

## PARALLEL GUIDE 14

### The Gospel According to John, Part II

#### Summary

This is the second of a two-chapter presentation of the Gospel According to John. The first portion presents a discussion of the Messiah's manifestation in Jerusalem and a series of images of Jesus such as "the light of the world," "the good shepherd," and "the bread of life." It continues with the Passion story and the commission to the Church. At the end of this chapter are three short essays: the identity of the Greeks (Hellēnēs), the identity of the Jews (Ioudaioi), and comments about the significant role of women in John's Gospel.

#### Learning Objectives

- Read [chapter 7 to the conclusion of the Gospel According to John](#)
- Explore the images of Jesus in the Gospel According to John
- Learn the differences and similarities of the Passion narrative when comparing John's Gospel to the Synoptics
- Learn the differences and similarities of the resurrection accounts comparing John's Gospel to the Synoptics
- Terms to learn:

*Ioudaios*  
*Sukkoth*  
*Hellēnēs*  
*Hanukkah*

- Discover the role of women in the Gospel According to John

#### Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

1. The images of Jesus are very powerful and have had a deep impact on our iconography as well as our literature, but today they may be dated. Not many of us live in the environment of sheep and shepherds. What images do you think would speak most clearly today?
2. The Gospel According to John includes women as significant figures in the stories. How might this treatment of women influence us today?
3. What is the significance for you that John links his text so closely to Judaism?

#### Preparing for Your Seminar

Although the Four Gospels present different views of Jesus, they also offer a very coherent picture. Jesus' question to Peter is our question too: "Who do people say that I am?" Who is the "real Jesus" is the question of Christology. Each of us develops our own thinking about this. To prepare for your seminar you may wish to answer

this inventory. Put a check mark by those items with which you agree and an X by those items you find questionable.

The following statements pertain to Jesus during the time of his ministry and prior to his Resurrection and Ascension.

- Jesus was human just as we are.
- Jesus knew only those things which he learned and was ignorant of other things.
- Jesus was tempted by evil.
- God presented Jesus with his vocation, and Jesus could accept or reject it.
- Jesus was subject to the presuppositions of his own time and culture.
- Jesus could only do what any human person could do.
- Jesus was divine.
- Jesus possessed knowledge of all things.
- Jesus was incapable of sin.
- From his birth, Jesus was the Son of God and Savior of the World.
- Jesus transcended over and beyond the presuppositions of his society.
- Jesus was able to do all things.
  
- Others: The following statements apply to the way or ways Jesus saves me (us):
- Jesus forgives my sins.
- He teaches me the true way of life.
- He inspires me by his example to love my neighbor and God.
- He has paid the price for my sins.
- He has destroyed the kingdom of Satan (evil).
- He is Lord of all, especially of our society.
- He feeds me sacramentally with the power of his own life.
- He infuses me with his own righteousness, making me righteous.
- He treats me as righteous in spite of my sins.
- Others:

Which of these statements is supported by the **kerygma** you have studied so far?

Which of these statements are **denied or affirmed by your experience?** How does our culture relate to these statements?

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## Chapter 14 THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN, PART II

### Jesus and the Jews

#### Dialogue, Testimony, Division 7:1-52

The running controversy with the Jewish religious establishment continues and deepens in this chapter. Historically there is some reminiscence here of Judean scorn of the Galilean preacher who is a Jew but not a Judean. Sukkoth (Booths, Tabernacles) would be an appropriate occasion for one who marked a new stage in the fulfillment of Jewish hope to show himself in the Temple. The main distinctive ritual of the festival is the requirement to "dwell in booths" in commemoration of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness, which the bread of life discourse in chapter 6 has just recalled. Sukkoth at Jerusalem was marked by ceremonies of water and light; the one who promised living water in chapter 4 declares himself the light of the world in chapter 8.

Flight from threat turns into opportunity for proclamation (7:1-3), just as it does in Matthew's story of the flight into Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15) that leads to the Christian feast of the Epiphany, the showing of Christ to the Gentiles. In the sense in which his brothers demand it, Jesus will not go up to the feast at all (7:8). The brothers have asked for public marvels, but when Jesus does go up, it is "in secret" (7:10), and he gives not marvels but teaching (7:14). His teaching rebukes that of the official teachers, and the tension is continually heightened as a result. Either Jesus speaks as God's prophet or he does not. If he does not, he is a false prophet and he must die (cf. 8:39-40). But if Jesus is the true prophet like Moses, the prophet whom Moses himself promised, then he must be believed.

"If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath?" (7:23) The argument is rabbinic—*qal wa-homer*, "light and heavy." For Jesus to confound his opponents by their own techniques is doubly infuriating. As a result some "people of Jerusalem" begin to wonder. The authorities say nothing to him: why? Perhaps they know he is the Messiah (7:25-26). "Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from" (7:27; cf. 6:42). Ironically, the exact opposite will be used as an objection in 9:29—"We do not know where he comes from." Jesus' reply is that the objectors do not know where he is from because they do not know the one who sent him (7:28-29; cf. 9:30, 33). The result is division.

The authorities are as incapable of grasping Jesus' end as his beginning (7:34). "Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?" they ask (7:35b; cf. 11:51-52). (See "Who were the 'Greeks' (Hellēnēs)?" at the end of this chapter.)

"On the last day of the festival, the great day"—during or just after the water ceremonies—Jesus stood up and cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink" (7:37-38). Next we have one of John's famous puzzles: just where does scripture say, "out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water" (7:38b)?—in Isaiah 44:3? 55:1? 58:11? In Zechariah 14:8? Not

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exactly. As often in the Fourth Gospel, the evangelist recalls whole passages, even collections of passages, or summarizes scriptural ideas with an apparent quotation. "Scripture says" does not necessarily signify for John or his contemporaries what we mean by a quotation. The water theme has already been introduced in the first sign and in the story of the woman at the well. To mention thirst is to recall verses 6:35 and 19:34. This living water is also the fountain of witness, the joint testimony of water and blood and Spirit (cf. 3:5; 1 John 5:6-8). Where there is eternal life, the Spirit (Wisdom) of God is manifest in flesh and blood.

