

THE FIRST DAYS OF JESUS
AND THE ROLE OF THE DISCIPLES:
A STUDY OF JOHN 1:19–51

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ABSTRACT

The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1–18) introduces the reader/listener to the narrative of 1:19–51. Set within the temporal markers of four days (1:29, 35, 43), leading into “on the third day” of 2:1, the narrative features the witness of the Baptist (1:19–34) and the vocation of the first disciples (1:35–51). The ‘days’ do not form a ‘week’ opening Jesus’ ministry, but reflect a liturgical tradition surrounding the Jewish celebration of Pentecost. Unlike traditional biblical and especially Gospel vocation stories, the response of the disciples to Jesus matches neither the Christology of the Prologue nor the Christological witness of the Baptist. Their limited faith-response leads the reader/listener further into the narrative, asking questions about the nature of authentic Johannine faith.

THE FOLLOWING STUDY IS BASED UPON TWO PREMISES NOWADAYS WIDELY accepted in analyses of biblical narratives.¹ The first is that the narrative is read as a whole, in the form in which it has come down to us in the canonical document. I have no doubt that a long and complex *Traditionsgeschichte* lies behind the formation of John 1:1–21:25.² Secondly, the interpretation of any single episode must devote serious attention to what has been communicated in the narrative *to that point*. This is not the place to debate the literary theory that

¹ This essay was delivered as a lecture to the Fellowship of Biblical Studies at Queens College, University of Melbourne, on 2 June, 2016. It appeared in a more extended form in Francis J. Moloney, *Johannine Studies 1975–2017* (WUNT 372; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017) 307–30. This version is published with the permission of Mohr Siebeck.

² On the possible pre-history of John 1:19–51, see Michael Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 2009) 176–78, 187–89.

lies behind such a claim: the unfolding of an implied reader who ‘knows’ what s/he has been told to that point in the story.³

In terms of the matter under discussion in this paper, the role of the disciples, who enter the narrative in 1:35, must be interpreted in the light of the information provided by the Prologue to the Gospel (1:1–18) and the first two ‘days’ of Jesus ministry (vv. 19–28; vv. 29–34; see v. 29: “the next day”). The reader implied by the narrative, and the real audience encountering this narrative, *experience* the role of the first disciples aware of all that has been said and that has taken place from 1:1–34.⁴

Contemporary interpretations of the call of the first disciples in vv. 35–51 are almost unanimous in a positive understanding of the response of the first disciples of Jesus. They appear as two disciples of the Baptist (v. 35), one named Andrew (v. 40), while the other remains anonymous, Simon Peter (vv. 41–42), Philip (vv. 43–44) and Nathanael (vv. 45–49). Craig Blomberg’s assessment of the historical reliability of the Johannine narrative claims: “Doubtless ... we [can] really believe that such ‘exalted Christology’ emerged in the early days of Jesus’ ministry.”⁵ A recent volume on the characters in the Fourth Gospel can serve as an example.⁶ The disciples are seen as “ideal disciples” (Garry Manning), found in a passage replete with “magnificent confessions” (Martinus de Boer) and “profound confessions of faith” (Steven Hunt).⁷ Jean Zumstein closes his recent analysis of vv. 35–51 with the claim that these verses offer a full presentation of Johannine Christology, represented in both the confessions of the first disciples and the interventions of Jesus.⁸ More recently, Peter Judge has suggested that Jesus’ question, “What are you looking for” (v. 38) and his invitation to “come and see” (v. 39) leads to an entirely positive series of responses, and concludes: “As the disciples respond to Jesus’ invitation and remain with him it is intimated that they are invited into a similar relationship with Jesus as he had with the Father and the Spirit.”⁹

³ See further, Francis J. Moloney, “Who is ‘The Reader’ in/of the Fourth Gospel?” *Johannine Studies* 77–89.

⁴ On the “real reader,” see Moloney, “Who is ‘the Reader?’” 85–88.

⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 81.

⁶ Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie and Ruben Zimmermann (ed.), *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel. Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

⁷ The citations can be found in Hunt, Tolmie and Zimmermann, *Character Studies*, 128 (Manning), 145 (de Boer) and 192 (Hunt).

⁸ Jean Zumstein, *L’Évangile selon Saint Jean* (2 vols; CNT IVA-b, Deuxième Série; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2007–14) 1:86–92.

⁹ Peter Judge, “Come and See: the First Disciples and Christology in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Studies in the Gospel of John and its Christology. Festschrift Gilbert Van Belle* (ed. Joseph Verheyden, Geert van Oyen, Michael Labahn and Reimund Bieringer; BETL 265; Leuven: Peeters, 2015) 68. Judge accepts, nevertheless, that

The strategic location of the Prologue (1:1–18) as the first page of the story places the audience in a “privileged position.” The members of the audience know *who* Jesus Christ is, and *what* he does, while the characters within the narrative do not. This privileged position forces the audience into a situation of *krisis*: they are called to decision—to respond negatively or positively to the story of *how* God acts in and through Jesus. The author makes this clear as he brings his narrative to closure, and informs his audience who have not seen Jesus (20:29) that he has told the story in this way so that they move further in their belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, so that they may have life in his name (20:30–31).¹⁰

The claims made for Jesus Christ in 1:1–18 are ‘tested’ by the narrative that follows, as the audience is ‘tested’ by its experience of a story of Jesus that began by informing them *who* Jesus is and *what* he has done. Now they encounter *how* he does it. The well-known Johannine use of a “misunderstanding” literary technique only makes sense if this is the case. Nicodemus misunderstands ‘rebirth’ (3:3–5) and the Samaritan woman misunderstands the welling up of water (4:13–15). “The Jews” misunderstand the gift of a bread that will last forever (6:33–34) and, when the Pharisees tell the blind man, “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from” (9:29), an audience already has the information needed to recognise the misunderstanding of what God is doing through Jesus: from the Prologue. Without it, Jesus’ claims make no sense to either the characters in the story or the audience. What Kingsley Barrett wrote of 1:1–2 could be said of vv. 1–18: “The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous.”¹¹ The audience must accept that Johannine truth: the Logos pre-existed all time, one in union with God (vv. 1–2). He has come *from God*, and taken up the human condition (v. 14). His name is Jesus Christ (v. 17).

