 165, 221
3:16.....524n90
4:22.....40
4:22–23.....24
6:6.....214
7:1.....192
8:19.....359
12:10.....142
12:46.....275, 289, 290
13:21–22.....540
14:19.....340, 449
14:19–20.....351
14:24.....540
16:2.....133
16:3.....373
16:7–8.....133
16:19.....142
17:1–3.....156
17:1–7.....159, 165
17:2.....381
17:6.....156
18:14–23.....396
18:21.....396
19:7.....524n90
19:9.....340
19:11.....55
19:15.....55
19:16.....55
19:18.....540
20:1–2.....165
20:2.....24
20:16.....399
21:24.....379
22:28.....546
23:20.....449
23:23.....449
24:15.....340
24:18.....128
25:10–20.....295
29:18.....432n49
29:25.....432n49
29:41.....432n49
32.....322, 403

32:1.....373
32:33.....373
33:11.....42
33:18.....42
33:18–34:8.....41, 42
33:19.....42
33:20.....42, 139, 140
33:23.....42
34:6.....42, 129
34:22.....350
34:28.....334
34:29.....399
40:34.....340
40:36–37.....341
40:38.....341

Leviticus

1:9.....432n49
2:2.....431, 432n49
2:9.....432n49
2:12.....432n49
3:5.....432n49
3:16.....432n49
4:15.....524n90
4:31.....432n49
6:15.....432n49
6:21.....432n49
7:26.....479
8:21.....432n49
8:28.....432n49
9:1.....524n90
10.....380
11.....432
14:5.....90
14:50.....90
16:8.....344
16:13.....296
16:14–16.....295
17:6.....432n49
17:12.....479
19:18.....362, 378, 536
19:23–25.....575
19:26.....407
19:31.....407
21:17–23.....109
23:5.....147
23:13.....432n49
23:15–21.....350
23:16.....350
23:18.....432n49
23:23–25.....165
23:26–32.....166
23:33–44.....166
23:34–36.....165
23:39.....165
23:40.....208
23:42–43.....165
24:14–16.....405
24:20.....379

25:1–7 166
 25:4 166
 25:8–22 166
 25:9 166
 25:10 166
 25:13–17 166
 25:23 166

Numbers

1–2 400
 6 535
 11:16 524n90
 11:25 351, 524n90
 12:5 351
 14:4 373
 14:14 351, 540
 14:22 381
 15:3 432n49
 15:7 432n49
 15:10 432n49
 15:13 432n49
 15:14 432n49
 15:24 432n49
 15:35 472
 16:42 351
 18:17 432n49
 19:17 90
 20:2–13 159
 20:10–13 165
 21:4–9 73, 74
 21:6 74
 21:8 74
 21:8–9 74, 136
 22:27 383
 24:17 121, 208
 27:18 460
 27:20 460
 28:2 432n49
 28:6 432n49
 28:8 432n49
 28:13 432n49
 28:24 432n49
 28:26–31 350
 28:27 432n49
 29:2 432n49
 29:6 432n49
 29:8 432n49
 29:13 432n49
 29:36 432n49
 35:30 385

Deuteronomy

1:33 351
 4:12 124
 5:16 286
 5:23 524n90
 5:24 540
 6:16 381, 477
 8:3 97
 9 322
 9:9–21 322
 10 322, 357
 10:12–15 322
 10:16 322, 357, 378
 12:5 95
 14:22–27 63
 15 168
 15:1–11 166
 15:4 378
 15:12–15 168
 15:12–18 166
 15:15 166
 15:16–17 168

16:3 141n27
 16:9–12 350
 16:16 24, 63
 17:6 385, 552
 17:14–20 462
 17:15 462
 17:18–19 462
 17:19 462
 17:20 463
 18 372
 18:10 407
 18:15 126, 139, 372
 18:15–18 46, 121, 128, 154
 18:18 126, 139
 18:19 372
 19:15 385, 540, 552
 19:21 379
 21:18–21 384
 21:22–23 288, 384
 21:22–32 466n63
 23:17 480
 28 322
 29:10 524n90
 29:18 409
 30:1–3 323
 30:6 323, 324, 357, 378
 30:8 323
 32:21 466
 32:32 409
 32:47 403
 34:10 42, 139, 140

Joshua

3:2 55
 3:5 55
 7 380
 18:6 344
 19:51 344
 24:32 401, 401n39

Judges

9:53 284
 11:12 59
 13:3 383
 13:6 399

1 Samuel

3:4 421
 13:14 463
 30:1 55
 30:17–20 55
 30:26–31 55

2 Samuel

7 213
 7:1–7 64
 7:1–14 208
 7:10 239
 7:12–13 463
 7:13 213
 7:13–14 139
 7:14 24, 49, 52, 85, 280,
 300
 13:1 306
 13:4 306
 13:15 306
 22:3 384

1 Kings

4:25 52
 8:27 404
 8:46 168
 14:24 480

15:12 480
 17:17–24 201
 17:18 59
 19:8 334
 19:10 373, 390
 19:11–13 351
 22:34–38 451
 22:46 480

2 Kings

2:1–15 48
 3:13 59
 4:18–37 201
 4:42–44 128
 5:10 176
 20:1–5 55
 23:7 480

1 Chronicles

21:12 383

2 Chronicles

26 380
 35:21 59
 35:22–25 290
 36:16 373

Ezra

9:3 470n69

Nehemiah

2:20 409

Esther

4:16 55
 5:1 55

Job

9:8 129
 38:8–11 573
 41 573

Psalms

1 462, 463
 1:1–2 463
 1:3 463
 2 463
 2:1–2 376
 2:1–3 64
 2:7 49, 464
 2:8 464
 2:12 279, 280
 16 359, 384
 16:8–11 359
 16:10 464, 498
 16:10–11 359
 16:11 464
 17:7 384
 22 285
 22:1 418
 22:18 285
 27:2 269
 34:7 383
 34:17–22 290
 34:20 275, 290
 34:21–22 290
 35:19 245
 41 221
 41:9 221, 223, 224, 245
 51:17 432
 56:9 269
 68:15–16 95
 69:4 245

69:9 64, 294
 69:21 286
 69:25 343
 78:18 477
 78:19 127
 78:41 477
 78:56 477
 80:8 239
 82 192
 82:6 192
 89 213
 89:20 463
 89:35–36 213
 89:36 213
 95:9 381
 104:24–26 573
 106:14 381, 477
 106:21 384
 107:25–30 129
 109:8 343, 344
 110 75, 180, 229, 360,
 384
 110:1 360, 405
 110:4 154
 118 379
 118:22 375
 118:25–26 207, 208
 136:12 214

Proverbs

5:22 167, 409
 9:10 424
 19:11 280
 24:25 64
 28:1 184
 30:4 73, 74, 75

Song of Solomon

4:15 90

Isaiah

book of 215n42
 2:1–4 57
 5:1–7 239
 5:26 211
 6 214, 215, 579
 6:1–7 431
 6:1–8 214
 6:4–7 351
 6:9–10 214
 6:9–13 182
 6:10 214, 215
 6:10–12 175
 6:11–13 215
 8:6 176, 177
 8:20 38
 8:20–9:2 38, 46, 49
 8:22 38, 176
 9:1 38
 9:2 38, 176
 9:6 215
 9:6–7 176
 9:21 339
 11 117
 11:1 215
 11:1–5 117
 11:1–16 215
 11:2 49
 11:10 211
 11:11 211
 11:13 339
 11:15 126
 11:15–16 48

13:34 498
 32:1–2 156
 32:3–4 175
 32:15 49, 56, 156, 248
 33:22 117
 35 370
 35:3–6 370
 35:5–6 175
 40:3 46, 48, 49
 43:2 126
 43:2–3a 130
 43:3 384
 43:7 478
 43:11 384
 44 505
 44:3 156
 44:6–8 237
 45:7 37
 45:15 384
 45:21 384
 48:5 221
 48:21 289
 49:5–6 337
 49:5–7 48
 49:6 57, 337, 467
 49:26 384
 51:15 573
 51:17 270
 51:22 270
 52:7–53:12 48
 52:13 48, 73, 74, 76, 135,
 163, 209, 211
 53 48, 49, 73, 214,
 215, 320, 410, 411
 53:1 214, 215
 53:2 51, 215
 53:3 101
 53:4 48
 53:5 48
 53:7 48
 53:7–8 410
 53:8 76
 53:11 371
 54 411
 54:3 411
 54:10 411
 54:13 139, 411
 54:14 411
 55 411
 55:3 464, 498
 55:11 411, 467
 55:12–13 411
 56 411
 56:3–8 412
 58:11 90
 60:16 384
 61 339
 61:1–2 576
 63:8 384
 65:1–2 466
 66:1–2 404

Jeremiah

2:8 546
 2:13 90
 2:30 373
 6:10 56
 6:20 432
 9:25–26 56
 10:21 546
 12:10 545
 14:8 384
 17:13 90

19:1–13 343
 23:1–2 546
 23:9–40 185
 25:15–16 270
 31 357, 442
 31:31–34 323
 31:32 55, 226
 31:33 357
 31:33–34 139, 378
 31:34 357, 385, 428, 564
 33:8 385
 36:3 385
 38:6 390

Lamentations

3:19 409

Ezekiel

1:4–28 431
 3:22–36 56
 4 60
 34:1–24 185
 34:2–10 546
 34:8 545
 34:10 545
 36 54, 336, 357, 385,
 442
 36–37 70, 72, 78
 36:24 70
 36:24–26 74
 36:24–27 74, 324
 36:25 70, 82
 36:25–27 71, 182, 357
 36:26 56, 71
 36:26–27 70, 248
 36:27 49, 71, 156
 37 57, 71, 74, 199, 337
 37:1–11 336
 37:1–14 74
 37:9 71, 351
 37:10 71
 37:11 336
 37:14 71, 156, 351
 37:16–17 339
 37:16–19 336
 39:29 156
 47:1–12 156

Daniel

3:28 383
 6:22 383
 7 53, 53n14, 117,
 180, 193
 7:9–10 53
 7:9–14 143
 7:10 117
 7:13 73, 74, 75, 85, 117,
 268
 7:13–14 53, 73, 74, 85, 117,
 163, 179, 180
 8:17–18 431
 9:24–27 60
 10:9–15 431
 12:2 117

Hosea

1:11 290
 2:14–23 84
 2:19 55
 5:14 55
 5:14–6:2 57
 6:2 55, 199
 13:4 384

Joel

2:28 356, 533
2:28–29 156
2:28–32 56, 248, 324, 356
2:32 358
3:1 356
3:18 156

Amos

5:25–27 404
9:11–12 478
9:13–14 61

Jonah

1:17 55

Micah

2:13 182
3:8 461
3:9 461
4:4 52
5:2 155, 157

Habakkuk

1:5 465

Zechariah

3:10 52
8:6–8 380
8:16–17 380
8:22 380
9:9 207
9:9–10 208, 209
10:3 545
11–13 290
11:8 290
11:10 290
11:12 290
11:13 290, 343
11:14 339
12:1–5 290
12:1–9 290
12:6–9 290
12:10 156, 290
12:11 290
13:1 156, 290
14:4 342
14:8 90, 156

