

## Introduction to John<sup>1</sup>

### Authorship

*External* evidence favors John as the book's author. Irenaeus is a source of external testimony. Irenaeus' opinion on this matter is weighty since he was a disciple of Polycarp who in turn was a disciple of John. Other sources of external evidence include Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Hippolytus, Theophilus of Antioch, Eusebius, Clement of Rome, Cyril of Jerusalem, Papias, Justin Martyr, Augustine, and Jerome. Some believe that there were two Johns: both the apostle and the Ephesian elder based upon Papias' double mention of John.<sup>2</sup> If this thesis is correct then perhaps John the elder rather than John the apostle penned the Gospel. However, in both mentionings of John in Papias' statement, he is connected to the title of presbyter or elder. Such an attachment favors seeing both references as alluding to the same person since the Apostle John uses this title in both his second and third letters in reference to himself.

Although the Gospel of John is an anonymous work, *internal* evidence favors the Apostle John as the book's author. The writer must have been Jewish since he often quoted the Old Testament (12:15; 13:18; 19:37), demonstrated a knowledge of the Jewish feasts (2:23; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 10:22; 13:1), understood Jewish customs (2:1-10; 3:25; 11:55), had an expectation of a coming messiah (1:19-28), and understood the Jewish-Samaritan conflict (John 4:9, 20). The writer must have also been a resident of Israel since he demonstrated an awareness of Israel's geography (1:44, 46; 2:1, 12; 4:5-6, 20; 5:2; 11:18, 54; 18:1; 19:13). The author most likely was an apostle since he depicts himself as an eyewitness to the earthly ministry of Christ (1:14, 45; 2:6, 11; 6:13, 19; 11:1, 38, 44; 12:5; 18:10; 19:33-35, 40; 21:8-11, 24-25). The Apostle John fits all of these descriptions.

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<sup>1</sup> Material for this section was compiled from various sources, including Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 130-36; Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 335-40.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.4.

Most believe that the writer of the book was the same person who desired to remain anonymous in the work by constantly portraying Himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) and the “other disciple” (18:15-16; 20:2; 21:2). This description fits John. “The disciple whom Jesus loved” is portrayed as leaning upon the breast of Christ in the upper room (13:23). This automatically means that this disciple was one of the original twelve since the meal in the upper room was reserved only for the twelve (Mark 14:17).

Such intimacy also suggests that this disciple was one of three disciples in Christ’s inner circle. The synoptic writers indicate that this inner circle consisted of Peter, James, and John (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). This disciple could not have been Peter since he motioned for “the disciple whom Jesus loved” to ask Christ who the betrayer would be (13:24). Also, Peter is mentioned by name elsewhere (1:41) in the book. James could not have been the book’s author since he was martyred too early (Acts 12:1-2). John is the only remaining possibility. Also, Christ’s giving the custody of Mary to “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 19:26) may also identify John as this disciple since he was likely the maternal cousin of Christ (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). Other internal evidence favoring the Apostle John as the book’s author includes the similarity of style and vocabulary between this Gospel and the epistles of John. Thus, if it is conceded that the Apostle John wrote the Epistles of John, then he also wrote the Gospel of John.

As far as John’s *biography* is concerned, his name means “Yahweh has been gracious.” His elder brother was the apostle James. James and John were the sons of Zebedee and Salome. It is likely that Zebedee was successful in his profession as a fisherman since he hired servants in addition to employing his two sons in the trade (Mark 1:19-20). Salome was either the sister or cousin of Mary, who was Christ’s mother (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). His family apparently was well off since John knew the high priest (18:15) and owned a home (19:27).

Originally, John was a disciple of John the Baptist. However, after John the Baptist introduced John to Christ, John became a follower of Christ (1:35-40). John followed Christ in His early travels (1:43; 2:1-2, 12-13; 4:4). He later became a disciple of Christ (Matt 4:21-22) and one of the original twelve (Matt 10:1-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13). In all of these apostolic lists, he is mentioned as being in the first group along with Peter, Andrew, and his brother James. He may have been the youngest of the twelve. He is also listed as being one of three disciples closest to Christ. He was one of the three present at the raising of Jairus' daughter, the transfiguration, and Gethsemane (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33).

John was present at the cross. Christ gave him the assignment of caring for His mother (John 19:27). After Christ's resurrection, he viewed the empty tomb and grave clothes along with Peter (John 20:1-10) and saw the resurrected Christ (20:19-23). He was also one of the beneficiaries of Christ's 40-day post resurrection ministry (Acts 1:1-8). John became a dominant force in the early church. He is mentioned four times in Acts (3:1; 4:13, 19; 8:14) and also is called one of the "pillars" of the church (Gal 2:9).

According to tradition, John became the overseer of the church at Ephesus. Under Domitian's reign (A.D. 81–95) he was banished to the island of Patmos where he wrote Revelation. He was released from this exile by Nerva in A.D. 96. He remained in Ephesus until his death. He died during Trajan's reign (A.D. 98–117). John's biography evidences God's grace as the Lord transformed him from a man of hate (Mark 3:17; Luke 9:51-56) to the apostle of love.

**Date**

Some date John as early as A.D. 40 while others date it as late as A.D. 140–170. The latest date seems unlikely with the discovery of Rylands fragment known as P<sup>52</sup>. This papyrus was discovered in Egypt and it contains five verses from John’s Gospel (John 18:31-33, 37-38). Because of its early date (A.D. 125–135), the Gospel of John must have been written earlier. Because one must allow enough time for the papyrus to circulate into Egypt, the date of John’s Gospel should probably be pushed back to the closing years of the first century. Moreover, the earliest date is ruled out since Eusebius indicates that John’s Gospel was written after the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>3</sup>

Many argue for a date prior to A.D. 70. Evidence mustered in support of this position includes the fact that John is silent about the A.D. 70 events and John’s Gospel seems to present a pre A.D. 70 perspective (2:19-20; 11:47-52). John also seems to show knowledge of some of the divisions that existed in Israel prior to the Jewish war. Moreover, arguing from the verb *estin* in John 5:2, Wallace says: “Since the equative verb is nowhere else clearly used as a historical present, the present tense should be taken as indicating present time from the viewpoint of the speaker. The implication of this seems to be that this Gospel was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Although many object to a pre-70 date for John’s Gospel, they must, in support of their view, reckon with this text.”<sup>4</sup>

However, tradition indicates that John wrote his book during his latter years in Ephesus. Interestingly, Revelation indicates that John was the overseer of the church in Asia Minor at the time he wrote that book (1:11). Most date Revelation late (A.D. 95). If John was overseer of this same group of churches when he wrote his Gospel, it must be dated late as well. All things considered, a date of A.D. 85–95 for the composition of his book seems appropriate.

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<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.24.7.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 531.

## Place of Writing

Many suggestions have been proposed regarding the place of writing of John's Gospel, including Syrian Antioch and Alexandria. However, tradition suggests that the book was written from *Ephesus*.<sup>5</sup> According to tradition, John was overseer of the Ephesian church in his later years. Revelation indicates that John was a bishop over numerous churches in this same area of Asia Minor (Rev 1:11). Thus, it seems safe to conclude that John penned the letter from Ephesus.

## Audience

John seems to have addressed an audience that was primarily *Gentile*. He feels compelled to explain or translate for them Jewish feasts, geographical references, names, and customs that would be foreign to a Gentile mind (2:13; 4:9; 5:2; 11:18, 54; 18:1; 19:13, 31). Since John was overseer of the churches in Asia Minor at the time he wrote, it is logical to assume that he addressed a primarily Gentile audience. John also addressed a primarily *unbelieving* audience. This conclusion is evident from the book's purpose statement (20:30-31). John's purpose involves presenting Christ's signs so that the reader might be persuaded that Jesus is the Son of God and consequently believe on Him in order to receive the gift of eternal life. However, some of John's readers were probably believers since John, as explained below, also wrote for an edificatory purpose.

## Purposes and Message

John wrote His Gospel in order to accomplish three *purposes*. First, John had an *apologetic* purpose of presenting accurate Christology against the backdrop of the false Christologies of Docetism and Cerinthianism ushered in by Gnostic dualism at the end of the first century.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.31.3.

<sup>6</sup> See my 1 John argument for a discussion of these heretical ideas.

doctrine of grace may have been deteriorating at the end of the apostolic age as well. Thus, John also wrote for the purpose of protecting this important doctrine.