I suspect that the widespread positive or at best, “soft,” interpretations of the role of the disciples in 1:19–51 is strongly influenced by the positive presentation of disciples in the Synoptic tradition, beginning with Mark (Mark 1:16–20; 2:13–14; 3:13–19), largely followed by Matthew (Matt 4:18–22; 9:9; 10:1–4), creatively rewritten by Luke (Luke 5:1–11; 5:27–28; 6:12–16). There is a tendency to “flatten” them into uniformity. Given the universally positive presentation of the first disciples in the Synoptics, their first appearance in the Fourth Gospel is also regarded as positive, even if not perfect. Harold Attridge

these confessions must be “fleshed out” across the course of the rest of the Gospel (69).

¹⁰ See Gordon D. Fee, “On the Text and Meaning of John 20:30–31,” in *To What End Exegesis? Essays Textual, Exegetical, and Theological* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 29–42.

¹¹ C. Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (2nd ed.; London: SPCK, 1978) 156.

maintains that John practises “genre bending.”¹² By this, Attridge suggests that at first glance a passage may reflect an identifiable genre. On closer analysis it emerges that John has used the genre in an unexpected fashion. I suggest that, in the light of the Prologue (1:1–18) and the opening witness of the Baptist (vv. 19–34), the disciples of 1:35–51 are used by John as a foil to generate a serious question for the audience.¹³

SOME BACKGROUND TO JOHN 1:19–2:11

Even a first encounter with John 1:19–51 reveals that ‘days’ determine the passing of time. No chronological allocation is given to John the Baptist’s appearance in vv. 19–28, but the expression τῆ ἑπαύριον (the next day) of v. 29 naturally allocates the events of vv. 19–28 to a day. From that point on the ‘days’ are clearly indicated in v. 35 (τῆ ἑπαύριον πάλιν) and v. 43 (τῆ ἑπαύριον). These indications create four ‘days’: vv. 19–28, 29–34, 35–42 and 43–51. The indication of the passing of ‘days’ continues into 2:1 with the indication καὶ τῆ ἡμέρᾳ τῆ τρίτῃ (and on the third day). This has regularly been read as an addition of 4 days + 3 days = 7 days, generating a week, a symbolic repetition of the seven days of creation in Genesis 1:1–2:4a.¹⁴ But this is poor mathematics, and a shallow reading. At no stage does the text say: “there were first four days, and then another three days.” The third day after the fourth day, including that fourth day, generates a sixth day. Some interpreters have noticed this fact, but reject the suggestion that the days should be counted.¹⁵ A few have generated five days across vv. 19–51 by claiming that Andrew’s bringing Simon to Jesus in vv. 40–43 is the fourth day. As Bauckham puts it:

According to 1:39, the man subsequently named as Andrew and his anonymous companion stayed with Jesus “that day,” which means for the rest of the day until evening (when in Jewish thinking the next day began). This makes it *quite*

¹² Harold W. Attridge, “Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 121 (2002) 3–21.

¹³ Throughout this essay I will use the name “John” to refer to the author of the document, without declaring any certitude about the name and person of the author.

¹⁴ The list of adherents to this view is too long to detail here. Recently Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory. Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 132–41, has resumed this interpretation, but sees the ‘week’ of 1:19–2:11 as the first of “two momentous weeks,” the other being the week that runs from 12:1–20:31.

¹⁵ See, for example, Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. George R. Beasley-Murray; Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 97–98; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (trans. Kevin Smyth et al.; 3 vols.; HTCNT 4/1–3; London/New York: Burns & Oates/Herder, 1968–82) 1:297, 308, 313; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972) 128; Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l'évangile selon Jean* (4 vols; Parole de Dieu; Paris: Cerf, 1988–96) 1:150–51; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (BNTC; London/New York: Continuum, 2005) 116.

clear that what Andrew then does (according to 1:41) *must* take place on the following day.¹⁶

The interpreter should not only respect what John says, but how he says it.¹⁷ His use of τῆ ἐπαύριον (v. 29), τῆ ἐπαύριον πάλιν (v. 35), τῆ ἐπαύριον (v. 43) and καὶ τῆ ἡμέρα τῆ τρίτη (2:1) make it clear that he is ‘up to something’ with his careful use of ‘days’ across these opening pages to Jesus’ story. To introduce another day in the subtle fashion suggested by Bauckham, Boismard and others is not the way John communicates. One must also not over-interpret the Johannine text of 1:19–2:12 to trace there the Pauline notion of a “new creation” (see 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rom 5:12–21).

