

# The Gospel According to John

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*How could the Eternal do a temporal act,  
The Infinite become a finite fact?<sup>1</sup>*

Formulated with Auden's eloquence or voiced threadbare and wanting any sense of refinement, this question finds an answer in the good news according to one called the Beloved Disciple.<sup>2</sup> While the other accounts of the good news of Jesus Messiah begin earthbound, our fourth gospel takes us back to the beginning, with the *λογος* ("word") who was with God and was God.<sup>3</sup> For this reason the eagle became the figure most often associated with this account of Jesus' life and ministry. "John's Jesus is the eagle, while the evangelist is the visionary caught in the eagle's talons and carried by his Lord soaring aloft."<sup>4</sup> The fourth evangelist begins with the origin of all things and then details the beginning of the new creation. Our story moves from the primordial chaos into which the Word pours light that overcomes the darkness (Gen 1.1-4), to humanity and all the groaning creation (Rom 8.19ff) to whom the Word once more imparts light that cannot be overcome by the darkness of this chaotic, fallen world. We begin with the call "come and see" (Jn 1.39) and end on the shores of the Tiberian Sea (Jn 21) with the invitation to follow Jesus into the darkness, bearing the light that is "the last best hope of earth" (see also Jn 12.36).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.H. Auden, "For the Time Being," Quoted in Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the NT: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 142.

<sup>2</sup> The "beloved disciple" does not appear until the latter chapters of the gospel (see 19.35; 21.20; 21.24). The identity of this figure is never revealed in the text, and theories abound. As Charles Talbert reveals, "there is agreement in the ancient church about authorship: John the son of Zebedee, an apostle, the disciple whom Jesus loved." However, "modern scholars are virtually unanimous in rejecting Christian antiquity's claims about authorship for at least three reasons. (a) The silence of Ignatius of Antioch regarding John's presence in Ephesus [the gospel's originating city according to antiquity]. (b) The picture of John, the son of Zebedee, which is found in the Synoptics, Acts, and Paul does not match that of the Fourth Evangelist. (c) Based on the internal evidence of the Fourth Gospel, Lazarus has a better claim to be the beloved disciple whom John 21:24 claims as author or sponsor (cf. John 11.3, 5, 36)," *Reading John*, 63-4. So, where does that leave us regarding authorship? We have an eyewitness tradition as the source of the Johannine literature (the gospel plus the three epistles), with the actual writer and likely a later redactor (editor) being members of the community of faith that gathered around and learned the story of Jesus from the unnamed and thus, unknown (to us), "beloved disciple." After noting that any views are mere guesswork, Raymond Brown suggests that it may have been "a minor figure during the ministry of Jesus, too unimportant to be remembered in the more official tradition of the Synoptics," but who gained prominence in the Johannine community, *An Introduction to the NT*, (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 369. Talbert's view that Lazarus is more likely to be the Beloved Disciple than John the Son of Zebedee seems to have a solid basis. When Mary and Martha send word of Lazarus' illness they say "Lord, he whom you love is ill" (11.3), and when Jesus arrives at Lazarus' tomb he weeps (11.35). Moreover, since Lazarus was raised from the dead (11.38-44) it would be understandable if a rumor arose that he would not die again (21.20-23). Yet, even this view is not without its difficulties and is certainly speculative at best. Therefore, accepting Brown's position that it is an unsolvable matter, Gail R. O' Day's thoughts are helpful. "The identity of this disciple may have been known to the first readers of the Gospel, but John is quite intentional about not naming him in the story. This suggests that what was important to the writer is not the name of the disciple, but his relationship to Jesus and the subsequent community. He stands as a model of love and witness (see 21.20-24)," *The New Interpreter's Bible: John*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1905. Though the dialogue about the Beloved Disciple's identity may be intriguing, spending time and effort debating the matter actually runs counter to the intentions of the writer/editor, who leaves the Beloved Disciple unnamed in order that he may serve as a model for the community in addition to being the source for the Jesus tradition presented in this gospel.