Second, John had an *evangelistic* purpose in writing. According to John 20:30-31, John wrote in order to present Christ's signs so that the reader might be convinced that Jesus is the Son of God and thus believe on Him and receive the gift of eternal life. To this end, John traces the responses of faith, as well as the unbelief of the nation, to Christ's signs throughout his Gospel so that his readers might have both positive and negative examples regarding how they should respond to Christ's signs. This evangelistic purpose would also be relevant to a believer by reinforcing the content of his initial faith. Third, John wrote for an *edificatory* purpose by explaining how those who have received the gift of eternal life are to live out this life (13–17). John hopes that those who have believed will continue believing and thus make progress in the area of practical sanctification.<sup>7</sup> The message of John's Gospel is that the signs of Jesus Christ show that He is the Son of God (20:31) who gives eternal life to all men who believe on Him (1–12; 18–21) and who teaches men to live out this eternal life as they continue to believe on Him (13–17).

## Method and Sources

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<sup>7</sup> Some have postulated that the articular present participle *ho pistueon* (John 3:16) indicates that a person is not a Christian if he once believed and stops believing. Arminians say that such a person lost his salvation. Those who are influenced by the reformed doctrine of perseverance say that such a person never believed in the first place. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, 621, n. 22. However, this argument invalidates Christ's promise to bestow eternal life upon any person the moment he believes on Christ (John 5:24; 6:40). Furthermore, there are several New Testament examples where the articular present participle does not indicate unending action (John 4:13-15, 26, 36; 5:3, 24; 6:14, 35; 11:26; Mark 6:14). See Bob Wilkin, "The One Who Believes: Is Continuous Faith Required to Be Born Again?," *Grace in Focus*, January/February 2006, 1-2, 4. In sum, if a person genuinely believed on Christ and then stopped believing, it does not mean that he does not possess the gift of life. Rather, it means that his progressive sanctification has been thwarted.

John had the Synoptic Gospels to draw from and may have incorporated their literary framework. However, it seems that he drew primarily from the information he gained as an eyewitness to the earthly ministry of Christ. John saw Jesus do many things. However, he only selected certain incidents from Christ's life that were consistent with his literary purposes (John 20:30; 21:25). Under the guidance of the Spirit, John selected and arranged material from Christ's life in order to give His readers an incentive to believe on Him for eternal life and to keep believing on Him in order to experience progressive sanctification.

### Structure

The Gospel of John contains three basic parts. The first part is the “book of signs” representing Christ’s public ministry to Israel (1–12). This section highlights Christ’s seven signs and seven discourses as well as various interviews and editorial comments designed to produce faith on the part of John’s readers (20:30-31).

<u>Sign</u>	<u>Verses</u>
Turning water to wine	2:2-11
Healing the nobleman’s son	4:46-54
Healing the paralytic	5:1-18
Feeding the five thousand	6:1-14
Walking on water	6:15-21
Healing the blind man	9:1-41
Raising Lazarus from the dead	11:1-44

<u>Discourse</u>	<u>Verses</u>
New birth	3:1–36
Water of life	4:1–42
Equality with the Father	5:19–47
Bread of life	6:22–66
Life giving Spirit	7:1–52
Light of the world	8:12–59
Good shepherd	10:1–42

Sometimes the miracle creates the sermon as in the case of the feeding of the five thousand and other times the miracle illustrates the sermon as in the case of the light of the world discourse.

Throughout this section, the faith of the remnant grows, as does the unbelief of national Israel. This section climaxes with the unbelief of Israel (12:37) as Christ formally presents Himself to the nation during His triumphal entry and experiences rejection.

The second section of the book is known as the “book of glory” (13–17). This section transpires as a result of Israel’s unbelief as portrayed in John 12. In this discourse, Christ prepares His disciples for their coming ministry as foundational leaders in the church age (Eph 2:20) by teaching them how to live out the gift of eternal life. John hopes that the material presented in this section will help members of his audience that are already believers to continue to believe so that they can be progressively sanctified.

The third section is the passion of Christ (18–21), which climaxes in Christ’s ultimate miracle of resurrecting from the dead. John holds this miracle out as the ultimate sign that should convince his readers to believe on Christ. Sprinkled throughout the book are the various “I am” statements from Christ designed to divulge His true identity so that John’s audience might believe on Him.

<b>I am statement</b>	<b>Verse(s)</b>
I am the bread of life	6:35
I am the light of the world	8:12; 9:5
I am the door	10:7
I am the good shepherd	10: 11, 14
I am the resurrection and the life	11:25
I am the way, the truth, and the life	14:6
I am the true vine	15:1

Another important structural marker involves Christ’s various trips to Jerusalem to celebrate different Jewish feasts.

<u>Feast</u>	<u>Verse</u>
First Passover	2:23
Unnamed feast	5:1
Feast of Tabernacles	7:2
Feast of Dedication	10:22
Last Passover	13:1

### Unique Characteristics

John's Gospel boasts several outstanding characteristics. First, John's Gospel contains a large proportion of unique material. About 93% of his content is unique. Only two of John's eight recorded miracles (feeding of the five thousand and walking on water) are found elsewhere. John fails to record a single parable of Christ<sup>8</sup> although they are included frequently elsewhere. The other Gospel writers do not record John's 27 interviews. John's seven discourses are not found elsewhere.

His Upper Room discourse is not found elsewhere. John is the only Gospel writer not to contain the Olivet Discourse. John omits numerous elements not found in the other Gospels: Christ's birth, genealogy, childhood, baptism, temptation, the term repent/repentance, parables, exorcizing of demons, transfiguration, the Lord's Supper, suffering at Gethsemane, and Ascension. John also includes numerous elements not found in the other Gospels such as Christ's Judean ministry and the attendance by Jesus at three Passovers (2:13; 6:4; 12:1). Such exclusivity is amazing considering John could have drawn material from the synoptics. Thus, John obviously wrote to accomplish a particular literary purpose rather than to present a comprehensive biography of Christ.

Second, John stresses Christ's deity. He accomplishes this by recording Christ's numerous self claims to deity (John 8:58; 10:30; 14:9), the seven "I am" statements, Christ's 23 uses of the phrase "I am," statements from others testifying to Christ's deity (1:1; 6:69; 9:11; 20:28), and the

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<sup>8</sup> The Greek of 10:6 is *paroimia* rather than *parabolé*. This refers to an extended metaphor rather than a parable.

six witnesses testifying to Christ's deity (5:31-47). Third, John uses unique literary devices. They include the seven "I am" statements, the seven discourses, the seven signs, the six witnesses, and the five visits to Jerusalem. Fourth, John focuses on the distinctions and unity in the Father-Son relationship. Fifth, John uses strong metaphors in recording Christ's discourses (bread, light, door, vine, water, eat, drink, shepherd, follow, born again, resurrection, way, truth, and life).

Sixth, John's Gospel contains more information about Christ's final night before the cross (13–17) than is found in any other Gospel. Seventh, John frequently makes editorial comments. Twenty-two such comments are found throughout his book. Eighth, John has one of the clearest and most overt purpose statements of any biblical book (20:30-31). Ninth, John's style is simple. Tenth, his level of Greek is uncomplicated. Eleventh, John follows more of a topical, as opposed to a chronological, approach. Twelfth, while the other Gospel writers focus on the Galilean ministry, John focuses more on the Judean ministry. Thirteenth, John reiterates Christ's humanity (4:6, 7; 5:19; 11:35; 12:27; 19).

Fourteenth, John highlights eschatology as it pertains to man's decision to receive the gift of eternal life. Fifteenth, John records numerous long interviews or conversations. Sixteenth, John uses the parallelism of light versus darkness. Seventeenth, John's Gospel seems more theological than the other Gospels. Eighteenth, John's prologue (1:1-18) is unique. Nineteenth, John emphasizes the importance of the gift of life to all men (3:16; 10:16; 12:32).

## Outline<sup>9</sup>

- I. Prologue (1:1-18)
  - A. Revelation of the Word (1:1-8)
    - 1. In relation to God (1:1-2)
    - 2. In relation to creation (1:3)

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<sup>9</sup> A booklet entitled "The Gospel of John" by Roy B. Zuck disseminated in the Koinonia adult Bible fellowship at Redeemer Bible Church in Dallas, Texas has influenced some parts of the outline.

