

## THE WITNESS OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES

### 1:19–51

ALTHOUGH THE GOSPEL'S NARRATIVE opens with 1:19, the implied reader knows Jesus' origin from 1:1–18 (and most of John's earliest audience probably were already Christians; see introduction). That the narrative can open abruptly after the prologue (especially the preparation of 1:6–8, 15) is to be expected, and a Diaspora audience conditioned by Mediterranean dramatic culture would feel at home here. Greek dramas often started by informing the viewer of what had happened prior to the opening of the play. The *Odyssey* opens abruptly and afterwards explains more of Odysseus's travels through flashbacks, but its hearers could also presuppose what they knew of Odysseus from stories about him in the *Iliad* (if they knew that work first; probably they heard both repeatedly).

The prologue introduces John the Baptist as a model witness for Jesus, leading immediately into a section (1:19–51) about the nature of witness and disciple-making for Jesus, which John the Baptist (1:19–28) opens.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the prologue, the evangelist starts his Gospel essentially where Mark did and early Christian evangelists often did (Acts 1:22; 10:37; 13:24).<sup>2</sup> This witness also fits the Gospel's specifically Jewish framework by opening with a witness to Israel (1:31, 49) embraced by true Israelites (1:47).<sup>3</sup> The writer of the Fourth Gospel wishes his audience not only to continue in the faith themselves (20:31), but to join him in openly confessing Christ (12:42–43), proclaiming him in a hostile world (15:26–27).

#### The Witness of the Forerunner to Israel (1:19–28)

In 1:19–34, as in 3:27–36, John the Baptist models the activity of a “witness” (1:8) by deferring all honor to Jesus. This model may counter the tendency of some to exalt John unduly at Jesus' expense (see comment on 1:6–8); it may also respond to some leaders in the Johannine circle who have proved too ambitious for personal honor (3 John 9). This context explains who John is not (1:20–21), his function as a witness to another (1:22–27), and his testimony for the other (1:29–34).

Many ancient biographies pass quickly over the subject's youth or background, focusing on his public career and sometimes at length on his death.<sup>4</sup> Thus Josephus covers the

<sup>1</sup>As one would expect from 1:6–8, 15 (Barth, *Witness*, 133–54).

<sup>2</sup>One should begin a narrative at its most natural starting point (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Thucyd.* 10–12); political biographies often opened in adulthood (Plutarch *Caesar* 1.1–4; also the *Life of Aesop*, Drury, *Design*, 29). Smith, *John* (1999), 78–80, compares 1:19–51 with the introductory infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, but it might fulfill better the role of the remaining introductions of Matt 3–4 and Luke 3–4. It might function as a (lengthy) transition between the proem and main narrative (cf. Seneca *Dial.* 1.1.25).

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Schenke, “Entstehungsgeschichte”; “Israel” appears again in this Gospel only in 3:10; 12:13.

<sup>4</sup>Burridge, *Gospels*, 197–98.

first thirty years of his life in an opening section that constitutes less than 5 percent of his autobiography; even some of this introductory material specifically prepares the reader for Josephus's role in the war (see *Life* 13–16). The Fourth Gospel, in contrast to Matthew and Luke but like Mark, turns very quickly to the Baptist's proclamation and Jesus' ministry.

The prologue's comments about John bearing witness to the light give way naturally to the narrative of 1:19–37, where John points priests and Levites (1:19–28) and his own disciples (1:35–37; possibly also 1:29–34) to Jesus. This section about John's witness fits neatly into the whole narrative concerning Jesus' first disciples (1:19–51),<sup>5</sup> and introduces various christological titles, some of which the Gospel will develop in more detail.<sup>6</sup>

Different days become the occasion for different confessions: John confesses the coming king on one day (1:19–28), acknowledges that Jesus is that king on the next day (1:29–34), and sends his own disciples after Jesus on the next day (1:35–39).<sup>7</sup> In the same way, new disciples witness to Jesus, making other disciples, in both 1:40–42 and (on the next day) 1:43–47, in both cases a self-revelatory encounter with Jesus himself being the converting factor (as in 4:42). The climactic confession of this section on discipleship comes in 1:43–47: Jesus is both Son of God and king of Israel (Messiah), and will further reveal more of heaven to the world. In Johannine ecclesiology, discipleship involves witness, and witness introduces open hearts to the Person whose power to address the truest issues of their hearts convinces them.

Because much of this material about John's witness is also attested in the Synoptic tradition, it is clear that the author of the Fourth Gospel does not fabricate John's witness from whole cloth, but adapts existing traditions.<sup>8</sup> As promised in the introduction, we will explore questions of tradition in this Gospel where it is most easily discerned, namely, in passages that overlap with the Synoptics. That much of this material is paralleled in substance elsewhere in extant sources suggests that other material in the narrative may derive from historical tradition as well, whether or not the other traditions remain extant. (The differences from the Synoptic tradition need not require an independent tradition—paraphrase was a common enough exercise and verbatim recitation was not essential<sup>9</sup>—but other sources besides the Synoptics and Q existed then [cf. Luke 1:1], and the writer would not have selected only those texts now extant as if he knew which texts would remain extant and wished to impress only later generations.)

At the same time, the author's mark is clearly on the material. The Gospel's "Jews" who sent the priests and Levites (1:19) were Pharisees (1:24), but early first-century Pharisees as a group did not exercise authority over priests and Levites (see also comment on

<sup>5</sup>Niccacci, "Fede," observes correspondences between 1:19–51 and 20:1–29, suggesting that both model coming to faith (one in Jesus' messiahship, the other in his resurrection). That the Baptist's witness is paradigmatic for others' witness in this section is clear; earlier Christian writers employed it similarly (cf. Luke 3:4; 9:52; 10:1; in Tannehill, *Luke*, 1:49).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Dschulnigg, "Berufung," on 1:35–51.

<sup>7</sup>Scholars have proposed various theories concerning the opening days of this Gospel, some connecting them with the idea of a new creation (cf. John 1:3), e.g., Hambly, "Creation"; Barosse, "Days." Most of these theories (addressed in our comments on "the third day" in 2:1) have little support in the text, where chronology probably functions as a structuring device, as it probably does in Mark 1:21–35 (so Smith, *Parallels*, 131, citing *m. Šabb.* 1:4–5; *Soṭah* 5:2–5; *Yad.* 4:1–4; *t. Šabb.* 1:16ff.; *Yad.* 16–18) and in the symposium section of *Let. Aris.* 203, 221, 236, 248, 262, though *Let. Aris.* 275 suggests a more careful count than John 2:1! Perhaps the days are intended as literal (cf. 12:12), to show a sample of meaningful days in Jesus' early ministry.

<sup>8</sup>See also Michaels, *Servant*, 15; cf. Smalley, *John*, 26–27.

<sup>9</sup>E.g., Theon *Progymn.* 1.93–171.

7:32). This is not to suggest that John reports no historical tradition here—he clearly does depend on some prior tradition (Luke 3:15); but the role of the Pharisees suggests that he couches his tradition in language relevant for his audience. Some Pharisees were involved in some such missions. Before 70, priestly leaders, perhaps with some Pharisees (Josephus *Life* 21) sent three priests to try to bring Galilee to peace (*Life* 28–29), and the Galileans had to heed them (*Life* 72–73). To restrain Josephus, Jerusalem’s chief priests sent some learned aristocrats, including three Pharisees (one of whom was a priest; *Life* 196).

Yet the Pharisees hardly controlled the priests of Jesus’ day, whereas some successors of the Pharisees appear to have been gaining an increasingly dominant role in the Palestinian Judaism of the Fourth Gospel’s day. Further, the Baptist’s self-abasement regarding his role vis-à-vis that of Christ, while not a Johannine invention (e.g., Luke 3:15–17),<sup>10</sup> reflects Johannine emphasis and possibly polemic.<sup>11</sup> Like other early Christian writers who adapted the original form of Jesus’ divorce logion to different contexts (e.g., Roman law in Mark),<sup>12</sup> or like Qumran’s interpreters applying the sense of biblical texts directly to their own generation, the writer of the Fourth Gospel updates his language to speak directly to the hearers of his day.<sup>13</sup> (It goes without saying that this section, like all John’s Gospel, would abound with typical features of Johannine style.)<sup>14</sup> Those interested in historical tradition will find plenty of it here; those interested in examining Johannine theology through the Gospel’s themes will also be amply rewarded by an analysis of this section.

### 1. Those Who Were Sent (1:19, 24)

Sending an inquiry to a prophet could fit biblical tradition (2 Kgs 19:2; 22:15; Isa 37:2), but the messengers here seem to inquire more from suspicion of John than from desire to hear his message. What appears most striking, however, is the identity of the senders and their agents.

Josephus (*Life* 1; cf. *Ant.* 4.218), Philo (*Spec. Laws* 1.131–155, esp. 1.131; 4.190–192),<sup>15</sup> and the Dead Sea Scrolls (the “wicked priest” in 1QpHab 8.8–12; 9.4–7; 12.5; greedy priests in 4QpNah 1.11) indicate the prominence that priests retained in all parts of Judaism before the destruction of the temple. Josephus, who also praises their general piety (*Ant.* 14.65–68), attests that priests remained the main local rulers of Palestine in this period.<sup>16</sup> Even the later Pharisees, who joined the Essenes and the Gospels in criticizing the

<sup>10</sup> See also Dodd, *Tradition*, 258, citing also Acts 13:25; cf. Freed, “*Egō Eimi*.”

<sup>11</sup> For comments on this passage, cf., e.g., Longenecker, *Ministry*, 70; see especially our discussion on John 1:6–8 above.

<sup>12</sup> Cf., e.g., Keener, *Marries*; for a more thorough redaction-critical analysis and some different conclusions, see Collins, *Divorce*, and the suggestions of Keener, “Review of Collins.”

<sup>13</sup> This is not to say with Fenton, *John*, 40, that our writer “was not acquainted with the situation in Palestine” before 70, a position contradicted by evidence cited above and throughout the commentary.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., the οὖν of 1:21, which Brown, *John*, 1:43 counts 195 times in the Gospel, though not once in the First Epistle. (Cf. only 3 John 8; it appears only 6 times in Revelation and 6 times in Mark.)

<sup>15</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 52–53, cites Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 1.32; Philo *Hypothetica* 7.12–13, and archaeological evidence as well.

<sup>16</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 171, cites Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 2.165, 184–187, 194; *Ant.* 14.4. See more fully Smallwood, “Priests.” For evidence from Jewish texts and Greek administrative analogies identifying the high priesthood with “the rulers,” see Reicke, *Era*, 147.

high priesthood<sup>17</sup> as corrupt (e.g., 1QpHab 9.4–5),<sup>18</sup> respected the high priest's office (later, e.g., *p. Sanh.* 2:1, §2). While some priests seem to have followed Pharisaic practices, even the later rabbis admitted that many (we would say most) did not;<sup>19</sup> most scholars concur that most of the priestly aristocracy were in fact Sadducees (see, e.g., Josephus *Ant.* 13.298; 18.17).<sup>20</sup>

Other aspects of this narrative also fail to fit the historical picture gleaned from a variety of other ancient sources. Rabbis who were mainly successors of the Pharisees later sent formal messengers to other dignitaries,<sup>21</sup> but the practice is well attested in this period and earlier only of the high-priestly temple hierarchy—of those with official authority.<sup>22</sup> The Levites appear rarely elsewhere in the NT but often appear together with priests in OT narratives and in passages such as Luke 10:31–32; they fill the same literary function as the priests here.<sup>23</sup>

John, who prefers to emphasize the authority of the “Pharisees” (more than Matthew, and far more than Mark or Luke, probably because he writes at a period when their authority was far more advanced and hostile to Palestinian Jewish Christians), nowhere else mentions “priests and Levites.”<sup>24</sup> One might suggest that the Fourth Gospel generally transforms the priestly leaders in traditional sources into Pharisees (leaders whose role in repressing minority factions in John's day corresponded to aristocratic priests in Jesus' day), and here perhaps even transforms crowds into priests.

This is not to deny the historical plausibility of various elements of the scenario. It remains possible that John the Baptist had rebelled against his priestly roots (Luke 1:5)<sup>25</sup> and it is still more likely that he reacted against an aristocratic Jerusalem priesthood that represented the very sort of ostensibly pro-Roman establishment against which a traditional Israelite eschatological prophet would thunder.<sup>26</sup> Priests and Levites gradually lost most of their power base after the temple's destruction, so their role of ensuring stability here is less easily explained as Johannine adaptation than that of his “Pharisees.”<sup>27</sup> Nor is the Fourth

<sup>17</sup>In contrast to OT usage, the NT (e.g., Mark 2:26; 14:55; 15:11; Acts 5:24; 23:14; 25:15; cf. Acts 4:6), other early Christian texts (e.g., theagraphon in Jeremias, *Sayings*, 51), Josephus (e.g., *War* 2.243, 316, 318, 320, 322, 336, 342, 410–411; 4.314), and probably the Scrolls (1QM 2.1) apply “high priests” in the plural to the members or leaders of the priestly aristocracy, not to the chief priest alone (see Stern, “Aspects,” 601, 603; Reicke, *Era*, 147–48; Feldman in the Josephus LCL 10:157). The rapid transition of officeholders under the Romans may have rendered the usage more fluid as well.

<sup>18</sup>Also implied in *T. Levi* 14:1 (though this could be a later interpolation). Avigad, *Jerusalem*, 130; idem, “Burnt House,” 71, cites *t. Menah.* 13:21; *b. Pesah.* 57.1 alongside archaeological attestation of a priestly name appearing there (Kathros).

<sup>19</sup>*P. Ter.* 6:1. The early church reportedly made inroads into both communities (Acts 6:7; 15:5).

<sup>20</sup>E.g., Simon, *Sects*, 24; cf. Baumbach, “Sadduzäerverständnis.”

<sup>21</sup>E.g., for rabbis sending rabbis to other rabbis, *p. Ta'an.* 3:11, §4; *Sanh.* 1:2, §10; for messengers to other regions, cf. *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 15:5; perhaps *CIJ* 1:438–39, §611.

<sup>22</sup>Macc 1:18; Acts 9:1–2; Sanders, *Jesus to Mishnah*, 255–57. Cf. Josephus *Ant.* 13.62–69; Safrai, “Relations,” 204–7, citing Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 1.32–33; Acts 28:21; and numerous other sources.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Brown, *John*, 1:43, who also points out their relative scarcity in the NT. Barrett, *John*, 172, does note that Levites remain distinct from priests even as late as rabbinic literature (*m. Hor.* 3:8) and, like Brown, notes their function as police as well as worshipers (citing *m. Tamid* 7; *Mid.* 1–2), the former function perhaps being more relevant in our text.

<sup>24</sup>Haenchen, *John*, 1:143, contrasting this with the OT and 1QS.

<sup>25</sup>See Kraeling, *John*, 26–27.

<sup>26</sup>Despite Josephus's portrayal of its later revolt against Rome, the priestly aristocracy clearly sought its own interests from Rome and not just peace for its people (e.g., Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 315; more harshly, cf. Horsley, “High Priests”).

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Blomberg, *Reliability*, 76.

Gospel our only authority that emphasizes that Jewish leaders came to John; Matthew, undoubtedly writing to a Syro-Palestinian community also struggling with ascendant Pharisaism after 70, turns Q's probable "crowds" (Luke 3:7) into "Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt. 3:7),<sup>28</sup> although it remains for the Fourth Gospel to eliminate the mention of the masses following John in this account almost altogether (John 3:26).

Ideological conflict between a wilderness prophet on one hand and Jerusalem temple functionaries and teachers on the other is probable should the latter have grown concerned enough about the former's reputation to investigate him with questions; and if John drew the crowds that both Josephus and the Synoptics should indicate that he did,<sup>29</sup> the Sadducean aristocracy would want to investigate him before the Romans did. Josephus provides many examples of messianic "false prophets" who brought about Roman intervention.<sup>30</sup> That John's interlocutors must provide an answer to those whose agents they are (1:22) underlines their official character in this text (cf. 2 Sam 24:13).<sup>31</sup> Following later rabbinic texts here, some writers suggest that the Sanhedrin would have investigated John to see whether he was a "seducer,"<sup>32</sup> a plausible portrayal of the events in the story world if the tradition is sufficiently early. But John's audience might have also known that Jerusalem authorities in the Baptist's day would have been especially concerned with potential political disruptions (cf. 11:47–50), and other historical sources indicate that John's preaching had already been interpreted politically.<sup>33</sup>

But the fact remains that another extant tradition places the priests' question here on the hearts of "the people" (Luke 3:15), and despite the Fourth Gospel's fuller report of other details in the narrative, it is easier to understand why the Fourth Gospel would have narrowed this question to messengers of the Pharisees than to hypothesize why the Third Gospel or its traditions would have softened the question's source to the crowds (cf. similarly Luke 3:7; Matt 3:7).<sup>34</sup>

## 2. John's Denials (1:20–23)

John's questioners ask him about Elijah and the Prophet (a new Moses figure), both of whom were end-time prophetic figures expected in this period.<sup>35</sup> Earlier tradition concurs with the Fourth Gospel's claim that some thought John the Christ (Luke 3:15), and that he responded that one mightier than he would come after him to bestow the Spirit (Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16), but the Fourth Gospel elaborates the discussion more fully than our other extant traditions do. The language of the denial may reflect a deliberate contrast

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<sup>28</sup>Cf. Manson, *Sayings*, 39 (though doubting that Q is the source here); see Tilborg, *Leaders*, for an analysis of this typical Matthean redactional tendency.

<sup>29</sup>Mark 1:5; Matt 3:5–6; Luke 3:3, 7; Josephus *Ant.* 18.118.

<sup>30</sup>E.g., Josephus *Ant.* 20.98, 168, 171 (though the reports are less complete in the earlier *War*, e.g., *War* 2.263).

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:291; cf. perhaps Prov 22:21.

<sup>32</sup>Edersheim, *Life*, 142, citing *m. Sanh.* 1:5 on the later view of the procedure.

<sup>33</sup>Josephus *Ant.* 18.118–119; cf., e.g., Meier, "John," 226–27; Kraeling, *John*, 85–91; Hoehner, *Antipas*, 143–44.

<sup>34</sup>In either case, the group speaks as a chorus, reflecting a corporate perspective (Malina, *Windows*, 140) familiar in antiquity (e.g., Virgil *Aen.* 11.122–131; Dionysius of Halicarnassus *R.A.* 6.10.1; 6.87.1; Acts 4:24; cf. 1 Sam 11:4; 2 Sam 5:1–2).

<sup>35</sup>Their "What therefore?" was common idiom, frequent in various forms in early Christian writers (cf. John 6:30; Acts 21:22; Rom 3:1, 9; 4:1; 6:1; 1 Cor 3:5; 14:26) and elsewhere (Musonius Rufus 5, p. 50.21; 16, p. 104.8; Menander Rhetor 2.1–2, 376.4; cf. Seneca *Dial.* 3.6.1).

with the confession the tradition reports for Jesus before the Jerusalem elite (Mark 14:61–62; cf. 8:28). John’s emphatic “I” in his denial of his messiahship in the Greek text of 1:20 (also 3:28) may suggest that John is about to confess another as the Christ (cf. 1:23, 27).<sup>36</sup> Certainly John’s confession contrasts with Jesus’ positive “I am” statements in this Gospel (e.g., 4:26; 11:25), fitting the running contrast created by John’s abasement and Jesus’ exaltation (1:15; 3:28–30).<sup>37</sup> That John both “confessed” and “denied not” is more than mere Semitic parallelism at work;<sup>38</sup> it is varied repetition for the sake of emphasis, sounding almost like a response to the charge that John claimed to be more than a prophet.<sup>39</sup> The reader will later learn that the leaders who sent messengers to John prove unwilling to confess Christ or permit others to do so (9:22; 12:42); John himself, however, “confesses” him openly (cf. Matt 10:32; Luke 12:8, a tradition likely known to the Johannine community—Rev 2:13; 3:5).

#### 2A. Not Elijah (1:21a)

That the Fourth Gospel plays John’s role down in light of some contemporary exorbitant claims for him is likely (see comment on 1:6–8), especially since the Fourth Gospel refuses to grant him even the role of Elijah which he seems to have played to some extent in pre-Markan tradition (Mark 1:6; Matt 3:4;<sup>40</sup> cf. 1 Kgs 17:6; 2 Kgs 1:8 LXX; Mark 9:13; Matt 17:12–13; Luke 1:17),<sup>41</sup> even though he does not explicitly transfer those claims to Jesus.<sup>42</sup>

It may also merit mention that the Synoptic miracle traditions which applied Elijah’s miracle-working role to Jesus and passages such as Luke 9:61–62 (cf. 1 Kgs 19:20) and 10:4 (cf. 2 Kgs 4:29) already transferred some Elijah images to Jesus, but for Jesus these were clearly inadequate (cf. Luke 9:8, 19–20, 33–35, although Luke omits Mark’s parallel acclamation of the deceased Baptist as Elijah here). Of course, even the Synoptic writers did not suppose that John was *literally* Elijah (Mark 9:4; Matt 17:3; Luke 1:17; 9:30).<sup>43</sup> If the historical John saw himself as a forerunner, he may have seen himself as an Elijah at least in a figurative sense (cf. 1:23; Mal 4:5); if he saw himself as a forerunner for Elijah, he would have seen the one coming after him as literally “before” him (1:30).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Freed, “*Egō Eimi*.” Westcott, *John*, 18, noted the contrast between the Baptist and Christ implied in the emphatic *egō* throughout this section (1:23, 26, 27, 30, 31, 33, 34); John may say εἰμὶ ἐγὼ here rather than ἐγὼ εἰμι to distinguish him from Jesus.

<sup>37</sup>“Confession” (ὁμολογία) can appear in the setting of witness (μαρτυρία); cf. the Hellenistic *Rhet. Alex.* 15, 1431b.21.

<sup>38</sup>Contrast the traditional idiom in “answered and said” (1:26, 48), common in Semitic texts and their translations (e.g., 1 *En.* 106:13; 4 *Ezra* 4:13, 19, 20, 22, 26, 33–34, 36, 38, 40, 44, 52; 2 *Bar.* 14:1; 15:1; 16:1; 17:1; 18:1; 19:1).

<sup>39</sup>See comments on 1:6–8 above. One should not press too much the distinction between “confessed” and “denied not” (as Westcott, *John*, 18, endeavors to do).

<sup>40</sup>So many commentators, e.g., Hooker, *Message*, 9; Ladd, *Theology*, 35; Lane, *Mark*, 51. Nortjé, “John,” sees Jesus as a John, hence Elijah, redivivus.

<sup>41</sup>Hunter, *John*, 22, suggests that our author’s remark is difficult to explain if the author knew Mark.

<sup>42</sup>Martyn thinks that the Fourth Gospel suppressed a source identifying Jesus as Elijah to conform to the broader Christian tradition. Another proposal, that Jesus viewed himself as a new Elisha following John the new Elijah (Bostock, “Elisha”), is reasonable but lacks adequate supporting evidence.

<sup>43</sup>Taylor, *Mark*, 390 suggests that in the transfiguration Moses and Elijah represent the law and prophets; but probably they are just harbingers of the end; cf. Moule, *Mark*, 70.

<sup>44</sup>For the latter view, see Brown, *Essays*, 181–84. The evangelist may use rhetorically less favored historical presents here (1:21) and elsewhere for vividness (as, e.g., in the Latin of Caesar *Gallic War*,

Jewish tradition naturally developed the promise of Elijah's return in Mal 4:5–6 (MT 3:23–24), which appears as early as Ben Sira (Sir 48:10). Later rabbis particularly seized on this feature of eschatological expectation, although they developed it in very different ways from nonrabbinic streams of thought.<sup>45</sup> That Elijah remained alive was safely assumed from the biblical text (2 Kgs 2:9–12; Mal 4:5–6; cf. 1 Macc 2:58; Sir 48:9), and later rabbis continued to work from this assumption.<sup>46</sup> In these later rabbis, however, his role in the present period before the final time became more prominent than his eschatological function, perhaps due in part to the de-emphasis of messianic eschatology after the sufferings under Hadrian. (The rabbis also tended to view the prophets as proto-scribes.)<sup>47</sup> Like other biblical prophets, Elijah became a master halachist, often sent to settle rabbinic disputes;<sup>48</sup> also sometimes described with a role comparable to that of angels,<sup>49</sup> the rabbinic Elijah often was sent on divine errands to miraculously aid rabbis.<sup>50</sup> Other rabbinic evidence, however, does point to Elijah's eschatological role. The rabbis were clearly aware of Malachi's prophecy and they anticipated Elijah's return at the end of the age<sup>51</sup> alongside rabbinism's other eschatological figures.<sup>52</sup> Elijah would also exercise an eschatological

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passim), though scholars could criticize inconsistency in verb tenses (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2 *Amm.* 12); on the importance of vividness, see Anderson, *Glossary*, 43, 125 (cf. also 73).

<sup>45</sup>Diversity of perspectives on Elijah extended even to interpretations of biblical narratives; cf. Zeller, "Elija."

<sup>46</sup>E.g., *b. Mo'ed Qat.* 26a; *Sanh.* 113b, although such texts may reflect differing implications as to whether (perhaps <sup>2</sup>*Abot R. Nat.* 38, §103 B, till Messiah comes) or not (cf. *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 9:4) he would die. Josephus's words are more guarded (*Ant.* 9.28), probably accommodating Hellenistic skepticism.

<sup>47</sup>See Keener, *Spirit*, 20–22; *Sipra Sh. M.D.* 99.5.6; also *Tg. Jon.* on 1 Sam 19:23 and on 2 Kgs 6:1; 9:1, 4.

<sup>48</sup><sup>2</sup>*Abot R. Nat.* 2A; *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 36a; *Ber.* 3a; *Giṭ.* 42b; *Hag.* 9b; *Qidd.* 79a; *Menaḥ.* 32a; *p. Ber.* 9:2, §3; *Ter.* 1:6 (unclear here whether the activity in this text was in ancient Israel or the rabbinic period); *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 11:22; he conversed with rabbis about unspecified or nonhalakic issues in *b. B. Meṣi'a* 85b; *Sanh.* 113b; *Yoma* 19b–20a. Cf. his settling of questions pertaining to himself in *b. Ketub.* 106a (instructing R. Anan as he wrote *Seder Eliyyahu Rabba* and *Seder Eliyyahu Zuta*); *Gen. Rab.* 71:9. Elijah already appears as "greatly zealous for the law" (ἐν τῷ ζηλώσει ζῆλον νόμου) in 1 Macc 2:58.

<sup>49</sup>E.g., *b. Ber.* 4b; he appears as an executor of judgment against a sacrilegious man in *b. Ber.* 6b; as a bearer of news to a rabbi in *b. Šabb.* 33b (Simeon ben Yohai); *Deut. Rab.* 5:15 (Meir); *Targum Rishon* to Esth 4:1 (to Mordecai). For his knowledge of what God does, cf. *b. B. Meṣi'a* 59b; he wakes the deceased patriarchs for prayers in *b. B. Meṣi'a* 85b.

<sup>50</sup>E.g., *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 17b; *Ta'an.* 21a; *p. Ketub.* 12:3, §6; *Kil.* 9:3, §4; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 18:5; *Gen. Rab.* 33:3. Other miracle-workers may have been associated with Elijah (cf. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 72, 76–77, whose case is probable though not certain). His appearances to Jewish teachers seem to begin in the second-century sources (Bamberger, "Prophet," 308).

<sup>51</sup>*Sipre Deut.* 41.4.3; 342.5.2; *b. Menaḥ.* 63a; at the redemption of the new exodus in *Exod. Rab.* 3:4; he would punish the Gentiles in *Gen. Rab.* 71:9; involved in the resurrection in *m. Soṭah* 9:15; *p. Šeqal.* 3:3. Ford, *Revelation*, 179, cites also *Pirqe R. El.* 43, 47; *Seder Eliyyahu Rabba* 25ff.

<sup>52</sup>E.g., the four craftsmen and comments on the seven shepherds of Mic 5:5 in *b. Sukkah* 52b; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 5:9; *Song Rab.* 8:9, §3; *Pesiq. Rab.* 15:14/15 (one may compare the priest anointed for war—and perhaps the two messiahs—in these texts with earlier Qumran expectation (see above on Christology, pp. 286–88 of our introduction). In late texts of varying date and opinion, he is associated with the Messiah (*Lev. Rab.* 34:8; *Deut. Rab.* 6:7; *Song Rab.* 2:13, §4), preceding him (*b. 'Erub.* 43b; *Pesiq. Rab.* 35:4); coming with him (*Exod. Rab.* 18:12); knowing something about the time of his coming (*b. B. Meṣi'a* 85b); he is also protective of his coming reign (*Gen. Rab.* 83:4); or Elijah is Phinehas the high priest (*Tg. Ps.-J.* on Exod 6:18; cf. *L.A.B.* 48:1).

halakic role,<sup>53</sup> especially (in line with the rabbinic interpretation of Malachi) in determining proper lines of descent (Israelites vs. proselytes, etc.).<sup>54</sup> Although the bulk of this evidence derives from the more numerous Amoraic texts, some of it is also Tannaitic.<sup>55</sup>

The evidence for Elijah's eschatological role in post-OT sources is hardly limited to later rabbinic texts, however.<sup>56</sup> Aune finds reference to him as forerunner in *1 En.* 90:31;<sup>57</sup> *4 Ezra* 6:26 assumes him among historic figures with special roles at the end of the age (among those who never died);<sup>58</sup> and Matthew (17:10) unhesitatingly follows Mark (9:11) in presupposing that this role was widely known in Jewish circles. Sirach's portrayal of Elijah as a restorer and forerunner of the end time (if not explicitly of the messiah) is very close to this.<sup>59</sup>

## 2B. Not the Prophet (1:21b)

Some of these texts may coalesce the image of Elijah with that of the Mosaic eschatological prophet many Jewish people saw in Deut 18:18.<sup>60</sup> A Tannaitic midrash on Deut 18 declares that this prophet could even temporarily suspend a commandment of Moses, as Elijah did.<sup>61</sup> Expectations of this prophet were not solely linked with Elijah, however; that represented only one conceptual option among several.<sup>62</sup> The expectation may appear in *1 Maccabees* (4:46; 14:41),<sup>63</sup> although these texts more likely focus on the restoration of prophecy in general and not a Mosaic prophet in particular.<sup>64</sup> Some other texts are clearer, although not attesting that all segments of Judaism expected a Mosaic prophet distinct from Elijah.<sup>65</sup> A Qumran text links an eschatological prophet with the messiahs of Aaron and Israel while distinguishing all three figures;<sup>66</sup> the historic Teacher of Righteousness ap-

<sup>53</sup>Primarily in Amoraic texts, e.g., *b. Ber.* 35b; *B. Bat.* 94b; *b. Meṣi'a* 3a, 30a; *Menah.* 45a, *bar.*

<sup>54</sup>*M. Ed.* 8:7; *t. Ed.* 3:4; cf. *Song Rab.* 4:12, §5.

<sup>55</sup>E.g., *m. Ed.* 8:7; *Soṭah* 9:15. Milikowsky, "lyhw," cites the *Seder 'Olam* as an early source for Elijah as the Messiah's forerunner (although the source's date may be debated).

<sup>56</sup>See the many references (especially the nonrabbinic ones) in Teeple, *Prophet*, 4–8. Cf. also *Sib. Or.* 2.187–189; but because its context is a Christian interpolation, we cannot date it early with much assurance; 4Q382 frg. 31 may be eschatological (in a context about Elijah, frgs. 1, 3, 9). Justin's view that Elijah precedes Christ (*Dial.* 8.4) fits the evidence (cf. Williams, *Dialogue*, 18 n. 5) but that he would anoint the Messiah (*Dial.* 8; 49) lacks other attestation (see Schneider, "Reflections," 169; the parallel in Williams, *Dialogue*, 18 n. 6, is inadequate).

<sup>57</sup>Aune, *Prophecy*, 124–25; cf. Brown, *John*, 1:47. This is relevant even if rabbinic evidence for Elijah's role as forerunner (*b. Erub.* 43ab, *bar.*) is later (as contended by Faierstein, "Elijah" [see esp. 86]; Fitzmyer, "Elijah"; contrast Allison, "Elijah").

<sup>58</sup>Enoch, Moses, "and possibly Ezra, Baruch, and Jeremiah" (Longenecker, *Christology*, 33).

<sup>59</sup>Teeple, *Prophet*, 106, is probably wrong in identifying Elijah in this text with a prophet-king Messiah, however.

<sup>60</sup>See Aune, *Prophecy*, 124–25; Ford, *Revelation*, 179; 4Q375 1 1.1–4. Bamberger, "Prophet," 303, also associates Elijah's coming with the eschatological return of prophecy.

<sup>61</sup>*Sipre Deut.* 175.1.3; cf. also Dalman, *Studies*, 49.

<sup>62</sup>Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 27.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Lightfoot, *Gospel*, 102; Longenecker, *Christology*, 33ff.; Appold, *Motif*, 72.

<sup>64</sup>See Keener, "Pneumatology," 78–79. Riesenfeld, "Background," 88, is nonetheless correct to point to the potential relevance of the assimilation of royal, priestly, and prophetic features in the latter passage (with *T. Levi* 8; Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 115, finds the prophet-king combination also in Philo and contends that non-Jewish sources cannot explain it).

<sup>65</sup>See references in Longenecker, *Christology*, 33ff.; Cullmann, *Christology*, 14ff. (although they include texts referring to the new Elijah in particular).

