**John Commentary**

**John Chapter 1**

Joh 1:1

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“In the beginning.”** There are elements of John 1:1 and other phrases in the introduction of John that remind us of God’s original creation while referring to the work of restoration done by Jesus Christ in the new administration and the new creation. Genesis 1 refers to God’s original creation; John 1 refers to the Restoration, not the original creation. Noted Bible commentator F.F. Bruce argues for this interpretation:

It is not by accident that the Gospel begins with the same phrase as the book of Genesis. In Genesis 1:1, ‘In the beginning’ introduces the story of the old creation; here it introduces the story of the new creation. In both works of creation the agent is the Word of God.[[1]](#footnote-28109)

*The Racovian Catechism*, one of the great doctrinal works of the Unitarian movement of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, states that the word “beginning” in John 1:1 refers to the beginning of the new dispensation and thus is similar to Mark 1:1, which starts, “The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ.” The phrase, “in the beginning was the word” does not refer to the “beginning” in Genesis 1:1, although God did have a plan back then too.

In the cited passage (John 1:1) wherein the Word is said to have been in the beginning, there is no reference to an antecedent eternity, without commencement; because mention is made here of a *beginning*, which is opposed to that eternity. But the word *beginning*, used absolutely, is to be understood of the subject matter under consideration. Thus...John 15:27, “And ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with me FROM *the beginning*.” John 16:4, “These things I said not unto you AT *the beginning* because I was with you.” And Acts 11:15, “And as I began to speak the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us AT *the beginning*.” As then the matter of which John is treating is the Gospel, or the things transacted under the Gospel, nothing else ought to be understood here beside the beginning of the Gospel; a matter clearly known to the Christians whom he addressed, namely, the advent and preaching of John the Baptist, according to the testimony of all the evangelists [i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke and John], each of whom begins his history with the coming and preaching of the Baptist. Mark indeed (chapter 1:1) expressly states that this was the beginning of the Gospel. In like manner, John himself employs the word beginning, placed thus absolutely, in the introduction to his First Epistle, at which beginning he uses the same term (logos) Word, as if he meant to be his own interpreter [“That which is from the beginning…concerning the Word (logos) of life.” 1 John 1:1].[[2]](#footnote-20516)

While we agree with the *Catechism* that the meaning of “beginning” in John 1:1 refers to the beginning of the Gospel and the restoration of mankind, we also need to point out that the word “beginning” was deliberately chosen by God to remind us of the original creation, and to set the stage for the sequence of events that follow; for example, the conflict between light and darkness. In the context of the Restoration, then, “the Word” is the plan or purpose according to which God is restoring His creation.

So using “In the beginning” takes us both back to the beginning in Genesis 1:1, and sets us up for the “beginning” of the work of Christ and the Restoration of mankind.

Genesis 1. THE CREATION

* In the beginning—The creation
* Chaos and darkness
* God hovering over the water
* God spoke light, and more, into being
* Light overcoming the darkness
* God preparing a Garden of Delight for people and living among them
* THE FALL (then God lived in a tent (the “tabernacle”) and people gazed at its glory)

John 1. THE RESTORATION

* In the beginning—the plan
* All things were made in accordance with the plan
* In the plan was light and life
* The darkness could not understand or overcome it
* The plan became flesh and lived in a tent among us, and we gazed at its glory.

**“the word.”** “Word” is translated from the Greek word *logos* (#3056 λόγος ). It refers to God’s reason as played out in His plan and purpose. It is important that Christians have a basic understanding of *logos*, which is translated as “Word” in most versions of John 1:1. Most Trinitarians believe that *logos* refers directly to Jesus Christ, so in most Bibles *logos* is capitalized as “Word” (some versions even put “Jesus Christ” instead of “Word” in John 1:1). However, a study of the Greek word *logos* shows that it occurs more than 300 times in the New Testament, and in both the NIV and the KJV it is capitalized only 7 times (and even those versions disagree on exactly when to capitalize it). When a word that occurs more than 300 times is capitalized fewer than 10 times, it is obvious that when to capitalize and when not to capitalize is a translator’s decision based on their particular understanding of Scripture. Below are five points to consider.

**1.** In both Greek literature and Scripture, *logos* has a very wide semantic range that falls into two basic categories: one is the mind and products of the mind like “reason,” (the word “logic” is ultimately from the root *logos*), and the other is the expression of that reason in language or life: thus, “word,” “saying,” “command” etc. The Bible itself demonstrates the wide range of meanings of *logos*. Some of the ways it is translated in English versions of the Bible are: account, appearance, book, command, conversation, eloquence, flattery, grievance, heard, instruction, matter, message, ministry, news, proposal, question, reason, reasonable, reply, report, rule, rumor, said, say, saying, sentence, speaker, speaking, speech, stories, story, talk, talking, teaching, testimony, thing, things, this, truths, what, why, word and words. Although the word logos appears over 300 times in the Greek text, it is only translated “word” about 175 times in the King James Version, and 125 times in the NIV 84.

Any good Greek lexicon will also show the wide lexical range of *logos*. The definitions below are from the BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon*.[[3]](#footnote-12512) The words in italics are translated from *logos*:

* Speaking; words you say (Rom. 15:18 NIV84, “what I have *said*”).
* A statement you make (Luke 20:20 NASB, “they might catch him in some *statement*).
* A question (Matt. 21:24 NIV84, “I will also ask you one *question*”).
* Preaching (1 Tim. 5:17 NIV84, “especially those whose work is *preaching*).
* Command (Gal. 5:14 NIV84, “the entire law is summed up in a single *command*”).
* Proverb; saying (John 4:37 NIV84, “thus the *saying*, ‘One sows, and another reaps’”).
* Message; instruction; proclamation (Luke 4:32 NIV84, “his *message* had authority”).
* Assertion; declaration; teaching (John 6:60 NIV84, “this is a hard *teaching*”).
* The subject under discussion; matter (Acts 8:21 NIV84, “you have no part or share in this *ministry*.” Acts 15:6 NASB, “And the apostles... came together to look into this *matter*”).
* Revelation from God (Matt. 15:6 NIV84, “you nullify the *Word of God*”).
* God’s revelation spoken by His servants (Heb. 13:7 NIV84, “leaders who spoke the *Word* of God”).
* A reckoning, an account (Matt. 12:36 NIV84, “men will have to *give account*” on the Day of Judgment).
* An account or “matter” in a financial sense (Matt. 18:23 NIV84, “A king who wanted to settle “*accounts*” with his servants”).
* A reason; motive (Acts 10:29 NASB), “I ask *for what reason* you have sent for me”).

The above list is not exhaustive, but it does show that *logos* has a very wide range of meanings. With all the ways *logos* can be translated, how can we decide which meaning of *logos* to choose for any one verse? How can it be determined what *logos* refers to in John 1:1? Any occurrence of *logos* has to be carefully studied in its context in order to get the proper meaning. We assert that the *logos* in John 1:1 cannot be Jesus. Please notice that “Jesus Christ” is not a lexical definition of *logos*. John 1:1 does not say, “In the beginning was Jesus.”

“The Word” is not synonymous with Jesus, or even “the Messiah.” The word *logos* in John 1:1 refers to God’s creative self-expression—His reason, purposes, and plans, especially as they are brought into action. It refers to God’s self-expression, or communication, of Himself. Thus, the *logos* has been expressed through His creation (cf. Rom. 1:19-20), and Psalm 19 tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God. The *logos* has also been made known through the spoken word of the prophets and through Scripture, which is the written “Word of God.” Most notably and finally, it has come into being through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2).

However, when we are studying John 1:1 and the use of *logos* in the Bible, and reading what the commentaries, systematic theologies, Bible dictionaries, etc., say about it, we must be very careful to discern where the writer is getting his information. We assert that John and his hearers thought of Jesus as the Son of God, not God. However, many commentators are Trinitarian and simply assume that the word *logos* in John 1:1 refers to Jesus, and then from that assumption ignore the way the Jews and Greeks of John’s time thought about the *logos*, and give it a meaning it had in later Christian history as the Trinity doctrine developed, and that new meaning is “Jesus Christ.”

For example, Edward Klink III writes: “Certainly the term [*logos*] might be recognizable [to John’s audience], but its direct connection to Jesus assumes that Jesus, not merely his [John’s] religious-philosophical context, determines its meaning. …John is not relying on a background but on a foreground. For it is Jesus who embodies the “Word” (*logos*) in the flesh.”[[4]](#footnote-32399) Klink is asserting that *logos* means Jesus in John 1:1 because later in John the *logos* became flesh. But to us that is an unwarranted assumption. There is no historical evidence that the people of Christ’s time who did not believe (John wrote to get people to believe that Jesus was the Christ, John 20:31) ever thought the *logos* was Jesus Christ, but they did believe that God’s *logos* was His plans and purposes, and that *logos* became flesh in Jesus Christ in much the same way that they came into concretion as the Word of God spoken by the apostles and especially as that word became written down as the written “Word [*logos*] of God.”

The renowned Trinitarian scholar, J. B. Lightfoot, correctly writes that it was Christian teachers who took the word *logos* and changed it, giving it new definitions, such as a divine Person, and that change occurred in the centuries after John lived.

The word *logos* then, denoting both “reason” and “speech,” was a philosophical term adopted by Alexandrian Judaism before St. Paul wrote, to express the *manifestation* of the Unseen God in the creation and government of the World. It included all modes by which God makes Himself known to man. As His *reason*, it denoted His purpose or design; as His *speech*, it implied His revelation. **Christian teachers, when they adopted this term, exalted and fixed its meaning by attaching to it two precise and definite ideas: (1) “The Word is a Divine Person,”** (2) “The Word became incarnate in Jesus Christ.” It is obvious that these two propositions must have altered materially the significance of all the subordinate terms connected with the idea of the *logos*.[[5]](#footnote-28963)

It is important to note that it was “Christian teachers” who attached the idea of a “divine person” to the word *logos*. It is certainly true that when the word *logos* came to be understood as being Jesus Christ, the understanding of John 1:1 was altered substantially. Lightfoot correctly understands that the early meaning of *logos* concerned reason and speech, not “Jesus Christ.” Norton develops the concept of *logos* as “reason” and writes:

There is no word in English answering to the Greek word *logos*, as used here [in John 1:1]. It was employed to denote a mode of conception concerning the Deity, familiar at the time when St. John wrote and intimately blended with the philosophy of his age, but long since obsolete, and so foreign from our habits of thinking that it is not easy for us to conform our minds to its apprehension. The Greek word *logos*, in one of its primary senses, answered nearly to our word *Reason*. The *logos* of God was regarded, not in its strictest sense, as merely the Reason of God; but, under certain aspects, as the Wisdom, the Mind, the Intellect of God.[[6]](#footnote-26810)

Many scholars identify *logos* with God’s wisdom and reason. Andrews Norton postulates that in John 1:1 perhaps “the Disposing Power of God” would be a good translation for *logos*.[[7]](#footnote-18940) Anthony Buzzard sets forth “plan,” “purpose” or “promise” as three acceptable translations.[[8]](#footnote-19492) James Broughton and Peter Southgate say that *logos* was used “to describe the thoughts and plan of God being put into action.”[[9]](#footnote-20784)

The *logos* is the expression of God, and is His communication of Himself, just as a “word” is an outward expression of a person’s thoughts. This outward expression of God has now occurred through His Son, and thus it is perfectly understandable why Jesus is called the “Word.” Jesus is an outward expression of God’s reason, wisdom, purpose, and plan. For the same reason, we call the Bible the “Word” of God, and revelation “a ‘word’ from God.”

If we understand that the *logos* is God’s expression—His plan, purposes, reason, and wisdom—it is clear that those things were indeed with Him “in the beginning.” Scripture says that God’s wisdom was “from the beginning” (Prov. 8:23). It was very common in Hebrew writing to personify a concept such as wisdom. The figure of speech personification occurs when something is given human characteristics to emphasize something. Psalm 35:10 portrays bones talking. Psalm 68:31 portrays Ethiopia as a woman with her hands outstretched to God. Isaiah 3:26 says the gates of Zion will lament and mourn. Isaiah 14:8 says the cypress trees will rejoice. 1 Corinthians 12:15 portrays the foot talking. The Bible has many examples of personification, and wisdom is personified in Proverbs. Nevertheless, no ancient Jew reading Proverbs would think that God’s wisdom was a separate person, even though it is portrayed as one in verses like Proverbs 8:29-30: “…when He marked out the foundations of the earth, I [wisdom] was the craftsman at His side.” Similarly, the logos was with God in the beginning, because God’s plan, purpose, and wisdom were with Him, but we should not think of these as a separate person.

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

The use of “word” in the prologue of John as the plan and purpose of God is unique in the book, something that was pointed out by the eminent scholar, F. F. Bruce: “…the term ‘Word’ does not reappear in the body of the Gospel [of John] in the sense which it bears in the prologue.”[[10]](#footnote-22696) That statement is true and is easy to confirm from any Greek concordance, furthermore, it makes perfect sense in the light of the goal of the Gospel of John, which is stated in John 20:31, “but these are written so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that by believing you will have life in his name.” The plan and purpose of God, that the earth and people would be restored to Him, was with Him in the beginning, and the plan and purpose became flesh in Jesus Christ as John 1:14 says, and so from John 1:14 until the end of John, the flesh and blood Christ is the focus, not the “plan,” the *logos*, of God.

**2.** Most Jewish readers of the Gospel of John would have been familiar with the concept of God’s “word” being with God as He worked to bring His creation into existence. There is an obvious working of God’s power in Genesis 1 as He brings His plan into concretion by speaking things into being. The Targums are well-known for describing the wisdom and action of God as His “word.” This is especially important to note because the Targums are the Aramaic translations and paraphrases of the Old Testament, and Aramaic was the spoken language of many Jews at the time of Christ. Remembering that a Targum is usually a paraphrase of what the Hebrew text says, note how the following examples attribute action to the word.[[11]](#footnote-29950)

* And the word of the Lord was Joseph’s helper (Gen. 39:2).
* And Moses brought the people to meet the word of the Lord (Exod. 19:17).
* And the word of the Lord accepted the face of Job (Job 42:9).
* And the word of the Lord shall laugh them to scorn (Ps. 2:4).
* They believed in the name of His word (Ps. 106:12).

The above examples demonstrate that the Jews were familiar with using the idea of God’s “Word” to refer to His wisdom and action. This is especially important to note because these Jews were fiercely monotheistic, and did not in any way believe in a “Triune God.” They were familiar with the idioms of their own language, and understood that the wisdom and power of God were being personified as “word.”

Like the Aramaic-speaking Jews, the Greek-speaking Jews were also familiar with God’s creative force being called “the word.” J. H. Bernard writes, “When we turn from Palestine to Alexandria [Egypt], from Hebrew sapiential [wisdom] literature to that which was written in Greek, we find this creative wisdom identified with the Divine *logos*, Hebraism and Hellenism thus coming into contact.”[[12]](#footnote-23808)

One example of this is in the Apocryphal book known as the Wisdom of Solomon, which says, “O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy who hast made all things by thy word (*logos*), and by thy wisdom hast formed man…” (9:1). In this verse, the “word” and “wisdom” are seen as the creative force of God, but without being a “person.”

**3.** The *logos*, that is, the plan, purpose, and wisdom of God, “became flesh” (came into concretion or physical existence) in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) and His chief emissary, representative, and agent. Because Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father, he represents everything that God could communicate about Himself in a human person. As such, Jesus could say, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). The fact that the *logos* “became” flesh shows that it did not exist that way before. There is no preexistence of Jesus in this verse other than his figurative “existence” as the plan, purpose, or wisdom of God for the salvation of man. The same is true with the “word” in writing. It did not preexist in any form in the distant past, but it came into being as God gave the revelation to people and they wrote it down.

**4.** It is important to understand that the Bible was not written in a vacuum, but was recorded in the context of a culture and was understood by those who lived in that culture. Sometimes verses that seem superfluous or confusing to us were meaningful to the readers of the time because they were well aware of the culture and beliefs of those around them. In the first century, there were many competing beliefs in the world (and unfortunately, erroneous beliefs in Christendom) that were confusing believers about the identities of God and Christ. For centuries before Christ, and at the time the New Testament was written, the irrational beliefs about the gods of Greece had been handed down. This body of religious information was known by the word “*muthos*,” which we today call “myths” or “mythology.” This *muthos*, these myths, were often mystical and beyond rational explanation. The more familiar one is with the Greek myths, the better he will understand our emphasis on their irrationality. If one is unfamiliar with them, it would be valuable to read a little on the subject. Greek mythology is an important part of the cultural background of the New Testament.

Although the myths were often irrational, they nevertheless had been widely accepted as the “revelation of the gods.” The pervasiveness of the *muthos* in the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament can be seen sticking up out of the New Testament like the tip of an iceberg above the water, and archaeology confirms the widespread presence of the gods in the everyday life of the Greek and Roman people of New Testament times. The average Greek or Roman was as familiar with the teachings about the adventures of the gods as the average school child in the United States is familiar with Goldilocks and the Three Bears or Snoopy and Charlie Brown. Thus, when Paul and Barnabas healed a cripple in Lystra, the people assumed that the gods had come down in human form (Acts 14:11), and no doubt they based their assumption on the legend that Zeus and Hermes had once come to that area in human form. While Paul was in Athens, he became disturbed because of the large number of idols there that were statues to the various gods (Acts 17:16). In Ephesus, Paul’s teaching actually started a riot. When some of the locals realized that if his doctrine spread, “the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty” (Acts 19:27). There are many other examples that show that there was a *muthos*, i.e., a body of religious knowledge that was in large part incomprehensible to the human mind, firmly established in the minds of some of the common people in New Testament times.

Starting several centuries before Christ, certain Greek philosophers worked to replace the *muthos* with what they called the *logos*, a reasonable and rational explanation of reality. It is appropriate that, in the writing of the New Testament, God used the word *logos*, not *muthos*, to describe His wisdom, reason, and plan. God has not come to us in mystical experiences and irrational beliefs that cannot be understood; rather, He reveals Himself in ways that can be rationally understood and persuasively argued.

**5.** In addition to the cultural context that accepted the myths, at the time the Gospel of John was written, a belief system called Gnosticism was taking root in Christianity. Gnosticism had many ideas and words that are strange and confusing to us today, so, at the risk of oversimplifying, we will describe a few basic tenets of Gnosticism as simply as we can.

Gnosticism took many forms, but generally, Gnostics taught that there was a supreme and unknowable Being, which they designated as the “Monad.” The Monad produced various gods, who in turn produced other gods (these gods were called by different names, in part because of their power or position). One of these gods, called the “Demiurge,” created the earth and then ruled over it as an angry, evil, and jealous god. This evil god, Gnostics believed, was the god of the Old Testament, called *Elohim*. The Monad sent another god, “Christ,” to bring special *gnosis* (knowledge) to mankind and free them from the influence of the evil *Elohim*. Thus, a Gnostic Christian would agree that *Elohim* created the heavens and the earth, but he would not agree that He was the supreme God. Most Gnostics would also state that *Elohim* and Christ were at cross-purposes with each other. This is why it was so important for John 1:1 to say that the *logos* was *with* God, which at first glance seems to be a totally unnecessary statement.

The opening of the Gospel of John is a wonderful expression of God’s love. God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). He authored the opening of John in such a way that it reveals the truth about Him and His plan for all of mankind and, at the same time, refutes Gnostic teaching. It says that from the beginning there was the *logos* (the reason, plan, power), which was with God. There was not another “god” existing with God, especially not a god opposed to God. Furthermore, God’s plan was like God; it was divine. God’s plan became flesh when God impregnated Mary.

**“and the word was with God.”** This is strange language to us, so it is important to know that it was not strange to the Jews. While we would say a person “has wisdom” or “is wise,” it was a common way of speaking among the Jewish people to say a word, or knowledge, or wisdom, was “with” a person. For example, the Hebrew text of Proverbs 2:1 speaks of the commandments being “with” a person, and so does Proverbs 7:1. Proverbs 11:2 speaks of wisdom being “with” the humble, not just the humble “having wisdom” or “being wise;” and Proverbs 13:10 says wisdom is “with” people who take advice.

Job spoke to God about His actions, and spoke of what God hid in His heart, and then Job said, “I know that this [God’s secret plans and purposes] is with you” (Job 10:13; the Hebrew text says “with you,” although it is not translated that way in many English versions). We would say, “I know you have these things,” but the Hebrews said, “I know these things are with you.” Job also spoke of what God desired, and concluded that “many such things [that God desires and that are appointed] are with him” (Job 23:14). Job 27:11 also speaks of things being “with” God.

When God gave the Ten Commandments, Moses said that God had come to test the people and also so that the fear of God would be “with them” (as per the Hebrew text). We today would never say “so that the fear of God will be with you” as if the fear of God was another entity somehow together with the people, we today would simply say “so that you will fear God.” The Jews used the same “with” language in the Bible and in other writings as well (cf. the non-canonical writings of Sirach 1:1; Wisdom of Solomon 9:9).

Once we understand the *logos* in John 1:1 to be God’s purpose and plan, we can see that if John 1:1 was written in today’s English, we would likely say something like, “In the beginning was the plan, and God had that plan, and what God was the plan was.” We would not say that the plan was “with God.” But the ancient Jews had said knowledge and wisdom were “with” people for millennia, and for them to speak that way was perfectly natural. However, if we today are going to understand the prologue of John (John 1:1-18), it is imperative that we understand that *logos* is a masculine noun and it is personified in the Prologue. Wisdom and the *logos* were personified in the literature of the Jews from long before the time that John wrote, and that influenced how he wrote the prologue of John. Personification was widely used in Jewish literature (see commentary on Proverbs 1:20). For example, Proverbs portrays Wisdom as a woman helping God with His creation of the world (cf. Prov. 8:22-31). John 1:1 is not portraying a preincarnate Christ being with God. That would have been a nonsensical concept to the ancient unbelieving Jews and Greeks—remember, John was writing to get people to believe (John 20:30-31)—it was portraying that God used wisdom and a plan in restoring mankind to Himself, and that logos was a “plan” made perfect sense to those ancient unbelievers.

**“and what God was, the word was.”** This phrase is stating that the Word has the attributes of God, such as being true, trustworthy, etc. It makes perfect sense that if the Word is the expression of God, then it has attributes of God. Although almost every English Bible translates the last phrase of John 1:1 as, “and the Word was God,” it should not be translated that way. To understand that, we first should be aware of how the Greek text of the New Testament was written and how the Greeks used the word *theos*, “God” or “god.”

Although we make a distinction between “God” with a capital “G” and “god” with a lowercase “g,” the original text could not do that. The original text of both the Old Testament and the New Testament was written in all capital letters, so in Greek, both “God” and “god” were “GOD” (ΘΕΟΣ; THEOS). This meant the person reading the Scripture had to pay close attention to the context. When our modern English versions mention “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), one way we know that the word “god” refers to Satan is because it is spelled with a lowercase “g.” But if our versions read in all capitals like the ancient Greek text and said, “THE GOD OF THIS AGE,” how would we know who this “GOD” was? We would have to discover who he was from the context. The people reading the early Greek texts had to become very sensitive to the context to properly understand the Bible. An unintended consequence of modern capitalization, punctuation, and spacing in the text is that it has made the modern reader much less aware of, and sensitive to, the context.

What the word “GOD” referred to in any given context was further complicated by the fact that, as any good Greek lexicon will show, the Greek word *theos* (#2316 θεός) was used to refer to both gods and goddesses, or was a general name for any deity, or was used of a representative of God, and was even used of people of high authority such as rulers or judges. The Greeks did not use the word “GOD” like we do, to refer to just one single Supreme Being with no other being sharing the name. The Greeks were polytheistic and had many gods with different positions and authority, and rulers and judges who represented the gods or who were themselves of high authority, and *theos* was used of all of those. Some of the authorities in the Bible who are referred to as ΘΕΟΣ include the Devil (2 Cor. 4:4), lesser gods (1 Cor. 8:5), and men with great authority (John 10:34-35; Acts 12:22).

When we are trying to discover what GOD (ΘΕΟΣ; THEOS) is referring to in a verse, the context is always the final arbiter. However, we do get some help in that it is almost always the case in the New Testament that when “GOD” refers to the Father, the definite article appears in the Greek text (this article can be seen only in the Greek text, it is never translated into English). Translators are normally very sensitive to this. The difference between *theos* with and without the article occurs in John 1:1, which has two occurrences of *theos*: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with **the** *theos*, and the Word was *theos*.” Since the definite article (“the”) is missing from the second occurrence of “*theos*” (“God,”) the most natural meaning of the word would be that it referred to the quality of God, i.e., “divine,” “god-like,” or “like God.” The *New English Bible* gets the sense of this phrase by translating it, “What God was, the Word was.” James Moffatt, who was a professor of Greek and New Testament Exegesis at Mansfield College in Oxford, England, and author of the well-known *Moffatt Bible*, translated the phrase, “the *logos* was divine.”

A very clear explanation of how to translate *theos* without the definite article can be found in *Jesus As They Saw Him*, by William Barclay, a professor at Trinity College in Glasgow:

In a case like this we cannot do other than go to the Greek, which is *theos ēn ho logos*. *Ho* is the definite article, *the*, and it can be seen that there is a definite article with *logos*, but not with *theos*. When in Greek two nouns are joined by the verb “to be,” and when both have the definite article, then the one is fully intended to be identified with the other; but when one of them is without the article, it becomes more an adjective than a noun, and describes rather the class or sphere to which the other belongs.

An illustration from English will make this clear. If I say, “The preacher is *the* man,” I use the definite article before both preacher and man, and I thereby identify the preacher with some quite definite individual man whom I have in mind. But, if I say, “The preacher is man,” I have omitted the definite article before man, and what I mean is that the preacher must be classified as a man, he is in the sphere of manhood, he is a human being.

[In the last clause of John 1:1] John has no article before *theos*, God. The *logos*, therefore, is not identified as God or with God; the word *theos* has become adjectival and describes the sphere to which the *logos* belongs. We would, therefore, have to say that this means that the *logos* belongs to the same sphere as God; without being identified with God, the *logos* has the same kind of life and being as God. Here the NEB [*New English Bible*] finds the perfect translation: “What God was, the Word was.”[[13]](#footnote-30989)

Daniel Wallace is a Trinitarian and a scholar of Greek grammar. After examining the grammatical possibilities in John 1:1 and whether the last *theos* in John 1:1 is indefinite (“a god”), definite (“the God”), or qualitative (that the *logos* has the qualities of God; the noun *logos* is being used to function like an adjective and give qualities to the noun *logos*), he concludes, “The most likely candidate for *theos* is qualitative. …Possible translations are as follows: ‘What God was the Word was’ (NEB)…The idea of a qualitative *theos* here is that the Word had all the attributes and qualities that ‘the God’ (of 1:1b) had.”[[14]](#footnote-23532)

We agree with Wallace and the (NEB, i.e., New English Bible), that the word *theos* is being used in a qualitative manner and telling us that the Word has the qualities of God, but we do not agree with Wallace that the Word had “all” the attributes and qualities of God. It is not the point of the qualitative use of a noun to confer every single attribute of the adjectival noun to the receptor noun. Wallace is trying to be honest grammatically that the word “God” is being used to function like an adjective while still defending the Trinity, i.e., that Jesus and the Father are co-equal and co-eternal. But the regular qualitative use of a noun does not demand that “all” the qualities of the adjectival noun are being assigned to the receptor noun, it is enough that many major qualities are being assigned. So, for example, both God and the logos are true, holy, righteous, life-giving, etc. We do not believe that John 1:1 is setting forth the doctrine of the Trinity, but the truth that the *logos* (which includes the Word in every form, written and in the form of Jesus Christ) has the attributes of God.

As we said above, however, although the wording of the Greek text of John 1:1 certainly favors the translation, “and what God was, the Word was” over the translation “the Word was God,” the context and scope of Scripture must be the final arbiter. In this case, we have help from the verse itself in the phrase “the Word was with God.” The Word (*logos*) cannot both be “with” God and “be” God. That is nonsensical. It is similar to us being able to discern that Jesus Christ is not God from reading 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15, which say that Jesus is the image of God. One cannot be both the image of the object and the object itself. We Christians must become aware of the difference between a genuine mystery and a contradiction. In his book, *Against Calvinism*, Roger Olson writes: “We must point out here the difference between mystery and contradiction; the former is something that cannot be fully explained to or comprehended by the human mind, whereas the latter is just nonsense—two concepts that cancel each other out and together make an absurdity.”[[15]](#footnote-29217) Richard Daane uses the term “verbalism” which he applied to certain aspects of Calvinism, but we feel it is appropriate when applied to many of the explanations of the Trinity. He wrote: “...verbalism, a theoretical game in which words really carry no ascertainable sense and phrases no ascertainable meaning.”[[16]](#footnote-30579) Most Trinitarians assert that the Word being with God and also being God is a mystery. We assert it is a plain contradiction, a verbalism, and the truth in the verse is actually simple: the *logos*, the plan, purpose, and wisdom of God, was with God, and what God was (i.e., holy, true, pure, righteous, etc.) his *logos* was too.

[For more information, see Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, *One God and One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith,* 205-12, 219, 443.]

Joh 1:2

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“This *word*.”** This is the translation of the Greek masculine pronoun *houtos*. It is masculine to agree with its associated noun, *logos*, which is masculine. Although most English versions translate the pronoun as “he,” that can be very confusing in English. The *logos* is not a person, it is an “it,” the plan and purpose of God. We could translate the phrase, “This one was in the beginning with God” (YLT); or “The same was in the beginning with God” (KJV), or even, “It was in the beginning with God.”

[For more on the *logos* being the plan of God, see commentary on John 1:1. For more on why the masculine pronoun is not translated “he,” see commentary on John 1:3, “it.”]

Although it is very confusing to translate the pronoun referring to the *logos* as “he” or “him” (which most modern English versions do only because they think that the *logos* refers to the preincarnate Christ), it worked for the ancients because they personified the logos and Wisdom in their literature (cf. Prov. 8:22-31, in which Wisdom is personified as a woman who worked with God in making the earth).

[For more on the figure personification in the Bible, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

It really works well in English to use “the same,” or “it” to refer to the *logos* until John 1:11, when the text says, “He came to his own,” and in John 1:11 the personified *logos* is embodied in Jesus Christ, who is in fact, “the word” in the flesh. The ancients would totally understand this, which is why John wrote it. The *logos* had existed as God’s plan before Jesus came, but when he came he was still the plan, but now the plan was an actual person. It seems to make a break in the text to say the *logos*, the plan, was an “it” but then became a “he” when it was embodied in Jesus Christ, but that is the clearest way to express it in English. If we say, “The plan became flesh in Jesus Christ,” that should be clear; and saying “It (he; the plan) became flesh when he (Jesus) came is simply saying the same thing.

**“was in the beginning with God.”** Although in one sense this phrase seems to simply repeat what we read in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the word,” this sentence is doing much more than that. When John 1:1 said, “In the beginning,” the reader’s mind was drawn to Genesis 1:1 and the original creation. But here in John 1:2, there is a different emphasis altogether. The Jews reading John 1:2 were well aware of what was “in the beginning with God” that helped with creation. It was wisdom. God wisely planned everything He did. Speaking of wisdom, Proverbs 8:22, 23, 27, 30 say, “The LORD made me [wisdom] at the beginning of His creation, before His works of long ago. I was formed before ancient times, from the beginning, before the earth began. I was there when He established the heavens…. I was a skilled craftsman beside Him.” Everything God did He did with wisdom, because “wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom” (Prov. 4:7 KJV).

God’s *logos*, His plan and purpose, was expressed in wise action. Certainly, this was the case when God created the heavens and the earth, but now the reader sees that wisdom was also part of God’s plan in this new beginning, a new beginning that will culminate in the restoration of all things. God’s wise plan includes “the *logos* became flesh,” thus, God’s wise plan includes a second Adam who can undo damage done by the original Adam and restore the earth and offer salvation to mankind.

Joh 1:3

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“Everything came to be through it.”** The *logos* is an “it,” not a “him.” God made everything through and according to His *logos*, His plan and purpose, and with wisdom. The *logos* was God’s plan and purpose, especially as it was put into action (see commentary on John 1:1). Furthermore, it was integrally tied together with His wisdom (see commentary on John 1:2).

To understand one reason why most English versions say “him” but others say “it,” we must understand how pronouns are used in languages such as Greek. Unlike English, but like many languages, including Spanish, French, German, Latin, and Hebrew, the Greek language assigns a gender to nouns. Then, grammatically, the gender of any pronoun must match the gender of the associated noun. The gender assignment of nouns happened in ancient antiquity, and often, there seems to be no reason why a noun has the gender assigned to it that it does.

In French, for example, a table is feminine, *la table,* while a desk is masculine, *le bureau*. Thus, a strictly literal translation of a French sentence with nouns and matching pronouns might be, “I like the table, **she** is just right for the room, but I do not like the desk, **he** is too big.” In correctly translating from French to English, however, we would never translate the English as, “the table, she,” or “the desk, he.” Not only is it improper English, it misses the point. Even the French people do not think of tables and desks as being masculine or feminine. The gender of the nouns is simply a part of the language that has come down through the ages.

Furthermore, no one would ever insist that a table or desk was a person just because it had a masculine or feminine pronoun associated with it. Good English translators recognize that even though a noun is assigned a gender in another language and the associated pronoun follows the gender of the noun, their job is to bring the meaning of the original into English, not introduce confusion into the English translation. Hence, someone translating from French to English would use the English designation “it” for the table and the desk, in spite of the fact that the original French language called them “she” and “he.”

What is true in the examples from the French language is true in any language that assigns a gender to nouns and then uses pronouns with that same gender. For example, the Greek word for “lamp” is *luchnos*, a masculine noun, and therefore proper grammar dictates that any pronoun associated with it is masculine. Thus, if the Greek text of Matthew 5:15 were translated literally, it would read, “Nor do they light a lamp and place **him** under the bushel.” However, every English version we checked said, “it,” as proper English dictates.

The same grammatical rule that the pronoun must agree with the noun is followed when the noun is feminine. According to the literal Greek text, Christ told his disciples that when they entered a “city” (*polin*; a feminine noun) or “village” (*kome*; a feminine noun), they should “find out who in **her** is worthy” (Matt. 10:11; literally translated). The English versions correctly read, “it” instead of “her.” When translating from another language into English, we have to use the English language properly. Students learning Greek, Hebrew, Spanish, French, German, *etc*., quickly discover that one of the difficult things about learning the language is memorizing the gender of each noun—something we do not have in the English language.

Once we clearly understand the gender of a pronoun is determined by the gender of the noun, we can see why one cannot build a doctrine on the gender of a noun and its agreeing pronoun. Only confusion would result from that kind of erroneous exegesis. In John 1:3, the pronoun *autou* is masculine so it agrees grammatically with the masculine noun *logos*. Most Trinitarians believe that the *logos* refers to Jesus Christ, so to them the translation “him” is proper. However, we assert that the *logos* is not a person, but the plan or purpose of God, and is, therefore, an “it.”

Historically, Trinitarians have thought of the *logos* as Jesus Christ, so they have translated the pronoun as “him,” but not every version does that. The first English translation from the Greek text was done by William Tyndale (1494-1536; John Wycliffe translated into English earlier, but used the Latin as his base text). He translated the pronoun as “it,” not “him.” In 1537, the Matthew’s Bible, translated by John Rogers using the pseudonym “Thomas Matthews,” used “it,” not “him.” In 1539, the Great Bible, a revision of Matthew’s Bible, had “it.” This was important because the translation was overseen by Miles Coverdale, and in the Coverdale Bible of 1535, done some years earlier and based on the Latin, Coverdale used “him,” not “it,” but in this later version he apparently switched his preference and used “it.” When Queen Mary forbade the printing of the English Bible, translation moved to Geneva, and the Geneva Bible of 1560 became the household Bible of the English-speaking people. It was the Bible used by Shakespeare, as well as the Puritans who settled New England. Under Queen Elizabeth, the English Bible was once again printed in Great Britain, and the Bishops’ Bible was published in 1568. It used “it,” not “him” in John 1:3-4, but was never popular with the people. The major change came with the King James Bible, which used “him,” not “it” in the opening of John, and most English versions since then have done the same. Nevertheless, we should be aware that the translation “it” has good literary foundation and a solid Christian history.

[For translating the gift of holy spirit as an “it,” see commentary on John 14:17.]

Although we today should think of the *logos* as an “it” for clarity, we need to acknowledge that the ancient people personified the concept of the *logos* and spoke of it as if it were a person, even though they did not believe it was a person. This seems strange to us, but it was perfectly natural for the ancients to use the figure of speech personification to express many concepts (for more on the figure personification, see commentary on Proverbs 1:20, “Wisdom”). Nevertheless, for us today it makes the text clearer if we say that God had a plan, and God worked through it (not, “him”) to restore the world to Himself.

Joh 1:4

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“in it.”** The pronoun we translate as “it” refers to the *logos*, which for clarity’s sake is best brought into English as an “it” not a “him,” because the *logos* was God’s design, purpose, and plan, especially as it was put into action.

A central and integral part of God’s plan for the redemption and restoration of mankind was that people could live forever, and that is why John 1:4 says “in it,” i.e., “in the plan” was “life.” Because of God’s plan, successfully carried out by Jesus Christ, people could live forever.

[For more on the logos being God’s plan, see commentary on John 1:1. For more on translating the masculine singular pronoun as “it,” not “him,” see commentary on John 1:3.]

**“was life.”** The verb “was” has been the source of a lot of theological discussion. But most of that discussion has been due to the fact that Trinitarians assert that the *logos* refers to Jesus Christ, who Trinitarians assert was with God as the preincarnate Christ before the world was created. But the Trinitarians acknowledge that the text of John 1:4 says that in the *logos* “was” life. But if the *logos* is referring to Jesus Christ, and if he is eternal, then John 1:4 should not say, “In him WAS life,” but rather, “In him IS life,” and so the phrase is difficult for them and a source of much discussion. But the phrase is not difficult to understand when we realize that the *logos* does not refer to Jesus Christ, but to God’s purpose and plan.

In God’s plan was life, that is, part of God’s plan was how mankind would be restored to Him and people could live forever. But by the time John wrote his Gospel, the plan had already become flesh, and it was through belief in the man Jesus Christ that people obtained everlasting life. By the time he wrote, people got saved by believing in the saving work of Jesus Christ, not by believing God had a plan to get them saved. Toward the close of his Gospel, John wrote: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples that are not written in this book, but these are written so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that by believing you will have life in his name” (John 20:30-31). So the verse makes perfect sense the way it is written: In God’s plan WAS life.”

As the verse starts out, it says, “In it” that is, in the *logos*, i.e., the plan, “was life.” This first use of “life” in the verse does not have the definite article, “the,” and thus it is not “the life” but “life,” that is, life in its fullest and richest sense; life both here and now, and life forevermore.

**“*that* life was the light of humankind.”** In this phrase, we see “the life” with the definite article, and so now “the life” is referring more succinctly to the life that comes through the plan of God and is the light of mankind, which is not just regular life such as every living animal has, but the full life and the everlasting life made available through God to those who accept His Son, Jesus Christ. It is the “light” in a figurative sense, where “light” is contrasted with “darkness.” It is the light of life in all its fullness in contrast to the darkness of death in all the ways darkness is manifested.

Joh 1:5

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“And the light shines in the darkness.”** The word “shines” is the Greek verb *phainō* (#5316 φαίνω) and is in the present tense, active voice, and refers to continuing to shine. In this verse, the “light” refers, as it did in John 1:4, to the light in all its fullness, and here we clearly see it being set forth in contrast to “darkness” which is opposed to it. In this verse, we again see some of the parallel between the “original creation” in Genesis and the “restoration of creation” with the advent of Jesus Christ. In Genesis, darkness was upon the face of the deep until God scattered it with His command, “Let there be light.” But the darkness returned when Adam and Eve sinned and dominion of the earth was transferred to the Devil, and so now the light once again has to shine forth in the darkness, which tries, but fails, to overcome it.

In the prologue of John, “light” and “darkness” are not literal but are being used metaphorically for ethical and moral good and evil. “Light” represents what is good, godly, ethical, and moral, whereas “darkness” represents what is evil, ungodly, unethical, and immoral. The light is all the goodness of God and it is fully represented in the person of Jesus Christ, who was the light of the world. It is also represented in godliness, truth, and other virtues, and even we flawed humans who do our best to follow God and are “lights” in the world (Matt. 5:14). The darkness cannot understand the light, and tried to overcome it, but the light continues to shine in spite of the opposition.

[For more on Adam and Eve transferring the dominion of the world to the Devil, see commentary on Luke 4:6. For more on the future Kingdom of Christ on earth that will not have the Devil present and will be a paradise, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“but the darkness did not overcome it.**” The words “did…overcome” are from the Greek verb *katalambanō* (#2638 καταλαμβάνω), which can refer to “overcome; conquer,” or “comprehend; grasp.” Thus, the phrase can be translated either as “the darkness did not understand it,” or “the darkness did not overcome it.” C. K. Barrett comments: “*Kathlambanein*, ‘to seize,’ may mean ‘to overcome’ or, especially in the middle [voice], ‘to grasp with the mind’, ‘to understand.’ Here it seems probable that John is (after his manner; see on 3:3) playing on the two meanings…. Since the Greek word itself bears both meanings…The darkness neither understood nor quenched the light.”[[17]](#footnote-20498)

We agree that both meanings of the word *katalambanō* are true and important in this verse making it a use of the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre). However, of the two meanings, “understood” or “overcome,” given the conflict between good (light) and evil (darkness) that has occurred since Genesis, and since the Devil had been trying to overcome the light since before the creation of man, “overcome” was the meaning we went with in the REV.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

Another thing worth noticing in the verse is that the verb “shines” is present tense, active voice, indicating that the light continues to shine on, while the verb “overcome” is in the aorist tense, active voice, referring to an event that happens in a specific time. The darkness made an attack and an attempt to quench the light, but the light continues to shine.

Joh 1:6

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

The insertion of the statements about John the Baptist seems like an abrupt interruption here. F. F. Bruce gives a plausible reason for their being in the text: “Their insertion may remind the reader that the author is not concerned simply to state timeless truths, but rather to show how these truths are anchored in human history.”[[18]](#footnote-21713) Also, their insertion at this point fits into the chiastic structure of the Gospel of John (chiasm provided by Dr. Dustin Smith):

A. The Word was with God (John 1:1-2)  
- B. Creation through word (John 1:3)  
- - C. Received life (John 1:4-5)  
- - - D. John the Baptist (John 1:6-8)  
- - - - E. Response to “embodiment” (John 1:9-10)  
- - - - - F. His own, i.e., Israel (John 1:11)  
- - - - - - G. Accept the Logos (John 1:12a)  
- - - - - - - H. Become children of God (John 1:12b)  
- - - - - - G’. Believe the Logos (John 1:12c)  
- - - - - F’. His own, i.e., believers (John 1:13)  
- - - - E’. Response to “embodiment” (John 1:14)  
- - - D’. John the Baptist (John 1:15)  
- - C’. Received grace (John 1:16)  
- B’. Grace and truth through Jesus (John 1:17)  
A’. Only son with God (John 1:18).

Joh 1:7

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“This man came as a witness.”** Most versions translate John 1:7 as, “He came as a witness, to testify.” John came for the purpose of testimony, that he may testify. It is worth noting that saying that John came “as a witness” places emphasis on the personhood of John as the one giving the testimony, when the emphasis in the Greek is on the *purpose* of John’s coming. It is also worth noting that “witness” and “testify” are actually different forms of the same Greek word, and the repetition of the word adds an eye-catching emphasis to the verse.

**“so that through him all would believe.”** This is saying that through John, everyone would believe. The “him” is John, as C. K. Barrett has stated, that the “through him” “must refer to John: men do not believe *through* Jesus, but *in* him.”[[19]](#footnote-19281)

Joh 1:8

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

Joh 1:9

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

Joh 1:10

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“and the world came to be through him.”** John 1:10 shows that the *logos*, God’s express purpose and plan was in the world, and it also repeats in a different way what had been stated in John 1:3, that it was through the *logos* that God made the world. However, John 1:10 adds that the world did not know the *logos* and thus by implication the world did not know God.

That John 1:10 restates what John 1:3 says brings this section of John to a close in a kind of *inclusio*, wrapping John 1:1-10 together and expressing what God did via the *logos*. John 1:11 changes subjects, and although we are to understand that it is still God working, but now through Christ and not through the *logos*, it seems apparent that the subject changes from the *logos* to Christ. Although we modern English readers could wish for a clearer presentation of what is happening in the text, given the poetic style of what John is writing, we can gain sufficient clarity from the scope of Scripture.

Some scholars think the phrase, “the world was made by him,” is a reference to the new creation only that is being made by Christ (cf. Col. 1:15-20 and Heb. 1:1,10), but that does not seem as likely an explanation as John 1:10 is highlighting what verse 3 said. For that alternative explanation, see the *Racovian Catechism,* 89-91.

Joh 1:11

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

Joh 1:12

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“name.”** See commentary on 1 John 3:23, “on the name of his son Jesus Christ.”

**“the right.”** The Greek word translated “right” is *exousia* (#1849 ἐξουσία), and it means authority; the ability to do something; power; and it was used of “right” or “permission” from a higher authority. The *TDNT* says, “1. This word denotes first the “ability” to perform an action. 2. It then means the “right,” “authority,” “permission” conferred by a higher court: a. the possibility granted by government; b. the right in various social relationships, e.g., that of parents, masters, or owners.”[[20]](#footnote-28803)

By virtue of the sacrifice of Christ, people have been given the ability and right to become born-again children of God. The Four Gospels must be read with great understanding, because the events they describe in the life of Christ happened before the Day of Pentecost when the New Birth became available. However, the narration, such as the prologue of John, was written after Pentecost and so often reflects what is available after Pentecost, such as the New Birth. That is the case here in John 1:12. It is pointing to what the finished work of Christ made available to humankind at the beginning of John, before the redemptive work of Christ on the cross was completed.

**“become.”** The Greek is in the aorist tense, indicating a one-time action. Becoming a child of God is not a process, it is an event. When a person confesses Christ as Lord and believes God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9), at that moment they become a born-again child of God. See commentary on Romans 10:9 and 1 Peter 1:3.

Joh 1:13

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“who were not born.”** The most common interpretation of this verse is that it is speaking of the Christian New Birth that became available on the Day of Pentecost. The manuscript evidence supports that the subject of the sentence, those who were born, is plural. The Greek texts are all plural, and most Latin and Syriac texts are plural. However there are some older Latin textual variants that are singular, some Syriac texts that have a plural subject but a singular verb, and there are some Church Fathers who quote the text in the singular.[[21]](#footnote-11327) The REV translation follows the Greek manuscripts, but it should be noted that there are some very competent scholars who argue that John 1:13 is about the birth of Jesus Christ, not about the Christian New Birth.

**“by blood.”** The only time in the NT that blood is used in the plural. In New Testament times it was sometimes believed that a baby was conceived by the mixture of the blood of the father and the blood of the mother.

**“the will of the flesh.”** Although the flesh does not have a “will” so much as it has “desires,” the REV wanted to remain consistent in reflecting the Greek “will” that occurs throughout the verse.

**“the will of a man.”** The Greek word for “man” is not the generic term *anthrōpos* (#444 ἄνθρωπος) that is often used to refer to a human person but rather is *anēr* (#435 ἀνήρ), which means “a man,” as in a male human, in contrast to “a woman.”

Joh 1:14

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“The word became flesh.”** The key to understanding this verse is realizing that “the word” is the wisdom, plan or purpose of God, just as it was in John 1:1 (see commentary on John 1:1). The word, the plan and purpose of God, “became flesh” as Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus Christ was “the Word in the flesh,” which is shortened to “the Word” for ease of speaking. Scripture is also the Word, but it is the Word in writing. Everyone agrees that the “Word” in writing had a beginning. So did the Word in the flesh. In fact, the Greek text of Matthew 1:18 says that very clearly: “Now the beginning of Jesus Christ was in this manner.” It is possible that some ancient scribes were so uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus having a “beginning” that they tried to alter the Greek text to read “birth” and not “beginning,” but they were unsuccessful. The modern Greek texts all read “beginning” (*genesis*) in Matthew 1:18 (see commentary on Matthew 1:18).

In the beginning, God had a plan, a purpose, which “became flesh” when Jesus was conceived. To make John 1:14 support the Trinity, there must first be proof that Jesus existed and was called “the Word” before he was conceived in Mary. But no conclusive proof of that exists. There is a large body of evidence, however, that shows that Jesus was foreknown by God. Furthermore, the use of *logos* to refer to a plan or purpose is also well attested. We contend that the meaning of John 1:14 is straightforward. God had a plan (the Word) and that plan became flesh when Jesus was conceived. Thus, Jesus became “the Word in the flesh.”

It is important to ask why John would say, “the Word became flesh,” which is a statement that seems so obvious to us. Of course Jesus Christ was flesh. He was born, grew, ate, and slept, and Scripture calls him a man. However, what is clear to us now was not at all clear in the early centuries of the Christian era. The Bible must be understood in the context of the culture in which it was written. At the time John wrote the Gospel of John, the “Docetic” movement was gaining disciples inside Christianity (“Docetic” comes from the Greek word for “to seem” or “to appear”). Docetic Christians believed Jesus was actually a spirit being, or god, who only “appeared” to be human. Some Docetics did not believe Jesus even actually ate or drank, but only pretended to do so. Furthermore, some Jews thought that Jesus was an angel. In today’s theological literature, theologians refer to this as “angel Christology.” John 1:14 was not written to show that Jesus was somehow preexistent and then became flesh. It was to show that God’s plan for salvation actually became “flesh,” that is, Jesus was not a spirit, god, or angelic being, but a real flesh-and-blood human being. A very similar thing is said in 1 John 4:2, that if you do not believe Jesus has come “in the flesh,” you are not of God.

[For more on this, see J. S. Hyndman, *Lectures on The Principles of Unitarianism*, (1824), 113, and the *Racovian Catechism*, 117-119, both available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship.]

As the Word in the flesh, Jesus Christ made known God in a very powerful and clear way. He was loving, kind, sacrificial, and much more. Those are wonderful qualities, and by studying Jesus Christ we get to know God. But sometimes people focus on the qualities that Jesus exhibited in his first coming and say, “If you want to know God, just look at Jesus,” and then only mention the kind and sacrificial things that he did. But to see how Jesus truly reveals God we must consider both of his comings. We cannot just look at the first of Jesus’ two comings and say that is what God is like. For Jesus to fully reveal God we must look at both comings of Christ and the prophecies of how he will rule the earth in the future. We cannot look at just one part of Jesus’ life and ministry and say, “That is what God is like.” We must look at the entire person and all that he does. When Jesus came the first time he demonstrated the kindness of God, His giving and sacrificial nature, and how much He desired to bless, heal, and save people. When Christ comes the second time we will see the other side of God, that He is a just God who rewards the righteous but kills the wicked so that they will no longer defy Him or hurt His people. Jesus will “kill the wicked” (Isa. 11:4; 63:1-6; Rev. 2:16; 19:15, 21; Matt. 25:31-33, 41, 46; cf. Ps. 2:9-12; Dan. 2:34-35; Matt. 21:42, 44.). Then, to make sure that there is justice and safety in his kingdom, Jesus will rule with a “rod of iron.” That Jesus will rule over the earth with a rod of iron is a well-established prophecy and occurs four times in Scripture (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). The fact that wicked people will be gone and cruelty, crime, and injustice will not be part of our future life on earth is a part of why Scripture refers to our next life as “paradise.”

[For more on the rod of iron, see commentary on Rev. 2:27.]

**“dwelled among us.”** The Greek verb is *skenoō* (#4637 σκηνόω), and it literally means “to live in a tent” or “to pitch a tent.” In fact, a very literal translation of John 1:14 would simply be that Jesus “tented” among us. It can refer to living in a place temporarily, although by New Testament times it also seems to refer to living in a place somewhat permanently. It is used five times in the New Testament (John 1:14; Rev. 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3).

John 1:14 is making a comparison between Jesus Christ and the Tent of Meeting (“Tabernacle”) in the wilderness. The verb most English versions translate as “dwelt” or “lived,” is *skenoō* (#4637 σκηνόω, pronounced skay-'nah-ō), which literally means to set up a tent or live in a tent. Our human bodies are sometimes referred to as “tents” (*skēnos*) in the Bible because our body is our temporary dwelling while we live on earth (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1, 4; 2 Pet. 1:13, 14). Similarly, many verses refer to Moses’ Tent of Meeting as a “tent” (*skēnē*, cf. Exod. 40:2, 5, 6, etc.) because it was a large tent.

Jesus’ body is specifically referred to as a “tent” in John 1:14 so the glory of God that shone in Jesus’ life can be compared to the glory of God that shone in Moses’ “tent” in the wilderness. The glory of God was associated with the Tent of Meeting (cf. Exod. 40:34; Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10). When Moses set up the Tent of Meeting it was filled with the glory of God (Exod. 40:34), and then the glory of God was upon the tent as a pillar of cloud during the day, and a pillar of fire during the night (Num. 14:14). So God “tented” among the people in the Old Testament and they gazed upon His glory, and when Jesus Christ came, he also tented among the people who gazed at the glory of God that was so evident in his life. It was at the Tent of Meeting that God met Moses and His people. Similarly, it was in Jesus Christ that people met God. Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

**“seen.”** The Greek word is *theaomai* (#2300 θεάομαι, pronounced theh-'ah-om-eye), and it means to see, to look upon, view attentively, contemplate, to learn by looking, to see with the eyes, to perceive. Although it can in some contexts simply mean “to see,” it often has a much deeper meaning, which it does in John 1:14. Hendriksen writes: “It refers, indeed, to physical sight; yet, it always includes a plus, the plus of calm scrutiny, contemplation, or even wonderment. It describes the act of one who does not stare absent-mindedly nor merely look quickly nor necessarily perceive comprehensively. On the contrary, this individual regards an object and reflects upon it. He scans it, examining it with care. He studies it, viewing and considering it thoughtfully (John 1:32; 4:35; 11:45; Acts 1:11).”[[22]](#footnote-23536)

In this prologue of John, Jesus is being compared to Moses’ Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle), and just as the Israelites no doubt looked and looked at the Tent of Meeting and the glory of God associated with it, so John says they looked at Jesus and saw the glory of God.

Joh 1:15

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“has surpassed me.”** John the Baptist set a wonderful example for all believers in that, as great as he was, he consistently pointed people to the Messiah. Furthermore, he recognized and humbly accepted that Jesus was his Lord, openly pointing out that Jesus was more important than he was. The words “has surpassed me,” point out that Jesus’ ministry had, even in this early stage, well surpassed John’s and John was pointing to Jesus and saying he was the Messiah. The Greek uses the perfect tense of the verb *ginomai*, “to become,” and the word *emprosthen*, which means “to be before, ahead of, or higher in position or rank than someone.” “To become” of a higher rank than someone is to “advance in front of someone” or to surpass him, thus, “has surpassed me” (NIV84, CSB) is a good translation. No one argues that Jesus had surpassed John the Baptist in every way.

**“because he was superior to me.”** The simple truth is that the Messiah always was superior to John. This verse, and John 1:30, are sometimes used to support the Trinity because the verse can be translated, “because he [Jesus] was before me” [John], and it is assumed that the verse is saying that Jesus existed before John the Baptist. In fact, a number of modern versions translate the last phrase something like, “because he [Jesus] existed before me.” However, there is no reason to bring the Trinity into this verse, and there are very good reasons that it does not refer to the Trinity in any way.

It is clear from the scope of Scripture and social context that John was not teaching the Trinity. There is no mention of the Trinity in the context, and had John mentioned it his disciples would not have understood what he was talking about (in fact, there is no biblical proof that John even knew of anything such as the Trinity). The Messiah the Jews were expecting was not “God in the flesh,” but a man sent from God. The Jews firmly believed in one God, and were not expecting the Messiah to be God in the flesh.

There are scriptures that we today know are prophecies of the Messiah that the Jews in the time of Christ did not apply to the Messiah. However, we also know that the ancient Jews had a lot of expectations about their Messiah that were based on Scripture. The Messiah the Jews were expecting was to be a descendant of Eve (Gen. 3:15), and descendant of Abraham (Gen. 22:18), from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10); a descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12, 13; Isa. 11:1), that he would be a “lord” under Yahweh (Ps. 110:1), that he would be the servant of Yahweh (Isa. 42:1-7), he will be “one of their own” and will be able to draw near to Yahweh (Jer. 30:21), and he will come out of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2).

This expectation perfectly fit John’s teaching his disciples that Jesus was the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29; i.e., the Lamb sent from God) and John’s statement that Jesus was “the Son of God” (John 1:34). If John had told his disciples that Jesus literally existed before he did, they would not have understood what he was saying, which would have engendered a big discussion and explanation of the doctrine of the preexistence of the Messiah. There is no such discussion or explanation for the simple fact that John was not saying Jesus literally existed before him. John was not teaching, nor did he mention, the Trinity in this context.

Many versions have the translation that Jesus “was before” John. In that translation, the Greek word translated “was” is the verb ēn (ἦν), which is in the imperfect tense, active voice of *eimi*, (εἰμί) the common word for “to be” (which occurs more than 2,000 times in the New Testament). In this context, it is vital that we understand that the force of the imperfect tense is “he was and continues to be.” Then comes the Greek word *protos*, which means “first.” It can refer to being “first” in time, and thus be translated “before,” or it can mean first in rank, and be translated “chief,” “leader,” “greatest,” “best,” etc. There are many examples referring to people being *protos* where *protos* refers to highest in rank or importance (cf. Matt. 19:30, 20:27; Mark 6:21; 9:35; 10:31, 44; Luke 19:47; Acts 17:4; 25:2; 28:17; and 1 Cor. 12:28). Similarly, *protos* is used of things that are the best or most important. For example, the “first” and great commandment was the first in importance, and the “first” robe was the “best” robe (Luke 15:22).

Given the mindset of the disciples and the fact that John was not teaching them about the preexistence of the Messiah, but rather was trying to point out that Jesus was the Messiah, it seems that John was making the simple statement that Jesus had always been superior to him, going back long before they started their ministries. John’s statement that Jesus “was before” him does not have to mean that Jesus is God or even be a reference to all the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament going back to Genesis 3:15. Before John or Jesus was born, when Mary came to visit Elizabeth, John leapt in the womb for joy upon being close to his savior. To John, Jesus had always been superior to him.

Of course it is possible, but there is no way to prove it, that when John said Jesus was before him, he also had in his mind all the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament, and that Jesus had been in the mind of God for millennia. The existence of Christ in the mind of God is so clear that it need not be disputed. Before the foundation of the world he was foreknown (1 Pet. 1:20); from the foundation of the world he was slain (Rev. 13:8); and before the foundation of the world we, the Church, were chosen in him (Eph. 1:4). The certainty about the Messiah that is expressed in the prophecies about him definitively reveals that all aspects of his life and death were clearly in the mind of God before any of them occurred. If John did have the prophecies of the Messiah in mind when he made this statement, then it would be similar to when Jesus himself said that he was “before” Abraham (see commentary on John 8:58).

It is clear in the context that the primary reason for John’s statement was to magnify Jesus Christ in comparison to himself, and “was my superior” does that. The Messiah has always been superior to the other prophets.

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Joh 1:16

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“from his fullness.”** This hearkens back to John 1:14, that Jesus was “full” of grace and truth. Thus, we received grace from his fullness of grace. This thought is reiterated in John 1:17 in which Jesus brings “grace and truth” (John 1:17).

**“grace upon grace.”** The Greek is *charis anti charis*, which can be understood as “grace upon grace,” or “grace instead of grace,” or “grace in place of grace.” There has been much theological debate about exactly what John meant by that phrase, but a meaning that is reflected in many modern translations that have “grace upon grace,” is that God’s grace is continually flowing. The grace of God is not a one-time event, but rather something that flows continually from the fullness of God. God gave grace before Jesus Christ came, and now He piles grace upon grace.

There had been grace in the Old Testament before Christ came, and with the coming of Christ God has given us more grace on top of the grace people already had. The word “grace” can be used of a gift of grace, so the translation “blessing” (NIV) or “gracious gift” (NET) both are good translations.

It is possible that, as D. A. Carson has said, that *charis anti charis* to an extent also has an undertone of the meaning of “grace in place of grace.” Carson writes: “…it appears that the grace and truth that come through Jesus Christ is what replaces the law; the law itself is understood to be an earlier display of grace.”[[23]](#footnote-12141) Christ did fulfill the Law, but he also lived under the Law and told others to live that way also, and there are still many things in the Law that apply to us today, so it seems better to see the grace of Christ as being a grace that is “upon” the grace that gave us the Law, not totally in place of it.

Joh 1:17

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

Joh 1:18

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“seen God.”** In this case, “seen God” refers to knowing Him for who he really is, not seeing Him with the eye. In many languages, “to see” is a common idiom for “to know.” In the Hebrew language, one of the definitions for “see” (Hebrew = *ra’ah*) is “see, so as to learn, to know.” Similarly, the Greek word translated “see” in verse 18 (*horaō*) can be “to see with the eyes” or “to see with the mind, to perceive, know.” Even in English, one of the definitions for “see” is “to know or understand.” For example, when two people are discussing something, one might say to the other, “I see what you mean.”

The usage of “see” as it pertains to knowing is found in many places in the New Testament. Jesus said to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Here again the word “see” is used to indicate knowing. Anyone who *knew* Christ (not just those who “saw” him) would know the Father. In fact, Christ had made that plain two verses earlier when he said to Philip, “If you really knew me you would know my Father as well” (John 14:7).

Further evidence that “see” means “know” in John 1:18 is that the phrase “no man has seen God” is contrasted with the phrase “has made Him known.” So from the context and vocabulary in John 1:18, we can see that it is not talking about “seeing” God with one’s eyes; it is saying that the truth about God came by Jesus Christ. Before Jesus Christ came, no one really knew God as He truly is, a loving heavenly Father.

Beyond that, however, people did actually see God in a form that He took on Himself temporarily so that He could fellowship with humankind. No one can see all that God is, and His nature is to be invisible to humans, but angels are naturally invisible to humans also and they quite often come into concretion in human form and are seen by people. God does that too. The NIV84 text note on John 1:18 is correct: “Sometimes in the OT people are said to have seen God (e.g., Exod. 24:9-11). But we are also told that no one can see God and live (Exod. 33:20). Therefore, since no human being can see God as he really is, those who saw God saw him in a form he took on himself temporarily for the occasion.”

[For more information on the idiomatic uses of “seen,” see commentary on Luke 1:48. For more information on the idiomatic uses of “seen” and people who saw God, see commentary on Acts 7:55.]

**“only begotten Son.”** There is a huge controversy about the original reading of this verse. As it stands, some Greek texts read “God” and some read “Son.” At some point in time the Greek text was changed, and either “Son” or “God” is original. The manuscript evidence is divided. Much has been written on this subject, and readers are invited to read some of the more scholarly books and commentaries that go deeply into the arguments.

When totaled, the evidence indicates that the reading, “only begotten son” is more likely original than “only begotten God.” A brief summary of some of the most important arguments is: first, a study of the scope of Scripture reveals that Jesus is not God. That is the plain reading of dozens of verses of Scripture. There is no description of the Trinity anywhere in Scripture, or of the “hypostatic union,” or of the “incarnation,” and the fact is that every single “Trinity proof text” can be explained from the position that Jesus is the Son of God, not God. In contrast, there are dozens of points of logic that cannot be explained if the Trinity is true, such as why, after his resurrection, Jesus spoke of having a “God.” God does not have a God—He is God.

Second, and very importantly, there is no other reference anywhere in the Bible to the “only begotten God,” while there are other Johannine references to the “only begotten son” (John 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). To fully understand that argument we must recognize that John 3:16, 18, and 1 John 4:9 have “son,” not “God” and there is no textual disagreement. So while the Bible has only begotten “Son” three times (four including John 1:18), the reading “unique God” in John 1:18 would be the only occurrence of that reading in the Bible, which makes it very unlikely.

Also, going along with the point just stated above is the fact that the Gospel of John closes with, “these are written so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that by believing you will have life in his name” (John 20:31). It would be strange indeed if John chapter 1 said Jesus was God, but the Gospel of John closed by saying it showed that Jesus was the Son of God. That would be even more strange—frankly too strange for us to believe—if Jesus were God and a person had to believe he was God to be saved. In that case, the Gospel of John should have plainly said that “these are written so that you believe that Jesus is God and so that by believing you will have life in his name.” If a person cannot be saved by just believing that Jesus is the “Son” of God, then John 20:31 should not have said so.

Also, many scholars concur with Bart Ehrman that the textual evidence supports the word “Son,” not “God” in John 1:18. Although the reading *theos* (God) appears in the Alexandrian texts, which are earlier than the Western and Byzantine texts and therefore most often considered by scholars to represent the original reading in disputed verses, there are times when the Alexandrian readings are not original. Many factors must be considered. For one thing, the Alexandrian readings are earlier because they survived in the sands of Egypt, whereas the early Western texts disintegrated in the climate and thus had to be copied more often. So the older age of the Alexandrian manuscripts does not, in and of itself, make the Alexandrian manuscripts more accurate. Other things have to be considered. Besides that, there are some Alexandrian texts that do read “Son.” Also, if “God” were the original reading, it seems, especially given the desire among third-century Christians to support the Trinity, that the Western, Caesarean, and Byzantine text families would have more than a few manuscripts that read “God,” after all, that is what those theologians believed, but the reading “God” is almost totally absent from those text families. Bart Ehrman writes:

“This is not simply a case of one reading supported by the earliest and best manuscripts and another supported by late and inferior one, but of one reading found almost exclusively in the Alexandrian tradition and another found sporadically there and virtually everywhere else.”[[24]](#footnote-20198)

Furthermore, “Son” predominates not only in the Greek manuscripts, but in the Latin and Syriac (Aramaic) manuscripts as well, and also is predominant in the writings of the Church Fathers (although some have “God” as well).

Another reason for believing that “Son” is original is the word *monogenēs* (“only begotten,” actually referring to “one of a kind,” some say “unique”). The fact is that *monogenēs* can mean “only begotten,” and that usage fits perfectly with Jesus Christ as the Son of God. There is a sense that the verse could read “unique Son,” but to what purpose? Just because a word can mean something does not mean that definition should be used. Occam’s razor, that simpler theories are the most satisfactory unless a more complex theory has greater explanatory power, applies here. Why create the difficult phrase “unique Son” when the translation “only begotten Son,” which occurs three other places in John’s writings, is understandable and biblical? Yes, Jesus was unique, but as the Son (not as “God,” because if Jesus, as part of the Trinity, was unique, then so are the Father and Holy Spirit, which would make three unique Gods, and defeat the purpose of using “unique” in the first place).

Another argument against the reading “God” in John 1:18 is the fact that there is no evidence that anyone in the culture of the time John was writing would have understood the concept of a “begotten God.” What would “*monogenēs* God” mean to the Jews and Greeks John was writing to? We should remember that, although John certainly wrote for Christians too, he was writing to unbelieving Jews and Greeks. We know this because John concludes his Gospel by saying, “But these are written so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31). So what would “*monogenēs* God” mean to those unbelieving Jews and Greeks? Certainly not “begotten.” What is a “begotten God?” But “unique” is no better. The Jews already had their One God (Deut. 6:4), who by definition would have been unique, and to the Greeks, every god or goddess was unique in some way. Thus, the concept of a “unique god” would not have made sense in the culture, but an “only begotten Son” of God would have made sense.

It is worth noting that by the time of the great Christological arguments and the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, there were ways that theologians could explain Jesus as a “unique God” but there is no reason to assume that when John wrote anyone would think that way. This adds to the evidence that “God” was the later addition, and “Son” was original.

Some modern Trinitarians skirt this issue by claiming that *monogenēs* inherently has the meaning of sonship (thus the NIV2011: “the one and only son, who is himself God”). The problem with that is that it is not a legitimate translation, but an interpretation due to bias. There is nothing inherently in the word *monogenēs* that demands sonship. It is used in Greek writings of both animate and inanimate objects. Translations such as the NIV2011 are only giving voice to their theology, not translating the text.

Other Trinitarian scholars try to claim that the phrases in John 1:18 are a series of appositions, which would read something like: “the unique one, God, who is in the bosom of the Father.” That translation also has problems. Again, how could Christ be “unique” and “God” at the same time? It would just mean that there were three unique Gods, which defeats the purpose of “unique.” It seems that theologians only suggest that the adjectives are substantives because they are trying to make the simple statement, that Jesus is the “only begotten Son,” fit with their theology that Jesus is God and there is a Trinity.

Another reason for favoring “Son” over “God” is that the verse is about God being revealed by Jesus (John 1:17), because the verse started with the phrase, that no one had ever seen “God.” To call Jesus in that context “the only begotten God” (or the “unique God”) would set up an inherent contradiction. If you cannot see God, how could you see “the unique God?” If, on the other hand, you could see “the unique God,” why could you not see “God” too (especially since, by the definition of “unique” being used, God the Father is unique too)? The simple answer in the verse is that the Son is not God, and so while we cannot see God, we can see the only begotten Son who has made God known. The fact is that the reading “the only begotten Son” is textually substantiated, fine from a translation standpoint, and makes perfect sense in the context, even to Trinitarians.

It has been argued that “God” is the likely reading because in trying to reconstruct the original text, scribes usually emended a harder reading so it read more easily. Thus, a scribe reading “God” would change it to “Son” because “Son” was the easier reading, and thus the reading “Son” was created. While the principle that the more difficult reading is usually original is often correct, in this case, that principle would not apply because scribes had a theological reason for changing “Son” to “God” and creating the more difficult reading—their belief in the Trinity. Verses were sometimes amended to support the Trinity, as almost all modern scholars admit happened to some manuscripts of 1 John 5:7-8, and may have purposely happened in 1 Timothy 3:16.

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on many of the places where scribes changed the Greek text of the Bible to match their theology, see Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture.*]

**“has explained *him*.”** The Greek is *exēgeomai* (#1834 ἐξηγέομαι). See commentary on Luke 24:35, “related.”

Joh 1:19

**“Jews.”** The Greek word is *Ioudaios* (#2453 Ἰουδαῖος, pronounced ē-oo-'day-os) and it has two different meanings in the Bible. One way the word “Jew” is used in the New Testament is to describe those people who are of Jewish heritage and religion—the Jewish people in general. The other way the word “Jew” is used is to refer to the Jews, especially the rulers of the Jews, who were evil and opposed Jesus, and are thus associated with evil, hate, and ungodly religious practices. It is very important to differentiate between these two uses of the word “Jew” to properly understand the New Testament. For example, the vast majority of the time the Gospel of John refers to “the Jews,” it is the second meaning, referring to the rulers of the Jews who opposed Jesus. That is the case in John 1:19.

When it comes to the more general use of the word “Jew,” by New Testament times, *Ioudaios* (Jew) had acquired a more generalized meaning than it had in parts of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, it had mostly referred to the people of the tribe of Judah, or to the people living in the land area of the tribe of Judah or the Southern Kingdom of Judah. By the first century AD, people from the Kingdom of Judah had been scattered across the Middle East, Turkey, and Europe and were known as the diaspora (pronounced dee-'ass-por-a; it means “the dispersion”). Peter wrote his first epistle to the Diaspora, which the ESV translates as “the Dispersion”:

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” (1 Peter 1:1 ESV).

Strictly speaking, it was hard to exactly define the word “Jew” back then, just as it is today (disputes in modern Israel over who is and who is not a Jew are a regular occurrence). The term “Jew” included religious, ethnic, geographical, and political elements, but in general, it was used to define someone whose ancestry was from the tribe of Judah, the Kingdom of Judah, or the broader understanding of “Judea,” and who was associated with the Jewish religion. This is supported by texts such as Acts 2:5, which says, “Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” (ESV). The term “Jew” is used 196 times in the New Testament, but it is not evenly distributed, because 148 of those occurrences are in John and Acts.

The general use of “Jew” is always used in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (except perhaps Luke 7:3). That situation changes dramatically in John, where the word “Jew” occurs 70 times and is mostly used in its more restricted sense, meaning the rulers of the Jews and those who opposed Jesus Christ and are associated with evil (cf. John 1:19; 2:18; 2:20; 5:10, 15, 16, 18; 6:41, 52; 7:1, 11, 13, 15, 35; 8:22, 48, 52, 57; 9:18, 22; 10:19, 24, 31, 33; etc.). There are, however, some uses of “Jew” in John that are the more general meaning (cf. John 2:6; 4:9, 20, 22; 5:1, etc.). The book of Acts usually uses “Jew” in the more general sense, but sometimes uses it in the more restricted sense (cf. Acts 12:3; 13:45, 50; 14:19; 17:5; 18:12; etc.). The apostle Paul occasionally used the word “Jew” in its more restrictive sense (cf. 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Cor. 11:24), but usually used it in its general sense. The two uses of “Jews” in the book of Revelation use the word in its general sense.

It is important to understand the two uses of “Jew” and differentiate the “average Jew” from the “evil Jewish rulers” as we read the New Testament, because there were many good people who were Jews (including the apostles and the majority of the early Church), and they should not be vilified for what “the Jews,” meaning the evil religious leaders, did to Jesus and God’s people.

Joh 1:21

**“Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.”** Jesus said that John was “Elijah” (Matt. 11:14; 17:11-13). So why did John deny it here when speaking with the religious leaders? The answer has to do with what the religious leaders expected of “Elijah” and what they thought would happen when he came. For one thing, they apparently thought that the “Elijah” in Malachi was the actual Elijah that God would raise from the dead and bring back to Israel, which was not the case. They also apparently thought that the “Elijah” that was coming would be very much like the old Elijah and do many miracles, confront the ruler and the Roman system, and such things as that, none of which John actually did—he confronted people about their sin and pointed them to the Messiah.

[For more information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was called “Elijah,” see commentary on Matt. 17:10.]

Joh 1:25

**“Elijah.”** For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

Joh 1:27

**“I am not *even* worthy to untie the strap of his sandal!”** That John would compare himself to Jesus in this way is very important in showing the humble and obedient heart of John, who was God’s loyal servant. John’s comparison occurs in all four Gospels (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16, and John 1:27). Matthew is slightly different but the heart is the same.

Joh 1:28

**“Bethany.”** This site is unknown, and its location has been the source of much scholarly discussion. Nevertheless, it seems clear that it was within a day’s walk from Bethany near Jerusalem, and likely would have been close to directly east of Jerusalem, thus explaining its name as “Bethany beyond Jordan.” When two towns are quite far apart, there is usually no such description: people simply recognize that the towns cannot be the same due to the distance they are separated from each other. It seems clear the messengers that came to tell Jesus that Lazarus was dead could make the journey in a day (see commentary on John 11:6). The Church Father Origen (184/185-253/254) went to Palestine and said that he could not find any town named Bethany, and so concluded that Jesus must have been at Bethabara (actually, there is a large variation in the manuscripts, apparently in some measure due to Origen’s report). Origen did say “We are aware of the reading which is found in almost all the copies, ‘These things were done in Bethany.’” However, when Origen is studied, it seems he did not go beyond the Jordan himself, but relied on what people said. R. D. Potter writes, “How did the name disappear in 100 or 150 years? The answer is that Origen, despite his pious assertion about visiting the scenes of Redemption, had never been there. He is reporting hearsay…. He never discovered Bethany beyond Jordan because he never went to look.”[[25]](#footnote-10915)

One of the arguments that “Bethany” is the original name, besides the fact that Origen said most of the manuscripts available to him read “Bethany,” is that John 10:40-11:18 seems to make some effort to make sure the reader understands that the Bethany where Lazarus was buried was not the place where Jesus was when he got the message about Lazarus. This would support that Jesus was at “Bethany” and then traveling to “Bethany.” R. Brown notes the pilgrim tradition says that Jesus was baptized by John close to where Joshua crossed the Jordan, and while tradition cannot be relied on, the location seems to fit what we know about the geography.[[26]](#footnote-24216)

It is sometimes argued that Jesus would not have stayed across the Jordan from Jerusalem because that was Perea, the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas, who had executed John the Baptist. However, it is logical that the death of John the Baptist had caused no small stir and would have made Herod quite unpopular, and he would have had no desire to complicate matters further, especially when Jesus had not done anything to threaten his rule. When Jesus was brought before him in Jerusalem he could have executed him, and Pilate would have been thankful to have that task taken from him, but instead, Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate.

Joh 1:29

**“takes away the sin.”** John’s audience would be very familiar with the idea that sin had to be “taken away” or “carried away.” The Hebrew and Greek text of the Bible treats sin as a very real “thing” that must be dealt with. One way that sin is described and dealt with in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is that sin is a weight that must be carried away. For example, Psalm 25:18 could be translated “Look upon my affliction and my trouble, and carry away all my sins.” The Hebrew word *nasa* (#05375 נָשָׂא sometimes spelled נָסָא) is more graphic than just “forgive,” and means “carry, bear, take; or carry away.” The context determines whether the “weight” is “carried” by the person or “taken away” from the person. In order for sin to be “forgiven,” it must be “carried away” by God or someone else. Here in John, Jesus Christ “takes away” the sin of the world.

We see sin as a weight in many places in the Old Testament. On the Day of Atonement, a goat was chosen “for Azazel” (a name for the Devil; see commentary on Lev. 16:8) The High Priest laid his hands on the head of the goat and confessed all the sins of Israel, and by doing that he “put them on” the goat, who then “carried” all the sins of the people into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21-22). Thus, the goat is portrayed as a pack animal that must carry away all the sins of Israel.

Other verses portray sin as a weight that must be carried off (Exod. 28:38; 32:32; Lev. 5:1, 17; 10:17; 17:16; 19:8; 20:17, 19, 20; 22:9, 16; 24:15; Num. 5:31; 9:13; 14:19, 33, 34; 18:1, 22, 23, 32; 30:15; Ps. 32:5; Prov. 9:12; Isa. 1:4; 5:18; 53:12; Ezek. 4:4, 6; 14:10; 23:49; 44:10, 12).

It should not surprise us that God describes sin as a weight, and no doubt every humble Christian has felt the weight of sin on occasion, and also felt the weight of sin “carried away” when they confessed their sin and made things right with God and the person they sinned against.

[For more on sin being a weight and a debt, see commentary on 1 John 1:7.]

Joh 1:30

**“After me.”** That is, “after” in time. Jesus came after John.

**“superior to me.”** See commentary on John 1:15.

Joh 1:31

**“I did not know him.”** John almost certainly knew Jesus as a person, but what he means here is that he did not know Jesus as the Coming One. Even if he had a personal opinion based on the testimony of his parents—and it seems certain he would have their testimony since his mother was the one whom Mary visited when both women were pregnant and John leaped in Elizabeth’s womb—he still had no divine confirmation on his own until the baptism. In this phrase, the “I” is emphatic in Greek.

**“but for this purpose I came baptizing in water: in order that he might be revealed to Israel.”** The record of Jesus’ baptism is in Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; and is mentioned in John 1:31-34.

Here we see one of the great purposes for John’s baptism, and Jesus was revealed to Israel through it in many ways. One was the direct testimony of John, an eyewitness of the holy spirit lighting as a dove upon him. John’s testimony had great weight, as we briefly glimpse in John 1:35-37. Another was that John’s baptism prepared the hearts of people to see the Messiah. John’s baptism was specifically a baptism of repentance, that is, a baptism that symbolized the repentance of the people, who confessed their sin before being baptized. The confession, repentance, and baptism gave John the perfect platform to speak of the Messiah and reveal him to Israel because it was the Messiah, not the baptism, that could really cleanse a person from sin. People who have repented of their sin and are desirous of everlasting life always wish to see and emulate their Savior, thus many believed when they were around Jesus—their hearts had been prepared to see and receive him (cf. John 2:23).

Joh 1:33

**“with holy spirit.”** The Greek text has no article “the.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the holy spirit and uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and also see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Joh 1:38

**“What are you seeking?”** The question is a deep one. It can have the essence of the NET translation: “What do you want?” But it also asks them the deep question of the heart: What is it that they really wanted in life? Were they in touch with the deep needs of their life? It is a question we should all ask ourselves: What are we really seeking in life?

Joh 1:39

**“it was about the tenth hour.”** The figure of speech, epitrechon is a type of parenthesis.[[27]](#footnote-10678)

The “tenth hour” is four o’clock in the afternoon. Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Joh 1:41

**“first.”** The word “first” is debated in the text. Lenski[[28]](#footnote-27335) does a good job with it. Andrew was the first of the two disciples of John to find his brother. The other disciple of John, the one not mentioned by name, would have been either James or John (the author of the Gospel of John), and he also found his brother, thus being the “second” to bring his brother, Andrew being the “first.”

Joh 1:42

**“you will be called Cephas.”** Jesus changed Peter’s name from Simon to Cephas (“Peter” in Greek), which means “rock.” In the biblical culture, when a king or someone who had authority changed someone’s name, it meant that he had some kind of control over the person’s life or was in a special relationship with the person. When given by God or godly people, the new name also generally reflected some important aspect of the person’s personality and ministry, and/or pointed to something important about the person’s future. For example, “Abraham” means “Father of a multitude,” and that is indeed what Abraham became.

In the Old Testament, God, as well as other rulers, changed people’s names. For example, God changed Abram to Abraham (Gen. 17:5); Sarai to Sarah (Gen. 17:15); Jacob to Israel (Gen. 32:28), and Solomon to Jedediah (2 Sam. 12:25). Sometimes God gave a person a different name to indicate the person was evil or against Him. For example, God changed Pashhur, an Egyptian name that means “Son of Horus,” to Magor-missabib, “Terror on every side” (Jer. 20:3).

In Genesis, a pharaoh ruled over Joseph, and changed his name to Zaphenath-paneah (Gen. 41:45). Pharaoh Neco ruled over Eliakim, king of Judah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34). Nebuchadnezzar changed Mattaniah’s name to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17), and the chief of eunuchs for Nebuchadnezzar changed “Daniel” to “Belteshazzar,” “Hananiah” to “Shadrach,” “Mishael” to “Meshach,” and “Azariah” to “Abednego.” He may have done that so that after their training they would fit better into Babylonian society (Dan. 1:7). The apostles called Joseph, who apparently was very pastoral and encouraging, “Barnabas” (Son of Encouragement). Sometimes names were changed for other reasons. Gideon’s name was changed to “Jerubbaal” when Gideon tore down the altar of Baal (Judg. 6:32).

Jesus changed Peter’s name from “Simon” or Simeon (Acts 15:14; 2 Peter 1:1) to “Cephas” (an Aramaic name that means “rock”). Simon is the Greek form of the Hebrew *shimon*, a diminutive of *shimeel*, “The Lord heard”). The fact that Peter immediately accepted the new name Jesus gave him shows us that Peter was a deeply spiritual man, and immediately willing to become a disciple of Jesus.

[For more information on Peter’s call to be Jesus’ disciple, see commentary on Matt. 4:20.]

Joh 1:47

**“truly.”** This is the adverb *alēthōs* (#230 ἀληθῶς), truly. Although some versions have translated it as if it were an adjective (cf. “Here is a true Israelite” HCSB) the more likely explanation is not that Jesus is saying Nathanael was a “real” Israelite; lots of Jews from Galilee were likely “real” Israelites. The adverb likely modifies the whole phrase, “an Israelite in whom is no guile.” Finding a truly honest person who had no guile was certainly more difficult than finding a real Israelite, and Jesus opened his conversation with Nathanael by commenting on his character, something Nathanael would certainly have recognized, and something that ties in with John 2:25 which says that Jesus knew what was in people, i.e., in their hearts.

Joh 1:51

**“you all.”** The you is plural.

**“ascending and descending on.”** This is the literal reading of the Greek text, and is designed to vividly call to mind the record in Genesis 28:12 where Jacob saw a great staircase going to heaven with angels going up and down on it (it was not a “ladder” as we know it today, even though many versions use “ladder.” It was a staircase, as per the HCSB, NAB, NET, NIV, etc.).

Although the Greek uses “on” (the preposition *epi*), the apostles would have understood what he meant, that it was “on” him, idiomatically meaning due to who he was, that the angels were ascending from, and descending to, him. As the Son of God, Jesus was now the focal point on earth for the angels who were coming from and going back to God.

**John Chapter 2**

Joh 2:1

**“and the mother of Jesus was there.”** Mary is not mentioned by name anywhere in the Gospel of John, she is simply called “the mother of Jesus.” This emphasizes the fact that the Gospel of John was written to emphasize the ministry of Christ as the Son of God. Matthew emphasizes Christ the king, Mark emphasizes Christ the servant, Luke emphasizes Christ the man, and John emphasizes Christ the Son of God. In that greater context, Mary’s personal life and ministry are de-emphasized in comparison to the way Mary is portrayed in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and her role in bringing forth the Son of the Living God gets the emphasis, so she is simply referred to as “the mother of Jesus.”

Jesus did not just “happen to be” at this wedding. He was not just some out-of-towner who happened to drop in with some disciples. He had been invited (John 2:2), and that was likely because it involved relatives of his, which is almost certainly why his mother was there too. It is most likely from the role Mary obviously played in this wedding that it was one of her relatives who was getting married, which is why she was so concerned when the host ran out of wine—this was a matter of family honor—and why she felt comfortable telling someone else’s servants what to do (John 2:3, 5).

It is noteworthy that Jesus’ first miracle occurred at a wedding and supported the families of the couple and also the institution of marriage. God ordained marriage when He brought Adam and Eve together in the Garden of Eden, and marriage is continually affirmed as a godly institution and the basis of society throughout Scripture. Furthermore, the record shows us that Jesus was not some ascetic believer, far removed from the ordinary problems of life, like running out of wine at a wedding. No, in contrast to that, Jesus inserted himself into the fabric of daily life and got involved in the problems of ordinary people. Christ’s followers should do the same.

In contrast to Mary, Joseph is not mentioned in the record, most likely because he had already died by this time. There is strong biblical evidence that Joseph died before Jesus started his ministry.

[For more on the individual emphasis of the Four Gospels, see commentary on Mark 1:1, “the good news of Jesus Christ.” For more on Joseph having died by the time of Jesus’ ministry, see commentary on John 19:27.]

Joh 2:2

**“had been invited to the wedding.”** This was likely because this was a wedding of a relative on Jesus’ mother’s side (see commentary on John 2:1). The wording of the sentence in Greek lets us know that Jesus was invited, and his disciples were invited also, but due to their association with Jesus.

Joh 2:3

**“They have no wine.”** Mary’s concern was most likely due to the fact that this was a wedding of a relative of hers and running out of wine would be a matter of family honor. See commentary on John 2:1.

It is unlikely that the wine would be completely gone before anyone noticed. R. C. H. Lenski writes, “The aorist participle in the genitive absolute is best regarded as an ingressive, ‘began to fail.’ The decline of the wine would be discovered before the last of it was used.”[[29]](#footnote-27814) Rotherham agrees, and his Emphasized Bible reads, “And, wine falling short, the mother of Jesus said….”

Some commentators assert that Mary never thought about Jesus doing a miracle when she told him about the wine running out, and that she simply leaned on her son to figure out a way to fix the situation just as he had likely so often done for her because her husband, Joseph, was dead and Jesus was her oldest son. However, that is unlikely. How would an out-of-town guest have the contacts and resources to fix the wine problem? Mary knew Jesus was the Promised Messiah and also that an abundance of wine was part of the promises associated with his kingdom (cf. Isa. 25:6; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13; Zech. 9:17). It is perfectly natural that Mary should assume that Jesus, who was now coming into the fullness of his ministry, would be able to correct the situation and protect the family honor even if it took a miracle.

[For more on Joseph having died by the time of Jesus’ ministry, see commentary on John 19:27. For Jesus’ coming kingdom on earth and the blessings that will be part of it, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Joh 2:4

**“*Dear*** **woman.”** The Greek word translated “woman” is the standard word for a female, *gunē* (#1135 γυνή). It is in the vocative voice, and could be translated “O woman” (cf. RSV). John 2:4 is an example of where a literal translation does not communicate the sense of the original text. For a son to address his mother as “woman” in English would be cold and insulting, but that is not at all the case in Greek, where that address is very normal and not disrespectful at all. It is a challenge to bring the sense of the Greek into English, but “Dear woman” is close (cf. NIV84, NLT). This same language is used in John 19:26.

**“what does your concern have to do with me?”** The Greek phrase here in John 2:4 is difficult to translate because it can be translated two different ways and because it is idiomatic. Grammatically it can be quite literally translated as either “What have I to do with you” (KJV, NASB77), or “What have you to do with me” (cf. NET, NIV, NJB, NKJV, RSV). Because it is Mary who approached Jesus with the problem and implied request, it is more likely that Jesus said “what have you to do with me?”

However, although the translation “what have you to do with me” is very literal, the phrase itself is idiomatic, and so, just as is the case in many idiomatic phrases, the words are not meant to be taken literally but instead, the meaning is understood in the culture. The phrase itself is actually Semitic, not Greek, and it was likely that Jesus was speaking to his mother in either Aramaic or Hebrew, not Greek. Because the phrase is idiomatic it should not be translated strictly literally, and the “cold feeling” that the literal Greek translation gives in English is not the feel of the Greek text.

The text note in the NET Bible explains that the Semitic idiom has two distinct meanings, one of which will apply: “The equivalent Hebrew expression in the Old Testament had two basic meanings: (1) When one person was unjustly bothering another, the injured party could say ‘What to me and to you?’ meaning, ‘What have I done to you that you should do this to me?’ (Judg. 11:12; 2 Chron. 35:21; 1 Kings 17:18). (2) When someone was asked to get involved in a matter he felt was no business of his, he could say to the one asking him, ‘What to me and to you?’ meaning, ‘That is your business, how am I involved?’ (2 Kings 3:13, Hosea 14:8).”

Here in John 2:4, when Jesus was talking to his mother, the second meaning is the applicable one, and explains why the idiom is translated in different English versions in ways such as, “what does that have to do with me” (CEB, ESV); “why should that concern me” (CJB); “why do you involve me” (NIV); “what does your concern have to do with me” (NKJV).

Keys to the meaning can be found in the context, especially the next verse, John 2:5. Not only is Mary not upset with Jesus’ response to her, but she expects Jesus will do something to help the situation. Jesus’ statement, “what does your concern have to do with me” is not an insult to Mary, or a statement of disregard for the situation. It is a question meant to get clarity on the situation.

It is Jesus’ next statement, followed by what took place at the wedding, that is a major point of confusion. Right after saying, “what does your concern have to do with me,” Jesus said, “My hour has not yet come.” That statement seems to indicate that Jesus believed that it was not time for him to do something about the situation and thus reveal more about who he was. But then he went right ahead and turned the water into wine. Also, apparently, Mary knew Jesus was going to do something about the situation because in the text of John, right after Jesus said how his time had not come, Mary went to the servants and told them to do whatever Jesus told them to do. So it seems that there must have been some conversation between John 2:4 and John 2:5 that is not recorded in John but that gave Mary the confidence to tell the servants to obey Jesus.

We can only speculate about exactly what happened between John 2:4 and 2:5, but it is clear that Jesus decided to help at the wedding. So it is likely that Mary spoke to him again about the need for more wine and he responded by saying he would do something about the situation. Then Mary went and told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do.

Joh 2:5

**“Whatever he says to you, do it.”** Jesus told Mary he would handle the situation about the lack of wine (see commentary on John 2:4). Mary had confidence in what Jesus said, and so simply went to the servants and told them to do whatever Jesus said to do.

Joh 2:6

**“stone water jars.”** These jars were very hard to make and expensive, since they were made of stone, not clay. The reason for the stone was that clay would absorb a little of what was put in it, and so clay vessels became unclean very easily and could not be cleansed once they were unclean. Stone, on the other hand, was harder to make permanently unclean because it could usually be cleansed by washing. The Greek reads that each water jar contained two or three *metrētēs*, and a *metrētēs* was about 10.3 gallons or 39 liters. So each jar held between 20.6 gallons (78 liters) and 31 gallons (117 liters), and since there were six stone jars, Jesus made somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of wine.

Joh 2:9

**“groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom.

Joh 2:11

**“signs.”** The Greek is *sēmeion* (#4592 σημεῖον), and it means “sign” or “portent.” It is very important to understand that, because although some versions translate it “miracle” (cf. KJV), it is not the Greek word for miracle, which is *dunamis* (#1411 δύναμις), it is a “sign.” The NIV84 had “miraculous sign,” but corrected it to just “sign” in the NIV2011. Although this “sign” happened to be a miracle, the Greek text is clear that God wants to classify it as a “sign.”

In this case, Jesus turning the water into wine was a “sign” that revealed who he was as the Messiah, although only a few people at the wedding knew that; however, his mother and the disciples he had with him knew that. Also, this sign of turning water into wine pointed toward the abundance in the coming Messianic Kingdom on earth, because there will be an abundance of wine (cf. Isa. 25:6; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13; Zech. 9:17). Jesus knew this and at the Last Supper told his apostles that he would not have any more wine until he drank wine again with them in his kingdom (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18).

This is one of the places where the “sign” is used in both an immediate and future sense: Jesus turned the water into wine and it was a sign he was the Messiah and also a sign that his kingdom (and lots of wine) was coming.

The Gospel of John focuses on “signs” that Jesus did that showed he was the Messiah. Here in John 2:11, the sentence, “This beginning of *his* signs Jesus did…and his disciples believed in him,” shows us that this first sign fits exactly into what John said his Gospel was to accomplish: “Now Jesus did many other signs…that are not written in this book, but these [signs] are written so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God…. (John 20:30-31). Jesus did his first sign and his disciples believed in him, and as Jesus did the other signs that are recorded in John, other people believed in him. And for some two thousand years now, people have been reading about the signs that Jesus did that are recorded in the Gospel of John and have come to believe in him, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that by believing, a person gets everlasting life.

[For more on the wonderful blessings of Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

The Gospel of John has more signs that point to Jesus being the Messiah, and also point to blessings that would be in his kingdom. Jesus’ being raised from the dead is both a sign of his being the Messiah and a sign that God can and will raise the dead (John 2:18). Jesus’ second sign, the healing of the nobleman’s child, was both a sign of Jesus being the Messiah and also a sign of the healing associated with the coming of the Messianic Kingdom (John 4:54). The feeding of the 5,000 and its associated healings was a sign of Jesus being the Messiah and of the healing and abundance that will be in his kingdom. Jesus’ healing of the blind man was both a sign of Jesus being the Messiah and also a sign of the healing associated with the coming of the Messianic Kingdom (John 9:16). The raising of Lazarus was a sign that pointed to Jesus being the Messiah and that the dead would be raised to life in his kingdom (John 11:47; 12:18).

Joh 2:12

**“down.”** This is literally true. Capernaum was on the Sea of Galilee, which is about 700 feet below sea level, while Cana is in what is known as the Upper Galilee, which is well above sea level. So to get to Capernaum from Cana one has to travel considerably downhill.

**“Capernaum.”** Jesus made his home in Capernaum after he left Nazareth (Luke 4:29-31).

[For more information on Jesus’ move to Capernaum, see commentary on Mark 2:1.]

**“a few days.”** The Greek literally says, “not many days,” but the idiom means a few days. Jesus moved permanently to Capernaum, but at this time his family, his disciples, and he only stayed in Capernaum for a few days because they left town to go to the Passover in Jerusalem, as is explained in the next verse. The Passover was near and everyone went to Jerusalem to celebrate it.

Joh 2:15

**“drove *them* all out of the Temple, also the sheep and the oxen.”** This is Jesus’ first appearance in the Temple after starting his ministry, and he is already demonstrating the fact that he is the representative of his Father, and actively judging, and correcting, right from wrong and dismantling the oppressive systems the world uses to keep God’s people in bondage. The wrath that he showed in his Father’s house will be mirrored and magnified at the Judgment, when sinners will be excluded, not just from an earthly Temple, but from the Kingdom of Heaven itself. When Jesus saw the evil merchants, he acted quickly and decisively, as is indicated by the fact that the four verbs in the verse, “made...drove...poured out...overturned” are all in the aorist tense.

Making the whip would be relatively easy. There was constant buying and selling of animals and many of them would have been tied up in the immediate area at any given time. No doubt there would be unused pieces of rope and cord tied to posts or pillars, or lying around. Although some people have suggested that Jesus did not use the whip on the merchants themselves, but only on the animals, the Greek text does not support that supposition. The text says that Jesus drove them “all” out of the Temple, and the word “all” is masculine, agreeing with the “sellers” (τοὺς πωλοῦντας) and the “moneychangers” (τοὺς κερματιστὰς) of the first part of the sentence, which is in the previous verse, John 2:14. It is also quite likely, although not specifically stated, that Jesus repeated his actions at the Passover just before his crucifixion, likely only a year later. The records of Matthew 21:12, 13; Mark 11:15-17; and Luke 19:45-48, show that Jesus did indeed “drive” the dishonest merchants from the Temple, not just drive the animals from it. Although those records do not state that Jesus made a whip, it is likely that he used more than words to get the merchants to abandon their lucrative business.

It has been correctly pointed out by commentators that it was not the physical whip that drove out the moneychangers, but Jesus’ intensity and the fact that what he was doing was righteous, and at some level, at least, they knew that. Even though they themselves were caught up in the system and may not have thought they could change it, they still would have been aware to some degree that what they were doing was wrong, and so yielded to Jesus without a fight.

Joh 2:16

**“Stop making.”** The verb “making” is *poieō* (#4160 ποιέω), which means to do or to make. In this verse, it is in the present tense, imperative mood. The present tense indicates the action is ongoing. If we translate the verse as “Do not make,” it repeats the verb *poieō,* “do, make,” and it also loses the force that this was something they had been doing and were continuing to do. The imperative mood also is the reason for the exclamation point at the end of the sentence.

Joh 2:18

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Joh 2:19

**“If you destroy this temple.”** In the Greek text, the verb translated “destroy” is in the second-person plural, meaning “you all.” What Christ said was, if “you all” destroy this temple I will raise it up. Also, when a verb is in the imperative mood (in this case “destroy”) and is combined with *kai* (“and”) and with a future indicative verb (which in this case is the verb translated “I will raise”), then the force of the verb is very likely conditional. This explains the translation, “If you (all) destroy….”[[30]](#footnote-23489)

The reason that the false witnesses at the trial of Jesus were false witnesses is that they did not correctly represent what Jesus said, but spoke as if Jesus had said he would destroy the Temple, which he did not say but would have threatened the very livelihood of the priests at Jesus’ trial. The reason that what these witnesses said was so important is that in the Greco-Roman world, the destruction of a temple was a capital offense, and if Jesus was convicted of that he could be put to death, but their witnesses did not agree.[[31]](#footnote-32360)

**“this temple.”** There are two Greek words that get translated as “temple.” Here in John 2:19, the word translated as “temple” is *naos* (#3485 ναός), which means the inner sanctuary of the Temple complex, the inner sanctuary of the temple proper, although it is occasionally used by association for the Temple building that houses the inner sanctuary. In contrast, the Greek word *hieron* (#2411 ἱερόν) refers to the Temple complex; the Temple building along with its porches, outer courts, and all associated outbuildings. Interestingly, the *hieron* is never used figuratively in the Bible, it is always literal.

**“I will raise it up in three days.”** Jesus gave this very fitting answer to the question the Jews were asking, which was basically, “What sign are you going to show us that proves you have the authority to do what you are doing?” Jesus had just cleansed the Temple of dishonest buying and selling, and had the authority to do that because he was the Messiah. But what sign showed that he was the Messiah? The Resurrection! Jesus made this clear when he said that no sign (that is, no clear incontrovertible sign) would be given to that generation except the resurrection (Matt. 12:40). Furthermore, Peter made it clear in his teaching on the Day of Pentecost that it was the resurrection that absolutely showed that Jesus was Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

The obvious difficulty in John 2:19 is that Jesus said “I” will raise up this sanctuary, which causes some problems. One of them is that the other times the Bible speaks of Jesus getting up from the dead it is the Father, God, who raises Jesus, he does not raise himself. Many verses plainly state that it was God who raised Jesus (cf. Acts 2:32; 4:10; 5:30; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; see commentary on John 10:17). Also, another problem caused by Jesus saying “I will raise it up” is that Jesus died on the cross and so if Jesus was dead then he could not raise himself from the dead.

When a single passage seems to say something that is difficult and/or contradicts many other passages, we should not reinterpret the many clear passages so that they agree with the one contradictory verse. If we base our theology on an unclear or obscure text and ignore the clear passages, we inevitably fall into error. When dealing with a difficult passage that contradicts many clear passages, the correct approach is to consider other possibilities such as transmission errors, translation errors, or simply that the passage means something that we have not considered. Even if after considering other possibilities the obscure passage remains puzzling, we should not abandon the many clear passages and accept a contradictory interpretation.

When it comes to John 2:19, we can see that Jesus’ statement is cryptic. The religious leaders to whom Jesus was speaking did not understand it (John 2:20); Jesus’ disciples who were with him did not grasp what he was saying until much later (John 2:22); and when John wrote his Gospel he realized the people reading it would not understand it and so he explained it to them (John 2:21). So what Jesus said was very unusual and cryptic, but thankfully there is a key in the context that shows that Jesus was not contradicting the clear teaching that God would raise him from the dead. Only a few verses after John 2:19, John 2:22 says that Jesus “was raised,” and the Greek verb is passive voice, indicating that someone [God!] raised Jesus and that he did not raise himself. The fact that Jesus’ statement in John 2:19 is followed closely by the statement that Jesus “was raised” shows us that the author of the Gospel of John did not think that Jesus was saying that he would raise himself from the dead. Furthermore, the Gospel of John continues teaching that Jesus “was raised,” as we see in John 21:14.