The division continues among the people, who argue on the basis of their preconceptions. More serious is the official reaction. The "temple police" (employed by the religious authorities, not the civil government; cf. 7:32) sent to arrest Jesus return empty-handed, overwhelmed by his words (7:46). The Pharisees, in the business of accrediting prophets, say that the officers have been deceived and "this crowd, which does not know the law"—the *am ha-arets*—"they are accursed" (7:49). Jesus is a false prophet.

Not all Pharisees take this view, however. None other than Nicodemus reappears to say, "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" (7:51) As Rudolf Bultmann said, Nicodemus' "cool objectivity" allows us to see that it is not a question of revelation contradicting the Law, but "the misuse of law which makes the world deaf to the Revealer" (1971, 311). The guardians of religion cannot hear anything but challenge to their authority and deride Nicodemus by asking sarcastically if he is a Galilean. "Search," they say—the same word used by Jesus in rebuking them at verse 5:39—"and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee" (7:52). They focus on Jesus' origin in dismissing his claims; in the next chapter Jesus focuses on their origins to confute them.

### **Jesus and the Adulterous Woman and the Jews 7:53-8:11**

**Scholars agree that the story of Jesus and the adulterous woman is not Johannine.** Only late manuscripts place it here, and not all of them do. Some manuscripts even have the story following Luke 21:38. Yet the story appears to be of great antiquity, and it has long been accepted in the church as faithful testimony to Jesus. As such, it stands at the border between canonical and non-canonical material, lending weight to the Fourth Evangelist's claim that there is far more to be said than his book contains (21:25).

The story is straightforward enough in isolation, yet it fits well into this section of conflict between Jesus and religious authorities. What is at issue is the right to condemn another, which Jesus stands on its head as the right to accept, forgive, and correct another. He displays how God operates, in contrast to how the religious authorities are wont to operate. He is as open and accepting of a Samaritan woman, or a royal official, or a blind man as he is of a teacher of Israel, or a wedding party, or dear friends in grief. It is no surprise to find him accepting a woman caught in adultery and facing legally mandated death. He offers her what he offers the others: "the possibility of a newness of life in a right relationship with God" (Moloney 1998, 262).

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## Jesus and the Jews: Dialogue, Division, Condemnation 8:12-59

Still in the Temple (cf. 8:20), Jesus now claims for himself the second motif of Sukkoth: “I am the light of the world” (8:12). (Elsewhere it is Jesus’ disciples who are said to be the light of the world: Matt. 5:14; cf. Phil. 2:15.) Jesus’ opponents are demanding a human witness for what Jesus claims, but the halakhah on which they base that demand is irrelevant, because no human witness is adequate to substantiate or question his claim. The point at issue is his true origin. “I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know” (8:14). His role is not to judge (8:15) but to save (3:17), yet he is judge nonetheless because he is God’s agent: “It is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me” (8:16). The form of the argument is once again the rabbinic “light and heavy.” In the Law the merely human witness of two is accepted; how much more should the Pharisees accept the witness of God’s agent and the Father (8:18)!

The question “Where is your Father?” (8:19) is, in effect, a request for a sign. Jesus’ reply is that they already have a sign: himself. If they do not know him, it is because they do not know the Father and hence are not equipped for the judge’s role they arrogate to themselves. Only the one from heaven is judge, for only that one can declare to the world what he has heard from God (8:26), as will become clear when he is “lifted up” (8:28). Then “the Jews” are divided, for only some believe in him (8:30).

To those who believe, Jesus offers comfort (strengthening, not sympathizing) and this promise to those who continue in his word and so are truly his disciples: “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (8:31). But how could a Jew be other than free? Rabbi Akiba once said, “Even the poorest in Israel are considered as freemen who had lost their estates, for they are the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (m. B. Qam. 8.6). Abraham’s descendants are free because they have Torah. If freedom is through Torah, what further need is there of deliverance?

In 8:34-40 Jesus does not deny that those who live by Torah are free. Rather, by contravening Torah they show that they are slaves (8:34, 40) and therefore not true (i.e., spiritual) children of Abraham, despite their physical descent (8:37-40). Paul’s comments about slavery to sin arise from the same view of Torah: possessing Torah is insufficient; only doing Torah avails. How are Jesus’ opponents contravening Torah? By “trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did” (8:40).

Stung, the opponents attempt to raise the ante: “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself” (8:41). As Rabbi Judah (c. 150 CE) observed, however, “if you act as sons, then you are sons; but if not, you are not sons” (b. Qidd. 36a). Jesus’ opponents play a dangerous game; increasing the claim increases the condemnation. “You are from your father the devil. . . . a murderer from the beginning” (8:44). Those who reject God’s messenger are children of God’s enemy.

The opponents’ reply amounts to a ludicrous reduction in scale from Jesus’ cosmic accusation: “You are a Samaritan and have a demon” (8:48). Jesus responds that he is God’s agent and that those who keep his word “will never see death” (8:51). The reaction is incredulous: “Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died?”

(8:53) When the Samaritan woman was offered water that would free her from thirst forever, she responded very similarly: “Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and . . . drank from it?” (4:12) The answer in both cases is “yes.” Certainly, according to the tradition, there were some who had escaped death—Enoch and Elijah, for example; but Jesus is claiming not simply to be exempt from death but also to save his followers from it. He is able to make such a promise because of who he is: “Very truly, I tell you, **before Abraham was, I am**” (8:58). The introductory formula denoting special significance comes together with the solemn declaratory formula “I am.” As we recall the prologue’s recalling of Genesis, we

see they want to kill him. Their reaction to him is the same as to the adulterous woman, and for the same reason: they claim the role of protector of Israel and, in effect, of God. Raising the claim raises the risk, as at Eden and Babel.