- 3. In relation to man (1:4-5)
- 4. In relation to John (1:6-8)
- B. Rejection of the Word (1:9-11)
- C. Reception of the Word (1:12-13)
- D. Incarnation of the Word (1:14-18)
- II. Public ministry to Israel (1:19-12:50)
  - A. Testimony of John the Baptist in Jerusalem (1:19-34)
  - B. Christ calls the first disciples (1:35-51)
    - 1. Andrew and Peter called in Jerusalem (1:35-42)
    - 2. Philip and Nathaniel called in Galilee (1:43-51)
  - C. **First sign:** Wedding in Cana and journey to Capernaum (2:1-12)
  - D. Temple cleansing in Jerusalem (2:13-25)
  - E. Conversation with Nicodemus in Jerusalem (3:1-21)
  - F. Conversation with John the Baptist in Judea (3:22-36)
  - G. Conversations involving the woman in Samaria (4:1-42)
    - 1. Christ's conversation with the Samaritan woman (4:1-26)
    - 2. Christ's conversation with His disciples (4:27-38)
    - 3. Christ's interaction with the Samaritans (4:39-42)
  - H. **Second sign:** healing of the noble man's son in Cana (4:43-54)
  - I. **Third sign:** healing of the paralytic in Jerusalem (5:1-18)
  - J. Christ's defense of his equality with the Father (5:19-47)
    - 1. Christ's equality with the Father (5:19-30)
      - a) Equality in work (5:19-20)
      - b) Equality in giving spiritual resurrection and life (5:21)
      - c) Equality in judging (5:22)
      - d) Equality in honor (5:23)
      - e) Believing transforms us from death to life (5:24-25)
      - d) Equality in life (5:26)
      - c) Equality in judging (5:27)
      - b) Equality in giving physical resurrection and life (5:28-29)
      - a) Equality in work (5:30)<sup>10</sup>
    - 2. Witnesses testifying to Christ's equality with the Father (5:31-47)
      - a) Christ (5:31)
      - b) John (5:32-35)
      - c) Christ's miracles (5:36)
      - d) The Father (5:37-38)
      - e) The Scriptures (5:39-44)
      - f) Moses (5:45-47)
  - K. **Fourth sign:** feeding of the 5000 in Tiberias (6:1-14)
  - L. **Fifth sign:** walking on the water in Capernaum (6:15-21)
  - M. Bread of life discourse in Capernaum (6:22-71)
    - 1. Curiosity of the masses (6:22-40)
    - 2. Accusations of the Jews (6:41-59)

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<sup>10</sup> This chiastic structure was taken from a handout entitled “Pattern of John 5:19-30” by Roy B. Zuck disseminated in the Koinonia adult Bible fellowship at Redeemer Bible Church in Dallas, Texas.

- 3. Response of the disciples (6:60-71)
  - N. Christ at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (7:1-53)
    - 1. Before the Feast (7:1-13)
    - 2. In the middle of the Feast (7:14-36)
    - 3. On the last day of the Feast (7:37-53)
  - O. Woman caught in adultery (8:1-11)
  - P. Light of the world discourse (8:12-58)
  - Q. **Sixth sign:** healing of the blind man (9:1-41)
    - 1. The miracle (9:1-7)
    - 2. The questions (9:8-34)
      - a) By the neighbors (9:8-12)
      - b) By the Pharisees (9:13-34)
    - 3. The reactions (9:35-41)
  - R. Good Shepherd discourse (10:1-21)
  - S. Christ claims equality with the Father at the Feast of dedication in Jerusalem (10:22-42)
  - T. **Seventh sign:** Resurrection of Lazarus in Bethany (11:1-57)
    - 1. Lazarus' death (11:1-16)
    - 2. Lazarus' resurrection (11:17-44)
    - 3. Reactions to the miracle (11:45-57)
  - U. Israel's formal rejection of Christ (12:1-50)
    - 1. Anointing by Mary at Bethany (12:1-8)
    - 2. Pharisees' plot to kill Lazarus (12:9-11)
    - 3. Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (12:12-19)
    - 4. Christ's interaction with the Greeks and crowd (12:20-36)
    - 5. Pinnacle of unbelief (12:37-50)
- III. Private ministry to the disciples (13-17)
- A. Christ's instructions to His disciples in preparation for His impending departure (13-16)
    - 1. Foot washing (13:1-17)
    - 2. Revelation of His betrayer's identity (13:18-30)
    - 3. Christ's imminent glorification and the new commandment (13:31-35)
    - 4. Prediction of Peter's threefold denial (13:36-38)
    - 5. Comfort (14:1-31)
      - a) Promise of heaven (14:1-6)
      - b) Revelation of the Father (14:7-11)
      - c) Power of prayer (14:12-15)
      - d) Promise of the Spirit (14:16-26)
      - e) Promise of peace (14:27-31)
    - 6. Fruit bearing (15:1-17)
      - a) Responsibility: abide (15:1-5)
      - b) Results (15:6-17)
        - i) Fruit bearing (15:6-8)
        - ii) Kinds of fruit (15:9-17)
    - 7. Hatred from the world (15:18-25)
    - 8. Work of the Holy Spirit (15:26-16:15)
      - a) To the disciples (15:26-16:7)
      - b) In the world (16:8-11)

- c) In guiding the disciples into all truth (16:12-15)
  - 9. Christ comforts and prepares his disciples for coming trials through promises of future victory (16:16-33)
    - a) The disciples' immediate trial (16:16-28)
      - i) Disciples' perplexity over Christ's announced departure (16:16-18)
      - ii) Disciples' sorrow to be turned to joy when Christ resurrects (16:19-22)
      - iii) Disciples to receive understanding and answered prayer when Christ resurrects and ascends (16:23-28)
    - b) The disciples' future trial: how to experience peace in the midst of tribulation in the church age (16:29-33)
  - B. Christ's intercession in preparation for his impending departure (17:1-26)
    - 1. Christ's intercession for Himself (17:1-5)
    - 2. Christ's intercession for His disciples (17:6-19)
    - 3. Christ's intercession for the future church (17:20-26)
- IV. Epilogue (18-21)
- A. Christ's sacrifice (18:1-19:42)
    - 1. Arrest (18:1-11)
    - 2. Trials (18:12-19:16)
      - a) Religious trials (18:12-27)
        - i) Before Annas (18:12-23)
        - ii) Before Caiaphas (18:24-27)
      - b) Roman trials (18:28-19:16)
        - i) First trial before Pilate (18:28-38a)
        - ii) Second trial before Pilate (18:38b-19:16)
    - 3. Crucifixion (19:17-37)
    - 4. Burial (19:38-42)
  - B. Christ's resurrection (20:1-21:25)
    - 1. Resurrection (20:1-10)
    - 2. Resurrection appearances (20:11-21: 25)
      - a) To Mary (20:11-18)
      - b) To the ten (20:19-23)
      - c) To Thomas (20:24-31)
      - d) To the seven (21:1-14)
      - e) To Peter (21:15-25)
        - i) Peter's restoration (21:15-17)
        - ii) Peter's destiny (21:18-25)

### **Argument**

John begins his book with a prologue establishing Christ's heavenly identity (1:1-18). While the other Gospel writers often begin their works with a genealogy linking Christ to either Abraham

(Matt 1:1-17) or Adam (Luke 3:23-38),<sup>11</sup> John begins his book with a genealogy linking Christ to heaven. John hopes that his readers will thus understand Christ's identity and therefore believe on Him in order to receive the gift of eternal life.<sup>12</sup>

John calls Christ the word<sup>13</sup> and explains His relation to the Godhead not only as an uncreated being but also as a sharer in the divine nature (1:1-2).<sup>14</sup> John also explains Christ's role in creation (1:3). What Christ has accomplished in physical creation He now seeks to replicate through spiritual creation in the hearts of men. The references to the "beginning" in the previous verse (1:2) and to "light" in the following verse (1:4) are designed to further identify Christ as God by linking Him to God's work in creation as recorded in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis.

Not only do light and life (1:4-5) identify Christ as God by conjuring up imagery from early Genesis, but they also foreshadow what Christ will accomplish as recorded throughout John's Gospel. He will manifest life by healing those at the point of death, restoring lifeless limbs, raising the dead, and resurrecting from the dead. He will manifest light by giving both physical sight and spiritual sight to men. He will also manifest His creative propensities by turning water into wine and multiplying the loaves and fish.