So why did Jesus word his statement the way he did? Although the Bible does not specifically say, there are a couple good possibilities. Before we consider them, however, we should remember that when Jesus was speaking to unbelievers, he tended to speak in veiled terms. Perhaps the best examples of his veiled speech are the parables he used. When his disciples asked why he spoke in parables he said to them, “To you it is given to know the sacred secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given. …And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive (Matt. 13:11, 14). The religious leaders eventually became frustrated by Jesus’ veiled language and at one point came to him and said, “How long will you keep our souls in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24). We should note that this demand by the religious leaders that Jesus speak to them “plainly” is in the Gospel of John, the same Gospel that has Jesus’ cryptic statement about raising up the “sanctuary” of his dead body.

So in what sense could Jesus say “I” will raise “this sanctuary?” The likely reason that Jesus could say “I will raise up my body” is because he knew that it was in his power to live a sinless life in total obedience to God so that God could raise him up. Thus, Jesus could have been referring to the fact that he was to a degree responsible for his resurrection just as people are responsible to a degree for their salvation. How so? We are responsible for our salvation because we must accept the Lord Jesus in order to be saved. In a similar way, Jesus was responsible for keeping himself “without spot or blemish” and for fully obeying the will of the Father in order to be able to be resurrected. Jesus was the sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and a sacrifice that was blemished was unacceptable to the Lord (Lev. 22:17-20; Mal. 1:6-8). Since this event in John was at the start of his ministry, Jesus knew he had a long and hard road ahead and that obedience would not be easy. If he turned away from God because he did not like what God said to do, or if he sinned, then his sin would have been a “blemish” that would have disqualified him as the perfect sacrifice and then he could not have paid for the sins of mankind. Thus, to a degree, Jesus’ destiny was in his own hands and he could say, “I will raise it up.”

It is common in speech that if a person has a vital part in something, they can speak as if they had done it. An example from ordinary life would be if a homeowner hires a worker to remodel the kitchen the homeowner might say to a friend, “I remodeled my kitchen,” even though the person only paid to have it remodeled by someone else. That is common language and the Bible uses that language too. For example, in 2 Samuel 5 and 1 Chronicles 11, David and his men were attacking the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. David had sent his men ahead into the city to fight and even said that the first one into the city would become his general. Although it was David’s army that actually captured the stronghold, the Bible says, “David captured the stronghold of Zion” (2 Sam. 5:7) because David played a vital role in the capture of the city. This same type of wording may have been used by Jesus when he said he would raise up his body because he played a vital part in it being raised.

Another possible explanation as to why Jesus said, “Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up” is that he was speaking directly for the Father. Jesus said in John 14:24, “the word that you are hearing is not mine, but the Father’s who sent me.” So, Jesus could have been speaking the words of God the Father directly in the same way that often the prophets of old said, “Thus saith Yahweh,” and then spoke directly for God. We should note that when Jesus cleansed the Temple in Matthew and Mark, he quoted from Scripture: for example, in Matthew 21:13 and Mark 11:17 he quotes Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Furthermore, in the verses that Jesus quoted, Isaiah and Jeremiah were speaking in the first person for God. It is quite possible that Jesus, being the Son of God and a prophet, could have been speaking in the first person for God just as the prophets he quoted had done many years earlier.

The resurrection of Christ is one of the teachings in the Old Testament, and so Jesus clearly had a basis for speaking about it to the religious leaders. However, neither they nor even Jesus’ disciples saw the resurrection in the Old Testament because they were blinded by their theology that the Messiah would not die (see commentary on Luke 18:34). Nevertheless, Jesus and Paul both asserted that the Old Testament taught the resurrection of Christ (Luke 24:45-46; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; cf. Acts 17:2-3).

In conclusion, John 2:19 does not contradict the many clear verses in the Bible that say God raised Jesus from the dead—John 2:22 and other verses in John make that clear. Jesus was speaking in veiled terms to the unbelieving religious leaders, and no one, not those religious leaders, not Jesus’ disciples, and not even the people reading the Gospel of John many years later, would have understood what Jesus said without the explanation John put in his Gospel. Furthermore, there are at least a couple ways that Jesus’ statement can be understood in a way that fits with the rest of Scripture: he could have been speaking in the common way people speak, indicating that his actions played a part in his being raised from the dead, or he may have been speaking for God in the first person just as the prophets of the Old Testament did time after time.

Joh 2:20

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?”** The Temple, and the complex around it, took many years to build. Then it stood in its completed form for less time than it took to build because it was destroyed in AD 70. The saying in Jewish tradition was, “He that has not seen the Temple of Herod has never known what beauty is.”[[32]](#footnote-28341) Here in John 2:20, the word translated as “temple” is *naos* (#3485 ναός), which means the inner sanctuary of the Temple complex (see commentary on John 2:19).

Joh 2:21

**“the temple.”** Here in John 2:21, the word translated as “temple” is *naos* (#3485 ναός), which means the inner sanctuary of the Temple complex (see commentary on John 2:19).

Joh 2:22

**“when he was raised.”** This is an important point. Even at the Last Supper, the apostles did not believe that Jesus was going to die, much less be raised from the dead. It was not until after Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to them that they believed.

[For more on the fact that the disciples did not expect Jesus to die and be raised, see commentary on Luke 18:34.]

**“from among the dead.”**[[33]](#footnote-22427) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

**“believed the Scripture.”** What scripture? Very likely Psalm 16:10, as per Acts 2:31 and 13:35, but they also may have believed Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, etc.

Joh 2:23

**“Now.”** This verse should have been grouped with the Nicodemus record, and therefore numbered “3:1” instead of “2:23.” A huge key to understanding why Jesus spoke to Nicodemus the way he did was that Jesus “knew what was in people” (John 2:25). Verse 23 tells us when and where the Nicodemus record occurred. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, so he would have lived somewhere in or very close to Jerusalem.

**“signs.”** The miracles that Jesus did are called “signs” (*sēmeion* #4592 σημεῖον) in the Gospel of John. A “sign” is something that points to something else, just as a road sign points to something coming up in the road or a condition the traveler needs to know about. In John, the miracles that Jesus did are called “signs” and pointed to him being the Messiah.

**“Passover.”** One of the three major feasts in the Jewish calendar that every male was to attend (Exod. 23:14-17; Deut. 16:1-17; 2 Chron. 8:13). This is the first of the two Passovers that Jesus attended during his ministry. At the second he was arrested and crucified.

**“believed in his name.”** This is an idiom and means that people believed that Jesus was the Messiah. What is not stated, but is very important, is that the people back then thought very differently about the Messiah than we do. For example, we have 20/20 hindsight and therefore know about Jesus’ two comings (the first coming when he suffered and was crucified; and the Second Coming, which is still future, when he comes and conquers the earth and sets up his Millennial Kingdom). In contrast, the people of Jesus’ day believed that because Jesus was the Messiah, he would simply come and at some point muster an army, overthrow the Romans and other governments of the world, and set up his kingdom on earth. Even his closest men, the apostles, did not understand about his death and resurrection until after he was raised and had appeared to them (Luke 24:45-48). So when the Scripture says the people believed “in his name,” they “got” that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but they did not “get” what that meant as far as Jesus’ earthly mission and ministry and how he would live out his life.

[For more on the custom of “the name” and “the name of Jesus Christ,” see commentary on 1 John 3:23. For more on Jesus’ future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Joh 2:24

**“Jesus did not trust himself to them.”** Even though Jesus was surely glad that people were recognizing that he was the Messiah, he did not trust himself to them. He knew that they did not really understand what the Messiah would do. At one point in time, even Jesus’ family thought he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21).

[For more information, see commentary on John 2:23, “believed in his name.”]

**“because he knew all people.”** This statement shows how much revelation the Father gave to His Son, Jesus. It is not that Jesus inherently knew every person, but rather that God told him what he needed to know about people, and this sentence sets the stage for John 3:1, when Jesus meets Nicodemus.

It is obvious from Scripture that Jesus did not know everything, for he grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52), and he did not know certain things (Matt. 24:36). Whenever the word “all” is used, the student of Scripture must be careful to ascertain from the context whether it means “all” in a totally inclusive sense, or whether it means “all” in a more limited sense.

[For more on the use of “all,” see commentary on Col. 1:16.]

John 2:24 puts Trinitarians in a difficult situation, because they usually explain it by saying that Jesus was God and therefore he knew all people. But then they explain the verses that say Jesus did not know certain things by saying that those verses refer to his human side. We think it is reasonable to assert that you cannot have it both ways. Either the person who walked the earth as Jesus Christ, our Messiah, did not know everything, or he did. It makes no sense that he “went back and forth” between his supposed human and God natures. That would have been very confusing both for his human side and those around him. There are very clear verses that say he did not know everything, and no verse that actually says that Jesus did know everything the same way God does. When a verse seems at first to say Jesus “knew all people,” it should be understood in a limited sense according to the context.

Jesus Christ was “made like his brothers in every way” (Heb. 2:17), but we are not “part God, part human,” or “fully God and fully man.” In order for the integrity of Scripture to be preserved, Jesus must actually be like we are, i.e., fully human.

There is no place in Scripture where the doctrine of the “dual nature” of Christ is actually stated. It is an assumption based on piecing verses together. What the Bible does say in a straightforward manner is that Jesus was flesh and bone, not spirit; that he was a man, and that he partook in our humanity. Also, the very concept of the dual nature of Christ involves a self-contradiction. God is infinite and man is finite, and so Christ would have to be a finite-infinite being, which is inherently impossible. That is not the Jesus described to us in the Bible. No wonder Tertullian, an early Trinitarian, said, “*Credo quia impossibile est*” (I believe because it is impossible). We realize it is not only “impossible,” but also unscriptural, so unlike Tertullian, we do not believe it.

Jesus needed to hear from God to know how to judge (John 5:30), and he knew all men the same way—by hearing from God. In saying that Jesus knew all men, the Bible was confirming that Jesus was in touch with God just as were the prophets of old (but of course, much more intimately). Charles Morgridge writes: “It was an opinion prevalent among the Jews, that prophets knew the thoughts and characters of those with whom they conversed. Luke 7:39: ‘Now, when the Pharisee which had bidden him, saw it, he spake within himself, saying, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him.”’”[[34]](#footnote-18834)

Furthermore, it is substantiated in Scripture that God did show prophets what people were thinking. Nathan knew of David’s secret sin (2 Sam. 12:7). Ahijah knew what the wife of Jeroboam wanted, and who she was, even though he was blind and she was wearing a disguise (1 Kings 14:4, 6). Elijah knew that Ahab had committed murder by framing Naboth (1 Kings 21:17-20), and he knew the information that the king of Israel wanted to know (2 Kings 1:1-4). Elisha knew that Gehazi was lying and knew of the greed in his heart (2 Kings 6:19-27). Daniel knew Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, even though Nebuchadnezzar had not revealed it to anyone (Dan. 2:5, 28ff). By saying that Jesus knew all men, Scripture confirms that he was, like the prophets of old, in communication with God.

Joh 2:25

**“he did not need anyone to testify about people.”** This statement sets up the record of Jesus and Nicodemus, which starts, “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus.” Because Jesus did not need anyone to testify about people, and knew what was in people, when Nicodemus came to him he already knew what Nicodemus wanted and needed. That explains why Jesus so abruptly spoke into Nicodemus’ life, saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born from above, he is not able to see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

**John Chapter 3**

Joh 3:1

**“one of.”** A partitive genitive. Nicodemus was “of” the Pharisees, meaning he was one of them. Some versions simplify the verse and just have, “Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus.” That is certainly what the text means.

**“Pharisees.”** The Greek word is *Pharisaios* (#5330 Φαρισαῖος), a transliteration of the Aramaic word *perishaya*, from the Aramaic word that means “separated.” The Pharisees separated themselves from things that made them unclean or were ungodly, and also separated themselves from others who they considered not godly. Our knowledge of them is limited by the sources we have. The Greek term is found for the very first time in the New Testament and it occurs in Josephus, but not in any other Jewish or Greco-Roman writings of the New Testament era. The group no doubt existed before the time of Christ, which is why it was so influential in the New Testament, but no description of it survives from that time. The term is found in the non-canonical and later Christian texts (e.g., *The Gospel of Thomas*), and in the writings of the Church Fathers. The text called “The Psalms of Solomon,” perhaps written in the mid-first century BC, has been thought of as a Pharisaic text, but never specifically identified as such.

Josephus tells us the Pharisees believed in the immortality of the soul, like the Greeks, which explains why the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16) resonated with them. However, they also believed in the resurrection from the dead, as is clear from Acts 23:6-8. It is not clear how they reconciled these two beliefs. Since Josephus tells us that the Pharisees believed the soul of the righteous went into another body, it is reasonable to believe that they thought the souls of good people waited in “Paradise,” where they could be in intimate association with the Patriarchs (cf. “in Abraham’s bosom;” Luke 16:22) until the resurrection. Many Christians hold a belief that is somewhat similar: that the souls of dead Christians are in heaven and will be joined with their resurrected bodies in the future.

That John 3:1 specifically refers to Nicodemus as a Pharisee helps us understand one reason why Jesus spoke to him about the resurrection from the dead. Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount with a teaching about the future Messianic Kingdom on earth because almost no one understood it. Similarly, one reason he opens his discussion with Nicodemus about resurrection into the Kingdom was that Nicodemus did not understand it.

[See Matthew 5:3-12; see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“ruler of the Jews.”** Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of 70 men that was presided over by the High Priest (cf. John 7:50).

Joh 3:2

**“came to him.”** The Bible is silent as to why Nicodemus came to Jesus, which means that either we can figure it out on our own, or it is not really important. In this case, the Bible gives us enough information that we recognize some very plausible reasons why Nicodemus came.

First, we should understand that around that same time John the Baptist was active in his ministry in “Bethany beyond Jordan,” not more than a day’s journey from Jerusalem (see commentary on John 1:28). John was teaching that the Kingdom of God was very close and that the Messiah was already among them (Matt. 3:2; John 1:26), and “the whole region of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him” (Mark 1:5). That meant that huge numbers of people were being stirred up by John, and the region would have been abuzz with talk about the Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom. The impact John was making on the people was enough that the rulers of the Jews in Jerusalem sent some Pharisees to question him (John 1:24ff), and either Nicodemus would have been one of them or he would have known about the report they brought back.

Since Nicodemus would have already been stirred up by the teaching that the Kingdom was close and the Messiah was among the people, he would have been especially sensitive to this new young rabbi who, in his first appearance in Jerusalem as a teacher, taught powerfully, did miracles, and even defied Temple authorities by overturning their money tables and driving away their animals. Nicodemus came to the conclusion that Jesus was a “teacher” and “sent from God.” Thus, it seems at least one reason for his coming to Jesus was to find out more about his teachings and beliefs. Of course, at that point, Nicodemus did not believe Jesus was the Messiah. Nicodemus would have still held to the traditions and beliefs of the Pharisees; he was not coming to Jesus to be saved. There is a wide gap between believing someone is a teacher sent from God and believing that he is the Messiah.

Perhaps a stronger reason that Nicodemus came to Jesus was that he believed John’s teaching that the Kingdom was close, and may have also believed the Messiah was somewhere among the people. That would mean he also thought there was going to be a rebellion or revolution of some sort in the near future. The Jews of Christ’s time thought that the Messianic Kingdom would replace the kingdoms on earth, but the exact way they thought that would happen is unclear. It seems certain that there were differences of opinion about it, but the bottom line was that people thought the Messiah was going to make war on the kingdoms of the world, overcome them, and set up his own kingdom. This would certainly mean the Messiah would need help overthrowing the Romans, and no doubt, a godly man like Nicodemus thought it would be helpful if the Jews were more united and fought less among themselves.

Given that, it is very likely that another reason Nicodemus came to Jesus was to offer him some advice about how to be successful in Jerusalem. As a member of the Sanhedrin and an old and experienced godly man among the often ungodly Jews, Nicodemus had learned how to influence others without being personally denounced. It seems he felt he could help this young Rabbi to navigate the uncertain and shifting waters between the rival religious factions, their rival political factions, and the masses of people, all vying for what would profit them personally. Nicodemus could give Jesus practical advice as to how to be successful and effective in his ministry. But Jesus had no interest in successfully influencing the culture in Jerusalem, and knew that Nicodemus needed to rethink his theology from the ground up to know the truth of the Word. Thus, it is no wonder that Jesus went right to the heart of the Kingdom issue with the statement, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born from above, he is not able to see the Kingdom of God.”

Jesus was not going to bring the Kingdom by uniting the Jews and overthrowing the Romans. The Kingdom was going to be established on earth in a totally different way, and will in large part be populated by those people whom God raises from the dead (cf. Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:9-14; Dan. 12:2). It is not by being powerful enough to overthrow the Romans that a person will be able to be part of the Kingdom, but rather by being godly enough to be part of the Resurrection of the Righteous (cf. John 5:29). For more information about how “born from above” refers to the resurrection, see commentary on John 3:3.

[For more information about the Kingdom of God on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“at night.”** Nicodemus came to Jesus at night so that he might not be recognized. This is not cowardice, but wisdom: careful caution. Lenski writes that Nicodemus “was not sure about this young Rabbi from Galilee who might turn out a disappointment after all. So he cautiously investigates.”[[35]](#footnote-18249)

**“Rabbi.”** The term means “teacher,” and is a respectful address. Jesus’ deeds had touched a chord in Nicodemus, and he knew Jesus was sent from God. Nicodemus knew Jesus was sent from God and addresses him as such, with respect.

**“we.”** This refers to the “many” people who believed in John 2:23. It does not refer to Nicodemus’ peers, the religious leaders, because they did not believe Jesus was sent from God, they thought he was a false prophet.

**“*sent* from God.”** The Greek is the preposition *apo* (#575 ἀπό), which in this context simply means “from.” Jesus Christ was a teacher from God. God sent him, just like He sent angels or the prophets, and God inspired his teachings. Some people have tried to support the Trinity or the preexistence of Christ by this verse, but it does not have to mean that at all. Actually, the very fact that Nicodemus started by saying, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher ‘*sent* from God’” shows that the verse is not referring to the incarnation or the Trinity in any way. Neither Nicodemus, nor the “we” he referred to in his statement, had been taught about the Trinity or the incarnation, nor believed it from the Law or what they learned in Synagogue. Nicodemus, and the “we” he referred to, believed exactly what Nicodemus said: that Jesus was a teacher from God, i.e., not a false prophet, and some of them no doubt believed he was the Messiah.

Joh 3:3

**“born from above.”** The Greek text reads *gennaō anōthen* (#1080 γεννάω; #509 ἄνωθεν), and literally means “born from above.” Unfortunately, *gennaō anōthen* is mistranslated as “born again” in most English versions, and that mistranslation has caused a lot of confusion in Christianity. The Greek word *anōthen* occurs five times in John, and all of them mean “above” or “top” (John 3:3, 7, 31; John 19:11, 23).

“Born from above” refers to the resurrection from the dead that will occur when God above puts His spirit in dead people who are then “born” from the grave. Saying, “born from the grave” is biblically accurate, because Isaiah 26:19 says that “the earth will give birth to her dead,” as if the earth is a big womb that gives birth to people at the resurrection (the KJV, which says the earth will “cast out” the dead, is not as clear as versions such as the ESV, NIV, or NASB, which have “give birth to.” The Hebrew word can refer to birth.[[36]](#footnote-26842) This same truth about the dead coming up out of the ground is found in Ezekiel 37:12-14 and Daniel 12:2. The imagery of resurrection as “birth” is in the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. Besides here in John 3, Jesus is called the “firstborn” from the dead, referring to the fact that he was the very first one to be raised from the dead (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5; cf. Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15).

The Jews had no knowledge of what the New Testament calls the “New Birth” (1 Pet. 1:3) or being “born again” (1 Pet. 1:23), and the Greek for “born again” and “new birth” in Peter is a totally different word than is used here in John 3:3 and in John 3:7. There was no “New Birth” mentioned in the Old Testament or the Gospels. From Genesis until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God gave His gift of holy spirit only on a relatively few people, and when He did give it, He gave it conditionally, meaning that He could take it away. So, for example, God took His spirit from King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14), and after David sinned with Uriah and Bathsheba, David prayed God would not take it from him (Ps. 51:11).

In contrast to the way God gave the gift of holy spirit during the OT and Gospel period, after the Day of Pentecost when the Christian Church started (Acts 2), God gave holy spirit in birth, and so the Epistles refer to this as the “New Birth.” Today, Christians get “born again” when they believe. However, the New Birth was never mentioned in the Old Testament and therefore the Jews knew nothing of it.

The New Birth is part of the Administration of Grace, which is also called “the Administration of the Sacred Secret (see commentaries on Eph. 3:2 and 3:9). John 3:1-12 is not referring to the Christian New Birth. Jesus was speaking about a “birth from above” that the Jews were supposed to know about and understand. That is why Jesus chided Nicodemus, saying, “Are you the *well-known* teacher of Israel, and *yet* do not know these things?” (John 3:10). Thus, we have to look in the Old Testament for the kind of birth Jesus spoke of, which is the birth of the body from the ground, which will happen at the resurrection (Isa. 26:19 (NIV); Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2). Unfortunately, at the time of Christ, most Jews were ignorant about the resurrection from the dead and entrance into the Messianic Kingdom. The Sadducees did not even believe in a resurrection (Matt. 22:23). The Pharisees, on the other hand, of which Nicodemus was one, generally believed in immediate life after death, like the Greeks (see commentary on John 3:1, “Pharisees”). So when Jesus told Nicodemus about being born from above, he did not understand what Jesus was saying. Nicodemus, who had read the Old Testament many times, should have known what Jesus was talking about. Instead, because of his theology, he was confused by the “birth” terminology even though birth terminology is used in Isaiah.

The Jews believed that God opened the womb allowing childbirth, or closed it causing barrenness (Gen. 20:18; 29:31; 30:2; 1 Sam. 1:5; Ps. 127:3; Isa. 66:9; Hos. 9:14). Thus, when Jesus spoke of being “born from above” Nicodemus would have thought of Jesus’ words in terms of “being born with the help of God.” However, at that point instead of correctly thinking that the dead are “born” from the ground by the power of God, as in Ezekiel 37:12-14, he incorrectly thought about how a person could once again be born from his mother’s womb with God’s help. Jesus’ words are actually quite simple, but they were completely outside any theology that Nicodemus understood, so he misinterpreted them. Jesus was saying that in order to “see” (i.e., enter) the Kingdom of God, i.e., the Messianic Kingdom that will be set up on earth (Dan. 2:44; 7:14), the dead will have to be “born from above” (resurrected by the power of God) and then enter the Kingdom.

In summary, what Jesus said to Nicodemus is actually very simple: no one will see God’s Messianic Kingdom unless he is “born from above,” i.e., raised from the dead by God. But Jesus’ statement needs to be seen in its historical context and not seen as “the whole truth.” Jesus was not giving Nicodemus a complete picture of his return, conquest of the earth, the “sheep and goat judgment” of Matthew 25:31-46, and all the resurrections. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus did not even believe that the dead were actually dead, so Jesus was making the point that no one saw the Kingdom of God when they died, which is almost certainly what Nicodemus thought (cf. the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31, and commentary on Luke 16:19). What Jesus said captured the larger truth of what Nicodemus needed to hear, and it is certainly true that the vast majority of humanity will not see the Kingdom of God unless they are raised from the dead into it.

[For a more complete chronology of the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, called the “Millennial Kingdom, and his rule over the whole earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.]

Joh 3:5

**“born of water.”** This phrase refers to the birth of the person from his mother’s womb, and Jesus used it because Nicodemus spoke of being born from the womb, somewhat sarcastically asking if a person could enter into the womb a second time. Jesus patiently pointed out that was not necessary, but to enter the Kingdom of God a person had to come from the womb once and be born of water (cf. that which is born of “flesh is flesh;” John 3:6), and then he must be born from above, via resurrection.

There are some people who say that this phrase means a person has to be water baptized to be saved, but that cannot be the case. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, no one had to be baptized to be saved. There in Judea John and Jesus both baptized as a sign of recommitment to obedience to the Law, and there is evidence that proselytes to Judaism were water baptized, but in no case did the Word of God, or John or Jesus, say it was a requirement for salvation.

It is clear that baptism was not a requirement for salvation in the Old Testament, so if baptism became a requirement for salvation during the ministry of John or Jesus, the Bible should tell us that, and it never does (Mark 16:16 is an addition to the original text; see commentary on Mark 16:9). Furthermore, water baptism was not universally practiced by Jesus or his disciples. When he sent out the Twelve (Luke 9:1-5) and when he sent out the 72 (Luke 10:1-12), in neither case did he tell any of his disciples to baptize those who listened and believed the message. This fact is made even clearer when the rich man came to Jesus and specifically asked how to be saved (Matt. 19:16ff). Jesus answered: “if you want to enter into life *in the age to come*, keep the commandments.” Jesus did not mention baptism because it was not essential in order to be saved.

Jesus just said the phrase “born of water” when he was speaking to Nicodemus, but he never explained it, so it must have referred to something that Nicodemus could understand without any explanation. Based on that, and the context that “that which is born of flesh [with water] is flesh,” the best conclusion is that “born of water” is literal, and should be understood literally. In the context in which Jesus was speaking, before the Church Age, in order to be saved a person had to be 1) born of water (when he is born from his mother) and 2) born of the spirit (when the earth gives birth to him: Ezek. 37:12-14; Isa. 26:19.)

[For a more thorough understanding of Nicodemus and John 3, see John W. Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*, Appendix H.]

**“*the* Spirit.”** This is a reference to God, who raises people from the dead (see commentary on John 3:3). The word “Spirit,” (*pneuma* in Greek) does not have the definite article before it, but it is not needed in this case to make the noun “Spirit” definite because it is ruled by the preposition (See commentary on Matt. 1:18).

Joh 3:6

**“the Spirit.”** God is “spirit,” so it is natural that one of the names of God is “the Spirit.” It is God who creates spirit in the dead bodies of believers and gives them life.

**“is spirit.”** This “spirit” is the spirit God creates in people that gives life to their dead bodies. When Jesus said, “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6), he was saying something that every student of the Old Testament should have known from Old Testament verses such as Isaiah 26:19; Ezekiel 37:12-14, and Daniel 12:2, 13, and Hosea 13:14, which is that God will raise the dead. God will raise the dead by putting “spirit” in their dead bodies, which will give those bodies life. In many cases, the bodies are already disintegrated, so God will have to organize the dust into bodies, just as He did for Adam, and then put spirit into them and give them life. This verse, “that which is born of Spirit is spirit,” is actually very simple when seen in light of the Old Testament prophecies. The Spirit, who is God, creates spirit in the dead bodies of believers and gives those bodies life, and they come up out of the grave in their new, spirit-powered bodies.

Joh 3:7

**“you must all be born from above.”** The “you” is plural in the Greek. Thus, Jesus shifts from the singular in John 3:3, “unless someone is born from above,” to the plural, “you all must be born from above” or “you must all be born from above,” making the point that the birth from above is not just for Nicodemus, but applies to everyone. The only way anyone is going to enter the Kingdom is by being “born from above,” that is, raised from the dead as per Ezekiel 37:12-14.

Joh 3:8

**“the Spirit breathes where it wants to, and you hear its voice.”** The traditional translation of this verse is “the wind blows,” not “the Spirit breathes.” However, the Greek word *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα) can mean “spirit” or “wind”; *pneō* (#4154 πνέω, pronounced 'pnew-oh) can mean “breathe” or “blow”; and *phōnē* (#5456 φωνή, pronounced phoe-nay) can mean “voice” or “sound.” Therefore, “the Spirit breathes and you hear its voice,” and “the wind blows and you hear its sound” are both legitimate translations of the Greek words. In this situation, we must determine what Jesus was saying from the context and scope of Scripture, not just from the Greek words themselves.

To understand John 3 it is essential that we realize (and few commentators do!) that the context of John 3 is the resurrection from the dead, not the Christian “New Birth.” Jesus spoke of being “born from above,” not being “born again,” although most English versions have “born again.” In saying “born from above,” Jesus was making a reference to resurrection: people being raised from the dead and “born” out of the grave.

The Old Testament speaks plainly of the resurrection and refers to it as the earth giving birth. Isaiah 26:19 (NIV84) says, “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy…the earth will give birth to her dead.” Other versions that use the word “birth” in Isaiah 26:19 include: the BBE, ESV, NASB, NIV, NJB, NRSV, and Rotherham. Other Old Testament verses that speak of the resurrection of the dead include Ezekiel 37:11-14; Daniel 12:2, 13; and Hosea 13:14. While the Old Testament plainly speaks of the resurrection of the dead and being born out of the grave, there is no Old Testament verse that speaks of the Christian “New Birth.” Verses that speak of the New Birth are all in the New Testament Epistles (1 Pet. 1:3, 23; cf. Titus 3:5; James 1:18).

We must remember that Jesus was trying to instruct Nicodemus about great spiritual truths that Nicodemus should have known but was ignorant of (Jesus said, “Are you the *well-known* teacher of Israel, and *yet* do not know these things? (John 3:10)). Nicodemus was a Pharisee (John 3:1), and therefore would have not correctly understood about what happens to people when they die (see commentary on John 3:1, “Pharisees” and commentary on 1 Cor. 15:26, “death”). He would also have not had a correct understanding of the future Messianic Kingdom.

[See Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

From studying the Old Testament, Nicodemus should have known about the resurrection and the Messianic Kingdom, but he had no way of knowing about the Christian “New Birth” (being “born again”). It is because most commentators think that this chapter is about the Christian “New Birth” that it does not occur to them to look in the Old Testament for clues to understand what Jesus is trying to teach Nicodemus.

[For more on John 3 not being about the Christian New Birth, see commentary on John 3:3.]

Once we understand that John 3 is about the resurrection from the dead, we can search the Old Testament and look for material about it. We find that the Old Testament links the breath of God with people being raised from the dead. In contrast, “wind” is never associated with the resurrection. This, then, begins to show us that in this context, “Spirit” and “breathes” are more accurate translations than “wind” and “blows.”

The Old Testament links the breath of God with both living and dying. In Genesis 2:7 it is the breath of God that gives life to Adam, just as in Ezekiel 37 it is the breath of God that gives life to the dead. Genesis 2:7 (Rotherham) says, “So then Yahweh God formed man, [of the] dust of the ground, and breathed in his nostrils the breath of life—and man became a living soul.” Isaiah 40:7 and Ezekiel 22:21 link the breath of God with death. Isaiah 40:7 (Rotherham) says, “The grass, hath withered, The flower, hath faded, Because, the breath of Yahweh, hath blown upon it! Surely the people, is grass!” Since the breath of God is associated with life and death, it makes perfect sense that in the context of the resurrection that *pneō* means “breathe” and that Jesus was saying “the Spirit breathes,” and not “the wind blows.”

There is also good evidence that *pneuma* should be translated “Spirit.” The word *pneuma* occurs about 380 times in the New Testament (385 in the manuscript on which the KJV is based, 279 times in the Nestle-Aland 27 Greek text), and in the KJV this is the only place *pneuma* is translated “wind” (the NIV has “wind” here and one other place; which also could easily be translated “spirit”). In contrast to *pneuma*, the Greek word *anemos* (#417 ἄνεμος) occurs 31 times in the New Testament and always refers to wind (cf. Matt. 7:25; 8:26; 14:24; Eph. 4:14; Rev. 6:13). What is quite compelling evidence that *pneuma* should be translated “Spirit” is that *pneuma* occurs five times in four verses (John 3:5-8), and it would seem incongruous if four of them referred to “spirit,” and one to “wind.” Leon Morris expresses this plainly: “…we would expect the meaning [of *pneuma*] to be unchanged. The passage then would mean that man cannot predict the movements of the Spirit.”[[37]](#footnote-21890) The flow of Jesus’ teaching and his implied references to the Old Testament all argue for the translation “Spirit.”

More evidence that *pneuma* refers to the Spirit and not the wind is that it is assigned a will, i.e., desires. Jesus said the Spirit breathes “where it wants to.” This is not true of the wind, which does not have a will and therefore does not blow “where it wants to.” Commentators such as Meyer and Lange point out that attributing desires to the wind would be the figure of speech personification, assigning human characteristics to an inanimate object. But there is no need for the figure of speech if *pneuma* means “Spirit.”

Translating *pneuma* as “Spirit” has had supporters for centuries. Commentators such as Origin (c. AD 185-254) and Augustine (AD 354-430) believed this verse referred to the Spirit, not the wind (referenced in Lange). John Wycliffe had “The Spirit breathes where it will” in his Bible (c. 1385). John Bengel understood the verse to mean: “the Spirit breathes where it will, and you hear its voice” (*Bengel’s New Testament Commentary*, c. 1742). Bengel pointed out that “breathe,” “will,” and “voice” are more appropriate to the Spirit than to the wind.

According to Leon Morris, a major reason that modern commentators favor the reading, “the wind blows” rather than “the Spirit breathes” is the phrase, “you hear its voice.” Commentators question, and with good reason, what that would mean. After all, most people who get “born again” would not say they heard the voice of God when they got saved. That would be a compelling argument against the translation “Spirit,” but instead, it actually shows why it is essential to understand that this verse is speaking of the resurrection from the dead and not referring to Christian salvation and being “born again.”

As soon as we realize this verse is speaking about people being resurrected from the dead, we see that there is indeed a “voice” associated with that event. Jesus made it clear that people would hear his voice and come out of the tombs: “…the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his [Jesus’] voice and will come out” (John 5:28, 29; cf. John 5:25). Paul wrote that the Christian Rapture would be accompanied by “a loud command” and the “voice of a ruling angel,” and then the dead in Christ would rise (1 Thess. 4:16).

The book of Ezekiel makes it clear that Jesus was trying to teach Nicodemus a truth from the Old Testament about the resurrection. According to Ezekiel, the Spirit of God would breathe into dead people who would then come to life:

**Ezekiel 37:9 (Rotherham):**

Then said he [God] unto me [Ezekiel], Prophesy unto the spirit,—Prophesy, Son of man, and thou shalt say unto the spirit, Thus, saith My Lord, Yahweh—From the four winds, come thou, O spirit, And breathe into these slain, That they may live.

Since the prophecy in Ezekiel was that the “spirit” would “breathe” into the dead and they would come to life, we can see why, in the context of the resurrection, Jesus would say that the “Spirit” “breathes;” it took the breath of God to raise the dead. Then Jesus added that the Spirit breathes “where it wants to.” We should not be confused by the phrase “where it wants to,” because people’s true hearts are hidden from us. Unless the Old Testament had let us know, very few people would have thought that when Solomon died, he was an evildoer in the eyes of God (1 Kings 11), whereas Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian and Darius the Persian extolled God at the ends of their reigns (Dan. 4:34ff; 6:25ff). At the Resurrection of the Righteous, the Spirit of God will breathe on the righteous dead, raising those whom He wants—those who have had faith in Him—and no doubt there will be many surprises. It will certainly be the case that some people we would have never expected to be righteous will be raised, while many who we thought were righteous will be passed over. For example, in his teaching about a Pharisee and tax collector who both prayed to God, it seems surprising that the Pharisee would be judged unrighteous but the tax collector judged righteous (Luke 18:9-14).

Jesus concludes his teaching to Nicodemus by saying, “this is how it is with everyone who is born by way of the Spirit.” The phrase “this is how it is” is from the Greek *houtōs* [#3779 οὕτως], which generally means, “thus, so, in this manner, in this way,” etc.[[38]](#footnote-19218) Furthermore, we say “by the Spirit” because the Greek text is not a simple genitive, but *ek tou pneumatos* (literally, “from [by way of] the Spirit”). The preposition *ek* (#1537 ἐκ) only takes the genitive case, which is why “Spirit” is in the genitive case in the sentence. The preposition *ek* is generally used in one of these six ways:

1. Source: *out of, from*; e.g., “it was discovered that she was pregnant *from* the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18; Luke 3:8).
2. Separation: *away from, from*; e.g., “*Out of* Egypt I called my son” (Matt. 2:15).
3. Temporal: *from*; e.g., “he saw a man blind *from* his birth” (John 9:1; Acts 15:21).
4. Causal: *because of*; e.g., “But if it is on the basis of grace, *then* it is not on the basis *of* works” (Rom. 11:6; cf. Mark 9:15).
5. Partitive (in place of a partitive genitive): *of, from*; e.g., “*some of* you they will cause to be put to death” (Luke 21:16; cf. 2 John 1:4).
6. Means: *by, from*; e.g., “providing for them *out of* their resources” (Luke 8:3; cf. Luke 16:9).

In this case, the context shows us that the first use of *ek* listed above, “source: from, out of” is the proper meaning. The BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* notes that when *ek* is used in the context of birth, it denotes the role of the male. John 3:8 is speaking of those people who are “born,” i.e., resurrected, “from, by, or by way of,” the Spirit.

In summing up John 3, we see Nicodemus the Pharisee coming to Jesus. Being a Pharisee, he had an incorrect understanding of what happens to a person after he dies and an incorrect understanding of the Kingdom of God. Jesus begins to correct his understanding by saying that if a person is not resurrected from the dead (“born from above”), he will not be able to enter the Messianic Kingdom on earth. It was a fairly straightforward teaching, and had Nicodemus grasped it, Jesus could have gone on and instructed him in deeper spiritual things. Instead, Nicodemus completely misunderstands Jesus and borders on being sarcastic, saying, “Can a man enter a second time into the womb?”

Jesus ignores the sarcasm and presses forward with his teaching, referring to how the Old Testament says the dead will be raised: “The Spirit breathes where it wants to, and you hear its voice, but do not know where it comes from and where it goes; this is how it is with everyone who is born by the Spirit.” Nicodemus again did not grasp what Jesus was teaching, and said, “How are these things able to happen?” At that point Jesus openly challenges Nicodemus’ ignorance, saying, “Are you the *well-known* teacher of Israel and *yet* do not know these things?” (John 3:10). Then Jesus goes on to make a sweeping statement about how in general the leaders of the Jews (“you people;” the “you” is plural in Greek) do not accept what Jesus is teaching, and he expresses some futility about teaching them deep spiritual truths: “If I told you *people* about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:12).

At that point, at the end of John 3:12, the conversation ends, and John 3 returns to the narrator (see commentary on John 3:13). We do not know what happened after verse 12 between Nicodemus and Jesus because the Bible is silent on the matter. We do know that Nicodemus tried to defend Jesus when the Jews wanted to arrest him (John 7:50-51), and he also contributed to Jesus having a proper burial (John 19:39), so what Jesus did and said obviously had a big effect on him. But did Nicodemus ever go from believing that Jesus was “sent from God” (John 3:2) to believing that he was the actual Messiah? Scripture is silent on this. Nicodemus is never mentioned after Jesus’ burial, including not being mentioned among the disciples in Acts. Thus, we do not know if Nicodemus truly came to believe that Jesus is the Messiah or if he remained in his conviction that Jesus was a prophet sent from God. In fact, we will not know that until the Rapture or resurrection, when the Spirit breathes life where it wants, and some of those who are dead hear the voice and get up while others remain dead in the grave, awaiting the second resurrection. Thus, this record of Nicodemus, which was penned in the Acts period likely after Nicodemus was dead, contains a subtle irony. Jesus’ teaching that the Spirit breathes life where it wants to, and we do not know where it comes from or is going to, applies to Nicodemus himself. We do not know the heart of Nicodemus and whether on that Great Day the Spirit will breathe life into him or not. We certainly hope he came to believe the truth.

**“by the Spirit.”** In this case, “Spirit” has a capital “S” because it refers to God. The Old Testament revealed that God (also called “the Spirit), was the one who will give birth from the dead. This is not referring to the gift of holy spirit or the Christian New Birth.

[See John W. Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope,* Appendix H.]

Joh 3:11

**“you.”** The “you” is plural in Greek. When Jesus says “you,” he is specifically referring to the Jewish leaders. Although Jesus was no doubt upset by the fact that the Jews in general had not accepted him or his teaching, in this case, he is most specifically speaking about those people in leadership positions among the Jews. John 3:1 told us that Nicodemus was a “ruler” of the Jews, and John 7:50 lets us know that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of 70 men, so Nicodemus was a very powerful man.

**“are not accepting our testimony.”** Although some people believed in Jesus as Messiah, the majority did not, and that was especially true of the rulers of the Jews, a point that becomes especially clear at his trial. Nicodemus, at this point in his spiritual journey, was only able to say that Jesus was from God. He did not yet see him as the Messiah, and perhaps he never did.

Joh 3:12

**“earthly things.”** The things that Jesus taught about, though having to do with God or having originated from God, were also related to the earth. For example, the Messiah himself, the Laws of God, and the resurrection all had to do with God’s relation to earth and were also part of the revelation of the Old Testament. There should have been no (or very little) debate about them. Instead, the religious world was completely perverted by tradition and wrong teaching. Yet when Jesus tried to correct the situation by his teaching and signs, the religious world stood against him and the common people were usually confused. Frankly, the same situation exists in the Christian religion today. There are so many unbiblical beliefs and traditions that someone presenting the truth is usually either scoffed at or ignored.

Joh 3:13

**“And no one.”** Jesus did not speak the words recorded in John 3:13 (or any of the words from verse 13 to the end of chapter 3). Jesus did not say he was in heaven while he was standing in Jerusalem speaking to Nicodemus. Jesus stops speaking at the end of verse 12, and that is where the red letters in red-letter Bibles should also stop. Verse 13 is part of the narrative of the Gospel of John, not Jesus speaking. Most of the Gospel of John is the narrative of John. John opens up with narrative, and the majority of chapter 1, and most of the rest of John, is narrative. John chapter 3 opens with narrative (“There was a man of the Pharisees....”), and that narrative continues in verse 13.

Although most people do not realize it, scholars debate what part of John chapter 3 was spoken by Jesus, and at what point the words of Jesus stop, and the narration of the Gospel of John restarts. Although the best way to see this debate is by reading the commentaries and articles in theological journals, an easy way to see the debate is by comparing different versions of “red-letter Bibles;” the red letters stop at different places in different Bibles. In the ESV, NASB, and NIV84, Jesus stops speaking (and the red letters stop) at verse 21, but in the NIV (2011 edition), the red letters stop at John 3:15, and John 3:16 is in black letters and is considered part of the narrative. In contrast to those two possibilities, the textual and contextual evidence supports the conclusion of E. W. Bullinger, who asserts that Jesus stops speaking in verse 12 and the narrative starts with verse 13. *The Companion Bible* by Bullinger has notes that make a good case for the fact that Jesus’ speaking ends at verse 12 and John, the narrator, begins with verse 13. In fact, Bullinger lists seven different reasons for Jesus’ talking ending at verse 13. Verses 14 and 16 agree with this entirely (see the commentaries on John 3:14 and 3:16).

Bullinger’s seven reasons are:

1. Because the past tense of the Greek verbs that follow verse 12 indicate completed events.
2. Because the expression “only begotten Son” is not used by the Lord of himself, but is used by John describing the Lord (John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9).
3. Because “in the name of” (John 3:18, using the Greek word *en*) is not used by the Lord, but by John (John 1:12; 2:23; 1 John 5:13).
4. Because to “do the truth” occurs elsewhere only in 1 John 1:6.
5. Because “who is in heaven” (v. 13) points to the fact that the Lord had already ascended at the time John wrote.
6. Because the word “lifted up” refers both to the sufferings (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34) and to “the glory which should follow” (John 8:28; 12:32; Acts 2:33; 5:31).
7. Because the break at verse 13 accords best with the context, as shown by the structure of the section.[[39]](#footnote-23268)

Strong and straightforward evidence that Jesus is not speaking after verse 12 comes from just reading the verses in the Greek (and sometimes even the English) and paying attention to the verbs and the content of the verses. For example, verse 13 is very clear: “No one has ascended into heaven...except the Son of Man.” The verb “ascended” is in the past tense in both Greek and English, and shows us that Jesus had already ascended to heaven when this verse was written. This is confirmed by the last phrase of the verse, which says that Jesus “is” in heaven. The phrase, “which is in heaven,” has all the evidence of being original, and should appear in English Bibles as it does in the King James Version (this point is covered below, under “who is in heaven”).

Orthodox scholars have come up with “explanations” of why they believe this verse says Jesus has ascended into heaven but is still on earth talking to Nicodemus, but they are contrived explanations, invented due to the commentators’ preconceived theology. There is no need for anything other than a straightforward reading of this verse to understand it.

The verbs in John 3:14 continue letting us know that Jesus had already ascended to heaven, and was not on earth talking to Nicodemus. Verse 14 says that “just as” Moses “lifted up” the serpent (aorist tense in Greek), even so the Son of Man “was lifted up” (also aorist tense). The tense of the verb “lifted up” is the same for both the serpent of Moses and the Son of Man. Thus, the natural reading of the text is that both the serpent and the Son of Man were lifted up in the past. Of course, because the orthodox teaching is that John 3:14 occurred long before the crucifixion and ascension of Christ, the natural reading of the Greek text is ignored, and the past tense reading of the last verb is made to read in English as if it were future, so most English versions read that the Son of Man “will be” lifted up. As in verse 13, the natural reading of the verbs shows that Jesus had already been crucified; “lifted up.”

The verbs in verse 16 continue to show that Jesus’ death is in the past, and that Jesus was not talking to Nicodemus but rather that verse 16 is the narrative of John (at this point many commentators agree, including the translators of the 2011 NIV, whose red letters stop with verse 15). The text clearly says that God “loved” the world and “gave” His Son. These things were already done, not future events. The serpent being “lifted up,” Christ’s being “lifted up,” that God “loved” the world, and that God “gave” His Son—all of these verbs in the aorist tense, and all refer to past events. This is why even the English versions say God “gave” His Son instead of “will give” him.

So, how do orthodox commentators explain these past-tense events, especially how God supposedly “gave” His Son long before Jesus died? R. C. H. Lenski, on many subjects a very good commentator, explains the past tense verbs this way: “This verb ‘gave’ really refers to an act that took place in the other world, where any consideration of time would be inadequate, meaning only that we are in a poor human way speaking of things beyond us.”[[40]](#footnote-10986) So in other words, Lenski claims that when the Bible says God “gave” His Son before He actually “gave” him, it was because the event happened in “the other world” where time is not counted like we count time. That explanation is contrived and ignores the plain reading of the Greek. We contend that there is no need to make up such bizarre explanations of verses that can be read and understood in a simple and straightforward manner. After all, is there any other place that Jesus speaks in a way that we cannot simply understand, but have to explain by saying that Jesus spoke of a future event in the past because the act “took place in the other world”? Certainly not to our knowledge.

Beyond a plain and straightforward reading of the Greek text, which places the events after verse 12 in the past, another reason to believe that Jesus stopped speaking in verse 12, and verse 13 resumes the narrative of John, is that from verse 3 to verse 12, whenever Jesus speaks, he uses “I.” However, after verse 12, we find the third-person pronoun “him” in the text. The logical reason for that shift is that from verse 13 on, the apostle John was writing about “him.” In verse 3, Jesus is speaking and he says, “I say.” In verse 5 he says, “I say.” In verse 7 he says, “I said.” In verse 11 he says, “I say,” and in verse 12 he says, “I told” and “I tell.” In verse 13, there is a sudden shift. We no longer see “I,” we see “him,” and other references to Jesus in the third person. For example, in verse 13, the text refers to “the one” from heaven, and in verse 14, instead of saying “everyone who believes in me” (which Jesus did many times in the Gospel of John, cf. John 6:35; 7:37; 11:25, 26; and John 12:44, 46), the text says, “everyone who believes in him.” When the evidence is weighed, the words from John 3:13 to the end of the chapter were not spoken by Jesus, but penned by the narrator, the apostle John, long after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

**“but he who came down from heaven.”** Something was said to have come from God or come from heaven if God was its source. For example, James 1:17 says that every good gift is “from above” and “comes down” from God. What James means is clear. God is the Author and source of the good things in our lives. God works behind the scenes to provide what we need. The verse does not mean that the good things in our lives come directly down from heaven. The phrase “he who came down from heaven” in John 3:13 is to be understood in the same way we understand James’ words—that God is the source of Jesus Christ, which He was. Christ was God’s plan, and then God directly fathered Jesus.

[For more information on Jesus coming from heaven or being sent by God, see commentaries on John 6:38 and 6:57.]

There are also other verses that say Jesus was “sent from God,” a phrase that shows God as the ultimate source of what is sent. John the Baptist was a man “sent from God” (John 1:6), and it was he who said that Jesus “comes from above” and “comes from heaven” (John 3:31). When God wanted to tell the people that He would bless them if they gave their tithes, He told them that He would open the windows of “heaven” and pour out a blessing (Mal. 3:10). Of course, everyone understood the idiom being used, and no one believed that God would literally pour things out of heaven. They knew that the phrase meant that God was the origin of the blessings they received. Still another example is when Christ was speaking and said, “Where was the baptism of John from? From heaven or of human *origin*?” (Matt. 21:25). Of course, the way that John’s baptism would have been “from heaven” was if God was the source of the revelation. John did not get the idea on his own, it came “from heaven.” The verse makes the idiom clear: things could be “from heaven,” i.e., from God, or they could be “from men.” The idiom is the same when used of Jesus. Jesus is “from God,” “from heaven” or “from above” in the sense that God is his Father and thus his origin.

The idea of coming from God or being sent by God is also clarified by Jesus’ words in John 17. He said, “Just as you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.” (John 17:18). We understand perfectly what Christ meant when he said, “I sent them into the world.” He meant that he commissioned us, or appointed us. The statement does not imply that we were in heaven with Christ and then incarnated into the flesh. Christ said, “As you sent me…I sent them.” So, in the same way that Christ sent us is how we should understand the phrase that God sent Christ.

**“who is in heaven.”** This last phrase of this verse as it appears in the KJV and REV is omitted in the modern Greek texts, but its originality is still disputed. Although the modern Greek texts such as Nestle-Aland and SBL text omit the phrase, and the modern English Bibles based upon those texts omit it also, there is good reason to believe the scholars compiling those modern texts have made a mistake in this instance. The reason the modern texts omit the phrase is that it is omitted in the Egyptian texts (the Alexandrian text family). Although the Egyptian witnesses carry a lot of weight, they are not the final word on the originality of any verse. The phrase is included in the texts of every other Greek text family, and it is also in early texts other than Greek, such as the Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian texts.

When a word or phrase is in some Greek manuscripts but not in others, scholars typically use a number of tests to try to reconstruct the original text. One of those tests is, “What do the earliest texts say?” Another is, “Is there a reading that is dominant among all the various text families and the early versions that are in other languages?” A very important test is, “Which reading is the most difficult?” This is important because scribes normally took difficult readings, either difficult grammatically, or difficult to understand, and simplified them. In this verse, the “difficulty” test is very important because the early Egyptian texts omit the phrase, but from a pure “difficulty” standpoint, having the phrase as part of the verse is much more difficult than not having it. The verse reads more simply without it. Thus, the evidence of the “difficulty” test, and especially combined with the fact that only Egyptian texts omit the phrase, would lead us to conclude that the phrase is original. One thing is certain: the phrase was either invented by scribes and added to the original text, or it was original and was deleted from the original text. That leads us to the question, “Are there historical factors that would make a scribe alter the text one way or the other?” We will see that there was a reason Egyptian scribes would have deleted the phrase, “who is in heaven.”

The phrase “who is in heaven” is difficult because according to Christian tradition, the words in verse 13 were spoken by Jesus when he was in Jerusalem speaking with Nicodemus (which is not correct, as we saw above). So the fact that the verse says “who is in heaven” created a huge problem. How could the Bible say Jesus was in heaven when he was on earth speaking with Nicodemus? The scribes had an easy solution to that problem: omit the difficult words. While it is easy to see why an Egyptian scribe would want to omit those words, no one has ever been able to give a reason why any scribe would want to invent those words and put them in the Bible. There just does not seem to be any good reason why an early scribe would add “who is in heaven” to a verse that read much more clearly without it.

While the phrase “who is in heaven” seems out of place to the ordinary reader, this was even more true in Egypt, where huge debates about the Deity of Christ were going on, and where many scribes did not believe in the Trinity. At least the Trinitarian scribes believed that Jesus could be on earth and in heaven at the same time, so they would not have seen a need to modify the verse by omitting the phrase (R. C. H. Lenski is an example of a Trinitarian commentator who has no problem with Jesus being both in heaven and on earth at the same time: “…he is both here and is still in heaven.”[[41]](#footnote-26303) But to the non-Trinitarian scribes in Egypt, it would make no sense at all that Jesus could be on earth and in heaven at the same time. Thus, in Egypt, there would have been pressure to omit the difficult phrase, “who is in heaven.”

We assert, based on the tests that are usually used to determine which texts are original, and on the fact that the phrase, which properly understood does make perfect sense, that the phrase is original. The non-Trinitarian scribes in Egypt removed the phrase about the Son of Man being in heaven because they misunderstood it, and they saw it as a contradiction in the text.

But if the phrase “who is in heaven” is original, does that mean the explanation is believing in the Trinity? Absolutely not. The key to understanding John 3:13 is not that Jesus was on earth and in heaven at the same time, but rather that Jesus did not speak the words recorded in John 3:13.

As we have seen in the earlier commentary entry on this verse, there is a very simple answer to why the phrase, “who is in heaven,” is in the text: Jesus was in heaven and the words were not spoken by Jesus but penned by the apostle John as part of the narrative of the chapter. But why would the scribes, even Egyptian scribes, not have recognized that? Did the inclusion of the phrase have other implications besides the Trinity? The answer is yes, it did. Verse 13 (and also John 3:14-21) was also traditionally ascribed to Jesus because of its implications about the state of the dead. It is well understood by theologians and Bible scholars that no one could go to heaven before Jesus died and paid for the sins of mankind. Since every human has sin, if even one person could go to heaven before Jesus died for the sins of mankind, then that would mean that people could go to heaven without having had their sins paid for, and thus Jesus did not have to die to pay for sins—the death of the Messiah became unnecessary.

But in the first century, it was commonly believed that people’s souls lived on after the body died, and if the souls of righteous people, like Abraham and Sarah, could not go to heaven, where did they go? We know the Bible actually teaches that when a person dies he is dead and in the ground, awaiting the resurrection, but that truth was not solidly believed by the early church and still is not widely believed today. The Jews who were Pharisees who were getting born again and joining the early Church believed in immediate life after death, and so did the Greeks and Romans. That meant that new converts to Christianity, both Jew and Gentile, brought the belief into the Church that the soul lived on after the body died. The fact that Paul had to write about what happens when people die (1 Cor. 15) shows there was division about it even when the apostles were still alive, and soon after the death of the apostles, belief that the soul (or spirit) continued to live on after a person died was quite firmly established as orthodoxy. Thus it was, and still is, a common belief that the souls of believers who died before the time of Jesus Christ went to a place of waiting that some theologians refer to as “Paradise,” and it is supposedly similar to Abraham’s bosom in Luke 16.

According to orthodox teaching, what happened to the righteous souls in Paradise that were awaiting Jesus’ death and resurrection? They waited in “Paradise” until Jesus ascended to heaven, at which time he took all those righteous souls with him to heaven. We are now in a position to see how John 3:13 could cause problems for people who believed the soul lives on after death. Since John 3:13 says that “no one has ascended into heaven,” if Jesus himself spoke the words, then the doctrine of immediate life after death was not challenged and not threatened. Jesus was still on earth talking to Nicodemus, so the souls of righteous dead people were still waiting in Paradise. However, if verse 13 was the words of John the narrator and was written after Jesus had ascended to heaven, then the doctrine of immediate life after death has problems. If John penned the words, “no one has ascended up to heaven” long after Jesus ascended, then when Jesus ascended into heaven he did not take the righteous souls with him. There would be no reason for righteous souls to be in a “waiting area” after Jesus ascended, so if they did not go up to heaven with Jesus, then it is logical that the orthodox teaching that the soul lives on after the body dies is wrong, and that when people die they are actually fully dead and in the grave, awaiting the resurrection or Rapture (which we assert is the true teaching of Scripture).

In examining John 3:13, the textual evidence supports the conclusion that the final phrase is original: Jesus had ascended into heaven and was in heaven, but no one else was in heaven. We also assert that the textual evidence shows that Jesus did not speak the verse, but rather it is part of the narrative of the Gospel of John. That makes this verse one of many verses in the Bible that teaches that no one is in heaven. The dead are asleep until Jesus comes and raises them up at the Rapture, the First Resurrection, or the Second Resurrection.

[For more information that dead people are dead and awaiting the resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more information about Jesus Christ not being part of the Trinity, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” and also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Joh 3:14

**“just as Moses lifted up the serpent...the Son of Man was lifted up.”** Although almost all the versions treat Jesus’ lifting up as if it is future, a quick look at the Greek text shows that, from the writer’s standpoint, it is in the past. The Greek verb “to lift up” is the same for both the serpent and the Son of Man, *hupsoō* (#5312 ὑψόω), and both are in the aorist tense. The translators ignore this, believing that Jesus is the one speaking in the verse and therefore referring to his future crucifixion, but the fact is that Jesus was not saying it, John was, as part of the narration of the Gospel of John, and the crucifixion was many years in the past when John was writing.

[For verse 14 not being the words of Jesus, see commentary on John 3:13, “And no one.”]

Joh 3:15

**“life in the age *to come*.”** The Greek phrase that we translate “life in the Age to come” is *zōē aiōnios* (#2222 ζωή; #166 αἰώνιος). The word *zōē* is the noun, “life,” while *aiōnios* is the adjective, “Age.” (Occasionally the phrase occurs as *aiōnios zōē*, with the noun last; John 17:3; Acts 13:46, but that is the exception, and there is no difference in meaning).

English Bibles usually translate the phrase *zōē aiōnios* as “eternal life” or “everlasting life,” but most of the time that is not a good translation, and can even be confusing. The phrase *zōē aiōnios* (“Age life”) refers to everlasting life which begins in the Messianic Age, also known as the “Millennial Kingdom” (cf. Rev. 20:1-6).

[For more information on everlasting life, see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Joh 3:16

**“For God.”** Jesus did not speak the words of this verse to Nicodemus but they are part of the narration of the Gospel of John, penned by John long after Jesus had ascended to heaven. One way we can tell this is that John 3:16 is the teaching about how to be saved after Jesus died and resurrected, not before. When Jesus told people how to be saved when he was alive, although he did tell them to believe in him, he also told them to keep the commandments. For example, he told the rich young ruler that to have everlasting life he had to keep the commandments (Matt. 19:17). More evidence that John 3:16 is part of the narration of the Gospel of John and not Jesus speaking to Nicodemus is that the verse says, “He **gave** His only begotten Son.” This refers to Jesus’ death as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and it is referred to as a past event. But God’s giving His Son was still future when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus.

[For more on verse 16 not being the words of Jesus, see commentary on John 3:13, “who is in heaven.”]

**“so loved.”** The word “so” is a translation of the Greek word *houtō* (#3779 οὕτω), which is an adverb, and refers to “in this way” or “this much,” depending on the context. Thus, John 3:16 can open with the phrase, “God loved the world in this way: He gave....” as the Holman Christian Standard Bible does, or it could open by saying, “This is how much God loved the world: He gave....” Both meanings are in the Greek word *houtō*. In this case, both meanings are accurate. Giving His Son is both the way God showed His love, and shows us how much He loved the world. The English word “so” contains elements of both “how” and “how much,” so it is a good translation of *houtō*.

**“his only begotten Son.”** Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This is one of the strongest and clearest arguments against the doctrine of the Trinity. That Jesus is the Son of God and therefore not God is a simple concept backed up by clear texts and simple biblical vocabulary. There are many clear texts expressing that Jesus is not God. For example, Jesus called God “my God” both before and after his resurrection (Matt. 27:46; John 20:17). Jesus referred to the Father as the only true God (John 17:3). Jesus said the Father was greater than he was (John 14:28). Just as Christ is the head of the man, God is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). God made Jesus “Lord,” he was not “Lord” on his own (Acts 2:36). Jesus was “given” his authority, he did not have it by virtue of being God (Matt. 28:18). God does not “inherit” anything, He is the creator. Instead, He gives an inheritance to His created children, which is why Jesus is an “heir of God” and a “joint heir” with us (Rom. 8:17). In the future Kingdom, Jesus will be subject to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28).

[Many more simple and biblical truths like these distinguish Jesus from God. See Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord*.]

The doctrine of the Trinity is unbiblical, and when it was created by the Church it caused problems that cannot be solved with simple and straightforward logic and the vocabulary in the Bible. Almost all of the Ecumenical Church Councils dealt with problems created by the Trinity, and most ended with the people who held the majority position declaring that the minority were “heretics.” Instead of seeing the problems the Trinity was causing and admitting its error, the orthodox Church typically did two things: it called the unsolvable problems it created “mysteries,” and then it attempted to solve (or at least explain) them by technical language that is usually unbiblical and actually “explains” nothing.

Christians need to be aware of the difference between a mystery and a contradiction. In the book, *Against Calvinism*, Roger Olson explained that some of the “mysteries” created by Calvinism were not mysteries at all, but simply contradictions and absurdities. Olson wrote: “We must point out here the difference between mystery and contradiction; the former is something that cannot be fully explained to or comprehended by the human mind, whereas the latter is just nonsense—two concepts that cancel each other out and together make an absurdity.”[[42]](#footnote-27436) We feel that what Olson wrote about the mysteries of Calvinism equally apply to the “mysteries” created by the doctrine of the Trinity.

Instead of “nonsense” and “absurdity,” Richard Daane uses the term “verbalism” to refer to phrases in which words are placed together in a logically inconsistent way and have no true meaning or explanatory power. Like Olson, Daane was writing about certain aspects of Calvinism, and also like Olson, what Daane wrote applies to many of the explanations of the Trinity. Daane defined a verbalism as “a theoretical game in which words really carry no ascertainable sense and phrases no ascertainable meaning.”[[43]](#footnote-19204) Many of the so-called explanations of the Trinity are nonsensical and are mere verbalisms.

The actual biblical description of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son is simple and clear. A father gives birth to a son. A son always has a beginning. God the Father fathered Jesus Christ the Son, who had a beginning. Of course, that would mean the Trinity was not true, so Trinitarians have invented explanations so the “Son” does not have to have a beginning. Thus, the Son is called “eternally begotten.” The problem with that phrase, however, is that it is unbiblical and meaningless. By definition, “begotten” means there is a beginning. “Eternally begotten” is a nonsense phrase, a verbalism, an absurdity. In the words of Olson, “eternally” and “begotten” are “two concepts that cancel each other out and together make an absurdity.” The fact that the Bible refers to Jesus over and over again as “the Son” should be a clear indicator that the Trinity is not a true doctrine.

Because the doctrine of the Trinity states that Jesus is both fully God and fully man, it states that Jesus himself is both 100% God and 100% man. This is another mere verbalism and absurdity. It is not in the Bible, and it is mathematically impossible. But Trinitarian scholars press ahead and try to understand and explain how Jesus can be both fully human and fully God and still be “made like his brothers [fellow humans] in every way” (Heb. 2:17). They call it a “mystery” and describe it using nonbiblical vocabulary. They describe it by the phrase *communicatio idiomatum*, literally, “the communication of the idiom.” That sounds scholarly, but it does not explain anything; it simply is a way of saying in Latin that the God part and the human part of Jesus communicate. That is Trinitarian doctrine, but it is not the simple truth of Scripture.

The doctrine of the Trinity also states that Jesus is an individual “person” but also an inseparable part of “one God” made up of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is logically impossible to be an individual and yet part of one God at the same time, and this is another illogical and contradictory part of the Trinity. Again, Trinitarian scholars call this a “mystery” and describe the “individual-but-part-of-one-God” doctrine by the Greek term *perichoresis*, which basically means “mutual indwelling.” But calling the problem by a Greek name does not solve the problem. The doctrine of the Trinity creates a host of biblical problems that would not exist at all if we just believed the simple and straightforward statements of Scripture.

Another simple and biblical way we know that Jesus is not God is that many verses mention God and Jesus in the same verse as two different individuals, and other verses mention Jesus and the Father in the same verse. For example, in Acts 7:55, Jesus is standing at the right hand of “God.” Trinitarians say that in contexts like these, “God” means the Father. But where is their proof of that? The only proof they have is that it contradicts their doctrine; but it is clear and biblical. Jesus is not God, so he can be with God. If the Trinitarians were right and Jesus was “God” too, then in the same way as there are many verses that mention both Jesus and “God,” there should be verses that have “the Father” and “God,” where “God” meant Jesus. But there are none. So there are many verses where Jesus is with God (the Father), but not one single verse where the Father is with “God” (the Son). The most logical, simple, and biblical explanation for that is that the Father is God, but Jesus is not.

**“so that.”** The Greek word *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) plus the verb in the subjunctive mood shows this to be a purpose-result clause. By giving his Son, God both intended to, and His action resulted in, saving those who believe.

[See Word Study: “Hina.”]

**“will not perish.”** The Greek verb *apollumi* (#622 ἀπόλλυμι) means “perish.” There is no such thing as the “immortal soul” in the Bible. Everlasting life is a gift of God to those who believe in Him and His Son and receive that life. People who reject God and His Son die in their sin (cf. John 8:21). God gives people life—their first life—and in that life, they can believe God or reject Him. Those who reject God will “perish” as John 3:16, Romans 6:23, and many other verses testify.

The Greek verb *apollumi* is in the subjunctive mood, which is usually known as the mood of condition, reflecting an “if” or a possibility. However, in this case, the Greek word *hina* earlier in the verse forces the verb *apollumi* to be subjunctive in its grammatical mood, but not in its meaning; the meaning is determined by the context. This verse is an example of when trying to translate the Greek text literally can cause problems for an English reader. The average English Bible student reads John 3:16 in most versions, and reads something like, “that whoever believes in him should not perish.” But why the word “should?” The “should not perish” makes it seem like even if a person believes, he still might perish. He “should” not perish (or “may” not perish, as the NRSV, Darby, and Young’s Literal Translation say), but maybe he will perish. A big key in understanding John 3:16 is that the subjunctive mood in this case is due to a grammatical construction, not due to there being an “if” about our salvation. No ancient Greek reader would think there was a “should” or “may” in the verse. Some modern versions besides the REV, such as the HCSB and the NET, are translating the verse the way a Greek reader would have understood it—that if anyone believes in the Son, that person will have everlasting life.

[For more on people “perishing” in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more on the translation “life in the age to come,” see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Joh 3:17

**“send his Son into the world.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For more information on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“to condemn.”** It was not God’s purpose or intent to send Jesus into the world to condemn the world. God sent Jesus into the world to save the world. However, because of mankind’s rejection of God, Jesus will judge the world to ensure that those who accept God will have a wonderful everlasting future, and those who reject God will be condemned. However, the ones who are condemned will be so because they passed that sentence upon themselves due to their behavior.

Joh 3:18

**“name.”** See commentary on 1 John 3:23, “in the name of his Son Jesus Christ.”

Joh 3:19

**“And this is the verdict.”** The Greek word translated “verdict” can also be translated as “judgment,” and that would be a good translation if it was understood, such as “this is my judgment” (my verdict; my decision). The verdict is that people loved darkness instead of light, and they are guilty of that sin. The New American Bible also has “this is the verdict.”

Joh 3:20

**“evil.”** The Greek is *phaulos* (#5337 φαῦλος), and means, “worthless, “good for nothing,” or “evil.” It is not necessarily that the works are “evil,” but just worthless. We are created to do good works (Eph. 2:10), and if we waste our lives in that which is worthless to God, there is a consequence for that.

**“hates the light.”** In both Hebrew and Greek, the word “hate” has a large number of meanings that range from an intense dislike and hostility to a dislike for or even just ignoring something. In this verse, “hate” has all of those meanings. Ungodly people dislike the light, can be hostile to the light, reject the light, and ignore the light.

[For more on the meanings of “hate,” see commentary on Prov. 1:22.]

**“are exposed.”** The Greek is *elegchō* (#1651 ἐλέγχω ), and can mean “reprove, correct, convict.” Here the sense is more that the person is afraid he will be discovered, and then, of course, reproof would follow. The subjunctive mood of the verb comes from the preposition *hina* earlier in the phrase, but that does not demand a translation with “would” or “should” (cf. the KJV, “lest his deeds should be reproved”). The verb *elegchō* is in the aorist tense, speaking not to the fact that the discovery would be sudden or complete in one act, but rather to the fact that it would occur.

Joh 3:21

**“lives by the truth.”** The Greek text is more literally, “is doing the truth,” but that is confusing in English. The meaning is that the person “doing” the truth is living by the truth.

Joh 3:22

**“After these things, Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea.”** The “things” include what Jesus had been doing, especially in Jerusalem. After Passover, Jesus left Jerusalem but did not immediately go back to Galilee, but went into different parts of Judea. When he finally goes back to Galilee, he goes directly north through Samaria and meets the woman at the well (John 4:3-7).

Joh 3:23

**“And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim.”** John was in Aenon baptizing people, and Jesus was baptizing somewhere in Judea; the Bible does not say exactly where. It is very likely that Jesus was not ministering in one place but was moving around. This event was after Passover but before Pentecost, because John had already been arrested when Jesus was in Jerusalem at Pentecost (John 5:35).

Joh 3:25

**“*ceremonial* cleansing.”** The Greek is *katharismos* (#2512 καθαρισμός), and it refers to “cleansing,” especially ritual or ceremonial cleansing, that is, a cleansing that is ritual in nature and does not actually cleanse in and of itself. For example, baptism is a “ritual cleansing,” because no amount of washing in water will wash away sin. Yet, if God commands it, and the person obeys, then God sees the act of obedience and cleanses the person from sin.

The connection between John 3:25 and 3:26 is subtle but unmistakable. A certain Jew got into an argument with John’s disciples about ceremonial cleansing, and baptism was a type of ceremonial cleansing—it did not cleanse from sin, but it represented that the person was cleansed from sin. That discussion would have raised other questions about baptism in the minds of John’s disciples and thus made the bridge into verse 26.

Joh 3:27

**“from heaven.”** This is a circumlocution for “from God.”

Joh 3:28

**“*can* testify.”** John’s point here is not that his disciples were, in fact, testifying that he did not claim to be the Messiah, but that they could. He calls on them to be witnesses on his behalf. The Greek reads, “You all testify for me,” using the dative of advantage.

Joh 3:29

**“the friend of the groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom. In this context, the friend of the bridegroom is John himself. This is a general, not a specific, reference to the Eastern wedding, where the friend of the bridegroom is a true friend and is just happy that the bridegroom is so happy. John had been faithfully ministering and baptizing, but now “all” were going to Jesus (John 3:26). Was John envious? Not at all, and he illustrated his point by comparing his feelings to a common occurrence: the happiness of the friend of the bridegroom because the bridegroom was happy.

Joh 3:30

**“He must increase, but I must decrease.”** John would have understood that Jesus must “increase” while he must “decrease” both from the Scripture and from logic. John knew that he was the messenger and forerunner who came before the Messiah, so it would be apparent that before the Messiah came on the scene, the attention would be on John, who taught about the coming of the Messiah. But once the Messiah was present, the messenger then “decreased”; he pointed away from himself and to the Messiah, which John did (cf. John 1:29-37). John openly spoke about the Messiah being greater than he was (cf. Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16, and John 1:27).

In contrast, once the Messiah came on the scene he “increased.” His followers increased in number and his influence and activity on the earth increased, and that continued through his resurrection and ascension, after all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him (Matt. 28:18).

Joh 3:31

**“He who comes.”** There is evidence that John 3:31-35 are not a continuation of the speech of John the Baptist but are the words of the writer of the Gospel of John, who picks up the narrative after he quotes John saying, “He must increase but I must decrease” (John 3:30). For example, the statement that Jesus was “above all” was much more widely understood and demonstrable after Jesus ascended to heaven. Also, the statement in John 3:35 that God “has given all things” to the Son was true after his resurrection (Matt. 28:18).

The word “comes” is a substantivized present participle, and the phrase could be translated “The Coming One from above is above all.” The designation, “the Coming One” was an accepted designation for the coming Messiah, both before and after he came (cf. Heb. 10:37; also Rom. 5:14, which uses a different verb).

**“He who comes from above is above all.”** This phrase, and the phrase at the end of the verse, “He who comes from heaven is above all,” are saying the same thing. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is indeed “above all.” The phrases, “to come from above” and “to come from heaven” can mean that literally, for example, if the text was speaking of angels coming to earth. However, in this context, speaking of Jesus, it means to come, or be sent, from God. The fact that Jesus was sent from heaven, i.e., from God shows us that he was not God. The meaning here is the same as earlier in the chapter, John 3:2, when Nicodemus said that he and others knew Jesus was “a teacher sent from God.” Nicodemus did not think Jesus was “God” or part of the Trinity, nor did he believe Jesus “incarnated.” So what did he mean? He simply meant that he knew that Jesus was commissioned and empowered by God to do the job that God gave him, just as the prophets of old were sent by God (2 Chron. 24:19; Jer. 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 35:15; Zech. 7:12).

[For more on Jesus not being God or part of the Trinity, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“of the earth…of the earth…of the earth.”** Although this verse uses “of the earth” three times (the Greek phrase is *ek tēs gēs*), they mean different things and thus are the figure of speech antanaclasis (“word clashing”).[[44]](#footnote-16987) The figure antanaclasis occurs when a word is used in a phrase or sentence two or more times but with different meanings (e.g., “We were driving all day in a driving rain”). The one who is of the earth [in his origin and place of identity] is of the earth [in nature; the way he acts and thinks], and of the earth he speaks [he speaks about earthly matters and in an earthly way].

[See Word Study: “Antanaclasis.”]

By using the repetition of *ek tēs gēs*, John catches our attention and emphasizes the contrast between the Messiah, “the Coming One” who comes from above, and those people who are “of the earth” in their identity, actions, and speech. There is no “neutral ground” in the spiritual battle. We are either for or against Christ (Matt. 12:30; Luke 11:23), and either “of the earth” or “of heaven.” Jesus says something like John 3:31 in John 15:19 (see commentary on John 15:19).

[For more on the figure of speech antanaclasis, see commentary on 1 Sam. 1:24.]

**“comes from heaven.”** Jesus was the Messiah, sent from God. See commentary on John 6:38.

Joh 3:32

**“no one.”** The figure of speech, hyperbole, exaggeration, as the next verse shows (and we know Jesus had some disciples). The phrase “no one” hearkens back to John 3:11, that the rulers did not accept Jesus’ testimony, and also states hyperbolically that the majority of the people rejected him as well. As his ministry went on, more and more people believed in him.

Joh 3:34

**“for He continues to give *to him* the spirit without measure.”** The Greek word we translate by the phrase “continues to give” is *didōmi* (#1325 δίδωμι), which means “give.” But in this verse *didōmi* is in the present tense, active voice, so it tells us that God was constantly giving “spirit” to Jesus Christ. In this case, the “spirit” refers to the things that came through the spirit, including revelation knowledge, wisdom, and power. All through the Old Testament, when the “spirit” came upon someone, they had revelation knowledge or wisdom, or gave a message by the spirit, or had power (cf. Exod. 31:3; Num. 11:25; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6; 15:14; 1 Sam. 10:6; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 24:20). That is the case here. Jesus was continually being given “spirit,” thus revelation and power from God. It was foretold in Isaiah that the Messiah would have the spirit in that way: “And the spirit of Yahweh will rest on him—a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and power, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh” (Isa. 11:2; and see commentary on Isa. 11:2).

One of the themes in the Gospel of John is that Jesus was in close contact with the Father and was dependent upon Him and obedient to Him. Jesus made it clear in his teachings that he had not come on his own, nor did he act on his own initiative or do mighty works because of some kind of personal power (cf. John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:16, 28, 29; 12:49, 50). This intimate connection between the Father and Jesus Christ shows us how he was able to walk so perfectly before the Father. It did not make Jesus’ walk easy—he was the one who had to walk out the revelation that God gave him and constantly trust God that the revelation and power he needed for his ministry would be there—but his intimate communication and the supply of spiritual power allowed Jesus to do what he did and live the life that God had foretold the Messiah would live.

Joh 3:36

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

**“life.”** Here the word “life” refers to “life in the Age to Come,” which can be determined from the context. See commentaries on John 5:40 and Luke 10:28.

**John Chapter 4**

Joh 4:3

**“he left Judea.”** Jesus was returning to Galilee from the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem.

Joh 4:6

**“just as he was.”** The Greek is *houtōs* (#3779 οὕτως), and it means “in this manner, thus, so, in this way.” Lenski points out that in this context it means “as he was.”[[45]](#footnote-25484) As Robertson points out, the “thus” [of the KJV] refers to his weary state.[[46]](#footnote-28227) About noon, Jesus got to Jacob’s well, worn out from the trip, and sat down “just as he was” in that tired condition by the well, while his disciples went to town to buy food. Jesus was human, and got tired like all of us do. Yet even in his tired state he draws energy from his faith and conviction, and speaks with the woman at the well, then the Samaritans. Verses like this should provide great inspiration to us as Christians. When the Bible says that Jesus Christ loved us, and did his Father’s will, not his own, verses like these are the proof. Jesus pushed himself to love people and do the will of the Father, and we should follow his example.

**“the sixth hour.”** The “sixth hour” was about our noon. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

**“by the well.”** The Greek preposition *epi* (“by”) primarily means “upon.” This phrase can legitimately be translated as “upon (the curbstone of) the well.” However, as Hendriksen notes, “in view of the fact that this preposition (used here with the locative) can also have the secondary meaning *by* or *at*, which is simpler (requiring no mental insertion of words which are not actually found in the text), it is probably better to give it that meaning here, just as in John 5:2.”[[47]](#footnote-32207)

The Greek word used for “well” is *pēgē* (#4077 πηγή) and is used also in John 4:14. However, *pēgē* is different from the typical word for “well” (*phrear*; #5421 φρέαρ) that is used in John 4:11-12. *Pēgē* simply denotes a “spring or fountain,” any water source with a natural flow into it. In other words, Jacob’s well was supplied by an underground spring that gushed or flowed out into it, as distinct from other wells that had no continuous water source to supply them.

Joh 4:7

**“Give me a drink.”** This is what Abraham’s servant said to Rebekah when he met her (Gen. 24:45).

Joh 4:10

**“you would have been the one to ask.”** The emphasis in the Greek is hard to reproduce in English, but it is very important to get the impact of what is being said. In both verse 9 and verse 10 the “you” is emphatic, being expressed on its own and not as part of the verb. We might get the sense by capital letters: 9So the Samaritan woman says to him, “How is it that YOU, a Jew, ask me for a drink, since I am a Samaritan woman?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is the one who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ YOU would have been the one to ask him, and he would have given you living water.”

**“living water.”** “Living water” was water that was used for ritual cleansing from sin and impurity. According to the Old Testament and Jewish Law, and apparently Samaritan belief as well, “living water” came from God, and thus included flowing rainwater, water from a flowing river or stream, and water in a well that was constantly replenishing itself when people drew water from it. In contrast, water that sat in a cistern was not considered “living water.” Given that understanding of living water, we can see how the Samaritan woman would be confused by what Jesus said.

According to the standard definition of “living water” accepted by the Jews and apparently also by the Samaritans, the water from Jacob’s well was “living water.” So from the Samaritan woman’s point of view, she had the means to give Jesus “living water” from the well, but he did not have anything to get water from the well with and so he could not get her “living water,” but in spite of that seemingly obvious fact, Jesus said if the woman asked for it, he would give her living water. How could he do that? What we learn as the record develops (cf. John 4:14), is that when Jesus mentioned “living water” he was not using the standard Old Testament definition of the phrase “living water,” but was referring to a new kind of living water, which was a spiritual water that would result in the woman having everlasting life. That new kind of living water was related to the coming gift of holy spirit from God. In the Old Testament, the coming holy spirit was compared to water in different ways, for example, it could be “poured out” (Joel 2:28). Of course Jesus knew his answer would be confusing to the woman, but he no doubt said what he did to draw her into the conversation, which it did.

[For more on living water, see commentary on Num. 19:17.]

Joh 4:11

**“Lord.”** One of the uses of “Lord” was a title of polite address, like we today say “Sir.” This woman did not know who Jesus was at this time, but still used the polite and formal form of address.

**“nothing to draw with.”** Many wells of the time were just holes in the ground or holes with short walls of rocks to keep dirt from being kicked in. Each person who wanted water had a rope and bucket of some sort. The most common “buckets” were skin bags or “buckets” that would not break if they hit the sides of the well. Clay jugs were also used, but great care had to be taken with them so they would not break while getting the water.

Joh 4:14

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Joh 4:15

**“come all the way here.”** A brief look at how much work it took to live before modern water pumps and pipes. Just getting water to drink and cook with was hard work.

Joh 4:20

**“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain.”** The “mountain” is Mount Gerizim, which is very close to Jacob’s well. Interestingly, the Samaritan Pentateuch (the “Torah” of the Samaritans) contained a version of the Ten Commandments, but included in them was a command to worship God on Mount Gerizim. While the earliest surviving copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch is from the thirteenth century AD, the document is generally believed by scholars to date to a much earlier time, perhaps around 100 BC or a little earlier. So while the Samaritans’ actual worship on Mount Gerizim started sometime after they were brought to Samaria around 720 BC (cf. 2 Kings 17:24-33), that worship was codified into written commandments likely around 100 BC. The Samaritans considered their “Torah” (the Samaritan Pentateuch) to be authoritative, and in fact, given by God to Moses, just as the Jews believed that their Torah was given by God to Moses and was authoritative. Note that Jesus did not enter into the debate about whose “Law” was authoritative, he just said that he was the expected Messiah and demonstrated his ability to prophesy, which was all that was needed to convince the unnamed “woman at the well” that he was who he said he was.

By the time the woman at the well spoke with Jesus, the Samaritan practice of worshiping God on Mount Gerizim was a well-entrenched (but erroneous) tradition. There is a lesson in that for believers. The Church has many traditions, and most of them are helpful in that they help people keep in mind their Christian Faith and even participate in it. However, many traditions are burdensome. They were burdensome at the time of Jesus, as he pointed out (e.g., Matt. 23:4; Luke 11:46), and they can be burdensome and harmful today. While it might have been difficult at the time of Jesus to discover when and where a tradition came from, with the information and Internet that is available today, that is rarely the problem. Christians should know the origin of the traditions they follow, and feel empowered to free themselves from the pressures of keeping traditions that are burdensome or harmful.

**“the Place.”** The Jews called the Temple, “the Place,” and although the Greek word *topos* is used in other ways as well, it is used of the Temple a few times in the New Testament (cf. John 4:20, 11:48; Acts 6:13; 21:28). See commentary on Matthew 24:15, “*topos*”.

Joh 4:22

**“salvation is from the Jews.”** Salvation is “from” the Jews and “for” the whole world. By the time of Christ, and much earlier, the most direct way that personal salvation came to the world was through the Jews. God spoke to Moses and the prophets and revealed His ways to them so that by following them they could be saved, and the Jews were to spread that knowledge to the world—which to some extent they did although they certainly could have done better. We see a good example of spreading the truth when Daniel was made ruler of the Magi (Dan. 2:48; 5:11), and he obviously taught them about the savior coming from Judah, because 500 years after Daniel, when the Magi believed the Messiah had been born, they went to Jerusalem (Matt. 2:1-8). Ultimately, however, Jesus is the savior of everyone in the world, and he is a Jew, so in reality, salvation is from the Jews.

Jesus could say to the Samaritan woman, “You worship that which you do not know,” because the Samaritans really did not know the truth and thus did not worship rightly. That is exemplified in the fact that they worshiped on Mount Gerizim, not Mount Zion where the Temple was. Furthermore, they rejected all the Old Testament except the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, which meant they missed out on all the revelation from God contained in all the rest of the Old Testament. The Samaritans were genuinely unaware of, and rejected, much revelation that pointed to who and how to worship, who the Messiah was, and so much more. Thus, they ended up worshiping falsely.

Joh 4:23

**“the hour is coming and now is here.”** In John 4:23 and 4:24, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that his Messianic Kingdom on earth was about to begin. Due to 20/20 hindsight, we now know that God delayed the coming of the Messianic Kingdom on earth, but Jesus did not know that at the time.

Jesus no doubt caught the woman’s attention by using the phrase, “But the hour is coming, and now is.” This was an idiom that means either the time being referred to is coming very soon, or that it has already arrived. In this case, when Jesus said, “the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,” he was saying that the gift of holy spirit would be given very soon, and he was referring to the fact that the Old Testament said that when the Messiah came and established his kingdom on earth, the holy spirit would be poured out in a way it never had been before.

Although Jesus said, “the hour is coming, and now is,” it has now been some 2,000 years and the Kingdom has not come. As a result, some people think that Jesus must have been referring to the giving of the gift of holy spirit on the Day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, but that is not the proper interpretation of this verse for a couple of important reasons. One is that although the woman knew that the coming of the Messiah would be connected with the coming of the spirit, she would not have known anything about the Church Age and the Administration of the Sacred Secret, which was hidden in God and not known before it was revealed to the apostle Paul. Also, the Day of Pentecost was not the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament about the coming Kingdom. When we read the Old Testament prophecies such as the ones above in their full context, it can be seen that the coming of the holy spirit is associated with the coming of the Messianic Kingdom, but that Kingdom is still future, it did not come on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 14:22; 1 Cor. 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; 2 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 12:10). However, God did give the gift of holy spirit on the Day of Pentecost and started the Christian Church and the Administration of Grace, and that was a surprise to everyone, even the Devil.

**“when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”** Many prophecies in the Old Testament speak of the coming holy spirit, such as the one in Joel chapter 2 that Peter quoted on the Day of Pentecost (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21). When the spirit of God is poured out in the way the prophecies teach, people will have the gift of holy spirit and then will genuinely worship “in spirit and truth” (cf. Isa. 44:3-5; 59:19-21; Ezekiel 36:24-29).

In the Old Testament, God had promised to give a new spirit to His people as part of the New Covenant, and Jesus taught about that coming spirit in a number of places. For example, Jesus taught about the coming spirit in John 7:37-38, which the writer, John, explains in John 7:39 was Jesus teaching about the new holy spirit that God promised. Jesus used the term “living water,” and said that it would flow from believers, and “water” was occasionally used as a metaphor for “spirit” in the Bible. John 7:39 is one of the places that shows that the gift of holy spirit that God was going to give to believers was going to be so completely different from the gift of holy spirit that God put upon Old Testament believers that John 7:39 could rightly say new holy spirit—the promised holy spirit—did not exist yet.

The Old Testament prophets had foretold that a new spirit was coming in the future, one that was different from the spirit God gave in Old Testament times. It was foretold to come as part of the Messianic Kingdom and the New Covenant that God would make with Israel (Isa. 32:15-18; 44:3-5; Ezek. 11:17-21; 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29). The Old Testament prophets and Jesus foretold the coming of this new spirit, saying it would be “poured out” (i.e., given in fullness) into all the believers (Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28-29). Jesus taught about this new gift of holy spirit that was coming on a number of different occasions (cf. Luke 24:49; John 4:24; 7:37-39; 15:26; 16:7-15; 20:22; Acts 1:4-5, 8). From the contexts of Jesus’ teachings, we can see that Jesus knew that it would come before his kingdom, perhaps to help believers to endure the Great Tribulation (John 15:26-16:16).

Since many of the prophecies of the coming of this new holy spirit were in the context of the Messiah’s Kingdom and the New Covenant, it was natural for people to think that when the Messiah came the new gift of spirit would come too, but as it turned out, that was not the case. Nevertheless, the Samaritan woman connected what Jesus said about worshiping “in spirit” with the coming of the Messiah because she said, “I know that the Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things” (John 4:25). From the woman’s statement, we know that she knew at least some of the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messianic Kingdom on earth and the spirit that would come with it, and she knew that God’s people would be given a new heart and then would worship in spirit and truth.

By God’s grace, Christians have today what Jesus spoke about and what was promised to Israel, even though the promised holy spirit was not specifically promised to the Christian Church. The Christian Church was a sacred secret, part of the Administration of Grace that was hidden in God and not foretold in the Old Testament (see commentary on Eph. 3:2), but it started after God established the New Covenant with Christ’s blood (cf. Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; and Luke 22:20). God gave the gift of holy spirit to the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), and today every born-again Christian has holy spirit. So now, although God said nothing about it in prophecy, God has given the Christian Church the gift of holy spirit that He promised to give as part of the New Covenant to those in the Millennial Kingdom. That is why in Acts and the Church Epistles this new holy spirit is sometimes referred to as “the promised holy spirit” (Eph. 1:13; cf. Acts 2:33; Gal. 3:14; Rom. 8:23). God “promised” to give it as part of the New Covenant, but out of His grace He decided to give it to the Christian Church as well.

Today, when a person believes Jesus Christ is Lord (Rom. 10:9), they are “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3, 23; Titus 3:5; James 1:18), and what is born inside the Christian is this new gift of holy spirit, and because of that every Christian can worship God “in spirit.” One of the ways Christians can do that is by manifesting the spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10), including speaking in tongues and prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1-5, 23-24).

The Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the spirit in association with Christ’s earthly kingdom have not yet come to pass, but they will in the future. In the Messiah’s Kingdom there will be a complete fulfillment of all the prophecies about the spirit and about Christ’s kingdom on earth, including Israel being exalted and the land being healed.

[For more about the holy spirit as God gave it in the Old Testament and then after the Day of Pentecost, see Word Study: “Pneuma.” For more about the gift of holy spirit being “upon” in the Old Testament and “in” after the Day of Pentecost, and the differences between holy spirit in the Old Testament and after Pentecost, see commentary on Eph. 1:13, “promised holy spirit.” For more information about the Eden-like Messianic Kingdom that will be on earth in the future, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more verses in which Jesus says that his return would be soon, see commentary on Matt. 16:28. For more about the holy spirit being the gift of God and not a “Person” called “the Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on Christian New Birth, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on Christians being part of the New Covenant, see commentary on 2 Cor. 3:6, “new covenant.”]

Joh 4:24

**“must worship in spirit and truth.”** Here in John 4:24, Jesus spoke of the time coming in the future when God’s gift of holy spirit would be poured out upon all believers, and they would worship “in spirit and truth” at that future time (see commentary on John 4:23).

**“spirit.”** God is “spirit,” that is, He is an immaterial substance. The word “spirit” has many meanings. This is true in English, and also true in Hebrew (*ruach* = spirit) and Greek (*pneuma* = spirit). The Greek noun *pneuma* comes from the verb *pneō*, “to blow or breathe.” Thus, to the ancient Greeks, *pneuma* was “breath,” and it came to be associated with invisible things that exerted a force or power. Although *pneuma* is a noun, it is a “verbal noun,” (a noun that has the inherent characteristics of a verb or is grammatically related to a verb), so *pneuma* is always associated with the invisible power exercised by it. The word “wind” is a good example of a verbal noun, a noun that cannot be divorced from the power or force associated with it. There is no such thing as “wind” without action, even though “wind” is a noun. Similarly, *pneuma* is associated with its action or power. In fact, a good basic definition of *pneuma*, “spirit,” is something invisible that exerts a force. That is why some of the things that are called “spirit” in the Greek language are: God (John 4:24); the gift of God known as holy spirit (Acts 2:38); angels (Heb. 1:14); demons (Matt. 8:16); “breath” or “life” (Luke 8:55); wind; and attitudes, thoughts, or emotions (Matt. 26:41). All of these things are invisible but exert force or power.

[For more information on “spirit” and its different uses, see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Joh 4:25

**“he will tell us all things.”** That is, “explain everything to us.” The Samaritan woman expected that the Messiah would reveal the truth, explain things, and answer many long-held questions.

Joh 4:26

**“I…am *he*.”** A clear indication of Christ’s love. He clearly reveals himself to this woman, whose heart is pure and simple, so that she can believe. To others, he veiled his identity and had them search (cf. John 10:24-26).

Joh 4:27

**“with a woman.”** The Greek reads with “a woman,” not “the woman,” as some versions have. The separation between the sexes in public was such that the disciples were amazed that Jesus was speaking publicly with any woman at all.

Joh 4:28

**“left her water jar.”** The woman believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, so she left the mundane things of her life behind in order to share the news. Many of us would do well to do the same. How much “life” consumes our time and energy such that we cannot share the Messiah with others? The text notes that she left the water jar she was going to bring her water back to town in, but there were other things, such as her rope (which would have been very valuable) that she must have left also which are not mentioned. The point was not to give a laundry list of what she left behind. A reader familiar with biblical life, upon hearing she left the water she came for, would realize she left the other things as well.

Joh 4:29

**“everything.”** Of course, Jesus did not tell the woman everything she ever did. However, it is often the effect of personal prophecy that a person feels very connected to God and the one who gives the prophecy.

Joh 4:32

**“I have food to eat that you do not know about.”** It was the custom that people did not usually eat and talk. Meals were customarily eaten in silence. Thus, Jesus did not want to start eating when the people were coming to talk to him.

Joh 4:34

**“to do the will of him.”** Jesus Christ made it very plain in this verse, and a number of others, that his primary purpose was to do the will of God, not follow his own ways and accomplish his own desires. This is a simple but difficult lesson. Each Christian has an individual calling from God, and individual opportunities and limitations that make each of our lives unique. What is not unique is that each of us can either spend our time trying to please ourselves, or we can spend it trying to please God. What made Jesus so successful was that he totally turned his life over to God. He was not interested in having time off, or vacations, or finding fun things to do that he enjoyed. And he never acted like giving his whole heart and life to God was some kind of loss and burden to him, or that it was some great gift that he gave to God and should get credit for. Jesus did take time to rest and take a break from the crowds (Mark 6:31). But that was not to “have fun,” it was to get rested so quality ministering could continue; and in fact, as it turned out, that intended rest never occurred (Mark 6:33-34). Other verses that say that Jesus came to please God and do His work include: John 5:30; 6:38; 8:29.

**“who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 4:35

**“You have a saying.”** The Greek is a question that expects an affirmative answer. The evidence is that Jesus was referring to a common saying or proverb of his time. It is not attested in the literature we have found, but that would be true of many sayings today. They are not written down much and would be easily lost. We do not have much “common literature” from the time of Christ.

The evidence is good that Jesus is not making a literal statement; that is, it was not literally four months until the literal harvest. It seems clear that he was traveling in hot weather. He was tired from the travel (John 4:6), and it was about noon, so it would be understandable that he was thirsty. If he was traveling in or near summer, the harvest would have already started. If he was traveling a full four months before harvest then it would have been the rainy season and much colder, and there would be plenty of water so that he would not have had to ask a Samaritan woman for some.

Sayings about things coming later or people having to wait for things are common in most societies, such as our “All things come to those who wait” (the more modern version of which is “Good things come to those who wait”). This record seems to be a case of Jesus getting his disciples to see the urgency of the times. While they may have been accustomed to having to wait for things, or not hurry to get things done, Jesus tells them that they do not have a lot of time and they cannot “just wait” for the harvest, the harvest fields are ready now, and they need to be diligent to harvest while they can. The same can be said for us today. We cannot be fooled into thinking we have lots of time to evangelize and can take our time. Our time may be short, and anyone with whom we would like to speak may not have much time either.

**“Listen!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“white to harvest.”** While it was true that the grains turned from green to a pale golden-white color as they were ripe to harvest, that was not what Jesus was referring to. The men of the city were coming to meet him, and their robes would have been the whitish color of the standard robe of the day.

Joh 4:38

**“Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”** Although this statement is a general statement, in this context it applies to the fact that the woman at the well was the one who went into the city and was so convincing that people came out to talk with Jesus, and the disciples then helped convince the people that Jesus was the Christ.

Joh 4:45

**“because they had seen.”** The participle of the verb “seen” is causative (cf. HCSB; Lenski[[48]](#footnote-18524)). Many of the Galileans would have gone to the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread that had just occurred in Jerusalem (John 2:13-3:12). Jesus did many signs at the Passover, and so many people believed that he was the Messiah (John 2:23). Perhaps they also saw, or heard about, him turning over the moneychanger’s tables and driving the animals out of the Temple (John 2:13-16). What Jesus did at the Passover opened doors for him in Galilee, and the people welcomed him. A powerful lesson in this record is that if we make a good, powerful impression on people in one place, it can open doors for us in another place or time. We never know how obeying God and being godly and loving in our daily life will open doors for us that otherwise might have been closed.

**“feast…feast.”** This refers to the Feast of Passover.

Joh 4:47

**“down.”** This is literal. See commentary on John 4:49, “come down.”

Joh 4:49

**“come down.”** This is quite literal. Capernaum was almost 700 feet below sea level. Most people know that the Dead Sea is the lowest spot on the face of the earth. The surface of the Dead Sea is almost 1300 feet below sea level. But the Sea of Galilee is also below sea level, almost 700 feet, and Capernaum is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Joh 4:52

**“seventh hour.”** About our 1 p.m. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Joh 4:54

**“second sign.”** Jesus had done signs in Judea, and this was the second one he did in Galilee. John 2:23 says he did “signs” (plural). Besides that, he demonstrated his prophetic ministry to Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John 4). When Jesus did return to Galilee, the people welcomed him because they had seen the signs he did in Jerusalem at the Feast of Passover (John 4:45). This second sign in Galilee was a healing.

**“when he had come out of Judea into Galilee.”** This was not Jesus’ second sign, but his second sign in Galilee. John does not include the signs he did in Judea in this counting (cf. John 2:23), and we can certainly assume that some of the signs in Judea were healings.

**John Chapter 5**

Joh 5:1

**“there was a feast of the Jews.”** It is very likely that this feast was the Feast of Weeks, called “Pentecost” in Acts 2. Why it is not named is not stated.

**“and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.”** John 5:1-18 is the record of Jesus healing a crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda, and a case where it was clear that he purposely broke the Jew’s tradition about the Sabbath to teach the people (and us) that God valued people more highly than man-made laws (see commentary on John 5:9 and Matt. 12:9).

Joh 5:2

**“a pool that in Hebrew is called Bethesda.”** Although the name “Bethesda” is debated, it very likely means “house of mercy” (or “house of grace” or “house of outpouring”) which is certainly an appropriate name for a healing center. The Pool of Bethesda was north of Herod’s Temple in Jerusalem. It apparently started in the eighth century BC when a dam was built across the Beth Zeta valley, turning it into a reservoir for rainwater.[[49]](#footnote-25249) Around 200 BC the channel was enclosed and a second pool was added. In the first century BC, possibly when the Romans controlled Jerusalem via their vassal king, Herod the Great, the area was enlarged and turned into a healing center, and quite likely an Asclepion, a healing center named after Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine and doctors. After the Gospel period, the area of the Pool of Bethesda went through many modifications, for example, Emperor Hadrian (reigned AD 117-138) built a temple to Asclepius there.

Being healthy and pain-free was as important to people in the ancient world as it is to people today, but ancient medicine was of limited effectiveness at best, so people understandably turned to God and the gods for healing. One god the Greeks turned to for healing was Asclepius. Asclepius’ healing was associated with water, especially water from natural springs, and he was also associated with snakes, so he is depicted in Greek art as a man with a snake on a walking staff or pole (the modern symbol of doctors and medicine, a snake on a pole, comes from the god Asclepius).

The Greeks had Asclepions—healing centers—built all over their empire, and the Romans built some too (and there were also other healing centers as well). The Asclepions attracted sick people, who would go there and stay, hoping for healing. It was common for people to stay there for long periods of time, sleeping there at night. Healing centers typically had shaded areas so extended stays could be comfortable. Asclepions had pools of water for people to get into and get healed. It was thought that often when Asclepius or one of his healing snakes was making healing available they would stir the water and make it bubble or ripple. People wanting healing would stay close to the pools waiting for the water to stir, which could happen supernaturally, but would sometimes occur naturally when water from the spring or water source caused bubbles or ripples in the pool. As people waited, they would often fast, pray, or chant, and when the water stirred they would do their best to hurry and get into it to be healed.

The Gospel of John gives us enough information to realize that the Pool of Bethesda could well have been an Asclepion or Asclepion-like pagan healing center—it certainly was by AD 135, at the time of Hadrian. It was obviously a place of healing because there was a multitude of sick people there wanting to be healed (John 5:2). Some of them slept there (the man Jesus healed had a bed there; John 5:8-11). It was comfortably shaded by five covered areas (John 5:2). Also, the people there were waiting for the water to be stirred (John 5:7). That the pool was a pagan healing center may also play into why Jesus said to the lame man, “Do not sin anymore, lest something worse happen to you” (John 5:14). If the man was seeking his healing from a pagan god, and turned his heart away from the true God, that would have been sin, and if it changed his heart deeply enough it could affect his salvation.

The pagan nature of the Pool of Bethesda can be seen because the Jews had no tradition of having healing centers with water whereas that was a mainstay of the Greeks and Greco-Roman culture. Also, the idea that healing would be available when the water stirred was thoroughly Greek, not Jewish. Yet we can see why such a healing center would attract Jews. In the same way that Baal, the Canaanite storm god, attracted Jews who wanted good weather for crops, when people needed healing and God did not seem to heal them, in desperation they would sometimes turn to pagan gods of healing.

In going to the Pool of Bethesda and healing a man there on the Sabbath, Jesus showed God was greater than the pagan gods and also was more merciful than the Jewish religion of the time. The pagan gods of healing had been ineffective in healing this man who had been sick for 38 years, longer than most people even lived at that time in history, but Jesus healed him with a word: “Get up, pick up your pallet, and walk” (John 5:8). Furthermore, Jesus healed on the Sabbath, showing that God did not support the restrictions that certain Jews had put on the Sabbath (Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7; John 9:16), for example, that no one was to heal on the Sabbath. Those ungodly regulations limited God’s mercy and power, and Jesus showed that God was merciful and powerful every day of the week.

