

John's Gospel Overview

John's gospel is likely the last of the four gospel books to reach its final form. The current scholarly consensus is that this book was created by at least two authors (and perhaps as many as 5!) and that it is a heavily re-worked first person account of Jesus' ministry. Exactly whose first-person account is hotly debated. The text itself never names the author, in fact the disciple named John (brother of James) is actually never mentioned in this book – though there is one reference to the “sons of Zebedee” (21:2). There is a beloved disciple who is mentioned several times in the second half of the book, but only in reference to events occurring in and around Jerusalem. Though many have believed this beloved disciple to be John, that is not explicit in the text and arguments have been put forth in favor of many others (including Lazarus, by none other than Martin Luther). Eusebius, the fourth century church historian, wrote that the original testimony was John's but that the current form of the book was due to a disciple of his, also named John (John the elder) who was also the author of the epistles of John.

Whatever the truth of its authorship, the book as we know it today seems to have reached its final form near the end of the first century (sometime between 90 and 110), probably in the city of Ephesus (in modern Turkey). Unlike Matthew and Luke, it does not rely on the narrative structure of Mark's gospel but tells a similar story - though with some important differences, such as;

- John's gospel has Jesus travelling to Jerusalem several times, his ministry unfolding over 3 years instead of 1
- Jesus doesn't use parables
- Jesus doesn't cast out demons nor is he tempted by Satan
- Jesus doesn't eat with outcasts or sinners
- Jesus doesn't preach about the kingdom of God
- Jesus never speaks about helping the poor
- Jesus doesn't share bread and wine, or use them as symbols of himself at the last supper
- Jesus doesn't seem to say much about a second coming, though there are implications that Jesus comes for his followers at their deaths.
- John's is also the only gospel that explicitly says that Jesus is God.

Many scholars believe that John's gospel was formed within a group of Jesus followers who saw themselves apart from other followers of Jesus. Not a cult exactly, but perhaps a sect who kept themselves out of the mainstream (similar to the community which

created the Dead Sea Scrolls). John's gospel uses a lot of us/them language to describe their relationship to the world (often identifying themselves as children of light) and John's gospel is the most vehemently anti-Jewish of the gospels, though paradoxically it also has the strongest language in favor of the universality of Jesus' message. We see some evidence of this in the epistles of John also in their concern over the welcoming of preachers from other communities.

Nevertheless, the testimony and theology of this gospel has inspired countless Christians over the centuries and its inclusion in the canon of scripture, despite its differences was not questioned or debated at all in the early church.

Gospel of John

Chapter 1

This chapter has two halves, the first 18 verses are a prologue that rather poetically explains who Jesus is before getting into the details of his story. The remaining verses speak of Jesus' association with John the Baptist and the beginnings of his own ministry there along the banks of the Jordan.

V1-18 This prologue basically captures the whole story that is about to unfold. Jesus was with God, came to earth to show people how to live aligned with God, and though it tried, evil could not defeat him and so Jesus returned to be with God.

V1-2 This lays the claim of Jesus' uncreated eternal existence – Jesus is the *logos*, or “word” of God and that word has *always* been with God, from the very beginning of everything. Logos is term that derived from Greek philosophy and suggests the enacted wisdom or knowledge of God – Jesus is God's wisdom put into an active form.

V3 It is through this *Word* (Jesus) that creation exists – God's will was made manifest through him.

V4 The *Word* is the source of life – a distinctive state of creation – and this *Word*-life is the light (truth, way, path, etc) for all people – which is to say it is applicable to all of humanity (all of creation really) and not just for *some* people.

V5 Here we understand that there is a kind of oppositional power to God – the darkness – which is inferior to the power of light.

We can begin to see in these first five verses the reasons why John's gospel has long been a favorite of heretical movements, especially for the gnostics which could read their understanding of special knowledge into Logos, as well their dualistic view of a spirit/material conflict.

V6-9 These are references to John the Baptist. This is a point that all the gospels make - that Jesus' ministry is in some way connected to John's. Similar to Mark, John's story of Jesus begins with John (though John does not baptize Jesus in this gospel) and John tells nothing of Jesus' human life before that moment.

V10-11 Though the world was created by the *Word*, when it came in the form of Jesus, he was recognized for what he was by his “own people” ie, the Jews.

V12-13 But some people did acknowledge who He really was and after committing themselves to Him, were adopted as “children of God.”

V14 This suggests that the *Word* as Jesus was fully human (we will see many examples of Jesus’ humanity throughout this story). The glory that was witnessed is likely a reference to Christ’s crucifixion. Also, the literal Greek is “tented among us” which may be a reference to the tent of the Tabernacle where God resided in the Exodus stories.

V15 Here John’s role as an anticipatory voice is again brought into the story. The *Word* pre-existed John, but John’s ministry pre-exists Jesus’ own in order to set the stage, as it were.

V16-18 Moses was an intermediary, but Jesus offers the word directly to humanity.

V19-23 Here we finally enter into the narrative with the religious authorities (priests and Levites, a kind of secondary order of priests, who belong the Pharisee sect) seeking to discredit John with their accusatory questions. All John will say of himself to these “outsiders” is that he is like the one mentioned in the prophet Isaiah (40:3) in a section where Isaiah is speaking about the coming defeat of Israel by Babylon – which is to set these are from a passage reassuring Israel that God will not be defeated, just the corrupt kingdom).

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Isaiah 40:1-5

V24-28 So, though ancient Judaism had rituals of cleansing (Mikvahs), what John was doing was something else entirely. John’s baptism symbolically offered a fresh start for anyone who accepted it by re-enacting Israel’s entry in the promised Land. In a sense it implied a forgiveness of past wrongs, which is why the Pharisees asking John by what authority he is doing this? I can imagine that they found John’s answers unsatisfactory.

But then John turns it around on them by saying that someone with the kind of authority they are looking for is coming, but that they are too blinkered to recognize him.

V29-34 Now John is talking to “insiders” and he points out the presence of Jesus to his disciples and followers proclaiming that Jesus is the one with authority he was telling the Pharisees about. John claims to know this because the Spirit of God descend upon Jesus and he had been told in a vision that the one on whom the Spirit alit was the one who would usher in God’s new age.

V35-39 At last Jesus enters into the story! John is again pointing out Jesus and inferring that He is the long awaited Messiah and two of John’s disciples decide to follow Jesus and hang out with him. This is the first of four uses of “come and see” in John’s gospel, reinforcing that Jesus is the “light” which allows us to see the Truth (God).

V40-42 We now learn that one of the two mentioned above was Andrew who goes and tells his brother Peter and then takes Peter to meet Jesus who gives him an Aramaic nickname “Rocky or maybe Blockhead ?” since his given name is very similar to the Greek word for rock (Petrus). All the gospels show Jesus using wordplay, implying a sense of humor. The use of translations here (Messiah and Peter) implies that the original audience for this Gospel were native Greek speakers – i.e., Gentiles

V43 It is unclear from this whether he found Philip in Galilee or asked him to follow him to Galilee; it also isn’t clear whether or not Jesus already knew Philip (was he the other one with Andrew who followed Jesus?) or just some random guy Jesus encountered (if anything Jesus does is random). It also isn’t clear whether or not Philip is Jesus’ only travelling companion since Philip will use “we” in a couple of chapters.

V44 Here John says that Philip, Andrew, and Peter were from Bethsaida (on the northern shore of Galilee) whereas the three Synoptic gospels say that Capernaum was the home of Peter and Andrew (as well as James and John).

V45 Here, the author tells us that the name of the father of Jesus was Joseph, which is the last time we’ll hear about him. We will hear about his mother later, though his mother is never named in this gospel. Jesus’ connection to Nazareth is well attested in all four gospels.

V46 Nazareth was a bit of a backwater village back in the hills. We also encounter the second “Come and See.”

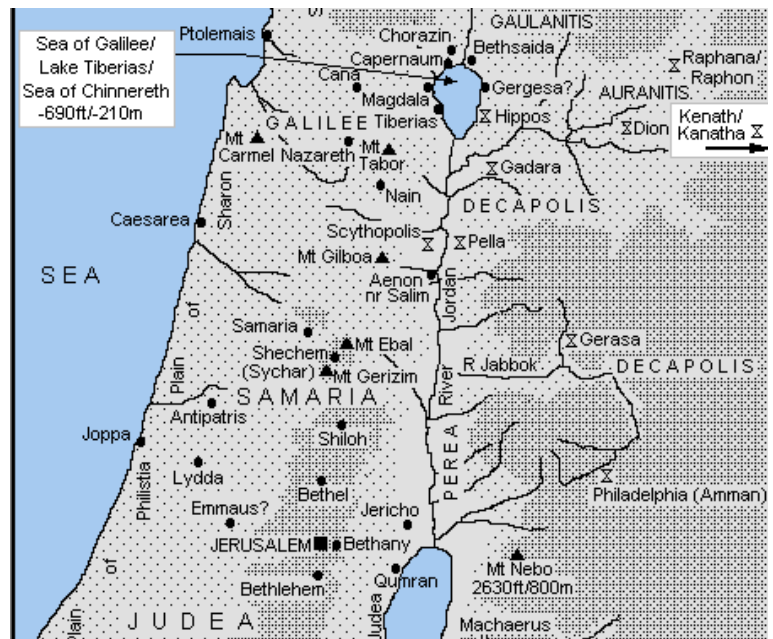
V47-51 This passage describes the somewhat odd first encounter of Nathanael and Jesus. This is the fourth “recruitment” story. First Jesus invited Andrew and one other to “come and see.” Next Andrew takes his brother to meet Jesus to essentially see for himself that Andrew’s claims are true. Next Jesus finds Philip (though Philip may already be known) and lastly Philip brings along Nathanael to “come and see.” So the pattern is that Jesus invites someone who then invites another (hey – it’s evangelism!).

So, we’re now up to four disciples; Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. Each of the gospels tells a slightly different version of how the disciples joined the group and none give the story for all twelve. In the next chapter we will begin to hear of the “Signs of Jesus,” which may have been a pre-cursor book to John’s gospels which told of the miraculous doings or “signs” of Jesus which showed his power.