<sup>3</sup> *λογος* is a word full of great depth given its diverse usage in the ancient world. "The Johannine *logos* is strongly parallel to the concept of wisdom in Hellenistic Jewish thought, where already wisdom and word were associated (Wisd. of Sol. 9.1-2). Wisdom or Word was God's creative presence through which the world came into being....In Greek, *logos* meant both spoken word and pervading principle," William A. Beardslee, "Logos," *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 463-4. A.T. Robertson adds the following. "*Logos* is from *lego*, old word in Homer to lay by, to collect, to put words side by side, to speak, to express an opinion. *Logos* is common for reason as well as speech. Heraclitus used it for the principle which controls the universe. The Stoics employed it for the soul of the world (*anima mundi*) and Marcus Aurelius used *spermatikos logos* for the generative principle in nature. The Hebrew *memra* was used in the Targums for the manifestation of God like the Angel of Jehovah and the Wisdom of God in Prov 8.23. Dr. J. Rendel Harris thinks that there was a lost wisdom book that combined phrases in Proverbs and in the Wisdom of Solomon which John used for his Prologue (*The Origin of the Prologue to St. John*, p. 43) which he has undertaken to reproduce. At any rate John's standpoint is that of the Old Testament and not that of the Stoics nor even of Philo who uses the term *Logos*, but not John's conception of personal pre-existence," *Word Pictures of the NT*, "John 1.1: The Word (*o λογος*)."

<sup>4</sup> Richard Burrige, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 134.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase "the last best hope of earth" is found in one of Abraham Lincoln's speeches (c. 1862), and is quoted in William J. Bennett's *America: The Last Best Hope – Volume I: From the Age of Discovery to a World at War*, (Nashville: Nelson Current, 2006), xiii. With all due respect to Mr. Bennett as a historian and to Mr. Lincoln as one of the greatest American Presidents, I must take exception with their statement. America—or any other

The gospel according to John begins with a lengthy prologue (1.1-18), which Raymond Brown notes is “a poetic summary of the whole theology and narrative of the gospel, as well as an introduction” that “can be fully understood only *after* the Gospel has been studied.”<sup>6</sup> This august preamble introduces two figures who will occupy main stage in the opening chapters, namely, the Word and John the Baptist (JBap). Suspense builds as the reader who encounters the text for the very first time must wait in eager anticipation to discover the identity of this Word who “was with God and was God” (1.1). What the prologue does reveal is that the story will disclose how the Word “came to his own, and his own people did not accept him” (1.11), “but to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (1.12).<sup>7</sup>

At 1.19 JBap again (see 1.6-9) takes center stage to identify the Word as Jesus, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (1.29). This begins what many scholars have labeled **THE BOOK OF SIGNS (1.19-12.50)**, during which Jesus will make known his identity through seven σημεῖων (“signs”) that reveal him as the presence of God dwelling with creation.<sup>8</sup> In 1.19-36 JBap sees Jesus and tells his followers, “here is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1.29).<sup>9</sup> At this, two of John’s disciples approach Jesus and ask where he is staying, to which Jesus responds “come and see” (1.37-39).<sup>10</sup> 1.40-51 completes the encounter when the disciples choose to follow and immediately go and tell others about Jesus, exemplifying the ideal engagement with the light of the world: encountering the light, seeing (believing) the light, and becoming bearers of the light (see Jn 12.36).<sup>11</sup> In 2.1-25 we first

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nation past, present or future for that matter—has never been and will never be *the last best hope of earth*. For a follower of Christ, seeing anyone or anything other than God’s redemptive mission (revealed most fully in Jesus Messiah) as the world’s last and best hope is not only off-base, but could be compared to the actions of the religious leaders in John 19.13-16. They demand that Pilate crucify the light of life that shines in the darkness (19.15; cf. 1.3b-5), to which Pilate replies, “Shall I crucify your king?” And in one of the most hauntingly ironic moments in a narrative full of them, the leaders cry out “we have no king but Caesar!” “At the heart of Israel’s faith is the claim that God is the only king (Judg 8.23; 1 Sam 8.7; Isa 26.13), so in their zeal to reject Jesus as their king, [the Jewish leaders] also reject the very God they claim to serve,” O’Day, *NIB*, NOTE 19.15b, 1946. So, is the declaration of the Jewish leaders in Jn 19.15b really as far from “America, the last best hope of earth” as we would like to believe? Or is declaring anything or anyone but God’s work in and through Jesus Messiah as the world’s last best hope a further replaying of that troubling declaration “we have no king but Caesar!”?