Joh 5:3

See commentary on John 5:4.

Joh 5:4

**“For an angel went down.”** The last sentence in John 5:3 (that occurs in some versions such as the King James) and John 5:4 were added to the text as an explanatory note. They were not part of the original text (see commentary on John 5:5).

Joh 5:5

**“And a certain man was there.”** The evidence is very conclusive that the last phrase in John 5:3, and all of John 5:4 are not part of the original text. The added material is, “waiting for the moving of the water, for an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.” This addition comes from Greek mythology, and this kind of healing was a very common mythology at the time of the transmission of the New Testament. It is perfectly logical that as Greeks became converts to Christianity they would bring their understanding of how that healing by the Greek gods occurred, and thus that addition would get into the text as it was copied through the years.

The textual evidence that the sentence is not original is very solid. The phrase does not occur in the earliest and best-preserved Greek manuscripts, and many Greek manuscripts that include the sentence have markings to show it was added. Also, the Greek sentence has words and expressions that are not Johannine. It is not in most modern English versions, although some have a footnote that it is in some ancient authorities. Modern Bibles that omit John 5:4 include the ERV, ESV, NAB, NIV, NLT, and NRSV, and versions that have the verse in italics or brackets include the AMP, ASV, CJB, and NASB.[[50]](#footnote-24669)

The information that became John 5:3b-4 likely started as a marginal note that explained John 5:7 about the water being stirred. There is evidence from the Church Father Tertullian (AD 145-220) that he knew of the tradition or belief that an angel stirred the water. At some point, then, the marginal note beside John 5:7 got copied into the text and became the John 5:3-4 of some of the early English versions, such as the KJV.

All the early manuscripts were handwritten, and when a scribe would accidentally omit a word or phrase, the only way to preserve it was to write it in the margin of the text, hoping that the next scribe could copy it back into the text. But this practice created a problem because sometimes marginal commentary written by scribes to explain the text got copied into manuscripts as if they were part of the original text. Thankfully today, due to the fact we now have discovered over 5,700 Greek manuscripts and we can compare them all by computer, most added material can be decisively determined to be an addition and taken out of the modern versions, and that is the case with John 5:3b-4.

Joh 5:7

**“I have no one to put me into the pool.”** Here we see the effects of long-term pain and frustration. One might think that when a man who had been sick for 38 years was asked if he wanted to be healed, he would have gotten excited and said, “Yes! And the sooner the better!” But instead the man never even answered Jesus’ question. Instead, he complained that he did not have the help he needed. Being debilitated and/or in pain for many years leads to despondency and hopelessness. Caregivers and pastors need to overlook that hopelessness just like Jesus overlooked it, and press forward in attempts to get the person to help themselves overcome their situation.

Joh 5:8

**“pick up your pallet.”** See commentary on Matthew 9:6.

Joh 5:9

**“became healthy.”** As soon as Jesus commanded it, the man was made well; he was healed. Some English versions use the phrase, “made whole,” but that seems to be overstating the case. Apparently, the man still had some kind of problem with sin because later, Jesus looked for him and found him in the Temple, and warned him not to sin any longer.

**“Now it was *the* Sabbath on that day.”** There were six incidents in the ministry of Jesus in which he showed that taking care of people was not considered “work” by God and thus was more important than keeping rules about the Sabbath that were made by humans. The six incidents were picking grain on the Sabbath and five healings (see commentary on Matt. 12:9).

There were times when Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath and he healed a person who happened to be there that day, which is what happened with the man whose hand was withered (cf. Matt. 12:9-14). But in this case, it was obvious to everyone that Jesus purposely chose the Sabbath to heal the crippled man, and that was a direct assault against the traditions of the Jews. The Jews responded by seeking to kill him, which they eventually accomplished. Throughout history, the work of God has been accomplished by men and women who were willing to make great sacrifices to obey God—sacrifices that sometimes cost them their lives. The names would number in the thousands, including such stars as the apostles, Joan of Arc, William Tyndale, and on and on. God exhorts us to give our bodies as living sacrifices to do His work (Rom. 12:1-2).

Joh 5:10

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“the man who was cured.”** The Greek is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun), and simply reads, “The Jews said to the cured,….”

[For more on substantives, see commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

**“it is not lawful.”** Jesus told the man to take up his bed and walk, and Jesus never sinned and never broke the Law. We learn many things from this record. God never said a person could not be healed on the Sabbath (cf. Luke 13:14), nor did He say that it was unlawful for a person to carry his bedroll on the Sabbath. Through the years, the religious leaders had declared more and more things to be unlawful on the Sabbath, and in doing that they laid heavy burdens upon the people (Matt. 23:4). Jesus taught us by example that just because some regulation or practice is “religious” or enforced by religious people does not mean it is godly.

This record also shows the subtle way that Jesus made that point clear. He knew it was the Sabbath when he healed the man and told him to carry his bedroll. He also knew the regulations the religious leaders had declared to be “law,” but he was not worried about offending them. Instead, he was concerned for the lame man, including where he might sleep if he had to leave his bedroll behind (which also may have been stolen by someone who did not obey the Law). So by simply ignoring the unrighteous laws of man, he helped people and set them free from their ungodly burdens. Of course what he did offended the religious leaders, and no doubt also made many people nervous and uncomfortable because no one enjoys a fight with the religious establishment, but each one of us has to decide whether we are living to please God or people.

Joh 5:14

**“Do not sin anymore, lest something worse happen to you!”** It is possible that Jesus is saying that if the man continued in sin, he would get a worse sickness than he had had, but that seems unlikely. During that ancient time, there would have been very few sicknesses worse than being lame for 38 years. It is much more likely that Jesus has in mind sinning and thus not being saved and suffering death in the Lake of Fire. Everlasting death is much worse than being lame for 38 years.

Joh 5:15

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Joh 5:16

“**And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus**.” Jesus did the notable and very public healing of the lame man on the Sabbath at the Pool of Bethesda, and the Jews started to persecute Jesus. The text does not state exactly how the Jews were persecuting Jesus, but it would have been multifaceted, and we can tell from the context that it also included plots to kill Jesus. Jesus responded to the Jews by saying, “My Father is always working, and I am *always* working” (John 5:17). What Jesus was saying by that was that God was always working, even on the Sabbath Day, and so he, too, would work on the Sabbath day. Jesus’ refusal to do things “their way” so angered the religious leaders that they redoubled their efforts to kill him (John 5:18). The “Jews” in John 5:16 are the religious leaders and those who oppose God and Christ. This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” (see commentary on John 1:19).

**“because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.”** Some Greek texts add the phrase “and sought to kill him,” and that addition got into some English Bibles such as the King James, which reads, “And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.” However, the textual research that can be done today, with the large number of texts available to us and the use of computers to compare them reveals that the phrase about killing Jesus was added, which is why almost no modern version of the Bible contains it.

Apparently, scribes added the phrase about killing Jesus to make John 5:16 harmonize with John 5:18. Philip Comfort writes: “The addition in the variant reading is a harmonization to the immediate context (see 5:18), where nearly the same expression occurs. This harmonization was included in the TR [Textus Receptus] and then rendered in the KJV and NKJV.”[[51]](#footnote-13648)

Joh 5:17

**“is always working.”** The verb working is in the present tense, which in this context is a durative present[[52]](#footnote-14186) and thus the word “always” is implied in the verb in this context, or as Neuman and Nida assert, the phrase “until now” means “always;” God has always been at work, without taking a break (cf. NIV: “My Father is always at His work”). The Jews were upset with Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath. Jesus’ answer to them was short and to the point. God is always working, even on the Sabbath, and so is His Son, Jesus. That is why the Jews correctly concluded that he was making himself equal with God. Not identical with God, but equal with Him, as His Son, in the way he operated.

Joh 5:18

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“but also was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”** This verse shows us that Jesus knew who he was and what he was doing. Some theologians teach that Jesus either never claimed to be the promised Messiah, or that he only took on the role of Messiah when he realized that the people thought he was the Messiah. But the truth is that Mary and Joseph knew Jesus was the Messiah and raised Jesus that way, and every indication in Scripture is that Jesus knew he was the Messiah, taught that to his disciples, and lived his life in obedience to the will of his heavenly Father.

Some Trinitarians claim that John 5:18 is evidence that Jesus was God because it speaks of Jesus making himself equal with God. But that is not what the verse is saying. The people in the time and culture of the Bible knew that children often carried the authority of the family. For example, the son of a king had great authority. The Jews knew that if Jesus was claiming that God was his Father, then he was also claiming to be the Messiah, and had authority both in this age and in the age to come (Psalm 2:7-12; 110:1-4; Isa. 9:6, 7). The Jews correctly caught Jesus’ meaning, but incorrectly ascribed some kind of independent authority to him, which likely came from their own desire to be out from under any authority.

Actually, John 5:18 is unsupportive of the doctrine of the Trinity. It accurately records that Jesus was saying that “God” was his father, not that he was himself God, or that he was “God the Son.” Jesus’ authority came from the fact that he was the Son of God, not God Himself.

There are a couple ways to interpret and understand John 5:18, and neither supports the Trinity. One is that Jesus was “equal” to the Father in a limited sense because in that culture children carried the authority of the family, and that interpretation is certainly correct. It is also possible that the Jews were claiming that Jesus was making himself equal with God in a more extended sense than Jesus was actually saying, and they were wrong—Jesus did not act independently of the Father’s will and direction.

Jesus was no doubt making himself equal to the Father in a limited sense. This is clear from reading John 5:19-47. For example, in John 5 he spoke of people honoring the Son just as they honored the Father. As to an example of his authority, he spoke about dead people hearing his voice and coming up out of the graves, but Jesus made it clear that the authority he had came to him from God (John 5:22).

The fact that the Jews claimed Jesus was making himself “equal” with God has been misunderstood in the Christian world. Most of the time when two things are “equal,” and all the time when people are considered “equal,” the word “equal” is being used in a limited sense and does not refer to a complete equality. The orthodox Christian world teaches that because Jesus was “equal” to God, he was God. But that is not what “equal with God” means in this context: not to Jesus, not to the Jews, and thus it should not mean that to Christians. “Equality” only means equality in certain respects; equality is not “identity.”

The concept of equality in only certain respects is found in a number of places in the Bible. For example, when Joseph was ruling Egypt under Pharaoh, Judah said to him, “You are equal to Pharaoh” (Gen. 44:18 NASB, NIV; cf. Gen. 41:40). But it is obvious that what was being considered “equal” was Joseph’s authority in the kingdom, and even that was not truly equal. Also, Paul wrote about men who wanted to be considered “equal with us” (2 Cor. 11:12), but again, not equal in every respect, only as to the honor and authority Paul had. In the parable of the laborers in the field (Matt. 20:1-16), the owner paid everyone the same no matter how long they had worked, and the people who had worked all day complained and said that the owner had made the other workers “equal to us,” but that only meant that their pay was the same.

Joseph and Pharaoh, Paul and his opponents, and the workers in the field were “equal,” but were certainly not “of one substance,” nor were they “one being.” John 5:18 means the same thing as the other verses that mention equality—equality in some aspects. Jesus was using God’s power and authority on earth and was thus “equal” to God in the same way Joseph, who was using Pharaoh’s authority and power, was equal to Pharaoh.

Another way we know that when the Jews thought Jesus was “equal” to God they did not think it meant he was God was that they never questioned him about being God. They understood he was claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and they questioned him about that several times: “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24; cf. Luke 22:67; Matt. 26:64). But they never once asked him to clarify any claim to be God.

From the way Jesus answered the Jews, it also seems clear that they were claiming that Christ was saying more than he actually was saying, that somehow he had an independence from God that he did not in fact have. For the rest of John 5, Jesus makes it very clear that his Father is greater than he was and that he obeyed his Father. In fact, that is so much the case that it is really impossible to correctly interpret John 5:19-47 without seeing it in the greater context of Jesus refuting the claim of the Jews that he was equal with God in some way that he was not claiming to be.

So in fact the two explanations above are both true: Jesus was saying he was the Son of God, which gave him some equality with God in his authority, but also the Jews, in their attempts to defame Jesus, were exaggerating what he was saying and telling people that he was claiming to have power and authority that, in fact, Jesus never claimed, and Jesus was refuting that point.

[For more discussion on this verse see, Charles Morgridge*, True Believer’s Defense Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians*, 1837, p. 118; and *The Racovian Catechism* (in Polish 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818, p. 133). Both books are available through Spirit & Truth. See also Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition.*]

Joh 5:19

**“the Son is not able to do anything on his own.”** This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his Father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

**“the Son also does in the same way.”** Cf. NRSV, “likewise.” The Greek is *homoiōs* (#3668 ὁμοίως), meaning, “likewise, so, similarly, in the same way.”[[53]](#footnote-16345)

Joh 5:20

**“is a friend to.”** The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the verb *phileō* in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say “the Father loves the Son,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of *phileō* here. We could say, the Father is friendly to the Son,” or “the Father is fond of the Son,” but these seem too weak. We meet “friendly” people all the time, but they are not friends. We could say the Father “befriended” the Son, but the verb in Greek is in the present tense, and “befriended” seems to be a past action. “Is a friend to” aptly carries the meaning of the Greek text into English.

[For a more complete understanding of *phileō* and how it is different from *agapē* love, see commentary on John 21:15.]

**“and shows him all *the* things that he is doing.”** Jesus got his guidance from God and did what God told him to do, and he taught that over and over, giving the glory to God. In John 8:28 he said, “I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things” (for more examples, see commentary on John 8:28).

**“so that.”** Purpose-result clause. These works are done for the purpose of marveling, and are performed with the result that people marvel.

[See Word Study: “Hina.”]

Joh 5:22

**“but he has given all judgment to the Son.”** On Judgment Day, it is God’s appointed judge, Jesus Christ, who will do the judging. Jesus knew this was going to be the case even before his death and resurrection, so he said, “…the Father does not judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son.” Paul also taught that Jesus was going to be the one to do the judging (e.g., Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16). However, Jesus tells us that he will judge (John 5:22) but he will judge according to what he hears from the Father (John 5:30).

Joh 5:23

**“the Father who sent him.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 5:24

**“is hearing…is believing.”** Both the verbs “hearing” and “believing” are in the present tense, active voice, meaning the action is currently occurring. It is important to remember when reading the Gospels that there was no New Birth with its guarantee of salvation before the Day of Pentecost; the New Birth is an aspect of the Administration of Grace. In the Old Testament and Gospels, a person had to maintain his faith to be saved, so the fact that the hearing and believing were a current reality is important to the proper understanding of the verse.

[For the guarantee of Christian salvation, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:23, “born again.”]

**“him who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“does not come.”** The verb *erchomai* (“does come” #2064 ἔρχομαι ) is in the present tense. The Gospel of John has a constant tension between the present and the future, and that tension is well represented in this verse, since the person “has crossed over” (past tense), “does not come” (present tense), and “has” (present tense), “life in the Age to come” (which will be fully manifested in the future when the “Age to come” arrives). The person is hearing Jesus and believing in God, and according to Jesus, believing was the work that God required to have everlasting life. Jesus said, “This is the work of God: that you believe in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29). If we were to translate the verbs in John 5:24 quite literally, the verse would read something such as this: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who is hearing my word and is believing him who sent me has, at this time, life *in the* Age *to come*, and does not come into condemnation, but has crossed over from death into life.”

Because “the one who is hearing my word and is believing him who sent me” was believing at that time, he has everlasting life at that time too (of course, if he quits believing, his everlasting life is not guaranteed). The present/future tension in the Bible is a challenge to translators as well as believers. We have to take the time to learn what God is trying to tell us when He goes back and forth between the past, present, and future. In this case, although the Day of Judgment is future, God is continually reckoning people’s sins and their good works, so although a person’s judgment and condemnation (or exoneration) will not be fully realized until the Day of Judgment, there is a sense in which that condemnation is happening today, and the Greek communicates that sense by having “does not come” in the present tense.

In translating the verse, some versions place the emphasis on the fulfillment of the judgment, which will occur on the Day of Judgment, and therefore have that the believer “will not” be condemned (cf. HCSB, NET, NIV). Other versions more literally follow the Greek text and say the believer “does not” come under condemnation, meaning that he is not piling up sins that will be condemned on the Day of Judgment and thus he will not be condemned on that great Day (cf. ESV, NASB, NRSV).

Another thing to pay attention to in the verse is that it does not say, “believes **in** him who sent me,” but “believes him who sent me.” Many people believe “in” God but do not demonstrate that they believe God by doing what He says to do. By hearing and believing Jesus we are hearing and believing God. John 5:30; 14:10 teaches us that Jesus’ words are God’s words.

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Joh 5:25

Here in John 5:25 Jesus used the phrase, “the hour is coming, and now is,” which is an idiom that means the time being referred to is coming very soon, or has actually already come (cf. John 16:32). Given that fact, how are we to understand Jesus’ use of this idiom when the event Christ referred to, the dead being raised, has not occurred? In many different contexts Jesus taught that his Second Coming and the Kingdom of God were very close, but as it has turned out, God, for reasons of His own that we do not fully understand, delayed the Second Coming of Christ. However, when the Second Coming and the Messianic Kingdom on earth does happen, the dead will be raised and all the other prophecies about that time will be fulfilled, just as God promised (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12; Dan. 12:2, 13; Hos. 13:14; Rev. 20:4).

[For more verses in which Jesus says that his return would be soon, see commentary on Matt. 16:28. For more information about the Eden-like Messianic Kingdom that will be on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“live.”** This refers to living forever. See commentary on Luke 10:28.

Joh 5:28

**“in the tombs.”** This verse, among many others, clearly shows that when a person dies, he is dead in the ground. Jesus did not think, or teach, that when a person died only his body went into the ground, but his soul (or spirit) went to “heaven” or “paradise.” The people are in the tombs, and they will be resurrected to life from being dead in the ground.

Joh 5:29

**“resurrection of life.”** The “resurrection of life” is also called the “first resurrection” and the “resurrection of the righteous.” The word “life” is sometimes used for “everlasting life” or “life in the Age to Come.” Here, when Christ says the “resurrection of life,” he is referring to life that will last forever. Most Christians misunderstand the verses about the resurrection because they think dead people are already alive in heaven or hell. In that case, why have a resurrection? It is Christian tradition that the soul or spirit lives on after the death of the body. The Bible says the dead are fully dead until they are raised from the dead at the Rapture or a resurrection.

[For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on the dead being dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**“evil”** The Greek is *phaulos* (#5337 φαῦλος), and its semantic range includes “worthless, good for nothing, bad, evil” Here the emphasis seems to be on evil, but it should not be lost on the reader that there is a more common word for evil, and *phaulos* includes the meaning “worthless.” The works of unsaved people do not have to be completely evil, they can just do worthless things all their lives and not get saved. God created humankind to obey Him and do good works (Eph. 2:10), and if we waste our lives in that which is worthless to God, or practice evil things, there is a consequence for that.

Joh 5:30

**“I am not able to do anything on my own.”** This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his Father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

**As I hear, I judge.** This statement shows how closely Jesus walked with the Father. His life involved constant judgments, and thus constant communication with the Father.

**“I do not seek *to do* my own will.”** Jesus Christ made it very plain in a number of verses that his primary purpose was to do the will of God, not follow his own ways and accomplish his own desires. See commentary on John 4:34.

**“him who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 5:35

**“you were willing to rejoice for a short time in his light.”** Jesus speaks in the past tense, “you were willing,” which indicates that John (John 5:33) had already been arrested. Jesus points to the time of John’s ministry as “an hour,” which indicates that it was likely not very long, but just how long is never stated in the Bible. John started his ministry before Jesus, but we don’t know how long before Jesus. It seems it could have been a few years at most, and was likely shorter than that.

Since John 5 is almost certainly referring to the Feast of Pentecost, which usually occurs in June, and John the Baptist was already arrested, then John would have been arrested between Passover, which usually occurred in April, and Pentecost, and likely much closer to Pentecost. It was after John the Baptist was arrested (Matt. 4:12, 17; Mark 1:14) that Jesus started preaching and telling people to repent because the Kingdom of Heaven (also called the Kingdom of God) had drawn near (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15).

[For more information on the chronology, see commentary on Matt. 4:12.]

Joh 5:36

**“that the Father sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 5:37

**“the Father that sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“You have never heard his voice at any time nor seen his form.”** The key to understanding what Jesus is saying here in John 5:37 is that he is talking with the ungodly religious leaders in Jerusalem who were persecuting him (John 5:16) and trying to kill him (John 5:18). Those leaders did not have the word of God living in them, and they did not believe in Jesus (John 5:38), in fact, they did not want to come to Jesus to receive everlasting life (John 5:40). They did not have the love of God inside them (John 5:42), and they were not seeking glory from God but welcomed the glory given to them by one another (John 5:44).

The Bible is full of examples of people who heard the voice of God and/or saw the form God takes when he appears in human form. But God does not generally appear to ungodly people, and that is the case here in John 5:37. In fact, Jesus’ words, “You have never heard his voice at any time nor seen his form” should have been a stinging rebuke to these leaders and caused them to question whether they were living godly lives that were pleasing to God. Godly leaders throughout the ages heard God’s voice: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, and many more. The fact that these leaders had not heard Him should have caused them to reconsider their thoughts and actions, but they were too hard-hearted for that.

This verse (and there are many others like it), is a problem for Christians who have been taught that no one has ever seen God. Actually, God does come into concretion in a human form that we can see and understand. He does this so that He can better relate to His creation. God created humankind so He could intimately fellowship with us, so it is reasonable that He occasionally becomes visible and takes on human form to be intimate with His creation. There are Old Testament verses in which Yahweh appears in the form of a man, and those appearances continue in the New Testament. Scripture records a number of people to whom God appeared: Adam and Eve (they heard His footsteps, Gen. 3:8), Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1), Jacob (Gen. 28:13), Moses and the elders of Israel (Exod. 24:9-11), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), Solomon (two times: 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; cf. 1 Kings 11:9), Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-22), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26-28), Amos (Amos 7:7), Daniel (Dan. 7:9-14), Stephen (Acts 7:56) and the apostle John (Rev. 5:1-8). In contrast to many great men and women of God who saw God in a visible form, Jesus upbraided the unbelieving Jews by saying: “You have never heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form” (John 5:37).

[For more on God taking on human form, see commentary on Gen. 18:1 and Acts 7:55.]

Joh 5:38

**“him whom he sent.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 5:39

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

**“those are the ones that testify about me.”** The Old Testament testified about Christ and what he would accomplish in many different ways (cf. Luke 24:27)

Joh 5:40

**“life.”** This refers to “everlasting life”. See commentary on Luke 10:28.

Joh 5:44

**“How are you able to believe.”** In this context, belief comes through honestly following the evidence to a logical conclusion. However, if a person does not honestly and correctly follow the evidence they will never be able to find and believe the truth. That is the case here. “The Jews,” i.e., the religious leaders, sought and accepted glory (honor and praise) from one another and not from God. Hence they were never able to believe in the true God.

**“the only God?”** John 5:44 provides important support for Biblical Unitarianism, which is the belief that there is only one God, the Father, and that Jesus Christ is the created Son of God.

John 5:44, along with John 17:3, are two places where Jesus calls the Father, the only God. Jesus never once from his own lips claims to be God, but instead, he claims that God the Father is the only God.

A few translations such as the KJV, translate this phrase in John 5:44 as “seek not the honour that *cometh* from God only?” Perhaps the reason for that translation is to avoid Jesus calling the Father the only God, but in any case, “from God only” is not the correct way to translate the Greek text. The translation “*cometh* from God only” makes “only” modify “*cometh*” (or “comes,” cf. CJB), and that word although implied and properly supplied in italics, does not actually exist in the Greek text. To put it more clearly, this is how that translation is actually translating the text: “seek not the honour that *cometh* only from God?” However, this is not accurate. The adjective “only” τοῦ μόνου (#3441 *monos*) modifies God. This is clearly seen because they are both in the genitive case and “only” is placed right before “God” in the sentence. “Only” is not an adverb modifying “comes” and should not be translated as it is in the KJV or CJB. It is an adjective modifying God (i.e., “the only God”).

That Jesus would call his Father “the only God” in John 5:44 is strong evidence that Jesus did not consider himself to be God, but knew that the Father is the only true God.

[For more on Jesus Christ not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**John Chapter 6**

Joh 6:1

**“After these things.”** The feeding of the 5,000 is in all four Gospels (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-13. The feeding of the 4,000 is in Matt. 15:29-39; Mark 8:1-10).

**“The other side.”** In this context, the “other side” is the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew 14:13 and Mark 6:32 refer to the place as a “solitary place,” and Luke 9:10 tells us it was the city of Bethsaida, so the “solitary place” would have been someplace outside of Bethsaida but near it. John 6:3 says Jesus was on a mountain, and just east of Bethsaida are the mountains of the Golan Heights. Jesus would have been on the lower slopes of one of those mountains east of Bethsaida.

**“which is *the Sea* of Tiberias.”** The “Sea of Galilee,” which is actually a lake, not a sea or ocean, was also called “the Sea of Tiberias” because Tiberias was the largest and most important city on the lake. Technically, a “sea” is a body of salt water, while a lake is a body of fresh water. The “Sea of Galilee” is fresh water, but it was named before the Europeans who called it a “sea” had been there and learned that it was not a “sea.” The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), translated as “sea” in most English Bibles, is not specific about being or not being salt water.

Joh 6:2

**“because they saw the signs that he was doing.”** Note that the crowd was following Jesus because of the signs he was doing, not because of the word of God that he was teaching. Some people are attracted to accurate teaching, but signs and wonders generally bring more people, even if it is just because they are curious at first. Signs and wonders have always been a great “calling card” to get people's attention and draw them to God and Jesus Christ. Although Christians may not see a lot of healings or miracles, we can always pray for people and expect the best for them. Many times those prayers are followed by signs, miracles, and wonders, or God showing up in the life of the person in some other way. Christians need to learn to pray for people, and then be bold and aggressive to do it.

Joh 6:3

**“Jesus went up onto the mountain.”** Just east of Bethsaida are the mountains that make up the Golan Heights. Jesus would have left Bethsaida, where he and the apostles had docked, and walked east up the mountain there.

Joh 6:4

**“the Passover.”** The words, “the Passover” are in the Greek text. Nevertheless, there is evidence that at some point in history they were improperly supplied. There is ancillary evidence that the ministry of Jesus Christ was just over a year. The pattern in the biblical text of the Gospels is that Jesus received the holy spirit at his baptism, which was likely two to four months before the Passover in John 2, and died the next Passover. The evidence for the year Jesus was born, the year he died, and the length of his ministry is not conclusive, and so at this time, there is some uncertainty about them. Nevertheless, when it comes to the length of time of Jesus’ ministry, it seems that the evidence weighs heavily in favor of a ministry that is just over a year.

Part of the evidence supporting the idea that Jesus’ ministry was just over a year is that if it was, then we can construct a basic overview of his ministry from the chronological events in the text. On the other hand, if Jesus had a three-year ministry, as is commonly believed, then there is no way to do a harmony of the Gospels and construct where Jesus traveled during his ministry. Most theologians believe Jesus had a three-year ministry and that there is no way to reconstruct his travels, which is why there are no serious attempts to reconstruct a chronology of the travels of Christ.

However, if the two Passovers in the Gospels mark out the vast majority of his ministry, then we can fit together all the other feasts mentioned in the Gospels and can map out his life and travels to a very good extent. For example, in the Four Gospels, there are two Passovers, one Feast of Tabernacles (John 7-8), one Feast of Dedication (John 10:22), etc. We know where Jesus was during those times, so we can quite accurately map his travels and learn from them.

The major obstacle to Jesus having a one-year ministry is John 6:4, which mentions a Passover. If John 6:4 is an accurate reference to a Passover at that time, then Jesus’ ministry was much longer than a year and a few months. However, there are a couple of good reasons to believe that John 6:4 was altered and “Passover” was added. We have already seen one reason: it would make following Jesus’ travels during his ministry impossible, and we believe that the ministry of Jesus is important and that God would want us to know a lot about it rather than have it be a huge mystery.

Another reason to believe that John 6:4 was altered is that Jesus did not go to Jerusalem at that time, which means he would not have fulfilled the Law, which seems impossible. The Law of Moses made it clear that Jewish males were to go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover (Deut. 16:16). However, when we read John 6, Jesus is teaching and doing miracles in Galilee. In fact, John 6:4 seems out of place. Jesus went to a mountain in Galilee with his disciples in John 6:3. Then in John 6:5 he saw the crowd coming toward him. There is no hint that any of those people thought about going to Jerusalem, and Jesus did not go, so the reference in John 6:4 to a feast is not connected to anything in the context. At the other two Passovers, the one in John 2 and the one at the end of his ministry, there is a lot of detail about what Jesus did in Jerusalem at Passover. For John 6:4 to say there was a Passover, but for him not even to go is a huge incongruity in the text.

There are a few manuscripts that omit the whole verse of John 6:4.[[54]](#footnote-18794) That is entirely possible because the verse does not fit in the context. Additionally, there is evidence from the Church Fathers that the word “Passover” was not in the early manuscripts, which would mean that the original text read “Now the feast of the Jews was near.” Statements made by Origen, Cyril of Alexandria, and Irenaeus are consistent with the fact that they had manuscripts that did not have “the Passover” in John 6:4.[[55]](#footnote-31410) If John 6:4 is just saying that “a feast of the Jews was near,” there were a number of smaller feasts in the Jewish calendar, and the Law did not require Jews to go to Jerusalem during those feasts.

There are a couple of different ways that the word “Passover” could have been added to the text. One is quite accidental. If the original text just said, “a feast of the Jews was near,” it would be entirely possible that a scribe who thought that feast was Passover wrote “Passover” in the margin of his manuscript. Scribes wrote notes in the margins of their manuscripts just as Christians today write in the margins of their Bibles. If that happened, then another scribe could have thought “Passover” was left out of the last copy, and so copied it into his next manuscript.

Another reason, less likely and less innocent, that John 6:4, or the word “Passover,” might have been added was in the early centuries after Christ there were debates about the length of Jesus’ ministry. Anyone who studies the manuscripts knows that there were a number of topics that were hotly debated by the early Church, and it was not uncommon for one side to alter a manuscript to support their argument.[[56]](#footnote-19675) Thankfully, today, especially with the help of computers that enable textual critics to compare the over 5,700 Greek manuscripts, it is usually easy to spot those intentional changes and expunge them from the modern Greek text, but a few manuscript discrepancies are still the subject of debate. The length of Jesus’ ministry was a topic of debate in the centuries after Christ, and John 6:4 could be one of the verses that was altered to support a position.

Some ancillary evidence that Jesus’ ministry was one year comes from Isaiah 61:1-2, which Jesus quoted in Luke 4:18-19. Isaiah mentions “the acceptable year of the Lord” (KJV), and we believe that the reference to a “year” is accurate. We know from Isaiah that the “acceptable year” is before the Day of Vengeance, which is the period of tribulation just prior to the Battle of Armageddon. The most likely candidate for an “acceptable year of the Lord” that occurs before the Day of Vengeance, is the year of Jesus’ ministry. That is especially true if we tie together the events of Isaiah 61:1 with Isaiah 61:2 and the events of Luke 4:18 with Luke 4:19, because Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18 refer to what Jesus would be doing during his time on earth—preaching the Gospel; healing; freeing captives—and this would certainly make that year “the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Tying the evidence together makes a viable case for the ministry of Jesus lasting just over a year, and there not being a “Passover” in John 6:4. That being said, it is still important to note that the Greek manuscripts do have the word “Passover” in John 6:4, which opens the door for a ministry of Christ that was slightly over two years.

Joh 6:9

**“young boy here who has.”** The fact that the boy had so much when other people had nothing suggests that he was an enterprising young man who brought bread and fish to sell to the crowd that was following Jesus. If so, Jesus would have paid for the food and then given it to the multitude.

**“five barley loaves.”** Barley was the least desirable grain used to make bread—wheat bread was considered to be much better. The boy had barley bread, so it was not worth a lot of money, but it fed the multitude.

**“two fish.”** The Sea of Galilee has 18 indigenous species of fish, and in this case, the fish were likely a variety of sardine.[[57]](#footnote-24946)

**“loaves.”** At this time in Israel, a “loaf” of bread was a single piece of flatbread. It would have resembled a pancake, and was usually cooked on the outer surface of a heated clay oven.

Joh 6:10

**“sit down.”** The Greek word literally means “recline,” *anapiptō* (#377 ἀναπίπτω). The Jews of this period followed the Greek custom of reclining, or leaning on one’s side to eat. Here, Jesus commands the disciples to have the people recline, which, functionally, would mean *get ready to eat*. Contrary to popular artistic renditions, Jesus himself and the disciples were reclining at the Last Supper (Luke 22:14; John 13:12). Because the people were just sitting in a field, “sit down” is better contextually than “recline.”

**“grass.”** Unfortunately, we do not have an English word that accurately catches the meaning of the Greek text. The “grass” is the mixture of weeds that grow freely in the uncultivated fields in Israel. Part of the mix are the thorns and thistles that grow in the fields. Mark 6:39 says the grass was “green,” so that would have placed this event in the spring or early summer. The feast of Tabernacles in the next chapter (John 7) was in the fall, and the fields would not have been green.

**“the men sat down...about 5,000 in number.”** There were about 5,000 men, not counting women and children, so it is safe to say that the crowd would have been more than 10,000 people.

Joh 6:13

**“twelve baskets.”** The feeding of the 5,000 and the twelve baskets of leftovers point to God’s blessing on the twelve tribes of Israel (see commentary on Matthew 15:37).

Joh 6:14

**“the prophet.”** When the people said, “This is truly the prophet who is to come,” they were referring to the prophet that Moses said would come (Deut. 18:15). There has been much scholarly discussion about who the Jews thought this prophet was. Likely the designation “prophet” is used here because that is the bottom line truth that everyone agreed on—that this man was the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15. Beyond that, it seems clear from what we know of the Jews in that time and area (Galilee; the home base of most of the Pharisees, there was more influence of the Sadducees around Jerusalem) that some of them believed “the prophet” was the Messiah himself, some believed the prophet was a forerunner to the Messiah and distinct from the Messiah (cf. John 1:20-21), and some likely believed that the man who started as the prophet may have become the Messiah.[[58]](#footnote-25457)

The sad truth in this record is that the people did not want the Messiah who actually stood before them and was calling for humility and self-sacrifice. They wanted the Messiah they had projected in their minds, one who would meet their selfish needs and deliver them from oppression. We learn from this very chapter that as soon as Jesus stopped “entertaining” the people with signs and miracles (which actually demonstrated who he was) and called for their commitment and sacrifice, “many of his disciples turned back, and did not walk any more with him” (John 6:66). Followers of Christ should make no mistake; we are to be prepared to turn away from worldly attractions and become broken bread for people, even as Jesus poured out his life for us as a sacrifice and an example.

Joh 6:15

**“Therefore, when.”** There is much detail left out of this part of John that is important to understanding the record. See commentary on Mark 6:45.

**“he withdrew again to the mountain by himself alone.”** That Jesus could leave the crowd and go off by himself was likely part miracle and part due to the encroaching darkness.

Joh 6:16

**“And when evening came.”** The record of Jesus walking on the water is in Matthew 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-51, and John 6:15-21. In this context, “evening” is the later evening, not the early evening when the afternoon sacrifice was done in the Temple, but the later evening that merged into darkness. The two evenings are quite clear in several verses in the Old Testament, where the Hebrew text reads “between the evenings,” but most English versions smooth the reading out to “in the evening” (e.g., Exod. 12:6; 29:39; Lev. 23:5) (see commentary on Exod. 12:6).

**“the lake.”** The “sea” of Galilee is actually quite a small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into the English “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to (see commentary on Matt. 4:18).

Joh 6:17

**“to Capernaum.”** Jesus and his apostles actually landed in “Gennesaret” (Matt. 14:34; Mark 6:53). The Gospel of John says that they sailed “to Capernaum.” It is likely that Jesus planned to go to Capernaum shortly, but landed at Gennesaret and healed people there, then made the short walk to Capernaum, where he was when the people found him (John 6:24).

[For more information on where the apostles were going and where they ended up, see commentary on Matt. 14:34.]

Joh 6:19

**“they saw Jesus walking on the lake.”** Jesus, in what must have displayed some levity on his part, made like he intended to pass them (Mark 6:48).

The apostles started rowing just about dark, perhaps around 8 p.m. or so. It was now the fourth watch of the night (Matt. 14:25), which was from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m.. So the apostles had been rowing for around seven hours or perhaps more, depending on how late in the fourth watch that Jesus came to them. Also, this shows something about Jesus’ prayer life. After he sent the crowd away he went up on the mountain to pray, and that prayer time would have then lasted for hours (Matt. 14:23). Jesus really believed in the power of prayer to accomplish great things.

Joh 6:21

**“Therefore, they were willing to receive him into the boat.”** This seems like a strange phrase to us today, because why wouldn’t the apostles be willing to take Jesus into the boat? We have to remember that when they first saw Jesus, they thought he was some kind of apparition or ghost (cf. Matt. 14:26). Because of that, if he approached the boat, we can imagine that they would have resorted to any kind of “demon repellant” words or formulas that they knew. But once they knew it was Jesus, they were not scared anymore and were willing to let him into the boat.

**“and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.”** Several times the Bible records that God miraculously moved people from one place to another, and this is one of those times. Another was when God moved Phillip to Azotus (cf. Acts 8:39).

Joh 6:22

**“boats.”** This is the same word as John 6:23, referring to a small boat. The Sea of Galilee was a small lake, so there were not any really large boats on the lake.

Joh 6:25

**“And when they found him.”** The next day, Jesus taught the people from the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:59).

**“the other side of the lake.”** They had been on the east side of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus fed the 5,000 men, and now they had crossed to the other side of the lake.

Joh 6:26

**“not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves.”** Jesus’ statement reveals the self-centeredness and short-sightedness of most people. They were initially drawn to Jesus because of the signs that he did (John 6:2). But once they realized he could feed them without their going through the effort of providing food for themselves, they shifted their focus and wanted Jesus to be king and provider. When dealing with the public it is helpful to remember that a large percentage of the people are just that way, and knowing that helps keep believers from being discouraged in doing the Lord’s work.

Joh 6:27

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

**“has set his seal.”** God set His seal of approval upon Jesus Christ. The phrase, “has set his seal,” is the translation of the Greek verb, *sphragizō* (#4972 σφραγίζω), which means, “to set a seal on, mark with a seal, to seal.” In this context, the translation “has set his seal on” (or “has put his seal on), is better than just “sealed,” and many translations read that way (cf. CJB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NKJV, NJB, NRSV, RSV). Some versions further clarify the meaning of the custom of setting a seal in this social context by saying, “set his seal of approval” (HCSB, NET, NIV, NLT).

The word *sphragizō* is used earlier in John with the same meaning, to set a seal of approval on, to approve of. The believer sets his seal of approval on Jesus by accepting the testimony of Christ (John 3:33). God set His seal of approval upon Jesus by, among other things, empowering great miracles through him, including, in the context of John 6, miraculously feeding over 5,000 people. C.K. Barrett writes, “At [John] 3:33, the word [*sphragizō*] is used to indicate that the believer, by accepting the testimony of Christ, has attested the truth of God himself. Here the word has the same meaning, but it is God the Father who attests the authority and truth of Jesus.”[[59]](#footnote-30931) God did many things in the life of Jesus that showed he had God’s approval and favor. William Hendriksen writes that when Jesus said that God’s seal was placed upon him, Jesus was saying, “by means of the testimony of the Son himself, of John the Baptist, of the many works, or *signs*, of the Father (directly), and of the Scriptures, God the Father has certified that I [Jesus Christ] am the real Messiah, the Son of God.”[[60]](#footnote-11766)

Joh 6:29

**“in him who he has sent.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 6:32

**“Moses did not give you the bread from heaven.”** Jesus knew that statement would catch the people off guard and force them to think. Manna did appear on the ground, but although it came from God, it was not “bread from heaven” because it was like ordinary bread in that it had to be gathered and prepared, and if it was left out overnight, it rotted. Furthermore, it did not keep a person from being hungry the next day. Manna was proof that God could sustain life, but belief in Jesus provided everlasting life.

Jesus was the “true” bread from heaven—belief in him led to everlasting life.

Joh 6:33

**“comes down from heaven.”** See commentaries on John 3:13 and 6:38.

**“life.”** Here the word “life” refers primarily to “life in the Age to Come,” which we can tell by reading the context (see commentary on Luke 10:28). However, it also has overtones of “life” now, life in the present. Jesus came so that our lives now would be rich and meaningful, and also so that we would have everlasting life.

Joh 6:35

**“bread of life.”** This is primarily a genitive of production, i.e., “the bread that produces [and sustains] life.” See commentary on John 6:48.

**“Whoever comes to me will never ever hunger, and whoever believes in me.”** The verbs “comes” and “believes” are singular. Trust in God is an individual matter. No one has trust in God or gets saved as a member of a group. Each person must decide on his or her own.

**“never ever hunger...never ever thirst.”** These words reflect upon Jesus being the bread of life and “filling” people forever, and they also have a more literal eschatological tone to them: in the future kingdom of Christ, the saved people who are there will literally never hunger or thirst (see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”)

Joh 6:36

**“you have seen me.”** The phrase “you have seen me” does not simply refer to seeing Jesus off in the distance somewhere, but seeing him doing the teachings and the works of the Messiah. By this time, the Jews had plenty of evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, and many people did believe in him, but many did not.

Joh 6:37

**“All *those* whom the Father gives me will come to me.”** The ones that God “gives” to Jesus are the ones He “draws” to Jesus (see commentary on John 6:44). God “draws” people and gives to them as they respond to Him and come closer and closer to Him. The Father does not “give” people to Jesus apart from their free will, or make choices for people that they are then forced to follow. A simple reading of the majority of the Bible shows this. God is constantly commanding people to do things that they do not do. That alone shows people’s free will.

There are Christians who believe that people have free will, but due to their sin nature they cannot make a truly godly choice, such as for salvation, so it is free will, but in effect only the free will to choose between different evils (this was the position of John Calvin and is the accepted position of the Reformed Churches). These Christians teach that in order for a person to make a truly godly choice they need God’s intervention and mercy. However, that belief does not fit with what Scripture says about the nature of God, who is universally loving and merciful, and asserts people’s free will.

[For a short critique of Calvinism, see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

The battle between man’s free will and God’s plans and desires for people rages throughout the pages of Scripture. It is very common in the Bible that God gets angry with people who are disobedient or defiant, and that includes both believers and unbelievers (cf. Exod. 4:14; Num. 11:1; 12:9; 32:13; Deut. 29:20; Judg. 2:14; 2 Sam. 6:7; 1 Kings 11:9; 15:30; 2 Chron. 25:15). This anger is genuine, not “faked” in some way, or disingenuous. God is genuinely disappointed in people and angry with them if they disobey or defy Him because people have the ability to choose to obey or disobey Him. However, if the Reformed believers are correct, then God not only knew that people would disobey Him, He actually contributed to their disobedience by not giving them the mercy to make a good decision. But that is simply not the way the text reads. If God keeps people from obeying, then is angry when they do not obey, then God is not “loving” in any usual sense of the word, and would really be quite irrational. In fact, if a human were to behave that way, psychologists and sociologists would label them irrational at best and perhaps even sociopathic. It is important that we take to heart the descriptions of God, such as that He is loving, righteous, just, good, etc., and take those words in the common way they are used in our speech, and not think that they have some kind of “special meaning.” Otherwise, how are we to understand the command to “be imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1)? If we are going to imitate God, then we have to be truly loving, giving, good, righteous, etc., just as God is.

Joh 6:38

**“I have come down from heaven.”** Jesus said that he came from heaven, meaning that He came from God; God was his source. However, the Jews seem to misunderstand Jesus’ words here in John 6:38. The Jews were confused by what Jesus said since they said that they knew Jesus’ mother Mary, and also Joseph whom they assumed to be Jesus’ father (John 6:42). They also misunderstood him when he said that he was the “bread of heaven” and that they needed to “eat his flesh” in order to live (John 6:51). What Jesus said confused them and they wondered in what sense Jesus could give his flesh to eat (John 6:52). Clearly, they did not catch his figurative language, which is a common theme in John (John 6:52; 8:27). Thus, we should not follow suit and misinterpret Jesus’ language here in John 6:38. It was a common use of language for them to say that something “came from heaven” if God were its source, and there are a number of verses that show that is true.

In John 8:23 Jesus says, “You are from beneath, I am from above.” Jesus does not mean that they are literally from the underworld; neither does he mean that he had literally existed as another being in heaven and then entered into the womb of Mary as a human. Instead, Jesus is using a figurative way of saying that his Father is God (John 8:28, 42), he is from above, just as their father is the Devil (John 8:44). This example in John 8:23 shows us that it is not out of the ordinary for Jesus to say that he is “from above” or “from heaven” in a figurative way, not meaning for it to be taken literally, which is exactly his meaning here in John 6:38.

Likewise, James 1:17 says that every good gift is “from above” and “comes down” from God. What James means is clear. God is the Author and source of the good things in our lives. God works behind the scenes to provide what we need. The verse does not mean that the good things in our lives come directly down from heaven. Jesus’ words should be understood the same way we understand James’ words—that God is the source of Jesus Christ, which He was. Christ was God’s plan for the salvation of mankind, and God directly fathered Jesus.

We still use the same language about things coming from heaven. Many Christians say “the Lord” blessed them when they receive a blessing by way of other people but realize that the ultimate source of the blessings was the Lord. Some people even use the phrase “blessings from heaven,” meaning that God was somehow behind the blessings that were given. The fact that Jesus said he came down from God does not make him God, as some Trinitarians claim.

It was common to speak of things coming from heaven when what was meant was only that God was the ultimate source. When God wanted to tell the people that He would bless them if they gave their tithes, He told them that He would open the windows of “heaven” and pour out a blessing (Mal. 3:10). Of course, everyone understood the idiom being used, and no one believed that God would literally pour things out of heaven. They knew that the phrase meant that God was the origin of the blessings they received. So, for example, one way God would “pour blessings out of heaven” was to give the rain and sun so the crops were abundant.

Another example was when the Pharisees asked Jesus to show them a sign from heaven (Matt. 16:1). They were not asking for Jesus to call some physical thing down from heaven, they were asking Jesus to show them a sign that clearly came from God. Their hypocrisy was revealed when Jesus healed a man who was born blind and they still did not believe (John 9:1ff).

Another example is when Christ said, “John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven or from men?” (Matt. 21:25). John’s baptism would have been “from heaven” if John did not get the idea on his own but the idea and the spiritual cleansing that came with it came from God; whereas it would have been “from men” if it was just John’s idea. The record about John’s baptism makes the idiom about heaven clear: Something came from heaven if God was its source; it did not have to actually come down from the sky. The idiom is the same when used of Jesus. Jesus is “from God,” “from heaven” or “from above” in the sense that God is his Father and thus his origin.

[For discussion on a related point, that God “sent” Jesus, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“not to do my own will.”** This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his Father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

**“the will of him.”** Jesus made it very plain in a number of verses that his primary purpose was to do the will of God, not follow his own ways and accomplish his own desires (see commentary on John 4:34).

**“who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 6:39

**“the will of him who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“raise them up at the last day.”** People do not go to heaven or “hell” the day they die, but are dead and awaiting a future resurrection. People will get up on “the last day.”

The Greek texts are divided on the last phrase of John 6:39 and John 6:40. Some have the word *en* (“in” or in this context “on”) and some do not. The Bible later revealed that there will be a resurrection of the righteous and a resurrection of the unrighteous separated by 1,000 years (cf. Rev. 20:4-6; this 1,000 years is referred to as the “millennium,” and during that time will be the “Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth; see Appendix 5: “The Future Kingdom of Christ on Earth.”).

The phrase “the last day” does not mean that the righteous and unrighteous will get up at the same time, but that “the last day” refers to the Day of Judgment.

[For more on dead people being dead, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

**“them.”** The Greek word is *autos* (#846 αὐτός), and it is singular, which is why literal versions such as the KJV have “it.” However, in this context, it is clear that the Greek is what grammarians call a “collective singular,” where the singular is used but it stands for a group.[[61]](#footnote-14299) We have collective singulars in English in words like “deer” or “fish,” but do not use “it” that way. So bringing the *autos* literally into English as “it” is actually unhelpful, because whereas the collective singular “it” would not confuse a native Greek reader, it is confusing in English. The subject is the people, the “them,” who will be raised from the dead.

This verse contains the figure of speech anacoluthon[[62]](#footnote-11785) which is why it reads in such a choppy fashion.

[See Word Study: “Anacoluthon.”]

Joh 6:40

**“sees…believes.”** The verbs are singular. See commentary on John 6:35.

**“life in the age *to come.*”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Joh 6:41

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Joh 6:43

**“Jesus answered and said.”** The original text has the phrase, “answered and said” more than 100 times in the Bible, and it can sometimes be confusing because it is often used when no one asked a question. The phrase is an idiom, but it has a literal overtone behind it. The person who “answered and said” may not have been answering a direct question from someone, but they were answering and addressing the situation that was presenting itself before them.

[For more on “answered and said,” see commentary on Matt. 11:25.]

Joh 6:44

**“No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”** This verse is sometimes used to prove the theory of predestination or to assert that God chooses those who will be saved and those who will not. However, if we examine the verse in its context and in light of the whole scope of Scripture, we will see that this verse is not speaking of predestination, but is referring to God’s constant efforts to help and bless people, and to bring them to Himself. In fact, instead of being a verse supporting predestination, when it is properly understood, this verse and the verses around it are a testimony to the free will of man and that we humans ultimately decide whether or not we will believe and obey God, and thus determine our own eternal fate.

In the context, the Jews had been grumbling about the claims Jesus was making about himself (John 6:41, 42). God was trying to draw even those hard-hearted Jews to Himself, but they were suspicious and spiritually blind. Their hard-heartedness was what was keeping them from properly seeing the great miracles that Jesus was doing and then concluding that he was a prophet of God and perhaps even the Messiah. They should have been at least convinced by Jesus’ miracles that he was a prophet of God; after all, many common people had made that connection, and these leaders should have been much more educated about the Law and the actions of a prophet than the common people. A few chapters earlier, the Pharisee named Nicodemus properly concluded: “...you are a teacher *sent* from God, for no one is able to do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him” (John 3:2). However, unlike the humble and pure-hearted Nicodemus, these Jews in John 6 were fighting against God, who was actively working in Jesus’ life by signs and miracles to demonstrate that he was the Messiah. All this is made plain in the next verse (John 6:45), in which Jesus quoted Isaiah 54:13 to show what he meant when he said that no one could come to him without the Father drawing him.

In John 6:45, Jesus quoted Isaiah 54:13 and explained its implications. Jesus quoted the phrase, “They will all be taught by God,” which shows that God is trying to reach and teach everyone. No one is excluded from our loving heavenly Father’s attempts to touch their hearts and teach them truth. However, not everyone listens to God. The Pharisees, for example, rejected God’s plan for them when they refused to be baptized by John (Luke 7:30). In fact, most of the Jews did not submit to God’s will when it came to faith in Christ (Rom. 10:3). Jesus quoted Isaiah 54:13 to show that God was attempting to teach everyone, then he further explained that “Everyone who has heard from the Father and has learned, comes to me.” Thus, he made the point that God is always trying to teach everyone, but some people close their ears (Ps. 58:3-5; Ezek. 12:2; Zech. 7:11; Matt. 13:15; Acts 7:51; 28:27; 2 Tim. 4:4) and harden their hearts (Zech. 7:12; Heb. 3:8, 15; 4:7). Thus, these prideful people did not learn from God, and were not drawn to Jesus Christ. But the people who are humble and hear God’s voice and pay attention to it and follow it, come to Jesus as a result. Their coming is their own choice, but they come because God is constantly trying to draw them to Himself. Again, Isaiah 54:13 and other verses make the point that God’s will is that everyone comes to Him (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). That these Jews did not believe in Jesus due to their failure to listen to God was their choice and their problem, not God’s.

It is important to notice that at no time in the discourse did Jesus excuse the Jews, as if their attitude toward him was not their fault. If the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination is true, then somewhere in Jesus’ dialogue with these Jews, we would have expected Jesus to have some pity on these unbelievers, realizing that they could not believe unless God helped them believe, and so their unbelief was not their fault. However, he never said, or implied, anything like that. In studying the doctrine of predestination, we must realize that all throughout the Bible, Jesus and the other writers, as well, when addressing unbelievers, always laid the blame for the unbelief on the unbelievers themselves, never on God. But if the doctrine of predestination is correct, the basic unbelief of unbelievers is always God’s fault, never theirs. That is because, according to the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, if God does not specifically move a person to believe, that person will remain in unbelief. In fact, when there were some in the audience who did not believe, (John 6:64), and some disciples who went away (John 6:66), Jesus turned to his disciples and asked, “Do you want to go away as well?” (John 6:67). The fact he asked them if they “wanted” to go away shows that he was respecting their choice to stay with him as a disciple, or leave him. To believe or to remain an unbeliever is our choice, not God’s.

**“the Father who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 6:45

**“And they will all be taught by God.”** This is a quote of Isaiah 54:13. See commentary on John 6:44 and Isaiah 54:13.

Joh 6:46

John 6:46 shows the intimate relationship that Jesus had with God. Jesus had a level of intimacy that no one had ever had with God, before or since. Jesus revealed the intimacy he had with God in his dialogue with the people near the Sea of Galilee, a crowd that included Jewish leadership, disciples, and onlookers, by continuing to tell them, albeit in somewhat veiled terms, that he was the promised Messiah. Those who had a meek heart listened, while those who were not meek to the truth grumbled or walked away. The complete dialogue of Jesus and the Jewish crowd is covered in John 6:25-70.

Jesus implied he was the Messiah in a number of ways. He said God set His seal upon him, meaning Jesus had God’s seal of authenticity and approval (John 6:27). He said doing God’s work meant believing in him (John 6:29). He said he was the Bread of Life and people who ate him would never hunger (John 6:35; cf. John 6:48, 51). Also, he said people who believed in “the Son” would have life in the Age to come because he would raise them from the dead (John 6:40, 44, 47, 54). This indirect way of teaching was typical of the way Jesus spoke—clearly implying the truth that he was the Messiah so people with a heart for God could hear and believe, but he did not state the fact so plainly that he forced his opponents into an out-and-out showdown. His opponents generally could not grasp what he was saying and ended up arguing about it (John 6:41-44).

Some people infer from John 6:46 that Jesus must be God, or at least that he preexisted his birth because he said he had “seen the Father.” However, this verse has nothing to do with the Trinity or preexistence. For one thing, Jesus’ audience would not have understood his statement to be about him as a member of a Trinity because such a concept was foreign to Jesus’ audience, and furthermore, the people were not expecting a Messiah who was also God.

In contrast, it was assumed in the culture that the Messiah would be a leader and ruler who would have an intimate relationship with God. So what Jesus was saying to them could be, and likely was, properly understood by some of his audience. However, the biblical record does not focus on the average person in the audience but on the religious leaders, which the Bible refers to as “the Jews” (John 6:41, 52). Since almost all of Jesus’ audience would have been Jewish, it is well-known to scholars that the phrase, “the Jews” was used to refer to the religious leaders such as top Pharisees and Sadducees.

The key to understanding John 6:46 is knowing that the phrase “seen the Father” does not refer to seeing with one’s physical eyes but figuratively to “knowing the Father.” Jesus knew God, not because he lived and talked with God in heaven before his birth on earth, but because God revealed Himself more clearly to Jesus than He had to anyone else. Jesus made this clear in other teachings when he said, “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does…” (John 5:20).

In both Hebrew and Greek, words that are translated “see” throughout the Bible often mean “to know or realize.” The Hebrew word *ra’ah* is used of both seeing with the eyes and knowing something, or perceiving it (Gen. 16:4; Exod. 32:1; Num. 20:29). Similarly, the Greek word *horaō* (#3708 ὁράω), translated “see” in John 1:18, 6:46; and 3 John 1:11, can mean “to see with the eyes” or “to see with the mind, to perceive, to know.” Even in English, one of the definitions for “see” is “to know or understand.” For example, when two people are discussing something, one might say to the other, “I see what you mean.”

The usage of “see” as it pertains to “knowing” is found in many places in the New Testament. For example, Jesus said to Philip, “…Whoever has seen me has seen the Father…” (John 14:9). Here again the word “see” is used to indicate “knowing.” Anyone who knew Jesus (not just those who “saw” him) would know the Father. In fact, Jesus had made that clear two verses earlier when he said to Philip, “If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you know him, and have seen him” (John 14:7). In this verse, Jesus says that those who know him have “seen” the Father.

Another verse that uses the word “seen” in the sense of “known” is John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in a most intimate relationship with the Father, he has explained *him*.” The phrase “seen God” is syntactically parallel to the phrase “has explained *Him*,” and both phrases refer to the role that Jesus, the only Son, fulfilled. No man fully knew God, but Jesus made Him known.

Throughout the Old Testament, what people knew about God was very limited. In fact, 2 Corinthians 3:13-16 refers to the fact that even today, the Jews who reject Christ have a veil over their hearts. The full knowledge, the “truth” about God, came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). He was the one who “saw” (fully understood) God, and then he taught others—which is what John 1:18 is conveying. Before Jesus Christ came, no one really knew God as He truly is, a loving heavenly Father, but Jesus Christ “saw” (knew) God intimately because the Father revealed Himself to him in ways that no one else has ever known.

While the term “seeing” can refer to physically “seeing” or figuratively “knowing,” there are occurrences in Scripture where it is said that someone “saw” God. For more information on passages where it says that someone “saw” God, see commentary on Genesis 18:1 and Acts 7:55, which speak about God appearing to people.

[Also, for more information, see Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, *One God and One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*, 4th ed., 459-60.]

Joh 6:47

**“whoever believes.”** The noun and verb are singular. See commentary on John 6:35.

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Joh 6:48

**“I am the bread of life.”** This verse is a metaphor. The phrase, “bread of life” is primarily a genitive of production, i.e., “the bread that produces [and sustains] life.”

A paraphrased translation could read, “I am the bread that gives life.” Our regular bread, and even the manna God gave in the desert, only sustained life. In contrast, Jesus is the bread that truly gives life. Jesus contrasted himself with manna in John 6:58 and pointed out that the people who ate it were dead. Only Jesus Christ can truly give life, everlasting life.

Using the metaphor “I am the bread that gives life,” and comparing himself to bread should have been clear to his audience. The word “bread” is *artos* (#740 ἄρτος), and it is used primarily of bread, but because bread was the most important food, it was also used of food in general (a synecdoche of the part for the whole). Everyone knows that bread, food, is essential to life, so when Jesus said he was the bread of life, they should have known that he was saying that it was he, not literal bread, that was essential if someone was going to have everlasting life.

[See Word Study: “Synecdoche.”]

Joh 6:50

**“eat.”** See commentary on John 6:54.

Joh 6:51

**“I am the living bread.”** Jesus repeats the metaphor he had just used (see commentary on John 6:48), but added the word “living.” Christ does not abandon the metaphor of bread, but now expands it, because bread sustains our life but is dead; it is not a living thing. In contrast, Jesus will give us life and is himself living. He continues the figurative comparison of himself to bread when he says that the bread he will give is his flesh, that he will give for the life of the world.

As we saw in the metaphor he used at the Last Supper (“This is my body which is broken for you”), in this context also, Jesus lets us know that his flesh will be broken for us, and that he will give it “for the life of the world.” This phrase is loaded with meaning. The word “for” is the Greek word *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ), meaning, “on behalf of, in place of, instead of.” The word “world” is a metonymy for the people of the world. The essence of the phrase is that Christ would give his life on behalf of the people of the world, so they could have life.

By referring to himself as bread, Jesus sets up a scenario in which he can use the metaphor of being bread in combination with the common idiom and understanding that to “eat” something was to fully partake of it (see commentary on John 6:54).

**“came down from heaven.”** See commentary on John 6:38.

Joh 6:52

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Joh 6:53

**“eat the flesh...drink his blood.”** See commentary on John 6:54.

**“life.”** Here the word “life” refers primarily to “life in the Age to Come,” which we can tell by reading the next verse, John 6:54. However, it also has overtones of “life” now, life in the present. Jesus came so that our lives now would be rich and meaningful, and also so that we would have everlasting life (see commentary on Luke 10:28).

Joh 6:54

**“The one who continues to eat my flesh and drink my blood.”** Jesus had already referred to himself as bread (see commentary on John 6:48, 51). Now when Jesus spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he was using idioms that were common enough in his day that they should have understood him. Nevertheless, people did not understand, not because they did not understand the idiom, but because they did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, or that being committed to him was the way to everlasting life. Therefore, when he spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, they were confused. Eating and drinking were common activities that required personal involvement, so it is easy to see why they became idioms for involvement and commitment. For example, Jeremiah 15:16 (KJV) says, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.” By saying he ate the Word, Jeremiah portrays his enjoyment of it and commitment to it. Similarly, in Ecclesiastes 6:2, the man has wealth and honor but cannot “eat” of them, that is, fully experience and enjoy them. Of course, the idiom “eat” can be used in a destructive sense too, such as when Psalm 53:4 (ESV) says evildoers “eat up” God’s people like bread (cf. Mic. 3:3). To eat the bread of sorrow (Ps. 127:2 KJV) is to have or receive sorrow. To eat the fruit of your way (Prov. 1:31) is to receive consequences for your actions (cf. Isa. 3:10).

The word “drink” was also used idiomatically for involvement. Proverbs 4:17 says the wicked will drink the wine of violence, meaning they will be committed to violence and be intoxicated by it. Jeremiah 2:18 has a great example of using “drink” to show commitment. God asks the “house of Jacob” (Jer. 2:4), “Now what are you doing, *traveling* on the road to Egypt to drink the water of the Nile? Or what are you doing, *traveling* on the road to Assyria to drink the water of the River?” No one would travel from Israel to Egypt or Assyria just to drink from their rivers. God is reproving His people from going to those pagan lands to “drink,” i.e., be committed to, their pagan ways. Job 21:20 speaks of drinking the wrath of God in the sense of being involved with it, i.e., receiving it (cf. Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:22; Jer. 2:18; 9:15; 25:15-17; 49:12; Ezek. 23:32). Psalm 36:8 speaks of godly people who drink from the river of God’s delights. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that Christians have been made to “drink” of the spirit of God; we have received it and are involved with it in our daily activities. Eating and drinking are also used idiomatically in English to describe mental activities. If someone really liked something, we say he “ate it up.” If someone believes something without properly thinking it over, we say he “swallowed it,” or “swallowed it whole.” If we have learned something, but have not had time to fully comprehend it, we say we “have not digested it yet.”

By asking people to eat his flesh and drink his blood, Jesus was asking people to be committed to him, and the response of the people is telling. They said Jesus’ words were hard, and many disciples turned from him (John 6:60, 66).

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Joh 6:56

**“In union with."** The phrase “in union with” took on a new and deeper meaning after the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Before Pentecost, the phrase just referred to fellowship. Those people who followed and obeyed God and Christ were said to be in union with them. We see that here in John 6:56. The person who continues to follow Christ is said to be in union with him.

Joh 6:57

**“the living Father sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts. That God sent Jesus into the world can have a couple of different nuances. For one thing, Jesus is the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), and just as God created Adam, so God created Jesus by Fathering him in Mary. Thus, God’s sending Jesus can refer to his conception and birth, and then subsequent ministry to save mankind, or it can simply refer to the much later event of God sending Jesus to fulfill his ministry to be the savior of mankind. That latter meaning, for example, is what John 17:18 (NET) means when Jesus prayed to God and said: “Just as you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.” Jesus commissioned his apostles and sent them out just as God had commissioned him and sent him out.

There are Trinitarians who insist that because God “sent” Jesus, Jesus must be God. But that is reading far too much into the simple concept of being “sent.” The idea that something has been “sent” by God was commonly used and simply means that God is the ultimate source, or “sender,” of what was sent. There is no reason to believe that Jesus’ being sent by God makes him God—nothing else that is “sent” by God is God. The phrase just means what it says, that God sent Jesus. The Bible has dozens of examples of things being sent by God, all meaning that God was the source. God sent bad weather on Egypt (Exod. 9:23), fiery serpents upon the Israelites (Num. 21:6), Moses (Deut. 34:11), prophets (Judg. 6:8; 2 Sam. 12:1), and many more people and things. John the Baptist was a man “sent from God” (John 1:6). The words of John the Baptist about being sent are very clear and, if taken the same way some Trinitarians take Jesus being “sent” by God, would make John God too. John said, “I am not the Messiah, but I’ve been sent ahead of Him” (John 3:28 HCSB). What John meant by “I’ve been sent ahead of him” simply means that God commissioned John at a time that preceded the Messiah. But if someone already believed John to somehow be a fourth member of the Godhead, then what John said could be used as evidence supporting that belief. The point is that the only reason someone would say that Jesus’ being “sent” by God meant that he was God or was preexistent in heaven would be if he already held that belief. The words themselves do not say or mean that.

Actually, the fact that God, or the Father, “sent” Jesus proves that Jesus is not part of the Trinity and therefore co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. Jesus made it clear that the one who “sends” is greater than the one “sent.” In John 13:16 he said, “A servant is not greater than his master, neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.” So if the Father sent Jesus, then the Father is greater than Jesus. Then he made that very clear when he said in the very next chapter, “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).

The culture of that day made it clear that the “master,” was greater than the servant, and the one who sends someone is greater than the one who is sent. Thus, by Jesus’ own standards, the fact that he says he was “sent” by God shows that although he is the Son of God, he was still a servant to God, his Father. And that is exactly how the early Christians related to Jesus: as their lord, but God’s Son and God’s servant. For example, they prayed in Acts that Jesus was God’s “Servant” (cf. Acts 3:13; 4:27, 30; also, see commentary on Acts 3:13).

Another piece of evidence that Jesus’ being sent by God does not make him God and “co-equal” with the Father is that the Bible never says Jesus “sent” God (or “the Father”) to do anything. If the Bible says more than 40 times that God sent Jesus, and both Jesus and the Father are God and co-equal, why does the Bible never say Jesus sent the Father to do anything? The answer is simple and clear from Jesus’ own mouth: the one who sends is greater than the one who is sent. Jesus is not God, and the fact that he says he was sent by God proves it.

**“live.”** This refers to living forever. See commentary on Luke 10:28.

Joh 6:58

**“came down out of heaven.”** See commentary on John 6:38.

Joh 6:62

**“coming up to where he was before.”** This verse is referring to the resurrection of Christ. This fact is clear from studying the context. Because the translators have chosen to translate *anabainō* (#305 ἀναβαίνω) as “ascend,” people believe it refers to Christ’s ascension from earth as recorded in Acts 1:9, but Acts 1:9 does not use this word. *Anabainō* simply means “to go up.” It is used of “going up” to a higher elevation as in climbing a mountain (Matt. 5:1, 14:23, et al.), of Jesus “coming up” from under the water at his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10), of plants that “grow up” out of the ground (Matt. 13:7; Mark 4:7, 8, 32), or of even just “going up,” i.e., “climbing,” a tree (Luke 19:4). Christ was simply asking if they would be offended if they saw him “come up” out of the ground, i.e., be resurrected, and be where he was before, i.e., alive and on the earth.

The context confirms that Jesus was speaking about being the bread from heaven and giving life via his resurrection. Verses such as John 6:39-40 and 6:44 confirm this: Jesus repeatedly said, “...I will raise him [each believer] up at the last day.” Christ was amazed that even some of his disciples were offended at his teaching. He had been speaking of the resurrection, and they were offended, so he asked them if they would be offended if they saw him resurrected, which has been unfortunately translated as “ascend” in John 6:62.[[63]](#footnote-21987)

Joh 6:64

**“(For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him).”** This verse shows the great love and patience of Jesus because even though he knew who would betray him, he knew people have free will and can change if they want to. Some Trinitarians claim this verse proves that Jesus was God just because the word “beginning” is in the verse. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even a cursory word study will show that the word “beginning” has to be defined by its context. Any good lexicon will show that the word “beginning” is often used to describe times other than the start of creation. Examples abound: God made them male and female at the “beginning,” not of creation, but of the human race (Matt. 19:4). There were “eyewitnesses” at the “beginning,” not of creation, but of the life and ministry of Christ (Luke 1:2). The disciples were with Christ from the “beginning,” not of creation, but of his public ministry (John 15:27). The gift of holy spirit came on Peter and the apostles “at the beginning,” not of creation, but of the Church Administration that started on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 (Acts 11:15). John 6:64 is simply saying that Christ knew from the time he began to choose the apostles which one would betray him.

When this verse is understood in its context, it is a powerful testimony of how closely Jesus walked with his Father. First, there is nothing in the context that would in any way indicate that the word “beginning” refers to the beginning of *time*. Jesus had just fed the five thousand, and they said, “This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14). Right away that tells you that the people did not think Jesus was *God*, but a prophet. The people wanted to make Jesus king, but only because he filled their stomachs (John 6:15, 26). When he challenged them to believe in him (John 6:29), they grumbled (John 6:41). As Jesus continued to teach, the Jews began to argue among themselves (John 6:52), and even some of Jesus’ disciples began to grumble at the commitment Jesus was asking from them (John 6:60, 61). Jesus, knowing his disciples were upset with his teaching, did not back off, but rather pressed on, even saying that he knew some would not believe (John 6:64). The result of this discussion was that some of his disciples left him (John 6:66). It is telling that the disciples left him at a time when Jesus was asking for their personal commitment. The fact is, and always has been, that some believers are more than happy to hang around as long as you do not ask much of them, but when they are required to give much of themselves, then they leave. Jesus taught that in the Parable of the Sower when he said that some believers leave as soon as persecution arises.

[For more on this verse not supporting the Trinity, see Don Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*, 215.]

Joh 6:65

**“no one is able to come to me, unless it is given to him by the Father.”** This is a restatement, in different words, of John 6:44, and a reflection of John 6:37 (see commentaries on John 6:37 and 6:44). God is always trying to draw people to Him. We can understand why God has to draw people to Him in order for them to come to Him. Of course, He cannot, and does not, act against a person’s free will, but when they want to come to Him, they need His help. For one thing, God is spirit. He is invisible and immaterial, so people who come to Him have to get some guidance as to how to do it. For another thing, people who believe and strive to live godly lifestyles are fighting against their sin nature, which is pushing them toward selfishness and a self-centered lifestyle. People can become selfless and God-centered in their lives, but it takes a diligent effort and some help from God. Thirdly, there is the spiritual battle that we need help from God to fight. The Adversary is always trying to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), to oppress and ensnare people (Acts 10:38; 2 Tim. 2:26), and pervert the ways of God (Acts 13:10). Since the Adversary is constantly working behind the scenes to keep people from God, God has to be constantly working behind the scenes to make a way for people who want to come to Him to do so. With all that is working against people being godly, if God were not working to bring people to Him, they could not come, which is why it makes perfect sense for Jesus to say, “no one is able to come to me, unless it is given to him by the Father.”

By saying what he said, Jesus was trying to highlight the spiritual truth that since God is always working to draw people to Himself, if people are not coming to God, it is due to decisions they themselves are making. This was the point of the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). God is always sowing His word into every person’s heart, but not every person receives it the same way. As the parable points out, some people do not hold the Word in their minds very long and so the Devil takes it from them. Some people abandon the Word due to trouble or persecution, and some ignore it and instead focus on this world and what it has to offer. Only some people make decisions that allow the Word to grow and produce fruit in their lives. Nevertheless, God is sowing into every heart. In the Parable of the Sower, it is never hinted or stated that people do not choose the Word because that is the choice God made for them, or the people who do choose the Word do so because that is the choice God made for them. The simple fact is that most people are selfish, and they want to be that way. They harden their hearts and close their eyes and ears to the things of God (Matt. 13:15). Jesus made that clear in John chapter 3. He said, “people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who practices evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his works are exposed” (John 3:19-20).

Joh 6:68

**“words of life.”** The possibilities for understanding this genitive are multiple. The genitive of relation would make the phrase, “words relating to life,” or “words about life.” Also, the genitive of production would make the expression say, words that produce, or lead to, life in the Age to come. This record is associated with the feeding of the 5,000, which is Matthew 14, and before Peter declared that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16). So although Peter may not have been certain Jesus was the Messiah at this time, he still knew that Jesus had the words that were about, and led to, life in the Age to come.

**“life in the Age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Joh 6:70

**“devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.” In this case, Jesus knew that Judas would act in a way that the Devil would act, so calling Judas a “devil” was appropriate.

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Joh 6:71

**“Iscariot.”** See commentary on Matthew 10:4 for more information.

**John Chapter 7**

Joh 7:1

**“And after these things, Jesus walked in Galilee.”** John chapters 7 and 8 reveal the titanic struggle between Good and Evil, between God and the Devil, in a way that no other section of the Gospels does. There are many players in this event. Behind the scenes, active but unseen, are God and the Devil. The active players are Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the “Jews” who were sons of the Devil (John 8:44). The stakes in the fight included the crowd, who were confused (John 7:25-27, 31, 40-43), but would not talk openly because they were afraid of the Jews (John 7:13). The stakes also included those among the Jews who had not yet been fully won over by evil and were “on the fence” about who Jesus was, and some of those came to believe as the Church grew (cf. Acts 15:5). It is in John 7 and 8 that we clearly see how evil and how blind to the truth the “Jews” really were. They were trying to kill Jesus (John 7:1), and were open enough about it that the word about it leaked out and the crowd knew it (John 7:25), yet apparently, the Jews did not know the crowd knew, so when Jesus openly challenged them about it they denied it (John 7:19-20). Jesus referred to them as the children of their father the Devil (John 8:38, 41, 44). We learn a lot about the children of the Devil from the exchange between Jesus and the Jews here in John 7 and 8.

The children of the Devil are: Murderers (John 7:1); Evil (John 7:7); They cause fear in people (John 7:13); They seek their own glory (John 7:18); They don’t obey God (John 7:19); They are threatened by the success of others (John 7:32); They think that others are always wrong, not them (John 7:49); They get their facts wrong (John 7:52; 8:33); They will die in their sin (John 8:21); They are “from beneath” and of this world (John 8:23); The Word of God has no place in them (John 8:37); They are of their father the Devil (John 8:38, 41, 44); They cannot hear (cannot understand) the truth (John 8:47); They use smear tactics to smear their enemies (John 8:48); They have not known God (John 8:55); They misunderstand truth when it is spoken (John 8:56-57); and, they want to kill those who oppose them (John 8:59).

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. In Jerusalem, the majority party and the party that controlled the Temple was the Sadducees, so for example the High Priest was a Sadducee. However, there were lots of Pharisees there also.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“were trying *to find a way* to kill him.”** This is the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Jews in Jerusalem were trying to find a way to kill Jesus, but it would be at Passover, some 6 months later, that he allowed himself to be captured and crucified to fulfill the prophecies and purchase the redemption of humankind. The Jews of Jerusalem had been trying to kill Jesus ever since his last trip to Jerusalem at an unnamed feast because he was healing on the Sabbath (John 5:1, 18).

Joh 7:2

**“the Feast of Tabernacles.”** This was a seven-day feast with an eighth day at the end that was not technically part of the feast but was especially celebrated (see commentary on John 7:37). Tabernacles was also known as the “Feast of Ingathering” because it celebrated the harvest even though it was later in the year than the grain harvest. The feast is often called “Sukkot” (“booths”). Tabernacles is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, Tishri, and was one of the three pilgrimage feasts in Israel: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. During the Feast, people would leave their homes and live in “booths” for seven days. The “booth” in the Feast of Booths was a very temporary structure in which farmers would live during harvest, something they did to protect the harvest from thieves and things that would eat the harvest.

Joh 7:5

**“for not even his brothers believed in him.”** Jesus’ brothers were James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matthew 13:55). It is an amazing truth that Jesus’ own brothers did not believe he was the Messiah, and there is no evidence that any of them did until after his resurrection (cf. Acts 1:14; 15:13; 1 Cor. 15:7). In fact, it is possible that one of the reasons for Jesus going to Galilee after his resurrection was to see his family. We know Jesus went to Galilee after his resurrection, and met with many people there, apparently including one meeting in which were more than 500 people (cf. Matt. 28:7, 10; Mark 14:28; John 21:1; 1 Cor. 15:6. It is assumed that the meeting with more than 500 took place in Galilee because on the Day of Pentecost, only about a month later, there were only 120 disciples gathered in Jerusalem. In contrast, it seems that Jesus could have gathered more than 500 in Galilee).

Taking care of one’s family is a very important part of a person’s walk with God, and it certainly would fit with the example that Jesus set for us that he would go to Galilee in part to convince his family that he was indeed the risen Christ, and in convincing them, assure them of having everlasting life.

One of the reasons we know that none of Jesus’ brothers believed that he was the Messiah until after his resurrection is that at the crucifixion Jesus told the apostle John to take care of Mary his mother, and he told Mary that John would take care of her. He did this by saying to John, “Look, *here is* your mother!” (John 19:27). Jesus would have only done this if Joseph, Mary’s husband and Jesus’ step-father, was dead, and if none of Jesus’ brothers were considered to be an appropriate caretaker to Mary. Since Mary was a believer of great faith, it would not have been in her best interest to be taken care of by her children who did not even believe their brother was the Messiah she claimed him to be. Their consistent refusal to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, despite what he and Mary no doubt did to try to convince them, would have made them inappropriate caretakers for Mary

[For more on this, see commentary on John 19:27.]

At some point after the resurrection, at least some of Jesus’ brothers came to believe. In fact, Jesus’ brother James rose to lead the Church in Jerusalem after Herod Agrippa executed the apostle James who was the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Acts 12:2). Although history is silent as to how Jesus’ brother James came to lead the Church, it is clear that he did. He first appears in a leadership role in Acts 12:17, then can be seen to be the leader by Acts 15:13. He is also the writer of the Epistle of James. Another brother of Jesus, Judas, also became a leader in the Church and wrote the Epistle of Jude.

Joh 7:6

**“time.”** The Greek word is *kairos* (#2540 καιρός), here meaning the right or proper time. Jesus had a mission from God, and a “right time” to go to Jerusalem. Ann Nyland catches the meaning in her translation: “It isn’t the right time for me yet—but for you, any time is right!”[[64]](#footnote-13412)

The context is not just about going to Jerusalem. Jesus’ brothers were urging him to show himself to the world. In saying that it was not the “right time” to go to Jerusalem, Jesus was saying that now was not the right time to go to Jerusalem and reveal himself. He knew he would go later, and when he did, it was in secret (John 7:10). Nevertheless, when Jesus did get to the Feast of Tabernacles, he did reveal himself to those with eyes to see and ears to hear. He made many bold statements, saying he was the light of the world and “unless you believe that I am *the one*, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

When he told his brothers that the “right time” for them was always here, he was saying that because his brothers did not have a mission from God, and because his brothers were still “of the world” (his brothers did not yet believe in him; John 7:5), for them the “right time” to go to Jerusalem was any time. It made no difference to the world who they were.

Joh 7:7

**“The world.”** Here in John 7:7, “the world” is put by metonymy for the people who live in the world. In this context, it specifically refers to the evil people who live in the world, and even more specifically to the Jews who were children of the Devil (John 8:44) who were trying to kill Jesus (John 7:1).

**“but it hates me because I testify about it, that its works are evil.”** The Devil is the god of this world, and hates God and all godly things. He supports all kinds of evil, and orchestrates things in the world in such a manner that all godly people are hated, persecuted, and have a difficult life in one way or another.

[For more about the Devil being the ruler of the world, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

Joh 7:8

**“I am not going up to this feast because my time has not yet fully come.”** Jesus said he was not going up to the feast, but then he went. There is an apparent contradiction here, which is solved by understanding the subject being discussed. The brothers wanted him to go up to the feast to make himself known as the Messiah because they did not believe in him (John 7:5). He was going, but not as they asked, i.e., to make himself known as Messiah.

Joh 7:10

**“in secret.”** There is a textual debate about whether the Greek text reads, “as it were, in secret,” or simply “in secret.” The debate concerns the originality of the particle *hōs* (#5613 ὡς) which is in some Greek texts but not others. *Hōs* means “like,” “as,” or “as though.” Some translations such as the NASB1995 keep it in the text, “He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as if, in secret.” Other translations leave it out: “he went also, not publicly, but in secret” (NIV). The textual sources that include the “as if” are somewhat stronger, but the transcriptional probability of *hōs* being added is also very likely, and so the textual evidence is divided.[[65]](#footnote-20324) We believe the particle is not original due to the fact that Jesus did go to the feast in secret. His family did not know about it, neither did the Jewish rulers, and neither did the crowds of people.

It was important that Jesus go to this feast in secret because the Feast of Tabernacles was a seven-day feast and Jesus did not want to be discovered and possibly arrested or be forced to leave before he got to proclaim the things God showed him to say, especially since the Jews were looking for him among the crowd (John 7:11). Jesus finally showed himself halfway through the feast (John 7:14). At that point the Jews did try to arrest him (John 7:30, 32), but he confounded and eluded them (John 7:46).

How would Jesus go to the feast “in secret?” Normally Jesus was surrounded by at least a small crowd of people including his apostles, other disciples, and people who just wanted to see or hear him. In this case, Jesus told his family he was not going and would have had to tell his apostles and any other disciples to go on without him. The Bible does not explicitly state that, but in that culture it would be a given and would not need to be stated, otherwise, his disciples would have just followed his example and stayed with him.

Joh 7:11

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Joh 7:12

**“secret discussion.”** The Greek word is *gongusmos* (#1112 γογγυσμός), and it refers to an utterance made in a low tone of voice. It is the context that determines exactly what that utterance is, whether it is discontent, i.e., “murmuring, muttering, complaining, grumbling,” or as it is here, a discussion or debate held in a low or subdued tone of voice. *Gongusmos* has been translated in various ways, such as “behind the scenes talk, secret talk, whispering, secret discussion,”[[66]](#footnote-24877) and “secret debate.”[[67]](#footnote-14785) Leon Morris calls it “quiet discussion” and points out that “it was not safe to speak up about Jesus, so they kept their voices low.”[[68]](#footnote-24408) C. K. Barrett calls it “subdued debate,”[[69]](#footnote-19746) and H. Meyer writes, “The people’s judgment of Him was a divided one, not frank and free, but timid, and uttered half in a whisper….”[[70]](#footnote-10814) It is clear from the context that the people were afraid to be caught discussing Jesus, so the translation “secret discussion” seems very appropriate.

Proverbs 28:12, 28 say that when the wicked are in power, the righteous hide. That is certainly the case here in John 7:12-13. It would have benefited people greatly to have open and honest discussion about Jesus, because they would have learned a lot about Jesus and perhaps believed in him as the Messiah. But the Devil worked in his pawns, the religious leaders (cf. John 8:44), to suppress honest conversation about Jesus. It takes great courage to speak up about the truth in dangerous times, but Christians are called to speak up for Jesus.

The reason for the discussion was that there was confusion about Jesus. There has always been confusion about Jesus, and there still is today, but there would be less confusion if there were more open and honest discussion about him.

**“the people.”** The Greek text is literally “the crowd” or “the multitude,” but it is clear from the text that only some of the people were being led to follow him, not “the whole crowd.” This is exactly why there was this discussion among the people, whose opinions about him were divided. Therefore, the translation “the people” seems to be the best option in this context.

Joh 7:13

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Joh 7:14

**“Now about the middle of the feast.”** At the time of Jesus, the Feast of Tabernacles was an eight-day feast, so about the middle of the feast could have been day three, four, or five. So the feast had been going on for a few days when Jesus made his appearance and started teaching.

Joh 7:15

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information on the Jews, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“How does this man have such learning.”** The Jews said this publicly so the crowd could hear. Although the Bible does not say in this context what Jesus taught, we can safely assume that it was what he had taught in many different places such as in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Note that the Jews do not challenge what he taught, but rather shift the argument to an *ad hominem*, an attack on the person. This is a common demonic tactic. By challenging the supposed qualifications of the person, they indirectly assert that what he taught could not be correct. Sadly, the average person is easily distracted and misses what is really happening, and they get influenced by the tactic. Even more sadly, the tactic often works in part because the “accredited” educational facilities are usually run by liberals and Bible detractors, and their “education” is not learning but anti-learning, as we see here with these “well-educated” Jews. The knowledgeable Christian is aware of this tactic of the Devil and realizes when it is being used.

**“when he has not been educated?”** People need to be careful about the “education” they get. Wherever it was these Jews got educated, it didn’t do them any good, and in fact, was harmful. That happens in centers of “higher learning” today. Many colleges today have a liberal view of the Bible, and teach, for example, that the Bible is not the God-breathed Word of God.

Joh 7:16

**“My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me.”** This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his Father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

**“that sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 7:18

**“of one who sent him.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 7:19

**“why are you trying to kill me.”** The Jews in Jerusalem had been trying to kill Jesus since he had come there and healed on the Sabbath and would not conform to their man-made religious rules (see commentaries on John 5:16 and 5:17).

Joh 7:20

**“The crowd.”** This is a metonymy for some of the people in the crowd. There would have been some louder voices and a lot of “small talk” about it among the crowd.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

**“Who is trying to kill you?”** There is an important lesson in John 7:20. The religious leaders were trying to find a way to kill Jesus (John 7:1), and they knew it and Jesus knew it, but the people from all over the world who had come to the Feast of Tabernacles were unaware. Evil people generally keep their true agenda hidden from the public. Many people know evil if it is right in front of them, but do not have the discernment to sniff it out on their own, and so evil people have always been able to get away with their plans and activities by saying nice things that the people want to hear even when those nice things are lies. The Jews who were from Jerusalem knew the religious leaders were trying to kill Jesus (John 7:25). Those people who can see evil behind the scenes have a moral responsibility to point it out to others (Eph. 5:11).

Joh 7:21

**“Jesus answered and said.”** Note that Jesus did not answer the question “Who is seeking to kill you?” directly; instead, he used their question as a teaching point to deepen their spiritual understanding. A direct answer would have been, “The Jews!”

**“I did one work.”** Although the Bible does not tell us specifically which work was the “one work” that Jesus did that is being referred to in John 7:21, it is almost certainly the healing of the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath Day. That occurred the previous time that Jesus was in Jerusalem. The healing caught the attention of the leaders and the people, but so did the fact that Jesus healed the man and told him to carry his bedroll on the Sabbath, which was against the Jewish Sabbath regulations. But the man had been healed and he needed to leave the area and go home to his family.

Joh 7:22

**“For this reason Moses has given you circumcision.”** The Greek phrase translated “for this reason” is *dia touto* (διὰ τοῦτο), and it usually means “for this reason,” or “because of this,” and it usually introduces a statement instead of ending one. That seems to be the case here. Some English versions put the *dia touto* at the end of John 7:21 (cf. the ESV: “I did one work, and you all marvel at it.” The ESV translates *dia touto* as “at it”). That reads smoothly, but it does not have the logical connector as to why Moses commanded circumcision. Although putting the *dia touto* at the beginning of the verse does not seem to read as smoothly, it has a greater logical force and impact.

Jesus had done a miracle on the Sabbath (healed a lame man on the Sabbath; John 5:1-18), and the Jewish religious leaders were upset about it. But God knew when He gave the Law to Israel that some laws would have to take precedence over other laws, and circumcision was one of those higher laws. Moses gave the law of circumcision in such a way that there was no doubt that circumcision was to be done on the eighth day (Lev. 12:3), and often that eighth day happened to be a Sabbath. Which law is greater: keeping the Sabbath or circumcising on the eighth day? Circumcision is more important. So it was specifically, “for this reason” that Moses gave the circumcision law, so that people would understand that some laws were higher than others and laws about taking care of human needs took precedence over other laws. Moses did not have to speak about circumcision because it came from Abraham, but the fact that Moses gave instructions about circumcision made it clear that people had to make a judgment about which of the laws were more important. Jesus tied together Moses giving circumcision with his healing a lame man on the Sabbath in John 7:23, then he admonished the people and told them they needed to make right judgments, that is, accurate and godly judgments.

Versions that include the translation of *dia touto* at the beginning of the verse include the CEB, CSB, KJV, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, and YLT.

Joh 7:23

**“so that the Law of Moses is not broken.”** In this context, “Law of Moses” means the Law of Moses regarding circumcision, not the Sabbath. Technically, if a circumcision, which is supposed to happen on the 8th day after birth, fell on the Sabbath, then one had to break one part of the Law (regarding the Sabbath) to keep the other part (regarding circumcision). Certain laws had to take precedence over other laws if they conflicted, and Jesus’ argument is that healing a man on the Sabbath should take priority. It is an argument from the lesser to the greater which was common in rabbinic logic.[[71]](#footnote-23994)

**“enraged.”** The Greek word is *cholaō* (#5520 χολάω), an extremely rare word that occurs only here in the New Testament and Septuagint, and rarely in Greek literature. It refers to a very deep anger. That the religious leaders became so deeply enraged with Jesus just because he healed a man on the Sabbath is unnatural, and points us toward the “doctrines of demons” that the religious leaders were following, and even to the fact that they themselves were in league with the Devil (John 8:44) and may have even been demon-possessed.

**“I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?”** This was the man that Jesus healed at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-18).

Joh 7:24

**“Stop judging by the outward appearance!”** The Greek verb “judging” is *krinō* (#2919 κρίνω, pronounced 'kree-no), and it is in the present tense, imperative mood, and in this context is probably best translated “Stop judging” (cf. HCSB, NAB, NIV). Jesus was addressing the specific situation, and was telling the Jews (John 7:15) and the crowd (John 7:20) to stop making the kind of judgment they were making, which was based purely on outward appearance. Instead, they were to make a “righteous judgment,” that is, a judgment that is right in God’s sight, a judgment that would be pleasing to God. Although this rebuke was directed to the Jews in a specific situation, the principle is a general one: we should all make righteous judgments rather than judging by appearances. Although the definite article, “the” does not appear in the Greek text before the noun “appearance,” the noun can be definite due to the presence of the preposition *kata* (by) if the context warrants it, as it does here.

**“judge with a righteous judgment.”** This is a very important statement and one that is commonly ignored in Christianity. Christians are taught to “judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt. 7:1 KJV), but the context of that verse is clearly making an unrighteous judgment of someone else, because the next verse is “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged” (Matt. 7:2 KJV). It is impossible to live a godly life without making judgments about all kinds of things each and every day. Here in John 7:24, Jesus sets the record straight: “Judge with a righteous judgment.”

Joh 7:25

**“some of them from Jerusalem.”** Some of the crowd who were from Jerusalem knew the Jews were trying to kill Jesus. The people who were from other areas did not (see commentary on John 7:20).

Joh 7:27

**“no one will know where he is from.”** There is some evidence that there was a Rabbinic teaching that the Messiah would be born and grow up without people knowing who he was, and then he would suddenly manifest himself as the Messiah. But these people thought that since Jesus came from Nazareth, based on their understanding of this fact, he could not be the Messiah they were looking for.

Joh 7:28

**“on my own.”** Greek is *ap’ emautou*, literally, “from myself.” The word *ap’* is a contracted form of the preposition *apo* (#575 ἀπό), which in this case, indicates the idea of *agency*. Jesus is saying he does not stand as his own representative; he is not an agent, as it were, sent from himself, but rather it was the Father who sent him. To communicate this denial of self-agency, the NET translation reads, “on my own initiative,” and that is the general idea of the verse, but just saying “on my own” communicates well.

**“he who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 7:29

**“he sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 7:32

**“and the chief priests and the Pharisees.”** The chief priests in Jerusalem were mostly Sadducees, and when it came to their evil regulations they were aligned with the Pharisees (see commentary on John 7:1, “Jews”).

Joh 7:33

**“to the one who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 7:35

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“the Dispersion.”** “The Dispersion,” also called the Diaspora, are the Jews who, over the centuries, have been scattered among the Gentiles. The dispersing of Jews among the Gentiles had been happening for centuries as Gentile nations made raids on Israel and Judah and carried people away captive to foreign lands.

Joh 7:37

**“Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast.”** The Feast of Tabernacles started on Tishri 15 (the seventh month—usually in our September) and lasted seven days (Lev. 23:34-36), but an eighth day was added, a special Sabbath that was especially celebrated; this eighth day is mentioned in Nehemiah 8:18. Although several scholars argue that the last and great day of the feast was the seventh day, most scholars contend that the last and great day was the final 8th day, Tishri 22, which was a special Sabbath like the first day. As a special Sabbath, it was a specially appointed time of gathering (a solemn assembly, Lev. 23:36).

**“whoever believes in me.”** The Greek text more literally reads, “the one who believes in me,” but that makes the English more awkward to read. Although traditionally this phrase goes in John 7:38, its reference is to the people who are thirsty in this verse, so we moved it to John 7:37 for clarity.

**“let him come to me and drink.”** Jesus is portrayed as the source of spiritual food and drink in several different ways in Scripture. We are to eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6:54-57). Jesus is the true bread from heaven and we come to him to “eat and drink” (John 6:32-35).

Joh 7:38

**“whoever believes in me…out of his belly...”** This is the figure of speech, anacoluthon, in which the flow of a sentence is abruptly changed.[[72]](#footnote-30482)

[See Word Study: “Anacoluthon.”]

**“out of his belly will flow rivers of living water.”** In the Greek, the verb “flow” is future tense, active voice, meaning that the river will flow and flow, not just “flow” one time, or only occasionally. Charles Williams (*The New Testament in the Language of the People*) goes so far as to translate that a believer will have “rivers of water continuously flowing from within him.” Believers should expect, and act upon, this promise and allow the spirit of God to flow from them day after day by speaking in tongues, interpreting, giving words of prophecy, and endeavoring to walk by the spirit.

**“as the Scripture has said.”** This phrase does not have to be a formula for a direct quotation from the Old Testament (there is no such verse), but rather an introduction of scriptural thought, i.e., the essence of what Scripture teaches. As long as what is being spoken reproduces the essential meaning of the biblical text, it is “as the Scripture has said.” Modern preachers and teachers do this all the time. They say, “The Bible says…” but give the essence, rather than a quotation. Isaiah 58:11b states, “you will be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.” Zechariah 14:8 mentions that living waters will flow from Jerusalem, and it is thought by many that Jesus was relating this to what he was saying, because that verse was one of the traditional readings at the Feast of Tabernacles. The Scripture foretold that the spirit would be poured out into the believer (cf. Isa. 44:3-5; 59:21; Joel 2:28, 29; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26, 27; 37:14). Jesus here adds that the ones who receive the spirit of God are those who believe in him.

**“rivers of living water will continuously flow.”** The manifestations of the spirit of God that flow from believers have God as their source and thus can flow continuously in a believer’s life. The reason Jesus would pick this illustration would have been immediately apparent to those people attending the Feast of Tabernacles. For the first seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, a priest would bring water from the Pool of Siloam and pour it, along with wine, on the altar of the Temple. However, on the eighth day, no water was brought. Opinions differ as to how the water ceremony got started and what it symbolized, but it seems likely that it referred to the water from the rock that Moses struck in the wilderness. Then, on the eighth day, no water was brought, symbolic of the water of Canaan that the people now could freely partake of. Thus, it seems natural that on this day when no water was brought, Jesus would cry out that if anyone was thirsty, he could come to Jesus and drink.

**“Out of his belly.”** Theologians have disputed whether or not “his” refers to the Messiah or the believer. In the Old Testament, God was the fountain of living water, the source of spiritual and physical sustenance, and Christ then became the source of holy spirit after he was glorified. However, the Greek text naturally refers “his” to the believer, not the Messiah.[[73]](#footnote-14135)

Although the believer is the most obvious “him,” it is not impossible that the Messiah is also being indirectly referred to. In John 4:14 Jesus speaks of spiritual water, and makes the point that he is the source, although it comes “springing up” (NASB) or “gushing up” (NRSV) from within the believer.

**“belly.”** The Greek word is *koilia* (#2836 κοιλία), and it means 1) the whole belly, 2) the lower belly, the lower region, the receptacle of the excrement 3) the gullet 4) the womb, the place where the fetus is conceived and nourished until birth 5) the innermost part of a man as the seat of thought, feeling, choice. The exact meaning is determined by the context. It seems obvious that “living water” will not flow out of a person’s belly, so what is the verse saying? Scientists are now discovering that the gut, the belly, plays a very important part in the emotional life of a person. The gut, also called the enteric nervous system, has as many nerve cells as the brain, and studies are now showing that it can react, or “think,” independently of the brain. This is why we have a “gut feeling” about something, or a “gut reaction,” or why we get an upset stomach when we are afraid or anxious. In contrast to the “heart” (Greek is *kardia*, where we get “cardiac”), which is more closely related to what we “think,” the belly, kidneys (Rev. 2:23), and bowels (2 Cor. 6:12) are more closely related to how we “feel,” our emotions and emotional state. The point being made in John 7:38 is that the person relates to the spirit on an emotional “gut level,” and not just a mental one, although the mind is certainly involved in our spiritual walk. But our emotional connection to our spiritual life is important too, and highlighted here. Although some versions read “heart,” it misses the point, and to make the vague reference, “within him,” as some versions do, is to water down the teaching so much that no point can be made of it. Other verses that refer to the “belly” in a way that relates to the emotional life are Romans 16:18 and Philippians 3:19.

[For the note on “kidneys” see commentary on Rev. 2:23, and for the note on bowels see commentary on 2 Cor. 6:12.]

**“living water.”** “Living water” was water that was used for ritual cleansing from sin and impurity. Living water came from God, and thus included rainwater, well water, and water from a flowing river or stream. Water that sat in a cistern was not living water.

[For more on living water, see commentary on Num. 19:17.]

Joh 7:39

**“as yet there was no spirit.”** The Greek text says, “…for as yet there was no Spirit….” God’s gift of holy spirit existed in the Old Testament, as many verses show (cf. Num. 11:17-29; Judg. 3:10; etc.), and it was obviously upon Jesus, so why does John 7:39 say there was no spirit? As part of the New Covenant, God promised to give a new spirit to His people, and here in John 7:39, the writer, John, is explaining that Jesus was referring to that new holy spirit that God promised as part of the New Covenant and Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth. John 7:39 shows that the gift of holy spirit in the Millennial Kingdom, which Christ knew about and understood, was going to be so completely different from the gift of holy spirit that God put upon people in the Old Testament that John could rightly say the holy spirit that was promised to come did not exist yet.

By God’s grace, Christians have today what Jesus spoke about and what was promised to Israel. It was obvious that God made His gift of holy spirit available in Old Testament times (cf. Exod. 31:3; 35:31; Num. 11:17, 25; 24:2; 27:18; Judg. 3:10; 1 Chron. 12:18; Isa. 42:1; Eze. 2:2). That, combined with theologians not realizing that the “spirit” that Jesus was speaking about in John 7:39 was different from the holy spirit that God gave to believers in Old Testament times, had a serious consequence. Wanting John 7:39 to “make sense,” the men who copied the biblical text added to John 7:39 when they copied it. Therefore, among the thousands of Greek manuscripts in existence, there are several different later renditions, among them that the spirit “was not yet given,” “was not yet upon them,” and “not yet come.”[[74]](#footnote-31920)

The Old Testament prophets had foretold that a new spirit was coming in the future, one that was different from the spirit God gave in Old Testament times. It was foretold to come as part of the Messianic Kingdom and the New Covenant that God would make with Israel (Isa. 32:15-18; 44:3-5; Ezek. 11:17-21; 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29). The Old Testament prophets and Jesus foretold the coming of this new spirit, saying it would be “poured out” (i.e., given in fullness) into all the believers (Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28-29). Jesus knew that it would come before his kingdom, perhaps to help believers endure the Great Tribulation (John 15:26-16:16).

The Christian Church was a sacred secret, hidden in God and not foretold in the Old Testament, but it started after God established the New Covenant with Christ’s blood (cf. Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; and Luke 22:20). So now, although God said nothing about it in prophecy, God has given the Christian Church the gift of holy spirit that He promised to give as part of the New Covenant to those in the Millennial Kingdom. That is why in Acts and the Church Epistles this new holy spirit is sometimes referred to as “the promised holy spirit” (Eph. 1:13; cf. Acts 2:33; Gal. 3:14; Rom. 8:23). God “promised” to give it as part of the New Covenant, but out of His grace He decided to give it to the Christian Church as well.

When a person believes Jesus Christ is Lord, he is “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3, 23; Titus 3:5; James 1:18), and what gets born inside the Christian is this new gift of holy spirit.

[For more about the holy spirit as God gave it in the Old Testament and then after the Day of Pentecost, see Word Study: “Pneuma.” For more about the gift of holy spirit being “upon” in the Old Testament and “in” after the Day of Pentecost, and the differences between holy spirit in the Old Testament and after Pentecost, see commentary on Eph. 1:13, “promised holy spirit.” For more about the holy spirit being the gift of God and not a “Person” called “the Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on the holy spirit and New Birth, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on Christians being part of the New Covenant, see commentary on 2 Cor. 3:6, “new covenant.”]

**“because Jesus was not yet glorified.”** This sentence tells us that the gift of holy spirit that God promised to pour out to believers (Joel 2:28) and Jesus said would come (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4), did not come until Jesus was glorified, which happened when he was resurrected. However, we learn from Acts 1:4 and Acts 2:4 and 2:33 that the gift of holy spirit was given after Jesus Christ ascended into heaven.

Joh 7:42

**“from Bethlehem.”** Many if not most of the Jews in the crowd at the Feast of Tabernacles knew that the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem, but it was not well-known that Jesus did come from Bethlehem.

Joh 7:45

**“the *Temple* police came *back*.”** They had been sent out earlier (John 7:32).

**“the chief priests and Pharisees.”** The chief priests in Jerusalem were mostly Sadducees, and when it came to their evil regulations they were aligned with the Pharisees.