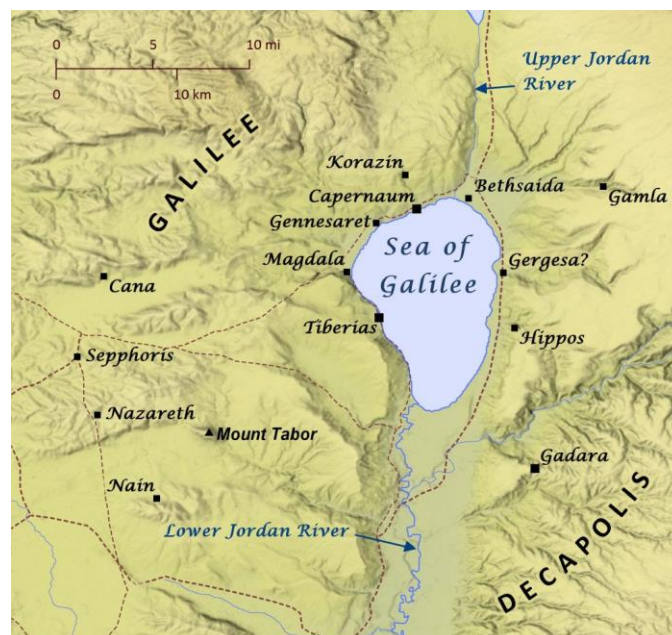
Gospel of John Chapter 2

The chapter begins with a continuation of a story about Jesus that occurs over three days. Clearly, this is a literary construct meant to mirror the three days at the end of Jesus' earthly life. There is no way Jesus and his (thus far) small group of followers could get from the place where John was baptizing (near Bethany) to Cana in three days, and especially if they went through Bethsaida as the end of chapter 1 suggests.

We can see on the map to the right, the distance from the Jordan near Bethany to either Cana or Bethsaida is about 80 miles as the crow flies, and the distance between Cana and Bethsaida is about 20. So, the distance travelled, on foot, was at least 80 miles and maybe more than 100, assuming they could travel on a fairly direct path.



The dotted lines are major travel routes, showing that a direct path wasn't likely.



V1-12 the miracle at Cana is only found in John's Gospel.

Wedding feasts could last several days, and that Jesus and his disciples were invited seems to suggest it was a large wedding party, so its not surprising that the wine might run out.

The interplay between Jesus and his mother is interesting here. Her role suggests that she is, of course, aware of who or what Jesus is but also that she has an important role in Jesus' ministry- it only begins at her insistence. And though it is perhaps jarring to our ears, the use of "woman" by Jesus here is not meant disrespectfully (He uses similar language in a much more touching interaction at the foot of the cross).

There are many scholars who believe that this story was taken from an earlier (though now lost) book that recorded stories of Jesus' miracles, or signs.

That the wine will come from the jars used for purification rites is clearly meant to be symbolic of the Jesus' mission. There may also be a symbolic connection to the wine as Jesus' own blood, though this gospel does not contain the story of the last supper and Jesus' use of bread and wine there, though the community which produced this gospel may have practiced communion as we understand it. Similarly, that it is the good wine being offered when others would have offered inferior wine also speaks to the superiority of Jesus over and above the received traditions of Israel.

As in the other gospels, Jesus' home base is Capernaum. This depiction of Jesus' family as being supportive of his ministry seems to contradict how the other gospels depict Jesus' relationship with his family

Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." — Mark 3:20–21 New Revised Standard Version.

Similarly, St Paul implies that James, the eldest of Jesus' 4 brothers did follow Jesus until after his death (1Cor: 15-7)

V1-13 the cleansing of the Temple.

As already mentioned, John's gospel has Jesus travelling to Jerusalem several times over three years. Here, the author of John places the story of Jesus' outburst at the Temple at the very beginning of his ministry rather than at the end.

A reminder that that Temple offered sacrificial animals for sale to meet the requirements of the Law while insisting that they could only be bought with shekels and not Roman money which had graven images on them. Undoubtedly, this was also a

nice money-making enterprise for the Temple leaders, who lived off of the offerings. The commercial activities were located in the outermost precincts of the Temple (the court of Gentiles). The Temple was built like a Russian nesting doll, with each precinct growing holier the closer one ventured to the center.

As in the other gospels, Jesus' actions are meant to show the words of the prophets coming true, in this case it is from Zechariah.

On that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the LORD." And the cooking pots in the house of the LORD shall be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar; and every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and use them to boil the flesh of the sacrifice. And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day. Zech 14:20-21

The quote in verse 17 is from Psalm 69

Do not let those who hope in you be put to shame because of me, O Lord GOD of hosts; do not let those who seek you be dishonored because of me, O God of Israel.

It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face.

I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children.

It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. Psalm 69:6-9

Again we hear about signs, or divine authentications of Jesus' actions. This is not the official "second sign" but Jesus is referencing a sign that will come in the future so probably not so helpful in the moment, but of course Jesus is playing the long game, but this also is the first mention of an important idea in John's gospel, that Jesus' body (i.e.; his self-sacrifice on the cross) will be the new Temple for Israel which permanently supplants the old.

The last three verses are a transition to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, but also serve to reinforce the earlier assertion in this gospel that Jesus is equivalent to God. For example we see this ability in 1 Samuel when Samuel is trying to figure out who to anoint as the king to replace Saul

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." 1Sa 16:7

Gospel of John

Chapter 3

Most of this chapter is taken up with a nighttime, apparently clandestine, meeting between Jesus and a leading pharisee named Nicodemus. After that conversation, Jesus begins a time of travelling.

V1 Nicodemus is apparently someone of import and yet is depicted as someone who, though earnest, has a somewhat limited understanding of God.

V2 They might at night, which could be both a reflection of the historical situation in which Jesus was surely not too popular after the ruckus in the Temple, but also reinforces this gospel's interpretation of Jesus as the "true light." Again, this encounter is only recorded in John's gospel.

It is curious that Nicodemus mentions "these signs that you do" since Jesus hasn't really done too many public signs yet and it isn't clear that the Temple cleansing would have been interpreted as a holy action by too many.

V3 There seems to be some interesting wordplay at work here, the phrase "from above," in the original Greek, could also be understood as "anew." This encounter also fits a pattern in all the gospels where something Jesus said is misinterpreted by a hearer which Jesus then *sorta* clarifies.

In some ways, being born anew is not so different from when Jesus, in the synoptic Gospels, tells the disciples they must become like children, as here in Matthew; *"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

Matt 18:3-4

V4-7 Nicodemus continues to misunderstand, taking literally what Jesus says metaphorically.

Also, verses 4 and 5 are the only places Jesus mentions the "kingdom of God" in this gospel

V8-12 The saying about the wind it where it goes may come from an ancient proverb whose meaning would have been clearer to the original audience of this gospel.

The crux of the matter though is expressed in verses 11 and 12 and the question for us is “what do we believe and why do we believe it?”

V13 What about the prophet Elijah?

As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. 2Ki 2:11

The Son of Man is a title that is drawn from the prophet Ezekiel in reference to an apocalyptic vision. Elsewhere in the Bible it is used a merely a poetic synonym of “human.”

V14-15 The story of the serpent comes from Numbers after the wandering Israelites complain bitterly, God sends a plague of snakes to kill the people, but Whoever looks at the bronze serpent is healed.

The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Num 21:7-9

In the same way, we crucified Christ and believe will also be saved from death.

V16 So probably the most famous Bible verse ever.

V17 Despite this gospels common use of a spirit/material dichotomy, this verse reaffirms the incarnations meaning that this world matters and is not a place where God is absent.

V18 But after those two beautiful verses, we get this rather stark message that is resonant with other teachings in the Synoptic gospels about the consequences of turning away from God.

V19-21 Again we return the theme of Jesus as the light and the power of that light to dispel and overcome any darkness.

Now we move away from the conversation with Nicodemus and go with Jesus as he travels through Galilee.

V22-24 This is the only place in the four Gospels where it says Jesus baptized anyone – though in the next chapter we get an....uh.... clarification that actually, Jesus wasn't baptizing anyone after all. The location noted, Aenon, near Salim is about 40-50 miles north of where John was said to be in the first chapter. As far as I can recall, this is the only mention that John moved around, usually he is described as always being near Jerusalem.

V25-30 The term "Jew" here seems to imply, as is often the case in this Gospel, that we are talking about one of the religious authorities and not just some random Jew – which of course includes everyone else in the story, including Jesus. Basically, the person in question is trying to goad John into jealousy as a means to undermine both his and Jesus' ministries.

V31-36 This is still John the Baptist speaking, affirming Jesus ministry and in a roundabout way reiterating that his role was messenger and not saviour.

Gospel of John

Chapter 4

Chapter 3 and 4 work together to showcase the radical nature of Jesus and His teachings. In chapter 3, Jesus meets with a respected leader of the Pharisees, a famously devout sect, who struggles to understand and accept who Jesus is. In chapter 4, Jesus encounters a peasant Samaritan woman (Samaritans were not considered “real” Jews by the Israelite cousins), the epitome of low status, whose status is even lower because of the nature of her relationships, who comes to fully accept Jesus and bring others to Him. This dichotomy reinforces that the good news of Jesus is not just good news for the usual suspects who already have so much but especially for those who occupy the lower strata of society. This possibly offers us some clues as to what kind of people made up the membership of the community that created this gospel.

Vv1-4 Continuing from chapter 3, we hear again how Jesus’ ministry is beginning to eclipse John’s which also means Jesus is likely garnering unwelcome attention from nervous authorities who generally don’t trust popular movements led by holy men. So Jesus decides to head back closer to home, in Galilee. But the road from where Jesus is (Aenon near Salim) to Galilee takes him through Samaria.

Reminder: The Samaritans also worshipped God, and understood God through the Law of Moses (Torah). However, the Samaritans were inheritors of a different tradition, connected with the northern kingdom (which had been destroyed by Assyria in about 721 BCE) and did not recognize the southern kingdom’s traditions about the preeminence of Jerusalem. They worshipped primarily at Mt Gerizim, which was where God is said to have told the Israelites to set their blessing when they first entered the land according to Deuteronomy.

When the LORD your God has brought you into the land that you are entering to occupy, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. Deu 11:29

V5-6 Sychar may refer to the city of Shechem, or to a now unknown village nearby. According to Genesis, Jacob bought land and settled near Shechem. Shechem was the city whose prince married Jacob’s daughter Dinah (which resulted in lots of murder of the original inhabitants) and it was also where the capital of the northern kingdom was first established.

Jacob’s well still exists – there’s a church built on top of it now, but as recently as the 19th century it was still in use as a water source for nearby residents.

According to Major Anderson, who visited the site in 1866, the well has

"a narrow opening, just wide enough to allow the body of a man to pass through with arms uplifted, and this narrow neck, which is about 4 ft. long, opens into the well itself, which is cylindrically shaped, and opens about 7 ft. 6 in. in diameter. The well and upper part of the well are built of masonry, and the well appears to have been sunk through a mixture of alluvial soil and limestone fragments, till a compact bed of mountain limestone was reached, having horizontal strata which could be easily worked; and the interior of the well presents the appearance of having been lined throughout with rough masonry."