But there are more substantial issues at stake, as recognisable Jewish background generates these ‘days.’ An early tannaitic midrash on Exodus, the *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, comments upon Exodus 19 in a way that relates directly with John 1:19–2:12.¹⁸ The starting point for the midrashic commentary is the use of “on the third new moon” in Exodus 19:1 and “on the third day” in 19:10–11, 15, 16. The midrashic commentaries on Exodus 19:1–2, 3–8, and 9–10 indicate that three more days had to be added to the preparation for the major celebration of the gift of the Law. They culminate on a ‘fourth day,’ based upon Exodus 19:9–10 (“Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and prepare for the third day”). The fourth day begins the immediate preparation: “This was the fourth day of the week” (*Mekilta* on Exod 19:10–11). The instructions culminate in the words from Exodus “and prepare for the third day” (19:10). This biblical “third day” of Exodus 19 is explicitly interpreted in the *Mekilta*: “This was the sixth day of the week on which the Torah was given” (*Mekilta* on Exod 19:10–11).¹⁹ The four days of 1:19–51 are generated by the Jewish preparation for the annual celebration of the gift of the Law at Pentecost, and the Johannine use of καὶ τῆ ἡμέρα τῆ τρίτη (“And on the third day”) in 2:1 deliberately resumes

¹⁶ Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory* 133, stress mine. Marie-Émile Boismard, *Moïse ou Jésus: Essai de Christologie Johannique* (BETL 85; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988) 79–81, generates an extra day for vv. 41–43 by reading πρῶτι (the next day) rather than πρῶτον (first). This reading (and the appearance of *mane* [in the morning] in a few Old Latin texts) is little more than speculation.

¹⁷ There is also an issue with ‘what John says.’ The narrator reports ὥρα ἦν ὡς δεκάτη in v. 39. For Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory* 141, it is a historical reminiscence of an eye-witness.

¹⁸ For the early dating of the *Mekilta*, see Jacob Z. Lauterbach (ed. and trans.), *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael* (2 vols; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961) 1:xviii–xxviii. For an unpointed Hebrew text of the Midrash on Exod 19, with an English translation, see Lauterbach, *Mekilta* 2:192–220. He is overly optimistic, but earlier traditions were collected in the *Mekilta* between 300–400 CE.

¹⁹ For the texts from the *Mekilta*, see Lauterbach, *Mekilta* 2:210–12. In this passage, the midrash extends the nature of the preparations that must be performed across those four days, culminating in the fourth day.

the description of the events surrounding the gift of the Law in Exodus 19:16–25 (see LXX v. 16: καὶ τῆ ἡμέρᾳ τῆ τρίτῃ).²⁰

The issue at stake in 1:19–2:12 is neither ‘the new creation’ nor the first of ‘two momentous weeks’ (1:19–2:12 and 12:1–20:31),²¹ but the preparation of disciples who will behold the δόξα of Jesus at Cana (see 2:11). It is well known that one of the features of LXX Greek is its regular translation of the Hebrew *kābôd* with the expression δόξα.²² This usage plays into the New Testament, and especially into the Fourth Gospel, where the themes of glory and glorification are so central.²³ In Exodus 19:16 the Hebrew *kābôd* is used to describe the “thick cloud” that hangs over the mountain. In the later Targums, the Hebrew *kābôd* quickly became “the glory of God.” The technical Aramaic expression for this, *yigrā*, is found in the *Pseudo-Jonathan Targum* on Exodus 19:9, 11, 15, 20, and in the *Neophiti Targum* on Exodus 19:11, 17, 18, 20. There is an undeniable and understandable tendency within Judaism to look back to the events of Sinai as the revelation of “the glory of God.”²⁴ Behind 1:19–2:12 lie the days of preparation (vv. 19–51), and the Jewish celebration of Pentecost, recalling the original revelation of the glory of God that took place at the gift of the Law at Sinai (2:1–12). The literary structure of four ‘days’ behind verses 19–51, culminating in the miracle at Cana in 2:1–12 “on the third day,” feeds off the teaching of the Prologue, and is based upon Jewish liturgical practices that marked the celebration of Pentecost. The Law was given through Moses. That was a remarkable revelation of the glory of God to his people. Now this gift has been perfected in the revelation of the glory of Jesus (1:17; cf. 2:11). The theme behind these ‘first days’ is neither the seven days of creation, nor an opening week (1:19–51) that is matched by a final week (12:1–20:31), as Bauckham has claimed. It reports preparation (1:19–51) for the revelation of the divine in the human story (2:1–12).²⁵

²⁰ Theobald, *Das Evangelium* 209–10.

²¹ See below.

²² See Gerhard von Rad and Gerhard Kittel, “δοκέω κτλ.” *TDNT* 2 (1964) 232–55.

²³ See the comprehensive studies of Wilhelm Thüsing, *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannevangelium* (3rd ed.; NTAbh 21/1–2; Münster: Aschendorff, 1979) and Nicole Chibici Revneanu, *Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten: das Verständnis der δόξα im Johannevangelium* (WUNT 2.231; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

²⁴ For a comparative study of the targums on Exod 19:1–20, see Jean Potin, *La fête juive de la Pentecôte* (2 vols; LD 65; Paris: Cerf, 1971) 1:46–70. For the texts themselves, see 2:7–32.

²⁵ See Francis J. Mooney, “The Use of χάρις in John 1:14, 16–17. A Key to the Johannine Narrative,” *Johannine Studies* 283–305.