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel & Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 21. This statement reveals the theological depth of the gospel narratives, which must be studied again and again, continually asking ourselves what the text means for us this day and this hour. Frederick Buechner’s well-known exhortation “listen to your life” (*Now and Then*, 1983) is in many ways analogous to the statement Brown makes here. Both are an invitation to drink deeply of the stories of our lives as well as those of the biblical narrative, and to find ourselves immersed in the tale and its characters that are very much like you and me. And at the end of all things, when the call *follow me!* echoes forth (Jn 21.22b) we must return to the beginning, this time carrying our little lights (Jn 12.36), however dim they may be, to find ourselves transformed anew by the light that shines in the darkness.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Brown offers these verses as an outline of the gospel, with the former expanded upon in 1.19-12.50 and the latter in 13.1-20.36, *The Gospel and Epistles*, 16. This proves to be a helpful way of understanding the function of the prologue, which introduces the reader to the Word (later revealed as Jesus) and foreshadows the narrative to come. I believe it would be just as fitting to see 1.5 as a summation of the story of Jesus with “the book of signs” (1.19-12.50) prefigured in the statement “the light shines in the darkness,” and “the book of glory” imaged in the second clause “the darkness did not overcome [this light].” This is a variation on Luke Timothy Johnson’s suggestion that 1.5 applies to “the book of signs” and 1.12 to the “book of glory,” *The Writings of the NT*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 478.

<sup>8</sup> “Jesus’ signs were to reveal the presence of God in him and lead to faith (2.11; 20.30-31). The Fourth Gospel has Jesus perform 7 such signs, corresponding to the 7 days of new creation” (see 2.1-11; 4.46-53; 5.2-9; 6.1-14; 6.16-21; 9.1-12; 11.17-44),” *The Writings*, 482-3. Johnson’s comments about 7 signs and 7 days of creation are insightful because we will later encounter Jesus fulfilling a variety of Jewish festivals and rituals, yet another way that the Word “has made God known” (1.18). See notes 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, and 27.

<sup>9</sup> In the Fourth Gospel sin is presented in the context of a present judgment. The writer, who declared that “the light shines in the darkness,” reveals that sin is simply this: refusing to accept the light that leads to life. Thus, Jesus can say in 3.19: “This is the judgment, that the light [the Word, who is Jesus] has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” As O’Day notes, “*sin* is not measured by individual actions, but is the condition of not recognizing God in Jesus,” because “in the fourth gospel, ‘sin’ is not a moral category of behavior, but is a theological category about one’s response to the revelation of God in Jesus (see 1.29),” *NIB*, notes 8.21, 1924; “Special Note,” 1926.

<sup>10</sup> This summons is extended to all readers and hearers of the evangelist’s message. Moreover, as Brown points out, “in John, ‘seeing’ is in the true sense means ‘believing’—cf. 6.40,” *The Gospel & Epistles*, 27. Thus, we find an open invitation to follow Jesus—to come with John’s disciples and see (believe) that he is the presence of God dwelling among us, bringing light into our darkness.

<sup>11</sup> We find a recurring pattern in John first revealed in 1.19-51, which follows the paradigm found in Jn 12.36. JBap shows the light (Jesus) to his followers (29-36), who then encounter the light for themselves (37-38). This leads them to believe in the light (39), and then show the light to others (40-51). Compare Jn 4.1-42; 5.1-18 (This man’s report to the Jewish leaders should not be seen as an effort to get Jesus into trouble; rather, he’s simply

encounter a key theme of the gospel through the stories about the water turned into wine (1-12) and the clearing of the Temple (13-22), namely, Jesus as the fulfillment and replacement of Jewish ceremonies, rituals, festivals and places of worship.<sup>12</sup> We then find the first of three encounters with “a Pharisee named Nicodemus” who functions as a typological figure for a particular faith experience (3.1-21),<sup>13</sup> followed by JBap’s final appearance (3.22-30/36?).<sup>14</sup> This leads to an encounter with a Samaritan woman who serves as a second typological figure of faith (4.1-42), followed by the healing of a royal official’s son (4.43-54).<sup>15</sup> 5.1-6.71 takes place during an unnamed festival in Jerusalem (see 5.1), where Jesus’ actions are followed by speeches explaining the significance of and authority for his deeds.<sup>16</sup> 7.1-10.21 occurs around the time of

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modeling this recurring pattern in John, but the Jewish leaders represent those who are Jesus’ own that do not accept him—Jn 1.11. We are to be faithful to proclaim the light of the world, knowing that the manner of another’s response is out of our control); 9.1-41; 12.12-19.