Based on a measurement made in 1935, the total depth of the well is 41 135 ft

V7-15 Jesus, left alone while his disciples went to pick up lunch, speaks to an unaccompanied woman.

So, there's a lot of context for this encounter. First, it would have been highly unusual, as she points out, for a Judean to be friendly with a Samaritan, it would have been doubly unusual, and somewhat scandalous, for unrelated men and women to speak with one another, and it is very odd that a woman would be risking herself by going to the well alone at noon (when it is really hot) instead of with the other women early in the morning.

Through the beginning of this conversation, because of the oddity of Jesus' behavior towards her and the unconventional things Jesus says, the woman is, more or less, treating Jesus as a crazy person. But again, this is a parallel of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus where Jesus says something metaphorical (living water in his case) that the hearer takes literally (living water = moving water).

V16-19 Now the conversation turns as the woman suddenly realizes that Jesus is not crazy at all, but this seems to just make her be cautious and a little indignant.

V21-24 When the woman said that Jesus was a prophet, she didn't mean that literally – she probably assumed he was just privy to the gossip about her, so she goads him a little about how the Judeans look down on the Samaritans concerning worship.

Surprisingly though, Jesus agrees with her and goes beyond to say that a new era is coming where the worship of God won't be bound by the limits of sacrificial ritual but will be embodied holistically in people's lives. This idea that God is wearied of sacrifices is a common theme throughout the prophets, perhaps best captured by Amos;

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:21-24

V25-26 Ok, the woman says, I know there's a new age coming, we're all waiting for someone to open up for us a new way of life and Jesus tells her simply that that is who he is.

V27 But the disciples, the perpetual avatars of missing the point are concerned at Jesus breaking the social taboo against being alone with an unrelated woman and they're not sure who exactly to blame.

v27-29 The woman, thankfully more clear-headed than the disciples, forgets the water jar and runs back to the town where she starts talking immediately about what has just happened and where people respond positively to her, despite her otherwise questionable status.

V31-38 Like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, the disciple here misunderstands Jesus' use of metaphor (about food) as something literal.

Jesus expands his food metaphor to include reapers and sowers at the harvest. The Samaritan woman's evangelism and readiness to accept Jesus' good news is an example of the readiness of the harvest, i.e. the world's deep desire for Good News and that the disciples are actually entering into the work of the Holy Spirit who may be inspiring others beyond the disciples in Jesus' immediate circle.

V39-42 Similar to the story of Jonah in Nineveh, the Samaritan woman is wildly successful in gathering converts to Jesus' message who quickly move from believing because the woman reported a kind of miraculous encounter, to belief based on Jesus' own teachings.

V43-45 After two days Jesus again hits the road to continue his journey back to Galilee. The aside about prophets and their honor is a little curious. We may remember Jesus saying that when he visits Nazareth and he is unable to much work there and they even try to kill him, but that story is not in John's Gospel, but it is in Mark and Matthew. So clearly, the Johannine community had access to some collection of Jesus' sayings, whether or not they were familiar with those other gospels or not.

V46-47 Royal official. Galilee was ruled by Herod, who wasn't actually a king, but was a roman client who governed these territories on behalf of Rome.

Normally we would expect a royal official to send an emissary and not come himself sine he and Jesus are not social equals. But again John is showing us how Jesus subverts the social order.

Also, Cana and Capernaum are about 15 miles apart (and its uphill)

V49-54 Here we see the pattern we will see thorough this gospel. Someone comes to Jesus with a request, they are seemingly refused at first, but then Jesus takes action that brings about a positive result.

The official makes the connections between Jesus *word* and his sons *healing* and this is reckoned as the second sign of Jesus.

Gospel of John

Chapter 5

v1 Many scholars believe that chapter 5 originally came after the material in chapter six, which has Jesus in Galilee, and it would fit more clearly with chapter 7 which has Jesus in Jerusalem again for the festival of Booths (Sukkot). There are three “pilgrimage festivals” described in the Bible, Passover, Pentecost, and Sukkot (aka the Festival of Booths). Chapter 2 occurs at Passover and Chapter 7 occurs at Sukkot (which is in the Fall), so chapter 5 could be at Pentecost, but Jesus’ reluctance to travel to Judea in chapter 7 makes more sense if it was following immediately upon the conflicts we’ll encounter here in chapter 5.

v2 Archeological digs suggest this was probably on the north side of Jerusalem, near the Temple complex where a double pool with five porticoes (covered walkways) has been found.

v4 You may notice, if you’re using an NRSV there is no verse 4! Some translations may have it, but it has been left out of the NRSV because as scholars have discovered older manuscripts, they have discovered that the verse isn’t there meaning it was a later addition.

v7 Apropos the missing verse 4, it seems only the person who entered the well first after the waters moved could be healed, which would surely have felt cruel to those who were essentially unable to move.

v8-9 As we saw with the royal official’s son in the previous chapter, Jesus “heals” without use of word or action as we might see in the other gospels. There’s no laying on of hands or anything like that. Rather Jesus gives a command that implies that healing has occurred. Though this story is unique to John, the controversy over healing on the sabbath occurs in all the gospels.

v10 The sabbath prohibition on work usually includes carrying things from one space to another. Generally the use of Jews here implies religious authorities/leaders since pretty much everyone here is Jewish.

v11-13 Curiously missing here is any word from Jesus about how the healed one’s faith has affected the healing, not surprising perhaps since the healed man didn’t even know Jesus’ identity.

v14 The Bible often relates a connection between healing and forgiveness, suggesting that illness and personal sinfulness are somehow linked.

v16-18 Here is the crux of the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities. Jesus teaches and acts on the maxim that nothing, not even the law, should stand in the way of responding in love to the pain and brokenness of the world. In all fairness, the authorities here aren't necessarily callous or indifferent to suffering but they did clearly link communal well being to obedience to the Law. This isn't surprising given that much of the Hebrew scriptures is given over to the perspective that Israel's suffering was the result of their unfaithfulness to God. What might be merciful for one person could result, in their minds, in the suffering of everyone from God's wrath.

Despite verse 18's implication of increasing pressure on Jesus, it's actually the first time the gospel mentions any real trouble for Jesus, let alone that his death might be being actively sought.

(this would make a little more sense if the narrative originally had this material after the event in chapter 6)

v19-47 The rest of this chapter is taken up with Jesus challenging the religious authorities by reinterpreting the Jewish tradition.

v19-24 Here Jesus explicitly identifies himself as the Son of God. This is a departure from the other gospels, where Jesus himself never explicitly claims to be God's son. In the other gospels it is only ever other people who say that about Jesus. He also says that he and God are essentially one being – to see Jesus is to see God.

v25-30 Jesus continues equating himself with God, imputing the expected actions of God at the end of time to his own authority

v31-38 Jesus now changes tack a bit to link himself to the teachings of John. John was widely regarded as a holy man and the gospels report him as having self-identified as a kind of Elijah-like herald to the coming of something greater – Jesus is saying (as he did at the Samaritan well) "I am that greater thing."

v39-44 Jesus' argument here is that the religious leaders are quick to heap glory on themselves, to strive for respect, and to adapt to the supremacy of Rome, but they are unwilling to accept Jesus' claims because to do so would undermine their own status and position.

v45-47 Jesus closes by essentially calling them hypocrites, saying that their piety is hollow and they have chosen the form of faith without the substance.

Gospel of John

Chapter 6

Chapter six, which might be called the bread chapter, contains versions of two familiar stories, the feeding of the thousands and Jesus walking on the water, but is mostly a discourse on Jesus' purpose and identity.

V1-3 Jesus travels to the eastern shore (where most of the populace is not Jewish) and is followed by large crowds because of his healing abilities.

V4 That Passover is near doesn't seem to have much bearing on the narrative other than unleavened bread is an important part of marking Passover.

V5-10 Similar to the other gospels, the crowds come to Jesus in a somewhat deserted place without easy access to food; the only thing available being five loaves and two fish. John sets up the story a little differently though, in the synoptic gospels, Jesus has been healing people all day and grows concerned as evening comes that the crowd will be getting hungry; here Jesus doesn't explicitly interact with the crowd at all, but upon seeing them approach wonders how they might be fed, not from compassion but as a test of the disciples' faith.

The original Greek only refers to men, so there were five thousand men *plus* whatever women or children that might have accompanied them. In other words, a lot of people. Especially considering that the region was made up only a few hundred small villages with no large cities nearby.

V11-15 As mentioned previously, John's gospel contains a number of incidents described as "signs" (i.e., miracles that point to Jesus' divinity) and this expansion of the five loaves and two fish is accounted as one of them.

Jesus is concerned that the crowd's interpretation of the sign was to initiate a political revolution with Jesus as its figurehead and so he retreats away from the crowd.

V16-21 For unexplained reasons, the disciples depart and leave Jesus on his own. At least halfway across (Galilee at its widest point is 8 miles across), Jesus appears walking across the water, which (understandably) scares the disciples. In the original Greek, Jesus says it is "I am," which, of course, is similar to the bush's response to Moses, "I am who I am" from Exodus (3:14)

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

V22-24 The crowd puzzles over the disappearance of Jesus but decide to go looking for him in his home base, the village of Capernaum.

V25-59 Much of the remainder of the chapter is a discourse on Jesus using the metaphor of bread. Fun Fact: In lectionary year B, there is a five-week span where each week's gospel is drawn from this part of the chapter. Preachers dread it.

V25-26 From the get go, this gospel sets up the crowd as, if not exactly hostile to Jesus, they are at least not exactly true believers.

V27 Again, Jesus makes an explicit claim of divinity

V28-29 Contrast this with what Jesus says to, more or less, the same question in Luke's gospel;

And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

Luke 3:10-14

Or with the Great Commission which closes out Matthew's Gospel;

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matt 28:19-20

Jesus here sets a different goal – to believe. In this discourse and throughout this gospel, Jesus' only explicit goal is to gather up believers who might be selected for eternal life.

V30-31 So, despite experiencing the "sign" of the feeding in the desert, and perhaps hearing of the earlier "signs," water into wine and the healing of the royal official's son – not to mention all the healings, the crowd asks Jesus how he intends to prove to them that he is "of God."

It must have been exasperating to be Jesus sometimes.

V32-34 structured similarly to the story at the Samaritan well and following the familiar pattern, Jesus describes something metaphorically (his teaching and example as bread) which the hearer takes literally.

V35-40 Jesus tries to clarify HE IS THE BREAD!! And Jesus reminds them of what they have seen and yet they still don't accept his claims. Jesus then reiterates that he is only doing what God has asked him to do and that those who believe his claims will participate in the resurrection to eternal life.

I would note that this seems to imply a material existence and not eternal life as a spiritual being.