Malachi

3:1 46, 154, 155
3:5 407
4:5 46

Matthew

1:25 171
3:2 47
3:5 45
3:7 545
3:8 47
3:15 61
3:17 341
4 97
4:4 97
4:23–25 382
5:7–9 421
5:12 341
5:16 341
5:38 379
5:43–47 421
5:45 471
6:9–10 341

6:19–21 378
6:20 341
7:1 444
8:16 382
8:28–34 494
9:5–6 375
9:6 429
9:14–17 61
9:28 371
10:2 469
10:6 373
10:14 467
10:19–20 374
11:10 46
11:11 231
11:14 46, 47
11:19 384
11:27 114
11:29 424
11:30 482
12:46–50 344
13:14–15 579
14:5 383
14:21 128
14:35 382
15:24 373
16:21 293, 356
16:24 220, 530
17:2 399
17:5 341
17:23 293
18:10 450
18:16 385, 540
19:19 378
19:23–24 500
19:28 71
20:18 356
20:19 293
20:25–28 433
22:17 556
22:23 374
22:34–40 421
22:39 362
23 546, 557
23:27 545
23:31–32 405
23:37 405
24 342
24:1–25:46 369
24:26 46
24:30 341
24:36 338
25:13 338
26:3 374
26:6–13 197
26:15 290
26:37 20
26:50 346
26:64 341
26:65 341, 470n69
27:3–10 343
27:4 343
27:5 343
27:9–10 290
27:46–47 418
27:51 358
27:57 398
27:60 201
28:1 294n51
28:18–20 22, 246, 435
28:19 437
28:19–20 354, 489
28:20 247

Mark

1:1 20
1:5 47
1:10–11 341
1:12–15 402
1:14 21, 81
1:15 60, 526
1:21 51
1:29 51
1:30 275
1:35 398
2:1–12 160
2:9–11 375
2:11 429
3:1–5 160
3:6 160
3:14 469
3:21–22 117
3:22 70
3:31–35 344
4:12 579
5:1–20 494
5:7 59
5:37 20, 224
5:41 429
6:3 342
6:34 127
6:48 129
6:53–56 382
7:3 60
8:31 293
8:34 198, 229, 530
9:2 224, 399
9:7 341
9:31 293
10:17–22 102
10:34 293
10:39 447
10:42–45 433
11:32 383
12:14 557
12:18 374
12:25 341
12:31 378
13 342
13:1–37 369
13:13 473
13:26 341
14:3–9 197
14:18–20 346
14:58 399
14:63–64 399
15:25 282
15:34–35 418
15:43 398
16:2 294n51
16:9–20 340
16:19 340

Luke

1:1–4 315
1:3–4 318
1:5 499n78
1:6 499n78
1:13 499n78
1:15 352
1:20 60
1:23 352
1:24–25 499n78
1:26–38 499n78
1:34 171
1:36 41
1:41 352

1:41–45 499n78
 1:46–56 499n78
 1:67 353
 1:79 562
 2:1–20 154
 2:6 60
 2:9 352
 2:19 499n78
 2:25 327
 2:32 563
 2:51 499n78
 3:2 374
 3:8 564
 3:16 335, 442
 3:22 338, 341
 3:38 24
 3:38–4:3 291
 4:1–2 338
 4:2 334, 517
 4:14–30 576
 4:16–30 462
 4:18–19 339, 378, 576
 4:21 339
 4:36 518
 4:38–41 576
 5:1–11 181, 304
 5:4 304
 5:5 304
 5:5–6 304
 5:6 305
 5:6–7 305
 5:7 352
 5:8 305
 5:10 305
 5:11 305
 5:12–16 576
 5:23–24 375
 5:24 429
 6:11 352
 6:12 398
 6:14–16 342
 6:22 386
 6:23 341
 7:1–17 576
 7:14 429
 7:18–35 577
 7:22 370
 7:22–23 577
 7:37 499n78
 8:1–3 294, 499n78
 8:2 293
 8:3 101
 8:10 579
 8:19–21 344, 478
 8:26–39 494, 576
 8:28 59, 494
 8:40–55 576
 8:43–44 499n78
 9:1 469
 9:10–17 576
 9:22 293
 9:23 530
 9:28 20
 9:29 399
 9:35 341
 9:37–43 576
 9:54 407
 10 407
 10:27 378
 10:38–39 499n78
 10:38–42 200
 11:13 346
 11:20 359

12:11–12 374
 12:33–34 378
 13:10–17 576
 13:18–19 335
 13:31 547
 13:33 356
 13:34 405
 15:7 341
 16:31 444
 17:11–19 371
 17:15–16 370, 407
 18:31–32 534
 18:33 293
 18:35–43 576
 19:10 97
 20:6 383
 20:20–25 499
 20:22 557
 20:27 374, 546
 21 342
 21:5–36 369
 21:12 386
 21:12–19 448
 21:16 447
 21:22 352
 21:25 358
 21:27 341
 21:38 160
 22:25–27 433
 23:1–25 472
 23:2 499
 23:18 371
 23:34 406
 23:44 358
 23:46 406
 23:49 342, 499n78
 23:50–51 398
 23:55–56 342
 24 319, 399, 579
 24:1 294n51
 24:2–11 342
 24:10 499n78
 24:13–27 410
 24:25 295
 24:25–26 319
 24:26–27 311
 24:27 319, 335
 24:30 574
 24:31 334
 24:36 334
 24:36–49 332
 24:39 334
 24:41–43 305
 24:42–43 334
 24:44–47 320
 24:45 143, 255, 311
 24:46–49 354
 24:47 337
 24:48–49 338
 24:49 335, 343
 24:50 342
 24:51 334
 24:52 340
 24:53 342

John

1 48, 50, 53, 148
 1–10 196
 1–12 19
 1:1 19, 23, 36, 37, 41,
 49, 88, 95, 129,
 230, 279, 300, 411

1:1–2 36, 37, 116, 216
 1:1–4 23
 1:1–5 35, 36–37
 1:1–18 19, 22, 34–43, 68,
 126, 197, 300
 1:1a 35, 36
 1:1b 36
 1:2 23, 36
 1:3 23, 37, 88, 109,
 167, 176, 230
 1:3b 37
 1:4 23, 37, 38, 39, 116,
 161, 199, 229
 1:4–5 38, 41, 216
 1:4–9 48
 1:5 37, 38, 39, 155, 214
 1:6 38
 1:6–8 35, 38, 39, 41, 45,
 46
 1:6–15 37–41
 1:7 38, 39, 45, 47, 49
 1:7–8 122
 1:8 38
 1:9 23, 35, 38, 39, 41,
 122, 216
 1:9–13 48, 175
 1:10 39, 48
 1:10–11 23, 35, 38, 39, 47
 1:10–13 39
 1:11 39, 40, 148
 1:11–13 143
 1:12 39, 40, 170, 263
 1:12–13 23, 35, 38, 39, 68,
 70, 75, 77, 162, 249
 1:13 37, 39, 40, 41, 71,
 156, 161, 170, 173
 1:14 23, 35, 38, 39, 40,
 41, 42, 50, 53, 56,
 61, 70, 88, 89, 95,
 161, 264
 1:15 35, 38, 41, 45, 47
 1:16 42
 1:16–17 62, 104
 1:16–18 35, 41–42, 61
 1:17 23, 42, 61
 1:18 42, 61, 62, 70, 88,
 140, 155, 169, 216,
 224, 228, 235, 241,
 260, 264
 1:19 45
 1:19–20 51
 1:19–24 109
 1:19–28 44, 45–48, 51, 59,
 122
 1:19–34 49
 1:19–36 45
 1:19–51 19, 43–53, 59, 68,
 126
 1:20 45, 49
 1:21 46, 47, 48, 131
 1:22 46
 1:23 46, 48, 49
 1:23–25 82
 1:24 47
 1:25 47, 82
 1:26 47, 48, 49
 1:26–27 47
 1:27 47, 49
 1:28 47, 59, 63, 81, 198,
 199
 1:29 25, 48, 49, 56, 59,
 65, 81, 182, 275,
 289