<sup>66</sup>1QS 9.11 (the Hebrew for "messiah" here is clearly plural); Haenchen, *John*, 1:272 (on John 6:14) cites also 4QTest. 5; and compares *T. Benj.* 9:2; *T. Levi* 8:15; *1 Macc* 4:46; 14:41.

parently reflected some functions of the “prophet like Moses,” but after his passing the complete fulfillment seems to have awaited the eschatological generation.<sup>67</sup> Samaritan expectation, with its emphasis on the Pentateuch, naturally emphasizes this prophet more than most Jewish texts do, although Qumran expectation is similar.<sup>68</sup>

In our text, John’s interlocutors are careful to question whether he is Elijah or the Prophet if he is not the Christ. “The Prophet” here refers to Deut 18:15–18,<sup>69</sup> and early Christian tradition found this text’s fulfillment in Jesus<sup>70</sup> (e.g., Acts 3:22; 7:37;<sup>71</sup> cf. Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). “Hear him” in the transfiguration story probably alludes in this context to Deut 18:15;<sup>72</sup> likewise the mountain; cloud; allusion to tabernacles; transfiguration (cf. Exod 34:29); presence of Moses and Elijah on the mount (Exod 34:2; 1 Kgs 19:8); and the timing (“six days,” cf. Exod 24:16) all suggest allusions to Moses.<sup>73</sup> The present text, however, distinguishes various roles, suggesting that more than mainstream Christian theology stands behind it. It is possible that the segment of Judaism from which much of John’s community and/or its opponents sprang laid heavy emphasis on the eschatological prophet (1:25; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17); while a prophet Christology would be inadequate (4:19, 25–29; 6:14–15; 7:40–41), Jesus is clearly a prophet (4:44; 9:17),<sup>74</sup> hence foreshadows the prophetic ministry of the Johannine community (16:7–15).<sup>75</sup>

#### 2C. A Voice Crying (1:23)

John the Baptist thus denies any prophesied function except that of forerunner, and even a qualified form of that (since he is not Elijah). Naturally the Fourth Gospel does not apply to John some of the traditional texts, such as Mark’s midrashic blending of Mal 3:1 with Isa 40:3 (Mark 1:2–3)<sup>76</sup> or Matthew’s citation of Malachi in a different context (Matt 11:10); this passage in Malachi would too easily evoke an allusion to Mal 4:5–6 and require a more detailed explanation of the sense in which John is or is not an Elijah redivivus. But

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<sup>67</sup> See Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 168–71; cf. Teeple, *Prophet*, 51–52. John the Baptist may fill such a role in Slavonic additions to Josephus inserted between *War* 2.110 and 3 (LCL 3:644–45), but (especially in view of Josephus’s reticence to speak of true prophets in the contemporary period) the additions are spurious.

<sup>68</sup> Bruce, *Time*, 36–42, esp. 39; cf. Longenecker, *Christology*, 34. Simon, *Stephen*, 61, 73, affirms that the Mosaic prophet-messiah appears in the Samaritan *Ta’eb* (Taheb) but not in Judaism; but Qumran employed the same texts (see Gaster, *Scriptures*, 393, 444–46), including Deut 18 (Villalón, “Sources,” 62–63; cf. Vermes, *Scrolls*, 247–48).

<sup>69</sup> Brown, *John*, 1:49 (citing Teeple); Bruce, *Time*, 40.

<sup>70</sup> See Hill, *Prophecy*, 53–54; Robinson, *Studies*, 32.

<sup>71</sup> For Acts and John here, see Cribbs, “Agreements,” 55; but both probably derive the language from earlier Jewish or Christian tradition. On the correspondence between Acts and traditional Jewish language here, cf. de Waard, “Quotation.” Teeple, *Prophet*, 86, also finds allusion to Lev 23:29. Aune, *Prophecy*, 155, thinks this reflects older tradition (because Luke neglects Moses redivivus imagery in his Gospel); contrast Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 27–28. Many note the helpful double entendre on “raise up” in Acts 3:22, 26 (Doeve, *Hermeneutics*, 155; O’Toole, “Observations”; Ellis, “Uses,” 202).

<sup>72</sup> Davies, *Sermon*, 24; Gundry, *Matthew*, 342; Lane, *Mark*, 321; Bruce, *Time*, 40.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Davies, *Sermon*, 20–21; Argyle, *Matthew*, 132; Lane, *Mark*, 317.

<sup>74</sup> See Meeks, *Prophet-King*, especially his proposition on p. 25.

<sup>75</sup> On the Johannine community and prophetism, see esp. Keener, “Pneumatology,” 284–329; see the discussion of the Paraclete and prophetism on 14:16.

<sup>76</sup> For short reference, Jewish testimonia collections sometimes attributed composite citations to the more prominent author (Longenecker, *Exegesis*, 138).

Isaiah's promise of a new exodus<sup>77</sup> and a messenger preparing the way (apparently giving orders to construction engineers and provincials) before the king at the head of the people was fitting.<sup>78</sup> All four gospels apply the Isaiah text to John, but only the Fourth places the citation on John's own lips. Some scholars suggest that the Fourth Gospel here reflects an independent tradition about the Baptist since this Gospel, unlike the Synoptics,<sup>79</sup> does not follow the LXX reading.<sup>80</sup> While John's normally eclectic appropriation of text types requires us to leave the question open in this case,<sup>81</sup> other evidence favoring his independence might support this conclusion.<sup>82</sup>

Some commentators have suggested that the Gospel tradition originally derived the citation from the Baptist's own usage, derived in turn from his sense of mission.<sup>83</sup> That John actually applied the text to himself is reasonable in view of his Synoptic pronouncements concerning the one whose way he prepared (Matt 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4–6); it seems unlikely that he would not have contemplated his own mission in scriptural terms. Although extant evidence is insufficient to prove or disprove that John uttered the words attributed to him in 1:23, the text was in use in his environment; its application by another wilderness community to its own mission<sup>84</sup> could have commended it to the Baptist as more appropriate to his own. If John knew Qumran, he may have felt the text applied better to his ministry because he was less fully separatistic than they;<sup>85</sup> they used the text to justify total seclusion from the rest of Israel.<sup>86</sup>

The wilderness was central in Israel's history (e.g., Hos 2:14; *1 En.* 89:28; *Song Rab.* 3:6, §1); other Jewish people also applied Isa 40 to salvation.<sup>87</sup> Many Jewish people awaiting the new exodus in the wilderness<sup>88</sup> were open not only to renewal movements<sup>89</sup> but to

<sup>77</sup>Roman-period Jews still understood Isaiah's language ("preaching good news," etc.) with respect to eschatological salvation and Israel's restoration, e.g., *Pss. Sol.* 11:1, and expectation of a new exodus continued (e.g., 4Q389 frg. 2).

<sup>78</sup>The idea of making a highway straight for a king or other travelers by leveling ground was still widely known in the late first century (in Trajan's reign, cf., e.g., *ILS* 5863, in Sherk, *Empire*, 155 (100 C.E.); similarly Galen 10.633 in Sherk, *Empire*, 164) and hence would not be lost on John's readers (cf. Luke 3:5 for a fuller citation).

<sup>79</sup>See esp. Stendahl, *School*, 48, on the Synoptic dependence on the LXX here. A minor divergence from the LXX may have christological implications (see Leaney, *Luke*, 106); Luke's extension of the quotation is also significant (Wilson, *Gentiles*, 38).

<sup>80</sup>Higgins, *Historicity*, 76 (citing also Zech 9:9 in John 12:15, vs. in Matt 21:5; Isa 6:10 in John 12:40, vs. in Matt 13:14–15; Acts 28:25–27; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10). But contrast Menken, "Quotation," who thinks that John's quotation does reflect a Septuagintal form.

<sup>81</sup>See Freed, *Quotations*. Schuchard, *Scripture*, 1–15, however, argues that John's translation of Isa 40:3 here comes from the old Greek (roughly, the LXX).

<sup>82</sup>See the brief discussion in the introduction, ch. 1, pp. 40–42; Smith, *Among Gospels*, 195–241.

<sup>83</sup>E.g., Robinson, *Studies*, 13.

<sup>84</sup>1QS 8.13–14; cf. 4Q176 1–2 1.4–9; cf. also Brownlee, "Comparison," 71; Brown, "Scrolls," 4. They applied it especially to their knowledge of the law (1QS 8.15–16).

<sup>85</sup>1QS 8.13–14; 9.19–20; Scobie, "John," 68. Even with crowds visiting, however, the wilderness remained a place of social isolation (cf. the Stoic claim in Cicero *Fin.* 3.20.65).

<sup>86</sup>Bruce, "Qumrân," 177. Yet the Qumran sect could also take "wilderness" figuratively, and clearly understood the promise of a new exodus in the biblical prophets; cf. 1QM 1.2–3 and comments in Yadin, *War Scroll*, 257.

<sup>87</sup>Snodgrass, "Streams."

<sup>88</sup>Cf., e.g., Mauser, *Wilderness*, 55–60. Mark's explicit mention of the Jordan (1:4) reinforces the image of the new exodus for his readers (Kingsbury, *Christology*, 59; Rhoads and Michie, *Mark*, 65; Kee, *Community*, 88).

prophets (e.g., Acts 21:38)<sup>90</sup> and messiahs (e.g., Matt 24:26)<sup>91</sup> appearing in the wilderness, and it was appropriate for the Baptist to read theological significance into his requisite exile from population centers.<sup>92</sup> (Although Mark may emphasize the Baptist's wilderness existence to prefigure Jesus<sup>93</sup> and to emphasize the fulfillment of Isa 40:3,<sup>94</sup> this element of John's ministry was undoubtedly historical—he could have safely drawn crowds there as long as he did nowhere else,<sup>95</sup> and it afforded him the only place for public baptisms not sanctioned by establishment leaders.<sup>96</sup> Further, Mark's "wilderness of the Jordan" presupposes a tradition familiar with Palestinian topography.)<sup>97</sup> For the author, a new exodus background may be significant, for it is in an exodus context that his Gospel most frequently mentions the "wilderness" (3:14; 6:31, 49; not clear in 11:54); such an allusion probably would have been intelligible to his audience (Rev 12:6). The "Jordan" (cf. John 1:28) might therefore evoke a corporate initiation of God's people crossing the Jordan into the promised land (Josh 3:6–17).

In this Johannine context, however, what is most significant is that the Baptist himself emphasizes his supporting role to Christ rather than requiring the narrator to do so. Such statements throughout the Fourth Gospel would challenge those who appealed to the Baptist as a figure whose stature could rival that of Jesus. The Fourth Gospel also weaves this quotation into its own minor wilderness motif concerning the place of redemption (3:14; 6:31; cf. 11:54).<sup>98</sup> (Some Jewish texts may have personified God's "voice";<sup>99</sup> Jewish texts used it as a surrogate for God's speech;<sup>100</sup> and "voice" becomes a recurrent theological term in John [3:8, 29; 10:3; 18:37]. Nevertheless, the term in this passage probably simply carries over from the tradition [Mark 1:3; Matt 3:3; Luke 3:4]. Whether John reuses "way" theologically as in 14:6 is open to discussion. Even in other passages the Gospel writers

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<sup>89</sup>Theissen, *Sociology*, 48–50, lists especially Essenes and Zealots; cf. also *Pesiq. Rab.* 15:14/15 (probably third-century tradition).

<sup>90</sup>Josephus *Ant.* 20.189; *War* 2.259, 261–262 (some of these "false prophets" may have also ventured messianic claims, which we would expect Josephus to suppress rather than recount).

<sup>91</sup>Cf. *Num. Rab.* 11:2; *Song Rab.* 2:9, §3; *Pesiq. Rab.* 15:10; *Tg. Neof.* on Exod 12:42; many of the eschatological wilderness prophets in Josephus were popularly susceptible to messianic interpretations (see Glasson, *Moses*, 18, citing Josephus *Ant.* 20.97–99; *War* 2.259, 261; and our previous note that addresses wilderness prophets, n. 90).

<sup>92</sup>Many concede that the Baptist understood his mission in terms of a wilderness renewal (e.g., Koester, *Introduction*, 2:72). The wilderness was also a natural place for refugees (in general, not just Essenes) from hostile society; see, e.g., Heb 11:38; Rev 12:6; *Pss. Sol.* 17:17; *Song Rab.* 2:13, §4).

<sup>93</sup>Kelber, *Story*, 17; Mauser, *Wilderness*, 90; that Mark depicted John in terms of Jesus is often noted (e.g., Marxsen, *Mark*, 33).

<sup>94</sup>Marxsen, *Mark*, 37; Bultmann, *Tradition*, 246; Anderson, *Mark*, 69.

<sup>95</sup>Cf. Josephus *Ant.* 18.118. Robinson, *Problem*, 73, who notes the allusion to Isa 40:3, concurs that the tradition itself is historical (citing Matt 11:7, 18).

<sup>96</sup>See Josephus *Ant.* 18.117. Although the Qumran community would not have welcomed a maverick like John (see Pryke, "John"; Gaster, *Scriptures*, xii), he probably baptized near them (see evidence in Jeremias, *Theology*, 43), an area called the "wilderness" (see Mauser, *Wilderness*, 78).

<sup>97</sup>Theissen, *Gospels*, 39.

<sup>98</sup>That the Johannine community assumed this position is also supported by Rev 12:1–6, where the wilderness represents the course of the present age (cf., e.g., Rissi, *Time*, 38; Kassing, "Weib").

<sup>99</sup>*T. Ab.* 14:13; 15:1; 20:13A; cf. Charlesworth, "Voice"; idem, *Pseudepigrapha and NT*, 128–30, citing also *Apoc. Sedr.* 2:5/2:2–4; *Apoc. Ab.* 9:1–4; *T. Job* 3:1–2; 2 *Bar.* 13:1; also Ellul, *Apocalypse*, 104, on Rev 1:12.

<sup>100</sup>Aune, *Prophecy*, 137, citing Josephus *War* 6.301 and the *bat qol*.

may draw on Isaiah’s highway, and probably not on Hellenistic moral instruction.)<sup>101</sup> John’s witness prefigures that of the Paraclete, who (literally) leads believers “in the way of truth” (16:12–13).

### 3. *The Purpose of John’s Baptism (1:25–26, 31)*

The Baptist is significant not only in directly introducing Jesus, but also in functioning as the first foil against Jesus in a water symbolism employed throughout the Gospel narrative; he introduces a baptismal (3:22, 23, 26; 4:1, 2; 10:40) and more general water motif (2:7, 9; 3:5, 23; 4:7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 46; 5:2; 7:38; 13:5; 19:34).<sup>102</sup> John’s questioners ask why he would baptize if he is not the Messiah, Elijah, or the prophet (1:25), which might presuppose broader knowledge of a messianic baptism. It is possible that they had already heard of John’s message of a coming Spirit-baptizer. Though the Gospel’s audience has not yet heard this promise in the course of the Gospel’s narration, 1:33 may suggest that John already had this revelation, and it is likely that the Gospel’s audience had heard of it (cf. Acts 1:5; 11:16; 19:2; 1 Cor 12:13).

#### 3A. The Function of Baptism in This Gospel

Given Josephus’s testimony, scholars scarcely ever doubt that John baptized in water;<sup>103</sup> the significance of this record for the Fourth Gospel, however, is more open to question. As an indispensable substance, appreciation for which was heightened in ancient agrarian societies by the effects of drought,<sup>104</sup> water had lent itself to frequent figurative usages, for example, as a symbol for life,<sup>105</sup> or perhaps as an image for oracular speech.<sup>106</sup> Philo read the four rivers in Genesis as the four virtues flowing from τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου,<sup>107</sup> and both he<sup>108</sup> and Ben Sira<sup>109</sup> depict divine Wisdom as water. Later rabbis likewise spoke

<sup>101</sup> Pace Robbins, *Teacher*, 190.

<sup>102</sup> See Keener, *Spirit*, 136–62; Koester, *Symbolism*, 155–84. Origen *Comm. Jo.* 13.26–39 also suggests that John 4 reveals Jesus’ water to be greater than that of the Scriptures.

<sup>103</sup> E.g., Chilton, *Approaches*, 31.

<sup>104</sup> It was naturally coupled with bread to represent the basic staples of life, e.g., Sir 29:21.

<sup>105</sup> Thales (sixth century B.C.E., in Allen, *Philosophy*, 2). One may thirst after philosophy (Socratics #25, *Cyn. Ep.* 278–79) and drink it (Porphyry *Marc.* 4.54); proper education is a source, a fountain (πηγή) of goodness (Plutarch *Educ.* 7, *Mor.* 4C; cf. Marcus Aurelius 7.59; Eunapius *Lives* 460–461; cf. John 4:14; virtue in Valerius Maximus 5.6.ext.2; 7.2.ext.1b); rhetors had πηγάζς of words (Philostratus *Vit. soph.* 1.482; Valerius Maximus 2.6.8); philosophy purifies (ἐκκεκαθαμένους) souls (Xenophon *Symp.* 1.4); cf. moral impurity in Aeschines *Timarchus* 19. Nile water may have been linked with immortality (Wild, *Water*, 97–99).

<sup>106</sup> Plutarch *Obsol.* 5, *Mor.* 411F; cf. Sir 24:30, *Odes Sol.* 40:2, and perhaps the wise speech that “flowed” (ῥέουσιν) from Adam and Eve in *Sib. Or.* 1.33–34; good rhetorical style also “flows” (Seneca *Ep. Lucil.* 100.2). The priest at Claros and prophetess at Colophon reportedly would drink from a sacred spring before prophesying (respectively: Maximus of Tyre *Or.* 8.2; Iamblichus *Myst.* 3.11).

<sup>107</sup> Philo *Posterity* 127–129; *Dreams* 2.242–243.

<sup>108</sup> Philo *Dreams* 2.242–243; *Worse* 117 (the “fountain of divine wisdom”); *Flight* 166; see Knox, *Gentiles*, 87–88; Argyle, “Philo,” 386. Cf. 1QS 10.12, in a hymn that speaks of God as the מְקוֹר דַּעַת וּמַעְיֵן קוֹדֶשׁ, the “fountain of knowledge and the spring of holiness”; rabbinic Hebrew uses “fountain” and “spring” also with reference to issuing from the womb, but the image here is more likely for the source of water; cf. further 1QS 3.19; 11.3, 5, 6–7; probably CD 3.16–17. Arabic and Syriac A *Ahiqar* 1:15 (ed. Charles, 2:726–27) compares a father’s instruction to bread and water.

<sup>109</sup> Sir 15:3, 24:25 (understanding, compared to rivers), 24:33 (where Wisdom says, “ἐκχεῶ my teaching like prophecy”). Cf. similarly Wis 7:25.

of Wisdom,<sup>110</sup> Torah, and teaching as water<sup>111</sup> or a well,<sup>112</sup> and heresy as bad water<sup>113</sup> (although they also compared Torah with honey and other sustaining materials).<sup>114</sup> Rabbinic texts occasionally also compare the Spirit with water,<sup>115</sup> as does John (7:37–39; see comments on 3:5).

Some have taken water to represent baptism in John and have read it as indicating a sacramental element in Johannine theology;<sup>116</sup> others read the Gospel in an antisacramental light.<sup>117</sup> Kysar thinks that sacramental interpreters presuppose a more widespread emphasis on sacraments in the late-first-century church than has been substantiated.<sup>118</sup> Commentators who support an antisacramental view vary in their proposed object of antisacramental polemic: MacGregor feels that John is polemicizing against the sacramentalism of the Mysteries, which he feels retained a strong hold on early Christian converts.<sup>119</sup> It should be noted, however, that the allegedly “sacramental” cults could involve ecstasy,<sup>120</sup> and thus that an opposition of sacrament and πνεῦμα (if the Johannine Christians could associate the latter with ecstatic inspiration) might not be as useful in opposing such sacramentalism as MacGregor hopes. Bultmann suggests a polemic against John’s baptism, due to continuing rivalry with the Baptist sect.<sup>121</sup>

Others have opted for a position between sacramentalism and anti-sacramentalism. Käsemann thinks that sacramentalism was not prominent in John (against Cullmann, Wilckens, and Barrett), but also not all redactional (against Bultmann).<sup>122</sup> Matsunaga thinks that the author was merely warning, in view of a substantial number of apostates (John 6), that baptism and the eucharist alone could not suffice to bring life apart from true discipleship.<sup>123</sup> This commentary contends that the Fourth Gospel does indeed include polemic against the efficacy of water rituals, but that this polemic functions as part of his argument

<sup>110</sup>E.g., *Exod. Rab.* 31:3.

<sup>111</sup>*M. Ḥabot* 1:4 (attributed to a pre-Tannaitic sage); 2:8 (attributed to ben Zakkai, though the form is heavily redacted); *Mek. Vay.* 1:74ff.; *Bah.* 5:99 (allegorizing OT on water); *Sipre Deut.* 48.2.7; 306.19.1; 306.22–25; *Ḥabot R. Nat.* 18 A; cf. *b. Ta’an.* 7a; *B. Qam.* 17a, 82a; *Gen. Rab.* 41:9; 54:1; 69:5; 70:8–9; 84:16; 97:3; *Exod. Rab.* 47:5 (and bread); *Song Rab.* 1:2, §3; *Origen Comm. Jo.*, 13.26–29.

<sup>112</sup>R. Akiba in *Sipre Deut.* 48.2.7; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 24:9; *Tg. Neof.* on Num 21:18–20; cf. Belleville, “Born,” 130, arguing that the rabbis used a well as a symbol of Torah more than they used water in general, to bolster her argument that the water of John 3:5 is not Torah.

<sup>113</sup>*M. Ḥabot* 1:11 (attributed to Abtalion, first century B.C.E.); *Sipre Deut.* 48.2.5.

<sup>114</sup>E.g., *Gen. Rab.* 71:8; see further Montefiore and Loewe, *Anthology*, 163ff. Nevertheless, Jesus the Word never appears as “water” in the Fourth Gospel, but only as its source (so also Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 196; cf. Lee, *Thought*, 218).

<sup>115</sup>Abrahams, *Studies*, 1:43; Freed, *Quotations*, 29; McNamara, *Targum*, 110.

<sup>116</sup>E.g., Smalley, “Relationship,” 97, although he sees it as less developed than Paul’s. Brown, *John*, 1:cxi, cites Cullmann, Vawter, Hoskyns, Lightfoot, and Barrett as tending toward the sacramental view.

<sup>117</sup>Brown, *John*, 1:cxi, cites Bornkamm, Bultmann, Lohse, and Schweizer as holding a non-sacramental or antisacramental understanding of John. For a summary of the major views before 1945, see esp. Howard, *Gospel*, 206–14.

<sup>118</sup>Kysar, *Evangelist*, 256. Brown, *Essays*, 97, also doubts that 1:33 is distinctly sacramental.

<sup>119</sup>MacGregor, “Eucharist,” 118. Otto’s parallel with pagan magical sacramentalism depends on Western sources geographically removed from Christian baptism’s origins in the Baptist (see Kraeling, *John*, 120).

<sup>120</sup>Lake, “Spirit,” 104.

<sup>121</sup>Besides the references in his commentary, see Bultmann, *Tradition*, 165–66. Mowry, “Scrolls,” 92, suggests an anti-Essene polemic; this is answered by Belleville, “Born,” 126.

<sup>122</sup>Käsemann, *Testament*, 32.

<sup>123</sup>Matsunaga, “Anti-sacramental.” Cf. Paul’s similar argument in 1 Cor 10:1–12.

with the synagogue about the nature of true purification (although Jewish immersions, too, normally required sincerity for repentance<sup>124</sup> or baptism<sup>125</sup> to be efficacious).

### 3B. Proposed Parallels with Other Ancient Baptisms

Not only the pervasiveness of the water motif in the Fourth Gospel but also the internal logic of the present narrative compel us to ask how the first Jewish witnesses would have understood both the Baptist's baptism and the subsequent Johannine interpretation of it. No extant Jewish traditions indicate that the Messiah, Elijah, or the prophet would baptize (1:25),<sup>126</sup> except in John's own teaching (1:33), but John's baptism was significantly different enough from contemporary lustrations to warrant the text's interlocutors questioning this baptism's eschatological meaning.

First of all, some have compared it to regular Jewish lustrations. The Hebrew Bible, rooted in the religious consciousness of ancient Near Eastern society (one may compare ancient Egyptian,<sup>127</sup> Mesopotamian,<sup>128</sup> and Hittite rituals),<sup>129</sup> commanded ritual washings.<sup>130</sup> Later Mediterranean models probably also contributed to the development of Jewish purification ideas. Although some philosophers, such as the Cynics, detested the thought behind bodily purifications,<sup>131</sup> other schools, such as the Pythagoreans<sup>132</sup> and Stoics,<sup>133</sup> valued them as important. Various temples had their own rules mandating ritual

<sup>124</sup>E.g., *b. Ta'an.* 16a; *Pesiq. Rab.* 44:1. Judaism despised false proselytes (e.g., *Jdt* 11:23; *T. Jos.* 4:4–6; *Sipre Deut.* 356.5.7; *b. Abod. Zar.* 3b; *Šabb.* 33b; *Pesiq. Rab.* 22:5), later texts explicitly demanding fear of God as the proper motive for authentic conversion (*b. Qidd.* 62a; *Yebam.* 24b, 47a; *p. Git.* 1:4, §2; *Qidd.* 4:1, §§2–3; *Num. Rab.* 8:4, 9; cf. Urbach, *Sages*, 1:387–88 on *b. B. Mešit'a* 72a), though some allowed that proselytes from impure motives might still have some status before God (cf. *p. Sanh.* 6:7, §2). Some second-century rabbis rejected proselytes who balked at so much as a single obligation of Torah (*t. Demai* 2:50; cf. *Num. Rab.* 5:3). Neusner, "Conversion," 66, argues that political factors may have partially motivated the conversions of Helene and Izates, though their conversions were sincere.

<sup>125</sup>1QS 3.4–9; 4.21; 5.13–14; Bonsirven, *Judaism*, 116, also cites *t. Ta'an.* 1:8. See Sanders, *Judaism*, 230, citing *Let. Aris.* 305–306; Philo *Unchangeable* 7–8. Early Christians retained the Jewish and the Baptist's prerequisite of repentance for valid baptism (against Flusser, *Judaism*, 53, who thinks Christians weakened it).

<sup>126</sup>Michaels, *John*, 16, points to the particularly Johannine construction of the language here.

<sup>127</sup>Spell 20, part T-1, in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (trans. Allen, 36); Moyer, "Purity," 130; Blackman, "Purification," 476; cf. Philo *Moses* 1.14.

<sup>128</sup>Moyer, "Purity," 130.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, 132; cf. the importance of ritual purity in "Instructions for Palace Personnel to Insure the King's Purity," trans. Goetze, *ANET* 207; "Instructions for Temple officials," 14, trans. Goetze, *ANET* 209.

<sup>130</sup>The principle also appears in genetically unrelated or distant societies, e.g., postpartum purificatory water rituals among Eskimos, in Fiji, and Uganda (Fallaize, "Purification"); postpartum or postmenstruation rituals among the Nandi and the Ndebele (Mbiti, *Religions*, 169, 172); prenuptial washings in Batoro (Mbiti, *Religions*, 182–83), Jewish (Safrai, "Home," 758) and Greco-Roman (Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 54–55; Batey, *Imagery*, 28) cultures; Hindu water purifications before approaching a deity (Fry et al., *Religions*, 61, and, to a lesser extent, in Shinto tradition in Japan [*ibid.*, 154]); possibly related Islamic purifications (Guillaume, *Islam*, 88); Mandaean (Drower, *Mandaean*, 100–23; cf. Kraeling, *John*, 107–9).

<sup>131</sup>Diogenes in Diogenes Laertius 6.2.42. Plutarch explicitly condemns only the βαπτισμοί of superstitious religion and magic (*Superst.* 2, *Mor.* 166A).

<sup>132</sup>Cf. Diogenes Laertius 8.1.33; Culpepper, *School*, 49 (following Iamblichus *V.P.* 71–74).

<sup>133</sup>Diogenes Laertius 7.1.119.

purity,<sup>134</sup> and the Eleusinian<sup>135</sup> and Isis<sup>136</sup> cults used lustrations as preliminary purifications in their initiatory rites; some initiatory baths were also used to secure pardon from the gods (Apuleius *Metam.* 11.23). But in contrast to some earlier scholarship,<sup>137</sup> most contemporary scholars have rightly observed that such acts were simply preliminary washings, and not initiatory of themselves.<sup>138</sup> It is moreover noteworthy that most terms for purification in the Greco-Roman world (καθαρμός, καθάρσια, κάθαρσις) are missing in the NT.<sup>139</sup>

The early Jewish practice of ritual washings was widespread in Jewish Palestine long before the time of the Jesus movement, as evidence from Josephus,<sup>140</sup> coins,<sup>141</sup> and especially archaeology attests.<sup>142</sup> *Mikvaot*, or standard ritual immersion pools, often included steps for descending into the pool and ascending from it, as well as a conduit for water to flow into it from an adjoining pool.<sup>143</sup> They are in evidence in the Hasmonean<sup>144</sup> and Herodian<sup>145</sup> periods, and are found at places like Masada<sup>146</sup> and Jerusalem.<sup>147</sup> They were especially common among the well-to-do who lived in upper-city Jerusalem,<sup>148</sup> and on the Temple Mount.<sup>149</sup> (Jerusalemites may have been more concerned with ritual purity than were the provincials

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<sup>134</sup>E.g., an inscription (SIG<sup>2</sup> 566.2–9) from Athena’s temple at Pergamum, in Grant, *Religions*, 6. Aune, *Prophecy*, 30, cites the Pythia’s ritual bath preceding sacrifice. Achilles Tatius 8.3.2, speaks of a fountain of τὸ ἕρπον ὕδωρ used for ablutions in the temple of Artemis in Ephesus. Even deities might purify themselves (Ovid *Metam.* 4.479–480).

<sup>135</sup>Epictetus *Diatr.* 3.21.14; Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 248; Angus, *Mystery-Religions*, 81–82.

<sup>136</sup>Plutarch *Isis* 75, *Mor.* 381D; Apuleius *Metam.* 11.1. For such ablutions deriving from older Egyptian traditions, see Wild, *Water*, 129–48. Cf. later blood baptisms in the cult of Cybele (Goode-nough, *Church*, 9; cf. Prudentius *Peristephanon* 10.1011–1050 in Barrett, *Documents*, 96–97).

<sup>137</sup>E.g., Bultmann, *Christianity*, 158.

<sup>138</sup>Livy 39.9.4; Burkert, *Cults*, 101; Nock, *Christianity*, 60–62, 133; Wagner, *Baptism*, 71–72, 102–3; Meeks, *Christians*, 152–53. Typical stages of initiation were κάθαρσις (purification), σύστασις (sacrifices), τελετή (initiation proper) and ἐποπτεία. Romans also “cleansed” (καθαίρονται) by sacrifice (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *R.A.* 4.22.1–2).

<sup>139</sup>Nock, “Vocabulary,” 134. John twice uses καθαρισμός, both times for Jewish lustrations (2:6; 3:25).

<sup>140</sup>E.g., Josephus *Ant.* 6.235 (who implausibly reads it into the David narrative); cf. his comments on the form of purification used by Essenes at the temple in *Ant.* 18.19.

<sup>141</sup>Wirgin, *Jubilees*, 27–38, adduces numismatic evidence that may argue for priestly use of holy water for their hands and feet in the Maccabean period.

<sup>142</sup>On the development of *mikvaot* ideology in an early period, see Selkin, “Exegesis,” esp. ch. 5 (pp. 97–161). The Pharisees probably did more to extend it beyond the priesthood than anyone else (e.g., Stambaugh and Balch, *Environment*, 87).

<sup>143</sup>E.g., Yadin, *Masada*, 164; Avigad, *Jerusalem*, 142; Bruce, *Thoughts*, 50–51; Kotlar, “Mikveh,” 1535; see fuller discussion in comment on John 2:6.

<sup>144</sup>Avigad, *Jerusalem*, 85–86; notes in Cornfeld, *Josephus*, 50; probably at Gezer, in Reich, “Mqww’wt”; Netzer, “Mqww’wt.”

<sup>145</sup>E.g., Reich, “Miqweh.”

<sup>146</sup>Pearlman, *Zealots*, 179, who identified this mikveh as the earliest known at the time of his writing.

<sup>147</sup>See Avigad, *Jerusalem*, 139–43. *M. Parah* 3:7 also mentions a place of immersion at the Mount of Olives.

<sup>148</sup>Avigad, *Jerusalem*, 139, 142.

<sup>149</sup>Cf. the “Chamber of Immersion” (*m. Mid.* 1:9) and, for the immersion of lepers, the Chamber of Lepers (*m. Neg* 14:8). See Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 55; Mazar, “Excavations,” 52; Cornfeld, *Josephus*, 272. The list of “officers” in the temple (*m. Seqal.* 5:1–2) includes one Nehemiah as “over the water,” literally, a “trench-digger,” and he was “in charge of the aqueduct and the temple cisterns, and to look after the baths” used for ablutions (Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 174).

“who purified themselves mainly for the festal pilgrimages.”)<sup>150</sup> Wandering wilderness pietists like Bannus, without access to *mikvaot*, frequently washed in the Jordan or other available sources of water (Josephus *Life* 11). Rabbinic texts include many discussions of ritual purification.<sup>151</sup> The mikveh’s waters were thought to cleanse ritual impurity,<sup>152</sup> and so were important for priests,<sup>153</sup> menstruants,<sup>154</sup> and even vessels.<sup>155</sup> Ritual purity was required preceding a festival and was achieved mainly through immersion (John 11:55).<sup>156</sup>

But while such Jewish lustrations and their broader cultural background provide a context for John’s baptism, they cannot define it. John’s baptism in the Synoptic tradition was initiatory and eschatological, a baptism of repentance in light of the coming kingdom of God.<sup>157</sup> Other writers have suggested Qumran initiatory baptism as the background for John’s and early Christian baptism,<sup>158</sup> but though the sect did practice baptism as part of initiation,<sup>159</sup> the initial baptism at Qumran was apparently viewed only as the first immersion among many.<sup>160</sup> Because of the cost and separation involved, one could describe Qumran baptism as repentance baptism,<sup>161</sup> but again, one’s first baptism at Qumran was one among many rather than the primary line of demarcation. Qumran washings probably reflect a particularly meticulous form of early Jewish purification ritual, and the Covenanters performed their washings frequently.<sup>162</sup>

### 3C. Baptism as a Sign of Conversion

Although the Qumran parallel for Jews joining a particular sect in view of the coming judgment supplies a partial context for John’s wilderness baptism, it, like Jewish lustra-

<sup>150</sup> Neusner, *Beginning*, 24–25.

<sup>151</sup> See especially the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmudic tractates *Miqwa’ot*. The most extensive discussion of this material to date is in Neusner, *Purities*. Mikveh was considered a commandment of God (cf. the Amoraic blessing in *b. Ber.* 51a).

<sup>152</sup> *M. Parah* 11:6; *b. Šabb.* 64b; *p. Šebu.* 2:1, §6. The touch of Gentiles could communicate impurity requiring immersion (cf. *p. Šeb.* 6:1, §12, 36c).

<sup>153</sup> E.g., *b. Ber.* 2b, with a purportedly Tannaitic attribution.

<sup>154</sup> *B. Pesah.* 90b; *Šabb.* 84a; *Yoma* 6b; the importance of this may be underlined by the haggadic illustration on an OT narrative in *Lev. Rab.* 19:6, and the illustration of R. Gamaliel’s maidservant in *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 12:15.