V41-42 The crowd replies (quite logically) that he couldn't have literally come down from heaven since we know who his mother and father are – clearly Jesus was born like everybody else and so skepticism of his claims to divinity seems reasonable.

V43-47 Belief, Jesus says here, is a gift that can only come from God, and then quotes from Isaiah (54:13) to support his contention.

I want to push back on this just a little, because it seems to me that faith is kind of both/and experience; the invitation to faith may emanate from God, but a response is still needed on our part to bring it to fruition. I really can't accept that a loving God would purposefully create people just to destroy them. Even this very Gospel states that Jesus came not to condemn but to save, and further that eternal life was given to "all who received him" and reception suggests an action on the part of the recipient.

V49-59 Here Jesus alludes to his death on the cross and the atoning features of his death that will break the power of evil other than whatever power people are willing to give to evil.

Again though, the people understand it literally – as cannibalism! – while Jesus is speaking metaphorically.

V60-65 Seeming to also misunderstand Jesus, some of his followers decide to back off because Jesus seems to them to be talking seriously taboo nonsense. In a sense, this literal/metaphorical pattern is similar to the pattern in other gospels where Jesus uses parables which no one understands. The point is the same, faith isn't logical,

it's an extension of trust that requires one to de-center themselves and instead re-center God in their understanding and view of the world.

V66-71 Jesus turns to the core group, which he himself invited and asks them if they are going to desert him, but Peter answers for the rest of them that they remain committed. These words of Peter resemble those attributed to him in Mark's gospel when Jesus asks the disciples who they think He is.

"But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

Mark 8:29

Curiously, Jesus now has twelve disciples, but when the author last mentioned the core disciples there were only 4 of them (Philip, Peter, Andrew, and Nathanael). Here we get the name of a fifth, Judas Isacriot.

Gospel of John Chapter 7

V1 That Jesus is afraid for his life after feeding the 5000 and healing many feels like some parts of the story (like the addition of 8 more disciples) has been left out.

And the obligatory reminder that everyone here in the story is a Jew.

V2 The Festival of Booths, or Sukkoth, in Jesus' time was one of the three annual pilgrimage festivals of Israel (along with Passover and Pentecost) which usually lasted for a week.

V3-5 Presumably, the author here intends the disciples when he writes "brothers," though he did perhaps imply that Jesus' actual brothers were already part of his ministry back in 2:12

The disciples want to go to the festival and think Jesus should put himself out there more – so they seem to be discounting Jesus' concerns about his safety.

V6-9 Jesus then encourages them to go without him. This is the only time in this Gospel where the disciples and Jesus are parted – there are no stories of the twelve (or 70) being sent out in John's gospel.

I really like Jesus' words here, "your time is always here," as it prefigures the work of the church, yet it also differs a little from Jesus' response in a similar situation in Matthew's gospel;

"See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles.

Matt 10:16-18

V10-13 Perhaps it was Jesus' plan all along, but he decides to travel to Jerusalem after all, on his own and seemingly keeping a low profile (though that's about to change). Remember that during the previous Passover, just a few months before, Jesus has caused quite a stir with his whip and the overturning of the tables. So, many were probably expecting him to be present and to again undertake some bold public act.

In this case "Jews" clearly implies the authorities.

V14-18 These verses are very similar to the story, in Matthew's gospel, of the young Jesus who steals away to the Temple when his family visits Jerusalem during another festival.

Despite what is said here, Jesus is hardly an illiterate peasant. He clearly reads and writes, as examples of each are presented throughout the gospels. Further, his family's ability to travel suggests that are relatively well off and as we learn from the genealogies and from the story of Mary and Elizabeth in Luke, Joseph and Mary are both members of traditional priestly families, which further suggests they are of relatively higher status. So, aside from being the Son of God, Jesus may also well have been a pretty well-informed human.

V19-20 As Jesus points out their hypocrisy, the crowd retorts basically by saying he is delusional (ancient peoples often conflated mental illness with demonic possession).

V21-24 It's not clear exactly what "work" Jesus means here, but presumably the feeding of the 5000. His main point is that his healing is no more "work" than performing a circumcision and in fact equally meets the intent of the Law.

His justification accords with that used to justify his healing on sabbath in the other gospels.

V25-31 Jesus' teachings continue to cause divisions among the people of Jerusalem, as each seek to understand Jesus through a combination of scriptural interpretation and personal experience.

V32-36 Jesus is causing unrest in the Temple in the midst of this very important festival and so the Temple authorities act to restore order.

We also encounter again the metaphor/literal pattern again when Jesus talks of his ascension while the authorities thoughts are more worldly focused.

V37-39 These verses are presumably meant by Jesus to connect what's happening as part of the festival to his own ministry. Sukkoth was primarily a harvest festival (a Thanksgiving, if you will) where imagery of God's favor in the Exodus (manna and water from the rock) was present was paired with the prophetic anticipation of a coming day when God will remake the world.

Jesus is trying to show that he is the living water, akin to the water from the rock, but "water" which slakes spiritual thirst. The quote he offers is not found in our Bibles

anywhere, though there is a verse in Zechariah 14, speaking of the coming day of the Lord which was part of the rite for Sukkoth that says;

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter. Zec 14:8

And, of course, water is a common metaphor for life and God's action in the world which would have been pertinent to a people who live in a fairly dry place.

V40-44 So the crowd seems really hazy on where exactly the messiah is supposed to come from – back in v27 they said “when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.” Now, they are certain the Messiah's from Bethlehem (they clearly are unfamiliar with Luke's gospel 😊) and everyone knows Jesus is from Nazareth which is not only not Bethlehem, it's not even in Judea!

And again, Jesus is not arrested at this point because it is not in accord with god's planned timeline.

V45-52 The authorities' plans are circumvented when the agents they send to arrest Jesus are also captivated by him, causing great frustration. But we see that the authorities are not all in agreement either because Nicodemus speaks, if not exactly in favor of Jesus, then at least in favor of due process on Jesus' behalf. But the leading forces among them are clearly intent on silencing Jesus regardless of law or procedure.

Historically outside of scripture, we know that Pontius Pilate himself was removed from his position because he overstepped Roman law and had some dissenters executed and that later, the high priest Caiphas was removed by the Romans for having James and other Christian leaders executed in the early 60's while there was a gap in Roman oversight.

Gospel of John

Chapter 8

7:53- 8:11 are not found in the oldest manuscripts of John's gospel that have been discovered in the past 50 years or so. Many biblical scholars question whether it should be included or not. There are some older manuscripts which locate the story in different parts of John and even some that have the story in Luke. It is very possible that it was an independent story of Jesus that later scribes felt was genuine enough to be included somewhere even if it wasn't part of the gospels as originally written.

V1-11 This story works similar to the one about paying taxes (found in Mark, Matt, and Luke) where Jesus uses a denarius to deflect his interlocutors. Jesus' opponents come to him with a what they believe is a moral quandary to "test" him by asking what should be done, believing that whatever Jesus chooses he will condemn himself. Here, as in the tax episode, Jesus responds without answering but in such a way that his opponents come off looking like hypocrites.

V3 This is the only occurrence in John's gospel of the term "scribes," though it is commonly used in the other three gospels. This is one of the pieces of evidence scholars use to support their contention that it is not meant as part of John.

V7 The law required that the one who witnessed the violation be the first one to stone the violator. Presumably, those who "witnessed" her adultery would implicate themselves by doing so.

The hands of the witnesses shall be the first raised against the person to execute the death penalty, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. Deu 17:7

V12-20 This seems to be marking the beginning of another encounter and not just the one continuing from either the 11 verses prior or from the end of chapter 7. Reading further in the chapter though, it does seem to be happening within the Temple complex.

Honestly, Jesus' reasoning here is a little circular. It goes something like this

Pharisees: We can't just take your say-so – where's the proof? Who can testify about you?

Jesus: I testify on my own behalf.

Pharisees: That doesn't count, we need independent verification.

Jesus: The law requires two witnesses, so I am my own witness and God is my second witness.

Pharisees: eyeroll – let's arrest him.

V21-30 Jesus speaks cryptically about his coming death, resurrection, and ascension. The crowd is confused (again) and express skepticism and yet many are nevertheless persuaded that Jesus is the messiah.

To go on a tangent for a moment; this is one of those passages (and there are many in the Bible) where it suggests a view that little or no effort on our part is needed to share Jesus with others. I want you to imagine meeting someone today who told you that they had magical water to drink that would satisfy your thirst for all time or that God was talking directly to them and telling them what to do and imagine how you would honestly respond.

I firmly believe that the only path to true human thriving is the way of Jesus. I also know that you can't argue someone into faith, nor can you get there by just saying ethereal spiritual things about God and Jesus. God incarnate may be able to say "follow me" and people do, but that won't work for the rest of us. So, if we really desire that others might thrive, and we believe that Jesus is the way, then we need to do take the time and put in the effort to *show* people the truth of our beliefs by allowing them to see them in our own lives *and* we need to be willing to be vulnerable enough to share that others as well.

End of sermon.

V31-33 Picking up from my sermonette above, the folks here ask an important question – what exactly is this savior saving us from (or for)?

V34-38 The way I would re-phrase Jesus' answer is to say that all humans exist within systems – some natural, like ecological systems but many that are human-created such as cultural systems, religious systems, financial systems (money is an invention, not an element), family systems. And being human-made, those systems are inherently imperfect or broken, in other words they all have elements that take us away from God's will thus they, by definition, incorporate sin. So, Jesus says, you can turn from those and join me instead, live my example, follow my teachings, and you will move closer to God's will and thus to the true purpose and meaning of your creation.

V37 This seems a little odd here as the beginning of this section identified the audience as Jesus' followers and yet in this verse he is saying that they all wish to kill him because they are unbelievers. This is one of the clues which suggests that this text has undergone revision.

V39-59 The rest of the chapter continues with Jesus facing a hostile crowd somewhere within the Temple precincts.

V39-40 The claim here that Abraham is their father seems to suggest that they understand their relationship with God to be primarily tribal – they are God's people by kinship and therefore needn't necessarily do more. Jesus, responds by saying the Abraham's children would act like Abraham, suggesting that actions are more important than kinship in determining who is God's people.

This is very similar to what Jesus says in Luke's gospel when he asks "who are my mother, and my brothers, and sister?"

V41-44 Who Jesus is suggesting their father is in v41 is made clear in v44 (the devil), while the crowds answer to Jesus is that they are truly inheritors of Abraham's blessing, but again Jesus tells them that kinship and the law are not markers of God's people.

V45-47 The implication here is that faith is a gift of God (which these people clearly don't have).

