

Brief Commentary on the Gospel of John

by Emilio G. Chávez

The Author of the Fourth Gospel

This is a neutral way to refer to what we commonly call the “Gospel of John,” following ancient *tradition* that attributes this gospel, the three “Johannine Letters” and Revelation to one individual, John, the Beloved Disciple, the son of Zebedee and brother of James. The author of the Fourth Gospel has strictly abstained from revealing his name beyond the description “Beloved Disciple,” and this has been respected by redactors, etc. Only in John 21:2 are “Zebedee’s [sons]” mentioned; elsewhere in the gospel “John” is “the Baptist,” though this evangelist does not call him that. In John 21:2, there are also two other unnamed disciples, and so we are still left (deliberately) in the dark as to who the Beloved Disciple is, mentioned in 21:7, 20-24 (in v. 24 of this last chapter/epilogue, this gospel is attributed to him). The author of Rev is indeed called John (1:1, 4), but is not called the Beloved Disciple. He is a fellow servant (19:10) and at most a prophet, 22:9. The author of 2-3 John is the “Elder” (“presbyter”); that of 1 John is unidentified. There is great affinity among the Letters, many things in common between the Letters and the Gospel, and some common themes between all these and Rev (the Lamb; water of life; blood, etc.). Other themes are common to the Gospel and Rev but not the Letters. For convenience, we will refer to the Fourth Gospel as “John.”

Given the highly symbolic nature of this gospel, it is clear that the Beloved Disciple is a model for followers of Jesus. He is on intimate terms with Jesus, 13:23, stands by Jesus crucified along with Jesus’ Mother and becomes her son, too, 19:25-27, can recognize Jesus more easily than even Peter, 21:7, and surpasses Peter in getting to Jesus’ tomb and coming to believe, 20:8. We have a pairing of Peter and the Beloved Disciple, who are played off one against the other, at least from 13:23, when the Beloved Disciple makes his first appearance. The “other disciple” in 18:15-16 is probably the same as the “other disciple” identified as the “one Jesus loved” in 20:2. He has more clout with the high priest and goes in with Jesus while Peter stays out, 18:15-16. Peter denies *being a disciple* in 18:17, 25 and 27. But Peter’s preeminence is taken

up in John at some point (by the redactor?), and this has an effect on his status vis-à-vis the Beloved Disciple, who defers to Peter at the tomb (20:5-6) and who is clearly a second banana in the epilogue, where the thrice renegade Peter is rehabilitated, 21:20-23.

Character of John

It would appear that John knows the synoptics or at least Mark, or at the very least, traditions about Jesus that found their way into one or more of the synoptics. There is apparently an independent source stemming from one or more eye-witnesses. This results in plausibly historical details lacking in the synoptics. But John is a work in its own class. Apparently well aware of other renditions of Jesus' life, teaching and significance, he wishes to present a more profound, insightful (contemplative) version of what really has taken place with Jesus. This theological reflection is akin to Paul's writings in that it is focused on the risen Lord and what he really represents, abstracting from more earthly and ultimately secondary details and narrations about what Jesus did and was (e.g., son of David, born in Bethlehem [see 7:42], baptized by John, etc.). The result is a streamlined, jet-propelled journey into outer space, where with a supra-atmospheric view, the reader can contemplate and understand (have *intelligence* of, that is, insight into) the whole mystery of God as Jesus has unfolded it for us (1:18).

The Prologue

As R.E. Brown states, the Prologue is a summary of the whole gospel of John. It begins with the same words as Genesis begins: Jesus the Word of God causes a new birth of humanity to come into being. Jesus is the Word made human ("flesh"). He was with God in the beginning and was God.¹ In Genesis, God creates through his word (Sir 42:15; Wis 9:1). In the background is the personification of wisdom, who assists God in creation, Prov 8:22-31. This is "Lady Wisdom," who delights in making her dwelling with human beings. In the same way, but surpassingly, Jesus is the Word who is divine

¹ As in Deut, where the otherness of God causes the pious writers to refer instead to his Name (Deut 26:2; Jer 7:12; the Lord's Prayer, "hallowed be thy Name"), in Jesus' day the Aramaic translations (targums) refer to God as Word (*Memra*), or God is said to act through his Word. See Daniel Boyarin, "The Gospel of the *Memra*: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John," *Harvard Theological Review* 94:3 (2001), 243-284.

life and light (Ps 119:105; John 1:4; 8:12), which cannot be overcome by evil darkness (Gen 1:2-3). But not all, not even “his own,” accepted this divine Word who came to us (cf. Prov 1:20-28; 9:1-6; Matt 22:1-10). However, those who did accept the Word are reborn as children of God, and behold the glorious presence of God-dwelling-with us (Exod 40:34; Ezek 37:26-28; “Emmanuel,” as in Matt 1:23). For it is Jesus the Word made flesh who manifests the invisible God (John 1:18; 6:46; 17:6), who embodies God’s essence (“grace and truth” = *hesed* and *’emet* = “love and faithfulness”). This is in contrast to the Law given by Moses. This Law testifies to Jesus (John 1:45), though “the Jews” do not recognize this (John 5:39, 46; 12:41); rather, instead of keeping the Law (John 7:19), the Law in their hands becomes deadly (John 15:25; 18:31; 19:7, 16).

John (the “Baptist”)

In the synoptics, the Baptist has the role of Elijah (Matt 17:10-13), the one sent before the terrible Day of YHWH (Mal 3:23-24). In John, he is the first witness to Jesus (Brown, p. 24). He is the anonymous “voice crying out in the wilderness” of Isa 40:3. This is all John has retained of the Baptist traditions, and it is enough. Isa 40 is the beginning of the work of the anonymous exilic prophet who announces the new exodus from captivity in Babylon to the Promised Land, led by YHWH.² The Baptist categorically denies any special title (such as Elijah or the Prophet) that might compete with Jesus (John 3:30); he simply baptizes with water (not with the Spirit, like Jesus). He does not baptize Jesus, but recognizes him to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Isa 53:7, 12; John 12:38), the one on whom the Spirit remains (Isa 61:1), and the Son (or Chosen One, Isa 42:1; cf. Mark 1:11) of God (John 1:34).

The First Disciples

Due to the Baptist’s testimony, two of his disciples begin to follow Jesus; they believe they have found the Messiah, the one written about by Moses and the Prophets

² This desert scenario has links with Qumran, where in the “Community Rule” (1QS 8:13-14) the Qumranites see themselves as separating from evildoers and going into the desert to prepare the way for the Lord, citing Isa 40:3; the Baptist has been connected with this group (the “Essenes”) by many scholars.

(i.e., the Hebrew Bible). The encounter with Jesus leads Nathaniel to confess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and the King of Israel. Jesus in turn promises that they will experience yet greater things: the full divine revelation which is the Son of man's prerogative (John 4:25-26; 14:26; 15:15; 16:30; 21:17).³

The First Sign at Cana

John has chosen to set Jesus' first sign "on the third day" (resurrection reference) at a wedding. The image of marriage is an important one in the OT to depict God's relation with his people Israel (Hos 2:4-25; Isa 50:1; 62:1-5). Jesus is the bridegroom in John 3:29; cf. Rev 19:7; 21:9; Matt 9:15; 22:2; 25:1). It is thus appropriate to set the eschatological events at a wedding banquet (Isa 25:6-9, where delicious wine is promised in this "apocalypse of Isaiah"). An important personage is "the mother of Jesus," never called by personal name in John. She sets off the eschatological events which will culminate in Jesus' hour (the passion, John 16:21, crucifixion, 12:23-33, resurrection and glorification, 12:41; 17:1, 5, 24) of salvation (5:25) and returning to the Father whence he came (13:1). Jesus' mother pushes Jesus to manifest his glory (2:11) even though his "hour" had not yet come, 2:4. She will next be at the foot of the cross with the Beloved Disciple when Jesus' hour has finally arrived, and she is there given the role of mother to this disciple and "his own," 19:27.⁴ These may well be those who received the Word and are reborn as children of God (1:12-13), who have life (3:15, etc.) and are thus "living." Jesus' mother is thus likened to Eve, a name that comes from the Hebrew verb "to live" and is said to mean "mother of all the living" in Gen 3:20.

Jesus causes the abundant water contained in the Jewish purification jars to become excellent wine. The good wine has been saved for last. This is a sign of the eschatological, messianic age (Gen 49:10-12; Amos 9:13; cf. Rev 7:14).

The Temple Act

³ In the background of the "angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51) is Gen 28:12; 32:2 (forming an inclusio), an important text regarding God's protective presence (28:15) with Jacob/Israel (he feels he is in God's house and the gate of heaven, 28:17), and Dan 7:9-14, the vision of God's throne and the eschatological taking away of dominion from the beasts in order to give the eternal kingdom to the Son of man (restoring God's original intention in creation, Gen 1:28).

We avoid assuming it is a “cleansing.” Behind John’s narrative stands either a historical incident of Jesus’ or some version of the synoptic account. The apparent protest against commerce in the Temple is buttressed by the allusion to Zech 14:21 in John 2:16. But this must be understood eschatologically: Zech 14 is from late in the postexilic period and speaks of the Day of YHWH, when YHWH will stand on the Mount of Olives and with his armies defeat the nations, and will reign as the only King. Then all the nations will come to Jerusalem to worship him as King, and celebrate Succoth, the feast of Booths. There will be living waters in Jerusalem and everything will be holy, and there will be no merchant in YHWH’S house “on that day.”⁵ Against this backdrop, Jesus refers to the destruction of the Temple (cf. Mark 13:2; 14:58), but in Johannine fashion, there is deliberate confusion between the Herodian Temple and Jesus the (new) Temple of God (Rev 21:22), whom “the Jews” will destroy, but which Jesus will “raise up in three days,” cf. John 10:17-18.

The Conversation with Nicodemus

John reflects the existence of various levels of acceptance of Jesus (i.e., of Christology) among various kinds of Jews (see R.E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*). Nicodemus is a Pharisee and a Jewish leader. He is very cautious and visits Jesus “by night,” a negative thing for John (9:4; 11:10; 13:30). However, he will question the Sanhedrin’s legal procedure in 7:50 and will attend to Jesus’ burial in 19:39.

Nicodemus recognizes through Jesus’ signs that Jesus has been sent by God. This gives place to a conversation soon to become a monologue wherein Nicodemus is shown to not really understand heavenly things, things concerning the Kingdom of God and rebirth through water and Spirit. Nicodemus functions at an earthly level (cf. 3:31-32). The difference is like that between an earthly interpretation of Scripture and a heavenly one, 6:32-33, 58, or a spiritual one and a fleshly, (merely) human one, 6:63-

⁴ “His own [things, house, sheep, etc.],” *ta ídia*; also used in 1:11; 10:3, 4, 12; 16:32; cf. 21:15-17.

⁵ Succoth and the eschatologically-expected living waters of Zech 14 will be important in John 7 (v. 37-38).

66.⁶ The Jews who remain on the human level eventually abandon Jesus, or he abandons them (cf. 6:15).

Nicodemus is not doing well, as far as John is concerned. He doesn't understand and has difficulty believing the things of heaven, especially that "the Son of man must be lifted up." He is at serious risk of being one of those who prefer the darkness, 3:19 (that is, not becoming a child of God, 1:11-12), and of not believing in Jesus and thus being already judged, 3:18-21.