[See commentary on John 7:1, “Jews.”]

Joh 7:48

**“Have any of the rulers believed in him, or *any* of the Pharisees?”** In this context, the “rulers” are the leading body of Israel, the Sanhedrin, which was a mixture of Sadducees and Pharisees, and likely other elders and leaders as well. These Jews separate “the rulers” from the Pharisees because the High Priests Annas and Caiaphas, and many other leaders, were Sadducees.

It was an unwarranted assumption that none of the rulers believed in Jesus. We learn in a few verses (John 7:50-51) that one of their own, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus, who had met with Jesus earlier (John 3) sympathized with Jesus, and likely was a secret disciple by this time. It is common for evil and arrogant people to make bold assumptions without checking the facts first (and as we see in this record, the facts did not matter to them anyway).

Joh 7:49

**“But this crowd that does not know the law—they are cursed.** This is an interesting statement made by the Jews, because what they saw was that many of the multitude believed on him. They could have said, “But this multitude that does not know the law—they believe in him!” But they were blind to the fact that the multitude could be right and they wrong, and so they concluded that the multitude was under God’s curse.

It usually happens that ungodly and satanic people get into the upper levels of society, and they are usually there due to help from the Devil, demons, and people who are aligned with Satan and his agenda. These ungodly people have contempt for the “regular people,” and think of them as being the “little people,” rabble, deplorable, cursed, and undeserving of the advantages that the privileged have. That “better than you” attitude has been among leaders for millennia, and we see it here among the religious leaders who are “from beneath” (John 8:23) and are of the Devil (John 8:44).

Joh 7:50

**“who had come to him earlier.”** Nicodemus had come to Jesus before (John 3:1-12). The earliest and better manuscripts read “earlier.” At some point, that was changed to “at night,” and thus harmonized with John 3:2, and some earlier Bibles such as the King James and Geneva Bible read “at night.” It is not known whether the change was an intentional harmonization, which occasionally happened, or whether a scribe had put “by night” in a marginal note that later got copied into the text.

Joh 7:51

**“Does our law condemn a man without first hearing from him.”** Nicodemus, of course, is correct. The Law of Moses does not condemn anyone without testimony and trial. But the evil and arrogance of the religious leaders in this situation sets up a powerful irony. The religious leaders had just announced that that crowd was cursed because they did not know the Law (John 7:49), but it was the religious leaders themselves who did not know or obey the Law.

Furthermore—and this is a very common tactic of the Devil and his evil followers—when the religious leaders were asked a very honest and relevant question as to whether the Law condemns someone without trial and testimony, they did not answer it, but instead railed on Nicodemus who asked the question. They accused Nicodemus of possibly supporting Jesus because of some tie to Galilee. The religious leaders were wrong and ungodly in every point: they called the crowd “cursed” when all the crowd did was to question whether Jesus could be the Messiah; they said no prophet came from Galilee when Jonah clearly came from Galilee; they asserted Jesus came from Galilee (and possibly Nicodemus also) when they should have known Jesus was born in Bethlehem—after all, they knew enough about his birth that they thought he was born out of wedlock (John 8:41); and when questioned by Nicodemus about the Law, they should have humbly recognized that Nicodemus was correct and agreed to look at the evidence for what Jesus was saying and doing. But evil people have no regard for the truth, and will not listen to reason. That is why it is so important to have a majority of good and godly people in society; so they can elect godly leaders and have and enforce godly laws. If evil leaders get control, many innocent people suffer.

Joh 7:52

**“no prophet arises out of Galilee.”** These evil religious leaders were only interested in killing Jesus. They were not interested in the truth, and their evil passion blinded them to what was real and true. R. C. H. Lenski correctly observes: “blind passion made these men set up false and unwarranted claims which contradicted their own better knowledge.”[[75]](#footnote-20521) Jonah was a prophet from Gath-hepher in the Galilee (2 Kings 14:25) in the tribal area of Zebulun (Josh. 19:10-13), and was just over 4 miles (over 6 km) north-northeast from Nazareth. It is also possible that Hosea and Nahum came from Galilee (the name “Capernaum” means “Nahum’s town,” and it is possible that Nahum came from there or near there). Rather than answer Nicodemus, they tried to bully him by making him look ignorant, when it was they themselves who were ignorant. It is an important lesson to learn that evil leaders can be so blind to the truth that they ignore facts and lie. The wise Christian keeps an eye out for evil leaders, who often reveal themselves by their tactics of bullying, inconsistency, and self-contradiction.

Joh 7:53

**7:53-8:11**. A lot has been written from a textual point of view about the record of the woman caught in adultery. Every indication is that it was not part of the original text. The oldest and best manuscripts do not include it. Furthermore, it is absent from a diverse number of manuscripts from different manuscript families.[[76]](#footnote-20479)

One of the signs that shows scholars the record is not original is different scribes put it in the Bible in different places. For example, in the Greek manuscripts that do have the record, it occurs in four different places in John, and even occurs in the Gospel of Luke. If the record were original but taken out of some manuscripts by zealous scribes who did not like the idea of Jesus letting adultery go unpunished, the manuscripts that still contained the record would always have it in the same place. That the record of the woman caught in adultery occurs in different places is very good evidence it is not original.

Very importantly, the record breaks the flow of Jesus’ presentation in the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus began his teaching in John 7 during the Feast of Tabernacles, which was the longest of the three feasts of the Mosaic Law that every Jewish male was commanded to attend (Exod. 23:14-17). By the first century, many people did not journey to Jerusalem three times a year, which was a three-day walk from Galilee. Many people would come only one time a year, and if they lived much further, not even that often. When they would make the journey for the Feast of Tabernacles, it often made sense to stay for the entire festival season, which, in the Jewish calendar, was longest in the month of Tishri (our September/October). The month of Tishri had the Feast of Trumpets (Tishri 1), the Day of Atonement (Tishri 10), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Tishri 15-22). After the Feast of Tabernacles, the festival season came to a close and people started to return home.

Jesus started his powerful presentation in John 7 inside the Temple, about midway through the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:14) by confronting the Jews about trying to kill him and saying to judge rightly (John 7:17-24). He was accused of being demon-possessed (John 7:20).

On the last and most important day of the Feast (John 7:37), Jesus taught about holy spirit coming to those who believed in him (John 7:37-39). This caused some to believe he was the Christ (John 7:41) and the Jews to try to arrest him (John 7:45-52). Undaunted by the apparent danger, Jesus continued to try to wake up the huge crowd that would be gathered at that last day of the Feast. He told them he was the light of the world (John 8:12), and was contradicted at every turn by the Jewish leaders. Finally, he addressed those who believed in him about being his disciples and being set free (John 8:31-32) while directly confronting his Jewish adversaries and telling them plainly they were from the Devil (John 8:41-47). The intense debate continued until the Jews finally picked up stones to kill Jesus, and he left the Temple area (John 8:59). There is no way to tell how large the crowd would have been who heard Jesus reveal in quite clear ways that he was the Messiah, but it would have been well into the thousands.

Another reason for John 7:53-8:11 not being original is that it ends the Feast of Tabernacles, and begins a new “regular day” at the Temple. Thus, not only is the debate between Jesus and the Jews interrupted, but the huge crowd that would have heard him speak about being the Messiah and how the Jews were of the Devil would not have been present because they would have gone home the day before.

In spite of the textual evidence that the record was added, we keep it in John because it has all the earmarks of being a true story. It is likely that it was an amazing event in Jesus’ life that was well remembered by his followers and at some point written down and then inserted into the Gospel of John (and Luke), but scribes could not agree where to put it.

**John Chapter 8**

Joh 8:1

See commentary on John 7:53.

Joh 8:2

See commentary on John 7:53.

Joh 8:3

See commentary on John 7:53.

Joh 8:4

See commentary on John 7:53.

Joh 8:5

See commentary on John 7:53.

Joh 8:6

See commentary on John 7:53.

Joh 8:7

See commentary on John 7:53.

Joh 8:8

See commentary on John 7:53.

Joh 8:9

See commentary on John 7:53.

**“in the midst.”** At first reading, this phrase seems to contradict the context, which says the accusers left. However, the accusers were not the only people at the scene. One can just imagine how the religious leaders brought the woman to Jesus and thrust her toward him saying she had been caught in the act of adultery, and demanding to know how he would judge the case. In short order these vicious men would have formed a circle or semicircle around Jesus, each wanting to hear exactly how he would answer them. Behind these men onlookers and curious people would gather, mixed with the disciples of Jesus. When Jesus answered the religious leaders and they melted away one by one, the outer circle would still remain and thus the woman and Jesus, though left alone from the accusers, would still factually be “in the midst” of the crowd.

Joh 8:10

See commentary on John 7:53.

Joh 8:11

See commentary on John 7:53.

**“do not sin anymore.”** The record of the woman caught in adultery is sometimes quoted to show that the death penalty that God commanded in the Old Testament is no longer valid, and we should not use it. It is argued that since Christ forgave a criminal (an adulteress), we should forgive the criminals in our society. However, when we take the time to study the record, we can see why Jesus said, “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.”

First, it is easy to prove that the religious leaders who brought her to Jesus were not interested in justice. Jesus was not a judge in Judea, especially not of capital cases. Capital cases were tried by the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. Therefore, Jesus had no recognized legal authority to render judgment on the case. That leads us to ask, “Why did the Jews bring the woman to Jesus in the first place?” John 8:6 answers that question—to have something with which to accuse him.

Secondly, the religious leaders were themselves breaking the Mosaic Law by bringing the woman without the man with whom she committed adultery. The Law of Moses clearly said that both the man and the woman were to be executed (Lev. 20:10 and Deut. 22:22). If this woman was caught “in the act” of adultery, as the Jews stated, then why did they not bring the man too? The answer is obvious: the woman was set up. For those reasons, Jesus knew that this was a trap, and not “justice” in any sense of the word.

The Jews had indeed formed a clever trap. The Romans had forbidden them to execute people (John 18:31), so if Jesus said to stone the woman, the Jews would have had Jesus arrested for breaking Roman law. However, if Jesus said not to stone her because the Romans forbade it, then the Jews would have defamed him for elevating Roman law over Mosaic Law. It seemed that no matter what Jesus said, he would “lose.”

Jesus got out of the trap by convicting the people’s consciences, which in this case was made easier by the fact that the accusers knew in their hearts that they were willing to take this woman’s life just to trap Jesus. The Jews were already almost certainly guilty of conspiring to commit adultery and also the sin of perjury in the situation, which in a capital case meant getting the penalty of the crime—in this case, death (Deut. 19:16-21). Had Jesus led a mob and stoned the woman based on their testimony, they would have also been guilty of murder. It was obvious from Jesus’ answer to them that he had figured out their sin and challenged them, saying if they were without sin, they could cast the stone; and so one by one they left until no accusers remained. That is a very important fact because, according to Mosaic Law, there had to be eyewitnesses if someone were to be executed. In fact, the witnesses had to cast the first stone (Deut. 17:6, 7). Since Jesus was not a witness, he, by law, could not condemn the woman.

Although Jesus could not legally condemn the woman according to the demands of the Mosaic Law, he nevertheless knew she was in trouble because of her wayward lifestyle, and so he warned her to leave her sinful life. If she did not, not only would she incur the wrath of God on Judgment Day, but at some point, she was likely to get caught and executed for her adultery. Thus, he said to her, “Go now and leave your life of sin” (NIV).

A careful reading of this record with a knowledge of the Mosaic Law and the Roman law in force at the time clearly reveals that this record has no bearing on whether or not there should be a death penalty today. Jesus did not simply excuse a criminal, he prevented a perversion of justice. The Romans executed many criminals during the life of Jesus, and there is no record of him ever trying to intervene in the criminal justice system in any way.

Joh 8:12

**“Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying.”** Jesus was speaking to the Jewish leaders, and this speech is a continuation of what he said to them in John 7 (cf. John 7:16-24).

**“the light.”** Jesus referred to himself as “a” light in John 9:5 and John 12:46 (Greek text; cf. YLT). He reflected the light of God, and knew that other people who reflected the light of God into the world were also lights. The only time Jesus referred to himself as “the” light is John 8:12, and when we read what he said in its context, we understand why he did that.

Jesus said he was “the” light while speaking at the Feast of Tabernacles (also sometimes called “the Feast of Booths,” John 7:2), which is one of the three feasts that the Law of Moses said the Jews were to attend each year (Exod. 23:14-17). The Feast of Passover occurred in the spring, the Feast of Pentecost occurred in the summer, and the Feast of Tabernacles occurred in the fall, usually our September. The way it was celebrated at the time of Christ, the Feast of Tabernacles was an eight-day feast, and the Feast of Tabernacles that is recorded in John 7 and 8 was the last of the three major feasts of Exodus that Jesus attended before he was killed at the Passover Feast the next year.

In the record in John 7 and 8, Jesus was trying to reveal that he was the Messiah but was doing so in a way that those with an open heart would understand, while those with cold hearts would not. Jesus’ words and actions did indeed convince people, because day after day as the Feast progressed, more and more people believed in him. John 7:31 says “many in the crowd believed in him.” Then, John 7:41 says people declared, “This is the Christ!” Then, on the last day of the feast, John 8:30 says, “As he was saying these things, many believed in him.” Thus, in the context of revealing that he was the Messiah, it makes sense that Jesus said he was “the” light of the world. He was not being exclusive and claiming to be the only light, he was claiming to be the major light, the promised Messiah.

The fact that Jesus said to the people, “you are the light of the world,” (Matt. 5:14) shows us that he did not think of himself as the only light. We all have the privilege and responsibility to reflect God’s light. In contrast to people and even the Messiah, who all reflect the light of God, God Himself is not “a” light, or even “the” light; God is “light” (1 John 1:5). In God is no darkness at all. He shines brilliantly and has done so forever.

**“but will have the light of life.”** Here the word “life” refers primarily to “life in the Age to Come,” which we can tell by reading the context. For example, John 8:21 speaks of people dying in their sin. However, the word life also has overtones of “life” now, life in the present. Jesus came so that we would have everlasting life but also so that our lives now would be rich and meaningful (see commentary on Luke 10:28). The one who follows Jesus will have the light that belongs to life, that is associated with life.

Joh 8:13

**“You are testifying on your own behalf, your testimony is not true.”** This is actually two points veiled as one. The Pharisees pointed out that he was testifying on his own behalf, which was true but only due to circumstances. For example, all of his apostles could have testified to much of what he was saying. Also, there are times when we testify on our own behalf and it is true. The facts need to be examined and allowed to speak for themselves. But the fact is that it did not matter how many witnesses Jesus had. The religious leaders had already decided that people who supported Jesus were cursed (John 7:49). Also, when they asked Jesus at his trial if he were the Christ, and he said that he was (Mark 14:62), and that was enough for them; those hypocrites did not need two witnesses then.

Joh 8:15

**“You are judging according to the flesh.”** The statement that Jesus is making concerns the judging that the Pharisees were currently doing of him. Lenski writes: “How these Pharisees customarily judge is not the point here, but how they judge in this specific case of Jesus.”[[77]](#footnote-18019) The Jews judged Jesus and others according to the worldly standards that they understood and lived by. In John 7:24, Jesus told the Jews they judged by the outward appearance. That was bad enough, but here Jesus digs more deeply into their judging and declares it to be not just by outward appearance, but by fleshly, worldly standards.

**“I am judging no one.”** The apparent contradiction caused by this statement juxtaposed with the next one, “Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true” (John 8:16) has given rise to many different scholarly opinions. Some scholars assert that Jesus says this because he did not come to judge the world but to save the world (John 3:17), but that misses the scope of the Scripture, because Jesus does make judgments about people all the time (cf. Matt. 15:12-15; 23:13-29). Other scholars would add the word “now,” so the meaning would be that Jesus does not judge now, but as we just saw, he did judge people. Some scholars emphasize the word “I” as if Jesus was saying “I alone” do not judge, but I and my Father do. But that would be Jesus playing word games with his adversaries and the crowd, saying that he did not judge when people, including his disciples, could see that he did. The meaning that fits with the scope of Scripture and the context is that Jesus was saying that he did not judge people according to the flesh, like the Jews did, and that was exactly correct since he then said, “Yet even if I do judge.” Also, however, what Jesus said points to the fact that he did not come to judge in his first coming; he came to die for people’s sins. So his primary mission was not to judge, but to help people overcome sin.

Joh 8:16

**“for I am not alone in my judgment, but I and the Father that sent me.”** This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his Father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

**“the father who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 8:17

**“in your law.”** It seems strange at first that Jesus would say, “in your law” instead of “in the law,” but often the Jews had warped their interpretation of the Law so badly that “their law” and the Law of Moses were not the same. Jesus made this point in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard it said...but I say to you” (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44). However, when it came to having two witnesses, the Jew’s understanding of the Law was correct, but Jesus wanted to make it clear that even they would agree with him on this point of having two witnesses.

**“the testimony of two men is true.”** The Law of Moses is very clear that there are to be two witnesses to establish a matter (Deut. 19:15; cf. Deut. 17:6). Having two witnesses to something that happened was a lot easier to do in biblical times than it is today because back then people were rarely apart. Life was dangerous, and so people lived and worked together. Today, many societies are very individualistic and people are alone a lot, but that was not the case in the biblical world. For example, in the biblical world, children lived with their parents until they married, no matter how old they were. Also, when a man married, he brought his wife home and lived close to his parents and his family. In many Arabic families today, the houses are multi-storied, with the sons’ families living above the parents, and moving down when the parents die. Also in biblical times, since the boys were raised in the occupation of the father, sticking close to the father and family made good economic sense as well as providing support and safety.

Joh 8:18

**“I am one.”** In this record, Jesus points out that the testimony of two was true, and he uses himself and the Father as witnesses. Jesus is making an argument from the lesser to the greater in John 8:17-18. If even the testimony of two men makes something true, then surely the testimony of one man (Jesus) and one God, who is greater than a man, is true.

John 8:17-18 also gives us evidence that the doctrine of the Trinity is incorrect, and there is only one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ. The Law said a person should have “two” or “three” witnesses (Deut. 19:15), so Jesus would have had a much stronger case if he said that the Father and “the Holy Spirit” testified as to who he was, especially since he was using himself as one of the witnesses. It seems apparent that the reason Jesus did not use “the Holy Spirit” as a third witness to what he was saying is that there is no such third “Person” as “the Holy Spirit.”

That the Father and Jesus, the Messiah, made “two” was exactly what the people of the time expected—that there was one God and His Messiah, making two. Furthermore, as the argument in John 8 developed, Jesus said to the Jews, “But now you are trying to find *a way* to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God” (John 8:40). But in the entire argument between Jesus and the Jews, which started in John 8:12 and goes through the whole chapter, Jesus only mentions himself and the Father, and that he was sent by the Father (John 8:16, 26, 29, 42) and taught what he received from the Father (John 8:26, 28, 40). But if he told them “the truth” about himself and the Father, why did he not say there was a Trinity, or that he was God, or that there was a third “Person” in God, “the Holy Spirit?” The straightforward reason why Jesus could say he taught them “the truth” but never mentioned that he was God or there was a Trinity is that the Trinity does not exist.

[For more on there not being a Trinity, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” and see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” Also see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith.*]

**“the Father who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“testifies about me.”** God testified about Jesus by energizing the work that Jesus was doing, and many people realized that the works that Jesus was doing were done by the power of God. Jesus told the people to believe the works that he did (cf. John 10:25, 37, 38; Matt. 9:8).

Joh 8:20

**“in the treasury in the Temple.”** The Temple had a series of courts, and the largest and most public of these, accessible to all Jews but not to Gentiles, was the Court of the Women, the outermost court after one entered the Temple proper. It was referred to as “the Court of the Women” because that was as far as women were usually allowed to go; the men could go further towards the Sanctuary. We are told that the Temple had 13 “shofar-chests” for people to put their money into (cf. Mishna *Shekalim* 2:1; 6:1, 5). The chests were likely called shofar-chests because they were shaped like shofars (in many ways like a modern funnel). Although the ancient sources do not tell us which part of the Temple they were placed in, it was almost certainly the Court of the Women because there were women who put money into the chests (Mark 12:41-42). Women had access only to the Court of the Women in the Temple except when they were bringing an offering or sacrifice, at which time they could go further into the Temple.

The point of saying where Jesus was teaching was to make the point that Jesus was boldly teaching inside the Temple court itself, right in the sight of the Jews and their police, and yet “no one arrested him because his hour had not yet come.” Jesus was protected by God and the people got to hear his teaching.

Joh 8:21

**“I am going away, and you will look for me.”** At this point in the teaching, Jesus picks up where he left off earlier (John 7:33-36). Earlier, Jesus said that he was going to a place that the Jews could not go and they thought he might have been saying that he was going to be among the Greeks, and perhaps teach the Jews of the Dispersion (John 7:35). Now they thought that Jesus could have been speaking of killing himself (John 8:22). Ironically, it was the Jews who would end up killing themselves by the choice they made to not to believe and get saved. Instead of going to be with the Father at the resurrection, they would be thrown into the Lake of Fire and die (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:1-15).

**“you will die in your sin.”** This is a bold statement. These Jews had rejected God and aligned themselves with the Devil (John 8:44), and because of that they would not accept Christ and get saved, so they would die in their sin. For the saved, resurrection life will be wonderful. It will be a wonderful life in a wonderful place with wonderful people and it will be enjoyed in a brand new healthy and incorruptible body. Part of the reason the next life will be so wonderful is that selfish, evil people will not be there. Jesus will kill them and they will not be part of Jesus’ wonderful future kingdom (cf. Isa. 11:4; Ps. 2:9-12; Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 19:11-21).

God is, and has to be, a righteous God, and He has two ways of removing sin from the earth that are totally in keeping with His godly character. Those two ways are “grace” and “judgment.” For those people who have a humble heart and ask for God’s forgiveness, God gives grace—the people ask for grace and mercy, and He gives it. But for those people who defy God and continue in sin and selfishness, God gives judgment—the sinful people are removed, and thus their sin is removed as well. We see this in Zechariah 5:3. People such as thieves and liars will be purged from Israel when Christ sets up his kingdom on earth (see commentary on Zech. 5:3).

Joh 8:22

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Joh 8:23

**“You are from beneath, I am from above.”** Jesus is not saying where people, he or the Jews, are literally from. He is pointing out what they were associated with, and the origin of their ways and ideas. The Jews were “from beneath.” That does not mean “from hell,” or “from the underworld,” because the idea that the Devil lived and reigned in “hell” and it was under the earth was not a Jewish idea, nor did it fit with the Greek idea of Hades, or the idea of an underworld where the dead lived. The word “beneath” here refers to the fallen world, which is “beneath” heaven and “beneath” God and godliness.

D. A. Carson says, “Jesus cuts through their misguided speculation by declaring that he and they emerge from two entirely antithetical realms. He is *from above, i.e., not of this world*, but from heaven, sent by his father. They are *from below*, which does not mean ‘from hell’ or ‘from the underworld’ or the like, but *of this world*, this fallen moral order in conscious rebellion against its creator…. The contrast is not between a spiritual world and a material world (John is not a Neoplatonist), but between the realm of God himself and the realm of his fallen and rebellious creation, the ‘world’ which hates Jesus because he testified that ‘what it does is evil’ (John 7:7).”[[78]](#footnote-24035)

Joh 8:24

**“unless you believe that I am *the one*.”** Trinitarians occasionally cite this verse to try to show the necessity of believing their doctrine, and unfortunately, sometimes they quote it even to intimidate those who doubt the Trinity. They supply the word “God” after “I am,” not from the text, but from the dictates of their doctrine, and make the verse read: ‘For if you believe not that I am [God], ye shall die in your sins.’ This is a distortion of the biblical text as a whole, and the Gospel of John in particular. The purpose of the Gospel is clearly stated in John 20:31: “But these are written so that you believe that Jesus is [“God”? No!] the Christ, the Son of God, and so that by believing you will have life in his name.” In light of the explicitly stated purpose of the Gospel of John, teaching that unless one believes in Christ’s “deity,” he will die in his sins, is particularly unwarranted.

The true meaning of the text is that if one does not believe that *Jesus is the Christ*, he will die in his sins, and this teaching can be found in a number of scriptures in the New Testament. Obviously, if one chooses to not believe in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, he will die in his sins. We believe the NIV84 does a good job with this particular text, especially in light of the way Christ was veiling his role as Messiah: “If you do not believe I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.” This then fits with other times he said similar things, such as in John 13:19 when he said to disciples at the last supper, “I am telling you now before it [his betrayal] happens so that when it does happen you will believe that I am he” (CSB).

[For more on Jesus Christ not being God and there not being a Trinity, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Joh 8:25

**“You—who are you.”** The second-person singular of “to be” makes the “you” at the beginning of the phrase emphatic. The Jews were asking and asking who Jesus was, but not accepting his answer (cf. John 7:19ff; 7:30ff; 8:13ff). Jesus’ answer in this verse is difficult in the Greek, and Lenski writes, “The reply of Jesus constitutes one of the most disputed passages in the New Testament….” Nevertheless, Lenski gives an excellent explanation of it. First, *tēn archēn* does not have the force of “the beginning,” but rather “in general,” or “altogether.”[[79]](#footnote-19659) Second, the word *lalō* (from *laleō*) is a present active, although almost all versions translate it as a past tense. Christ was telling the Pharisees who he was even as they were asking him who he was, so he answered, “I am what I am [presently] telling you.” Christ had just told them (John 8:12) that he was the light of the world, an obvious Messianic reference (“a light for the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:6) and the glory of Israel). Because they did not know that Jesus was speaking of the Father (John 8:26), then they certainly did not understand that he, the one sent by the Father, was obviously the Messiah.

Joh 8:26

**“he who sent me is true.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 8:28

**“When you have lifted up...then you will know.”** We must not take the “when” and “then” as coming very close together, as if as soon as Jesus was crucified, the people and the Jews would know he was the Messiah. The words do not imply “immediately,” and the knowledge that Jesus was indeed the Messiah took years for some and will take until Judgment Day for others. The point of the text is that it would be by Christ’s work on the cross that people would truly see he was the Messiah. Christ had to die to accomplish his great mission.

**“lifted up.”** This refers to the crucifixion, as is clear from the fact that Jesus says, when “you” (Jews) have lifted up the Son of Man.” The reason there is any confusion at all is that there is no evidence in the writings that have come down to us from antiquity that the term “lifted up” was used of crucifixion. However, that does not mean it was not used that way, and it does not mean that Jesus was being purposely obscure. The phrase referred to crucifixion (see John 12:32-33). Also, here we see that Jesus places the responsibility for his crucifixion on the Jews and their unbelief. He does not say, “When the Romans have crucified me,” but “when you have lifted up the Son of Man.”

**“then will you know that I am *the one*.”** The sentence should end after “one” (or “he” if the translation is “that I am he”). “The one” refers to the one whom they were expecting: the Messiah. There is no connective, such as “that,” between that statement and the next one, even though the major versions (KJV, HCSB, ESV, NIV, NRSV, etc.) all put one in the text. D. A. Carson writes, “Probably we should read a full stop after ‘I am.’ In the next words, nothing in the Greek text corresponds to the NIV’s ‘that.’ Rather, Jesus goes on to say, ‘And I do nothing on my own...’ recapitulating the argument of John 3:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:16; etc.”[[80]](#footnote-28249) Other scholars agree.[[81]](#footnote-30780)

R. C. H. Lenski points out that the word “know” is an ingressive aorist and means “come to know.”[[82]](#footnote-21061) The “then” is not tied to the immediacy of the crucifixion, as if as soon as Jesus was crucified the Jews would know he was the Messiah, but to the whole context. We approach Jesus’ words as they are written, but we must remember that they were spoken in a quickly moving and tense verbal context. Thus, the Jews’ “coming to know,” or “coming to realize” that Jesus was the Messiah, was tied to his crucifixion and what would happen after it, all of which are part of the context of Jesus’ statement.

**“And I do nothing of myself.”** A new sentence starts with the word “And.” When deciding how to punctuate a verse, we must be sensitive to the grammar, context, and scope of Scripture. In this case, Jesus continues a theme that he taught over and over in John, that he had not come on his own and that he was not acting on his own initiative or from his own power (cf. John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:16, 28, 29; 12:49, 50; 14:10, 24). Thus, this verse is a continuation of something he had been teaching all along. Furthermore, there is no compelling reason to connect the two halves of the verse. The verse makes much more sense and flows with the teaching of Jesus to have it read as two separate sentences. Then also, the last sentence in the verse flows seamlessly into the next verse, John 8:29.

This verse, and the other verses mentioned above that are similar to it, show the dependency that the Son had upon the Father. This is very good evidence that Jesus is not God in the flesh, but the Son of God. Even Jesus’ statement to the Jews, that he was “the one,” reflected back to the Messiah they were expecting, and they were expecting a human being, a man from the line of David. If Jesus were God, and especially if a person had to believe that to be saved, this was a perfect time for Jesus to say so. Instead, he said he was the Messiah the Jews were expecting.

Joh 8:29

**“and he who sent me is with me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”** Jesus Christ made it very plain in a number of verses that his primary purpose was to do the will of God, not follow his own ways and accomplish his own desires. See commentary on John 4:34.

Joh 8:30

**“As he was saying these things.”** Jesus’ bold presentation, combined with the works that he had done there in Jerusalem that most people had heard about and some people had witnessed firsthand, convinced the people that he was the Messiah. This should be great encouragement to believers to boldly testify about Jesus Christ. A bold and confident teaching about Jesus convinces many people.

Joh 8:31

**“If you continue in my word.”** In Jesus’ time, to continue in the Word was to live it; to obey it. Too many times modern people think of continuing in the Word as continued study, or as continuing to believe what the Bible says. But the greater reality is that it refers to doing what the Word of God says to do.

Joh 8:32

**“the truth will set you free.”** The Greek verb translated “set you free” is *eleutheroō* (#1659 ἐλευθερόω), and it means to “set free.” Occasionally teachers will quote a version such as the KJV, which has “make you free,” and teach that the Bible “makes” a person free as if it forces them to be free, but that is not the meaning of the verb. The Word frees a person, it sets them free.

Joh 8:33

**“They answered him.”** It is most likely that the “They” refers to the Jews who did not believe, who jumped in at this point and began to argue again with Jesus. The Jews had been arguing with Jesus, as John 8:13, 19, and 8:25 say. During the argument, other Jews who were listening believed in him (John 8:30).

This section of Scripture has been hotly debated by scholars because the text is not clear that the Jews butted back into the conversation. The text could read that Jesus began talking to those who believed in him and then continued through John 8:44 where he called them children of the Devil. But that is highly unlikely because it was the Jews who did not believe who were trying to kill him (John 8:37), and were children of the Devil.

There are four major ways that scholars have traditionally handled this section of Scripture.

1. The Jews who believed in John 8:30 are different from the Jews who “had believed” in John 8:31.
2. The Jews are the same people throughout the whole conversation, but when Jesus tries to tell them about being free by remaining in the Word (John 8:31, 32), they become angry and turn from their belief in him.
3. John 8:30-32 refers to Jews who believed in Jesus, and the unbelieving Jews butt back into the conversation in John 8:33, with their remark about never being enslaved, and they are the ones trying to kill Jesus, who are children of the Devil.
4. John 8:30-36 is Jesus talking with the Jews who believe in him, and then he turns and addresses the unbelieving Jews in John 8:37.

As to these arguments, we cannot agree with **1)**. We see no reason to make the Jews in John 8:30 and John 8:31 different. For anyone to believe at any time they have to have a heart to believe, and the “Jews” who opposed Jesus never had such a heart. No matter what Jesus did, even when he healed the sick or raised the dead, they found a reason to be angry with him. They never showed any appreciation for any aspect of his ministry. Those Jews are the children of the Devil who were trying to kill Jesus, and they did not believe at some point but then turn against him. This same reasoning is valid against argument 2): the Jews who believed at one time did not suddenly become children of the Devil and begin actively trying to kill Jesus.

Arguments 3) and 4) are the strongest, but 4) seems weaker because John 8:37, “I know that you are Abraham’s seed,” is in direct response to John 8:33, “We are Abraham’s seed.” It seems clear that Jesus is talking to the same group of people, so the break in the dialogue does not seem to be between John 8:36 and John 8:37.

So, argument 3) is the strongest and most likely. Jesus had been arguing with the Jews who continually opposed him. During their discourse, other Jews believed. Jesus began to address them, telling them that if they continued in what they were learning, they would be set free. At that point the Jews who opposed Jesus butted back into the conversation with their statement that clearly missed the point of what Jesus was saying, insisting they had never been enslaved. But they had been enslaved, physically, mentally, and spiritually, something the believing Jews would have at least been meek enough to recognize. Why these Jews would become offended at Jesus’ words and butt back into the conversation becomes even clearer in John 8:43: the Jews could not “hear” what Jesus was saying. They were children of the Devil, so they could not grasp the spiritual truth Jesus was speaking of, and arrogantly challenged what he was saying, thus reentering the conversation at John 8:33.

Joh 8:34

**“everyone who continues to commit sin is a slave to sin.”** The practice of sin actually enslaves a person to sin. Furthermore, anyone who thinks that wickedness in any form will rescue a person from being a slave to it or rescue a person from God’s judgment is mistaken. Wickedness will not rescue people who get involved with it (cf. Eccl. 8:8).

Joh 8:35

**“the slave does not remain in the house forever.”** The slave may be sold or given away, whereas a son stays as a member of the household forever.

Joh 8:37

**“I know that you are Abraham’s seed.”** Jesus did not deny that these Jews were the physical descendants of Abraham. However, Abraham had eight children (Gen. 21:9-10; 25:1-2), so being a descendant of Abraham did not in and of itself qualify a person for a special blessing or salvation (cf. Gen. 21:9-10; Rom. 9:6-9; Gal. 4:21-31).

Joh 8:40

**“you are trying to find *a way* to kill me.”** Evil, demonic people say and act on what they believe, but they are not willing to let people who disagree with them say and act on what they believe. No, evil and demonic people try to silence by any means those who disagree with them, and a primary way of doing that is to kill their enemies. This has been true for centuries, and it is still true today (cf. Jer. 38:4 and commentary on Jer. 38:4).

Joh 8:42

**“came from God.”** God created Jesus when he was conceived in Mary.

[For more explanation of the phrase that Jesus came from God, see commentary on John 6:38.]

**“but he sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 8:43

**“word.”** The Greek word translated “word” is *logos* (#3056 λόγος), and here it means “word” or more accurately, “message.” The Jews were not able to hear the message of Jesus. They were hard-hearted and had closed their ears, and were blinded by the Adversary (2 Cor. 4:4). They are enemies of righteousness (Acts 13:10). They do the works of their father, the Devil (John 8:44). The wise Christian knows that just as these evil people had infiltrated the religious institutions in Jesus’ day and taken positions of authority in it, they have done the same today. That is why some church leaders and seminary professors seem to be so against the things of God—they are against them. Jesus told us to know them by their fruit.

[For more on having ears unable to hear the truth, see commentary on John 10:1.]

Joh 8:44

**“You are from *your* father the Devil.”** Some of the religious leaders of Jesus’ time had committed the unforgivable sin (Matt. 12:31-32) and taken the Devil as their god. Jesus identified these people as children of the Devil and knowing that fact helps explain so much about them. It explains why they murdered innocent people (Matt. 23:35; Luke 22:2; John 11:53; 12:10-11), why they lied and bribed people (Matt. 28:11-15), and why they could not rejoice even when something wonderful had occurred like the healing of a man who was born blind (John 9:24-34). It also explains why they perverted the Word of God and made it hard to obey it (Mark 7:8-13; Luke 11:46).

Because people can be horrible sinners without taking the Devil as their god and committing the unforgivable sin, people who are children of the Devil must be identified by revelation. Nevertheless, the Bible has a lot to say about people who have become children of the Devil so we know how they are and that they always pervert the ways of God, but that information is scattered throughout the Word of God and thus requires diligent study.

[For more on the unforgivable sin, see commentary on Matt. 12:31.]

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“the father of them.”** In biblical custom, if someone started something, then he was referred to as its “father.” The Devil is indeed, “the father of lies.”

[For more on the use of “father,” see commentary on Gen. 4:20.]

Joh 8:46

**“Which one of you convicts me of sin?”** The Jews thought that Jesus was a sinner (John 9:24), but they had no evidence to back up their claim.

Joh 8:48

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”** This is one of the places where we see from Scripture that evil and narcissistic people accuse others of having or causing the problems that they themselves have and cause. It was the Jews who had demons, not Jesus, yet they accuse him of having demons. Wise believers are aware of this Satanic tactic and are not thrown off by it. Furthermore, just as these Jews were not convinced by Jesus’ logic or good works, the same is true of evil people today. Believers should not waste much time trying to convince hard-hearted people.

Joh 8:51

**“see death.”** This is an idiom for “die,” and in this case “see death” is used idiomatically for experiencing “everlasting death.” Jesus is not saying that a person who keeps his word would not die in the flesh, but that he would not die an everlasting death. The words “live” and “life” were sometimes used of everlasting life (see commentary on Luke 10:28), and the words “die” and “death” were sometimes used of everlasting death, as is the case here in John 8:51.

There are times in the Bible when the reader is called upon to use their knowledge of the scope of Scripture and their logic to understand what the Bible is saying. Isaiah 1:18, says, “‘Come now and let’s reason together,’ says Yahweh.” Yahweh God expects us to use the brains and logic that He gave us to understand what He is saying. Jesus’ followers die in the flesh just like unbelievers do, so when Jesus says that people who keep his word will not die, he does not mean that this flesh body will not die, but that they will not die an everlasting death.

[For more on the dead being dead in every way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For information on people being totally consumed in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Joh 8:52

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Joh 8:53

**“Surely.”** The “surely” is implied by the word “not” (Gk: μή #3361, transliterated “*mē”*), which expects a negative answer.

Joh 8:54

**“He is our God.”** Some early manuscripts say “He is our God,” and others say “He is your God.” It is more likely that the “our” was changed to “your” as the scribes would not like to possibly imply that the Jews were saying that God was Jesus’ God also. The punctuation that makes the reading clear was not in the early texts.

Joh 8:57

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“and you have seen Abraham.”** The Jews were so blinded by evil and hate that they did not even hear what Jesus said. This was not uncommon. It happened regularly enough that Jesus even pointed it out when speaking with the Jews. He said, “Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because you are not able to hear my word” (John 8:43). Jesus never said he saw Abraham. He said Abraham saw his day, that is, the time when the Messiah would conquer the world and rid it of evil. Abraham, who was a prophet and knew the prophecies, saw by faith the Day of Christ, and he looked for a future city that would be built by God (Heb. 11:10).

There are Bible teachers and commentators today who make the same mistake the Jews made, and say that Jesus had to be God because that is how he saw Abraham. But Jesus was not God and never saw Abraham, who lived some 2,000 years before Jesus was born.

Joh 8:58

**“I am *the one*.”** Many Trinitarians argue that this verse states that when Jesus said “I am,” he was claiming to be God, (*i.e., Yahweh*, the God who revealed Himself to Moses in the Old Testament)**.** But saying “I am” does not mean a person is claiming to be God. The Greek that is translated as “I am” in John 8:58 is *egō eime* (ἐγὼ εἰμί), and it was a common Greek way for a person to identify themself. For example, only ten verses after Jesus said, *egō eime* (“I am”) in John 8:58, the man who had been born blind identified himself by saying exactly what Jesus said; *egō eime* (“I am;” John 9:9). Thus, Jesus and the man born blind both identified themselves by saying *egō eime* (“I am”), only ten verses apart.

Sadly, unless someone looks at the Greek text, they will never see that “I am” was a common Greek way for a man or woman to identify themselves. In what seems to be a clear case of Trinitarian bias in translating the Greek text, when Jesus says, *egō eime* (“I am”) in John 8:58, the English Bibles read, “I am.” But when Jesus says *egō eime* in other places in the New Testament, or other people say *egō eime* (“I am”), the Greek phrase gets translated differently. So, for example, some English translations of what the man born blind said are: “I am the one” (CJB, HCSB, NASB, NET); “I am he” (BBE, RV, KJV, YLT); “It is I” (DBY); and, “I am the man” (ESV, NIV). The only commonly used English Bible that has “I am” in John 9:9 is the New American Bible.

There are many other examples of the phrase *egō eime* not being translated as “I am,” but being translated as “I am he” or some other similar phrase. For example, Jesus taught that people would come in his name, saying *egō eime* (“I am he”) and will deceive many (Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8 (HCSB, ESV, NAB, NET, NIV).

Jesus said *egō eime* (“I am”), in a large number of places, but it is usually translated “I am he,” “It is I,” or “I am the one,” which are good translations because, as was stated above, *egō eime* was commonly used by people to identify themselves. Examples of Jesus using *egō eime* include: John 13:19; 18:5, 6, and 18:8; Jesus identifying himself to the apostles on the boat: Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50; and John 6:20; and Jesus identifying himself to the Jews, saying *egō eime*, translated “I am the one I claim to be” (John 8:24 and 8:28 NIV84). All these places where Jesus says *egō eime* but it is not translated as “I am” show that the translators understand that just saying *egō eime* does not mean the person is saying “I am” and claiming to be God.

At the Last Supper, the disciples were trying to find out who would deny Christ. They used *egō eime* as the standard Greek identifier. Jesus had said one of them would betray him, and one after another they said to him, *mētiegō eime, Kurie* (literally, “not I am, Lord;” Matt. 26:22 and 26:25.) The apostles were not trying to deny that they were God by saying, “Not I am.” They were simply using as the common personal identifier *egō eime* and saying, “Surely not I, Lord.”

In Acts 26:29, when Paul was defending himself in court, he said, “I pray to God that…all who hear me this day would become the same as I am [*egō eime*].” Obviously, Paul was not claiming to be God. There are more uses of the phrase “I am,” and especially so if we realize that what has been covered above is only the nominative singular pronoun and the first-person singular verb that we have just covered. The point is this: “I am” was a common way of designating oneself, and it did not mean you were claiming to be God. C. K. Barrett writes:

*Egō eimi* [“I am”] does not identify Jesus with God, but it does draw attention to him in the strongest possible terms. “I am the one—the one you must look at, and listen to, if you would know God.”[[83]](#footnote-18589)

A major problem that occurs when we misunderstand a verse is that the correct meaning goes unnoticed, and that certainly is the case with John 8:58. If the phrase *egō eime* in John 8:58 were translated “I am he” or “I am the one,” like all the other places where Jesus says it, instead of coming to the erroneous conclusion that Jesus is God, we would more easily see that Jesus was speaking of himself as the Messiah of God who was foretold throughout the Old Testament.

Trinitarians assert that because Jesus was “before” Abraham, Jesus must have been God. But Jesus did not literally exist before his conception in Mary, but he “existed” in the plan of God, and was foretold in prophecy. Prophecies of the coming redeemer start as early as Genesis 3:15, which was before Abraham. Jesus was “the one,” the Savior, long before Abraham. The Church did not have to literally exist as people for God to choose us before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), we existed in the mind of God. Similarly, Jesus did not exist as an actual physical person during the time of Abraham, but he “existed” in the mind of God as God’s plan for the redemption of man.

It is also important to notice that many people misread John 8:58 and think it says Jesus saw Abraham. We must read the Bible carefully because it says no such thing. It does not say Jesus saw Abraham, it says Abraham saw the Day of Christ. A careful reading of the context of the verse shows that Jesus was speaking of “existing” in God’s foreknowledge. John 8:56 says, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.” This verse says that Abraham “saw” the day of Christ (the day of Christ is usually considered by theologians to be the day when Christ conquers the earth and sets up his kingdom—and it is still future). That would fit with what the book of Hebrews says about Abraham: “for he was looking forward to the city that has the *lasting* foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). The Bible says Abraham “saw” a city that is still future. In what sense could Abraham have seen something that was future? Abraham “saw” the day of Christ because God told him it was coming, and Abraham “saw” it by faith. Although Abraham saw the day of Christ by faith, that day existed in the mind of God long before Abraham (cf. Gen. 3:15). Thus, in the context of God’s plan existing from the beginning, Christ certainly was “before” Abraham. Christ was the plan of God for man’s redemption long before Abraham lived.

Jesus did not claim to be God in John 8:58. In very strong terms, however, he claimed to be the Messiah, the one whose day Abraham saw by faith. Jesus said that before Abraham was, “I am the one,” meaning, even before Abraham existed, Jesus was foretold to be the promised Messiah. Jesus gave the Jews many opportunities to see and believe that he was in fact the Messiah of God, but they were blind to that fact, and crucified him.

We see a good example of “I am” being used as a way to identify oneself but without any claim of being God when we compare Mark 13:6 with Matthew 24:5. In these parallel records, Jesus is in the last week of his life, and he is on the Mount of Olives teaching disciples. According to Mark, Jesus said, “Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am,’ and will lead many astray.” However, Matthew records the same incident as Jesus saying, “many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will mislead many.” In the context of the End Times, false Messiahs could identify themselves simply as “I am,” but the meaning is clarified in Matthew, “I am the Messiah.” In this case, we can see that “I am” means “I am the Messiah.”

Another important thing we need to know is that despite the Trinitarian claim that when Jesus said “I am” he was quoting the Old Testament and claiming to be God, that is not an accurate claim. As we saw above, the Greek text records Jesus as saying *egō eime,* “I am.” But the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament), which is quoted many times in the New Testament, does not say that. When God says what most English Bibles translate as “I am that I am” (Exod. 3:14), the Hebrew can also be translated as “I will be (or “become”) what I will become” or even “I will cause to be what I will cause to be.”[[84]](#footnote-15086) Although the exact way to bring the Hebrew into English is debated, that is off the topic we are discussing here. What we need to focus on is that if Jesus Christ was going to say “I am” and thus claim to be God on the authority of the Old Testament, the “I am” in the Old Testament should match the “I am” in John 8:58. But it doesn’t. The Septuagint uses Ὁ ὢν (*ho ōn*) for “I am” in the latter part of Exodus 3:14, when God says, “I AM has sent me to you” (NASB). It surely seems that if John wanted his audience to connect what Jesus said in John 8:58 with what God said his name was in Exodus 3:14, the text would be the same. The fact that they are not is good supporting evidence that Jesus was not claiming to be God. Most English Bibles read the same “I am” in Exodus and in John, and so Bible teachers who do not read the original languages (and sadly some who do) claim that Jesus was quoting the Old Testament and claiming to be God. But that is not the case.

[Some other sources that comment on John 8:58 and conclude that Jesus’ using “I am” did not make him God are: Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*; Mary Dana, *Letters Addressed to Relatives and Friends Chiefly in Reply to Arguments in Support of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1845; available from Spirit & Truth); Charles Morgridge, *The True Believer’s Defence Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians* (1837; available from Spirit & Truth); Andrews Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*; Don Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*; Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition?*]

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Joh 8:59

**“they picked up stones to throw at him.”** The Jews were so arrogant that they thought if anyone was the Messiah they would know it, so they considered it blasphemy and worthy of death if someone claimed to be the Messiah. When Jesus said, “I am the one,” and that he was before Abraham and that Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus’ day, the Jews realized that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, so they picked up stones to kill him. Later on, he was tried and crucified for claiming to be the Messiah.

Trinitarians claim that the Jews picked up stones to stone Jesus because he was claiming to be God, but that is only an assumption. The biblical evidence is that the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus because they understood he was claiming to be the Messiah. The Jews had asked Jesus about being the Christ, the Messiah, at other times, and Jesus told them that he did tell them he was the Christ (John 10:24-25). Furthermore, the Jews made it clear that if anyone believed that Jesus was the Christ, they would be excommunicated from the synagogue (John 9:22). Also, at Jesus’ trial, the High Priest asked, “I charge you under oath by the living God, that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). The Jews asked Jesus if he was the Christ. No one ever asked him if he was God. But if the Jews thought Jesus had been claiming to be God, that certainly would have been a question they would have asked. Instead, at the trial, the High Priest asked Jesus in very clear terms if he was “the Christ” because that is what the Jews knew Jesus had been claiming to be. Also, when the Jews heard Jesus’ clear answer (“Yes, it is as you say”), they accused him of blasphemy and said, “He deserves to die!” (Matt. 26:66). They also felt he was worthy of death here in John 8:59 and they picked up stones to kill him but Jesus got away. In contrast, after hearing his “blasphemy” of claiming to be the Christ at the trial, they took him to Pilate and got the Romans to execute Jesus by crucifixion. It was technically illegal for the Jews to execute anyone, but in times of great emotion, the law was sometimes ignored. That would have happened in John 8 if Jesus had not gotten away, it almost happened to Paul in the Temple (Acts 21:31), and it did happen to Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:58-60). About two months after this incident at the Feast of Tabernacles, when Jesus was again in Jerusalem for the Feast of Hannukkah, the Jews again realized Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God (John 10:36) and tried to stone him then too (John 10:31).

In summary, then, the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus because they knew he was claiming to be the Christ; eventually, they did kill him for making that claim.

**“but Jesus hid himself and went out of the Temple.”** Instead of “hid himself,” the Greek can also be translated that he “was hidden,” saying that his disciples likely hid him by surrounding him. However, as their leader, it is likely that Jesus knew what to do and was directing his disciples in what they were doing. There were parts of the Temple still under construction during the ministry of Jesus, and what likely happened is that the Jews, eager to rid themselves of Jesus, went off to get stones from the construction area and while they were gone Jesus was surrounded by his disciples and the group left the Temple. Although God could have helped with Jesus’ escape, it is more likely that it was due to quick thinking and decisive action, which are things that should be a part of the life of every Christian.

Some versions of the Bible add the phrase “going through the midst of them, and so passed by” (cf. KJV). The evidence is overwhelming that those words were not original but were added by later scribes. They do not appear in the earliest manuscripts, and when they do appear in the later manuscripts, there are some differences in wording among those manuscripts. Thus, the Greek manuscript evidence has the signs of the addition being later, and the reason for the addition, which could have started as a scribe’s notation, was to try to show that Jesus’ leaving the area was a miraculous event, and that God cloaked him as he walked right through the midst of his enemies. The later manuscripts of the Western text tradition have these extra words, which is why they appear in the Geneva Bible (1599) the King James (1611), and the New King James, which were translated from Western texts, the older versions being translated long before the earliest and best Greek texts were discovered.

**John Chapter 9**

Joh 9:1

**“And as he passed by.”** The record reads like Jesus just left the Temple and saw the blind man. It is possible, but not necessary, that that is what happened. The man was healed on a Sabbath day (John 9:14), and the last day of the Feast was a Sabbath. John 7:37 mentions “the last day, the great *day* of the feast” which most scholars believe is the eighth day of the feast, which, according to Leviticus 23:36 was a Sabbath. Thus, it is possible that Jesus simply left the Temple on that last day of Tabernacles and saw a man who was blind who had been brought there, likely to beg, much like the lame man in Acts 3. However, it is also possible that Jesus simply remained in Jerusalem after the Feast of Tabernacles and the record of the blind man occurred later, on another Sabbath.

There were six incidents in the ministry of Jesus in which he showed that taking care of people was not considered “work” by God and thus was more important than keeping rules about the Sabbath that were made by humans. The six incidents were picking grain on the Sabbath and five healings (see commentary on Matt. 12:9).

Joh 9:2

**“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents.”** The Jews taught that the sins of the parents could cause a baby to be afflicted. However, the full question of the disciples seems very strange to us, because how could the man sin before he was born? The answer is not reincarnation or some form of transmigration of the soul (i.e., the person did not sin in an earlier life), but rather that the Rabbis taught that a person could sin even in the womb.[[85]](#footnote-30242) If this man sinned in the womb so that he was born blind, then he would have been born “entirely” in sin, as the religious leaders confidently asserted in John 9:34.

**“so that he was born blind.”** This is a usage of *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood result clause (see commentary on John 9:3 and Word Study: “Hina”). The disciples assumed that someone’s sin unintentionally resulted in this man’s blindness. Jesus specifically rejects this thinking in John 9:3. His response takes the disciples’ thoughts away from who is to blame, and leads them to think only of working the healing works of God in this man’s life.

Joh 9:3

**“Neither did this man sin nor his parents.”** Here Jesus specifically refutes a common thought of his day, that a child could sin in the womb and bad things happen to people because of sin.

**“let the works of God be revealed in him.”** This phrase is open to several different translations. The translator’s understanding of the passage, how he believes it fits into the context, and the scope of Scripture, in accordance with his theology, will determine his opinion as to how it is best brought into English. The Greek reads, *hina phanerōthē ta erga tou theou en autō*. The controversy surrounds the use of the particle *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) with *phaneroō*, the verb for “revealed” (#5319 φανερόω), in the subjunctive mood. The question is whether this use of *hina* with the subjunctive is to be understood here to indicate *purpose* or *command*. This same Greek construction can be used in purpose and command clauses, with purpose clauses being the more common of the two.[[86]](#footnote-26277) A purpose clause indicates *why* something happened, it shows the intention behind the action: e.g., “Children were being brought to him in order that he could lay [Greek is *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood] his hands on them and pray” (Matt. 19:13). A command clause, on the other hand, *issues an order* or command: e.g., “Come, lay [Greek is *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood] your hands on her so that she will be healed and live” (Mark 5:23).

[For more on result clauses, see Word Study: “Hina.”]

Because it is the same Greek form of *hina* with the subjunctive, there can be disagreement as to whether purpose or command is meant. This disagreement shows up in the varying translations of Mark 5:12 for instance, when the demons plead to go into the herd of swine. Some versions translate the second part of their plea as purpose, “Send us into the pigs *so that* we may enter them” (cf. NASB, HCSB, KJV, ASV), while most modern versions translate it as a command: “Send us into the pigs. *Let us* enter them” (cf. ESV, NIV, NRSV, NET, NAB, NJB). Interestingly, we see precisely the same split between the translations with regard to Titus 3:13, “see that they lack nothing” (command: ESV, NIV, NRSV, NET, NAB, NJB) as opposed to “so that they lack nothing” (purpose-result: NASB, HCSB, KJV, ASV). (See also Revelation 14:13 for similar disagreement between translations).

Since John 9:3 has *hina* with the subjunctive, we must ask whether it is meant to be a purpose or command clause. It is rendered as a purpose clause in most translations, “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (NRSV); however, this translation has serious consequences for the meaning of the text. It makes the man’s blindness intentionally brought upon, so that he could not see for the better part of his life, simply for the purpose of being healed this day—that “God’s works” may be manifest by his healing. Such an interpretation goes against the teaching of Scripture, that God is love (1 John 4:16), has plans not to harm us (Jer. 29:11), and that it is Satan who is our enemy, the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4) who has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8), his ministry was to heal those oppressed by Satan (Acts 10:38). The Gospels nowhere portray this warfare mindset of Jesus as going about healing those *oppressed by God*.[[87]](#footnote-11731)

Accordingly, a number of scholars agree that John 9:3 should be read as a command clause, “But let the works of God be revealed in him.”[[88]](#footnote-26854) In this way, the Greek is understood just like Ephesians 5:33, which has the same construction: “let [Greek is *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood] the wife see that she respects her husband” (ESV, RSV). This translation fits best with the context of the verse, as well as the rest of the gospels and the scope of Scripture. In the context, the disciples falsely assume that someone’s sin resulted in this man being born blind. Jesus corrects this wrong thinking, saying it was not the result of anyone’s sin, and then he points them to the proper response of seeing such a man. He models what he came to do—to destroy the works of the Devil and heal those oppressed by him—“Let the works of God be manifest in him,” he says, showing compassion for the man. Then he turns to his disciples and reminds them that they must work the works of God while it is day. Rather than painting a picture of a capricious God who makes a man blind for the purpose of healing his blindness, this passage reveals the son of a loving God, who makes the works of his Father manifest by healing a man oppressed by the Devil.

[For other command clauses see also: Matt. 20:33; Mark 5:23; 10:51; 12:19; 1 Cor. 7:29; 16:16; 2 Cor. 8:7; 1 John 3:11; 3:23.]

There are two other grammatical options for understanding this verse, which we feel are less likely than the command clause but are worth mentioning here. First, it is also possible that Jesus’ words should read as a result clause. On this understanding, the verse would not be speaking of the purpose of the man’s blindness, but only of its result, “he was born blind with the result that the works of God are manifest in him.” This understanding, like the purpose clause reading, requires that the phrase, “he was born blind” be supplied since it is not in the original Greek. This view has for it the fact that the disciples used a result clause in John 9:2, asking Jesus whose sin resulted in the man’s blindness. To this, Jesus reverses their thinking from whose sin resulted in the blindness to how the blindness can result in the manifestation of the works of God.

Secondly, there is the option that the phrase is, in fact, a purpose clause; nevertheless is not to be read that he was born blind for a purpose. Rather, it should be read with what follows. In that case, it would read: “Jesus answered, “Neither did this man sin, nor his parents. But in order that the works of God be revealed in him, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.” But this is highly unlikely, for there is no other clear instance of a purpose clause gathering its main verb from what follows; usually the action comes from what precedes the *hina* clause, not after. Romans 7:13 is a near parallel, but it is a result clause, not purpose.

Joh 9:4

**“We.”** There are texts that read “I,” but the better textual support is for “we.” It is understandable that the copyists, particularly early in the Christian era, would be uncomfortable with “we,” wanting to put all the focus and power upon Jesus. Nevertheless, the true reading is very empowering to those who work for the Lord. “We” must all work, if work is to get done for the Lord.

**“night is coming.”** The “night” that Jesus referred to is the seven-year period of tribulation after the Rapture. Not much work will be done for God during that time and it will indeed be a dark time (cf. Joel 2:2; Amos 5:18-20). The Great Tribulation will be a horrible time on earth (see commentary on Dan. 12:1).

Joh 9:5

**“a light of the world.”** Although almost every translation reads, “the” light of the world, the Greek text does not read that way. John 8:12 says Jesus is “the” light, but not this verse. In the context of “we” must work the works of God (John 9:4), Jesus is “a” light, and we are lights also. Believers have always been lights in the world, shining the way to God (Matt. 5:14).

Joh 9:6

**“and made mud out of the spittle.”** Not only did Jesus “break the Sabbath” (that is, the man-made rules about the Sabbath invented by the religious leaders through the centuries) by healing the blind man, he also broke the Sabbath by making mud. “Kneading” was considered work by the Jews, and so to knead the dirt in with the spit and make mud was also breaking the man-made Sabbath. Of course, Jesus knew this and did not have to heal the man that way, but Jesus came “to set the captives free,” and a large part of being captive was being captive to man-made religious rules that put burdens on people.

Joh 9:7

**“Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.”** The Pool of Siloam is in the far southeast corner of Jerusalem, some 650 yards (six and a half football fields) from the Temple. It seems logical that the healing of the blind man took place in the pool as he washed, very much like Naaman’s healing took place in the Jordan River when he dipped in it (2 Kings 5:10-14).

There has been much discovered about the Pool of Siloam in the last few years. In 2004 a sewer pipe broke deep underground, and in digging down to fix it, the first large flagstones of the Pool of Siloam were discovered. Since that time, excavation has been ongoing but it was hindered by the fact that the ground above much of the pool was privately owned and could not be excavated. However, in 2023 the land above the pool was purchased, and archaeological excavation began in earnest. It is now believed that the Pool of Siloam at the time of Christ was about 2 acres. Furthermore, there is evidence that the Pool of Siloam was a mikvah, a pool for ritual cleansing, and it accommodated some of the large crowd that would come to Jerusalem for the feasts. Also, a paved path from the Pool of Siloam up to the Temple has been partially uncovered. The “Psalms of Ascent” (Ps. 120-134) would have been recited while making the uphill walk from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple. While that pathway did not exist in the time of David who penned many of those psalms, they were later adopted and used during that uphill walk to the Temple.

Not as well-known, but likely, is that “the tower of Siloam” that fell on 18 people was a tower that was associated with the Pool of Siloam (Luke 13:4). The tower could have just been near the pool, or an architectural feature of the pool.

The Pool of Siloam was first built by the Judean king, Hezekiah (c. 726-697 BC), although it seems there were other older pools on the western side of the City of David (Isa. 22:9-11). During the reign of King Hezekiah, Jerusalem was attacked by the Assyrian king, Sennacherib. Not wanting Sennacherib to have plenty of water for his army, Hezekiah had the springs outside Jerusalem blocked off, and had a tunnel, “Hezekiah’s Tunnel,” dug from the Gihon Spring to the southwest side of Jerusalem (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:1-4). 2 Kings 20:20 mentions that Hezekiah built a tunnel and a pool, and that pool would have most likely been the “lower pool” of Isaiah 22:9, and almost certainly the “Pool of Shelah” of Nehemiah 3:15. The Hebrew name of Siloam is used in Isaiah 8:8, but that does not likely refer to the pool dug by Hezekiah but rather to the natural flow of water from the Gihon Spring.

Joh 9:8

**“Therefore, the neighbors.”** The blind man went home after he washed and could see. It was the neighbors who took him to the Pharisees at the Temple (John 9:13). Their motivation for doing that is not stated.

Joh 9:11

**“The man who is called Jesus made mud.”** The man, knowingly or unknowingly, openly revealed that Jesus had broken the Sabbath in at least two ways: making mud on the Sabbath and healing on the Sabbath (see commentary on John 9:6). The breaking of the Sabbath was almost certainly what prompted the neighbors to take the man to the Pharisees.

Joh 9:12

**“He said, “I do not know.”** This was an honest and accurate answer. After receiving his sight, the man went home, and he had no idea where Jesus might have gone with his disciples. For all the man knew, since the Feast of Tabernacles had come to a close (John 7:37), Jesus might well have left Jerusalem and headed back to Galilee. As it turned out, Jesus had stayed in Jerusalem.

Joh 9:13

**“They brought to the Pharisees.”** Although the reason that the neighbors did this is not clear, it seems most likely that they were suspicious of a healing that had been done on the Sabbath, and the way it had been done, by making mud and smearing it on the blind man’s eyes. The neighbors did not take this man to the High Priest, or the Sanhedrin, or the Sadducees who ruled the Temple. Instead, they brought the man to “the Pharisees,” who seem to have been the leaders of the local synagogue, which is why they had the authority to expel the man from the Synagogue.

Joh 9:14

**“Now it was a Sabbath day.”** This may have been a weekly Sabbath, but it also could have been the special Sabbath that was the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles. According to Leviticus, the Feast of Tabernacles was a seven-day feast, but God added an eighth day to it. The first day of the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles was a special Sabbath, but also God said that the eighth day, technically the day after Tabernacles ended, was a special Sabbath (Lev. 23:34-36). Jesus began his teaching and dialogue with the Pharisees on the “last day” the “great day” of the feast (John 7:37), and that was the eighth day. Most commentators agree that it was the eighth day when Jesus healed the blind man. That dialogue ended with the Jews picking up stones to kill Jesus with, and so he left the Temple (John 8:59). It was as he was walking out of the Temple that Jesus saw the blind man and his disciples asked about him, which resulted in Jesus healing him (John 9:1-7).

**“opened his eyes.”** This is an idiom meaning “caused him to see.”

Joh 9:17

**“the blind *man*.”** Here “the blind man” is used as a commonly known designation for the man. He was actually no longer “the blind man” since he could see. The Greek text does not have the word “man” but uses the adjective “blind” as a substantive, meaning “the blind one.”

[For more on substantives, see commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

**“He is a prophet.”** The miracle done to the blind man made it clear to him that Jesus was a prophet. The Old Testament prophets had spiritual power. Here we see the boldness and honesty of this man who had been blind. He almost certainly knew that Jesus had broken the Sabbath regulations of the Jews when he made the mud and healed him, and he could have avoided a conflict by simply “flying below the radar” and stating that he did not know about the man who healed him. But he had been healed by Jesus! He had been blind for years and now could see and he was not going to let that be ignored, nor was he going to water down his testimony and thankfulness just because the Jews were angry he was healed on the Sabbath.

As the questions by the hard-hearted and unbelieving Pharisees continued, the blind man was seeing life, and Jesus, more and more clearly. Meanwhile, the simple and honest answers given by the blind man clouded the vision of the Pharisees with a religious fog. What Jesus said about his coming so the blind would see but the seeing would be blind (John 9:39) was happening at that very time.

Joh 9:18

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“until they called the parents.”** This indicates that the man who was born blind was still quite young, but over age 13 (see commentary on John 9:21).

Joh 9:21

**“who opened his eyes, we do not know.”** It is extremely unlikely that the man’s parents did not know how or who healed the eyes of their son. They must have been heartbroken for years over their son’s blindness, and may well have felt guilty and wondered if they had done something that offended God. They must have been overwhelmed, overjoyed, amazed, and thankful beyond words that their son had been healed. Of course, they would have asked what happened, and no doubt he told his parents what he told everyone else: a man named Jesus healed him. The fact that they would not admit that to the Pharisees shows how debilitating and imprisoning fear can be, and their son must have been brokenhearted at his parent’s lack of support even if at some intellectual level he understood it.

**“he is of age.”** The age of the man is not given, but he seems to have been quite young. That he was “of age” means he was at least 13, but he was likely older, but if he was much older his parents would not have had to point out, “he is of age.” However, the fact that the Pharisees called for his parents to give testimony likely indicates he was still a teenager, and he would have been living at home with his parents.

Joh 9:22

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Joh 9:23

**“He is of age.”** (See commentary on John 9:21).

Joh 9:24

**“So a second time they called the man who was blind.”** The inquisitive, impartial questions of the Pharisees can now be seen to be a farce, a lie. When the man stood his ground and would not impugn Jesus for what he did, the evil nature of the Pharisees came out of hiding, and the blind man did not back down but responded with boldness and truth.

**“Give glory to God.”** This was an idiomatic way of saying “Swear to tell the truth” (cf. Josh. 7:19). The Pharisees asked for the truth, and they got it in the blind man’s answer (cf. John 9:25).

Joh 9:25

**“If he is a sinner, I do not know.”** The blind man had already said he thought Jesus was a prophet (John 9:17). The Bible has examples of many people who were prophets and did wonderful things but still were sinners. Abraham was a prophet but allowed Sarah to be taken into the harem of a foreign king on two different occasions. Samuel was a great prophet but his sons were out of control. The man thought Jesus was a prophet, but he could not speak to whether he had any particular sin. The fact that Jesus broke the Sabbath traditions may not have been a sin in his eyes; it is likely that lots of people who knew the Mosaic Law realized that many of the regulations of the religious leaders were just traditions, and that a person was not a sinner in God’s eyes for breaking human traditions.

Joh 9:27

**“and you did not hear.”** The translation “hear” is accurate. People who side with evil and the Devil usually cannot “hear” the truth. They can listen to it, but they cannot “hear” it; it simply makes no sense to them (cf. John 8:44-45).

**“You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?”** We now see that this young formerly blind man had already made up his mind to be a disciple of Jesus. When truth presents itself to people who are genuinely hungry for truth it does not take them long to make a decision.

Joh 9:28

**“And they heaped insults on him.”** This is a sign of complete bankruptcy and defeat. The Pharisees have no legitimate challenges against Jesus that they can mount, so they just make up insults and lies. This is a tactic of the Devil. When there is no legitimate challenge, people just make up lies about the situation and cast doubt on what really happened. This tactic is used in politics all the time.

**“You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.”** Amazing irony. The Pharisees thought they were insulting the man by saying he was Jesus’ disciple, but in fact, there could be no higher praise. Furthermore, although the Pharisees claimed to be disciples of Moses they were not following the Law, and Moses himself will accuse them on Judgment Day (cf. John 5:45).

Joh 9:29

**“we know...we do not know.”** Like many modern unbelievers, these Pharisees arrogantly thought that they were the fountain of knowledge. They “knew” and they “did not know” and for them, that was the only possibility. What they said was right and everyone else was wrong. They were like Job’s miserable comforters, 2,000 years earlier who thought they had the wisdom and knowledge of the time (Job 12:2). In this case, they said, “We know that God has spoken to Moses,” but it was obvious from how they lived and what they said and did that they did not know what God said to Moses. They could not “hear” Moses any more than they could “hear” Jesus or this man who Jesus healed.

**“where he is from.”** This is not a statement about Jesus coming from Galilee or Nazareth; they knew that (cf. John 7:52). They were saying that they knew Moses was sent by God but they did not know where Jesus got his authority, but they certainly insinuated it was not from God.

Joh 9:31

**“God does not hear sinners.”** It should have been well-known in the culture that God does not hear the prayers of sinners but does answer the prayers of righteous people. Many verses in the Old Testament make that clear. Everyone sins, but some people are prideful and unrepentant about their sin, and God will not listen to the prayers of wicked and unrepentant people; those prayers are an abomination to Him (Prov. 21:27; 28:9). It is the prayer of a righteous person that accomplishes much (James 5:16). The Pharisees were so spiritually blind due to their evil, pride, and greed, that they could not give credit to Jesus Christ for healing a man born blind.

[For more information about the sacrifices and prayers of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Joh 9:34

**“You were born entirely in sins.”** The Pharisees now return to their “blame game” religion. The man was born blind, so he must have been born entirely in sin, either his own sin in the womb or a past life or because his parents were sinful, he was born with that sin and the consequences of it. In any case, to them, this man who was born blind was born “entirely in sins.” This was what the Pharisees taught in the synagogues that became part of the culture of the time, and that belief was the genesis of the disciple’s question back in John 9:2, “Who sinned, this man or his parents?”

**“And they cast him out.”** In other words, they excommunicated him from the synagogue. After at first not believing that he was blind (John 9:18), because that would then give credit to Jesus for healing the man and doing a great miracle, the religious leaders now refer back to the fact that he was “born” blind, and accuse him and excommunicate him on that basis. The Rabbis believed that a person could sin while in the womb, and reap the result of that sin at birth (see commentary on John 9:2). Because the man was born blind, the Jews assert that he was born “entirely” in sin, and was in no position to teach them anything. This is spiritual blindness and evil at its worst, yet it happens often in religious circles. It often happens that someone who is healed supposedly gets his healing “in the wrong way” or “from the wrong person” and is excluded from fellowship on that basis. The leaders ignore the healing that has occurred and hurt is piled upon hurt by supposedly well-meaning people.

The fact that the man was excommunicated from the synagogue could make it very difficult for him in that culture because much of city life revolved around the synagogue one went to. The synagogue provided friends, supporters, and contacts, and so was central to one’s social and business life. It was fear of being excommunicated that kept this man’s parents from speaking up for him. The Bible does not tell us what happened to the man at this point, but now that he could see, a whole world of opportunity opened up for him, if not in Jerusalem, then elsewhere.

Joh 9:35

**“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”** Here Jesus uses the title of the Messiah out of Daniel 7:13 when one like the son of man was given all authority by God. The healed man must have understood this because he asked “Who is he,” and when Jesus basically said, “Me,” the man bowed down before him.

The English versions vary, with some reading “Son of Man” and some reading “Son of God.” That is because there are Greek texts that read “Son of Man” and there are Greek texts that read “Son of God,” but the earlier Greek texts and logic support that the original reading was “Son of Man.” We can see why later scribes would change the phrase “Son of Man” to “Son of God,” but there is no logical reason that if the original phrase was “Son of God” that it would be changed—especially in the early texts—to the “Son of Man.”

Joh 9:38

**“Lord.”** In this context, the man did not know Jesus Christ was the Messiah, so the word “Lord” is being used as a term of respect, like “sir.” He had just said, “who is he?” (John 9:36).

**“bowed down before him.”** See commentary on Matthew 2:2. When he was healed, this man believed that Jesus was a prophet (John 9:17). It is clear from the record that the man does not believe Jesus is God. He spoke of God not hearing sinners, but hearing this “man,” Jesus. Jesus, however, sought him out and asked if he believed on “the Son of Man,” a messianic title. The man answered, “Who is he, Lord (in this case, “Lord” is the cultural equivalent of “sir.”). When Jesus identified himself as the Son of Man, the man said, in clear terms, “I believe you,” thus accepting Jesus as the Messiah. At that point, it would have been appropriate and cultural for him to bow (or fall on his face) before Jesus. This is where the exact action that accompanies *proskuneō* is not clear. What is clear is the act of homage the man paid to Jesus.

Joh 9:39

**“For judgment.”** The Greek word translated “judgment” is the noun *krima* (#2917 κρίμα), and in this context, it refers to the judicial decision that separates the righteous from the unrighteous; the verdict that is passed upon those who are judged. The “verdict” is neutral, both the righteous and unrighteous get a verdict, a judicial decision. The content of that verdict will differ and be individual, but that is not the meaning of verdict here.

**“will see.”** The verb with “blind” and “see” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” instead of will. But the Greek conjunction *hina* is the reason the verb is subjunctive, (#2443, *hina*, ἵνα; usually translated “that,” “in order that,” or “so that,” but see Word Study: “Hina”). Thus, when *hina* is used, the verb must be translated according to the context, not strictly by the mood of the verb. Jesus says he came for judgment, which will mean that those who are blind will see, while those who say they see will be blind.

Joh 9:40

**“Those of the Pharisees who were with him.”** Although many of the Pharisees who had been arguing with Jesus were gone, some of them had stayed around the blind man and were with him when Jesus found him and spoke with him.

**John Chapter 10**

Joh 10:1

**“Truly, truly, I say to you.”** John 10:1-21 is the continuation of the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees, a specific dialogue that started in John 9:40. This would have been much easier to see if John chapter 10 had not been a new chapter but instead, simply a continuation of John 9, and thus John 10:1 had been numbered as John 9:42. Sometimes when chapters were put in the Bible, instead of helping they broke up the subject matter and made it harder to understand, and that is the case here. This record starts in John 9:35 when Jesus enters the scene, and goes to John 10:21, after which point there seems to be a break in time. If a chapter break must be inserted, the most appropriate chapter place for it seems to be between John 9:39 and 40, but even that would have broken up the record. The whole dialogue between Jesus and the Jews is John 9:40-10:21. The Pharisees are called “the Jews” in John 10:19, which is a phrase that in John often refers to the leaders among the Jews. Furthermore, the Jews themselves were still talking about Jesus healing the blind man in John 10:21, saying, “These are not the sayings of one *who* has a demon. Is a demon able to open the eyes of the blind?”

Not seeing that the record in John 9 continues into chapter 10 causes the reader to miss some important points in the record. Two of the major points that are being made in the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees are that the Pharisees were “blind” (John 9:39-41) and “deaf” (John 10:3). Humble people, like the man born blind (John 9:1), could “see” the truth, but the Pharisees were “blind” and could not see it, so they did not repent of their sin and get forgiven, instead, their “sin remains” (John 9:40). Similarly, the Pharisees were “deaf” to the voice of the Messiah. The true sheep of God, the humble believers, “heard” the voice of the Good Shepherd, but the proud unbelievers did not hear it (John 10:3-5; the words “hear” and “voice” occur several times in those verses).

That the unbelievers are proud and arrogant, and thus blind and deaf to the truth is a theme that occurs over and over in the Bible. The prophecy in Isaiah 6:9-10, that Israel would not see, hear, or understand the truth, occurs in whole or in part five more times in Scripture (Matt. 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40; Acts 28:26-27), the repetition giving great emphasis to God’s attempts to get people to believe, and highlighting man’s stubborn refusal to believe and obey God. Isaiah 29:10 is yet another verse about Israel not being able to see, hear, or believe the truth, and it is quoted in Romans 11:8. Israel’s rejection of God is why they were said to have “uncircumcised” ears (Jer. 6:10; Acts 7:51).

Only the chapter before this confrontation in John 9 and 10, Jesus was in the Temple and confronted the Jews. After some back-and-forth dialogue that was going nowhere, he told them, “Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because you are not able to hear my word” (John 8:43). It is likely that these Jews in John 9 and 10 were some of the same group of Jews that Jesus confronted in John 8.

An important thing to keep in mind when reading verses that say things such as God hardened someone’s heart, or blinded their eyes, or covered their ears is that those people did those things to themselves: God does not harden someone’s heart and then punish him for having a hardened heart. That would be totally against the loving nature of God. Verses that say things like God hardened someone’s heart are written using standard Hebrew language and customs, and are using the Semitic “idiom of permission.”

The “idiom of permission” is a name given by scholars to the particular Semitic manner of speaking in which someone is said to actively do what he only allowed to be done. For example, God did not reach into Pharaoh’s heart and harden it, but He allowed Pharaoh to harden his own heart (actually, Pharaoh had free will and God could not stop him from hardening his heart). God asked Pharaoh over and over again to let His people go. Pharaoh refused. The more God asked, and the stronger God’s plague warnings became, the more stubborn Pharaoh became and the harder he had to make his heart to resist God. So God was only hardening Pharaoh’s heart in the sense that Pharaoh had to harden his heart harder and harder to resist God’s appeals. The same is true of the Jews. Through the centuries God sent prophet after prophet to Israel, and Israel suffered consequence after consequence because of their unbelief. The more prophets God sent, the more Israel hardened itself against them. So in the Semitic idiom, God is said to have blinded Israel’s eyes and closed her ears. He did nothing of the kind. It is said, “The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay.” Each person decides whether he is wax or clay. In this record in John 9 and 10, the “sunlight” was poured on the Jews. They saw the Messiah heal a man who was blind from birth and tell them he was the Good Shepherd. Would they humble themselves and give up the money, power, and control they had in Israel and follow the Messiah, or would they harden themselves and maintain their worldly power and position? They chose to “not see” the healing, and “not hear” the voice of the Good Shepherd. Like Israel of old, they hardened their hearts.

[For more on “the Jews” being a designation for the religious leaders, see commentary on John 1:19. For more on the idiom of permission, see commentary on Rom. 9:18.]

**“Truly, truly.”** The Greek is *amēn amēn* (#281 ἀμήν). It was a strong affirmation or way of emphasizing what someone was about to say. In the three other Gospels it is not doubled, it is only, “truly I say to you.” However, it occurs 25 times in John and is always doubled. The doubling adds emphasis and is technically the figure of speech geminatio, a form of epizeuxis. The figure geminatio occurs when the same word is repeated with the same meaning for emphasis with no words between the word that is repeated.[[89]](#footnote-11383)

**“sheepfold.”** This teaching of Jesus is very much like a parable in that it contains many figures of speech and has many levels of understanding (thus it can be called a parable). It certainly was an illustration from everyday life in biblical times, and the sheepfold, shepherd, doorkeeper, and sheep would be familiar to everyone. Beyond that simplicity, the teaching becomes complex, involving figures of speech such as metaphor (“I am the door,” etc.) and hypocatastasis (“sheep”) which we learn from the scope of Scripture refers to believers; cf. Matthew 25:33, and Bullinger.[[90]](#footnote-20613)

[For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

A sheepfold was an open area in the countryside surrounded by a wall that was usually topped with interwoven briars and thorns so that wild animals and thieves could not get to the sheep inside. The folds were often quite large and would accommodate several flocks at once. That is why it was so vital that the sheep knew the shepherd’s voice, who not only called to them, but often called them by name, as in this parable (John 10:3). As the shepherd called to his sheep, often in the early morning while it was still quite dark, the sheep would know the shepherd’s voice and leave the other sheep and go out with their shepherd (John 10:3). The sheep would not know the voice of a stranger, and so would never follow a stranger (John 10:5). The biblical shepherd went ahead of his flock, calling, speaking to them, or singing, and his sheep would follow him (John 10:4). This is in contrast to the Western shepherd, who herds his sheep in front of him, and follows them. The doorkeeper of the fold would let legitimate shepherds and hired hands in, but not allow unauthorized people to enter. The doorkeeper is not named in this teaching, but the scope of the teaching shows us it must be God.

This parable of Jesus has multiple layers of meaning. For example, Jesus is both the door of the fold and the Good Shepherd. The multiple layers of meaning draw us deeply into the teaching, inviting us to spend time reading and rereading the parable, considering all that it is saying to us. Because of the layers of meaning, it cannot be read once through and “simply understood.” Often the multiple layers of meaning are confusing to an unsaved or unspiritual person, who thinks the biblical writers should have written something simple and straightforward. They wonder, “How can Jesus be both the door and the Good Shepherd? How can the fold represent everlasting life and also just safety on this earth?” It is that kind of information that can be confusing and causes some scholars to call the teaching “nonsense.”[[91]](#footnote-31953) In reality, it is the profound Word of our Heavenly Father who loves us on multiple levels and wants us to explore that with Him as we read and pray.

The sheepfold represents two different things in the parable. The “fold” is everlasting life (“If anyone enters by me, he will be saved;” John 10:9). However, it also is simply a place where the sheep can be safe, because they “go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9). It is easy to understand the two meanings, because while it is true that God’s sheep have everlasting life, they also need the guidance and support of the Good Shepherd right now, while they go in and out in life.

A point of the parable that we should not miss is that the thieves and robbers enter the fold by stealth so they can get to the sheep. They do not enter to stay and have everlasting life (if they wanted that, they would just enter by the door and be a sheep). They come to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), not to have everlasting life. They are thieves, robbers, strangers, and wolves (John 10:1, 5, 12). Often God’s people are naïve about how many thieves and robbers there are who do not love the flock, but by design or ignorance, hurt the sheep. Also, there are good people who try to shepherd the flock but who do it for reward, not out of love and devotion, and these “hired hands” do not adequately protect the sheep and so end up actually contributing to their being hurt (John 10:12).

We can tell from the use of “thieves” in John 10:1, that “the thief” in John 10:10 is anyone who is trying to take the sheep away from the Good Shepherd, but it also certainly points to that Great Thief, the Devil, who is ultimately behind all the attacks on the sheep. All those who work to destroy the sheep are doing the work of the Devil.

**“fold.”** The Greek is *aulē* (#833 αὐλή, pronounced ow-'lay). It was used in the time of the Greek poet Homer (date unknown: 800-1200 BC) to refer to an uncovered space surrounded by a wall in which were the house and stables for livestock. So in the biblical culture, it came to be used for a roofless area enclosed by a wall out in the open country in which flocks were kept at night, a sheepfold. The word *aulē* was also used for the uncovered courtyard of a house. Also, in the Septuagint, it was used of the open courts of the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle), and the Temple in Jerusalem, and the New Testament uses *aulē* of the Temple courtyard as well (Rev. 11:2).

**“door.”** The Greek word is *thura* (#2374 θύρα), “door.” The meaning of “door” is just as we use it today, usually the door to a building, or room in a building. It was different from the Greek word *pulē* (#4439 πύλη, pronounced 'poo-lay), usually translated “gate.” The *pulē* often referred to gates that opened into courtyards or wide areas (such as the gate of the Temple).

Joh 10:2

**“the one who enters by the door is the shepherd.”** Jesus said he was the door (John 10:7), and true shepherds, those people who shepherd under the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4), the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11), enter into God’s flock through Jesus Christ and teach about and elevate Jesus Christ. In John 10:11, Jesus changes his metaphor from being the door to being the Good Shepherd.

Joh 10:4

**“he goes before them.”** This is a custom of shepherds in biblical times. The Western shepherd drives his sheep, the Eastern shepherd leads them.

Joh 10:6

**“veiled language.”** The Greek is *paroimia* (παροιμία #3942) and it occurs 5 times in the NT. It is “a brief communication containing truths designed for initiates, *veiled saying,* figure of speech, in which esp. lofty ideas are concealed.”[[92]](#footnote-20580) It is also translated “proverb” in 2 Peter 2:22. Jesus’ language was figurative, but exactly what to call it is debated by scholars, so it is translated differently in different English versions; cf. “parable” (ASV, KJV); “analogy” (CEB); “indirect manner of speaking” (CJB); “illustration” (HCSB, NKJV); “figure of speech” (ESV, NAB); “similitude” (YLT). Technically, referring to God’s people as sheep the way it is done in John 10:2, 3, 4, etc., is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (see commentary on Rev. 20:2).

Joh 10:9

**“and will go in and go out.”** This phrase is a figure of speech polarmerismos where the opposite ends of something are put for the whole thing. The Jewish day started at sunset and people went into their tents or homes to sleep and for safety, and then in the morning, they would go out to live and work. So the beginning and end are put for the whole, and “go in and go out” means to live all of life. Solomon used the same figure of speech (1 Kings 3:7).

[For more on polarmerismos, see commentary on Josh. 14:11.]

Joh 10:10

**“the thief.”** The “thief” in this record is specifically a reference to the various evil religious leaders. It is not a direct reference to the Devil, although in John 8:44 Jesus boldly proclaimed that the religious leaders were children of the Devil, and said that they did the works of their father the Devil. It is not wrong to call the Devil a thief, because he is one, but the “thief” in this parable is any given follower of the Devil, who through evil intent or simple ignorance destroys the sheep.

The key to understanding what Jesus is saying is to realize the record here in John 10 is a continuation of John 9, and even a continuation of John 8, at least in general thrust and impact (see commentary on John 10:1). In John 8, which occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles which would have brought huge crowds to Jerusalem, Jesus openly opposed the religious leaders. Jesus taught that he was the light of the world, but the religious leaders challenged him. But he said to them, “You are from beneath, I am from above…That is why I said to you that you will die in your sins” (John 8:23-24). The argument between Jesus and the Jews got more and more heated until the last verse in John 8, at which point the Jews “picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the Temple” (John 8:59).

Apparently, as Jesus was leaving the area, he passed a man born blind and healed him (John 9:1-12. There does not seem to be a time break between John chapters 8 and 9). At that point, the Pharisees, those children of the Devil, got involved again and intensely questioned the man about his healing (John 9:13-34) and eventually ended up casting the man out of the congregation because he would not admit Jesus was a sinner (John 9:34). Soon after that, Jesus found the man and comforted him and resumed a dialogue with some of the Pharisees, apparently a smaller group who had stayed around the blind man (John 9:35-41).

The group of Pharisees asked Jesus if they were blind too, that is, blind to the truth, and Jesus in effect said, “Yes” (John 9:41). Jesus then started John 10:1 by saying “Truly, truly, I say to you,” and the “you” are the Pharisees of John 9:41. So John 10:1-21 is Jesus continuing the dialogue he started in John 9:40 with this group of Pharisees.

Jesus used the metaphor of sheep and a shepherd to speak to those Pharisees about who he was and the failure of the Jewish leaders to take care of God’s people, the “sheep.” Jesus called himself the door of the sheepfold (John 10:7, 9), and said that anyone who got into the sheepfold some other way than through him was a thief and robber (John 10:1). Of course, that showed that the religious leaders were thieves and robbers because they were in among the sheep and were claiming to be rulers over them, but they rejected Jesus Christ.

Jesus went on to say, “The thief does not come except to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). The “thief” in John 10:10 is the same as in John 10:1, and the fact that they steal, kill, and destroy had just been vividly demonstrated in John 8 and 9: the religious leaders called Jesus a Samaritan who had a demon, and thus they steered people away from Christ (John 8:48); they tried to stone Jesus (John 8:59); and they mistreated and excommunicated a man born blind whom God had just healed (John 9:34).

Religious leaders who reject Christ are thieves, stealing God’s sheep away from him for their own aggrandizement and because of their own arrogance and pride, and all they do is steal, kill, and destroy. Because of that, it is imperative that God’s people—His “sheep”—learn the difference between a “thief” and a minister who accepts Christ, leads others to Christ, and co-ministers with Christ. Sadly, the religious world is full of leaders—thieves—who reject Jesus Christ as Lord. These supposedly spiritual people are dangerous and can do a lot of damage to a person who follows them. Jude refers to them as “hidden reefs” who can sink a person or a fellowship with their lies, false beliefs, and sin (Jude 1:12). In contrast to those religious thieves, Jesus said, “I came so they can have life, and have *it* abundantly,” and “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:10-11, 14).

Although it is commonly taught that the “thief” in John 10:10 is the Devil, that is not the case. Besides the immediate context, the cultural context also points to the fact that the “thief” referred to self-serving religious leaders. Gary Manning writes that Jesus used commonly known symbols in his parables to help them resonate with his audience. Manning writes, “…symbols in the New Testament were not new; instead, Jesus and the apostles used existing symbols from the Old Testament or from their culture…Thief is not used as a metaphor for Satan in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or other ancient Jewish literature. However, *thief* and *bandit* are used as metaphors for the leaders of Israel in the Old Testament (Isa. 1:23, Jer. 2:26, 7:11, 23:30). At least 20 other ancient Jewish documents described the ruling Jewish priests as thieves. In fact, Jesus was intentionally reusing an existing shepherd parable from Ezekiel 34. In Ezekiel 34, God condemns the failed leaders of Israel, who have stolen from the sheep, killed them, and caused them to become scattered. God says that he will remove these hired shepherds and replace them…Jesus is doing the same thing in John 10. He condemns the leaders of Israel as thieves and points to himself as the only true shepherd.”[[93]](#footnote-16183)

Church Fathers and theologians through the centuries have understood that the “thieves” in John chapter 10 are the evil religious leaders. For example, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. AD 215) wrote about the thieves: “Those, then, who follow impious words and dictate them to others inasmuch as they pervert the divine words instead of using them rightly” (*Stromateis* 7.17). Gregory of Nazianzus challenged people as to whether they would follow Christ or others. Will you follow Christ, “Or will you follow a stranger climbing up in to the fold like a robber and a traitor? Will you listen to a strange voice when that voice would take you away by stealth and scatter you from the truth” (*On Easter and His Reluctance*, Oration 1.6-7). John Chrysostom (AD 347-407), bishop of Constantinople wrote, “Jesus refers to those who had been before and to those who would come after him: antichrist and false christs” (sic. *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 59.2.3.[[94]](#footnote-27005) John Calvin (AD 1509-1564) understood who the thief was, but also caught the heart of the passage, that it was a warning that some of the religious leaders were evil, so we should not let them surprise us. “‘*The thief cometh not*.’ By this saying, Christ—if we may use the expression—pulls our ear, that the ministers of Satan may not come upon us by surprise.”[[95]](#footnote-14022)

It is quite common to hear today that the thief in John 10:10 is the Devil rather than devilish ministers. Gary Manning briefly covers the history of the shift. “In the 1800s and early 1900s, many denominations produced Sunday School curriculum and Bible study-oriented newspapers…When these curricula covered John 10, they nearly always gave the traditional interpretation: the thief represents failed human leaders in Israel, and this can be applied to false teachers today. But there was an interesting change that happened sometime in the mid-1800s. A few devotional books and some Sunday School curriculum (but still a minority, and no commentaries) began to say that the thief referred to Satan…Finally, the view that the thief was Satan began to appear in a few mainstream commentaries in the early 1900s (Arthur Pink is a notable example). But by the mid-20th century, commentaries again began to return to the traditional view that the thief referred to false leaders.”[[96]](#footnote-27818)

In summary, by the time he spoke the words recorded in John 10:10, Jesus had been in an ongoing argument with the religious leaders in Israel for quite a while, and now was being questioned by some Pharisees. He was teaching them and his disciples, and any bystanders as well, to beware of evil leaders and false teachers who did not come to God through the “door,” that is, Jesus himself. So the “thief” in John 10:10 is not the Devil, but evil leaders. That does not mean the Devil is not a thief, because he is one, but he is the thief behind the scenes while those people who follow his ways and try to lead apart from Jesus Christ are the specific thieves of John 10. Certainly one of the central points of Jesus’ message besides his statement that he is the door and the good shepherd, is that there are evil, satanic ministers in the religious system today, and the wise person knows they are there, watches out for them, and is not misled by them. Furthermore, that cannot be done by instinct, but by intimately knowing the Word of God, which directs us as to what is truth and what is error.

**“kill.”** The word “kill” is translated from the Greek word *thuō* (#2380 θύω), meaning “to sacrifice.” Elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments, it is used nearly exclusively to refer to the killing of animals (for ritual sacrifice or celebration). There were several other Greek words for kill (e.g., *apokteinō, anaireō, diaxeirizomai, phoneuō*), so it is very telling that the Lord used this word to describe the thief. The choice to employ *thuō* shows us that humans are just like animals to devilish rulers who use people to gain their own ends, and those rulers and leaders kill humans as if they were animals. (See commentary on Acts 10:13 for another interesting usage of this word).

Joh 10:11

**“life.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that show that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Joh 10:15

**“life.”** See commentary on John 10:11.

Joh 10:16

**“I have other sheep that are not of this fold.”** Jesus is saying that there are others who believe in God who are not Jews (or proselytes). Although some commentators say that Jesus was speaking about the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Christian Church (and it is true Gentiles and Jews are now one Body in Christ) that is not the primary meaning of what Jesus was saying. Jesus did not say he “will have” other sheep, but that he “has” other sheep—he already has them, and he will also have more of them in the future.

There have always been Gentiles who deserved salvation and everlasting life. It helps to remember that starting from Adam, there was more time between Adam and Christ when Jews did not exist than when Jews did exist. Before the time of Jacob—before Judah was born and before God changed Jacob’s name to Israel—there were no Jews. Since Jacob lived from about 1800-1650 BC (Jacob lived to be 147 years old; Gen. 47:28), and Adam was created around 4,000 BC (possibly 3961 BC), there were over 2,000 years before the Jews existed, and less than that once they did exist.

But even when there were Jews on earth, there were still non-Jews who acted in a godly way and will be granted everlasting life on the Day of Judgment. That both Jews and Gentiles will be in the Kingdom of Christ on earth is why Christ will be a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 49:6), and why the Temple will be “a house of prayer for all people” (Isa. 56:7). There are many verses that speak of Gentiles (sometimes referred to as “the nations”) being in the future Kingdom of Christ (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; 11:10-12; 42:1-4; 52:15; 55:5; 60:3; Jer. 3:17; 4:2; Mic. 4:2-3; Zeph. 2:11; Zech. 2:11; 8:20-23; 9:10; Mal. 1:11, 14).

Joh 10:17

**“life.”** See commentary on John 10:11.

**“in order that I can receive it again.”** Jesus “received” life from the Father, who raised him from the dead. The Bible teaches that Jesus was raised from the dead, and specifically that God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus did not raise himself from the dead, he was raised from the dead. However, there are two places in Scripture, both in the book of John, John 2:19 and John 10:17-18, that have been historically used to say that Jesus raised himself from the dead. However, if those verses are understood that way they are an anomaly that both contradicts the many other clear verses about God raising Jesus from the dead and also skews the whole concept of death. But both those verses can be, and should be, understood in a way that harmonizes with all the other verses that say that God raised Jesus from the dead.

What Jesus said was that he would “receive” his life back, that is, it would be given back to him by God. He did not say he would “take” his life back.

This commentary entry will examine John 10:17-18 (for a study of John 2:19, see commentary on John 2:19). However, before we examine John 10:17-18, it will be helpful to review some of the many clear verses that teach that Jesus was raised from the dead.

* Matthew 17:23: Jesus taught that after he died, “the third day he will be raised.”
* Matthew 28:7: The angel told the women that Jesus “was raised from the dead.”
* Mark 14:28: Jesus taught his disciples that “after I am raised I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”
* John 2:22: Jesus’ disciples remembered Jesus’ teaching after “he was raised from among the dead.”
* John 21:14: Jesus revealed himself to his disciples “after he was raised from among the dead.”
* Acts 2:24: Peter taught that Jesus was not dead because “God raised him up.”
* Acts 2:32: Peter taught, “God has raised this Jesus.”
* Acts 3:15: Peter spoke about Jesus “whom God raised from among the dead.”
* Acts 4:10: Peter spoke about Jesus “whom God raised from among the dead.”
* Acts 5:30: Peter spoke to the Jewish leaders and said, “The God of our fathers raised Jesus.”
* Acts 10:40: Peter taught the Gentiles that Jesus died, but “God raised him up the third day.”
* Acts 13:30: Paul taught in Antioch that Jesus died, “But God raised him from among the dead.”
* Romans 10:9: “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from among the dead, you will be saved.”
* 1 Corinthians 6:14: “God raised the Lord, and will also raise us up through his power.”
* Galatians 1:1: “God the Father, who raised him [Jesus] from among the dead”
* Ephesians 1:19-20: “his [God’s] mighty strength that he worked in Christ when he raised him from among the dead.”
* Colossians 2:12: “God, who raised him from among the dead.”

All the above Scriptures, and there are others like them, testify that Jesus “was raised” from the dead. None of them say or imply that Jesus raised himself, and after Jesus was raised, the apostles taught that God raised Jesus from the dead. It is important to realize how many times and how clearly the Bible says God raised Jesus because the Bible is truth and historically accurate, and there cannot be two contradictory histories when it comes to Jesus getting up from the dead. Either God the Father raised him or he raised himself, but both statements cannot be historically accurate. Although someone might postulate that God and Jesus worked together to raise him from the dead, that would just be an assumption to support an already-held belief. There is no verse of Scripture that says that, in contrast to the many that clearly say God raised Jesus.

We will see that John 10:17-18 does not teach that Jesus raised himself from the dead and that properly understanding those verses is a fairly simple matter of translating the Greek text correctly and then understanding what it is saying.

A well-known principle of biblical interpretation is that difficult or cryptic verses that seem to contradict many clear verses need to be understood in light of the clear verses, rather than reinterpreting many clear verses to fit with the one or two difficult verses. In this case, the many clear verses that say that God raised Jesus should be seen to be historically correct. The way to handle an unclear verse in situations like this is to think through other possibilities as to how it could be translated or what it could be saying. In the end, even after much study if the unclear verse is still unclear, it should still not be used to overturn the meaning of the many clear verses. When it comes to John 10:17 however, the verse can easily be understood when the Greek text is understood and translated into English in such a way that it fits with the rest of Scripture.

In the case of John 10:17-18, the Greek word *lambanō* (#2983 λαμβάνω), which generally means “take” or “receive,” occurs three times, all in the active voice. But in most English versions, *lambanō* is translated two different ways in those two verses, while the Greek word *airō* (#142 αἴρω), which occurs one time, is translated in much the same way as *lambanō*. For example, the King James Version of John 10:17-18 reads: “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take [*lambanō*] it again. No man taketh [*airō*] it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take [*lambanō*] it again. This commandment have I received [*lambanō*] of my Father.

Note the way *lambanō* is translated the last time it is used: “This commandment have I received [*lambanō*] of my Father.” That is a good translation. Jesus did not “take” the commandment from the Father as if he grabbed it from Him. He “received” it when God gave it to him. That is the way *lambanō* should be translated and understood in John 10:17-18. Then the verses read, “This is the reason the Father loves me: because I lay down my life in order that I can receive [*lambanō*] it again. No one takes it away [*airō*] from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the authority to lay it down and I have the authority to receive [*lambanō*] it again. This commandment I received [*lambanō*] from my Father.”

*The Emphasized Bible* by J. Rotherham translates John 10:17 as, “Therefore, doth the Father, love, me, because, I, lay down my life, that, again, I may receive it,” and he translates the two uses of *lambanō* in verse 18 as “receive” as well.

Jesus “received” his life from the Father when the Father raised him from the dead. Jesus said he had the authority to receive his life back from the Father, and when we understand sin and its consequences we can understand what Jesus meant by that. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). If a person sins, the consequence of that sin is everlasting death unless the sin is paid for, which is why a person has to get saved and have Jesus pay for their sin in order to have everlasting life. Jesus’ death paid the wage of sin so sinners could live, but he himself never sinned, and because of that, he had the legal authority to receive life from His Father without breaking any of the spiritual laws of God.

There is another very good reason that Jesus could not raise himself from the dead that has been ignored in orthodox Christianity: a dead person cannot help himself. He is dead. Scripture is quite clear about the fact that dead people do not—indeed cannot—do things such as think, speak, or participate in the things in this world. Jesus was not alive, he was dead, and so he could not raise himself from the dead.

A question that is worth asking is, if *lambanō* can be translated as either “take” or “receive” in John 10:17-18, why do so many versions translate it “take” when “receive” fits so much better with the rest of the Bible? The answer to that question is that a Trinitarian bias has been translated into most English versions of the Bible. Thus, in many versions, if a verse of scripture can be translated in either a Trinitarian or non-Trinitarian way, the Trinitarian translation is often preferred (cf. John 1:1, 18; 8:58; Rom. 9:5).

Trinitarians teach that Jesus is God, then say that Jesus “died” but was still alive in some form, and because he was God, even though he was dead, he could raise himself from the dead. That does not make any sense and so Trinitarians refer to it as a mystery. But it is not a mystery, it is an error. First, “God” cannot die, and if Jesus was God he could not die. Trinitarians teach that the human nature of Jesus died, but that explanation is invented to support the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible universally states that “Jesus” died. There is not a single scripture that says only the “human part” of Jesus died. Second, if Jesus did die, then he would be dead and unable to raise himself from the dead. All the problems such as these disappear when we realize that the Bible says that “Jesus” died and that he “received” his life back from the Father.

Another important fact that we should understand about God raising Jesus from the dead is that it is a very important part of the future hope of everlasting life that we humans have. It was a major part of Paul’s argument about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:1-21 that God raised Jesus from the dead (in fact, “raised” is used ten times in those 21 verses, and “resurrection” is used as well). One of the reasons it was so important for Paul to emphasize that God raised Jesus from the dead is that believers need God to raise them from the dead too. People cannot raise themselves from the dead, so we have to trust that God can and will do that for us. If God raised Jesus from the dead to everlasting life, then He can do that for us too. If Jesus raised himself from the dead, or even did it in tandem with God, then God has not ever raised a human to everlasting life, which leaves open some doubt about whether He can do it or not. Thankfully, we know that God raised Jesus from the dead to everlasting life, and He will do that for everyone who is saved.

[For information of Jesus becoming “a sin offering” and not “sin,” see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:21. For more information on dead people being dead in every way and not able to help themselves, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on there being everlasting death for the unsaved, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more information on Jesus not being God and there not being a Trinity, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Joh 10:19

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. It is interesting and noteworthy that the obviously good and godly works that Jesus was doing were producing division among them. That is one reason that the Bible commands believers to do good works. Unbelievers who think that your theology is crazy can be swayed by consistent good works (cf. John 10:25).