INTERPRETING JOHN 1:19–51

A close narrative link between the Prologue (1:1–18) and the ‘days’ that follow (1:19–51) is generated by the use of *καὶ* in the introduction to the witness of the Baptist in v. 19. The link is continued into ‘the third day’ in the same fashion in 2:1. Richard Bauckham has recently suggested that two parallel “momentous weeks” frame the Johannine narrative: the week represented by 1:19–2:11, and another week that unfolds across the days of 12:1–20:31.²⁶ Creative and insightful as this proposal may appear, despite the close link between 1:1–19 and 2:1–11, generated by the use of the ‘days’ that mark the celebration of Pentecost in vv. 1–19 and the manifestation of the *δόξα* in 2:1–11, commentary on the two passages should be separated. The days of 1:19–51 are preparation for the gift of the glory, promised in the ‘greater sight’ of verses 50–51. The first Cana miracle (2:1–12) is the first moment of realisation of that promise. A second Cana miracle is found later in the narrative, in the cure of the son of the Royal Official (4:46–54). John makes it clear to his audience that the two Cana miracles are closely associated. He indicates the first of the miracles at Cana in Galilee (2:11), and then recalls it as he opens and closes 4:46–54: “Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine” (v. 46), and “Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee” (v. 54). Thus the literary shape of these opening passages is: 1:19–51 (the first days) and subsequently 2:1–4:54 (from Cana to Cana).²⁷ As an author moves from one stage in a narrative to another, brick walls are not established between the stages. The opening words of 2:1–4:54, “and on the third day,” form an obvious link with Jesus’ first days. As we hope to show, 1:19–51 poses a question to the audience. The eight responses to Jesus across 2:1–4:54 form a narrative response to that question.

THE FIRST DAY (1:19–28)

The ministry of Jesus opens with an initial indication that “the Jews” have doubts about Jesus.²⁸ At this stage, the audience has no such doubts; they have

²⁶ Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory* 131–84; see the scheme presenting the “The Gospel’s two momentous weeks” on 134–35.

²⁷ See Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word. Reading John 1–4* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 59–60. Bauckham never draws the clearly intended literary link between 2:1–12 and 4:46–54 (see 2:1, 11 and 4:46, 54) into his discussion. He has earlier suggested that a strong indication of the eyewitness testimony behind the Fourth Gospel is the presentation of the Beloved Disciple in an *inclusion* between 1:35–51 and 21:1–25. See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses. The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 384–411. Are both inclusions possible?

²⁸ The expression “the Jews” (*οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι*) represents one side of a Christological debate. Historically, John identified them with the Jews who rejected Jesus, his teaching and his followers, but they should not be identified with a race. One must

been told who Jesus is in the Prologue. The opening testimony of John the Baptist responds to questions from priests and Levites from Jerusalem, emissaries of “the Jews.” They ask the crucial Johannine question: “Who are you?” John’s response is very solemn, marked by a repeated use of “he confessed.” One of the reasons for the writing of the Gospel of John was to support those Jewish Christians who “confessed” that Jesus was the Christ (9:22; 12:42). The original audience of the Gospel, challenged to “confess” Jesus as the Christ recognise that John the Baptist leads the way.²⁹ But the force of the Baptist’s confessing that he is not the Christ points the audience elsewhere. If the Baptist is not the Christ, then who is he? The audience knows, but they are waiting to hear it from the Baptist.

In the light of this rejection of a messianic role, the interlocutors ask about lesser figures: Elijah or the prophet. Jewish messianic expectation contained traditions that Elijah, who had ascended to heaven, would return to usher in the messianic era (see Mal 4:5–6), and that a prophet like Moses would also return at that time (see Deut 18:15, 18; 1QS 9:11).³⁰ The Baptist vigorously rejects these suggestions. The priests and Levites ask him to inform them who he is. In his description of his role, the Baptist begins his positive witness that was promised to the audience in 1:6–8. Continuing early Christian tradition (see Mark 1:2–3; Matt 3:1–3; Luke 3:3–6), he cites Isaiah 40:3: “I am the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord.” As in his rejection of the role of Messiah, and figures associated with the Christ, this citation from Isaiah allows the Baptist to point beyond contemporary messianic hopes. He is preparing the way for “the Lord.” The expression “Lord” (κύριος) was used consistently in the LXX to translate the Hebrew word used for God. The God-sent witness prepares the way for the presence of the divine in the incarnate Word (cf. v. 15).³¹

“The Jews” of verse 19 are further identified as “the Pharisees” (v. 24). They ask by what authority he is involved in a baptismal ministry, used by certain groups in Israel (e.g., the Pharisees and the Essenes [see 1QS 4:20–22]) as

“recognise in these hot-tempered exchanges the type of family row in which the participants face one another across the room of a house which all have shared and all call home” (John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991] 151).

²⁹ An important element in the origins of the Johannine story was the post-70 CE parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity (see 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

³⁰ For an English translation of the Community Rule from Qumran that cites Deut 18, see Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated. The Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1993) 13–14.

³¹ See, Gottfried Quell, “κύριος κτλ.,” *TDNT* 3 (365)1058–81. See also Timothy M. Law, *When God Spoke Greek. The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 95–98, especially 97.

an initiation rite of purification, if he is not the Christ, Elijah or the Prophet.³² This question enables John to again return to early Christian tradition to point out that he, like others, practices a water purification ritual, but “among you stands one whom you do not know” (v. 26). A former disciple of the Baptist, “he who comes after me” (ὁ ὀπίσω μου; see also v. 15), is greater than the Baptist. Indeed, the Baptist is not even worthy of performing the most menial of services for him: untying his sandal (v. 27; cf. Mark 1:7–8; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16; see also John 3:26). The first day’s witness closes with a careful description of the location of John’s baptism: in Bethany across the Jordan (v. 28; see 10:40–42).

Jesus has not yet appeared on the scene (see v. 29), but promises of the Prologue are being acted out. John the Baptist’s witnessing (see vv. 6–8) looks beyond himself to a greater one. He is *not* the Messiah. By means of this *negative* witness, he is preparing “the way of the Lord” (v. 23). The Prologue has already made it clear to the audience that Jesus Christ is more than “the Christ.” That may be the name by which he is known (see 1:17), but he is the incarnate Word of God, the Son of God, and thus “the Lord” (v. 14). Any attempt to understand Jesus within the religion and culture of his time cannot be correct, and this first day of the Baptist’s witness sets the agenda for that theme. But more radical truths about Jesus’ relationship to God have been stated in 1:1–18.