The Conversation with the Samaritan Woman

In contrast to the Pharisee Nicodemus, the Samaritans believe in Jesus. Jesus has gone into their territory (avoided by pious Jews, cf. Luke 9:52-56) and begun a conversation with one of their women. The talk turns to the subject of "living water," a phrase originally referring to moving water such as from springs (Gen 26:19; Lev 14:6) necessary for some purifications (Num 19:17) which became a symbol of God himself (Jer 2:13; 17:13) and of the eschatological age (Ezek 47; Zech 14:8).⁷ In John it is associated with the Spirit and spiritual rebirth, 3:5; 4:14; 7:38; Rev 7:17; 22:1, 17). Wisdom is in the background, as it was in the Prologue. Water is a symbol of wisdom, Sir 15:3, along with wine, Prov 9:4-6. Once tasted, it cannot be relinquished, Sir 24:19-21; cf. John 4:13-14; Rev 7:16-17. It is God and Jesus himself, cf. John 6:35; Rev 22:1.

Jesus tells the woman to call her husband. The pagan deity dear to the north of Israel (capital: Samaria), Ba'al, means "husband" (Hos 2:18-19). This woman has had at least five (cf. 2 Kgs 17:30-31). She now recognizes Jesus to be a prophet.⁸ Jesus announces that in the time he is inaugurating (the hour that is coming, 4:23), God will be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth (probably a hendiadys, two things standing for a whole; see 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6), and not in the Temple on Mount Zion or on Mount Gerizim. Notice that the theme of we know/you don't know is present here, too (John 4:22; see 3:11); here, the Jews, from whom salvation comes, are contrasted to the

⁶ Cf. 6:26. The Jews who believe in Jesus in 8:31 become murderous in 8:40.

⁷ In John 7, we will make reference to Succoth/water themes; aside from Zech 14:8, see Isa 12:3; 44:3.

⁸ As in 9:17; Jesus will be explicitly recognized as *the* eschatological prophet of Deut 18:15 in John 6:14; 7:40; M-É. Boismard, *Moses or Jesus?* (1993), 6-9, tries to defend this meaning and the presence of the article ("the") in 7:52 also. The Baptist denied being this prophet in 1:21, 25.

Samaritans. The woman now states her belief that the Messiah will explain everything when he comes; Jesus tells her he is that Messiah.⁹ The woman runs off to tell her people, many of whom believe in Jesus, who stays with them.¹⁰

Conclusion of this Section of John

The section John 2-4 ends with an *inclusio* linking the two Cana miracles (2:1; 4:46, the healing of the royal official's son, Jesus' second sign, taking place in Galilee like the first). He will next be in Jerusalem. Keep in mind the replacement of Jewish institutions/feasts theme.

The Healing of the Man who was Sick for 38 Years

Jesus is in Jerusalem, possibly during Pentecost, which became the Jewish feast celebrating the renewal of the Sinai covenant (see Brown, pp. 39-40). He encounters a man who had been lying down for 38 years by the pool called Bethzathá (or something like this). Jesus asks him if he *wants* to be healed, to which the man gives a rather lame response (John 5:7). Jesus then tells him to get up, and the man gets up and walks.

John here apparently shows signs of eyewitness information. Jesus probably healed several or many paralytics. But notice links with Mark 2:1-12. The paralytic in Mark is carried by others who have faith, but is not explicitly said to have faith himself (Mark 2:5). His malady is linked with sin and its forgiveness. Jesus both heals and forgives his sins, and thereby arouses the scribes' criticism that he is blaspheming. He also tells the paralytic to get up, take his mat and go (Mark 2:11), which he does, instantly. Cf. John 5:8-9.

In John 5:14, Jesus' remarks to the healed paralytic connect his malady to sin. This healing on a Sabbath (cf. Mark 3:1-6, which results in the plot to kill Jesus), and Jesus' statements that he works (is responsible for maintaining the whole cosmos, cf.

⁹ The Samaritans expected the Taheb, the "Restorer," a rather unclear figure modelled on the eschatological prophet of Deut 18:15. Boismard, using later Samaritans traditions, tries to link him with a kingly Joseph (a figure prominent for the northern kingdom of Israel), and points to Jesus being called "son of Joseph" and "king of Israel" in John 1:45, 49.

¹⁰ Cf. Acts 1:8; 8:5, 14; 9:31; 15:3.

Col 1:17) like his own Father, result in the Jews seeking to kill him (John 5:18), much like in Mark 2-3.

We may here see in the background Israel's time of wasting in the desert, said to be 38 years in Deut 2:14. Had Israel had faith and obeyed God's command to take the Promised Land, the time of travel would have been merely 11 days! See Deut 1:2, 19-33, 45; 2:1-3; 9:23-24. In parallel fashion, this paralytic could have asked for help and not waited a whole generation to be healed!

Realized and Future Eschatology

In John 5:19-30, the themes of (eternal) life and judgment are presented as if they are both a present and a future reality, and as coming from both the Father and the Son (each is equally to be honored, 5:23). The Son has been *sent* by the Father,¹¹ who has entrusted the Son with the authority (*exousía*) to judge, 5:22, 27, "because he is the Son of man." The Son of man's *exousía* is prominent in LXX Dan 7:14 (where it is mentioned three times), linked to an eternal kingdom.¹² Those who now believe in the Son have entered into (eternal) life and need not fear the judgment, 5:24. "Eternal life" consists in knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent, 17:2-3; 1 John 5:11-13, 20. It is a present reality, but it also has a future aspect; this tension is felt in John 5:25; 6:40. The future aspect is stressed (by the redactor?) in 5:28-29, leaving the final resurrection and judgment for the very End, as in Dan 12:1-4, 13.

Witnesses to Jesus

John (the Baptist) witnessed to Jesus, but a greater testimony are the works which the Father has given him to do; thus the Father himself testifies that he has sent Jesus, John 5:36-37. Another witness is the Scriptures and Moses who wrote in them about Jesus, 5:39, 45-47. But Jesus' unspecified addressees here (probably the "Jews")

¹¹ This is expressed in the theology of the Trinity by the concept of "mission" (from the Latin "to send").

¹² See my handout of 1 Enoch 62; cf. Matt 25:31-46. Again, notice the possible links to Mark 2:1-12.

do not believe this, that is, they do not properly read (examine or understand, 5:39) the Scriptures.¹³

The Feeding of the Multitude

Jesus is attributed in all four gospels with a miraculous feeding of a multitude. In John, the eucharistic overtones are prominent, as Brown states in p. 43. Unlike in the synoptics, Jesus distributes the blessed bread himself, John 6:11.¹⁴ This great sign leads the people to believe that Jesus is the eschatological prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15) who was expected, the End Time Leader,¹⁵ and so they want to make him king. Jesus flees this messianic (kingly) attempt (cf. the temptations in Matt 4:3-4, 8-9 and Luke 4:3-7).

Jesus Walks on the Sea¹⁶

Whether or not this episode is a resurrection appearance of Jesus retrojected into his earthly life, the passage here in John is meant to manifest Jesus' divinity. When Jesus says, literally, "I am, fear not" (John 6:20), he is echoing YHWH'S name in such divine protection passages as Gen 15:1; 26:24 and in monotheistic passages such as Deut 32:39; Isa 43:10; 45:18 (LXX), as well as in the revelation to Moses in Exod 3:14.¹⁷ Jesus will repeat this divine self-appellation often in John (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:6). We should consider this passage in its context as preparation for Jesus' extraordinary words to follow.

¹³ This ignorance of the Scriptures is an important theme in the New Testament: Mark 12:24; Luke 24:25; Acts 3:17-18; 2 Cor 3:14-15.

¹⁴ Also unlike the synoptics, Jesus will carry the cross himself, John 19:17.

¹⁵ Boismard emphasizes the synonymous parallelism between the (eschatological) Prophet and the Messiah in such passages as John 6:14-15; 7:40-41; cf. 9:17, 22.

¹⁶ I think it is important to refer here to the *sea* and not merely to "water." The Greek word is *thálassa*, and it is used in the LXX for the seas, Gen 1:10, 22, 26, etc.; for the "Red Sea," Exod 10:19; in the Psalms, etc. Also in Dan 7:2-3. The sea is a place of chaos, evil and danger. Only God can rescue from the raging waters, Ps 124:1-5. In Mark 4:39, Jesus calms the sea (see Mark 5:1) by using exorcism commands. Cf. Ps 104:6-7.

Jesus is the Bread of Life

Jesus declares that those who seek him do so not even because of the signs he has done, but because they are interested in full stomachs, John 6:26.¹⁸ The stage is set for the contrast between non-belief, murmuring and earthly appetite (characteristic of the Israelites in the exodus desert), on the one hand, and faith and obedience of God which leads to true life, on the other.¹⁹ The Israelites did not *believe/trust* God (Deut 1:31-32) and murmured against him, Deut 1:26-27; they wanted to eat and distrusted God's ability to feed them, Exod 16:2-4; Num 11:4-6; Ps 78:17-18; 106:9-15. In spite of God's wonders, the Israelites did not believe, Ps 78:32. Now the crowd in John 6:30-31 ironically states that their fathers had received the sign of the manna, and want Jesus to give them a sign in order to believe in him, in fact quoting Ps 78!²⁰ In line with the Deuteronomic tradition that one lives by the Word of God, Jesus states that he is the true bread = food of God which has come down from heaven to truly nourish mankind = give it life.²¹ Notice the links between this "bread of life" (John 6:35) and the "living water" in 4:10-14; we are in the realm of the Spirit, of rebirth and eternal life. This is connected to faith (1:12) and baptism (3:5-6), and to the eucharist (notice the link between 6:39 and 6:12);²² see the references to eternal life and/or last-day resurrection in 6:39-40, 44, 47, 50-51, 53-54, 57-58, 63, 68.

Jesus, then, is God's Word (which comes out of God's mouth) and that truly life-giving bread which the Father provides from heaven. One must believe this: believe that the Father has sent Jesus (because of the signs the Father has given Jesus to do, 5:36), in order to have (eternal) life, 6:40, 47. On the sapiential (= wisdom teaching; see Brown p. 45) level, the believer lives by faith in Jesus, which is also obedience to

¹⁷ In fact, "I am," in Hebrew *'ehyeh*, was one form of God's personal name (Hos 1:9), similar to *yahweh*.

¹⁸ Signs are somewhat ambivalent in John (see 2:18, 23-24; 3:2; 4:48; 6:2; 12:37).

¹⁹ In the background is the late Deuteronomic passage Deut 8:1-6, where Israel's time in the desert is considered to be a time of testing, divine correction and education, so that Israel may know that "man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by what comes out of God's mouth," quoted by Jesus in the temptations in Matt and Luke.

²⁰ "Bread from heaven he gave them to eat," in John 6:31. Notice also the contrast faith/works in John 6:28-29. Cf. 1 Thess 1:3 ("the work of faith"); Rom 4:5.

²¹ Cf. Isa 55:10-11.