[For more information on “Jews” referring to the religious leaders, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Joh 10:22

**“the Feast of Dedication.”** This is the feast more commonly known as Hanukkah. It was instituted by Judas Maccabaeus in 167 BC, in commemoration of the cleansing and rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after the Greek Seleucid ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes had profaned it in many ways, including sacrificing a pig on the altar. Hanukkah became an annual feast lasting eight days, starting on the twenty-fifth of the month “Chisleu” (or spelled “Kislev”), which normally falls in December, thus the statement in John 10:23 that it was winter.

Jesus would not have spent the two months between the Feast of Tabernacles (Feast of Booths) and Hanukkah in Jerusalem. He was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7-10 (cf. John 7:2, 10, 14). After the Feast of Tabernacles, he would have gone back to Galilee for about two months until Hanukkah. As we see in John 10:22ff, the conflict between the Jews and Jesus Christ picked up almost exactly where it had left off some two months earlier, with the Jews pressuring Jesus as to who he was, and Jesus speaking of his sheep hearing his voice.

Joh 10:24

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“souls.”** The Greek word translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here, *psuchē* is used broadly and means “us” (as it is translated in most versions), but the fact that “soul” is used and not just the Greek word “us” lets us know that these religious leaders were emotionally invested in getting an answer to their question. The Greek has *psuchē* in the singular, “our soul,” but in English, we would say, “our souls.” Note how this section of John shows us some of the common uses of *psuchē*, because it refers to human “life” in John 10:11, 15, 17.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Joh 10:26

**“of my sheep.”** This is the partitive use of the preposition *ek* (#1537 ἐκ) and the genitive case. The partitive usage indicates a part of some greater whole; in this case, Jesus denies that these Jews were a part of the larger group of “his sheep.”

Joh 10:28

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more information on this phrase, see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Joh 10:29

**“My Father, who has given *them* to me, is greater than all.”** This is one of the many verses that show that Jesus Christ is not co-equal with the Father and thus not part of a Trinity. The Bible states in many places and in many ways that “God” is greater than Christ.

[See Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” esp. section 12.]

Joh 10:30

**“I and the Father are one.”** Here in John 10:30, Jesus says that he and the Father are “one” in purpose, and unified in their goals and actions. Jesus and the Father operate in perfect unity, and it should be the goal of every Christian to be “one” with them. This is clearly what Jesus wanted when he prayed, “…that they [Jesus’ followers] may be one as we are one; I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be perfected into one” (John 17:22-23 YLT). When Jesus prayed that his disciples “may be one as we are one,” he did not mean “one in substance,” he meant “one in heart” having unity of purpose.

There is no reason to take John 10:30 to mean what Trinitarian doctrine says it means, that is, that Christ and the Father are of the same “substance” and make up “one God.” To be “one” was a common idiom in the biblical world and it is even still used the same way today when two people say they are “one.” For example, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his ministry in Corinth, he said that he had planted the seed and Apollos had watered it. Then he said, “he who plants and he who waters are one” (1 Cor. 3:8 KJV). In the Greek texts, the wording of Paul is the same as that in John 10:30, yet no one claims that Paul and Apollos make up “one being,” or are somehow “of one substance.” Furthermore, the NIV translates 1 Corinthians 3:8 as “he who plants and he who waters have **one purpose**.” Why translate the same Greek phrase as “are one” in one place, but as “have one purpose” in another place? The reason is the translator’s bias toward the Trinity. But translating the same Greek phrase in two different ways obscures the clear meaning of Christ’s statement in John 10:30: Christ always did the Father’s will; he and God have “one purpose.” The NIV translators would have been exactly correct if they had translated both John 10:30 and 1 Corinthians 3:8 as “have one purpose” instead of only 1 Corinthians 3:8.

Jesus used the concept of “being one” in other places, and from them, one can see that “one purpose” is what he meant. John 11:52 says Jesus was to die to make all God’s children “one.” In John 17:11, 21-23, Jesus prayed to God that his followers would be “one” as he and God were “one.” We believe the meaning is clear: Jesus was praying that all his followers be one in purpose just as he and God were one in purpose, a prayer that has not yet been answered.

Sadly, the Trinitarian bias in reading John 10:30 has kept many people from paying attention to what the Bible is really saying. Jesus was speaking about his ability to keep the “sheep,” the believers, who came to him. He said that no one could take them out of his hand and that no one could take them out of his Father’s hand. Then he said that he and the Father were “one,” *i.e.,* had one purpose, which was to keep and protect the sheep. No wonder Jesus prayed that we believers be “one” like he and his Father. Far too many believers are self-focused and do not pay enough attention to the other believers around them. Cain thought he did not have to be his brother’s keeper, but we should know differently. If we are going to be “one” like God and Jesus are “one,” then we need to work hard to help and bless God’s flock.

There are Trinitarians who agree that John 10:30 is not about Jesus and the Father being one in substance, but one in purpose. For example, the famous theologian John Calvin wrote: “The ancients made a wrong use of this passage to prove that Christ is (*homoousios*), of the same essence, with the Father. For Christ does not argue about the unity of substance, but about the agreement which he has with the Father, so that whatever is done by Christ will be confirmed by the power of his Father.”[[97]](#footnote-19177)

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more information on the interpretation of “I and the Father are one,” see, Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Christianity’s Self-inflicted Wound*, 289-291; Frederick Farley, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, 1873, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, 60, 61; Charles Morgridge*, True Believer’s Defense Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians*, 1837, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship, 39-42; and Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition*, AuthorHouse, 2011.]

Joh 10:31

**“Jews.”** The use of “Jews” here in John 10:31 is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“took up stones again to stone him.”** Just as they had done at the Feast of Tabernacles about two months earlier (see commentary on John 8:59).

Joh 10:33

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“blasphemy.”** The Greek noun is *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία, pronounced blas-fay-'me-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmia*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

**“a god.”** The Greek word *Theos* (#2316 θεός), God or god, does not have the definite article and should be translated “a god” or “divine.” The Jews would never believe a man could be Yahweh, “God,” but in Aramaic and Hebrew a man representing God could be referred to as a “god,” as we see here in this very dialogue (John 10:34-35), and that is reflected in the REV translation. Jesus clearly was teaching that he was the Son of God (John 10:36).

[For a much more detailed explanation of the words for “God” being used for God’s representatives, see commentaries on John 20:28 and Heb. 1:8. For more on Jesus not being God in the flesh, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Joh 10:36

**“him whom the Father made holy and sent into the world.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“You speak blasphemy.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. The religious leaders thought it was slanderous and insulting to God that Jesus would refer to himself as the Son of God.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Joh 10:38

**“come to know and continue to know.”** The Greek verb, used twice, is *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω). The first *ginōskō* is in an aorist tense active voice and here means, “come to know,” or “get to know.” The second *ginōskō* is in the present tense, active voice, and refers to an ongoing knowledge, “continue to know.” Lenski’s commentary has, “that you may come to realize and go on realizing.”[[98]](#footnote-11851) The force of the two verbs is expressed more idiomatically, but correctly by Newman and Nida: “that you may know once and for all….”[[99]](#footnote-22730) Most modern versions say something similar to “know and understand,” using “understand” to express ongoing knowledge, but there is a fundamental difference between knowing something and understanding it. Also, there is the fact that it would not just be one work that would convince people that Jesus was the Christ, but ongoing works that could be seen and believed, thus continuing to reinforce the knowledge that Jesus was the Christ.

**“the Father is in *union with* me, and I am in *union with* the Father.”** In Greek, this is the use of “in” that refers to the sense of sphere and relation, which some Greek grammars refer to as the “static *en*,” (the English would be the static “in,” not the static “*en*”). The static “in” is often used to refer to being in a relationship, and that is certainly true with the phrase, “in me” and “in the Father.” The preposition *en* (#1722 ἐν), like all prepositions, has many different meanings, depending on the context. In fact, BDAG says of *en*:

“The uses of this preposition are so many and various, and often so easily confused, that a strictly systematic treatment is impossible. It must suffice to list the main categories, which will help establish the usage in individual cases.”[[100]](#footnote-23718)

What BDAG is saying is that there are so many meanings of the preposition *en* (“in”), that we need to get an understanding of its major uses and then we can gain a feel for how it is used in specific places. The important meaning of *en* for the study of these verses in John and the many other verses that speak of us being “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” “in him,” etc., is that it signifies a close association or relationship. BDAG says:

“Especially in Paul or Johannine usage, [*en* is used] to designate a close personal relation in which the referent of the ἐν-term is viewed as the controlling influence: *under the control of, under the influence of, in close association with...*In Paul the relation of the individual to Christ is very often expressed by such phrases as ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ], ἐν κυρίῳ [in *the* Lord], etc.,...*in connection with, in intimate association with, keeping in mind.*”

In light of what BDAG is saying, some of the ways the preposition *en* can be translated include, “in connection with,” “in relationship with,” “in association with,” or “in union with.” When two people (or groups of people) are “in” one another, they are in relation to each other, and the degree of intimacy and connection is defined by the context and scope of Scripture. Thus, for example, in John 10:38, Jesus speaks of the Father being “in” him and he “in” the Father, which is certainly a very close relationship. Some time later, during the Last Supper, Jesus again says he is “in” the Father and the Father “in” him (John 14:10-11). Then Jesus developed his teaching to show that because the apostles follow Jesus he can say, “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (John 14:20).

When Jesus says to the apostles, “you in me, and I in you” (John 14:20), he is using the same wording that he used when he speaks of being “in” the Father. In fact, Jesus prayed in John 17:21 that people will believe so “that they also may be in us” (in the Father and Jesus).

A study of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper shows that he placed a lot of emphasis on he and the Father being “in” each other (John 14:10, 11, 20; 17:21-22), and similarly taught about the disciples being “in” him and he “in” them (John 15:4-7). Thus, just as God and Jesus have an intimate relationship and are in union with one another, so God, Jesus, and believers are to be in an intimate relationship with one another. This intimate relationship is expressed by the word “fellowship” in 1 John 1:3, and according to that verse our fellowship, i.e., our full sharing and intimate joint participation, is to be with God, Jesus, and each other. Thus, 1 John 1:3 expresses by the word “fellowship” what the Gospel of John expresses by the word “in.”

Another word in John that expresses the union and fellowship between God, Jesus, and the believer is the word “one.” Jesus said that He and the Father were “one” (John 10:30), meaning one in purpose, unified, in intimate relationship with each other. The Jews were offended at his statement, but he explained it by saying he was “in” the Father and the Father “in” him (John 10:38). Jesus expanded what he said about He and his Father being “one” at the Last Supper when three times he prayed about the believers being “one” just as God and Christ were one. He prayed, “that they can be one, just as we are” (John 17:11), and “that they can all be one, just as you, Father, *are* in me and I in you, that they also can be in us” (John 17:21), and “so that they can be one, just as we *are* one; I in them, and you in me, so that they can be perfected into one” (John 17:22-23). It is clear from all the uses of “one” that Jesus and God being “one” does not refer to them being “one God and of the same essence,” but rather one in purpose.

That the word “in” refers to a relationship, a very close relationship, is clear from Jesus elucidating his teaching by using the same vocabulary and speaking of a branch being “in” a vine: “Live in me, and I *will* in you. As the branch is not able to bear fruit by itself unless it lives in the vine…” (John 15:4). The branch is not “inside” the vine, nor is “in” referring to being of the same mystical essence. It is a simple truth that the branch is in union with the vine; in an intimate relationship with it and united for the same purpose: to produce fruit. Similarly, God and Christ are in an intimate relationship and are in union with each other, and believers are to be in union with them.

A few English versions make the relationship between God, Christ, and us somewhat clearer by translating the *en* (in) as “in union with,” or “unified with” instead of simply “in.” So, for example, in John 10:38, Charles Williams’ translation reads, “the Father is in union with me and I am in union with the Father” (he also uses “in union with,” rather than just “in” in other places in John). The New Testament translated by Edgar Goodspeed also uses “in union with” in John 10:38; 14:10-11, 20; and “united with” in John 15:4-7). The Complete Jewish Bible by David Stern also reads, “united with” instead of just “in” in John 10 and 14. The New English Bible uses “united with” in John 15:4. The point is that when the Bible says that the Father, Jesus, and believers are “in” each other, or being “one,” it refers to being in an intimate relationship with each other; being in union with each other.

After the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost, and salvation via the New Birth became available, the Church became “in” Christ, “in union with” Christ, in an even more powerful way. Christians have the blessings they have by virtue of being united with Jesus Christ (see commentary on Eph. 1:3).

Although the New Testament is translated from the Greek, which has the “static *en*,” the Hebrew has the same basic concept but it is not expressed as clearly in the grammar itself but is in the context and traditional understanding of the language and the relationships involved. This is important because Jesus would have been speaking Hebrew or Aramaic to his disciples at the Last Supper (and other places in the Gospels), and so the Greek text is a Greek translation of what he said. If the Greek had a “static ‘in’” but the Hebrew did not have that concept, that could make the interpretation of Jesus’ phrase about being “in” the Father and his apostles being “in” him somewhat questionable. But the Hebrew does have the semantic equivalent of the “static ‘in’” as we can see from verses such as Proverbs 8:15-16 (see commentary on Prov. 8:15). So when Jesus was using language such as “I in you and you in me” at the Last Supper, the apostles were familiar with the language and the concepts he was speaking of. The fact that most English readers are not familiar with the static use of “in” is one reason that what Jesus said is so challenging and open to misinterpretation by English readers. Another cultural reason is that in Western culture, especially modern Western culture, people are taught to be independent and self-sufficient. The need to be deeply “in union” with other people does not exist in the modern Western world as it did in the ancient world, before police forces, doctors, hospitals, cars, phones, and mechanical devices—all the things that make independent living so easy. The result is that many modern adults have never actually experienced being “in union” with another person.

The concepts of “in” and “one” in John 14-17 are very simple and point to a close relationship, but they are greatly complicated and usually misunderstood because of the doctrine of the Trinity, which is man-made and not a biblical doctrine. According to the Trinity, Jesus and the Father are “one God,” so when the Bible says they are “in” each other and “one,” Trinitarians have to give these words a mystical meaning and say they refer to God and Jesus being unified in essence and one-and-the-same being. However, that mystical understanding of “in” and “one” can only be derived from the text when a preconceived understanding of the Trinity is read into the verses and the words themselves are stripped of their normal and straightforward meaning.

Phrases such as God being in Christ, Christ being in the disciples, the disciples being in Christ, and the branch being in the vine, should all have the same meaning since they are all part of the same overall context. If we simply read the entirety of Jesus’ teaching, using all the verses that use the same Greek construction with “in” to guide our interpretation, the conclusion is an easy one. God and Christ are “in” each other and want the disciples to be “in” them, and God and Christ are “one” with each other and want the disciples to be “one” with each other and “one” with them. God, Jesus, and the disciples should be in close relationship with each other.

Another difficulty caused by Trinitarian doctrine is that in John 17 Jesus prays that the disciples “can all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also can be in us… so that they can be one just as we are one, I in them and you in me, so that they can be perfected into one” (John 17:21-23). We should pay attention to the fact that when Jesus prayed, “that they may be one **just as** we are one,” the words “just as” are the translation of the Greek word *kathōs* (#2531 καθώς), which means “in the same manner,” “in the same way.” The only way all the disciples can be “one” is if they are united in heart and mind, and since Jesus was praying that the disciples would be unified “in the same manner” in which he and God were unified, we can know that Jesus was united with his Father by being of the same heart and mind. There is no difficulty here unless it is created by Trinitarian doctrine.

Meyer, himself a Trinitarian, confirms that the unity being spoken of in John is a unity of the heart and mind. He says that the unity referred to in John 10:38 is not “essential unity,” as in the Trinitarian understanding, which Meyer identifies as the “old orthodox explanation,” but rather it is a “dynamic unity.” He identifies this “dynamic unity” as “nothing else than that of inner, active, reciprocal fellowship.”[[101]](#footnote-20953)

[For more on “in” and the relationship it refers to, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For information on the Greek preposition *eis* having the same meaning as *en* and referring to a relationship, see commentary on Rom. 6:3. For more on the static use of “in” in the Old Testament, see commentary on Prov. 8:15. For more about the doctrine of the Trinity not being biblical and Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**John Chapter 11**

Joh 11:2

**“And it was *this* Mary.”** Mary anointing Jesus and wiping his feet is in John 12:3. The Gospel of John was written long after Jesus ascended into heaven, so the fact that this mention of Mary is before the event is recorded in John is no problem.

Joh 11:3

**“friend.”** The Greek is the verb *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω), “to be a friend to.” It is hard to translate the verb *phileō* in this context and keep the English as a verb, which is why most English translations have, “He whom you love is sick,” but “friend” is a more accurate translation than “love.” If we translated quite literally, which is not the way we usually talk in English, we would have to say, “He who is your friend is sick,” and understand the verb *phileō* to be translated by the whole phrase, “is your friend.”

Jesus had a special attachment to Lazarus. For a similar construction see commentary on John 5:20; “is a friend to,” and for a more complete understanding of *phileō*, and the difference between *phileō* and *agapaō* (love), see commentary on John 21:15.

Joh 11:4

**“is not ending in death.”** The Greek has an unusual construction here. The Greek phrase πρὸς θάνατον would literally mean something such as “with a view to death,” as if you could translate it, “This sickness is not with a view to death.” The point was not that Lazarus would not die, because, in fact, he was already dead (see commentary on John 11:6). The phrase means that the final result of the sickness would not be death. Jesus already knew he would raise Lazarus from the dead, something he plainly stated in John 11:11. Newman and Nida write: “The Greek expression ‘this sickness is not to death’ means that ‘death will not be the final result of this sickness.’”[[102]](#footnote-22917) While Newman and Nida say “final result,” Robertson and Vincent both say death would not be the “final issue.”[[103]](#footnote-12256) H. Meyer translates the phrase: “it is not to have death for its result.”[[104]](#footnote-29812) Also, the verb is in the present tense, although that makes it hard to translate into English without it being awkward English. Thus, some translations read, “will not” end in death, while the REV attempts to keep the present tense verb and also communicate that the phrase is speaking of an ultimate result: thus, “is not ending in death.”

Jesus knew Lazarus was dead when the messengers arrived to say he was sick, something we learn by putting the record together, understanding the context, scope of Scripture, and geography. Nevertheless, he did not tell people that, but worded his statement in a way that was true without revealing what he knew. He did not say Lazarus would not die; what he said was that the final result of the sickness would not be death. If the messengers returned to Mary and Martha and told them exactly what Jesus had said, they could have rested in hope that no matter what happened to Lazarus, he would live.

If we translate the phrase, “This sickness will not end in death” (HCSB, NIV), or “This sickness will not lead to death” (ESV, NET), we can see what it is saying when we realize that Jesus knew Lazarus was already dead. For Jesus to say the sickness would not end in death when Lazarus was already dead was a way of saying he would raise Lazarus from the dead.

Some commentators think that Lazarus did not die until after the messengers left Jesus and headed back to Bethany, and Jesus knew by revelation that Lazarus had just died and stayed where he was for two more days. It seems more likely, both from when the messengers would have arrived where Jesus was, and what Jesus said, that Lazarus was already dead when the messengers arrived.

**“but to the glory of God.”** The sickness would result in God being glorified. That does not mean God made Lazarus sick; no verse says that. God does not make people sick just to make them well. As to the preposition *huper*, it can mean “to do or suffer anything.”[[105]](#footnote-20824)

[For more on how God was glorified, see commentary on John 11:6.]

**“glorified.”** The Greek word is the verb *doxazō* (#1392 δοξάζω, pronounced dox-'ad-zo), and it refers to glory: i.e., holding in honor, show and acknowledge the dignity, power, and worth of someone. It is related to the noun “glory,” which is *doxa* (#1391 δόξα ). In the Greek and Roman cultures, the idea of “glory” also often contained the idea of power or might, and that is the case here. It is not just that raising Lazarus from the dead would show Christ’s dignity and worth, but that it would also reveal that he and God have the power to raise the dead after an extended period of time, which the disciples needed to be completely convinced of, because they had to believe that Jesus could come back from the dead after he had been in the grave three days and nights (see commentary on John 11:6, “stayed two more days”).

[For more on glory being associated with power, see commentary on Rom. 6:4.]

Joh 11:5

**“loved.”** The Greek verb is *agapaō* (#25 ἀγαπάω) and is very important here. *Agapē* love (agapē is the noun form), is a love that often runs against the feelings. God so loved that He gave His Son when He did not want to. Christ so loved he gave his life when he did not want to. We are told to love our enemies. In this case, Jesus knew he had to follow the guidance he was being given by God even though his absence was very hard on Mary and Martha. Nevertheless, Jesus loved them with agapē love, and did the difficult, but loving, thing, following the revelation he got from the Father. Lazarus was already dead, and the people needed to be completely convinced that God could raise the dead even after three days (as to why four days were important, see commentary on John 11:6).

Joh 11:6

**“so when.”** The Greek phrase *hōs oun* that starts this verse should be translated as “so when” as many modern versions do (cf. BBE, HCSB, ESV, NET, NIV, RSV); or with a “therefore,” as “When, therefore,” or “Therefore, when” (cf. ASV, DBY, NASB, Rotherham, YLT). Although almost all versions end verse 5 with a period and start verse 6 as a new sentence, the text does not have to be punctuated that way. The Greek connective *oun* ties the two verses together. The point of verses 5 and 6 is so counterintuitive that it grabs our attention and requires study, reflection, and prayer. They say that it was because Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus that he stayed where he was for two more days. But how can that be? There are several reasons, but a major part of the record is that when he heard from the messengers that Lazarus was sick, he also knew by revelation that he had already died (see commentary on “stayed two more days” below).

**“stayed two more days.”** When we piece together what we know about the character of God and Christ, the geography of the area, the four-day time period involved, and the beliefs of the people at the time, we can see both why Jesus knew Lazarus was already dead when the messengers arrived and told him Lazarus was sick, and also why Jesus waited two extra days to raise him from the dead.

As to the character of Christ, that he walked in love and would never let a person die from sickness if it could be prevented, nothing needs to be said. If Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick and could have arrived in time to keep him from dying, he would have left immediately to help him. However, it seems most likely that sometime around the arrival of the messengers, shortly before they arrived or just as they arrived, God let Jesus know Lazarus was already dead. That kind of revelation is quite in character with the entire Gospel of John. The first day that Jesus began to gather disciples he demonstrated that he walked with God by renaming Simon and calling him “Peter” (John 1:42), and very shortly after that he told Nathanael that he saw him under the fig tree (John 1:48). John 2:25 says Jesus knew what was in people, and many other verses in John highlight and confirm his walk by revelation (cf. John 4:17, 18; 5:19, 20; 6:6, 70; 7:16; 13:10, 11, 38). God telling Jesus that Lazarus had died explains why he did not immediately leave for Bethany. F. F. Bruce writes: “…Lazarus must have died shortly after the message was dispatched, and Jesus knew that he had died.”[[106]](#footnote-10446) Leon Morris concurs, and writes that the “therefore” (or “so when” as the REV translates it) that opens verse 6, “cannot mean that Jesus deliberately waited for Lazarus to die. Indeed, the death must have already taken place when the messengers arrived.”[[107]](#footnote-26752) J. Dongell writes: “Lazarus must have died almost immediately after the messenger left to find Jesus. The delay of Jesus, then, was not designed to permit Lazarus to die.”[[108]](#footnote-27540) Newman and Nida write that “verses 17 and 39 suggest that Lazarus was already dead at the time Jesus received the message.”[[109]](#footnote-21979)

As to the geography and the timing of the four days, we do not know exactly where Jesus was staying. John had been baptizing at “Bethany” beyond the Jordan (John 1:28) and the exact location of that place was unknown. However, it is most likely close to the Jordan River across from Jericho (see commentary on John 1:28). Since the other Bethany, the town of Lazarus, was east of Jerusalem, it would not have been a full day’s journey to go from where Jesus was staying to where Lazarus was buried. Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus arrived. Leon Morris succinctly writes: “The four days are accounted for by allowing a day for the journey of the messengers, the two days that Jesus remained where He was, and a day for Jesus’ journey.”[[110]](#footnote-27191) In the culture of Palestine, burials occurred the same day as the person died, and by the time Jesus arrived Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days (John 11:17).

A vital final thing we need to understand about the record is why Jesus would stay where he was for two more days. The answer to that question comes from the beliefs of the people. Rabbinic literature from after the time of the New Testament shows that the rabbis taught that the soul hung around the body for three days looking for an opportunity to reenter it, but when decomposition set in on the fourth day, the soul left.[[111]](#footnote-19049) Although that particular rabbinical commentary post-dates the New Testament, Jesus purposely staying away from Bethany for four days is good evidence that the belief was in existence at the time of Christ (and this may also factor into the wording of Hosea 6:2, that God would revive Israel on the third day).

Even though Lazarus died close to the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, the death and resurrection of Christ were still unknown to the apostles and disciples. Jesus had told them over and over about it, but they just could not grasp it. The cultural belief that the soul would not reenter the body after 3 days would have made Jesus’ resurrection very hard for some people to believe. That Jesus raised Lazarus after four days would confirm to people that God could raise the dead even if they had been in the grave for four days.

Jesus’ powerful miracle of raising Lazarus showed that God could raise the dead even after four days, and helped people, even the apostles, believe in the resurrection. This is clear from John 11:15: “I rejoice for your sakes that I was not there [to heal him] so that you can believe.” The raising of Lazarus did something besides get people to believe Jesus was the Messiah and believe in the resurrection. It was because of the miracle of raising Lazarus that the enemies of Jesus went into high gear in their plans to kill Jesus.

Jesus’ miracle in raising Lazarus after he had been dead was so great, and so undeniable, that many of the Jews believed in him (John 11:45). In contrast to those pure-hearted Jews, the religious leaders realized if they let Jesus go on doing miracles, “everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our Place and our nation” (John 11:48). Then Caiaphas prophesied that it was better for one man to die than for the nation of Israel to perish (John 11:50-52). The result of all this was that from the very day that Jesus raised Lazarus, “from that day on they made plans to kill him” (John 11:53). It was only a short time later, at the time of the Passover, that their plans were fulfilled, and Jesus was crucified.

It was Jesus’ delay to go to Lazarus that made the raising of Lazarus so amazing and undeniable, and started the intense religious fervor to arrest and kill Jesus. Jesus had said that Lazarus’ death was “to the glory of God, so that the Son of God will be glorified by it” (John 11:4), and now we can see the fullness of what he meant. The death and resurrection opened the door for God to be truly glorified by giving His only Son and providing for the salvation of mankind so that anyone who believed could have everlasting life.

Joh 11:9

**“12 hours in a day.”** At the time of Christ, in both Jewish and Roman reckoning of time, the “day” was divided into 12 hours. Also, both the Jews and Romans divided the night into four “watches,” each being three hours long. (See commentary on Mark 6:48).

Jesus was obviously making a point in John 11:9-10 when he spoke about the hours of the day, but he did not explain it, so there are many opinions about what he meant. We believe that here, like in many other places, Jesus is using something physical to make a spiritual point, actually more than one point. There are 12 hours in a day, and Jesus’ “day” was running out. He would soon die in Jerusalem. After Jesus’ day was over and he was gone, we would be left to “see in a mirror, darkly,” and would stumble (1 Cor. 13:12). Furthermore, Jesus knew that “night is coming, when no one will be able to work” (John 9:4). After the resurrection and ascension, people would not see clearly and stumble, and eventually the time of the Antichrist would come with its full darkness, when even the believers would be handed over to evil (Dan. 7:21; Rev. 13:7).

While it is “day” there is light, but the light is not “in him” (John 11:10), it comes from outside him, from God. Jesus could go back to Judea even though the Jews were trying to kill him because he walked in the light, i.e., by the revelation God gave him. Thus, it also seems clear that part of the meaning of what Christ said was that by walking by revelation, a person could be safe even in situations that were normally very dangerous. This would turn out to be a good lesson for the disciples after Jesus’ ascension when they were being hunted by the authorities.

Joh 11:11

**“fallen asleep.”** The Greek verb is *koimaō* (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

**“to awaken him.”** In the Greek, the *hina* phrase indicates purpose and is also the reason the verb is subjunctive mood. But Jesus was not going so he “may” awaken him, he was going “to awaken him,” so that is the better translation here.

Joh 11:12

**“fallen asleep.”** See commentary on Acts 7:60.

Joh 11:13

**“sleep.”** The Greek word is *hupnos* (#5258 ὕπνος), “sleep.” Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

Joh 11:15

**“rejoice.”** The Greek word is *chairō* (#5463 χαίρω), which usually means “rejoice.” Although “glad” is within the semantic range of *chairō*, it did not seem to carry the full meaning of what Jesus was feeling, and perhaps even seemed too smug. It was a difficult time, emotionally. Jesus knew he was very close to his death, and his friend had just died and the family he loved was obviously very hurt. Yet we can have joy and rejoicing in those times because of what we see lies ahead. He was not happy about the death of Lazarus, or the four days he would wait to raise him from the dead, but he rejoiced for the disciples and that what happened to Lazarus would help them to believe in his own resurrection.

**“that you can believe.”** Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the grave after four days was clear proof that God could raise the dead even if they had been dead for a long time. The historical evidence supports the fact that the rabbis taught that the soul (or spirit; life force) of the body hung around the dead body for three days, but by the fourth day, when decomposition had definitely started, it left and would not return. Thus, culturally, many people would likely have rejected Jesus’ resurrection solely on the basis that he had been dead for three days and nights. However, with Lazarus alive and among the disciples, that objection would melt away.

Although Jesus taught about his death and resurrection many times, the disciples just could not seem to grasp it until after the resurrection when Jesus opened their minds to the Scriptures. No doubt the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus helped the disciples believe in the resurrection, and also helped them witness about Jesus’ resurrection after he ascended to heaven.

[For more information on the disciples’ understanding of Christ’s suffering and death, see commentary on Luke 18:34.]

Joh 11:16

**“die with him.”** Although Thomas generally has a bad reputation in Christian circles, verses like this one show he was a man of great devotion and courage. We do not know anything about the life of Thomas, but here he boldly declares that death with Jesus is better than life without him. So true; and such a wonderful spiritual lesson! Jesus taught that if we lose our life for his sake we will actually find our life.

Thomas was courageous, but his courage was based on misunderstanding. It seems clear that Thomas did not grasp that Jesus was the “Lamb of God” and had to die for the sins of the world (Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2), and he also was obviously ignorant of the fact that Jesus’ atoning death was something that Jesus alone could accomplish. No one else, by dying with Jesus, could help with the atonement.

Joh 11:17

**“So when Jesus came.”** That is, when Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus had been buried.

**“found.”** The Greek word is *heuriskō* (#2147 εὑρίσκω), and means to find; come upon; discover for oneself; find by searching, or accidentally, or by thought and reflection; to “see;” discover, understand, experience. Jesus knew Lazarus was dead four days, but now he sees that fact personally for himself.

Joh 11:18

**“fifteen stadia.”** About 1 3/4 miles (2.8 km). The Greek word is *stadion* (#4712 στάδιον), and a stadia is about 600 feet (185 meters); or 1/8 of a Roman mile. Thus, the 15 stadia are very close to 1 3/4 miles. People who lived in Palestine and went to the feasts likely were very familiar with the distance, but people outside of Palestine were not, and the distance is likely given in the text to show us how close to Jerusalem Jesus went, and therefore how dangerous the situation was for him and the apostles.

The description, “fifteen stadia,” would have let everyone know the distance from Bethany to Jerusalem. Historically, the one-*stadion* race was very popular in the Greco-Roman world and was one of the events in the Panhellenic Games, of which the Olympic Games was one of the games. In fact, from 776 to 724 BC, the stadion race was the only Olympic event. This stadion race, this 200-yard sprint, was so prestigious that the “Olympiad,” the span of four years, was named after the winner of the stadion race. The *stadion* unit of measurement got its name from the place where the race was held, which then came into Latin and English as a place where events were held: a stadium (the Latin and English are spelled the same way).

Joh 11:19

**“many of the Jews.”** This is one of the several indications that Lazarus and his sisters were a wealthy and influential family. It was Mary who poured the ointment on Jesus that was worth 200 denarii, or about a full year’s salary (John 11:2). It is not unlikely that some of the visitors were some of the “chief priests” who would soon try to kill Lazarus because of the witness he was to Jesus (John 12:10). These Jews were so willing to comfort the sisters concerning their dead brother, but they wanted him dead again when his living witness supported that Jesus was the Christ. This is the blindness and nature of evil: it dismisses reality and does not mind even murder if it furthers its cause.

Joh 11:20

**“Mary remained seated.”** The records of Martha and Mary show that Martha is the more active and perhaps even the more aggressive one. She is often belittled because she served while Mary sat and listened to the Lord (Luke 10:38-42). But then we do not know how much private time they and their brother got to spend with Jesus, and how many people needed attending to when Jesus visited their home. In this record there is no indication that Jesus called for Martha; it seems to be her more aggressive nature that she would take the initiative to go see him. Perhaps Mary was affected more deeply by the death of her brother; she is the only one who is said to be crying (John 11:33). Perhaps Mary felt betrayed by circumstances. She, like Martha, believed that had Jesus been around when Lazarus was still sick that Jesus could have healed him and kept him from dying (John 11:21, 32). And Jesus had been around until just shortly before Lazarus got sick, but his confrontation with the Jews was so intense that they were seeking to arrest him (John 10:39), and so he had left and traveled beyond the Jordan, out of Judea (John 10:40). That kind of circumstance naturally leaves people with an “If only” mindset.

Martha’s faith shines clearly in the record as she declares that she knows her brother will be in the resurrection. By staying home, Mary missed out on one of Jesus’ very powerful and oft-quoted statements: “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Joh 11:25

**“life.”** Here the word “life” refers to “life in the Age to Come, which is clear from the next verse, John 11:26.” See commentary on Luke 10:28.

**“live.”** In this context, “live” refers to living forever. This is one of the many places where “live” is used idiomatically for “live forever,” and sometimes “life” is used in the same way: idiomatically for everlasting life. Occasionally when the Bible uses “life” or “live” with the meaning of “live forever,” scholars refer to the idiom as “the pregnant sense” of the word, either meaning the word has both a regular sense and a fuller meaning in that context, or the word is being used in the fuller idiomatic sense in that context. Furthermore, just as “live” or “life” can refer to everlasting life, “die” and “death” can refer to everlasting death (see commentary on John 8:51).

Culturally, and with an understanding that “will live” refers to living in the Age to Come after the resurrection, an expanded understanding of the last sentence in John 11:25 would be, “Whoever believes in me will live in the Age to come even if he dies now.”

[For more on “live” being used in the pregnant sense of “live forever,” see commentary on Luke 10:28. For more on the idiomatic or “pregnant sense” of some biblical vocabulary, see commentary on Luke 23:42.]

Joh 11:26

**“in the age *to come*.”** A translation of *eis ton aiona*, “to (and through) the Age.” The Greek word *eis* does not just mean *to*, but *fully into*, and in this case, by inference, *through it*. The preposition *dia* might have been used, but *dia* has the added meaning of through and passing out of.[[112]](#footnote-16059) No resurrected person dies in the middle of the Messianic Age. In the mind of Jesus’ audience, the Messianic Age that was to come was established on earth and lasted forever. The details of it coming to an end and an eternal kingdom following it were not revealed in the Old Testament.[[113]](#footnote-25261)

Joh 11:27

**“believe.”** The Greek word *pisteuō* (#4100 πιστεύω), is in the perfect tense, active voice, which generally refers to something that started in the past and still is continuing. Martha’s believing that Jesus was the Christ seems to be a firm conclusion she had reached some time earlier and had not wavered in, thus Nyland translates it “firmly believe.”[[114]](#footnote-10766) On the other hand, it is possible that the perfect tense is being used for emphasis: “I do believe” or “I really believe.”

Joh 11:32

**“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”** Mary makes the same basic statement that Martha did, only the position of “my” in the Greek text is different. No doubt they had expressed the sentiment to each other many times, and both expressed it to Jesus (John 11:21, 32). But whereas Martha is more in control of her emotions, and enters into a dialogue with Jesus, Mary, upon seeing him, falls down at his feet crying.

Joh 11:33

**“was deeply angered.”** The Greek is *embrimaomai* (#1690 ἐμβριμάομαι), and it occurs 5 times in the New Testament. It has the overtone of anger or indignation, and can mean to sternly warn (Matt. 9:30; Mark 1:43) to harshly scold because of anger or indignation (Mark 14:5), or be moved with anger or indignation. Robertson writes, “First aorist middle indicative of *embrimaomai*, old verb (from *en*, and *brimê*, strength) to snort with anger like a horse. It occurs in the LXX (Dan. 11:30) for violent displeasure. The notion of indignation is present in the other examples of the word in the New Testament (Mark 1:43; 14:5; Matt. 9:30). So it seems best to see that sense here and in verse 38. The presence of these Jews, the grief of Mary, Christ’s own concern, the problem of the raising of Lazarus—all greatly agitated the spirit of Jesus (locative case *tôi pneumati*). He struggled for self-control.”[[115]](#footnote-22831) The New Living Testament translates this phrase, “a deep anger welled up within him,” which catches the sense very well. Most modern versions say something such as Jesus was “deeply moved.” However, to our modern ears, this seems like a touching sympathy, not an anger and indignation about what the Devil had been able to do in the situation, causing such pain and hopelessness. When faced with the pain of the sisters and even some of the crowd, and the realization that they thought that Jesus could have saved Lazarus if he were just sick but could do no more once he died, a deep anger and indignation arose within Jesus. Often that is what happens to men and women of God who are faced with not only the effect of the Devil’s work (destruction and death) but also the fact that the people are confused and deceived and thus faithless and hopeless. A deep resolve born of righteous anger wells up, and the sword of the Lord is bared to do its work as the believer steps forth to do the will of God.

**“was troubled”** (*etaraxen heauton*). First aorist active indicative of *tarassô*, old verb to disturb, to agitate, with the reflexive pronoun, “he agitated himself” (not passive voice, not middle). “His sympathy with the weeping sister and the wailing crowd caused this deep emotion.”[[116]](#footnote-18819) Some indignation at the loud wailing would only add to the agitation of Jesus.

Joh 11:35

**“burst into tears.”** The Greek word is *dakruō* (#1145 δακρύω, pronounced dack-'roo-ō). The verb literally means “to shed tears,” and thus means to cry or weep, and this is the only time it is used in the New Testament. The cognate noun, *dakruon* (#1144 δάκρυον), which occurs ten times in the New Testament, is a “tear,” and the plural noun can refer to “tears” or “weeping.” *Dakruō* usually means to weep or cry quietly without loud wailing, and it means that here in John 11:35, and is in stark contrast to *klaiō* (#2799 κλαίω, pronounced 'kly-ō), which means to cry, weep, or mourn, usually with loud and open crying or mourning (John 11:31, 33). *Klaiō* occurs some 40 times in the New Testament.

Here in John 11:35, *dakruō* is in the aorist tense, active voice, and as such most likely means “burst into tears.”[[117]](#footnote-20268) Charles B. Williams’ translation renders it: “Jesus burst into tears.” In contrast, when Jesus got over the Mount of Olives and could see Jerusalem he “burst into sobs,” broke into audible crying. In Luke, the Greek word is *klaiō*, while John 11:35 uses *dakruō*, but both verbs are in the aorist tense active voice, and refer to a sudden outburst of emotion. In Luke, Jesus bursts into audible sobs; here he bursts into tears. Here, he holds back his voice but experiences deep emotion from the circumstances around him: the death of his friend, the pain of Mary and Martha, the misunderstanding of his apostles, the ignorance and duplicity of the Jews.

Verses like this show us the true humanity of Jesus—that he was fully human and the Son of God, not God the Son. If he were God in the flesh he would have been better prepared for the situation and not, it seems clear, overcome with emotion. Indeed, Trinitarians have wrestled with this verse. Most point out that this verse shows Jesus’ true humanity, but that glosses over the fact that he was also supposedly God. God would not have been so overcome by emotion. For that to happen, Jesus’ humanity would have had to have overridden his godhood, but how could that happen? So this verse has caused problems. Hippolytus of Rome (170–235) wrote that Jesus wept “to give us an example.” Peter Chrysologus (c. 380–c. 450), a bishop and doctor in the Church, wrote that Jesus did not weep out of human weakness, but “because he was welcoming him [Lazarus] back.” Potamius of Lisbon, a bishop in the mid-fourth century AD, wrote that one reason Jesus wept was to “moderate the sisters’ outpouring of grief.” Augustine (354–430) said that Jesus wept to teach us to weep. Basil of Seleucia (d. c. 460) taught that Jesus wept to set “a law with his tears…He defined the bounds of grief.”[[118]](#footnote-23235)

All of these explanations fundamentally deny that Jesus had true human emotions and was overwhelmed by them. But having strong emotions is not a sin, and not even a sign of weakness. Indeed, quite the opposite. Jesus’ strong emotional reaction in the situation shows how deeply he was both in touch with how he felt (he did not have a head-heart disassociation problem), and that he had very deep emotions. No wonder Isaiah foretold that Jesus would be “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3 ESV). Thus, in his sobbing and weeping, Jesus again sets a standard that we strive to emulate: having very deep feelings, but not losing control of ourselves in the midst of those feelings.

Joh 11:36

**“was a friend to him.”** The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the verb *phileō* in this context and keep the English as a verb. Jesus had a special attachment to Lazarus. See commentaries on John 5:20 and 11:3 on “is a friend to.” For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see commentary on John 21:15.

Joh 11:38

**“deeply angered.”** See commentary on John 11:33. The anger that Jesus initially felt when he saw the pain and weeping of Mary and the Jews subsided (as emotions do) as they all walked to Lazarus’ tomb. However, upon arriving at the tomb, the anger was rekindled.

Joh 11:40

**“see the glory of God.”** This is one of the many places where “glory” is related to power. In this case, the “glory of God” was His power in action (His exercised power), and seeing God’s power in raising Lazarus from the dead was seeing God’s power in action and thus His “glory” (cf. John 11:40; Rom. 6:4; Eph. 3:16). In 1 Corinthians 6:14 it is God’s power that raised the dead.

Joh 11:42

**“so they believe that you sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 11:43

**“cried out with a loud voice.”** Jesus did not need to cry out with a loud voice to raise Lazarus. He could have raised Lazarus with a whisper. He cried with a loud voice because there was a crowd there and he wanted the people to know that Lazarus responded to his voice.

Joh 11:44

**“He who was dead came out.”** Lazarus was raised from the dead. Although Lazarus was raised from the dead prior to Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead, Jesus is still called the “firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15), which should be understood as the “firstborn of the *new* creation.” This is due to the fact that Lazarus’ body still died after his resurrection, whereas Jesus’ resurrection body was raised incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:42) to never die again. Thus, Lazarus’ resurrection was not part of the new creation, which is untainted from sin, but rather, his resurrection was a glimpse and foreshadowing of the true new creation to come.

Joh 11:48

**“our Place.”** The word “place” was a designation of the Temple (see commentary on Matt. 24:15, *topos*.)

**“the Romans will come and take away both our Place and our nation.”** Why would these ungodly Jews think that if all the people believed in Jesus the Romans would come and “take away” the Temple and the Jewish nation? The answer to that question lies in understanding the mindset of these Jews in the Sanhedrin, which was the ruling body of Judaism. We see from the way they treated Jesus and his followers, and from the “religious” but “ungodly” rules that they placed on people, which Jesus called “burdens” (Matt. 23:4; Luke 11:46), that these men were ungodly and some were even downright evil. Because they were power-hungry and greedy, they thought others were too. Thus, they could not imagine that Jesus could be believed in by all the people but then not want to be king and rule over them. Of course, if Jesus became a king, then the Romans would indeed come and punish Israel. However, exactly what that would look like would not have been known. It seems very likely, though, that the Sanhedrin would be greatly affected and possibly even dispersed. Given that way of thinking, no wonder they wanted to kill Jesus (John 11:53).

Joh 11:50

**“People.”** This is a good example of the use of the word “People” as meaning the Jewish nation, “the Jews,” hence the capital “P.” See commentary on Matthew 2:4.

Joh 11:51

**“Now he did not say this on his own.”** Before the Day of Pentecost God could place His gift of holy spirit upon people so that they would accomplish His work. This is a good example. Caiaphas, though not a godly man, was still High Priest and God placed holy spirit upon him at least so that he could give an accurate prophecy about Jesus, which then became a prime motivator for them to seek his death (John 11:53). This is an example of how God works in history to bring about His purposes without the need for perfect foreknowledge. God, by His power, can influence things He wants accomplished.

Joh 11:52

**“but also to gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”** Part of the effect of the redeeming work of the Messiah was that the Israelites, who over the centuries had been scattered around the earth, would be gathered together in the land of Israel. There are many prophecies about this gathering to Israel, and it will be fully fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth.

[For more on the gathering of the Israelites to the land of Israel, see commentary on Jer. 32:37. For more information on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Joh 11:53

**“plans.”** The middle voice of the verb indicates they worked together (cf. NASB).

Joh 11:54

**“Ephraim.”** A city close to the Arabah desert, about 13 miles (20 km) NNE of Jerusalem. From here Jesus went north through Samaria, into Galilee, across the Jordan River, traveled south through Perea, crossed the Jordan River again and came to Jericho, and then traveled west to Jerusalem. The Gospel of John omits this entire final itinerary of Jesus. See commentary on Luke 17:11.

Joh 11:56

**“were looking for.”** *zēteō* (#2212 ζητέω), “to seek.” The verb is in the imperfect tense, active mood, so the Jews were seeking, or looking for, Jesus. Caiaphas had given a prophecy that one man should die for the nation instead of the nation being destroyed, and so the Jews were now zealously looking for a way to kill Jesus.

**“Surely he will not come to the feast?”** The form of the question assumes strongly that Jesus will “absolutely not” (the Greek uses two negatives for emphasis: *ou mē*) dare to come this time.[[119]](#footnote-31156) This verse shows that the people knew their leaders were trying to arrest and kill Jesus, and so they assumed that he would know that too, and not show up at Passover. The translation in many modern versions loses the fact that the question expects a “no” answer.

**John Chapter 12**

Joh 12:1

**“six days before the Passover.”** When the Greeks counted dates, they counted backward from the termination date.[[120]](#footnote-32240) And since the Passover falls on Nisan 14 (that was the day the lamb was killed at about 3 p.m.; the Feast of Unleavened Bread started the next day, the fifteenth, which was at sunset), that made six days before the Passover, Nisan 8, which was a Saturday.

This chronology poses a problem for those people who believe what tradition teaches, that Jesus was crucified on Friday, because it would mean that the simple and straightforward reading of the text would be that Jesus walked from Jericho to Bethany on the Sabbath, a distance of some 15 miles (24 km), far greater than the standard “Sabbath day’s journey” (just over ½ mile or .8 km) allowed by the law the religious leaders enforced. This leads to some very inventive solutions.

A common solution is that Jesus walked almost to Bethany on Friday (within ½ mile or 0.8 km), and then walked into Bethany on the Sabbath. At face value, however, this is absurd. For one thing, there are no known good resting places on the downhill slope of the Mount of Olives that close to Jerusalem. The “Jericho Road” had an inn on it (cf. Luke 10:34), but it would have been much further down the slope toward Jericho. But the real problem with that solution is that no one who has walked uphill for some 15 miles (24 km) would stop within a few minutes of their destination and friends and food. There would simply be no reason for such a halt.

Lenski, Hendriksen, and other commentators say that the Passover Lamb was killed on Thursday the fourteenth, so that day was “Passover,” and thus the Last Supper that Jesus ate with his disciples was the Passover. Then Jesus’ death was Friday, Nisan 15. In that scenario, six days before “Passover” (Thursday) was the previous Friday, and thus Jesus was free to travel on that day. Many commentators have a problem with that construction of events, and rightly so, because Jesus could not have been the “real” Passover Lamb if he was not killed when the Passover Lamb was being killed in the Temple.

It is suggested by some commentators that Jesus simply broke the Sabbath and acted in a similar way to when his disciples picked grain on the Sabbath. But this was very different. First, there was no law about eating raw grain on the Sabbath. You could not light a fire and cook, but that was not what the disciples were doing. They were eating the raw standing grain just the same as they would have taken a drink from a flowing brook. Second, this time Jesus was accompanied by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of followers, and they would not have broken the Sabbath and would have doubted that Jesus was the Messiah if he had done so.

A more reasonable solution, but an unlikely one, is that the sun set just as Jesus was entering the Bethany area, which means he would have walked the last half mile to Bethany in the dusk on the Sabbath. The problem with that solution is its improbability. Jesus had left Jericho many miles and many hours earlier, and, as anyone who hikes long distances knows, it is very hard to judge any arrival time with much accuracy. Jesus and the people following him would have known that the next day was the Sabbath and allowed plenty of time for the journey, which could be made in one long day. The thought that Jesus and the people following him would have cut their timing so close and may have had to stop traveling and be stuck for the Sabbath day in the open only a mile or so from Bethany and Jerusalem is improbable in the extreme. People knew they could not travel on the Sabbath and made sure not to get stranded in a difficult place. Furthermore, if Jesus arrived on the Sabbath to Bethany, which was a small village on the east slope of the Mount of Olives, it is likely that a good portion of the people with him would have needed to go to Jerusalem to get food and lodging. But to do that, those people would have to travel more than a Sabbath day’s journey, because they had already walked part of a Sabbath day’s journey to reach Bethany, and so they could not go on to reach Jerusalem without breaking the law.

The “problem” caused by John 12:1 is not a problem at all. Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, Nisan 14, and his arrival in Bethany was six days earlier, Thursday, Nisan 8.

[For more information on the last week of Jesus’ life, see commentaries on John 18:13; 19:14; Luke 23:50.]

**“came to Bethany.”** He was traveling up from Jericho. This is clear from reading the record in John and comparing it to the other Gospels.

[For more information on Jesus’ travels in the last weeks of his life, see commentary on Luke 17:11.]

**“from among the dead.”**[[121]](#footnote-24688) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Joh 12:2

**“So they made him a supper.”** This event is out of chronological order, in John coming before Jesus enters Jerusalem (John 12:12), and in Matthew and Mark after he did. There is no problem with that, because the chronology is not being emphasized here, but rather that the people would have it on their heart to honor Jesus, and thus the supper is mentioned at the beginning of his last time in Jerusalem.

**“Martha was serving.”** The anointing occurred in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3), which is why John specifically says Martha was serving. If the supper occurred at the house of Mary and Martha, that would never be stated because it would be obvious and expected.

**“Lazarus was...reclining *to eat* with him.”** Thus, Lazarus is mentioned as an honored guest. This would never be mentioned if the supper was at Lazarus’ house.

Joh 12:3

**“Then Mary.”** This record of Mary pouring the oil on Jesus occurs in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:1-8; it is not in Luke.

Mary loved Jesus and may have poured the expensive perfume on him as simply a gesture of love, but also Jesus had just raised her beloved brother from the dead (John 11), and so especially at this time, she would have been profoundly thankful to him. The anointing of Jesus occurred in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3), which is why John specifically says Martha was serving. If the supper occurred at the house of Mary and Martha that would never be stated because it would be obvious and expected. We do not know from the text of Scripture about the family situation of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, for example, whether Lazarus was married or whether Mary and Martha were married and had their own houses. If they all did have their own houses it makes sense that they would have lived close together and if Jesus was a guest at Lazarus’ house, Mary and Martha would go there to see him and help out.

**“pound.”** A Roman pound was 12 ounces, three-quarters of our English pound.

**“expensive perfume.”** That the family had this extremely expensive perfume is one of the indications that Lazarus and his family were wealthy.

**“pure nard”** “Spikenard” is a plant native to northern India and was a favorite perfume in the ancient world. The prefix “spike” refers to the shape of the plant. The best nard was imported from India in sealed alabaster boxes, which were only opened on special occasions. The Roman historian Pliny commented on the expensive nature of Indian nard.[[122]](#footnote-31022) For “perfume of pure nard” see Lenski.[[123]](#footnote-15092)

**“anointed the feet.”** At first glance, there seems to be a contradiction between Matthew, Mark, and John, because Matthew and Mark say the ointment was poured on Jesus’ head (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3), while John 12:3 says Mary poured the ointment on Jesus’ feet. The key to understanding this apparent contradiction is to realize that a flask of oil worth a year’s salary would be quite large, and thus the oil would have covered both his head and feet. That is why Jesus said that the woman “poured this perfume on my body” (Matt. 26:12; Mark 14:8).

**“perfume.”** The Greek word is *muron* (#3464 μύρον), and it is a general term for perfume, ointment, perfumed oil, or even a sweet-smelling substance. In the New Testament, the emphasis is on the way it smells, and thus “perfume” seems to be the best translation. It is not an “ointment,” per se, because that implies it would be being used for healing. Also, what Mary put on Jesus was likely not oily, so “perfumed oil” is perhaps not the best translation.

Joh 12:4

**“But Judas.”** This is a very important verse in that it shows why there was contention and dissension among the apostles and disciples when the expensive perfume was poured on Jesus. Judas, who kept the money box and stole from it (John 12:6), saw that he lost out on stealing a lot of money when the perfume was poured on Jesus, and so he started complaining about the “waste” of the perfume to the other apostles. The perfume was worth 300 denari, or about a year’s wage for a laborer, and Judas could have taken a lot without it being noticed, so he grumbled at the supposed “waste” of money. The grumbling spread to the rest of the apostles, who took up his cause such that there was a general grumbling and discontent among them (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:4-5). Matthew and Mark just mention the grumbling without mentioning that the root cause of it was Judas, so this incident is a good example that shows the need to read all four Gospels to fully understand what is happening and why. Jesus no doubt knew Judas was a thief, just as he knew at the Last Supper that Judas would betray him, and he put a quick end to the grumbling (Matt. 26:10-13; Mark 14:6-9; John 12:7-8).

One of the things that the Bible specifically says God hates is a person who stirs up strife among the believers (Prov. 6:19). A good leader knows that strife can get out of hand and destroy a church or fellowship, so he or she follows Jesus’ example and handles it quickly and decisively. The “root of bitterness” that Hebrews 12:15 speaks about is primarily a bitter person in the fellowship who “sprouts up and causes trouble” and because of whom many people are defiled. Good leaders watch out for people who cause division and deal with them.

**“Iscariot.”** See commentary on Matthew 10:4 for more information.

Joh 12:6

**“*money* box.”** The Greek word *glossokoman* is from *glossa*, “tongue,” and *komeo*, “to keep, to preserve.” It technically referred to a small box or container in which reeds for wind instruments were kept, but, as with all boxes, eventually, all kinds of things are kept there. “Money box” is probably better than “money bag” since the reeds would never be kept in a bag.

**“steal.”** The Greek is more literally, “carry,” or “carry away,” which gets translated various ways in the English versions. For example, “steal,” “pilfer,” “help himself to,” etc. For more information, see commentary on John 12:4.

Joh 12:7

**“she has kept this *until now* for the day of my burial.”** The similar records in Matthew 26:12 and Mark 14:8 are clearer, and from them, we build the full meaning of this record. Lenski does a wonderful job.[[124]](#footnote-32162) We added *until now* for clarity’s sake. Versions such as the NASB, “…Let her alone, in order that she may keep it for the day of My burial…,” make no sense—she had just poured out the oil, how could she now keep it? An important fact to keep in mind is that Mary was not expecting Jesus to die, so she did not purposely save the oil to anoint his body before he died. From her perspective, she had kept the oil for an appropriate time, and it is likely that the tension and even some confusion about Jesus in this last week caused her to think (God likely working in her) that now would be a good time to anoint and bless Jesus. Jesus, knowing his situation, understood that her anointing him was a fitting way for him to be blessed and touched before his torture and death.

The perfume was very expensive and therefore likely quite strong, so it is possible that there could have been a faint smell of it even days later when Jesus was buried. It is impossible to know what the disciples thought Jesus meant when he spoke of his burial. They did not expect him to die, much less be buried.

Joh 12:9

**“from among the dead.”**[[125]](#footnote-22176) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Joh 12:10

**“plans to put Lazarus to death…”** This is religion at its worst. The religious leaders were willing to kill an innocent man to protect their power and doctrine. The Devil’s way is to steal, kill, and destroy, and you know his followers by their fruit.

Joh 12:13

**“Hosanna.”** The people who were shouting praises to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem were, for the most part, not the same group as the group that shouted, “Crucify him” only a few days later. See commentaries on Luke 23:21, 27.

Joh 12:15

**“Daughter Zion.”** The phrase “daughter Zion” is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem, and it occurs many times in the Old Testament (see commentary on Isa. 1:8). Translating the Greek literally as “daughter of Zion” is confusing, because a “daughter of Zion” is a female descendant of Zion, whereas the idiomatic phrase refers to Zion as the daughter. Thus, the translation “Daughter Zion” more accurately communicates the meaning of the text (cf. CEB, CSB, NAB, NIV2011). When the 1984 NIV was updated in 2011, the translators changed the wording from “Daughter of Zion” to “Daughter Zion.”

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Joh 12:17

**“meanwhile.”** Cf. HCSB. The Greek word is *oun* (#3767 οὖν), it is understood to be used here as a continuation of the narrative,[[126]](#footnote-32742) which the translation “meanwhile” captures beautifully here.

**“crowd.”** This is the crowd (the multitude of people) who followed Jesus from Jericho, where Jesus had performed miracles such as healing blind Bartimaeus and his blind companion (Matt. 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). It is different from the crowd in John 12:18, who were the people who came out of Jerusalem to see Jesus when they heard he was approaching and went out to see and welcome him (John 12:12-13). (There were two crowds that merged into one huge multitude as Jesus reached the top of the Mount of Olives).

**“from among the dead.”**[[127]](#footnote-30777) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Joh 12:18

**“the crowd went and met him…”** A different crowd than the crowd specifically mentioned in John 12:17 (see commentary on John 12:17).

Joh 12:19

**“You see that you are not accomplishing anything! Look! The world has gone after him.”** The religious leaders had been looking for Jesus to arrest him. They can find him now easily enough! But they dare not to take him.

Joh 12:20

**“Now there were certain Greeks.”** The Bible does not tell us whether these “Greeks” were actually fully Greeks (non-Jews who were not proselytes) or whether they were Greeks but were proselytes. They were at the temple “to worship,” but that is not conclusive as to whether they were proselytes or not, because, for example, the Ethiopian eunuch had been at the Temple to worship (Acts 8:27), and he was not a proselyte. Furthermore, it seems unusual that John would call them “Greeks” if they were proselytes or Greek-speaking Jews. Many Greeks admired the Jews for their values and their just laws, and Gentiles were allowed into the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple. Also, if they were Greeks, that would explain the apparent hesitancy of Philip in John 12:22 (see commentary on John 12:22).

**“worship.”** See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

Joh 12:21

**“So they came to Philip.”** John 12:21 is an example of the ancient custom of using an intermediary to represent oneself to a person of “higher” position, power, or influence, instead of direct person-to-person contact. It often happened in the biblical world that a person of high status or position simply would not bother to see someone who was considered somehow “lower,” especially since that lower individual almost always needed something. It therefore was incumbent on that lower person to find an intermediary who would be considered respectable enough to actually get the desired audience with the person of higher rank.

There are some examples of people using intermediaries in the Bible. Here in John 12, the Gentiles wanted to see Jesus and custom dictated that their best chance would be to secure the aid of one of his apostles, so they approached Philip. The centurion whose servant was sick used intermediaries (Luke 7:1-10; Matthew 8:5-13. Actually, the record of the centurion is a very good example because it shows that the use of intermediaries and agents was so common in the biblical world that in some cases the intermediary was assumed and did not even have to be mentioned). Abraham used intermediaries in Genesis 23:8 when he wanted to buy a burial site for Sarah, his wife, and approached Ephron through the elders of the Hittite clan.

[For more information on the related custom of agency in the biblical world, see commentary on Matt. 8:5.]

**“Lord.”** Here the word “Lord” is being used as a respectful form of address, like “Sir.” The Greeks are speaking to Philip, who they certainly knew was just a disciple of Jesus.

Joh 12:22

**“Andrew went, and Philip.”** The wording in the text seems purposeful, and likely with good reason. Greeks had approached Philip and asked to see Jesus (John 12:20-21). This was in Jerusalem very close to Passover, and many enemy eyes would have been watching Jesus and his disciples. In that charged context, Philip likely had some hesitation about walking straight to Jesus after talking to Greeks, and that hesitation is probably what we see reflected in the text here in John 12:22.

Joh 12:23

**“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”** At first glance, this seems to be a strange comment for Jesus to make after he was told that some Greeks wanted to see him. But the Old Testament had many prophecies about the nations seeking God when Christ ruled the earth, and indeed, the Temple would be “a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56:7). Jesus understood that Greeks wanting to see him at this particular time pointed to the fulfillment of those prophecies and that his kingdom would come soon. As it turned out in God’s plan, the fullness of Christ’s kingdom on earth was delayed and in fact, is still future, but the acceptance of the Gentiles by God was not; on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the “Body of Christ” made up of Jews and Gentiles began (cf. Eph. 2:11-19; 3:6).

[For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Joh 12:25

**“is overly attached to.”** The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). Although most versions say “love his life,” in doing so we confuse *agapē* love (“love” in the REV) and *phileō* love. *Phileō* love has an attachment, and it is the attachment between good friends. However, we would not say, “If anyone is a friend of his life….” We could say, “is attached to his life,” but that would be confusing because there is an appropriate attachment to life that we must all have or we would commit suicide during difficult times. For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see commentary on John 21:15.

**“life” (first 2x).** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that show that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

**“loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it.”** The lesson in this verse is a simple one—each person makes a choice about how they live and whether they live selfishly for themselves or selflessly for God and others. The tenses of the verbs translated “loses” and “will keep” teach a wonderful lesson. The word “loses” (which can also be translated “destroys”) is a present tense verb, while “will keep” (or “will guard”) is a future tense verb. People who reject God destroy their lives now and in the future when they experience the “second death,” while those who believe and obey God will be saved and have everlasting life, but the fullness of that salvation is not for today but is in the future.

**“life in the age *to come*.”** In this phrase, “life” is *zōē* (#2222 ζωή, pronounced zō-'ā), life, animal life that animates the body. This verse contrasts two words that are used for “life.” *Psuchē*, soul, is used more broadly, while *zōē* is used more specifically of the “life” in man and animals. This verse could be translated “Whoever is overly attached to his soul loses it, and whoever hates his soul in this world will keep it, resulting in life in the Age to come.” “Life in the Age to come” is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Joh 12:27

**“troubled.”** The Greek word is *tarassō* (#5015 ταράσσω), and it has a broad semantic range, including, to trouble, agitate, disturb, make restless, stir up, be in fear, or dread. This record in John occurs in the last few days of Jesus’ life, and Jesus was agitated and troubled in his soul. Man’s redemption was on the line, and his task was neither easy nor fun. There were many details that had to happen exactly on time and as prophesied. The night of his arrest he was even more deeply troubled; see commentary on Matthew 26:38.

Joh 12:30

**“Jesus answered and said.”** The original text has the phrase, “answered and said” more than 100 times in the Bible, and it can sometimes be confusing because it is often used when no one asked a question. The phrase is an idiom, but it has a literal overtone behind it. The person who “answered and said” may not have been answering a direct question from someone, but they were answering and addressing the situation that was presenting itself before them. In this case, Jesus was answering the confusion among the people as to the sound they heard from heaven.

[For more on “answered and said,” see commentary on Matt. 11:25.]

Joh 12:31

**“ruler of this world.”** The Devil is indeed the “ruler of this world,” and Jesus calls him that in John 12:31; 14:30, and 16:11. There are three designations of the Devil that refer to him specifically as “ruler.” The ruler of the demons (Mark 3:22), the ruler of the world (John 12:31; 14:30, and 16:11), and the ruler of the authority of the air (Eph. 2:2). These three, combined with the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), show how complete the Devil’s control of what happens on earth really is when it comes to the age and world we live in.

Although most Christians believe that God is the ruler of the world, all we have to do is look around us at what life in this world is like to realize this world is not being ruled by God. When God ruled the world in Genesis 1 it was a wonderful place and everything was very good. But God gave the world to Adam and Eve to steward (Gen. 1:28). They chose the Devil’s way (Gen. 3:6) and in an event we refer to as “the fall of humankind,” the Devil somehow took control of the world from Adam and Eve. It immediately began to show the effects of the Devil’s rulership both in the physical aspects of the world (“the ground is cursed” “it will produce thorns and thistles;” Gen. 3:17-18), and in his effect over people (Cain killed his brother Abel and lied about it; Gen. 4:8-9). The Devil told Jesus he had been given authority over the world (Luke 4:6). Furthermore, it is because the Devil is the ruler of this world and has authority over it that he could offer that authority to Jesus, and Jesus did not deny the Devil’s claim (Luke 4:6).

[For more on the power the Devil exercises as the “ruler” and “god” of this world, see commentaries on Luke 4:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; and 1 John 5:19. For more names and characteristics of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“ruler.”** The Greek word translated as “ruler” is *archōn* (#758 ἄρχων), which is from *archē*, “first,” and it means the one who is first, thus the “ruler, commander, chief,” etc.

**“world.”** The Greek word for “world” is *kosmos* (#2889 κόσμος), and it has a wide semantic range in Greek, but here it just has a standard meaning of “world,” the inhabited earth.

**“Now the ruler of this world will be cast out.”** The Adversary had been able to go into heaven, into the presence of God (Job 1) when he wanted, and thus he “accuses them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10). However, before Armageddon, the Adversary will be cast out of heaven by Michael and his army (Rev. 12:7-10). The ruler of the world will first be cast out of heaven (Rev. 12:8-9) and then out of the world as we know it when he is chained in the Abyss (Rev. 20:1-3).

Jesus spoke these words in the last few days of his life before he was crucified. He knew from the Old Testament that the Day of the Lord would include judgment and punishment of the world and the spiritual powers of darkness behind much of the world’s evil. Although there is not much about the Devil in the Old Testament, there is quite a bit in the Gospels, and Jesus had met the Devil personally (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) and also had cast out many demons. In this verse, by repeating the word “now” two times, Jesus emphasizes that God’s judgment of the world and the Devil’s losing his authority would happen very soon. Jesus taught that after his death and resurrection, the end of the Age would happen very shortly.

Theologians have a problem with this verse because a straightforward reading of it is that the Day of Judgment is close, but it has not turned out that way and it has now been some 2,000 years since Jesus said “Now” is the time for judgment. Theologians therefore usually explain John 12:31 by saying that with the death of Jesus, the judgment (“condemnation”) of the world was a foregone conclusion, as was the destruction of the Devil and his dominion. However, the problem with that explanation is that it does not deal with what the verse actually says. The verse uses the word “now” twice, and places it at the beginning of each phase for emphasis. This makes it quite clear that Jesus thought the things he was speaking about would occur very soon indeed. What we know from this verse and many others similar to it is that like many Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist, Jesus taught the End Times were near, but God, for His own purposes, has delayed the Second Coming, which is still future.

[For more verses in which Jesus says that his return would be soon, see commentary on Matt. 16:28. For more information about the Eden-like Messianic Kingdom that will be on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Joh 12:32

**“will draw all people to myself.”** Jesus had just been told that Greeks wanted to see him (John 12:20-22). This confirmed the Old Testament prophecies that he would be a blessing to the Gentiles and was something he himself had taught about earlier in his ministry. The phrase “all people” refers to all the humble, godly people, just as he had taught throughout his ministry. It is the humble, meek, pure-hearted, righteous people who will be in the Kingdom (Matt. 5:3-10).

John 12:32 has not been well understood by most Christians. Also, it has been completely misunderstood by Christian Universalists, who believe that every human who has ever lived will be saved regardless of whether they were godly or ungodly, and their belief is partly based on passages such as John 12:32 and 1 Corinthians 15:22, which use the word “all” to describe the group of people who will be saved.

The entry below covers three major points: 1) That the word “all” is usually used in a limited, not universal sense. 2) That it was Greek Gentiles who asked to meet Jesus, and that event prompted Jesus to say that he would draw all people to himself. 3) That what Jesus said in John 12:32 does not contradict his many teachings that some people will be saved and some will not.

Point number one is that the word “all” is usually used in a limited, not universal sense. “All” is usually limited by the context or common sense. This is quite easy to see by simply looking at all the uses of “all” (or “every,” or “the whole”) in a concordance. A few examples will suffice to show the pattern. In Genesis 6:17, God said to Noah, “I, even I, am bringing a flood of water on the earth to destroy from under the heavens all flesh in which is the breath of life. Everything that is on the earth will breathe its last.” But “all flesh” and “everything” on earth did not die. In Joshua 8 the Israelites attacked the city of Ai. The Bible says “all” the people in Ai were called to pursue the Israelites, and the record goes on to say that “all Israel” then fought against Ai, but in neither case was the “all” literal (Josh. 8:16-17). In John 3:26, Jesus was baptizing, and John’s disciples told John that “all men” (KJV) were going to him; and in John 4:29, the Samaritan woman said that Jesus told her “all” (KJV) that she had ever done, and in neither of those cases was the “all” literal. The word “all” is usually restricted by context or logic, and we should recognize that it is being used in a restricted sense in John 12:32, especially since if it was being used in a universal sense not only would Jesus be teaching something new, but he would be contradicting what he had taught before.

Point number two is that there were Greek Gentiles who wanted to meet Jesus. The context of a passage often helps us understand what that passage is saying, and that is the case here in John 12:32. The immediate context of John 12:32 is John 12:20-36, which lets us know that Jesus is in Jerusalem just before the Feast of Passover and he was speaking to his disciples and the crowd around him. At that time there were some Greeks who wanted to meet Jesus (John 12:20). Some scholars propose that the “Greeks” were Jews who were not from Jerusalem, in other words, Jews who were culturally Greek and spoke Greek. Although this is a possible way to understand the word, there are many good reasons to believe that the “Greeks” were in fact Gentile Greeks.

One reason is that it was precisely because Greeks asked to see Jesus that he said what he did about drawing “all people” to himself. He knew the Old Testament prophecies about the Gentile nations being blessed by him (cf. Ps. 2:6-8; Isa. 2:3-4; 11:10; 42:1; 49:6; 60:3; Zech. 2:11; and Mal. 1:11), and here on the eve of his death, it was now obvious that event had started. That Gentiles would come to Jesus was not a new teaching, he had taught that before (cf. Matt. 13:5-8; Luke 13:29; John 10:16), but now, here in Jerusalem just before he was lifted up on the cross, that Gentiles would come to him had special meaning. He did not go to them, as had happened before; they sought him out just to “see” him, i.e., meet with him. This should have made it clearer to many people that Jesus’ death and resurrection were not just for the Jews but for anyone who believed and obeyed God. This is a prominent theme in John’s Gospel and is on full display here in John 12:32.

Furthermore, if John wanted to communicate that these “Greeks” were actually Jews but came from outside Israel, he could have called them Diaspora Jews, or used the word “dispersion” as he did earlier (John 7:35, cf. 1 Pet. 1:1). Also, about two months after the events in John 12, when Jews from all over the world were at the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:5-11), the people were called “Jews” even though they spoke many different languages, including Latin and Greek (Acts 2:8). Also, it makes sense that there were Gentiles in the crowd because Jesus had traveled and taught in Gentile lands and people from those places followed him. In fact, when Jesus fed the 4,000 it was almost certainly in the Decapolis, a Gentile area (Matt. 4:25; 15:21; Mark 7:24, 31; 8:1-9; Luke 10:13). God would not have led Jesus into many Gentile areas if no Gentiles would believe and be saved. In fact, Samaritans believed in him (John 4:39-42), and even Gentiles in Jewish areas believed in him (Matt. 8:5-13).

More evidence that Gentiles were present in the crowd following Jesus is that the Pharisees were saying among themselves, “Look! The world has gone after him” (John 12:19). Although saying the “world” was following Jesus was an exaggeration, it was more than just an exaggeration because it contains an important truth. The Gospel of John uses “world” to indicate all kinds of people, Jews and Gentiles alike (John 1:29; 3:16; 14:17), and it fits with the beliefs of the narrow-minded religious leaders that they would slander Jesus using that same vocabulary, and mock him for attracting the “world”—“Gentile dogs”—as his followers. It is very unlikely that the Pharisees would have said the “world” was following Jesus if only Jews were following him. So there would have been Gentile Greeks in the crowd around Jesus, and once we understand that, we can see more clearly why Jesus would respond to that by saying that he would draw “all people”—Jews and Gentiles—to himself, a process that had already started and was now becoming obvious even to his disciples.

Point number three is that when Jesus said that he would draw “all people” to himself, he was not teaching that everyone would be saved. There are several reasons to draw that conclusion. One reason is that Jesus said his teaching was not his own and came from God (John 7:16-17). But that some people will be saved and some will not be saved was what God had said in His Word throughout the Old Testament. There are some Christians who believe that the unsaved are tormented in hell forever, and some who believe that the unsaved will eventually be annihilated in the Lake of Fire, but they all agree that the message throughout the Bible is that some people will be saved and some will not. So if Jesus’ teaching came from God, then it would agree with what God said about salvation in the rest of the Bible. On a subject as important as salvation, if Jesus disagreed with the message of the Old Testament, he surely would have said so. In fact, when we see what Jesus himself taught about salvation, it becomes apparent he did not contradict the Old Testament.

Another reason to believe that some people will be saved and others will not be saved is the teaching of Jesus himself. Jesus had made it clear from his earliest teachings that only some people would be saved (cf. Matt. 5:29-30; 7:13-14; 10:38; 13:36-43, 47-52; 18:8-9; 19:16-17, 23-26; 25:31-34, 41, 46; Luke 13:23-24; John 5:28-29). For Jesus to suddenly shift his teaching at the end of his ministry right before the Feast of Passover and say that everyone would be saved is more than unlikely, it would be unreasonable and nonsensical. Furthermore, it would have been confusing and meaningless to his disciples. If Jesus were to suddenly change his position and teach that everyone was going to be saved, it would take more than the seven-word sentence, “I…will draw all people to myself” to do that, especially when in the context that sentence does not have to be interpreted as referring to universal salvation.

Still another reason to believe that Jesus was not teaching universal salvation in John 12:32 is that in that very same speech to the crowd, Jesus taught that some people would be saved and others would not be saved. He said, “Whoever is overly attached to his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it, resulting in life in the age *to come*” (John 12:25). Surely in the same speech to the same group of people, Jesus would not teach that some people will be saved and others will not be (John 12:25), and then say that everyone will be saved (John 12:32). That fact alone should tell us that the phrase “I will draw all people to myself” cannot be about universal salvation. D. A. Carson states it well when he says that “all” “means ‘all people without distinction, Jews and Gentiles alike,’ not all individuals without exception since the surrounding context has just established judgment as a major theme (John 12:31), a time for distinguishing between those who love their lives (and therefore lose them) and those who hate their lives (and therefore keep them for eternal life).”[[128]](#footnote-31414)

Jesus’ teaching that he would draw all people to himself would have been eye-opening, revolutionary, and a great comfort to many in the crowd, but it was not a new teaching, and it fits with the whole scope of Scripture. For example, “Israelites” (or “Jews”) did not even exist until Jacob, and by Jacob’s lifetime, more than half of the about 4,000 years of the Old Testament was already over. Surely no one would say Noah, Abraham, and Isaac were not saved because they were not Jews. But amazingly, at the time of Jesus, many Jews felt that only Jews or proselytes could be saved (cf. Matt. 3:9. In comparison, many Christians today think that only Christians can be saved, contradicting Romans 2:12-16—many people on earth have never even heard of Jesus, but if they “do by nature” righteous things, they can be saved). Jesus was the Savior whose salvation and kingdom were not just for Israel but also for Gentiles.

Most Jews saw their Messiah as a military and political ruler who would conquer the earth and reign forever (John 12:34; cf. Ps. 2:8-10; 89:35-37; Psalm 110:4; Isa. 9:7; 11:1-5; Ezek. 37:25; Dan. 2:44; 7:14). Yet, in his life and teachings, Jesus painted a different picture—a more complete picture—of himself. Jesus taught that he came to save the lost and to die to cleanse people from sin, and even in the context of John 12:32 he repeatedly explained that “whoever” wants to can have life in the age to come (John 12:25), that “anyone” could come to him and that “anyone” could be honored by the Father (John 12:26).

John 12:32 is a beautiful passage in which Jesus shows his heart for all people from every nation and that both Jews and Gentiles could be saved. Jesus longs for anyone who is willing to turn from their ways and find forgiveness in Him to do so regardless of their national identity or ethnicity (Acts 28:28; Gal. 3:14, 28; Rom. 1:16; Col. 3:11). Therefore, John 12:32 teaches us that salvation is not just for one ethnicity, not just for the Jews, but for “all” people.

[For more information on the teaching of annihilation in Gehenna, “hell,” see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Joh 12:33

**“clearly indicating what kind of death he was about to die.”** The Bible says that when Jesus spoke about being “lifted up from the earth,” he was “clearly indicating” that he was going to be crucified. The statement he made may not be a clear indication of crucifixion in our modern world, but it was clear in Christ’s day and culture. This means that the same phrase “lifted up,” refers to crucifixion in John 8:28 and 12:33.

Joh 12:34

**“We have heard from the law that the Christ will remain forever.”** In this verse, the people are using the word “law” in its broader sense of the entire Old Testament, not just the five books of Moses. The people correctly understood that when the Messiah finally set up his Kingdom it would last forever. What they did not see was that that would happen the second time the Messiah came. The first time the Messiah came he would be killed, resurrected, then ascend to heaven. There is no verse that specifically says that the Messiah would live forever and not die. However, that doctrine was being taught, based on all the prophecies that his kingdom would never end, such as Psalm 110:4 (“You are a priest forever”), Isaiah 9:7; Ezekiel 37:25; Daniel 2:44; 7:14.

One of the reasons it was easy for people to believe that the Messiah would not die was there is no specific verse that says, “the Messiah will die,” and there are only two or three sections that can be taken that way: Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, and Daniel 9:26. But most of the Jews of Jesus’ time did not apply Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 to the Messiah, and Daniel 9:26 is not stated clearly. There was a very small minority of the Jews that taught a “Messiah” would die, but the vast majority of the Jews believed the Messiah would not die, so what the crowd was voicing in John 12:34 was the predominant Jewish teaching that had to be overcome for the people to understand what happened to Jesus.

Joh 12:38

**“with the result.”** The Greek is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood result clause. To fully understand this passage, we must see how Matthew’s record portrays the human side of the events, John’s portrays the spiritual side, and Mark’s and Luke’s records combine the two into one.

Their decision of unbelief resulted in the word of Isaiah being fulfilled. The decision to believe or disbelieve was the free choice of those present. Hence, the verse should not be translated as a purpose clause: “they did not believe in him, in order that the word which Isaiah the prophet spoke might be fulfilled…” (NAB). Those who were unbelieving did not intend on fulfilling the passage in Isaiah, neither did God overstep their free will and control their belief with the purpose of fulfilling the word. Rather, this is a result clause, indicating that these Jews’ unbelief, their own free decision of unbelief, resulted in this passage’s fulfillment. Also, see commentary on John 15:25, “but let the word…be fulfilled” for a similar passage employing a command clause.

[For more information on this passage see commentary on Matthew 13:13. Also, see Word Study: “Hina.”]

Joh 12:39

**“for this reason.”** The reason refers to what was spoken in John 12:37: they still did not believe in him. It was because of this persistent unbelief that they were hardened. See commentary below, and commentary on Matthew 13:13.

**“they were not able to believe.”** The people were “not able to believe” because they had allowed their hearts to become hardened to the possibility that Jesus could be the Messiah. They had let their interpretation of the Law blind them to the truth being revealed through Jesus’ teaching and actions. For example, they decided that healing on the Sabbath was wrong, but God never said it was, and Jesus proved that it was not (Matt. 12:9-14; Luke 13:14-17). So when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, instead of being open to the possibility they were wrong, and adjusting their doctrine, they arrogantly held to their doctrine and concluded Jesus was a sinner (John 9:24). Eventually their hearts were so hard and blind that they were not able to believe based on the signs that Jesus did. When a person’s heart becomes that hard, it takes much love and prayer to change it.

Joh 12:40

**“he has blinded…hardened.”** This was a Semitic way of saying that God permitted the people to be blinded, and permitted their hearts to be hardened. This is the idiom of permission, just the same as Exodus 4:21 (see commentary on Rom. 9:18). “Active verbs were used by the Hebrews to express, not the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do”[[129]](#footnote-31246) Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible translates Exodus 4:21 as, “…but I will let his heart wax bold [hard], and he will not suffer [allow] the people to go.” Then his marginal note reads, “…the translation…is thoroughly justifiable on the two grounds (1) of the known character of God, and (2) the well-attested latitude of the Semitic tongues, which are accustomed to speak of *occasion* as *cause*.” God has given mankind freedom of will, and when we make up our minds to do something, God respects the free will we have and allows us to make bad choices. That is why He so often in His word reminds us, even commands us, to make good choices. These people who were blinded and hardened had made a series of bad choices in their lives, and even held to their error when they could have repented and changed. However, not everyone was so hardened. Only two verses later (John 12:42) we read about leaders of the Jews who were not hardened and who believed on Jesus.

[For more on the idiom of permission, see commentary on Rom. 9:18. For a good example of the idiom of permission, see Exod. 4:21 and commentary on Exod. 4:21. For more on why Christ taught in parables, see commentary on Matt. 13:13.]

Joh 12:42

**“even many of the rulers believed in him.”** This verse shows the great power of fear and of wanting success in this life. The versions are divided as to the wording of the verse. Some versions read as if the verse is saying “many people, including some of the rulers, believed in him” (NAB, NJB, NRSV), while other versions read like the verse is saying “many of the rulers believed in him” (HCSB, NET, YLT). The natural reading of the Greek text is that many of the rulers believed. However, that reading seems difficult to believe because we wonder, “If many of the rulers believed, why do we not see more evidence of it? Where is the support from these leaders that Jesus needed?” The answer to those questions is in the verse itself. These rulers loved their earthly life and positions of authority, and knew that if they openly confessed what they believed then they would lose their position in the synagogue and with it the glory of men they received every week. It is verses such as this that show us the Word of God is living and real, and as relevant today as when it was written, for it is clearly true that many people in authority do not speak up about what they really believe because of fear of losing their earthly possessions or positions. Jesus Christ often tried to help people deal with earthly concerns, and told us to not be afraid of those who could only kill the body, but to fear God (Matt. 10:28). To those to whom much has been given, much will be required (Luke 12:48).

Joh 12:44

**“Jesus cried out and said.”** The Greek sentence starts with the word *de*, which is often the signal of a new subject and left untranslated, as we have here (cf. CJB, KJV, NLT). John 12:36 says Jesus left the feast and was not in public, so he cannot now be speaking in public. John 12:44-50 are a continuation, and in a sense a summary, of what he had spoken publicly. In that light, it is not correct to translate the *de* as “then,” as many versions do, for this is something that Jesus had said earlier, not a continuation of his teaching when at the feast. The verbs “cried out” and “said” are in the aorist tense in Greek, and thus in this context indicate something that had already occurred.

We could and should ask, “Why would God separate this part of what Jesus said from the body of his teaching, and place it alone by itself?” The answer seems to be that this summary is the “chewy caramel center,” of what he said, a very important and central point to his teaching.

**“Whoever believes in me does not believe in me *only*.”** If we believe in the Son, we believe in the Father also. If we receive the Son, we receive the Father also (Mark 9:37). This is an idiomatic way of speaking.

[For more information on this idiomatic way of speaking, see commentary on 1 John 3:18.]

**“but *also* in him who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 12:45

**“him who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 12:46

**“…a light.”** Not just “light” as some translations have, although the Greek could be read that way. Jesus was “the light, and “a light,” because other prophets were light too (John 5:35).

Joh 12:49

**“speak.”** The English does not do justice to what is being communicated here. The difference between “say” and “speak” is that “say” in the Greek refers to the communication, the message, but “speak” can, in the range of the word, refer to the utterance itself. Thus, Jesus got even the tone of what he said from God.[[130]](#footnote-28295)

**“for I did not speak on my own.”** This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his Father, God.

[For more information on Jesus not speaking on his own, see commentary on John 8:28.]

**“the Father who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For more information and in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 12:50

**“His commandment is life.”** The “commandment” is not in and of itself life, as if a person could have everlasting life by just knowing the commandments. This is the figure of speech metonymy (metonymy of the effect), whereby the commandment is substituted by metonymy for believing and obeying the commandment, which is what produces the effect of having everlasting life.[[131]](#footnote-24029) A similar example in common English is the saying, “knowledge is power.” Knowledge is not power unless the knowledge is recognized for what it is and then properly applied. So just as “knowing and obeying” the commandment results in everlasting life, “recognizing and properly applying knowledge results in power.

Jesus had been saying that he was speaking on the authority of God, and teaching about believing and obeying what he was saying (John 12:44-47). The metonymy emphasizes the “commandment,” which is from God, instead of the believing and obeying, which is works that people do.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more information on the translation “life in the Age to come,” see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

**“so whatever I say, I say just as the Father has said to me.”** This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his Father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

**John Chapter 13**

Joh 13:2

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“Iscariot.”** See commentary on Matthew 10:4 for more information.

Joh 13:5

**“began to wash the disciples’ feet.”** Washing someone’s feet was considered an important part of hospitality, and was usually done by a person’s servant or slave if they had one.

[For more on the custom of foot washing, see commentary on 1 Tim. 5:10.]

Joh 13:7

**“you do not know now, but afterward you will understand.”** The “afterward” refers to after the death and resurrection, and actually on into the future; after the ascension and giving of the gift of holy spirit. For the most part, up until the life of Jesus, rulers, leaders, and other important and powerful people did not think of themselves as genuinely serving the people under them. “Humility” was considered a weakness, not a strength. Jesus explained what he was doing (John 13:12-17), but the lesson was not understood until much later. Jesus realized that and told his disciples that they did not “know” but that afterward they would “understand.” The word “know” is translated from the Greek word *oida* (#1492 οἴδα), while the word “understand” is from the word *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω). *Oida* sometimes has the sense of knowing intuitively, while *ginōskō* often has the meaning of knowing through a process, such as learning by experience. Jesus was making the point that his washing his disciples’ feet was so against the common custom that they could not even mentally grasp what he was doing, but afterward, they would fully “understand” and experience that what it meant to be a leader was being a servant to others. John Dickson writes about “humility” being considered a weakness before the time of Christ but a virtue after it.[[132]](#footnote-17521) The life and work of Christ literally changed “humility” from being a weakness to being a virtue.

Joh 13:10

**“And you are clean.”** This verse has great encouragement for believers. To be “clean” in the eyes of God means to be acceptable to Him. Note that Jesus did not say “You are sinless.” The apostles were good believers, but not sinless**.** The Bible tells us that no person except Christ is without sin. Sometimes believers feel unacceptable to God because they sin, but we see here that sin does not make a person unacceptable to God—or else no person would be acceptable to Him. In the context of John 13:10, to be “clean” is to have a humble, obedient, and honest heart before God. In contrast to the other apostles, Judas was a thief and liar.

Joh 13:14

**“one another.”** For more on “one another,” see commentary on Galatians 5:13, “one another.”

Joh 13:16

**“a servant is not greater than his master.”** While this seems axiomatic, in this context it is very profound. Jesus had just set the example that leaders were to be servants. But occasionally that lesson gets forgotten and the leaders don’t serve others as they should. So after setting the example of being a true leader by serving others and washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus reminds them that they are not greater than he is, so if he can serve others, so can they. This lesson echoes down through history; no leader is so big and important that they are somehow excused from being a servant to others.

Joh 13:17

**“if you put them into practice.”** The Greek text is more literally, “if you do them,” but that is not particularly clear in English. The idea in the text is “you are blessed if you put these things into practice.” The REV translates the phrase like some other versions for example, the translation by the Greek scholar Dr. Mounce reads like the REV, “if you put them into practice”[[133]](#footnote-13882) (cf. Amplified Bible, GNT, ISV). Believers must do more than just know what to do, we must do what we know to do.

Joh 13:18

**“I am not speaking about all of you.”** This phrase goes with John 13:17: “If you know these things, you are blessed if you put them into practice. I am not speaking about all of you.” Jesus knew Judas would betray him and was not one of those who would serve others.

**“I know whom I have chosen.”** Jesus prayed all night about who among his disciples should be an apostle (Luke 6:12), and he chose Judas. There must have been every indication that Judas was a natural leader and a committed follower. Judas went out when the other apostles went out and healed the sick and raised the dead (Luke 9:1-6; Matt. 10:1-42; Mark 6:6-13). Judas had charge of the money box (John 13:29). But see John 6:64, that Jesus did know Judas would betray him.

**“let the Scripture be fulfilled.”** Judas was not fatalistically damned to fulfill this passage (see also commentary on John 17:12, “resulting in the Scripture being fulfilled”). Rather than a purpose clause, “so that the Scripture might be fulfilled,” the phrase should be understood as a command clause. The HCSB translates this phrase as a command, but uses the word “must.” See commentary on John 15:25 for why “let” is a better translation of the command clause.[[134]](#footnote-10570)

[For more on command clauses, see commentary on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him,” and commentary on John 15:25, “but let the word… be fulfilled.”]

Joh 13:19

**“will believe.”** The verb “believe” is in the subjunctive mood, but that comes from the *hina* (“so that”) at the start of the phrase that requires a subjunctive. Jesus was not telling the apostles things ahead of time just so they “may” believe,” but so that they will believe. Although Peter had correctly identified Jesus as the Christ months before (Matt. 16:16), there was plenty about what Jesus said and did that they did not understand. But there was a time coming when they would confidently believe.

Joh 13:20

**“him who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 13:21

**“he was troubled in *his* spirit.”** The fact that Judas was now going to betray him would have had an impact on Jesus because he knew that his torture and death were about to begin. Jesus knew that he had to suffer and die, and had even told that to his disciples on several occasions, but that did not make it easy for Jesus. Torture and death are never easy.

But perhaps more impactful at this time was his knowledge of what was about to happen to Judas. Jesus cared for Judas and understood that there would be no going back for Judas once he had betrayed Jesus. It could not have been at all easy for Jesus to see someone who had been so close to him and the other apostles make such an unwise choice and face everlasting death. Indeed, Judas committed suicide shortly afterward and then, when he is resurrected, will face Judgment Day.

Joh 13:23

**“*the one* whom Jesus loved.”** The disciple whom Jesus loved, and the author of the Gospel of John, is John (see commentary on John 21:20).

Joh 13:24

**“nodded.”** The Greek is clear, and means to signal with a nod of the head. “…to give a nod; to signify by a nod…followed by an infinitive of what one wishes to be done,” John 13:24; Acts 24:10. This was an ancient custom, and is attested in the Septuagint in Proverbs 4:25. Peter was not close enough to John to whisper, and if he spoke it loudly, Jesus would have heard also. The intimate connection between Peter and John shows clearly here. Peter simply nods his head and John knows what he should do.

Joh 13:26

**“the one to whom I will give this piece *of bread*.”** Although this cannot be completely confirmed, it seems that Jesus did not get up from eating in order to give Judas the piece of bread he had dipped. This indicates that Judas would have been sitting very close to Jesus, an honor he no doubt thought he deserved.

**“piece.”** The word “morsel,” used in many versions, in today’s English communicates a very good-tasting bite of something. The Greek does not necessarily mean that the piece tasted good, just that it was a small piece. So the REV has “piece.”

**“when I have dipped it.”** In the Israelite culture of the first century, there was generally no silverware; people ate with their fingers. Bread—flatbread, like a thin pancake—was the staple food, and people would generally tear off a piece of bread, roll it up into a spoon or scoop shape, and scoop out some of the food that was before them in a bowl or on a plate. In some cases, there was just the bread and an olive oil dip, and that is possible here, but given the fact that this was an important supper, there would likely have been various stews to eat. In that case, in essence, what Jesus is doing here is giving Judas a spoonful of food.

**“Iscariot.”** See commentary on Matthew 10:4 for more information.

Joh 13:27

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost.

[For more information on it, see commentary on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“What you are doing, do more quickly!”** Luke 22:3 tells us the Adversary entered in Judas earlier, and thus Judas had already gone to the priests to betray Jesus, which had started the process of betrayal (Matt. 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:1-6). That was why Jesus said, “What you **are** doing…” In the Greek text, the verb “do” is a “conative present,” thus it means “are doing.”[[135]](#footnote-30321) Furthermore, the words usually translated “do quickly” should be translated as, “do more quickly.” Lenski writes, “The adverb *tachion* [“quickly”] is comparative and does not mean “quickly” (our versions) but “more quickly.”[[136]](#footnote-28576) Robertson writes, “Sometimes the comparative form is used absolutely…that is because the context makes the point perfectly clear.”[[137]](#footnote-15216) Robertson goes on to say that Jesus’ statement to Judas may have well been the factor that caused Judas to act as quickly as he did, after all, it is clear from Scripture that Judas had been exposed in front of the other apostles: “Jesus testified and said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray me. It is he to whom I will give this piece *of bread* when I have dipped it.’ So when he had dipped the piece, he gave it to Judas” (John 12:21-26 abridged).

Jesus knew that he had to be the Passover lamb that year, which meant that Judas did have to move quickly. The High Priest and his henchmen were frightened of the crowds and had discussed not arresting Jesus during the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matt. 26:5; Mark 14:2). After all, Jesus had touched the lives of many people all over Israel, and many of those people would be in Jerusalem for Passover. The possibility of a riot could have made an arrest at Passover less desirable than simply waiting a week until all the crowds were gone. But now that option was not available. Jesus had exposed Judas in front of the other apostles, and had said to Judas that he should act “more quickly” (John 13:27). Even though it is likely that the other apostles did not understand what Jesus meant when he spoke of being betrayed, Judas did, and the evil in his heart convicted him. He left the room immediately and arranged for Jesus to be arrested that very night.

[For more on the way human behavior can change whether or not a prophecy is fulfilled, see commentary on Deut. 18:20.]

Joh 13:29

**“Judas had the money box.”** Jesus and his disciples would have regularly been given money for the wonderful things they did for people, and Judas was the one they entrusted with the “box,” the money box. Sadly, Judas stole from the box (John 12:6), which is almost certainly where he got the money to buy the field where later he committed suicide (see commentary on Acts 1:18).

Joh 13:30

**“and it was night.”** Although sunset and twilight happened sometime shortly after 6:30 p.m. Jerusalem time, the dark of “night” started by 8 p.m. So the Last Supper started before sunset, but by the time Judas left, it was dark and after 8 p.m.

Joh 13:31

**“now is the Son of Man glorified.”** Jesus was not yet literally glorified when this was spoken, yet in the Greek, the verb “glorified” *doxazō* (#1392 δοξάζω) is in the aorist tense, which would be well represented in English as “has been glorified.” This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect, when something that was absolutely going to happen in the future was spoken of as if it had already happened to emphasize the fact that the event was surely going to happen.

Robertson points out that we know the two aorist “glorify” verbs in verse 31 refer to a future event because the verbs are in the future tense in verse 32.[[138]](#footnote-20409) We also know it is a prophetic perfect because the actual glorification did not occur until the resurrection, but Jesus’ arrest and the process of his death leading to the resurrection started that night.

The prophetic perfect is a very common idiom, but translating it can be difficult. If we translate it as a future event, true to facts but not representing the certainty of the original text, we lose what the actual text is saying and the certainty being communicated by the past tense, but the meaning is clear. Hence the NLT translation: “Jesus said, ‘The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because of him.’” However, if we translate the verb as a past tense, we risk confusing the reader and leading them to the wrong conclusion.

[For more on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Joh 13:32

**“immediately.”** This is a hyperbole, an exaggeration.[[139]](#footnote-15516) It would be very soon. It was Monday night by this time, and Jesus would be arrested in just a few hours. Tuesday would be trials and torture, with more torture overnight Tuesday to Wednesday morning, when he was crucified about 9 a.m.

Joh 13:33

**“Little children.”** This is more evidence that the apostles were teenagers, likely in their late teens. But in the culture, they would not be considered as fully adult until their mid-twenties. Priests could start to serve at twenty-five.

**“I am with you *only* a little while longer.”** This “little while” is the little time before Jesus’ arrest, which culminated in his crucifixion and death. After his resurrection, Jesus was with the apostles again on and off for some forty days.

**“you are not able to come.”** It is not that Peter could not be crucified and die, but he could not die for the sins of the world, like Jesus did. A few sentences later, in John 13:36, Jesus told Peter, “you will follow afterwards,” and indeed, Peter did follow Jesus to a martyr’s death, but that time was not now, but many years later.

Joh 13:34

**“a new commandment.”** The word “new” is the Greek word *kainos* (#2537 καινός), which has the emphasis of new in quality, not new in time (which is the Greek *neos*). That we are supposed to love other people is not new, but what Christ was saying was new in quality and thus different from what had come before. The Law commanded to “love your neighbor” (Lev. 19:18), and your neighbor was someone near to you. But this was a new kind of love. In the context, “love one another” meant “love the other believers,” not just “love others.” Christians are to have a special love for each other.

Christ looked at his disciples and said they were to love one another. They already knew they were to love their neighbor, but now Christ was introducing a new, more elevated, more intense, more selfless love than was clear in the Law. Jesus himself made that point clear when he said, “Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” Christ clarified and elevated the Law. Believers were to love each other like Christ loved them. It is further clarified that “love one another” means to love our fellow believers in the Epistle of John which says we are to love our fellow believers (1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21).

[For more specific ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13.]

**“love one another.”** It is very important for Christian unity and for our own personal wholeness that we love our fellow Christians (for this love being about our fellow Christians, see commentary above, on “a new commandment”). Because of the value and necessity of loving our fellow Christians, this important commandment to love one another is repeated 13 times in the New Testament (John 13:34 twice; John 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:8; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 1:5), and other verses have the same basic meaning but not the same wording.

Love is to be the organizing principle that guides everything we do. But we must recognize that all genuine love starts in God and follows His ways. If we are not acting as God would act, then we are not being loving, even if we think we are. For example, certain sins are so egregious that God has those sinners ejected from the church (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20). Some people today would assert that it is not “loving” to force people to leave your church, but it is what God would do if He Himself were here. It is similar to Jesus turning over the tables of the money changers and driving off their animals (John 2:13-15). It was a harsh but loving act. It is unloving to allow people to hurt others if we can somehow stop it.

People do not act in love, and especially “love one another,” for a number of reasons. Some people do not know that it is important to God that we give special attention and love to our fellow Christians—but that is clearly what the Bible says (cf. also Gal. 6:10). Also, there are the ordinary reasons people do not act in love, such as they are selfish or hungry for money or power. But beyond that, many people are not loving because they do not know the Bible and do not know how God would act, or they do not have the personal courage to act in a truly loving manner if it means confronting sin and evil. It is not easy to really love others the way Jesus loved. “Kind love” is easy because being nice to people is usually easy love. It is the “tough love” that is difficult; when we have to confront or reprove people for their words and actions. Nevertheless, Jesus did it, and if we are going to follow Christ and be genuinely loving, we have to do it too.

[For more specific ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13.]

**“you also are to love one another.”** The Greek is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood command clause. For an explanation of this construction, see commentary on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him.”

Joh 13:37

**“life.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that show that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Joh 13:38

**“life.”** See commentary on John 13:37.

**“a rooster will absolutely not crow before you have denied me three times.”** Jesus can make this statement, knowing that God would back him up. God backed up Joshua when the sun stood still (Josh. 10:14), and He backed up Samuel when he called upon Yahweh (1 Sam. 12:17). Our relationship with God and Jesus is one of fellow laborers. We can make requests of God, and He can answer them (we should be praying, asking, all the time). Jesus could make this statement, knowing that God would honor it. It is not hard for God to make a rooster crow, or keep a rooster from crowing.

**John Chapter 14**

Joh 14:1

Chapter 14 continues Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper, which started in chapter 13.

**“Continue to trust in God and continue to trust in me.”** This occurs in the shadow of Judas’ betrayal, Peter’s denial, and the events of Christ’s last night, when he will not look like the Christ at all, but rather, appear to be conquered. So the Lord is not simply commanding belief in God to disciples who already believe in God, but is telling them of the necessity to *continue* to trust God and His Messiah, considering what is about to happen. This use of the present tense is known as the “iterative” present.[[140]](#footnote-29554) Some English versions use the word “faith” here in John 14:1 rather than “trust,” but “faith” is greatly misunderstood in Christian circles today, whereas “trust” is not.

The apostles and disciples were confused by Jesus’ arrest, crucifixion, and death. First, they ran from the Garden, then they scattered but regrouped and hid behind locked doors. No wonder Jesus tried to prepare them for what would happen by saying, “Continue to trust in God and continue to trust in me.” One would hope that they remembered to trust God and Christ in these confusing and frightening times.

[For more information on using “trust” instead of “faith,” see Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust.’”]