<sup>12</sup> At a wedding in Cana we have the first of seven (7) signs Jesus will perform, which indicate his identity as the Word become flesh (see note 8). It’s noteworthy that Jesus and his disciples are invited to this wedding celebration, which indicates that Jesus knows how to have a good time and was quite likeable. This ought to be more deeply reflected upon, particularly when we so often hear Christianity defined by what Christians do not do or say and the places that they do not go. Jesus goes to a party, and does not talk about his Messianic identity (at least explicitly) at any point. In other words, he does not go to evangelize, but simply to have a good time with friends. He even provides more wine, the best wine, once everyone has already had a fair share and wouldn’t have been able to distinguish between great and poor wine anyway. What is more significant about this sign is that the water turned into wine was used for purification (2.6), which led the disciples to believe. As F.F. Bruce noted, “the water, provided for purification as laid down by Jewish law and custom, stands for the whole ancient order of Jewish ceremonial, which Christ was to replace by something better....The wine symbolizes the new order as the water in the jars symbolized the old order,” *The Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 71. Just as Jesus brings a new manner of purification at Cana, namely believing the light (2.11b), the Temple scene is significant since it precedes Passover (2.13) and prepares the disciples (and the readers) for the celebration (see 11.55). Moreover, clearing the money changers (manipulators and exploiters of the religious system) from the temple courts in 2.13-22 “shows that the very center of Jewish worship loses its meaning in his presence. The glorious presence of God, once confined to the Temple, has now become flesh in Jesus,” Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles*, 30. See also John 4.21-24; 10.22-42.

<sup>13</sup> A typological figure is a diverse concept in biblical interpretation. My use of the term is along the lines of a representative figure. Thus, Nicodemus functions as an image of those who some may call “seekers” today—a term which ought to apply to any who call themselves Christ followers (see Brian McLaren and Tony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003)). Nicodemus appears three times in the narrative (3.1-21; 7.50-52; 19.39-42), each time progressing in his understanding of Jesus and in his identity as one intrigued by this man many are calling the Messiah. Johnson expands upon the function of such characters by noting that “individual persons represent others: Nicodemus stands for all teachers of the Jews, Martha for all believers, Thomas for all doubters....[just as] the Gospel’s tendency is to group all Jews together,” *The Writings*, 477.

<sup>14</sup> “(3.22-30/36?)” indicates that scholars are uncertain whether JBap’s words continue all the way to v 36 or conclude at v 30 with vv 31-36 being the words of the author or Jesus. See O’Day, *NIB*, “Special Note,” 1913; Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman functions as yet another typological figure. As Brown notes, “In 4.4-42 a character who is more than an individual has been developed in order to serve as a spokesperson for a particular type of faith-encounter with Jesus. The portrayal centers on how one first comes to faith and the many obstacles that stand in the way,” *An Introduction*, 342. This woman is another model of faithful discipleship (see also 1.35-51), as the encounter leads her to return to her village to tell everyone about Jesus (4.28-42). In this story we also find an expansion upon and reaffirmation of the clearing of (and rendering unnecessary) the Jerusalem Temple when Jesus tells the woman that “the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain [Gerizim] nor in Jerusalem” (4.21). Here (v 26) Jesus makes one of his numerous “I AM” statements, which is “Jesus’ characteristic formula of self-revelation found in John....When Jesus speaks this way, he is making a direct connection with the divine name (as in Exod 3.14, ‘I AM WHO I AM’), in order to identify himself as the one in whom God is visible and made known (1.18),” O’Day, *NIB*, “Excursus: ‘I AM’ Sayings,” 1915. For other ‘I AM’ statements see 6.20, 35, 48, 51; 8.12, 24, 28, 58; 9.5; 10.7, 9, 11, 14; 11.25-26; 13.19; 14.6; 15.1, 5; 18.5, 6, 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Unit 1: Action (5.1-18) + Speech (5.19-47)*. Here Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath, which angers the religious leaders who believe it violates the Sabbath law (5.1-18). Jesus responds by saying that he does only what he sees God doing (5.19-47), thus declaring that he is the authority regarding what is permissible on the Sabbath. *Unit 2: Action (6.1-21) + Speech (6.22-71)*. Here Jesus feeds 5000 people by the Sea of Tiberius with five loaves and two fish (6.1-21). The next day the crowd comes to Jesus who declares that he is the bread of life, which, like the manna in the wilderness (see Exod 16), comes from God to give life to all who are weary from the journey. In these two speeches Jesus surpasses Moses and the religious leaders of the day by declaring that he is the authoritative interpreter of the Torah (5.17) and as the provider of bread (manna) from heaven that ends the hunger and thirst of all who partake (6.35). Finally, it is here (6.35-59, esp. vv 52-59) that the writer places a parallel account of the Synoptic Passover meal where Jesus offers up his body as redemptive bread and his blood as redemptive wine (see Exod 16; Num 20.9-13; Prov 9.5). “The discourse in John 6 is the place where the institution of the eucharist is lodged because, for John, all of Jesus’ life... ‘institutes’ the sacrament of the eucharist....To share in the eucharist meal is not to remember or commemorate one particular event, but is to share in all of Jesus’ life, including ultimately his death. Participation in the eucharist creates a relationship between Jesus and the believer (6.56) that contains within it the promise of new life (6.57),” O’Day, *NIB*, “Excursus: The Eucharist in John,” 1920. Thus, while foot washing takes place at the Johannine Passover meal (see 13.1-20), the writer retains the Synoptic reinterpretation of the Passover bread and the wine as Jesus’ body and blood here.