<sup>155</sup> *M. Makš.* 4:6; *Miqw.* 9:5–7, 10; *Sipra Sh. pq.* 9.115.1.6–8; *b. Šabb.* 15b, 34a, 84a; *Zebaḥ.* 22a; *Menah.* 101a; *Bek.* 22a; *Hul.* 123a; *p. Hag.* 3:8, §§1–3; cf. *m. Tehar.* 8:9; CD 10.12; 11.3–4. Other Eastern cults (such as that of Cybele) also purified vessels (*Martial Epigr.* 3.47).

<sup>156</sup> *B. Pesah.* 59a, *bar.*; references in Urbach, *Sages*, 1:582–83. Cf. Jdt 16:18 (the people ἐκαθαρίσθη before offering sacrifices); cf. John 2:6 with 2:13.

<sup>157</sup> See, e.g., Ladd, *Theology*, 38–39.

<sup>158</sup> Fritsch, *Community*, 7; Thiering, “Initiation”; idem, “Cleansing”; Smith, “Baptism”; Brownlee, “Comparison,” 58; Brown, “Scrolls,” 4; cf. Robinson, *Studies*, 16; Jeremias, “Qumran Texts,” 68–69; Anderson, *Mark*, 70–71; against, Pryke, “John,” 483–96; Delmore, “Pratique.”

<sup>159</sup> See 1 QS 5.8–23 and texts in Josephus cited by Cross, *Library*, 95 n. 96a. Wood, “Dip,” argues for dipping in ritual purifications; the *mikvaot* that archaeologists have uncovered argue strongly in favor of immersion as the form of washing, fitting other early Jewish evidence.

<sup>160</sup> Cf., e.g., Josephus *War* 2.150. This has been argued by many scholars, e.g., Driver, *Scrolls*, 496–506; Ringgren, *Faith*, 221; Milik, *Discovery*, 102–3; Pryke, “John,” 483–96; Simon, *Sects*, 75. Such purifications were not thought to purify the soul from sin; see Sutcliffe, “Baptism.”

<sup>161</sup> So Black, *Scrolls*, 94.

<sup>162</sup> E.g., 4Q512 passim; 4Q414 frg. 12; Oxford Geniza Text C.2–8; Mount Athos manuscript in Wise, *Scrolls*, 255. The impression that Essenes were meticulous in washings may be gained, e.g., from Josephus *War* 2.129, 150; cf. *Ant.* 18.19. It should be noted, however, that non-Essene Jews in

tions in general, does little to explain the fully initiatory status of a single baptism as an act of conversion to a new way of life. For this we must turn to the closest Jewish parallel to John's and early Christian baptism, namely proselyte baptism, a specific and extremely potent form of ritual purification.<sup>163</sup> Some argue against proselyte baptism as a source for Christian baptism,<sup>164</sup> but it has long had its advocates,<sup>165</sup> and the opinion is increasingly shifting in the direction of recognizing it as a source, with whatever modifications.<sup>166</sup> Major differences naturally distinguish John's baptism from proselyte baptism, including its public and eschatological orientation and particularly its summons of Jews as well as Gentiles to turn to Israel's God;<sup>167</sup> but it did not arise *ex nihilo*, and Judaism's most widespread once-for-all immersion ritual forms the most significant backdrop from which to understand it.

The conversion ritual provided a clear, symbolic line of demarcation between a proselyte's Gentile past and Jewish present. Although it was understood that some other societies had practiced circumcision,<sup>168</sup> Judaism continued to employ it as the essential sign of entering the covenant,<sup>169</sup> despite Roman antipathy, which viewed the rite as an act of castration.<sup>170</sup> Some of those who were spreading Judaism apparently thought exceptions could be made where Judaism would be brought into more reproach if it were carried out (e.g., Josephus *Ant.* 20.40–42), but this laxity is undoubtedly exceptional (cf. Eleazar of Galilee in Josephus *Ant.* 20.43–44). Both circumcision and baptism would have normally been required for new converts to Judaism. Because the Babylonian Gemara reports a debate between R. Joshua and R. Eliezer concerning whether baptism or circumcision by themselves would suffice for a valid conversion,<sup>171</sup> some scholars have held that some authorities accepted baptism without circumcision;<sup>172</sup> but it is hard to think that R. Joshua could have openly diminished an explicit commandment of the Torah. Other scholars have thus preferred to follow the Palestinian recension of this tradition, where R. Eliezer allows circumcision without immersion (probably under exceptional circumstances), and R. Joshua insists that both are necessary.<sup>173</sup> On either reading, the sages concurred on that

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upper-city Jerusalem, who had adequate resources, may have also been more meticulous than their halakah demanded; see Avigad, *Jerusalem*, 142.

<sup>163</sup> Cf., e.g., *p. Qidd.* 3:12, §8.

<sup>164</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 18–31; Anderson, *Mark*, 71; cf. Albright, *Stone Age*, 290.

<sup>165</sup> E.g., Abrahams, *Studies*, 1:42; Montefiore, *Gospels*, 1:8; Rowley, "Baptism"; cf. Taylor, *Mark*, 155; White, *Initiation*, 78–79; Argyle, *Matthew*, 23.

<sup>166</sup> Schiffman, "Crossroads," 128; Schiffman, *Jew*, 26; Goppelt, *Theology*, 1:37; Bruce, *History*, 156; Ladd, *Theology*, 41; Meeks, *Christians*, 150; Falk, *Jesus*, 151; cf. Hooker, *Message*, 9; LaSor, "Miqva'ot."

<sup>167</sup> Rowley, "Baptism," 333–34.

<sup>168</sup> See, e.g., Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 1.169–171; Eliade, *Initiation*, 21–25; Mbiti, *Religions*, 160, 165, 329, 333; cf. Artapanus in Eusebius *Praep. ev.* 9.27.10 (contending that Egyptians and Ethiopians borrowed it from Moses rather than the reverse).

<sup>169</sup> For its importance in Jewish practice, see, e.g., Gen 17:10–14; Exod 4:22–23 with 4:24–26; Sir 44:20; Jdt 14:10; 2 Macc 6:10; 4 Macc 4:25; Josephus *Ant.* 12.256; 20.44; *T. Levi* 6:3, 6–7; *m. Ned.* 3:9; *t. Abod. Zar.* 3:12; *Ber.* 6:13, MSS; *b. Šebu.* 13a; *Exod. Rab.* 5:8; 17:3; 19:5; 30:12; 38:8; *Lev. Rab.* 21:6; 31:4; *Pesiq. Rab.* 13:8; 52:4 (temporary exceptions for health reasons in *b. Pesah.* 69a; *Song Rab.* 7:2, §3; perhaps for one already circumcized, *b. Šabb.* 135a, first-century schools).

<sup>170</sup> Sevenster, *Anti-Semitism*, 132–36; Gager, *Anti-Semitism*, 56–57; cf. *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 3:6.

<sup>171</sup> *B. Yebam.* 46a.

<sup>172</sup> McEleney, "Conversion"; Gilbert, "Convert"; cf. Lake, "Proselytes," 78–79.

<sup>173</sup> Bamberger, *Proselytism*, 49–52; cf. Nolland, "Proselytes"; in support of this position, cf. *b. Yebam.* 71a. Then again, it is easy to see how the tradition would have been modified to its Palestinian form, to conform the tradition to the normative interpretation of the Torah.

occasion that both circumcision and proselyte baptism were necessary, and other texts reinforce the conclusion that proselyte baptism was a necessary part of conversion.<sup>174</sup>

It is also quite likely that proselyte baptism is pre-Christian. Some scholars have denied this claim, often wishing to argue for the temporal priority of Christian baptism;<sup>175</sup> but their denial is difficult to maintain. The relative paucity of references to conversion in general in pre-70 rabbinic traditions, as well as baptism's secondary place to circumcision for males, may explain the relative paucity of pre-70 references to proselyte baptism. Ceremonial washings were so common and so unobjectionable in the ancient Mediterranean that one would not expect any particular washing to appear as frequently in conversion literature as circumcision, which provided a comparatively major hurdle for Gentile men to cross.<sup>176</sup> Lacking explicit support from the OT (though naturally inferred from purity considerations there), immersion may also have been less universal than circumcision;<sup>177</sup> but references show that it was well enough known to merit allusions even in the Diaspora, and such wide geographical distribution makes it improbable that it rose suddenly with our first references to it in the sources. The antiquity of Jewish proselyte baptism may be argued on several grounds:

- (1) The Hasmonaean *mikvaot* and references to immersions in the Dead Sea Scrolls make the antiquity and widespread character of Jewish ritual cleansing obvious; and it is almost inconceivable that the transition from the most unclean state to a state of cleanness should not have been marked by such a washing.<sup>178</sup>
- (2) At the end of the first century, Epictetus speaks of full converts to Judaism in the Diaspora being βεβαμμένον (pf. of βάπτω), as if this is well known;<sup>179</sup> and Epictetus was undoubtedly not alone in this knowledge.<sup>180</sup>
- (3) *M. Pesah.* 8:8 makes *tebillah* a matter of dispute between the first-century adherents of Beth Hillel and Beth Shammai;<sup>181</sup> this point is considerably weakened, of course, if proselyte bap-

<sup>174</sup> *T. 'Abod. Zar.* 3:11; *b. Ber.* 47b; *'Abod. Zar.* 57a; *Yebam.* 46ab; *p. Qidd.* 3:12, §8; cf. *t. Zabim* 2:7.

<sup>175</sup> Taylor, "Baptism"; Smith, "Baptism," 13–32; Robinson, *Studies*, 16 n. 12; Légasse, "Bap-tême"; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2:52.

<sup>176</sup> For whatever reasons, Judaism attracted Gentile women more frequently than their husbands (cf. Josephus *War* 2.560–561; *CIJ* 1:384, §523; inscriptions in Leon, *Jews*, 256).

<sup>177</sup> Cohen, "Ceremony," may be correct that until the mid-second century different people practiced it in different ways. At least in politically sensitive cases such as Izates, some Jews felt circumcision itself unnecessary (cf. Gilbert, "Convert") though others clearly disagreed (Josephus *Ant.* 20.44).

<sup>178</sup> Cf. similarly Pusey, "Baptism." Also Taylor, *Immerser*, 64–68 (though she on other grounds rejects this as background for John's baptism, 69); for Gentile impurity (because of idolatry), cf., e.g., Acts 10:28; 11:3; *m. Pesah.* 8:8; *'Ohal.* 18:7; Josephus *War* 2.150; *p. Šeb.* 6:1, §12; Safrai, "Religion," 829.

<sup>179</sup> Epictetus *Diatr.* 2.9.20 (despite the interpretation of the Loeb editor that these are Christians, probably based on ignorance of the Jewish practice). Stern, *Authors*, 541, interprets it correctly.

<sup>180</sup> It might also be implied by Juvenal *Sat.* 14.104, who would then be regarding it as a matter of common knowledge in Roman society that after Jews circumcized their converts, they led them to the place of washing. On *Sib. Or.* 4.165, see below; *Jos. Asen.* 14:12 requires Aseneth to purify her hands and feet in water when converting (for Diaspora handwashing, see comment on 2:6). Cf. Justin *Dial.* 29.1 for a mid-second-century Diaspora reference.

<sup>181</sup> Schiffman, "Crossroads," 128–31; definite early attestation is not possible here, but "the transmission of this statement in the names of three separate Tannaim may indicate that it was widespread," and probably reflects an authentic early dispute. Cf. Torrance, "Baptism," 154.

tism was not originally in view here,<sup>182</sup> but Tannaitic tradition in the Tosefta supports the antiquity of the proselyte baptism interpretation.<sup>183</sup>

(4) A possibly first-century Diaspora Jewish text assumes that even Gentiles know the Jewish practice of baptisms in running water when turning from sins.<sup>184</sup>

(5) Most other initiation rituals in the ancient Mediterranean (whether to mystery cults or Qumran) at least included ceremonial washing, even if they viewed it as merely one washing among many (see comments above).

(6) Given the facts that rabbinic Jews were in a position of far greater power than the early Jewish Christians in their area of geographical influence, and usually ignored or condemned the Christians teachings, it is quite unlikely that they would have borrowed initiatory baptism from Christians, and hardly more likely that they would have developed and approved it on their own once it had become associated with the Jewish Christians.<sup>185</sup>

Other arguments, for instance that some definite symbol of transition was necessary for women converts, are less substantial but can supplement the case.

### 3D. John and Proselyte Baptism

In short, then, John's baptism historically summoned Israelites to turn to God the same way Jewish people expected Gentile proselytes to do so; like the Qumran sect, but with a more radical and public symbolism, he regarded only the true remnant of Israel as prepared for the Lord (see the Q material in Matt 3:9 // Luke 3:8), and sought to turn the larger community of Israel to repentance.<sup>186</sup> His greater subordination to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel does not diminish this function there, but his mission to bring Israel to repentance becomes still more christologically focused (1:31).

The view that John's mission in some sense redefined the remnant of Israel seems a legitimate interpretation of the function of John's baptism; the connection of repentance baptism with John's christological message in the Synoptics suggests that the Johannine interpretation of 1:31 is likewise consistent with prior tradition. To the Johannine community, expelled from the synagogues (perhaps by persons who found their christological claims more objectionable than the views that the Baptist was a prophet), the critical fact of John's baptismal mission was that he came to reveal Israel's king to Israel (1:31; 12:13). While some of Israel's self-appointed guardians might remain clueless (3:10), the genuine

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<sup>182</sup>Taylor, "Baptism," 196.

<sup>183</sup>See Abrahams, *Studies*, 1:37.

<sup>184</sup>*Sib. Or.* 4.162–165; the text probably dates to ca. 80 C.E., and Collins regards this as Jewish rather than Christian. The association of turning from sin (4.162–164), repentance (4.168–169), and washing in water (4.165) is significant. Some Diaspora circles may have required only washing of hands and feet (*Jos. Asen.* 14:12).

<sup>185</sup>Cf. also Rowley, "Baptism," 313; Cohen, *Maccabees*, 53; Schiffman, "Crossroads," 128; White, *Initiation*, 320. Kraeling, *John*, 99–100, indicates the widespread acceptance for an early date, noting that "a growing sense of historical proportion showed how impossible" was the view of some early Christian scholars that Judaism took proselyte baptism from the Christians.

<sup>186</sup>Some suggest that the Baptist was an Essene (e.g., Betz, "John"); whether he may have been one at one time, he certainly was not one by the time he began his public proclamation (Witherington, *Christology*, 36; Pryke, "John"). Qumran sectarians practiced strict separatism from the rest of Israel (see, e.g., Minde, "Absonderung"). Further, most commonalities between them also appear in most of the rest of Second Temple Judaism (Taylor, *Immerse*, 15–48), and John's baptism implied the inadequacy of former purifications (*ibid.*, 99).

Israelites would recognize Israel's rightful king (1:47, 49). While his interlocutors, like the world (1:10, οὐκ ἔγνω), might fail to recognize their king (1:26, οὐκ οἶδατε), the Spirit would enable others to recognize him (1:33, οὐκ ᾔδειν).<sup>187</sup>

#### 4. *John's Confession of the Greater One (1:27)*

Jesus is John's successor (or, on some readings, disciple; see comment on 1:30); but he is incomparably greater than John. After John has denied that he is the Christ, Elijah, or the prophet (1:19–21), affirming that his mission is only to prepare the way for one greater (1:22–23), he declares how much greater than himself the Christ is. While this self-effacement fits the Fourth Gospel's emphasis, it is clearly not Johannine invention (indicating that this Gospel, like the Synoptists, could paint theology from history). The Baptist's self-abasement represents pre-Johannine tradition, attested in the Synoptic Gospels (both in Mark's abridgement of Q for his introduction, and in Matthew and Luke). If the Baptist's eschatology resembled the typical eschatological options of his day, he undoubtedly believed in some eschatological figure or figures greater than himself. If the crowds responded to him as they did to some other prophetic figures in his day (who appear to have been much less self-effacing), it would also have been natural for him to have clarified the superior character of the coming one, as in all four extant gospels; a "good" man in a status-conscious society would not purposely intrude on another's proper honor.<sup>188</sup>

That John's interlocutors did not "know" the Christ (1:26) links them with the unbelieving world (1:10);<sup>189</sup> John's own subordination to Christ is less demeaning. John is not morally reprobate; yet by comparison with the Messiah he offers nothing. The most demeaning tasks performed by a household servant involved the master's feet (washing the feet,<sup>190</sup> carrying sandals, or unfastening thongs of sandals);<sup>191</sup> to do such work was to be a slave. Thus although ancient teachers usually expected disciples to function as servants,<sup>192</sup> later rabbis entered one caveat: unlike slaves, they did not tend to the teacher's sandals.<sup>193</sup> But could John really claim himself unworthy to be the coming one's slave? If so, he exalts the coming one in virtually divine terms. The Hebrew Bible and later tradition regularly calls the Israelite prophets "slaves of God,"<sup>194</sup> also applying the title to

<sup>187</sup> John's initial failure to recognize him (1:31) may underline the fact that he is known only by revelation (1:33; Smith, *John* [1999], 70), by the Spirit's witness (15:26; 16:7–11).

<sup>188</sup> See Malina, *World*, 78.

<sup>189</sup> The two Greek words for knowledge used here function interchangeably in the Fourth Gospel; see on "Knowledge and Sight" in the introduction, ch. 6, above.

<sup>190</sup> See comment on 13:5.

<sup>191</sup> E.g., Diogenes Laertius 6.2.44; *b. B. Bat.* 53b (though both sources ridicule treating slaves in such a demeaning manner); Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 944–945; see Daube's and Urbach's citations below. Other commentators have noted that this is the work of a slave (Westcott, *John*, 19; Hunter, *John*, 23).

<sup>192</sup> Exod 24:13; 33:11; Josh 1:1; 1 Kgs 19:21; 2 Kgs 5:20; 6:15; 8:4; Zeno in Diogenes Laertius 7.1.12; Cleanthes in Diogenes Laertius 7.5.170; *t. B. Meši'a* 2:30; cf. <sup>2</sup>*Abot R. Nat.* 27, §56B; *p. Soṭah* 5:5, §4; perhaps more like fatherly counsel in Xenophon *Anab.* 3.1.5–7. Lachs, *Commentary*, 45, and Daube, *Judaism*, 266, cite also *b. Ketub.* 96a. Cf. Joshua as Moses' disciple and other "disciples of the prophets" (CD 8.20–21; *Mek. Pisha* 1:150–153; <sup>2</sup>*Abot R. Nat.* 11, §28 B).

<sup>193</sup> *B. Ketub.* 96a, cited by various commentators (many following Billerbeck), cf. Davies, *Sermon*, 135; Morris, *John*, 141.

<sup>194</sup> E.g., 2 Kgs 9:7, 36; 10:10; 14:25; 17:13, 23; 21:10; 24:2; Ezra 9:11; Isa 20:3; Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Dan 3:28; 6:20; 9:6, 10; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6; cf. <sup>2</sup>*Abot R. Nat.* 37, §95 B; Martin, *Slavery*, 55–56; Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 3; Käsemann, *Romans*, 5.

David,<sup>195</sup> Moses,<sup>196</sup> the patriarchs,<sup>197</sup> and Israel as a whole;<sup>198</sup> other ancient hearers also would have received the image of God's slave as one of great honor.<sup>199</sup> By contrast, the prophet John here claims his unworthiness even to be Christ's slave.<sup>200</sup> The words demean John only by contrast with Christ, and fit the Fourth Gospel's high Christology, suggesting Jesus' deity.

With minor variations the Baptist's claim appears in all four extant gospels (Mark 1:7; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16). Even in early generations, ancient transmission permitted considerable variation in relatively minor details (see our introduction); "loosening" and "carrying" the sandals convey the same image of servility, hence function identically on the semantic level.<sup>201</sup> (Indeed, Daube relates that "carrying the master's things before him to the bath-house and taking off his shoes [when he comes home]" were the primary illustrations of slaves' services in rabbinic texts.)<sup>202</sup> Although John and Luke may stand alone among the four authors in challenging partisans of the Baptist, none of the four elected to pass up the Baptist's christological testimony before Jesus' arrival.<sup>203</sup> In view of biblical promises, the Baptist's respect for a coming king (e.g., Isa 9:6–7; Jer 23:5–6; Dan 7:14) who would, like most kings, judge makes sense on the historical level; so do his later doubts that Jesus was fulfilling that role (Matt 11:3//Luke 7:19).<sup>204</sup>

### 5. A Historical Note (1:28)

The Fourth Gospel's proposed location for the Baptist's ministry in 1:28 may have some theological significance (it is not in Judea), but a theological intent cannot exhaust

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<sup>195</sup>E.g., 2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8, 19–21, 25–29; 1 Kgs 3:6; 8:24–26, 66; 11:13, 32, 34, 36, 38; 14:8; 2 Kgs 8:19; 19:34; 20:6; 1 Chr 17:4, 7, 17–19, 23–27; 2 Chr 6:15–21, 42; Ps 78:70; 89:3, 20; 132:10; 144:10; Isa 37:35; Jer 33:21–22, 26; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; cf. <sup>2</sup>Abot R. Nat. 43, §121 B.

<sup>196</sup>E.g., Exod 14:31; Num 12:7–8; Deut 34:5; Josh 1:1–2, 7, 13, 15; 8:31, 33; 9:24; 11:12, 15; 12:6; 13:8; 14:7; 18:7; 22:2, 4–5; 1 Kgs 8:53, 56; 2 Kgs 18:12; 21:8; 1 Chr 6:49; 2 Chr 1:3; 24:6, 9; Neh 1:7–8; 9:14; 10:29; Ps 105:26; Dan 9:11; Mal 4:4; cf. 4Q378 frg. 22, line 2; L.A.B. 30:2, *famulum*; <sup>2</sup>Abot R. Nat. 43, §121 B.

<sup>197</sup>Cf. Gen 26:24; Exod 32:13; Deut 9:27; Ps 105:6; 2 Macc 1:2; *Jub.* 31:25; 45:3; *T. Ab.* 9:4A; 2 Bar. 4:4; <sup>2</sup>Abot R. Nat. 43, §121 B.

<sup>198</sup>Lev 25:42, 55; Deut 32:43; Isa 41:8–9; 42:1, 19; 43:10; 44:1–2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3; Jer 30:10; 46:27–28; Ezek 28:25; 37:25; 2 Bar. 44:4; *t. B. Qam.* 7:5; <sup>2</sup>Abot R. Nat. 43, §121 B; *Gen. Rab.* 96 NV; *p. Qidd.* 1:2, §24; cf. *Tob* 4:14 MSS.

<sup>199</sup>Inscription in Grant, *Religion*, 122; Martin, *Slavery*, xiv–xvi (citing Sophocles *Oed. tyr.* 410; Plato *Phaedo* 85B; Apuleius *Metam.* 11.15; inscriptions), 46, 49 (against, e.g., Beare, *Philippians*, 50); cf. Rom 1:1 (cf. Minear, *Images*, 156). Slaves of rulers exercised high status (e.g., Epictetus *Diatr.* 1.19.19; 4.7.23; inscriptions in Sherk, *Empire*, 89–90; Deissmann, *Light*, 325ff., passim; P.Oxy. 3312.99–100 in Horsley, *Documents*, 3:7–9; Suetonius *Gramm.* 21 [in Dixon, *Mother*, 19]; cf. Chariton 5.2.2).

<sup>200</sup>E.g., Anderson, *Mark*, 72–73; Taylor, *Mark*, 157.

<sup>201</sup>Kraeling, *John*, 53–54 points to "the thong of whose sandals I am not fit to loose" as the most primitive form (enumerating variations therefrom on p. 198 n. 13). Matthew's form probably reflects his penchant for abridgement (Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary*, 106; Manson, *Sayings*, 40, instead suggests "a single Aramaic verb" behind both).

<sup>202</sup>Daube, *Judaism*, 266, citing *Mek.* on Exod 21:2; *Sipre Num* 15:41; *b. Qidd.* 22b; see also Urbach, *Sages*, 1:386 (citing *Sipre Selah* §115 and comparing *Sipre Zuṭa* 190).

<sup>203</sup>On Mark's editorial subordination of the Baptist, see Trocmé, *Formation*, 55 (although Mark's condensation of Q material attested in Matt 3 and Luke 3 probably reflects standard abridgement for an introduction).

<sup>204</sup>Against Kraeling, *John*, 130 (cf. 159), who doubts Matt 11:2–6 par. (to which we would respond, if this material were anti-Baptist polemic, why would Q include Matt 11:7–15 par.?).

its function (a Galilean site would have served the narrator's theological purpose much better). The specific place-name thus has little purpose except as a historical observation,<sup>205</sup> one which challenges the assumptions of many modern scholars that this Gospel lacks any historical interest.

That much of the Baptist's ministry occurred in Perea "beyond the Jordan" (1:28; 3:23; 10:40) might not convey much theological insight to many of the Gospel's readers (aside from its location outside the power centers of Judean Judaism),<sup>206</sup> but it fits the evidence other sources provide about the Baptist. Although the reports place the influence of John's itinerant ministry in both Judea and Galilee, Josephus's reports suggest that Herod Antipas must have captured John while he was in Perea.<sup>207</sup> Evidence for the specific reading for the city (more textual evidence favors "Bethany," but it is easier to see how a scribe misread "Bethabara" as the familiar "Bethany" than the reverse) is debatable,<sup>208</sup> but "Bethabara" seems to have come into vogue late because of the obscure location of the proposed Bethany of earlier manuscripts.<sup>209</sup> In the final analysis the question probably ultimately makes no theological difference for the Gospel (being "beyond the Jordan," it could not literally be the Bethany of John 11:1; 12:1), which underlines our point: the *specific* place-name is likely a matter of historical rather than theological interest. The location of a Bethany beyond the Jordan is unknown; "Not even Origen could find it."<sup>210</sup> But it may refer to the area of Batanea in Philip's tetrarchy rather than to a town.<sup>211</sup>

If there are theological associations one would read them along the following lines: Jesus was later welcomed at a Bethany (11:1) known from the tradition (Mark 11:1, 11–12; 14:3), though it was quite near Jerusalem (John 11:18; 12:1; cf. Mark 11:1; Luke 24:50). Yet because the Gospel portrays Perea "beyond the Jordan" as Jesus' place of refuge, where he had shared ministry with John the Baptist (1:28; 3:26; 10:40), one might argue that he symbolically moves Bethany across the Jordan despite his literal acknowl-

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Conversely, Mason, *Josephus and NT*, 159, thinks Matt 11:2–6 // Luke 7:18–23, "read by itself . . . implies the beginning of John's interest" rather than doubting a previous position; but any datum read "by itself" may contradict other data in an account. Both accounts reflect Q material, and the Baptist's christological testimony may be multiply attested.

<sup>205</sup>This is especially the case if John writes to a Diaspora audience, even one with Palestinian roots. The exception would be if John presumes a perspective from east of the Jordan (Byron, "Bethany"), in which case this Bethany anticipates the later events at Bethany (12:1–3); but this Bethany is too far from baptismal water (11:18), and geographical digressions were commonplace (Polybius 1.41.6; cf. 1.42.1–7).

<sup>206</sup>Unlike earlier Palestinian Christians, John's readers might not even recognize that such texts indicate that the Jesus movement was for all of ancient Israel, now divided into Judea, Galilee, Samaria, and Perea (as noted by Riesner, "Bethany"). The location and knowledge of John's readership, however, are ultimately less decisive than the consistency of detail; that only the Baptist and not Jesus ministers there actively would suggest that historical considerations control the data that the writer may employ theologically.

<sup>207</sup>Kraeling, *John*, 9.

<sup>208</sup>Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:296, also finds evidence that can be read either way from the Madaba mosaic map of Palestine. Metzger, *Commentary*, 200, notes that most of the committee doubted that a scribe would alter "Bethabara" to "Bethany."

<sup>209</sup>Metzger, *Commentary*, 199–200, on Origen.

<sup>210</sup>Brodie, *Gospel*, 151. Some think a recently discovered pilgrim site (from 530 C.E. on) east of the Jordan might be the site (Couturier, "Baptisé"), though this evidence is late.

<sup>211</sup>See Carson, *John*, 146–47.

edgment that it was “near Jerusalem” (11:18).<sup>212</sup> This argument, however, appears strained. Although it would be compatible with John’s use of symbolism, it is probable that the references to “beyond the Jordan,” which would make little sense to John’s audience (except for the transplanted Palestinian minority), reflect the Baptist’s actual historical ministry there, as noted above. It was also customary when mentioning more than one site of the same name to distinguish them, so John’s Bethany “across the Jordan” would be naturally read as a Bethany distinct from the Bethany near Jerusalem of the gospel passion tradition.

### **The Spirit’s Witness about Jesus (1:29–34)**

In the preceding section, John the Baptist defers all honor to Jesus. This section explains more of Jesus’ identity.<sup>213</sup> A prophet, like a teacher, could have “disciples” (1 Sam 19:20; 2 Kgs 2:3; Isa 8:16).<sup>214</sup> In 1:19–28, John negatively testifies that he himself is not the eschatological king, Elijah, or the Mosaic prophet, but that one whose slave he was not worthy to be was already among them. In 1:29–34, he positively testifies that Jesus is the lamb (as in 1:36), and he recognized his identity as Son of God (1:34, probable reading) and Spirit-bringer (1:33) because the Spirit was on Jesus (1:32–33).

The “next day” provides a transition to a new christological confession to John’s disciples. Although some ancient writers preferred disjunctive episodes, many connected events of various occasions into a chronological sequence that made them easier to follow (cf. Mark 1:21, 29).<sup>215</sup> Some have found symbolic significance in the number of days in the introductory narratives (see comment on 2:1), but John could intend them literally (cf. 12:12), providing a sample of meaningful days at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. While it would be an exaggeration to say with Origen that John “leaves no room for the temptation story” and that one cannot harmonize John with the Synoptics here,<sup>216</sup> John is not interested in the temptation story here; nor was chronological sequence a necessary feature of ancient biography.<sup>217</sup> In view of the Gospel’s penchant for double entendres, that the Baptist saw Jesus “coming” (ἐρχόμενον) to him (1:29) may suggest a narrative confirmation of the one “coming” (ἐρχόμενος) after John (1:27).

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<sup>212</sup>For this location symbolizing the meeting of “above” and “below,” see Nortjé, “Doper.” In Elisha’s day prophets assembled near the Jordan (2 Kgs 6:2, 4); it could also relate to the new exodus theme (1:23) while anticipating the later events at Bethany (11:1, 18; 12:1); but probably such associations are foreign to the way John’s audience would have heard the story.

<sup>213</sup>Cf. also McPolin, *John*, 45–47 (negative vs. positive testimony).

<sup>214</sup>Later scribal schools exaggerated this comparison; see Keener, *Spirit*, 20–22; *Sipra Sh. M.D.* 99.5.6; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 26:6/7; *p. Hor.* 3:5, §1; *Sanh.* 10:1, §9; 11:4, §1; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on 1 Sam 19:23; 2 Kgs 6:1; 9:1, 4.

<sup>215</sup>Aune, *Environment*, 90 (citing Lucian *Hist.* 55; for disjunction, Polybius 38.5.1–8). Ovid is a striking example of arranging obviously disparate stories, sometimes in contrived ways, as if they happened sequentially (e.g., *Metam.* 2.708–713; 6.1–5 with 6.148–150); stories within stories (e.g., Ovid *Metam.* 4.37–388 within 4.1–415; perhaps Mark 5:21–43) were common. In Tannaitic texts, see Smith, *Parallels*, 131.

<sup>216</sup>Wiles, *Gospel*, 15. One who wished to harmonize could claim that John’s testimony in 1:32–34 can refer to a past event that could have been followed by a temptation, if (1) the Baptist could have uttered 1:26–27 on more than one occasion and (2) if 1:29 is not his first encounter with Jesus (which the verb tenses in 1:32–34 may suggest it is not).

<sup>217</sup>E.g., Stanton, *Jesus*, 119–21; see comments in the introduction on genre.

### 1. *The Sin-Bearing Lamb* (1:29, 36)

In the Fourth Gospel's distinctive chronology, Jesus dies on Passover; the temple cleansing, which in the Synoptic tradition occurs in his final Passover, opens his public ministry, framing his whole ministry with the shadow of the passion week and its Johannine association with Passover. "Lamb of God" is thus a very appropriate title.

#### 1A. Proposed Backgrounds

Scholars have proposed four main backgrounds for the lamb of 1:29: apocalyptic lambs; the lamb of Isa 53:7; and Passover and sacrificial lambs (we have treated these last two together). On the first reading, the Baptist announced an apocalyptic lamb, like the eschatological horned lambs of the messianic era in *1 Enoch*.<sup>218</sup> In this case, the Baptist's public confession in 1:36 (as opposed to the relative clause in the possibly unattested confession of 1:29, which defines the lamb's mission in terms of sin-bearing) could make historical sense in the context of the Baptist being an eschatological prophet. The evidence for this position is weak, however.<sup>219</sup> Apocalyptic lambs before John the Baptist appear only in materials from portions of *1 Enoch* (chs. 89–90), and probably bear no specific function worthy of special attention by the Baptist or the Fourth Gospel.<sup>220</sup> Other works that use lambs to convey other images were more widely read in this period.<sup>221</sup> Another apocalyptic work from the Johannine community includes one central lamb (Rev 5:6, 13; 6:16; 7:10; we read the Greek terms for "lamb" interchangeably), but no allusion to the lambs of *1 Enoch*; even in Revelation, the lamb is a Passover lamb that delivers God's people from the plagues (cf. 5:6, 9; 7:1–8, 17).<sup>222</sup>

Others have found here the language of Isaiah's Suffering Servant.<sup>223</sup> Although the servant is clearly Israel in most of the Servant Songs (41:8–9; 43:10; 44:1–2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3), in 49:5 and 53:4–8 the innocent servant suffers on behalf of Israel, which failed to carry out its mission fully (42:19). Although extant sources suggest (against some scholars)<sup>224</sup> that Judaism lacked a messianic reading of the servant passages in

<sup>218</sup>Dodd, *Interpretation*, 230–38; Barrett, "Lamb," 218; cf. Sandy, "Affirmation." Longenecker, *Christology*, 50, and Morris, *John*, 146, see this as the background for Revelation but not for John 1:29.

<sup>219</sup>Cf., e.g., the arguments of Brown, *John*, 1:58–60; Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:299–300; Ridderbos, *John*, 72.

<sup>220</sup>The earliest supposedly non-Christian use of "lamb" for the Messiah is a Christian interpolation in *T. Jos.* 19:8 (Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 95; cf. Michaels, *John*, 17). A lamb does prophesy in Manetho *Aegyptiaca Epitome* frg. 64; but the connection with *1 En.* 89–90 is at best weak. Likewise, even if Aries was considered a "lamb" in this period and a ruling constellation (Malina and Rohrbaugh, *John*, 49–50), a Palestinian Jewish prophet (applicable to both the Baptist and the author) would think more readily of sacrificial or paschal lambs.