John the Baptist, His forerunner, will also draw attention to His heavenly identity (1:6-8) by noting His preexistence (1:15). Despite the reality of His identity, the nation will reject Him (1:9-11) while a remnant will believe in Him and thus receive the gift of eternal life (1:12-13). John will

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<sup>11</sup> Mark's genealogy omits Christ's genealogy since the book seeks to portray Christ as a servant and servants had no genealogies in biblical times.

<sup>12</sup> "Believe" is similar to "trust."

<sup>13</sup> The logos pertained to the personification of divine revelation to the Hebrews and an intermediary between the good spiritual world and the evil physical world to the Greeks. It is likely that John built upon both concepts through His use of logos in 1:1. J. Carl Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1997), 224.

<sup>14</sup> By not using the term "a God" John avoided the error of Arianism, which taught that Jesus was a created being. By not using the term "the God" John avoided the error of Sabellianism, which taught that Christ and the Father are one in nature and personality rather than one in nature but not personality. Ibid.

trace these two lines of belief and unbelief throughout his Gospel as both positive and negative examples for his readers. Christ's incarnation also reveals His heavenly identity. It reveals Him to be the unique one<sup>15</sup> full of grace and truth (1:14),<sup>16</sup> the one who ushers in superior grace than what was experienced under previous dispensations (1:16-17),<sup>17</sup> and as the one who perfectly explains the Father (1:18).<sup>18</sup> In sum, by revealing Christ's identity in his prologue, John hopes to induce his readers to believe on Him and thus receive the gift of eternal life.

John also includes John the Baptist's testimony of Christ in Jerusalem in order to further clarify His divine identity (1:19-34). Thus, the author notes how John indicated that Christ is greater than John the Baptist, will baptize in the Spirit, is favored by the Spirit, is the sin bearer of the world, is preexistent, and is the Son of God. In fact, the very existence of John the Baptist's ministry also shows Christ's divine identity since this ministry was anticipated in the pages of the Old Testament (Isa 40:3). By recording the calling of the first disciples (1:35-41), John is given further opportunity to reveal Christ's deity. Christ is the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the one to whom the Law and the Prophets point, omniscient, the Son of God, the King of Israel, and the mediator between heaven and earth. By recording the belief of Andrew (1:41), Philip (1:45), and Nathaniel (1:47, 49-50), John furnishes his readers with positive examples of those who respond in

<sup>15</sup> “Begotten” (*monogenes*) found in 1:14, 18; and 3:16 is derived from the Greeks words *mono* (“one” or “only”) and *genos* (“kind”). *Genos* is unrelated to the word *gennao* (“to beget”). Thus, the word refers to something that is unique or one of a kind (Gen 22:2; Heb 11:17) rather than to something that is created. *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>16</sup> Those who emphasize grace often do not emphasize truth. Those who emphasize truth often do not emphasize grace. Christ was unique in that He equally manifested both attributes. Elliot Johnson, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Many understand verse 17 as teaching that grace began with Christ. John 1:17 says, “For the Law was given through Moses; but grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.” They emphasize the “but” in John 1:17 while neglecting that truth is contrasted with the Law just as grace is contrasted with the law. Thus, grace and law cannot be contrasted in this verse anymore than truth and law can be contrasted. What John 1:17 is actually teaching is that grace came through the Law and more grace came through Christ. This may be the meaning of “grace upon grace” or “one grace after another” in the preceding verse (John 1:16). Ronald Allen, “Affirming Right of Way on Ancient Paths,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (January-March 1996): 10.

<sup>18</sup> The Greek verb for “explained” in verse 18 is *ezhgeomai*. From this word we derive the English word “exegete.”

faith upon discovering the true identity of Christ. John hopes that his own readers will do the same as they discover Christ's identity as recorded in his Gospel.

In order to further persuade his readers of Christ's deity, John records Christ's changing of the water into wine at the wedding at Cana (2:1-12). This miracle represents the first of the seven signs performed by Christ (2:11a). It also shows Him to be God by revealing His creative power. Apparently, He had the ability to supernaturally accelerate the fermentation process. The reaction to this miracle was belief (2:11b).<sup>19</sup> John hopes that his audience will respond to his written record of Christ's miracle in the same way.

The cleansing of the temple (2:13-25)<sup>20</sup> also reveals Christ's identity through His reference to the temple as His Father's house, by fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (Ps 69:9; Mal 3:1-3), and through His prediction of His resurrection.<sup>21</sup> Because people believed as a consequence of these revelations (2:23),<sup>22</sup> John includes their reactions as more positive examples for his readers to follow. However, they also serve as a negative example since these believers were not yet ready to continue on in faith and thus make progress in the area of practical sanctification (2:24-25). John will later explain how believers can experience daily sanctification through continued faith (13-17).

The repetition of the words "man" (2:25; 3:1) and "signs" (2:23; 3:2) connects chapters two and three by pointing to Nicodemus as one who exemplifies the immature believers spoken of at the

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<sup>19</sup> Although some of Christ's disciples had already believed back in John 1, they may have developed a fuller conviction or persuasion of who He was as a result of witnessing this miracle.

<sup>20</sup> Here, the cleansing of the temple appears at the beginning of Christ's public ministry. In the synoptics, it transpires at the end of Jesus' public ministry. Perhaps these were two separate events that serve as bookends showing how Israel was corrupt when Jesus arrived and never changed regardless of His many attempts He made to lead them into faith.

<sup>21</sup> John will later show how this prediction came to pass (20:1-10).

<sup>22</sup> Because the *pisteuw eis* construction always indicates genuine faith throughout John's Gospel (1:12; 3:16, 18, 36; 4:39; 6:29, 35, 40; 7:38, 39; 20:31) and because those that believed did so on the basis of the signs that Christ was performing (20:30 31), those mentioned in this chapter's final verses (2:23-25) were genuine believers. However, they were not yet ready for deeper intimacy with Christ. Such deeper intimacy is characterized by fuller insight (John 15:14-15). Zane Hodges, "Untrustworthy Believers," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (1978): 139-52.

end of John 2. Because Nicodemus spoke of Christ as a mere teacher and prophet (3:2), he was not yet a believer when Christ interacted with him (3:1-21). However, the rest of the book indicates that Nicodemus became a secret or immature believer (7:48-51) who eventually matured (19:38-39). John is interested in tracing Nicodemus' faith trajectory since he wants his audience to also move from unbelief to belief and then from immature belief to mature belief. John records Jesus' interview with Nicodemus (3:1-15) since it furnishes more information of His identity as the one who regenerates<sup>23</sup> fallen men who believe in Him. John desires his readers to follow the description of the new birth given by Christ to Nicodemus so that they might believe themselves. Thus, John includes Christ's explanation<sup>24</sup> that eternal life comes through faith (3:16-17) and condemnation comes through unbelief (3:18-21).

John records John the Baptist's reaction to the complaint of his disciples regarding Christ's prominence since it gives him more opportunity to reveal Christ's true identity (3:22-36). Although John the Baptist was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament dispensation, he still saw himself merely as the best man who introduced the bride (or the remnant) to Christ the bridegroom. According to John the Baptist, Christ was sealed by the Father, of heavenly origin, had received all things from the Father, spoke God's words, had the Spirit,<sup>25</sup> was loved by the Father, and had been sent into the world by God. John concludes this chapter by reminding his audience of John the Baptist's exhortation that belief leads to life and unbelief leads to condemnation. John hopes that his audience will choose the former.

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<sup>23</sup> For various interpretations of the phrase "born of water and Spirit," see Edwin Blum, "John," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. Roy B. Zuck and John F. Walvoord (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1983), 281.

<sup>24</sup> Because 3:16-21 contain past tenses, some take these verses as John's comments upon Christ's teaching rather than the actual words of Christ. However, the "for" in verse 16 connects these verses to Christ's preceding words and offers an explanation of them. Thus, it is best to take them as emanating from the lips of Christ. J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 127.

<sup>25</sup> Christ received an unmeasured work of the Spirit. Such a work stands in contradistinction to the Spirit being given on a temporary and selective basis in the Old Testament dispensation.