²² According to one interpretation of 1 Cor 11:29; 12:27, we are in some way the eucharistic body of Christ; cf. *Didache* 9:3 regarding the eucharist: "Just as this broken bread was scattered upon the

God the Father, who has sealed Jesus (6:27).²³ It is the same as living by faith in/obedience to God.²⁴ On the sacramental/eucharistic level, Jesus is referring to himself as he who gave his life for the world, 6:51. The bread (sapiential metaphor) which gives life here becomes Jesus' own life = flesh and blood, true nourishment (6:55) which allows the one who eats and drinks it to be one with Jesus and to live through him (6:56-57). He is talking about his risen, glorified body, not his human, earthly flesh (which would be cannibalism, as even some of his disciples understood his words, 6:60-63).

In John 19:31-37, we find linked the Preparation for the Passover, when the Passover lambs were slaughtered (Jesus has been slain along with them and replaces them), the Passover itself (“not a bone of it shall be broken,” citing the institution of the Passover in Exod 12:46), blood and water, symbols of Jesus' redemptive death which issues in a rebirth through water and the Spirit,²⁵ and finally, the Spirit of grace and supplication (LXX “compassion”) promised by Zech 12:10. So we must read the Johannine narrative on various levels: as sapiential teaching (hear and obey the Word of God and you shall live) and as sacramental instruction (we must be reborn through cleansing water²⁶ and the Spirit of rebirth, and appropriate this Word of God made flesh through the eucharist).

The Church in the Second Vatican Council constitution *Dei Verbum* 21 stated that:

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy.

mountains and then was gathered together and became one, so may your church be gathered together.” St. Augustine admonishes us to “become what we eat.”

²³ “Sealing” is related to “anointing” with the Spirit; cf. John 1:33-34; Isa 42:1; John 4:33-34 Greek: “The one who receives his testimony seals that God is true, for [the one] whom God sent speaks the words of God, for he does not give the Spirit by measure.” Cf. 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38.

²⁴ See John 6:45. Cf. Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17.

²⁵ Cf. 1 John 5:5-6.

²⁶ John 13:8-10; cf. 15:3; 1 John 1:7.

John 7. Preliminary Observations

This is a rather difficult section of John, beginning with John 7:1-52 + 8:12. We skip John 7:53-8:11 (the woman caught in adultery), which probably belongs after Luke 21:38. For John 7, Pheme Perkins' article in *NJBC* 61:104-114 is most useful.

Jesus Goes up to Jerusalem for Succoth

In the *Jerusalem Bible*, the subheading is appropriate enough: "The Great Messianic Revelation. The Great Rejection." What happens during this great Jewish feast is charged with significance. In John 8, the heat turns up with Jesus' solemn declarations of his divinity (and superiority to Abraham). The rift grows wider in John 9, and the danger increases in John 10, until the die is cast (the final decision to execute Jesus is taken) in John 11.

Succoth

The feast of Booths, or Huts, or Tabernacles (*succoth*), was the Jewish feast *par excellence*, often called simply "the Feast." It took place in the seventh month (Tishri, September-October) and celebrated the great fall harvest of many crops, including wine and olives. There was much drinking and merriment, and it became a feast associated with YHWH'S kingship (thus, with the kingdom of God, which means the end of all other kings and kingdoms). It was therefore also associated with final, messianic salvation, and liberation from all oppression and evil.

The "Jews" are trying to kill Jesus, and he cannot go about in Judea. But his brothers urge him to go (!) and manifest himself through his works so that his "disciples" may believe in him. The irony is that his brothers do not believe in him (7:5) and these "disciples" who need signs are not trustworthy (2:23-24) and have an inadequate belief (6:60). Even if Jesus were to 'manifest himself to the world,' "the world" cannot know him, 1:10, and hates him, 7:7, for it cannot receive the Spirit of truth, 14:17.

But Jesus does go on to the feast, secretly, and there is a lot of discussion among the Jews about him. The charge in 7:12 is quite serious: Jesus is accused of “deceiving/leading astray” the common people/crowd. This is the verb used for false prophets who lead the people to false worship in LXX Deut 13:1-6; they should be executed.²⁷ The widespread “fear of the Jews,” John 7:13, is a retrojection from John’s day unto the time of Jesus (in 9:22, those who believe in Jesus are excommunicated from the synagogue, something which occurred decades after Jesus’ death).

At the midpoint of the Feast, Jesus defends himself in much the same terms as Jeremiah centuries before: God has *sent* (divinely commissioned) him; Jer 26:12, 15. He is not acting on his own account; therefore he is not liable under Deut 18:20. But the “Jews” do not really follow or believe Moses, who wrote about (and thus supports) Jesus, 5:46-47; 7:19.

Jesus is now accused of having a demon, in the context of his healing the sick man in John 5 on the Sabbath. This is reminiscent of Mark 2-3 (discussed in pages 7-8, *supra*).²⁸ The Sabbath healing in Mark 3:1-6 is followed by Jesus’ relatives’ feeling that he is out of his mind, 3:20-21, and the accusation that Jesus is possessed by the prince of demons, 3:22-30. Jesus, in turn, justifies his action with a rabbinic rule, arguing from the lesser to the greater (*a fortiori*): if circumcision, pertaining to a small part of the body, is allowed on the Sabbath, a healing pertaining to the whole person is all the more allowed! “The Jews” are judging things superficially.

More Discussion about Jesus

The discussion (“murmuring” in 7:32) is on the question of Jesus’ messiahship. The Messiah was supposed to be hidden (7:27) until revealed by Elijah. Some do believe that Jesus is the (eschatological) Prophet and/or the Messiah/Christ, 7:40-41, but according to the Pharisaic reading of the Scriptures, the Prophet would not come from Galilee (“of the Gentiles”), 7:52, and the Messiah would come from the house of David (2 Sam 7:11-16) and from his hometown of Bethlehem (Mic 5:1). John is not interested

²⁷ This passage is related to the eschatological prophet passage, Deut 18:15-20, also calling for the death penalty.

in addressing these popular notions, even if they have or have not a valid scriptural basis. Jesus' origin and provenience is much more profound: he comes from (6:38, 42-44; 13:3; 16:28), and has been sent by, the Father (7:28-29).

The Great Eschatological Feast of Succoth

In John 7:33-34, Jesus states that there is only a short time in which to find him. He is going where they cannot follow. The Jews muse that he is going to the Greeks (pagans). This is just before the last, great day of Succoth (7:37). The tradition was that Jews who had not had their sins forgiven on Yom Kippur a few days before could have a final chance on the last day of Succoth. Succoth became the feast in which to expect final messianic salvation.²⁹ This was symbolized by water and light. In Succoth, the Jews prayed for the rain that regularly came in winter. There were daily processions to the spring at Siloam (meaning "Sent," see John 9:7)³⁰ and water ceremonies around the altar. Light was also important: four huge candelabra ("menorahs") were set up in the Court of Women in the Temple, lighting everything around. Palm branches, with twigs wrapped around, were carried around the Temple court; they were the symbol *par excellence* of messianic deliverance.³¹ In the background to all this is one of the last prophetic passages, Zech 14. It describes the day of YHWH, when he will plant his feet on the Mount of Olives to establish his eschatological kingdom (Zech 14:9). It will be only light on that Day, and out of Jerusalem shall come out living waters (14:8). After the final purification of evil, the nations (pagans) will all go up to Jerusalem *to celebrate Succoth* (14:16)! All must bow before King YHWH, or there will be no rain.

²⁸ Note that in John 5:18, the accusation is double (healing on the Sabbath and claim of equality with God), similarly to Mark 2:7; 3:2.

²⁹ The last day was known as that of the *hoshannah rabbah*, the great hossana, which means "save, please," and was addressed to kings or to YHWH, Ps 118:25; these verses are applied to Jesus in John 12:13.

³⁰ See the note in the *Jerusalem Bible* to John 9:7. See the link between water and salvation in Isa 12:3 and water and the Spirit in Isa 44:3, linked in the tradition to Succoth. Siloam is mentioned in Isa 8:6.

³¹ As such, they were the main feature of Jewish coins depicting independence. They are specifically mentioned in John 12:13, when Jesus is acclaimed as the King of Israel. Jewish tradition had it that David was supposed to visit on the last day of Succoth.

In John 7:37-39, in this context of the great feast, Jesus cried out and called on everyone who thirsts to come to him,³² for rivers of living water will flow out of his side (*koilias*; cf. John 19:34, *pleurá*). He said this referring to the Spirit which he would give (19:30; cf. 12:10-17; 13:1, 7).

Finally, the Succoth theme of light is taken up in 8:12 (we skip 7:53-8:11).

John 8-9

The trial continues (suit/counter-suit), with many of the same themes and arguments previously seen, but always with Johannine progression. We here highlight points of special interest, relying on your reading of Brown and consultation as appropriate of Bruce and Perkins (in the *NJBC*).

More Argument concerning who Jesus is

Read John 8:13-30 as reflecting what the Johannine community at the end of the first century was preoccupied with, especially in its debates with the non-Christian Jews. How can one come to belief in Jesus as being of God? Which witness is one to believe, Jesus or the Law? Jesus is accused of testifying on his own behalf (8:13, invalid, as Jesus seems to have agreed in 5:31). In fact, Jesus “knows whereof he speaks” (see 3:11). Therefore his self-testimony *is* valid, 8:14. The Pharisees, however, judge “according to the flesh,” 8:15, which is merely human and superficial (like “according to the eye,” 7:24), devoid of faith. If the Law requires two witnesses for valid testimony (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15), Jesus can adduce these two: himself and the Father.

The Pharisees remain on the human level of unbelief. They ask who Jesus’ father is. Jesus, referring to the heavenly Father, replies that they do not know him. Jesus then alludes to his death; they think he speaks of suicide. The contrast is between the realms of the above and below, of the world and of what is not of the world. The world does not believe (1:10), and those of the world will die in their sin (which is

³² See Isa 55:1, 10-11 for a text on water for the thirsty, water that is a symbol for God’s Word that does what it was *sent* to do. In Isa 55:3, God’s extension to the whole people of his promises to David is called

essentially unbelief, as life is essentially faith/knowledge of God and of the One he sent, 17:3. See the judgment of the Paraclete in 16:7-11.

The debate/trial begins to center on who Jesus really is. He says he is “I Am,” 8:24 (see page 9, *supra*). The interlocutors do not know who he is; Jesus replies that when they lift up the Son of man, then it shall be known that He Is, and that he has done what the Father taught him, 8:28. His crucifixion/resurrection/glorification will draw “everyone” to himself, 12:32. The Father has sent Jesus, who always does what is pleasing to him, 8:29. Hearing this, many came to believe in him.

We could see Isa 53 in the background. In 53:5, it is said that the (divine) discipline (or education) that brought salvation (or well-being, *shalom*) to us fell upon the Servant; in 53:10, the Servant does what is YHWH’s good-pleasure. Cf. Mark 1:11; Isa 42:1.

Jesus and Abraham

The debate is with Jews who have come to some level (ultimately insufficient) of belief in Jesus. They are proud of being Abraham’s descendants, and deny ever being slaves (remember Egypt?). Recall the contrast between fleshly (human) descent and being born of God from above in the Spirit through faith in Jesus, 1:11-13; 3:5-6. Jesus places slavery not on the physical or social, but spiritual level, 8:34; cf. Rom 6:17-18. Even though one might be a member of the household (God’s chosen people), in the new dispensation faith in Jesus is required to remain in good stead with God, 8:35-36. See the contrast between Moses and Jesus/us in Heb 3:5-6.