the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles,<sup>17</sup> and records the mixed response to Jesus (7.1-36, 40-52; 9.13-34; 10.19-21) interspersed among his words and deeds (7.37-39; 8.1-9.12; 9.35-10.18). Jesus responds to criticism from the religious leaders in **10.22-42** during the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah),<sup>18</sup> which echoes his earlier declaration that he is the good shepherd (10.1-21) and brings us to the Lazarus narrative (**11.1-12.50**) that will conclude THE BOOK OF SIGNS and transition to THE BOOK OF GLORY. The Lazarus event proves to be the metaphorical straw that broke the camel's back. While the Synoptics see the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing (condemning?) of the Temple as the event leading to Jesus' arrest and trials (Mt 21.1-17; Mk 11.1-26; Lk 9.28-48), in John the Temple cleansing has already occurred (see 2.13-22) and raising Lazarus from the dead becomes the catalyst.<sup>19</sup>

At **13.1** we begin reading **THE BOOK OF GLORY (13.1-20.31)**, which takes place during the week of Passover and details Jesus' final days where he will prepare his disciples for his ensuing death.<sup>20</sup> **13.1** reveals that Jesus "hour"<sup>21</sup> (see 2.4; 7.30; 8.20; 12.23, 27; 13.1; 17.1; 19.27) has now arrived during the third(?) Passover of Jesus' ministry (see 2.13; 6.4).<sup>22</sup> For the

<sup>17</sup> The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths is the setting for two key speeches of Jesus (7.37-39; 8.12-20), the significance of which is increased with a knowledge of the actions conducted during the celebration. As Brown reveals, "this week-long feast...[was] celebrated in September/October at the fall harvest in order to pray for early rain in the winter season," and "(a) the people lived in huts or bowers to recall their ancestors' sojourn in the desert; (b) to symbolize the need for rain, there was a daily procession from the pool of Siloam bringing water as a libation to the Temple; (c) the court of the women in the Temple was lighted by immense torches," *The Gospel and Epistles*, 48-9. It is in this context that Jesus declares that any who are thirsty may come to him to find rivers of living water (7.37-39) and any who are walking in darkness may come to receive the light of life from the light of the world (8.12-20). The reader can appreciate the depth of Jesus' words when he/she imagines the worshippers carrying vessels filled with water to the Temple, which is emanating torch light. Jesus stands up in the midst of all the ceremony (see 7.14) and declares that he is sent from God to give living water to all who are thirsty and light to all who are groping about in darkness. The reader may recall the earlier response of the Samaritan woman going to the well to get water (4.1ff). When Jesus proclaims to her that he is the Messiah and offers "living water" (4.10), she lays down her jar and hurries to tell others about Jesus (4.28-42). The reader can only hope that those in the Temple will do likewise. It is a powerful image indeed. At the same festival Jesus overturns another traditional notion (8.39-59), namely being set apart by natural birth by declaring that children of God are not Abraham's descendants by birth, but those who believe in the Word and are given the right to become God's children (see 1.12; 3.5ff).