### **Sixth Sign (Jesus Heals the Man Born Blind) 9:1-34**

The story of the sign itself is straightforward enough, but issues raised earlier are raised again by the sign: Is Jesus sent from God (9:16, 24, 33; cf. 8:14-26)? Is he a true prophet or a deceiver (9:19; cf. 7:17-19)? Is he the Messiah (9:24; cf. 7:25-31, 40-44)? What is his origin (9:29-30; cf. 7:28; 8:23-30)? What is his relationship to Moses (9:28-29; cf. 7:22-24)? These questions do not trouble the man Jesus heals, however. He now has light, and he knows that God is the only possible source for that light. The religious establishment insists that they have nothing to learn from this man who must have been born in sin (on the theory that his being born blind had to be somebody's fault). As a result, Jesus' opponents are now his as well, "and they drove him out" (9:34).

### **Jesus and the Jews 9:35-10:21**

The climax comes, as it often does in John, with the demand for confession of Jesus as eschatological Son of Man who has come into the world for judgment (9:35, 39; cf. 8:23-29). **Both the New Testament (e.g., Gal. 3:5)** and the rabbinic tradition indicate that healing by Jesus and by his followers was a factor in the debate between church and synagogue.

The community's leaders ask, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" (9:40) Rather than simply denying their assertion by saying "yes," Jesus in effect gives them the negative reply that the Greek form of the question here expects: "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains" (9:41). Their inability to respond to Jesus is rooted in a self-deception that has begun to believe its own falsehoods and so cannot grasp the truth when faced with it. As a result they cannot receive what Jesus was sent to bring.

This dialogue leads naturally to the next episode, Jesus' discourse on the shepherd, introduced by the solemn formula "Very truly, I tell you" (10:1). **In Hebrew tradition the shepherd is an image both royal and Mosaic.** The psalmist speaks of God's leading the people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron (Ps. 77:20), and of David, taken from the sheepfold to be the shepherd of God's people Israel (Ps. 78:71). The Psalms of Solomon (first century BCE) speak of the Messiah as "faithfully and righteously shepherding the Lord's flock" (Ps. Sol. 17:40b). But it is God who is the fundamental shepherd of Israel and to whom all human shepherds must answer for their stewardship (Isa. 40:11; Jer. 23:1-6; Ezek. 34).

The introduction (10:1-5) describes how shepherd and flock recognize each other. Verse 6 calls these verses a "figure of speech" (NRSV Greek: *paroimia*), and it is as close as the Fourth Gospel comes to the parables of the Synoptics. Yet this is an extended image, not a story so much as the setting in which a story might be told. And it is: the story of Israel, which his hearers already know. Jesus is the prophet like Moses; hence the pertinence of this early midrash on Ruth: To whom can Moses be compared? To a faithful shepherd whose fence falls down in the twilight. He arose and repaired it from three sides, but a breach remained on the fourth side, and having no time to erect the fence, he stood in the breach himself. A lion came, he boldly withstood it. A wolf came, and still he stood against it. (Ruth Rab. 5)

The shepherd places his own body where any external threat will come and also prevents sheep from leaving the safety of the fold. The shepherd is devoted to the sheep, even to the point of death, because of the investment he has in them: they are his sheep. The analogy is obvious, as is the connection to the prophets' promise that in the end-time, God would assume the shepherding role directly.

Who are Jesus' "other sheep, that do not belong to this fold?" (10:16) Gentiles? Possibly, although in Old Testament, rabbinic and Jewish apocalyptic writings outside the canon, and in the Synoptics "sheep" and "flock" invariably refer to Jews, whether straying or faithful (e.g., Ezek. 34; 37:21-28; Jer. 23:1-8; Tanhuma 2.7 on Exod. 3:1; 1 Enoch 89:12-90:41; Mark 6:34; Matt. 10:6; Luke 15:3-7). The most natural sense of the reference is probably to Christians in the synagogues of the Diaspora, in contrast to the Aramaic-speaking Palestinian Jews (the Judeans), as perhaps also in verse 11:52. Jesus and the Fourth Evangelist are both in the business of stretching preconceptions, so that it is very probable that both these different groups of Jews and the Gentiles are intended here. John often intends what he says to be understood on more than one level, and this may be an example of that pattern.

Finally, we are reminded of the cross. Jesus will lay down his life for the sheep, but he is never a mere victim. No one takes his life from him. Like Isaac he makes a willing offering, in freely chosen obedience to his Father (10:17-18). His obedient self-offering constitutes his final claim to be who he is; he does what God does for the flock, which shows who he is. "Again the Jews were divided because of these words" (10:19).

### **Jesus and the Jews in Jerusalem 10:22-42**

The Festival of Dedication (*Hanukkah*) is associated with the cleansing of the Temple from idolatry (1 Macc. 4:36-61). This is the setting for the most developed statement of Jesus' relationship to the Father in the Gospel so far. Hanukkah is not one of the three pilgrim festivals (Deut. 16:16) and does not require presence at Jerusalem.

"If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly" (10:24)—unbelief's usual request for incontrovertible proof. Jesus appeals to his works as the Father's agent. He is the shepherd of those whom the Father has given him (10:29). Then comes the astonishing pronouncement, "The Father and I are one" (10:30). Can agency amount to identity? Must it do so? Does it in Jesus' case? According to the school of Rabbi Shila it was

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impossible for an agent to act as an independent witness, since the agent ranks as his master's own person (b. Qidd. 43a). These are not mystical or metaphysical ideas but legal ones. The purely legal reasons for Rabbi Shila's view are obvious enough, and other rabbis disagreed with him, also for legal reasons.

Once again the opponents attempt to stone Jesus, not because of what he has done but because of what he has said, which they consider blasphemy: "Because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God" (10:33). Jesus' rebuttal does not deny the claim at all but raises instead the possibility that his opponents ought to be making the same claim on the basis of scripture. If one lives the life of God in the world, as in fact the Torah-observer is called upon to do, then surely there is God, or the functional equivalent of God—the incarnational principle once again, on which the whole Gospel turns.