THE SECOND DAY (1:29–34)

On the following day (v. 29) the initiative remains entirely with John the Baptist. Jesus is not an active agent, even though he appears on the scene for the first time (v. 29). As Jesus approaches, the Baptist makes a further statement of Johannine faith. No longer is the witness of the Baptist couched in negative terms (as in vv. 6–8), but he continues the positive proclamation of v. 15: “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (v. 29). Scholars have long pondered the association between the Lamb and the taking away of sins.³³ On the third day (see v. 35), John will make use of the term “the Lamb of God” a second time, before two of his disciples in verses 35–36. An association between 1:29, 35 and 19:14, as Jesus will be led away to be slain as the Paschal lambs were being prepared, is widespread among the commentators. A scholarly problem arises from the fact that there is no known association in Jewish thought between the slaying of the Paschal lamb and the

³² For the text from the Community Rule, see Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* 7. See further, Wilhelm Michaelis, “Zum jüdische Hintergrund der Johannestaufe,” *Judaica* 7 (1951) 81–120; Joachim Gnllka, “Die essenischen Tauchbäder und die Johannestaufe,” *RevQ* 3 (1961) 185–207.

³³ For a survey, see J. Terence Forestell, *The Word of the Cross. Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (AnBib 57; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974) 151–65.

remission of sins. Forgiveness of sins is not a major theological issue in the Gospel of John, as it is in Paul, the Synoptic Gospels and the later Letters (see, for example, Romans 3:21–26; 5:12–21; Mark 2:15–17; Matt 26:26–29; Luke 15:13–35; 1 John 2:1–2). But the tradition is not absent from the Fourth Gospel, even though “It is important ... to recognise that it is entirely subordinate to the main Johannine idea that sin is dealt with by the very communication of eternal life.”³⁴

Tentatively, it is possible that John takes the image from the broader context of Jewish sacrificial practices, where the lamb was used both for the sacrificial rites of communion and reconciliation after sin.³⁵ The link with the Passion and the Passover Lamb (19:14) could come from this context.³⁶ But the problem with all interpretation of this crucial witness of the Baptist to Jesus is the intense focus upon “the Lamb.” A number of backgrounds may be possible for the concept of a lamb that takes away sin. But the key to understanding John’s point of view here is to appreciate that the Baptist’s witness indicates that Jesus transcends all human limitations and interpretations. The Baptist points to Jesus as the Lamb of God. The Baptist points out that Jesus is the Lamb, and that he takes away sin but he also indicates *why such a life-giving presence is possible*. At one with the Prologue, John the Baptist locates Jesus’ significance in his being “of God”³⁷ Once the message of the Prologue is seen as the key to the Baptist’s use of the term, then Jesus’ oneness with God (vv. 1–2) provides the key. The Lamb of God takes away sin because the Word is victorious over darkness (v. 5), giving authority to all who believe in him and receive him to become children of God (vv. 12–13). The Word is one with us, flesh and glory at one and the same time (v. 14), and his name is Jesus Christ (v. 17).

The Baptist’s role in the Prologue is again recalled, as he cites his own direct speech from 1:15 in verse 30. Looking back to v. 1 (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος) the witness of the Baptist makes clear that he was not even aware of the presence of a figure among his own who “was before me” (ὄτι πρῶτός μου ἦν). This enigmatic statement makes no sense without the Prologue. Jesus may have been an unknown disciple of the Baptist, but in fact he must be ranked ahead of his master: he has pre-existed all time (vv. 30–31). The audience, already instructed by the Prologue, is aware of that. The Baptist’s witness thus makes eminent sense. But he performed his baptism by water as a prepa-

³⁴ Forestell, *The Word of the Cross* 166.

³⁵ See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961) 415–21.

³⁶ This is helpfully proposed by Forestell, *The Word of the Cross* 157–66.

³⁷ See Forestell, *The Word of the Cross*, 159: “It is clear that Christ in his death is known as the paschal lamb and as the patient servant of Yahweh in early Christian tradition, but these designations in themselves do not tell us in what sense he is God’s lamb, ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ. The formula is unique, regardless of the explanation adopted.”

ration for the unveiling of the presence of the one who existed before all time with God, and who makes God known (1:1–5, 14–18), that he might be revealed ($\psi\alpha\nu\epsilon\rho\omega\theta\eta$) to Israel. The use of this technical Greek verb, found through the Fourth Gospel with the theological meaning “to reveal,” continues the theme of the Baptist’s authoritative witness in preparation for the definitive revelation of God in and through his Son (see vv. 14, 18).

The baptism of Jesus is not narrated in the Gospel of John. Instead, John the Baptist looks back to that moment when his ignorance of the identity of the one to whom he is being witness was overcome. Earlier Christian tradition again provides the background, as the Baptist witnesses to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus, and remaining upon him (cf. Mark 1:10–11; Matt 3:16–17; Luke 3:16, 22). There is no voice from heaven in the Johannine account, but “the one who sent me to baptise with water” has informed him that the one upon whom the Spirit descends and remains will baptise with the Holy Spirit. The audience knows from the Prologue that John the Baptist was sent by God (v. 6: ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ). It is thus God who communicates to the Baptist that Jesus will administer the Holy Spirit (vv. 32–34). The association of Jesus with a baptism in the Holy Spirit, in contrast to the baptism with water administered by John the Baptist, is the only element in the Baptist’s witness that does not draw the Christological truths of the Prologue into the story of Jesus. A Christian audience might be aware of that tradition associated with John the Baptist (see Mark 1:7–8; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16),³⁸ and the Johannine presentation of the role of the Spirit Paraclete will develop further as the narrative unfolds (3:5–8, 4:24; 7:37–39; 14:4–6, 25–26; 15:26–27; 16:7–11, 12–15; 19:30; 20:22–23).