1:29-34.....44, 48-49, 49, 51, 59	2:13-17.....56, 63-64, 294	3:19.....77, 78, 197
1:31.....48, 49	2:13-22.....54, 63, 218, 268	3:19-20.....38, 181
1:31-34.....48	2:13-25.....55, 56, 62-67, 126, 195	3:19-21.....38, 79, 216
1:32-33.....48, 123	2:14.....63, 81	3:20.....37, 39, 77
1:33.....48, 49, 50, 122, 231, 234	2:15.....64	3:20-21.....75, 77, 78
1:34.....49	2:17.....64, 65, 294	3:21.....41, 72, 75, 77, 80, 107, 117
1:35.....59, 81	2:18.....64	3:22.....73, 75, 81, 107
1:35-36.....49	2:18-21.....88	3:22-23.....81
1:35-37.....49, 122	2:18-22.....64-65, 138	3:22-24.....79, 80, 81
1:35-42.....44, 49-51	2:19.....64, 73, 134, 294	3:22-36.....55, 79-86, 126, 195
1:36.....25, 49, 56, 65, 182, 275, 289	2:19-20.....97	3:23.....81, 82
1:37.....50	2:19-21.....90	3:24.....21, 81
1:38.....50	2:19-22.....64	3:25.....80, 82, 84
1:38-39.....49, 50	2:20.....65	3:25-26.....81-82
1:39.....52	2:21.....65	3:25-36.....80, 101
1:40.....50	2:22.....64, 65, 142, 213, 234, 294	3:26.....80, 82, 84
1:40-42.....49, 51	2:23.....65, 66, 68, 81, 191	3:27.....80, 82, 83
1:40-49.....209	2:23-24.....135	3:27-30.....41
1:41.....51, 189, 300	2:23-25.....61, 65-66, 68, 70, 74, 101, 167, 195	3:27-33.....82-84, 82n20
1:42.....51	2:24.....66	3:27a.....83
1:43.....51, 59, 63, 81, 100	2:24-25.....66, 68	3:27b.....83
1:43-51.....44, 51-53, 59	2:25.....68	3:28.....82
1:44.....51, 51n13	3.....68, 69, 74, 147, 182, 219, 291, 442	3:28-29.....80
1:44-46.....51	3:1.....46, 68, 69, 101	3:28a.....83
1:45.....51, 62, 208	3:1-2.....74, 79, 80	3:28b.....83
1:45-46.....51n13, 100	3:1-15.....69-74	3:29.....56, 82, 84, 85, 86, 97
1:45-51.....138	3:1-21.....55, 56, 67-79, 80, 126, 195	3:29a.....83
1:46.....51, 52	3:2.....65, 68, 69, 77, 81, 101, 179, 190, 191	3:29b.....83
1:47.....52	3:3.....37, 40, 41, 66, 70, 71, 72, 74, 134, 143, 162, 170, 173, 234, 263	3:29c.....83
1:48.....52	3:3-4.....97	3:30.....45, 47, 82n20, 83, 84n21, 86
1:48b.....52	3:3-5.....90	3:31.....41, 80, 82, 83, 84, 84n21, 86, 88, 190
1:49.....24, 52, 97, 279, 291	3:3-8.....74, 75, 77, 80, 156	3:31a.....83
1:49-51.....195	3:4.....70, 138	3:31b.....83
1:50.....52	3:5.....37, 40, 66, 70, 71, 72, 74, 80, 82, 84, 143, 170, 173	3:31c.....83
1:50-51.....52	3:5-6.....72, 74	3:31d.....83
1:51.....52, 53, 73, 189	3:6.....77, 95, 143, 231	3:31e.....83
2.....68, 101, 147, 182, 197	3:6-8.....71	3:32.....80, 82, 83, 84, 86
2-4.....22, 54, 55, 56, 126, 195, 196	3:7.....68, 71	3:32a.....83
2-11.....104	3:8.....71, 74, 143, 231	3:32b.....83
2:1.....25, 54, 59, 61, 63, 65, 81	3:9.....72, 74, 138	3:33.....80, 82, 83, 84
2:1-2.....58, 59, 81	3:10.....69, 74	3:33-34.....84
2:1-5.....58-61	3:11.....70, 72, 73, 74, 80, 190	3:34.....49, 56, 80, 84, 85, 171
2:1-11.....54, 195	3:12.....72, 73, 74, 80	3:34-36.....82n20, 84-85
2:1-12.....54, 55, 56, 57-62, 99, 101, 103, 126, 195	3:13.....73, 74, 75, 80, 85, 88, 136, 138, 143, 189, 228	3:35.....80, 85, 197, 306
2:1-4:54.....19, 54-57, 59	3:13-14.....74, 75	3:36.....74, 80, 85, 115, 245
2:3.....59, 101	3:13-15.....72, 73	4.....88, 147, 182, 197, 407
2:4.....59, 60, 87, 101, 102	3:14.....73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 135, 136	4:1.....81
2:5.....60n15, 101	3:14-15.....73, 75, 76, 85, 136	4:1-2.....80, 87
2:6.....60	3:15.....74, 75, 76, 135, 136	4:1-3.....100
2:6-10.....190	3:15-21.....80	4:1-4.....79
2:6-12.....61	3:16.....75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 85, 89, 93, 197, 235, 255, 266, 301	4:1-6.....87-89
2:7.....60, 61	3:16-17.....75	4:1-8.....81
2:7-8.....101	3:16-21.....73, 74-78	4:1-15.....86-91
2:9.....60	3:17.....76, 77, 78, 216	4:1-42.....195
2:9-10.....101	3:18.....76, 78, 85, 249	4:1-45.....55, 56, 57, 126
2:10.....60	3:18-19.....75	4:2.....88
2:11.....41, 54, 55, 57, 59, 60, 61, 66, 70, 88, 97, 99, 101, 103, 191, 193, 195		4:3.....81, 87, 107
2:12.....58, 59, 61, 63, 65, 81		4:4-5.....87
2:12-25.....195		4:4-42.....107
2:13.....19, 24, 61, 63, 65, 81, 107		4:5.....57, 88

- 4:10 60, 89, 91, 134
 4:10-11.....97
 4:10-14.....93, 156, 191, 289
 4:10-15.....96
 4:11 90
 4:12 57, 89, 90
 4:13-14.....90
 4:14 91, 93, 97
 4:15 91, 93, 94
 4:16-18.....93, 93-94, 96, 98,
 204
 4:16-42.....92-99
 4:17-18.....94
 4:18 89
 4:18-19.....101
 4:19 89, 94, 98
 4:19-20.....93
 4:19-24.....96
 4:19-26.....94-96
 4:20 94, 96
 4:21 60, 94, 95
 4:21-26.....93
 4:22 94
 4:23 26, 60, 95
 4:23-24.....71, 94, 95
 4:24 96
 4:25 94, 96, 180
 4:25-26.....189
 4:26 94, 96, 180, 407
 4:27 89, 96
 4:27-30.....93, 96
 4:29 89, 94, 98, 101, 191
 4:30 57, 97
 4:31 96
 4:31-34.....93
 4:31-38.....96-98
 4:32 97
 4:32-33.....97
 4:33 97, 127
 4:34 97
 4:35-38.....93, 97
 4:36 97
 4:37 97
 4:38 98
 4:39 94, 98, 101, 191
 4:39-42.....88, 98
 4:40 54, 98, 100, 195,
 198
 4:41 98
 4:42 57, 93, 98, 111
 4:43 54, 57, 100, 198
 4:43-44.....109
 4:43-46.....100-101
 4:43-54.....99-103, 195
 4:44 100
 4:45 101, 102, 191
 4:46 57, 101, 103
 4:46-48.....101
 4:46-54.....54, 55, 57, 111, 126
 4:47 57, 101
 4:47-54.....101-103
 4:48 101, 102, 191
 4:49 101, 102
 4:50 101, 102
 4:51 103
 4:51-52.....101, 102
 4:52 54
 4:53 57, 103
 4:53-54.....54, 101, 191, 193,
 195
 4:54 55, 57, 65, 99, 103
- 5 105, 114, 126, 127,
 147, 162, 167, 175,
 182, 191, 197, 216
 5-10 196
 5-11 104, 196
 5-12 19, 22
 5:1 24, 107, 147
 5:1-5 107
 5:1-9 120, 123
 5:1-16 150, 154, 178, 191
 5:1-18 105, 106-111, 114,
 126
 5:1-47 105
 5:1-11:57 104-105
 5:2 107
 5:2-5 107
 5:3 107
 5:4 107
 5:5 107
 5:6 107
 5:6-9a 107-108
 5:7 107
 5:8-9a 108, 109
 5:9b 108
 5:9b-13 108-109
 5:10 109
 5:10-13 108
 5:10-16 120
 5:11 109
 5:11a 109
 5:11b 109
 5:12 109
 5:13 100, 109
 5:14 109, 110
 5:14-18 109-111
 5:16 110, 112
 5:16-18 112
 5:17 105, 110, 112, 117,
 120, 129, 138
 5:17-18 112, 190
 5:18 112, 117, 120, 121,
 122, 129, 133, 147,
 149, 151, 160, 163,
 192, 280
 5:19 113, 118, 120, 190,
 230
 5:19-23 113-115
 5:19-30 105, 111-118, 126,
 138, 162, 163, 200,
 216
 5:20 114, 115, 116, 191,
 197, 241, 306
 5:20-23 116
 5:20-30 120
 5:21 114
 5:21-22 115
 5:21-23 114
 5:21-26 231
 5:22 115, 260
 5:23 115, 117
 5:24 113, 115-116, 116,
 117, 118, 121, 122,
 123, 133, 156, 301
 5:25 60, 95, 113, 116,
 167
 5:25-26 115, 117
 5:25-29 113, 116-117
 5:26 116, 142, 190, 199,
 229, 241, 260
 5:27 74, 117, 260
 5:27-29 216
 5:28 60
 5:28-29 116, 135, 196, 229
- 5:29 117
 5:30 113, 117-118, 135,
 162, 190, 230, 249,
 260
 5:31 121
 5:31-32 119, 120, 121,
 121-122
 5:31-39 121
 5:31-47 105, 118-125, 121,
 124, 126, 161
 5:32 121, 122, 123
 5:33 122
 5:33-35 119, 120, 122-123
 5:33-39 121
 5:34 122
 5:35 122
 5:36 123, 191, 260
 5:36-37 122
 5:36-37a 119, 120, 123-124
 5:36a 123
 5:36b 123
 5:37 122, 124, 140, 155
 5:37-38 124
 5:37a 123
 5:37b-38 119, 120, 124
 5:38 124
 5:38-39 124
 5:39 124, 150, 151, 154,
 179, 190, 208
 5:39-40 119, 120, 123,
 123-124
 5:41 122
 5:41-44 119-120, 120,
 122-123
 5:42 122
 5:43 122, 190
 5:43-47 150
 5:44 122, 123, 133
 5:45 124
 5:45-46 124, 150
 5:45-47 120, 121-122
 5:45a 121
 5:45b 121
 5:46 121, 179, 190, 208
 5:46-47 151, 154
 5:47 121
 6 66, 105, 126, 127,
 129, 135, 141, 142,
 144, 147, 152, 153,
 173, 175, 182, 219,
 298
 6:1 127
 6:1-13 134, 191
 6:1-15 127-129
 6:1-21 125-130, 131, 138,
 139
 6:1-71 25, 218
 6:2 66, 127, 132, 191
 6:3 127
 6:4 19, 24, 127, 138,
 147, 153
 6:4-59 268
 6:5 127
 6:6 127
 6:7 128
 6:9 128
 6:10 128
 6:11 128, 142
 6:12-13 128
 6:14 46n10, 126, 128,
 129, 131, 133, 139,
 157, 191
 6:14-15 46n10, 132, 191