<sup>18</sup> The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) is the setting for Jesus' speech, which draws upon his declaration in 10.1-21 that he is the good shepherd. Hanukkah occurs "around Christmas time, in the heart of winter," and "celebrates the dedication of an altar and the re-consecration of the Temple by the Machabees after several years of desecration under the Syrian rulers (164 BC)," Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles*, 60. So, at the festival celebrating the restored ability to worship at the Temple, the site most associated with the presence of God, Jesus declares that he is the presence of God in their midst ("the Father and I are one," v 30) who does the works of God and all who know his voice will follow him. Moreover, "we should notice that the Father has 'made holy' or consecrated Jesus [v 36]—the same word the OT uses for the consecration of the Temple. On this feast of Temple-altar dedication and consecration, Jesus replaces the theme of the feast," Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles*, 61. Jesus already revealed to the Samaritan woman that their holy place had been superseded ("the hour is coming and now is when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain [Gerizim]...," 4.21a) and now he reveals to the Jewish leaders that their holy place has been as well ("...nor in Jerusalem," 4.21b). At the feast celebrating the re-consecration of the place where finite and infinite meet, Jesus places himself—the Word, God dwelling among us—as the means by which such interaction now occurs.

<sup>19</sup> Brown views the raising of Lazarus (chaps. 11-12) as "a bridge between the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory," noting the irony that "the gift of life [see 11.1-44] leads to the decision of the Sanhedrin that Jesus must die (11.45-53)," *An Introduction*, 349.

<sup>20</sup> Both Brown (*The Gospel and Epistles*, 16) and Johnson (*The Writings*, 478) suggest that "the book of glory" expands upon the statements made in 1.12-13. Moreover, Johnson notes that "The [Fourth Gospel] has no direct teaching of disciples except in the Book of Glory, first by Jesus' words and then by his death and resurrection," 491. See also note 7 above.

<sup>21</sup> Up to this point "we have repeatedly been told that Jesus' 'hour' had not yet arrived, without being told what it was (2.4; 7.30; 8.20)." Now we learn that "the hour of Jesus is...at once his death and his glorification....Jesus' death is the moment when God's presence is, paradoxically, most powerful. The notion of Jesus' glory (1.14; 2.11; 11.4, 40; 12.41) and of his 'being glorified' (7.39; 8.54; 11.4; 12.16, 23, 28), which was associated with his signs, is now intensified by association with the great sign that is his death and resurrection," Johnson, *The Writings*, 492.

<sup>22</sup> John's gospel is the basis for the three-year time frame of Jesus' ministry based upon the three references to Passover (see 2.13; 6.4; 13.1). The Synoptic gospels mention only one Passover. Traditionally the three Passovers are denoted by 2.13; 6.4; 11.55/12.1/13.1ff. Each reference seems to be followed by Jesus performing distinct elements of this celebration. The Passover in 2.1ff shows Jesus preparing for the feast by clearing the Temple (akin to the meticulous preparation of one's home for the celebration?), 6.4ff has Jesus transforming the Passover meal's bread and wine into his body and blood (as in the Synoptics), and 13.1ff indicates Jesus as the replacement of the paschal lamb through his death on the cross. Therefore, could the Passover in John function as the writer's way of emphasizing the major theological theme that Jesus is the fulfillment/abrogation of the Jewish rituals/celebrations? Moreover, is it possible that John's gospel spans only one year of ministry as the Synoptics seem to indicate? It does seem plausible if one takes 2.1 and 13.1 to indicate the usual Passover celebration (see Lev 23), and 6.4 as another feast that was also called Passover (see Num 9, esp. vv 6-14). This intriguing perspective is set forth by

first time the writer records that Jesus celebrates the Passover meal with his disciples, using this gathering to instruct them in the Kingdom manner of life (13.2-17.26). Significantly, “in the place of Jesus’ words over the bread and wine [see Mk 14.12-25, Mt 26.17-30, Lk 22.14-23], John has the washing of feet, an act of loving abasement that serves as an example to his disciples” (13.2-17).<sup>23</sup> This demonstration leads to the declaration that one of the disciples will turn against Jesus (13.18-25a), and though Jesus singles Judas out (13.25b-27) the other disciples fail to realize it (13.28-29). Judas immediately leaves the meal, *and it was night* (13.30). With this phrase the author provides an ominous foreshadowing of what is to come, recalling the prologue’s declaration that “the light shines in the darkness,” as well as the hope that the darkness will not overcome the light (1.5).<sup>24</sup> What follows is a lengthy discourse by Jesus while the remaining disciples sit at the Passover table (13.31-17.26): the new commandment of love is given (13.31-35); Peter’s coming three-fold denial is foretold (13.36-38); the way to the Father (14.1-14) and the promise of the Holy Spirit (14.15-31) are revealed; Jesus as the true vine (15.1-17), the world’s hatred of this new way of life (15.18-27), the reason for these final instructions (16.1-15), and the promise of joy and peace after sorrow and turmoil (16.16-33) are disclosed; and a final prayer for the disciples is voiced (17.1-26). Having concluded his instructions, Jesus and the disciples leave the table for a garden “across the Kidron valley” (18.1). The story quickly progresses from Jesus’ betrayal and arrest (18.2-11) to his trials before the Jewish (18.12-27)<sup>25</sup> and Gentile (Roman) authorities (18.28-19.16a).<sup>26</sup> After Pilate acquiesces to the