<sup>221</sup>E.g., Wis 19:9 (the redeemed Israelites leaped before God like lambs, praising him); cf. also Luke 10:3 (cf. Matt 10:16 in the context of 10:6) in the Jesus tradition.

<sup>222</sup>Minear, *Images*, 102–3; Hillyer, "Lamb"; Keener, *Revelation*, 187.

<sup>223</sup>E.g., Bernard, *John*, 1:44–46; Taylor, *Atonement*, 138–39; Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:300; Bruce, *Time*, 48–49.

<sup>224</sup>Zimmerli and Jeremias, *Servant*, 57ff.; Schoeps, *Paul*, 134–35, 139. Some think Qumran's Teacher of Righteousness is described in terms of Isaiah's Servant Songs (Brownlee, "Motifs, I," 18–20; Dupont-Sommer, *Writings*, 361–63); but Sir 1:6's *rhiza* and *apekalyphthē* probably derive from Prov 8:1, etc., rather than Isa 53:1–2; *Pesiq. Rab.* 31:10 and the Kabbalah (Ginsburg, *Kabbalah*, 141–42) are too late to be of value.

this period<sup>225</sup> (and later continued to lack it with regard to the suffering aspects of these passages),<sup>226</sup> this became the prevailing interpretation in early Christian sources (e.g., Acts 8:32; 1 Pet 2:22–24),<sup>227</sup> and may hark back to Jesus' self-definition as presented in Mark 10:45; 14:24. Despite arguments to the contrary,<sup>228</sup> it is likely that Mark 10:45 reflects an authentic logion of Jesus.<sup>229</sup> Although its language could allude to martyrdom in general<sup>230</sup> and the allusion to Isa 53 is disputed,<sup>231</sup> we favor the view, held by many scholars, that an allusion to Isa 53 is present, albeit not in its LXX form.<sup>232</sup> Likewise, despite objections,<sup>233</sup> we favor the view that Mark 14:24, the language of which is multiply attested, is authentic.<sup>234</sup> In any case, these Jesus traditions would have been widely accepted as authentic by the time of the Fourth Gospel. (The allusion here would be to Isaiah's specific mention of a lamb in Isa 53:7, however, not to an original Aramaic term which could mean either "lamb" or "servant";<sup>235</sup> as Haenchen points out, first, there is no evidence that this passage or its tradition represents an Aramaic original, and second, "the Targum on the Prophets shows that Aramaic עֲבֹדָה was readily available for the Hebrew term עֲבֹדָה.")<sup>236</sup> But while this allusion would explain the sin-bearing role of the lamb (Isa 53:4),<sup>237</sup> the first

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<sup>225</sup> Goppelt, *Jesus, Paul, and Judaism*, 83; cf. R. Simlai (third century C.E.) in Davies, *Land*, 60, who takes the servant as Moses. (Hooker's exclusion of it even from Isaiah [*Servant*, 47, essentially on the grounds that the prophet would not have introduced new ideas] is more questionable.) For this reason many scholars are skeptical of the Isa 53:7 reference here (Morris, *John*, 145).

<sup>226</sup> On the Targum, see Bruce, *Acts: Greek*, 193; Yamauchi, "Concord," 165–66, and Zimmerli and Jeremias, *Servant*, 57ff.

<sup>227</sup> Justin *Dial.* 13, 43 attests Christian rather than Jewish usage (so also *1 Apol.* 50). Acts 8:32 may not explicitly emphasize vicarious suffering (cf., e.g., Decock, "Understanding"), but the quotation of part of a text implied the rest (e.g., *p. Qidd.* 4:1, §2) and though atonement is not Luke's emphasis, it is not incongruent with his thought (Luke 22:19–20).

<sup>228</sup> Bultmann, *Word*, 214, sees it as "a Hellenistic variation" of the older form in Luke 22:27; for evidence that the Markan form is more Semitic, cf. Jeremias, *Message*, 46.

<sup>229</sup> On Mark 10:45's authenticity, see Page, "Authenticity"; Morris, *Cross*, 29–33; Cullmann, *Christology*, 65.

<sup>230</sup> So, e.g., Stanton, *Jesus*, 36.

<sup>231</sup> E.g., Anderson, *Mark*, 257; Hooker, *Servant*, 74–79; idem, *Message*, 93; though Kümmel, *Promise*, 73, recognizes the allusion, he is reticent to explain it.

<sup>232</sup> Cf. Taylor, *Atonement*, 14; Jeremias, *Theology*, 292–93; Cullmann, *Christology*, 64–65; Higgins, *Son of Man*, 43–44; Moulder, "Background," 127; Bruce, *Time*, 29–30; Ridderbos, *Paul and Jesus*, 31; Gundry, *Matthew*, 404; Argyle, *Matthew*, 154; Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 243. For why Jesus could teach his atoning death yet emphasize the kingdom theme more, see Hengel, *Atonement*, 34.

<sup>233</sup> Hooker, *Servant*, 80–82, also disputes the background of Isa 53 here, but see Jeremias's case, cited below. Doeve, *Hermeneutics*, 147–48, demonstrates how rabbinic exegetical methods would naturally connect Isa 53 with Dan 7:13–14; but such methods could connect many texts once the connection accorded with tradition.

<sup>234</sup> The most thorough work, despite criticisms on specific points, remains Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*; for discussion of the authenticity of the base-form, cf. also Davies, *Paul*, 244–50; attested in Pauline as well as Synoptic tradition, this appears one of the securest traditions in the Gospels if the theological biases against it are set aside.

<sup>235</sup> Pace Jeremias, "ἄμνός," 339; C. J. Ball (cited in Bernard, *John*, 1:44–46, who disagrees with him).

<sup>236</sup> Haenchen, *John*, 1:152–53; also Barrett, *John*, 176.

<sup>237</sup> E.g., Gilbert, "Notes," 46; by contrast, Barrett, "Old Testament," 155–56, suspects that nuances from various texts are blended together here. The LXX uses a different term (cf. Bernard, *John*, 1:47), but the Fourth Gospel is not bound to the LXX (Freed, *Quotations*, passim).

hearers of the announcement would probably think more quickly of a more dominant lamb image in the OT.<sup>238</sup>

The primary background must be that of the (sacrificial) Passover lamb, as many scholars have contended,<sup>239</sup> although combinations with other sources like the Suffering Servant remain feasible.<sup>240</sup> The paschal lamb appears here also as a sacrificial lamb,<sup>241</sup> “taking away the world’s sins”; the writer undoubtedly viewed the Passover as a form of sacrifice. (The LXX uses John’s term here for sacrificial lambs approximately one hundred times.)<sup>242</sup> Although one may distinguish sacrificial and Passover lambs in the Hebrew Bible—an objection some raise to seeing the Passover lamb here<sup>243</sup>—early Judaism attached the nuances of sacrifice to Passover,<sup>244</sup> and the relation may have existed in the Hebrew Bible as well.<sup>245</sup> John’s emphasis may be on Jesus dying “on behalf of” others (10:11, 15; 11:50; 18:14) rather than “propitiatory” sacrifice,<sup>246</sup> but the ideas fit together comfortably and are in no way mutually exclusive (1 John 2:2; 3:16; 4:10).<sup>247</sup>

This portrayal fits other early Christian images (e.g., 1 Pet 1:19;<sup>248</sup> Rev 5:6; 7:14).<sup>249</sup> In Rev 5:6, 9, the “lamb having been slaughtered” is the Passover lamb whose blood delivers God’s people from the coming plagues (7:3), but also (in 6:9) the lamb in union with whom the martyrs are portrayed as sacrifices beneath the altar (where the blood of sacrifices was poured in the Hebrew Bible).<sup>250</sup> That the Fourth Gospel later portrays Jesus’ death in terms of the Passover lamb (18:28; 19:36) and writes in the context of a new exodus and a new redemption (1:23) expected by Judaism indicates that this is the sense of “lamb” in view in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>251</sup>

<sup>238</sup>Black, “Messiah in Levi,” 321–22, finds an allusion to priestly sacrifice, father offering son, and possibly Isa 53:7 in *T. Levi* 18 and suggests that if *T. Levi* 18 is not a Christian work, it may supply the background for John 1:29, 36.

<sup>239</sup>E.g., Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:299; Ashby, “Lamb”; Grigsby, “Cross”; Lightfoot, *Gospel*, 97; Keener, “Lamb,” 641.

<sup>240</sup>E.g., Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:300; Brown, *John*, 1:60–63; Carey, “Lamb”; cf. Pancaro, *Law*, 348–49.

<sup>241</sup>Enz, “Exodus,” 214, sees Exod 29:38–46 as the background. Pagans would also understand the sacrificial use of lambs (Ovid *Tristia* 1.10.43, though he wanted to give a larger sacrifice, 1.10.44).

<sup>242</sup>Longenecker, *Christology*, 50.

<sup>243</sup>E.g., Gilbert, “Notes,” 46; Bruce, *Time*, 48–49.

<sup>244</sup>Morris, *John*, 145, correctly citing Josephus *Ant.* 2.312 (which calls the Passover a “sacrifice”), although in an earlier work Morris saw here merely sacrificial terminology in general (*Cross*, 143; contrast Morris, *John*, 146). Bokser, “Passover,” thinks political redemption more central in an earlier paschal tradition (*m. Pesah.* 10) than in later texts.

<sup>245</sup>One may read Gen 22:9–13 as a type of the Passover, the redemption of the first-born; note that the ram functions as a “lamb” (22:7–8; cf. *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Lev 22:27; *p. Ned.* 1:3, §1, early third century, comparing the sacrificial lamb with Abraham’s ram; cf. the unrelated later tradition of the patriarchs as unblemished lambs in *Pesiq. Rab.* 48:3). Some see Isaac typology in John 1:29 as well; cf. Braun, “Sacrifice”; Grigsby, “Cross,” 51–80; Swetnam, *Isaac*, 84; Bruce, *Time*, 48–49.

<sup>246</sup>Koester, *Symbolism*, 199.

<sup>247</sup>Cf. Turner, “Atonement”; Watt, “Lam.”

<sup>248</sup>See comments of Selwyn, *Peter*, 146.

<sup>249</sup>Probably the Passover lamb (Minear, *Images*, 102–3), with possible additional allusions to Isa 53:7 (Taylor, *Atonement*, 36; Hillyer, “Lamb”). Cf. 1 Cor 5:7; also Philo, who interpreted Passover allegorically as deliverance from passions to virtue (*Sacrifices* 63).

<sup>250</sup>Exod 29:12; Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 5:9; 8:15; 9:9. Cf. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 135; Ladd, *Last Things*, 39. For martyrs as sacrifices, see also 4 Macc 9:24.

<sup>251</sup>Some who argue that the Baptist meant it otherwise concede this sense in the Gospel, e.g., Barrett, “Lamb,” 218.

### 1B. Historical Tradition or Johannine Theology?

Where John covers the same ground as the Synoptics (e.g., 1:30–33; 12:25), it is clear that even when he employs Johannine idiom, he normally develops earlier tradition. John himself testifies that he employs his traditions very selectively, and had a sufficient number from which to choose those he found most appropriate to his purpose (20:30–31; cf. 21:25). A choice between John's theology and his tradition is therefore forced. Whether one regards the information in any particular pericope as historical, however, will depend largely on the presuppositions with which one approaches the rest of the material.

Is the Baptist's confession of Jesus as the lamb ahistorical? Many scholars think so; how could John regard Jesus so highly, yet later doubt that he was the one (Matt 11:3 // Luke 7:20)?<sup>252</sup> Yet if we accept the Baptist's confession that Jesus was mightier than he<sup>253</sup> and would baptize in the Spirit, that the Baptist was unworthy to be his slave and saw the Spirit descend on Jesus (details recorded in all four extant gospels),<sup>254</sup> another high christological confession is not impossible. Indeed, we would expect later Christology to emphasize dominant themes like "Christ," "Lord," or perhaps "God" or "Son of God" (cf. 1:34) more readily than the less common "lamb." While the Fourth Gospel's *Tendenz* explains why the author omits the Baptist's later doubt when Jesus does not inaugurate eschatological judgment, it need not make other pronouncements ahistorical.

At the same time, whatever view one takes regarding the historicity of the claim, it is surely also Johannine theology. The Fourth Gospel returns to the paschal lamb motif (18:28; 19:36), and "Behold" (Christ) is an especially Johannine construction (19:5, 14).<sup>255</sup> If the tradition of the exclusion of Jewish apostates from the Passover lamb is this early (though such exclusion could not be easily enforced in any case),<sup>256</sup> recognizing Jesus as the lamb may have served an apologetic function encouraging to Jewish Christian expelled from their synagogues. Neither other reports about the Baptist nor contemporary Jewish Christologies (see introduction, chapter 7) support the likelihood that the Baptist would have foreknown that the messianic mission included an atoning death. While the Baptist could have drawn such concepts from the Hebrew Bible (a new exodus and eschatological redemption could imply the need for a new Passover), the Fourth Gospel's testimony on this specific point can neither be confirmed nor disproved with certainty. On grounds of historical probability, one can say only that the Baptist's witness here is consistent with the general historical truth that the Baptist testified to Jesus,<sup>257</sup> and is specifically consistent

<sup>252</sup> Kraeling, *John*, 127, noting the Fourth Gospel's "anti-Baptist polemic," which must subordinate the Baptist because of the Gospel's high Christology (p. 128).

<sup>253</sup> Probably uttered before his recognition of Jesus. Kraeling thinks that this is an angel-like heavenly figure from Dan 7, not the earthly Jesus (Kraeling, *John*, 57); given the variety of combinations in early Jewish eschatological speculation, however, the Baptist need not have viewed a heavenly Son of Man and an earthly prince as mutually exclusive. "The mighty one" functions as a title for God in Isa 1:24; 10:21, 34; 49:26; 60:16; Jer 32:18; 2 Bar. 25:4; 32:1, 6; 34:1 but is not necessarily implied in the Baptist's language (even less is Harnack's allusion to the morning star, Ramsay, *Luke*, 232).

<sup>254</sup> One may read Mark 1:10 and Matt 3:16 (following Mark) as if the Spirit's descent on Jesus was only his personal vision (contrast Luke 3:21–22), but the voice from heaven is public in all four gospels (Mark 1:11; Matt 3:17; Luke 3:22), suggesting that we take the vision the same way.

<sup>255</sup> In Greek the term is pleonastic (emphatic but superfluous; see Anderson, *Glossary*, 102) despite its value for John's vision motif.

<sup>256</sup> *Tg. Onq.* on Exod 12:43; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Exod 12:43; the Targum translations also cite *Mek.* 15 on Exod 12:43; and *Mek. de R. Simeon b. Yohai* on Exod 12:43.

<sup>257</sup> Thus Bernard, *John*, 1:44–46, suggests that the author expressed the Baptist's messianic confession in his own words.

with motifs in the Fourth Gospel that the author may have regarded as natural insights for a true prophet and Jesus' forerunner. Given the Gospel's genre and use of materials where we can test him, I suspect that the author believed that the Baptist made an affirmation which could ultimately have been understood in this manner; but his wording appears to be a thoroughly Johannine formulation.

The result is at any rate a masterful expression of Johannine soteriology. "Taking away sin" (also 1 John 3:5) may evoke the scapegoat, but probably alludes to a sacrificial reading of the Passover lamb, very possibly interpreted in light of the servant lamb of Isa 53.<sup>258</sup> John's particular expression for "taking up" sin probably means that it is lifted up with him on the cross (3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34). Although the Greek term for sin had undergone changes to include more moral connotations (while sometimes retaining some of the term's original amoral sense),<sup>259</sup> John assumes the concept's historical Jewish sense of transgression against God's law (cf. 5:14; 8:34; 9:2–3, 31), which in the Fourth Gospel especially involves unbelief against Jesus (8:21, 24, 46; 9:41; 15:24; 16:9). "Walking" is a theological term at times in John (e.g., 8:12; cf. 1 John 2:6), but that John sees Jesus "walking" (1:36) may well be no more significant than that he earlier saw him approaching (1:29).<sup>260</sup>

## 2. Ranked Before the Baptist (1:30)

The Baptist again takes second place to Jesus. This passage, one of the few in which John and the Synoptics overlap, illustrates the point evident from other cases of overlap: the author of the Fourth Gospel clearly grounds his story in prior sources and, just as clearly, generally adapts them in his own christological language. Historical tradition stands behind the saying about the superior one coming after the Baptist (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16), but again this tradition plays into the Fourth Gospel's heightened emphasis of Jesus' superiority to the Baptist. The much more compressed Markan narrative connects in one logion the mightier coming one with the Baptist's unworthiness to untie his sandals, as well as the Baptist's water baptism versus Spirit baptism (Mark 1:7–8; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16); the Fourth Gospel or its tradition separates these components (John 1:26, 27, 30, 33).

"One who comes after me" could refer to a temporal succession of prophets, but many scholars think it reflects traditional early Christian language for "following after" in discipleship, suggesting that Jesus was among the Baptist's disciples.<sup>261</sup> (On this reading, Jesus is John's disciple in 1:27, but John is not worthy to be even Jesus' slave, much less his disciple.) Although some propose that this interpretation suggests that the Baptist's saying is a later Christian invention,<sup>262</sup> the reverse is more likely; if anything, the Gospels suppress a

<sup>258</sup>The scapegoat, however, would be a more obvious allusion than the intercessor of 2 En. 64:5 (in Boring et al., *Commentary*, 247); but ἀρῶ is not used in LXX of Lev 16, though it is a common term (twenty-three times in John alone).

<sup>259</sup>Nock, "Vocabulary," 137.

<sup>260</sup>Various clues, such as the potentially theological use of "follow" in 1:40, could shift the case, but even their cumulative weight seems inadequate for certainty. "Walking" might possibly allow for peripatetic instruction (see comment on 1:37–39), which was common (hence the name of Aristotle's school; see Aune, *Environment*, 186; Robbins, *Jesus*, 171, 178).

<sup>261</sup>See Dodd, *Tradition*, 274; Stauffer, *Jesus*, 65; Lane, *Mark*, 52; Kraeling, *John*, 55, summarizing Lohmeyer, "Überlieferung," and K. Grobel, "After Me." On the Baptist's direct influence on Jesus, see further Michaels, *Servant*, 1–24.

<sup>262</sup>Kraeling, *John*, 55.

tradition of Jesus being John's disciple, and only the Fourth Gospel even informs us that their ministries were partly concurrent (3:22–24, 26; contrast Mark 1:14).<sup>263</sup> The saying may, however, reflect eschatological nuances concerning the expected "coming one" (cf. the participle in 3:31).<sup>264</sup> The Baptist's original saying concerning one mightier than himself may have alluded to Daniel 7's Son of Man, as Kraeling assumes,<sup>265</sup> in which case the Fourth Gospel may merely clarify the idea of preexistence already implicit in the tradition of the Baptist's words here.<sup>266</sup>

In the Fourth Gospel, the Baptist declares paradoxically, "One comes after me who came before me, for he was first before me." The first "came before me" may be read as a reference to preeminence; status-conscious ancients allowed those of higher rank to enter or be seated before them as a mark of respect.<sup>267</sup> Such respect was typically accorded the aged,<sup>268</sup> but for the Gospel's informed audience, the respectable antiquity to which the Johannine Baptist refers is no mere matter of primogeniture or age, but preexistence itself (1:1–3).

### 3. Jesus and the Abiding Spirit (1:32–33)

Although the Baptist's "witness" resounds throughout the surrounding narrative, the author underlines John's testimony at this point in the narrative ("And John witnessed, saying"),<sup>269</sup> which recounts John's eyewitness experience. Michaels feels that none of the extant gospels contradicts the Markan portraits of Jesus alone seeing the dove and hearing the voice;<sup>270</sup> but given the usual nature of "heavenly voices" in Jewish texts, it may be more likely that all four intended the event publicly. Thus one need not regard this encounter as merely an ecstatic experience of Jesus.<sup>271</sup>

This passage fits John's theology: the Spirit is prominent in this Gospel (1:32–33; 3:5, 6, 8, 34; 4:23–24; 6:63; 7:39; 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13; 20:22), and draws attention to and attests Jesus (14:26; 15:26; 16:13);<sup>272</sup> the Spirit's descent accords with the Gospel's vertical dualism; that John "sees" (1:32, 34) the Spirit's descent fits another motif in this Gospel (e.g., 1:14; see introduction). The title "holy spirit," frequent in Judaism by this period, is reserved for the

<sup>263</sup> Blomberg, *Reliability*, 79, following Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2:116–20.

<sup>264</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 56–57, although we doubt his contention that this Son of Man was viewed as an angel.

<sup>266</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2:34–35, doubts that John saw this announcement in divine terms.

<sup>267</sup> Luke 14:7–11; 1QS 2.19–23; 1QSa 2.11–17; *t. Sanh.* 7:8; *b. Hor.* 13b, *bar.*; *p. Ketub.* 12:3, §6; *Sanh.* 1:2, §13; *Ta'an.* 4:2, §§8–9; *Ter.* 8:7; Plutarch *T.T.* 1.2.3, *Mor.* 616E; *T.T.* 1.2.4, *Mor.* 617B; Apuleius *Metam.* 10.7; cf. 1QS 6.10–13 (with 6.26–27; Josephus *War* 2.132; and comments of Marcus, "Mebaqqr," 302; cf. *p. Roš Haš.* 2:6, §9). In current Middle Eastern custom, see Eickelman, *Middle East*, 23–24.

<sup>268</sup> Philo *Contempl. Life.* 66ff.; *Ps.-Phoc.* 220–222; *t. Meg.* 3:24; *Sanh.* 8:1; *p. Ta'an.* 4:2, §12; Lycurgus 14 in Plutarch *S.S.*, *Mor.* 227F; on respecting elders in general, cf. *Sir* 8:6; *Wis* 4:8–9; 1 *Tim* 5:1–2; 4 *Bar.* 5:20; *Syr. Men.* 11–14, 76–93 (though cf. 170–172); *t. Abod. Zar.* 1:19; Pythagoras in Diogenes Laertius 8.1.22–23.

<sup>269</sup> For the importance of the eyewitness component in "witness," see, e.g., Aune, *Environment*, 81; Painter, *John*, 8; Trites, *Witness*, 4–19, 136–39.

<sup>270</sup> Michaels, *Servant*, 36. Cranfield, "Baptism," 58, argues that it was a vision but a real communication to Jesus; Bultmann, *History*, 248, thinks it describes an objective happening as in Matthew and Luke, but only because it is a faith legend.

<sup>271</sup> Pace Hill, *Prophecy*, 59; Johnston, *Spirit-Paraclete*, 18; cf. Burge, *Community*, 52; Borg, *Vision*, 41, 53 n. 19; Anderson, *Mark*, 75; Kelber, *Story*, 18–19; Hooker, *Message*, 13; Robinson, *Problem*, 81; Kingsbury, *Structure*, 14.

<sup>272</sup> Alongside the Baptist; cf. 15:26–27; Charles, "Witness."

first, last, and one other pneumatological passage in the Gospel; this title thus frames the book's pneumatology as a large *inclusio* (1:33; 14:26; 20:22).<sup>273</sup> Yet despite the author's employment of this title in his literary design, the first reference derives from his tradition (all four extant gospels concur at this point in the tradition: Mark 1:8; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16). The Baptist's words here are again rooted in tradition (cf. Mark 1:8–10; Matt 3:11, 16; Luke 3:16, 22); where he can be checked against other extant sources, our author again makes his point by adapting available tradition rather than by fabricating what suits him.

The Fourth Gospel naturally omits the Synoptics' rendering of the heavens here (probably eschatological, as in Isa 64:1 [63:19 LXX], though at least partly realized in the Gospels; but certainly revelatory, as in Ezek 1:1; *Jos. Asen.* 14:2/3),<sup>274</sup> but characteristically employs some analogous language for the whole of Jesus' ministry in 1:51.<sup>275</sup> He likewise omits the Markan tradition's heavenly voice here, which probably corresponds roughly with the idea of the *bat qol* in later rabbinic texts.<sup>276</sup> (Some scholars have denied that a *bat qol* could be in view in the Synoptic accounts, since it was a second-class substitute for the Spirit of prophecy,<sup>277</sup> but this objection is untenable for the following reasons: First, although it is *sometimes* viewed as a substitute for the Spirit of prophecy, it is *always* a heavenly voice, as in the Synoptics; second, some late texts report that the *bat qol* was active before the Spirit of prophecy departed from Israel, in a source that might have roots in pre-70 C.E. tradition;<sup>278</sup> and most significantly, the *bat qol* normally *was* the means of divine communication before the eschatological time, and functioned, along with John and OT prophecy, as part of the threefold witness to the events of the new era in Mark.)<sup>279</sup>

Whereas the *bat qol* is missing here, the Fourth Gospel attests Jesus' passion through a *bat qol*, a heavenly voice (12:28–29). Mark may use the message of the heavenly voice to frame Jesus' entire ministry with the shadow of the passion (Mark 1:11; cf. 9:7);<sup>280</sup> the Fourth Gospel places the voice more directly before Jesus' passion. Meanwhile, he substitutes here for the heavenly voice the testimony of John's own hearing from God as a prophet; the author may make this substitution because prophecy was viewed as superior to the heavenly voice, although the other evangelists include both as complementary wit-

<sup>273</sup> Cf. also the christological *inclusio* of 1:1, 18; 20:28 (elsewhere, e.g., the sympathetic, choruslike ἐκκλησία, or public assembly, at the opening and close of Chariton *Chaereas and Callirhoe*).

<sup>274</sup> Cf. also dramatic language for personal deliverances (e.g. Ps 18:7–16 in context and some Qumran hymns, perhaps including the controversial “messianic” text 1 QH 3, which depicts the psalmist's sufferings in terms of eschatological messianic woes). Mark's heaven rending corresponds with the temple curtain's rending (Rhoads and Michie, *Mark*, 46), but John omits this scene for other reasons than his own omission of the veil (Mark's connection is subtle anyway).

<sup>275</sup> For John, Jesus' entire ministry was a sort of Moses-like transfiguration (1:14).

<sup>276</sup> Frequent in rabbinic texts, e.g., *Sipre Deut.* 357.10.3; *b. B. Bat.* 58a, 73b, 85b; *ᵉErub.* 54b; *Mak.* 23b; *Pesah.* 114a (= *Hul.* 44a); *Sanh.* 104b; *Ṣabb.* 88a; *p. ᵉAbod. Zar.* 3:1, §2; *Hor.* 3:5, §3; *Soṭah* 9:16, §2; *Taᵉan.* 4:5, §10; *Lev. Rab.* 19:5–6; *Lam. Rab.* 1:16, §50; *Ruth Rab.* 6:4; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 9:2, 11:16, 17:5; reportedly Tannaitic sources in *b. Hul.* 44a; *Ketub.* 104a; *Ṣabb.* 33b; *Soṭah* 21a; *Eccl. Rab.* 7:12, §1; *Song Rab.* 8:9, §3 (but many of the attributions are presumably part of later haggadah). For nonrabbinic parallels, see comment on 12:28. The connection cannot be limited to an Aqedah allusion (contrast Stegner, “Baptism”).

<sup>277</sup> E.g., Hooker, *Message*, 12–13; cf. Gundry, *Matthew*, 53.

<sup>278</sup> *B. Pesah.* 94a; *Ḥag.* 13a, anachronistically attributed to ben Zakkai; similarly R. Isaac in *b. Sanh.* 39b. Although the evidence is quite late, it might be relevant that the *bat qol* could have eschatological ramifications in some very late rabbinic sources (*Lev. Rab.* 27:2).

<sup>279</sup> A *bat qol* was, of course, open to challenge, particularly on halakah: *p. Moᵉd Qat.* 3:1, §6; Kadushin, *Mind*, 261–63; texts in Hill, *Prophecy*, 34 (though cf. *p. Soṭah* 7:5, §5).

<sup>280</sup> See, e.g., Keener, *Spirit*, 55–59.

nesses. All the Gospels tend to pass over the baptism proper fairly rapidly, especially after Mark; it was an established rhetorical principle that the narrator “should narrate most concisely whatever is likely to distress the audience.”<sup>281</sup> Further, rhetorical practice dictated focusing only on matters essential to the narrator’s purpose.<sup>282</sup> The Fourth Gospel’s wholesale omission of it is thus undoubtedly intentional.<sup>283</sup>

The Spirit “descends,” as in LXX imagery (Num 11:17, 25; Judg 14:19). The descent of the dove is retained from the Jesus tradition as we have it also in the Synoptics—though the Fourth Gospel characteristically specifies that the dove, like Christ in the Fourth Gospel’s pervasive vertical dualism (e.g., 3:13; 6:31; cf. 3:31; 8:23), comes “from heaven” (1:32).<sup>284</sup> While modern readers may think of the dove as a symbol of peace<sup>285</sup> and doves were known for timorousness (Sophocles *Ajax* 139–140; Athenaeus *Deipn.* 11.490d; cf. Homer *Il.* 21.493), weakness (Homer *Od.* 20.243), innocence or gullibility (Phaedrus 1.31), or inconspicuousness (Homer *Il.* 5.778), doves could also be said to stir some nations to war.<sup>286</sup> John elsewhere associates doves with sacrifice (John 2:14), but nothing supports the use of that image here.<sup>287</sup> Pagan religious associations<sup>288</sup> are likewise very unlikely in the Gospels’ social context.

In early Jewish texts, a dove was most often used as a symbol of Israel,<sup>289</sup> and only rarely for the heavenly voice<sup>290</sup> or the Holy Spirit;<sup>291</sup> but though some view Israel as the

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<sup>281</sup>Theon *Progymn.* 5.52–56. This embarrassment is often held as one guarantee of its historicity; see Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 11; Jeremias, *Theology*, 45; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2:100–5; Stanton, *Gospel Truth*, 164–66; pace Bultmann, *Tradition*, 251.

<sup>282</sup>Satterthwaite, “Acts,” 345, cites in this respect Lucian *Hist.* 56–57; Cicero *De or.* 3.27.104–105; 3.53.202–203; Quintilian 8.4; Longinus *Subl.* 11–12; cf. Lucian *Hist.* 6.

<sup>283</sup>Often pointed out; e.g., Burkitt, *History*, 225–26; Smith, *John* (1999), 70.

<sup>284</sup>Ancient cosmologies differed considerably from our own; many Greeks held the upper heavens to be purer than lower regions (e.g., Plato *Phaedrus* 248AB; Diogenes Laertius 8.1.27, 31; Philo *Flight* 62; cf. Aristotle *Heav.* 1.2, 268b11–269a19), Romans located gods there (Ovid *Metam.* 1.168–176), and Jewish apocalypses report God’s throne there (2 *En.* 20:1–3; 3 *En.* 1:2; *T. Levi* 2–3; *b. Hag.* 12b–13a; Rev 4:2–5; see esp. Lincoln, *Paradise*).

<sup>285</sup>For their function in Neo-Assyrian treaty making, see Begg, “Doves”; for peace and harmlessness, see, e.g., Augustine *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 6.12.2.

<sup>286</sup>Πελεκῆς in Aelian 11.27, perhaps referring to the oracle at Dodona (cf. Dodona’s doves in Herodotus *Hist.* 2.57). A dove functions as a decoy in Aelian 13.17; birds often functioned as omens (e.g., Homer *Il.* 10.274–275). Doves could also function as carriers (Homer *Od.* 12.62–63).

<sup>287</sup>Doves often appear with grapes in Jewish art (Goodenough, *Symbols*, 1:156–57), but an implicit link with 15:1 on this basis would be extremely improbable.

<sup>288</sup>The dove could represent Aphrodite (Plutarch *Isis, Mor.* 379D; Ovid *Metam.* 13.673–674; Statius *Thebaid* 5.58, 63; Helen or her daughters in Lycophron *Alex.* 86–87, 103; for Athene disguising herself as a bird, see Homer *Od.* 3.371–372; 22.239–240), was sacred in some Syrian religion (Lucian *Syr. d.* 54, in Grant, *Religions*, 119), and in artwork often symbolized the realm of a goddess, which was transferred to wisdom and hence to the Spirit in later Christian art (Schroer, “Geist”). For a survey of uses in pagan art, see Goodenough, *Symbols*, 8:27–37; for Christian material, 8:37–41, and other Jewish material, 8:41–46.

<sup>289</sup>4 *Ezra* 5:26; *L.A.B.* 39:5 (23:7); *b. Šabb.* 49a, 130a; *Exod. Rab.* 20:6; *Song Rab.* 2:14, §§1–2. Johnston, *Parables*, 595, cites *Mek. Beš.* 3:86ff.; 7:27ff. but notes that it is not frequent enough to constitute a standard metaphor. Although Augustine applied it to the Spirit (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 6.13.1), he noted some applied it to the church (6.11.2).

<sup>290</sup>*B. Ber.* 3a; cf. Abrahams, *Studies*, 1:47. One may compare the prophetic doves of Dodona (alluded to in *Sib. Or.* 1.242–252; the term is different from here).

<sup>291</sup>Abrahams, *Studies*, 1:48–49 (followed by Barrett, *Spirit*, 38; cf. Taylor, *Mark*, 160–61), cites only *Gen. Rab.* 2 and *Yal. Gen.* 1:2 (where the interpretation seems dominated more by exegetical

background for the Synoptic dove,<sup>292</sup> all sorts of images were understood as symbols for Israel, there is no reason to think of *Israel* symbolically descending on Jesus at his baptism, and in this context Jesus is not a representative of Israel (Nathanael is), but rather of Jacob's ladder that is Israel's way to God above.<sup>293</sup> A link with Noah's dove, a harbinger of new life, is more likely,<sup>294</sup> and *Sib. Or.* 1.242–252 uses the term πέλεια (in its Ionic form πεληιάς) for this dove, perhaps tying it to the prophetic doves of Dodona. Granted, the dove could have been used simply because some flying creature was necessary, and this was thought more appropriate than any of the possible alternatives; but on the whole, a biblical allusion would make good sense, and in such a case an allusion to Noah's dove as a harbinger of the new creation is most likely. Whatever its function in earlier tradition, the dove is probably retained as a mark of the Spirit here because it had already been established as such in the tradition.