As I said back in chapter 6, I want to push back on this just a little, because it seems to me that faith is kind of both/and experience; the invitation to faith may emanate from God, but a response is still needed on our part to bring it to fruition. I really can't accept that a loving God would purposefully create people just to destroy them. Even this very Gospel states that Jesus came not to condemn but to save, and further that eternal life was given to "all who received him" and reception suggests an action on the part of the recipient.

V48-49 In other words "we don't need to listen to you because you're delusional and a foreigner!"

Curiously, Jesus does not deny being a Samaritan even though he isn't, though being a Galilean makes him suspect in the eyes of many who live in Judea proper.

V50-59 The confrontation continues to escalate as Jesus tries to impress upon them that he is of God and offers a message of hope.

The crowd hears his message of hope (which in all honesty, is kind of over the top) as a sure and certain sign of his lunacy. The crowd knows that nothing is certain except death (and taxes) and Jesus' claims to the contrary needn't be taken seriously. And then Jesus says that he knew Abraham and is, in fact, an eternal being, which is really just the last straw, and they spontaneously decide to just kill him then and there – but it's not Jesus' time yet, so he slips away.

Note: John's gospel in its final form emerged in a time of great conflict between post-temple Judaism and Christianity. Both groups offer an answer to the fundamental question about how to be God's people in the wake of the Temple's destruction and the community that produced John seems to have a particularly pointed animosity to Judaism that is reflected in how they chose to share these stories about Jesus. If the authorities and other observant Jews had truly been as dismissive of Jesus and believed he was as much of a lunatic as these two chapters have suggested, then it seems unlikely that Jesus would have warranted execution.

Clearly, Jesus was a compelling figure and inspired widespread devotion in his own day. He was a popular guy and it was his popularity that made him dangerous, so this gospel's depiction of every crowd as hostile seems to me to be missing the mark somewhat.

Gospel of John

Chapter 9

This chapter is about a blind man who after meeting Jesus is able to see and the response of his community to this. It is also about the nature and impact of sin and our willingness to perceive God in our midst. Though it is similar to stories in the other gospels, this one is unique to John's.

V1-3 As we will see later, the man is a beggar. There are many verses in the Bible linking blindness (and other disabilities and illnesses) to sinfulness; ie, that these conditions are a kind of divine punishment and that this punishment can be meted out on succeeding generations.

Exo 20:5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me,

Jesus though, echoes the words of Ezekiel who wrote:

What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. Ezekiel 18:2-4

Though such a link was pretty clear still in Jesus' day and has strong echoes in our won, I don't think we can possibly reconcile such a condition with the example of Jesus.

V4-5 I think the most important part of these two verses is the use of "we." As Jesus' followers – his "body" on earth we are compelled to continue his work and to bear His light courageously in the darkness.

V6-7 This is similar to the story in chapter 8 of Mark in that Jesus physically does something to affect the healing rather than just pronouncing that the healing has occurred.

The pool of Siloam was a spring fed pool in Jerusalem which had been built by king Hezekiah in the 8th century BCE and was originally intended as a source of water in the event the city was besieged.

In Jesus time, the pool, which was near the southern (and lowest) entrance to the city (and close to the mount of Olives) was the traditional first stop of pilgrims to the Temple who would ritually cleanse themselves in the pool before beginning the climb up to the Temple.

V8-12 I always find this amusing, whether or not that was the intent of the author. But as I mentioned earlier, this is an exchange that points out the limits of our imagination and ability to perceive divine action. People would rather deny what is in front of them that defies their preconceived conceptions than admit that a blind man can now see.

V13-17 Who is the “they” here?

Here again we see the internal conflict of the Pharisees around the question “how could someone wield divine power while also defying the divine law?” The Pharisees, despite their long study of scripture are as unable to perceive God’s will in action through Jesus as the townsfolk who didn’t accept that the man was the same one who had been blind and a beggar. And when they ask the man himself, they reject his answer.

V18-23 The standard disclaimer – everyone here in this story is a Jew.

So now the parents of the blind man, who is apparently a young man, possibly a teenager, are questioned by the Pharisees who, we are told, are afraid of the Pharisees and so try to avoid answering their questions.

Historically, it isn’t clear what actual authority Pharisees would have had, they aren’t an official group invested with power. They are more similar to the Masons than the police. But clearly they were influential and could possibly have gotten those with actual power to act on their behalf. That the author conflates Pharisees with the city authorities is an anachronism rooted in a later experience when Pharisaism and Judaism were more nearly the same.

V24-25 This has echoes in the story from Luke where John’s disciple come to Jesus seeking reassurance that he is the Messiah and Jesus says they should tell John what they have seen and heard, namely that “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.”

V26-34 The confrontation with the Pharisees builds until they throw the man out.

The man whose sight was given to him has come to understand that Jesus is of God. He has literally and figuratively “seen” Jesus. The Pharisees, on the other hand, reject the evidence before their eyes, they are figuratively “blind” to Jesus. And in the end they can only protect their incorrect worldview by an ad-hominem rejection of the man himself.

V35-41 The story nicely ends with Jesus seeking the man out to ask him about his experience. The story also helps *us* to see sin more clearly. Sin isn’t about breaking the rules or defying the Law of Moses; rather it is an unwillingness to partner with God in being agents of loving action.

Gospel of John

Chapter 10

Chapter ten has two parts, a teaching discourse and a final conflicted interaction with the authorities.

V1-6 It isn't clear who Jesus might be talking to here, but it seems to be a mixed audience of followers and detractors (based on vv19-20).

These verses are the closest the author of John gets to having Jesus use a parable in his teaching. Apparently, it is an accurate reflection of first century shepherding practices in Judea.

V7-16 These verses "unpack" what Jesus says in the six verses immediately prior.

V7-10 Here Jesus explains his parable by saying he is the gate, and the sheep seem to represent something like righteousness or heaven or something about being in God's good graces. Jesus is saying that following him is the only pathway to a life within God's will.

V11-16 Somewhat confusingly now, Jesus says he is *also* the shepherd, in fact he is the good shepherd.

Now the sheep represent not righteousness, but those who seek to do God's will.

V11 is an allusion to Jesus' own death and his claim to be the good shepherd is in contrast to the passages in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Zechariah describing Israel's faithless leaders as bad shepherds who led the nation astray and to destruction.

V12-14 the hired hand likely points to "leaders" like the kings of old who seek to gain what they can for themselves, but in the end do not really care for the welfare of the community – they are hypocrites.

V15-16 While reiterating his closeness to God, Jesus seems to be alluding to the gentile mission which will be taken up after his death, especially by St Paul.

V17-18 I think the best way to read this is that God's love for Jesus is centered on his willingness to go, without fear, to wherever God leads, trusting fully in God's promises.

V19-21 The argument here is the same as the one the pharisees had over the healing of the blind man in the previous chapter.

V22-42 The rest of this chapter is devoted to telling of the growing confrontation with the religious authorities

V22-23 The festival of Dedication is Hannukah. The portico of Solomon was part of a long covered walkway around the outer portion of the Temple known as the court of the Gentiles where anyone could gather.

V24 Everyone mentioned here is a Jew

V25-26 Again, we return to the problem of an unwillingness to accept the truth right in front of us. Much like the Pharisees earlier and the thieves in the parable.

Jesus' claim that they are not his sheep though is somewhat problematic as it seems to go against several other teachings in the gospel about the universal applicability of Jesus' Way. It really gets at a deeper argument about the role of free will in the cultivation of faith.

V27-30 Jesus here speaks of the promises at the core of the gospel. The especially challenging one is in verse 30, where Jesus claims that He and God are the same, which, from the perspective of his audience, is a pretty wild and extremely blasphemous claim, His miracles notwithstanding.

V31-33 Because of v30, many in the crowd feel compelled to punish Jesus (to death) and Jesus' answer, though it feels deliberately obtuse, is actually intended to get them to perceive properly the divine root of Jesus' abilities.

V34-38 As in the rest of the chapter, Jesus speaks to the evidence of God's power that is rejected for self-serving reasons.

V34 quotes from Psalm 82

I say, "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you;" Psalm 82:6

V36 Only In John's gospel does Jesus claim anything like being the Son of God.

V39-42 Jesus escapes (again) from the designs of the authorities and makes his way out of Judea (and the influence of the Pharisees).

We also get evidence that many are having their perceptions altered to see Jesus' truth.

Gospel of John Chapter 11

This chapter can be divided into 2 sections, the first half tells the story of the resurrection of Lazarus while the second half provides some details about the authorities' motivations and plans to arrest Jesus. Unlike the other gospels, John's story of Jesus is largely centered around Jerusalem instead of Galilee, and this chapter is no different. We now begin to move towards the last few weeks of Jesus' life with Jesus returning to the village of Bethany, which is just outside of Jerusalem on the opposite slope of the Mount of Olives.



V1-3 Here we get some evidence of the gospel being edited and changed around because Mary is described as the “one who anointed the Lord with perfume,” but the story of that anointing now comes after this episode chapter 12.

But here we are also introduced to a family of a brother and his two sisters who live in the village of Bethany. Presumably, none of these three are married. We can probably also assume that this is the same Mary and Martha mentioned in Luke's gospel (where Martha complains that Mary isn't pulling her weight) but the story about Lazarus only appears in John's gospel. We are also told that Lazarus is someone Jesus loves (which is why some conjecture that Lazarus and not John is the "beloved disciple")

V4-6 Jesus here appears to have foreknowledge of Lazarus' condition and asserts that it is not a fatal condition and so he stays, presumably to ensure that Lazarus actually does die so that God can be glorified through the sign of his resuscitation. The timing of things, the *kairos* moment, is an important theme in John's gospel. Jesus is concerned, throughout John's gospel about two things; showing glory to God and doing so when the moment is ripe.

Though this gospel doesn't have the story of the temptations in the wilderness, there too, Jesus is concerned with doing things at the right time to glorify God. Each of the things Jesus is tempted with are things he *will do* (create food from nothing, trust in God in a moment of peril, and be sovereign over all the earth) but at a moment when doing so will further God's plans.

v7-10 deciding that the moment is now ripe, Jesus decides to leave to go to Lazarus unafraid of the intentions of the authorities (because it's not the right moment for them to harm him). This is what Jesus is getting at in the verses about walking in the light, it's a metaphor for discernment of the right moment to act.

v12-16 Jesus uses a euphemism to describe what has happened to Lazarus which, as is par for the course, they don't understand (they take literally what Jesus says metaphorically).

What Thomas says is most likely in reference to the danger Jesus faces from the authorities, with the "he" meaning Jesus.

v17-19 That Lazarus was in the tomb four days may be significant as there may have been a belief that the soul resides with the body for three days, so someone who is dead for four days would be well and truly dead. That theory is derived from Jewish writings that post-date Jesus, so it's interesting but not definite. At any rate, four days buried means Jesus is well and truly late.