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Michael A. Daise in his Princeton dissertation entitled “Feasts in John,” (Tubingen, German: Mohr Siebeck, 2007). Portions of this work are available online at <<http://books.google.com/books?id=0yzSqTxW9SoC&pg=PP1&dq=feast+in+john+daise>>. He suggests that we “read the Passover at 6.4, not as a regular Passover, observed on 14 Nisan (the first month of the Jewish calendar), but as the Passover prescribed in Numbers 9.9-14, observed on 14 `Iyyar (the second month of the Jewish calendar),” which “pushes back the date of [John 6’s] Passover by one month into `Iyyar, allowing the regular Passover and the Waving of the ‘Omer to have already passed by, and therefore, legitimizing the secular (non-cultic) use of barely in 6.9,” 3-4. This second Passover, Daise reveals, was for those unable to participate in the regular Passover feast, and since Jesus is said to have gone to Jerusalem for Passover in 2.13, he did not need to make another journey to Jerusalem in 6.4 (which he does not). One of Daise’s presuppositions is that chaps. 5-6 were initially inverted, so the unnamed Jewish feast in 5.1 would occur after the second Passover celebration in 6.4. Thus, Daise reveals that “the full order of feasts (and their times) would now be: the Passover at 2.13 (14 Nisan), the Passover at 6.4 (14 `Iyyar), the unnamed feast at 5.1 (???), Tabernacles at 7.2 (15-22 Tishri), Dedication at 10.22-23 (25 Kislev) and Passover at 11.55 (14 Nisan),” 4. Daise’s suggestions make it possible to see John detailing a year-long ministry of Jesus that begins with the Passover mentioned in 2.13 and ending with the Passover in 13.1. Accepting Daise’s inversion of chapters, and considering that only three feasts necessitated a pilgrimage to Jerusalem—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles—it would seem that Pentecost is the unnamed feast in 5.1. Why? Passover has already occurred (2.13) and the feast of Tabernacles has yet to occur (7.2), which leaves only Pentecost (50 days after Passover and a few days prior to Tabernacles) (see <http://www.religion-cults.com/Judaism/p-festi2.htm>). Thus, Pentecost, which celebrates the giving of the Law at Sinai (Lev 23), becomes the setting for Jesus’ reinterpretation of the Law. He heals on the Sabbath, which offends the religious authorities because it violates the Law. In reply Jesus declares that he does only what the Father is doing (5.19ff), which is another way of declaring that Jesus, the Word, is the authoritative interpreter of the Law. As with the other feasts in John, Jesus is shown as the fulfillment of Pentecost. Daise’s overall position seems less tenable if you maintain the canonical chapter order. Nevertheless, his suggestion that the Passover mentioned in 6.4 is that of Num 9.9-14 is still plausible, as the focus of 5.1ff is on Sabbath law rather than the festival itself.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, 351.

<sup>24</sup> The proverbial “the night is always darkest just before the dawn” seems appropriate here.

<sup>25</sup> The writer actually reveals two people on trial before the Jewish authorities: Jesus and Peter. *Inside* Jesus appears before Annas (18.12-14), while *outside* in the courtyard Peter appears before the woman guarding the gate (18.15-18). *Inside* Jesus is questioned by Annas (18.19-24), while *outside* Peter is questioned by those around the fire (18.25-27). As Luke Timothy Johnson notes, “As in the Synoptics, Peter’s betrayal is juxtaposed to Jesus’ witnessing. In John, the contrast is even sharper because the two accounts are interwoven (18.15-27). And only a dull reader misses the point of Peter’s reaching to a fire for warmth while the light of the world is captured by the powers of darkness (18.18),” *The Writings*, 495.