6:15	46n10, 100, 126, 128, 129, 133, 139, 203, 207, 276, 279	6:53–56.....	289	7:25–26.....	154
6:15a.....	131	6:54	60	7:25–30.....	154–155, 156, 159
6:15b.....	131	6:56	142	7:25–36.....	161
6:16	129	6:57	142	7:25–52.....	152–158, 154
6:16–18.....	129	6:58	143	7:27	100, 154, 155, 179
6:16–21.....	129, 131, 191	6:59	131, 138, 143, 147, 153	7:27b.....	155
6:17	129	6:60	143	7:28	155, 156, 159, 160, 165, 190, 260
6:18	129	6:60–66.....	167	7:28–29.....	155
6:19	129	6:60–71.....	138, 143–144	7:29	155
6:20	129, 259, 260	6:61	66	7:30	60, 109, 151, 155, 157, 160, 268
6:21	129	6:61–62.....	143	7:31	155, 167, 191
6:22	131	6:62	190, 228	7:31–36.....	155, 156, 159
6:22–24.....	131–132	6:63	37, 40, 95, 143, 156, 167, 170, 173, 190, 216, 229, 231	7:32	151, 157, 160, 204, 268
6:22–40.....	130–136	6:64	144	7:33–34.....	155, 228
6:23	142	6:64–66.....	66	7:34	155, 162, 190, 225
6:25	129, 132, 191	6:65	135, 144, 191	7:34–35.....	159
6:25–26.....	191	6:66	144	7:35	162
6:25–29.....	132–133	6:67–68.....	66	7:35–36.....	155
6:25–58.....	143	6:67–69.....	144	7:36	160, 190, 225
6:25–59.....	143	6:68–69.....	144	7:37	50, 60, 156, 157, 159, 165
6:26	66, 133, 135	6:70	144	7:37–38.....	165
6:26–29.....	138	6:71	144	7:37–39.....	25, 155–157, 159, 160, 161, 165, 167, 289
6:27	97, 132, 133	7	69, 105, 147, 152, 153, 154, 156, 159, 162, 165, 173, 175, 182, 291	7:38	156, 381
6:28	129, 133	7–8	176, 188	7:39	156, 160, 299, 299n53
6:29	129, 133, 167, 260, 301	7–9	19, 104, 196	7:40	157
6:30	66, 129, 133, 191	7:1	146, 147, 148, 149, 151	7:40–44.....	157
6:30–31.....	133	7:1–13	147–149	7:40–52.....	157
6:30–35.....	133–134, 138	7:1–24	145–152	7:41a.....	157
6:31	133	7:1–52	196	7:42	291
6:31–35.....	165	7:1–10:21	24, 147	7:43	157, 186
6:32	138	7:2	24, 147, 165	7:44	157
6:32–33.....	133, 140, 143	7:3	148	7:45	157
6:33	134, 136, 138, 139, 140, 141, 231	7:4	148	7:45–46.....	100, 268
6:34	134	7:4–5	149	7:45–47.....	160
6:35	135, 138, 139, 140, 142, 156, 167, 190, 199	7:5	148, 149, 286, 344, 478	7:45–52.....	157
6:35–58.....	153	7:6	148	7:46	157, 191
6:36	135, 139	7:6	148	7:47	157
6:36–40.....	134–136, 138, 139	7:6–8.....	149	7:49	157
6:37	135, 136, 138, 139, 144, 191, 259, 269	7:7	149, 151	7:50–51.....	157
6:38	135, 136, 190, 260	7:8	148, 149	7:50–52.....	69
6:39	135, 139, 259, 269	7:9	149	7:51	160
6:40	135, 136, 138, 139, 142	7:10	100, 147, 148, 149, 165, 188	7:52	100
6:41	133, 138, 140, 190	7:11	149, 204	7:53–8:11	159, 160, 165n31
6:41–42.....	138	7:11–12.....	149	7:53–8:29	158–164
6:41–51.....	138–141	7:12	149	8	38, 105, 159, 165, 166, 175, 182
6:41–71.....	137–145, 138	7:13	149	8:3	160
6:42	139, 140, 141, 190	7:14	149, 156, 165	8:12	25, 38, 69, 122, 155, 159, 160, 161, 165, 167, 190, 199, 214, 216
6:43	140	7:14–24.....	149–151	8:12–20.....	160–162
6:43–44.....	139	7:15	149	8:12–59.....	196
6:44	135, 136, 139, 140, 144, 191	7:16	150, 190, 260	8:13	38, 39, 159, 161
6:44–45.....	140, 142	7:16–18.....	150, 161	8:14	159, 161, 178
6:45	139, 140, 191, 276	7:17	150, 156	8:15	160, 161
6:46	139, 140	7:17–18.....	250	8:16	161
6:47	140, 142	7:18	150, 159, 160	8:17–18.....	162, 385
6:48	140	7:19	151, 154, 179	8:19	160, 162
6:49	140	7:19–20.....	160	8:20	60, 109, 159
6:49–50.....	140, 143	7:20	186, 191	8:21	162, 225, 228
6:50	141	7:21	151	8:21–22.....	159
6:51	141, 190	7:21–24.....	154	8:21–29.....	162–163
6:52	138, 141	7:22	162	8:21–58.....	162
6:52–59.....	138, 141–143	7:23	151, 154	8:23	162, 171, 190, 281
6:53	128	7:24	151, 160, 161, 165, 249		
6:53–55.....	141	7:25	151, 160		

- 8:24 163, 165, 167, 172,
 173, 175, 190, 199,
 221, 230, 259, 260,
 269
 8:24–25 189
 8:25 163
 8:26 163, 250
 8:27 163
 8:28 73, 163, 165, 167,
 172, 173, 175, 190,
 199, 221, 230, 250,
 260, 269, 301
 8:29 163, 178
 8:30 167
 8:30–36 166, 167–186, 171
 8:30–59 164–174
 8:31 167
 8:31–32 167, 168, 169
 8:32 167, 168, 173
 8:33 168
 8:34 168, 173
 8:34–36 161, 168, 169
 8:35 168
 8:35a 168
 8:36 173
 8:37 169, 170, 172
 8:37–47 166, 168–171, 169,
 171
 8:38 169, 171
 8:39 169, 170
 8:40 169, 171
 8:41 169, 171, 172
 8:42 170, 171, 190, 197
 8:43 170, 171, 172, 173
 8:44 169, 170, 171, 179,
 191, 381
 8:45 170, 171
 8:46 171, 173
 8:46b 171
 8:47 171
 8:48 169, 171, 172, 186
 8:48–49 191
 8:48–59 171–173
 8:49 171, 172
 8:50 160, 171, 172
 8:51 171, 172
 8:52 186, 190, 191
 8:53 172
 8:53–58 189
 8:54 160, 172
 8:55 160, 172
 8:56 172
 8:58 165, 167, 172, 173,
 175, 178, 179, 190,
 199, 221, 230, 260,
 269
 8:59 100, 172, 176, 188,
 268
 9 105, 182, 183, 197,
 298
 9:1 176
 9:1–7 176–177, 191
 9:1–41 174–181, 196
 9:2 176
 9:3 180, 197
 9:4 225, 228
 9:4–5 176, 198
 9:5 190, 214
 9:6 176, 178, 179
 9:6–7 175
 9:7 176, 177
 9:8 178
 9:8–9 178
 9:8–12 177
 9:8–34 177–179
 9:9 178, 179
 9:10 177, 178
 9:11 177, 178, 180
 9:12 100, 178
 9:13–15 178
 9:13–17 177
 9:14 177
 9:15 177
 9:16 177, 181, 184, 186,
 191
 9:16a 178
 9:16b 178
 9:17 177, 178, 180
 9:18 177
 9:18–19 178
 9:18–23 177
 9:19 177
 9:20–23 178
 9:22 177, 184, 215
 9:22–23 179
 9:24 178, 181
 9:24–34 177, 178
 9:25 178
 9:26 177, 178
 9:27 179
 9:28 179
 9:28–29 180
 9:29 179
 9:30 179
 9:30–33 179
 9:31 177, 179
 9:32 179
 9:33 179, 180
 9:34 178, 179
 9:34b 179
 9:35 177, 179, 371
 9:35–38 190
 9:35–41 177, 179–180
 9:36 180
 9:37 180
 9:37–38 180
 9:38 175, 177, 180
 9:39 180
 9:40 188
 9:40–41 180
 9:41 180
 10 105, 183, 188, 291
 10:1–6 184
 10:1–10 183–185
 10:1–18 191
 10:1–21 25, 181–187, 188
 10:2 184
 10:3 184, 191, 276, 305
 10:3–4 191
 10:4 184, 185, 191
 10:5 184
 10:6 255
 10:7–10 184
 10:8 185
 10:9 185
 10:10 191
 10:11 185, 191, 192, 199,
 242, 305
 10:11–18 185–186
 10:12 185
 10:13 185
 10:14 185, 191
 10:14–15 262
 10:14–16 185
 10:15 185, 186, 191, 192,
 229, 242
 10:16 97, 186, 191, 276,
 305
 10:17 186, 197, 229, 242
 10:17–18 237
 10:18 186, 190, 267, 268,
 272, 286
 10:19–21 186
 10:20 186
 10:21 186
 10:22 24, 147, 189
 10:22–24 189
 10:22–30 189–192
 10:22–42 188–193, 189
 10:25a 189
 10:25b 190
 10:26 191
 10:27 191
 10:27–29 259
 10:28 191, 269
 10:29 191, 192, 269
 10:30 116, 163, 192, 193,
 216, 279
 10:30–31 280
 10:31 192, 198
 10:31–39 192
 10:31–42 192–193
 10:32 192
 10:33 192
 10:34 192
 10:34–36 193
 10:35 193
 10:36 192
 10:37 193
 10:37–38 193
 10:38 193, 230
 10:39 100, 193, 268
 10:40 147, 198
 10:40–42 193, 195, 196
 11 105, 114, 116, 195,
 197, 203, 298
 11–12 19
 11:1–10 197–198
 11:1–44 147, 194–202, 196
 11:1–54 189
 11:2 197
 11:3 197, 198, 209
 11:4 197, 200
 11:5 197, 200, 201
 11:6 197, 200
 11:6–7 198
 11:8 198
 11:9–10 198
 11:11 200
 11:11–13 198
 11:11–16 198
 11:12 198
 11:13 198
 11:14–15 198
 11:16 100, 198
 11:17 199
 11:17–27 198–200
 11:18 199
 11:19 199
 11:20 199, 200
 11:21 197, 199, 200
 11:21–27 201
 11:22 199
 11:23 199, 200
 11:24 199
 11:25–26 199, 200
 11:26 200
 11:27 200
 11:28 200