John includes Christ's dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well (4:1-26) in order to show that it is not just prominent individuals such as Nicodemus who need the gift of eternal life, but the immoral and nationally despised need it as well.<sup>26</sup> John's record of Christ's conversation with the Samaritan woman allows Him to reveal more truth about Christ's identity. His heavenly origin is seen in His desire for gender and racial reconciliation,<sup>27</sup> His ability to quench the spiritual thirst of man through the gift of eternal life, His omniscience, His ambition to usher in a new era of worship, and His direct claim to be the Messiah. John notes the woman's development of faith through these revelations. She first calls him "Jew," "sir," and "prophet" before coming to the realization that he was Messiah. Her newfound faith then stimulated her to tell others about Him. John hopes that his own audience will similarly respond in faith as He discloses to them the same information about Christ.

John notes the disciples' concern over dinner so that he can show Christ's spiritual priorities in comparison to their superficial priorities. Revelation of such priorities helps further disclose the heavenly identity of Christ (4:27-38). Christ's priorities involved doing the Father's will and sending out workers to reap a spiritual harvest through the offer of the gift of eternal life. As a result of the Samaritan woman pursuing these priorities many Samaritans believed (4:39-42). Just as the Samaritans responded to the revelation of Christ's heavenly identity, John hopes that his readers will do the same.

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<sup>26</sup> For differences in Christ's approach in His ministry to the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus, see Blum, "John," 284.

<sup>27</sup> The Samaritans can be traced back to the time when Mesopotamians were brought to the land of Israel (2 Kings 17:23-24, 33) by Tigileth Pilessar and Sargon after the Assyrians evicted the Jews in 722 B.C. This new group of inhabitants syncretized worship of the God of the land with their pagan ideas (2 Kings 17:27). Because of their paganism, they were prevented by the Jews from helping rebuild the temple in the postexilic era (Ezra 4:1-3). Some Jews intermarried with the Samaritans creating a race of half-breeds. The Samaritans built their place of worship on Mount Gerizim in competition with the Jerusalem temple. By the time of Christ, the Jews despised the Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56; John 8:48). Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 227. Christ came to erase this racial hostility (Acts 1:8).

The record of Christ's healing of the nobleman's son (4:43-54) allows John to record the second public sign (4:54) that Christ gave. John does so with the hope that his readers will recognize Christ as the Son of God and thus believe on Him in order to receive the gift of eternal life. This miracle showed Christ's power over life and death. Because he healed the son residing in Capernaum from Cana, the miracle evidenced Christ's transcendence over geographical and spatial distances. It also demonstrated His effectual word. On account of this miracle (4:48) the nobleman and his household believe (4:53). John hopes his readers will follow their example. Unfortunately, this pericope also reveals the building unbelief of national Israel (4:44). John will trace these two currents of belief and unbelief throughout the rest of the Book of Signs in hopes that his readers will conform to the former rather than the latter pattern.

The events surrounding the healing of the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem allow John to furnish even more information regarding Christ's heavenly identity (5:1-18).<sup>28</sup> In addition to again exhibiting His omniscience (5:6) and rescuing the man from a pagan superstition, He performed his third public sign that showed His authority over the paralytic's lifeless limbs. Because Christ later indicated that the man's former condition was attributable to sin (5:14), the miracle also showed that He had the capacity to remove the effects of sin. John includes the pharisaical objections to the occurrence of the miracle on the Sabbath<sup>29</sup> in order to give his readers a negative example of unbelief that he does not want them to imitate (5:16-18).

John notes the grumbling of the Pharisees regarding Christ's claim to deity since it also gave him the opportunity of recording Christ's discourse in which He demonstrates His equality with the Father (5:19-30). John is obviously interested in the contents of this discourse since it fits his theme

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<sup>28</sup> For a defense of why verses 3-4 are authentic, see Ibid., 227-28.

<sup>29</sup> While Christ understood the Sabbath as existing for the benefit of man (Mark 2:27), the Pharisees interpreted the Sabbath in a manner consistent with their man-made traditions (Mark 7:13).

of revealing Christ's heavenly identity. John does so with the hope that his readers will believe on Christ in order to receive the gift of eternal life. Thus, John observes how Christ claimed equality with the Father in work, spiritual and physical resurrection, issuing judgment, bestowing honor and life, and transforming any person who believes from death to life. This last point of comparison epitomizes the goal that John has for his readers. John wants his readers to believe so that they will escape the future judgment.

Because Christ's sole testimony about Himself would not be admissible in a Jewish court,<sup>30</sup> John notes the other witnesses that Christ summoned in order to verify His words (5:31-47). These witnesses include Christ (5:31), John (5:32-35), Christ's miracles (5:36), the Father (5:37-38), the Scriptures (5:39-44), and Moses (5:45-47). Thus, John's audience has all the evidence they need to understand that Christ is the Son of God and to believe on Him for eternal life. Sadly, all of this evidence is met with unbelief from the Jews (5:38, 44, 46-47). While the Samaritans had believed in the previous chapter, the Jewish leadership remained in unbelief. John will continue tracing these two currents of belief and unbelief throughout the Book of Signs in hopes that his readers follow the former pattern.

Christ's performance of the fourth sign (6:1-14) took place in Tiberias just prior to the celebration of the Passover. This miracle again showed Christ's creative power. Because He ultimately created the fish and the loaves, it was no problem for Him to multiply these same items. Christ performed the miracle for the purpose of testing the faith of His disciples (6:6). As a result of the miracle, many believed (6:14). John hopes that his own readers will similarly pass the test of faith by reading his inclusion of this miracle in his book. Christ's fifth sign of walking on the water

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<sup>30</sup> See John 5:31; Deut 19:15; *Ketuboth* 2:9. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 228.

near Capernaum supplemented the previous miracle by showing His transcendence over nature's laws (6:15-21).

The crowd's preoccupation with just physical food (6:15, 26) meets with sharp rebuke from Christ in the form of the Bread of Life discourse (6:22-71). John is careful to record the events of this exchange since it gives him greater opportunity to reveal Christ's deity to his audience so that they might believe. Christ tells the crowd (6:22-40) to work for food that endures to eternal life (6:26-27) and Christ grants access to eternal life through simple faith (6:28-29). John hopes that his readers will also experience eternal life through simple faith.

John also notes Christ's self-description as "the Bread of life" (6:35). This statement represents the first of Christ's seven "I am" statements that John will record throughout his letter for the purpose of revealing Christ's identity. John also reveals Christ's identity when he observes that the Father sent Christ into the world and that those the Father gives to the Son He will keep secure and eventually resurrect. Moreover, a person can enter into a relationship with Christ through simple faith (6:39-40). This is John's goal for his audience.

John continues to record Christ's testimony regarding his own divinity (6:41-59). Here, Christ claims resurrection power, the ability to forgive sins, the ability to bestow eternal life on the one who believes, and the supremacy of His spiritual bread in comparison to the mere physical bread offered by Moses. The invitation to eat of Him (6:53-54) represents strong metaphorical language for receiving, understanding, and digesting spiritual truth.<sup>31</sup> This language is the equivalent of believing on Christ for eternal life.<sup>32</sup> Despite the presentation of this evidence, the

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<sup>31</sup> This metaphor appears in the apocryphal *Ecclesiasticus* 24:21.

<sup>32</sup> This statement is paralleled with 6:40, which also speaks of eternal life. "If the results are the same (eternal life), then the actions leading to those results must be also theologically equivalent. Eating and drinking of Christ is another way of saying 'looking to and believing in Christ.'" Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 228-29.

majority of Christ's "disciples"<sup>33</sup> failed to believe (6:64, 66, 71) while the eleven exercised faith (6:69). John includes all of this information with the hope that his audience will react in a manner consistent with the eleven rather than the rest of the "disciples" (6:60-71).

This pattern of unbelief continues as Christ's own brothers reject Him prior to the Feast of Tabernacles<sup>34</sup> (7:1-13).<sup>35</sup> While they wanted Christ to publicly display Himself, He would not do so because His life was lived on a divine rather than a human timetable.<sup>36</sup> John records Christ's teaching at the feast (7:14-24) since it reveals even more of who He is.<sup>37</sup> It shows his great learning without formal rabbinical training, His omniscience, the fact that He was sent from God, that His teaching was from God, and His proper understanding of the Sabbath. The crowd's reaction to Christ's teaching (7:25-36) also confirmed His heavenly identity. It showed His heavenly origin and destination and the fact that His life was lived on a divine timetable. While many reacted to these revelations with belief (7:31), the majority remained in unbelief (7:27, 30). John includes this information with the goal of inducing his audience to follow the former example.