Once more Jesus' opponents attempt to arrest him, but his hour and God's has not yet come (10:39). Instead, he withdraws to the place where the proclamation began, "across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier" (10:40). This is the end of the manifestation of the Messiah in Jerusalem, but the situation is by no means without hope. "Many" recall the Baptizer's witness to him (10:41) and "many" believe in him there (10:42).

John 7:1-10:42 presents Jesus under three images: water, light, and shepherd. The images all recall the first Exodus; two of them are explicitly linked by the evangelist to Sukkoth. They are all in some sense Mosaic images. Second Baruch, written some time early in the second century CE, speaks of the hope of Israel under the same three striking images. Jerusalem has been destroyed and the people of Israel are mourning before Baruch:

For the shepherds of Israel have perished, and the lamps which gave light are extinguished, and the fountains from which we used to drink have withheld their streams. And I answered and said to them: “Shepherds and lamps and fountains came from the Law, and when we go away, the Law will abide. If you therefore look upon the Law and are intent upon wisdom, then the lamp will not be wanting and the shepherd will not give way and the fountain will not dry up.” (2 Bar. 77.13-16)

The hope that the writer of 2 Baruch found in Torah, the writer of John found in the person of Jesus Christ.

### **Seventh Sign (Jesus Raises Lazarus 11:1-44)**

The seventh and last sign, with the accompanying movement to condemnation, serves as an introduction to the Passion narrative. There is a much stronger impression of direction in events than in earlier sections of the Gospel. John’s usual practice is to tell a story and attach to it, before or after, a related dialogue. Here we find a fusing of elements, with theological comment and dialogue interspersed.

The introduction to the section again emphasizes Jesus’ authority. “Lord [Greek: *kyrios*, which can be translated simply as a term of respect: ‘sir’], he whom you love is ill” (11:3). This is at least a polite suggestion that Jesus intervene, like Mary’s “They

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have no wine” at 2:3. (What would we not give to be able to hear tone of voice in these stories!) Once again Jesus declines to act in response to human prompting. To our ears Jesus sounds almost uncaring when he says, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (11:4). Further, when Jesus does go to Judea, it is in spite of human protest rather than because of it (11:8). He goes because he has work to do there.

The dialogue recorded in 11:11-13 springs ostensibly from the disciples’ misunderstanding of what Jesus means by “sleep.” He means “sleep in death”; they understand it as “taking rest in sleep” (cf. Mark 5:39). The effect of the ambiguity is to emphasize that Jesus does indeed confront the full reality of physical death: “Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead’” (11:14). But he has already said, “I am going there to awaken him” (11:11). Then Thomas speaks up: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (11:16, perhaps echoing Peter’s apparent resignation in 6:68). But Thomas will not die with Jesus after all; Jesus will die for Thomas, and for them all. From Mark 10:38-39 or Romans 6:3-8 we learn that in one sense Christians do die with Christ. Thomas speaks of an act of loyalty to Jesus, even though Jesus’ cause is lost. **The basis on which Christians die with Christ, however, is not their loyalty to him in a hopeless cause but his loyalty to them in a victorious one.**

Martha and Mary clearly believe in Jesus. In his presence the death of their brother would have been inconceivable (11:21, 32). Even now they believe that Jesus’ prayer will be answered (11:22). They also believe that Lazarus will rise again at the last day. Martha’s orthodox **Pharisaic hope** is not denied, but she has yet to learn the connection between resurrection and Jesus, who then says, “I am the Resurrection and the life” (11:25a; cf. 5:24-29), not the means only but the thing itself. One who lives human life faithfully is living in this world nothing less than the life of God (**“eternal life,” in John’s terminology, not life without end but life of the sort God lives**). For such a one there is in the final sense no death at all (11:26), a lesson Paul is at pains to teach the churches in Thessalonica and elsewhere. When Jesus asks if she believes this, Martha says, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (11:27). This is where the whole Gospel is directed; see its statement of purpose in verse 20:31.

The answering of Jesus’ prayer is the sign that **he truly is the Father’s agent. Jesus has no authority—indeed, no significance or existence—independent of the Father.** When Jesus calls Lazarus forth, it is with the voice

of God, the voice of the Son of Man that the dead shall hear on the last day and live (5:25-28).

### **The Jews Against Jesus: Condemnation 11:45-57**

The resurrection to life is the sign that leads directly to Jesus' death (11:46-53; cf. 12:17-19), a death defended as necessary lest the Romans—"them" to the Jews' "us" in Jesus' day—"come and destroy both our holy place and our nation" (11:48). Jesus' opponents cast themselves as Israel's defenders as well as God's; one wonders which was more important to them.

In any event, Jesus' death clearly would be expedient. The irony is at its heaviest when the high priest Caiaphas rebukes his colleagues' ignorance and says, "It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation

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destroyed" (11:50). Indeed it is, but not in the sense Caiaphas consciously intended. His statement is taken by the evangelist as unconscious prophecy that "Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God" (11:51b-52).

### **Jesus at Bethany 12:1-11**

After Lazarus' resurrection there is a celebratory meal at which Mary anoints Jesus' feet. Eating and anointing here foreshadow another meal to follow shortly; both are part of the preparation for Jesus' Passion. Judas emerges in his true character, and the hostility to Jesus comes to include Lazarus as well, "since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus" (12:11). New life is a costly gift, one that can be paid for ultimately only by giving up old life.

### **Transition**

### **Jesus and the Entry into Jerusalem 12:12-19**

The narrative setting now turns to the Passover, the festival of redemption (11:55-56; 12:1, 12, 20). Against this background Jesus enters Jerusalem as messianic king (12:12-19). The meaning of this act, says the evangelist, like that of the "cleansing" of the Temple (see 2:22), becomes clear to the disciples only when Jesus is "glorified" (12:16).