11:28–37 200–201	12:23 60, 109, 149, 207, 209, 211, 213, 229, 258, 268	13:11 219
11:29–31 200	12:23–24 156, 208, 210, 229	13:12 220
11:32 197, 200, 205	12:23–28 258	13:12–17 218, 220, 221
11:33 201, 223	12:23–32 213	13:13 220
11:33–36 200, 209	12:24 209, 213, 229, 258	13:14 220
11:35 201	12:24–27 207	13:14–15 242
11:36 197	12:25 209, 210	13:15 220
11:37 196	12:25–26 210, 213	13:15–17 229
11:38 201	12:26 210, 211, 229	13:16 220
11:38–44 201	12:27 60, 209, 210, 223, 268	13:17 220
11:39 199, 200, 201	12:27–28 208, 213	13:18 220, 221, 223, 224, 245, 285, 295
11:40 201	12:27–30 418	13:18–19 218
11:41–42 201, 210	12:28 210, 258	13:18–20 220–221, 223, 295
11:43 201	12:28–30 207	13:19 221, 230, 231, 237, 260, 269
11:43–44 196, 209, 429	12:29 210	13:20 218, 221, 224, 231, 235
11:44 201	12:29–30 213	13:21 223, 224, 228
11:45 203	12:30 210	13:21–30 223–225
11:45–53 196, 203–204, 205	12:31 210, 211, 213, 249, 250, 258, 268	13:21–38 222–227
11:45–12:11 202–206	12:31–33 207	13:21b 223
11:46 203	12:32 73, 209, 211, 213, 229, 258	13:22 223
11:47 203	12:32–33 213, 276	13:23 42, 224, 231, 235, 264
11:47–48 195	12:33 209, 258	13:23–25 224
11:48 203, 204	12:34 73, 213	13:23–26 224
11:48–51 277	12:34–36 213–214, 216	13:24 20, 306
11:49 204	12:34–50 212–217	13:25 20
11:49–52 273	12:35 214	13:26 224
11:50 204	12:35–36 69, 225	13:26b 224
11:51 204	12:36 100, 216	13:27 224, 225, 237, 267
11:52 204	12:36a 214	13:28–30 225
11:53 204	12:36b 214	13:29 225
11:54 147, 196, 204	12:37 195	13:30 69, 225, 228
11:54–55 198	12:37–43 213, 214–216, 295	13:31 156, 225
11:54–57 100, 204	12:38 295	13:31–32 208, 225, 229, 258
11:55 19, 24, 189, 196, 204	12:39 214	13:31–35 223, 225–226
11:55–57 356	12:40 214	13:33 225, 233, 244, 246, 248, 251
11:56 207	12:41 215	13:34 225, 226, 243, 246
11:56b–57 204	12:42 195, 215	13:34–35 233, 241, 242
12 208, 213, 258	12:42–43 215	13:35 226, 243
12–20 104	12:43 215, 217	13:36 226, 228, 232
12:1 24, 189	12:44 221	13:36–37 228
12:1–8 197, 205, 207, 209	12:44–50 213, 216	13:36–38 223, 226, 233
12:1–11 204–205	12:45 42, 216, 230, 259	13:37 226, 228, 270, 275
12:1–19 147	12:46 216, 225	13:38 70, 226, 228, 256, 275
12:2–3 205	12:47 216	14 238, 267
12:3 205	12:48 216	14–15 244
12:4 205	12:49 216, 250	14–17 352
12:4–6 205, 346	12:50 216	14:1 223, 228, 233, 236, 241, 246
12:5 205	13 228, 238, 244	14:1–3 265
12:6 205	13–16 213, 256, 258	14:1–6 228, 228–229, 236
12:7 205, 209	13–17 19, 22, 288	14:1–14 227–232, 233
12:8 205	13–20 19	14:2 228, 236
12:9 205, 208	13:1 24, 60, 189, 218, 228, 267	14:2–3 161, 234, 244
12:10–11 205	13:1–3 218	14:3 228
12:12 207	13:1–11 218–220	14:4 229
12:12–13 207	13:1–20 217–222, 223	14:4–15:17 244
12:12–15 148	13:2 218, 224	14:5 229
12:12–19 149, 207–209	13:3 218, 219	14:5–6 248
12:12–33 206–212	13:4–5 219	14:6 157, 161, 229, 234, 245, 276
12:13 208	13:6 219	14:7 230
12:14 208, 209	13:6–11 219	14:7–11 228, 230–231, 233, 236
12:14–15 207, 208	13:7 219	14:9 42, 124, 125, 216, 230, 259
12:16 142, 208, 213, 215, 234	13:8 219	14:10 230, 231, 239, 250
12:17–18 209	13:8–10 229	14:11 230, 233, 241, 246
12:18–19 195	13:9 219	
12:19 209	13:10 219, 220, 239, 240, 352	
12:20 209	13:10–11 220	
12:20–21 207		
12:20–22 211		
12:20–33 209–211		
12:22 209		

- 14:12 231, 234, 241
 14:12-13 231
 14:12-14 228, 231, 233, 234,
 236
 14:13 242
 14:13-14 231, 234, 236, 237,
 254
 14:15 233, 235
 14:15-16 234
 14:15-17 233-234, 237, 246,
 248, 251, 252, 262,
 299
 14:15-26 236
 14:15-31 231, 232-237
 14:16 234, 236, 246, 251
 14:16-17 235, 299, 299n53,
 360
 14:17 231, 234
 14:18 234
 14:18-21 233, 234-235
 14:19 234
 14:20 234, 235
 14:20-23 231
 14:21 235, 251
 14:22 235
 14:22-24 233, 235-236
 14:23 234, 235, 236, 251
 14:24 236
 14:25 236
 14:25-26 248
 14:25-31 236-237
 14:26 236, 246, 251, 252,
 255, 360
 14:27 223, 228, 236
 14:28 236
 14:29 221, 237
 14:30 224, 237
 14:31 237, 267
 15 238, 239
 15-17 237, 267
 15:1 239
 15:1-8 239-241
 15:1-17 238-243
 15:2 239, 240
 15:3 239, 240, 352
 15:3-4 239
 15:4 239, 240, 241
 15:4-7 124
 15:5 239
 15:6 240
 15:7 240, 241, 242, 246,
 360
 15:8 241
 15:9 241
 15:9-11 238, 241-242
 15:10 241
 15:11 241, 255
 15:12 242, 246
 15:12-17 238, 242
 15:13 226, 242, 244, 248
 15:14 242
 15:14-15 242
 15:15 242, 250, 296
 15:16 221, 242, 244, 246,
 247, 254
 15:17 242
 15:18 244
 15:18-25 244-245, 246, 248,
 249, 251, 295
 15:18-16:4a 243-247
 15:19 244, 247
 15:20 244, 245, 287
 15:21 245, 246
 15:22 245
 15:23 245
 15:24 245
 15:25 245, 295
 15:26 246, 251
 15:26-27 244, 246, 248, 251,
 252
 15:26-16:4a 246-247
 15:27 246
 16:1 246, 248
 16:1-4 249
 16:1-4a 244
 16:2 246
 16:2-3 248
 16:3 246
 16:4 221, 246, 247
 16:4-6 251
 16:4-7 248
 16:4-15 253
 16:4b 248
 16:4b-7 248-249
 16:4b-15 247-252
 16:5 248, 249
 16:5-6 251
 16:5-7 249
 16:6 248
 16:7 248, 249, 250, 251,
 254, 255, 262, 299
 16:7-11 252
 16:7-15 251
 16:8 249
 16:8-11 246, 249-250, 251,
 264
 16:8-15 248
 16:9 249, 250
 16:10 249, 250
 16:11 249, 250
 16:12 250, 251
 16:12-15 250-251, 252, 255
 16:13 231, 250
 16:14 250
 16:16 255
 16:16-22 253-254, 254
 16:16-33 252-257
 16:17-18 253, 254
 16:19 253, 254, 256
 16:20 253, 254, 255
 16:21 60, 254
 16:21-22 253, 255
 16:22 249, 253, 254, 256
 16:22b 254
 16:23 254, 255
 16:23-24 254
 16:23-28 253, 254-255
 16:24 254, 255
 16:25 255
 16:26 254
 16:26-27 249, 255, 257
 16:27 255
 16:28 255, 256
 16:29 256
 16:29-33 253, 256
 16:30 256
 16:30-31 256
 16:31-32 256
 16:32 60, 256
 16:33 256
 17 213, 258, 259
 17:1 60, 156, 208, 250,
 258, 259
 17:1-5 257, 258-259
 17:1-8 257-261
 17:1-26 257
 17:2 259, 269
 17:3 114, 116, 231, 259
 17:4 259, 260, 286
 17:5 259
 17:6 66, 114, 244, 259,
 260, 269
 17:6-8 257, 259-260
 17:7 260
 17:8 61, 260
 17:9 66, 234, 259, 262,
 269
 17:9-19 262-264
 17:9-26 261-266, 262
 17:11 262, 269
 17:12 221, 240, 260, 262,
 269, 346
 17:13 263
 17:14 263, 264
 17:14-16 263
 17:14a 263
 17:14b 263
 17:14c 263
 17:15 263
 17:16 263
 17:17 263, 352
 17:18 264
 17:19 264
 17:20 264
 17:20-23 262, 264-265
 17:21 266
 17:21a 264
 17:21b 264
 17:21c 264
 17:22 264, 265
 17:23 265, 266
 17:23a 265
 17:23b 265
 17:23c 265
 17:23d 265
 17:23e 265
 17:24 265, 269
 17:24-26 262, 265
 17:25 249, 265
 17:26 265
 18 213, 288
 18-19 19
 18-21 22
 18:1 267
 18:1-2 267-268
 18:1-11 266-270, 267
 18:3 268
 18:3-6 268-269
 18:4 269
 18:4-9 273
 18:5 269
 18:5-6 273
 18:6 272
 18:7 269
 18:7-9 269
 18:8 269
 18:8-9 272
 18:9 259, 269
 18:10 275
 18:10-11 269-270
 18:11 270
 18:12 272
 18:12-14 272-273
 18:12-40 271-277
 18:13 272, 374
 18:14 273
 18:15 272, 273
 18:15-16 273
 18:15-18 273-274

18:16.....272, 273	19:28–30.....283, 286, 295	21:1–14.....303–305
18:17.....273, 274, 305	19:30.....286, 289	21:1–25.....302–308
18:18.....304, 305	19:31.....288	21:2.....20, 304
18:19.....272, 274	19:31–35.....288–289	21:3.....304
18:19–24.....274	19:31–42.....287–292	21:4.....304
18:20.....274	19:32.....288	21:5.....304
18:21.....274	19:33.....288, 289	21:6.....304
18:22.....272, 274	19:34.....289	21:7.....304, 306
18:23.....274	19:34–35.....288	21:8.....304
18:25.....274, 305	19:35.....289	21:9.....304, 305
18:25–27.....274–275, 275	19:36.....275, 289	21:10.....304
18:26.....275	19:36–37.....289, 289–291, 290,	21:11.....305
18:27.....305	295	21:12.....304, 305
18:28.....189, 275, 282	19:37.....290, 295	21:13.....305
18:28–32.....472	19:38.....291	21:15.....305, 306
18:28–40.....275–277	19:38–39.....398	21:15–19.....305–306
18:29.....276	19:38–42.....69, 291	21:16.....305
18:30.....276	19:39.....291	21:17.....305, 306
18:31.....276, 280, 405	19:40.....291	21:18.....70, 307
18:32.....276	19:41.....291	21:18–19.....227, 306, 447
18:33.....276	19:42.....291	21:19.....306
18:34.....276	20.....213, 234, 305	21:20.....306
18:35.....276	20–21.....235, 255	21:20–23.....224
18:36.....276, 281	20:1.....294, 294n51	21:20–25.....20, 306–307
18:37.....281	20:1–2.....294	21:21.....307
18:37a.....276	20:1–10.....293–295	21:22.....307
18:37b.....276	20:1–18.....292–297	21:23–24.....307
18:37c.....276	20:2.....294, 295, 306	21:24.....21, 307
18:38.....276, 279, 281, 284	20:2–8.....224	21:25.....21, 26, 55, 160, 307
18:39.....24, 276	20:3–4.....294	
18:40.....279	20:4.....20	
19.....69, 213	20:5.....294	
19:1.....279	20:6.....294	
19:1–3.....279	20:7.....294	
19:1–16a.....278–283	20:8.....294	
19:2.....279	20:9.....142, 213, 234, 294	
19:3.....279	20:10.....295	
19:4.....279, 280, 281, 284	20:11.....295	
19:4–8.....279–281	20:11–18.....295–296	
19:5.....280, 282	20:12.....295, 296	
19:5–6.....281	20:12–13.....296	
19:6.....280, 281, 282, 284	20:13.....296	
19:7.....280, 281	20:14.....296	
19:7–8.....281	20:14–15.....296	
19:8.....280	20:15.....296	
19:9.....281	20:16.....296, 298	
19:9–11.....281	20:17.....296, 303	
19:10.....281	20:19.....294n51, 295, 298	
19:11a.....281	20:19–20.....298	
19:11b.....281	20:19–23.....297, 298–299, 299,	
19:12.....281, 557	304, 305	
19:12–16.....472	20:19–31.....297–301	
19:12–16a.....281–282	20:20.....298, 300	
19:12a.....281	20:21.....299, 303	
19:12b.....281	20:22.....21, 156, 234, 299,	
19:13.....282	299n53, 351, 442	
19:14.....282	20:22–23.....299	
19:15.....282, 557	20:23.....299, 351	
19:16.....284	20:24.....144, 300	
19:16–22.....283	20:24–29.....298, 299–300, 304,	
19:16a.....282	305	
19:16b.....284	20:25.....300	
19:16b–22.....284–285	20:26.....19, 300	
19:16b–30.....283–287	20:26–28.....298	
19:17.....284	20:27.....300, 305	
19:18.....284	20:28.....180, 300	
19:19.....284	20:29.....300	
19:23–24.....283, 285, 295	20:30.....300, 304	
19:24.....285, 295	20:30–31.....65, 300	
19:25.....285, 294	20:31.....21, 38, 43, 307	
19:25–27.....283, 285–286	21.....19, 213, 227, 303,	
19:26–27.....285	304, 305	
19:28.....286, 295	21:1.....19	