Jesus then draws a contrast between Abraham and “the Jews who had believed in him” who do not follow in Abraham’s footsteps of righteousness and faith (Rom 4:12). They are of those who are trying to kill Jesus. The “Jews” say that they have not been born of prostitution, 8:41. We may see here, in 8:19 and (possibly) in 8:48 echoes of slurs against traditions of Jesus’ birth from a virgin. The debate heats up now quite a bit. Jesus, looking at the situation in theological terms, states that the father (origin) of these unbelievers and murderers is the devil (logically enough!), 8:42-47.

an “eternal covenant.” This is the last chapter of Second Isaiah.

The debate draws to a climax as to who Jesus is and how he compares with the Patriarchs and Prophets. Jesus ends up by saying that Abraham has rejoiced to see Jesus' day. This is the rejoicing by the Patriarchs and Prophets who contemplate (or view from afar, see Heb 11:13; cf. Matt 13:17; Luke 10:24) the End Time salvation. See *NJBC* 61:125. See the Testament of Levi handout, which speaks of the rejoicing of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (18:14) in the End Time. John 12:41 states that the prophet Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. When Jesus then repeats another divine I Am saying, 8:58, the Jews are ready to stone him.

The Blind Man Comes to Believe in Jesus

The light theme returns; Jesus repeats he is the light of the world (8:12; 9:5). Notice the similarities with Mark 8:22-26: a blind man, the use of saliva, touching, gradual sight/confession of Jesus. Debate and division ensues over who Jesus is after he has performed a sign which points to his divine origin, but which meets the resistance of unbelief. The Pharisees judge that Jesus cannot come from God, though he has healed a man blind from birth, because Jesus does not keep their *halakah* (legal teaching) regarding the Sabbath.³³ After saying that he does not know where Jesus is (9:12), the healed man now says that Jesus is a prophet, 9:17. The parents of the healed man are afraid to say anything positive regarding Jesus, or to even get involved beyond the mere minimum, in the whole inquiry. This, as Brown p. 57 states, reflects the situation in John's community, where those who confess Jesus as the Messiah are excommunicated, 9:22.³⁴

Some of the Pharisees (they are divided, 9:16) "know" Jesus is a sinner, and will not be convinced otherwise. They are disciples of Moses. They know God spoke to Moses, but they do not know where Jesus is from (that is *the* question!). Now the healed man begins to give testimony in Jesus' favor, 9:30-33. No one can cure a person born blind unless he is from God; this was one of the signs (or works, Matt 11:2), of the

³³ This is the judging superficially, in a human manner, seen above.

³⁴ "Sometime between 85 and 130 the rabbinic distaste for sectarians (*mînîm*) was enshrined by a curse against them introduced into synagogue prayer (the expanded 12th of the Eighteen benedictions). Since Jewish Christians were considered among the *mînîm*, gradually they were excluded from synagogue

Messiah, Isa 35:5; LXX 61:1; Luke 4:18. The Pharisees are indignant to be taught by this man “born wholly in sin,” and they cast him out (excommunicate him).

Now Jesus *finds* him (cf. Ezek 34:6, 11, 12, 16; Luke 15:24, 32; 19:10) and asks him to believe in the Son of man. This is further progress from belief in Jesus as prophet and as coming from God. The healed man then professes his belief in Jesus, giving Jesus the occasion to solemnly pronounce the judgment of eschatological reversal: those who think they see but do not believe will be shown to be blind, while the poor and the lame who do not presume on their righteousness or knowledge will have the sight of faith and will see God. Cf. the eschatological reversals in Ezek 34:16; Matt 19:30; 20:16; 21:28-32; Mark 10:31; Luke 1:52-53; 6:20-26; 16:25. The Pharisees’ blindness is culpable; cf. Isa 6:8-10.

The Good Shepherd

I assume you have read and studied Brown, so I will try not to go over the same things. The “Good Shepherd” speech is called a parable in John 10:6; “they” didn’t know (or understand) what he was saying to “them.” “They” might be the Pharisees he was addressing in 9:41.³⁵ But it could just as well refer to the disciples, 16:25. Jesus contrasts the legitimate shepherd from false ones who are “thieves and bandits,” 10:1. All other shepherds are thieves and bandits, 10:8. How are we to explain this?

Although Brown states on p. 58 that “Background is supplied by the ‘shepherd’ texts of the Old Testament,” Ezek 34 is glaringly omitted from his discussion, as it is in most commentaries large and small. In fact, Ezek 34 is one of the essential OT passages for an understanding of the ministry of Jesus. In Ezek 34, YHWH comes out against the shepherds of Israel, who only look after themselves. They clothe and feed themselves off the sheep and have not shepherded the flock; they especially have not taken care of the weak, nor healed the sick, nor made to turn (sought the “conversion”) of, the lost sheep. So the sheep are dispersed, Ezek 34:5; cf. Matt 10:6; 15:24. Therefore the wild beasts attack the flock. YHWH will therefore remove those shepherds and take the flock

worship. . . . The Johannine community . . . may have been among the first to provoke exclusion from the synagogue authorities . . .”. Brown, *NJBC*, 80:24.

³⁵ See the *Jerusalem Bible* note to 10:6.

away from them, Ezek 34:10. YHWH will himself shepherd the flock; he will gather the lost and will feed them well, 34:11-16; he will seek the lost, take care of the sick, and destroy the fat ones who have exploited the flock, judging between sheep and goat, 34:17. This he will do through his servant David, the sole shepherd, 34:23-25. Read Ezek 34 carefully. See 1 Pet 2:25 (combining Ezek 34 with Isa 53).

With this text in mind, we can understand Jesus' contrast. He is the sole legitimate shepherd who shepherds for God himself. The other shepherds are "thieves and bandits," who steal from the sheep (the scribes in Mark 12:38-40 clothe and feed themselves off the poor widows) and are violent (*lestai*, the word used for the leaders of the Temple, especially priests, in Jer 7:11 and Mark 11:17).³⁶ The Jewish leaders (high priests, scribes, elders) are the murderers to whom Jesus directs the parable of the "wicked" vine-dressers in Mark 11:27; 12:1-12; this is the meaning of *lestai*: they beat and kill.³⁷

With all this further in mind, Jesus declares that salvation is through him, John 10:9, while the bad shepherds steal and kill and destroy. The Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep, while the salaried shepherd (like the bad leaders in Mic 3:11, who are motivated by money) leaves the flock to the dangers of wild beasts, John 10:12-13, unlike David, 1 Sam 17:34-35. Jesus and his sheep "know" each other = are in an intimate relationship, as he is with his Father. And there are other sheep which are also Jesus' though "they are not of this fold," John 10:16, that Jesus wants to make part of the one flock. This probably refers to Gentiles, contra Brown p. 59 (who seems to be a bit fixated on the Johannine community); see 11:52. This will then fulfill the prophecy in Ezek 34:23; 37:24 of one sole shepherd, David.³⁸ 1 Pet 2:25 combines Ezek 34 with Isa 53:6; see *Jerusalem Bible* margin references.

The Father loves Jesus because he gives his life voluntarily, John 10:17-18, since this is the Father's command. This echoes Isa 53:10, where it is YHWH'S good-pleasure to crush his Servant. Moreover, in John 10:18, Jesus twice mentions his *exousia* (absolute, unrestrained ability to act and dispose of things) to give up his life and take it up anew. This word takes us to the Son of man passage in Dan 7:14, where

³⁶ Also for Barabbas in John 18:40, and for the ones crucified with Jesus, Mark 15:27.

³⁷ *Lestai* appears in LXX Ezek 22:9;

exousia appears three times in the LXX. The Son of man became linked to the Servant in the intertestamental literature, as we have seen, and in John.³⁹ After this, there is yet again dissension (“schism”) among the “Jews” concerning Jesus.

Jesus and Hanukkah

This feast,⁴⁰ which Jews today celebrate around Christmas time,⁴¹ celebrates the “renewal” or “dedication” of the Temple (specifically, the altar, 1 Macc 4:46, 59; 2 Macc 2:19) after its desecration by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The “Jews” are in suspense about Jesus’ nature. Jesus tells them that he has already said he comes from God, who is his Father, that He Is, even before Abraham, that is, from eternity. He adduces the works he has done in his Father’s name, but they do not believe because they are not of his sheep, John 10:25-26. The Father has sent him, and it is his will that none who belongs to Jesus should perish, 6:39, but no one can come to (believe in) Jesus unless the Father draws him, 6:44. Jesus and the Father are one. Now the Jews again want to stone him (see 8:59, after an I Am saying). Jesus again refers to his good works (healings) in self-defense, but the Jews clearly understand and object to Jesus’ claim of equality with God (see 5:17-18, in the context of a good work).

Jesus now will argue from “their” Law (here, in the sense of the Old Testament, God’s revelation to Israel).⁴² Ps 82:6 speaks of “gods” and of the “sons of God” in reference to human beings.⁴³ YHWH constitutes Moses god to Pharaoh, with Aaron as the god-Moses’ prophet, Exod 7:1. God will be a father to David, who will be his son, 2 Sam 7:14; YHWH’s decree is that his Anointed (Messiah) is his son, “begotten today,” Ps 2:7.⁴⁴ So Jesus cannot be accused of blasphemy for saying he is God’s Son, since the Father has sanctified and sent him into the world, John 10:36. The word “sanctified” in

³⁸ The idea of a “leader” who leads the sheep and goes in front, John 10:3-4, in a context of suffering, is echoed in Heb 2:10. Jesus is the “Great Shepherd” in Heb 13:20.

³⁹ John speaks of *exousia* in the Son of man sense also in 5:27 and 17:2.

⁴⁰ From the Hebrew *hanak*, “to initiate, to dedicate, to consecrate.”

⁴¹ It begins at sundown, Monday, December 22, in 2009, and ends December 29 (it lasts for eight days).

⁴² See 8:17. The prologue contrasted the Law given by Moses to (communication of, access to) the nature and life of God himself, given to us by Jesus, 1:14, 17. This Law’s application will result in Jesus’ death, 19:7. Nevertheless, the Law is fulfilled in Jesus, 1:45, at times ironically (15:25). Cf. 8:5.

⁴³ Other “sons of God” passages are Gen 6:2, 4; Exod 4:22 (Israel is God’s first-born); Deut 32:8; Job 1:6; 38:7; Hos 2:1; Sir 4:10, leaving out here passages in Qumran and intertestamental literature.

⁴⁴ See also Ps 89:27-28.

Greek is that used in LXX Num 7:1 for the Holy Dwelling of God, which is also anointed. The culmination of the Book of Exodus (in the final chapter, 40), for the Priestly writer, is the erection of the “Dwelling of the Tent of Meeting,” where the Divine Presence dwells (cf. John 1:14, literally “and the Word became flesh and tented among us, with the word for “tented” reminding one of the Shekinah, the rabbinic Divine Presence). In Exod 40:9-10, the Dwelling is anointed and sanctified (or consecrated), as is the altar. The altar is likewise sanctified in 1 Macc 4:48 after the purification of the desecrated Temple discussed above. The language in John is thus meant to contrast Jesus the Anointed and sanctified One with the altar which is to be destroyed and replaced; see John 2:19-22; Brown, p. 61.