What is most significant is that the Spirit *remains* on Jesus, a term used elsewhere in the Gospel for mutual indwelling and continuous habitation (e.g., 14:23).<sup>295</sup> Some have contrasted this experience with the mere temporary inspiration of the Spirit Jewish writers thought accompanied typical Israelite prophets,<sup>296</sup> though Tannaitic texts speak of the Spirit “resting” on individual persons<sup>297</sup> or on Israel<sup>298</sup> and some biblical texts suggest that the Spirit did abide with particular persons.<sup>299</sup> At the least, as Hill points out with regard to the less explicit Synoptic baptismal pericope, Jesus' reception of the Spirit confirms “the ending of the era of the quenched Spirit . . . the prophetic Spirit has again been given.”<sup>300</sup> The LXX translators usually depicted the Spirit's charismatic activity with the

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principles than by standard tradition); Lachs, *Commentary*, 47, adds *b. Hag.* 15a (or the Spirit as an eagle in *t. Hag.* 2:5). A link with the Spirit naturally became common in early post-Synoptic Christian tradition, however (*Odes Sol.* 24:1; 28:1; and the interpolation in *T. Levi* 18). The Hebrew Bible does sometimes portray God as a bird (e.g., Ps 91:3–4).

<sup>292</sup> E.g., Lane, *Mark*, 57.

<sup>293</sup> Against the arguments of Odeberg, *Gospel*, 33–36; Lightfoot, *Gospel*, 104; Dahl, “History,” 136, which effectively assume that the Johannine community would more readily read the Jacob narrative through late rabbinic tradition on the Hebrew than through the LXX.

<sup>294</sup> Gen 8:8–12; cf. *4 Bar.* 7:8 (which develops from Gen 8 the image of messenger-birds); Augustine *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 6.19.2–4; pace Burge, *Community*, 57. Johnston, *Spirit-Paraclete*, 20, suggests a combination of Gen 8:8–9 and Isa 11:1–2. Writing on Mark 1:10, Garnet, “Baptism,” connects the dove with Noah, Noah with Enoch, and Enoch with the Son of Man; but this scheme of associations is too complex, and the last two links are particularly tenuous. In early Christian literature, see 1 Pet 3:20–21; cf. 2 Pet 3:6; Matt 24:38. For a connection with Gen 1:2 and its eschatological interpretation in the DSS, see Allison, “Baptism.”

<sup>295</sup> Turner, *Spirit*, 59 n. 5, is surely right that the Baptist would not have seen the Spirit rest “permanently” on Jesus; but in view of Johannine usage elsewhere (3:36; 19:31), the Gospel audience would probably understand the term this way.

<sup>296</sup> Lampe, *Seal*, 35. Cf. the phrase “The Spirit came upon so-and-so” in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Num 11:25–26; 24:2; Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:13; 19:20, 23); cf. also, e.g., Josephus *Ant.* 6.166; *L.A.B.* 28:6.

<sup>297</sup> In *Mek. Pisha* 1:154–155 (Lauterbach, 1:14), the Spirit of the Lord rested on the prophets, and “rest” could function as a designation for the Spirit of prophecy. In *t. Pisha* 2:15 the Spirit of prophecy “rested” on Rahab.

<sup>298</sup> In *Mek. Beš.* 3:82–83; cf. *Šir.* 7.17–18 [Lauterbach, 2:55]), the Holy Spirit rested on Israel when they came out of Egypt.

<sup>299</sup> E.g., Num 27:18; Deut 34:9 (Joshua); 1 Pet 1:11. Still the Spirit could “rest” on one temporarily (Num 11:26).

<sup>300</sup> Hill, *Prophecy*, 49.

aorist tense,<sup>301</sup> a tense which contrasts strikingly with John’s usage here. (I mention more specific interpretations only in passing. The adoptionist interpretation of 1:32<sup>302</sup> has little to commend it contextually or culturally, failing completely to reckon with Johannine Christology in general. Burge and others who accept a messianic interpretation<sup>303</sup> would be closer to the mark, as would perhaps someone stressing a parallel with the Philonic Moses.<sup>304</sup> The Spirit remaining on Jesus might also contrast with the glory of Moses which faded; cf. 1:17–18; 2 Cor 3:11.)

Thus Jesus and His followers are sealed with a divine mark that their opponents did not even claim, and this can encourage John’s audience in their conflict with their accusers: as John could recognize Jesus by his possession of the Spirit, so could the Christians be recognized as God’s anointed by their possession of the Spirit<sup>305</sup> (even if their spiritually insensitive opponents could not recognize this, 3:8).

#### 4. The Spirit-Baptizer (1:33)

The central point here is that not merely human agents like John but God’s own *Spirit* testifies to Jesus’ identity. The Fourth Gospel often speaks of God’s Spirit, but two of the three uses of the particular title “Holy Spirit” frame the Gospel’s pneumatology (1:33; 20:22)—this passage introducing the Spirit as one who descends to the world on account of Jesus, the middle one emphasizing the continuity between Jesus’ revelation and that of the Spirit (14:26), and the final one emphasizing Jesus’ sending of the Spirit (20:22).

Matthew and Luke both follow a longer form of the Baptist’s saying in a fuller context which apparently speaks of a judgment baptism in fire as well as in the Spirit (cf. also Luke 12:49–50 in light of Mark 10:38–39).<sup>306</sup> The contextual image of a harvest and threshing floor in that Q tradition often functioned in the Hebrew Bible as judgment and/or end-time imagery.<sup>307</sup> Fire also symbolized eschatological judgment in this context (Matt 3:10, 12; Luke 3:9, 17) as in the Hebrew Bible,<sup>308</sup> Jewish tradition also developed a doctrine of

<sup>301</sup>Stronstad, *Theology*, 20. The Spirit nowhere appears with μένω in the LXX, although καταβαίνω appears in Num 11:17, 25; Judg 14:19. Dowd, “Theology,” 333, contrasts the remaining with the tabernacle (Exod 33:9).

<sup>302</sup>E.g., Colwell and Titus, *Spirit*; Cerinthus in Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.26.1; Hippolytus *Haer.* 10.17. Even in Mark, this reading is open to challenge. Cf. Morton Smith’s view that Jesus’ Spirit reception was originally a deification story like some in magical papyri (Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 165); this fails to reckon with the Palestinian Jewish origin of the story (see above) and the retention of its traditional Jewish meaning as late in the history of tradition as Mark 1:9–11.

<sup>303</sup>Burge, *Community*, 55, 71–110 (esp. 81–87); Lampe, *Seal*, 35; Turner, *Spirit*, 59. They appeal especially to Isa 11:2 (which the rabbis took messianically; Bonsirven, *Judaism*, 218); Jeremias, *Theology*, 54–55, appeals to Isa 42:1 (as in Matt 12:18). For the association of the Spirit and Messiah in Qumran texts, see Chevallier, *L’Esprit*, 134–43, though he wrongly attributes this to gnostic influence on the relevant texts; he treats *T. Levi* 18:2–14; *T. Jud.* 24 but correctly warns, “Ces hymnes sont . . . une prophétie ex eventu de la venue, de Jésus-Messie accomplissant les Ecritures” (125–33).

<sup>304</sup>Cf. in Isaacs, *Spirit*, 47, citing Philo *Flight* 132; *Moses* 1.175 for Moses being the Spirit’s “recipient *par excellence*” and *Giants* 47 for the Spirit abiding with him longer than with others.

<sup>305</sup>Whitacre, *Polemic*, 98; see the thesis of Keener, “Pneumatology,” *passim*.

<sup>306</sup>See, e.g., Mattill, *Last Things*, 4; Robinson, *Studies*, 161; Dunn, *Baptism*, 42; cf. Minear, *Kingdom*, 135. Tannehill, *Sword*, 145; idem, *Luke*, 1:251, connects with the context of division. For authenticity, see Hill, *Prophecy*, 67.

<sup>307</sup>Ps 1:4; Hos 13:3; Isa 17:13; cf. Exod 15:7; Jer 4:11–13; 13:24; 15:7; Isa 29:5; 33:11; 41:15–16; Zeph 2:2. Cf. Matt 9:38; 13:39; 21:34. Cf. the “threshing-floor” in *4 Ezra* 4:30–32.

<sup>308</sup>Isa 26:11; 66:15–16, 24; cf. 2 Thess 1:6–7 and many other early Christian sources; cf. Ps 97:3; Nah 1:6; Zeph 1:18 (which readers could have taken eschatologically, although historic judgments

an eternal<sup>309</sup> or temporary<sup>310</sup> hell. Like Mark, the Fourth Gospel omits the mention of fire baptism along with the context in Q that makes it clear that it represents eschatological wrath.<sup>311</sup>

Given the Baptist's emphasis on repentance and the Essene association of the Spirit with eschatological purification,<sup>312</sup> we need not doubt that he proclaimed such an eschatological baptism.<sup>313</sup> Given the comparison between outpoured water and the Spirit in the biblical prophets (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:25–27; 39:29; Joel 2:28–29; Zech 12:10), the image of a Spirit baptism which supercedes a mere water baptism is natural (see esp. comment on the background of John 3:5 in Ezekiel).

Scholars have more often disputed whether the Gospels accurately reflect the original meaning of John's prophecy. Following the Q form, some scholars have suggested that the Baptist's "holy spirit" may extend the image of wind separating the wheat from the chaff, hence applying to a fiery wind that would purge Israel of its sinners;<sup>314</sup> but beyond the possibility that a wordplay may lie behind the phrase, three reasons make it improbable that "spirit" does not refer to God's Spirit: the phrase "holy spirit" is much more widely established in early Judaism with reference to the Spirit of God; both fire and wind can represent the purifying spirit of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible; and all streams of tradition in which the saying is extant include the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33), although three of the four gospels can speak of "God's Spirit" in the context (Mark 1:10; Matt 3:16; John 1:32).<sup>315</sup> Contrasted with fiery judgment in Q (Matt

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stood in the foreground); or for noneschatological judgment, e.g., Num 11:1; Jer 4:4; 15:14; 17:4; 21:12; Ezek 21:31; 22:20–21. The Semitic expression "wrath burned" is common in the Hebrew Bible, and the cognate appears, e.g., in the Moabite Mesha inscription (ANET 320–21).

<sup>309</sup>Chaff did not burn eternally (Ladd, *Theology*, 37, cites Isa 1:31; 66:24; Jer 7:20); that Q's fire is unquenchable suggests a particular Jewish image of judgment as eternal (the worst sinners in 4 Macc 9:9; 12:12; *t. Sanh.* 13:5; probably 1 *En.* 108:5–6; *L.A.B.* 38:4; *Ascen. Isa.* 1:2; 3 *En.* 44:3; *p. Hag.* 2:2, §5; *Sanh.* 6:6, §2; Plutarch *D.V.* 31, *Mor.* 567DE). There was no unanimous Jewish view; see the probably first-century dispute in <sup>2</sup>*Abot R. Nat.* 41 A; cf. also 36 A. Matthew's view is more obviously Jewish than Luke's (cf. Milikowsky, "Gehenna"; Goulder, *Matthew*, 63), though Luke's Hellenistic contextualization does not abandon future eschatology (Acts 17:31–32; 23:6; 24:15; contrast to some extent, e.g., Josephus *Ant.* 18.14, 18; *War* 2.163; Philo *Sacrifices* 5, 8).

<sup>310</sup>In the most common rabbinic view, most sinners endure it temporarily till destruction (cf. IQS 4.13–14; *Gen. Rab.* 6:6; most sinners in *t. Sanh.* 13:4; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 10:4; *Pesiq. Rab.* 11:5) or release (*Num. Rab.* 18:20; other texts are unclear, e.g., *Sir* 7:16; *Sipre Num.* 40.1.9; *Sipre Deut.* 311.3.1; 357.6.7; <sup>2</sup>*Abot R. Nat.* 16 A; 32, §69 B; 37, §95 B). Many Jewish storytellers conflated Gehenna with the Greek Tartarus (e.g., *Sib. Or.* 1.10, 101–103, 119; 4.186; 5.178; 11.138; cf. *Gk. Apoc. Ezra* 4:22; *b. Git.* 56b–57a; *p. Hag.* 2:2, §5; *Sanh.* 6:6, §2; *Apoc. Pet.* 5–12; on the relationship between Jewish and Greek concepts, cf. also Serrano, "Sheol").

<sup>311</sup>Although God's "Spirit" means more than "purifying wind" here, perhaps John's baptism partly symbolized cleansing by the spirit of judgment and burning (Isa 4:4; Mal 3:2) that would deliver from eschatological fire (so Dunn, "Spirit," 695); Barnard, "Matt. III," 107, suggests the Jewish and Iranian image of a fiery stream.

<sup>312</sup>Keener, "Pneumatology," 65–69.

<sup>313</sup>See Kraeling, *John*, 58–59, against detractors citing the obscure ignorance of Baptist disciples in Acts 19:2. That they were unaware of any Holy Spirit is unlikely, given the prevalence of teachings about the Holy Spirit in early Judaism (with or without the Baptist).

<sup>314</sup>Flowers, "Pneumati"; Manson, *Sayings*, 41 (citing Acts 19:1–6 against Spirit); cf. Kraeling, *John*, 61–63; Bruce, "Matthew," 84; for the wind in winnowing, e.g., Ps 1:4; Isa 17:13; 29:5; 41:15–16; Hos 13:3; *Lev. Rab.* 28:2; *Eccl. Rab.* 5:15, §1.

<sup>315</sup>See Bruce, "Spirit," 50.

3:11; Luke 3:16), “holy spirit” may there refer to the purificatory aspect of the Spirit in early Judaism stressed in Essene circles.<sup>316</sup>

In Mark, Jesus is anointed with the Spirit at baptism, and thereby qualified to bestow the Spirit on others who partake of his messianic baptism into the new era.<sup>317</sup> While water and Spirit baptism are not synonymous, they are closely connected;<sup>318</sup> yet Mark emphasizes not water baptism but Spirit baptism,<sup>319</sup> and the Spirit (quite rare in Mark) provides unity to three tight pericopes in his introduction (1:8, 10, 12).<sup>320</sup> In contrast to John’s completed baptism,<sup>321</sup> Jesus’ baptism inaugurates a new age;<sup>322</sup> as in many sectors of ancient Judaism, the return of the *ruah haqodes*, the Spirit of holiness, was an eschatological phenomenon.<sup>323</sup> Although the Synoptics otherwise emphasize the prophetic element of the Spirit in Judaism,<sup>324</sup> the Baptist probably emphasized the Spirit of purification.<sup>325</sup>

But no mere mortal could pour out the Spirit; this was the gift of God alone (e.g., Isa 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28–29) (just as no mere mortal would baptize in fire, i.e., judge the wicked). Again the Baptist’s “Christology” provides a suitable source for the Gospels, especially the Fourth Gospel, to develop.<sup>326</sup> The Fourth Gospel alone sustains the Baptist’s contrast between water and Spirit baptism in succeeding chapters (cf. comment on 2:6; 3:5; etc.). The writer also indicates here that the Spirit, who will testify to Jesus in the days of his own audience (14:26; 16:13–15), testified to Jesus for John the Baptist, a prototypical witness, in 1:33.<sup>327</sup>

##### 5. God’s Son or Chosen One (1:34)

The Baptist’s acclamation of Jesus based on the Spirit’s descent probably represents the testimony of the heavenly voice at Jesus’ baptism in the Synoptics. No one had seen God (1:18), but beholding the Spirit’s testimony to God in flesh, John could testify to what he had seen. Whichever reading one takes concerning his testimony—“chosen one”<sup>328</sup> on

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<sup>316</sup>Aune, *Prophecy*, 132, citing 1QS 4:20–21; for further documentation, see Keener, “Pneumatology,” 65–69.

<sup>317</sup>Cf. Robinson, *Problem*, 74. For the essential identity between John’s and Christian baptism, cf. Bultmann, *Theology*, 1:39.

<sup>318</sup>On the difference, e.g., Meier, *Matthew*, 25; Parratt, “Spirit”; on their similarity (Christian baptism and Spirit baptism; John’s may function paradigmatically, but this is not in view here) cf. Beasley-Murray, “Spirit”; idem, *Baptism*, 275–78; Richardson, *Theology*, 357.

<sup>319</sup>See Dunn, *Baptism*, 33–34.

<sup>320</sup>Robinson, *Problem*, 76–77.

<sup>321</sup>The aorist here might contrast with Jesus’ eschatological baptism; cf. Botha, “*Ebaptisa*,” who describes it as a “timeless aorist.”

<sup>322</sup>Dunn, *Baptism*, 24; cf. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 290; White, *Initiation*, 87; Robinson, *Problem*, 9; Hooker, *Message*, 11; Robinson, *Studies*, 169.

<sup>323</sup>See more fully Keener, “Pneumatology,” 77–84; less eschatological segments of early Judaism stressed this less, but biblical traditions were clear (e.g., Isa 44:3; 59:21; Ezek 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–29).

<sup>324</sup>On the prophetic Spirit, see Keener, “Pneumatology,” 69–77.

<sup>325</sup>On the Spirit of purification in Judaism, see *ibid.*, 65–69.

<sup>326</sup>In Matthew, cf., e.g., Meier, *Matthew*, 25.

<sup>327</sup>Whitacre, *Polemic*, 98.

<sup>328</sup>Jeremiah in 4 Bar. 3:5; apparently David in a manuscript of Ps 152:4 (but omitted in other Syriac MSS); Israel in Syriac Ps 155:21 (perhaps also 1 En. 39:7); the righteous in T. Job 4:11/9. Cf., however, the “Chosen” or “Elect” who judges on the throne in Similitudes of Enoch (e.g., 1 En. 39:6; 45:3, 4; 49:2; 51:3, 5; 52:6, 9; 61:5); 4Q534 1.10 applies it to some eschatological leader.

the grounds that later scribes copied “son” from the Synoptics,<sup>329</sup> or “son” on somewhat better textual attestation and usual Johannine usage<sup>330</sup>—“son” probably is the primary language in the tradition on which the Fourth Gospel draws.<sup>331</sup> Although some have argued that an original ambiguous παῖς underlies Mark’s υἱός, and referred to the servant rather than to the “Son,”<sup>332</sup> a mistranslation from Greek to Greek is much less likely than a mistranslation from Aramaic to Greek, and it is unlikely that Mark would deliberately tone down ambiguous Servant language fitting his theme of suffering.<sup>333</sup>

The source of the language in the Jesus tradition is probably the OT itself. Some have doubted that Ps 2:7 is used in Mark 1:11 because of a different word order in the LXX,<sup>334</sup> perhaps not an insignificant argument given the few words in the citation. Given the possibility that υἱός was placed later to keep ὁ ἀγαπητός with ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα (also not from Ps 2:7), however, and the abundant use of the psalm in other strands of early Christian tradition known to us (e.g., Acts 13:32–33<sup>335</sup> and Heb 1:5),<sup>336</sup> Ps 2:7 is probably in the background here.<sup>337</sup> Because this psalm was originally an enthronement psalm,<sup>338</sup> typically employed in the NT for Jesus’ messianic exaltation after the resurrection (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; cf. Mark 9:7),<sup>339</sup> at least a proleptic enthronement appears here, validated by no less an authority than God himself.<sup>340</sup>

Many have also found echoes of Isa 42:1 in Mark,<sup>341</sup> but the wording is completely different;<sup>342</sup> “son,” “beloved,” and “pleasing” were all used of Israel in other contexts besides

<sup>329</sup> E.g., Brown, *John*, 1:55; Ladd, *Theology*, 44. Ross, “Titles,” 281, prefers “chosen” because John favors variety in his christological terms in the first chapter.

<sup>330</sup> Metzger, *Commentary*, 200. Michaels notes (*John*, 18) that John did not alter “holy one” to son in 6:69 (compare Matt 16:16 with Mark 8:29).

<sup>331</sup> Contrast Cullmann, *Christology*, 72–73, who contends that only John preserves this original form of the declaration, which he derives from Isa 42:1 (which does fit the context of Spirit bestowal; see below).

<sup>332</sup> The arguments for this position are summarized in Marshall, “Son or Servant,” 327; Marshall argues (pp. 327–32) that υἱός is original.

<sup>333</sup> One may note, e.g., the probable use of Isa 53 in Mark 10:45 (as advocated above; Moulder, “Background,” regards Luke 22:27 as Jesus’ most explicit reference to himself as Servant).

<sup>334</sup> Cranfield, “Baptism,” 61.

<sup>335</sup> On Acts 13:32–33 (interpreting the psalm concerning Jesus’ resurrection/enthronement), cf. Dahl, “Abraham,” 148; Goulder, *Acts*, 53; Hengel, *Son*, 23. Cf. *Midr. Pss.* 2, §9 (messianic, after the woes).

<sup>336</sup> See, e.g., Longenecker, *Exegesis*, 177. The emphasis of Lindars, *Apologetic*, 211, on the metaphysical as over against the resurrection interpretation of Heb 1:5, appears to me mistaken. Ps 2:7–8 and 110:1 are also linked in *1 Clem.* 36.3–5 (*ANF* 1:15), but Clement is probably dependent on Hebrews here, citing Heb 1:3–4 and also Ps 104:4 (Heb 1:7).

<sup>337</sup> E.g., Marshall, “Son or Servant,” 332–33; but this is also the view of nearly all the commentators below.

<sup>338</sup> See Bright, *History*, 225–26; Harrelson, *Cult*, 86–87; cf. De Vaux, *Israel*, 109, for comparison with ancient coronations. Later Judaism generally regarded the psalm as specifically messianic (e.g., *b. Sukkah* 52a; Longenecker, *Christology*, 113).

<sup>339</sup> See Kim, “Mark,” 92.

<sup>340</sup> Kingsbury, *Christology*, 66.

<sup>341</sup> Marshall, “Son or Servant,” 335; Jeremias, *Theology*, 53–54; Kingsbury, *Christology*, 40, 65; Bruce, *History*, 168; Hurtado, *Mark*, 6; Schweizer, *Matthew*, 37; Robinson, *Studies*, 162; Taylor, *Mark*, 162 (with Isa 44:2); Burge, *Community*, 61. We do not here contest the possibility of influence by the language (“echoes”; Robinson, Taylor), but doubt that the phrasing here is intended to evoke the picture of the Servant (in contrast to Matthew).

<sup>342</sup> Hooker, *Servant*, 72; cf. Anderson, *Mark*, 79–80.

Isa 42:1.<sup>343</sup> The solution that LXX Isaiah’s παῖς can mean “son” as well as “servant”<sup>344</sup> is again weakened by Mark’s use of “son,” followed by the other Synoptics (who had some Q material surrounding Jesus’ baptism); the Spirit’s conferral in Isa 42<sup>345</sup> also fails to make the case: other passages in Isaiah (44:3, 48:16; 59:21; 61:1) also mention the Spirit’s conferral, and the Spirit’s conferral was to be expected in enthronements. Probably the strongest argument that can be offered is the similarity of the citation of Isa 42 in Matt 12:18, which could suggest that the passage circulated in this form in early Christian circles;<sup>346</sup> but that text may just suggest that Matthew (rather than Mark and prior tradition) interpreted the heavenly voice in these terms. Matthew shapes his texts to fit his narrative, as well as the reverse;<sup>347</sup> while he has changed Q’s “finger” to “Spirit” in 12:28,<sup>348</sup> he has probably purposely conformed the Isaiah quotation to the baptism, suggesting a link between the two in Matthew that need not be found in Mark.

Another text, however, has received some (though less) attention in this connection, namely Gen 22:2.<sup>349</sup> The differences between this text and the Markan acclamation are considerably less pronounced. Although ἀγαπητός could conceivably reflect a variant of ἐκλεκτός (cf. Luke 9:35; other manuscripts of John 1:34),<sup>350</sup> in the LXX it sometimes is used to translate *yahid* (an *only* son), including in Gen 22,<sup>351</sup> where it adds to the pathos of God’s call to a father to sacrifice His son; for Mark, in which Jesus’ Sonship is defined in terms of the cross (14:36; 15:39), this makes good sense. That the Fourth Gospel would draw on such a tradition also makes sense, given the prevalence of the “only, that is, beloved” son motif of 1:14, 18.

## New Disciples (1:35–42)

The Baptist’s general testimony to the reader (1:29–34) gives way to a specific testimony to his disciples (1:35–36), who trust his witness (contrast 1:19–28) and experience Jesus for themselves (1:37–39; cf. 3:25–30). These disciples in turn become witnesses themselves (1:40–42). John weaves his sources into a theology of witness here, and emphasizes that even those who tentatively accept another’s witness must also experience Jesus for themselves to be fully convinced (1:39, 46). On 1:36, see comment on 1:29.

### 1. Historical Plausibility

In contrast to the previous paragraphs of the Fourth Gospel, we lack corroboration from the Synoptic accounts here (a matter which seems not to trouble the writer, in whose day perhaps numerous other sources besides the Synoptics and his own eyewitness

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<sup>343</sup> Hooker, *Servant*, 72–73.

<sup>344</sup> Schweizer, *Matthew*, 38.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–38.

<sup>347</sup> Cf., e.g., Prabhu, *Quotations*.

<sup>348</sup> Pace Rodd, “Spirit.” Matthew changes the more Semitic “finger” to fit his own context, perhaps as midrash on Isa 42 just cited; Luke includes the Spirit whenever he can, suggesting it was there missing from his source (cf. also Schweizer, *Matthew*, 287; Gundry, *Matthew*, 235).

<sup>349</sup> Best, *Mark*, 81. Others admit it as probable (e.g., Marshall, “Son or Servant,” 335; Kingsbury, *Christology*, 65) or find echoes (Taylor, *Mark*, 162).

<sup>350</sup> Cf. Marshall, “Son or Servant,” 328.

<sup>351</sup> Dodd, *Parables*, 130 n. 1; Ladd, *Theology*, 164; Schweizer, *Mark*, 41.

traditions were extant; cf. already Luke 1:1).<sup>352</sup> Although the Fourth Gospel is well aware of the historical tradition of the Twelve (6:71),<sup>353</sup> he shows no interest in recounting the occasion of their call (Mark 3:13–19; Matt 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16) or the Synoptic call stories of the fishermen (Mark 1:16–20; Matt 4:18–22; Luke 5:1–11; although the writer is well aware that some are fishermen and may know the Lukan tradition—John 21:3–6). The readiness of those disciples to abandon their livelihoods on the occasion depicted in Markan tradition (or to lend Jesus use of their boat in Luke) may actually make more sense historically if they had encountered Jesus on a prior occasion, as this narrative in John would suggest.<sup>354</sup>

Dodd suggests that the number of disciples here (five in 1:35–51) reflects a tradition of five initial disciples mentioned together in the Synoptics, but contends that the Fourth Gospel's tradition is independent (hence only Simon and Andrew overlap).<sup>355</sup> But this proposal concerning historical tradition is much less likely than the more readily documented proposals for which we have argued. First, neither John nor the Synoptics makes any special point of the number, and the *baraita* Dodd cites from *b. Sanh.* 44 is too fanciful—constructed on the basis of typical rabbinic wordplays—to claim any historical merit. John probably simply produces sufficient examples to illustrate his point about witness, and gives us no indication that he is counting. The most likely reason that John shares five disciples with the rabbinic passage is coincidence, since other ways of counting disciples in the Fourth Gospel could provide different numbers. Some other rabbis had five disciples,<sup>356</sup> and for John a smaller sample could represent the whole (as when Joseph presents five of his brothers, though Jacob had twelve sons).<sup>357</sup> The coincidence is probably, as Dodd concedes possible at the outset, “fortuitous.”<sup>358</sup>

In contrast to the Synoptic accounts of the call of the fishermen, Jesus is not drawing crowds and teaching publicly when he meets Andrew or Simon.<sup>359</sup> The Baptist points the first disciples to Jesus, although, as in the Synoptics, Jesus also calls his own (1:43).<sup>360</sup> Andrew recognizes the significance of the Baptist's witness (1:26–27, 29–36) immediately, confessing Jesus as the Christ (1:41); perhaps in deference to the tradition emphasized in Mark

<sup>352</sup> Matthew and Luke seem to have followed the standard biographical procedure of following one primary (Mark) and another secondary source (presumably Q) before weaving in material around it, whereas John goes his own way. See introduction.

<sup>353</sup> An almost certainly historical tradition; see Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 98–101. Variations in the lists of names support this, indicating that the number existed before the lists were standardized (Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 101). The names may have varied because people often had multiple names (Acts 1:23; *CIJ* 1:24, §30; 1:279, §279; 2:111, §879; *CPJ* 2:140, 143, 146–147, §§261, 269–270, 274–276; 2:151, 153–154, 156, §§298, 304, 311, 321; 3:9, §453; see Leon, *Jews*, 107, 111–12); cf. also OT examples, which, regardless of their origins, were by the early Christian period regarded as from one source (e.g., Horeb as Sinai, Exod 3:1; 19:11; 24:13; Jethro as Reuel, Exod 2:18; 4:18; 18:1–12; Num 10:29). On nicknames, see below; nor is twelve an exorbitant number for disciples (e.g., Diogenes Laertius 8.1.39).

<sup>354</sup> Blomberg, *Reliability*, 80.

<sup>355</sup> Dodd, *Tradition*, 303–4; cf. the slightly different parallel between John and the five disciples of *b. Sanh.* 43a also in Bammel, “Name.”

<sup>356</sup> E.g., Johanan ben Zakkai in *m. ʿAbot* 2:8.

<sup>357</sup> E.g., Gen 47:2. Johannine tradition also knows twelve disciples (John 6:70–71).

<sup>358</sup> Dodd, *Tradition*, 304.

<sup>359</sup> Whitacre, *Polemic*, 83, emphasizes the Johannine Jesus' “almost mysterious silence.”

<sup>360</sup> Talbert, *John*, 83–84, finds parallels for both forms of drawing disciples—another's witness and Jesus' special character (1:36–39, 40–42, 45–49; Epictetus *Diatr.* 3.23.27) and calling disciples (Plat. *Apol.* 19E; Diogenes Laertius 2.48).

and those who followed him, Peter's own conviction and confession appear only later (6:69), and all announcements of Jesus' identity are private among friends (1:41–42, 45–46).

At the most, then, one may investigate the plausibility of the narrative. Would the Baptist have actually referred disciples to Jesus (1:36)? Generally disciples were to follow their own rabbis only.<sup>361</sup> Yet biographers report exceptional occasions in which teachers who became impressed with other teachers would refer their students to them, as when Antisthenes reportedly recommended that his own disciples become with him fellow disciples of Socrates.<sup>362</sup> Other stories of referrals are also told; when Zeno sought a teacher like Xenophon's Socrates, a bookseller pointed out Crates and said, "Follow that man," and Zeno became his disciple.<sup>363</sup> If the Baptist recognized Jesus as the object of his witness about the mightier one, as the Synoptics also attest, it is inherently likely that he would defer to Jesus.

For Andrew being one of the Baptist's disciples, we have no other evidence, and Andrew's commitment to his family's fishing cooperative with Zebedee's family (Mark 1:20; Luke 5:10)<sup>364</sup> would not favor the idea that he was a full-time follower of the Baptist. Since one could follow a teacher seasonally (see comment on 1:40–42), perhaps the Baptist could also accept "disciples" who only came and listened to him during the daytime when he was in the area. Whereas the Perean Bethany (1:28) placed the Baptist within range of Judean questioners a few days earlier (1:19), the story world (which probably presupposes some readers familiar with Palestinian topography) may presuppose that he is now nearer the lake of Galilee, for whether the narrative supposes that Jesus still resided in Nazareth (1:45–46; cf. Matt 4:13) or had already settled in Capernaum (2:12; cf. the language of Luke 4:16), his disciples could hardly have followed Jesus home from a Perean Bethany in a single day (1:39).

Various details of the narrative cohere with historical data from Jewish Palestine, but these data were also available to the implied audience. The narrative thus makes sense either as history or as the writer's creation from whole cloth; like most of the Fourth Gospel, it cannot be verified or falsified to a high degree of probability. Like the rest of the Fourth Gospel's narratives, however, we suspect that it rests on some historical tradition, because the degree of convergence where our other Gospel accounts independently corroborate John indicate that he writes within the general biographical genre and shift the burden of proof to those inclined to read the narrative novelistically.

## 2. *Following Jesus Home (1:37–39)*

Although the Baptist's disciples who "followed" Jesus initially did so literally (1:37; cf. 11:31; 20:6), the writer's usage elsewhere infuses the narrative with the term's deeper nuances (1:43; cf. 8:12; 10:4; 21:22);<sup>365</sup> their initial following represents "the precursor of real

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<sup>361</sup> Goodman, *State*, 78–79, citing R. Judah in *m. Erub.* 3:5.

<sup>362</sup> Diogenes Laertius 6.1.2.

<sup>363</sup> Diogenes Laertius 7.1.3. In less permanent fashion, Socrates allegedly sent a student to hear another's lecture, then sent him back with more questions (Xenophon *Mem.* 3.1.1–3, 11). Greek adult students were free to move from one teacher to another (Cicero *Brutus* 91.316) or even attend different lectures on the same days (Eunapius *Lives* 469).

<sup>364</sup> Other Palestinian fishing cooperatives existed; see Stambaugh and Balch, *Environment*, 69; Applebaum, "Life," 685. Though fishermen were not rich landowners, they "were among the more economically mobile" members of ancient society (Freyne, *Galilee*, 241), working a critical industry around the lake of Galilee (see Safrai, "Home," 747).

<sup>365</sup> Also, e.g., Barrett, *John*, 180; Fenton, *John*, 42. "Following" also appears literally, e.g., in *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 18:5.

discipleship.”<sup>366</sup> The language of following (ἀκολουθέω, δεῦτε ὀπίσω, ὀπίσω ἔλθω) represents standard Jewish language for discipleship.<sup>367</sup> By this period, “disciple” meant not only “learner” but more specifically “adherent,” requiring one to adhere to a great teacher and his school.<sup>368</sup>

The call material in 21:19–23 may link with the call story of 1:37–39, bracketing the Gospel.<sup>369</sup> The presence of an anonymous disciple here who might match the beloved disciple in the later passage is not, however, a necessary part of the link. One disciple is later named as Andrew (1:40), whereas the other remains anonymous. Some think that the other disciple here is the “beloved disciple” (13:23; 19:26–27; 20:2–8; 21:7, 20, 24).<sup>370</sup> Granted, this would fit the Gospel’s contrasts between Peter and the beloved disciple, since the anonymous disciple here functions with Andrew as a witness to Peter (“we” in 1:41).<sup>371</sup> But the text never emphasizes the other disciple, and there is no reason to identify the latter with the “beloved disciple” who first appears explicitly in 13:23.<sup>372</sup>

## 2A. Low-Key Hospitality

Because travel was less safe after dark (robbers normally acted at night; Job 24:14; Jer 49:9; Obad 5) and because people did not normally follow others around without reason, the reader would know that Jesus understands the two disciples’ motives even if the reader were as yet unfamiliar with Jesus’ supernatural knowledge (1:42, 48).<sup>373</sup> Like God’s questions to Adam in the garden or to Cain in the field (Gen. 3:9, 11; 4:9; see 4:10), Jesus’ in 1:38 is thus rhetorical (as with the more hostile crowd in 18:4, 7). One could “seek” Jesus for more than one reason (e.g., 7:19; 18:4).