<sup>26</sup> The trial before Pilate continues the inside-outside juxtaposition. Jesus is brought *inside* to Pilate (18.28), while the Jewish leaders remain *outside* (18.29). Pilate questions the leaders *outside* (18.29-32) and then questions Jesus *inside* (18.33-38a). Pilate again goes *outside* to question the leaders (18.38b-40), and then returns *indoors* to have Jesus flogged (19.1-4). Finally, Pilate brings Jesus *outside*—beaten and wearing a purple robe and crown of thorns—to face his accusers (19.5-7). When the leaders tell Pilate that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God (19.7), he becomes frightened and brings Jesus back *inside* to question him further (19.8-11). Pilate then returns *outside* to persuade the leaders to drop the charges, but gives in to their demands when they declare, “if you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor” (12.12). At this, Pilate returns *indoors* to lead Jesus back *outside* and gives him over to the soldiers for crucifixion (18.13-16). Gail R. O’Day notes that “the Greek verb used here [19.13], *εκαθισεν*, can be translated as either ‘sat’ or ‘seated him.’ Either Pilate himself sits on the judge’s bench or he places Jesus there. Either reading is possible grammatically, but it is in keeping with the mockery of 19.1-3 and Pilate’s taunting of the religious leaders in 19.4-5 for Pilate to seat Jesus on the judge’s bench. This act lends a profound irony to this final scene of the trial. Pilate intends to mock Jesus and the Jewish leaders by placing Jesus, their ‘king,’ on the judge’s bench, but he unknowingly places Jesus in his rightful place as judge. The world attempted to judge Jesus in the trial but, in the end, Jesus judges the world,” *NIB*, 19.13, 1946. Moreover, it is darkly ironic that the Jewish leaders remain outside

insane demand to crucify Jesus, whom he found no case against (18.38b), Jesus is led to Golgotha where he is lifted up (see Jn 3.14-15; 12.32) as his hour of glory finally arrives at Passover when the Lamb of God will take away the sin of the world (see 1.29) (**19.16b-42**).<sup>27</sup> In **20.1-29** we find the hope of Jn 1.5b manifested with the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus to his followers. The primary narrative concludes with a statement of purpose (**20.30-31**): *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.* The story ultimately concludes with what most scholars regard as an epilogue (**21.1-25**).<sup>28</sup> Jesus appears to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberius (vv 1-14), Peter's three-fold denial is countered by a three-fold confession (vv 15-19), and the fate of the Beloved Disciple (the source behind the gospel narrative) is clarified (vv 24-25).

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to maintain their ritual purity (19.28), while they vehemently compel Pilate to execute Jesus. The careful reader of the gospel will recognize the bitter irony of this scene when he/she recalls Jesus' words in 16.2b-4a: "An hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God," when the reality is that "they will do this because they have not known the Father or me."

<sup>27</sup> That Jesus' death takes place on the day before the Passover feast is significant. "In 19.29-30 a sponge full of common wine is placed on hyssop and offered to Jesus....By mentioning hyssop...John is again playing on symbolism, for in Exodus 12.22 hyssop was used to sprinkle the blood of the paschal lamb on the doorposts of the Israelite houses. Jesus is sentenced to death at noon (19.14), the very hour on Passover Eve when the priests began to slaughter the paschal lambs in the Temple precincts. In his death [Jesus] gives meaning to that mysterious acclamation of John the Baptist uttered when Jesus made his first public appearance: 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (1.29)," Raymond Brown, *A Crucified Christ in Holy Week*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 65.

<sup>28</sup> "The consensus of scholarly opinion is that chap. 21 is a secondary addition to the Gospel and should be read as an epilogue. Yet it is important to note that all of the most ancient manuscripts of John contain this chapter....John 21 points explicitly to the future life of Jesus' disciples. These concerns were all the central concern of the Farewell Discourse (chaps. 14-16) and Jesus' prayer (chap. 17), so this focus is not new or foreign to the Gospel. John 21 turns the reader's attention to the story of the church, much as Acts does for Luke," O'Day, *NIB*, 21.1-25, 1950.

## Outlines of and Commentaries on the Gospel

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### **Raymond Brown**<sup>29</sup>

#### **1.1-18 PROLOGUE**

An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word

#### **1.19-12.50 PART ONE: THE BOOK OF SIGNS**

The Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they will not accept him

#### **13.1-20.31 PART TWO: THE BOOK OF GLORY**

To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection, and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life

#### **21.1-25 EPILOGUE**

A series of resurrection appearances in Galilee of theological import

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<sup>29</sup> Brown, *The Gospel & Epistles of John*, 15-16.