The regular disclaimer, everyone here is a Jew (though not everyone is a Judean).

v20-21 As in Luke, Martha is the busy one here but it's hard not to hear a tone of accusation in what she says to Jesus.

v22-24 Martha confirms her trust that Jesus works in concert with God, but given the next couple of verses, she doesn't seem to be expecting Jesus to actually be able to affect Lazarus' death. She trusts in a future resurrection, but that's it.

v25-27 Though Jesus seems to be saying that he holds the power of life and death now, Martha still seems to be thinking only of the resurrection to come in the new age.

v28-31 As in Luke, Mary is eager to be with Jesus, but since the rest of the mourners did not hear what Martha said, they just got up and followed Mary.

v32-33 Like Martha, Mary knows that Jesus could have saved Lazarus is undoubtedly lamenting and confused about his absence in the critical hours even though they had sent word in time.

One might be tempted to see Jesus' reaction to their grief as the impetus for him to act, but as we've seen Jesus has already expressed his intentions before arriving – to awake Lazarus.

For me though, Jesus' reaction to their grief is a source of some comfort and consolation as it expresses the impact of the incarnation on the nature of God and stresses the altered connection between us and God because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

v34-37 Jesus continues to react emotionally, but some of the mourners also speak of him unfavorably, wondering why he apparently did so little for one he loved.

v39-44 Jesus wants to see Lazarus, his beloved friend, which is understandable. Martha, the practical one, suggests that may not be such a good idea because of his decomposition. Clearly though, no is expecting a miracle here. But the story moves to its climax, not with Jesus entering the tomb but by Him calling Lazarus out.

v45-47 Now the story turns away from Bethany and towards Jerusalem and the city council, which historically was mostly dominated not by the Pharisees but by another group, the Sadducees which was drawn primarily from the Temple priesthood and aristocratic families.

What's most interesting to me in this, both the reaction of those who witnessed the miracle who seek to undermine Jesus and the council itself, is seeing how fear works to undermine us. Acting from fear so often leads us away from our own ability to thrive.

v48-53 "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one" was a notable sentiment when expressed by Mr. Spock at the end of Star Trek II, but feels a little more sinister here since they are plotting murder.

However, that essentially is also what Jesus is speaking to when in chapter 10 he said, "the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

The difference between Jesus (and Spock) and Caiaphas is that Caiaphas acts from fear while Jesus acts from love. Its one thing to give yourself sacrificially but quite another to be sacrificed.

So, ironically, Caiaphas' prophecy is spot on about Jesus' impact on the nation.

v54 It not being the right time for Him to give his life, Jesus and the disciples decamp for Ephraim which was a village 15 miles or so north of Jerusalem in the hill country overlooking the Jordan valley.

v55 Once again, as a festival draws closer the people of Jerusalem and Judea speculate about whether or not Jesus will appear and, once again, defy the authorities' efforts to catch him. Spoiler alert: He will and he won't.

Gospel of John

Chapter 12

This and the following 8 chapters all deal with Jesus' last week in Jerusalem leading to his crucifixion.

V1-2 Jesus and his followers have returned from Bethany from Ephraim to the house of Lazarus and his sisters and true to form, Martha is serving the dinner while Mary is... doing something else.

V3-8 This story of the anointing of Jesus is very similar to the one in Mark's gospel (14:3-9), except that there they are at the house of Simon the Leper, not Lazarus, and the woman doing the anointing isn't identified. There is also a discussion about the poor and the use of resources. It is also similar to a story in Luke (7:37-50) where the woman is a "sinner" (so, a prostitute) but which has no mention of the poor and Simon is now a Pharisee and not a leper.

V3 Nard is an essential oil derived from a plant (aka known as muskroot) which grows in the Himalayas.

V5-6 Actually, I think Judas asks a pertinent question. One might wonder whether or not this and maybe other unrecorded episodes made Judas feel as though Jesus wasn't committed to the changes Judas thought he was (keeping in mind that Jesus couldn't comprehend Jesus' larger plan). The moniker Iscariot may derive from a Jewish sect known as the Iscarii which was committed to violent opposition to the Romans.

We need to also ask ourselves how the resources of the church are balanced between inspiring the faithful and attracting those who don't yet know Jesus.

V9-11 This is the first we hear of a desire on the part of the authorities to silence anyone else in Jesus' circle. I think it also suggests that the authorities don't doubt the things Jesus has done, rather they don't trust that the source of his abilities is what Jesus claims.

It is also anachronistic to say that the "Jews" were deserting because at this point, the Way of Jesus is very much still an all-Jewish affair. There is nothing to desert *to*... yet.

V12-13 All of the gospels report large crowds gathering to welcome Jesus, though only John reports the presence of palms. This verse is from Psalm 118:25-26

This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.

Psalm 118:20-26

Palms and Psalm 118 were also used as part of the rituals associated with the Festival of Booths (which was primarily a harvest festival and associated with the Exodus)

V14-15 Where the other gospels give a longer account of the procurement of the mount (Mk and Lk, a colt, in Matthew a donkey *and* a colt), here Jesus just gets it himself. The quote is from Zechariah, from a passage about the coming of the Messiah. As in all the gospels, much of what Jesus does is a bringing-to-life of the prophets.

V16 Basically, the disciples didn't "get" the link to the prophets, but only understood everything after the resurrection.

V17-19 The authorities are being driven to desperation by the overwhelming response of the crowd to Jesus. It also serves as a bit of irony since it says aloud what will happen – that the whole world will come around to Jesus – the complete opposite of their intentions.

V20-22 The "Greeks" here likely are "God Fearers," Gentiles who followed the Mosaic law and attended synagogues but who did not undergo ritual conversion. These are the people who would be primary targets of St Paul's missionary activities.

V23-26 Jesus' response, at first glance, doesn't seem to have anything to do with the "Greeks" request to see him. But if we step back and ask why Philip and Andrew were reluctant to allow them through we can see that Jesus is explaining, in his confusing Jesus way, that whoever seeks to follow the example of Jesus is part of God's people, regardless of their status or origin. The last verse is the real give away and points towards the expansion of the Way of Jesus beyond the historical covenant with the Judean people.

V27-36 Jesus speaks to those who had gathered to welcome him, cryptically referring to his death and the promises offered to those who align their lives with Him.

V27-28 Jesus here displays his total commitment to God regardless of the consequences to His earthly life. In response to Jesus' words, God, the Father, responds affirmatively.

V29-30 Despite having heard it, many in the crowd are unable or unwilling to accept what they have experienced (this is kind of one of the major themes of John's Gospel that explains why the son of God was executed by the leaders of the people of God).

V31-33 The ruler of this world Jesus is referring to is Evil (or Satan) though many among His followers would probably like to connect it to the Romans while "lifted up" refers to his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension – all of which involve some kind of "lifting."

V34-36 The people, understandably, are a little confused by Jesus' words and ask for clarification while Jesus continues to respond that they should do as he does. Then, after His entry and speaking Jesus makes himself scarce. In John's gospel, this is Jesus' last public appearance prior to his judgement and execution.

V37-43 The gospel author ruminates on the end of Jesus' public earthly ministry and explains the confusion about and mixed response to Jesus by drawing upon the prophet Isaiah; first from 53:1 and then from 6:10 and verse 41 also seems to be reference to the beginning of Isaiah 6 where Isaiah speaks of his visions and the sensation of having a coal placed on his tongue.

The idea or theme of misunderstanding Jesus occurs in all the gospels in one form or another. My reflection is that faith is something that transcends intellectual understanding, that Jesus isn't a philosopher who offers interesting or compelling ideas (though he does) but rather that following God is something deeper and more holistic encompassing body, spirit and mind.

V44-50 It isn't clear to whom these words of Jesus are directed since he has supposedly withdrawn from the public so he shouldn't need to be crying aloud. Narratively, it seems to be a speech given earlier that was moved here by an editor because it so neatly encapsulates what Jesus is all about and so it "fit" better here.

The gist of the speech is that Jesus is the en-fleshment of God – to see and hear Jesus is *exactly the same* as seeing and hearing "God." Of particular interest, to me at least, is that

Jesus reiterates that he is not here to judge but to save, echoing his words in 3:17. Nevertheless, Jesus also seems to say that those who *choose* to act contrary to God's Will do face consequences for that choice.

Gospel of John Chapter 13

This chapter begins this gospel's version of the last supper, which differs in some ways from that described in the Synoptic gospels, beginning with the story of the foot-washing.

V1 This makes clear that the time Jesus has been anticipating, which has been referred to throughout, has arrived at last. As in the other gospels, this last gathering of Jesus and his disciple is linked to the festival of Passover, which commemorates Israel's freedom from bondage in Egypt.

V2-4 What's most important here is that Jesus, despite knowing of Judas' treachery, includes him in his final earthly ministry.

V4-8 Jesus prepares to wash the feet of the disciples. In Jesus' time, this would have been an expectation of hosts to provide the means for guests to wash the dust off their feet, as most people wore sandals and most streets, would have been unpaved and dusty. Usually though, in well-off homes, the washing would have been done by a slave. In doing this, Jesus is subverting his established role as the master and placing himself below the disciples in status. This status reversal is the basis of Peter's reluctance.

V8-11 This kind of subversion of the world's hierarchies is at the heart of Jesus' mission which is why he tells Peter that his unwillingness is contrary to what following Jesus requires.

Peter, of course, in typical Peter fashion, then goes all in and says that Jesus should give him a whole-body sponge bath. Jesus' reply seems like a clear reference to baptism and the cleanliness He refers to is our own freedom from bondage to sin.

Again, though Jesus knows about Judas and references that here, he will still stoop and wash the feet of his betrayer.

V12-17 Jesus now explains to the disciples the meaning of his actions, probably to make sure they get it this time. Jesus also makes clear that his followers should do as he has done, set aside their status to serve others, even their "enemies."

V18-20 Again Jesus makes explicit that he is fulfilling what the scriptures foretold, in this case he is quoting Psalm 41 verse 9.

*All who hate me whisper together about me; they imagine the worst for me.
They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me, that I will not rise again from where I lie.
Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.*

*But you, O LORD, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may repay them.
By this I know that you are pleased with me; because my enemy has not triumphed over me.
But you have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence forever.
Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.*

Psalm 41:7-13

V21-22 Another rare reference to Jesus' emotions in this gospel, interestingly it is very similar to the description used in reference to his reaction to Lazarus' death.

Jesus explicitly states that one of them will betray Him.

V23-25 The unnamed "disciple whom Jesus loved" gets asked by Peter to get Jesus to clarify who he means, and he does.

The literal Greek in verse 23 translated as "reclining next to Him" is leaning on Jesus' chest."