On the basis of the experience he had at the baptism of Jesus, previously made known to him by the one who sent him (v. 33), the Baptist is now able to come to a final solemn witness to the Christological truth that lies at the heart of the Prologue (vv. 14, 18), and which will determine the Christology of the story as a whole: “And I myself have seen (ἑώρακα) and have testified (μεμαρτύρηκα) that this is the Son of God” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) (v. 34). The Son makes God known (v. 17); the Baptist has seen the Son, and can render his authentic witness to the light (vv. 6–8). Jesus is the Son of God (v. 34). Consistent with the teaching of the Prologue, John the Baptist has given authoritative witness to Jesus as the Lord (v. 23), the Lamb of God (v. 29), the one who will administer the Holy Spirit (v. 34) and the Son of God (v. 34). This *must* be the case. The Baptist can never err in his witness to Jesus, as he was sent by God for that purpose (v. 6).

³⁸ I suspect that the Fourth Evangelist and the Johannine community were aware of Gospel traditions, and even the Gospels (especially Mark and Luke). But there is no Johannine literary dependence upon them, in the way, for example, that Matthew depends upon Mark.

THE THIRD DAY (1:35–42)

The situation and the nature of the encounters reported on the third day are markedly different. To this point, John the Baptist (cf. vv. 6–8, 15) has witnessed to Jesus as the Lord, the Lamb of God, the one who administers the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God. He leads the audience into this third day as he points two of his disciples to Jesus, repeating his authentic witness: “Look, here is the Lamb of God” (vv. 35–36). From this point on the Baptist disappears, only to appear briefly as an active character in 3:23–30, where his witnessing ministry comes to an end.³⁹ For the following two “days,” Jesus and his potential disciples are the focus of the narrative. But the audience encounters the events and words of these days informed by the Prologue (1:1–18) and the witness of the Baptist across the first two days of the Johannine story (vv. 19–34).

The former disciples of the Baptist “followed Jesus” (ἀκολουθησάντων αὐτῷ). This is an acceptance of the suggestion of their former teacher, John the Baptist. They are now setting out after a new Rabbi. In response to his striking question, “What are you looking for?” they address him with the title “Rabbi,” explained by John to a non-Jewish audience as meaning “teacher” (v. 38a). They then ask “Where are you staying?” This first encounter between Jesus and his potential disciples disappoints the audience. In the first place, the pre-existent Logos (v. 1), the Word become flesh (v. 14a), the only Son of the Father (v. 14c), the gift of the truth (v. 14d; v. 17b), the Son who makes God known (v. 18), the Lamb of God (vv. 19, 36) and the Son of God (v. 34), is recognised as a Rabbi (v. 38a). What Jesus offers and what they seek are entirely different. Jesus has accepted their “following,” but they regard him as a replacement for John the Baptist, a new teacher. Thus, if they wish to join him they must go to the place where he lives (v. 38b). With a further provocative statement, Jesus invites them: “Come and see” (v. 39a). The first words of Jesus in the Gospel retain their power for the audience: “What are you looking for?” and “Come and see.” The scene has been set for the establishment of a discipleship associated with the unique revelation of God by Jesus Christ, the Word of God. The audience follows the progress of these former disciples of the Baptist.

They spend the day with him, leaving late in the afternoon, “about the tenth hour,” matching our 4pm (v. 39b). John provides the name of one of the two disciples: Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother (vv. 40–41).⁴⁰ A chain of communica-

³⁹ His role and ministry are described in 4:1 (by the narrator) and in 5:31–35 (by Jesus). The location of his ministry, recalling 1:28, is narrated in 10:41–42.

⁴⁰ Much speculation surrounds the identity of the unnamed disciple, and the possibility that he will become the Beloved Disciple later in the narrative. For a summary, see Theobald, *Das Evangelium* 181–83, accepting that this is the first “hidden” reference to the future Beloved Disciple.

tion begins. The first encounter between Andrew and Jesus was made possible by the action of the Baptist who directed two disciples to Jesus (vv. 35–36). A play on the verb “to find” (εὐρίσκω) follows in vv. 41, 43, and 45. The new disciple finds (εὐρίσκει) his brother Simon and informs him, “We have found (εὐρήκαμεν) the Messiah.” John again provides a translation of the Hebrew/Aramaic: “which means the Christ” (v. 41). The chain of communication begins with an untruth. The disciples did not “find” Jesus. They were sent to him by John the Baptist.

Andrew leads Simon back to Jesus who looks at him and changes the rhythm of the encounter. Andrew’s words to Simon indicate that he accepts Jesus as the Messiah, but the audience knows that Jesus transcends these categories. Jesus begins a theme that will play an important role in the narrative: “now” and “after” (see 2:22; 12:16; 13:7, 19; 36; 14:29). It is in the time “after” Jesus’ death and resurrection that a true understanding of what Jesus says and does will be understood. That is the situation of the audience. The new disciple may currently be called Simon, son of John. But a different challenge lies ahead of him. He will be called Cephas, a word that means the proper name “Peter,” and also “the rock” (v. 42). The post-resurrection audience, aware of the future role of Simon Peter (6:66–69; 18:10–11, 15–18, 25–27), and especially his post-Easter role (see 20:2–10; 21:1–23), recognises the truth of Jesus’ words, but can see that the first disciples and Jesus are not working on the same level. Greater challenges lie ahead, and Peter, the rock, will play a major role in them. John the Baptist sent these disciples to the *Lamb of God*, and they have recognised him as “the Christ” (vv. 36–41). While Jesus is called “Christ” in verse 17, for the Prologue he is Christ because he is the Son of God (vv. 14, 16–18; see 20:31). The response of the first disciples may not yet be good enough, but Simon is informed that challenges lie ahead. This word from Jesus points to a time later in the narrative, and the audience follows.