Jesus Gives Life to a Dead Man

The final sign in the Book of Signs is the bringing of Lazarus back to life. It is the last sign which Jesus presents as testimony in his trial (both as defense and accusation), and it results in the decision to have him executed. In the background is John 5:21, where both the Father and the Son give life to whom they will, followed by 5:22-30, concerning judgment/condemnation⁴⁵ (both present and future) as unbelief and belief as passing from death to life. In the End Time, Jesus’ Hour, the dead will hear the voice of God’s Son, and live. This was another sign expected in the messianic age, Isa 26:19.

Ironically, this greatest (life-giving) sign is already preceded by foreboding of what will happen to Jesus in Judea, John 11:7-8, 16. The disciples are fearful (as they are in Mark 10:32-34; cf. Luke 9:51). Jesus tarries two days after being notified of his friend’s illness so that there will be no doubt that he is going to bring a really dead man back to life, for the glory of the Father and his Son, John 11:4, 15, so that the disciples may believe (see also 11:42). Notice the *inclusio* with the first sign, 2:11.

In 11:23-27, the discussion between Martha and Jesus is meant to illustrate the tension between present (or realized) and future eschatology. Martha, as a pious Jew, believes in the resurrection at the End of Days (Dan 12:2, 13; John 6:39-40, 44, 54; 11:24; Final Judgment in 12:48). But Jesus states that he *is* the resurrection and the

life,⁴⁶ so that whoever believes in him lives, and shall not die eternally.⁴⁷ Martha responds with a perfect pre-Paschal profession of faith: “Yes, Lord, I have believed⁴⁸ that you are the Christ the Son of God the one coming into the world.” This includes all the messianic expectations of Judaism plus the divine Sonship of Jesus.

One of the mysterious words in the gospels is that used to describe Jesus’ reactions in 11:33, 38, *enebrimésato*, *embrimómenos*, from *embrimáomai*. It is used in Matt 9:30 (“spoke harshly”), Mark 1:43 (“sternly charged”), 14:5 (“reproached”); here in John associated as it is with the verb for “troubled” in 11:33, it seems to indicate a deep emotional (sympathetic) reaction to the weeping of the Jews.

Jesus then gave a great shout (the same expression is used for when he is on the cross, Matt 27:46, 50; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:46) and commanded Lazarus to come out (fulfilling John 5:25; cf. Brown p. 65). Lazarus comes out with the Jewish burial wrappings, just as how the Pharisees expected the final resurrection to take place. This results in many coming to believe in Jesus. So the high priests and Pharisees literally “synagogued a sanhedrin” (convened a council) and, in order to protect the Holy Place (Temple) and the Jewish Nation, decide to put Jesus to death, so that he may die “on behalf of” the people. This is an ironic prophecy from the high priest regarding the significance and effect of Jesus’ death. A comment adds “and not only for the (Jewish) Nation, but also in order to gather together (again, “synagogue”) the dispersed children of God into one.” This refers back to 10:16 (contra Brown p. 59), that is, it refers to the Gentiles destined to become children of God through faith in the Word made flesh, 1:11-13. Jesus is now in hiding, since the Jewish leaders seek to have him executed.

⁴⁵ The word can have both meanings in Greek.

⁴⁶ This is the most probable reading, now considered “virtually certain” (upgraded in recent years from “some degree of doubt”); in other words, include “and the life.”

⁴⁷ See 3:15-16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 10:26-28; 17:3.

⁴⁸ The perfect tense indicates a continuing state, established and confirmed with future validity.

The Anointing, the Messianic Entry and the Close of the Trial

Jesus' *ante mortem* anointing is found in Mark and Matt, but for some reason omitted in Luke. Notice that in Mark and Matt the act takes place in the house of Simon the Leper. Only John states that it was a Roman pound (11.5 oz.).⁴⁹ Being a few days before Passover, it is not unlikely that Jesus and his followers had premonitions of his impending execution. John stresses the extravagant nature of the act, with extremely expensive ointment and Mary's very unusual gestures of anointing Jesus' feet and drying them with her hair (obviously taken over from Luke; likewise, the 300 denarii sum and the mention of the poor etc. comes from Mark). John personalizes the objection by pointing to Judas the betrayer. See the irony in the high priests (contrasted here with the Jews) seeking to kill Lazarus as well because he leads to faith in Jesus!

Note that the "great crowd" —the common (Jewish) people are for Jesus in the gospels— gives Jesus a massive messianic acclamation during Passover, the feast commemorating liberation from Egyptian slavery. See Brown p. 67. Only John has the palm branches,⁵⁰ great symbol of political victory and independence, the messianic symbol par excellence. The acclamation "hosanna," = "please, save," was addressed to kings (2 Kgs 6:26) and to God (Ps 118:25). Jesus is explicitly acclaimed as God's peaceful king for Israel, fulfilling the prophecy of Zech 9:9 (the "fear not, daughter of Zion" echoes Zeph 3:16, a YHWH-King-of-Israel passage in the context of the "Righteous Remnant" of the *'anawim*, those who survive the purificatory judgment). All this, which has every trace of historical reliability in its essentials, was not understood by the disciples as the fulfillment of prophecy until Jesus' glorification, John 12:16.

That the raising of Lazarus was Jesus' culminating sign which leads to his execution is reinforced by 12:17-19, where the Pharisees complain that "the world has gone away behind him," a reference to defections from Judaism and also to the "Greeks," who are probably non-Jews who go to the synagogue and celebrate Jewish

⁴⁹ John will likewise indicate the huge amount of myrrh and aloes taken by Nicodemus to anoint Jesus' corpse, 19:39. These two passages form an *inclusio*, centered on Jesus' burial.

⁵⁰ Perkins, *NJBC* 61:160, states that these palm branches were not native to Jerusalem and had to be imported.

feasts⁵¹ (see Acts 14:1; 16:1; 18:4; 19:10; contrast the “Hellenists,” 9:29, though cf. 6:1; 11:20). We are at the end of the Book of Signs and at the threshold of the Book of Glory, when Jesus will be glorified (12:23). Jesus now refers to his upcoming death, and to the disquiet this causes him, 12:27 (see the echoes of the agony [= struggle] in Gethsemane, missing in John). Cf. Brown p. 68. Jesus’ manner of death will draw everyone to himself; cf. Mark 15:39, where the Roman centurion is not unlike these Greeks.

The crowd, however, begins to debate this. Jesus gives them a final warning, 12:35-36, reminiscent of 7:31-36. Jesus is at the end of his ministry among his own; cf. his going away and hiding from them to Matt 24:1, “and going out away from the Temple he goes . . .” The conclusion of the trial is that despite the overwhelming evidence presented on Jesus’ behalf, they (“his own,” 1:11) did not believe, in order to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecies. It seems that John creates a “sandwich,” the bread being Isa 53 (quoted or alluded to in John 12:38, 41) and the meat being Isa 6:9-10 (John 12:40). The bread includes the beginning of the fourth Servant poem (Isa 53:1), regarding the unheard of nature of the report about the Suffering Servant, and the end (53:11-12), regarding the Servant’s glory.⁵² The “meat” (Isa 6:9-10) describes Isaiah’s (and Jesus’) mission (= sending, Isa 6:8), destined to fail among the people, so that only a very few survive (a “holy seed,” Isa 6:11-13; again, only a remnant). This ironic passage was much used by the early Christians to try to explain the failure of Jesus’ message among the Jews; see Acts 28:26-27, and Mark 4:12 and parallels. Jesus finishes his case (countersuit) by recapitulating what he has been saying repeatedly (John 12:44-50).

The Foot-Washing

The Book of Glory ironically begins with an act performed by slaves, or “servants” (the word is the same in both Hebrew and Greek). This dramatizes that Jesus is the Servant. Cf. Mark 10:45 (also the Son of man). It is an example of Jesus’ love “until the end,” John 13:1. Jesus is aware of his *exousía* that the Father has given him (17:2; see also 13:3; 3:35; cf. Matt 28:18). This is the *exousía* of the Danielic Son of

⁵¹ Called “God-fearers,” Acts 13:16, they had not formally converted to Judaism or been circumcised.

⁵² A possible reading and translation of 53:11 is “he shall be bathed in light.”

man.⁵³ The Servant and the Son of man are thus here combined, as in Mark 10:45 and in some intertestamental passages (see 1 Enoch 62 handout).

The washing has clear baptismal overtones. It should be linked to passages where water and the Spirit result in a new birth (John 1:33; 3:5). It should also be connected to Jesus' life-giving death (12:24) on the cross (19:34), when water and blood come out; faith is a rebirth as a child of God (1:12) into eternal life, 3:15; the eucharist (Jesus' given flesh and poured blood) nourishes (and is required for) this new life (6:51-57). Baptism is required in order to have a share with Jesus, 13:8.⁵⁴ See Brown for additional commentary on these verses. Rev 7:14 speaks of washing in the Lamb's blood.⁵⁵ After the foot-washing, Jesus says that he has given an example to follow; but there is also a reference to the Servant, who is also one "sent," 13:16, 20; see 1 Pet 2:21; Jas 5:10. The Servant is a prophet who has been sent, Isa 6:8; 61:1.

Judas' Betrayal

Jesus, upset, announces that he will be betrayed (13:18-19, 21); Jesus knows everything that is going to happen to him, and he has the full *exousía* of "I Am" (cf. 18:6). See Brown pp. 73-74. He admonishes those who know these things to do them, 13:17 (cf. Luke 12:47-48; James 4:17).

The disciples are at a loss as to who will betray Jesus. It is the Beloved Disciple, reclining at the meal "in Jesus' bosom = privileged place of intimacy (cf. Luke 16:23) who, at Peter's request, asks Jesus. It will be Judas, into whom Satan enters after he eats the morsel (cf. Luke 22:3). It is night (cf. John 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 9:4; 11:10; 12:35, 46; Luke 22:53).

⁵³ LXX Dan 4:17 speaks of the *exousía* of the Lord of heaven, who does what he wills in heaven and on earth. In LXX Dan 4:31, he bestows this *exousía* on whomever he wills. In our Bibles, see Dan 4:14, 22, 29.

⁵⁴ See 14:3; 17:24; *NJBC* 61:172. "Share" (in Greek, *méros* = part) is found in 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:16 regarding the Body of Christ.

⁵⁵ Cf. Dan 11:35; 12:10 (regarding the *maskilim* ["wise teachers, etc."], noun derived from "prosper" in Isa 52:13).

Jesus' Glorification Begins

Now that the "Passion" begins, Jesus is about to be glorified, John 13:32. Jesus is about to die. He leaves his last will and testament: a new commandment, that we love one another as he has loved us; this will be the sign of our discipleship. The commandment is old (Lev 19:18), but new in the way that we are to understand and fulfill it (like Jesus); see 1 John 2:7-8; 2 John 1:5. Lev 19:18 left at least one lawyer in doubt as to who his neighbor was (probably commonly understood as only fellow Jews), Luke 10:25-37. One could question Brown's insistence that outsiders are excluded (p. 74; again, with great focus on his imagined Johannine community); see John 10:16; 17:20-23; *NJBC* 61:179.