Joh 14:2

**“In my Father’s house are many places to live.”** Jesus is saying, “In my Father’s Kingdom there are many places to live.” This verse has been misunderstood due to our not understanding the vocabulary used and the cultural context involved. The word we translate “house,” is the common word *oikia* (#3614 οἰκία, pronounced oi-'key-a) which usually refers to a house, a dwelling, or the people of a house. However, the word “house” was also used of people who were under one head, the “head of the house.” Thus, the kingdom of a king was often referred to as the king’s “house” because he was in charge of all the people in his kingdom. That is why the Kingdom of Judah was referred to as “the house of David” (Isa. 22:22). In a similar way, the “house of Israel” was all the Israelites (Lev. 10:6; Ruth 4:11); the “house of Ephraim” was the whole tribe of Ephraim (Judg. 10:9); the “house of Benjamin” was the whole tribe of Benjamin (2 Sam. 3:19), etc. The concept of the kingdom of the king being his “house” or “household” was common in the ancient Near East. Michael Heiser writes: “The rulers of ancient Egypt were called pharaohs. In the language of ancient Egypt, the title was actually two words, *per a-a*, which meant ‘great house(hold).’”[[141]](#footnote-27183)

The apostles knew that God did not live in a big house in heaven in which there were many rooms. They understood that in that context the phrase, “in the house of the Father of me” (the literal reading of the Greek text) was like “the house of David;” it referred to the Kingdom. In the Kingdom of God, there are many places to live.

The word that the REV translates as “places to live” is *monē* (#3438 μονή, pronounced moe-'nay). It is translated “mansions” (KJV), “rooms” (NIV84), and “dwelling places” (NASB1995), but in this context, it simply refers to a place to live. In God’s “house” (i.e., kingdom) are many places to live. This was not a new revelation, but the common teaching of the Old Testament that when God restored the Kingdom on earth it would fill the whole earth (cf. Dan. 2:35, 44). This understanding is continued in the New Testament, which is why Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth that the believers would judge and administer the world (1 Cor. 6:2).

The fact that Jesus uses the present tense and says there “are” many places to live has confused some commentators into believing that the places to live already exist, and people are living in them in heaven. From the scope of Scripture and the flexibility of the verb, we can see that is not the case. Things in heaven are often spoken of by the Jews as if they physically exist when they exist in the mind of God and will come into concretion in the future. So, for example, Jesus taught us to store up our treasure in heaven as if there were already storehouses there where things could be stored (Matt. 6:20). But there is nothing like that in heaven and we cannot put things there. Similarly, in Matthew 5:12, Jesus spoke of people’s reward as being “in heaven,” when he meant that God kept a record of it and would bestow it on the believer at the resurrection. Today, God is keeping track of the believers and will have a place for each of them to live when Jesus sets up his Kingdom. Thus, one of the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom on earth will be that “Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree” (Mic. 4:4 NIV84; cf. Zech. 3:10).

**“I go to prepare a place for you.”** This statement has been misunderstood due to the traditional teaching that when people die, their soul goes to heaven and lives with God and Jesus forever. Jesus was not saying, “I am going to heaven to prepare it for you.” The “place” Jesus was going to prepare for believers is the future Kingdom on earth. Scripture teaches that Jesus will come to earth and set up a Kingdom that lasts 1,000 years; then there will be a final war; then a White Throne Judgment; then the New Jerusalem, a gigantic city with streets of gold, will descend from heaven and land on earth,

Jesus was going to heaven to “prepare a place for you,” but the “place” is not in heaven. The preparation is done from heaven, but the place is on earth. We know that because the whole of biblical prophecy speaks of the coming Kingdom on earth. This verse needs to be understood in the context of the entire Bible, which speaks of the restoration of the earth and the Messiah reigning over the earth from Jerusalem.

Jesus did not give us any specifics about preparation he had to do before he set up his Kingdom and had a place for us. It does seem apparent that when Jesus said at the Last Supper, “I go to prepare a place for you,” he did not know when his Second Coming would be but he did think it was going to be very quickly, while that generation was still alive (Matt. 16:28; 24:34). He was thinking there was lots of preparation to do very quickly.

No doubt Jesus knew there was a lot to be done before God’s Kingdom could be set up on earth. He had to fully understand his role as king and Lord over God’s creation. Also, preparations would have had to have been made for the Battle of Armageddon and the defeat of Satan’s evil army on earth headed up by the Antichrist and the False Prophet (Rev. 19:11-20:3), and the restoration of planet Earth. Furthermore, the people of earth would have to be judged (Matt. 25:31-46), assignments had to be given to resurrected believers who would have jobs in the Millennial Kingdom, the New Temple, and New Jerusalem had to be built as per Ezekiel’s prophecy, and much more. Jesus knew that when he went away, he would have a lot of planning and preparation to do so that the Kingdom on earth could be set up and run and be a blessing to everyone there, as the prophecies state. Jesus could not just come down from heaven, fight at Armageddon, and say, “What do I do now?” Jesus knew that once he ascended to heaven, he would not just be “sitting around” enjoying himself. He would be working on things concerning his return and preparing for his Kingdom on earth.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the final war and the New Jerusalem, see Rev. 20-22.]

Joh 14:3

**“I will come again.”** John 14:3 is clear that Jesus will receive people when he comes again, not when they die. Jesus does not say that he will welcome people into heaven when they die. He said he would come back—his Second Coming—and receive believers to himself. Jesus will receive them so that where he is—on earth—believers will be there also, even if they have died, because he will raise them (John 5:28-29).

Orthodox Christianity teaches that John 14 is about people going to heaven. It is not: Jesus said, “I will come again.” The verse is about Jesus coming back and welcoming people into his kingdom on earth. Furthermore, although the translation “take you” is not as clear as “receive you,” even if the verse is translated, “take you to myself,” it still is referring to when Jesus comes back and that he will take living and dead believers to be with him in his kingdom. So from the scope of Scripture, we see that this verse is saying, “And if I go [to heaven] and prepare a place for you [do the preparations for my coming kingdom on earth], I will come again [back to earth] and will receive you to myself [by welcoming living believers in the kingdom (Matt. 25:31-46) and raising dead believers (John 5:28-29)] so that where I am [on earth in my kingdom] you will be also.”

Christ will come back to earth in the event known as the Second Coming. At his Second Coming, Jesus will come down from heaven with his armies and conquer the earth, an event described in Revelation 19:11-21. Christ’s conquest of the earth was foretold in scriptures such as Isaiah 63:1-6 and Zechariah 14:3-10, and scriptures such as Daniel 2:35, 44-46 speak of Christ’s kingdom filling the earth. Many prophecies speak of the Second Coming of Christ, and Jesus himself spoke quite often about it and the events associated with it (Matt. 16:27, [cf. Mark 8:38 and Luke 9:26]; Matt. 24:30-44, [cf. Mark 13:26 and Luke 21:27]; Matt. 25:31-46; 26:64 [cf. Mark 14:62]; Mark 8:38; Luke 12:40; 17:24-30; John 14:3, 18; 21:22). Also, Christ’s “Second Coming” is not the same event as the Rapture of Christians, which is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

The Old Testament does not clearly show that Christ’s “coming” would be in two distinct stages: his first coming when he was crucified, and his Second Coming when he comes from heaven and conquers the earth. The information is there, but it is unclear and can only be clearly understood with 20/20 hindsight. In contrast, the New Testament is very clear about the first and second comings of Christ. Nevertheless, even though they are somewhat veiled, Old Testament passages that speak of the Second Coming of Christ include Isaiah 63:1-6; Daniel 2:34-35, 44; Zechariah 14:3-6, and there are many more that speak of Christ ruling the earth (see commentary on Matt. 16:27).

The Greek text emphasizes the word “again” by moving it to the front of the sentence: “Again I will come and will receive you to myself.” Christ came to earth once, and he will come again as conqueror and king.

[For more on Christ’s future Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“prepare a place for you.”** See commentary on John 14:2.

**“and will receive you to myself.”** There has been mistranslation and misunderstanding of this phrase due to the traditional belief that when a saved person dies their soul goes immediately to heaven and is with Jesus. Translations such as the NLT, “I will come and get you” are an unwarranted translation of the Greek text due to the bias that people go to heaven when they die. Actually, the verse is simple. Jesus said that he would come back and then receive believers to himself. Jesus’ statement applies to both living and dead believers: The living believers will be allowed into the kingdom while the dead believers will be raised and enter the kingdom. Christians are in a different category entirely, because Christians experience an event known as the Rapture, which occurs before the Second Coming. At the Rapture, both living and dead Christians will be taken into the air to be with Christ and then will return to earth with him at his Second Coming

[For more information on the Rapture of Christians, see commentary on 1 Thess. 4:17.]

The believers who are alive at the Second Coming will be allowed to enter Jesus’ kingdom, just as Jesus said: I “will receive you to myself.” The Great Tribulation and Armageddon will not kill everyone on earth. Many people will still be alive, and so when Jesus comes to earth he will gather all the nations before him and judge them. Those people who are judged unworthy will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, while those people who are judged worthy will enter into Christ’s kingdom on earth (Matt. 25:31-46, see commentary on Matt. 25:32). Thus, at Christ’s Second Coming, believers who lived through the Great Tribulation will be “received” by Christ and will enter into his kingdom.

The believers who are dead at the time of the Second Coming will be raised from the dead and received by Christ into his kingdom on earth. The dead believers who Christ will raise will be those believers who died before the Day of Pentecost or who died after the Rapture but before the Second Coming (in other words, Christ will raise every dead believer from Adam to his Second Coming with the exception of the Christian Church, because Christians will have been raised earlier, at the Rapture). At the Second Coming, when Christ comes back to earth, he will call the dead believers out of the ground and receive them to himself and bring them into his kingdom (Ezek. 37:12-14).

John 14:1-3 helps settle the argument about whether or not Old Testament believers such as Abraham and Sarah are in the Rapture. They are not. To understand what John 14:1-3 is saying, it is imperative that we understand the difference between what happens to believers if they die before or after the Day of Pentecost. The Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and every believer who died before the Day of Pentecost will be in the Resurrection of Life (John 5:28-29). In contrast, believers who die after the Day of Pentecost are Christians, and they will be in the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

The people who died before the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost will be in the Resurrection of Life, and will get up out of the grave and go to be with Christ in his kingdom (Ezek. 37:12-14). In John 14:1-3, Jesus was speaking at the Last Supper, which was before the Day of Pentecost, and notice that Jesus says that believers will not be with him until he comes back to earth again, and he will not come to earth again until he comes and fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth (Rev. 19:11-21). At that time he will set up his kingdom on earth and will raise from the dead the believers who died before the Day of Pentecost, and also allow the living believers to enter his kingdom (Matt. 25:31-46; cf. Matt. 13:24-30, 40-43). This is further substantiated by Revelation 11:18 (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16). The time to give rewards to the believers is when they are raised from the dead, which happens immediately after the Second Coming.

The word “receive” in John 14:3 is the verb *paralambanō* (#3880 παραλαμβάνω), and it is in the future tense, middle voice. Thayer speaks specifically about John 14:3 and says, “middle [voice] with πρός ἐμαυτόν [to myself], [means] to my companionship, where I myself dwell.”[[142]](#footnote-20923) Friberg agrees, and also references John 14:3 and says that in John 14:3 *paralambanō* means “receive to oneself,”[[143]](#footnote-11239) and BDAG also references John 14:3 and has “I will take you to myself.”[[144]](#footnote-15837) The *TDNT* says *paralambanō* is used “for acceptance into the kingdom of Christ.”[[145]](#footnote-26603) A number of English versions translate the phrase as “receive you to myself” (cf. ASV, HCSB, GNV, KJV, NASB1995, WEB, YLT).

When Jesus comes back to earth he will raise the dead believers, who will join the living believers, and Jesus will “receive” all of them to himself and into his kingdom. That is why Ezekiel 37:12-14 says that when the dead get up they will go to the land of Israel, and why Jesus said that the “sheep” among the living believers would also be in his kingdom. Jesus will be in Israel, ruling from the newly rebuilt city of Jerusalem (the boundaries of Israel, including the size of Jerusalem, are described in Ezek. 47 and 48).

In John 14:3, Jesus spoke to the apostles and told them he “will come again and will receive you [“you all,” the “you” is plural] to myself so that where I am you will be also.” What Jesus was saying to the apostles was in essence: “I will come back to earth at my Second Coming, and receive all the believers to me so that where I am, on the wonderful new earth, they will be too.”

[For more on the first and second resurrection, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on the dead being dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Joh 14:4

**“And where I am going, you know the way.”** Jesus implied he was going to the Father (John 14:2). But later Jesus said plainly that he was going to the Father (John 16:28).

Joh 14:5

**“Thomas said to him.”** The Apostle Thomas is not mentioned much in Scripture, but in verses such as John 14:5, we see that he is an independent thinker and very bold. Probably most, if not all, of the apostles were thinking like Thomas was, but he had the boldness to express it.

Joh 14:6

**“the life.”** Here the word “life” refers to “life in the Age to Come.” See commentary on Luke 10:28.

**“except through me.”** This phrase uses the Greek preposition *dia* with a genitive object, and thus is correctly translated “through.” Here Jesus is focusing on his role as the mediator between God and mankind. In the biblical world, it was customary that people did not get to see an important person without going through some kind of mediator. So, for example, when some Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they went to Phillip, one of the apostles (John 12:21). The centurion who wanted his servant healed sent a delegation of Jews to Jesus (Luke 7:3-5). Here Jesus correctly teaches that now that the Son has come, if a person is going to get close to God, he or she must go through His Son.

Joh 14:7

**“and have seen him.”** Jesus is saying that if you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father, something he will state in different words in John 14:9. This is almost certainly the meaning in John 20:28, when Thomas, who had doubted Jesus’ resurrection, said, “My lord and my God.” Thomas was saying that in the resurrected Jesus, he saw both the Lord Jesus and the Father, just as Jesus said in at least two different ways (John 14:7, 9).

Joh 14:9

**“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”** The consistent theme throughout the book of John is that Jesus reveals God the Father to the world (John 1:18; 9:3; 14:9; 15:15; 17:6, 26). This simple truth demonstrates that Jesus is someone different from God. Many Trinitarians or Oneness believers see equivalence between Jesus and God in the Gospel of John, however, the author seeks to show how Jesus reveals the Father, not how Jesus is the Father. Knowing this helps the reader understand what Jesus means by phrases like, “whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” (John 14:9) and “I am in *union with* the Father and the Father is in *union with* me” (John 14:11). Neither of these phrases states that Jesus is the Father, nor should they be understood that way. Rather, these verses, when properly seen in light of the rest of the Gospel, demonstrate that God was working so powerfully through Jesus and Jesus was demonstrating God’s character so clearly that when one looked at Jesus, it was as if you were looking at the Father.

This concept is not too difficult to grasp, because we use language similar to this in our modern culture. For instance, if a son is displaying a characteristic similar to his father (named Jim), we might say, ‘You’re just like your Dad,’ or, ‘Jim, is that you?’ or, ‘I see your Dad in you.’ No one takes that to mean the son literally is Jim, but that he resembles Jim in some ways. This is how we should understand Jesus’ statements of his similarity with his Father. Jesus never intends to teach that he is his Father, because he sees God his Father as someone different from himself (John 10:29; 14:28; 20:17), and he reveals his Father clearly through his works and teachings (John 14:10).

This phrase in John 14:9 is also very helpful for understanding what Thomas may have meant in John 20:28 when he said to Jesus, “My Lord and my God.” Since Jesus taught Thomas here in John 14:9 that “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” this is likely what Thomas was finally realizing in John 20:28. He was not realizing that Jesus was the Father, because Jesus had never taught Thomas that. Jesus taught Thomas that the Father was someone different from himself (John 14:6, 12, 16, 24; etc.). So Thomas was realizing that the Father was “in union with” Jesus (John 14:11), that the Father was working in Jesus (John 14:10), and that Jesus’ words were the Father’s words (John 14:24). Thus, Thomas was realizing that the Father could be seen in Jesus, and so in reference to both of them he could say, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

Joh 14:10

**“I am in *union with* the Father, and the Father is in *union with* me.”** See commentary on John 10:38, “the Father is in *union with* me, and I am in *union with* the Father.”

**“I am not speaking from myself.”** Jesus said basically this same thing many times (cf. John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:16, 28, 29; 12:49, 50; 14:10, 24). See commentary on John 8:28.

Joh 14:11

**“Keep on believing…keep believing.”** The Greek is *pisteuō* (#4100 πιστεύω) in the imperative present active. Robertson notes that this stresses, especially in this verb, the continuance of one’s trust and believing.[[146]](#footnote-23023) Jesus was not asking for short-lived belief, but continued belief in what he was saying and teaching. It is important to note that Jesus says “or else keep believing me because of the works themselves.” In other words, if you cannot believe in me (what I am saying) on its own, believe what I am saying based on the works that I do. The works are a witness to the teaching, and vice versa. Many people today want to “just do good works,” as if that were enough. But that does not point to right doctrine, only to the kind heart of a good person. We must, like Jesus, let our good works testify to what we are saying.

That Jesus said this during the Last Supper gives it special meaning. The apostles did not know it yet, but in a few hours, they would be scattered and confused. Yet they had to keep believing in Jesus, if not for what he said, then because of the works of God that they saw him do with their own eyes. Those memories would help keep them on the right path in the turbulent hours ahead.

**“I am in *union with* the Father, and the Father in *union with* me.”** See commentary on John 10:38, “the Father is in *union with* me, and I am in *union with* the Father.”

Joh 14:12

**“continues to believe.”** The Greek uses the present participle in the active voice. R. C. H. Lenski correctly writes: “The substantivized present participle characterizes the person as one who continues in this faith.”[[147]](#footnote-21602)

**“in me”** This does not mean just that Jesus existed. In the biblical culture, to believe in someone meant that you believed, and thus acted upon, what the person said. So, for example, Jesus said to pray. If a person never prays, then he does not believe “in me,” even if he thinks Jesus existed as a person.

**“he will do also.”** The Greek is *poieō* (#4160 ποιέω) in the indicative future, so there is no question or argument: the one who is believing in Jesus will do what Jesus did.

**“and greater *works* than these will he do.”** This statement has been a problem for believers for many years. Jesus Christ did all kinds of miracles and healings, and it is hard to see how any person could do more memorable works than Jesus did. If, however, we think of Christ’s works as being part of his witnessing to others and doing miracles in order to get people to believe and be saved, then doing greater works takes on a different meaning. It does not refer to doing more astounding miracles than Jesus did, but doing more to bring people to salvation. Jesus Christ’s ministry, although he reached some Gentiles, was primarily to the house of Israel, the Jews. He said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). Furthermore, when he sent out the disciples, he said, “Do not go on any road of the Gentiles, and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans, but go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6). In contrast, after his resurrection, he gave his disciples a new mission: “go and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19). Reaching the whole world for Christ, and not just primarily the Jews, is a greater work than Jesus did.

**“because I go to the Father.”** The basis of the “greater works” that the Christian believer can do is “because” Jesus ascended to the Father, poured out the gift of holy spirit, and now pours out revelation and grace to the Christian, who is energized to do God’s work.

Jesus knew he would not be on earth, but in heaven at the right hand of God, so if good works are going to be done, believers on earth must do them. Furthermore, Jesus knew that the gift of holy spirit would be poured out (Joel 2). Jesus did not know about the Christian Church at that time (the Sacred Secret), and that holy spirit would be poured out as it was on the day of Pentecost, but he did know that holy spirit would be poured out after he was raised.

Joh 14:13

**“whatever you ask in my name, that I will do.”** The Bible has many statements about prayer and asking God for things, and those prayers make a difference in what happens in the world (cf. Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 7:5; Eph. 6:19; Phil. 1:9; 4:6; Col. 4:2; 1 Tim. 2:8; James 5:16). Wise believers obey 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “never stop praying.” However, some statements in the Bible make it seem like all a person has to do is ask and the prayer will be answered. In fact, a number of those statements were made by Jesus at the Last Supper just as this one was (cf. John 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16:23).

Statements such as the one we see here in John 14:13, “whatever you ask in my name, that I will do,” can be confusing because they seem so straightforward and definite. However, in actuality, they are not straightforward and definite. It often happens in conversation that when a subject is well-known, statements are made that are not complete in themselves. For example, a person may say to a friend, “If you ever need anything, let me know.” But it is understood from the culture and context that the statement is limited in many unspoken ways and “anything” does not mean “anything at all.” The word “anything” is limited by many factors that are understood in the social context, and the same is true in discussions about prayer.

Jesus certainly knew when he said he would do “whatever” people asked that the “whatever” was limited, and the apostles would have known that also. We know it from two different perspectives. The first is prima facie: many times when we ask for things, we don’t get them. No one ever gets all the things they ask for in prayer, even if they ask in the name of Jesus Christ. So if Jesus said we would get what we ask for in prayer but we don’t always get them, then we know that there must be more to what Christ was saying than is written in the text. What Jesus said had unspoken conditions.

The second way we know that Christ’s statement about getting “whatever” we ask is not a straightforward statement but has unspoken conditions is that in other places in the Bible, we see that there are conditions to getting prayer answered. Some of these are very clear, such as that our prayer has to align with the will of God (Matt. 26:42). But also there are factors about the fallen nature of the world, wise living, and the spiritual battle that limit prayer.

The Bible makes a number of statements that show us prayer is inherently limited. An entire book could be written on this, but a few examples will make the point. For example, the Bible says people age and die, so praying not to get old, infirm, and die, will not be answered. Also, the Bible says godly people will be persecuted, so living a godly life but praying not to be persecuted will be ineffective to some extent. Also, God says that wisdom is the principal thing and people must live wisely (Prov. 4:5-9), so living unwisely but then praying for God to get us out of trouble that we have brought upon ourselves is generally ineffective. For example, if a person eats poorly and does not exercise, and then gets sick, prayers for healing are generally not very effective. Or, if a person spends all their money all through their life and does not save up for their old age, prayers to somehow “get money” when it is needed in retirement are generally ineffective. God cannot contradict Himself. He cannot command us to live wisely but then bail us out of trouble when we refuse to live in a wise and godly manner. Part of living wisely is consistently living in a godly way that is in alignment with the will of God and Christ. That is why later on in the Last Supper Jesus said, “If you live in *union with* me, and my words live in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). People who generally ignore God and His commands or live a defiantly sinful life, but ask Him for help when they need something, generally have a mostly ineffective prayer life (see commentary on Amos 5:22).

The spiritual battle is another, mostly unseen, factor that can limit prayer. Although the spiritual battle affects us in many different ways, one of them is the effect of living in an ungodly culture. For example, the Bible is clear that the ungodliness of a culture affects the weather, and often believers suffer from droughts, floods, and storms that are brought on by the evil culture around them. In those situations, the prayers of believers for “nice weather” go mostly unanswered because they are overridden by the statements in the Bible that if the culture is evil the weather will be affected.

The bottom line about prayer is that there are many factors that limit prayer, but believers must continue to pray in the knowledge that their prayers are heard and do make a difference even though sometimes the prayers do not seem to be effective. God commands us to pray and keep praying. God does answer prayers, but if we do not pray, then God will not even have any prayers to answer.

Joh 14:14

**“If you….”** John 14:14 is in the original text. Although the last words of verse 13 and all of verse 14 are omitted in a scattering of manuscripts, some of them ancient, scholars have concluded from the totality of the manuscript evidence that the omission was due to the fact that the Greek word *poiēsō* occurred in the middle of verse 13 and the end of 14. The lines in between the two uses of *poiēsō* were skipped by some scribes when they were copying the text. The copyist’s eye skipped from the first *poiēsō* to the second one. In textual studies that is something scholars see regularly, and they have named it “haplography.” Books on the text of the Bible have many examples of haplography occurring in the manuscripts, and thankfully due to the over 5,700 Greek manuscripts we currently have, by comparing them, scholars can usually spot the erroneous manuscripts and the original text can be reconstructed.

**“ask me.”** The manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being in the original text. Modern textual scholars have concluded that some of the scribes copying the Greek text either thought that the wording, “ask me anything in my name” seemed strange, or they wanted to avoid what they thought was a contradiction to John 16:23, so they omitted the word “me” from the manuscripts they were copying (but in a couple of manuscripts scribes changed “me” to “the Father”). This explains why “me” is not in the King James Version—the manuscripts used in making the King James did not have the “me.” However, the weight of the manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being original, which is why almost all modern versions include it.

Very strong evidence that the word “me” is in the original text is that we can see from Acts and the Epistles that the early Christians did indeed ask Jesus for things, which is what the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord Jesus” refers to (1 Cor. 1:2).

[For more information on John 14:14 not contradicting John 16:23 see commentary on John 16:23. For more information on talking to and praying to Jesus as well as a further discussion of the manuscript evidence that “me” is original, see Appendix 13: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”]

**“I will do *it*.”** God and Jesus do answer prayer, but many prayers go seemingly unanswered. For more on that, see commentary on John 14:13.

Joh 14:15

**“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”** This is a very important verse, because it, combined with others that are similar, shows who does and who does not really love Jesus. The one who loves Jesus, and his Father, God, keeps the commandments. Many people say they love God but do not keep God’s commandments. They are liars, lying to themselves and others. Jesus made it clear: if you love him you keep the commandments. We see this command, worded slightly differently, in a number of verses (e.g. John 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 1 John 5:3).

Joh 14:16

**“which will be with you forever.”** Jesus knew from the Old Testament prophecies that when God gave the gift of holy spirit in the future, it would be permanently with those people. Although that is not directly stated, it is clearly implied. God promised to give the people a new spirit and a new heart so that they would keep His commandments forever (cf. Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:24-30; Jer. 32:37-41).

Joh 14:17

**“it...it...it...it.”** The gift of holy spirit is an “it,” not a “he.” To understand why some versions differ from others in the translation of the pronouns associated with holy spirit, we must understand how pronouns are used in languages such as Greek. Unlike English, but like many languages, including Spanish, French, German, Latin, and Hebrew, the Greek language assigns a gender to nouns, and the gender of any associated pronoun must match the gender of the noun. This gender assignment happened in ancient antiquity, and often there seems to be no reason why a particular noun has a particular gender assigned to it. The gender of nouns never changes.

In French, for example, a table is feminine, *la table,* while a desk is masculine, *le bureau*. Thus, a strictly literal translation of a French sentence with nouns and matching pronouns might be, “I like the table, **she** is just right for the room, but I do not like the desk, **he** is too big.” In correctly translating from French to English, however, we would never translate the English as “the table, she,” or “the desk, he.” Not only is it improper English, it misses the point. Even the French people do not think of tables and desks as being masculine or feminine. The gender of the nouns is simply a part of the language that has come down to them through the ages.

And just as we would not say, “the desk, he,” we would **never** insist that a table or desk was somehow a person just because it had a masculine or feminine pronoun associated with it. Furthermore, good English translators recognize that even though a noun is assigned a gender in another language and the pronoun follows the noun, their job is to bring the meaning of the original into English, not introduce confusion as they translate. Hence, someone translating from French to English would use the English designation “it” for the table and the desk, in spite of the fact that in the original language, the table and desk have a masculine or feminine gender.

What is true in the examples from the French language is true in any language that assigns a gender to nouns and then uses pronouns with that same gender. For example, the Greek word for “lamp” is *luchnos*, a masculine noun, and therefore proper grammar dictates that any pronoun associated with it is masculine. Thus, if the Greek text of Matthew 5:15 were translated literally, it would read, “Nor do they light a lamp and place **him** under the bushel.” However, every English version we checked said, “it,” as proper English dictates, and not “him,” which would have been literal. The Greek word for wine is *oinos*, a masculine noun, so it takes a masculine pronoun. Christ taught that no one puts new wine in old wineskins, because the wineskins would burst, and the wine, “**he** will be poured out.” English versions correctly say “it” will be poured out.

The same grammatical rule that the pronoun must agree with the noun is followed when the noun is feminine. According to the literal Greek text, Christ told his disciples that when they entered a “city” (*polis*; a feminine noun) or “village” (*kōmē*; a feminine noun), they should “find out who is worthy in **her**” (Matt. 10:11; literally translated). The English versions correctly read, “it” instead of “her.” Similarly, the Greek word for “fig tree” is *sukē*, a feminine noun. When Jesus was entering Jerusalem, he saw a fig tree, but when he came to “her” he found nothing but leaves (Mark 11:13). Again, all the English versions read “it,” not “her.” When translating from another language into English, we have to use the English language properly. Students of Greek, Hebrew, Spanish, French, German, *etc*., quickly discover that one of the difficult things about learning the language is memorizing the gender of each noun—something we do not have in the English language.

Once we clearly understand that the gender of a pronoun is determined by the gender of the noun, we can see why one cannot build a doctrine on the gender of a noun and its agreeing pronoun. Only confusion would result from that kind of erroneous exegesis. For example, the noun *pneuma* (spirit) is neuter in gender and thus any pronoun associated with it is neuter and naturally translated “it.” However, because the holy spirit helps us in many ways, it is called the *paraklētos*, (John 14:16, etc., “Helper” or in some versions “Comforter” or “Counselor”), which is a masculine noun and takes a masculine pronoun.

Since *paraklētos* is masculine, and spirit (*pneuma*) is neuter, are we to believe the gender of holy spirit changes depending on what it is called? Of course not. Trinitarians do not insist that when “the Holy Spirit” is called the “spirit” it is neuter gender and when it is called “the helper” its gender changes to masculine. Or, worse, since “spirit” in Greek is neuter, but “spirit” in Hebrew is feminine, are we to believe the sex of the holy spirit changed after the time of Jesus when the believers started to speak and write Holy Scripture in Greek? Of course not. We must stress again that the gender of the noun is assigned as a part of the language (Hebrew, Greek, German, Spanish, etc.) and is not the “real” gender of the noun in question—in fact, most nouns have no gender (e.g., car, desk, apple, earth, pencil, etc.).

Another good example of how confusing things would become if someone tried to build their theology from the gender of pronouns involves nouns used to describe the Word of God. Sometimes the Greek word *logos* is used to refer to the Word of God (Luke 5:1), and *logos* is a masculine noun. Sometimes the Greek word *rhēma* is used of the Word of God (Matt. 4:4), and *rhēma* is a neuter noun. Are we to believe that, first, the Word of God even has gender, and second, that it somehow changes gender? Of course not. The gender of the noun was assigned in antiquity as a linguistic necessity, it is not designed to refer to some kind of actual biological characteristic.

The point is this: no translator should ever use the gender of the nouns or pronouns in a language to build a theology. Only error could result from that kind of exegesis. The way to properly translate the Scripture from a language that assigns gender to nouns is to study the subject matter and understand the subject being discussed, and then translate accordingly. Does *pneuma hagion* have a gender? We know people come in two genders, masculine and feminine, so references to people should be either “he” or “she.” Animals also have a gender. Rocks do not, and should be “it” (by the way, in Greek, the noun “rock” is feminine, while in Hebrew it is masculine). In the case of *pneuma hagion*, when it is used as a name for God, and refers to God, it is proper to use the pronoun “he,” or other personal pronouns such as “who.” (There has been much discussion in recent years about the gender of God and if He is male or female, but this is not the place for a discussion about that.) Although we believe that God has no actual gender, in Scripture, He presents Himself as masculine. He presented himself as a man to Abraham (Gen. 18:1-2), and to many others (cf. Exod. 24:10; Dan. 7:9).

When it is referring to God’s gift, the gift of holy spirit, it is proper to use pronouns such as “it,” “which,” and “that,” because the gift of holy spirit is not a person. Trinitarians, of course, disagree with that conclusion. They view the “Holy Spirit” as the third person of the Trinity, so even though *pneuma*, spirit, is a neuter noun, they use masculine personal pronouns with it. If the Trinitarians were correct, then the fact that they translate the Greek neuter pronoun as the English masculine pronoun is the right thing to do. A good example is the NIV translation of John 14:17, which we have produced, showing in brackets the actual gender of the noun and pronoun.

John 14:17 (NIV): “the Spirit [neuter noun] of truth. The world cannot accept him [*autos*, neuter pronoun, not masculine], because it neither sees him [*autos*, neuter pronoun, not masculine] nor knows him [*autos*, neuter pronoun, not masculine]. But you know him [*autos*, neuter pronoun, not masculine], for he [pronoun not in Greek text] lives with you and will be in you.”

Almost every English version does what the NIV does, and uses the English masculine personal pronouns “him” and “he,” even though the Greek pronouns are neuter. This shows that Trinitarian scholars do not use the gender of the pronoun to determine how the English should read, but instead use the subject being discussed, which is what every translator should do. However, it reveals an inconsistency and contradiction in one of their standard arguments for the existence of the Trinity. Many Trinitarians say that because masculine pronouns are sometimes used when the subject is the “Holy Spirit,” it must be masculine and therefore the third person of the Trinity. But if that argument is valid, then it would be just as valid to say that because the Greek text has neuter pronouns referring to spirit (indeed, especially since the noun “spirit” itself is neuter), then “holy spirit” must be a thing, not a person. Worse, since in the Hebrew language the “spirit” is feminine, and Hebrew was the original language given to God’s people, it seems the translators should insist that pronouns associated with “the Holy Spirit” should be “she,” not “he.” In reality, as we have seen, we must never build our theology from the gender of pronouns. The scope of Scripture shows that the gift of holy spirit is an “it.”

An example of the inconsistency in the Trinitarian logic is the Greek word *paraklētos*, which is masculine, and usually translated as the “Helper,” “Comforter,” or “Counselor,” depending on the English version being used. Greek grammar demands the use of masculine pronouns, such as *ekeinos*, to describe the “Helper,” because *paraklētos* is masculine (John 14:26), but Trinitarians have said that the use of *ekeinos* is evidence that “the Holy Spirit” is masculine.[[148]](#footnote-27209) But the Trinitarians cannot have it both ways. If the gender of the pronoun is evidence for the actual gender of the noun, then the “helper” is masculine, but the “holy spirit” is neuter—and thus certainly not a person. It is also noteworthy that although some Trinitarians use verses like John 14:26 to “prove” the holy spirit is masculine, they do not then explain why in Hebrew it is always feminine and then insist the holy spirit would be feminine or somehow be dual-gendered.

Once the above information is understood, it becomes clear why some versions of the Bible use personal pronouns such as “who” or “whom” when referring to *pneuma hagion*, while versions such as the REV use “it” and “that.” If the translators believe *pneuma hagion* refers to the third person of the Trinity, they will use masculine pronouns and personal pronouns. Thus, their versions read “the Counselor…he” in the Gospel of John, and “he” “who” or “whom” in other places in the New Testament. However, if *pneuma hagion* refers to the gift of God, which we believe it does, then pronouns such as “it,” “which,” and “that” are the proper English pronouns to use. Since no one can conclude from the use of pronouns whether or not “spirit” refers to a person or a thing, the only way to find that out is by studying it through the whole Bible. After we discover what “holy spirit” is, then we will know how to translate the pronouns associated with it.

[This commentary entry has focused on noun-pronoun agreement. For the integration of pronouns into the translation of verbs, see commentary on John 16:13.]

**“for it is present with you, and will be in you.”** The “natural person” is just body and soul, the body being made of the basic elements found in the earth and the “soul” being the life that comes from God. Although God can communicate in various ways with the natural human of body and soul, in order to communicate with the natural person more directly, in the Old Testament and Gospels God put His very nature, “spirit” (sometimes referred to as “holy spirit,” cf. Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:11), upon certain people. This can be seen quite clearly in Numbers 11:16, 17, 24, 25.

Before the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)

1. God gave holy spirit to only some people, such as prophets.
2. God gave different measures of spirit to different people.
3. God could take His spirit away from people (cf. King Saul, Samson).

Because the spirit was not permanent and did not add to the nature of the person who had it, it was said to be “upon” people. Examples of the spirit of God coming upon Old Testament people include: Exodus 31:3; 35:31; Numbers 11:17, 25; 24:2; 27:18; Judges 3:10; 1 Chronicles 12:18; Isaiah 42:1; and Ezekiel 2:2. Some New Testament believers who had holy spirit upon them before the Day of Pentecost were Elizabeth (Luke 1:41), Zechariah (Luke 1:67), Simeon (Luke 2:25), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15). Also, as He had done with the prophets of the Old Testament, God put holy spirit upon Jesus Christ (Luke 3:22), something that had been foretold in the Old Testament (Isa. 11:2; 61:1; cf. Matt. 12:18; Luke 4:18).

In the Old Testament, God promised that as part of the New Covenant He would give a new spirit that would be “in” people (cf. Ezek. 11:19; 36:26-27; and 37:14). That is why at the Last Supper Jesus Christ taught that the holy spirit that was upon the apostles (“with them”) would be “in” them (John 14:17).

[For more about the holy spirit as God gave it in the Old Testament and then after the Day of Pentecost, see Word Study: “Pneuma.” For more about the gift of holy spirit being “upon” in the Old Testament and “in” after the Day of Pentecost, see commentary on Eph. 1:13, “promised holy spirit.” For more about the holy spirit being the gift of God and not a “Person” called “the Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Joh 14:18

**“orphans.”** The Greek word is *orphanos* (#3737 ὀρφανός), and it means to be without parents, an orphan. The English word “orphan” comes directly from the Greek *orphanos*. Someone could be an *orphanos* because the parents were dead or permanently gone, or because they were simply not functioning as parents. It was sometimes used on a more limited scale to mean without a father, because the father was the primary support and protection of the family. By extension, it was also used for someone who had lost a “father.” To the Jews, a trusted teacher and mentor was a “father,” and so the rabbis applied the word *orphanos* to those disciples who had lost their teacher.[[149]](#footnote-24234) In that light, for Jesus to say, “I will not leave you as orphans” was very meaningful, because it communicated to the disciples that Jesus would not abandon his role of teacher and mentor, but they could expect that continued teacher/mentor relationship.

Jesus’ use of “orphan” in his teaching at the Last Supper was especially meaningful because orphans were often taken advantage of in society and needed an “advocate,” someone to support, guide, and protect them. In that light, it is a wonderful truth that it was at the Last Supper that Jesus introduced the coming holy spirit as “the *paraklētos*” (#3875 παράκλητος), and one of the primary meanings of *paraklētos* is “Advocate” (which the KJV calls the “Comforter,” the ESV and REV call the “Helper,” and the NET and NIV2011 call the “Advocate”). Although there had been a few teachings that mentioned the holy spirit before the Last Supper (cf. Luke 3:16; 11:13; 12:12), Jesus clearly referred to the *paraklētos* as “the spirit of truth” (John 14:17) and “the holy spirit” (John 14:26). It is also noteworthy that only at the Last Supper, just before Jesus would leave his disciples as “orphans,” that Jesus called the holy spirit “the *paraklētos*” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; in its only other use *paraklētos* refers to Jesus himself; cf. 1 John 2:1).

The gift of holy spirit is the way that Jesus Christ will help and advocate for his followers. That is why Jesus said, “it will not speak on its own, but whatever it hears, it will speak” (John 16:13). Like the gift of holy spirit in the Old Testament that God put upon people that better allowed Him to communicate directly with them, the gift of holy spirit, the Helper, would allow God and Jesus to communicate more efficaciously with believers.

[For more information on God putting holy spirit on people in the Old Testament, see Word Study: “Pneuma.” For more information on how God and Jesus communicate with us via the gift of holy spirit, see commentary on Gal. 1:12, “revelation.”]

**“I will come to you.”** The Greek is in the present tense, although in this case, it refers to a future action, which is why most versions say, “I will come to you.” The present tense indicated that the disciples did not have to wait long until Jesus came, and indeed, they did not. This “coming” does not refer to the Second Coming, but to the fact that after his resurrection, and even after his ascension, Jesus would be “with” his disciples (cf. Matt. 28:20).

Joh 14:19

**“will see… will see.”** The Greek text has the verb for “see” in the present tense, so literally it reads, “Yet a little while and the world sees me no more, but you see me.” This is a clear example of the figure of speech heterosis of tense.[[150]](#footnote-30463) In the Greek, the present tense is used in place of the future.

When Jesus spoke of his disciples seeing him, he was not primarily speaking of the disciples seeing him during the 40 days after his resurrection and before his ascension. Some theologians teach that the primary meaning of Jesus’ statement refers to the apostles being able to see Jesus after his resurrection and before his ascension. We do not think that is the case for a number of reasons. For one thing, the verse says that the world will not see Jesus, but during the 40 days after his resurrection, the world was able to see him. But after his ascension, his disciples see him (cf. Stephen, Ananias, Paul, and John), but the world does not see him.

Also, the word “see” does not necessarily mean to see with the physical eye, although many disciples have actually seen Jesus, but it means to see him via what he does and via our relationship with him. For example, Jesus often communicates with us directly via the gift of holy spirit. The promise that true disciples would “see” Jesus was more than just a way of saying we would “know about” him or recognize that he was at work in the world, although those things are included too.

When Jesus said that the disciples would see him, he also said he would not leave them as orphans but would come to them. But if they were only “orphans” for the three days he was dead, and then only not orphans for 40 more days, and have now been orphans again for the last 2,000 years, then Jesus’ statement that he would not leave us as orphans is hollow. We are not orphans because even though Jesus is not with us physically, he is still genuinely with us.

Jesus made a number of statements at the Last Supper that paralleled this one about “seeing” Jesus. These included: he said that he would not leave the disciples as orphans, but would come to them (John 14:18), the disciples would be in union with Jesus and the Father (John 14:20), he would show himself to them (John 14:21), he and the Father would make their home in them (John 14:23; *monē* means “home,” “residence,” “dwelling place”), he said that he and the disciples would be “friends” (John 15:14, 15), and they could ask him for what they needed (John 14:14). Jesus knew at the Last Supper that in only a couple of hours he would be taken from the disciples and after that his relationship with them would change dramatically as he would be the risen, then ascended, Lord. He did not want them to think that after his ascension they would be without his help and guidance, so he told them they would “see” him.

**“Because I live, you will live also.”** The word “live” refers to living forever (see commentary on Luke 10:28). Because Jesus lives forever, his disciples and the people who believe in him will also live forever. Jesus not only modeled that a person can rise from the dead and live, he will cause people to come out of the grave and live—God gave him that authority, and Jesus will raise the dead by the power of God (cf. John 5:21-29; 1 Thess. 4:16).

Joh 14:20

**“in *union with*.”** See commentary on John 10:38, “the Father is in *union with* me, and I am in *union with* the Father.”

Joh 14:21

**“Whoever has my commandments, and keeps them, that is the one who loves me.”** Jesus made it clear: if you love him you keep the commandments. We see this command, worded slightly differently, in a number of verses (e.g. John 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 1 John 5:3).

Joh 14:22

**“Judas.”** This “Judas” is generally believed to be “Thaddaeus” (Matt. 10:3, Mark 3:18).

**“how is it that.”** An alternate translation could be, “what happened that?” (cf. NASB, NET, NAB, NJB).

**“(not Iscariot).”** This is likely in reference to Judas son of James, who is in the list of the 12 apostles in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13, but is curiously not in the lists in Matthew 10:2-4 and Mark 3:16-19. This discrepancy has caused much debate, even with some supposing that Judas son of James is Thaddeus who is mentioned in the lists in Matthew and Mark, yet not in Luke and Acts. However, no clear explanation is possible given the data we have.[[151]](#footnote-12535)

Joh 14:23

**“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.”** Jesus made it clear: if you love him you keep the commandments. We see this command, worded slightly differently, in a number of verses (e.g. John 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 1 John 5:3).

**“and we will come to him and make our home with him.”** The person who diligently seeks God and strives to obey His commands will come into an intimate relationship with God, which John 14:23 describes as the Father and Jesus making their home with him—as if they live in the same house together and have a close relationship. Many verses teach how to be in a close relationship with God, and they center around being obedient to God (cf. John 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 15:4-7, 10.) God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). The wise believer seeks God diligently (Prov. 2:1-6), while “the fool speaks folly and his heart plans iniquity, to do what is godless and to speak error concerning Yahweh” (Isa. 32:6).

Joh 14:24

**“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.”** Jesus made it clear: if you love him you keep the commandments. We see this command, worded slightly differently, in a number of verses (e.g. John 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 1 John 5:3). Furthermore, if you are not keeping Jesus’ commands, you are not loving him.

**“the Father’s who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 14:26

**“And.”** The Greek word *de* (#1161 δέ) can express a small contrast, but can also just express a change of subject. In this case, “but” is too strong a contrast. Some English versions leave the *de* untranslated and just start the English sentence with the subject, the Helper (cf. CEB), Others translate it “And.”[[152]](#footnote-13520) Jesus was speaking with his disciples while he was still alive, and his point was that after he was personally gone from his disciples, the Helper would teach them what it heard.

**“the holy spirit.”** The Greek text has no article “the” but it is supplied in the REV for clarity. The “the” is added in English due to its reference in the immediate context. This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the holy spirit and uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and also see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**“in my name.”** In this context, the phrase “in my name” means “in connection with me.” The phrase is used that way many times in Scripture. The specific nature of the connection must be determined from the context (e.g., Matt. 18:5, 20; 24:5; Mark 9:37, 39; John 15:16).

Joh 14:27

**“Do not let your heart be troubled.”** The verb translated “do not let” is *tarassō* (#5015 ταράσσω), and here in John 14:27, it is in the imperative mood, so it can either be translated with the idea of “must” (cf. HCSB: “Your heart must not be troubled”) or with the idea of “let” (cf. NIV: “Do not let your hearts be troubled”). Since Jesus is speaking to the apostles about what is coming in the near future and that they should not worry or be anxious about it, and given that believers are supposed to control their minds, the translation “let” (“Do not let your heart be troubled”) is the better translation.

Joh 14:28

**“I am going away.”** Jesus had said this earlier that night (John 14:2, 3, 12).

**“I am coming back to you.”** Jesus had said this earlier that night (John 14:3, 18).

**“If you loved me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father.”** Jesus told the disciples that if they loved him they would rejoice that he went to the Father because of the blessing that it would be to Jesus himself, and also because ultimately it would be a great blessing for them too.

**“the Father is greater than I.”** This statement is simple and clear. The Father, God, is greater than Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus Christ is not God.

[For more information about Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Joh 14:29

**“believe.”** The verb “believe” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” believe, but the Greek conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) that started the phrase is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, Jesus’ purpose was to tell the disciples what would happen before it happened so that they “will” believe, not just so they “may” believe.” Versions that use “will” include (CEB, CJB, GW, NIV, NLT, and The Source New Testament).

It was not that the disciples were not believing, but just as they had not understood what Jesus had told them about his death because it was so different than what they were taught, now they were about to expand what they believed and take it to new levels.

Joh 14:30

**“the ruler of the world is coming.”** The Devil is the “ruler of this world,” and Jesus calls him that in John 12:31; 14:30, and 16:11 (see commentary on John 12:31). The world is under his evil influence. Christ taught that soon after he left to go to the Father there would be great tribulation in the world, and believers would be persecuted, tortured, and killed (Matt. 16:28; Matt. 24:4-13, 34; Mark 13:5-12, 30; Luke 21:8-19, 32). Now here at the Last Supper, he told the apostles not to let themselves be troubled, but to be at peace even though evil is coming.

A number of scholars believe that Satan’s coming in John 14:30 has to do with Judas betraying Christ and thus setting up the crucifixion, and it is correct that Satan did come in an immediate way through his evil followers, including Judas and the ungodly religious leaders who engineered Christ’s torture and crucifixion. Knowing that fact helps explain why, right after saying that Satan was coming, Jesus made it clear that Satan did not have any power over him. Jesus did not want his apostles to be misled and become fearful when he was arrested—even in that terrible situation Jesus was still fulfilling the will of God in what was happening to him. From a fleshly perspective, the fact that Jesus was arrested, tortured, and crucified made it seem like Satan had power over Christ, but that was not the case. Right after Jesus said that Satan did not have any power over him, in John 14:30, we see that what was happening to Christ was the will of God. Furthermore, even while Jesus was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane he said he could have 12 legions of angels (72,000 angels) if he requested them, but then the will of God that he die for the sins of humankind would not come to pass (Matt. 26:53). So Jesus told the apostles that “the ruler of the world” (Satan) was coming but did not have power over him, and furthermore, that Jesus was doing the will of God. Armed with that knowledge, the apostles were in a position to stay peaceful and be clearheaded when only a short while later Jesus was arrested, but they forgot what he told them and were confused and afraid.

It is also important to realize that in the greater scheme of things, Jesus saying that Satan—the ruler of the world—was coming involved more than just the events of Christ’s arrest and crucifixion. Jesus saying that Satan was coming was in the greater context of Jesus himself going away to the Father and leaving the apostles on earth without him (cf. John 14:3, 18, 28), and he had told them he would send the holy spirit to help them while he was gone (John 14:16-17). Jesus knew that after he ascended, Satan would come in a more bold and powerful way, and we see that quite clearly articulated in Jesus’ prophecies of the Tribulation and in the book of Revelation.

To fully understand John 14:30 we must understand that when the text says “the ruler of the world is coming,” it does not mean that Jesus thought that Satan would come in person, but rather that he would come through his agents, those people who follow him. Satan was directing his agents and they were doing his will, but Satan did not come in person as an evil angel. The idea that Satan (or God) could come by sending their agents occurs many times in the Bible. Quite often in the Old Testament, the Bible says that “God” did something when God worked through His believers, His agents, to do His will (cf. Luke 7:16). Here in John 14:30, Satan comes in the form of his agents.

[For more on the power the Devil exercises as the “ruler” and “god” of this world, see commentaries on Luke 4:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; and 1 John 5:19. For more names and characteristics of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“he has no power over me.”** The Greek is more literally, “in me he has nothing.” The Greek phrase is rooted in a Semitic idiom. Its most basic meaning is that Jesus is saying there is no association between him and Satan. In this context, it means that Satan has no claim, power, or control over Christ in any way. Thus, in this context, the idiom can be translated as “he has no power over me,” or “he has no claim on me.”

Joh 14:31

**“Get up, let us go from here.”** At this point, the disciples started getting ready to leave the Upper Room and the Last Supper. However, Jesus continued teaching and praying, and the disciples did not leave until John 18:1 (cf. Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 22:39; John 14:31).

**John Chapter 15**

Joh 15:1

Chapter 15 continues Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper, which started in chapter 13.

**“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.”** The illustration of the vine and vinedresser is a good one to show our dependence on Christ and Christ’s dependence on God. Wine and wine vinegar were important staples in the biblical community, and vines and grapes are often used in biblical illustrations (e.g., Deut. 32:32, Ps. 80:8-11; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21; 5:10; Ezek. 15:1-7; Hos. 10:1). The branches need the vine and the vinedresser to survive and prosper, and believers need Christ and God to survive and prosper.

This teaching of Jesus at the Last Supper is evidence against the Trinity. The vine and the vinedresser are not the same. The vinedresser controls and directs the vine and the branches. God does His work through the vine and the branches.

[For more about the doctrine of the Trinity not being biblical and Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Joh 15:2

**“takes it away.”** Some argue that “to take away” here means “to lift up.” Although that could be the case grammatically, it does not fit contextually. John 15:6 makes it clear that if a person does not bear fruit, he is cast into the fire. This parable parallels the parable of the servants and the talents. If a servant does not bear fruit with his talents and buries it in the ground, he is wicked and lazy, and is thrown out into the darkness.

Joh 15:3

**“Already you are clean.”** In this context, Jesus is using the word “clean” in a standard, Levitical way, meaning “clean” in the eyes of God and thus acceptable to Him. The apostles had become “clean” this way when they accepted Jesus as the Christ (Matt. 16:16-20). It was now important that they remain clean, which they would need to do by holding on to that belief and being faithful to him, which is what Jesus is expounding on in much of the chapter.

Joh 15:4

**“live.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

**“in *union with*.”** See commentary on John 10:38, “the Father is in *union with* me, and I am in *union with* the Father.”

Joh 15:5

**“lives.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

Joh 15:6

**“live.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

**“and they are burned.”** The unsaved are eventually thrown into the Lake of Fire and burned up.

[For information on the unsaved being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not “burning forever in hell,” see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For information on people making their own choice about the future, see commentary on Rom. 6:23, and see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

Joh 15:7

**“live.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

**“in *union with*.”** See commentary on John 10:38, “the Father is in *union with* me, and I am in *union with* the Father.”

**“want.”** The Greek word is *thelō* (#2309 θέλω) and means want or desire.

**“and it will be done for you.”** God and Jesus do answer prayer, but many prayers go seemingly unanswered. For more on that, see commentary on John 14:13.

Joh 15:9

**“live.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

Joh 15:10

**“live.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

Joh 15:12

**“love one another.”** The command to “love one another” was the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:34, and it is so central to Christian life that it occurs 13 times in the New Testament—and besides those, there are also similar commands to love our fellow believers (cf. 1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21). It is vital to understand the impact of this command, that it is not a general call to love everyone, although we are supposed to love everyone. It is a specific command to especially love fellow Christians, and thus is similar to Galatians 6:10, be especially good to the household of faith; that is, fellow Christians.

[For more on “love one another” referring to loving fellow believers, and more on specific ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.”]

**“just as I have loved you.”** The love that Jesus had for others was a selfless love, one that valued others more (cf. Phil. 2:3). It was also a sacrificial love (cf. Rom. 12:1).

Joh 15:13

**“life.”** See commentary on John 13:37.

Joh 15:14

**“friends.”** John 15:14-15 mark an important shift in the relation between Jesus and those who closely follow him and obey him. Jesus now says he will not call his close disciples “servants,” but friends, denoting an intimate and affectionate relationship. Jesus had referred to his disciples as friends earlier, in Luke 12:4, but that was in the context of his protecting and blessing them, and teaching them not to fear the world. He was not making the much more personal and intimate statement that he was making at the Last Supper, at most only a couple hours before his arrest.

To understand the importance of what Jesus says here at the Last Supper, it is important to understand the word “friend” and what it really implies. Since so much has been spoken of in the Christian world about *agapē* love, we will discuss that also. In American culture, the word “friend” has lost some of its true meaning and value. Today we call people “friends” when we have only met them a few times. Biblically, a “friend” was someone you knew well and really trusted. It is exemplified by the word “companion,” which comes from the Latin, “com” (with) and panis (bread). A friend, a companion, was someone you would trust in your house and eat with. When Jesus calls us friends, he is referring to a deep and intimate relationship. In the Bible, that deep relationship is represented by the word *philos*.

Greek has four different words for love, and the Greek word that refers to God’s love for us is *agapē*. The verb form is *agapaō* (#25 ἀγαπάω); the noun form is *agapē* (#26 ἀγάπη). *Agapē* love is the very nature of God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-12, 16). The big key to understanding *agapē* is to realize that it can be known from the action it prompts. People today are accustomed to thinking of love as a feeling, but that is essentially not the case with *agapē* love. *Agapē* is love because of what it *does*, not because of how it *feels* (cf. the list of actions prompted by *agapē* in 1 Cor. 13).

God so “loved” (*agapē*) that He gave His Son. It did not feel good to God to do that, but it was the loving thing to do. Christ so loved (*agapē*) that he gave his life. *Agapē* love is not simply an impulse generated from feelings, rather it is an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice. This is why God can command us to “love” (*agapē*) our enemies (Matt. 5:44). He does not command us to “have a good feeling” for our enemies, but to act in a loving way toward them (cf. the loving actions in Exod. 23:1-5). That is not to say the *agapē* love cannot have feelings attached to it, and the ideal situation occurs when the loving thing to do also is what we want to do, such that we combine the feeling of love with loving action.

The Greek word *phileō*, which is translated as “love” in many English Bibles, is different from *agapaō* love. *Phileō* means “to have a special interest in someone or something, frequently with focus on close association; have affection for, like, consider someone a friend.”[[153]](#footnote-13174) *Phileō* (#5368 φιλέω) is the verb form, and *philos* (#5384 φίλος) is the noun form and refers to a “friend.”

It would be helpful if *phileō* were never translated “love,” because it refers to a strong liking or a strong friendship. Of course, *phileō* gets translated “love” because in modern culture we say we “love” things that we strongly like: “I love ice cream” or “I love my car.” The word *phileō* implies a strong emotional connection, and thus is used of the deep friendship, and it is also used of the way people “really like” things. Thus, we can *agapē* our enemies because we can be kind to them whether we feel like it or not, but we cannot *phileō* our enemies; we cannot be true friends with them.

In Christian circles, it is very common to hear people compare *agapē* and *phileō* and disparage *phileō* as if it were a “lesser” kind of love. Nothing could be further from the truth. *Phileō* refers to that deep friendship relationship and the wonderful friendly feeling that everyone craves: we all want friends. Lenski writes about friendship and says that the word *philoi*, friends, “denotes an affectionate and intimate relation.”[[154]](#footnote-10721) Although *agapē* can have that deep friendly feeling, it can also be “cold love,” and manifest itself as godly acts done without a true “loving” feeling. Both *agapē* and *phileō* are very important. If we are going to win the people of the world, we must be able to “love” them even in the most unlovable circumstances, and that takes *agapē*. *Agapē* was the reason that Paul went to city after city to teach the Word, even though he was defamed, beaten, and jailed. He did not like those experiences, but he knew that given the specific ministry Christ gave him, it was how he was to obey God. In contrast, what we really crave in our hearts is the most intimate friendship relationship, and that is what *phileō* offers.

The difference between *agapē* and *phileō* becomes very important in John 21. Jesus was asking Peter if he “loved” Jesus (*agapē*) because Jesus wanted Peter to be committed to following Jesus even though it would often be neither easy nor likable. Peter, on the other hand, used *phileō* because he wanted to see if his friendship with Jesus was still intact: was Jesus still an affectionate and intimate friend to him even though Peter had publicly denied him? Jesus wanted commitment no matter what the circumstances, Peter wanted close friendship with Jesus—and the Word tries to communicate their desires by the specific vocabulary it uses for their verbal exchange.

Here in John 15, Jesus now tells the apostles that they are his “friends” (*philos*), if we do what he commanded us. In fact, he shows his apostles what he means, and proves to them that they are indeed his friends by telling them that he has told them what he heard from his Father—intimate communication that he would only tell his friends about. Jesus’ invitation to be his friend is not only here in the Gospel of John, it is in the book of Revelation. Jesus says, “Look!, I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). Anyone in the biblical culture would immediately understand that for Jesus to come in to a home and eat would mean there was a deep friendship between Jesus and the person.

What Jesus said at the Last Supper, very shortly before his arrest, has huge implications for Christians, because he was telling his disciples things that would define their roles and relationship after his resurrection and ascension. Jesus has now opened the door for us to be “friends” with him. And nothing could be of greater worth. No wonder Paul said that he counted all his worldly credentials as dung in comparison to “knowing” Jesus, that is, having a firsthand, experiential relationship, or “friendship,” with Christ (see the commentaries on Phil. 3:8 and 3:10).

Having a genuine friendship relationship with Jesus Christ is part of the very fabric of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. Jesus spoke of his relationship with his disciples in a number of different ways, including: he said that he and the disciples would be “friends” (John 15:14, 15), they would “see” him (cf. John 14:19), they would be in union with Jesus and the Father (John 14:20), he would show himself to them (John 14:21), he and the Father would make their home in them (John 14:23), and they could ask him for what they needed (John 14:14). Jesus knew what his disciples did not know: that in a few hours he would be arrested, then crucified, and after that, his relationship with them would be on a different level. Even with Jesus gone, his disciples had to be confident that he would be in close contact with them even though he was in heaven and they were on earth. That is why he took the time to communicate in many different ways that he and his disciples would be friends—ones who have an intimate and affectionate relationship.

[For more on the difference between *agapē* and *phileō*, and information on all four Greek words for “love,” see commentary on John 21:15.]

Joh 15:16

**“he will give it to you.”** God and Jesus do answer prayer, but many prayers go seemingly unanswered. For more on that, see commentary on John 14:13.

Joh 15:17

**“These things I command you, so that you will love one another**.” The grammar of the verse and the context favor this translation over something simpler, such as “This I command you: love one another.” “These things” comes from the Greek *tauta*, a plural pronoun, and the conjunction *hina* that starts the second phrase is most naturally “so that,” or “in order that.” It is not clear how far back in Jesus’ teaching he was referring to when he said “these things.” It is clear, however, that in the context, Christ had been teaching and directing the disciples concerning love and his love for them. His discourse included commands, as well as general information. Now he tells them that he has said these things “so that” they will love one another. This is a wonderful demonstration of the principle in 1 John 4:19, that we love because he first loved us. Jesus clearly told the disciples of his love for them, and told them to remain “in” his love, i.e., connected to him and the blessings that would flow to them through him. Thus, here, many years before 1 John was written, Jesus was telling his disciples about his love for them and commanding them to remain in him so that they would love one another.

**“love one another.”** The command to “love one another” was the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:34, and it is so central to Christian life that it occurs 13 times in the New Testament—and besides those, there are also similar commands to love our fellow believers (cf. 1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21). It is vital to understand the impact of this command, that it is not a general call to love everyone, although we are supposed to love everyone. It is a specific command to especially love fellow Christians, and thus is similar to Galatians 6:10, be especially good to the household of faith; that is, fellow Christians.

[For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34. For more on specific ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.”]

Joh 15:18

**“If the world hates you.”** In both Hebrew and Greek, the word “hate” has a large number of meanings. Although in this context the primary meaning is to have an intense dislike for, and even hostility toward, it certainly includes the meanings of reject or ignore.

[For more on the meanings of “hate,” see commentary on Prov. 1:22.]

Joh 15:19

**“world…world…world…world…world.”** In this verse Jesus gives great emphasis to the world, combining the figures of speech antanaclasis and repetitio*.*[[155]](#footnote-17276) In the figure repetitio, or repetition, the same word is repeated at irregular intervals in the sentence. In antanaclasis, the same word is used more than once in a sentence but the meanings differ (i.e., a waiter says: “My customers waited on me as much as I waited on them”). John 15:19 is somewhat similar to John 3:31: “The one who is of the earth is of the earth, and he speaks of the earth” (see commentary on John 3:31).

[For more on the figure of speech antanaclasis, see commentary on 1 Sam. 1:24.]

[See Word Study: “Antanaclasis.”]

Jesus taught, “If you were of the world [i.e., your spiritual origin and/or identity were the world], the world [i.e., Satan, his demons, and demonic and worldly people] would befriend you as its own, but because you are not of the world [your spiritual origin and identity are not the world; in fact, you oppose “the world”], but I chose you out of the world [out from Satan, demons, and demonic and worldly people], therefore the world [i.e., Satan, demons, and demonic and worldly people] hates you.

Jesus’ teaching in this verse highlights the spiritual battle that rages between God and Satan; between Good and Evil; between God’s people and worldly people, who are under the influence of Satan. The truly worldly people hate the things of God, which is why the Bible is a banned book in more than 50 countries in the world, and why Christians are persecuted or Christian practices are restricted in many countries around the world. Although it is a common Christian response to “keep your head down” and “not make waves,” in an attempt to maintain a friendly relationship with the world, Jesus tells us that the only terms on which the world will befriend us are if we become worldly too. There is no way to be a practicing Christian and also be a friend with the world—that is a clear message of Scripture (Matt. 5:10-11; 10:22; John 16:2; 17:14; 2 Cor. 4:8-9; 2 Tim. 3:12; James 4:4; 1 Pet. 5:9). The Bible says we are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) and we need to “contend earnestly for the Faith” (Jude 1:3), and even though there will be a price Christians pay for their stand for Christ, those who stand will be richly rewarded (Matt. 5:10-12).

**“befriend you.”** The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). Although most versions say “love,” doing so confuses *agapē* love (“love” in the REV) with *phileō* love. *Phileō* love has an attachment, and it is the attachment between good friends. The world “befriends” those who are of the world.

[For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see commentary on John 21:15.]

**“but I chose you.”** The “but” in this phrase is the very strong “but” as in, “but in contrast.” The Greek is *alla* (#235 αλλά).

Joh 15:21

**“the one who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 15:22

**“they would not have had sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.”** This is a good example of how important it is to get the scope of Scripture and not “prooftext” to make a point. Jesus is not speaking of sin in general, as if the religious leaders would have had no sin at all unless Jesus had spoken to them. Rather he is speaking in the context of his life, particularly during the Last Supper, about his death, and saying that the sin of not believing and not obeying Jesus would now be reckoned to them, because they heard him, but turned away.

Joh 15:25

**“but let the word…be fulfilled.”** We feel this is a command clause rather than a purpose clause (see commentary on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him”) or a result clause (cf. Matt. 1:22), although it could be a result clause. In the Greek, there is no phrase “they have done this” which must be supplied for it to read either as a purpose clause: e.g., “But *they have done this* to fulfill the word that is written in their Law” (NASB1995), or as a result clause, “with the result that….”

We do not believe this could be a purpose clause. Why would these men hate *with the purpose* of fulfilling Old Testament prophecy? They wouldn’t. On the other hand, if it is God who instigates the purpose behind their hatred of the Messiah, then God would be making them hate just so a prophecy would be fulfilled, which goes against God’s character and nature. Although it could be a result clause, “This happened with the result that the word was fulfilled,” it does not seem as likely that Jesus would say that to his disciples, although he could have.

To us the reading that makes the most sense in the context is that Christ was making a simple statement in reaction to the men’s hatred; “let the word that is written in their law be fulfilled, ‘they have hated me without a cause.’”

Like our translation, the ESV renders the phrase as a third-person command but uses the word “must”: “The word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled.” This is a possible rendering of the command, just as using the word “let” and saying “let the word be fulfilled,” is possible. However, Jesus was not telling his disciples about what “must” happen, but pointing out what was happening. The “let” translation is better because in English the word “must” could be misunderstood to imply some metaphysical necessity for fulfillment, which is not being communicated by the Greek grammar of the command clause. Also, see commentary on John 13:18, “let the Scripture be fulfilled.”

Joh 15:26

**“that I will send to you from the Father.”** As the Bible reveals, the gift of holy spirit is given by God to Jesus Christ, to be administered or given to others (Luke 24:49; John 15:26; Acts 2:33; Titus 3:6. See commentary on Acts 2:33). John the Baptist also said it would be Jesus that would baptize in holy spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). It was promised in the Old Testament and is referred to as “the promised holy spirit” (see commentary on Eph. 1:13).

**“it will testify about me.”** The gift of holy spirit in believers testifies about the resurrection and lordship of Jesus Christ in many ways: e.g., by revelation, by miracles and healing, and by speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy.

Joh 15:27

**“testify.”** The verb “to testify” is in a form that can be either indicative (you *will* testify,” picking up “will” from the context), or imperative (“you must testify,” picking up “must” from the imperative form of the verb). The key is in the sentence itself. The word “because” dictates the imperative. Anyone could testify of Christ, whether they had been around since the beginning of his ministry or not. However, these apostles had been given much, and now much was required. “Because” they had been with Jesus since the beginning, they must now testify of him (or suffer severe consequences). This verse is also good evidence that the helper, holy spirit, will be poured out during the tribulation.

**John Chapter 16**

Joh 16:1

Chapter 16 continues Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper, which started in chapter 13.

**“so that you will not be caused to fall away.”** The “these things” refers to all the things that Jesus had told them at the Last Supper, which started in John chapter 13. However, in this context “these things” most specifically refers to the things about being hated by the world and persecuted (John 15:18-27), because those are the things that cause many believers to fall away from the Faith. Many believers abandon their faith when they are hated and suffer persecution, so Jesus told his apostles that hatred and persecution would happen to them so they could prepare their minds to stand for the Lord even during persecution.

Joh 16:2

**“They will put you out of the synagogues.”** Jesus said the time was coming when true believers who testified to the truth of who Jesus was and what he did and what he taught, would not be tolerated, and people who stood for the teachings of Jesus and the Bible would be excommunicated from the synagogues. This is happening today, as people who believe the truth about who God is and what the Bible teaches about things like godliness, marriage, and godly sexuality are excommunicated from churches. Paul said basically the same thing in 2 Timothy 4:3.

**“whoever kills you will think that he offers a service to God.”** Jesus was speaking about the Great Tribulation that will come on the earth (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), which is described in some detail in the book of Revelation. That will be a very difficult time for believers (Matt. 24:9). However, true believers have always suffered persecution in the world, and always will until Christ returns and rules the earth. So preparing mentally to endure persecution is an important part of Christian life.

Joh 16:3

**“because they have not known the Father, nor me.”** If a major reason that people sin is because they do not know the Father or Jesus, then it behooves the good Christian to do what it takes to get to know God and Jesus. That involves seeking a personal relationship with them through things like prayer, Bible study, listening to godly and experienced Christian men and women (remember, God set “teachers” in the Church for a reason), and involving oneself in discussions about God and the Christian Faith. It also involves building one’s trust in God by obeying Him and seeing that what He says is godly and true. Jesus said, “If anyone is willing to keep doing his [God’s] will, he will come to know about the teaching, whether it is of God, or *if* I am speaking on my own” (John 7:17). There are some things about the Christian Faith that are only learned by experience. When the Bible says to do something, and we consistently do it, we get the right results and that builds both our trust in God and Jesus and our relationship with them.

People who do not know God or do what it takes to get to know God are fools. They will suffer on Judgment Day. God said, “my people are fools, they do not know me” (Jer. 4:22).

Joh 16:4

**“will remember.”** The verb “remember” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” remember, but the Greek conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) earlier in the sentence is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, Jesus’ purpose was to tell the disciples what would happen before it happened so that they “will” remember, not just so they “may” remember.” Versions that use “will” include (CEB, CJB, NET, NIV, NLT, and The Source New Testament).

**“I did not say these things to you from the beginning because I was with you.”** Since the beginning, Jesus had been there with the apostles to be able to protect them and deflect criticism that was directed at them. However, the major reason that Jesus did not teach much about the apostles and disciples being hated by the world was that he did not need to. He was the Messiah, and the hatred of the world, the Jews, and his other enemies was focused on him. But now that was going to change. Jesus was going away. He told them, “But now I am going to the one who sent me” (John 16:5). That meant that now the hatred of the world would shift and be focused on Jesus’ apostles and disciples. That is why, here at the Last Supper, Jesus had to prepare them for the hatred and persecution that would soon come upon them.

What Jesus said to his apostles that night at the Last Supper is still applicable to Christian believers today. Christians must be prepared to stand for the Lord in the midst of persecution and the hatred of the world.

Joh 16:5

**“to the one who sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’”** It is with a hint of reproof, and perhaps wonder and sorrow as well, that Jesus said that none of the apostles had asked where he was going. Jesus had said he was going away early on at the Last Supper (John 13:33). The Bible never tells us why none of the apostles asked that; it may well be that they were afraid to say anything—that had happened before (Mark 9:32; Luke 9:45). In any case, when he told them he was going to the Father they did not understand him. It was not until after Jesus’ resurrection that the disciples even understood that he was going to die (Luke 24:45-47).

Joh 16:7

**“I will send it to you.”** Jesus receives the holy spirit from the Father and gives it to believers (cf. (Luke 24:49; John 15:26; Acts 2:33; Titus 3:6)).

The Greek pronoun translated “it” is *auton* (αὐτὸν), a masculine singular pronoun that is associated with “helper,” which is the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος). We translate it as “it” because the “Helper,” the gift of holy spirit, is not a person but a thing, the gift of God. In inflected languages like Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, etc., the gender of the pronoun has to agree with the gender of the noun, so we do not learn the gender from the pronoun itself, but from what person, place, or thing the noun represents (see commentary on John 14:17, “it”).

[For more about the “Holy Spirit” and “holy spirit” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Joh 16:8

**“it.”** In Greek, the pronoun *ekeinos* (#1565 ἐκεῖνος) is masculine because it is governed by the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. However, the “Helper” is a word describing the gift of holy spirit (John 14:17), which is not a “he” but an “it” (see commentary on John 16:7; 14:17).

[For more about the “Holy Spirit” and “holy spirit” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“it will convict the world.”** The gift of holy spirit will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment because it will work powerfully in believers to demonstrate the power of God and the truth of the Bible. For example, 1 Corinthians 14:22 says that speaking in tongues is a sign to unbelievers. The manifestations of holy spirit, present in the world in the life of believers, will testify of the truth of the resurrection of Christ and of the power that believers have (cf. Acts 1:8). The lack of revelation and power in the Chuch has caused people to doubt the reality of the resurrection and the accuracy of Scripture. As to conviction concerning “sin,” “righteousness,” and “judgment,” see commentaries on John 16:9, 10, and 16:11.

**“righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God.

[For more on “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right or just (“justice”), see commentary on Matt. 5:6.]

Joh 16:9

**“Concerning sin, because they do not believe in me.”** The gift of holy spirit working powerfully in each believer in giving them revelation and power attests to the existence of God, the resurrection of Christ, and the accuracy of the Bible. However, as Christ specifically pointed out, the holy spirit convicts people of the sin of rejecting Christ, not believing in Christ, because the Christian has power because of the presence of the gift of holy spirit that the non-Christian does not have (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7-10). If non-Christians were honest and genuinely desired truth, they would ask about the power that Christians have, which would lead them to Christ. Thus, by openly demonstrating the power of God through Christ, and having them reject it, the gift of holy spirit convicts God-rejectors of sin.

Joh 16:10

**“concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you will see me no more.”** The gift of holy spirit working in each believer in giving them revelation and power attests to the existence of God, the resurrection of Christ, and the accuracy of the Bible. Thus, it convicts the world concerning “righteousness,” that is, what is right in the sight of God. The world is filled with pagan religions and ungodly beliefs, but the power of God in manifestation testifies to the truth of the Bible because people who believe the Bible and live by it generally exhibit the power of God and the operations of the gift of holy spirit (although it should be said that Satan has effectively worked in the Church for so many centuries now that many Christians deny the power of God in things like speaking in tongues, prophecy, etc. Nevertheless, the “powerless Christian” is never what God intended, as is evidenced by the NT itself). Christ is not on earth now; we see him no more, as he said. Nevertheless, the powerful and knowledgeable Christian, walking by the spirit of God, can testify effectively to the truth of the Bible and give people a choice to live righteously by trusting and obeying the Bible.

If non-Christians were honest and genuinely desired truth, they would ask about the power that Christians have, which would lead them to Christ and the truth of the Bible. Thus, by openly demonstrating the power of God through Christ, and having them reject it, the gift of holy spirit convicts God-rejectors concerning righteousness.

Joh 16:11

**“concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”** The gift of holy spirit working in each believer in giving them revelation and power attests to the existence of God, the resurrection of Christ, and the accuracy of the Bible. Thus, it convicts the world concerning God’s judgment and especially the future Day of Judgment. Many passages of Scripture speak of the future judgment, yet these passages of Scripture are ignored by the unbelieving world. However, when Christians live by revelation knowledge and walk in revelation power, that testifies to the truth of the Bible and the existence of God, which then points to the fact that there will be a future day of judgment. Furthermore, the gift of holy spirit testifies about the future life not only by revelation given to individuals, but in prophecies that are spoken to the Church, just as the writers of the Bible prophesied about the future. Here in John 16:11, Jesus points to the future judgment of the Devil as proof that there will be a future judgment, and the Devil, and those who follow him and his ways, will be judged. If non-Christians were honest and genuinely desired truth, they would ask about the power that Christians have, which would lead them to Christ and the truth of the Bible. Thus, by openly demonstrating the power of God through Christ, and having them reject it, the gift of holy spirit convicts God-rejectors concerning righteousness.

**“ruler of this world.”** The Devil is indeed the “ruler of this world,” and Jesus calls him that in John 12:31; 14:30, and 16:11 (see commentary on John 12:31).

[For more on the power the Devil exercises as the “ruler” and “god” of this world, see commentaries on Luke 4:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; and 1 John 5:19. For more names and characteristics of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“has been judged.”** This is a Semitic way of speaking that many scholars refer to as the prophetic perfect. It is generally used when something in the future is so certain it is spoken of in the past tense as if it had already occurred (see commentary on Eph. 2:6, “raised…seated”). Lenski writes, “Jesus speaks of the devil’s final judgment as having already been effected because his own death and resurrection, which pronounced the final judgment on the devil, are already at hand, are as certain as though they had already been completed.”[[156]](#footnote-28524)[[157]](#footnote-31110)

Joh 16:12

**“but you are not able to bear them now.”** At this point, the apostles did not even believe that Jesus was going to die, much less believe in his resurrection and ascension. Given that, there were a lot of things about the future that they would not have understood. Although we sometimes tend to think of information as a weight that must be carried and so in our idiom say that a person cannot “bear” (carry) the information, in this context the idea seems to be that the apostles simply could not have understood what Christ would have told them. Goodspeed’s translation catches that sense, and has “you cannot take it in now.” The Peshita Syriac version (PESHNT-E) has “ye cannot comprehend it now.”

Joh 16:13

**“But when it, the spirit of truth, comes.”** The gift of holy spirit was given after Jesus’ resurrection, but since the apostles did not even believe that Jesus was going to die, to try to give them a chronology of when the spirit would be given out by God would have been pointless. Once Jesus was raised, he told them the spirit was coming soon and they were to stay in Jerusalem and wait for it to come (cf. Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49).

**“it.”** In Greek, the pronoun *ekeinos* (#1565 ἐκεῖνος) is masculine because it is governed by the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. However, the “Helper” is a word describing the gift of holy spirit (John 14:17), which is not a “he” but an “it.” See commentary on John 14:17.

**“it...it...it...it...it.”** Greek verbs have no gender, and therefore any gender associated with any given verb has to be assigned from the context and the subject being discussed. Usually, this is not confusing to translators because the subject is understood. However, sometimes the context and subject matter of the verse are debated. For example, when a verb refers to something the “holy spirit” will do, then Trinitarians, who assert that the “Holy Spirit” is a person, assign a masculine pronoun to the verb. In contrast, Biblical Unitarians, who see the “holy spirit” as a gift from God or the power of God, assign a neuter pronoun to the verb. Since almost all English translations of the Bible are done by Trinitarians, they almost all have masculine pronouns associated with verbs relating to holy spirit. This makes the average person reading the English Bible believe that “the Bible” says the holy spirit is a person. However, the masculine personal pronoun was placed in the text because of the theology of the translator, and not because the Greek text demanded it.

A verse where the different theology of Biblical Unitarians and Trinitarians greatly influences their translation is John 16:13. The NIV translation reads:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Although the word “he” appears in the NIV translation six times, it is only in the Greek text one time, and that one time it is a translation of the pronoun *ekeinos* (#1565 ἐκεῖνος), which is masculine because it is governed by, and thus has to match the gender of, the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. The other times that “he” occurs in the NIV text are an assumption on the part of the translators. They assert that the “Holy Spirit” is a person and is masculine, and therefore a masculine pronoun would automatically be assigned to any verb associated with it. For example, the NIV translates the Greek verb *hodēgeō*, as “he will guide,” even though it is simply a third-person singular verb, and, as we said, Greek verbs have no gender. But since the verb *hodēgeō* has no gender, it could just as easily be translated “it will guide” or “she will guide,” whichever is best supported by the context.

When we understand that any gender associated with verbs has to be assigned from the subject being discussed and the context, then proper translation work demands that we scrutinize the context to see whether the subject being referred to is a “he,” “she” or “it.” In the case of John 16:13, we believe that the context is God’s gift of holy spirit, which is not a person, and that the verse should be properly translated, “it will guide.”

Another example regarding “spirit” is in the Gospel of John. In this verse, Jesus is talking with his disciples about the spirit of truth, and he says, “*but* you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.” (John 14:17b, NASB). The words “he abides” are an interpretation of the Greek, which is simply, “abides” in the third-person singular, and thus could be “he abides,” “she abides,” or “it abides.” In this case, because Jesus is speaking of God’s gift of holy spirit, which is a “thing” and not a person, it is proper to say, “it abides.”

The fact that Greek verbs do not have a gender, so any assigned to it is the interpretation of the translators, comes up in many areas besides holy spirit. For example, Luke 11:24 speaks of demons, and some versions say that when an unclean spirit comes out of a man, “he goes” through arid places. But are we sure the demon is a “he?” The Greek verb is genderless and can be masculine, feminine, or neuter. Thus, there are some versions that say “he” (cf. KJV, RSV) and some versions that say “it” (cf. NASB, NRSV), but because of mainstream theology, none say “she,” although biblically that is a possibility. Although we usually think of angels and demons as masculine, there are both female good spirits (Zech. 5:9) and female evil spirits. The Hebrew word “Lilith” (Isa. 34:14) is the name of a female demon. “Lilith” gets translated many ways in the English versions, including “night monster” (ASV, NASB, AMP); “night hag” (RSV); “night spectre” (Rotherham); and by her name, “Lilith” (NAB, Tanakh, MSG). Some translators apparently miss the point that Isaiah is referring to a demon at all, and have “screech owl” (KJV) or “night creature” (NIV). Lilith is “a malevolent supernatural being” (Bromiley).[[158]](#footnote-14637) Unless the context tells us the gender of a demon, using “it” in Luke 11:24 is our best choice because it allows for either male or female gender.

God’s holy spirit is a most amazing and valuable gift, and it behooves us as Christians, especially those who translate the Bible, to understand it. Bible students who are not familiar with the original languages can only do this when the Greek and Hebrew texts are properly translated. If the translation is not accurate, then we do not have the Word of God, we have the words of men. Translating Scripture is one of the most important and spiritual of all responsibilities because millions of people who do not read the original languages trust the translation to accurately represent the original. When it comes to the subject of God’s gift of holy spirit, countless Christians have been misled or confused by the improper use of the pronoun “he,” or other personal pronouns. When the pronouns associated with *pneuma*, spirit, are translated correctly, it is much easier to see the love and mercy of God expressed to us by His giving to us the wonderful gift of holy spirit. (This commentary entry has dealt with pronouns as they are assigned to verbs. For the agreement of Greek nouns and pronouns, especially as they refer to the gift of holy spirit, see commentary on John 14:17).

**“it will guide...it will not speak...it hears, it will speak...it will declare.”** Here in John 16:13, Jesus is speaking of the gift of holy spirit that he was about to send to mankind. We now know he sent it on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). In this verse, Jesus speaks about the gift of holy spirit in a new way, giving it the characteristics of a living thing. This is the figure of speech personification. The reason for the personification is that the gift of holy spirit that came on the Day of Pentecost was brand new and very different from the gift of holy spirit that God had put upon prophets and selected people in the Old Testament (for more on the coming of this “new spirit,” see commentary on John 7:39). The gift of holy spirit the apostles were about to receive on Pentecost was different than the holy spirit that was “upon” them at the time, so it was important for Jesus to tell them something about it. Jesus had told them earlier in the conversation that the spirit they now had was “upon” them, but the coming new spirit would be “in” them (John 14:17).

[For more on personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

The gift of holy spirit that Jesus poured out on the day of Pentecost is “born in” the believer (1 Pet. 1:3, 23) and becomes part of his very nature (2 Pet. 1:4), making him or her a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). Because this new holy spirit actually becomes part of the nature of the believer, it starts to conform the believer into what it is: holy. That is why Galatians 5:17 says the spirit fights against our human flesh nature. The gift of holy spirit is born in the believer, and God and Jesus communicate through it, which is why it does not “speak” on its own, but only what it “hears” from God and/or Jesus.

Jesus said the “helper” (the holy spirit) would fill the void created by his going to the Father (John 16:7-15). Jesus would still be present with his disciples in part because of the presence of the holy spirit: “I will come to you” (John 14:18); “I am in you” (John 14:20); and “I will show myself” (John 14:21). By this spirit his work with them would continue: “It will teach you” (John 14:26); “It will remind you of everything I have said” (John 14:26); “It will testify about me” (John 15:26); “It will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13); “It will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:14).

All of these statements point to the role of the gift of holy spirit in continuing the work that Jesus started, and empowering his followers. This spirit is not an independent and self-existent being, but as the nature of God, it can effectively make Christ present within the believer, influencing, guiding, teaching, reminding, and pointing the believer to follow his Lord and Savior. It is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). This spirit is certainly not “co-equal” with God when by its very design it is given by God and the risen Lord. Yet because it carries the *personal* presence of Christ into the life of every believer, the use of personification is highly appropriate. As a practical matter, the holy spirit in us will not lead us anywhere that the Lord himself would not lead us if he were personally present. We can study Christ’s life and his priorities in the written Word to verify whether the “spirit” leading us is, in fact, God’s gift of holy spirit or whether it is “another spirit.” For instance, he whose basic commitment was “it is written” will not be leading his followers away from relying on Scripture as the only rule of faith and practice.

**“in all the truth.”** This statement should not be pushed to an unrealistic conclusion. Jesus was not teaching that the gift of holy spirit would somehow communicate to people everything that was truth. If that were the case, no Christian would need to study for a test—God would simply give the person the answers. The word “all” is usually defined by the context. For example, if you come home expecting to get to eat some leftover cake, but someone ate it, you might say, “Who ate all the cake.” You do not mean “all” the cake in the world but “all” the cake in your house. Similarly, in this context, the “all” refers to the subjects he is covering with his apostles. Furthermore, Jesus did not say the holy spirit would “give” us the truth, as we would somehow “just know” truth from error, but rather that the holy spirit would “guide” us. So as we pray, study the Bible, and talk to wise and experienced Christians, the holy spirit guides us into the truth we are seeking.

**“for it will not speak on its own.”** This is a very important statement about the gift of holy spirit. The revelation and guidance that Christians get via the gift of holy spirit is from God or Jesus, not from the holy spirit itself. This is clear as we study the gift of holy spirit throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, God put the gift of holy spirit upon prophets and certain other people so that He could easily communicate with them. For example, He put holy spirit on prophets so they could prophesy (cf. Num 11:17, 25). However, the prophecies spoken by the prophets were the words of God, not the words of the spirit. The gift of holy spirit was only what enabled the prophets to communicate easily with God.

Joh 16:14

**“it.”** In Greek, the pronoun *ekeinos* (#1565 ἐκεῖνος) is masculine because it is governed by the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. However, the “Helper” is a word describing the gift of holy spirit (John 14:17), which is not a “he” but an “it.” See commentaries on John 16:7; 14:17.

**“it will take from what is mine, and will declare *it* to you.”** This is describing a function of the gift of holy spirit; Christ proclaims that it will deliver messages to his disciples by means of taking them from him and declaring the messages to his disciples. The words “from what is mine” in the Greek is *ek tou emou*, “out from the thing of me.” It is the partitive use of the preposition *ek* (#1537 ἐκ), where the spirit takes a part of the things (messages) of Christ, and then heralds, *anangellō* (#312 ἀναγγέλλω), it to the disciples. By using the phrasing, “what is mine,” Jesus naturally raises the question, “Do not these messages ultimately come from God, and not you, so why do you say, ‘what is mine?’” Jesus anticipates this concern and explains in verse 15: “All things, whatever the Father has, are mine, therefore I said that it will take from what is mine and will declare *it* to you.”

Joh 16:16

**“A little while and you will see me no more, and again a little while, and you will see me.”** This statement of Jesus has been interpreted in three major ways. One way is that the two “little while” times are consecutive and about the same length. A second is that the two times are consecutive but not at all of the same length. That second view does not fit with the simple statement that Jesus made twice about the time frame being “a little while.” The fact that Jesus has now been absent for some 2,000 years does not fit with the normal use of the phrase, “a little while.” Also, there is evidence in the next verses that argues against that interpretation. The third way is that the two times are actually only one time that is looked at by two different sets of people.[[159]](#footnote-19229) This third view seems highly unlikely given the way the verse itself reads.

Given that, and also building with the evidence from the verses that follow John 16:16, the evidence best supports that Jesus said in a “little while”—which turned out to be the very little while from the time Jesus spoke until he was arrested and taken away—the apostles would not see him because he was arrested and taken from them. But then, in “a little while,” which turned out to be six days (Monday night to Sunday morning), the believers saw him again, after his resurrection. Jesus knew the apostles wanted to know what he meant, so he explained it to them. At first when they could not see him, as he was arrested, they cried and lamented. For example, Peter wept bitterly, but at that same event the world rejoiced, just as Jesus said (John 16:20). But then in “a little while” the apostles’ sorrow was turned into joy (John 16:20) when Jesus was resurrected. Furthermore, Jesus had said that when the apostles’ sorrow was turned to joy, “no one will take your joy away from you” (John 16:22). Once the apostles saw the resurrected Christ and realized more about everlasting life, the new body of a resurrected believer, and the secure hope of the future that believers have, no one could take their joy from them.

Joh 16:17

**“What is this that he is saying to us.”** At this time, the apostles did not even understand that Jesus was going to suffer and die, much less that he would ascend into heaven and be separated from them for a time before finally coming back from heaven. Today, with 20/20 hindsight, we know that Jesus had to suffer, then die, then ascend into heaven, and also that one day in the future he will return from heaven to earth and fight the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21), and then set up his 1,000-year kingdom on earth (Rev. 20:4). In contrast, the apostles had been taught that when the Messiah came, he would put an end to this present evil age and usher in a new and wonderful Messianic Age. Jesus knew the apostles did not understand what he was saying to them, but he knew that at some time in the future they would remember that he had told them what was going to happen and at that time they would understand what he had said to them (John 16:4).

[For much more on the apostles’ lack of understanding about the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Messiah, see commentary on Luke 18:34.]

Joh 16:20

**“you will cry and lament, but the world will rejoice.”** This happened in the days between Jesus’ arrest and his resurrection.

**“your sorrow will be turned into joy.”** This happened when the apostles and disciples saw the resurrected Jesus. Of course, the main focus of the joy was seeing Jesus alive again. But the believers also had a deep and lasting joy because they saw firsthand that death cannot stop the power of God, and Jesus did not just come back as himself, he was the prototype of what each believer saw that they would be—immortal people with wonderful and immortal bodies (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35, 42-44).

Joh 16:21

**“pain.”** The word means sorrow, grief, or pain. Christ is comparing the childbirth to what was about to happen to him.

**“woman.”** The woman is Israel. In conjunction with “in that day” (John 16:23), it indicates the woman, Israel, in the tribulation.[[160]](#footnote-23098)

**“boy.”** The noun *anthrōpos* is in the masculine singular, but the reason for the translation “boy” is that it was the custom in Israel that when a baby boy was born there was music, shouting, and great celebration, but when a baby girl was born there was none. This was due to a number of factors. Boys added to the family, while girls were thought to take from it. When a boy was married, his wife came to live with his family; he did not go to hers, and the grandchildren, of course, stayed within the man’s family circle. In days when travel was by foot or donkey-cart, if a man and woman lived even what to us would be a short distance apart, the families rarely saw each other.

Also, at the time of Christ, when a girl got married, her family paid the dowry to the man’s family, not, as in the European tradition or in biblical times before the Babylonian Captivity, the man’s family paying the dowry to the woman’s family. So the woman’s family did not just lose the girl herself, they also gave up wealth.

Also, men helped defend the family, which, in the turbulent times of the ancient world was no small help if the family was to survive. All of this contributed to the cultural excitement at the birth of a boy. Of course, after some initial sadness that the baby was a girl, the baby would be warmly accepted into the family.[[161]](#footnote-19150)

Joh 16:23

**“in that day you will not ask me anything.”** This phrase is a wonderful example of why we have to pay close attention to translation and the context if we are going to properly understand and interpret the Word of God. At first glance, this verse seems to be a clear contradiction of John 14:14, where Jesus said, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” Are we, or are we not, to ask Jesus for things? Here in John 16:23, the context is the questions that the apostles had about what Jesus was saying. Now Jesus says that after his resurrection what Jesus was talking about will be clear so their questions will all have been answered.

A major part of resolving the apparent contradiction between John 16:23 and John 14:14 lies in the Greek words themselves. In John 14:14, Jesus is clearly speaking of being able to do the works that he had done so the Father would be glorified. And in that context, the word “ask” is *aiteō* (#154 αἰτέω, pronounced eye-'te-ō), which means “ask” but very forcefully so. BDAG defines it as “ask for, with claim on receipt of an answer; …demand.” Friberg has “ask, request, demand.” In contrast, here in John 16:23 the Greek word “ask” is *erōtaō* (#2065 ἐρωτάω, pronounced err-ō-'tah-ō) and it means “to put a query to someone, ask, ask a question”;[[162]](#footnote-25588) “ask, seeking for information; question.[[163]](#footnote-28673)

In John 14:14, Jesus is speaking of his being gone after his ascension. This is very clear from reading John 13-16. In John 13:33 Jesus told the apostles he was going away to a place they could not follow, and he continued teaching them he was going away right up through chapter 16 (cf. John 14:1-4, 18, 19, 28; 16:5-10, 16). After Jesus ascends to heaven, having been given all authority in heaven and on earth, we are to ask him for things. In John 14:14, Jesus told his disciples to ask him for things so they could do the works that he had done (14:12). If we just read John 14:12-14 we can easily see that. In 14:12 Jesus told the disciples that if they continued to believe in him they would do the works that he did, and even greater works. Then in 14:13, he told them that he would do those works (i.e., Christ would accomplish those works) so that the Father would be glorified. Then, continuing that thought, he told his disciples that if they “asked” (asked expecting an answer; demanded) of him in his name, he would do it.

[For more information on this point, see commentary on John 14:14].

In looking at John 16:23, we must remember that John 14:14 and 16:23 were both spoken at the Last Supper, perhaps only a very short while apart. The disciples were not confused by the “apparent contradiction,” and we should not be either. The disciples had been asking Jesus many questions, and there was a lot they did not understand. So, for example, they asked, “Where are you going?” (John 13:36); “Why am I not able to follow you now?” (John 13:37); “How can we know the way?” (John 14:5); “Show us the Father” (John 14:8); “How is it you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?” (John 14:22); “What is this that he is saying, ‘A little while?’” (John 16:17-18).

Jesus knew the disciples had lots of questions, and carefully navigated his way through them throughout the Last Supper, answering some while not answering others. As he got to the end of the Last Supper, he told his disciples, “In that day you will not ask me anything,” (perhaps Charles Williams’ translation is clearer: “At that time you will ask me no more questions”). The disciples would not have to ask questions because, for one thing, Jesus said, “I will no longer speak to you in veiled language, but will tell you plainly about the Father” (John 16:25), plus, after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, they would understand all the things they had questions about—something that is quite plain in Acts, as we see the once-ignorant and dumbfounded apostles become bold proclaimers of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

**“he will give it to you in my name.”** God and Jesus do answer prayer, but many prayers go seemingly unanswered. For more on that, see commentary on John 14:13.

Joh 16:24

**“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name.”** What Jesus said, that up until that point people had not asked for things in the name of the Messiah, was perfectly true and made perfect sense. There is no prayer or request in the Old Testament that was “in the name of the Messiah.” It was clear in the Old Testament that eventually the Messiah would rule the world, but it was not stated, and certainly not clear, that in order to petition God, a person would have to do so in the name of the Messiah. Now, however, Jesus is on the verge of being given all authority in heaven and on earth, and so he tells his apostles that now when they ask the Father for something, they should ask in his name (John 16:23-24).

**“keep asking.”** The verb for “ask” in this verse is in the active voice, present tense, and is what is known as a broadband present, or continuous present.[[164]](#footnote-29188) This form indicates a continual action that takes place over a long time, rather than a one-time event. Williams translates the phrase, “But now you must keep on asking.” We are not to just ask once for the things we seek from God, but to repeatedly ask, as the widow asked the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). Wallace explains the present tense in Matthew 7:7 this way: “The force of the present imperatives is ‘ask repeatedly, over and over again…seek repeatedly… knock continuously, over and over again.”[[165]](#footnote-23841) (Cf. Matt. 7:7, Luke 11:9, and commentary on 1 John 3:22.)

Joh 16:25

**“veiled language.”** Many of the truths that Jesus had spoken about his life and the future were spoken in veiled language, such that the truth could not be clearly seen. The Greek word translated in the REV as “veiled language” is *paroimia* (#3942 παροιμία), and it has a range of meaning including maxim, parable, proverb, figure of speech, and veiled saying. Since Jesus spoke in different ways, sometimes in similes and metaphors, sometimes in parables or allegories, and sometimes with a double entendre, it seems best to translate *paroimia* in a way that covers the general way in which Jesus spoke, which was in “veiled language.”

The English versions differ on how they translate *paroimia* (e.g., “dark sayings” (ASV); “veiled language” (BBE, Mounce, NJB); “figures of speech” (CEB, CSB, ESV, NAB, NASB2020, NET, NLT); “figurative language” (Goodspeed, NASB1977, NKJV); “allegories” (Darby); “proverbs” (Douay-Rheims, RV, KJV, Tyndale); “parables” (Geneva Bible); “stories” (NCV); and “metaphors” (TLV). The AMPC seems to cover most of the possibilities when it translates *paroimia* as “parables (veiled language, allegories, dark sayings).

**“The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in veiled language.”** It is important to get the timing of this correct. Jesus did not say that he had completely stopped speaking in veiled language even as he was there at the Last Supper with the apostles, and some of what he was saying was still veiled to them. However, the hour “is coming” when that veiled language would no longer be necessary, the events of the death and resurrection of Christ would be over.

Joh 16:27

**“treats you as friends…befriended me**.” The two Greek verbs are both forms of *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). Although most versions say “loves…loved,” doing so confuses *agapē* love (“love” in the REV) with *phileō* love. *Phileō* love has an attachment, and it is the attachment between good friends.

[For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see commentary on John 21:15.]

Joh 16:28

**“came…going.”** This is very easy to understand if we take the Scripture at face value, that Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of the Father. Jesus “came” from the Father when the Father God impregnated Mary, just like all of us came from our fathers when our mothers were impregnated by them. Jesus knew from Scripture that he would go to the Father at some point after his resurrection, and so he states that to the apostles here at the Last Supper, just before his arrest and crucifixion. This verse does not refer to the doctrine of the “incarnation.”

It is worth noting that none of the occurrences in Scripture that speak of Jesus going to the Father after his resurrection speak of Jesus “returning” to the Father, as if he had already been there. Instead, they refer to Jesus as going to the Father (John 13:1, 3; 14:12, 28; 16:10, 17, 28; 17:13; 20:17). This is more evidence that Jesus was not preexistent.

[For more information on Jesus “coming from heaven,” see commentary on John 6:38. For more on Jesus not being “God in the flesh” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son. For evidence that there is no such “third person in the Trinity” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Joh 16:30

**“Now we know that you know all things, and do not need anyone to ask you a question.”** The phrase “ask you a question” is a translation of the Greek verb *erōtaō* (#2065 ἐρωτάω; a present active third-person singular verb). It is translated elsewhere as “to ask,” and it can mean to ask a question or ask for something, i.e., make a request. Although translating *erōtaō* as “question you” is shorter and follows the Greek more closely than the longer phrase, “ask you a question,” in vernacular English, “question you” usually means “doubt you” or “doubt what you say,” which is not at all what John 16:30 means.

The statement by the disciples, “Now we know that you know all things, and do not need anyone to ask you a question” fits perfectly with what the disciples would have thought given the culture they lived in and their background in the Old Testament. The commentary on John 21:17 shows that the phrase “knowing all things” is most often used to describe “all [the] things” in a specific context rather than refer to omniscience. Also, the commentary on John 21:17 shows that Jesus is not omniscient, he does not know literally every piece of knowledge in the universe (Mark 13:31). So, what are the disciples saying by their statement? To answer that, it helps to keep their entire statement in mind: “Now we know that you know all things, and do not need anyone to question you. This is why we believe that you came from God” (John 16:30).

The context of this statement and the scope of Scripture both help us understand what the apostles said and why they said it. John 16 is part of Jesus’ teaching to his apostles at the Last Supper, which started in John 13. At this part of the supper in John 16, Jesus has been teaching on his death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father—which the apostles never understood until after his resurrection—but at the beginning of his teaching he was speaking in veiled terms (John 16:16). Since the disciples did not know what Jesus meant and were confused by it, they started asking each other what Jesus meant. John 16:17-18 says: 17“Therefore *some* of his disciples said to one another, ‘What is this that he is saying to us, “A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me,” and, “Because I go to the Father?’ 18So they kept saying *to each other*, ‘What is this that he is saying, “A little while?” We do not know what he is saying.’”

The very next verse, John 16:19 tells us that Jesus knew the question that they wanted to ask him even though they were not asking it. It says, “Jesus knew that they were wanting to ask him.” So Jesus answered their unasked question in a short teaching (John 16:19-28). It was Jesus’ teaching that answered their unasked question that prompted the disciples’ response in John 16:29-30: “See, now you are speaking plainly…Now we know that you know all things, and do not need anyone to ask you a question.” (It is somewhat humorous that the disciples said that Jesus was speaking plainly, because they still did not realize what he was saying even though they apparently thought they did).

The reason the disciples said, “Now we know that you know all things,” is that by answering their question before they asked it, Jesus demonstrated that he had special knowledge about what the disciples were discussing among themselves. Some Christians assert that the statement “Now we know that you know all things” means the disciples recognized that Jesus was God and therefore knew all things. But that flies against the context and scope of Scripture, which teaches that Jesus is not God and besides, prophets of God, including the Messiah, were expected to have special knowledge from God.

The disciples did not say, “you know all things” and so “That is why we believe you are God.” Instead, they said they believed Jesus “came from God.” In fact, we know they believed that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). As the promised Messiah, and indeed, just like any prophet, Jesus was expected to have access to God, who would give him special knowledge. It was well understood throughout the Old Testament that prophets and people to whom God had given His spirit had access to God and God showed them what they needed to know—in fact, that is how the prophets came to be recognized as prophets—they receive special knowledge from God (Num. 11:16-17, 25; Deut. 18:18-20; 34:9; Judg. 3:10; 1 Sam. 3:19-21; 2 Chron. 15:1-2; 24:20).

The apostles knew Jesus was the Messiah, and he had proved over and over again that he had special knowledge, knowledge that he received from God. Jesus had made it clear many times throughout his ministry that he knew what he knew and did what he did because he received the guidance and knowledge from God. For example, Jesus taught, “the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing” (John 5:19); “I am not able to do anything on my own. As I hear, I judge” (John 5:30); “My teaching is not my own, but his that sent me” (John 7:16); “I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things” (John 8:28); “I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me, he has given me a command *as to* what to say and what to speak” (John 12:49); “whatever I say, I say just as the Father has said to me” (John 12:50); “the word that you are hearing is not mine, but the Father’s who sent me” (John 14:24).