### **Jesus and the Greeks 12:20-36**

"Some Greeks"—that is, Jews from the Greek-speaking Diaspora—ask to see Jesus (12:20-22; see below, "Who Were the 'Greeks' (Hellēnēs)?"). Jesus perceives that "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23). Jesus' "single grain that bears much fruit" when it dies (12:24) sharply recalls Caiaphas' one man dying for the people in the preceding chapter. What follows is the functional equivalent of the agony in the garden found also in the synoptic tradition. Is the cross necessary? "And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour" (12:27). Like Isaac, Jesus willingly enters the hands of his Father ("Father, glorify your name"), and his self-offering is in turn accepted by the Father ("I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again"), the heavenly voice heard by the crowd only as thunder (12:28-29a). "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (12:31-32). This is the third of the Johannine Passion predictions.

The crowd still seeks a midrashic debate (12:34), but the time for debate is over. The light is its own justification; it needs no other. "While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light" (12:36). That is why he came in the first place: to reproduce—hence the Gospel's

colophon.

### **Jesus and the Jews: Judgment 12:37-50**

Neither words nor signs have persuaded his opponents to believe in Jesus. Now John interprets Jesus' signs and the people's unbelief in terms of Isaiah's servant (12:37-38; cf. Isa. 53:1), a figure that later rabbinic tradition identified with Moses. A second quotation, also from Isaiah (12:40; cf. Isa. 6:10) is drawn from deep in the Christian tradition (cf. Matt. 13:14; Mark 4:12; 8:17-18) and applied perhaps with an eye to the evangelist's own opponents (12:39-43).

"Then Jesus cried aloud" (12:44)—once more the action and word of a prophet (cf. 7:37). Once again Jesus speaks as the Father's agent (12:44, 49). More than one

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commentator has noted the connection between 12:44-50 and Deuteronomy 18:18-19. Both Moses and Jesus came to deliver God's people, to give them the word of life. Moses presented the commandments that gave life: "If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God . . . then you shall live" (Deut. 30:16; cf. 32:46-47). Jesus does the same, and what he says is spoken just as the Father has spoken to him (12:49-50). Reiterating his commission is the last thing Jesus says in his public ministry in the Fourth Gospel.

### **Jesus and the Disciples: Eating, Washing, Dialogue, Division 13:1-30**

The Last Supper comes early in John. The farewell discourses (chapters 14-17) come between it and the Passion narrative. John 13 is like half a hinge between the Books of Signs and Glory. The other half is chapter 12. Jesus is transfigured all through the Fourth Gospel and he is glorified, both in the sense of being revealed as Son of God and in the sense of being "lifted up" on the cross. The cross is the throne of the king who washes his subjects' feet, and their last meal together ensues in the same sort of combined acclamation and division that follows the last meal at Bethany (12:1-11).

Jesus has loved his disciples "to the end"—the ambiguity of the phrase is obvious and intentional (13:1). One of the disciples, however, has gone over to the adversary (13:2). In this context the Father's agent washes the feet of all the disciples. Anyone who will not accept that grace will have no part in him, and all finally accept it. If his disciples do what he has commanded—namely, do as he has done—they are truly his agents, and the line will continue. God is handed on in the faithful tradition of action as well as teaching.

The dialogue with Peter and the "beloved disciple" is both realistic and symbolic. (The traditional identification of the beloved disciple with John continues to seem a reasonable option, although the role of this disciple in composing our present Gospel remains uncertain.) The Synoptics tell the story somewhat differently. John does not have their repeated "Is it I?" and they do not have John's equally poignant comment when Judas goes out: "And it was night" (13:30). Here again the evangelist's double entendre is obvious and powerful.

### **Jesus and the Disciples: Discourse, Love Command 13:31-38**

This is the prelude to the Book of Glory, this announcement that now the hour has come for both Son and the Father to be "glorified"—not given what was not theirs heretofore, but duly acclaimed for what has been theirs all along. It is the mode of that acclamation that astonishes us. It turns the usual notions of "glory" upside down. The gospel of Jesus is the message of the great reversal, in which masters wash disciples' feet and kings die in order to reign forever. This great reversal is wedded inseparably to a "new commandment, that you love one another" (13:34); the disciples are known by their imitation of the master, whose dominant characteristic is love. This is the heart of the dispute in the next stage of this community's life, as we see in

Chapter Thirty-three on the Johannine Epistles. The writer of 1 John goes straight to this love command to convict the community of its shortcomings (1 John 2:7-11, etc.).

The love commandment is the bridge to the farewell discourses. The troll under the bridge, as it were, is the prediction of Peter's denial (13:36-38). Judas betrays

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Jesus, but Peter denies him. Yet Peter is the one who draws a sword to resist when Jesus is arrested (18:10-11) as well as the one who denies being his disciple. Peter is not condemned for his denial, only known. He denied his master in order to hide who he was and therefore what his community was, contrary to the principle that disciples are known by their love for one another (13:35). In effect, Peter would withdraw from the community by his denial (cf. 1 John 2:22), but ultimately that withdrawal was rescinded, and forgiven, by the steadfast love of the master and of the community.

### **The Book of Glory**

#### **Jesus and the Disciples: Farewell Discourses 14:1-16:33**

Jesus urges his disciples not to be as he was himself: "troubled" (14:1a; cf. 12:27). Believing in God means believing in God's agent as well (14:1b). They do not need to know where he is going or to be able to follow him there now, though they will in the future. Their confidence is based in who he is, which determines who they are. "No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also" (14:6b-7). This saying has troubled many over the centuries and has been used to justify the condemnation of "unbelievers," but its reference is entirely within the community of disciples. Jesus is telling his disciples what their roots and guarantees are, not ruling out the "pagans"—or, for that matter, the "Jews." Jesus repeats his teaching on works and believing (14:8-14; cf. 10:38) and links love and commandment-keeping (14:15), speaking unmistakably in the place of God. Yet he immediately says he will "ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate" (14:16), implying that he is an advocate himself (as he is in 1 John 2:2, the only New Testament occurrence of the word outside the Fourth Gospel). This word "advocate" (Greek: *paraklētos*, sometimes brought into English as "Paraclete") means counselor or comforter (in the sense of one who strengthens, not one who says "there, there"), and in 14:26 this figure is explicitly identified as "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name" to "teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (14:26). Jesus promised them "the Holy Spirit," to be sure, but we must remember that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity would not be fully worked out for another four centuries.