Acts	
1.....273, 341	
1:1.....318	
1:1–2.....314, 315, 333	
1:1–3.....286	
1:1–26.....331–347	
1:2.....333, 469	
1:2–3.....318	
1:3.....19, 255, 517	
1:3–5.....334–336, 338, 402	
1:4.....304	
1:4–5.....335, 338	
1:5.....442	
1:6.....395	
1:6–11.....334, 336–341	
1:7–8.....337	
1:8.....311, 314, 317, 318,	
338, 345, 357, 398,	
404, 406, 407, 410,	
423, 451, 473, 478,	
508, 517, 560, 564,	
581	
1:9.....334, 340	
1:10–11.....340	
1:11.....341, 345, 581	
1:12.....342	
1:12–14.....313	
1:12–26.....339, 342–345	
1:13.....345	
1:13–15.....342	
1:14.....343, 346, 398	
1:15.....374	
1:15–26.....273	
1:18.....343	
1:18–19.....343	
1:20.....344	
1:21–22.....246, 334	
1:24.....333	
1:25.....346	
1:26.....339	

- 2.....105, 273, 322, 324,
 326, 338, 343, 349,
 350, 351, 354, 362,
 363, 371, 405, 436,
 500, 516, 525, 565
 2:1-4.....350-354
 2:1-47.....347-363
 2:2.....350, 351
 2:3.....350, 352
 2:4.....352, 353, 436, 469
 2:5-13.....354-355
 2:6.....353, 354
 2:7.....354, 355
 2:8.....354
 2:11.....354, 358
 2:12.....355
 2:13.....355
 2:14.....356
 2:14-15.....355-356
 2:14-39.....321
 2:16.....319
 2:16-21.....356-358
 2:17.....356, 533
 2:17-18.....357
 2:18.....338
 2:19-20.....358
 2:21.....358
 2:22.....338, 358
 2:22-24.....372
 2:22-36.....358-360
 2:23.....356, 359, 360, 464
 2:23-24.....359, 371n26
 2:24.....359
 2:24-36.....517
 2:25.....384, 564
 2:25-28.....359
 2:27.....359, 498
 2:27-28.....359
 2:28.....359
 2:29.....359, 375
 2:30.....359
 2:31.....359, 498
 2:31-33.....359
 2:32.....359
 2:33.....352, 359, 360, 384
 2:34.....384, 405, 564
 2:34-35.....360
 2:36.....360
 2:37.....360
 2:37-41.....356, 360-361
 2:38.....360, 375, 408, 443,
 541
 2:39.....360
 2:40.....356, 358n23, 361
 2:41.....361, 374, 398
 2:42.....142, 361, 362
 2:42-47.....326, 361-363, 362,
 377
 2:43.....362, 369, 424
 2:44.....362
 2:44-45.....325, 326
 2:46.....142, 343, 361
 2:47.....363, 398
 3.....273, 470
 3:1.....273
 3:1-10.....369-370
 3:1-5:42.....364-390
 3:2.....577
 3:4.....369
 3:6.....470
 3:6-7.....369
 3:6-8.....518
 3:7.....362
 3:8.....370
 3:10.....370
 3:11.....370
 3:11-16.....370-371
 3:11-26.....321, 369n25
 3:12.....338, 371
 3:13.....371, 372
 3:13-26.....355n22
 3:14.....371
 3:15.....371, 384
 3:16.....371
 3:17-26.....372-373
 3:18.....372, 564
 3:19.....356, 372
 3:19-21.....338
 3:20.....372
 3:20-21.....371, 378
 3:21.....372
 3:21-25.....564
 3:22-26.....372
 3:23.....356, 373
 3:24.....373
 3:25.....373
 3:26.....373
 4.....273, 362, 378, 388
 4-5.....390
 4:1.....383
 4:1-2.....373
 4:1-4.....373-374
 4:3.....374
 4:4.....374, 398
 4:5.....524n90
 4:5-12.....374-375
 4:6.....374
 4:7.....338, 374
 4:8.....353, 374, 524n90
 4:8-12.....321
 4:9.....374
 4:10.....371n26, 374
 4:10-12.....355n22
 4:11.....375, 379
 4:12.....375, 387, 441, 541
 4:13.....354, 374, 375
 4:13-22.....375-376
 4:14.....376
 4:16.....376
 4:19-20.....376, 498
 4:20.....388
 4:21.....376, 395
 4:23.....524n90
 4:23-31.....376-377
 4:24.....343, 376
 4:24-30.....398
 4:27.....371
 4:28.....376
 4:29.....375, 377
 4:30.....371, 377
 4:31.....353, 375
 4:32.....379
 4:32-37.....362, 377-379
 4:32-5:16.....382
 4:33.....338, 518
 4:36.....379, 423, 443, 489
 4:36-37.....379
 5.....273, 493
 5:1-11.....379-381
 5:3.....379, 381
 5:3-4.....379
 5:4.....362, 379, 381
 5:5.....381, 424
 5:8.....379
 5:9.....381
 5:10.....381
 5:11.....381, 424
 5:12.....343, 518
 5:12-16.....381-382, 382, 577
 5:13.....382
 5:14.....382
 5:15.....382, 518
 5:15-16.....382, 518
 5:16.....518
 5:17.....383
 5:17-26.....382-383
 5:19-20.....383, 541
 5:20.....383
 5:21.....383
 5:22-25.....383
 5:26.....383
 5:27-28.....384
 5:27-32.....384-385
 5:29.....384, 498
 5:29-32.....321, 384
 5:30.....384
 5:30-32.....355n22, 371n26
 5:31.....371, 384
 5:32.....385
 5:33.....385
 5:33-40.....547
 5:33-42.....385-386
 5:34-39.....539
 5:36.....46, 385
 5:36-37.....75
 5:39.....386
 5:40.....386, 395
 5:41.....495
 5:41-42.....368, 386
 6.....395, 396, 481
 6-8.....417
 6:1.....443, 469, 476
 6:1-6.....423, 523
 6:1-7.....395, 396-398
 6:1-8:40.....390-415
 6:2.....469
 6:3.....353, 396
 6:4.....397
 6:5.....395, 407
 6:6.....459
 6:7.....398, 469, 518
 6:8.....397, 398
 6:8-10.....338
 6:8-15.....395, 398-399
 6:9.....398
 6:10.....399
 6:11.....399
 6:12.....524n90
 6:13.....399
 6:15.....399
 7.....312, 373, 379
 7:1.....399
 7:1-53.....395, 399-400
 7:2-8.....400
 7:5.....400
 7:9.....400
 7:9-16.....400-401
 7:14.....400
 7:16.....401
 7:17-22.....401
 7:17-34.....401-403
 7:19.....402
 7:20.....402
 7:23-29.....401, 402
 7:25.....402, 405
 7:27-28.....402
 7:29.....402
 7:30-34.....383, 401, 402
 7:31.....403

7:33	403	9:4-6	420	10:42	435, 436
7:35	320, 403, 405	9:5	383, 525	10:43	360, 428, 435, 436,
7:35-43	403-404	9:7	418, 540		564
7:36	402, 403	9:8	421	10:44	338, 436, 437
7:37	403	9:8-9	420	10:44-45	352, 443
7:38	403, 449	9:10	417, 421	10:44-48	436-438, 493, 509,
7:39	320	9:10-19a	421		563
7:39-40	403	9:11-16	540	10:45-46	353
7:41	404	9:13	406	10:46	436, 437
7:42	404	9:15	321, 333, 421, 459,	10:47	352, 437, 442
7:43	404		547, 561, 565	10:48	437
7:44	404	9:16	472	10:49-50	467
7:44-50	315, 404-405	9:17	334, 353, 417, 421	11	443
7:48	404	9:17-18	419, 493	11:1	440, 443
7:48-50	503, 519	9:18	421	11:1-18	439-443
7:51	405	9:19	469	11:2	428, 440
7:51-53	405	9:19b-25	421-422	11:2-3	475
7:52	320, 371	9:20	421	11:3	440
7:53	403, 414	9:21	422	11:5-15	440
7:54-8:1a	395	9:22	421	11:12	441
7:54-8:3	405-406	9:26-30	417, 422-423	11:14	435, 438, 441
7:55-56	405	9:27	379, 422, 423, 443,	11:15	441
7:57	343		469, 489	11:16	442
7:58	405	9:27-28	375	11:16-17	440
7:59-60	406	9:28-29	423, 443	11:17	434, 442, 477, 563
7:60	395	9:29	423, 443	11:18	442
8	88, 314, 395, 397,	9:30	443	11:19-30	443-444, 482
	412, 512, 516	9:31	423-424, 429	11:22	469
8:1	361, 405	9:32	429	11:24	443
8:2	413, 414	9:32-43	429-430	11:25	423
8:3	406	9:32-11:30	425-445	11:26	443, 566
8:4-8	406-407	9:34	429	11:28	444, 533
8:5	407	9:35	430	11:30	473, 524n90
8:5-8	397	9:36	429, 430	12	446, 492
8:6	343	9:36-38	429	12:1	557
8:6-7	407	9:39	429	12:1-2	553
8:7	518	9:40	430	12:1-5	447-448
8:9-10	518	9:42	430	12:1-25	445-453
8:9-13	460	9:43	432	12:2	20, 384
8:9-25	407-410	10	412, 433, 436, 516	12:6-11	448-450
8:10	407	10:1-8	410, 431-432	12:7	449
8:11	408, 409	10:1-11:18	476	12:7-10	383
8:12	517	10:2	424, 431, 435, 437	12:9	449
8:13	338, 408, 409	10:3-6	383	12:11	452
8:14	408, 443	10:4	431, 435	12:12	362, 489
8:14-17	88, 327	10:9-16	432-433, 478	12:12-19	450-451
8:15-16	408	10:9-20	541	12:15	450
8:17	338, 352, 408	10:10-11	432	12:16	450
8:18	493	10:10-16	541	12:17	450
8:18-19	408	10:12-14	321	12:18	450
8:18-24	518	10:13	432	12:19	575
8:19	409, 430	10:15	321, 433, 434	12:20	343
8:20	409	10:17	433	12:20-23	553
8:21	408	10:17-33	433-434	12:20-25	451-452
8:23	409	10:22	431, 435	12:22	451, 470
8:24	409	10:23	441	12:23	383, 451
8:25	409	10:25-26	451	12:24	398, 451, 518
8:26	383	10:26	433	12:25	450, 451
8:26-40	397, 410-412, 533	10:27	437	13	459, 465
8:30	410	10:28	434	13-14	458
8:31	410	10:30-33	434	13:1-2	471n70
8:35	320, 410	10:31	435	13:1-3	459-460
8:36	442	10:33	434	13:1-15:35	453-483
8:39-40	412	10:34	434, 436	13:2	459, 541
9	397, 398, 418, 419,	10:34-43	434-436	13:2-3	321, 469
	459, 469, 538, 539,	10:34-44	321	13:4	379, 460
	540, 541, 561	10:35	434	13:4-12	460-461
9:1	469	10:36	435	13:5	450, 460
9:1-9	417-421	10:36-43	355n22	13:6	461
9:1-31	415-425, 417	10:38	439	13:6-11	518
9:2	417, 518	10:39	384, 435	13:6-12	460
9:4	418, 540	10:39-41	371n26	13:7	461
9:4-5	334	10:41	333	13:8	461, 493