During the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles the priest would fill his pitcher with water from the pool of Siloam and pour it over the altar in order to commemorate God's miraculous provision of water from the rock during the time of Moses. Thus, Christ took this opportunity to explain that He offered something greater than mere physical water. He offered the spiritual water

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<sup>33</sup> Because "disciple" is a non-technical term, it must be defined by its context. Here, it refers to a mere follower of Christ for superficial reasons rather than an actual believer in Him.

<sup>34</sup> The Feast of Tabernacles commemorates God's provision for Israel.

<sup>35</sup> This chapter's chronological markers (7:2, 14, 37) causes it to be divided on the basis of events before the feast, events during the feast, and events on the last day of the feast.

<sup>36</sup> Because the ministry of the Holy Spirit is associated with Pentecost rather than Tabernacles, Christ could not yet fulfill this aspect of His ministry since Tabernacles is a fall feast and Pentecost is a spring feast. Elliot Johnson, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Christ's eventually coming to the feast does not contradict verse 8 since Christ initially came privately without disclosing Himself publicly at the feast (7:10). Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 229.

of the Holy Spirit that would be poured out on the Day of Pentecost (7:37-53).<sup>38</sup> These revelations caused many at the feast to believe (7:41). In fact the arresting officers were so impressed with Christ's powerful words (7:46) that the religious leaders could not arrest Christ at that time. Nicodemus' faith is even apparent on this occasion as he pointed out the bias of the religious leaders. However, the nation at large remained in unbelief (7:44, 52). Once again, John includes both reactions to Christ's claims so that his readers will imitate the positive example of belief rather than the negative example of unbelief.

The story of the woman caught in adultery (8:1-11)<sup>39</sup> involved the religious leaders attempt to catch Christ on the horns of a dilemma. If He demanded the woman's execution then He could be charged with treason against Rome since the Romans had usurped from the nation the power of Capital punishment. However, if He dismissed the charges, then He could be accused of disrespecting the Law of Moses, which demanded execution in such cases (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22-27). However, by finding an alternative way of resolving the situation, His heavenly identity was evidenced since He obviously possessed wisdom from above.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, this story also shows

<sup>38</sup> The ministry of the Spirit that Israel had already experienced in Old Testament times is unrelated to the gift of the Spirit that was soon to be poured out in Acts 2. The reference to the Scriptures in verse 38 may relate to the water of the millennial temple as depicted in Ezekiel 40-48. The point of the analogy is that just as water will come from the temple and bring the Dead Sea back to life in the millennial age, water will also flow from the temple or the body of the believer and bring the spiritually dead to life in the church age. This definition fits well with the Feast of Tabernacles since it typologically prefigures the millennium (Zech 14:16-19). Elliot Johnson, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Many argue that while this event may be historical, it was not originally part of John's Gospel. They base this argument on the omission of the passage from the oldest manuscripts and patristic writings, from its awkwardness in relation to the surrounding context, and its linguistic and stylistic dissimilarity in comparison to the rest of John's Gospel. However, six reasons argue for its authenticity. First, John's Gospel makes frequent use of explanatory editorial comments (6:6, 71; 11:13, 51; 13:11, 28) and this story is no exception to this rule (8:6). Second, John's Gospel makes use of lawsuit imagery and so does this story. Third, the majority (450) of the surviving manuscripts include the story. Fourth, the story is included in some of the earlier manuscripts. Fifth, early church father Jerome thought that the pericope was genuine. Sixth, Augustine offers an explanation as to why the text had been omitted from the oldest manuscripts. Apparently, some feared that their wives would feel that they could sin with impunity if this story were included. Zane Hodges, "The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11): The Text," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (October-December 1979): 318-32.

<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the alternative resolution that Christ offered involved a refusal to execute the woman on account of the fact that her witnesses were malicious. The existence of such malicious witness was a violation of the Mosaic Law

Him to be the unique man full of grace and truth (1:14). He showed grace and truth to the accusers in allowing them to leave and by requiring them not to be malicious witnesses. He showed grace and truth to the woman in not condemning her and by telling her to sin no more.<sup>41</sup> Also, by forgiving her He showed that He was God since He exercised a prerogative belonging only to God. John includes this story to show his readers that just as Christ forgave the adulterous woman, He will also forgive them of their sins as they become persuaded of His identity and believe on Him.

The lighting of lamps was an important ingredient of the Feast of Tabernacles. Against this backdrop, Christ took the opportunity of giving his second “I am” statement as “the light of the world” (8:12). Just as this statement reveals Christ’s identity, so does the discourse that follows (8:12-59). Christ’s heavenly identity is evidenced by the fact that both Christ and the Father testify to it. Although Christ’s own testimony would be sufficient, the Father corroborates it as well (Deut 17:6; 19:15). Moreover, Christ and the Father are one. Thus, knowing one automatically entails knowing the other (8:12-20).

In addition, Christ speaks on the Father’s behalf. Because Christ is from heaven, He is returning to where He came from. Thus, His hearers will not be able to follow Him. In fact, Christ’s listeners will not even understand these truths until after His glorification. Christ shares these truths for the purpose of invoking belief in His listeners (8:24). Many who heard Christ speak on these things came to faith in Him (8:30).<sup>42</sup> John similarly records these truths so that His readers will be brought to faith upon the realization of who Christ is (8:21-30).

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(Deut 19:16-19, 21). This approach allowed Christ to show proper respect for the Law (8:7) and at the same time not commit treason against the Roman government. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 231.

<sup>41</sup> Elliot Johnson, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Many understand the belief of those in 8:30 as spurious since the surrounding description of these individuals seems to suggest that they were unbelievers (8:24, 33-38, 47). However, it seems better to take 8:30-32 as a parenthesis. This insertion represents those who believed as they listened to Christ’s interaction with the Pharisees.

John continues to reveal Christ's identity (8:31-59) as the sinless one (8:46) that can set the sinner free and liberate those under satanic bondage. Those who believe in Him will never see death. Because Christ saw Abraham's day,<sup>43</sup> He is preexistent. Christ is the great "I am" of Exodus 3:14. The Jews had no problem ascertaining the meaning of this statement since they picked up stones to kill Christ after He uttered it. In their minds, he was committing the sin of blasphemy (Lev 24:16). Their reaction also revealed their unbelief at Christ's heavenly claims. John includes this information so that his readers would not react the way the Jews did to Christ's heavenly claims. Rather, John hopes that his readers will believe on Christ for the gift of eternal life.

The healing of the blind man (9:1-41) also reiterates that Christ is the light of the world. Not only has He come into the world to restore spiritual sight (8:12), but in this instance He also restored physical sight (9:5). The healing of the blind man also represents Christ's sixth public sign demonstrating His deity (9:33). John is once again careful to note the mixed reaction to this miracle in order to exhort his audience to follow the positive example of belief rather than the negative example of unbelief. While many believed (9:35, 38), the Pharisees remained in unbelief (9:39-41). John also observes the maturation of the spiritual understanding of the one who was healed (9:10-12, 17, 24-25, 26-27, 30, 31-33, 35-38). The miracle eventually allowed Him to understand who Christ was. Thus, he believed upon Him and received the gift of eternal life. John hopes that his readers will have a similar growth in understanding of Christ's deity and therefore also respond in faith.

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Christ's conversation with the Pharisees continues in verse 33. The law of the nearest antecedent does not work here given the fact that a multiplicity of audiences may be in view. Elliot Johnson, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005.

<sup>43</sup> This statement may refer to a theophanic appearance of Christ in some of the Old Testament narratives involving Abraham (Gen 18).

This miracle naturally transitions into the good shepherd discourse (10:1-42). Christ begins this discourse with three stories revealing His role as the good shepherd. (10:1-21). In the first story (10:1-6), Christ explains how His role as shepherd was exhibited in the story of the man born blind (9:1-41). In the second story (10:7-10), Christ notes how His role as the good shepherd differed from the philosophy and activities of the Pharisees. This second story allows Christ to utter His third “I am” statement as “the door.” In the third story (10:11-22), Christ explains His future act of shepherding in which He will bring both Jews and Gentiles into one flock (10:16) in the coming church age (Eph 2:11-22). This third story allows Christ to utter His fourth statement as “the good shepherd.” People again respond to these revelations either through faith (10:21) or unbelief (10:20). John desires that his audience also respond to the truths of Christ as the good shepherd through the positive example of faith rather than through the negative example of unbelief.