Understandably, many commentators suggest that these Last Supper dialogues originally concluded here, and that what follows in chapters 15-16 has either been misplaced or added. Whatever the explanation, we have here two more chapters which touch on many of the themes in chapter 14.

"I am the true vine" (15:1), Jesus says. The vine—as always—is Israel, so that whoever "abides" in the vine—stays, with the kind of faithfulness God exhibits—is part of Israel, God's people, where fruit is borne and God is glorified. The evidence of abiding is love (15:9; cf. 13:35; Deut. 6:6, 8). The love commandment is repeated (15:12) with an exposition of its meaning: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (15:13). The hostility the world has shown to the master will be shown to the disciples as well, if they are faithful, if they love each other—and God—as he has. The comfort and communion the Father offers the faithful is ample recompense (15:26-16:1) if, for example, they are expelled from their synagogues (16:2) like the man born blind.

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The Paraclete comes to comfort the faithful and also to convict the faithless (16:7-11). The world has

understood neither sin nor righteousness nor judgment, or else the world would have known who Jesus was and received him accordingly (cf. 1:10-11). **The world will rejoice in attacking the weakness of the church (16:20), yet the church is like a woman in childbirth**—after enduring the pain, she will know the joy of messianic salvation (16:21-22; cf. Isa. 26:16-19; 66:7-14).

Finally the disciples understand that Jesus is really going to leave them, and—like Nicodemus (3:2) and the Samaritan woman (4:25), and like the Pharisees whom the blind man describes ironically (9:31)—they tell Jesus what they “know”: “Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God” (16:30). But do they really know now any more than they did? How they respond in the trials to come will tell the tale. “But take courage,” Jesus says, “I have conquered the world” (16:33).

### **Jesus Alone: Intercessory Prayer 17:1-26**

“After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven” and prayed (17:1). This prayer of Jesus is often called the “high-priestly prayer” or the “prayer of consecration.” As in his Passion and death, we see here the perpetual loving obedience that is the basis of Jesus’ perfect unity with the Father (5:19-23; 10:25-30; 14:24b, 28, 31). This is moral unity, the unity of wills, between Father and Son, into which every disciple is invited.

In verses 17:1-5 Jesus’ death (“the hour”) is to be the glory of Father and Son, for Jesus’ power is that he may give eternal life to all (cf. Mark 10:45). Eternal life is not (essentially) length of life, but quality of life: the quality that consists in knowing God—“knowing” in the Hebrew sense of intimate relationship. For one who believes in Jesus, that knowledge of God cannot be separated from knowledge of Jesus Christ, God’s Son and agent.

In verses 17:6-26 Jesus prays for his disciples present and future, that they may be kept in unity with God, with Jesus, and with each other. He asks that they may be protected in and by the faithfulness of God. As with all intercessory prayer, the intent is neither to change God’s mind nor to give God fresh information; it is rather to “sanctify” the one praying, as Jesus says of himself (17:19), to confirm who he is: God’s agent, God’s Son, God’s Word. The idea of intercessory prayer is to pray the prayer God would pray, which being in moral union with God—like Jesus—enables the disciples to do.

### **Jesus Betrayed, Arrested, Denied, Tried, Derided, Buried, Mourned 18:1-19:42**

The Passion narrative in John has many features that distinguish it from the Passion narratives in the other Gospels. Read it through and note particularly the following:

- separate hearings before Annas and Caiaphas (18:13-24) • continued emphasis, largely by reference to Scripture, that all has taken place in the providence and power of God (18:9, 32; 19:24, 28, 36, 37; cf. 18:11)
  - the “other” disciple, usually identified with the “beloved” disciple (18:15-16; 19:26-27)
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- ironic conversations between Jesus and Pilate (18:33-38; 19:9-11)
  - explicit denial of the usual understanding of “political” messiahship (18:36)
  - ironic conversations between Pilate and the Judeans (19:1-7, 14-22)
  - Jesus’ words from the cross, including the intense humanity of the first two (it is quite wrong to

“spiritualize” 19:28), and the triumph of the last, which is better translated, “It is accomplished!” (19:30 NEB)

- Nicodemus’ assisting with Jesus’ burial (19:39)

Even with these distinguishing features, the Passion story in John is basically the same as that told by the Synoptics. Is it a revision of one or more of the synoptic versions? The matter is debatable. The Gospel claims to have eyewitness tradition lying behind its Passion material (19:35), but that tradition has no doubt been worked on by the *beit ha-midrash*. The most useful question for us is not “Which evangelist’s Passion story is ‘correct’ or ‘best’ or ‘most accurate historically’?” That would be expecting them to think like us. Rather, the most useful question for us is “What did each evangelist mean by what he wrote, and what can we learn from it?” That would be for us to try and think, in some measure, like them.

### Jesus Risen 20:1-29

John’s first group of resurrection narratives centers, like Luke’s, on Jerusalem (20:1-29). First there is a curious picture of the disciples’ incompetence and confusion (20:1-10), then the focus shifts to a woman—Mary—and Jesus together (20:11-18), reminding us of other conversations between Jesus and women (his mother, the Samaritan, Martha). The Greek text preserves both Jesus’ address and Mary’s reply in Aramaic (called “Hebrew” in the Greek text and in NRSV). Jesus says to her, “Do not hold on to me” (20:17 NRSV; “cling” in NEB), for his role is changing from earth to heaven—just the kind of movement prefigured in 1:51.

The second appearance story (to “the disciples” as a group, 20:19-23) establishes their identity as “the church.” There is no particular reason, despite traditional Christian iconography, to imagine that by “the disciples” John intends us to understand only “the Twelve”—indeed, his usage at 6:66-67 and 20:24 might lead us to suppose he did not. We should probably assume that at least the faithful women are present (cf. Acts 1:14; 2:1). Disciples are those who have received Christ’s “Peace,” those sent by Jesus as he was by the Father (20:21).