Since Jesus had been telling his disciples all along that he was getting what to say and do from God—including one time even at the Last Supper itself (John 14:24)—there is absolutely no reason that the apostles would suddenly believe that Jesus was God or knew everything. He had been telling them over and over that what he knew he got from God just like any other prophet did, except he received more content and in more detail, which would be expected since he was not just any prophet, but the very “Son of God.”

Once we have the background knowledge of how God worked with prophets and what Jesus had been teaching throughout his ministry, we can see what the apostles had in mind when they said, “you know all things.” They simply meant that God told Jesus whatever he needed to know; “all” that he needed to know. In this specific context, the fact that Jesus knew their question and answered it before they even asked caught them off guard and further confirmed to them that he was the Messiah and thus “came from God.”

[For more Jesus knowing all things and not doing anything on his own, see commentary on John 8:28, “I do nothing of myself.” For more on Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on the Holy Spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” Also see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Joh 16:31

**“Do you believe now?”** Grammatically, in both Aramaic and Greek, this sentence can either be a statement or a question. Translated as a statement it would be something like, “You believe now” (cf. CJB, GW, NIV84). Translated as a question it would be something like, “Do you now believe?” (ESV, HCSB, KJV, NASB, NET, NIV2011). It is the context that determines whether Jesus made a statement or asked a question, and in this case, the context is clear that he asked a question.

Starting in John 14:1, Jesus had been trying to tell his apostles that he must go away to the Father. These are the same apostles who could not grasp that he was going to die, no matter how often or clearly he told them. Since they did not know about his death, they certainly could not understand that he was going to ascend to heaven and be with the Father. It seems that Jesus told them so that they might understand at least part of what he was saying, but especially so that after his ascension they would remember that he had told them about it.

Evidence that the apostles did not understand what Jesus was telling them is throughout the account. After Jesus said he was going to prepare a place for them, Thomas said, “Lord, we do not know where you are going” (John 14:5). A little later in the conversation Philip spoke up and said, “Show us the Father, and it is enough for us” (John 14:8). Other statements revealing that the apostles did not understand what Jesus was talking about are in John 14:22 and 16:17-18, culminating in them saying to each other: “We do not understand what he is saying” (John 16:18). At that point Jesus tried one last time to tell them he was going to the Father, but he put the emphasis of his comments on the subject of asking and receiving, God’s love, and his coming from God (John 16:19-28). At that point, the apostles said they understood, but what they understood was not that Jesus was going away to be with God, but rather that “you [Jesus] came from God” (John 16:30).

Jesus was no doubt pleased that his apostles understood that he came from God, but was not fooled into thinking they understood about his ascension into heaven. Therefore, it was natural for him to challenge their confidence and try to keep them exploring what his words meant, which he did by asking the question, “Do you believe now?” We know from the Gospel records that Jesus was correct and the apostles still did not believe Jesus would die, be raised from the dead, or ascend into heaven.

Since at this Last Supper the apostles did not know what Jesus meant when he told them he was going to the Father, it is certain that a few days earlier when they had asked him for signs of his “coming,” they did not mean his coming back to earth from heaven. They were referring to his “coming” (see commentary on Matt. 24:3).

Joh 16:32

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“each one for himself.”** The Greek word *eis* in the phrase is the “*eis* of advantage,” with the sense being, each one for his own advantage. The Greek phrase does not include the word “home,” as many English versions have, and “home” is not accurate, unless it was taken as “the place they were staying.” Most of the apostles had their homes in the Galilee, yet they stayed around Jerusalem. However, they were so afraid that it is not likely that they went to where they were commonly known to be staying, but rather would have found a temporary place to be secluded and protected. Jesus said that the disciples would be “scattered,” and that is no doubt what happened when Jesus was arrested. The disciples “fled” (Matt. 26:56; Mark 14:50), but not as a group. In the panic of the moment, it was each man for himself. Although the Gospels do not track exactly where the disciples went, Peter and another disciple followed Jesus to the house of the High Priest. No doubt over the next days the disciples assembled again, and were together when Jesus came to them (John 20:19). The *Complete Jewish Bible* has, “each one looking out for himself,” which sums up the meaning very well.

Joh 16:33

**“In the world you will have hardships.”** It is helpful for Christians to really “get” this lesson. This was the last thing that Jesus said to his apostles at the Last Supper. Many Christians think or act as if hardship in life is abnormal and so they are angry or depressed or both in life. The world is a fallen world under the sway of the Devil (1 John 5:19), and life is difficult with many hardships. Paul told his people the same thing Jesus did, and taught “that we cannot avoid going through many hardships on our way into the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:12 that everyone who lives a godly life will experience persecution. The Bible tells us in many places to be thankful, but that is not because the world is naturally full of things to be thankful for, but because there are things to be thankful for and Christians must make up their minds to focus on those things and not be negative and complaining.

**“I have overcome the world**.” This is the prophetic perfect idiom, when something that will happen in the future is spoken of as already being accomplished (see commentary on Eph. 2:6, “raised…seated”).

**John Chapter 17**

Joh 17:1

**“and lifting up his eyes to heaven, said, “Father.”** The prayer in chapter 17 is the closing event of the Last Supper, which started in chapter 13. It is not the same as the prayer he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus’ prayer, which takes up all of John chapter 17, can be broken into 4 sections: John 17:1-5; John 17:6-19; John 17:20-24; and John 17:25-26. In the first section, Jesus addresses God about the work that God has done and will do through Christ. Jesus said that he had glorified God here on earth, and now asks for God to glorify him. In the second section, John 17:6-19, Jesus prays for disciples who were with him and the apostles who were right there with him at the Last Supper. The main point of his prayer is that the disciples be holy and are safe. In the third section, John 17:20-24, Jesus prays for those disciples who, in the near or distant future, will believe in him. Jesus prays that they will be one and in union with both Christ and God and that they will be with Christ and see his glory. In the fourth section, John 17:25-26, Jesus reviews a few of the accomplishments of his ministry, and states that he will continue to make God known so that the love that God had for Jesus can be in his disciples as well.

After the prayer, Jesus leaves the city of Jerusalem with his apostles and goes to the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:1)

**“Father, the hour has come.”** Jesus was astutely aware of the timing of events that had to occur for him to fulfill the different aspects of his ministry. At the very beginning of his ministry, at the wedding at Cana, he told his mother the time had not come (John 2:4). In fact, earlier in John we are told many times that the hour had not come (John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). Then, at the last week of his life at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem, his hour had come (John 12:23; John 13:1). Throughout his ministry Jesus was aware of what needed to be done and when. For example, he knew he was going to be the real Passover Lamb that year and die for the sins of humankind, so he needed to be arrested at the right time. So at the Last Supper, he told Judas to do what he was doing—betraying Jesus—more quickly (John 13:27). Here Jesus speaks of the hour that was his purpose from birth, to die for the sins of humankind and redeem them from death.

**“Glorify your Son so that the Son can glorify you.”** Jesus prays, “Glorify your Son so that the Son can glorify you.” It is important to note that Jesus did not want to be glorified for his own benefit but for God’s. Good and godly people don’t do things that are only for their own good and advantage. God’s glorifying the Son would be reflected back upon Himself. If a great person is a benefactor to someone else and does something wonderful for that other person, it results in glorifying the benefactor. So too here, for in glorifying the Son the goodness and grace of God are shown, and in that sense, the Son then glorifies the Father.

Joh 17:2

**“just as you gave him authority over all flesh.”** This is the prophetic perfect idiom, in which something that will happen is spoken of as if it had already happened, adding certainty to the statement. The prophetic perfect idiom is common in the Semitic languages and is very common in the Old Testament. In this case, Jesus’ use of the idiom reveals God’s pre-determination to rule through His Son, and give the Son all authority in heaven and earth. God’s predetermination to rule through His Son shows up in prophecies in the Old Testament, so Jesus was well aware of God’s intention (e.g., Ps. 2:6-8; 66:4; 72:8-11; Dan. 2:35, 44; 7:13-14; Zech. 9:10). The prophetic perfect idiom is also used in John 17:11.

[For more information on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6]

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. When people die, they are dead in every way: body, soul, and spirit. People will only come to life again at the resurrection of the dead. (John 5:25-29).

[For more information about dead people being dead in every way until they are raised from the dead by Jesus Christ, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more information on why the REV translation uses the phrase, “life in the Age to Come” instead of “eternal life,” see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.” For information on the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, when the righteous dead will be raised, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Joh 17:3

**“this is life in the age *to come*, that they know you...and Jesus Christ.”** This conclusion here in John 17:3 follows directly from the previous verse, John 17:2. If God is going to give all authority in heaven and earth to His Son, Jesus, then it follows that life in the age to come would be as a result of knowing both of them. Unstated here, but stated elsewhere, is that it is Jesus Christ who will raise the dead on resurrection day (e.g. John 5:25-29).

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins after a saved person is raised from the dead, technically in the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more information about dead people being dead in every way until they are raised from the dead by Jesus Christ, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more information on why the REV translation uses the phrase “life in the Age to Come” instead of “eternal life,” see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.” For information on the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, when the righteous dead will be raised, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“that they know you.”** Not “that they may (or might) know you.”[[166]](#footnote-24518) Also, it is not that they “know about” you, the demons “know about” God but do not “know” God in the sense that they understand and believe Him. People need to do more than “know about” God, they need to know Him in a way that indicates they understand, believe, and obey Him.

**“the only true God.”** This is similar to John 5:44 and is one of the many places that give good evidence that Jesus Christ is not God. When Jesus prayed and called God “the only true God,” he was simply acknowledging a truth that was clearly stated in the Old Testament: For example, Nehemiah 9:6-7 says, “You are Yahweh, even you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens with all their army, the earth and all things that are on it, the seas and all that is in them, and you preserve them all. The army of heaven worships you. You are Yahweh, the God who chose Abram” (cf. Ps. 86:10; Isa. 37:16; 43:11; 45:5). Yahweh is the Father and “the God,” the “only true God” that Jesus recognized and prayed to.

The Trinity, the doctrine that “God” is both three and one at the same time is mysterious, incomprehensible, and unbiblical. It is never described in the Bible and attempts to come close to explaining it have to use language that is not in the Bible. For example, that Jesus is said to be both “100% human and 100% God” is both unbiblical and self-contradictory. Also, the Trinity doctrine says there are three “persons” in the one God, but then Trinitarians are quick to state that “persons” does not actually mean “persons” in the ordinary sense, but then they cannot exactly define “person” in the Trinitarian sense. That is because a “person” is an individual, but the “persons” in the Trinity are not individuals in the ordinary sense, but are part of “the one God,” so they are persons but not persons at the same time.

Trinitarians say that God is “one what and three whos,” but that is, as stated above, both incomprehensible and unbiblical. When we read the Bible, God always speaks of Himself as one being. He uses “I” and “me” and “my,” and never refers to Himself as an “essence” or “nature.” The same is true of Jesus. John 17:3 is clear, succinct, and understandable: God is “the only true God,” and He “sent” His Son, Jesus Christ, who is a human being (1 Tim. 2:5).

[For more information on Jesus not being God in the flesh, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” Also, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”** The Greek text places “Jesus Christ” at the end of the verse for emphasis and literally reads: “and whom you have sent: Jesus Christ.” However, that reads awkwardly in English. The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts. But it emphasizes the fact that Jesus is not God, but was sent by God.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 17:4

**“I glorified you.”** The Greek phrase can mean either “I give glory to you” or “I reveal your glory.” Although both translations are true, the primary one in this context seems to be that Jesus glorified God, because in this prayer he said he glorified God by doing the work that God gave him to do.

**“by accomplishing the work.”** The first and second phrases in the verse are linked together. Newman and Nida write: “These are not two separate actions [“I glorified you” and “I finished the work”]. Rather, the second clause indicates the means by which God’s glory was revealed, that is, ‘by finishing the work you gave me to do.’”[[167]](#footnote-14360)

Joh 17:5

**“And now, Father, glorify me together with yourself with the glory that I had with you before the world was.”** God had planned to glorify His Son, and now that the time of Jesus’ death was drawing near, Jesus prayed that God would bring His plan to fruition.

This verse has been used to prove that Jesus is God because of the phrase, “that I had with you before the world was.” There is no question that Jesus “existed” before the world began. But did he exist literally as a person or in God’s foreknowledge, “in the mind of God”? Both Christ and those called to be in the Body of Christ, the Church, existed in God’s foreknowledge before being alive. Christ was part of the intention of God from the beginning, and he became flesh only when he was conceived. It is Trinitarian bias that causes people to read an actual physical existence into this verse rather than a figurative existence in the mind of God. When 2 Timothy says that each Christian was given grace “before the ages began” (2 Tim. 1:9), no one tries to prove that we were actually alive with God back then. Everyone acknowledges that we were “in the mind of God,” i.e., in God’s foreknowledge. The same is true of Jesus Christ. His glory was “with the Father” before the world began, and in John 17:5 he prayed that it will come into manifestation.

Jesus was praying that the glory the Old Testament foretold he would have, and which had been in the mind of God the Father since before the world began, would come into concretion. Trinitarians, however, teach that Jesus was praying about glory he had with God many years before his birth, and they assert that this proves he had access to the mind and memory of his “God nature.” However, if, as a man, Jesus “remembered” being in glory with the Father before the world began, then he would have known he was God in every sense. He would not have thought of himself as a “man” at all. If he knew he was God, he would not and could not have been “tempted in every way just as we are” because nothing he encountered would have been a “real” temptation to him. He would have had no fear and no thought of failure. There is no real sense in which Scripture could actually say he was “made like his brothers in every way” (Heb. 2:17) because he would not have been like us at all. Furthermore, Scripture says that Jesus “grew” in knowledge and wisdom. That would not really be true if Christ had access to a God-nature with infinite knowledge and wisdom.

John 17:5 is a great example of a verse that demonstrates the need for clear thinking concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. The verse can clearly be interpreted in a way that is honest and biblically sound, and shows that Christ was a man, but was in the foreknowledge of God as God’s plan for the salvation of mankind. It can also be used the way Trinitarians use it: to prove the Trinity. However, when it is used that way, it reveals a Christ that we as Christians cannot truly identify with. We do not have a God-nature to help us when we are tempted or are in trouble or lack knowledge or wisdom. The Bible says that Christ can “sympathize with our weakness” because he was “tempted in every way, *just as we are*” (Heb. 4:15). The thrust of that verse is very straightforward. *Because* Christ was just like we are, *and* was tempted in every way that we are, he can sympathize with us. However, if he was not “just as we are,” then he would not be able to sympathize with us. We assert that making Christ a God-man makes it impossible to really identify with him.

We can tell that Jesus was speaking of being in God’s foreknowledge from the immediate context. Just two verses earlier, in John 17:3, Jesus said that the Father was “the only true God.” Jesus could not have prayed that while at the same time thinking he was God too. Furthermore, Jesus spoke again about things in God’s foreknowledge in John 17:22 when he said that he had given the glory from God to his disciples. But that had not happened yet either (see commentary on John 17:22). Both the glory of Jesus and the glory that his disciples would have was in the foreknowledge of God, and Jesus prayed about it in his prayer. The proper interpretation of John 17 is simple and biblical. Jesus knew he was the promised Messiah and Son of God, and God had spoken of his glory many centuries earlier. Now, on the eve of his arrest, he prayed to his Father, the “only true God,” and asked for God’s plan to glorify His Son to come to pass.

It also should be noted that Trinitarians have quoted Isaiah 42:8 which says that God will not give His glory to another, to show that Jesus must be God since Jesus had glory from God. The argument is fallacious for a number of reasons. The context of Isaiah 42 is about idols, and that God will not share His glory with idols. The verse, taken in context, is not saying God will never give any glory to those who obey Him, because He clearly does give glory to those who obey him (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7); it is saying that God will never give His “one-of-a-kind” glory to anyone else. Furthermore, John 17:22 says that Jesus gave the glory he got from His Father to his disciples. So, clearly, God can give glory to humans without turning them into God. A distinction must be made between God giving glory to others (which is biblical) and God giving His glory to others (which is unbiblical; cf. Isa. 42:8).

[For information on why this glory that Jesus had is not God’s glory, see commentary on Isa. 42:8.]

Jesus’ prayer in John 17 sets a wonderful example for us as Christians. He poured out his heart to his Father, “the only true God” (John 17:3), and prayed that the prophecies of the Old Testament about him would be fulfilled.

[For more information on John 17:5, see *The Racovian Catechism*, written in Polish in 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818; reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, 144-46. Also, Don Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*, 424-25.]

Joh 17:6

**“I revealed your name.”** In this context, “your name” is the same as “you.” The “name” of God was often used as a circumlocution for God Himself. It was common that the name in some way represented the person themself.

**“to the people whom you gave me.”** Jesus recognized and acknowledged the primacy of God. Jesus was God’s Son and servant, as we all are, whereas God is “the only true God” (John 17:3). Jesus’ disciples believed God and God entrusted them to Jesus.

**“and they have kept your word.”** Jesus’ disciples had kept the word of God. Jesus knew that in these final hours they would be confused and desert him at his arrest, but he also knew they would be back, which of course they were.

Joh 17:8

**“for the words that you gave me I have given to them.”** Jesus said over and over that what he said and taught came from the Father (cf. John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:16, 28, 29; 12:49, 50; 14:24; see commentary on John 8:28).

Joh 17:9

**“I am not asking on behalf of the world.”** The only valuable prayer for the world is that it turn to God and be saved. However, that is not what Jesus is doing at this time. Later he will pray for the people of the world to hear the message spoken by his disciples and believe (John 17:20).

Joh 17:10

**“I am glorified in them.”** That is, Jesus is glorified in connection with the disciples; in what they do and believe. The disciples glorify Christ. The “in” here is the Greek static “in,” and can mean “in connection with,” “in association with,” “in union with” (see commentary on Eph. 1:3, “in *union with* Christ”). When we follow and obey Christ, we glorify Christ. Although some translations have “I am glorified by them,” that can give the wrong impression, and seem to indicate that Jesus is referring to the disciples openly praising and glorifying Christ. While praising Christ is certainly glorifying him, that Christ is glorified “in” us is deeper than us praising him, it is that Jesus is glorified “in connection” with us in the way a parent might be glorified by a child who was living the kind of life that the parent taught the child to live. When we obey God and follow Jesus we are glorifying him.

Joh 17:11

**“And I am no longer in the world.”** This is another example of the prophetic perfect idiom in John 17 (cf. John 17:2). Jesus was about to be no longer in the world, and that was so certain that Jesus spoke it in the past tense.

[For more information on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“Holy Father.”** This address is only used here in the Bible, and it sets up some following verses (John 17:17-19), in which Jesus speaks of making the disciples holy and he making himself holy. It is a strange concept to many people that we can make ourselves holy, but that is exactly what we do when we obey God and follow His guidance. Born-again Christians are holy by nature, and then have to work to get their flesh lined up with the holy nature they have due to the internal presence of the gift of holy spirit (see commentary on Phil. 1:1).

In this prayer in John 17, Jesus uses two titles for God that are not used anywhere else in the Bible. Here in John 17:11, he uses “Holy Father,” and in John 17:25 he prays, “O righteous Father.”

**“keep them safe.”** The Greek word translated by the phrase “keep them safe” is tēreō (#5083 τηρέω), and it means to guard, take care of, watch over, attend to. It is also used of keeping a person in the state that they are in. Jesus knew that terrible times were coming, and he prayed to God to keep his disciples safe and that they would not stray from the Faith. This is an earnest and heartfelt prayer, and one that needs to continue to be prayed today.

**“so that they can be one, just as we *are*.”** This verse should have ended the Trinitarian debate about John 10:30, in which Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.” Here in John 17:11, Jesus confirms that he and the Father are “one” but has requested “that they can be one” just as God and Christ are. Since it is obvious that Jesus would not be praying so that every believer can be part of the Trinity, it is then equally obvious that “one” means one in purpose.

Joh 17:12

**“perished.”** Judas had not yet hanged himself, but he would the next morning (Matt. 27:1-5). Jesus speaks of his death in the prophetic perfect, as he does with a couple of things in this prayer (cf. John 17:11, 22). Jesus likely knew from both Scripture and revelation that Judas would kill himself, but also he knew that Judas’ ultimate future was everlasting death. Because the death of Judas was so imminent, the prophetic perfect is certainly appropriate.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6. For more on unsaved people being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not “burning in hell forever,” see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“son of destruction.”** This is a literal translation of the Greek, *huios tēs apōleias*, composed of the word for “son” (#5207 υἱός) and “destruction” (#684 ἀπώλεια) in the genitive case. It is the genitive of character—he is described as a son characterized by destruction, in this case, his destructive behavior. Judas’ character came first, then the consequences of his character; first he was a son of destruction, then accordingly he went to destruction. In other words, this title does not describe how he was *first* to be destroyed and was thus a “son of destruction,” but that he was a son of destruction and thus to be destroyed because of his behavior and rejection of God.[[168]](#footnote-22144) Thus, in actuality, the idea of “son of destruction” referred to both Judas’ behavior and then to his ultimate future destruction, with the latter meaning having the most emphasis. Many versions add “the one doomed” (NIV) or “the one destined” (NET, NJB, NRSV), but these words are not in the Greek text.

It was a common Semitic idiom to refer to an aspect of one’s character by referring to him as the “son of” some quality. Thus, we have “son of eighty years” which means someone 80 years old (Exod. 7:7 YLT); “son of stripes” is someone deserving to be beaten (Deut. 25:2); “sons of rebellion” (Num. 17:10); “sons of the army” are soldiers (2 Chron. 25:13 YLT); “sons of the pledges” are hostages (2 Kings 14:14 YLT); “sons of death” are those who are worthy of death or are going to die (Psalm 79:11 YLT); “son of Gehenna” (Matt. 23:15); “son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3); “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36); “son of the Devil” (Acts 13:10); this custom even applies to animals: “son of the herd” (Gen. 18:7 YLT), and objects: “sons of the flame” for sparks (Job 5:7). The exact meaning of the idiom “son of X” has to be determined from the context, as the examples above show.

The word “destruction” is commonly used in the New Testament to refer to the future destruction in the Lake of Fire (e.g., Matt. 7:13; Acts 8:20; Rom. 9:22; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 1 Tim. 6:9; Heb. 10:39; 2 Pet. 2:1; 3:7; Rev. 17:8, 11), and, as stated above, Judas’ final destruction in Gehenna is the primary meaning.

**“resulting in the Scripture being fulfilled.”** This phrase should not be translated as a purpose clause, as most translations do: “so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.” This would have the consequence of making Judas intentionally lost for the purpose of fulfilling a prophecy about him. But the text in no way requires such a reading. In the Greek it is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood clause, which could be read to indicate a purpose or simply the result with no intention. Here it would be a result clause; Judas of his own free will was lost, resulting in the Scripture being fulfilled, his being lost was not for the purpose of filling Scripture.

Several scriptures apply to the fact that Jesus would be betrayed by a close associate (Ps. 41:9; 69:25; 109:8).

[For more on Judas, see Acts 1:20 and commentary on John 13:18, “let the Scripture be fulfilled.” For an explanation of purpose and result clauses, see Word Study: “Hina.”]

Joh 17:13

**“so that they have my joy made full in them.”** The joy that Jesus had was directly the result of his obedient lifestyle focused on God. Jesus said, “I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:29). Now Jesus prays that his apostles and disciples would have the kind of joy that Jesus has, which will come as they had the desire to obey and focus on God that Jesus had. The kind of full and rich joy that Jesus had does not come from just “getting saved.” While there is joy in being saved, there is more joy available from getting saved and living an obedient lifestyle. When a person truly understands the rewards that they will receive in the future for living an obedient lifestyle, they can have joy in the midst of difficulties and persecution, just as Jesus did.

Joh 17:14

**“and the world has hated them.”** This statement has a note of the prophetic perfect in it, because up until now, the focus of the evil world has been on Jesus Christ, and the apostles and disciples have for the most part been spared (see commentary on John 16:4). However, once Jesus ascended, the hatred of the Devil and his minions will be directed at believers.

**“because they are not of the world.”** The Devil wants everyone to think and act like he does. The Devil does not tolerate “diversity,” especially if it involves godly thinking and living. The world hates believers even though they do not deserve it. Believers who stand against persecution are greatly helped by knowing that their future reward is great (cf. Matt. 5:10-12).

Joh 17:15

**“I am not asking that you take them out of the world.”** In this prayer, John 17:15 combined with John 17:18 (“I sent them into the world”) states in different words what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, “go and make disciples of all the nations.” The only effective way to make disciples in all the nations is to go to the nations. This can be mentally and physically challenging. The world is a difficult place and it is made more difficult for believers because the world hates believers. This has caused some believers to retreat from the world, which is done in various ways. While it is comforting to be alone with God in prayer, song, and study, a person who pursues that lifestyle needs to be sure that is what the Lord wants for his or her life. Living out among the people can be difficult, but it is the most effective way to make converts.

**“Wicked One.”** The Greek is *ponēros* (#4190 πονηρός), which BDAG describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’” *Ponēros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun).

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time, he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness.

[For more on substantives, see commentary on Matt. 5:37. For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“but that you keep them safe.”** Here in John 17:15, for a second time, Jesus prays that God will keep the believers safe (cf. John 17:11).

Joh 17:17

**“Make them holy.”** Being holy in the sight of God is a team effort. The believer has to really want to be holy, that is, be different from the world, being separated, by being obedient to God, and God, for His part, will help the believer fulfill that desire. The Bible says, “but as the one who called you is holy, you yourselves must also be holy in all your way of life” (1 Pet. 1:15). And this use of “holy” is not just “holy enough to be saved,” but truly “holy,” truly like God. We believers should make it our goal to so immerse ourselves in the Word of God and the things of God that we become holy and like God in every aspect of our lives.

**“by the truth.”** The Greek word translated “by” is the preposition *en* (ἐν), and it can mean “in,” “by,” and even “through.” Although the translation “by the truth” is certainly true, the Greek is not just communicating that a person is made holy “by” the truth, as if the truth were a hammer pounding in a nail. Rather, the preposition *en* indicates that the person is “in relation” to the truth, or “in connection” with the truth. It is as we are “in” the truth, in a relationship with it, submerged in it, if you will, that people truly become holy in the sight of God. And so, the word “through” can also be used to convey this sense of the preposition *en.*

**“your word is truth.”** The Word of God—the Bible—is truth when it has been accurately transmitted from generation to generation and the text is accurately translated. It is by obedience to the Word of God, the truth, that people become holy.

Joh 17:18

**“Just as you sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 17:19

**“by the truth.”** The Greek reads, “in the truth,” or more literally, “in truth,” but the phrase makes more sense with the definite article, which it has in John 17:17. Although the definite article “the” is not in the text in this verse, it does not have to be. In Greek, a preposition can make the noun it modifies definite without there being a definite article in the phrase. Whether the noun is definite or indefinite can usually be determined from the context, at which point it can be translated in the best way to fit the receptor language.[[169]](#footnote-17547) For an explanation of the phrase “in the truth,” see commentary on John 17:17.

Joh 17:20

**“*will* believe.”** In the Greek text, the verb translated “believe” is a present participle, but in this context, it has a future force to it, which many modern English versions supply in the text. It is important for believers to pray for unbelievers to be saved, just as Jesus did here in John 17:20.

**“through their word.”** Jesus taught his disciples, and they in turn taught others, who in turn believed because of what Jesus’ disciples said to them.

Joh 17:21

**“in *union with* me and I in *union with* you.”** See commentary on John 10:38, “the Father is in *union with* with me, and I am in *union with* the Father.”

**“so that the world may believe.”** When Christians stand together in love even when we differ on certain things, that is a powerful witness to unbelievers to get them to turn from the world to the Word and be saved. Love and peace are magnets to people because every decent person wants to be loved and have a peaceful life. Of course, the Devil knows that too, and so he salts the Church with pretend Christians, people who say they are Christians but are not, and those pretend Christians cause much division and havoc in the Church. In many cases, it is the pretend Christians who are hurtful to both believers and non-believers and keep non-believers from the Faith.

**“that you sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 17:22

**“the glory that you have given me, I have given to them.”** What is the glory that Jesus is speaking of here? The scholars differ in their opinions, some saying it is the glory of everlasting life, some saying it is the glory to manifest the power of God by miracles and such, and still others saying it has to do with the great commission; that Jesus was given the glorious task of reconciling people to God so they could live forever, and his disciples have that glorious task also. It is quite possible that all three of those explanations are correct and that the “glory” Jesus speaks of is multifaceted. However, the context and flow of John 17, and reading John 17:22-24 as a unit, indicates that the primary meaning of the glory here is the future glory that Jesus and the believers will have with God.

When Jesus speaks of the glory that he has been given, it is an example of the prophetic perfect idiom, that something that is future is spoken of as if it is in the past to emphasize the fact that it absolutely will occur, the act is “as good as done.” In the prophetic perfect idiom, things that will exist in the future are spoken of as if they already existed. Literally understood, the verse would read, “And the glory that you will give me, I will give to them.”

When it comes to the fullness of salvation and future glory, we know Jesus had not yet given the glory that he had to his disciples because he himself did not have it yet. Earlier in his prayer, Jesus prayed, “glorify me” (John 17:5), and he prayed that prayer specifically because he had not been glorified yet. Jesus was glorified when he was raised from the dead. So when Jesus prayed to the Father to be glorified, neither he nor his disciples were glorified yet. Many biblical passages, especially in the Old Testament, use the prophetic perfect idiom and Jesus does so here in John 17:22.

Another proof that Jesus was using the prophetic perfect idiom in John 17:22, is that when he says, “I have given to them,” the “them” is his disciples, but reading John 17:20-22 shows that his “disciples” were not just the apostles and disciples who were alive at the time, but “those who *will* believe in me through their word” (John 17:20), in other words, people who would become disciples years in the future. Jesus could not give glory to people who did not exist yet.

John 17 is a magnificent prayer, and in it, Jesus prayed that the glory that God, in His foreknowledge, planned for him to have would be given to him, and that he would then give it to his followers, even followers who had not been born yet.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Joh 17:23

**“so that the world can know that you sent me.”** What Jesus says here in John 17:23 is very similar to what he said a couple of verses earlier in John 17:21.

The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 17:25

**“O righteous Father.”** This is the only time in the Bible this title for God appears. This is the second time in this prayer that Jesus uses a title for God that only occurs here in the Bible. In John 17:11, Jesus used the title, “Holy Father.” In the context of what Jesus is praying for, the righteousness of God stands out. He loves the world and has done what He can to ensure the people of the world who want to be saved will be saved through the actions of Jesus Christ and the disciples’ message about him to the world.

**“these knew that you sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 17:26

**“And I made known to them your name.”** The phrase “your name” is a circumlocution for “you.” Christ made known God. At this same Last Supper, Jesus said that if you had seen him you had seen the Father (John 14:9).

The consistent theme throughout the book of John is that Jesus reveals God the Father to the world (John 1:18; 9:3; 14:9; 15:15; 17:6, 26). See also commentary on John 14:9.

**John Chapter 18**

Joh 18:1

**“he went out.”** Jesus and his disciples had gotten ready to leave the Last Supper in John 14:31 (cf. Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 22:39; John 14:31), but Jesus had continued to teach (John chapters 15 and 16), and then pray (chapter 17). Now he goes out of the Upper Room, and out of the walled city of Jerusalem, and heads east across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Joh 18:2

**“also knew the place.”** This verse tells us that Jesus often met with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, and that is one reason that Judas knew where to find Jesus. It seems likely that Jesus may have even said something earlier about going to the garden, just to make sure Judas knew where to find him. Jesus knew Judas was going to betray him and knew why Judas left the Last Supper (John 13:11; John 13:27). So it would have been easy for Jesus to avoid being arrested: just go somewhere other than Gethsemane. But then, as he himself said, “How then would the scriptures be fulfilled?” (Matt. 26:54). So the fact that Jesus went to Gethsemane shows that Jesus deliberately placed himself into the hands of the enemy so he could suffer and die on our behalf.

Joh 18:3

**“*Roman* cohort.”** Not necessarily the traditional cohort of one-tenth of a legion, or 600 men. At this time period, the word “cohort” was sometimes used of a representative number of a cohort; a part of a cohort. But they were Roman soldiers, not just the guard of the High Priest. They were under the command of their “chiliarch,” which, like “centurion,” is an official military rank (a Tribune, or an officer over roughly 1,000 men) but because the term is considered obscure to most readers, it is translated as “military commander” in many versions (cf. John 18:12). These Roman soldiers would have come from the Antonia fortress.

D. A Carson writes: “Only John specifies that, in addition to bringing the Jewish officials, Judas Iscariot also guided *a detachment of soldiers*. The Greek (*tēn speiran*) makes it clear that these were not Jews, but ‘*the cohort* (of Roman auxiliaries)’. A full auxiliary cohort had a paper strength of 1,000 men, i.e., 760 foot soldiers and 240 cavalry, and was led by a ‘chiliarch’ (lit. ‘leader of a thousand’, often translated ‘tribune’, v.12, ‘commander’). In practice a cohort normally numbered 600 men; but in any case, the *speira* can refer to a ‘maniple’ of only 200 men, and it is not necessary to assume that an entire maniple was present. Roman auxiliary troops were usually stationed at Caesarea, but during the feast days they were garrisoned in the fortress of Antonia to the northwest of the temple complex.”[[170]](#footnote-11807)

To get the Roman soldiers, the priests would have gone to Pilate, or even just to the chiliarch himself in Antonia under pretense of stopping a fomenting revolution. Some commentators think the entire group is Jewish, but this is not likely for a number of reasons. First, the vocabulary, especially chiliarch, is specific to the Roman army. Second, the cohort and the Temple police are mentioned as separate groups. If they were all Temple police, saying it once would have been enough. Third, the Temple police had already been sent to arrest Jesus once, and failed (John 7:45). The priests would take no chance this time, especially after they paid all that money to Judas to set the arrest up. After the mobs had proclaimed him the Messiah (a great crowd yelled “Hosanna” (Save!), and called him the King of Israel; John 12:12, 13), it would not have been difficult to persuade the Romans to arrest Jesus to keep a riot from occurring.

**“*Temple* police.”** The Greek word *hupēretai* originally referred to the “under-rowers” in a galley, then it was generalized to mean any servant or underling under a superior. Thus, it has a broad usage, and one that may or may not be demeaning, depending on the context. It applies to servants in different capacities: prison guard (Matt. 5:25), minister of Christ (Luke 1:2; 1 Cor. 4:1); Synagogue attendant (Luke 4:20), etc. Here, it applies to a police force of sorts that was dedicated to keeping the peace in the Temple, so “Temple” is supplied from the context and put in italics.[[171]](#footnote-31212)

Joh 18:4

**“knowing everything that was about to happen to him.”** Much of what Jesus knew came from his intimate knowledge of the Old Testament prophecies about him. He also likely knew much from the culture and how the Jews and Romans treated criminals. However, it seems that Jesus certainly learned specific things by revelation.

**“Who are you looking for?”** The Gospel of John differs significantly from the other three Gospels on how Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane. Matthew 26:48-50; Mark 14:44-46; and Luke 22:47, 48; all tell about Judas kissing Jesus to point him out, but do not mention Jesus personally identifying himself to the crowd who came to arrest him. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, gives the record of Jesus identifying himself but does not mention the kiss. Commentators are divided as to whether the kiss came before or after Jesus identified himself. We agree with R. C. H. Lenski that the kiss had to come first.[[172]](#footnote-25842)

For one thing, if Jesus stepped forward and identified himself, there would have been no need for the kiss. On the other hand, even if Judas kissed Jesus first, one can see how the Jews and Romans still may not have been sure they had the right man, but Jesus’ stepping forward and saying, “I am he” would take away all their doubt. Also, in John, Judas is standing with the soldiers, not with the apostles (John 18:5). It seems certain that after Judas kissed Jesus, he would step back into the crowd of soldiers and police, for his own protection if nothing else. At that point, Jesus, wanting to ensure the safety of the other disciples, stepped forward and boldly declared that he was the one they were looking for and that they should let the other disciples go (John 18:8).

Joh 18:9

**“*...*with the result that the word he had spoken was fulfilled.”** The Greek is *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose-result clause (see Word Study: “Hina”). Jesus said “let the men go” with the *intention* of fulfilling his words in John 17:12, and it also *resulted* in them being fulfilled.

**“Of those whom you have given me I did not lose one.”** Several times Jesus made statements to the effect that he would not lose anyone who was given to him by God (cf. John 6:39, 10:28, 29; 17:12). Several layers of interpretation need to be understood in order to get the full meaning of what Jesus said, and of John 18:9. The most obvious is that the context of John 18:9 is Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane and Jesus saying to the Jews and Roman soldiers who had come to arrest him, “…if you are looking for me, let these men go” (John 18:8). So Jesus told the Jews and Romans to arrest him but let the disciples go, which is in effect what happened, showing that Jesus’ words that he would not lose anyone whom God had given him came to pass in that instance.

It has been pointed out that when Jesus spoke about not losing people, such as in John 6:39, he was speaking in terms of not losing them from a spiritual point of view, but in John 18:9, the context is losing them from a physical point of view. The simple and straightforward answer to that observation is that it often happens when people use quotations in literature that they modify the quotation to fit the new circumstances, or else wrest the quotation from its original context and apply it in a new way. This happens both in secular literature and the Bible, and in fact, is very effectively used in modern advertising. When it comes to biblical quotations, even a short study of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament will show that very often the quotations are modified to fit new circumstances and/or they are used to import information or a perspective that the author wants brought into the new situation. Thus, it makes perfect sense that Jesus had said he would lose no one in the context of salvation, but that same idea of not losing anyone also applies to physical circumstances. Beyond that, it is possible that in the case of Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane, as Calvin, Luther, Stalker, Evans, Lenski, Hendriksen, and others have pointed out, Jesus may have known that at that point in time if the disciples were arrested and tortured as he was, it may have been too much for some of them to bear and they may indeed have turned from the faith and have been spiritually lost. Thus, the quotation is appropriate as it is used in John 18:9.

Another thing we must understand is the phrase “of those whom you have given me,” in light of biblical culture and idiomatic ways of speaking, and freedom of will. God cannot “give” someone to Christ and salvation against their will. God works with each and every person in different ways to get them to come to salvation, but ultimately it is the person’s decision. Each person whom God “gave” to Christ came to Christ of their own free will and made the choice to make him Lord and follow him. Jesus helped, taught, and worked with many people who did not ultimately believe. John 6 makes that point very clear.

Many people started following Jesus and became disciples as they traveled to see him, heard him teach, and saw him do miracle after miracle. However, in John 6, Jesus began to say that to really follow him and believe in him, a person had to eat his flesh and drink his blood, idioms taken from animal sacrifice that meant to be committed to, and fully partake of, what he was doing. That was too much for many of the people who claimed to be disciples, who actually just wanted to “come along for the show” with Jesus. So John 6:66 says, “From that time many of his disciples turned back, and did not walk anymore with him.” Jesus never “lost” those disciples—he never had them in the first place. They had never made a commitment to do what it took to really follow Jesus, and neither did Judas Iscariot.

Judas never really followed Jesus from his heart. He never gave himself to God, so God never was able to give Judas to Jesus. Jesus knew Judas was not committed from the very beginning, and yet chose Judas to be an apostle anyway, giving him the chance to believe. John 6:64 clearly implies that Judas did not believe, and says that even from the beginning Jesus knew Judas would betray him. Then in John 6:70, Jesus says he called Judas, even though he is a “devil.” We see Judas’ character and unbelief portrayed in the Four Gospels. He was greedy and instigated trouble for the woman who poured expensive ointment on Jesus (John 12:5). He stole the money that people gave to support Jesus (John 12:6). Ultimately, he betrayed Jesus for money—30 pieces of silver. It is important to understand this about Judas because in John 17:12 Jesus is praying and says that none of the people God gave him perished, but then adds, “but the son of destruction,” referring to Judas. If we do not understand that Judas never was one of those “given” to Jesus, then John 17:12 seems to contradict John 18:9. John 17:12 would say Jesus lost Judas, but John 18:9 would say he lost “none.” But when we read the full sentence, “Of those whom you have given me I did not lose one,” then we understand that Judas is excluded from this because he never was “given” to Jesus.

[For more on Calvinism and the teaching that people are saved by God’s choice, not their own, and a short rebuttal of Calvinism, see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.” For more on the biblical idiom behind the phrase “those whom you have given me,” see commentaries on John 6:37 and 6:44.]

Joh 18:11

**“Am I not to drink…”** The strong *ou mē* in the Greek has been left as a simple “not.”

**“drink the cup.”** “Drinking the cup” was a common idiom meaning to experience, whether that experience was good (cf. Ps. 16:5; 23:5; 116:13; Jer. 16:7) or bad (cf. Ps. 11:6; 75:8; Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15). See commentary on Matthew 20:22.

Joh 18:12

**“commander.”** The Greek word *chiliarchos* (#5506 χιλίαρχος) designates a specific rank, namely, a “chiliarch,” which is the rank of a commander of a cohort; it is equivalent to a Roman tribune. We might say, the platoon and the sergeant. Thus, the Romans not only sent soldiers, but the commander came along also.

Joh 18:13

**“And they led him to Annas first.”** The events of the last week of Jesus Christ’s life are spread throughout all Four Gospels, and different Gospels give different details, which is why we have to be familiar with all four Gospel records to properly reconstruct what happened that week. Every Gospel is written from a different point of view: Matthew portrays Jesus as a king, Mark as a servant, Luke as a man, and John portrays Jesus as the Son of God (for more about these four viewpoints, see commentary on Mark 1:1).

In the case of Jesus’ arrest, only the Gospel of John records Jesus being taken to Annas, and makes it clear that he was taken to Annas first. Annas had been the High Priest from AD 6-15, which meant Annas had been the High Priest when Jesus was in the Temple at 12 years old (Luke 2:41-52). At that time in the history of Israel, the High Priest was placed in office or removed from office by the Roman governor. Quirinius installed Annas, and Valerius Gratus deposed him, replacing him with Ismael son of Phabi. However, Annas’ power, wealth, and political adroitness were such that five of his sons, then his son-in-law Caiaphas, then a grandson, were all High Priests. Thus, there is little doubt that Annas was the power behind the High Priest’s office, and so Jesus was first taken to Annas before he was taken to Caiaphas.

It makes sense that the Gospel of John would record Jesus being taken to Annas, because although Annas did not have an official position, he had set the tone for the High Priesthood for many years, and in the epic struggle between good and evil and between Jewish religious traditions and truth, it would make sense that the Son of God would stand before the “real” spiritual authority in Israel and be rejected by him before being taken to the “official” authorities. From Annas, Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, the “official” High Priest (John 18:24).

The events of the last week of Jesus’ life are the pivotal events of history. According to the Western way time and days are reckoned, it was late Monday night when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, while according to Jewish reckoning of time, the arrest was on Tuesday, which had started as sunset (Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12). After that, the following events take place, culminating in Jesus’ death.

To understand the events from Jesus’ arrest to his death and be able to better see how they fit with the prophecies and prophetic shadows in the Old Testament, it is important to know that the Jewish day started at sunset, while the Roman day started at midnight (like our Western time does). This is important because if an event happened during daylight hours, for example, Jesus’ death around 3 p.m., then that event would be counted as being on the same day in both Jewish and Roman time. But if an event happened between sunset and midnight, it would be a day earlier in Roman time than in Jewish time, because sunset started a new day according to the Jewish reckoning of time. For example, if it is Wednesday at 3 p.m., then according to both Jewish and Roman reckoning, it is Wednesday. But when the sun sets, it becomes Thursday in Jewish time but it is still Wednesday by Roman counting. Then at midnight, the Roman day changes from Wednesday to Thursday, and the Jewish and Roman days are synchronized again. We have recorded the events below in both Jewish and Roman time.

**Monday, Nisan 12 (Roman and Jewish time)**

*In the evening*: In Jewish reckoning of time, the “evening” could be any time between 3 p.m. and sunset. The Bible does not give the hour that the Last Supper started, so we do not know that, it just says that Jesus and the apostles came to eat in the evening (Mark 14:17) and were eating in the evening (Matt. 26:20).

**Monday, Nisan 12 (Roman time); Tuesday, Nisan 13 (Jewish time)**

*Very late evening or early night*: The Last Supper comes to a close after sunset, and Jesus and his apostles go to the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:30, 36; Mark 14:26, 32; Luke 22:39; John 18:1). When Judas left the Last Supper it was already dark outside (John 13:30).

*Night*: Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12).

*Night*: Jesus was then taken “first” to Annas, who would have been at his own home inside a walled area that also probably contained Caiaphas’ house (John 18:13-23).

*Night (even perhaps after midnight, which would then be Tuesday Roman and Jewish time):* Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, the High Priest, who had called together many of the chief priests and rulers of the Jews (Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54-65; John 18:24-27).

**Tuesday, Nisan 13 (Roman and Jewish time)**

*Sunrise*: Jesus was taken to a dawn meeting of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. This meeting almost certainly was held in a chamber inside the Temple (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71).

*Early morning*: The Sanhedrin took Jesus to Pilate early in the morning, which was his first appearance before Pilate (Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1-6; John 18:28). Roman government started business early, and usually quit in the early afternoon. Pilate’s location in Jerusalem is hotly debated, but it is likely that he was in the Hasmonean Palace just west of the Temple area.

*Early morning or mid-morning*: Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, who would have been staying in the Western Palace built by Herod the Great (Luke 23:7-12). Herod Antipas is the “Herod” who had executed John the Baptist.

*Close to noon*: Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. This was the second trial of Jesus before Pilate, and it occurred about 12 noon (John 19:14). Matthew, Mark, and John do not clearly show that Jesus’ trial before Pilate was in two parts, an early morning part (Mark 15:1; John 18:28) and a later part (about 12 noon). They show the two trials as one record. (Actually, it seems that Matthew leaves the early trial out completely, and just focuses on the second trial before Pilate; John 19:14.) From the record in Luke, we can see that Barabbas was offered to be released as part of Pilate’s second trial (Luke 23:18), which is helpful in determining the chronology of the other Gospels. Also, Luke notes that at the start of the second trial, Pilate had to call together the chief priests again (Luke 23:13), which makes sense because they would have left his palace and gone about their duties when Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, except for a few who might have followed Jesus to Herod.

*Afternoon*: After Jesus’ second trial before Pilate, Pilate handed Jesus over to his soldiers. They took him to the Praetorium, gathered the entire Roman cohort, and then beat and tortured him. (*This torture by the Roman army lasted through the night until Wednesday morning*; Matt. 27:26-31; Mark 15:16-20. Luke and John omit Jesus’ overnight torture by the Roman cohort of soldiers).

**Wednesday, Nisan 14 (Roman and Jewish time)**

*Through the night:* “Wednesday” Roman time started at midnight while midnight was already Wednesday by Jewish time. The Roman soldiers started mocking and torturing Jesus on Tuesday afternoon, and continued through the night until Wednesday morning, when he was crucified.

*Morning*: Jesus was led out to be crucified about 9 a.m. (Mark 15:25), and about 12 noon a darkness came over the land that lasted until about 3 p.m., when Jesus died (Matt. 27:31-45; Mark 15:20-33; Luke 23:26-44; John 19:17-29)

*Afternoon*: Jesus died about 3 p.m. (Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46). The Gospel of John records events of Jesus’ crucifixion, and also his death (John 19:30), but does not give the time of day, as do the other Gospels.

*Late afternoon:* Joseph of Arimathea goes to Pilate and gets permission to take the body of Jesus (Matt. 27:58; Mark 15:43-45; Luke 23:52; John 19:38).

*Late afternoon:* Jesus is put in the tomb. Jesus’ burial happened in two stages. The first stage is when Joseph of Arimathea brings Jesus’ body to his own tomb, wraps it in clean linen cloth he had just bought, rolls the stone over the tomb door, and leaves (Matt. 27:59-60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53). Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching, and they saw that Jesus was not properly buried with spices as was the custom (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55).

*Late afternoon just before sunset and the start of the Special Sabbath:* In the second stage of Jesus’ burial, Nicodemus, who was likely supposed to work with Joseph of Arimathea but was late for some reason, came with his servants carrying 75 pounds of spices and gave Jesus a burial that was according to Jewish custom (John 19:39-40). Nicodemus would have had servants with him to help him carry the spices and also as a guard because 75 pounds of spices would have been extremely valuable. These men would have also helped him open the tomb, which Joseph and his servants had closed with the stone (Matt. 27:60; Mark 15:46). However, the women had already left and did not see what Nicodemus had done because the Sabbath was just about to begin (Luke 23:54-55; John 19:42). That fact explains why the women thought they needed to buy spices to anoint Jesus’ body.

**Thursday, Nisan 15 –** Jesus is dead in the grave. This is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was a Special Sabbath (Exod. 12:16-17; Lev. 23:6-8; Num. 28:19-25; John 19:31), so no work was allowed. Everyone had a day of rest.

*Morning:* The chief Priests (who were Sadducees) and the Pharisees go to Pilate and get a guard to watch the tomb for three days, thus Thursday, Friday, and Saturday (Matt. 27:62-66).

**Friday, Nisan 16 –** Jesus is dead in the grave.

*Morning* (*likely into the afternoon*): The women, not knowing that Nicodemus had properly buried Jesus with spices, went and bought spices and prepared them to properly bury Jesus (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56). It is after the Sabbath like Scripture says (Mark 16:1; after the Special Sabbath that was on Thursday) and also before the Sabbath like Scripture says (Luke 23:56; before the regular weekly Sabbath on Saturday). But the women could not take the spices to the tomb on Friday because of the Roman guard (Matt. 27:62-66).

**Saturday, Nisan 17**

*Late afternoon*: Jesus is raised from the dead just before sunset, having been three days and three nights in the grave (Matt. 12:40). [Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset—day one; Thursday to Friday sunset—day two; Friday to Saturday sunset—day three]. The stone did not need to be rolled back for Jesus to leave the tomb. The rolled-away stone was for the benefit of people to see, it was no hindrance to Jesus. Scripture makes it clear the stone was rolled away later, because when it was, the guards went to the Jews (Matt. 28:2-4, 11).

*Late afternoon as the weekly Saturday Sabbath was about to end:* Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” go to see the tomb. No other reason is given for their visit other than that they went “to see the tomb.” They did not bring any spices with them because it was the Sabbath day and it was unlawful to carry anything heavy on the Sabbath. No doubt they saw the guard while they were there. The earthquake and the guard leaving the tomb area came later (Matt. 28:1-2, 11).

**Sunday, Nisan 18**

*Morning*: Jesus first appeared in his resurrected body to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-16). Then he appeared to the other women (Matt. 28:8-9). [For more detail on this event, see commentary on Luke 24:1].

*Afternoon*: Jesus appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31. It was almost evening when they arrived Luke 24:28-29). They knew the women had seen angels who said Jesus was alive, but Jesus had not yet appeared to Peter when they left the other disciples and headed for Emmaus (Luke 24:34). Since Emmaus was less than a three-hour walk from Jerusalem, they likely left Jerusalem in the early afternoon.

*Afternoon*: Jesus appears to Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). The two men walking to Emmaus knew Jesus had appeared to the women, but not to Peter, so Jesus could have appeared to Peter just before he appeared to these two men, or afterward, while they were making the journey back to Jerusalem.

*Evening:* Jesus appears to the disciples behind locked doors (Luke 24:36; John 20:19).

[For more information about Jesus being crucified on Wednesday, not Friday, and being in the tomb, in the “the heart of the earth,” for three full days and three nights, and also for a day-by-day account of what happened between Jesus’ arrest and his resurrection, see commentary on Matt. 12:40. For information on the chronology of the four trials of Jesus on Tuesday (before the Jewish Sanhedrin, then Pilate, then Herod, then Pilate) see commentary on John 19:14, “the sixth hour.” For information on the two-stage burial of Jesus, first by Joseph of Arimathea and then by Nicodemus, see commentary on John 19:40. For information on the Hasmonean palace as the likely location of Jesus’ trial before Pilate, see commentary on Luke 23:7. For more information about which events are recorded in which Gospel, see commentary on Luke 23:50.]

Joh 18:14

**“Caiaphas who advised.”** This was back in John 11:50.

Joh 18:17

**“servant girl.”** The word is translated from *paidiskē* (#3814 παιδίσκη, the feminine of *paidiskos*, a young boy or slave; a diminutive of παῖς.[[173]](#footnote-29866) A *paidiskē* could refer to a young girl, a servant girl, or a young female slave.

Joh 18:18

**“servants and the *Temple* guard.”** The Greek words are both general. *Douloi* is slaves or servants, and *hupēretai* is also servants or underlings. So what are the specifics of these words? The context would indicate the servants and the Temple guards.

Joh 18:21

**“Why do you ask me?”** Jesus was correct and following the Law by saying this. He knew he was on trial, and the prosecution is supposed to produce witnesses, not try to get self-incrimination. This was one of the many inconsistencies or illegalities with the trial of Jesus. That is also why, after one of the police struck him in the face for supposed impertinence, Jesus said in John 18:22-23, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong, but if rightly, why do you strike me?”

Joh 18:24

**“Annas sent him, still tied up, to Caiaphas the high priest.”** It is almost certain that Annas and Caiaphas lived in the same palace-like complex or adjoining homes surrounded by a fence or wall and sharing a courtyard. It was common for relatives to share a living space, or live close together, and there is no indication that Peter moved from one courtyard to another in the trial of Jesus. Peter was only able to get into the High Priest’s courtyard because of a connection that one of the disciples had with the High Priest (John 18:16), and Peter never again had to ask to gain entrance to another courtyard. After his arrest in Gethsemane, Jesus was taken to Annas first, then sent to Caiaphas. From there he was taken to a dawn meeting of the whole Sanhedrin (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71).

Caiaphas was the son-in-law to Annas, and the designated High Priest at that time. The trial of Jesus (indeed, the whole conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders), reveals the extent to which tradition often takes precedence over truth, and how some religious people will go to great lengths to protect their traditions, even at the expense of people’s lives. It was against Jewish Law to conduct a capital trial at night. According to law, any capital trial had to be held during the full light of day, but in this case, Caiaphas tried Jesus at night. His “reason” was likely that a full daylight trial of Jesus in Passover season would attract large crowds of his followers, and the uproar might require Roman troops and lead to more Roman control and restrictions, which the Jewish ruling council did not want.

Joh 18:25

**“He denied it.”** For more on the denials of Peter, see commentary on Matthew 26:70.

Joh 18:27

**“he denied it.”** For more on the denials of Peter and the rooster crowings, see commentary on Matthew 26:70.

Joh 18:28

**“Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the governor’s headquarters.”** The Gospel records of the last hours of Jesus are quite complete if one studies all four Gospels. However, it must be remembered that the four Gospel records were written from different perspectives and with different purposes, and so it is no wonder that no gospel has the entire complete record. In this case, John leaves out the early morning trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, which is covered in the other three Gospels, and most completely in Luke (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-23:1).

**“the governor’s headquarters.”** “Praetorium” was a term used for wherever the governor or the current military commander was staying, so the word itself does not tell us where it was. Scholars are divided over where Jesus was tried by Pilate. The debate has historically been centered on whether Jesus was tried at the large Western Palace built by Herod the Great, or at the Antonia Fortress north of the Temple (the current start of the Via Dolorosa). However, new historical and archaeological evidence favors a third site, the old Hasmonean Palace just west of Robinson’s arch at the southwest corner of the Temple Mount. All three locations will now be discussed, starting with the Antonia Fortress.

Many people believe that the Praetorium was in the Antonia Fortress, although it is the least likely location according to historical and archaeological research. One reason for that, although it is usually unspoken, is that it is the traditional location, and many people believe that there had to be a good reason for the tradition to get started. Actually, starting a tradition does not require factual evidence, as we can see from many Church traditions. In fact, if tradition is the test, the fact that the Antonia Fortress is the traditional location would witness against its being the actual site. The traditional site of the Transfiguration, the Ecce Homo arch, the Stations of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa, the Pool of Siloam, and much more have all been disproven.

The tradition of the current pathway of the Via Dolorosa, which starts at Antonia and ends at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, did not start until Medieval times. When Christian pilgrims began coming to the Holy Land in the fourth century, the site of the Praetorium where Pilate tried Jesus had been forgotten. The earliest pilgrims of this period located it below the Jewish Quarter in the Tyropoeon Valley just east of the Temple area. Later the pilgrimage site was moved to the Church of Holy Sion on “Mount Zion,” which is actually not far south of where Herod’s Western Palace had actually stood. Then in the Medieval period, the “traditional site” was reassigned a third time, this time to the site on which now stands the Convent of the Sisters of Zion in Jerusalem.

Another reason the Antonia is favored by some people is that because Herod Antipas would normally stay at the Western Palace at the Feast of Passover, it is assumed that Pilate could not stay there. However, the Western Palace was huge, and contained at least two completely separate living areas and a military barracks, as well as a huge pavement area for people to assemble and for Pilate to preside and judge. We must keep in mind that when Herod had it built, he needed to be able to house visiting dignitary guests in luxury. High dignitaries would come from Rome as well as other countries such as Egypt. Herod was also paranoid about security, so the presence of a barracks is understandable. The military presence in Herod’s palace would most likely have been in the northern part of the palace complex, including inside the three huge defense towers there. It is very likely that Pilate stayed at the Western Palace at night, but during the day conducted business from the traditional palace of the Hasmoneans.

Another reason the Antonia is sometimes favored is that it is said that the governor had to stay close to the troops so he could be firmly in command in case of trouble. But that is speculation. Besides, neither the Western Palace nor the Hasmonean Palace are very far from the Antonia. The historical and archaeological evidence does not point to the Antonia as being the place where Pilate tried Jesus Christ, and the tradition that it was the site started very late in history.

The other site that many historians believe was the Praetorium where Jesus was taken to Pilate is Herod’s Western Palace. One reason for this is that John 19:13 mentions “the Pavement,” *lithostrōtos* (#3038 λιθόστρωτος). There is a supposed “*lithostrōtos*” under the Convent of the Sisters of Zion in Jerusalem, but this has been conclusively dated as being constructed after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. That pavement covers the “Struthion Pool,” which Josephus, speaking about it after the time of Christ but before AD 70, said was open to the air. Thus, any pavement covering it post-dates the Jewish revolt of AD 70. In contrast, the huge paved area in the Western Palace dates to the time of Christ, and is so huge it is genuinely worthy of getting the name, “the Pavement.” Also, Philo of Alexandria, in his *Delegation to Gaius*, says Pilate’s residence during the feasts was in “Herod’s palace,” and Josephus makes the point that the governor Florus also stayed at the Palace, and says it had a *bēma* (#968 βῆμα; place of judgment) in front of it and a place where criminals could be whipped.[[174]](#footnote-27882) So there is evidence that seems to point to Herod’s Palace on the Western side of Jerusalem as being the place where Pilate tried Jesus, and that, plus the fact that until recently there was no better contender for the place is a major reason that a large number of historians favor the Western Palace. However, the evidence is mounting that the Hasmonean Palace was the place where Pilate tried Jesus.

It is most likely that Pilate would have stayed in the Western Palace at night but ran his administration from the more central and ancestral Hasmonean Palace. Modern archaeology and some recently discovered historical texts, as well as a reexamination of well-known historical texts in light of new archaeological discoveries, point to the Hasmonean Palace as the place where Pilate tried Jesus. The early Christian tradition pointed to the Hasmonean Palace, although it is referred to as Pilate’s house and the Church of St. Sophia (“wisdom”). The Hasmonean Palace close to the Temple had served the Hasmonean dynasty for over 100 years as a royal residence. Furthermore, in 37 BC, when Herod the Great was recognized as king by the Romans, he took up residence there. It was not until 23 BC that Herod decided to build a larger and more fortified palace on the west side of Jerusalem, but even then there is evidence the Hasmonean Palace was used for administrative purposes.[[175]](#footnote-23815)

One piece of evidence that Pilate tried Jesus at the Hasmonean Palace is that Luke 23:7 says that Pilate “sent” Jesus to Herod Antipas, and the Greek word likely indicates that Pilate and Herod were in two quite different places at the time. The Greek word for “sent” in Luke 23:7 is *anapempō* (#375 ἀναπέμπω), and it means “to send up” to a higher place or to a higher authority; or “to send back.” It seems to be used all three ways in the Bible: to send up to a higher place (Luke 23:7); to send to a higher authority (Acts 25:21), and to send back (Luke 23:15; although here Pilate is the higher authority as well). When Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, he did not send him to a higher authority, because as the Roman Governor, Pilate was the higher authority. Furthermore, he was not sending Jesus “back” to Herod; Jesus had never seen Herod before, a point made in the Bible itself (Luke 23:8). But if Pilate was at the Hasmonean Palace, and Herod was at the Western Palace, then Pilate did send Jesus “up” to Herod, because the Western Palace is uphill from the Hasmonean Palace; thus in using *anapempō*, the Bible would be making a very accurate geographical statement and giving us a good hint about where Jesus was tried.[[176]](#footnote-23854) In summary, an impartial examination of the evidence seems to favor that Jesus was at the ancient Hasmonean palace when he was tried before Pilate.

**“and it was early.”** Roman officials usually started their day very early, even 6 a.m., but in this case it would likely not have been that early because when Jesus was on trial before the entire Sanhedrin, by Jewish law it had to be light out—it could not be night. However, that daylight trial might have only taken an hour or so, and the Temple and the Hasmonean palace were basically next to each other. So it is very conceivable that Jesus could have been before Pilate at 7 or 7:30 a.m., then tried by Herod Antipas, and then sent back to Pilate by noon (John 6:4).

Joh 18:29

**“Pilate.”** Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from AD 26-36.

[For more on Pilate, see commentary on Matt. 27:2.]

**“What accusation are you bringing against this man?”** This was a standard opening of a trial, and no doubt Pilate had spoken the same words many times before.

Joh 18:30

**“If this man were not an evildoer.”** The religious leaders were children of the Devil and did the deeds of the Devil (John 8:44). They were liars and murderers. They were asking that the Romans put Jesus to death, but they knew that they did not have any actual legal reason to do that, so they did not want Pilate asking questions. For his part, Pilate asked the proper legal question, “What accusation are you bringing against this man?” Asking for the death penalty is a serious matter, and the Jews should have been able to produce very good reasons for wanting Jesus dead, reasons that they did not have. So in this verse we see a tactic of the Devil: try to find a way to get someone to do something without asking questions about it. In this case, they basically said, “Trust us, if he did not deserve death we would not have brought him to you.” But Pilate did not trust them, and as he continued to press the issue, they had to lie (Luke 23:2), threaten (John 19:12), and start a riot (Matt. 27:24).

Joh 18:31

**“It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.”** The religious leaders were hypocrites and used Roman law when it suited them and flaunted it when they wanted to. They had no trouble putting Stephen to death (Acts 7), or helping to arrange for Paul to be murdered (Acts 23:12-16).

Joh 18:32

**“with the result that.”** In the Greek a *hina* (“that”) with a verb in the subjunctive mood (“was fulfilled”) is a result clause (see Word Study: “Hina”).

**“clearly indicating by what manner of death he was about to die.”** Jesus had spoken of being lifted up from the earth, which meant he would be crucified (see John 12:32, 33; 3:14; 8:28; see commentary on John 12:33).

Joh 18:33

**“the governor’s headquarters.”** The Greek text is “the praetorium,” and the praetorium was normally the headquarters of the residence of the Roman governor. The exact place that was called the praetorium is debated but it is likely that it was the old Hasmonean palace in the center of Jerusalem (see commentary on Luke 23:7 and John 18:28).

**“Are you the king of the Jews?”** Pilate’s question, “Are you the king of the Jews,” and Jesus’ affirmative answer, “Yes,” is very important, both for Pilate and for us, and it is recorded in all four Gospels, although the Gospel of John shows us something the other three Gospels don’t show us, which is that there was a conversation that occurred between Pilate’s question and Jesus’ “Yes” answer (John 18:33 and 18:37; cf. Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3). Pilate’s question, “Are you the king of the Jews,” shows us that this interaction was in the first of Jesus’ two trials before Pilate, something that is made clear in Luke (Luke 23:1-19). Neither Matthew, Mark, nor John mention Pilate sending Jesus to Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12), but they blend Jesus’ two trials before Pilate as if they were one trial. However, by studying all four Gospels together we can see that this question was part of Jesus’ first trial before Pilate, and then when John speaks of Barabbas (John 18:39-40), that was part of Jesus’ second trial before Pilate.

Joh 18:36

**“My kingdom is not of this world.”** What Jesus means is that his kingdom and “this world” (not “the world,” but “this world”) have little in common. “This world” is a fallen world, under the control of the Devil (John 14:30; 1 John 5:19). Jesus’ enemies were “of this world” (John 8:23), and were children of the Devil (John 8:44). The wisdom of “this world” is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 3:19). Thankfully, the present shape of “this world” is passing away, and one day will be gone altogether (1 Cor. 7:31; Rev. 21:4, 5). Jesus’ kingdom was going to be established on earth by the power of God when he came from heaven (Rev. 19), and his authority was going to come from God, not from “this world’s” system of things.

We must be careful when reading “My kingdom is not of this world” that we do not think it is saying, “My kingdom will not be on earth,” because Jesus will set up his Millennial Kingdom on earth

[For more on Christ’s earthly kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“in fact.”** This is the logical, not the temporal, use of the Greek word *nun* (#3568 νῦν). It can be confusing to translate this as “now,” because people might take it to mean “not now, but later,” but that is not its meaning here. Jesus was not telling Pilate that he would later have a kingdom. He had just told Pilate he did have a kingdom but it was not of this world. Now he was saying that in different words: The fact is that my kingdom is not from here. He was not a rival to Pilate or Rome.

Joh 18:37

**“You *rightly* say.”** See commentary on Matthew 27:11, “*Yes, it is as* you say.” In John 18:36-37, Pilate discovers that, although Jesus is claiming to be some kind of king over something with which he is unfamiliar, the Jews’ blanket accusation that Jesus was making himself a king in a sense that would be threatening to Caesar was false. Thus, he reports in John 18:38 that he finds no cause for death in Jesus.

Joh 18:40

**“Now Barabbas was a revolutionary.”** Although many English versions translate the Greek word *lēstēs* (#3027 λῃστής) as “robber” in John 18:40, and not “revolutionary” or an equivalent term, there is good evidence that “robber” is not the best translation in this context. The NET text note correctly states, “It is possible that Barabbas was merely a robber or highwayman, but more likely, given the use of the term ληστής (*lēstēs*) in Josephus and other early sources, that he was a guerrilla warrior or revolutionary leader. …The word λῃστής was used a number of times by Josephus (*J. W.* 2.13.2-3 [2:253-254]) to describe the revolutionaries or guerrilla fighters who, from mixed motives of nationalism and greed, kept the rural districts of Judea in constant turmoil.” That Barabbas was a revolutionary and not just a “robber” fits with Mark 15:7 and Luke 23:19, which say that Barabbas was involved in insurrection and had committed murder, and murder would be a natural part of being a revolutionary. Being a revolutionary against Rome and thus being involved with insurrection makes Mark, Luke, and John all fit together and all make the same basic claim about Barabbas (Matthew does not mention why Barabbas was in prison). It also makes it easier to understand why the crowd of Jews at Jesus’ trial could be so easily persuaded by the priests and elders to release Barabbas and crucify Jesus (Matt. 27:20; Mark 15:11). The people generally did not like the Roman occupation and oppression, and would have wanted anyone who had actively stood against Rome to be released.

Also, since the Jews were accusing Jesus of making himself a king in opposition to Rome (John 19:12), that would make Jesus and Barabbas both insurrectionists and revolutionaries in the eyes of Rome. That would mean Pilate was asking the people which revolutionary they wanted to be released: Jesus or Barabbas. Also, it seems that Jesus used the term *lēstēs* to refer to a revolutionary when he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (see commentary on Mark 14:48).

Quite a few commentators describe Barabbas as being a revolutionary and not a robber. For example, J. Ramsay Michaels uses the word “terrorist” to describe Barabbas.[[177]](#footnote-29981) Craig Keener writes that the word *lēstēs* was “the aristocracy’s derisive title (shared by Josephus) for insurrectionists.”[[178]](#footnote-21649) D. A. Carson writes, “In the hands of some first-century authors, however, the word [*lēstēs*] depicts not simply a brigand, but a terrorist (from the Roman point of view), a guerrilla (from a nationalist perspective)…he had participated in a bloody insurrection.”[[179]](#footnote-25940) Also, some modern English versions use “revolutionary” to describe Barabbas (cf. CJB, CSB, GW, NAB, NET, NLT). In light of the biblical and historical evidence, “revolutionary” is a better description of Barabbas than “robber.”

**John Chapter 19**

Joh 19:4

**“to let you know.”** The verb “know” is *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω), and it is in the subjunctive mood, which is why many translations have “that you may know.” However, the Greek conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα), which is a word introducing a purpose, earlier in the sentence, is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore in these cases, we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, there is no reason to use the awkward translation, “so that you may know,” when the meaning is simply “to let you know” (cf. HCSB, NIV; also see CJB and NJB).

Joh 19:5

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Joh 19:6

**“reason for a charge.**” The Greek is *aitia* (#156 αἰτία), and means that which is responsible for a condition, *cause, reason*; the actual state of affairs, *case, circumstance, relationship*; a basis for legal action, charge, *ground for complaint*; accusation.[[180]](#footnote-25586) In this verse, Pilate was telling the Jews he found no reason for a charge against Jesus.

Joh 19:11

**“You would have no authority against me if it had not been given to you from above.”** This was absolutely true. Many times people sought to kill Jesus, but God protected him until the time was right and the prophecies were fulfilled. Six months earlier the Jews in Jerusalem were already trying to kill him (John 7:1), and the crowd in Nazareth tried to kill him when he had barely started his ministry (Luke 4:28-30), but throughout his ministry God protected him. But now was the time, and in his love for God and us, Jesus submitted to his Father’s will and allowed himself to be crucified.

Joh 19:14

**“the sixth hour.”** This is about our 12 noon, and it is on Tuesday, Nisan 13. Jesus is about to be crucified the next day, Wednesday, Nisan 14. This verse is one of the verses that proves the traditional teaching about Jesus being arrested Thursday night and crucified Friday morning is just tradition, not truth.

Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m. (This was true even though the Jews started their new day at sunset, about 6 p.m., and the Romans started their new day at midnight, like we in the West do).

[For more information on the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

There has been much discussion about the chronology used in the book of John, but there is no genuine reason to believe that John used a different standard of chronology and timekeeping than the other Gospels. The reason some theologians have questioned the way time is counted in the Gospel of John is to try to explain how John can say that Jesus was still with Pilate about noon, the 6th hour, (John 19:14) when other Gospels have him being crucified at the third hour (our 9 a.m.; Mark 15:25), then darkness coming over the land at the sixth hour (our noon; Luke 23:44), then Jesus dying around the ninth hour (our 3 p.m.; Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:24-37). Obviously, if Jesus was still with Pilate at noon, and then Pilate handed him to the soldiers who tortured him, he could not have been crucified at 9 a.m. that day.

One problem with the traditional chronology of the crucifixion is that it is believed that Jesus was arrested on Thursday night and then crucified on Friday. Tradition teaches that Jesus was taken before Pilate very early on Friday morning, then to Herod, then back to Pilate, all in time for him to be crucified by “the third hour,” our 9 a.m. (Mark 15:25). But that scenario does not work if Jesus is before Pilate at noon, and then after that tortured by the soldiers.

It has been suggested that in John 19:14 John uses a “special chronology” and the sixth hour is actually 6 a.m. But the only reason such an unusual proposal has been set forth is to preserve the traditional teaching and chronology. It is never true anywhere else in the Bible that the sixth hour is anything but noon. The Gospel of John clearly uses the standard Roman and Jewish hours, as we can see from John 1:39, 4:6, and 4:52. In fact, John 4:6 is the record of the woman at the well, and it shows Jesus talking with the woman about “the sixth hour,” about noon. John would have used the same method of keeping time in John 4 as he did in John 19. Jesus was before Pilate at noon.

Furthermore, there are other reasons that the sixth hour in John 19:14 cannot be 6 a.m. After being taken to Annas and Caiaphas the night he was arrested, the Jews took Jesus to a trial before the whole Sanhedrin that was held in the morning (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66). This trial would have started after it was daylight out, because the whole ruling council of the Jews was present, and according to Jewish law, a capital case could not be tried at night. This daylight trial would have most likely occurred in one of the rooms inside the Temple.

We must also remember that according to our chronology, this was now Tuesday, so neither the Jews, nor Pilate, nor Herod had any reason to try to rush Jesus through the trial process. Modern theologians, if they believe that Jesus has to be tried by the Sanhedrin, then Pilate, then Herod, then Pilate, then tortured by the soldiers, and then crucified by 9 a.m., have a reason to try to rush these trials, but the Jews and Romans of the time had no reason to rush. They had all day, and the next day as well.

After the trial before the whole Sanhedrin, the Jews took Jesus to Pilate for what turned out to be his first trial before Pilate. During this first trial, Pilate, who did not want to have to deal with Jesus in the first place, found out he was a Galilean, and so he sent him to Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee who was in town for the Passover. The walk alone, with Jesus being taken by the chief priests and scribes from Pilate to Herod through the crowded streets of Jerusalem would have likely taken a quarter-hour or more.

Herod would have been surprised at the sudden and unexpected appearance of Jesus, and so would not have been prepared for a trial. That in part explains why Jesus’ second trial before Pilate ended up taking until noon. Herod had to assemble his court. For a long time he had wanted to see Jesus, and now was his chance (Luke 23:8). Then he asked Jesus many questions, mocked him, dressed him in a king’s robe, and finally sent him back to Pilate.

The second trial before Pilate would have also taken quite a while. For one thing, the chief priests and rulers of the Jews had dispersed by that time and had to be called back together (Luke 23:13). Then the trial began again, which included the negotiations about Barabbas and also whipping Jesus, which meant handing him over to the soldiers, going through the process of whipping, and returning him to Pilate (Luke 23:16; John 19:1-6).

It is easy to see how the four trials (Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, Pilate), including the times that people had to be assembled, the walking back and forth, the questioning, the negotiations, the whipping of Jesus, and all the court proceedings, took from early morning until noon when Pilate pronounced his final sentence. After Pilate pronounced sentence, the Roman soldiers took charge of Jesus and tortured him, and after torturing him, “led him out” to crucify him (Mark 15:20). Jesus was so weak by the time he went to be crucified that he could not even carry his own cross, so the walk to the crucifixion site would have taken considerable time. Yet Mark says Jesus was crucified at nine o’clock in the morning (Mark 15:25). There is no reasonable way that all that happened to Jesus from daylight to his crucifixion only took until 9 a.m., but it is reasonable that Jesus could have been tried before the Sanhedrin, Herod, and Pilate between daylight and noon on Tuesday, the day before he was crucified on Wednesday, which is the chronology that fits with all the biblical data.

That the second trial before Pilate was around noon also explains why there was such a great multitude of people present for the trial, and that by stirring them up the Jews were starting a riot (Matt. 27:20, 24). The riot that was in its early stages was what it finally took for Pilate who, because he was the Roman governor, was charged with keeping the peace, to finally make the decision to crucify Jesus (Matt. 27:24-26). Then Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers, who tortured Jesus through the rest of the day and that night and then crucified him at 9 a.m. on Wednesday morning, which was the day of Passover.

The Romans did technically count their hours from midnight for their civil day, but that was not how the ordinary Romans counted the hours. As R. C. H. Lenski points out, “for ordinary purposes they [the Romans], too, reckoned twelve hours from sunrise to sunset.”[[181]](#footnote-27201)

There is no reason the Gospel of John would use a “special” chronology just in this one verse. R. C. H. Lenski, who believes in the traditional Friday crucifixion, is honest enough to say, “No solution [to the John 19:14 problem] has yet been found.” We disagree, and say the solution to the problem is actually very simple. Jesus was before Pilate at 12 noon just as John 19:14 says, but it was on Tuesday, Nisan 13. Then, after the trial, Pilate turned Jesus over to the soldiers who tortured him through the night, and he was crucified on Wednesday morning, Passover Day, AD 28. He arose from the dead three days and three nights after he was buried, so he got up on Saturday evening just before sunset (Matt. 12:40 says Jesus was 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth). Then Jesus first appeared to his disciples on Sunday morning, just as Scripture says (the Bible never says Jesus got up Sunday morning. That is an assumption. It says he appeared to his disciples on Sunday morning).

The accurate chronology is:

* The Last Supper happened on Monday and after supper, Jesus and the apostles went to the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:30, 36; Mark 14:26, 32; Luke 22:39; John 18:1)
* Jesus was arrested Monday night in the Garden of Gethsemane and taken to Annas (John 18:12-14)
* Jesus was taken to Caiaphas’ house later that night (Matt. 26:57; [Mark 14:53; Luke 22:54] John 18:24).
* There was a night trial at Caiaphas’ house at which Jesus was condemned to death for blasphemy (Matt. 26:59-67; Mark 14:55-65).
* After the night trial, Jesus was taken at daybreak on Tuesday to a trial before the whole Sanhedrin and was condemned by them (Matt. 27:1; Luke 22:66-70).
* After the daybreak trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus was taken before Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:2; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1-6; John 18:28).
* Pilate sent Jesus to the tetrarch Herod Antipas to be tried by him (Luke 23:7-12).
* Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate, so about noon on Tuesday Jesus was before Pilate for a second trial (John 19:14). Matthew, Mark, and John do not clearly show that Jesus’ trial before Pilate was in two parts, an early morning part (Mark 15:1; John 18:28) and a later part about 12 noon. They show the two trials as one record (actually, it seems that Matthew leaves the early trial out completely, and just focuses on the second trial before Pilate). Barabbas was offered as part of Pilate’s second trial (Luke 23:18).
* Pilate hands Jesus over to the soldiers who torture him from Tuesday afternoon through the night until Wednesday morning (Matt. 27:26-31; Mark 15:16-20; John 19:16).
* Jesus is crucified at the “third hour” (around 9 a.m.) Wednesday morning (Mark 15:25).
* Darkness comes over the land from the sixth hour (around 12 noon) to the ninth hour (around 3 p.m.) (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44)
* Jesus dies sometime around the “ninth hour” (around 3 p.m.) (Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46).
* Joseph of Arimathea places Jesus in the tomb without proper winding cloth and spices, and rolls a stone over the door before sunset on Wednesday and the women see that Jesus is buried without spices (Matt. 27:57-61; Mark 15:43-47; Luke 23:50-56;).
* After Joseph and the women leave, Nicodemus comes with spices and properly buries the body of Jesus (John 19:39-42).
* Jesus gets up from the dead Saturday, Nisan 17, just before sunset, exactly three days and three nights after he was buried, as Jesus had foretold (Matt. 12:40).
* When Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early Sunday morning, while it is still dark, Jesus is already up (John 20:1).

[For more information about Jesus being crucified on Wednesday, not Friday, and being in the tomb, in the “the heart of the earth,” for three full days and three nights, see commentary on Matt. 12:40. For information on the chronology of the four trials of Jesus on Tuesday (before the Jewish Sanhedrin, then Pilate, then Herod, then Pilate) see commentary on John 19:14, “the sixth hour,” and also commentary on John 18:13. For information on the two-stage burial of Jesus, first by Joseph of Arimathea and then by Nicodemus, see commentary on John 19:40. For more information about which events are in which Gospel, see commentary on Luke 23:50. For information on the Hasmonean palace as the likely location of Jesus’ trial before Pilate, see commentary on Luke 23:7.]

Joh 19:15

**“Crucify him.”** This is not the same crowd that had said, “Hosanna,” and “Son of David” some days earlier. See commentary on Luke 23:21.

Joh 19:16

**“So then he handed him over to them to be crucified, so they took Jesus away.”** John 19:16 makes it sound like Pilate gave Jesus to the Jews (John 19:14) to be crucified. In this case, “handed him over to them” is used idiomatically for Pilate handing Jesus over to the will of the Jews, the desire of the Jews, not that he physically gave Jesus to the Jews.

From the other Gospels—especially Matthew—we learn that Pilate gave Jesus to the soldiers, who took Jesus to their headquarters and tortured him and then took him to be crucified (Matt. 27:27-31).

Joh 19:17

**“carrying his own cross.”** The Gospel of John says Jesus carried his own cross, but Matthew 27:31-32, Mark 15:20-21, and Luke 23:26 say that Simon of Cyrene carried the cross. Both records are accurate, but neither gives all the details. Putting all the Gospel accounts together, Jesus started out carrying his own cross, as was the Roman custom. But Jesus was apparently too weak to carry his own cross, which makes sense given all he had endured since his arrest. He had been arrested Monday night and it was now Wednesday morning, and the entire time there is no indication he had been given any rest, food, or water, and he had been beaten and whipped again and again throughout that entire time.

[For more on the chronology of Jesus’ last few days on earth, see commentary on John 18:13.]

**“cross.”** The Greek noun is *stauros* (#4716 σταυρός). The shape of the “cross” that Jesus was executed on has been a subject of scholarly debate for many years. The problem is that *stauros* can mean several things, including a cross, a single stake, or even just the horizontal cross-piece that was attached to something that was fixed in place such as an upright stake or even a tree. Similarly, the verb *stauroō* (#4717 σταυρόω) often translated as “crucify,” has a number of meanings, such as “drive a stake” or “crucify” (i.e., execute on a *stauros*), but as with the noun *stauros*, the Greek word itself does not describe the shape of the execution device.

Despite the ambiguity of *stauros* and *stauroō*, the Bible and standard Roman culture give us some help with how Jesus died. While it is possible that the *stauros* Jesus carried was a large upright stake that he was then crucified on, that is not likely. For one thing, it was not the typical way the Romans crucified people.

Also, if Jesus and then Simon had carried a large single stake, the Romans would have had to have gone out much earlier and dug a hole for that upright stake to fit in securely, which would have been quite difficult. The rocky ground would have made trying to dig a hole that fit the stake securely very unlikely. We must also keep in mind that the place Jesus was crucified was not “specially made” for him and the other criminals. Given Roman custom and efficiency, the place Jesus was crucified was a place where others had been crucified before (and no doubt after, especially in light of Judah’s rebellions against Rome), and this adds to the likelihood that Jesus carried his crossbeam to an already established crucifixion site.

Also, the people who assert that Jesus was crucified on a stake describe him as having his hands above his head fastened to the stake by a single nail. But the apostle Thomas, commonly known as “doubting Thomas,” did not describe the crucifixion that way. He said to the other apostles, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not ever believe” (John 20:25). Thomas spoke of the mark made by the “nails,” not by the “nail.” Thomas would have known how Jesus was crucified, and so his statement gives quite conclusive evidence that Jesus was crucified in a standard Roman way, with his arms outstretched to the side and two nails used; a nail in each hand (actually, the nail was almost certainly in the wrist. In the Hebrew culture, the wrist was considered part of the hand, which is why when the Jews washed their “hands,” they also washed far up the wrist).

There has also been some confusion caused by the Bible’s statement that Jesus was crucified on a “tree” (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; 1 Pet. 2:24). The Greek word is *xulon* (#3586 ξύλον, pronounced 'zoo-lon) and it means a tree, log, a piece of timber or wood, or something made from wood such as a beam, cross, or club (Mark 14:48), or even the wooden stocks that Paul’s feet were placed in (Acts 16:24). The use of *xulon* to describe the way Jesus died has caused some scholars, such as Ernest Martin, to say that Jesus carried his cross-piece, but when he got to the place of crucifixion, it was nailed to a living tree. However, the word *xulon*, like the word *stauros*, has so many different meanings that we cannot tell from it the exact shape of the “cross” Jesus was crucified on. The word *xulon* can well refer to the cross piece used in crucifixion just like it can for the wooden pieces of the stocks in a prison.

It is unlikely that Jesus was crucified on a single upright stake that was dropped into a hole that had already been dug. It is also unlikely that Jesus was nailed to a piece of wood that then had to be nailed to a living tree. That would have required a lot of manpower and at least a few living trees, because others were crucified with Christ. It is much more likely that the Romans already had upright stakes in the ground waiting for Jesus and the others who were crucified with him, and that they nailed the men with their arms outstretched to horizontal cross-pieces that were then hoisted into place and secured. That possibility is made even more likely when we keep in mind that the Romans regularly used crucifixion to execute egregious criminals, and so it is likely that a number of crucifixions would have already occurred in the place Jesus and the others were crucified, which was a prominent place close to a busy road. If that is the case, then the crosses on which Jesus and the other men were crucified were quite “standard” in shape, looking like the common Christian cross.

Part of the upright beam of the cross projected up above the top of Jesus’ head, and it was to that part of the cross that the sign declaring Jesus was the king of Jews was nailed (Matt. 27:37).

**“the Place of *the* Skull.”** There is good evidence that the place of the “Skull” referred to the place where a “headcount” took place, and there is some very good evidence that Jesus was crucified on top of the Mount of Olives (see commentary on Matthew 27:33).

Joh 19:18

**“where they crucified him.”** There is good evidence that Jesus was crucified on the Mount of Olives (see commentary on Matt. 27:33).

Joh 19:20

**“the Place of the city.”** The word translated “Place” is the Greek *topos* (#5117 τόπος). While just the word “place” can refer to any place specifically mentioned, there are many times when the word “Place” is used to mean the Temple in Jerusalem, which it is here in John 19:20 and other places in the New Testament as well (cf. Matt. 24:15; John 4:20, 11:48, 19:20; Acts 6:13-14, 21:28).

Here in John 19:20, the Bible is explaining why there would be so many Jews reading the sign over Jesus, and those many Jews included both common people and priests. The answer is that Jesus, and the sign over his head, was near the “Place,” the Temple, and so many Jews and priests on their way to the Temple to see the Passover sacrifice, walked by Jesus. One of the best places in Jerusalem to get that much traffic was on the top of the Mount of Olives near the road that led into the Temple, and that would mean that Jesus was crucified on the Mount of Olives.

[For more on the word “Place” meaning the Temple, see Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, and *Secrets of Golgotha*, second edition, by Ernest Martin, Chapter 8.]

**“in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.”** Jerusalem was a cosmopolitan city with people from many backgrounds. Hebrew or Aramaic were the most widely spoken languages (though scholars debate which was more prevalent). However, Jews from the diaspora who were visiting or had moved to Jerusalem, as well as Greeks who lived there or were visiting, formed a significant part of the population and would have spoken Greek. Thus, it has been estimated by scholars that 6,000 to 20,000 Greek-speaking Jews lived in Jerusalem.[[182]](#footnote-30388) Besides that, quite a few of the Jews would have been bilingual and spoken both or all three languages; the Gospels and the geographic location of Nazareth near Sepphoris certainly seem to indicate that Jesus did. Latin was the official language of the Romans who occupied and controlled the city, but besides the government officials and soldiers, this was Passover, and Jews of many backgrounds, including Latin-speaking Jews, would have been in the city. Note the diverse population of Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, less than two months later (Acts 2:5-11).

Joh 19:24

**“with the result that.”** In the Greek, the conjunction *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood is a purpose-result, or simply a result clause. God could have worked in these men—in a way that did not inhibit their free will—to want to draw lots, or it could just be a result clause. Rendering *hina* as “so that” is an ambiguous translation in that it could be read as either purpose or result. Therefore, the translation “with the result that” is employed to highlight the purpose-result force of the clause.

[For more information, see Word Study: “Hina.”]

**“my clothes...clothing.”** In the Greek, the first word, “clothes” is plural and the second word “clothing” is singular and, in context, references the tunic or undershirt worn by Jesus, which the soldiers cast lots for because they did not want to tear it. The Septuagint, where this is quoted from, differs from the Hebrew of Psalm 22:18 (21:19 LXX). The Hebrew text uses two completely different words, one for “clothes” and one for “clothing,” but the Greek uses two very similar words for “clothes” and “clothing.”

**“Now this is what the soldiers did.”** The context demands that this phrase goes with verse 24, not verse 25. Parting with the ASV and NRSV, we followed the verse pattern of the Nestle-Aland Greek text. Although the Greek phrase, *oi men sun* that opens the sentence (“Now this is what”) can be causal, i.e., “so this is what,” it can also simply be a mark of continuation of the dialogue, in this case, sort of a summation of the action of the soldiers. Although the soldiers fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy by their actions, they did so by their free will as an act of logic. God did not force the soldiers to act in a manner that fulfilled the prophecy, but we can see that He worked behind the scenes such that the prophecy was fulfilled at the crucifixion. Jesus’ clothing was valuable, and all clothing at that time was handmade, and the clothing of a crucified criminal belonged to the Roman state, as did the dead body of the criminal, which is why Joseph of Arimathea had to ask Pilate for Jesus’ body. The way Jesus went to the cross and given what he was wearing, it makes perfect sense that the soldiers would divide up the clothing he was wearing but not want to cut up his one-piece tunic (the article of clothing worn next to his skin) because then it would be basically worthless. So as it happened, given God’s foreknowledge and His working behind the scenes in history, the prophecy is fulfilled without curtailing anyone’s freedom of will.

Joh 19:25

**“his mother.”** Jesus’ mother was Mary, so there were three women named “Mary” by the cross, and other women named Mary that Jesus interacted with during his ministry. This was not unusual in the culture of the time. Historical and archaeological records from the Second Temple period, which includes the time of Christ, reveal that two female names, one of which is translated as “Mary,” accounted for perhaps half of the names of the women of the time.[[183]](#footnote-26608)

**“and his mother’s sister.”** There is good evidence that this “sister” of Mary’s is Salome, the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John (see commentary on Matt. 20:20).

**“Mary Magdalene.”** Mary is called “Magdalene” because her hometown was Magdala, on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee.

[For more information on Mary Magdalene see commentary on Luke 8:2.]

Joh 19:26

**“the disciple whom he loved.”** The disciple whom Jesus loved, and the author of the Gospel of John, is John (see commentary on John 21:20).

**“*Dear* woman.”** The Greek word translated “woman” is the standard word for a female, *gunē* (#1135 γυνή), and it is used of a woman of any age, or a wife. It is in the vocative voice, and could be translated “O woman.” John 19:26, and John 2:4, which use the same Greek, are examples of where a literal translation does not communicate the sense of the original text. For a son to address his mother as “woman” in English would be cold and insulting, but that is not at all the case in Greek, where that address is very normal and not disrespectful at all. It is a challenge to bring the sense of the Greek into English, but “Dear woman” is close (cf. NIV84, NLT).

It was a blessing that Jesus referred to Mary as “woman” and not “mother.” Calling Mary “mother” would have only heightened the horrible emotional pain she was already feeling, but more than that, it would have taken her focus in the wrong direction. Jesus, although her biological son, was her Lord, and she was his disciple. She needed to begin to think of Jesus’ crucifixion as the will of God and the obedience of her Lord, and as God’s provision of restoration for the whole world and herself as well. For why Joseph was not there, see commentary on John 19:27.

Joh 19:27

**“your mother!”** As part of his last acts before his death, Jesus took care of his family, which was an important duty, especially since he was the oldest son. Thus, he shows by example what the Bible says clearly: “But if anyone does not provide for his own *family*, and especially his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). It is fair to ask why Jesus would have told John to take his mother Mary home with him. Although the Bible does not tell us directly, we can deduce that Jesus’ father, Joseph, had died. It also seems certain that Jesus’ brothers still did not believe in him (see commentary on John 7:5).

The Bible does not say directly that Joseph died, but that is the logical conclusion from the scope of Scripture and from the culture. It seems unlikely that Joseph, who had been a good husband and father, had abandoned the family. Yet he was obviously not around when Jesus told John to take Mary home. We know that in Nazareth, Jesus’ hometown, Joseph took care to raise his boys in a traditional way. Joseph was considered “the carpenter” (or, more accurately, “the builder”), and he had raised Jesus to be a builder too. We know this because in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is called a builder (Mark 6:3), and that almost certainly means that Joseph trained Jesus through at least most of his teenage years, and likely even into his 20s.

By the time Jesus started his ministry, however, there is a complete absence of Joseph. Joseph was not with Mary at the wedding in Cana at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Similarly, Joseph was not included when the people of Nazareth mentioned the names of his family members (Matt. 13:55-56). Then, later, when the family thought Jesus had gone insane, Mary and his brothers came to get him without Joseph (Matt. 12:47; Luke 8:19). That record in and of itself is good evidence that Joseph was dead because in that male-dominated culture, Mary would never be named as part of a family group that was going to take charge of her grown son without her husband also being named if he was still around. As Jesus’ ministry progressed, his brothers are mentioned, but never his father. In fact, when the Scripture says that “his brothers” did not believe in him, it seems unlikely that the opinion of his father Joseph would have been omitted if he had still been around. The most conclusive evidence that Joseph was dead, however, was that Jesus told the Apostle John to take Mary home. That would have been unthinkable if Joseph were alive.

The other reason Jesus would have asked John to take care of Mary is that Jesus’ own brothers were continuing to reject him (see commentary on John 7:5). Scripture says that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, and the disbelief of his brothers would have certainly been a source of pain to Jesus. All of us want the love and support of our family members, but in the case of faith in Jesus, his brothers having faith in him meant more than just family unity; it meant their salvation. There is no scriptural evidence that any of Jesus’ brothers believed he was the Messiah until after his resurrection, and that may have been part of the reason that Jesus went to Galilee after his resurrection. Thankfully, at least some of Jesus’ brothers came to believe in him after his resurrection. In fact, his brother James rose to lead the Church in Jerusalem after the apostle James was killed by Herod Agrippa I (cf. Acts 12:2, 17; 15:13), and it is believed that Jesus’ brother James wrote the Epistle of James. Also, his brother Judas rose to prominence and wrote the Epistle of Jude.

Joh 19:28

**“in order to.”** The scripture that was fulfilled was Psalm 69:21: “for my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.” The Greek is *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood, and here it is a purpose clause (see Word Study: “Hina”). By this time Jesus’ mouth would have been utterly dry, not having had any water for over 24 hours. As Scripture says of the suffering Messiah, “My strength is dried up like a potsherd. And my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. And you lay me in the dust of death” (Psalm 22:15). Now seeing that all things were completed, he had only to die. But in a last act of grace toward those standing near, he desired to quote Psalm 22 to the onlookers, that they may see he is clearly fulfilling Scripture. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” quotes Jesus (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34), but some of those standing by misheard “Eli, Eli” to be a call for “Elijah,” due to the difficulty Jesus would have had in speaking. Therefore, Jesus says, “I am thirsty,” not as a statement of fact, but “in order to fulfill the Scriptures,” and also to moisten his mouth to allow for enunciation. Having received the sour wine and feeling the unconsciousness of death creeping on, Jesus exclaims, “It is finished” (John 19:30), which the other gospels only record as a “loud cry” (Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37). Luke 23:46 gives the further information that during this time he also said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (from Psalm 31:5).

Joh 19:29

**“A vessel full of wine vinegar was sitting there.”** One of the things that occurred during crucifixion was a terrible thirst that the crucified person endured as his body dehydrated and burned in the sun—a crucified person typically took three days to die. It was no accident that the wine vinegar was “sitting there.” The Roman soldiers would sometimes have some mercy on the crucified person and give them some wine vinegar to quench their thirst a little, and they did that for Jesus.

Wine vinegar is made by fermenting wine until it sours and becomes vinegar. Wine vinegar is much easier to keep than wine, and in fact, in the heat of the Near East, keeping wine from spoiling was quite difficult. The grape harvest was in the mid-summer, and within a few months much of it had been drunk by people or it had been ruined or it had been turned into wine vinegar. During fermentation, the alcohol in the wine is converted into acetic acid, which is the main component of vinegar.

“While vinegar making may be as old as alcoholic brewing, the first documented evidence of vinegar making and use was by the ancient Babylonians 3000 BC. They primarily made vinegar from dates, figs, and beer and used it for both culinary and medicinal purposes. Traces of it also have been found in Egyptian urns. The Greeks and Romans frequently used vinegar made from wine. The Spartans had vinegar as a part of their traditional broth *melas zomos*. The Roman Columella described the ingredients and process for making several types of vinegar in his work *Res Rustica.*”[[184]](#footnote-11753)

Joh 19:30

**“It is finished.”** This phrase is the translation of the one Greek word *teleō* (#5055 τελέω, pronounced “tel-'eh-ō”). It means “to complete an activity, thus, to finish, to close; to carry out an obligation, thus to accomplish, perform, fulfill; to pay what is due.”[[185]](#footnote-11126) Interestingly, it has been found in the papyri on tax receipts where it was used as “paid in full,” just as we put “paid in full” on paid receipts today. Thus, this statement is pregnant with meaning. It did mean, “It is finished,” because every obligation and prophecy of the Law, every requirement that was necessary for the salvation of mankind, was finished when Jesus ended his life. It also meant, “Paid in full,” because Jesus was the payment, the sin offering, for mankind’s sin (Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Joh 19:31

**“the high day.”** The Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the crosses on that special Sabbath that started the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so they wanted to have the legs of the criminals broken. Then the criminals would not be able to support their weight on their legs and would quickly asphyxiate.

The Passover lamb was always killed on Nisan 14 (Nisan is the first month of the Jewish year), and the sunset after the Passover lamb was killed started Nisan 15. Nisan 15 was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and it was always a Sabbath, no matter on which day of the week it occurred (Exod. 12:16-17; Lev. 23:6-8; Num. 28:16-18). The Law of Moses decreed that Nisan 15 was a special Sabbath, which is why Luke 23:54 says the “Sabbath” was beginning, even though the day that was beginning was a Thursday. We need to be clear on the fact that the “Sabbath” here in John 19:31 and in Luke 23:54 is not the weekly Sabbath, Saturday, but Thursday, Nisan 15 (see commentary on Luke 23:54). This point is made clear here in John 19:31, which tells us specifically that this Sabbath was a “high day,” meaning a special Sabbath, not the regular weekly Sabbath.

Most Christians do not realize that when the Bible says Jesus was crucified the day before the “Sabbath,” it does not mean the regular weekly Sabbath, but rather the Sabbath that starts with sunset after the Passover sacrifice. Sunset of Nisan 14, the day the Passover sacrifice is killed, starts the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 15, and that day is always a special Sabbath, a high day.

The Jews had no love for Jesus, and stories about him got confused as time went on. Yet apparently they retained the historical memory of him dying the day the Passover Lamb was killed, just before the Feast of Unleavened Bread started. Thus, they write in the Babylonian Talmud: “On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged. For 40 days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!”[[186]](#footnote-18366)

[For information on Jesus being crucified on Wednesday and being raised from the dead Saturday just before sunset, see commentary on Matt. 12:40. For more information on Nicodemus and that he came after Joseph of Arimathea left the tomb, see commentary on John 19:40. For more information on the events from Jesus’ arrest to his death, see commentary on John 18:13 and 19:14.]

Joh 19:35

**“And he who saw *this* has testified.”** John 19:35 is similar to John 21:24 in some ways, and points to the fact that a reason for John writing the Gospel of John was so that people would believe in Jesus, the Son of God.

John 19:35 gives good contributing evidence that John is the disciple whom Jesus loved, who was at the cross and was charged by Jesus to take care of his mother Mary (John 19:25-27). That John was with Jesus for most of his ministry, and was even at the cross when Jesus’ side was pierced, helps explain why John wrote the introduction to 1 John the way he did: “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked at and our hands touched, concerning the word of life—” (1 John 1:1). John truly had an intimate relationship with Jesus that even the other apostles did not have. For example, John was the apostle who leaned on Jesus’ chest at the Last Supper, and from the evidence in Scripture, John is the only apostle who was actually at the crucifixion site when Jesus died.

[For more on John being the disciple whom Jesus loved, see commentary on John 21:20.]

Joh 19:36

**“Not a bone of his will be broken.”** This is an allusion to the Passover sacrifice, in which no bone was broken (Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12; Ps. 34:20).

**“with the result that.”** See Word Study: “Hina.”

Joh 19:37

**“they will look.”** This is referring back to Zechariah 12:10, but it is not a direct quotation of the Hebrew text or the Septuagint; it is a summary and adaptation of the Old Testament prophecy (see commentary on Zech. 12:10).

Joh 19:38

**“Joseph…asked Pilate’s *permission* to take away the body of Jesus.”** Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus. See commentary on Matthew 27:58.

Joh 19:39

**“But Nicodemus also came.”** The Greek has the particle *de* (#1161 δέ, pronounced deh), often translated “but,” at the beginning of the sentence. However, the *de* in the Greek text has been basically ignored by translators due to the tradition that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus worked together to bury Jesus, even though they did not (see commentary on John 19:40). The most common use of the *de* is to either mark a contrast or mark the start of a new subject. In this verse, it could be translated as a contrast, as in the REV, or it could be seen to start a new subject, but we do not have a good English word that does that (Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible uses “Moreover”). Many English versions show the change in subject by not translating the *de* at all, but we did not feel that was strong enough in this context. We should read John like, “Joseph took down the body of Jesus, but Nicodemus came with spices to bury him.” Although it is true that grammatically there are times when the *de* can be translated “and,” that would be misleading in this case because it would connect Joseph and Nicodemus too closely.

Translations of John 19:39 such as the NIV’s “he [Joseph] was accompanied by Nicodemus,” are in error. They are not what the Greek text says, and thus are not translations, but interpretations, and erroneous ones at that.