In a status-conscious culture, it was appropriate for the disciples (whether wishing to become his disciples or merely to express respect) to defer to Jesus with the title “Rabbi”<sup>374</sup> (although this did not identify Jesus with the post-70 C.E. rabbinic movement, it did imply

<sup>366</sup> Haenchen, *John*, 1:158.

<sup>367</sup> Culpepper, *School*, 222, following Fascher, “Jesus,” esp. 327–31, and citing 1 Kgs 19:21.

<sup>368</sup> Wilkins, *Discipleship*, 42; see more fully pp. 11–42; cf. *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 6:4. See also Robbins, *Jesus*, 94–99, on Greco-Roman teacher language in Philo and Josephus; for OT prophetic models of discipleship along with some other Jewish models, see esp. Wilkins, *Discipleship*, 43–91. Borg, *Vision*, 48, is too narrow when he contends that discipleship fits the “charismatic stream of Judaism”; it fits scribal tradition as well.

<sup>369</sup> Franzmann and Klinger, “Stories.”

<sup>370</sup> Charlesworth, *Disciple*, 332, based on the *inclusio* with ch. 21 (on which he follows Ruckstuhl, “Jünger,” 392) added by one who belonged to the community. Evans, *John*, 17, suggests John son of Zebedee.

<sup>371</sup> Ridderbos, *John*, 83–84 (who thinks this fits the author’s claim to be an eyewitness, probably “from the beginning,” p. 3).

<sup>372</sup> Neiryneck, “Disciple.”

<sup>373</sup> To follow unquestioningly even at another’s request was a mark of humility (*Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 18:5), hence considered appropriate for those of lower social status. For the interchange here, cf. also Whitacre, *Polemic*, 83; Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:308.

<sup>374</sup> Given Palestinian Judaism’s diversity before 70, no one supervised accreditation and anyone could have followers (Cohen, *Maccabees*, 122), no matter how much traditions in common Judaism normally dictated some standards (cf. John 7:15; Acts 4:13). “Rabbi” (“my master”) was usually simply thus a respectful title for “teacher” (Matt 23:7–8; see the pre-70 ossuary inscription in Brown, *John*, 1:74); by John’s day, however, “Rabbi” had taken on more specific nuances and may play into Johannine polemic.

their recognition that he was a teacher).<sup>375</sup> This was a title that both his disciples (1:49; 4:31; 9:2; 11:8; 20:16) and other inquirers (3:2; 6:25) would apply to him; it also applied to John the Baptist (3:26). For John it seems an honorable title, but ultimately means only “Teacher” (1:38; 20:16),<sup>376</sup> hence proves christologically incomplete. Those who would doubt John’s Jewishness because he translates “Rabbi” read the later dominance of the title into an earlier period or assume too much knowledge of Semitic languages on the part of Diaspora Jews. Interestingly, while John often interprets Semitic terms for his audience (also 1:41; 9:7), Matthew, whose Jewishness is also almost certain,<sup>377</sup> rarely translates. But Matthew usually omits Mark’s Aramaic (except for Jesus’ cry of dereliction in Mark 15:34, which he changes to Hebrew) and does not use “Messiah” (as John twice [1:41; 4:25], and alone, among the earliest extant Christian writers, does; Matthew uses “Christ”).<sup>378</sup>

It was also appropriate for them to request the favor of following him, the opportunity for which he provides by asking them the question to which the answer would be obvious: “Why are you following me?” (1:38). The sort of question is a natural one to address on encountering strangers,<sup>379</sup> and not intended to put them off.<sup>380</sup> Jesus’ specific wording (“seek”) is significant in a Johannine context (6:26; 7:34, 36; 20:15; cf. 6:24; 7:18; 18:4, 7) and, like the language of “following,”<sup>381</sup> was often used in Judaism with deity as its object (4:23),<sup>382</sup> although even in view of John’s Christology a specific connection to deity may be overreaching here. Jesus elsewhere uses a similar question to force those who sought him for wrong reasons to articulate the object of their quest (18:4); here, however, the motives are presented positively, as in 20:15.<sup>383</sup> In each case Jesus knew the answer but asked those who sought him to acknowledge this; perhaps this

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<sup>375</sup> See Davies, *Sermon*, 134; Vermes, *Jesus and Judaism*, 30. Those who deny Jesus the status of “rabbi” do not deny that he was a popular teacher (wisdom sage or prophetic teacher; Freyne, *Galilee*, 249–50; Hengel, *Leader*, 42–50, 55–56; Jeremias, *Theology*, 77), and those who allow him the title also distinguish him from other rabbis (Stein, *Method* 1–3; Cohen, *Maccabees*, 122); cf. further Borg, *Vision*, 97–124 (more briefly Meeks, *Moral World*, 117) on Jesus as a sage. Jesus’ ministry bore affinities to rabbis, eschatological preachers, Cynic-Stoic preachers, etc. (Davies, *Setting*, 422–25; against limits in, e.g., Smith, *Magician*, 22–23).

<sup>376</sup> Not exalted (as רַבִּי for Moses in *Tg. Ps.-J.* to Deut 9:19). John translates both “Rabbi” and “Rabboni” on their first appearances in the Gospel, but it may be noteworthy that these also constitute the first and last appearances of the “Rabb-” title, which occurs nine times in the Gospel, always for Jesus or (once, 3:26) for John. Tilborg, *Ephesus*, 99–100, provides information on the office of “teacher” in Ephesus, but it would have been widespread.

<sup>377</sup> See Keener, *Matthew*, 45–51.

<sup>378</sup> Some purist stylists objected to including foreign words in their works; see, e.g., [Virgil] *Catal.* 7.

<sup>379</sup> E.g., Gen 37:15; Virgil *Aen.* 7.197; 8.112–114.

<sup>380</sup> Cf. Latinus’s question of the Trojans and subsequent hospitality in Virgil *Aen.* 7.197, 202.

<sup>381</sup> Jewish texts especially speak of “following after” God (rather than one’s own desires); see Helfmeyer, “Gott.”

<sup>382</sup> See, e.g., Wis 1:1; *Jub.* 1:15; 21:2; Matt 6:33; in the DSS, e.g., 1QS 1.1–2; 5:9, 11; CD 1.10; 6.6; 4Q185 frg. 1–2, col. 1, lines 8–12; 4Q416 frg. 2 (with 4Q417 in Wise, *Scrolls*, 384–85), col. 3, lines 12–14; cf. García de la Fuente, “Búsqueda”; “seekers of smooth things,” negatively, 4QpNah. 2.2, 4; 3.3. For Wisdom, e.g., Sir 51:13–14, 21; Wis 8:2; the law, Sir 35:15; for seeking out a prophet, cf. *Sipre Deut.* 62.1.1; on the application to study of Torah, see CD 6.7, and esp. Culpepper, *School*, 291–99, with John 5:39; 7:52 (pp. 298–99). On seeking and “finding” (cf. John 1:41, 45) God, cf. Wis 1:2; *Jub.* 1:15; Matt 7:7; a prophet, cf. *Sipre Deut.* 62.1.1.

<sup>383</sup> Stibbe, *Gospel*, 1, finds an *inclusio* between 1:38 and 20:15. For this as Johannine discipleship language, see Collins, *Written*, 52, 94–127.

is a matter of Johannine style, but perhaps it points to an emphasis on verbal confession of one's quest (12:42–43).

It was likewise appropriate to wait for those with higher status in society or in the situation to express an invitation, or to maintain one's own status by not accepting hospitality too forwardly (e.g., Luke 24:28–29; cf. Judg 19:4–9); thus their indirect question, "Where do you live?" in 1:38 invites Jesus in return to invite them home.<sup>384</sup> In both Greek<sup>385</sup> and Jewish<sup>386</sup> culture disciples sometimes stayed with their teachers. Although Jewish teachers sometimes traveled with their disciples (e.g., 2:12) or taught in open areas,<sup>387</sup> they undoubtedly usually taught from a schoolhouse<sup>388</sup> or, more affordably, from their homes.<sup>389</sup> Probably like most first-century Jewish teachers, Jesus had no formal schoolhouse for his academy except his own home or that of a disciple (see Mark 1:29).<sup>390</sup> Such homes were generally not large; most Galilean dwellings consisted of one or two small rooms.<sup>391</sup> Hospitality toward a traveling teacher was important,<sup>392</sup> but here Jesus must extend the hospitality to would-be disciples. Jesus would also continue conversing with them along the way to his home; not only the Peripatetics but also rabbis discussed Scripture on journeys.<sup>393</sup>

The "tenth hour" here probably means around 4:00 P.M.,<sup>394</sup> which during most seasons would be too late in the afternoon to walk back from Capernaum (2:12; a few hours' walk)—and certainly from Nazareth (1:45–46; a good day's walk)—to a town like Bethsaida (1:44) before nightfall. In this case ancient hospitality would have required him to have offered for them to spend the night<sup>395</sup> (although "spent the day" does not demand

<sup>384</sup>For reticence in responding, as in Luke 24:28–29, see, e.g., Bailey, *Peasant Eyes*, 108. One might protest that another of higher status has no time (Ovid *Metam.* 5.333–334) and await their assurance to the contrary before proceeding (5.335–336). A teacher might converse in a low-key manner to arouse the hearers' interest to learn more (e.g., Philostratus *Hrk.* 1.1–5.6).

<sup>385</sup>See Liefeld, "Preacher," 223, noting Dio Chrysostom as an exception due to his exile. Most of Socrates' students wished to be with him as much as possible (Xenophon *Mem.* 4.1.1; 4.2.40). Musonius Rufus advocated this approach (11, p. 84.9–14; cf. 6, p. 52.7).

<sup>386</sup>Gerhardsson, *Origins*, 16–17.

<sup>387</sup>See abundant evidence in Young, *Parables*, 214; Safrai, "Home," 762; among Romans, though usually inside, see Jeffers, *World*, 255. Vermes, *Religion*, 46, notes some meager evidence for "wandering Galilean" Bible interpreters."

<sup>388</sup>Robbins, *Jesus*, xxi, 101, 105, contrasting Greek teachers and the portrait of Jesus in Mark. But even most Greek teachers lectured in particular locations. See also local teachers in current Middle Eastern communities (Eickelman, *Middle East*, 141).

<sup>389</sup>See Watson, "Education," 312. Although specific buildings probably were used in the Mishnaic *Beit ha Midrash*, the scant evidence (cf. Goodman, *State*, 75) need not require formal structures exclusively devoted to study in this period.

<sup>390</sup>Evidence is unclear as to whether Jesus' ministry was seasonal (Sanders, *Figure*, 110).

<sup>391</sup>Horsley, *Galilee*, 192.

<sup>392</sup>Safrai, "Home," 762. On teachers traveling, see also Safrai, "Education," 965.

<sup>393</sup>See Liefeld, "Preacher," 229. For emphasis on traveling with those who hold divine favor, see *t. 'Abod. Zar.* 1:17; *Šabb.* 17:2; on finding a good traveling companion to talk with, see Aulus Gellius 17.14.4; cf. Babrius 15.1–4; Plutarch *Cicero* 39.4; Luke 24:14–17; Hock, *Context*, 28.

<sup>394</sup>Following the use of time in the Synoptics (Mark 15:25, 33; Matt 27:45–46; Luke 23:44) and in Jewish texts (e.g., *Exod. Rab.* 41:7), i.e., reckoning from dawn around 6 A.M. Apart from legal contracts, Romans counted from sunrise as well; noon was VI (not XII) on their sundials (Morris, *John*, 158 n. 90; cf. Michaels, *John*, 20).

<sup>395</sup>So also Morris, *John*, 157. See, e.g., Homer *Od.* 3.345–358; Gen 19:2–3; Judg 19:6–7, 20; Alciphron *Farmers* 34 (Pratinus to Megaloteles), 3.36, par. 1; Luke 24:29.

this interpretation).<sup>396</sup> Although this time reckoning best fits the reference in 4:6, some scholars prefer the time reckoning system in which the “tenth hour” would mean 10:00 A.M.<sup>397</sup> (this allows one to harmonize 19:14 better with the Synoptics, assuming John’s usage is consistent);<sup>398</sup> in this case the day was only perhaps four hours spent (people normally arose at sunrise), and Jesus must have spent the night in their area, perhaps among the Baptist’s followers (cf. 1:26, “among you,” even in Perea near Judea). Although travelers occasionally carried pocket sundials,<sup>399</sup> the writer indicates that the time is an approximation (“about the tenth hour”).<sup>400</sup>

Jesus’ invitation, “Come and see” (1:39), was a sufficiently low-key invitation; the phrase appears in some analogous contexts<sup>401</sup> and was probably already idiomatic in the LXX.<sup>402</sup> John’s language may reflect his characteristic usage (11:34; cf. 21:12) but nevertheless is likely pregnant with theological nuances as well.<sup>403</sup> Rabbinic literature, which because of its vast size provides the most instances of the idiom (forms of  $\text{בָּרָא וְרָא}$ , or occasionally  $\text{בָּרָא וְרָא}$ ), applies the phrase to examples (“Come and see the humility of so-and-so,” “Come see how God loves Israel”),<sup>404</sup> and especially to examples in Scripture. Rabbis employ the idiom often from Scripture (and other sources).<sup>405</sup> The phrase means,

<sup>396</sup>Different peoples reckoned days from different points (Aulus Gellius 3.2.4–6); a Jewish “day” began at nightfall, but a Roman “day” technically began at midnight (Plutarch *R.Q.* 84, *Mor.* 284C; Aulus Gellius 3.2.7). Thus Bruns, “Time,” 286, notes that literally “staying a day” with Jesus on the Jewish method (which he favors, pp. 286–87) is only two hours.

<sup>397</sup>The so-called Egyptian method of reckoning; Walker, “Hours.” Westcott, *John*, 282, thinks that John follows the practice of reckoning civil days from midnight (cf. Matt 27:19; *Mart. Pol.* 21), though admitting that Romans, like Jews and Greeks, normally reckoned hours from sunrise.

<sup>398</sup>Hanhart, “Tenth Hour,” 345, suggests that John had two fixed points on his festival calendar, with John 19 to be read on Nisan 14 and John 1 on Nisan 15.

<sup>399</sup>Casson, *Travel*, 176–77 (though this was probably the exception); on variation in hour lengths through the year on Roman clocks, cf. Carcopino, *Life*, 149–50.

<sup>400</sup>Cullmann, *Time*, 44, explains such references to time as indicating John’s special interest in Jesus’ life as a redemptive event; but his argument that John otherwise betrays less interest in geography or chronology than the Synoptics is mistaken.

<sup>401</sup>E.g., 4:29; 11:34; “come” ( $\delta\epsilon\upsilon\pi\omicron$ ) in *T. Ab.* 7:1; 14:5; 16:4A; Gen 29:21. “Come and do or contemplate such-and-such” or “Go do or contemplate such-and-such” was idiomatic, e.g., Jas 4:13; 5:1; Epictetus *Diatr.* 1.2.29; 1.6.37; 1.7.10; 1.8.14; 1.11.25; 1.16.9; 1.18.28; 1.23.9; 2.4.9; 2.10.21; Plutarch *Mus.* 2, *Mor.* 1131E; Athenaeus *Deipn.* 11.459–460 (Greek texts reading *age*, etc.); Cicero *Tusc.* 3.20.49; Horace *Sat.* 1.10.51; 2.3.152; Martial *Epigr.* 1.42 (most Latin texts read *age* or *ferrum*). For “come and testify,” *t. Šebu.* 2:12, 13, 14; 4:1; “come and I will teach you,” *b. Menah.* 109b (cf. *Sanh.* 81b); “come and learn,” *Sib. Or.* 3.562. One may compare the American English idiom “Come see (this).” Cf. apocalyptic language (e.g., Rev 4:1; 17:1; 21:9; *1 En.* 14:24–25; 15:1; *2 En.* 21:3; cf. Plutarch *D.V.* 33, *Mor.* 568A), especially when used in a rabbinic context (*3 En.* 41:1; 42:1; 43:1; 44:1; 47:1; 48A).

<sup>402</sup>E.g., “Go see” (Gen 37:14), “comes to see” (Gen 42:12; 2 Sam 13:6; cf. perhaps *Pss. Sol.* 17:31), “came and saw” (2 Chr 31:8; Jdt 14:6; 1 Macc 15:32).

<sup>403</sup>Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:309; against Barrett, *John*, 181, who notes its commonness in rabbinic literature but finds “no special significance here.”

<sup>404</sup>For clearly nonhalakic usage, see esp. *t. Ta’an.* 2:13; *Abot R. Nat.* 13, §32; 18, §40 B; *b. Abod. Zar.* 26a; *B. Bat.* 46a; 73b; 74a; *Bek.* 28b; *Ber.* 25a; *Šabb.* 30b.

<sup>405</sup>E.g., *m. Abot* 2:9 (attributed to ben Zakkai); *Mek. Pisha* 1.156; *t. B. Meši’a* 6:17; *Šabb.* 1:14; *Ta’an.* 2:13; *Abot R. Nat.* 11, §28; 13, §32; 18, §40 B; *Sipre Num.* 88.2.1; *Sipre Deut.* 43.6.8; *b. Arak.* 15a, *bar.*; 30b; *B. Bat.* 88b; *Ber.* 5a; *B. Meši’a* 71a, *bar.*; *Erub.* 19a; 54a; *Ḥul.* 54b; *Ketub.* 105a; *Qidd.* 20a; 31a; *Meg.* 15a; *Menah.* 72a, *bar.*; 99b; *Pesaḥ.* 68b, *bar.*; 119a; *Sanh.* 22a; 24a; 108a; *Šabb.* 53b; *Soṭah* 5ab; 13a, *bar.*; 36a; *Ta’an.* 8a; 23b; *Yebam.* 63b; *Yoma* 57a; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 2:7; 13:10; 18:5; *Pesiq. Rab Kah. Sup.* 1:16; *Deut. Rab.* 2:37; *Ruth Rab.* 3:5; *Lam. Rab.* 1.5.32.

“Come reflect on”;<sup>406</sup> it is equivalent to another frequent rabbinic phrase in the Babylonian Talmud, “come and hear,” nearly always used for halakah.<sup>407</sup>

Just as Jesus invites prospective disciples to “come and see” in the narrative, the narrator invites other prospective disciples, seekers of truth, to “come and see” as well. The Gospel reiterates this invitation to “come” elsewhere (6:35, 37, 44–45, 65; 7:36–37) and the invitation to “see” invokes the pervasive motif of spiritual vision in the Fourth Gospel (see introduction, ch. 6). One thinks of a popular earlier sage’s invitation to come and learn from him in his house (Sir 51:23). In view of John’s Christology (see 1:1–18), some commentators find here an echo of Wisdom’s invitation (Prov 8:5; 9:5; Wisd 6:12–14).<sup>408</sup>

The two disciples are thus paradigmatic for disciples in John’s day. When the disciples ask where Jesus “dwells,” they are allowed to stay with him and learn as disciples;<sup>409</sup> Johannine believers can dwell in Jesus’ presence and learn from him continually (14:23, 26).<sup>410</sup> Just as the model disciples in the narrative “come and see” where Jesus “abides,” and then began to “abide” with him, so other disciples who follow Jesus will “abide” or “dwell” with him where he is (cf. 14:2, 6, 23; 15:4–10); only those who continue as Jesus’ disciples will truly be his disciples (8:31).<sup>411</sup> Those who “come and see” are those who experience Jesus for themselves (1:46, 50), and disciples can repeat the invitation first offered by Jesus (1:46; 4:29).

## 2B. Testing Would-Be Disciples

Not only did Jesus sometimes make it difficult for would-be disciples to follow him; sometimes he thrust them aside (Q material in Matt 8:19–22; Luke 9:57–62), especially if they held high worldly status (Mark 10:21–22; Matt 19:21–22; Luke 18:22–23).<sup>412</sup> In the same way, the Johannine Jesus is particularly hard on Nicodemus and the wealthy official of Antipas (3:3, 10; 4:48) and to a lesser extent on members of his family (2:4; 7:6–8)—on those who would be most likely to assume their right of access to him (contrast his inviting treatment toward the Samaritan woman). But Jesus probably thrust aside or made matters difficult for prospective disciples for the reason other ancient popular teachers did: to test the would-be student’s real willingness to become a learner, challenging a disciple to recognize the need to sacrifice.

<sup>406</sup>As in Neusner’s translation (4:39) of *t. B. Qam.* 7:10.

<sup>407</sup>Sample notes from my own reading through the Talmud: *b. Arak.* 11b; 12a; 2ab; 24b; 25b; 26b; *Abod. Zar.* 6a; 11b; 16a; 22a; 24b; 30a; 32a; 53a; 70b; 71b; 72ab; 73a; 76a; *B. Bat.* 2b; 5b; 6a; 13ab; 17b; 18a; 19b; 21a; 22b; 23b; 25a; 27ab; 43a; 63b; 64a; 78ab; 83a; 84b; 85a; 86ab; 87b; 92b; 93a; 94b; 95a; 103b; 104a; 116b; 123a; 129b; 131a; 132a; 133b; 140a; 146a; 148b; 149a; 150a; 157ab; 162b; 176a; *Bek.* 2ab; 3a; 6a; 7a; 10a; 12ab; 14b; 17ab; 24a; 25a; 26b; 28ab; 38b; 39a; 41b; 42a; 47a; 49b; 60a; *Ber.* 12a; 18b; 19b; 45a; 62a; 63a; *Beṣah* 16b; 17ab; 31a; 35a; 40a; *B. Qam.* 15ab; 17b; 18ab; 19a; 20b; 22ab; 23b; 24b; 28a; 30ab; 31a; 37a; 47b; 48a; 52b; 65a; 68a; 85b; 86b; 91a; 94b; 95ab; 96ab; 97b; 101a; 108a; 109b; 114ab; 119b; see other references under John 1:46.

<sup>408</sup>Witherington, *Wisdom*, 69–70; Blomberg, *Reliability*, 81.

<sup>409</sup>Thus, e.g., Democritus kept at his own home a disciple who studied with him (Aulus Gellius 5.3.6).

<sup>410</sup>Even when used physically, John’s use of μένω often connotes intimacy (cf. Potterie, “Demeurer”). For the discipleship model here, see also Collins, *Written*, 53.

<sup>411</sup>Cf. the observations of Michaels, *John*, 20.

<sup>412</sup>As Shammai, schematically contrasted with the gentle Hillel in rabbinic tradition, is said to have done with prospective converts (the later tradition, dominated by Hillel’s followers [cf., e.g., *t. Ed.* 2:3], naturally viewed this negatively, though Shammaites earlier predominated [e.g., *t. Sabb.* 1:16; *b. Beṣah* 20a]; see comments from various perspectives in Urbach, *Sages*, 1:589; Falk, *Jesus*, 49–53, 75; Bowker, *Pharisees*, 43). On most points (e.g., *b. Ber.* 23b) Beth Shammai was stricter, but there were exceptions (e.g., *b. Hul.* 104b).

The sacrifice of following a traveling teacher like Jesus could be demanding. Although disciples usually studied with local teachers, remaining with their wives during study, this may not have always been the case, even in formal rabbinic schooling reported in second-century sources.<sup>413</sup> An epideictic story of Rabbi Akiba, whether wholly or only partly apocryphal, reflects the views of this period: having returned home after years of study, he heard that his wife was willing to be apart from him for as many more years, for the sake of learning—whereupon he returned to his studies and came back to her at their completion with an abundance of disciples.<sup>414</sup> Similarly (perhaps due to the transfer of the story from Akiba), R. Simeon ben Yohai and another rabbi were said to have left their families for thirteen years to study under Akiba.<sup>415</sup> While these examples may represent patent exaggerations—Tannaitic law forbids leaving one’s wife for more than thirty days to engage in Torah study<sup>416</sup>—they may indicate that despite rulings of first-century schools prohibiting long-term abstinence, some Jewish men would go to study with famous teachers of the Law.<sup>417</sup> It is at least clear that those who circulated these traditions about Akiba and his disciples viewed such sacrifice as laudatory.

But teachers did not always make it easy for disciples to follow them; some, especially in the Cynic and Stoic traditions, rejected prospective disciples.<sup>418</sup> In a story that reminds us of Jesus’ confrontation with the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17–22; Matt 19:16–22; Luke 18:18–23), it is said of one Stoic lecturer that

A Rhodian, who was handsome and rich, but nothing more, insisted on joining his class; but so unwelcome was this pupil, that first of all Zeno made him sit on the benches that were dusty, that he might soil his cloak, and then he consigned him to the place where the beggars sat, that he might rub shoulders with their rags; so at last the young man went away. Nothing, he declared, was more unbecoming than arrogance, especially in the young.<sup>419</sup>

On other occasions Diogenes the Cynic is said to have imposed demands that drove away would-be disciples.<sup>420</sup> Nor was Diogenes alone, according to Diogenes Laertius, our main source for this tradition. The same story is told of the early Stoic Zeno.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Cf. Safrai, “Education,” 965.

<sup>414</sup> Sandmel, *Judaism*, 246–47, citing *b. Ned.* 50a; cf. Witherington, *Women*, 10, citing *b. Ketub.* 62b–63a. On the enormous number of disciples (and explanations of how they all died off), see *b. Yebam.* 62b; *Gen. Rab.* 61:3; *Eccl. Rab.* 11:6, §1.

<sup>415</sup> *Gen. Rab.* 95 (MSV).

<sup>416</sup> *M. Ketub.* 13:10; 5:6, cited in Safrai, “Home,” 763. It is not clear that all Jewish teachers in the first century would have felt obligated to follow the rulings of the schools, but by the period of Akiba and his disciples, this would be a standard ruling followed by all in the rabbinic movement, unless exceptions could be made for particularly extensive Torah study.

<sup>417</sup> Although the condition of spouses is not mentioned, stories like that of Hillel, a Babylonian immigrant, nearly freezing to death sitting in the window to hear Shemaiah and Abtalion may reflect such a practice.

<sup>418</sup> In drawing on the widest range of ancient sources for Jesus traditions, we look for broader cultural patterns mediated through Palestinian Judaism; we do not imply that Jesus was a “Jewish Cynic” (*pace* Crossan, “Cynic”; Mack, *Myth*, 67–68, 87 n. 1; see Eddy, “Diogenes”; Witherington, *Sage*, 117–45; Keener, “Critique”). Jesus’ movement began in rural Galilee and only later spread to Hellenistic urban areas (cf. Schmeller, “Weg”) where Cynics might be known; indeed, what later Judean rabbis seemed to know about Cynics (Luz, “Cynic”) does not encourage the view that they were well understood in Judea.

<sup>419</sup> Diogenes Laertius 7.1.22 (LCL 2:132–33).

<sup>420</sup> Diogenes Laertius 6.2.36.

<sup>421</sup> Diogenes Laertius 7.1.22.

But what is probably more significant is the suggestion that Diogenes allowed those who persisted actually to become his disciples, as in the case of a wealthy young man he despised; as the story goes, the young man, impressed, distributed all his property and adopted the Cynic lifestyle.<sup>422</sup> Diogenes actively “persuaded Crates to give up his fields, . . . and throw into the sea any money he had.”<sup>423</sup> According to Diogenes Laertius, this is the same treatment Diogenes the Cynic received from his teacher Antisthenes, according to Antisthenes’ custom;<sup>424</sup> this may suggest that Diogenes thought it a useful pedagogical technique for those who survived it.

Diogenes was actually willing to attract disciples—provided they were willing to pay a price for following him. Onesicritus of Aegina

is said to have sent to Athens the one of his two sons named Androsthenes, and he having become a pupil of Diogenes stayed there; the father then sent the other also, the aforesaid Philiscus, who was the elder, in search of him; but Philiscus was also detained in the same way. When, thirdly, the father himself arrived, he was just as much attracted to the pursuit of philosophy as his sons and joined the circle—so magical was the spell which the discourses of Diogenes exerted.<sup>425</sup>

We may compare this to Jesus’ demand that disciples be willing to forsake even familial obligations to follow his teaching.<sup>426</sup> All of this fits Hengel’s proposal that Jesus’ calling of disciples follows the model of a charismatic leader (though we may use “charismatic” more broadly here) rather than that of institutional teachers like the later rabbis.<sup>427</sup> But likewise Jesus’ anticipated response (both on the historical level and in the literary world of all four gospels) is the same sort of response given by persistent miracle-seekers throughout the tradition: the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:27–29), blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:48–52), the Gentile centurion (Matt 8:7–13),<sup>428</sup> and the mother of Jesus (John 2:3–9). Many studies<sup>429</sup> have documented the *chutzpah*, the holy boldness, of charismatic teachers; but teachers like Jesus apparently demanded the same sort of boldness from those who would learn their way of life. Jesus’ sorrow over the unwilling disciple (Mark 10:23–25) indicates that his goal was not to turn disciples away, but rather to make them become true disciples, which they could only do by counting the cost and choosing the narrow way of following him.

The present passage portrays Jesus as both hospitable and reserved, inviting the prospective disciples to prove their interest by pressing their way through to him. Two paragraphs later, however, Jesus will directly invite a disciple to follow him. Both portrayals of discipleship evoke the image of Jesus’ authority.

<sup>422</sup> Diogenes *Ep.* 38 (*Cyn. Ep.* 162–63). The rabbis more frequently tell such stories with regard to conversion to Judaism (e.g., *Sipre Num.* 115.5.7), which more strictly parallels philosophical conversion than adopting a Jewish teacher would have.

<sup>423</sup> Diogenes Laertius 6.5.87, citing Diocles (LCL 2:90–91).

<sup>424</sup> Diogenes Laertius 6.2.21.

<sup>425</sup> Diogenes Laertius 6.2.75–76 (LCL 2:76–79). Cf. 1 Sam 19 for an Israelite example of a similar phenomenon with regard to the Spirit of prophecy.

<sup>426</sup> Matt 8:21–22; Luke 9:57–62; Mark 10:29–30; Matt 19:29; Luke 18:29–30. The particular demand of the dead burying their dead may involve secondary burials (cf. McCane, “Dead”).

<sup>427</sup> See Hengel, *Leader*, 1–2, 27–33.

<sup>428</sup> Especially if v. 7 is construed as a question (so Jeremias, *Promise*, 30; Martin, “Servant,” 15; France, “Exegesis,” 257; contrast Meier, *Matthew*, 83–84).

<sup>429</sup> E.g., Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 79–80.

### 3. Andrew and Simon (1:40–42)

As in ancient drama (which could address either historical or fictitious characters) characters could be viewed as real people but used as “types.” The dramatist would then “convey general truths by showing how a certain type of person would speak or act in a given situation.”<sup>430</sup> The Fourth Gospel’s examples of various kinds of people coming to Jesus (e.g., 1:42, 43, 45–51; 3:1–10; 4:1–29) thus illustrates that all kinds of people are appropriate objects of Jesus’ gospel.<sup>431</sup>

Through the Baptist’s witness, Andrew became a follower of Jesus (1:36–37, 40); through Andrew’s witness, Simon became a follower of Jesus (1:40–42a); but in both cases, the inquirers became true disciples only through a personal encounter with Jesus for themselves (1:29, 38–39, 42; cf. 8:31). In both cases, Jesus knows the character of the person who approaches him; he knows his sheep (10:14, 27) whom the Father gave him (10:29; 17:9), and indeed knows the hearts of all (2:23–25). Andrew here becomes the second witness, demonstrating that the Baptist’s literary role as witness is paradigmatic and not merely limited to the Baptist himself (note “first” in 1:41, implying both the priority of witness to one’s family—cf. 7:5—and that he continued to testify to others after Peter). Andrew “finds” Simon in 1:41 much as Jesus later finds Philip (1:43); this is characteristic Johannine vocabulary (e.g., 5:14) but also functions paradigmatically for witness; Andrew continues to appear in this Gospel as one who introduces the resources or interest of others to Jesus (6:8–9; 12:22.)

That Andrew announces Jesus’ messiahship (1:41) may reflect his interpretation of John’s testimony about the lamb (1:29) interpreted through the grid of his own experience of Jesus. In the same way, Philip’s testimony about Jesus’ messiahship provides the categories for Nathanael to interpret Jesus’ supernatural knowledge (1:45, 49). In John’s theology, both the christological witness of disciples and the personal experience of Christ become necessary for adequate faith. In the language of the First Epistle, one needs the right Christology (1 John 2:22–24) through the apostolic witness (1 John 4:6) as well as the testimony of the Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27; 3:24; 4:13; 5:7–8); the latter is supposed to be inseparable from the former (1 John 4:1–6; cf. John 15:26–27). When some other prospective disciples encounter Jesus for themselves, they discover that he already knows them, which convinces them of his identity as well (1:48–49; 4:17–19, 29). We may envision such a response to 1:42 here; but why is it not narrated in this case?<sup>432</sup> Perhaps John wishes to save Peter’s confession for 6:69.

At the same time, if the Fourth Gospel reacts against an exaltation of Peter in some strands of early Jewish-Christian tradition (such as is later manifested in the *Pseudo-Clementines*), it may be noteworthy that despite Peter’s continuing visibility in the Fourth Gospel (Andrew here is defined in terms of Peter’s identity, 1:40),<sup>433</sup> Andrew is the one who comes to Jesus first and leads Peter to him (1:41–42; contrast the impression of simul-

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<sup>430</sup>Koester, *Symbolism*, 37. See esp. Theophrastus *Char. passim*.

<sup>431</sup>Collins, *Witness*, 46–55, and Xavier, “Andrew,” address Andrew as a character in this Gospel. On the “roundness” of some of John’s (esp. minor) characters, cf. Grant, “Ambiguity.”

<sup>432</sup>John Chrysostom *Hom. Jo. 19* (on 1:41–42) notes that Jesus convinces Peter, Nathanael, and the Samaritan woman with prophecies.

<sup>433</sup>On the Fourth Gospel’s foreshadowing technique, including here, see Ellis, *Genius*, 9. Fenton, *John*, 43, correctly notes that the Johannine Jesus regularly foretells the future or demonstrates other supernatural insights (1:47–51; 2:19, 21, 25; 4:17–18; 5:6; 6:6, 64, 70–71; 11:4, 11–12; 12:23, 32–33; 13:1–2, 10–11, 21, 26–27, 38; 16:31–32; 18:4, 32).

taneity in Mark 1:16–18; Matt 4:18–20; and the complete omission of the less central Andrew in Luke 5:1–11). Others have often proposed that the Fourth Gospel plays down Peter,<sup>434</sup> or perhaps more accurately treats him and the other disciples ambiguously,<sup>435</sup> whether to play up sectarian Johannine Christianity against apostolic Christianity, or, more likely, to demonstrate that Peter does not truly outrank an ordinary faithful disciple.<sup>436</sup> (Those who think that Peter’s negative or ambiguous role signals a Gospel in competition with the apostolic tradition preserved in the Synoptics should reconsider: Mark’s picture of the disciples is far more negative.) For Simon’s brother Andrew to confess Jesus as “Messiah”<sup>437</sup> (also 4:25) before Peter does so (cf. Mark 8:29) may indicate some desire to set the record straight by putting Peter in his place.