V26-28 In answer, Jesus says the one who will betray me is the one I will give this piece of bread to, and then he gives it to Judas, and yet no one seems to connect that it is Judas who is the betrayer.

John's gospel has no mention of Jesus speaking of the bread wine as His body and blood and his command to remember Him through consuming it.

This is the only mention of Satan in John's gospel.

V29-30 Despite Jesus seeming to clearly identify Judas as the betrayer, the disciples find other reasons to explain Judas's departure.

V31 This verse begins a long discourse by Jesus which last through chapter 17.

V31-32 The “hour” has truly come. Jesus has been glorifying God in his teachings and actions and now God will be “glorifying” Jesus (through the resurrection).

V33-35 First the usual disclaimer, everyone here is a Jew. Jesus’ giving of a new commandment (or in the other gospels, a new covenant) does not cancel the old covenant.

Jesus is trying to set them up for his imminent death and the “new” commandment He gives them is to love one another. We tend to read this as a universal command though the text itself seems to be speaking primarily to how followers of Jesus should treat one another (though it doesn’t preclude the universal application).

V36-38 Jesus isn’t necessarily speaking about heaven, so much as the resurrection. The scriptures are mostly pretty clear that Jesus teaches a bodily resurrection in the future as our hope and not a disembodied spiritual existence in some other realm of existence.

So Jesus is promising the disciples that they too will experience the resurrection, just not yet.

Peter then goes on to bravely claim that he would stand by Jesus no matter what, even at the risk of his own death. Jesus, surely with deep sadness, tells Peter that this is not what will occur.

Gospel of John

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 (& 15, 16, & 17) continues Jesus final discourse, or teaching, at the last supper.

At the end of Chapter 13, Jesus told the disciples about his impending betrayal and that he was going to his death, but now he begins to talk about his return.

V1-4 Jesus' words are clearly meant to be comforting. Jesus is clearly offering a promise to the disciples that not even death can sever their relationship, while also explicitly promising that Jesus himself will "come again."

Essentially, he is asking the disciples to continue to trust him that, despite what they are about to experience, their relationship to Jesus will have been worth it.

V5-7 Following the theme of misunderstanding present throughout this gospel, Thomas asks where Jesus is going as if Jesus were planning to take a trip, but it also serves as the means by which Jesus can explain what He has been all about from the beginning.

Jesus is the face of God to humanity, he is the truest representation of who God is and what God is like that humanity can ever know. Jesus' life is the closest a human life can get to living wholly in accordance with God's hopes and desires for us, therefore if we should seek to live the lives we were created for we should seek to follow Jesus' example in our own lives.

V8-11 Now it's Philip's turn to ask the obtuse question. Jesus is probably getting a little exasperated here as he reiterates that knowing Jesus, the icon of God in human form, is the best (and probably only) way to know God.

V12-14 the implication here is that Jesus' successors (from the disciples to us) will continue Jesus' ministry through our own lives and that our efforts will be somehow bolstered through Christ's ascension to God's presence.

V15-17 Again Jesus offers a comforting promise, the gift of the Holy Spirit, who will be present within the lives of followers of Jesus.

Theologically, the Holy spirit has always been something of a conundrum and object of debate. The Great Schism between the Eastern (orthodox) and western (catholic) church was centered around the Holy Spirit.

Originally, the church agreed and codified in the Nicene creed that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father. But by the seventh century, the idea began growing in the western church that in some way, Jesus was equally responsible for the sending of the Holy Spirit and so they altered the creed to sway that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the father *and* the Son (which is the version we've inherited, though you may notice I personally do not say "and the Son" out of respect for that original decision).

But even in this short passage we can gather support for both. The Father will send the advocate, and yet only because Jesus asks. I think the mystery of the Spirit is beyond our understanding and the now thousand year old debate dividing Christianity is both fruitless and a deep wound in the body of Christ.

V18-21 Jesus continues to provide assurance by again promising to return but also showing that it is through the Spirit that we will continue to know that Jesus lives and is present among us. Importantly, Jesus implies that it is our actions and way of life that matter most in how God sees us.

V22 A reference to Judas (sometimes Jude), son of James mentioned by the author of Luke/Acts. The four gospels and Acts do not agree 100% on the names of the disciples.

Gospel of Matthew	Gospel of Mark	Gospel of Luke	Gospel of John	Acts of the Apostles
Simon	Simon	Simon	Simon Peter	Peter
Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew
James	James	James	one of the "sons of Zebedee"	James
John	John	John	one of the "sons of Zebedee"	John
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Nathanael	Bartholomew
Thomas	Thomas	Thomas	Thomas ("also called Didymus")	Thomas
Matthew	Matthew	Matthew/Levi	not mentioned	Matthew
James ("son of Alphaeus")	James	James	not mentioned	James
Thaddaeus (or "Lebbaeus"); called "Judas the Zealot"	Thaddaeus	Judas (son of James, referred to as brother in some translations)	Jude ("not Iscariot")	Judas son of James (referred to as brother in some translations)
Simon (the Canaanite)	Simon (the Cananaean)	Simon (who was called the Zealot)	not mentioned	Simon the Zealot
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas ("son of Simon Iscariot") ^[33]	(Judas replaced by Matthias)

V22-24 Jesus answers Judas' question by saying that Jesus (God) will be revealed in the loving actions of believers.

V25-26 The clear implication here is that the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will teach us *more* than Jesus was able or felt necessary to teach during his earthly ministry.

So, while the faith, as Jude wrote may have been "once delivered unto the saints." It is not a static thing. Christian faith is not merely a reaction to events of the past but is an invitation to a different future. Much of Christian history has revolved around the need to maintain the integrity of Jesus' message with discerning what the Spirit is drawing us towards today.

V27-31 The rest of the chapter serves to summarize what has gone before;

- Jesus is going to die
- The disciples need to trust that this is necessary, but not final
- The best way to know God and do what God asks is to follow Jesus' example.
- Do not be afraid

Gospel of John

Chapter 15

Ch 15 (& 16 & 17) reiterate the themes presented by Jesus in ch's 13 & 14, namely that Jesus and God are inseparable, that Jesus (and by extension, the disciples) are about undergo a significant trial, and that the disciples should continue to trust in Jesus and his teachings because, despite appearances, he is not abandoning them.

Because chapter 14 ended with Jesus saying "Rise, let us be on our way" and because ch's 15-17 largely just reiterate what has already been said, many scholars believe that the original version of this gospel moved straight from what is now ch 14 to ch 18 (when they actually get up and go) and that this material was added by later editors. Which is not to say that it doesn't accurately reflect Jesus, but that it was material not included in the first draft.

v1-6 Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, the vine is a metaphor for Israel with God presented as the one who tends the vine.

Psalms 80 offers a really good example;

Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.

Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.

Psalm 80:8-9

Here, this ancient metaphor is repurposed and we understand that those who follow Jesus become grafted onto Israel by being Jesus' "body" in the world.

V7-8 This invitation to "live" in Christ and to expect responses from our prayers is here linked to glorifying God through our actions. So, I think that what Jesus might mean here is that when we seek strength and support in doing things that magnify God's love (i.e., build up the kingdom=bear fruit) we can be confident of God's support. So this isn't so much that our every wish will be granted so much as it is an encouragement to courageously work to further God's vision.

V9-12 At first blush this may sound a little like God's love is conditional; that is dependent upon our following the rules. However, Jesus is talking about abiding in God's love, so instead of saying that God's love is dependent upon our ability to follow the rules, what I think He is actually saying that the path to contentment ("joy") lies in living our lives by following Jesus' teachings and example (after all, Jesus offers few, if any commandments other than to love one another). So it's not "follow my rules or I

won't love;" it's my love is always available to you and never more so than when you live as Jesus showed you.

V13-17 Jesus pretty much just says the same things he said in the previous few verses.

The rest of the chapter probably offered important encouragement to the community in which this gospel was created because, as we know from the Epistles of John, it was a community deeply affected by tensions and conflicts with communities who understood Jesus differently.

V18-19 Jesus here reminds us that faith is a gift and that to live in faith requires a kind of separation in values from the wider world; that the people of God are invited to take a longer and more holistic view of things.

V20-25 Again Jesus refers back to the prophets to help the disciples understand what is happening, but He is also reminding them that discipleship has a cost because the world still contains forces which are opposed to God's vision.

V26-27 Jesus again reminds them that the Holy Spirit will come to lead them into deeper relationship and understanding.

Gospel of John

Chapter 16

Jesus continues his farewell discourse, with much of the chapter focusing on what the Holy spirit will bring when it comes.

V1-4a Chapter 15 had ended with Jesus offering assurance and the promise of the coming of the Advocate (Paraclete in Greek). Here we pick up with Jesus again reiterating that though they (the disciples) will suffer, Jesus expects them to stay the course.

What Jesus describes in verse 2 and 3 reflects what will happen in the second half of the 1st century when there will be rising conflict between the followers of Jesus and other Jews (esp the Pharisees) and especially after the destruction of the Temple in AD70.

I do want to point out that even though Jesus tells of the coming suffering of his followers Jesus in no way ever commands or suggests that his followers respond in kind or turn to violence or oppression in response – there is no space in Jesus words for anti-semitism.

V4b-15 In these verses Jesus speaks more about the “Advocate” who will come only after Jesus departs, expanding on his words in chapter 14, verses 15-28

Paraclete comes from the Greek words *para* and *kalein*, which mean respectively alongside or in-place-of and to call, so a paraclete is someone whom you call to come alongside you. The word was not common but was used to indicate someone who would support you, such as a lawyer in a trial. It also shows up in non-scriptural Jewish writings in a similar sense as an advocate.

In the New Testament, it is only found in the Johannine writings and is usually understood to refer to the Holy Spirit.

A quick discursive note on gender. Most languages that aren't English assign grammatical gender to all nouns, Hebrew and Greek included. There has been a long discussion (nearly two millenia) about the gender of the Holy Spirit. Though generally, grammatical gender refers to the word and not necessarily the object described, there is also strong correlation between the two. In Hebrew, the word for Spirit is *ruach*, which is feminine whereas in Greek it is *pneuma*, which is neuter

(neither masculine nor feminine). Holy Wisdom was also a common way to refer to the Spirit in the early church and the Greek word for wisdom, *Sophia*, is also feminine. Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century wrote that terms like "Father" and "Son" in reference to the persons of the trinity are not to be understood as expressing essences or energies of God but are to be understood as metaphors. The Roman Catholic catechism affirms this, saying that words like the Spirit should be assigned the grammatical gender appropriate to the local language, so there are Christians who would refer to the Spirit as she. It is masculine in English only because we dropped grammatical gender about 1000 years ago and defaulted to making all nouns masculine, a practice that has increasingly been questioned and reversed.