THE FOURTH DAY (1:43–51)

The chain of communication intensifies across the last of these four days of preparation for the revelation that will take place “on the third day” (2:1). We are now in the final day of preparation, which is also the first of the three days that will lead into ‘the third day’ (2:1; see also *Mekilta* on Exod 19:10–11). On this crucial day, Jesus takes the initiative for the first time. He makes a decision to go to Galilee (v. 43a). No location is given, although Bethsaida, a Galilean village that was the home of Philip and Andrew is mentioned (v. 44; see also 12:21–22). What must be noticed is that Jesus continues his initiative as he “finds” (εὐρίσκει) Philip, and asks him to “follow me” (v. 43: ἀκολούθει μοι). The steady use of the language of following (see vv. 37, 38, 43) makes it clear that the characters in the narrative are called to discipleship. But there is

considerable misunderstanding at this stage. After having been “found” (εὐρίσκει) by Jesus, Philip “finds” (εὐρίσκει) Nathanael, and announces “We have found (εὐρήκαμεν).” The contradiction of what has happened across these two days, in terms of “finding,” continues. Andrew reported falsely to Simon: “We have found” (v. 41), despite the fact that he and his companion had been directed to Jesus (vv. 35–36). After Jesus had found Philip, the latter tells Nathanael “we have found” (v. 45). The impression is created by these first disciples that the discovery of Jesus is the result of their initiative.⁴¹

The person they have found is described by Philip as “him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth” (v. 45). The question from Nathanael, possibly with its roots in a popular proverb, asks “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (v. 46a). The audience, already exposed to the Christology of the Prologue and the authentic witness of John the Baptist, is aware that these confessions of faith in Jesus fall well short of Johannine expectations. The Fourth Gospel has its own voice. For John (1:1–18) and the Baptist (1:19–34) what matters are the *origins of Jesus* (1:1–2, 3–5, 14, 18 [Prologue]; 1:26, 34, 36 [Baptist’s witness]). The key to understanding the Johannine Jesus is to recognise that Jesus is *from God* or, as the narrative will put it later, *from above*. To claim that he is “son of Joseph,” “from Nazareth,” or “out of Nazareth,” is to miss the essential point about Jesus. But this is something that Nathanael will discover as he responds to Philip’s repetition of Jesus’ invitation to the former disciples of the Baptist: “Come and see” (v. 46b).

Jesus recognises Nathanael’s qualities as an Israelite in whom there is no deceit, a description once given to justify Jacob (cf. Gen 32:28; 35:10). Like Jacob, he is presented as a man who can be trusted. But Nathanael’s surprise that Jesus already knows him allows Jesus to indicate that there is more to him than Nathanael might expect. He reveals to Nathanael that he saw him under the fig tree, before Philip called him (v. 48). Much ink has been spilt over the possible meanings of Nathanael’s presence under a fig tree that is beyond review in this paper. Jesus’ awareness of Nathanael’s prior location leads him to confess: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (v. 49).

No disciple has expressed a faith that matches the Christology of the Prologue. Does Nathanael’s confession that Jesus is “the Son of God” (v. 49) overcome the problem? Care is called for in the interpretation of this expression, as it is only one of three titles used by Nathanael in v. 49. Obviously, “Rabbi” and “King of Israel” are not adequate confessions of Johannine faith. Nathanael’s use of “Son of God” must be interpreted as a fine sentiment, but

⁴¹ This point is denied by Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory* 147 n. 41. He claims that it does not matter who finds whom. Such reasoning flies in the face of the obvious play upon the verb “to find.” *Never* in the New Testament and later Christian tradition does the initiative for “finding” Jesus and God lie with the potential believer.

not an adequate expression of Johannine faith in Jesus. “Rabbi” and “King of Israel” are expressions that are either insufficient (for “Rabbi,” see 1:38; 3:2, 26; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8) or unacceptable until articulated in the passion narrative (for the unacceptable use of “king” during the ministry, see 6:15; 12:13, 15, and for its Christological use in the passion, see 18:33, 37 [twice], 39; 19:3, 12, 14, 15 [twice], 19, 21 [twice]). The use of “Son of God” in v. 49 must be measured by the terms that flank it.

Some subtlety is called for here. Beginning with speculation on Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 (see, for example, *4Q Florilegium*), the expression “Son of God” was widely used within second-Temple Judaism to speak of a Davidic king, or even an angel. When associated with the Davidic tradition, it formed part of Israel’s messianic expectation.⁴² When John the Baptist expresses faith in Jesus as “the Son of God” (v. 34), he utters a profound Johannine truth, repeating the teaching of verses 14, 16–18, as one would expect in the light of his description as the God-sent witness to the true light in vv. 6–8. The same cannot be said for Nathanael. When this fifth disciple (if one counts the unnamed disciple of vv. 35–40) joins the procession of good, but limited, expressions of belief in Jesus, he uses “Son of God,” side-by-side with “Rabbi” and “King of Israel,” as an indication that Jesus’ telling him that he had seen him under a fig-tree has led him to believe that Jesus is the expected Messiah. He is the first to articulate a faith based upon a miracle: Jesus told him that he had been under the fig-tree.