John continues the good shepherd discourse through Christ’s presence in Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication (10:22-42). Here, Christ explains that those who oppose Him are not His sheep because they are not chosen (10:22-26). However, He is able to keep eternally secure those that are chosen (10:27-29). Christ also notes his equality with the Father (10:30).

John once again notes the mixed reactions to these revelations of Christ’s heavenly identity (10:31-42). The charge of equality with the Father was immediately met with unbelief (10:31-39). To the Jew, such a claim was tantamount to blasphemy (10:31-33; Lev 24:16). However, Christ refutes this charge by noting that if the title “gods” was appropriate for those in Jewish history who acted as God’s representatives (Ps 82:6), why is such a title inappropriate for Christ who was God incarnate (10:34-38)? Such steep resistance and unbelief necessitated His miraculous escape (10:39). John contrasts this unbelief with the belief of those in Perea (10:40-42). Once again, by

including these mixed reactions to Christ's heavenly deity, John exhorts his audience to follow the positive example of faith rather than the negative example of unbelief.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-57) represents Christ's seventh sign demonstrating His deity. This miracle was performed for the benefit of God's glory (11:15, 40) by revealing who Christ is. Since Lazarus was in the tomb for four days prior to His resurrection (11:17, 39), there can be little doubt of the miracle's authenticity. This miracle also gave Christ the opportunity of uttering his fifth "I am" statement as "the resurrection and the life" (11:25). John is careful to again note the mixed reactions to the disclosure of these heavenly truths. He observes how Martha believed on Him (11:27) thus causing her to become a recipient of the gift of life (11:26). Many Jews believed as well (11:45). However, John also notes the existence of unbelief from the Jewish leaders that culminated in a conspiracy to kill Christ (11:53-57). Interestingly, the double entendre associated with Caiaphas' conspiratorial statement (11:47-53) demonstrated that God would even use the unbelief of the Jews in order to bring about His sovereign purposes. Once again, this record of mixed reaction is for the benefit of John's audience in hopes that they would follow the path of belief rather than unbelief.

This pattern of belief and unbelief continues in the next chapter as Mary's faith is contrasted with Judas' unbelief (12:1-8). This contrast is also seen through the many Jews who believed and the unbelieving Pharisees who conspired to have Lazarus put to death (12:9-11). This contrast is also detectable in the Pharisees who refused to believe in Christ despite His fulfillment of numerous prophecies during His triumphal entry (Ps 118:25-26; Zech 9:9; Dan 9:25-26) and the masses who were on the verge of becoming persuaded of Christ's identity based upon the sign of Lazarus' raising (12:12-19). John's audience must choose which of these two camps they are going to be in.

Christ's interaction with the crowd during the triumphal entry also allows him to reveal more information regarding His identity (12:20-36). Here, He explains the necessity of His death. It was for this reason that He left heaven and came to earth. Furthermore, the voice from heaven also demonstrates Christ' unique heavenly identity (12:28-30). Because of these manifestations, it was now incumbent upon mankind to believe on Christ for the purpose of receiving the gift of eternal life 12:32, 26). Thus, John explains these things to His audience so that they too may believe.

However, the climax of Israel's unbelief soon transpires (12:37-50) as the nation refuses to believe on Him (Isa 6:10; 53:1) despite the signs that are recorded in the book's first twelve chapters (12:37).<sup>44</sup> Neither would the numerous identifications of Christ's heavenly identity (12:45, 48, 50) persuade the unbelieving nation. However, a small remnant did believe on Christ (12:42). Once again, these mixed reactions to Christ's heavenly identity are important to John's purpose in writing. His own audience should not follow the negative unbelieving example of the nation but rather should follow the positive believing example of the remnant and thus receive the gift of life (12:47).

Now that national Israel has formally rejected Christ by failing to believe in Him at the triumphal entry (12:37), John records a new phase in Christ's ministry of preparing the disciples for their foundational roles in the coming mystery age or church age (Eph 2:20). This section of Christ's ministry is known as the Upper Room Discourse (13–17). Here, Christ no longer performs public miracles for the benefit of the nation but rather engages in private ministry for the benefit of the disciples. Although the disciples had already received the gift of life through faith, here Christ teaches them how to live out their new life as they continue to believe in Him. Thus, this section of John's Gospel represents in capsule form the message of the epistles. It teaches the disciples of their

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<sup>44</sup> This verse summarizes the “Book of Signs” and represents the turning point in John’s Gospel.

new responsibilities and resources that they will have as a consequence of Christ's coming death, Resurrection, Ascension, and advent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Christ first taught the disciples how to live out the gift of life by washing their feet (13:1-17). Knowing that His hour had come and that the Father had placed all things under His authority (13:1-3), Christ washed the feet of the disciples (13:4-11) and then indicated that this action was an example for them to follow (13:12-17).<sup>45</sup> Foot washing taught the disciples two important truths regarding how to live out the gift of life. First, it taught them the importance of serving one another. Thus, greatness is determined by service to one another rather than lording authority over each other. Second, it taught them the importance of regular cleansing in order to experience practical fellowship with God.<sup>46</sup>

Christ's prediction of His betrayer's identity (13:18-30)<sup>47</sup> taught the disciples to continue to believe in Christ. Because only God knows the end from the beginning (13:19; 14:29), such a prediction gave them further persuasion to continue to believe. The disciples could also live out the gift of life by practicing Christ's new commandment of loving one another (13:31-35).<sup>48</sup> In fact, such love would testify of the reality of Christ to the unsaved throughout the mystery age. Christ predicted Peter's threefold denial (13:36-38) to teach the disciples that they could not live out the gift of life through their own human resources. They had to draw upon God's resources by

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<sup>45</sup> The references to "example" and "as" in 13:15 seem to indicate that Christ was speaking figuratively of service rather than mandating literal foot washing. Nowhere in Acts or the epistles are foot washing services required of the local church.

<sup>46</sup> This interpretation of John 13:10 understands "bathed" *louo* as regeneration (Titus 3:5) and "washed" *nipto* as regular cleansing of sins for the restoration of practical fellowship (1 John 1:9). Thus, repeated cleanings subsequent to regeneration are necessary for the maintenance of practical fellowship.

<sup>47</sup> This pericope can be broken down as follows: Christ's prediction (13:18-20), Christ's emotion (13:21), the disciples' questions (13:22-25), Christ's answers (13:26-29), and Judas' exit (13:30).

<sup>48</sup> In what sense was this commandment new? This commandment is new in terms of its source (from the lips of Christ), its manner ("as I have loved you" rather than love others as you love yourself), and its object (love one another).

continuing to believe in Him. This prediction also presented another short-term prophecy to give the disciples further incentive to continue to believe in Christ.

Christ's announcement of His coming departure troubled the disciples (13:36). Thus, Christ equips them with various promises that will sustain them and give them hope and comfort throughout the mystery age in His absence (14:1-31).<sup>49</sup> Such promises of comfort include the promise that He will return and take them to heaven (14:1-6),<sup>50</sup> the revelation of Christ as the intermediary to the Father (14:7-11), the power of prayer (14:12-15), the promise of the coming Spirit (14:16-26), and the promise of peace (14:27-31). As the disciples trust in these promises they will be comforted in Christ's absence and thus learn to live out the gift of life. Further incentive for continuing faith is given through the book's sixth "I am" statement (14:6), which reveals even more of Christ's heavenly identity.

Next Christ explains that as the disciples maintain fellowship with God<sup>51</sup> they will bear fruit<sup>52</sup> throughout the mystery age. Such fruit bearing through intimacy with Christ will allow them to live out the gift of life (15:1-5). Additional incentive for continuing intimacy is given through the book's seventh "I am" statement (15:1). Those disciples that do not bear fruit will forfeit positions of service, become the object of divine discipline, and suffer loss at the Bema Seat judgment (15:6-8).<sup>53</sup> Abiding in God's love, love for the brethren, obedience, joy, answered prayer, friendship with

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<sup>49</sup> This section revolves around Christ's answers to various questions from Peter (13:36), Thomas (14:5), Philip (14:9), and Judas (14:22).

<sup>50</sup> There are eight exact chronological parallels between the words of John 14:1-14 and those of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. J.B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1971), 312.

<sup>51</sup> Daily fellowship is maintained through constant cleansing and pruning. Thus, while fruit bearing is desirable for the believer, it is not inevitable.