John’s functional equivalent to the Pentecost story (20:19-23; cf. Acts 2) is next. After showing them his hands and side, thus proving the One Risen to be identical with the One Crucified, Jesus breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (20:22), just as God breathed the breath of life into original humanity (Gen. 2:7). The saying about “forgiving” and “retaining” sins seems similar to Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, neither of which has any parallel in the other Synoptics. “Binding” makes us think of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac, and some scholars think both Matthew and Luke are translating an original Aramaic saying based on Isaiah 22:22. Whatever its source, this saying (like its Matthean counterparts) has occasioned enormous and destructive

controversy within the church since the Fourth Gospel was written. Whether it refers more to internal discipline in the Johannine church or to evangelistic preaching to those outside the church, the responsibility laid on those commissioned is heavy. Upon their faithfulness depends the spiritual health of the people of God.

The appearance to Thomas (20:24-29) reflects the doubt that must have been mingled at this point with the disciples’ faith and joy and hope (cf. Matt. 28:17). Its chief importance for John lies in Thomas’ confession, “My Lord and my God!” (20:28), which both brings us back to the prologue (1:18) and leads forward to the purpose statement in verse 20:31. In the Fourth Gospel faith never rests on signs, or in Jesus’ teaching, or in the Bible generally, either Jewish or Christian. Jesus promises a blessing to those who “have not seen and yet believe” (20:29), for they are those who rely upon the testimony of these and other disciples who have

encountered the Risen Lord in whatever way. Identity of experience is not a prerequisite to faith.

## Conclusion

### Colophon 20:30-31

Here is what led to the book (testimony of witnesses) and what its limitations are (not all that might have been written) and what it is for (“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”)[20:3]). Quite possibly the Gospel ended here at one stage of its composition.

### Jesus and the Disciples 21:1-19

The last chapter reads like an appendix that has been added to chapters 1–20, apparently by the same hand or hands that wrote or compiled the rest of the book. The story of the “fish fry” is somewhat like that of the “great draught of fishes,” as it used to be called, in Luke 5:1-11. It also reminds us of Jesus walking on the water. In these stories Peter leaps into the water and into speech with the master. The eucharistic atmosphere of John 6 is clearly present, too—the earlier signs all seem to be caught up in this remembrance of “how it was” before the cross, a remembrance that is a foretaste of “how it will be” when the disciples’ shepherding, like their fishing, provides food for God’s people.

### Attestation: Jesus and the Beloved Disciple 21:20-25

The disciple who has “borne witness” to the apostolic faith as the evangelist’s church has received it (21:24) is dying. Rumors and misunderstandings are circulating, and the record must be put straight (21:23). The disciple’s testimony is true, but not exhaustive (21:24-25). Here ends this Gospel, this book, but not the telling of the story.

### Who Were the “Greeks” (*Hellēnēs*)?

Twice John refers to *Hellēnēs* (NRSV “Greeks”), at verses 7:35 and 12:20. The word *Hellēnēs* itself simply meant “a person of Greek culture” and could therefore be used to refer either to Gentiles or to Greek-speaking Jews. Paul perfectly illustrates the ambiguity in Romans 1:14-16, where almost in one breath he speaks of “Greeks and barbarians” (those who spoke Greek and those whose language sounded to Greek ears like barbarbarbar, hence “barbarians”) and then of “Jew first and then Greek” (Jews and those foreigners who had occupied Jewish lands under Alexander and his successors, bringing their language and their ways with them).

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Ordinarily John uses *Hellēnēs* to indicate Jews of the Greek Diaspora, who probably made up the majority of the membership of the church for which John’s Gospel was intended. In 12:20 John makes clear that the *Hellēnēs* have come to “worship at the festival,” i.e., not merely to offer a sacrifice at the Temple, as was occasionally done by non-Jews for courtesy’s sake, but actually to take part in the cult. The matter is disputed among scholars, however, and the reader should consult commentaries for different views.

### Who Were the “Jews” (*Ioudaioi*)?

In different contexts the word *Ioudaioi* carries either or both of the connotations of our English words “Jew” and “Judean.” The word is often used in John, sometimes positively (4:22), but frequently with considerable hostility (e.g., 2:18, 20; 6:41). NRSV usually translates it as “Jew.” What did John actually mean by it?

Who they were is a difficult question, and each passage must be examined individually. With the single exception of the scene in the synagogue at Capernaum (6:41, 52), every use of *Ioudaioi* in John is in some way explicitly connected to Judea and Jerusalem, making “Judean” reasonable in most cases. The Gospel

tends to sympathize with northerners (Galileans) rather than southerners (Judeans), and the evangelist seems to be interested in Diaspora Jews rather than Judean Jews. The evangelist may well have retained a historical memory of the tension between Galileans and Judeans in the time of Jesus, a tension that played its part in the events of Jesus' life. If accurate, this interpretation allows us to make good sense of those passages in which John appears to be explaining that, for example, Passover was a "Jewish" festival (2:13; cf. 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55). It seems hard to imagine who among John's readers—even among Gentile converts—would be expected to need such information. If the phrase is intended for the (Diaspora Jewish) reader as a reminder that these are pilgrim festivals, Judean festivals (at least for one festival each year a faithful inhabitant of Israel had to make the journey to Jerusalem), then the meaning of the phrase becomes clear. Jesus was in no sense a sectarian. He took part in the rites and ceremonies of mainstream Judaism and, like the Galileans of 4:45, went up to the appropriate feasts at Jerusalem. In this case, verse 4:9 also makes excellent sense as a description of the situation in Judea before 70 CE. John does not say, however, that Dedication (Hanukkah) was a "feast of the Ioudaioi" (see 10:22). If by Ioudaioi John meant "Judean," the omission makes good sense. Dedication is not a pilgrim festival, and the description would therefore have been incorrect.