This understanding of the limited, but genuine, confessions of the first disciples, and their inability as yet to articulate a faith that matches the claims of the Prologue and John the Baptist’s witness explains Jesus’ questioning response to Nathanael, followed by a promise to all the disciples. Initially addressing only Nathanael, he asks a rhetorical question indicating that his expression of faith is inspired by the mini-miracle of Jesus’ foreknowledge of where he was located before he was called by Philip (v. 50: πιστεύεις). Jesus indicates that more is required. In words that are initially addressed to Nathanael, and then open out in a promise to all the disciples, he continues: “And he said to him (καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ), ‘Amen, amen, I say to you (λέγω ὑμῖν), you will see (ὄψεσθε) heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (v. 51). It is not enough to express faith in Jesus that is determined by culturally conditioned messianic hopes. That is a first step, a good start, but the disciples must be prepared to reach beyond

⁴² For a comprehensive assessment of the Old Testament and second-Temple material, see Brendan Byrne, “*Sons of God—Seed of Abraham*”: A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of All Christians in Paul against the Jewish Background (AnBib 83; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979) 9–78, and John J. Collins, *The Sceptre and the Star. The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1995) 154–72.

those expectations (v. 50). The members of the audience are aware of this: they have experienced the Prologue (1:1–18) and the witness of the one sent by God (vv. 19–34). If the disciples are able to reach beyond their culturally-conditioned categories, they will see much more than wonders; they will see a communication between heaven and earth. “Faith based on miracles has only a relative value as a stepping stone to true faith, which once awakened will see ‘something greater’ than such miracles.”⁴³

In Genesis 28:12, Jacob dreamt of a ladder that communicated between heaven and earth, and the angels of God ascended and descended upon that ladder. Jesus replaces the ladder with his first use of a term that appears regularly across the story, the Son of Man. Gazed upon with the eyes of faith (see v. 14c: “we have gazed upon his glory”), Jesus Christ will be the place where communication between heaven and earth takes place. The expression “Son of Man” came to Jesus from Daniel 7:13. He used it to express unshakable faith and trust in God’s ultimate victory over rejection, suffering, and even death.⁴⁴ All the while retaining its association with the death of Jesus (see 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–34), John expands its significance. At the heart of his reinterpretation is a use of the expression to refer to the revelation of God (with its subsequent judgment) that takes place in the human presence and experience of Jesus, the incarnate Word. The opening of the heavens indicates that “the heavenly world” communicates with the earthly world (see, for example, Mark 1:10; Rev 4:1; 19:11). This communication will be seen in the Son of Man. Jesus promises his disciples that, if they look beyond the limited hopes expressed across these days (vv. 38, 41, 45, 46, 49), and abandon their expectations and control (vv. 41, 43, 45, 50), they will see the revelation of God (the “heavenly”) in the mission and presence of Jesus Christ (v. 51), the incarnate Word who makes God known (vv. 14–18).⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

Closely linked to the Prologue, the first days of Jesus are marked by the witness of John the Baptist who introduces Jesus to the story by performing in history what was promised in the Prologue (vv. 6–8; 15): he gives authentic witness to Jesus (vv. 19–34). However, the first disciples of Jesus were not part of the Prologue. They can only respond to what they experience, in the light of their own limitations at this stage of the story. Called to share time with Jesus

⁴³ Bultmann, *John* 104–5. See also Theobald, *Das Evangelium* 195. The corrective nature of Jesus’ words in v. 50 is often missed.

⁴⁴ Discussion of the background and meaning of the expression “the Son of Man” is interminable. For a more detail on the interpretation adopted here, see Moloney, “Constructing Jesus and the Son of Man,” *Johannine Studies* 201–21.

⁴⁵ See Francis J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man* (2nd ed.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007) 23–41.

(vv. 36–38), the initial disciples of Jesus claimed that they had “found” Jesus (vv. 41, 45). They show promise and enthusiasm as they recognise Jesus as the fulfilment of their hopes (vv. 41, 44–46, 49), and follow him (vv. 38–39, 43). Jesus indicates that more is in store. Simon will become a rock (v. 42), and the partial responses of Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathanael are challenged. Their immediate impressions must be transformed, that they might see the presence of the divine in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (vv. 50–51).

John’s audience is aware of the distance between the Prologue (1:1–18), the witness of John the Baptist (1:19–34), and the limited response of the first disciples who are somewhere “between the truth and the whole truth” (1:35–49).⁴⁶ Jesus’ admonition of Nathanael and his promise to all the disciples points to their future experience (vv. 50–51). However, Jesus’ words to Nathanael, followed by the promise, indicates that “more” is needed from them. “You will see greater things than these” (v. 50b). There is much to be said for those disciples who have responded to Jesus, however limited that response may be in comparison with the Christology of the Prologue (1:1–18) and the witness of the Baptist (vv. 19–34).

Unlike the audience that has heard the Prologue, they have not been told who Jesus is and what he does for humankind. The narrative therefore raises a question for the audience: if the response of Jesus to Nathanael and his promise to all the disciples in vv. 50–51 show that they fall short of genuine Johannine faith across vv. 35–49, what more is needed from them that they might see “greater things” (v. 50)? A critical question for the audience has been raised by the narrative. John will respond to it in full measure in the next major literary section of his story of Jesus that runs from Cana (2:1–12) to Cana (4:46–54). He instructs the audience on the need for unconditional belief in the Word of Jesus (see 2:1–12; 3:22–30; 4:39–42, 46–54).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ The expression “between the truth and the whole truth,” see Meier Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (IBS; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 180–85, and especially 230–63.

⁴⁷ See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols; AB 29–29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1996–70) 1:95–198; Francis J. Moloney, “From Cana to Cana (John 2:1–4:54) and the Fourth Evangelist’s Concept of Correct (and Incorrect) Faith,” *Johannine Studies* 331–53.

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