- 13:9 417, 460, 461
 13:10 461
 13:11 461
 13:12 461
 13:13 450, 458, 471n70,
 489
 13:13-14 461
 13:13-52 461-468
 13:15 462
 13:16-25 462
 13:16-41 321
 13:17 333
 13:17-20 462
 13:18 462
 13:21-22 462
 13:22 463
 13:22-23 462
 13:23 463
 13:23-25 462
 13:23-41 355n22
 13:26 424
 13:26-37 462
 13:27 39, 124, 464
 13:28-31 371n26
 13:29 464
 13:30-37 517
 13:32-33 464
 13:34 464
 13:35 498
 13:38-39 360, 464
 13:38-41 462
 13:40-41 465
 13:41 465
 13:42-43 465
 13:43 465, 468
 13:44 466
 13:44-52 466
 13:45 466
 13:46 321, 375, 467, 468,
 472, 509, 510
 13:46-47 478
 13:47 467, 478
 13:48 333, 361, 467, 471,
 496, 506
 13:49 398
 13:51 458
 13:52 468
 14:1 468, 471
 14:1-7 468-470
 14:2 353, 468
 14:3 375, 468, 472
 14:4 469, 470
 14:5 468
 14:8-10 370
 14:8-18 470-471
 14:9-12 576
 14:10 470
 14:11 470
 14:15 470
 14:17 471
 14:18-19 471
 14:18-23 353
 14:19-23 471-473
 14:20 471
 14:21 471, 472
 14:22 446, 473, 490, 580
 14:23 460, 524n90
 14:24-28 473
 14:27 353, 473
 15 312, 408, 440, 442,
 450, 469, 483, 489,
 511
 15:1 475
 15:1-2 478
 15:1-5 475-476
 15:1-35 458
 15:2 473, 476, 482,
 524n90
 15:3 476
 15:4 524n90
 15:5 398, 475, 476, 547
 15:6 524n90
 15:6-21 476-481
 15:7 476
 15:7-11 563
 15:8 338, 477
 15:8-9 353
 15:9 353, 477
 15:10 477, 478
 15:11 477
 15:15 564
 15:19-21 479
 15:20 479
 15:21 479
 15:22 469, 481, 524n90
 15:22-35 480, 481-483
 15:23 469, 524n90
 15:24 481
 15:25 343, 481
 15:26 481
 15:28 481, 482
 15:31 482
 15:32-33 482
 15:33 482
 15:34 482
 15:35-41 482
 15:36 482
 15:36-40 458
 15:36-41 462, 489-490
 15:36-17:34 485-506
 15:36-21:36 484
 15:37 450
 15:39 379, 450, 489
 15:39-40 482
 15:40 471n70, 482
 16 493, 499
 16:1 471, 491
 16:1-3 471n70
 16:1-5 490-492
 16:3 491
 16:4 492, 524n90
 16:6 512
 16:6-10 492
 16:7 492
 16:8-10 523
 16:9 525
 16:10 471n70, 492
 16:10-17 315
 16:11-15 492-493
 16:13 493
 16:14 493, 509
 16:15 362, 493, 499, 509
 16:16 493
 16:16-19 518
 16:16-24 493-495, 519
 16:17 418, 494
 16:18 494, 577
 16:19 494
 16:20 494
 16:21 494
 16:22-23 495
 16:24 495
 16:25-34 495-496
 16:26 495
 16:27 495
 16:28 495
 16:29 424
 16:30 441, 495
 16:31 496, 510, 541
 16:32 496
 16:33 496, 509
 16:35-39 388, 520
 16:35-40 496-497
 16:37 496
 16:37-40 542
 16:40 499
 17 436, 471
 17:1-3 422
 17:1-4 411
 17:1-9 498-500
 17:2-3 320, 498
 17:2-7 556
 17:4 498, 499, 500
 17:5 499
 17:6-7 499
 17:7 499, 556
 17:8 499
 17:9 499
 17:10-15 500
 17:12 499, 500
 17:13 500
 17:15 500
 17:16 501
 17:16-21 501-502
 17:17 501
 17:18 502, 505, 565
 17:19 502
 17:21 502
 17:22 502, 503
 17:22-34 502-506
 17:23 503
 17:24 503
 17:24-25 503, 519
 17:25-26 503
 17:26 503
 17:27 504
 17:28 471, 504
 17:29 505
 17:30-31 436, 505
 17:31 371n26, 503, 505
 17:31-32 502
 17:32 334, 469
 17:34 499
 18 508, 515
 18:1-17 508-511, 551
 18:1-28 506-513
 18:2 499, 509, 578
 18:3 508
 18:4 509
 18:6 321, 466, 509, 511,
 513, 570
 18:7 508, 509
 18:7-8 362
 18:8 398, 509
 18:9 525
 18:9-10 510
 18:10 507
 18:11 508
 18:12 343, 556
 18:13 510
 18:14-17 520
 18:15 508
 18:15-17 509
 18:16 510
 18:17 510
 18:18 499, 511, 535
 18:18-23 511-512
 18:19 511
 18:20-21 511

18:22.....490, 511	20:26.....526	22:25.....422
18:22-23.....484	20:27.....526	22:25-29.....496
18:24.....512	20:28.....526, 527	22:30.....545, 547
18:24-28.....512-513	20:28-30.....524	22:30-23:11...545-547
18:25.....418, 512	20:29-30.....527	22:30-23:35...543-548
18:26.....375, 499, 512	20:31.....527	23.....548
18:27-28.....320	20:31-35.....524	23:1.....545
19.....508, 511, 512, 515, 516, 517	20:32.....527, 528, 563	23:2.....545
19:1.....516	20:33-35.....528	23:3.....544, 545
19:1-2.....516	20:35.....523, 528	23:5.....545, 546
19:1-7.....327	20:36.....529	23:6.....564
19:1-10.....493, 512, 516-518, 526	20:36-38.....524	23:8.....546
19:1-41.....513-521	20:37.....529	23:9.....546, 551
19:2.....513	20:38.....529	23:10.....545, 547
19:4.....516	21.....531, 538, 566	23:11.....547, 548, 561, 571, 573
19:5.....516	21:1-16.....482, 532-534	23:12.....556
19:6.....338, 353, 436	21:1-18.....315	23:12-14.....547
19:7.....517, 523	21:1-36.....530-536	23:12-15.....545
19:8.....375, 508, 517	21:4.....532	23:12-35.....547-548
19:9.....418, 518, 519	21:8.....362, 533	23:14.....524n90, 547
19:10.....508	21:9.....533	23:15.....547
19:11.....338, 520	21:10-14.....444, 482	23:16.....547
19:11-20.....518	21:11.....532, 533	23:18-22.....547
19:15.....518	21:12.....534	23:20.....547
19:17.....424	21:13.....534	23:22-24.....545
19:18.....513	21:14.....534	23:23.....268
19:20.....398, 518	21:16.....362	23:23-24.....547
19:21.....532, 547	21:17-19.....532	23:25.....548
19:21-22.....519	21:17-26.....492, 534-535	23:25-35.....545
19:21-41.....515, 519-520	21:18.....473, 524n90	23:26.....556
19:23.....418, 519	21:20.....532	23:27.....548
19:24.....493	21:21.....534	23:29.....509
19:26.....513, 519	21:24.....492, 535	23:31-32.....547
19:27.....519	21:25.....535	23:34-35.....548
19:29.....343, 571	21:26.....532	24.....320
19:30.....520	21:27.....534, 535, 552	24-25.....561
19:31.....520	21:27-36.....535-536	24:1.....524n90
19:32.....520	21:28.....532, 541, 550	24:1-21.....550-552
19:33.....520	21:28-29.....562	24:1-27.....549-554
19:34.....515, 520	21:29.....535	24:5.....444, 550
19:37.....466, 520	21:30.....534	24:5-6.....550
19:38.....520	21:32-36.....532	24:6.....550
19:40.....520	21:33.....536	24:8.....551
20.....522	21:34.....536	24:9.....551
20:1-16.....523-524	21:37-39.....539	24:10.....551
20:1-38.....521-530	21:37-22:29...537-543	24:11.....551
20:2.....523	21:40-22:29...539-542	24:12.....551
20:3.....523	22.....320, 418, 538, 540, 562	24:13.....551
20:4.....523	22-23.....561	24:14.....418, 444, 519, 551, 552, 564
20:4-5.....571	22:1.....539	24:14-15.....550, 551
20:5-16.....315	22:2.....539, 562	24:15.....551
20:7.....142, 294n51, 524	22:3.....385, 539	24:17.....551
20:7-12.....523, 529	22:4.....418, 519	24:18.....550, 551
20:9.....524, 529	22:4-5.....406	24:18-19.....551
20:10.....524	22:4-9.....418	24:20-21.....551, 552
20:10-12.....577	22:5.....540	24:22.....418, 552
20:12.....524	22:6.....540	24:22-27.....552-553
20:17.....473, 524	22:8.....538	24:23.....550, 552
20:17-38.....523, 524-529	22:9.....418, 540, 562	24:24.....552
20:18.....525	22:10.....459	24:24-27.....550
20:18-27.....524	22:12.....540	24:25.....552, 553
20:19.....525	22:12-16.....538	24:26.....552
20:20.....525, 529	22:14.....371, 540	24:27.....556, 557
20:20-21.....525	22:16.....541	25:1-3.....555
20:21.....525	22:17-19.....541	25:1-12.....556-557
20:22.....525	22:18.....542	25:1-27.....554-558
20:22-23.....532	22:19-20.....542	25:3.....556
20:22-25.....523	22:20.....406	25:5.....555
20:23.....525, 533	22:21.....321, 542	25:6-12.....556
20:24.....530	22:22.....542	25:7.....556
20:25.....525	22:23.....542	25:8.....556
	22:23-24.....548	