What about our one exception—verses 6:41, 52? The translation here, rather than "Jew," actually creates in the scene a dramatic division exactly the same as that in verses 1:19-28, where also it is those sent from the south who challenge the preaching rather than the local Galileans. This seems likely to be what John intended, though the matter is much debated.

In any case, "the Jews" in John are not "the Jewish people," i.e., all ethnic Jews. Both "the Jews" and many of "the disciples" were ethnic Jews. As John Ashton has written, in the Fourth Gospel one must "recognize in these hot-tempered exchanges the type of family row in which the participants face one another across the room

of a house which all have shared and all call home" (1991, 151; cited in Moloney 1998, 11).

### **John and Women**

John's canonical Gospel gives women the most consistently significant roles in the action:

- The first sign arises out of a conversation with Jesus' mother Mary.
- Jesus' first encounter with those on the fringe of Judaism involves a long conversation with a woman.
- The resurrection of Lazarus follows a dialogue with Martha and Mary of Bethany.
- The Passion narrative begins with the anointing at Bethany by Mary.
- At the Crucifixion several women are present: Jesus' mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene (19:25); by contrast, the male disciples are represented only by the beloved disciple.
- At the Resurrection Mary Magdalene is first to find and bring news of the empty tomb, the first to see the Risen Lord, and the first commissioned to bear witness to the Resurrection.

In the dialogue between Jesus and his mother in the wedding episode, she represents the ideal disciple. She brings her concern to Jesus. While there is no personal rejection or anything discourteous about Jesus' reply, it is a disappointing response. Her concern cannot be his! His hour has not yet come, and nothing—not even her worries—can compromise the Johannine Christ, who acts only as the Father wills. (The tension between Father and mother could be seen as mirroring the experience of all humanity, but to do so may be to overinterpret and to inject our concerns into ancient narrative.) Despite this disappointment, she continues to

trust: “Do whatever he tells you” (2:5; cf. Job 13:15).

**The Samaritan woman is of questionable moral character (4:18) yet engaged in life-sustaining work:** drawing water (4:7). She becomes de facto the first missionary to Samaria; “many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” (4:39). Jesus himself, contrary to all custom, “stayed there two days” (4:40). When the disciples find Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman, they are astonished, but none of them questioned him about it (4:27). By then one suspects that they were used to being astonished.

Martha and Mary of Bethany (particularly Martha) engage in a rich dialogue with Jesus that includes two confessions: “Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (Martha, 11:27) and “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (Mary, 11:32). Both are “beside the

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point” as this story is shaped, but very much to the point of the Gospel as a whole (cf. 20:31). Though he will not act except as the Father wills, Jesus is clearly moved by their grief (11:33). In the anointing that follows Lazarus’ raising, the parsimony of Judas is rejected, but the extravagance of Mary is affirmed.

John is aware that the women remained close to the Lord at the Crucifixion while the male disciples fled (except, in this tradition, John). Jesus’ last recorded dialogue before his death is with his mother and the beloved disciple. She is to be mother to the beloved disciple, and he is to be son to her. Jesus’ hour has now come, and his concern is hers.

Mary Magdalene, as the first witness to Jesus’ Resurrection, becomes in a sense the first apostle and “apostle to the apostles.” Mary and the women cannot be charged with the cowardice or betrayal that marked most of the male disciples in John’s Gospel, but perhaps even in their loyalty there is danger: “Do not hold on to me” (20:17). But then it is she who is ready to hear him say, “Go to my brothers” (20:18). Mary’s faithfulness is chosen to bear witness, not just to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also to what has become possible for all humankind (cf. Rom. 8:18). John brings women into the narrative as significant participants in dialogue and action with Jesus at almost every key point. Sometimes they play roles that are more significant than those of the male disciples. John’s “feminism” is very relaxed. The evangelist does not normally draw attention to it, and certainly the Fourth Gospel portrays men vividly as well. The man born blind is as spirited and significant in his way as the woman of Samaria in hers. There is depth and integrity in the details of Nicodemus’ role, and flawed but dogged loyalty in Thomas and Peter. If John had wanted, he easily could have emphasized the disciples’ refusal to believe the witness of Mary Magdalene. It was an element in the tradition that must have been known to him and indeed is implicit in his own narrative. Instead, he draws a veil over the episode. **The full participation of women is not something to be proved but rather taken for granted.**

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End of chapter



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**Kerygma**<sup>back</sup>

Proclamation. See also [Wikipedia](#).

>

**Your experience**<sup>back</sup>

I don't understand this.



>

**Scripture says**<sup>back</sup>

He's quoting from memory.

>

**I am** <sup>back</sup>

That's what he says. A total present tense, not a timeless tense, or anything special. Just "I am."

>

**Shepherd**<sup>back</sup>

Also applied to Greek kings in Homer - "Shepherd of the People."



## **Hopeless cause/victorious cause**<sup>back</sup>

At least as Christians we have to hope so. That's what our faith is all about. But - OK, I'm a bit of a pagan and a romantic, but I still think there are worse things than sacrificing oneself for a hopeless cause, if one believes it to be right. Never really had to do it though.

>

### **Eternal life**<sup>back</sup>

The exact same phrase every time in John. And its natural translation is "eternal (or everlasting or perpetual) life." If the EFM writers think it means something different, they should make a case rather than merely asserting.



>

## **An agent**<sup>back</sup>

I'm becoming increasingly spooked by the idea that the universe might be some kind of computer simulation, controlled by a geek beyond the skies in no way different from what we call God. And here the Gospel is pretty much saying that Jesus is God's avatar. In the game? Just saying...

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**Beloved Disciple**<sup>back</sup>

For another version, see *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*, by Christopher Moore (2003). This novel fills in the rest of of Jesus' life between childhood and ministry, His best friend Biff has

been almost, but not quite, written out of the Gospels.

>

**The world will rejoice** <sup>back</sup>

Yes, but he's talking to his disciples. Bringing the church into it is an anachronism.



**Most accurate historically**<sup>back</sup>

We really need to have a discussion concerning how much we care about the Bible's historical accuracy.

>

**Questionable morals, but...** [back](#)

Oh please!