Such theological motives need not deny prior historical tradition.<sup>438</sup> Peter is, at the least, in character with the Synoptic Peter most of the way through this Gospel, often speaking and acting boldly and on impulse, for good (6:68; 13:9; 18:15; 20:3–6; 21:7) or ill (13:6–8, 36–37; 18:10).<sup>439</sup> For instance, it is interesting that the Gospel does not report Peter’s response to Jesus’ words at this point, nor a call to “follow” Jesus, despite the exalted response of Nathanael in the parallel narrative which follows (1:49). The faith implied here is not yet that of a disciple who leaves his occupation behind to study with a traveling teacher (although even the latter was sometimes seasonal; if rabbis followed a school year similar to the Greek practice of October to June,<sup>440</sup> even agrarian workers would have difficulty maintaining a livelihood while following a traveling teacher).

Moreover (wholly aside from the question of John’s relation to Mark), Jesus changing Peter’s name is attested independently in a special Matthean source (Matt 16:17–18) and, in less detail, Mark (Mark 3:16).<sup>441</sup> That such significant words do not appear in the parallel Markan narrative may be explained either by their absence from Mark’s source at that

<sup>434</sup>Brown, *Community*, 82–84; cf. Hengel, *Mark*, 52, who argues that the comparison exalts the guarantor of the Johannine tradition over “the guarantor of the Markan-Synoptic tradition.” Possibly the Markan tradition was now so entrenched that the beloved disciple’s tradition needed to stake its claims (like Paul in Gal 2:6–10).

<sup>435</sup>Collins, *Witness*, 56–78.

<sup>436</sup>See Maynard, “Peter”; cf. Watty, “Anonymity.” Comparisons do not always demean their inferior object (see comment on 13:23)

<sup>437</sup>Although John alone of all NT writers includes this Aramaic (see Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua*, 13) term, some older scholars, convinced that the Gospel addressed Gentiles, asked why John translates the term into Greek (though that was the language of most Diaspora Jews); Westcott even suggested that John kept the term to guard against gnosticism (*John*, 25).

<sup>438</sup>Even Andrew’s precedence over Peter may reflect the tradition of Asiatic Christianity reported in Papias (Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4, as argued by Dodd, *Tradition*, 304–5).

<sup>439</sup>Wolmarans, “Peter,” argues that John uses standard literary conventions of this period to portray Peter’s character, adapting them for Peter’s special characteristics. Matthew and Luke depend largely on Mark’s portrayal (Feldmeier, “Peter”), which may even go back to Peter (Hengel, “Problems,” 238–43).

<sup>440</sup>Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 83; Watson, “Education,” 311; Jeffers, *World*, 256; independent farmers worked about one hundred days annually (Jeffers, *World*, 20), but their work overlapped with the school year. Some students studied with teachers only for several months (Cicero *Brutus* 91.315–316), but some apparently studied many years (Eunapius *Lives* 461), perhaps with little break (cf., e.g., the tale of Akiba, *Abot R. Nat.* 6A).

<sup>441</sup>Brown, Donfried, and Reumann, *Peter*, 88, observes that John 1:42 confirms the pre-Matthean tradition here; for discussion of that passage’s authenticity, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:609–15; Keener, *Matthew*, 423–30.

point or by Mark's portrayal of the original disciples in an ambiguous light;<sup>442</sup> at any rate, this may represent a floating tradition not directly connected with Peter's confession.<sup>443</sup> (John is not particularly concerned with maintaining the original context of the saying, however; he reports even the confession in a context very different from that of Mark; cf. John 6:67–70, where also Judas, rather than Peter, is called a devil.<sup>444</sup> Peter's "you are" the holy one in 6:69 may respond to Jesus' "you are Simon" in 1:42, though an earlier "you are" confession appears in 1:49; cf. 4:19; 11:27.)

Despite the undoubtedly independent confirmation of the saying in two divergent sources, many scholars regard the name change story as inauthentic. Some view it as a prophecy, probably from the Petrine party,<sup>445</sup> or offer still more speculative proposals;<sup>446</sup> others more objectively argue for an originally purely Matthean construction based on the parallelism,<sup>447</sup> but parallelism need not indicate even a later structure (cf. the Q form of the beatitudes and Jeremias on Jesus' Aramaic rhythm). Against their position one may point to the particularly heavily Semitic construction in Matthew's language in that passage.<sup>448</sup>

Evidence also allows that Jesus would have spoken, in some saying (if not this one), of a future community, since most teachers trained disciples for this purpose;<sup>449</sup> dependence on the Hebrew Bible and contemporary Qumran usage indicates the plausibility of Jesus' use of a term that could translate as "church."<sup>450</sup> Although many view the pronouncement as a postresurrection saying,<sup>451</sup> this premise is unnecessary given Jesus' preparation for a future community (providing ethics for a community; provoking his own death in Jerusalem but—on our reading—viewing himself as the eschatological Son of Man and Lord at God's right hand who would reign in the kingdom after his enemies were subjected).<sup>452</sup> Further, we may cite the prominence of Peter from the earliest point in the tradition (Acts 1:15; 2:14; 12:3; 15:7; 1 Cor 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Gal 1:18; 2:7–8; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1),<sup>453</sup> although James the

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<sup>442</sup> See Ellis, *Matthew*, 128–29; Weeden, *Mark*, 43. One may also compare the thesis of Weber, "Petrus"; also idem, "Notes," who suggests that Matthew's interest in the OT wilderness community explains his preservation of the words as against Mark.

<sup>443</sup> Cf. Cullmann, "Πέτρος, Κηφῶς," 105, who rightly points out (at least from a Markan reading) that the Matthean beatitude interrupts an otherwise negative portrayal of Peter's inadequate Christology. Certainly the whole narrative is exquisitely balanced in Matthew, however (see Meier, *Vision*, 118; idem, *Matthew*, 179). Feldmeier, "Excursus," prefers the Markan portrait while not excluding all historical basis for other traditions.

<sup>444</sup> Rearranging sayings and their contexts was standard rhetorical practice; see, e.g., Theon *Progymn.* 3.22–23; 5.388–425.

<sup>445</sup> Käsemann, *Questions*, 106–7; Boring, *Sayings*, 213–14; cf. Beare, *Matthew*, 353 (finding elements in the Matthean account that he believes must stem from the later church—Jesus' messiahship, the church, and Peter's prominence; we would differ on each point); Goppelt, *Theology*, 1:213 (unlike Jesus' other sayings). Aune, *Prophecy*, 273, sees it as a recognition oracle.

<sup>446</sup> E.g., Carroll, "Peter," attributes the saying to the Antiochan church, where he believes Peter was the first bishop (others also hold the latter position, e.g., Pelikan, "Peter," 59–60).

<sup>447</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 331.

<sup>448</sup> Harrington, *Matthew*, 68; Ellis, *Matthew*, 129–30; Cough and Esbroek, "Primauté."

<sup>449</sup> See esp. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 20–22, 99–105; Michaels, *Servant*, 301–2; cf. Keener, *Matthew*, 427–28.

<sup>450</sup> Cullmann, *Peter*, 166–67, 187, 195; Hunter, *Message*, 53; Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 121.

<sup>451</sup> Brown et al., *Peter*, 92; Harrington, *People*, 29; Meier, *Matthew*, 179; cf. Cullmann, *Peter*, 180.

<sup>452</sup> Cullmann suggests the saying belongs to the passion story (Cullmann, *Peter*, 184; but cf. the critique in Gundry, "Framework").

<sup>453</sup> Also Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 147.

Lord's brother seems to have taken an administrative leadership in the church (Acts 1:14; 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12). While Cullmann's suggestion that "Bar-Jona" (Matt 16:17) may not mean "son of John" as the Fourth Gospel seems to construe it (1:42; 21:15) is worthy of consideration,<sup>454</sup> this hardly justifies appealing to a distant Akkadian cognate to the Aramaic to propose that the phrase originally meant "terrorist," hence identifying the fisherman as a Zealot.<sup>455</sup> Tomb inscriptions frequently identify a given person as "the [offspring] of such-and-such a person."<sup>456</sup> Whatever the earliest reading, because the name of Peter's father elsewhere occurs only in John 21:17, we may safely assume that both Matthew and John at this point reflect the same naming tradition.

While the name change is theologically significant, perhaps recalling earlier biblical examples like Abram and Jacob,<sup>457</sup> people in the imperial period did at times change their names (e.g., from local names to higher-status ones).<sup>458</sup> Simon itself was a common name among Jews;<sup>459</sup> nicknames were common;<sup>460</sup> converts to Judaism also sometimes reportedly took Jewish names,<sup>461</sup> although this practice was unusual (e.g., *CIJ* 1:384, §523); and, perhaps most important, rabbis sometimes in praising their disciples gave them epithets.<sup>462</sup> In a Johannine christological context, it may be significant that God exercised the authority to rename special servants like Abram, Sarai, and Jacob, although the pre-Johannine tradition and probably John himself make nothing of that allusion here (though cf. 10:3).<sup>463</sup> At any rate, since birthparents normally assigned names,<sup>464</sup> only a

<sup>454</sup> Cullmann, *State*, 16, who points to the lack of documentary evidence for Jona as an abbreviation for Johanan. The name Jona continued even among Diaspora Jews to a late period (*CIJ* 1:483, §671; 2:124, §900). Gundry suggests a symbolic allusion to Jonah in Matt 12:39; 16:4 (*Matthew*, 332), regarding "John" as original; conversely, the Fourth Gospel could change "Jona" to "John" to allude to the Baptist as the initial witness who "begot" Andrew and Simon (1:40). "Son of John" could mean "John's (the Baptist's) disciple," but the narrative suggests this role only for Andrew (1:40).

<sup>455</sup> Cullmann, *State*, 17, uncertainly. Brown et al., *Peter*, 88 n. 203, "deem unlikely" this suggestion. Roth's association of even "Simon" with revolutionaries falters in that it was one of the most popular names (Fitzmyer, *Essays*, 105–12). Theissen, *Sociology*, 11, speculatively suggests that some called Peter "wild," i.e., "outlaw," because he abandoned his family to follow Jesus.

<sup>456</sup> Cf., e.g., *CIJ* 1:291, §375; 2:112, §880; 2:117, §890; 2:126, §905; 2:128, §911; 2:137, §932; 2:171, §986; 2:312, §1367; 2:391, §1468; 2:445, §1538.

<sup>457</sup> Cf. OT covenant contexts suggested in Palatty, "Covenant."

<sup>458</sup> E.g., the application for a name change from Egyptian to Greek in *W. Chrest.* 52 (194 C.E.).

<sup>459</sup> E.g., *CIJ* 1:117, §165; 2:117, §890; 2:126, §905; *CPJ* 1:29; 3:191–192; see further Williams, "Personal Names," 93.

<sup>460</sup> Cf., e.g., Hachlili and Killebrew, "Saga"; idem, "Byt glyt"; Samuel the Small in *p. Soṭah* 9:13, §2; Dionysius of Halicarnassus *R.A.* 7.2.4; Cornelius Nepos 3 (Aristides), 1.2; Philostratus *Hrk.* 14.4.

<sup>461</sup> E.g., *m. Yad.* 4:4; *Sipre Deut.* 253.2.2; *b. Ber.* 28a; Bamberger, *Proselytism*, 234; cf. Dominus Flevit ossuary 31 in Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 68, Finegan, *Archeology*, 247–48, and Bagatti, *Church*, 237. That these instances represent Jewish "proselytes" to Christianity is unlikely, since Jewish Christians thought in terms of fulfillment more than conversion; cf. Avi-Yonah, "Sources," 47–48. Name change was sometimes used elsewhere to connote conversion; see Horsley, "Change"; on initiation rites, cf. Mbiti, *Religions*, 165, 228; Bietenhard, "ὄνομα," 243. It could also be associated with a promise or new hope and identity; cf. Gen 17:5; Rev 2:17; 3:12; cf. perhaps Ford, *Revelation*, 399.

<sup>462</sup> Cf. R. Johanan ben Zakkai's praise of each of his five disciples (*m. Ḥabot* 2:8, redactionally balanced).

<sup>463</sup> E.g., John Chrysostom *Hom. Jo.* 19. Reitzenstein, *Religions*, 40, 320–32, finds parallels to the Christian concept of a divine call in the Mysteries, but the concept is pervasive in the Hebrew Bible and appears in Diaspora Judaism (e.g., God calls Abraham in death in *T. Ab.* 4:9B).

<sup>464</sup> Cf., e.g., Danker, *Age*, 17; Harrelson, *Cult*, 39; names might fit circumstances of birth (Cambridge Geniza Text 3.13–16). On the Roman custom of naming boys on the ninth and girls on the

person acknowledged to be of much higher status could exercise the authority to rename another person,<sup>465</sup> at least if that name were to be retained among a community where the nicknamed person was held in high esteem. Clearly *someone* gave Simon this name, so the burden of proof should lie with those who deny the only evidence we do have, which points to Jesus as its originator.<sup>466</sup>

Such epithets were usually positive,<sup>467</sup> and “rock” makes sense in connection with a saying about “building” one’s church, language which would have been familiar in Jewish thought<sup>468</sup> and coheres well with other known teachings of Jesus, especially his almost certainly authentic use of the cornerstone image from the Hallel (Ps 118:22).<sup>469</sup> The preservation of Peter’s Aramaic name Kephas in early tradition (e.g., 1 Cor 9:5; Gal 2:11, 14) also supports the saying’s authenticity. Perhaps because the most natural Greek translation of Aramaic Kepha, *Petra*, is feminine, the Gospel writers prefer the less common masculine *Petros*, a term which by this period had come to be used interchangeably with the former.<sup>470</sup>

Some have also found specific historical tradition in the number of initial disciples mentioned before the wedding at Cana. As mentioned above, this proposal lacks merit. But many other details in the narrative reflect both historical tradition and John’s literary-theological purpose.

### Philip and Nathanael (1:43–51)

This narrative directly parallels the Andrew and Simon account (one disciple bringing a prospective disciple to Jesus, and Jesus revealing the newcomer’s heart), with significant

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eighth day, cf. Plutarch *R.Q.* 102, *Mor.* 288BC; Luke 1:59–60; 2:21 and the late *Pirqe R. El.* 48 suggest that the custom may have also affected Palestinian Jewry (Safrai, “Sources,” 5; idem, “Home,” 767).

<sup>465</sup> Cf., e.g., *Sent. Sext.* 28. Thus, e.g., ancient Near Eastern kings sometimes renamed their vassals (e.g., 2 Kgs 23:34; 24:17; cf. Gen 2:19–20; 3:20; De Vaux, *Israel*, 108).

<sup>466</sup> See Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 146–47. This precise name (in contrast to some similar forms) is not attested in the pre-Christian era (Gnilka, *Jesus*, 186–87), so would not be a name from his parents.

<sup>467</sup> Cf. also the use of a person’s name when praising that person in an encomium, even by wordplays (Theon *Progymn.* 9.49–55). Contrast Stock, “Peter.”

<sup>468</sup> “Building” represents people-of-God language in the Hebrew Bible (Ruth 4:11; Ps 51:18; 69:35; 147:2; Jer 1:10; 24:6; 31:4, 28); cf. esp. Jeremias, *Theology*, 168; also Ladd, *Theology*, 109–10). Some connect the saying with the Abraham saying of Isa 51:1–2 (although the rare rabbinic parallels they cite, such as *Yalqut Shim’oni* 1.766; *Exod. Rab.* 15:7, are late; cf. *Gen. Rab.* 44:21); cf. Cullmann, “Πέτρος, Κηφᾶς,” 106; Bruce, *Time*, 60; Ford, “Abraham”; Manns, “Halakah”; Chevallier, “Pierre”; Siegel, “Israel,” 108; contrast Arnéra, “Rocher.” Jesus and his teachings, of course, represent the ultimate foundation in the gospel tradition (Matt 7:24–27; Luke 6:47–49), but his witnesses provide the next layer of the structure (Eph 2:20).

<sup>469</sup> As in Mark 11:9; Matt 21:9; Luke 19:38; the Hallel was sung during Passover season (*m. Pesah.* 5:7; 9:3; 10:5–7; especially mentioned in connection with Sukkoth, e.g., *m. Sukkah* 3:10; 4:8; *t. Sukkah* 3:2; *Gen. Rab.* 41:1); cf., e.g., Stendahl, *Matthew*, 65; Michaels, *John*, 207; Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 255–56.

<sup>470</sup> Cullmann, *Peter*, 18, and especially primary references in n. 11; cf. n. 12. Cullmann holds that “Petros” was also an Aramaic name (e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 92:2; *Exod. Rab.* 52:3; contrast Meier, *Matthew*, 181; Williams, “Personal Names,” 104), but Paul’s letters indicate that “Kephas” was the earlier name (Cullmann, *Peter*, 19 n. 14; contrast Edersheim, *Life*, 360). The pun indicates identity between Petros and Petra (Cullmann, “Πέτρα,” 98; idem, “Πέτρος, Κηφᾶς,” 106; Brown, “Rock,” 386; Richardson, *Theology*, 309; contrast Lampe, “Petrusnamen).

contrasts (Jesus initiates Philip’s discipleship) and narrative developments (Nathanael’s christological confession; like the climactic third parable in Luke 15, the climactic account here is the fullest).<sup>471</sup>

### 1. *Jesus Seeks Philip (1:43–44)*

The setting of this paragraph is significant; although technically in Galilee already, Jesus “went out” into Galilee (1:43) to find an emphatically Galilean disciple (cf. 1:44; 12:21) who would soon after bring to him a “true Israelite” (1:47). Although the phrase may mean nothing more than that Jesus left a particular location to venture into a broader one, it reinforces John’s geographical emphasis that Galilee, the more peripheral “frontier” of Judea, was the place that welcomed Jesus when his “own” Judea would prove hostile (1:11; 4:43–44; 7:1, 9). On the social level this may suggest some historical implications for responses to the earliest Christian mission (see introduction concerning Galilee, ch. 5), but on the internal literary level also supports John’s emphasis on God’s activity among those marginalized by the attitudes of the elite (7:52; cf. 2:9).

Philip’s name is Greek, perhaps inviting the Greeks to approach him first in 12:20–21, but scholars who would therefore dispute Philip’s Jewishness<sup>472</sup> reckon neither with the hellenization of Palestine<sup>473</sup> nor with the Palestinian Jewish use of Greek names.<sup>474</sup> That a few of Jesus’ disciples bore Greek names is not unusual;<sup>475</sup> further, had Jesus had any immediate Gentile followers, his Jewish disciples and especially his opponents would have pointed this out, and the later church, advocating the Gentile mission through less relevant narratives like the centurion and Syrophoenician woman (Matt 8:5–13/Luke 7:1–10; Mark 7:24–30/Matt 15:21–28), would have surely exploited it.

Unless Philip<sup>476</sup> is the other anonymous disciple of 1:37,<sup>477</sup> which is unlikely,<sup>478</sup> Jesus directly initiates the call of Philip without a mediating witness, in contrast to the above narratives. But Philip quickly becomes a witness to Nathanael, inviting him to a personal encounter with Christ which convinces him as readily as it convinced Philip. John seems to indicate that an honest and open heart confronted with the true Jesus himself—and not

<sup>471</sup> This passage is also a unity; cf. Schreiber, “Jüngerberufungsszene.”

<sup>472</sup> Smith, *Magician*, 147, doubts that all Jesus’ disciples were Jewish, contending that “Galileans with pure Greek names like Philip are dubious.”

<sup>473</sup> Palestinian inscriptions in *CIJ*; cf. also, e.g., Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 1.255; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1:252; Freyne, *Galilee*, 172–73; Goodman, *State*, 88, 175; Meyers, “Judaism and Christianity,” 77–78; Davies, “Aboth,” 138–51. For some nuancing in the other direction, cf. also Vermes, *Jesus and Judaism*, 26; Sandmel, “Theory”; Feldman, “Hellenism.”

<sup>474</sup> T. *Job* 1:3; 51:2/1; Mussies, “Greek in Palestine,” 1051–52; *CIJ* 1, lxxvii; cf. also Simon, “Synkretismus.”

<sup>475</sup> Greek names were to be expected in areas such as Bethsaida with its Gentile surroundings (Cullmann, *Peter*, 22; cf. 17).

<sup>476</sup> Collins, *Witness*, 79–85, treats Philip as a character in the Gospel.

<sup>477</sup> So, e.g., Michaels, *John*, 21. One could appeal in support of this to the parallel structure between 1:40–42 and 1:43–51, since the opening disciple of the first narrative derives from the preceding account; but the symmetry could as easily argue the opposite, for, had Philip been one of the two disciples of 1:37, one would have expected John to have pointed this out as in 1:40.

<sup>478</sup> This need not mean that the anonymous disciple is the beloved disciple (against which see, e.g., Smalley, *John*, 75), but in favor of the possibility one may note that (1) he is in the company of Andrew, a fisherman in a fishing cooperative with James and John (Luke 5:10), and (2) this proposal would explain the private Baptist tradition narrated here (not that ancient narrators required such explanation). In the Fourth Gospel, anonymity applies especially to the beloved disciple (at least in later parts of the Gospel), but not exclusively to him.

merely another's testimony about him without that encounter—will immediately become his follower (3:20–21).

Normally disciples were to seek out their own teachers. Joshua ben Perachiah, a pre-Christian sage, reportedly advised this, as well as acquiring a חבר, a companion (presumably for Torah study).<sup>479</sup> Rabban Gamaliel repeated the same advice in another context.<sup>480</sup> Likewise, a writer for Socrates in the Cynic Epistles advises choosing a good education and a wise teacher.<sup>481</sup> In the call of Philip, however, as in some dramatic examples in the Synoptics (Mark 1:17; 2:14; Matt 4:19; 9:9; Luke 5:10, 27), Jesus directly summons one to follow him, like some radical Greek teachers seeking to convert the open-minded to philosophy.<sup>482</sup> It has often been argued that disciples normally chose their teachers rather than the reverse, making Jesus' action unusual and authoritative.<sup>483</sup> This contention, while partly true, is not nuanced enough, since prospective disciples did indeed come to Jesus, and, as argued above, he allowed them to follow him if they were willing to pay the price. In both cases, however, Jesus demonstrates his authority by the demands he makes.

The geographical note of 1:44 (repeated in 12:21) is significant.<sup>484</sup> Although the Synoptics place Peter's home in Capernaum, John places it without apology or explanation in Bethsaida. Like other cities around the lake of Galilee, Bethsaida was not well known to most authors outside Palestine<sup>485</sup> and does not pose a likely candidate for invention outside the Jesus tradition. Bethsaida's very name indicates its connection with the fishing industry, and it is possible that many of Bethsaida's inhabitants were involved with that industry.<sup>486</sup> Thus it is possible that Andrew and Peter had business in Bethsaida (perhaps supplying a regional market there),<sup>487</sup> making it their city in some sense. More likely, they were originally from Bethsaida but the family had moved to Capernaum before Simon and Andrew married;<sup>488</sup> people from out of town were often

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<sup>479</sup> *M. ḥAbot* 1:6.

<sup>480</sup> *M. ḥAbot* 1:16; both sayings are very concisely formulated and probably reflect the same editing. That the early teachers sought to raise up many disciples (*m. ḥAbot* 1:1) or perhaps held public meetings in homes (*m. ḥAbot* 1:4) need not conflict with this principle.

<sup>481</sup> Socrates *Ep.* 4 (*Cyn. Ep.* 228–29).

<sup>482</sup> Socrates with Xenophon in Diogenes Laertius 2.48. In John's Gospel, one might also think of God seeking his people (Ezek 34:11; 4Q521 frs. 2, 4, col. 2, line 5 in Wise, *Scrolls*, 421).

<sup>483</sup> E.g., Gundry, *Matthew*, 62. By contrast, Malina, *World*, 78, suggests that Jesus calling the disciples represents a diminution of his own status to initiate “bonds or alliances with others,” so that Jesus' act here is not one of authority but one of humble service.

<sup>484</sup> Crocker, “Bethsaida,” places Bethsaida at et-Tell.

<sup>485</sup> Cf. Adinolfi, “Lago.” It was forgotten long after its destruction by the Romans (Arav and Rousseau, “Bethsaïde”).

<sup>486</sup> Stambaugh and Balch, *Environment*, 102; Arav and Rousseau, “Bethsaïde”; for fishing instruments found there, see Arav, “Bethsaida.” Galilean villages generally regulated their own economy (Goodman, *State*, 120, citing *t. B. Meṣi'a* 11:23). Locals likely ignored Herod Philip's Roman name for the town (Julias).

<sup>487</sup> That Mark would transfer Andrew and Simon to Capernaum because of their fishing cooperative with James and John is far less probable, though not impossible if Mark has simply connected chronologically discrete narratives for the sake of narrative unity (Mark 1:21, 29; cf. 2:1; Matt 4:13, 18).

<sup>488</sup> See, e.g., France, *Matthew*, 103. Clan and village endogamy may have been common (Isaues *Estate of Pyrrhus* 63; Horsley, *Galilee*, 199; Ilan, *Women*, 75–79), and many in the ancient Mediterranean preferred to marry a woman who lived nearby (Hesiod *Op.* 700), but Capernaum was directly opposite Bethsaida and ties were undoubtedly close. The husband and the bride's father could determine the new marital home (P.Eleph. 1.5–6, 311 B.C.E.), though it was usually initially with the groom's parents (see Keener, *Matthew*, 271, 330, on Matt 8:14; 10:35).

identified by their place of origin (e.g., Jesus of Nazareth).<sup>489</sup> Despite the possible compatibility of Johannine and Synoptic tradition here, John's lack of concern for harmonization (or explicit refutation) indicates the independence of his tradition (either through not knowing the Synoptics or, more likely, through lack of concern to follow particular prior accounts). Although Synoptic tradition mentions Bethsaida only in passing, it makes clear that Jesus was active there (Matt 11:21/Luke 10:13; Mark 6:45; 8:22/Luke 9:10). John's more extensive treatment of particular Galilean sites omitted in the Synoptics, the location of which John assumes his readers' knowledge (e.g., 2:1; 4:46), may indicate that his audience is Galilean or (as we think more likely) familiar with the Galilean tradition he follows here (e.g., as Galileans transplanted to Asia Minor). Presumably Philip knows Nathanael from his home town (1:45).

## 2. Philip Seeks Nathanael (1:45–46)

Philip “finds” Nathanael (1:45) as Jesus had “found” him (1:43).<sup>490</sup> “Nathanael” (1:45) was “a real if uncommon Semitic name.”<sup>491</sup> Some have identified this character with Bartholomew of the Synoptic tradition,<sup>492</sup> but because Jewish people did not usually have two Semitic names, other scholars prefer to follow “early patristic suggestions that he was not one of the Twelve.”<sup>493</sup> Arguments for both sides of the debate are inconclusive: “Bartholomew” may represent the Greek form of Aramaic “Bar Tholmai,” son of Tholmai, a patronymic rather than a proper name;<sup>494</sup> but the apparent association of Philip with Nathanael in Synoptic lists (Mark 3:18; Matt 10:3; Luke 6:14) may be the only genuine evidence for the identification, and it is inadequate. Nathanael may figure prominently in the Fourth Gospel not because he is one of the Twelve but because he is a primary source of the Gospel's Galilean tradition, being from Cana (21:2; cf. 2:1; 4:46), or perhaps a close friend of the author or his source (cf. 21:2). His role in the Gospel makes it likely that he was one of the Twelve (a group John knows, 6:70), and if he was one of the Twelve, he was likelier Bartholomew than anyone else;<sup>495</sup> but the identification remains uncertain.

By announcing to Nathanael that Jesus is the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote (1:45; cf. 5:46),<sup>496</sup> Philip utters a confession identical in sense to that of Andrew:

<sup>489</sup>Malina, *Windows*, 91.

<sup>490</sup>Tracking people down, as with locations (cf. Ling, “Stranger”), was probably done by asking for them; Jesus, however, presumably had other methods (1:48).

<sup>491</sup>Higgins, *Historicity*, 59. See, e.g., Νατανήλου on a Jerusalem ossuary inscription in *CIJ* 2:296, §1330.

<sup>492</sup>Leidig, “Nathanael”; cf. more tentatively Higgins, *Historicity*, 59–60; Blomberg, *Reliability*, 82. Hill, “Nathanael,” suggests that the identification with James son of Alphaeus in the *Epistula Apostolorum* might reflect Asian tradition, perhaps early enough to be known by John.

<sup>493</sup>Brown, *John*, 1:82; cf. Smith, *John* (1999), 75.

<sup>494</sup>Higgins, *Historicity*, 59.

<sup>495</sup>The contorted argument of Hanhart, “Structure,” 24–26, that he was Matthew depends on fanciful linkages.

<sup>496</sup>The Law and the Prophets together constitute Scripture, e.g., 2 Macc 15:9; 4 Macc 18:10–18; Matt 5:17; 7:12; Q (Matt 11:13 = Luke 16:16); Rom 3:21; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:484, cite also *t. B. Meṣi'a* 11:23. Cf. also the threefold division in Luke 24:44 (more popular among the sages—Sir prol.; <sup>2</sup>*Abot R. Nat.* 14A; *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 19b; *B. Bat.* 13b, *bar.*; *B. Qam.* 92b; *Mak.* 10b; *Sanh.* 90b, Gamaliel II; 106a; *p. Meg.* 1:5, §3; *Ned.* 3:9, §3; *Seqal.* 3:2; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 12:13; *Gen. Rab.* 76:5; cf. Philo *Contempl. Life* 25). First-century Jews attributed the Pentateuch to Moses (Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 1.39).

“We have found the Messiah” (1:41). For John, all the Scriptures point to Jesus (e.g., 2:17, 22; 7:37–39; 12:15–16; 20:9). Philip’s confession, however, is more explicit in its appeal to the authority of Scripture—witness to Christ is the most common function of Moses in the Fourth Gospel<sup>497</sup>—and climaxes in Nathanael’s own confession of Jesus’ messiahship (1:49).

Jesus’ status as Joseph’s son (1:45; 6:42) is also attested in Synoptic tradition (Matt 1:16; Luke 3:23; 4:22; cf. Mark 6:3), where it can be linked with his Davidic heritage (Matt 1:6; Luke 3:31), so this confession need not imply the Johannine community’s ignorance of or opposition to the virgin birth tradition (which would probably be known throughout early Christianity by the Johannine period since it is clearly pre-Lukan and pre-Matthean). Similarly, it may but need not imply the imperfection of Philip’s christological understanding, though readers would not have reason to suppose that he understands the virgin birth nor does John anywhere make use of the virgin birth tradition (cf. 7:42). It is possible, though not likely, that John intends an additional theological allusion here; Jesus is the spiritual descendant of Joseph (cf. 4:5), the noblest son of Jacob. But the allusions to Jacob in 1:47–51 suggest Jesus’ infinite superiority to Jacob, as his God or mediator, not a mere identification with him or his descendants.

To question whether “good” might come from something or someone may have been a way of demeaning them, though the remark here sounds more flippant than hostile.<sup>498</sup> Nathanael takes apparent offense at Jesus’ origin in Nazareth, although he as a Galilean does not seem to rule out the whole of Galilee as Judean Pharisees were prepared to do (7:52).<sup>499</sup> Nazareth was a relatively small town,<sup>500</sup> but few towns and villages of Galilee were large;<sup>501</sup> many villages would have included fewer than 300 inhabitants,<sup>502</sup> and only Tiberias and Sepphoris were technically cities in the Hellenistic sense.<sup>503</sup> Thus size may not be the problem. Further, although Nazareth existed in the shadow of the hellenized Jewish city of Sepphoris,<sup>504</sup> reputed impiety is probably not the problem, either.<sup>505</sup> Sepphoris

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<sup>497</sup> See Whitacre, *Polemic*, 51.

<sup>498</sup> For an example of the question demeaning one, cf. perhaps the later *p. Pesah*. 6:1 (involving Hillel, and where he is vindicated).

<sup>499</sup> “Nazareth” thus emphasizes Jesus’ “humble origin and his humanity” as in 1:14 (Smith, *John* [1999], 75).

<sup>500</sup> Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 56, suggest 1600–2000 inhabitants, based on the tombs; cf. p. 27. More recent estimates suggest below 500 (Stanton, *Gospel Truth*, 112; Horsley, *Galilee*, 193); perhaps those who lived in the nearby countryside would count themselves inhabitants in a more general way. Although some opined that coming from a famous city was necessary for happiness (Plutarch *Demosthenes* 1.1), Plutarch thinks life in a famous city necessary only if one needed exposure (*Demosthenes* 2.1; cf. John 7:3–4).

<sup>501</sup> Cf. Finkelstein, *Pharisees*, 1:41. See Harvey, *History*, 3, for a summary of the initial archaeological discoveries concerning early Roman Nazareth (for an early defense of Jesus’ Nazarene connection’s authenticity, see Moore, “Nazarene”; more speculatively on earlier excavations of Joseph’s legendary home, cf. de Nazareth, “Maison”).

<sup>502</sup> Horsley, *Galilee*, 193. Cf. the more concrete data in Egyptian tax records in Lewis, *Life*, 67–68.

<sup>503</sup> E.g., Goodman, *State*, 27; Stambaugh and Balch, *Environment*, 89.

<sup>504</sup> The theater seated 4000–5000 (Freyne, *Galilee*, 138; cf. further Boatwright, “Theaters”). For a summary of archaeological and literary evidence on the city, see Meyers, Netzer, and Meyers, “Sepphoris”; cf. Boelter, “Sepphoris”; for the Dionysus mosaic, Weiss and Netzer, “Sty”; for its wealth, Meyers, Netzer and Meyers, “Byt-mydw.”