Peter asks Jesus where he is going (in the Vulgate, *quo vadis?*). Jesus replies that he cannot follow him right now, but will later. Impetuous Peter wants to follow Jesus *right now* (cf. Luke 22:31-34), but Jesus predicts his threefold denial (recorded in all four gospels). In between the lines, however, is the fact that Peter will indeed follow Jesus in laying down his life (like Jesus in John 15:13); this is linked to 21:15-19, where (likewise after a meal), Jesus thrice questions Peter about his love for him (Peter in 13:37 had expressed a willingness to lay down his life for Jesus), reversing Peter's threefold denial. Jesus gives Peter the task of shepherding his sheep and lambs, and predicts that Peter will indeed follow Jesus to the cross (21:18-19); notice the final "follow me." See Brown-Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (2003), 41-42.

The Last Discourses

Please study Brown carefully for this section of John, as we will only make supplementary comments. His three-part division is helpful: 1) John 14; 2) John 15:1-16:4; 3) John 17. This way, we have basically three chapters to deal with. We will, however, devote some attention to important points in 16:5-33, which Brown considers duplicative of John 14 (p.79).

John 14

Jesus comforts his disciples regarding his departure. This is like Jesus' last will and testament (a common biblical and intertestamental genre). Jesus is leaving to prepare them a place in his Father's house; they should not be frightened, but believe in Jesus as they believe in God. Eventually Jesus will gather them (an important eschatological concept) and they will be with him eternally. The disciples should believe in Jesus' intimacy with the Father, so that anything they pray for in his name will be granted (associated with keeping Jesus' commandments in 14:15).

The disciples should be glad that Jesus is leaving them to go back to his Father, for 1) this is where he belongs after completing his mission; 2) the Father and Jesus will send the Paraclete, "the Spirit of Truth," who will dwell in the disciples (the divine indwelling of the Trinity); the disciples will thus enjoy and benefit from a closeness with the triune God not possible without the glorified Jesus' departure. But one must love Jesus = observe his Word, in order to receive this divine guest.⁵⁶ Thus Jesus leaves the disciples peace, so that they will not be disturbed or frightened.⁵⁷ The mentions of the "world" hint at the persecution of the world, and point to the end of John 16.

John 15:1-16:4

The dominant theme here is *remaining* in Jesus, under the image of the vine.⁵⁸ Fruitless branches are cut-off, and fruitful branches are "cleansed" (Greek verb from which catharsis comes, 15:2), or purified (an apocalyptic and later ascetico-mystical term).⁵⁹ To *remain* with Jesus as presented and believed in by the Johannine community is emphasized, given the defections from their ranks (6:66; 1 John 2:19). Remaining in Jesus —recall the importance in Paul of *being in Christ*⁶⁰ — "possibilitates" all things

⁵⁶ Cf. Eph 4:30.

⁵⁷ Cf. 1 John 4:18.

⁵⁸ The word "remain" (Greek *meno*, often translated "abide") is used very often in John in reference to "remaining in" Jesus; see 1:38-39; 4:40; 6:56; 15:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10; in reference to his Word, 5:38; 8:31; to the Spirit, 14:17; cf. 8:35; it appears very often in 1 John (2:6, 10, 14, 17, 19, 24, 27, 28, etc.).

⁵⁹ On eschatological purification/refinement, see Dan 12:10; Mal 3:3; see the *Community Rule* of Qumran, 1QS 4:20-22. Purification is very important in the works of St. John of the Cross.

⁶⁰ For Paul, from the moment of his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus, the only thing that matters is to *be* with or in (the same preposition is often used for both words in Hebrew and in Greek) Christ (Phil

(John 15:5, 7; cf. Phil 4:13); it requires keeping Jesus' commandments, but this results in fullness of joy, 15:10-12. The great commandment is love for one another.

The world hates Jesus, whom it did not accept (1:10; 7:7), and will hate the disciples, 15:18; 17:14. See the dualism in 8:23; the world is under the power of Satan, 12:31; 14:30; 16:11;⁶¹ 1 John 5:19; 2:16 (cf. 2 Cor 4:4). The world will persecute Jesus' disciples, John 15:20. In this dualistic framework, there is no middle ground. Failure to accept Jesus, who has been sent by the Father, is also a rejection of the Father. Hatred of Jesus is hatred of God his Father, with whom unbelievers have no relationship (= "do not know," 15:21-23). The "Jews" have failed to believe despite the works performed by Jesus, 12:37; see also 10:25, 32, 37-38. Since they have seen these works and have not believed, they are deemed to hate Jesus and his Father, ironically fulfilling *their* (!) "Law," 15:25.⁶² The same idea of fulfillment of prophecy by unbelief is found in 12:38-41, reflecting to some extent a certain determinism in line with a mysterious divine plan.⁶³ We must understand the bitter polemic against the "Jews" in John as reflecting a terrible internecine (= between close relatives) dispute, in which both sides most hate what is closest to them. The Pharisaic rabbis must exclude Christians from the synagogue because they see them as a threat to the post-70 Judaism they are trying to forge as they try to regroup and recover from the catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem; the Christians hate to be expelled from the synagogue and persecuted (see 16:1-4; cf. 9:9:22). We must not lose sight of the fact that Jesus the Son of God is a Jew (4:9) and that salvation arises from the Jews, 4:22.

Those who have remained with Jesus will receive the Paraclete (sent by Jesus and the Father, as in our Creed), who will testify about Jesus and enable the disciples to also testify, 15:27.⁶⁴

3:7:14; Gal 6:14-17; see also Rom 8:1; 12:5; 1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 1:22; 3:14, 26, 28; Phil 1:1; 4:19).

⁶¹ Called "ruler" (Greek *archon*) of this world. Interestingly, the Pharisaic leaders are called by the same word, 3:1; 7:26, 48; 12:42. In Rev 1:5, Jesus becomes *archon* of the kings of the earth.

⁶² The use of "their" reflects the bitter separation from Judaism; cf. Matt 4:23; 9:35; 10:17.

⁶³ Cf. Rom 9:14-24; 11:1-35.

⁶⁴ Cf. Luke 22:28, "You are the ones who have remained (*diameno*) with me in my trials ("temptations")."

John 16:5-33

In 16:8-11, it is said that the Paraclete (the defense attorney turned prosecutor!) will come and convict the world as regards sin, righteousness and judgment/condemnation. The sin is not believing in Jesus; righteousness will be revealed when Jesus rises from the dead and is thus vindicated (from the Latin for claimant [= one who sues], avenger) by God as having been in the right (cf. 8:46, in its surrounding context); judgment/condemnation (Greek *krisis*) means that the ruler of this world has been defeated.⁶⁵ Jesus has defeated the world, 16:33.⁶⁶

The language about the woman in birth pangs, the hour and the tribulation (often translated “anguish”) in 16:21 have an apocalyptic/eschatological flavor.⁶⁷ As Perkins notes, the point is the eschatological reversal about to take place with Jesus’ glorification.⁶⁸ Likewise eschatological is “that day” in 16:23.⁶⁹ On that day —given John’s realized eschatology, it takes place once Jesus has been glorified, which will happen soon (notice that in 17:10-12 Jesus is already glorified and is not even in the world anymore!)— the disciples’ joy will be full because they will ask and receive (see the same verbs in Matt 21:22); Jesus won’t even be needed as intermediary (!), 16:26-27, for the Father loves them because they have believed that Jesus came from him. The cycle adumbrated (hinted at) in the Prologue is explicit in 16:28.⁷⁰ And now the disciples can exclaim that they understand what Jesus is saying clearly (cf. 10:6; 16:25, 29).⁷¹

⁶⁵ Cf. Jesus’ apocalyptic vision of Satan’s defeat in Luke 10:18.

⁶⁶ Faith overcomes the world, 1 John 5:4.

⁶⁷ See Perkins, *NJBC* 61:197, making reference to Isa 26:17-18 LXX (in the “apocalypse of Isaiah”!); 66:7-10. The references to *thlipsis* (= “tribulation” is better than “pangs,” which is applied to birth pangs, *odin*, Rev 12:2) are also appropriate; see also Hos 13:13 (first mention); Qumran Hodayot 9; cf. Dan 12:1.

⁶⁸ For instances of eschatological reversal, see Isa 65:13-14; Matt 5:5; Mark 10:31.

⁶⁹ See Zech 14:6, 8, 9, 21 etc. (same words in LXX as in John), and often in Zech.

⁷⁰ See Brown p. 21.

John 17

Jesus' address here is clearly a prayer to his Father, though John does not use the exact word for prayer (*proseúhomai*, frequent in Luke), but uses "ask" (*erotáo*), in the sense of "to pray for," 14:16; 16:26; 17:15, 20. This address has been frequently called the "Priestly Prayer" (e.g. Brown p. 84), but this must be understood in the sense of a prayer offered by Jesus (as the Prophet?) before offering himself up (as the High Priest who makes eschatological expiation).⁷² In the OT, the priests are not thought of primarily as men of prayer (except for blessing the people, Num 6:22-27; Deut 10:8; 21:5; Sir 50:20), but as dealing with sacrifice and its preparations.⁷³ It is more typically the prophet who prays and intercedes.⁷⁴ Jesus is said to offer (in the OT sacrificial sense) himself in Heb 9:14, 25, 28; offering sacrifices is what defines the priest, 8:3-4. Cf. 5:7. So in John 17, Jesus seems to be combining various functions expected of the prophet and the priest as well as perhaps that of the king, which he is in John, kings also praying for others in the OT.⁷⁵ Jesus prays that the Father glorify him (referring to his exaltation on the cross, which draws everyone to himself as savior, 12:32) so that he may glorify the Father (by making him and Jesus Christ, his Sent One, *known* = establishing a perfect communion with, 17:11, 21-24, 26) by giving all who believe in Jesus eternal life (defined as knowledge/communion in 17:3).⁷⁶ Jesus has finished his great work (cf. 19:30),⁷⁷ and now prays that the glory he is about to return to will also be shared by those who have believed he has been sent by the Father.⁷⁸ Jesus speaks as a shepherd who has solicitously guarded all who have been entrusted to him; none has been lost except the one destined to be lost. Remember also that *remaining* or *abiding* in

⁷¹ Cf. Matt 13:13, 35; Mark 4:11, 33; Luke 8:10; 1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2.

⁷² The Qumranites, according to JOSEPH M. BAUMGARTEN, "Messianic Forgiveness of Sin in CD 14:19 (4Q266 10 I 12-13)," *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Technological Innovations, New Texts, & Reformulated Issues* (ed. D.W. PARRY - E.W. ULRICH) (Leiden - Boston - Köln 1999), 542, expected one Messiah of Aaron and Israel, combining priestly and kingly functions, to provide atonement for sins "as a divinely appointed redeemer."

⁷³ Also instructing on legal matters, giving oracles, etc. Cf. *NJBC* 76:23.

⁷⁴ Abraham in Gen 20:7; Moses in Num 11:2; 21:7; Deut 9:20 [Moses prays for Aaron]; Samuel in 1 Sam 7:5; 8:6; the man of God akin to a prophet in 1 Kgs 13:6; Elisha in 2 Kgs 6:17. But priests such as Ezra in Ezra 10:1 and Phinehas in Ps 106:30 are said to pray.

⁷⁵ E.g., Solomon in 1 Kgs 8:28-61; Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 19:15-19; cf. Manasseh in 2 Chr 33:13.

⁷⁶ See 1:12; 6:37, 39, 65; 10:28-29; 17:6, 8-9, 22, 24.