**“about 75 pounds.”** The Greek text says 100 *litra* (#3046 λίτρα). There is some dispute about the exact weight, because if the Greek word *litra* was being used as a literal Greek weight, then the weight of the spices was about 65 pounds, but if the word *litra* was being used in the Greek text to represent the common Roman pound of 12 ounces (which is possible since Nicodemus was neither Greek nor Roman), then the weight of the spices was about 75 pounds (a Roman pound is 12 ounces while the American pound is 16 ounces, so 100 Roman pounds is 75 American pounds). Quite a few English versions read, “100 pounds,” which is confusing to English readers who only think in terms of American pounds. Nicodemus was bringing 65-75 pounds of spices. The uncertainty explains why the English versions differ about the weight: “100 pounds” (ASV, KJV, NASB); “70 pounds” (CJB); “75 pounds” (CSB, ESV, NET, NLT)

This is a huge amount of spices for a burial. It is likely that Jesus’ body did not even weigh much more than twice that amount. It has been suggested by many scholars that this large amount was actually fitting for a royal burial, and thus although Jesus’ birth was in less than royal circumstances, it seems his burial, in the tomb of a rich man and with a royal amount of spices, was a royal burial. Nicodemus was a rich man, and also it is possible that he and Joseph of Arimathea shared the cost of the spices. In any case, the amount of spices showed the great love and respect Nicodemus had for Jesus, and that they treated him like royalty. When Asa died, his bier was covered with spices (2 Chron. 16:14), and the historian Josephus (c. AD 37-100) tells us that when Herod the Great was buried, 500 servants carrying spices took part in the funeral.[[187]](#footnote-16310)

Had the women watching the burial seen Nicodemus, they would not have gone and bought spices themselves, and we can be sure that even though they did buy spices, they did not buy nearly 75 pounds of spices, which would have cost a lot of money.

Joh 19:40

**“they.”** To properly understand the burial of Jesus, we need to be aware that it happened in two stages: First, Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Jesus’ body in linen cloth, put it in his tomb, rolled the stone over the door, and then left. Later, Nicodemus came, opened the tomb, properly buried Jesus with spices, and then closed the tomb and left. The evidence is that the two men planned to work together, but something happened and things did not go as planned.

It was Joseph of Arimathea who went to Pilate and got permission to have Jesus’ body. Joseph then got the body of Jesus down from the cross, wrapped it in clean linen cloth, put it in his own new tomb, rolled the stone over the door of the tomb, and left, and while he did that, Mary Magdalene and another woman watched him (Matt. 27:58-61; Mark 15:43-47). It was so close to sunset that the special Sabbath was beginning (Luke 23:54). Later, after Joseph of Arimathea (and the women) left the tomb, Nicodemus and his servants arrived, and this was likely after the special Sabbath had begun. We know that Nicodemus and Joseph did not bury Jesus at the same time, working together, because Joseph closed the tomb and left while the women were still watching him (Matt. 27:60-61; Mark 15:47). But if the women had seen Joseph and Nicodemus work together to bury Jesus, which is what the traditional teaching says, then the women would have seen that Jesus had been properly buried, even royally buried, with 75 pounds of spices (see commentary on John 19:39). The fact that the women left the tomb after Joseph did, and still thought they needed to buy spices is conclusive evidence that Joseph and the women had left the area before Nicodemus arrived with the spices.

To do what they did, both Joseph and Nicodemus needed to have servants with them. For one thing, they were both wealthy and it would have been normal practice for a wealthy man to travel with servants. Beyond that, Joseph would have needed help with the body of Jesus and rolling the stone in front of the tomb.

Nicodemus would have also needed servants. They would have had to help him carry the spices, which weighed about 75 pounds (John 19:39). Also, it would have been the custom that as a member of the Sanhedrin and a wealthy man, he would have traveled with a bodyguard anyway, especially when it was close to dark, and very especially when he was carrying what certainly was thousands of dollars worth of valuable spices. Also, as it turned out, he needed help rolling the stone away from the door of the tomb when he arrived and then rolling it back to close the tomb when he left.

Nicodemus brought the traditional burial spices with him, but seemingly much more than would have ordinarily been used, showing the love and respect he had for Jesus, and he rewrapped Jesus’ body with them. Nicodemus’ work would have almost certainly been completed at dusk after the sun had set, even late dusk. Also, Nicodemus touched Jesus’ dead body, making himself unclean for the Passover meal, which showed how much he loved Jesus.

One reason that tradition teaches that Joseph and Nicodemus worked together is that the evidence leads us to conclude that they, being the only two followers of Jesus in the Jewish Sanhedrin, would have collaborated together on the burial of Jesus. The Bible never says if Joseph and Nicodemus were friends, or when they found out that they were both followers of Jesus. It is possible that they did not find out they were both disciples of Christ until Jesus’ trial when they were asked to vote for his death. It does seem that they both had been very quiet about being followers of Jesus, so much so that it is likely that none of the other members of the Sanhedrin knew they were disciples (John 7:50-52).

Joseph bought the linen to wrap Jesus in, got Jesus’ dead body, and put it in his own tomb (Mark 15:46). Joseph likely bought the cloth to wrap Jesus in because he needed a fitting way to transport Jesus’ body and also planned with Nicodemus to wrap Jesus in it as a burial cloth anyway. In contrast to Joseph who got the body of Jesus, Nicodemus bought the spices but did not buy a wrapping cloth. Also, Nicodemus knew to take the spices to Joseph’s tomb. That in itself shows Nicodemus and Joseph collaborated together and at some point decided to use Joseph’s tomb, which was close to the crucifixion site (John 19:42). Without the use of Joseph’s tomb, how would Jesus ever be properly buried as Scripture foretold, in the tomb of the rich (Isa. 53:9)? In fact, as a criminal, the Romans would have buried Jesus in a shallow grave along with other wicked people, but Jesus escaped that fate because of Joseph’s tomb. Also, more evidence that Joseph and Nicodemus planned things out together is that it would have been inappropriate and presumptuous for Nicodemus to go to Joseph’s personal tomb, open it, and wrap Jesus’ body without Joseph’s permission. So the evidence is that the two men collaborated together on the burial of Jesus even though they did not end up actually working together.

As we reconstruct the burial event, the most likely scenario is that Joseph and Nicodemus were supposed to meet at the tomb; Joseph with Jesus’ body and Nicodemus with the spices. But Nicodemus got delayed, so Joseph wrapped the body, put it in the tomb, and left just before the Sabbath started. Nicodemus, arriving later, likely even after the start of the special Sabbath, saw the closed tomb and realized that, since he had been delayed, Joseph had just put the unprepared body of Jesus in the tomb. Realizing that, Nicodemus and his servants opened Joseph’s tomb, went ahead with the royal burial of Jesus, and then closed the tomb again.

So the “they” in John 19:40 could refer to Nicodemus and his servants who did the final burial of Jesus, or the “they” may refer to both Joseph and Nicodemus, because even though they did not work on the burial of Jesus at the same time, they did both bury Jesus and the “they” could simply be melding the two burials because they had agreed together on what they would do with Jesus’ body. What is clear from the Gospel records is that the women saw Joseph put Jesus in the tomb, close it, and leave without properly burying Jesus, and they were not there when Nicodemus came with the spices, which is why they went and bought spices so they could properly bury him.

Joh 19:42

**“because of the Preparation Day.”** The phrase, “because of the Preparation Day” indicates that at some point Joseph became aware that Jesus would be crucified on Passover and would likely need to be buried before the special Sabbath started at sunset that same day. Furthermore, Nicodemus was also likely involved, meaning the two men planned Jesus’ burial together. It is also likely that being members of the Sanhedrin, they could quite easily find out where the crucifixion would take place. At that point, they would know they would not have time to take Jesus’ body very far before the Sabbath started. While they could touch Jesus’ dead body and be unclean on the Sabbath, they could not carry a dead body on the Sabbath for more than a Sabbath day’s journey. Thus, the selection of Joseph’s tomb for Jesus’ burial made sense from a geographical perspective.

**“they laid Jesus there.”** John 19:41-42 are a summary describing the burial place of Jesus. The “they” in verse 42 is simply referring to the fact that Jesus was placed in the tomb by people. It does not have to mean that Joseph and Nicodemus worked together. “They” placed him in the tomb: Joseph brought his body there, wrapped it, and shut the tomb door. Nicodemus and his servants opened the tomb, wrapped the body of Jesus with spices, and rolled the stone back over the door (see commentary on John 19:40).

[For more information on Jesus being crucified and buried on Wednesday and being three days and three nights in the grave, see commentary on Matt. 12:40.]

**“because the tomb was nearby.”** This phrase starts out with the Greek word *hoti* (#3754 ὅτι), which is a conjunction that in this context means “because, since, for.” This little phrase in John is a huge key to properly understanding Jesus’ burial. Matthew 27:57-60 informs us that the tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, who was wealthy, while Mark 15:43 informs us that Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of Israel, so he was indeed a wealthy and powerful man. Although he was from Arimathea, his position on the Sanhedrin would have been a reason for him to move to Jerusalem. That is no doubt why he had a tomb already cut out and prepared, surely for himself and his family.

Although the exact location of Arimathea is uncertain, it is most likely the modern town of Rentis, about 20 miles (32 km) NW of Jerusalem, and even if Joseph had a family tomb there, it is understandable that he would have wanted a family tomb in Jerusalem that would have been fitting both to his wealth and social status. Also, since at that time people were buried the same day they died, and Arimathea was at least a day’s journey, that would have been another reason Joseph would have wanted a tomb in Jerusalem, and why he would have had it prepared long before any of his family died. Death often came suddenly and unexpectedly in biblical times.

Joseph’s tomb just happened to be nearby the place where Jesus was crucified, and since he was a disciple of Jesus he willingly allowed his tomb to be used for Jesus’ body, including using his position and influence to get the body from the Romans. By the time Pilate’s permission could be obtained to claim Jesus’ dead body, it was very near sunset, which started the Passover, so there was no time to move the body far.

It has sometimes been taught that Joseph prepared the tomb for Jesus, but that would not be the case. Joseph would have no idea where Jesus was going to be crucified (and similar to the apostles, most likely did not even know that Jesus would be crucified until very close to when he was crucified), and this verse tells us that Jesus was buried there “because” it was near to the crucifixion site.

**John Chapter 20**

Joh 20:1

**“on the first *day* of the week.”** John chapter 19 ended with Jesus being buried, which was Wednesday close to sunset. John chapter 20 starts on Sunday morning before Sunrise, so there have been more than three days and nights between John 19:42 and 20:1.

**“Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early.”** Mary had seen the tomb just before sunset the night before (see commentary on Matt. 28:1). Now she came alone to the tomb “early, while it was still dark.” The Greek for “while it was still dark” indicates that the darkness was ending and the daylight was coming on. Biblically, the dimness of just before sunrise was still “dark.” We in the Western world tend to think of “dark” as “black-dark,” but in the biblical world before artificial lights, “dark” meant when it was not yet clearly bright out yet. The haze before sunrise was “dark” to them.

The trip from Bethany, which was on the east side of the Mount of Olives and apparently where Peter and the others were staying, to the tomb area, which we believe was on the west side of the Mount of Olives, is quite short, probably no longer than a 20-minute walk. Even if the tomb is in the vicinity of Gordon’s Calvary (a traditional Protestant site of the tomb) or at the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (the traditional Catholic and Orthodox site of the tomb), the walk would have only taken perhaps a half hour.

It is likely that the other women, who had the spices, were going to meet Mary at the tomb, and arrived at the tomb only a little while later, shortly after sunrise, carrying the spices they had prepared on Friday (see commentary on Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; cf. Matt. 28:5; see commentary on Matt. 28:5). Or it is possible that Mary had gone to the tomb early to see if the guard was gone or would let them properly bury Jesus, and then was going to return to tell them not to go if they could not get to the body of Jesus. In any case, once Mary saw the open tomb, she completely forgot about the spices and preparing Jesus’ body, and ran off to tell Peter and John that Jesus’ body was missing. The Bible never actually says Mary looked in and saw Jesus’ body was missing, but she must have or she would not have known that Jesus’ body was gone (John 20:2).

Mary’s going to tell Peter and John meant that by the time the other women arrived at the tomb, Mary Magdalene had already been startled by the empty tomb and left the area.

Joh 20:2

**“was a friend.”** The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the verb *phileō* in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “loved,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of *phileō* here, and confuse it with *agapē* love. We could say that Jesus was “friendly” or the disciple whom Jesus was “fond of,” but these seem too weak. We meet “friendly” people all the time, but they are not “friends.” It seems that changing the verb “befriended” to the phrase, “was a friend,” is the best way to handle this. For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see commentary on John 21:15.

The disciple whom Jesus loved, and the author of the Gospel of John, is John (see commentary on John 21:20).

**“They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb.”** This seemed totally ridiculous to Peter and the other disciple. For one thing, the tomb had been guarded by Roman soldiers. Secondly, who would take Jesus’ body? Not the Romans, they thought he was a common criminal. Not the religious leaders. They had the tomb guarded so no one would take the body and claim Jesus was resurrected. The Jews wanted there to be a body in the tomb to prove he was not the Messiah. Not the disciples. They were not expecting a resurrection themselves, and were more honest than to try to perpetrate some false plot about Jesus being raised. Besides, if Peter and the other disciple (almost certainly John) were not in on such a plot, it was bound to fail anyway. At this point, neither Peter nor the other disciple believed Mary’s report, but they went to check it out. When they saw the empty tomb with their own eyes, they believed Mary was telling the truth about the body being gone (see commentary on John 20:8).

Although the text does not say that Mary entered the tomb, we have to assume that she did. It was dark out and she would not have been able to testify that Jesus’ body had been taken unless she actually saw that it had been taken.

Joh 20:3

**“So Peter went out, and the other disciple…to the tomb.”** Although it does not say so in this verse, we know that Mary Magdalene also went back to the tomb, although she would have walked or slowly run behind. She may have even arrived at the tomb very shortly after Peter and the other disciple left, which could have been possible because they were running while Mary was more likely walking. In the biblical culture, it was customary for women to follow behind the men, so Peter and John would not have waited for her.

Joh 20:5

**“stooping down and looking in.”** The Greek word is *parakuptō* (#3879 παρακύπτω), and it means to stoop down or toward something in order to look at it, or to look at something with the head bowed forward or with the body bent over. It is also used metaphorically for looking at or into something carefully or intently.[[188]](#footnote-14725) There is a metaphorical use of the verb in which it is used for a rapid or cursory glance, and some commentators have taken that to be the sense in which Peter, Mary, and the other disciple looked into the tomb, as if they quickly glanced into it. However, that does not fit the situation. When Jesus’ followers looked into the tomb, they were studying it intently, barely believing what they saw, or rather, did not see.

**“and looking in, he saw the linen cloths.”** There are three times when people who are outside the tomb are said to be able to see where Jesus lay: here, John 20:11-12, and Luke 24:12. We believe that the tomb was a standard wealthy person’s tomb, since Joseph of Arimathea was wealthy. That meant it would have had a “weeping chamber” before the room or rooms that had the benches on which to lay the dead. In Joseph’s tomb, the setup was such that a person could stand outside the tomb and see through the weeping chamber to the place where Jesus’ body would have been placed.

Joh 20:7

**“handkerchief.”** The Greek word is *soudarion* (#4676 σουδάριον), a widely used Latin loanword. The Latin word is *sudarium*, from the Latin root *sudor*, “sweat.”[[189]](#footnote-23865) As well as being used as a loanword in Greek, the Romans also introduced it into Palestine where it was picked up and used by the Jews, even appearing in the Mishnah and Talmud.[[190]](#footnote-14065) A *soudarion*, as the name implies, was usually our equivalent to a handkerchief or sweat cloth, and was used for wiping sweat from the body and cleaning the nose. Due to the heat in Palestine, a word that uniquely described a piece of cloth to wipe sweat from the body was readily assimilated into the culture. Besides being used for wiping sweat, it was also useful for wrapping things (Luke 19:20 records a man hiding money in one, but the rabbinical writings show that practice was considered unsafe.[[191]](#footnote-32171)) Furthermore, because it was a face cloth, it was used to cover the face of a dead body, something apparent from the record of Lazarus (John 11:44), and Jesus (John 20:7).

The facecloth was folded, or rolled up (the Greek word can mean either), apart from the rest of the grave wrappings, but the Bible does not explain why. A few plausible reasons have been set forth as to why the facecloth was folded and set aside: one is that it enabled anyone who came into the tomb to see in an instant that the body was not there. Another is that it shows the orderliness of the situation, that things were not done haphazardly or in haste, but that, just as with the rest of God’s creation, things are done in an orderly way. Still another contributing reason could be that the facecloth was folded as further proof that the body was not stolen. If thieves had stolen the body, they likely would have stolen the small face cloth too, but even if they did not want to steal it too, they certainly would not have taken the time to fold it up and set it aside.

In recent years a teaching has arisen in Christianity that the “napkin” (KJV) covering the face of Jesus’ dead body was folded by itself as an indication that Jesus Christ would come back. The teaching goes like this: in biblical times if a master was eating at the table and got up to leave, if he was done eating, he would just throw the napkin down in a heap and the servants knew he was completely finished. If, however, the master folded the napkin and left, the servants knew not to clear the table, because he was coming back. So, it is concluded, Jesus carefully folded the napkin to show us he was coming back. There are a number of problems with this teaching. First and foremost, there is absolutely no evidence from ancient times that it is true. There is no ancient evidence that there was any such custom associated with eating; in fact, what we know about ancient meals contradicts this new teaching. People in the East ate with their hands, and after eating they cleansed them by washing in water, not by using a “napkin.”[[192]](#footnote-12369) Second, the word “napkin” is used in the KJV, and from that, people get the idea of our table napkin. But as we have seen, the people of the East did not use “table napkins,” and the Greek word used in the verse does not mean “table napkin.” This whole new teaching is presented as if it happened in today’s culture. Even a wealthy man in the ancient Near East would not sit in a chair at a table, use silverware, and wipe his hands with a napkin. He would sit or recline on the floor or a low pillow and eat primarily with his right hand. When he was ready to leave the table for any reason, a servant would clean his hands by washing them in water.

This new “urban legend” about Jesus shows what can happen when a word in the Bible is mistranslated in such a way that the meaning chosen in English (in this case, “napkin”), does not accurately represent the meaning of the word in the biblical culture. Like so many other things in Jesus’ life, the cloth and face-covering that Jesus was buried in disappeared in history. They would have had blood and oil on them and would likely not have gotten much if any attention. The Shroud of Turin is claimed by some to be the cloth Jesus was buried in. There are good reasons to believe that it is not, but for some it’s a reminder that Jesus died and was buried for them.

Joh 20:8

**“and he saw, and he believed.”** Peter and the other disciple both “saw,” and both “believed.” If we read John 20:8 without paying attention, and especially without seeing the Greek text, it can seem like the other disciple was the one who saw and believed. However, the double use of *kai* (and, also) in the Greek text makes it clear that both Peter and the other disciple saw and believed. John (the “other disciple”) arrived at the tomb first and looked in the tomb to see the grave clothes, but did not go in. Peter, always the bold one, arrived and went right in, and saw that Mary had been telling the truth: Jesus’ body was gone. Then the other disciple went in, “and he saw and he believed,” or “he also saw and he also believed.” The two of them both believed that the body was actually gone.

**“believed.”** Believed what? Many people say Peter and the other disciple believed in the resurrection, but that cannot be the case. For one thing, the next verse (John 20:9) says they did not know about the resurrection. Although Jesus had tried to tell them he would be killed and raised, there is not one time the Bible indicates they understood what he meant, and they even argued among themselves as to what he was saying (cf. Matt. 16:21-22; Mark 9:10; Luke 18:34). It was only after the resurrection and personally seeing Jesus that they understood the death and resurrection of the Messiah (Luke 24:45). In fact, when Jesus did show himself to them when they were behind locked doors, they were frightened and thought they were seeing some kind of spirit (Luke 24:37).

After the crucifixion, the tomb was closed, sealed, and guarded. So when Mary said Jesus’ body had been stolen, they did not believe her at first (see commentary on John 20:2). After all, why would anyone want Jesus’ dead body? Nevertheless, when they went to the tomb themselves, they “saw” it was empty and they “believed” what Mary had said, that the body had been taken. The next verse confirms this by saying that they did not know the scripture that he would rise from the dead. Peter and John went back home, but Mary remained at the tomb crying, more evidence they did not believe in the resurrection. If she believed Jesus was resurrected, she would have been rejoicing. Even after the whole group of women said they saw Jesus, Peter still did not believe in the resurrection (Luke 24:12).

Also, although they saw the grave clothes with the spices in the tomb, that would have only been more confusing to them, not indicative of a resurrection they were not expecting. We must remember that neither the women nor Peter and John knew Nicodemus had come and wrapped Jesus with spices. The women (and hence the disciples), thought Jesus was buried in a simple linen cloth by Joseph of Arimathea. Thus, the wrappings and spices would have been just one more thing that did not make sense, so the disciples went home and Mary just stayed and wept.

Joh 20:9

**“did not yet know.”** The disciples did not expect Jesus to be killed and then raised from the dead, so they did not expect an empty tomb. (See commentary on Luke 18:34).

**“from among the dead.”**[[193]](#footnote-14497) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Joh 20:11

**“crying.”** Mary was crying because she believed someone had taken the body of Jesus (John 20:13. Also, see commentary on John 20:8).

**“stooped down and looked.”** The Greek word is *parakuptō* (#3879 παρακύπτω), and it means to stoop toward something in order to look at it (see commentary on John 20:5). The Bible never says that Mary actually went into the tomb. In contrast, the Bible clearly says the other women who came with the spices shortly after sunrise did enter the tomb (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3).

Joh 20:12

**“[Mary] saw two angels in white, sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.”** After seeing the empty tomb, Peter and John went back to where they had been staying, but Mary Magdalene stood outside the sepulcher weeping. As she was crying, she stooped down and “looked” into the sepulcher (she did not go in). Mary had a completely different experience at the tomb than the group of women who arrived at the tomb after she had left. Mary only looked into the tomb, but the group of women went into the tomb. Mary looked in and saw two angels sitting, one at the head and one at the feet of where the body of Jesus had been. When the group of women entered the tomb, they saw only one angel sitting (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3-4), but while they were in the tomb with that angel, two other angels suddenly appeared and stood by them (Luke 24:4).

Furthermore, the angels only asked Mary Magdalene why she was crying, they did not tell her Jesus was raised from the dead. It was as Mary started to walk away from the tomb that she met Jesus. In contrast, the angels in the tomb told the group of women that Jesus had been raised from the dead (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6), but then those women also met the Lord personally as they were going to tell the disciples what the angels said (Matt. 28:9-10).

The presence of the angels in the tomb did not startle Mary so it is clear she did not know they were angels. If she thought about them at all, she likely thought they were men who saw the open tomb and went in before Peter and John got to the tomb. Or, if she arrived at the tomb after Peter and John had left, she might have thought they went into the tomb after they left and before she arrived the second time. If Mary arrived at the tomb while Peter and John were still there, she likely thought that they did not say anything to her about the two “men” in the tomb because they were focused on the missing body of Jesus (see commentary on John 20:3). Besides, it was Passover time, Jerusalem was packed with people, and the “men” might have gone into an empty tomb just out of natural curiosity. In any case, the “men” in the tomb only asked why she was crying and gave no hint they were angels.

**“in white.”** Many clothes in the biblical world were white, such as linen garments and clothes made of white wool, so the white garments were not out of the ordinary and did not indicate to Mary that the men she was talking to were angels. The white garments were appropriate to signify the righteousness and purity of the risen Lord and also helped Mary to see the men in the dark tomb, which would have been especially dark before the sun was up.

Joh 20:13

**“Woman, why are you crying?”** The greeting, “Woman,” is colder today than it was in biblical times, when it was a proper and respectful way to address a woman, particularly one with whom you were not on familiar terms. The angels only asked Mary why she was crying, they did not tell her Jesus had risen from the dead. This is different from the experience the other women had when they came to the tomb. Angels told the other women that Jesus was not there because he had risen from the dead (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6). After the angels spoke to Mary she turned from the tomb and saw the Lord, but did not recognize him at first (John 20:14).

Joh 20:17

**“Do not touch me.”** John 20:17 is a difficult verse, and to understand it we must pay attention to everything in the verse, the context, and the scope of Scripture. To start our examination of the verse, we should look at the Greek word translated “touch.” The word “touch” is *haptomai* (#680 ἅπτομαι), and in the Greek text, it is in the imperative mood, present tense, middle voice. *Haptomai* means “touch,” or “grasp,” and in this verse can legitimately be translated in one of two broad categories. One is, “Do not touch me,” (ASV, BBE, NET, i.e., Mary has not yet touched Jesus and he is stopping her from touching him). The other is, “Stop clinging to me” (CSB, ESV, NASB, i.e., Mary has already taken hold of the Lord and he is asking her to stop). Although some commentators assert that the present tense indicates that Mary was already touching him, that is not correct. Bultmann writes: “The present imperative does not necessarily imply that she [Mary] has already touched him, but it need only presuppose that she is trying to do it, and is in the process of doing it.”[[194]](#footnote-27455)

Many scholars say that Mary was already clinging to Jesus based on the fact that *haptomai* usually refers to a firm grasp and not just a light touch. They say that if Mary had not yet touched Jesus, then he would not have used *haptomai*, but would have used another word for touch that referred to a lighter touch. However, that is not a good argument for why *haptomai* was used in the verse. Jesus stopped Mary from doing what she intended to do, and given the circumstances and her relief at seeing Jesus alive, she would not have “lightly touched” him, she would have grabbed him and held him. So it was appropriate for Jesus to stop Mary by saying, “Do not grasp me.”

In the final analysis, because *haptomai* can be translated either as “Do not touch me,” or “Stop touching me,” we must decide how to translate it from understanding the context and what the verse is talking about. In other words, when we discover what Jesus is talking about when he says he is going up to the Father, then we will see how to translate *haptomai*. Jesus then explains why he does not want Mary to touch him when he says that it is because he has not yet “gone up” to the Father (see explanation below). It is worth noting that although Jesus told Mary not to touch him at this time, not too long after this he allowed the women who came with spices to take hold of his feet (Matt. 28:9), and later in the day he told the disciples to touch him all over to get to the point that they were convinced that he had really gotten up from the dead and was present with them in a physical body (Luke 24:39). Luke uses a different Greek word for “touch,” *psēlaphaō* (#5584 ψηλαφάω), than the *haptomai* that John uses for touch here.

**“because I have not yet gone up to the Father.”** Jesus told Mary, “Do not touch me, because I have not yet gone up to the Father.” As we will see, Jesus told Mary not to touch him because he had not yet gone up into the Temple and presented himself there as the firstfruits from the dead.

The Greek word *gar*, translated “because,” is vital to understanding this verse. The normal reading of *gar* is that it gives the reason that Mary cannot touch Jesus. In today’s modern English, we use “because” and not “for,” although many Bibles read “for” and say, “Don’t touch me for I have not yet gone up to the Father.” This is a very simple sentence. It gives the reason that Mary cannot touch (or hold on to) Jesus, which is “because” he had not yet gone up to his Father. If we find out what Jesus’ going up to the Father is, we will understand the verse and also understand whether to translate *haptomai* as “Do not touch me” or “Do not hold on to me.”

Almost every commentator seriously misunderstands this verse because they assume that “going up to the Father” refers to Jesus’ ascension into heaven. This problem is made worse by the fact that most English versions of the Bible translate the common Greek word *anabainō*, which means “to go up” or “to come up,” as “ascended.” This makes it seem like the verse is referring to Jesus’ ascension into heaven, which it does not.

If Jesus told Mary not to touch him because he had not yet ascended into heaven, then why did he allow or invite others to touch him before he ascended? The same morning he told Mary not to touch him, he allowed the other women to touch him and hold on to his feet (Matt. 28:9). Then later that same day Jesus appeared to his disciples when they were behind locked doors and told them, “Look at my hands and my feet, *and see* that it is I myself. Touch me and see” (Luke 24:39). The word translated “touch” in Luke 24:39 is *psēlaphaō* (#5584 ψηλαφάω, pronounced psā-lä-'fä-ō), and it means to handle, to touch around on, to feel (see commentary on Luke 24:39). Thus, the same day Jesus told Mary not to touch him, he allowed the other women to not only touch him but to hold on to him, and he also invited all the disciples to touch him all over and become convinced that it was really him. Then, eight days later, he told Thomas to touch him (John 20:26, 27).

Rudolf Bultmann is a commentator who saw the problem about Mary touching Jesus, and wrote: “If the wording were pressed, it would follow that when he had gone to the Father he would subsequently present himself to his followers for fellowship and physical contact….”[[195]](#footnote-25836) Bultmann is correct. If Jesus says the reason not to touch him is that he had not gone to the Father, then once he had “gone up” to the Father, people could touch him. Of course, that is exactly what happened. Once Jesus had “gone up” to his Father, which, as we will see, he did when he went “up” to the Temple and then presented himself to the Father there, he allowed people to touch him.

D. A. Carson, thinking the “ascension” was Jesus’ ascension into heaven, saw the problem and wrote: “And why should being ascended make a difference? …the implication is that the disciples are permitted to touch Jesus after the ascension but not before—exactly the reverse of what might have been expected.”[[196]](#footnote-31684) Carson is correct that the implication of the verse, indeed, we would say the very meaning of the Greek text, is that people cannot touch Jesus before he “goes up,” but can touch him after he “goes up.” From that evidence alone, we can see that Jesus’ “going up” is not his ascension into heaven. As Carson has seen, if no one was supposed to touch Jesus before the ascension, then he should not have let anyone, including the women and his disciples, touch him. On the other hand, if the women and the disciples can touch Jesus before his ascension, then he should have let Mary Magdalene touch him too. And also as Carson has seen, if we were not supposed to touch Jesus before his ascension into heaven, but we can afterward, how are we supposed to do that? How can we touch Jesus after he goes to heaven?

Thankfully, there is a simple and biblical answer to why Jesus did not let Mary touch him. But before we study it, we should note some of the unsatisfactory solutions that have been postulated to solve it. One is that Jesus did not let Mary touch him because she was touching him out of doubt, not faith. She doubted he was “real” or that it was really him. But the other disciples and Thomas doubted too, in fact, the very reason Jesus told them to touch and handle him was to get rid of their doubt, so that “solution” is not correct.

Another unsatisfactory solution is that Mary had grabbed Jesus so she would not lose him again, but if that were the case he would have simply told her she could let go “because” he would be with her forever. Instead, he told her to let him go “because” he had not yet gone up to his Father. But if his going up to God is the ascension, then the reason he told Mary to let him go would be incorrect since he let others touch him before his ascension.

Yet another unsatisfactory solution postulated by some Bible teachers is that Mary must have grabbed him in worship, and Jesus was telling Mary not to worship him at that time. But why would he not allow her worship and why would his being in heaven be a better time to worship him? Besides, he let other people worship him before his ascension, including the women who grabbed his feet and the people he met in Galilee (Matt. 28:9, 17).

Still another proposed solution is that he told Mary to let him go so that he was then free to ascend to the Father in heaven; as if he could not ascend while she was holding him. But then when she supposedly let go, he stayed on earth for another 40 days. So that “solution” cannot be correct.

Another solution, a quite inventive one, is that the phrase “I have not yet gone up to the Father,” is parenthetical. Removing the words in the parenthesis would make the verse read: “Do not cling to me, for…go rather to my brothers and tell them I am going up to the Father.” In other words, “Let me go so you can go tell my brothers I am going up to the Father.” However, that proposed solution has many problems. Not the least of them is that it requires a very unusual and unnatural way to read the Greek text. Also, if Jesus was going to be around for 40 more days, why would Mary have to let go of him and hurry off to tell the disciples about the ascension? Jesus’ allowing Mary to hold him for a few more minutes would not change anything. Also, why would Jesus want Mary to give the disciples a message about his ascension, when they did not understand there would even be an ascension? (There will be more on this point later). This solution does not work.

Some scholars explain the verse in a totally different manner, and say that “going up” to the Father refers to some kind of progressive glorification of Christ. These scholars correctly note that the word that most English Bibles translate as “ascended” (*anabainō*; #305 ἀναβαίνω), is a very common Greek word. It occurs more than 80 times in the New Testament, and refers to all kinds of ways of “going up” or “coming up.” In essence, the reasoning of these scholars is that after his resurrection, Jesus went through a progressive glorification, which John 20:17 refers to as an “ascension,” a “going up.”[[197]](#footnote-28369) In other words, according to this interpretation, after his resurrection, over a period of time, Jesus “went up” to a greater and greater state of glorification, and he had just started the process when he met Mary, so he did not want her to touch him. We reject this proposed solution for a number of reasons. The first is that we assert that when God raised Jesus from the dead he was fully glorified and given all authority in heaven and on earth. Also, it does not make sense that after his resurrection he was not glorified enough to let Mary touch him, but perhaps only about an hour later, he was glorified enough that other women could touch him, and by the end of the day, he was so glorified that any disciple could touch him.

None of the above explanations of the verse are satisfactory. However, the number of explanations and the wide variety of them shows us that properly understanding the verse will require good translation work, sound logic, and an understanding of both the scope of Scripture and Jewish laws and customs. What we will now see is that the solution to the problem is biblical, but to understand it, there is some important background we must understand.

One thing we must understand is that the Greek word most English Bibles translate as “ascended” is *anabainō*, which is a common Greek word and is used of many types of “going up” in the New Testament. Examples of *anabainō* in the New Testament include when Jesus “went up” out of the water at his baptism (Matt. 3:16); when Jesus “went up” a mountain (Matt. 5:1; 14:23; 15:29); when thorns “came up” out of the soil (Matt. 13:7); when Jesus and the disciples “went up” into a boat (Matt. 14:32); when Jesus and his apostles “were going up” to Jerusalem (Matt. 20:17); and when the multitude “went up” to Pilate (Mark 15:8). The point is that *anabainō* is the common word for “going up” from one place to another. Since the Bible uses *anabainō* for the times when Jesus climbs up a mountain, it would be the normal word the Bible would use to say that Jesus “went up” from the area of the tomb to the Temple, because the Temple was on top of Mount Moriah. In John 20:17, *anabainō* does not refer to Jesus’ ascension into heaven, and should not have been translated as “ascended.”

Another key to understanding the verse is in the last sentence of the verse: “But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am going up to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.’” Jesus said “I am going up,” using the present tense verb. That indicates that going up to his Father was something that Jesus was in the process of doing or just starting to do. Although there are times when the present tense of a verb is used as a generalization for the future tense of the verb, that does not seem likely here. After all, if Jesus was speaking of his ascension into heaven, then he would have been speaking of an event that was 40 days away, so it would have been more natural for him to use the future tense of the verb and have said, “I will go up to my Father.” The simple and straightforward reading of “I am going up to my Father” is that his “going up,” was something that was happening or going to happen right then.

Another key to understanding what Jesus meant when he said he had not yet “gone up” to his Father is that Mary knew what he was talking about. Even though the meaning of what Jesus said may not be immediately apparent to us, it was clear to Mary. She was certainly glad (and astounded!) to see Jesus. However, once she grasped that she was really speaking to the resurrected Christ, there is no evidence that she was confused by his message to tell the disciples he was going up to the Father. This should have signaled us from the start that the “going up to the Father” did not refer to his ascension into heaven, because the disciples did not know about his ascension into heaven.

Whenever Jesus spoke of his death or resurrection, the disciples were confused and did not know what he meant (see commentary on Luke 18:34). Similarly, they did not understand what he was talking about when he spoke of his ascension into heaven (John 14:5; 16:17-19). Even after his resurrection, when they finally understood about his death and resurrection, there is no indication they understood about his ascension. As late as Acts 1:6 the disciples were asking Jesus if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time, and they were speaking of his kingdom on earth. They were not expecting him to leave the earth, even though he had told them he was going to, which is why they were so caught off guard when he did leave, and angels had to appear and tell them he was coming back (Acts 1:9-11).

[See Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Since Jesus told Mary to tell to the disciples that he was “going up,” he could not have been speaking of his ascension into heaven because neither she nor the disciples knew about the ascension. Even if Jesus had taken time to explain to Mary about his ascension into heaven, she could not have then told the disciples about it. She could not even get them to believe she had seen the risen Christ! How could she have gotten them to believe that this risen Christ was going to go up into heaven?

From the evidence, we can see that the “going up” in John 20:17 had nothing to do with Jesus’ ascension into heaven, but instead was something that Jesus told Mary to tell the disciples that would help them believe that they had really seen the resurrected Christ. It had to be something the disciples would have understood and something that they knew he had to do on that Sunday. We will see that what Jesus had to do was present himself in the Temple as the High Priest and the Firstfruits offering.

The Messiah was the fulfillment of the types and symbols in the Old Testament. For example, he was the true Passover Lamb; the true acceptable sacrifice; the true Sabbath rest for God’s people; and the true High Priest. He was also the true “firstfruits” to God, that is, the first of God’s true harvest (God’s true harvest is the harvest of people who get up from the dead to everlasting life, and Jesus was the first one to be raised from the dead to everlasting life). After his resurrection, Jesus was both the High Priest (Ps. 110:4; Zech. 6:13; Heb. 5:5; 8:1) and the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20, 23), and he had to go to the Temple and show himself in both those roles.

According to the Law of Moses, the firstfruits of the harvest were shown to God during the Feast of Unleavened Bread “on the day after the Sabbath.” On that day, the High Priest was to wave firstfruits of the harvest in the Temple (Lev. 23:10, 11). The day after the Sabbath is Sunday, and in the year Jesus was crucified it was Sunday, Nisan 18. Sunday was the day Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene, but when Jesus met Mary at the tomb, it was still dark and before sunrise (see commentary on John 20:1). It would be proper for him to wait until after the sun had risen before showing himself to God in the Temple. That is because “the purpose of such [waving] rites was to show the offering to God,” which would logically be after the sun came up.[[198]](#footnote-26724) The firstfruits were publicly waved “so it will be accepted on your [the people’s] behalf” (Lev. 23:11 NIV). In other words, the High Priest waved the firstfruits offering publicly and so that it was accepted for the people.

[For more on this occurring the Sunday after the Saturday Sabbath, see commentary on Acts 2:1.]

After the sun came up, Jesus Christ, as the acceptable firstfruits, went up from the tomb area to the Temple on Mount Moriah and showed himself publicly to God and was acceptable in God’s sight to represent the rest of the harvest—all the believers who will be raised from the dead. The High Priest showing the firstfruits in the Temple was something all the apostles and disciples understood from their Jewish upbringing, and knew was supposed to happen that very day. So if they believed Mary’s testimony that Jesus had been raised from the dead, they would also understand he had to go up to the Temple and show himself to God there. Therefore, when Mary appeared to them and told them Jesus was alive, she bolstered her statement by telling them that he had to “go up to the Father,” that is, appear in the Temple. We know she told them Jesus had to go up to the Father (in the Temple) because when Mary got to the disciples, she not only told them she had seen Jesus alive, but she also told them what he had said to her (John 20:18).

As both the High Priest and the Offering, Jesus had to remain Levitically clean until after he offered himself, and he would not be Levitically clean if Mary touched him (Lev. 22:1-8). Mary was unclean by virtue of the fact that she had been in the tomb that morning and seen that the body of Jesus was gone. However, after Jesus had fulfilled his role as High Priest and firstfruits offering by showing himself in the Temple, he could let people touch him—and he did. As we saw in Matthew 28:9, the first people he allowed to touch him were the women who came to the tomb to anoint his body with spices. However, the Bible makes it clear that he came to them after the sun had come up (Mark 16:2). So Jesus had time to go to the Temple between the time he saw Mary Magdalene and told her not to touch him and the time he saw the other women and allowed them to grab his feet. We should remember that when Jesus saw Mary he was in the process of starting up to the Temple (“I am going up to my Father;” John 20:17). So by the time he allowed the women to take hold of his feet later that morning, he would have been finished with his brief priestly duties. Also, later that day when the disciples were behind locked doors, Jesus could invite them to touch around on him and become convinced that it was really him (Luke 24:39).

**“my God.”** For this being evidence that Jesus Christ is not God, see commentary on Mark 15:34.

[Also see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Joh 20:18

**“went *and* announced to the disciples.”** After seeing Jesus alive, Mary went back to the disciples and told them that she had seen the Lord, but they did not believe her. Since Jesus had met Mary before he met the other women, Mary would have arrived where the disciples were hiding some time before the other women. It is quite possible that Mary arrived to tell the disciples just about the time Jesus was appearing to the other women (Luke 24:10-11; see commentary on Luke 24:10).

Joh 20:19

**“Jesus came.”** Jesus appeared to the apostles and disciples as they were gathered together behind locked doors. John 20:19 lets us know it is in the evening on Sunday, because it was still the first day of the week. If it was after sunset, then Monday, the second day of the week, would have started.

This was the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples as a group, but Thomas was not with them (John 20:24). Jesus had already appeared to people a number of times: to Mary Magdalene; to the women who came with spices to the tomb, to Peter, and to the two men that he met on the road to Emmaus. All these people were present when Jesus appeared in the room, and we can tell from Luke 24:34 that the people in this room full of disciples were quite convinced that Jesus was alive. Still, he now appeared inside the locked room, which startled and frightened the disciples. This was likely due to the fact that he simply appeared in the room, whereas the Jesus they were used to would have had to knock on the door. Jesus tried to calm them by saying “Peace be to you,” but they thought they were seeing a spirit. Nevertheless, he corrected them and told them that a spirit did not have flesh and bone like he had. He then showed them his hands and feet.

Jesus had just taught the Scriptures about himself to the two men on the road to Emmaus, and now he opened the Scriptures to these disciples who were gathered together, thus giving them a scriptural as well as an experiential reason to believe that he was alive. The record of Jesus appearing in the room with the disciples is Luke 24:36-46 and John 20:19-24.

Joh 20:20

**“he showed them his hands and his side.”** Jesus showed the disciples the scars he had from the nails driven through his wrists to hold him on the cross, and the scar from the spear that had been thrust into his side. If Jesus had scars in his resurrected body, will Christians have scars and deformations in the new bodies they receive at the Rapture? The answer is “No.”

In this record in John 20, Jesus had scars from his earthly wounds, but Christians will not have scars or blemishes in the new body they will receive when they are raptured. Jesus could change the way his body looked; his outward appearance (Luke 24:16, 31; Mark 16:12; Rev. 1:13-15). In Jesus’ case, here in John 20, his appearing with scars on his wrists and side confirmed to his disciples who he was and reminded them of what he did. There was no need for him to show all his cuts and bruises; in fact, the fact that he didn’t would encourage the disciples about the healing power within the resurrection and new body. The nail and spear wounds were more than enough for a positive identification.

We should not think that in our next life we will have scars or deformation in our new body. We today know a lot more about the new body we will receive at the Rapture than any person who lived during the Old Testament or Gospel period could have known about their resurrected body. The Old Testament only says that the people who are raised from the dead will be healed: the blind will see, the lame will walk, etc. (Isa. 35:5-6). The Old Testament prophecies did not promise that people would get a brand-new body with no earthly marks on it, and the apostles were not surprised to see scars on Jesus’ body.

In contrast, the information in the New Testament Epistles about the new body Christ got at his resurrection, and the new body Christians will get at the Rapture, was written long after Jesus ascended into heaven. So while Jesus’ disciples would not have been surprised that Jesus’ resurrected body had scars from his wounds, the revelation in the Church Epistles is that a Christian will receive a new body that is very different from their old flesh body. Our flesh body is “soul powered,” while our new body will be “spirit powered” (1 Cor. 15:44). Our old body is corruptible, our new body will be incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:42). Our old body is weak and dishonorable, while our new body will be powerful and glorious (1 Cor. 15:43). Our old body is mortal, our new body will be immortal (1 Cor. 15:53-54). Our new body will be like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21). The Old Testament promised new bodies would be healed. The New Testament promises that the new bodies Christians receive at the rapture will be “glorious,” and that is something every Christian can look forward to with joyful expectation.

Joh 20:21

**“as the Father has sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Joh 20:22

**“breathed on them.”** The Greek word for “breathed on” is *emphusaō* (#1720 ἐμφυσάω, pronounced em-foo-'sah-ō), and it means to breathe on or to blow on. The word “them” is correctly supplied because the Greek reads, “blew on and says ‘to them’” (*autois*), and the dative pronoun *autois* (to them) governs both the verb “blew” and the verb “says.” When understood as “blew on” we can see that Jesus was instructing his disciples about the Day of Pentecost, when the Temple was filled with the sound of a mighty wind.

The beauty of the two meanings of *emphusaō* is that the Greek text is showing the two things Jesus is doing for his disciples. He is giving instruction for the Day of Pentecost when the Temple will be filled with the sound of a rushing, mighty wind, because he breathed on them, blew on them, and said, “Receive holy spirit.” At the same time, Jesus is making a powerful association between what happened in Genesis, what is foretold in Ezekiel, and what will happen on the Day of Pentecost when he pours out the gift of holy spirit. The use of *emphusaō* here in John 20:22 takes us back to its use in Genesis 2:7 in the Septuagint, where God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and “breathed” into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul. In Genesis, God breathed natural life into Adam; now Jesus foretells when spiritual life will be breathed into the disciples. Also, the Bible foretells that believers will receive resurrection life when the *ruach* (“spirit, breath, wind) “breathes” on the dead bodies of Israel, and they come to life. “Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the spirit, prophesy, son of man, and tell the spirit: This is what the Lord Yahweh says: Come from the four winds, O spirit, and breathe on these slain, so that they come to life” (Ezek. 37:9; cf. Ezek. 37:9-14).

It is important to realize that the disciples did not receive the gift of holy spirit at this time, which was the Sunday that he first appeared to his disciples, starting with Mary Magdalene early that morning. Jesus was giving them instructions for when the holy spirit would be poured out in the near future, which we know from Acts occurred some 50 days later on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus breathed or blew out, making a wind-like sound, and said, “Receive holy spirit.” Some 50 days later, on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were in the Temple when it was filled with the sound of a strong rushing wind (but there was no wind; only the sound; Acts 2:2), and the gift of holy spirit was poured out on the apostles who were filled with it and began to speak in tongues; the first time in history anyone had spoken in tongues (Acts 2:4).

**“holy spirit.”** The Greek text has no article “the.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the holy spirit and uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and also see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Joh 20:23

**“you forgive.”** The “you” is plural. See commentary on Matthew 16:19.

Joh 20:25

**“Unless I see in his hands the mark.”** For information on the scars on Jesus, see commentary on John 20:20.

**“nails.”** It is sometimes taught that Jesus was crucified on a stake, with his hands above his head fastened by a single nail. This statement of Thomas, who knew how Jesus was crucified, gives good evidence that Jesus was crucified in a standard Roman way, with his arms outstretched to the sides and a nail in each wrist (in the Hebrew culture, the wrist was considered part of the hand; this becomes very clear in hand washing practices, which included washing the wrist).

[For more on the way Jesus was crucified, see commentary on John 19:17.]

**“I will not ever believe.”** At some point after Jesus left the disciples, Thomas rejoined them. The Bible does not give us a specific time, so it could have been just before sunset and still on Sunday, Nisan 18, or after sunset and thus on Monday, Nisan 19 (this is very likely), or even in the next few days. Even though everyone would have testified to Jesus’ being alive, Thomas did not believe what they said.

Joh 20:26

**“eight days later.”** The Lord appeared a second time in a locked room to all the disciples (including Thomas) eight days later, that is, eight days after he appeared to them the first time. Generally in the biblical culture, when counting set numbers of something, the first and last thing are both counted, so “eight days later” is Sunday to Sunday, eight days. Thus, the Lord appeared the first time to the disciples on a Sunday, Nisan 18, and they were behind locked doors. Then he waited a week before appearing a second time. His second appearance to all the disciples was also on a Sunday, Nisan 25, and the disciples were still behind locked doors. This time, however, Thomas was with them.

We cannot be sure, but it is possible that the fact that Jesus appeared to the disciples on Resurrection Sunday, then not again until the following Sunday, helped establish the tradition of holding Christian meetings on Sunday.

Joh 20:28

**“My Lord and my God.”** A very likely way to understand John 20:28 is that Thomas had realized the power of God working in Jesus, and in saying “my Lord and my God” he was pointing out that Jesus did, in fact, reveal God in a unique and powerful way. In seeing the resurrected Jesus, Thomas clearly saw both the Lord Jesus, and the God who raised Jesus from the dead, and he stated that fact.

Jesus always taught that he only did what God guided him to do, and said that if you had seen him you had seen the Father. In that light, there is good evidence that here in John 20:28, “doubting Thomas” was saying that in seeing Jesus he was also seeing the Father.

The construction of the Greek text is “article, noun, pronoun; *kai* [and], article, noun, pronoun” (lit. “the Lord my and the God my). That construction is used many times when two different things are being referred to (cf. Matt. 12:47; Mark 3:33; Luke 8:20; John 4:12; and Acts 2:17). However, there are times when that construction is used when it is not clear that two separate things are being referred to, but the author may be simply amplifying the expression for emphasis (e.g., Acts 10:4; 1 Cor. 2:4; Phil. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 10:17; and Rev. 6:11). What is clear is that if Thomas had meant to call Jesus God, there is a much clearer way to say it in Greek than is in the Greek text of John 20:28 and that is good evidence that he did not mean to call Jesus, “God” in a Trinitarian sense of the word.

We have to remember that Thomas’ statement occurred in a moment of surprise and even perhaps shock. Only eight days earlier, Thomas had vehemently denied Jesus’ resurrection even though all the other apostles and disciples, including the women, emphatically stated that they had seen Jesus alive. But Thomas said, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not ever believe” (John 20:25). But eight days later Jesus appeared in the locked room and stood before Thomas and said, “Reach your finger here, and see my hands, and reach your hand *here*, and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believing!” (John 20:27). Thomas could no longer deny that Jesus was alive and that God had raised him from the dead. Thomas saw that what Jesus had said was true. The Father had worked in Jesus and raised him from the dead. Thomas, looking at the living Jesus, saw both Jesus and the God who raised him from the dead.

It was only a couple weeks before, at the Last Supper, that Philip asked Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father” (John 14:8). Jesus responded, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Then Jesus went on to say, “The words that I am saying to you I am not speaking from myself, but the Father living in *union with* me does his works” (John 14:10). In other words, when you saw Jesus, you saw him and the Father.

Jesus had taught many different times that he would be killed and then raised from the dead. He taught about it right after the disciples recognized him as the Christ (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31, 32; Luke 9:22). Then he taught about it again immediately after the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:9-12; Mark 9:9-13); and again when he was in Galilee shortly after the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:22, 23; Mark 9:31, 32; Luke 9:43-45), and again at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 8:21, 28); and again while he was going up to Jerusalem for the Passover (Matt. 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34); and again when he was in Jerusalem for the Passover (Matt. 26:2; cf. John 12:7). Despite Jesus’ seemingly clear teaching about it, however, the apostles did not understand what he meant (Luke 18:34), and after the crucifixion, Thomas outright denied that Jesus was raised from the dead.

When Thomas saw the resurrected Christ, he became immediately convinced that Jesus was raised from the dead. But did he suddenly have a revelation that Jesus was God? That would be totally outside of Thomas’ knowledge and belief. Jesus had never claimed to be God (despite Trinitarian claims that he had), and in fact quite the opposite. From the cross he called out to the Father, “My God, My God” (Matt. 27:46); then after his resurrection he still called God, “my God” (John 20:17).

Jesus said that the Father was the only true God (John 17:3). He also said that he was sent by God; sent by the Father, and in fact, he repeated that so often that it would be quite impossible for the apostles to miss it (John 5:23, 30, 36, 37; 6:29, 44, 57; 8:16, 18, 42; 10:36; 12:49; 14:24; 17:3, 21; 20:21). Jesus continued along that same line of thinking, saying many times that his works, his teachings, and even what he said was not his own but came from the Father (e.g., John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:16, 28, 29; 12:49, 50; 14:24). This was what the apostles expected of the Messiah—that he would constantly do God’s will. They—along with the Jewish religion they were raised in—never expected the Messiah to be God. In contrast to Jesus, who did not act on his own, the Bible states many times that Yahweh alone is God and that He acts on His own (e.g., Deut. 32:12, 39; 2 Sam. 22:32; 2 Kings 19:15, 19; Neh. 9:6; Job 9:8; Ps. 72:18; 136:1-4; Isa. 37:16; 44:6-8; 45:18, 21; Matt. 24:36; Mark 12:29). It seems incongruous that Jesus could be God but not speak, teach, or work on his own, but Yahweh, God, could and did act on His own.

In the other places in the Bible where the apostles speak about the resurrection of Jesus, they do not declare, “This proves Jesus is God!” Rather, they declare that “God” raised the Lord Jesus from the dead” (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10, 5:30, 10:39-40, 13:30, 33, 37; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:15; Gal. 1:1; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:21). From all those examples we can safely conclude that the apostles, including Thomas, saw God at work in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The apostles understood Jesus’ resurrection to be an act of God, and a demonstration of His power (Eph. 1:19-20).

Jesus did not tell only the apostles that if they saw him they saw the Father, he told others that too. Just a few days before he was crucified, after his triumphal entry in Jerusalem (John 12:12-16), Jesus shouted out to the crowd there in Jerusalem, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me *only*, but *also* in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me” (John 12:44-45). So even the crowds in Jerusalem had the opportunity to hear that seeing Jesus was seeing God in the sense that Jesus perfectly did the will of God.

Another important point is that upon seeing Jesus, Thomas did not say to him, “You are my Lord and my God.” But that is likely what we would expect if, in fact, Thomas thought Jesus was God. There is a close parallel of circumstances when Thomas and Nathanael saw Jesus: they had both been doubters. When Philip first told Nathanael that they had found the “one Moses wrote about,” i.e., the Messiah (John 1:45), Nathanael did not believe and said, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Yet after meeting Jesus in person, Nathanael changed his mind completely and said, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are King of Israel” (John 1:49). In contrast to Nathanael who said, “You are” the Son of God, Thomas did not use the phrase, “You are.” Jesus had been teaching that he was sent by God and doing the works of God, and after he was raised from the dead, any doubt about that was gone. In seeing Jesus, Thomas saw both Jesus and the God that sent him, empowered him, and raised him, and so Thomas said, “My Lord and my God.”

Another possible way to understand John 20:28 is to realize that in the Semitic languages, “God” can refer to things besides the Most High God. Any good Greek-English lexicon will give examples of the Greek word *theos*, often translated “God,” also referring to a pagan “god” or “goddess” (Acts 19:37), the Devil or a demon (2 Cor. 4:4), or of people who represent God in some way (John 10:34). The fact that Thomas called Jesus “God” does not mean he thought Jesus was part of the Triune God, but he did think of him as God’s highest representative and worthy to be called “god.”

To understand this interpretation of what Thomas said there is some background information that we must understand. For one thing, Thomas was almost certainly speaking Hebrew or Aramaic, and thus the flexibility of the word “God” in those languages will be covered in some detail below. It is also important to know that the early manuscripts of the Bible were written in all capital letters. That means that technically, both *Elohim* in Hebrew and *Theos* in Greek should always be translated “GOD,” in all capital letters. Since the biblical languages used the word “GOD” to refer to God, lesser divinities such as the Devil, angels, and demons, and also to rulers, judges, and people who represented God in some way, Bible readers are forced to use the context and scope of Scripture to determine whether the modern English translation should be “God,” “god,” or “gods.”

[For more on these different ways of understanding Elohim, see commentary on Heb. 1:8.]

The following few paragraphs are about the biblical, especially the Semitic, way of using the words for “God.” It is quite detailed, but in light of the huge Trinitarian bias to make Thomas say that Jesus is “God,” it seems necessary to quite fully show that in biblical language you could call someone *Elohim* or *Theos* without meaning they were the Most High God. It is helpful in understanding the Bible to know that the Hebrew word *Elohim* (“God”) is a plural form—*Elohim* is always plural. It is a uniplural noun like the English word “deer” or “fish,” and so it has to be translated according to the context and can mean “God,” “a god,” or “gods.” When we see the word “fish” we must determine from the context if it is singular or plural. In a sentence like, “Did you eat the fish?” there may not be enough context to determine whether the person ate one fish or more than one. This problem can occur in the Hebrew text as well, although we sometimes get help in the Hebrew from the accompanying verb.

*Elohim* is not the only uniplural noun in Hebrew. Two others are “water” and “heaven.”[[199]](#footnote-13308) Trinitarians assert that the reason *Elohim* is plural is that it refers to the plurality in the Trinity, but even if there was a Trinity, and we do not believe there is, that would not be likely. For one thing, God gave the Hebrew language to the Jews, so they should be the experts in their own language, and they have never believed *Elohim* referred to any plurality in God. Just as “water” and “heaven” are plural in part because they are so vast, *Elohim* seems to be plural because of the vastness and greatness of God.

The majority of the times *Elohim* occurs in the Bible, it refers to the true God. However, even a brief glance through a Hebrew concordance will show that many times it refers to false gods. Dozens of verses could be cited as examples, but a few are: “You must not have any other gods [*Elohim*] besides me” (Exod. 20:3); “You must not bow down to their gods [*Elohim*]” (Exod. 23:24); “Israel chose new gods [*Elohim*]” (Judg. 5:8); and, “[Solomon’s] wives turned away his heart after other gods [*Elohim*]” (1 Kings 11:4).

There are times when *Elohim* is used to refer to a specific pagan god: for example, Dagon (Judg. 16:23; 1 Sam. 5:7), Chemosh (Judg. 11:24), and Baal (1 Kings 18:24-27).

*Elohim*, “God,” can also refer to angels or other spirit beings. One example is Psalm 8:5, which says God made mankind a little lower than *Elohim*. Given the flexible meaning of *Elohim*, the verse could be saying that God made mankind a little lower than He Himself, or it could be saying that He made mankind a little lower than his representatives in the spirit world, i.e., angels. Thankfully, the interpretation is not in doubt because the verse is quoted in Hebrews 2:7, which says “angels,” letting us know that in Psalm 8:5, *Elohim* refers to God’s representatives, the angels. Thus, Psalm 8:5 is an excellent example of how the New Testament clarifies our understanding of the Old Testament. Another example is Judges 13:22, where Manoah and his wife saw an angel, but exclaimed, “We have seen God [*Elohim*].” Their statement made perfect sense in the biblical culture because they saw God’s representative.

There are times when God’s representatives are called “God” (*Elohim* and even Yahweh!) when they represent God and speak on His behalf. This is referred to as “agency.” The essence of the principle of agency is: “a person’s agent is regarded as the person himself.[[200]](#footnote-10737)” The principle of agency is well-attested by scholars and occurs quite a few times in the Bible. For example, in Genesis 16:13, even though Hagar was speaking to an angel, she referred to him as Yahweh and *El* (God). In Genesis 31:11 an angel speaks to Jacob, but in Gen. 31:13 he says, “I am the God [*El*] of Bethel.” In Genesis 32:28, 30 it seems Jacob is wrestling with God [*Elohim*], but we learn from Hosea 12:3-4 that it was an angel representing God. Another example is that Exodus 13:21 says “Yahweh” went before Israel in the pillar of fire, but Exodus 14:19 and 23:20-23 let us know it was an angel, a representative of God. So “Yahweh” did go in front of Israel as represented by his angel protector. Similarly, if you read Judges 2:1-4, an angel speaks to the Israelites, but his speech is in the first person as if he were God Himself.

*Elohim*, “God,” can also refer to human rulers, kings, prophets, and people who represent God in some way. Thus, Exodus 21:6; 22:8-9 almost certainly refer to God’s representatives as *Elohim*, “God” (Exod. 22:28 likely does too. In those verses, the accompanying verb is plural, not singular, so the traditional teaching of the Rabbis, that the meaning is “judges,” which is also in the KJ21[[201]](#footnote-21589), is almost certainly correct). Psalm 82:1 is noteworthy because it uses Elohim twice: at the beginning of the verse to refer to the true God, and at the end of the verse to refer to rulers and people who represent him. The verse says, “*Elohim* [God] takes his stand in his own assembly. He judges in the midst of the *Elohim* [gods].” Furthermore, Ps. 82:6 says, “You are *Elohim* [gods], all of you are children of the Most High.” As sons of the Most High, these rulers are qualified to be called *Elohim*, [gods]. Psalm 97:7 also calls rulers *Elohim*.

There are times when specific individuals are called *Elohim*, “God.” One example is Moses. In Exodus 7:1, God is speaking to Moses and says, “See, I have made thee God [*Elohim*] to Pharaoh” (Darby). Given the uniplural nature of *Elohim*, another translation is, “See, I have made you a god [*Elohim*] to Pharaoh” (BBE, KJV), but the fact is that Moses, who represents Elohim (“God”) can legitimately be called *Elohim* (“God”) in the biblical culture. Another example is when King Saul wanted to speak to the dead prophet Samuel and went to a woman who was a medium and necromancer (1 Sam. 28:7-15). When she conjured up “Samuel” (actually a demon impersonating Samuel), the woman said, “I see *Elohim* coming up from the ground” (1 Sam. 28:13). This is a good example of a person being called *Elohim*, and we could translate it “God” and understand the custom of God’s representatives being called “God,” or a more easily understood translation for the English reader is simply, “a god;” the woman saw “a god” coming up who she thought was Samuel.

Given the language of the time, and given that Jesus did represent the Father and have divine authority, for Thomas to refer to Jesus as “god” is certainly understandable. In contrast, to assert that Thomas said that Jesus was “God,” and thus 1/3 of a triune God, seems incredible. As was noted above, in biblical times it was common to call God’s representatives “God,” and the Old Testament contains quite a few examples, such as when Jacob wrestled with “God” and it is clear that he was actually wrestling with an angel (Hos. 12:4).

It is common to read commentaries that assert that Thomas shifted from the depths of unbelief to the height of faith and called Jesus his “God.” But on what basis would Thomas do that? The commentators point out John 1:1, that the Gospel says “the Word was God.” First, there is solid evidence it does not actually say that (see commentary on John 1:1). More to the point, however, the Gospel of John was not written until decades after Thomas spoke, and there is no evidence that Jesus ever taught the Trinity or that he was “fully human and fully God.” Quite the opposite. He called God, “the true God” (John 17:3); he said the Father was greater than he was (John 14:28); and he referred to the Father as his God both before and after his resurrection (Matt. 27:46; John 20:17). Also, when he did have chances to “correct” people’s understanding about him or to teach the Trinity, such as with the woman at the well (John 4), or the Pharisee who asked him about the first and great commandment (Mark 12), he did not teach about the Trinity or say that he was man but also God. Very importantly, the few verses in the Gospels where Jesus said something that Trinitarians use to show Jesus is God can all be interpreted in a non-Trinitarian way. There is just no evidence that people at the time of Jesus knew about the Trinity or that Jesus was fully God and fully man—there was no teaching about it.

There are many Trinitarian authorities who admit that there was no knowledge of Trinitarian doctrine at the time Thomas spoke. For example, if the disciples believed that Jesus was “God” in the sense that many Christians do, they would not have “all fled” just a few days before when he was arrested. The confession of the two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus demonstrated the thoughts of Jesus’ followers at the time. Speaking to the resurrected Christ, whom they mistook as just a traveler, they talked about Jesus. They said Jesus “was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God…and [they] crucified him. But we were hoping that he was the one who was about to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:19-21). The disciples thought Jesus was the Messiah, a “prophet,” and the Son of God, but not God Himself.

Even in realizing that Jesus was the Christ, they knew that according to the Old Testament prophecies, the Christ, the anointed of God, was to be a man: he was to be an offspring of Eve (Gen. 3:15) and through the line of Abraham and David, and “God” did not fit that description. He was to be anointed with holy spirit by God as foretold in Isaiah 61:1, a verse Jesus quoted about himself (Luke 4:18); whereas God does not need to be anointed with holy spirit. The Messiah was to be “one of their own” (Jer. 30:21), not God. We know how hard Jesus worked to teach the disciples that he would die and be resurrected—how many different times he taught it—and the disciples never did “get it.” Are we to believe that somehow Jesus taught the Trinity, something that went against everything the disciples were taught and believed, but there is no mention of Jesus ever teaching it anywhere, and yet the disciples somehow “got” that teaching? That seems too incredible to believe. There is no evidence from the gospel accounts that Jesus’ disciples believed him to be God, and Thomas, upon seeing the resurrected Christ, was not birthing a new theology in a moment of surprise.

Besides the biblical use of the words for “God” being used for God’s representatives, there is a contributing cultural reason Thomas may have used the word “god” to refer to Jesus when Jesus appeared to him. In the Greco-Roman culture it was becoming customary to refer to the emperor as “god,” but usually only after he was dead. So, for example, after Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 BC, the Roman senate voted that he was a god. Elevating great people into the ranks of the gods is a process scholars refer to as “deification.” If dead Roman emperors were “gods,” it is reasonable that Thomas, knowing Jesus had been dead but now seeing him alive, referred to him as “god.”

The context of the verse shows that its subject is the fact that Jesus was *alive*. Only three verses earlier, Thomas had ignored the eyewitness testimony of the other apostles when they told him they had seen the Lord. The resurrection of Christ was such a disputed doctrine that Thomas did not believe it (the other apostles had not either), and thus Jesus’ death would have caused Thomas to doubt that Jesus was who he said he was—the Messiah. Thomas believed Jesus was *dead*. Thus, he was shocked and astonished when he saw—and was confronted by— Jesus himself. Thomas, upon being confronted by the *living* Christ, instantly believed in the resurrection, i.e., that God had raised the man Jesus from the dead, and, given the standard use of “God” in the culture as one with God’s authority, it certainly makes sense that Thomas would proclaim, “My Lord and my god.” There is no mention of the Trinity in the context, and there is no reason to believe that the disciples would have even been aware of such a doctrine. Thomas spoke what he would have known: that the man Jesus, whom he thought was dead, was alive and had divine authority.

[For more information on this verse and further references, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith.*]

Joh 20:31

**“will have life.”** The verb “have” is in the subjunctive mood; thus, many versions have “may” have life, but the Greek conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) that started the phrase is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore, we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, what is written in the Word of God is written so that we will have life if we believe, not that we “may” have it.[[202]](#footnote-20875)

**“life.”** This refers to “everlasting life (see commentary on Luke 10:28). The Gospel of John starts by saying that “life” was part of God’s plan and purpose (John 1:4), and it ends by confirming what is stated in various ways in the Gospel of John, that everlasting life came through belief in Jesus Christ.

**“in his name.”** Believing on “the name” of someone is an idiom where that person’s name is taken to represent the totality of who that person is: his notoriety, authority, influence, all he stands for, and the respect due him (see commentary on 1 John 3:23, “in the name of his son Jesus Christ”). From the writings of Paul, we learn that salvation comes by more than just believing that Jesus was a human being who lived and died. We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and we confess him as our Lord (Rom. 10:9).

**John Chapter 21**

Joh 21:1

**“After these things Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples…”** After appearing to the disciples as a group on Sunday, Nisan 25, Jesus appeared to the apostles on the Sea of Galilee. The trip to Galilee usually took three days, so this meeting could have been close to Nisan 28, but judging by the fact that Peter started fishing again, it was likely a while after that. It seems likely that after Jesus appeared to the group of disciples a second time and then them leaving for Galilee, that Peter would have waited a while for the Lord to show up. However, when that did not happen as quickly as he expected, and not being sure of what to do, he went back to fishing.

We should remember that the general populace did not yet believe Jesus had been raised from the dead, so most of the apostles’ source of money had dried up. Peter, therefore, took the lead and said he was going fishing, the job he knew. However, Jesus appeared to them, which was the third time Jesus appeared to all the apostles at one time. The first time was the Sunday after his crucifixion (John 20:19-24), and Thomas was not there at the time. The second was the following Sunday, and this time all the apostles, including Thomas, were there (John 20:26-29). Jesus’ meeting the apostles on the Sea of Galilee is the third time he appeared to all of them together (John 21:14) and got them refocused on ministry.

Joh 21:2

**“the *sons* of Zebedee.”** That is, James and John.

**“and two more of his disciples.”** That makes seven who were together in Galilee.

Joh 21:3

**“I am going fishing.”** Jesus appeared to the apostles on the Sea of Galilee. The apostles had finally obeyed and went to Galilee, but seemed unsure of what to do once they got there. With their presumption that Jesus was dead, and the general populace not yet believing that he had been raised from the dead, it seems most of their source of money had dried up. Peter took the lead and said he was going fishing, the job he knew. Jesus appeared to them and got them refocused on ministry.

Joh 21:7

**“that disciple whom Jesus loved.”** The disciple whom Jesus loved, and the author of the Gospel of John, is John (see commentary on John 21:20).

**“he tied his outer garment around him (because he had taken it off).”** There are a couple of points of custom that make this verse much clearer than it reads in English. The first is that although the Greek text uses a word that is normally translated “naked” (the REV has “had taken it off”), this does not mean that Peter was fishing in the nude, that is, without any clothing at all. First, no orthodox Jew would do that in front of others except under very adverse conditions, and second, no orthodox Jew would do that where he could be seen by women (and he was married), and since they were fishing only about 100 yards from shore anyone could have seen him (John 21:8).

So the text is indicating that Peter was wearing only his undergarment to fish in, and when he knew it was Jesus on the shore, he took his outer garment and put it on and tied it with a belt around his waist to free up his legs more, and then jumped in the lake and swam to Jesus. Although the Greek text leaves out details, Peter would not have tried to tie his outer garment around his waist as if it were a huge belt; it simply would not have tied well. When he “tied his outer garment around him,” it would have been in the regular way: he would have put it on and then tied it tight to his body with a belt or sash to keep it firmly in place.

**“and jumped into the lake.”** The Greek text is more literally that Peter “threw himself” into the lake than he “jumped” into the lake. However, the Greek just implies something that Peter did quickly, whereas the English phrase “threw himself” into the lake implies more of a reckless abandon than the Greek text conveys. What Peter did was to quickly jump from the boat into the lake (the “Sea of Galilee” is a small lake) and then swim to Jesus. It is also worth noting that this event would almost certainly have occurred in the month of April or early May, and at that time of year the lake, which is fed in part by the melting snows on Mount Hermon, is quite cold.

The “sea” of Galilee is actually quite a small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into English as “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to (see commentary on Matt. 4:18).

Joh 21:14

**“from among the dead.”**[[203]](#footnote-10574) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Joh 21:15

**“do you love me more than these?”** Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Jesus more than he loved fishing. Jesus was asking Peter if he would leave the security of his fishing trade to go into ministry full-time. Some people think that Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Jesus more than the other disciples did. That is not the case. First, that is the kind of question that fosters division between people. It leads to a proud, braggart position of the heart and sometimes then even gets manifested among the people. Jesus never fostered division among the apostles. Second, the extent to which someone loves the Lord is a matter of the heart. We cannot look at other Christians and tell whether we love Jesus more than they do. Jesus knew this, and would never ask Peter to evaluate the love that the other apostles had for him. Third, the context makes it clear what Jesus was asking Peter to do: give up fishing and take on full-time ministry, because three times Jesus asked Peter to feed his sheep, i.e., the people. The “these” that Jesus referred to, and probably looked at or pointed to, were all the fish that were there, which had been dragged onto the shore by the other disciples (John 21:8).

Still more evidence comes from the fact that as Jesus walked off with Peter, John followed. But when Peter asked Jesus about John, Jesus basically told Peter that was none of his business. It would be incongruous for Jesus to ask Peter if he loved Jesus more than the other disciples but then only minutes later tell Peter that what the others were to do was none of his business. We can conclude that Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me more than fish and fishing?”

**“I am your friend.”** This is the best English translation of the Greek text that keeps the intended meaning. To understand this verse, and the ones that follow, it is important to understand the difference between *agapē* love and *phileō* love.

There are four Greek words for love that are important for Christians to understand. They are *agapē*, *philos*, *storgē*, and *erōs*. Three of them appear in the Bible. If we are going to understand the Bible and the biblical world, it is important that we understand what these four words mean and how they differ.

The Greek word that refers to the love of God is *agapē*—the verb form is *agapaō* (Strong’s #25, ἀγαπάω) and the noun form is *agapē* (Strong’s #26, ἀγάπη). *Agapē* love is the very nature of God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-12, 16). The big key to understanding *agapē* is to realize that it can be known from the action it prompts. In fact, we sometimes speak of the “action model” of *agapē* love. People today are accustomed to thinking of love as a feeling, but that is not necessarily the case with *agapē* love. *Agapē* is love because of what it *does*, not because of how it *feels*.

God so “loved” (*agapē*) that He gave His Son. It did not feel good to God to do that, but it was the loving thing to do. Christ so loved (*agapē*) that he gave his life. He did not want to die, but he loved, so he did what God required. A mother who loves a sick baby will stay up all night long caring for it, which is not something she wants to do, but is a true act of *agapē* love. *Agapē* love is not simply an impulse generated from feelings. Rather, *agapē* love is an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice. This is why God can command us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Exod. 23:1-5). He is not commanding us to “have a good feeling” for our enemies, but to act in a loving way toward them. In fact, Luke 6:27 says to love our enemies and then tells us how to love them, which is by doing good to them: “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.”

*Agapē* love is related to obedience and commitment, and not necessarily feeling and emotion. “Loving” someone is to obey God on another’s behalf, seeking his or her long-term blessing and profit. The way to know that we love (*agapē*) God is that we keep His commandments. Jesus said, “Whoever has my commandments, and keeps them, that is the one who loves me” (John 14:21). There are Christians who say they love God, but their lifestyle is contrary to the will of God. These people mistake their feelings of affection for God for true *agapē* love. Jesus made this clear: “Whoever does not love me does not keep my words” (John 14:24). Love, *agapē,* is the distinctive character of the Christian life in relation to other Christians and to all humanity. The “loving” thing to do may not always be easy, and true love is not “mushy sentimentalism.” There is often a cost to genuine love. For example, asking someone to leave your Christian fellowship because they persist in flagrant sin is loving, but never easy (1 Cor. 5:1-5). That *agapē* love involves doing the right and responsible thing does not mean that it cannot have feelings attached to it, and the ideal situation occurs when the loving thing to do also is what we want to do. Christians are to be known for their love toward one another (John 13:35).

*Phileō*, which is translated as “love” in many English versions, is different from *agapaō* love. *Philos* is the noun form (Strong’s #5384, φίλος), and *phileō* is the verb form (Strong’s #5368, φιλέω) of the same root. *Phileō* means “to have a special interest in someone or something, frequently with focus on close association; have affection for, like, consider someone a friend.”[[204]](#footnote-20376) It would probably be helpful if *phileō* were never translated as “love” in the New Testament because it refers to a strong liking or a strong friendship. Of course, we see how *phileō* gets translated “love,” because in modern culture we use the word “love” to describe things that we strongly like. So, for example, we say, “I love ice cream” or “I love my car” when we actually only “strongly like” them. The word *phileō* implies a strong emotional connection, and thus is used of the deep friendship between friends, and is used of the way people “really like” things, or get mentally attached to them. Thus, you can *agapē* your enemies, but you cannot *phileō* them. While *agapē* love does not have to have good feelings associated with it (as in “love your enemies”), *phileō* love has the strong emotion of friendship associated with it.

The difference between *agapē* and *phileō* becomes very important in John 21, but unfortunately, it is obscured in most English translations. After being raised from the dead, Jesus met Peter. Here is the short version of what they said to each other.

Jesus: Simon…do you love (*agapē*) me more than these [fish]?

Peter: Yes, Lord; you know that I love (*phileō*) you.

Jesus: Simon…do you love (*agapē*) me?

Peter: Yes, Lord, you know that I love (*phileō*) you.

Jesus: Simon…do you love (*phileō*) me?

Peter: [Grieved] “Lord, you know that I love (*phileō*) you.”

Why did Jesus use *agapē* and Peter use *phileō*? Jesus was asking Peter if he loved him with the love of God, a love that may require sacrifice and doing what you feel obligated to do but may not want to do. After all, Jesus had just gone through something he did not want to do but did anyway because of his *agapē* love. In contrast, Peter avoided possible torture by denying Jesus. Thus, Jesus twice asked Peter, “Do you *agapē* me?” In other words, “Are you willing to do things for my sake that you do not want to do?” Peter, on the other hand, still felt the sting of having denied Jesus, and was hopeful that their friendship was intact. Peter wondered if Jesus held Peter’s denial against him. Would Jesus still treat Peter as a close friend? Peter was not sure where he stood with Jesus, so he was trying to let Jesus know that he was still a true friend, and had *phileō* love for Jesus.

The third time Jesus spoke to Peter, he came to Peter’s level and asked if Peter were indeed a true friend (*phileō*), which grieved Peter. Nevertheless, it was important, because Jesus knew what Peter did not know—that Jesus would ascend into heaven, and Peter and the others would be left to carry out his work on earth, which would require that they do things they did not want to, even, as it turned out, die as a martyr.

The third Greek word for “love,” which refers to sexual love or passionate love is *erōs*, and we get English words such as “erotic.” When *Erōs* was used as a proper noun, it referred to the Greek god of love. The Greek word *erōs* does not appear in the Bible, so we will only just mention it here, but it has had such an impact on English and our view of sexual love that it is important to mention. Sexual attraction and passion (*erōs*) involve strong emotions.

The fourth Greek word we need to understand is *storgē*, which is the love and affection that naturally occurs between parents and children, can exist between siblings, and can also exist between husbands and wives in a good marriage. The intense emotional attraction and love that a parent has for a child is so strong and spontaneous that the Greeks recognized it as a different kind of love from *agapē*, *phileō*, and *erōs*, and they called it *storgē*, a love for family (see Rom. 12:10).

[For more on *storgē* see commentary on Rom. 12:10.]

If one is going to have a wonderful Christian life, be obedient to the voice of God, and have rich fellowship with other Christians, he or she will need to exercise all three kinds of love that are in the Bible. We need *agapē* love because some of the things that God requires of us are not fun or easy, but need to be done. We need to have *phileō* love because we need true friends to stand with us, people who are emotionally connected to us and with whom we can share our deepest thoughts and feelings. Lastly, we Christians need to have *storgē* love between us, a deep family affection that comforts us and helps us feel connected to all our spiritual family.

**“Feed my lambs.”** John 21:15-17 is a threefold confrontation between Jesus and Peter, in which just as Peter had a threefold denial of Christ, now Jesus gives Peter a threefold chance to reaffirm his relationship with Christ and receive a threefold guidance for Peter’s ministry. It is important to note that in this threefold confrontation between Jesus and Peter, at the end of each confrontation Jesus gives Peter a different command, and each one is important.

The first direction Jesus gives Peter is “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15). Taking good care of the new and inexperienced believers is vital for the Christian Faith and ensures a strong Christian flock in the future. Also, it demonstrates the heart of Christianity, which is to care for the young, old, weak, and disadvantaged.

At the end of the second confrontation, Jesus tells Peter to “shepherd my sheep” (John 21:16). In contrast to the lambs, the sheep are experienced believers, but they still need guidance and direction, and they need to be protected from wolves and other enemies (i.e., false teachers, false doctrines, and harmful pathways in life). Many times experienced believers get lost in the weeds of life, and a called and experienced shepherd is important to provide both personal counsel and direction and also direction and guidance for the group under his or her care. Jesus’ charge to Peter to “shepherd my sheep” is specific and important direction to leaders in the Body of Christ.

At the end of the third confrontation, Jesus tells Peter to “feed my sheep” (John 21:17). Although feeding the sheep is somewhat related to “shepherding” the sheep, there is an important difference. While shepherding involves more guidance, care, and protection, “feeding” is more directly related to ensuring that the sheep have the proper food they need to grow, mature, and become strong and healthy. Without proper nourishment for growth, sheep can become stuck in a kind of no-man's-land—more knowledgeable than lambs but not strong and mature enough to know and fulfill their own ministry. The knowledgeable shepherd knows that every person has an important task to fulfill for the Lord, a personal ministry, and so the shepherd works hard to get each person the food that he or she needs to become strong and fulfill that task. While lambs need the “milk of the Word” (1 Pet. 2:2) the sheep need “solid food” (Heb. 5:12-14). The diligent pastor has “the goal of building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *growing* into a mature person, *attaining* to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13). Also, as the sheep mature they should become less dependent on the shepherd doing all the work and they themselves should become “pastor-helpers,” helping support the pastor in his work.

Another important point in what Jesus said to Peter was that it is clear that the flock belongs to Jesus, not to the pastor or caretaker. Jesus said, “Feed MY lambs,” “shepherd MY sheep,” and “feed MY sheep.” The people are under the care of an earthly pastor, but they are Christ’s sheep, not the pastor’s, and leaders and pastors must never forget that and become overly possessive of the people.

[For more on the three denial events of Peter, see commentary on Matt. 26:70.]

Joh 21:16

**“love…I am your friend.”** See commentary on John 21:15.

Joh 21:17

**“are you my friend…are you my friend…I am your friend.”** See commentary on John 21:15.

**“Lord, you know all things.”** It has been claimed by some teachers that in John 21:17 Peter is stating that Jesus is omniscient. However, there are good biblical reasons to not understand Peter’s statement that way, but rather that he was saying “You know enough about me to know that I am your friend.” First, we know that Jesus did not know “all things” because he grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52) and did not know the hour of his return (Mark 13:32). If there is even one thing Jesus did not know, which is true, then he was not omniscient.

More to the point, however, is that the phrase “all things” is used in Scripture multiple times and usually does not carry the meaning of “all knowledge in existence.” For example, Ephesians 6:21 reads, “Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make known to you all things so that you also will know the things *that are happening* with me *and* how I am doing.” In this case, “all things” refers to the things about Paul that were important for the believers in Ephesus to know.

1 John 2:27 says that the “anointing” (likely referring to the gift of holy spirit) teaches them “about all things.” But we know that the Christians do not know “everything,” nor could they even learn “about all things.” The context is the antichrists that are in the world and the Christians knowing all that they need to know to stay faithful and not be deceived by falsehoods.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told the apostles that the spirit would “teach you all things” (John 14:26). Clearly, Jesus was not saying that the apostles would become omniscient. He was saying that the spirit would teach them what they needed to know in any given situation. That is the same way that Peter used “all things” in John 21:17.

In looking at the examples cited above, the phrase “all things” is referring to “all the things appropriate in the given context,” or “many,” or sometimes even “most” of the things, but not literally “all things” in an unlimited sense. In fact, the word “all” very rarely means “all” in an unlimited sense. “All” is usually either limited by what it is modifying, such as “all the disciples” (meaning the disciples there, not every disciple in the world), or it is limited by context and common sense. Thus, when 2 Samuel 16:22 says that Absalom had sex with David’s concubines “before the eyes of all Israel,” it does not literally mean “all” Israel, but all the Israelites who were in Jerusalem and who could physically see the palace roof, and furthermore that no one was purposely prevented from watching if they could do so.

It is common for the word “all” to refer to a limited amount, and there are dozens of examples of “all” being used in a limited sense in the Bible. For example:

Psalm 22:7: “All those who see me mock me.” But the psalmist was not mocked by “all.” It is clear even in the psalm itself that not everyone mocked him, even if he felt like the greater part did.

Psalm 118:10: “All the nations surrounded me...” All the nations of the world did not surround the psalmist even if some people from many different nations did.

Hosea 7:4: “They [the people of Israel] are all adulterers.” Even if many people in Israel committed physical and spiritual adultery, not all of them did. The Bible mentions a number of righteous people who lived during Hosea’s time.

Matthew 3:5: “Then Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him [to John to be baptized].” There were many people who went to John to be baptized, but certainly not “all Judea” and “all the regions around the Jordan.”

John 10:8: Jesus said, “All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.” It is clear that not “all” who came before Jesus were thieves and robbers. Even if there were many false prophets and teachers, Jesus certainly did not mean that Moses and the prophets and prophetesses of God in the Old Testament were “thieves and robbers.”

Mark 13:23: “But be on guard; I have told you everything beforehand.” Jesus had not told them all knowledge in the universe, but all of the warning signs they needed to know.

To understand John 21:15-17, we need to understand the different ways “all” is used and examine the context of what Peter said so that we can grasp what Peter meant. Jesus had repeatedly asked Peter, “do you love me.” By the third time Jesus asked it, Peter, having already answered “yes” twice, was exasperated, and basically said, “you know all things, you know that I love you.” Peter was not trying to affirm some spiritual truth about Jesus being omniscient, he was working hard to make the point that Jesus knew everything he needed to know to conclude that Peter really loved him.

So, given the evidence that Jesus was fully human and not God, and that Jesus clearly stated that there were things he did not know, and that Peter said what he did because Jesus knew him and knew of his love for him, we can conclude that what Peter meant when he said to Jesus, “you know all things,” was, “you know all the things about me you need to know; you know that I love you.”

Joh 21:20

**“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”** There is a long-standing debate about the identity of “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” All the references to the disciple whom Jesus loved are in the book of John (John 13:23, John 19:26, John 20:2 and John 21:7, John 21:20), and John uses both the Greek words *agapaō* and *phileō* to express the love Jesus had for that disciple (for more on the Greek words for love, see commentary on John 21:15). Although the Gospel of John does not specifically identify its author, and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is nowhere explicitly named in Scripture, there are convincing reasons to believe it refers to the apostle John.

* The early Christians recognized John as the author of the Gospel and “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” For example, Irenaeus (c. AD 130-203), Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150-211), Tertullian (AD 155-222), St. Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (c. AD 185), and Origin (AD 185-253), say the apostle John wrote the Gospel of John. Furthermore, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origin all identified John as the author of 1 John, and conservative scholars conclude that the same person wrote the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John. The fact that John likely lived to at least the mid-90s AD, and may have even lived to see AD 100, makes the testimony of these early Church Fathers quite authoritative.
* The author of the Gospel of John is similar to the author of the three Epistles of John in the sense that he is unnamed, and much content in the books is similar, adding credence to the fact that the same man wrote all four books. The fact that the author is unnamed, but simply called “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” is not a mistake, but places more emphasis on the content of the books than on the writer of the books.
* Not only does the Gospel of John not name John as the writer, but the introduction to the Gospel of John in the NIV Study Bible correctly points out that the apostle John “is not mentioned by name in this Gospel—which would be natural if he wrote it, but hard to explain otherwise.” That the apostle John is not once specifically mentioned by name in the Gospel of John is indeed “hard to explain,” unless he is there but referred to as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Given that identification, John shows up everywhere we would expect him to be: at the Last Supper, at the crucifixion, taking care of Jesus’ mother Mary, at the empty tomb, on a fishing boat with Peter, and following behind Jesus and Peter while walking in Galilee. That John is the disciple whom Jesus loved also explains why only the Gospel of John mentions that disciple. Other writers mention John by name (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul), but John does not mention himself by name in the Gospel or Epistles of John.
* It is fitting that John would call himself the disciple whom Jesus loved because John writes a lot about love. For example, there are more than 40 references to love in the Gospel of John and more than 25 references to love in the Epistles of John, even though they only total seven chapters.
* Peter, James, and John were the three closest disciples to Jesus, which is consistent with John being called the disciple whom Jesus loved. But it could not have been Peter, because Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved are seen together (John 20:2; 21:7).
* The writer of the Gospel of John was intimately familiar with all phases of Jesus’ ministry, what he did in Galilee, in Samaria, and in Jerusalem. Furthermore, he did more than write about them, he “testified” about them (John 21:24), and that agrees with what the author of 1 John said about seeing with his own eyes, touching with his hands, and thus that as an eyewitness he testified to those things (1 John 1:1-2). Thus, the way the Bible writes about the disciple Jesus loved indicates he did not just “learn” about Jesus and what he did, but was an eyewitness of Jesus’ life.
* John 13:23 and John 21:20 show that the disciple whom Jesus loved was at the Last Supper, at which Jesus ate with the twelve apostles (Matt. 26:20; Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14). There is no indication that any other guests were there. The wording of the records of the Last Supper supports that only Jesus and the apostles were there (cf. Luke 22:14). No guests are mentioned in any of the four Gospels, and when Jesus washed the feet of the disciples there, it would have been natural for those disciples to be the twelve who had been chosen to be apostles and had traveled with him.
* Peter and John were both fishermen from Galilee, not from Jerusalem, so it makes sense that they would stay together when they came to Jerusalem, and Peter was with the disciple that Jesus loved when Mary Magdalene came and told them the body of Jesus was not in the grave. In contrast, Lazarus lived in Bethany (John 11:1; 12:1), just over the crest of the Mount of Olives to the east, and he would not have had separate housing in Jerusalem but would have stayed in his own house.
* When Jesus was on the cross, he asked the disciple whom he loved to take his mother Mary home with him (John 19:26-27). It would make sense that Jesus would entrust his mother to one of his disciples because Jesus’ brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5). The fact that the record in John 19:26-27 refers to the disciple Jesus loved as a “he” shows us that disciple was a man. Besides Jesus, Mary had four other sons and at least two daughters (Matt. 13:55-56; Mark 6:3), and Jesus would have wanted his mother to be close to her children and family, who lived in Galilee around Capernaum. Jesus and his family had apparently made their home in Capernaum after Jesus was nearly killed in Nazareth (Luke 4:28-31). The apostle John was also from around Capernaum (Matt. 4:21-22; Mark 1:19-20; Luke 5:10) and John came from a fairly prosperous family (Zebedee, John’s father, owned his own boat or boats). So, Mary being with John would mean she would be with a disciple who had the means to take care of her, yet lived close to her family. In contrast, Lazarus lived in Bethany, and it is likely that Mary would not have visited Galilee much if at all, and often women did not make the yearly trips to Jerusalem for the feasts (the Law of Moses only required the men to go to the feasts), so Mary may not have seen her female relatives much at all if she lived in Bethany.
* After Jesus was resurrected, he was not with the apostles all the time, and some of them returned to fishing for a short while. Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved were on the same ship fishing when Jesus appeared on the shore (John 21:7). The text names the people who were fishing together: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the *sons* of Zebedee (that is, James and John), and two more disciples. Although the text does not name the two other disciples, they were likely apostles who stuck together with Peter, James, and John, because the eleven apostles were all from Galilee (Acts 1:11). It makes sense that the disciple fishing with Peter would have been John because they had been business partners before being called by Jesus (Luke 5:10) and no doubt had developed a close friendship. In contrast, Lazarus had never been a fishing partner with Peter, he lived in Bethany in Judah.
* At the close of the Gospel of John, Jesus made an unusual comment about the disciple whom he loved, which points to that disciple being John. That disciple was following Jesus and Peter (John 21:20), which fits with the fact that John was often included along with Peter and James while the rest of the apostles were left behind (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). But then Jesus made an unusual statement about that particular disciple and said, “If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you?” Jesus’ other disciples took Jesus’ statement to mean that the disciple Jesus loved would not die before Jesus returned (John 21:22-23). Although John did eventually die, church historians say that John outlived all the rest of the apostles, and so he is appropriately referred to as “the Elder” in the Epistles of 1 John and 3 John. He apparently lived until after AD 90, and in fact might have lived to see AD 100, which we know in part because he was alive and specifically referred to as “John” in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9), which was the last book of the Bible to be written. So John’s life fits with Jesus, indicating that John would live a long time. We have no idea how long Lazarus lived, but most men did not live nearly as long as John did.
* John 21:24 says, “This is the disciple who is testifying about these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.” Some scholars point out that the close of John may have been written by someone other than the one who penned the rest of the Gospel of John, but that is speculation; there is no solid evidence for that. In fact, the evidence is that the one who “is testifying” is the one who experienced firsthand the events portrayed in the Gospel. For example, John 21:24 is very close in content to John 19:35, tying the author of the conclusion of John with the author of the body of the Gospel.[[205]](#footnote-11267) D. A. Carson writes about “the Evangelist [John], whom the next verse identifies as the beloved disciple,” and says, “Many scholars treat vv. 24 and 25 as coming from a different source or sources than the rest of ch[apter] 21 …But verse 24 is better seen as part of the answer to Peter’s question in v. 21, “Lord what about him?” …All the disciples live under the commission of 20:21. …That means verse 24 has to be read as part of vv. 20-23 and v. 20 establishes that the beloved disciple is none other than the beloved disciple who appears throughout the fourth Gospel.[[206]](#footnote-16201)

Although other people have been suggested as being the disciple whom Jesus loved, historically, four of them have gotten serious attention, and they are Mary Magdalene, Lazarus, the apostle Thomas, and the apostle James.

Mary Magdalene is not the disciple whom Jesus loved for a number of reasons, the most obvious of which is that the disciple whom Jesus loved was a man (John 19:26-27). Beyond that, Mary Magdalene would not have been at the Last Supper, would not have been on the fishing boat with Peter, and because of the position of women in the culture, would not generally have been one who was “testifying” and writing about Jesus’ ministry, especially when she would have seen so little of it firsthand.

Lazarus has been suggested as the disciple whom Jesus loved because Martha and Mary called him Jesus’ friend (John 11:3). However, Lazarus is also an unlikely candidate for a number of reasons. For example, he would not likely have been at the Last Supper, which apparently was for the apostles (Matt. 26:20; Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14). Also, he and his family were from Bethany near Jerusalem (John 11:1), and he would have had a job and responsibilities there, so it is extremely unlikely he would have been fishing with Peter on the Sea of Galilee after Jesus’ resurrection. It is also unlikely that Jesus would entrust the care of his mother to someone who was such a long distance from her family in the Galilee. Also, Lazarus is only mentioned in Scripture in John 11 and 12 and thus is never said to be with Jesus except for the few times when Jesus was in the Jerusalem area. This does not fit with the fact that the disciple Jesus loved is an eyewitness of the events of Jesus’ ministry, and it also seems to be out of harmony with Jesus’ statement about the disciple he loved living a long time since Lazarus is not mentioned after John 12 which is even earlier than the crucifixion.

The apostle Thomas has been suggested as the disciple whom Jesus loved, mainly due to external evidence, but several factors weigh against that identification. None of the Church Fathers said Thomas was the disciple whom Jesus loved, and although there seems to be some external evidence from the School of Thomas in the East (which is the area where Thomas apparently went and was elevated in stature), the other external evidence that the beloved apostle was John is stronger. Thomas is mentioned so seldom in the Four Gospels—and there is no evidence that he was especially beloved by Jesus—that it is unlikely that anyone would recognize that Thomas was the disciple whom Jesus loved. Also, it seems unlikely that Thomas would be the beloved disciple but yet be so doubtful of the testimony of his fellow apostles and everyone else who had seen the risen Christ that he would adamantly state that he would not believe in the resurrection unless he personally met Jesus.

The apostle James has also been suggested as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Of all the possible contenders, James is the most likely candidate besides the apostle John. He was with Jesus from early in his ministry, he was a fisherman from around Capernaum, he was at the Last Supper, and he was very close to Jesus. Nevertheless, there are things that favor John over James for being the disciple whom Jesus loved. There is the testimony of early Christians—some only removed by several decades from the death of John—who say that John was the disciple whom Jesus loved, and none of them say James was. There is the fact that the apostle James died quite early in the history of the Church; in fact, the consensus among church historians is that James was the first apostle to die, being martyred by Herod Agrippa in AD 44 (Acts 12:1-2). So James did not live a long life, which does not fit with what Jesus said about the beloved disciple living a long life (John 21:22). Also, there is a continuity between the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John that indicates they were written by the same person, and the internal and external evidence that the apostle John wrote the Epistles of John is very strong. Also, and very important, is the close of the Gospel of John (John 21:20-25), which, when read in a straightforward manner, ties the disciple whom Jesus loved with the writer of the Gospel of John and is a major reason many conservative scholars believe John is the disciple whom Jesus loved.

In conclusion, although the Bible does not specifically say who the disciple whom Jesus loved was, there is enough evidence favoring the apostle John that we can be quite sure he is that beloved disciple. The noted scholar F. F. Bruce concurs and writes, “… if in fact none apart from the twelve was present with Jesus in the upper room, a process of elimination points to John the son of Zebedee as the disciple whom Jesus loved.”[[207]](#footnote-17597)

[For more technical information on the disciple whom Jesus loved, see Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 81-139. Keener is the author of a two-volume, 1,635-page commentary on the Gospel of John, and he concludes that John is both the author of John and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Keener’s massive work is very helpful because he considers a huge number of factors and the writings of many scholars on the subject, giving one a wide scope of the topic.]

Joh 21:22

**“If I want him to remain until I come.”** In the 40 days between his resurrection and ascension, Jesus was talking to Peter about leading the people of God when they saw the disciple who Jesus loved, i.e., John, following them. Then Peter asked Jesus what John was going to do. That question made sense in the larger context of their training as apostles because Jesus almost always worked with Peter, James, and John as a core leadership team, so what Jesus assigned Peter might have seemed closely aligned with what John was assigned to do.

Jesus answered Peter, but his answer reveals that Jesus was teaching that his Second Coming was not very far off. Jesus’ answer to Peter does not make sense if Jesus knew he was not going to return for some 2,000 years. Jesus basically answered Peter saying, “What if I want him to remain alive until I come back?” But how could John possibly remain alive until Jesus returned if it was going to be many centuries away? To answer Peter the way he did, Jesus had to be thinking that he would come back shortly, in fact, while that very generation was still alive. Jesus’ answer makes perfect sense when we realize that Jesus did indeed think he was coming back very shortly.

Also, it is apparent that the disciples thought Jesus was coming back very shortly because the Bible says, “Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die” (John 21:23). The only way the believers would have thought that John would not die until Jesus returned was if they thought that Jesus’ return was going to be very soon. That tells us that the disciples took what Jesus said about “this generation will not pass away,” and “there are some of those who are standing here who will absolutely not taste of death until they see the Kingdom of God come with power,” and other similar statements, at face value (cf. Matt. 10:23; 23:35; 24:34; 26:64; Luke 11:50, 51; John 4:23; 5:25; 12:31). The disciples thought Jesus was coming back as Lord and Judge within their lifetimes.

Jesus taught in many different contexts that his Second Coming and the Kingdom of God would come very quickly, but as it has turned out, God, for His own purposes, has delayed the Second Coming and it is still future.

[For more verses in which Jesus says that his return would be soon, see commentary on Matt. 16:28. For more information about the Eden-like Messianic Kingdom that will be on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“what *is that* to you.”** There is an important lesson in what Jesus told Peter, which was basically, be concerned for what you yourself are to do for God and do not be so concerned about what God wants other people to do. Many people waste their lives thinking about others and what they are or are not doing, when they should be focusing on what they themselves are supposed to be doing for God.

Joh 21:24

**“This is the disciple.”** John 21:24 is somewhat similar to John 19:35 in that it points to the truth of the Gospel so that people will read it and believe. When the text says, “This is the disciple who...wrote these things,” that is very good supporting evidence that John is the author of the Gospel of John and also the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (cf. John 21:20-24; the disciple whom Jesus loved was the same one who wrote the Gospel of John).

Some scholars have proposed that the last verses of John were not written by John, but that is only speculation, there is no actual evidence for it, and the evidence of the continuity of Scripture is against it. The speculation is mainly based upon the fact that sometimes an amanuensis (scribe) penned the book as it was being dictated by the author, but then he would sometimes put down some personal words at the end. However, if read in a straightforward manner, the close of John is written by the same person who wrote the rest of the Gospel of John, and conservative scholars agree on that. Furthermore, there is good evidence, both internal and external, that the same writer wrote the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John, which would make John the disciple whom Jesus loved and the author of the Gospel and Epistles of John. The disciple whom Jesus loved, and the author of the Gospel of John, is John.

[For more information on John being the author of the Gospel of John and the disciple whom Jesus loved, see commentary on John 21:20.]

Joh 21:25

**“And there are also many other things that Jesus did.”** The Gospel of John ends with the apostles and disciples in Galilee. But they returned to Jerusalem, chose Matthias to replace Judas, and witnessed the ascension, and then were there for the Day of Pentecost.

1. F. F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, 28-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-28109)
2. Thomas Rees, The Racovian Catechism, 63-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-20516)
3. Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, s.v. “λόγος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12512)
4. Edward Klink, John [ZECNT], 87-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-32399)
5. J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon, 143-144 (bold emphasis added, italics in the original). [↑](#footnote-ref-28963)
6. Andrews Norton, A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians, 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-26810)
7. Norton, A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians, 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-18940)
8. Buzzard and Hunting, The Doctrine of the Trinity, 191-196. [↑](#footnote-ref-19492)
9. Broughton and Southgate, The Trinity: True or False?, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-20784)
10. F. F. Bruce, The Gospel and Epistles of John, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-22696)
11. From John Lightfoot, A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, 3:238. [↑](#footnote-ref-29950)
12. J. H. Bernard, St. John 1-7 [ICC], 1:139. [↑](#footnote-ref-23808)
13. William Barclay, Jesus as They Saw Him, 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-30989)
14. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-23532)
15. Roger Olson, Against Calvinism, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-29217)
16. Richard Daane, The Freedom of God, 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-30579)
17. C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John, 158; cf. Sanders and Mastin, The Gospel According to St. John [BNTC], 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-20498)
18. F. F. Bruce, The Gospel and Epistles of John, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-21713)
19. C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John, 2nd ed., 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-19281)
20. Bromiley, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. “ἐξουσία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28803)
21. See R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel,66. [↑](#footnote-ref-11327)
22. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: John, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-23536)
23. D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John [PNTC], note on John 1:17, 131-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-12141)
24. Ehrman, The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-20198)
25. Potter and Origen quoted in The Gospel According to John [NICNT], 125, n40. [↑](#footnote-ref-10915)
26. Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According to John [AB], 44-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-24216)
27. See Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 472, “epitrechon.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10678)
28. R. C. H. Lenski, St. John’s Gospel, 152-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-27335)
29. Lenski, Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel, 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-27814)
30. Cf. Daniel Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 489-90. Wallace actually cites John 2:19 as an example. [↑](#footnote-ref-23489)
31. Cf. D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John [PNTC], 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-32360)
32. Edersheim, Life and Times, 2:120. [↑](#footnote-ref-28341)
33. Cf. Kenneth S. Wuest, New Testament, “out from among those who are dead,” 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-22427)
34. Morgridge, The True Believer’s Defence Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians, 124-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-18834)
35. Lenski, Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel, 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-18249)
36. Cf. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. [↑](#footnote-ref-26842)
37. Morris, The Gospel According to John [NICNT], 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-21890)
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