<sup>505</sup> Later rabbis told of individual *minim* there (*t. Hul.* 2:24) but do not provide details for an entire Jewish-Christian community (Miller, “*Minim*”).

remained faithful to Judaism<sup>506</sup> despite its unwillingness to revolt,<sup>507</sup> the surrounding region was acknowledged to be Jewish,<sup>508</sup> and Nazareth's inhabitants seem to have been entirely orthodox.<sup>509</sup> Moreover, Galilean villages and towns required no economic or cultural dependence on the two Galilean cities,<sup>510</sup> though, like most villages and towns, they would have been influenced by larger currents in the Roman empire.<sup>511</sup> Large cities usually tended to be economically parasitic on the countryside,<sup>512</sup> and most Galileans hated the two cities.<sup>513</sup> (This situation is hardly surprising; a cultural rift divided cities from countryside throughout the empire.)<sup>514</sup> Sepphoris's prominence and later Christian tradition about it make its absence in the Gospels all the more striking; Jesus probably had little contact with it.<sup>515</sup> Perhaps Nathanael's hostility is conditioned by the "prophet from one's own country" mentality (4:44; Matt 13:54–57; Luke 4:24), but more likely from civic rivalry in the region,<sup>516</sup> which was common more generally in antiquity.<sup>517</sup>

<sup>506</sup>See Avi-Yonah, "Geography," 105, citing especially Josephus *Ant.* 18.37; *Life* 67; and aniconic coins after 67 C.E.; Freyne, *Galilee*, 138; for Tiberias, see Josephus *Life* 275, 279. Cf. *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 18:5; later rabbinic Judaism found a welcome home there (see Meyers, "Judaism and Christianity," 76). This is not to say that it was entirely orthodox by Pharisaic standards (cf., e.g., Cornfeld, *Josephus*, 216); more Gentiles may have also moved there, at least after 135 (see Horsley, *Galilee*, 104). For Christians coming there, cf., e.g., b. *Abod. Zar.* 17a; Herford, *Christianity*, 115; Crocker, "Sepphoris."

<sup>507</sup>E.g., Josephus *Life* 30, 38, 124, 232, 346–348, 373–374. Its pacifism may have stemmed from its historic devastation in a previous revolt in Jesus' childhood (Josephus *War* 2.68).

<sup>508</sup>E.g., p. *Sanh.* 5:1, §3 (early third century). If this is not propaganda, later rabbis thought that Sepphoris was particular about the purity of Israelite lineage (cf. *m. Qidd.* 4:5 in Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 300).

<sup>509</sup>That one of the priestly courses reportedly settled here after 70 C.E. indicates "that the remnants of temple Judaism found Nazareth 'clean' and unsullied by paganism" (Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 27), though for questions on the tradition see Trifon, "Mšmrwt." Johanan ben Zakkai seems to have settled not far from Nazareth before 70 C.E. (Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 72, citing p. *Ber.* 7c; b. *Ber.* 34b). On ancient Israelite pottery before resettlement in the Hellenistic period, see Horsley, *Galilee*, 193; on the proper Hebrew form of the name, see Rüger, "NAZARETH."

<sup>510</sup>Goodman, *State*, 27, 60; Horsley, *Galilee*, 174–81; *pace* Crossan, *Jesus*, 17–19; Batey, "Sepphoris." All evidence for trade consists of agricultural or very basic products (Adan-Bayewitz and Perlman, "Trade"). Jesus nevertheless probably had some familiarity with Sepphoris; Joseph undoubtedly took up carpentry (Matt 13:55; cf. Mark 6:3) because of Antipas's project rebuilding the nearby city (four miles away) after its devastation (Josephus *War* 2.68); cf. Schürer, *History*, 162.

<sup>511</sup>Cf. Millar, "World," on second-century C.E. Greek villages.

<sup>512</sup>Horsley, *Galilee*, 177; for relevant estimates of Sepphoris's population, see Horsley, *Galilee*, 166. Sepphoris was probably Roman Galilee's most critical market center (Adan-Bayewitz and Perlman, "Trade").

<sup>513</sup>Josephus *Life* 375, 384, 392.

<sup>514</sup>E.g., Longus 2.22; Babrius 108; Ps.-Theocritus *The Young Countryman*; Alciphron *Farmers* 8 (Dryantidas to Chronium), 3.11 par. 1, 3; 22 (Hylé to Nomius), 3.25; MacMullen, *Relations*, 15, 30–32; Applebaum, "Life," 663–63; Finley, *Economy*, 123–49.

<sup>515</sup>Miller, "City."

<sup>516</sup>E.g., Barnett, *Reliable*, 64.

<sup>517</sup>Acts 21:39; *Let. Aris.* 249 (with Hadas's note, 197); Heraclitus *Ep.* 9, to Hermodorus (*Cyn. Ep.* 214–15); Diogenes Laertius 7.1.12; *Gen. Rab.* 34:15; cf. *Rhet. ad Herenn.* 3.3.4; MacMullen, *Relations*, 58–59; Yamauchi, *Archaeology*, 164–65; Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 140; Cadbury, *Acts in History*, 32–33; Longenecker, *Paul*, 32 n. 41 (on Acts 21:39; Euripides *Ion* 8); on epideictic orations praising cities, cf., e.g., Quintilian 3.7.26; Aelius Aristides *Oration to Rome* on Rome; Isocrates *Panegyricus* and more so his later *Panathenaicus*.

On a theological-literary level, however, Nathanael's question is parallel to that of Jesus' opponents: they object to his putative origin (7:41–42, 52), though Nathanael, unlike Jesus' opponents, is quickly convinced that his home town does not disqualify him from the identity Philip attributed to him.<sup>518</sup> Most important, Philip's invitation to "come and see" parallels that of Jesus in 1:39; an encounter with Jesus accomplishes more than an extended debate would (the Johannine debates produce no explicit conversions). (As noted on 1:39, "come and see" was a standard phrase in ancient literature, including for halakic investigation.)<sup>519</sup> This invitation reflects the characteristic Johannine epistemology: the synagogue leadership may know the written Torah, but disciples of Jesus, Torah made flesh (1:1–18), have a personal experience with God (cf. 9:25; 10:4) and lay claim to the Spirit, which the opponents admit they do not have.<sup>520</sup>

### 3. Nathanael Meets Jesus (1:47–51)

Jesus' revelation of Nathanael's true identity (1:47) parallels his analogous revelation of Peter in 1:42; Jesus contextualizes his revelation to address the seeker's personal state. People sometimes expected miracle workers in Greco-Roman and Jewish tradition to be able to lay bare human hearts or predict the future,<sup>521</sup> but in the context of the Fourth Gospel Jesus' insight is divine and not merely human in nature (2:24–25).

#### 3A. Nathanael as a True Jacob or Israelite (1:47–48)

Nathanael is a "genuine Israelite" (1:47)—one who is true, as Jesus is (1:9; 6:32, 55; 7:18; 15:1).<sup>522</sup> This distinguishes him from Jesus' opponents, "the Jews," who undermine their claims to a covenant relationship with God by how they respond to Jesus, the enfleshed Torah (e.g., 8:54–55).<sup>523</sup> Nathanael thus functions proleptically as the representative fulfillment of the Baptist's mission in 1:31.<sup>524</sup> By calling Nathanael an Israelite "in

<sup>518</sup>Whitacre, *Polemic*, 81, 210 n. 188.

<sup>519</sup>In addition to references under 1:39, cf. *B. Meṣi'a* 5a; 7a; 8b; 9a; 14b; 20b; 21ab; 22ab; 23a; 24ab; 25b; 27b; 30a; 32b; 45a; 46a; 47a; 50a; 53b; 54a; 80a; 81b; 89b; 90a; 91b; 92ab; 95b; 96b; 105b; 108b; 109ab; 113ab; 114a; *Ḥerub.* 11a; 15ab; 16ab; 22b; 30a; 37b; 45b; 52a; 70b; *Git.* 5a; 12ab; 15a; 20b; 28b; 29a; 33b; 36b; 38b; 41b; 42ab; 43a; 44a; 47ab; 48a; 49b; 50ab; 51a; 54a; 62b; 63ab; 82a; 85b; *Ḥag.* 17b; *Hor.* 2a; 3b; 4b; 5b; 6b; 13a; *Ḥul.* 8a; 9b; 16b; 27b; 28ab; 29a; 31a; 35b; 36ab; 41a; 43a; 45b; 51b; 54b; 55ab; 68a; 70a; 74a; 77a; 79a; 82b; 83a; 86b; 90b; 91a; 95a; 102ab; 107ab; 109b; 113a; 119ab; 121a; 122ab; 123ab; 124b; 127b; 130b; 131ab; 133b; 139b; 140ab; 141ab; *Ker.* 10ab; 12ab; 15b; 17a; 27a; *Ketub.* 3a; 5a; 25ab; 28a; 41ab; 46b; 49b; 59a; 69a; 86b; 87b; 91a; 96a; 97ab; 98b; 99ab; 102b; 107ab; *Qidd.* 10ab; 19a; 21ab; 26b; 27a; 32a; 33b; 37a; 51b; 52a; 54ab; 69a; 82a; *Meg.* 4b; 22ab; 27a; *Me'il.* 5b; 6a; 8b; *Menah.* 14a; 15a; 16ab; 23b; 24a; 26a; 48b; 52ab; 54ab; 59b; 74b; 76a; 81b; 85ab; 86a; 93b; 104a; 105a; *Mo'ed Qat.* 14b; 15ab; 16a; 18b; 22a; see further under John 4:29.

<sup>520</sup>See the thesis of Keener, "Pneumatology"; idem, "Knowledge."

<sup>521</sup>Blackburn, "ANΔPEΣ," 193; for philosophers, see Musonius Rufus frg. 48, p. 140.17–19; in Jewish texts, e.g., *Sir.* 48:24; *Mek. Šir.* 7.17–18 (Lauterbach, 2:55); *t. Pisha* 2:15.

<sup>522</sup>The polemical contrast with the accusers is particularly evident in the term's association with true testimony (5:31; 8:13, 14, 16, 17; 10:41; 19:35; 21:24) and with the Father's character and witness (3:33; 5:32; 7:28; 8:26; 17:3). The adjective and its cognates could be applied to other ethnic groups (e.g., ἀληθινοί Egyptians were recognizable by their speech; P. Giess. 40, col. 2, line 27).

<sup>523</sup>See Whitacre, *Polemic*, 81, 210–11 n. 190; Pancaro, "Israel," 398; idem, *Law*, 288–304; Collins, *Written*, 11–14; on "the Jews," see our introduction, pp. 214–28. There is little to commend the suggestion of Painter, "Church," 360, that the language suggests nationalistic expectations, which are then confirmed in "King of Israel" in 1:49.

<sup>524</sup>Meeks, "Jew," 181.

whom there is no deceit,” Jesus deliberately contrasts this representative Israelite with his ancestor Jacob.<sup>525</sup> One of the few qualifications for Israel’s leaders was “men of truth” (Exod 18:21). Deceit was essentially a negative term,<sup>526</sup> but appears in Gen 27:35 LXX when Jacob stole Esau’s birthright.

Scholars have discussed the meaning of Jesus’ statement to Nathanael that he saw him beneath a fig tree (1:48). Some have found allegorical significance in the “fig tree,” though most of these proposals have elicited little support.<sup>527</sup> Perhaps because Nathanael is concerned with the law (1:45), some have pointed out that Jewish people sometimes studied Torah under fig (and other) trees.<sup>528</sup> But people studied Torah in many places besides under trees,<sup>529</sup> and, more significantly, when they studied under fig and other trees they did so for the same reason that they would sit and talk under such trees: the shade provided respite from the heat.<sup>530</sup> Sitting under one’s fig tree could thus indicate rest as opposed to labor, or tranquility as opposed to trouble.<sup>531</sup>

Rather than a specific allusion to Torah study, John’s contemporaries would more likely have thought of the apocryphal story of Daniel and Susanna in the LXX: when Daniel asked each of the false witnesses separately under which tree they had seen her commit adultery, they gave different responses and proved themselves false witnesses.<sup>532</sup> Jesus, by contrast, had actually seen Nathanael under the fig tree (whatever he was doing there) although not present. (The tree may be mentioned because some specific landmark is necessary, rather than for any symbolic import attaching to fig trees in particular.)<sup>533</sup>

Jesus’ knowledge of Nathanael’s positive character (1:47–48) fits the Gospel’s claim concerning his knowledge of others’ untrustworthiness (2:23–25). Later in the Gospel John reinforces the point that Jesus foreknew his betrayer (6:70–71; 13:26), perhaps because this had become a point of apologetic contention. In any case, Jesus demonstrates divine knowledge of human character. Such insight was normally attributed only to prophets, magicians, and God, the last source being the likeliest one in view of this Gos-

<sup>525</sup> Cf. Trudinger, “Israelite.” Hanson, *Gospel*, 37, finds Bethel allusions as early as 1:30–31, 33 (to Gen 28:16), but this is dubious.

<sup>526</sup> E.g., *Let. Aris.* 246; *T. Iss.* 1:12.

<sup>527</sup> Augustine *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 7.21.1 thinks it symbolizes sin and death (based on fig leaves in Gen 3:7); Fenske, “Feigenbaum,” sees an allusion to the Jewish people (based on Mark 11:12–25 and Nathanael as a “true Israelite”).

<sup>528</sup> Hunter, *John*, 27; Boice, *Witness*, 108; Hanson, *Gospel*, 39; before Strack-Billerbeck, Westcott, *John*, 27, cited *p. Ber.* 2:8. Pancaro, *Law*, 304; Hoskyns, *Gospel*, 182; Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:317, mention but do not endorse this solution. For studying Torah under or among trees, see, e.g., *Sipra Behuq. pq.* 7.268.2.3; *p. Ber.* 2:7, §2; *Hag.* 2:1, §4; *Gen. Rab.* 62:2 (two accounts, one purportedly Tannaitic); *Eccl. Rab.* 5:11, §2; cf. *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 5:8 (following Braude’s interpretation, 102).

<sup>529</sup> See the partial list in Safrai, “Education,” 965.

<sup>530</sup> E.g., Plutarch *Rom.* 4.1; *b. Ta’an.* 24a.

<sup>531</sup> Especially in traditional Jewish idiom, e.g., 1 Kgs 4:25 (cf. 2:46 LXX); 2 Kgs 18:31; Isa 36:16; Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10; 1 Macc 14:12; cf. Bernard, *John*, 1:63; Hoskyns, *Gospel*, 182; Barrett, *John*, 185; Scott, *Parable*, 332. Koester, “Exegesis,” ingeniously connects this image with the messianic branch of Zech 3:8–10, but given the breadth of OT allusions possible, this connection is improbable.

<sup>532</sup> Sus 54, 58. That the expression in Susanna became proverbial (Moule, followed by Fenton, *John*, 45), is, however, improbable (Barrett, *John*, 185). Others (e.g., Bury, *Logos-Doctrine*, 31) transform the fig tree into a symbol for Judaism; Michaels, “Nathanael,” suggests a midrashic-style allusion to Hos 9:10, but this would require that text to read, “I saw Israel *under* the fig tree” rather than *as* a fig tree.

<sup>533</sup> See also Barrett, *John*, 185.

pel's Christology).<sup>534</sup> Such encounters in which Jesus demonstrates to people that he already knows them often move the inquirer toward faith (cf., e.g., 1:42; 4:17–18; 16:30; perhaps 3:10);<sup>535</sup> an encounter with Jesus becomes the Fourth Gospel's ideal apologetic for those with open hearts.

Jesus, who knows his own sheep and “calls” them (10:3; cf. through Philip in 1:48), here demonstrates his intimate knowledge of Nathanael,<sup>536</sup> just as Nathanael quickly recognizes his shepherd (1:49; 10:4) and demonstrates “that he is a member of the people of God.”<sup>537</sup>

### 3B. Jesus as Israel's King (1:49)

Jesus' revelation of Nathanael's true identity parallels not only his revelation of Simon's identity, but also Nathanael's revelation of Jesus' own identity (1:49) and Jesus' revelation of Jesus' own identity (1:50–51). Exaggerated compliments (especially to those of disadvantaged status) may characterize Mediterranean culture,<sup>538</sup> but Nathanael's response bursts the bounds of propriety if it is not intended sincerely. Nathanael's response to this divinely revealed knowledge is a christological confession; titular acclamations occurred after other miracles in other early Christian texts and elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>539</sup> Nathanael's ready faith contrasts starkly with the difficulty of full resurrection faith leading to the Gospel's climactic confession in 20:24–29. It illustrates, however, the Johannine principle that those who are genuinely “from God” heed others who are from God (3:20–21; 1 John 4:6).

Because one would expect either that the titles be parallel or that the second title would be higher than the first one, the use of “Son of God” first may lead one to suppose that it retains its traditional messianic sense from the OT and some of the Synoptic tradition (see introduction) rather than its more divine Johannine sense. On this reading, “Son of God” and “King of Israel” would both function as messianic titles, and this may be what John expects his readers to suppose Nathanael meant. Nevertheless, not only “Son of God” but also “king” has developing nuances as the Fourth Gospel progresses,<sup>540</sup> and the latter may come to be associated with deity.<sup>541</sup> Presumably in part because Jesus' kingship (12:15) failed to fulfill traditional Jewish expectations for the messianic king (6:15; 12:13), both his people and others rejected him (18:33, 37, 39–40; 19:3, 12, 14–15, 19, 21). Given John's divine Christology elsewhere, however, and the possible contrast between Caesar's and God's kingship implied in 19:15, he may allude to Jesus as the divine King, God.<sup>542</sup> The

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<sup>534</sup>In one later story, someone supernaturally (and convincingly) reveals what happened to her inquirer on his journey when he seeks to test her (Eunapius *Lives* 468); pagans might think such a revealer divine (470). But see esp. comments on 2:24–25.

<sup>535</sup>This Johannine pattern was noticed at least as early as Chrysostom *Hom. Jo.* 19 (on 1:41–42).

<sup>536</sup>Cf. also Hoskyns, *Gospel*, p 182.

<sup>537</sup>Whitacre, *Polemic*, 81.

<sup>538</sup>See Herzfeld, “Hospitality,” 80.

<sup>539</sup>Theissen, *Stories*, 161 (citing among early Christian references Matt 12:23; 14:33; Luke 5:8; 7:16; John 6:14; Acts 8:10; 14:11–12; 16:30; 28:6).

<sup>540</sup>Howton, “Son,” 237, suggests that John infuses the term with more meaning than it had previously carried.

<sup>541</sup>Tilborg, *Ephesus*, 33–38, notes “king” titles in Ephesian inscriptions; an audience in Asia might have contrasted Jesus with the emperor, as in the East the title would connote the king of Persia or Parthia (Aristophanes *Ach.* 65).

<sup>542</sup>For God as king, see Zech 14:9, 16; Jdt 9:12; Tob 13:6; 2 Macc 12:15; *1 En.* 25:3, 5; 91:13; *Sib. Or.* 1.73; 3.11, 56, 499, 560, 704; *T. Ab.* 15:15A; Philo *Good Person* 20; 1 Tim 1:17 (*pace* Oke, “Doxol-

Johannine Christians might recognize this; thus in Revelation Jesus bears the divine title “King of kings” (19:16; cf. 17:14).<sup>543</sup>

Within the logic of the narrative, Nathanael’s confession offers another lesson for the Johannine community. Nathanael recognizes Jesus’ identity as Messiah with proof only of Jesus’ prophethood—because if he is a true prophet he cannot be a false messiah. Philip had already told Nathanael about Jesus’ identity from Scripture (1:45), so it was witness as well as a sign that enabled Nathanael to correctly interpret Jesus’ identity. Both Jesus’ epideictic response and inadequate christological models offered by others in response to signs (e.g., 6:15) suggest that a sign alone is inadequate to articulate the true character of Jesus’ person and mission.

### 3C. Jesus as Jacob’s Ladder (1:50–51)

Whereas others might be reproved for needing much evidence for faith (20:29), Jesus commends Nathanael for believing on the basis of such comparatively meager evidence; Jesus promises to provide still more (1:50). John makes extensive use of this term “greater,” (e.g., 13:16; 15:13; 19:11), often applying it to the Father’s greatness (10:29, over all; 14:28, over Jesus; cf. the Father’s witness, 5:36; 1 John 5:9), to Jesus’ greatness over the patriarchs (4:12; 8:53), but sometimes to Jesus’ promise of greater impending works from himself (5:20) or his disciples (14:12), as here.<sup>544</sup> He underlines the authoritativeness of his words by appealing to an authenticating phrase which will often recur in this Gospel: “Ἀμήν, ἀμήν, λέγω . . .” (3:3, 5, 11; 5:19, 24–25; 6:26, 32, 47, 53; 8:34, 51, 58; 10:1, 7; 12:24; 13:16, 20–21, 38; 14:12; 16:20, 23; 21:18).<sup>545</sup> Although the conjunction of “believe” with ἀμήν could represent a wordplay in Hebrew, the Gospel’s Greek language and the frequency of the double ἀμήν in the Gospel suggest that the wordplay is probably coincidental. The double ἀμήν undoubtedly means the same thing as the almost certainly authentic Synoptic single ἀμήν,<sup>546</sup> albeit possibly a reinforcement thereof (cf. exceptional agreement or

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ogy”); Aristophanes *Plutus* 1095; Epictetus *Diatr.* 1.6.40; Cleanthes *Hymn to Zeus* (Stobaeus *Ecl.* 1.1.12, in Grant, *Religion*, 153); references to “King of kings” below. The royal image for the supreme deity was natural; in unrelated societies, see Mbiti, *Religions*, 58–59. For Roman imperial propaganda concerning the cosmic implications of imperial rule and its applicability to early Christian proclamation of Jesus, cf., e.g., Fears, “Rome.”

<sup>543</sup> See Dan 2:47; 1 Tim 6:15; 2 Macc 13:4; 3 Macc 5:35; 1 En. 9:4; 84:2; 3 En. 22:15; 25:4; text 67.2 (Isbell, *Bowls*, 147); Philo *Decalogue* 41; *Spec. Laws* 1.18; *m. Ḥabot* 3:1; *t. Sanh.* 8:9; *Sipra Sav M.D.* 98.8.5; *Ḥabot R. Nat.* 25, 27 A; *Ḥabot R. Nat.* 1, §1 B; 27, §56 B; 29, §61 B; *b. Ber.* 28b; 32b–33a, *bar.*; 62b; *Sanh.* 38a, *bar.*; *p. Meg.* 1:9, §17; *Gen. Rab.* 8:7; 12:1; 14:1; *Exod. Rab.* 2:2; 6:1; 20:1; *Lev. Rab.* 18:1; 33:3; *Num. Rab.* 1:4; 4:1, 20; 8:3; 14:3; 15:3; 18:22; *Lam. Rab.* 1:16, §50; *Ruth Rab.* 2:3; *Eccl. Rab.* 2:12, §1; 4:17, §1; 5:10, §2; 9:15, §7; 9:18, §2; 12:1, §1; 12:7, §1; *Esth. Rab.* 3:15; *Song Rab.* 1:12, §1; 7:5, §3; *Pesiq. Rab.* 13:7; 15.preamble; 23:8; Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 2, *On Kingship* 2, §75; cf. Deut 10:17; Ps 136:2–3; *Book of the Dead* spell 185E (206); the phrase is rooted in titles of suzerain rulers (Ezra 7:12; Ezek 26:7; Dan 2:37; *T. Jud.* 3:7; Plutarch *Pompey* 38.2).

<sup>544</sup> Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:319, also finds reference to Jesus’ continuing signs (2:11); Jonge, *Jesus*, 59, emphasizes Jesus’ “permanent contact with God in heaven.”

<sup>545</sup> Cf. *T. Ab.* 20:1A (Death to Abraham; Death had previously made his claim of truth emphatic by adding the first-person pronoun, *T. Ab.* 16:11A, cf. 18:6A), but this may represent Christian alteration; the double Amen of *m. Soṭah* 2:3 is an affirmation after, rather than before, a statement; that in an apparent synagogue inscription is uncertain and late (cf. Nebe, “Inscription”).

<sup>546</sup> On the single ἀμήν’s very likely authenticity and sense, see Keener, *Matthew*, 54, 181. In contrast to the prefatory ἀμήν, “I say to you” is not unique to the Jesus tradition (see Keener, *Matthew*, 182; also Wise, “General Introduction,” 264; Matt 3:9; Acts 5:38; 1 Cor 7:12; cf. Rev 2:24).

confirmation for a blessing in Neh 8:6;<sup>547</sup> doubling to signify double prophetic anointing in *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 16:4).<sup>548</sup>

After promising Nathanael that he would “see” greater things (cf. on vision in the introduction),<sup>549</sup> Jesus addresses all disciples present (at least Nathanael and Philip) and through them disciples in general, shifting to a plural deponent verb (cf. the similar move in 14:1; for communities in 3:11–12).<sup>550</sup> He promises his followers that they will see the heavens opened—the language of revelation (Ezek 1:1; Acts 7:56; 10:11; Rev 4:1; 11:19; 15:5; 19:1);<sup>551</sup> whereas he omits the specific opening of the heavens in the revelation at Jesus’ baptism (Mark 1:10; John 1:32), he promises it here. Jesus is the link between heaven and earth, the realms above and below, between God and humanity, throughout his entire ministry, as he later explains to Nathanael’s friend Philip (14:9). (This may be analogous to the Synoptics’ transfiguration theologically extended to the entire public ministry, 1:14; or passion week covering the entire ministry based on the placement of Jesus’ act of judgment in the temple, 2:14–16.) He likewise promises that Nathanael and his colleagues will see angels ascending (cf. John’s vertical dualism with Jesus in 3:13; 6:62; 20:17) and descending (cf. the Spirit “descending” from “heaven” “upon” Jesus in 1:32; Jesus in 3:13; 6:33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 58).<sup>552</sup> Thus, he is not only the “Son of Man” who will come from heaven (Dan 7:13–14), but is the mediator between heaven and earth, on whom the angels must travel. The “angels of God ascending and descending” is a direct quote from Gen 28:12. Thus, in short, Jesus is Jacob’s ladder, the one who mediates between God in heaven and his servant Jacob on earth (cf. 14:6); thus the “true Israelite” (1:47) may receive the revelation of God as his ancestor did (Gen 28:12; cf. 32:1, an *inclusio*).<sup>553</sup> As Jacob’s ladder, he is also Bethel, God’s house (Gen

<sup>547</sup>It functions as a solemn confirmation after a blessing also in the Scrolls, e.g., 4Q286 frg. 5, line 8; frg. 7, 1.7; 2.1, 5, 10, and perhaps 6; 4Q287 frg. 5, line 11; 4Q289 frg. 2, line 4 (and perhaps frg. 1, line 2); 4Q509 1.7; 4Q511 frg. 63, 4.3; after a curse in Num 5:22. A cognate term could precede a statement, adding the emphatic meaning “truly” (Ruth 3:12; 1 Kgs 8:27; 2 Kgs 19:17; 2 Chr 6:18; Job 9:2; 12:2; 19:4–5; 34:12; 36:4; Ps 58:2; Isa 37:18).

<sup>548</sup>Higgins, *Historicity*, 74–75, thinks the double ἀμήν form is not historically improbable given the single usage in the Synoptics. Given John’s free restatements of Jesus’ language in his own idiom and the uniqueness of the double form to his Gospel, however, it probably represents his own emphatic adaptation of the Synoptic phrase.

<sup>549</sup>For the specific inflected form ὄψεσθε, which as a plural envisions the other disciples in addition to Nathanael, cf. 1:39; 16:16–19.

<sup>550</sup>Cf. the comments of Sandmel, *Judaism*, 475 n. 10; Nicholson, *Death*, 30; Smith, *John* (1999), 77.

<sup>551</sup>Also *Apoc. Mos.* 35:2; 2 *Bar.* 22:1; *T. Ab.* 7:3A; *T. Levi* 2:6; see also Lentzen-Deis, “Motiv,” citing especially 2 *Macc* 3:24ff.; 3 *Macc* 6:18. For heaven parting for revelatory messengers, see, e.g., Virgil *Aen.* 9.20–21; for heavenly vision, see, e.g., Maximus of Tyre *Or.* 11.11–12; discussion of John’s “vision” motif, pp. 247–51 in the introduction.

<sup>552</sup>The particular ascent and descent of angels (e.g., Rev 7:2; 10:1; 18:1; 20:1; cf. 12:12; Jacob sees an angel descend in 4Q537 frg. 1, beginning), like that of other entities (e.g., Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10), made sense within the worldview of apocalyptic literature because of its vertical dualism, which this Gospel shares.

<sup>553</sup>Cf. also Morgen, “Promesse”; cf. Luther, *16th Sermon on John*, on John 1. Unlike the Greek, the Hebrew term for “ladder” is masculine (Smith, *John* [1999], 78); but it is unlikely that John would require complete gender agreement for the analogy in any case. Malina and Rohrbaugh, *John*, 63–64, think John evokes in 1:51 the “heavenly” connotations of “Son of Man” from Daniel and Enoch’s Similitudes. Others might also understand the necessity of a mediator between gods and people (e.g., Janus in Ovid *Fasti* 1.171–174).

28:19),<sup>554</sup> an image that naturally connects with Jesus as the new temple (1:14; 2:19–21; 4:20–24; 7:37–39; 14:2, 23).

Many commentators have investigated subsequent Jewish, particularly rabbinic, traditions about Jacob as background for the present passage. Because the Hebrew reference to angels descending “on it” (*bn*) could be translated “on him,” that is, “on Jacob,” some Jewish traditions portrayed angels traversing Jacob.<sup>555</sup> In some rabbinic traditions angels beheld Israel’s heavenly image engraved in heaven, then descended to find the earthly Jacob on earth.<sup>556</sup> The Palestinian Targum also indicates that angels ascended and descended to see Jacob; thus some commentators suggest that 1:47 portrays Jesus as the true Jacob.<sup>557</sup> Others, also pointing to Philo’s earlier picture of a heavenly Israel, find an analogous portrait in John, in which Jesus represents the heavenly and Nathanael the earthly Israel.<sup>558</sup>

While contemporary Jewish backgrounds are welcomed and later evidence is sometimes all that we have, this passage makes more sense against the widely available background in Genesis itself than against the uncertainly dated and possibly not widely available background many scholars have suggested. Although John’s “upon” could be read in support of the rabbinic interpretation that angels descended on Jacob, the LXX attests the more widespread interpretation in his day that angels ascended and descended the ladder (which, like the pronoun, is feminine in Gen 28:12 LXX), the more natural contextual sense in Genesis.<sup>559</sup> It is Nathanael, not Jesus, who is the new Jacob here (1:47; Jesus is greater than Jacob, 4:12);<sup>560</sup> Jesus is Jacob’s ladder (what *Jubilees* calls the “gate of heaven”),<sup>561</sup> the way between God and the world (14:6).<sup>562</sup> If later rabbis could claim that

<sup>554</sup>For John’s possible association of Jesus with holy-place imagery, see Barrett, “Old Testament,” 160; cf. Fritsch, “Angelos”; Davies, *Land*, 299–300. The rabbinic connection between heaven and earth in Gen 28:17 may be relevant (see the summary of this position in Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 157). Still, some earlier sources, such as *Jubilees*’ suggestion that Jacob sought a sanctuary at Bethel that could be interpreted as an alternative to Jerusalem (cf. Schwartz, “Jubilees”), naturally did not commend themselves to rabbinic development.

<sup>555</sup>See, e.g., Dahl, “History,” 136; Lightfoot, *Gospel*, 104.

<sup>556</sup>*Gen. Rab.* 68:12; cf. 82:2 (purportedly second century; cf. also *Lam. Rab.* 2:1, §2); *Tg. Neof.* 1 on Gen 28:12; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Gen 28:12. *Ladder of Jacob* (*OTP* 2:401–11) differs from rabbinic description, but its date is also problematic. One rabbi also supposedly saw rabbis ascending to heaven accompanied by angels who regularly were ascending and descending (*b. B. Mešic’a* 85b). Jacob’s image may have decorated God’s throne as images did the Roman emperor’s throne (Stern, *Parables*, 111–12); the nature of the engraved image in 4Q405 frg. 14–15, 1.2–3, 5; frg. 19A-D, lines 2–3, 6–7 (reconstructed in Wise, *Scrolls*, 374), may be disputed but is possibly the Lord’s.

<sup>557</sup>McNamara, *Targum*, 147; Rowland, “John 1.51”; cf. McNamara, *Judaism*, 229; Morris, “Jesus,” 44. The Targumim stress Jacob’s role in prayer at Bethel (see Clarke, “Dream”; *Tg. Neof.* 1 on Gen 28:17; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on 28:18).

<sup>558</sup>Borgen, “Agent,” 145–46, citing Philo *Confusion* 146; *Alleg. Interp.* 1.43. Odeberg, *Gospel*, 33–36, contends that the celestial and earthly images of Jacob in rabbinic texts correspond to the heavenly glory of Jesus revealed in the flesh, and cites Philo *Dreams* 1.23 for the ladder “as a symbol of spiritual process,” noting that the Metatron association is later. But Philo also emphasizes that God was on Jacob’s ladder (*Dreams* 1.157), and his use of the stairway as the “air” part of heaven, where disembodied souls dwell (1.133ff.), also reflects a different thought world than John.

<sup>559</sup>For how John’s audience might have envisioned various types of ladders, see perhaps *p. Erub.* 9:1, §3 (on Tyrian and Egyptian ladders); cf. *Apoll. K. Tyre* 43.

<sup>560</sup>Neyrey, “Allusions,” speculates here that Johannine disciples would be visionaries like Jacob.

<sup>561</sup>*Jub.* 27:27. If John knew the ancient *Jubilees* tradition, however, he does not exploit it; in it God stood on Jacob’s ladder (27:21). Cf. the cosmic ladder of later Jewish Christian tradition in Daniélou, *Theology*, 173–81.

Moses was greater than Jacob because he not merely saw angels but ascended into their domain, no one could dispute that Jesus was greater than Jacob,<sup>563</sup> for angels depended on him as the true connection between the worlds (cf. also 3:13–15, where Jesus is the true ascender superior to Moses). This confession climaxes the human christological titles of 1:19–50; Jesus is Christ, the lamb, the Son and the King, but only when the disciples recognize him as the exalted Son of Man and way to the Father do they recognize the full heavenly reality behind the other titles.<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>562</sup>Cf., e.g., Bruns, *Art*, 92. A third-century tradition about Jacob's ladder could complement this approach; R. Samuel bar Nahman suggested that the angels ascending on Jacob's ladder were angels of the nations, each ascending a number of rungs corresponding to the years of dominion they would exercise over Israel (*Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 23:2; cf. *Lev. Rab.* 29:2). This image could reinforce the picture of Jesus as the ultimate king (John 1:49), but I know no early or widespread corroboration for this view in early Judaism (even other rabbis read it differently, some allegorizing the ladder as Sinai and the angels as Moses, *Gen. Rab.* 68:12).

<sup>563</sup>Urbach, *Sages*, 1:157, citing *Deut. Rab.* 11:3; *Yalqut Shim'oni*, Deut. §951; etc.

<sup>564</sup>Cf. Michaels, *John*, 24; Painter, "Church," 361.