⁷⁷ Brown p. 84 says that in this discourse "we cross the threshold of eternity." See 17:11-12.

Jesus is very important in the Johannine literature.⁷⁹ The dualistic contrast is with the world, who rejects Jesus.⁸⁰ As the Father sanctified/consecrated and sent Jesus into the world (10:36), so Jesus wants his own to be sanctified and sent into the world, 17:17-19. The goal is that all come to faith in Jesus and become one with/in him and the Father, so that the world may believe.⁸¹ Jesus wants those whom the Father has given him to be with him in eternity, 17:24. In a sense, this sums up his work, to prepare a place for us in his Father's house, when he returns to take us with him, 14:1-4. Is there an inclusion with the Prologue here?

Jesus' Arrest, Trial and Execution

Preliminary note: Please study the assigned parts of REB in addition to this handout.

Although this is now the process of Jesus' glorification, and John's account shows unmistakable traces of Jesus' *exousia* and command of the situation, the Johannine account of the passion does not avoid the cruel historical facts regarding the last moments of Jesus' life. John mentions the Kidron Valley and "a garden," unlike the synoptics. There is no agony-in-Gethsemane scene, but echoes of Jesus' struggle in John 12:27. There is no mention of any kiss by Judas; the "band of soldiers" is the Roman cohort, several hundred men! Clearly John is aggrandizing the scene and Jesus' majestic divine power (18:6), but it could well be historical that the Romans were already in on the plans to arrest this messianic pretender. Could "the lanterns and torches" (18:3), missing in the synoptics, symbolize the darkness which envelops the evildoers (cf. Wis 17:5)? Jesus protects his own, the Good Shepherd (Ezek 34) to the last. All four gospels recount the strike against the high priest's slave, John adding names (Peter, Malchus). It is puzzling that this violent act of defiance seems to have had no repercussions. Is this due to Jesus' protection? Notice that Peter is recognized in 18:26.

⁷⁸ John 17:22; cf. 1 John 3:2. Recall how important this shared glory was for Paul, e.g. Rom 5:2; 8:18; 2 Cor 3:18.

⁷⁹ See above and John 6:56; 8:31, 35; 15:4-7, 9-10; 17:26. 1 John 2:6; 3:24; 2 John 1:9.

⁸⁰ Recall what has previously been said about the "world": pp. 12, 15-16, 28-29.

⁸¹ The world will be convicted by the Paraclete in 16:7-11.

An informal night session (not the implausible whole Sanhedrin as in Mark 14:53) at the patriarchal high priest's house (see Brown p. 88) is totally credible. Jesus is to be checked out in-house before being handed over to the Roman executioners. John's description of these proceedings (the high priest questions Jesus about his teaching and disciples) seems more historical than Mark's (followed by Matt, though not Luke here; cf. Acts 6:11-14) scene with witnesses and accusations about the Temple and explicit questions about messiahship. John represents Jesus as an open book to the world, and no secret plotter.⁸² Jesus is then taken from the patriarch's house to the incumbent high priest, Caiaphas, from which he will be led to the Roman prefect Pilate, without any Jewish morning session, as in the synoptics. John seems more historical in all this.

Brown has elsewhere pointed out that Peter twice denies *being Jesus' disciple* (18:17, 25), "a particularly serious denial granted the Johannine emphasis on discipleship as the primary Christian category."⁸³ All four gospels mention Peter's denials of Jesus in various ways, which is "an uncomplimentary tribute to Peter's importance" (Brown p. 89), as well as an indication of historicity.

Early (in the morning, i.e., at dawn), Jesus is brought to Pilate in the praetorium (mentioned three times in John, 18:28, 33; 19:9; it refers to the "governor's" residence).⁸⁴ John ironically states that "they" (obviously the "Jews," 18:31, 36) would not enter in order not to be ritually impure for the Passover feast.⁸⁵ The first exchange between the Jews and Pilate (18:29-32), as Brown p. 90 suggests, is to emphasize that John wants to make it clear that Jesus is to die by crucifixion (see also 3:14; 12:32). Pilate tells them that they should judge Jesus by their own Law, 18:31; in fact, they have, 19:7, and "their Law"⁸⁶ (15:25) has condemned him to death, for being the Son of God. But they cannot implement this Law and need Roman assistance, in John's presentation of these events. John's dualism presents a dichotomy (a cutting in two)

⁸² In John 18:22-23, Jesus does not follow, in a pedestrian manner, his teaching in Matt 5:39||Luke 6:29.

⁸³ *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (1979), 84.

⁸⁴ See also Matt 27:27; Mark 15:16. Pilate was technically not "governor" but "prefect" (though it was the same office); later the title would be changed to "procurator," *NJBC* 75:167. Dawn was a normal time for such hearings; *NJBC* 61:215.

⁸⁵ Perkins notes that this contact in a legal setting would not have been defiling, *NJBC* 61:215.

⁸⁶ Actually, their interpretation of Torah, which really testifies to Jesus, 1:45; 5:46; cf. 5:45; 7:19, 51; 10:34.

between Jesus the Word of God made flesh and the Law (already from 1:17), and now will translate the dualism we have been seeing (between the fleshly and the spiritual, the realms above and below, etc.) into political terms: the “Jews” reject the peaceful, eschatological King God has sent/given them (the “king of *Israel*,” 1:49; 12:13, 15) and exclaim that Caesar is their king (19:15).

All four gospels accurately reflect history when they have Pilate asking “Are you the king of the Jews?” This would have been the actual concern about and accusation against Jesus on the part of the Roman authorities and their aristocratic Jewish collaborators. Jesus’ reply, literally “you say,” in John more fully “you say that I am a king,” seems to place on his interlocutor (and the interlocutor’s political context) the idea; Jesus would be YHWH’s messianic King à la Zech 9:9, peaceful and humble (cf. Zech 4:6), not a political insurgent like Barabbas. The Barabbas episode is found in all four gospels. Most scholars allege that there was no such custom of releasing a prisoner;⁸⁷ in this case, the prisoner to be released was “a revolutionary and a murderer, just the kind of person that the Romans would fear the most.”⁸⁸ The episode is charged with symbolism: “Barabbas” means “son of the father.” The “Jews” are thus made to prefer a false, political insurgent to God’s real Son, and reject the real King of Israel out of a sycophantic (from the Greek for “false accuser”) loyalty to the Roman emperor. The distinctive “feature” of Christianity is the belief that Jesus was the eschatological Son of God sent to redeem the world, and that God’s full revelation takes place in Jesus; see Mark 12:6; John 1:18; 11:27. The Jewish people by and large reject this belief, and this is the reason for the split reflected in John’s gospel.

Jesus gives his last testimony to the Truth before Pilate.⁸⁹ Review Brown’s setting forth of the seven scenes in pp. 90-93, following the great Dominican scholar M.-É. Boismard. The scourging prior to crucifixion was normal, and there is no reason to doubt the placing on Jesus of the crown of thorns (omitted only by Luke, probably for his own reasons). Unique to John 19:4-15 is Pilate’s solemn presentation of Jesus (*Ecce homo*), the “man of sorrows” (Isa 53:3), with the Jewish insistence on obeisance

⁸⁷ See *NJBC* 42:160. J.L. MCKENZIE, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York – London 1965) 642, states: “Jn appears to be supported by two passages of the Talmud. One places the death of Jesus on the 14th Nisan; the other places the Passover amnesty (cf BARABBAS) on the eve of the Passover, the 14th Nisan.”

⁸⁸ *NJBC* 41:102. John 18:40 calls him a *lestés*, which accords with this description.

⁸⁹ See 1:14, 17; 3:21; 4:23-24; 5:33; 8:32, 40, 44-46; 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:7, 13; 17:17, 19.

to Caesar.⁹⁰ The historical Pilate was extremely ruthless, and may well have executed someone of low rank like Jesus without any trial.⁹¹ In all four gospels, as often asserted, the Roman role is downplayed and the Jewish one heightened; actually, the Romans are exonerated (Pilate washes his hands) and the Jews collectively inculpated, maybe forever, Matt 27:24-25 (although it can be interpreted as only referring to that generation, cf. Matt 23:35-36). Thus, Pilate declares Jesus innocent, but hands him over to the Jews for crucifixion! After the terrible history of the relation between Christians and Jews due in no small part to these texts, we must make a great effort to read and preach about them intelligently and with historical and exegetical knowledge: *otherwise*, it might be best not to read or preach about them at all.

Unlike the synoptics, in John Jesus majestically carries his own cross. They come to the crucifixion place “of the skull” and Jesus is crucified.⁹² Jesus was not the only one crucified that day, fulfilling Isa 53:9, 12; remember John 12:41. John makes repeated references to Jesus as King of the Jews;⁹³ there is no mocking of the crucified Jesus as in the synoptics. Jesus’ tunic all of one piece not only serves to fulfill the passion Ps 22:19, but may echo the high priest’s (see Brown p. 94; Exod 28:32).

Now Jesus’ mother makes her second appearance in Jesus’ hour (John 19:27). Jesus entrusts her as mother to the Beloved Disciple, who receives her as his own (or as part of his family).⁹⁴ Jesus’ mother has been with Jesus at the beginning and end of his work. Jesus’ work is now accomplished (see 17:4).⁹⁵ He must still fulfill one more Scripture, however: Ps 69:21 (the psalm “most quarried” in the passion narratives), regarding the vinegar, and Ps 22:16. It is then that Jesus can declare the work that his Father gave him to do finished (or “fulfilled,” as in 19:28 [twice]). And it is now that

⁹⁰ See Bruce p. 363.

⁹¹ See *NJBC* 75:168.

⁹² According to Mark 15:25, Jesus was crucified on the third hour, 9:00 a.m., and died on the ninth hour, 3:00 p.m. (Mark 15:34||Matt 27:46). See Luke 23:44 and parallels. John 19:14 states that it was the sixth hour (noon, cf. Mark 15:34 and parallels) when Jesus was before Pilate. This fits in with John’s theological chronology which makes the time of Jesus’ death (John 19:31) to coincide with the slaughter of the Passover lambs (which Jesus replaces), which took place in the late evening before sunset; see Exod 12:6 and the *Jerusalem Bible* note thereto; cf. Deut 16:6.

⁹³ Some scholars say that “King of Israel” is the believer’s title for Jesus, while “King of the Jews” is the unbeliever’s.

⁹⁴ εἰς τὰ ἴδια (= [in]to one’s own things) appears in 1:11; 16:32; 19:27.

⁹⁵ See 4:34; 5:20, 36; 9:4; 10:25, 37-38; 14:10; cf. 6:29.

the great eschatological promise of the Spirit can also take place (“he delivered the Spirit,” 19:30).⁹⁶

Unique to John is 19:31-37, the reference to the breaking of the legs of the crucified (Jesus fulfills yet another Scripture regarding Passover, Exod 12:46; cf. Num 9:12).⁹⁷ The blood and water which comes out of Jesus’ side represent rebirth in the Spirit (John 1:33; 3:5; 4:10; 7:38) and redemptive forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:7; 5:6, 8; Rev 1:5; 5:9; 7:14) and spiritual nourishment unto eternal life (6:53-56). The citation of Zech 12:10 is John’s way of also referring to Amos 8:9-10, the darkness at noon (of the synoptics) and the reversal of the joy of pilgrimage feasts (such as Passover!) into the mourning as for an only son. John agrees with the synoptics in mentioning Joseph of Arimathea’s involvement in Jesus’ burial, but adds the figure of Nicodemus, the ‘secret disciple for fear of the Jews’. As previously stated, the amount of the anointing mixture is enormous, indicative of Jesus’ majesty. Only in John is Jesus properly prepared for burial (cf. Mark and Luke). John’s unique mention that Jesus’ tomb was in a garden (*képos*) ties in with 18:1, and seems to form an *inclusio* with the beginning of the Passion.⁹⁸

John’s Original Final Chapter

Preliminary note: Please study the assigned parts of REB in addition to this handout.