<sup>52</sup> It is likely that this lesson was initiated as Christ saw a vineyard as He and the disciples traveled from the Upper Room to Gethsemane.

<sup>53</sup> The repetition of the phrase "in me," the pruning of the branch so that it will bear even more fruit (15:2), and the reference to the spiritual cleanliness of Christ's audience (15:3) all argue that Christ had believers in mind when he uttered these words. Thus, the fire (15:6) may refer either to divine discipline (1 Cor 5:5, 11:30-32) or an unfavorable ruling at the Bema Seat judgment (1 Cor 3:10-15).

Christ, and greater spiritual insight are all examples of the kinds of fruit that Christ desires for His disciples to bear (15:9-17).

Christ goes on to explain that His disciples can live out the gift of life when they have the right perspective toward the opposition they will automatically face from the world system (15:18-25). To this end, Christ gives seven reasons why the world will naturally hate His disciples. These reasons include the fact that the world hated Christ first (15:18), that His disciples do not belong to the world (15:19), that the world hated Christ so Christ's servants will not fair any better (15:20), that the world is ignorant of the Father (15:21), that the world is guilty of sin (15:22), that the world hated both Christ and the Father (15:23-24), and that the world's hatred for Christ represents a fulfillment of Scripture (15:25; Pss 35:19; 69:4).

Part of living out the gift of life involves cooperating with the agenda of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Christ explains to the disciples the three realms of the Spirit's ministry (15:26-16:15). First, Christ explains that the Spirit's ministry to the disciples (15:26–16:7). Because the Spirit will bear witness of Christ and bring to remembrance the things Christ spoke to the disciples, it is advantageous that Christ is going to depart so that the Spirit can come in His place. Second, Christ explains the ministry of conviction that the Spirit will have in the world (16:8-11).<sup>54</sup> Third, Christ explains the ministry of inspiration that the Spirit will have in allowing the disciples to record Scriptural truth (16:12-15).

Christ next deals with how the disciple's can live out the gift of life as they learn how to properly handle adversity (16:16-33). First, Christ gives them insight regarding how to handle the immediate trial they will face regarding His impending crucifixion. After they had become unsettled over the announcement of His imminent departure (16:16-18), He comforts them by informing

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<sup>54</sup> The Spirit will convict the world of not believing in Christ, the reality of Christ's righteousness, and the reality of future judgment as evidenced by the fact that Satan has been defeated (although his punishment has not yet been imposed).

them that their sorrow will be turned to joy after He resurrests (16:19-22). Furthermore, His post-resurrection ministry and Ascension will replace their partial understanding with full understanding and will also enhance the effectiveness of their prayers (16:23-28). Second, Christ gives them insight regarding their future trials that they will experience in the church age. He reminds them that they will ultimately overcome the world system since He Himself has overcome it (16:29-33).

Finally, Christ explains that His disciples will live out the gift of life when their experience matches His expectations for them as expressed in His high priestly prayer (17:1-26). This prayer has three parts. First Christ prays for Himself (17:1-5). He prays for His return to His preincarnate glory now that His hour has come. Second, Christ prays for His disciples (17:6-19). His specific requests for them include their preservation (17:11) in the midst of their mission in the world (17:15) as well as their sanctification (17:17) and joy (17:13). Third, Christ prays for all believers throughout the church age (17:20-26). Specifically, Christ prays for their unity (17:22) and ongoing fellowship with Him (17:24).

In the book's final section known as the "epilogue" (18-21), John's uses the passion of Christ to assemble even more information regarding Christ's heavenly identity. Here, John emphasizes more of Christ's signs, Christ's identity, and His character so that His readers will understand who He is and believe on Him in order to receive the gift of life. This information also plays a role in helping those who have already believed to continue to believe so that they can live out the gift of life by pressing onward in their progressive sanctification.

Christ's arrest (18:1-11) demonstrates His heavenly identity by highlighting His omniscience (18:4), power (18:6), ability to preserve His own (18:9; 17:12), and capacity to give predictive prophecy (18:2; 13:18-30). Christ's trial before Annas (18:12-23) also reveals His identity since it demonstrated His divine character in the midst of unfair treatment (18:22-23; 8:46).

The events surrounding Christ's trial before Caiaphas (18:24-27) also represents another fulfillment of Christ's prophetic word (13:35-38). Because only God knows the end from the beginning, this fulfilled prophecy also serves to disclose Christ's deity.

Christ's first trial before Pilate (18:28-38a) also contributes to a growing understanding of His heavenly deity. It gives Christ the opportunity of declaring to Pilate that He was the king of a kingdom and yet His kingdom was not of this world (18:36-37). Christ's second trial before Pilate (18:38b–19:16) also demonstrated His heavenly identity by revealing His innocence (18:38b-40), His identity as the Son of God (19:7), and His understanding of the delegation of divine authority (19:11). Because Christ's crucifixion (19:17-37) fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies (Ps 22:18; John 19:24; Exod 12:46; Ps 34:20; John 19:36; Zech 12:10; John 19:37), this event also contributes more proof of Christ's heavenly identity. Because the fulfillment of the prophecies found in John 19:36 and 37 are only mentioned in John's Gospel, the apostle seems to make a special point of using the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in Christ's crucifixion as a further means of conveying His deity.

John is careful to observe the role that Nicodemus played (19:39) in the burial of Christ (19:38-42). While Nicodemus began His spiritual journey as an unbeliever (3:2), he eventually believed as a result of becoming persuaded as to whom Christ was. Consequently, he developed into a maturing disciple of Christ (7:50-52; 19:39). Based on the information that he has recorded in his book, John hopes that His readers will imitate the example of Nicodemus. He wants them also to become convinced of who Christ is and thus believe on Him for the gift of life. He hopes they will also continue to believe on Him and thus live out the gift of life as they make progress in the area of their practical sanctification.

John includes the evidence of the empty tomb (20:1-10) since Christ's resurrection is the ultimate sign testifying to His heavenly identity (2:19-22). He also notes the details regarding the position of the linens since their arrangement indicates that Christ's body had passed directly through them (20:6-7). John also mentions Christ's resurrection appearances to both Mary (20:11-18) and the ten (20:19-23) since they also testify to the reality of the resurrection, which is the ultimate sign of Christ's heavenly identity. Christ's exhortation to doubting Thomas (20:24-31) summarizes the message of the book when He says, "blessed are they who did not see, and yet believe" (20:29). This statement represents John's goal for His audience and explains why he has labored to selectively incorporate certain signs from Christ's ministry that demonstrate His deity (20:31). John wants his readers to believe based upon the scriptural testimony even though they were not eyewitnesses to the recorded events. However, John wants his audience to also understand that not all the signs that Christ performed are recorded in his Gospel (20:30). In other words, if the signs that John has recorded are somehow inadequate to convey who Christ is, there are many other unrecorded signs evidencing Christ's deity as well.

More signs testifying to Christ's deity are given in the following chapter. First, there is the sign involving the miraculous catch of fish. This sign was of such magnitude that many commentators refer to it as an eighth sign (21:1-14). Second, there is the sign relating to Christ's prediction of Peter's death (21:18-23). Because Peter's martyrdom had already been an established fact for over two decades before the composition of John's Gospel, John's readers could verify the miraculous nature of Christ's words by noting how they had been fulfilled in history. Third, there were the plethora of other signs that Jesus performed that are not recorded in John's book (21:24-25). All of the signs presented in this chapter clearly show that Christ is deity.

John concludes his Gospel with Christ's exhortation to Peter (21:15-17). Christ's question to Peter related to whether he loved fishing more than Him. John ends his book with this question because he wants his audience to ask themselves the same question. What do they love more than the Lord that is keeping them from Him? Instead of embracing these other things, the content of John's book should convince his readers that Christ is God. Consequently, they should believe on Him for eternal life. Even as believers they should continue to believe on Him and thus live out the gift of life by maturing in the realm of progressive sanctification (20:30-31).

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<sup>55</sup> Bernard is an example of a critical commentary. Brown, Schnackenburg, Beasley-Murray, Bruce, Carson, Guthrie, Godet, Lightfoot, Westcott, Stott, Laney, Bloomberg, and Morris represent examples of exegetical commentaries. Hendriksen, Morgan, Kent, and Tenney are examples of expositional commentaries. Wiersbe is an example of a devotional commentary.

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