25:9 556, 557
 25:9–10 555
 25:10 557
 25:11 422, 496, 555, 557
 25:13–27 557–558
 25:15 524n90
 25:15–17 558
 25:19 509, 558
 25:20–21 558
 25:23 558
 25:24–25 558
 25:26 557
 25:26–27 558
 26 320, 418, 419, 540, 555
 26:1–8 561
 26:1–32 559–567
 26:2–3 550
 26:3 557, 560
 26:4–7 561
 26:4–11 560
 26:7 561
 26:9–11 561
 26:9–18 418
 26:9–23 561–565
 26:10 406
 26:11 466
 26:12–18 561
 26:14 418, 540, 562, 563
 26:15–16 334, 383
 26:16 562
 26:16–18 459
 26:17 562
 26:18 360, 528, 560, 562, 563
 26:19 564
 26:19–21 560
 26:19–23 561
 26:20 563, 564
 26:20–21 562, 564
 26:22–23 564
 26:23 371n26, 563, 565
 26:24–32 565–566
 26:25 355, 565
 26:25–29 550
 26:26 375, 565
 26:27 565
 26:28 565
 26:29 560, 566
 26:31 566
 26:32 566
 27 313, 570, 573
 27–28 571
 27:1 571
 27:1–12 571–572
 27:1–28:16 315
 27:1–28:31 567–581
 27:2 571
 27:3 575
 27:4–12 572
 27:9 572
 27:10–12 572
 27:13 572
 27:13–38 572–575
 27:14–15 572
 27:17 572, 572n100
 27:18 572
 27:19 572n100
 27:20 572
 27:21 573
 27:23 383
 27:25 573
 27:25–26 575

27:26 570, 573
 27:27 573
 27:29 573
 27:30 573
 27:31 572, 575
 27:32 573
 27:33–34 574
 27:34–35 361
 27:35–36 574
 27:36–37 574
 27:37 574
 27:38 574
 27:39–44 575
 27:42 574
 27:43 572
 28 313, 316, 390, 508, 570
 28:1 575
 28:1–10 575–577
 28:2 575, 577
 28:3 575
 28:4 575
 28:6 576
 28:7–10 576
 28:8–9 577
 28:10 577
 28:11 577
 28:11–16 577–578
 28:12–13 578
 28:14 578
 28:15 578
 28:16 578
 28:17–19 579
 28:17–31 578–580
 28:20 579
 28:22 444, 579
 28:23 411, 517, 579
 28:28 579
 28:31 335, 375, 517, 580

Romans

1 471, 504
 1:1 469n66
 1:3 517
 1:16 373, 468, 477
 1:16–17 566
 1:18–3:20 420
 1:19–20 471
 1:24 404, 471
 2 471
 2:9 477
 2:10 477
 2:23 399
 3:2 403
 3:10–18 168
 3:19–20 413, 436, 558
 3:21–5:21 465
 3:25–26 249, 258
 3:26 270
 3:29–30 477
 4:9–12 563
 5:1–2 255
 5:3–5 386
 5:6 61
 5:12–21 291
 6:16 168
 7:21 361
 8:24–25 197
 8:28 225, 390
 8:32 258
 8:34 517
 9–11 413, 579
 9:3 468, 556

9:6 373
 10–11 466
 10:4 151
 10:5–21 468
 10:12 477
 10:17 143
 10:19–21 466
 11 499
 11:11 499, 579
 11:11–12 563
 11:13 421, 469n66
 11:18–19 579
 11:25 563
 11:25–32 215
 11:33 548
 11:36 225
 12:1–2 26
 12:3 83
 12:14–21 421
 13:1–3 388
 13:1–7 387, 496
 13:4 496
 13:9 378
 13:13 480n74
 14:3 491
 14:5 491
 14:17 491, 517n86
 15:16 528, 563
 15:25 532
 16:5 362
 16:21 499
 16:25 528

1 Corinthians

book of 508
 1 570
 1:1 469n66, 510n84
 1:2 528, 563
 1:12 512
 1:14 509
 1:14–15 87
 1:18–31 565
 1:23 76
 2:4 566
 3:5 512
 3:6 475
 3:6–7 173
 4:6 512
 4:7 83
 4:12–13 545
 4:20 517n86
 5:5 563n97
 5:7 48, 275
 6:9 517n86
 6:10 517n86
 6:11 528, 563
 7:5 563n97
 7:40 421
 8:4 501
 9:1 469n66
 9:2 469n66
 9:20–23 511
 9:22 492, 535
 10:4 156, 160
 10:16 527
 11:22 362
 11:23–24 141
 11:23–26 574
 11:24 128
 11:25 527
 11:27 527
 13 430
 13:1 353, 437

13:1–3 437
 13:2 533
 14:1 533
 14:5 437
 14:13 437
 15 564
 15:1–4 564
 15:7 286
 15:8 345
 15:9 406, 469n66, 542
 15:20–28 229
 15:21–22 291
 15:24 517n86
 15:45–49 291
 15:50 517n86
 15:56–57 414
 16:2 294n51
 16:3–4 524, 532
 16:19 362

2 Corinthians

book of 481, 508
 1:1 469n66
 1:20 67, 420
 2 492
 2:11 563n97
 2:12–13 492
 2:16 509, 565
 3:13 399
 4:6 420
 5:13 565
 9:8 528
 10:10 335
 11:14 563n97
 11:25 572
 11:25–27 580
 11:27 524
 11:29–30 566
 11:32 422
 12 452
 12:7 546, 563n97
 12:10 566
 12:12 469n66
 13:1 540
 13:1–2 305
 13:4 566

Galatians

1–2 450
 1:1 469n66
 1:6–9 481
 1:13 406, 419
 1:13–14 542, 561
 1:17 417, 422
 1:18–19 417, 422
 1:19 469
 1:21 417
 1:23 406, 542
 2 439
 2:3 492
 2:6–10 345
 2:9 469, 478
 2:13 469
 3 465
 3:1 465
 3:6 373
 3:7–9 563
 3:8 354
 3:10 420
 3:13 288, 464
 3:19 403
 3:19–22 420
 3:23–29 420

3:28 477
 4:3 492
 4:4 61
 4:4–7 168
 4:15 546
 5:1 477
 5:3 491
 5:14 378
 5:19 480n74
 5:19–21 480
 5:21 517n86
 6:10 528, 576
 6:15 511

Ephesians

1:1 469n66
 1:7–14 563
 1:14 528
 1:18 38
 1:20 517
 1:23 41
 2:1–3 72
 2:1–10 431
 2:2 563n97
 2:5 72
 2:20 344
 3:6 345, 563
 3:19 41
 4:13 41
 4:15 380n31
 4:25 380
 5:3 480n74
 5:5 480n74, 517n86
 5:8 562
 5:18 352
 5:25 262
 5:26 71, 563

Philippians

1:9 62
 1:12–14 388
 1:13 581
 1:14 448
 1:21 307
 1:22 530
 2:2–4 378
 2:5 362
 2:5–11 219, 220
 2:6 116
 2:9 517
 2:10 279
 2:11 279
 3 538, 539
 3:4–6 539, 561
 3:5 546
 3:6 406, 542
 3:19 132

Colossians

1:1 469n66
 1:13 517n86, 563
 1:13–20 563
 1:15 124, 216
 1:18 371
 1:19 41
 1:20 527
 2:9 41
 2:16 491
 3:1 517
 3:5 480n74
 3:11 477
 4:10 450, 571
 4:11 517n86

4:14 315
 4:15 362

1 Thessalonians

1:5 525
 1:8 500
 1:9 498, 500
 2:1–10 525
 2:7 527
 2:12 517n86, 527
 2:14 511
 2:14–16 468
 2:15–16 564
 2:18 563n97
 3 500
 3:1 500
 3:1–2 500
 4:3 480n74
 4:13 414
 5:2 338
 5:5 562
 5:20–21 533
 5:21 534

2 Thessalonians

1:5 517n86
 2:9 563n97

1 Timothy

1:1 469n66
 1:2 491
 1:10 480n74
 1:13 406, 542
 1:18 491
 1:20 563n97
 2:1–2 388
 2:12 513
 3:1 524n90
 3:1–7 473
 3:8–10 396
 3:8–13 396
 4:1 527
 4:14 460
 5:10 220
 5:15 563n97
 5:19 540
 5:22 460
 6:11–16 526

2 Timothy

1:1 469n66
 1:5 491
 1:8–12 388
 2:1–6 526
 2:8 517
 2:16–18 527
 3:1 356
 3:1–9 527
 3:11 472
 4 578
 4:1 517n86
 4:5 256
 4:6–8 530
 4:7 256
 4:10 571
 4:11 315, 450, 489
 4:18 517n86

Titus

1:1 469n66
 1:5 524n90
 1:5–9 473
 1:12 504

1:15 170
 2:2–6 396
 3:1–2 387
 3:5 70, 71

Philemon

24 315, 450

Hebrews

1:1–3 42
 1:2 356
 1:3 216
 2 449
 2:2 403
 2:10 371, 384
 2:11 563
 3–4 110
 3:1 469
 4:15 256
 7:27 350
 8–10 226
 8:5 420
 8:13 226, 420
 9:12 350
 9:28 350
 10:1–4 420
 10:1–10 420
 10:10 350
 10:11 420
 10:20 141, 296
 10:24 489
 10:28 385, 540, 552
 11 444, 517
 12:2 371

12:16 480n74
 12:29 424
 13:4 480n74
 13:8 116

James

1:2–4 386
 2:8 378
 2:14–17 528

1 Peter

1:1 469n67
 1:6–8 386
 1:8 300
 1:10–12 250
 2:4–10 380
 2:13–25 387
 2:17 388
 2:20 388
 2:20–21 306
 2:21 229
 2:21–25 220, 390
 4:3 480n74
 5:1–4 306
 5:13 450

2 Peter

1:1 469n67
 1:21 250
 3:3 356

1 John

2:7–11 226
 2:20 176, 179

2:27 176, 179
 4:7 41, 243
 4:9 41
 4:19 255
 5:18 41

3 John

12 21, 307

Jude

7 480n74
 9 505n82
 14 204n39
 14–15 505n82

Revelation

1:3 300
 1:5 464
 1:10 294n51
 1:16 424
 2:14 480n74
 2:16 424
 2:20 480n74
 11:7–10 254
 12:11 256
 18:1 38, 39
 19:10 180
 19:15 424
 19:21 424
 20:6 200
 21:1 372
 21:8 407, 480n74
 22:8–9 180
 22:15 407, 480n74