John is in accord with the other gospels that the discovery of Jesus’ empty tomb took place very early on the first day of the week.⁹⁹ Rather than have several women go (e.g., to anoint Jesus, as in Mark and Luke), only the great Mary Magdalene goes,¹⁰⁰ the reason being unclear (in Matt she and another Mary go “to see” the sepulcher). The stone had been rolled away (cf. Matt 28:2). Unlike the synoptics, the angels will make their appearance subsequently (John 20:12). Mary Magdalene runs to tell Simon Peter and, again, the “dynamic duo” (Peter and the Beloved Disciple) run to the tomb. As

⁹⁶ See 7:39; 16:7, 13; 20:22.

⁹⁷ See also Ps 34:21, quite apropos.

⁹⁸ See also 18:26.

⁹⁹ Had the sun risen, as in Mark 16:2, or was it still dark, as in John 20:1?

¹⁰⁰ But notice the “we” in 20:2!

usual, the Beloved Disciple has the advantage, though he defers to Peter's primacy. The Beloved Disciple is the first to witness the inside of the tomb containing only the linen cloths left behind by Jesus, neatly indicating that there was no surreptitious theft. Peter is the first to actually go into the tomb, but it is the Beloved Disciple who "saw and believed."¹⁰¹ This is the twofold activity required of Jesus' followers.¹⁰² Notice the similarities with Luke 24:10-12. In John, there are repeated statements that the disciples did not understand the Scriptures until Jesus was risen (and sent the Spirit); see 2:17, 22; 12:16; 14:26; 20:9; cf. 5:39; Luke 24:25-27, 45.

Mary is weeping outside the tomb and suddenly encounters the risen Jesus, whom she does not recognize. Recognition of the risen Jesus is not automatic, but requires discernment and faith (see Matt 28:17; Luke 24:16, 31, 37-38; Mark 16:12; Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15). Jesus in John 20:16 calls Mary's name, and then she recognizes him. Jesus tells her not to "touch" or "lay hold of" him (cf. Matt 28:9, with the even stronger "hold fast" or "seize;" Luke 24:39), for he has not yet gone back up to the Father. Thus even in John the "realized eschatology" and "telescoping" (concentrating things into a simple, single whole) is not carried out in a thoroughgoing manner. Jesus has not immediately returned whither he came, despite 17:11-12, nor have the effects of the Spirit he sends at his death yet occurred (cf. 19:30; 20:22).¹⁰³ See Brown regarding all this.

Later that same day (20:19-20), Jesus appeared to his disciples in a recognizable manner which showed he was the same person that was crucified.¹⁰⁴ Jesus greets the disciples ("shalom") and commissions ("sends") them to continue the work his Father sent him to do and which he finished on the cross (19:30); they will indeed be able to do

¹⁰¹ In Luke 24:34, Simon Peter is the first to believe.

¹⁰² See (!) how often the verb "to see" is used in John in relation to belief or witness, e.g., 1:34; 3:11, 32; 5:37; 6:14; 11:40; 1 John 1:3; cf. 4:48; 6:14, 26, 30, 36; 20:25. The Beloved Disciple's seeing is spiritually perceptive, it gets to the heart of the significance of what he sees, and thus results in faith, while the unbeliever or doubter, like Thomas (which means "twin" in Aramaic, which may be symbolic or representative of others), demands to see physical signs (like those whom Jesus criticizes in 4:48) which may actually interfere with faith (as in 6:26; cf. 2:18; 12:37). In Thomas' case, the risen Jesus' appearance leads not only to faith, but to its most complete confession, but Jesus contrasts this with the faith of those who believe without demanding signs.

¹⁰³ Luke's chronology is of course much drawn out (Acts 1:3, forty days of resurrection appearances, the Holy Spirit being poured forth on the fiftieth day, Pentecost). In John it all takes place in that one Sunday. The apocalypsis of the prophet John takes place on a Sunday, Rev 1:10.

¹⁰⁴ Luke also emphasizes the reality of the resurrection of the Crucified One; see Luke 24:39-40; Acts 1:3; 10:40-41. The Qur'an, Sura 4:157, denies that Jesus was crucified.

even greater works than him, 14:12, through faith, the great work God requires, 6:29, and which constitutes our victory over “the world,” 1 John 5:4, and which is why this gospel was written, 20:30.

Having commissioned them, Jesus now breathes the Spirit on them (cf. Isa 61:1) and gives them authority to “let go” (“forgive”) or “retain” (a Semitism)¹⁰⁵ sins.¹⁰⁶ This is a clear recording of authority given by the risen Jesus to the leaders of what would become known as the Church,¹⁰⁷ but which is not developed further here.¹⁰⁸

The Doubting Thomas (“Twin”) episode takes place after eight days, so that it is to be considered separately from what took place that great Easter Sunday. Jesus appears in much the same manner, but the point is simply to challenge Thomas in a rather gruesome way. Contrary to popular tellings of this episode, the only reaction Thomas has is to pronounce a full profession of faith in Jesus as divine (using the unmistakable “God” with the Greek article, *ho theós*, literally “the God”). In this coming to faith, Thomas is a model for all those who did not get to see the risen Jesus as did the first disciples.

The original conclusion to the gospel simply states that Jesus performed many other signs which were not written down, but the ones that were written are meant to give rise to faith in him as the messiah and the Son of God, which faith gives (eternal) life (1:4, 12; 3:15-16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 17:3).

¹⁰⁵ A Semitism is something like Spanglish, here a Greek word which too faithfully renders a Hebrew one, like translating “I’ll call you back” as “Te llamo para atrás.”

¹⁰⁶ The passive form of the verbs indicates that it is God who will forgive or not according to the disciples’ decision. The Holy Spirit is associated with forgiveness in Acts 15:8-9; 2:38; 11:15-18. Jesus applied Isa 61:1 to himself in Luke 4:18 and is said to have been anointed with the Holy Spirit and power (*dynamis*) in Acts 10:38.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Matt 16:19 (to Peter), 18:18 (to the community?). Cf. Jas 5:16; 1 John 5:16.

¹⁰⁸ Jesus has *exousía* and can give it to others, 1:12; cf. Mark 3:13-16; 6:7; Luke 10:19. God has *exousía* and gives it to whom he will in Dan; see footnote 53, *supra*. This sending of the disciples after receipt of the Spirit, as Brown p. 99 indicates, corresponds to the consecration of the disciples in God’s true (or faithful) Word in John 17:17-19; recall that the “consecration/sanctification” word is connected to anointing.

The Second Ending

Here there is yet another appearance of Jesus after that first Easter Sunday. How long after did it take place? John 21:14 says it was the third time that the risen Jesus had appeared to his disciples, but 21:23 would indicate that a good while had passed, long enough that the rumor that the Beloved Disciple would not die had been belied. But Simon Peter is still fishing in Galilee, rather than leading the Church in Jerusalem (as in Acts). Clearly there was a strong tradition that associated the apostolic call of the first disciples with their trades (fishermen, Mark 1:16-18, followed by Matt 4:18-22), but here John, in a way reminiscent of Luke 5:1-11, associates a miraculous catch of fish after a fruitless night with a special commissioning of Simon Peter. In Luke 5:8-10, Jesus' numinous¹⁰⁹ nature is not immediately apparent to the future disciples, including Peter; in John, the disciples, including Peter, do not recognize Jesus, though again, the Beloved Disciple does. At Jesus' word, they cast the net and it is so filled up they cannot drag it. As Brown pp. 101-102 indicates, the number 153 probably symbolizes the totality of kinds of fish (as in Matt 13:47) and bespeaks abundance (one of the eschatological blessings which result from the healing water which flows from the right side of the new Temple in Ezek 47).¹¹⁰ The abundance of fish is also related to the miraculous feeding of the multitude in John 6 and indeed 21:13 recalls 6:11, with its eucharistic overtones.

Simon Peter, the Shepherd who Follows Jesus

It is in this eucharistic setting that the rehabilitation-cum-commissioning exchange takes place between the Risen Lord and Peter the Rock. Jesus thrice asks Peter if he loves him (more than the others), and asks him to fulfill the function of shepherd (Ezek 34:15, 23).¹¹¹ The threefold exchange is a rehabilitative reversal of Peter's threefold denial (cf. Luke 22:31-32). Three is a number indicating Semitic definiteness. Now Jesus predicts Peter's martyrdom by crucifixion, by which he will

¹⁰⁹ "Supernatural, mysterious, holy, spiritual," *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*.

¹¹⁰ See Ezek 47:9. This passage is related to John 7:38 and 19:34.

¹¹¹ The greeting of Ignatius of Antioch's letter to the Romans speaks of the Roman church's preeminence in love.

glorify God (like Jesus, 13:31-32, and the disciples, 15:8). This will be the result of Peter's finally following Jesus, 13:36-37; see Matt 16:24 in its context, and parallels).

Now comes the typical Johannine second panel of the Peter-Beloved Disciple diptych. Peter, "having been turned" (using a conversion-verb; see Luke 22:32), sees the Disciple whom Jesus loved (already) *following* (as in NAB; many Bibles add "them," which is not in the text, but which would be interesting: this would indicate the final submission of the Beloved Disciple to Peter the Shepherd whom Jesus leaves to guide his sheep and lambs). One level on which this passage may be read is as telling Peter not to be concerned with the Beloved Disciple (avoid comparisons or competition?), but to stick to following Jesus. The next part regards the idea that the Beloved Disciple would not die, but might remain until Jesus' return (14:3), which rumor is dispelled. This would be related to Peter's preoccupation with his seeming-rival. On another level, the passage indicates that the Beloved Disciple was a historical figure about whom there was concrete talk among the brethren, 21:23.¹¹² This is often the situation in Scripture: we are left at a loss as to the exact historicity of what is narrated.¹¹³ Notice that the passage ends with a reference to Jesus' return (cf. Rev 22:20).

The Beloved Disciple's Testimony

The final redactor now weighs in with a statement from the Beloved Disciple that he is the one who has borne witness to and written these things, and that this testimony is known to be true by the Beloved Disciple's community. This testimony-talk forms an *inclusio* with the beginning of the gospel, 1:7, 8, 15, 32, etc., and is related to the Spirit's witness, 15:26-27. But this is only a small part of what could be said about Jesus . . .¹¹⁴

¹¹² But could this be related to sayings of Jesus such as 6:50-51; 8:51-52?

¹¹³ Deut 29:28 states: "The things hidden are for YHWH our Lord, the things revealed are for us and for our children forever, (in order) to do all the words of this Torah."

¹¹⁴ See 16:12-13, and the *Jerusalem Bible* note to 14:26.