V4b-6 Jesus is returning to "him who sent me," aka God the Father and the disciples are troubled.

Keep in mind that the popular understanding of the Messiah in Jesus' time was a kind of David-like warrior king. The disciples (much like the religious authorities) are expecting Jesus to be a Judas Maccabee like leader who will overthrow the Romans and their supporters in a violent revolutionary war. Jesus is very much up-ending their hopes and expectations.

V7-8 But, Jesus says, it is better if I do not stay because the Advocate will come along aside you and lead you into deeper relationship with God.

Interestingly, the Spirit is meant to be teaching us that the world misunderstands sin, righteousness and judgment.

Sin is about walking the way of God (ie, Christ's example) or not

Righteousness isn't about following the letter of the Law while looking for loopholes, nor is it measured by human wealth or power.

Judgment is Christ's alone and will be based on our actions, especially our actions to refute and stand against evil.

V12-15 The key takeaway here is that Jesus did not in his lifetime share all that there is to know or do concerning our relationship to God. The Holy Spirit's mission is to share more from God with us that we might more fully embody God's love in our lives.

V16 Jesus seems to be alluding to his death and resurrection, though some scholars suggest He is speaking about His second coming.

V16-19 The author again uses the theme of confusion on the part of the disciples which reinforces the power of the coming advocate to “open our eyes.”

V20-24 I really love this passage and the metaphor of childbirth Jesus use here. Resurrection, like birth, is a fraught experience and full of danger, but the joy of a successful delivery is amazingly special. I think the path of individual followers can be like that too, following Jesus will bring us to difficult choices and, potentially, painful consequences. And yet, His phrase from the first half of verse 23 really captures the joy of both childbirth and faith “on that day you will ask nothing of me,” in other words we are consumed by thankfulness.

V25 Here Jesus admits that he has talked in ways to be deliberately vague or unclear (He says something similar in other gospels about his use of parables). But from here on out, He says, He will speak clearly about God.

V25-28 Usually Jesus says (in this gospel) that the hour is coming and *is already here*. But he says that the hour is coming but is not here *yet*. Presumably, given the context, this day will come with the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

The key takeaway here is that because the Spirit, there are no barriers, no needed intermediaries between our selves and God. We are each able to be in relationship with God.

V29-31 The disciples say that *now* they get it and understand completely; Jesus however is doubtful that they do (spoiler – they don’t)

V32-33 Similarly to when Jesus told Peter he would deny Jesus three times, Jesus tells all the disciples that he knows each of them is withdrawing into themselves and their fears, but that they should take heart because Jesus has already secured their victory.

Gospel of John

Chapter 17

Again, Jesus continues his farewell discourse, largely repeating things already said in ch's 13 and 14. This chapter is largely an expansive prayer on behalf of the disciples.

In this gospel, this is Jesus' final prayer in his earthly life. Unlike the synoptic gospels, John does not mention Jesus praying at Gethsemane, nor does it tell of the disciples falling asleep as he does so.

V1-5 These verses constitute a kind of creed, outlining some core statements about who Jesus is:

- Jesus' death is offered voluntarily by Jesus and it is designed to show God's power
- Jesus is a living icon of the Father – to know Jesus is to know God
- Jesus pre-existed his human birth and, in fact, pre-exists creation itself.

V6-9 Here Jesus is identifying the disciples as the inheritors of his mission. They have been called out of the world in order to proclaim the truth about Jesus to the world. This is the crux of God's strategy to alter human society; societal change through individual transformation by the truth shared through relationship and community.

V10-12 Jesus reiterates the closeness of his relationship to the Father; so close that they are indistinguishable from one another – they are "one." He also asks that God be with them as Jesus returns to the Father's side so that their "community" may remain unbroken.

I think one way to look at this is that Jesus' intention for his believers is unity, though not necessarily uniformity. As such, I do think that nurturing a willingness and desire for ecumenism is a core part of our faith calling.

As to Judas, though clearly Jesus always expected one of them to betray him, humans being humans after all, I would offer two reflections. The first is that the betrayer didn't necessarily have to be Judas. The disciples as presented in all of the gospels are quite imperfect and prone to all the usual human temptations and self-regard; any of them could have been the one. Second, Judas had been present for the foot washing (and communion in the other gospels) and Jesus' seems more sad about Judas than angry.

I think then, that given our own propensity towards imperfection, we should walk in

our faith with humility and generosity; spending more energy on building gates rather than fences between ourselves and those with whom we disagree.

V13-19 To follow Jesus means that we are never truly fully at home in the world; some part of us is always resident with God in the spiritual realm. At the same time though, we are not *apart* from this world – we have been *sent* into it that we might change it to be more like the world God intended for us.

V20-21 Jesus here prays specifically for us. What Jesus asks for the disciple he asks also for all believers across time – including you and me.

V22-23 Essentially, Jesus asks here that we be adopted by God through Himself, linking us, in a new way, to God.

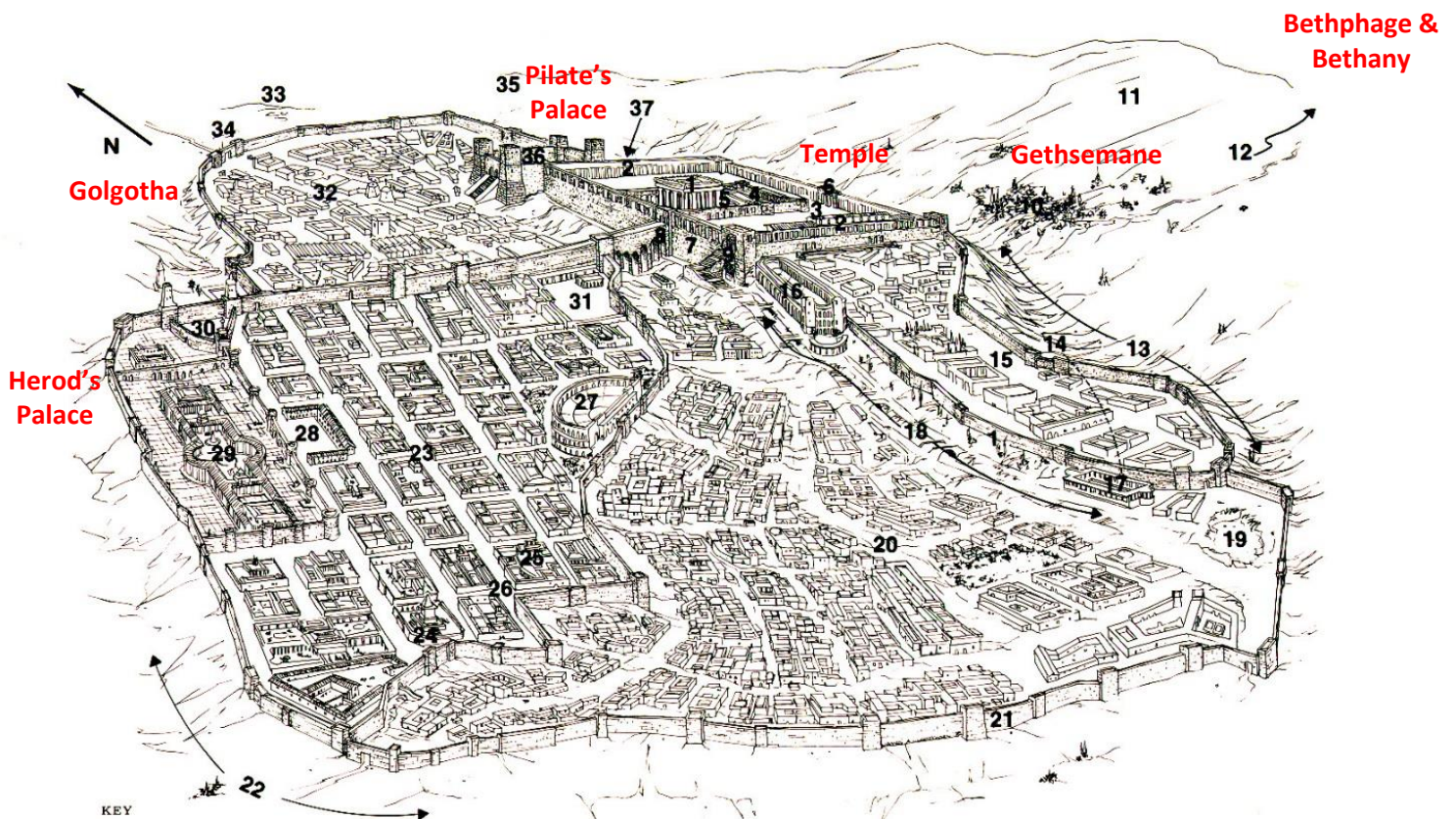
V24 This would seem to be an allusion to the resurrection

V25-26 Jesus' conclusion to his farewell discourse and prayer, summarizing his desire that we strive to be "as One" in order to further Christ's mission with the promise of his continuing presence to guide and strengthen us.

Gospel of John Chapter 18

As I mentioned previously, many scholars believe that this chapter, originally, came directly after the end of chapter 14 where Jesus said, "Rise, let us be on our way."

V1 Though not specifically named in this gospel, the "garden" across the Kidron valley is clearly the same place identified as Gethsemane in the other Gospel accounts. The Kidron Valley separates Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. Gethsemane means "oil press." So a place where olives were turned into olive oil. It's exact location is unknown (there are four locations claiming the title today). Archaeology at the location controlled by the Roman Catholic church has found an ancient church and even older Jewish ritual bath that has been inscribed (in Greek) "for the memory and repose of the lovers of Christ... accept the offering of your servants and give them remission of sins"





Kidron Valley in modern times, looking south from the Old city

V2-3 In John's telling, the arrest comes almost immediately after Jesus and the disciples entered the garden. There is no story about Jesus praying there, as in John's gospel Jesus' last prayer takes place at the end of chapter 17, presumably in the upper room.

Instead of soldiers and police, the literal Greek says the "cohort" and the "under-officers." Cohort usually refers to Roman soldiers (a cohort was about 600 soldiers) and if so, John's is the only gospel to mention them. His is also the only one of the gospels to connect the Pharisees to Jesus' arrest. Mark and Matthew tell only of an armed crowd from the chief priests, while Luke just says a crowd.

V4-5 Here Jesus identifies himself to the crowd, presumably to protect his disciples and there is no mention of a kiss from Judas. Judas is merely "standing with" the officers.

V6-9 The group's reaction to Jesus seems curious (especially if some of them were Romans) is seemingly related to his self-identification which is very similar to God's reply to Moses when asked God's name "I am Who I am."

Jesus explicitly seeks to keep his disciples from harm by asking the group to leave them alone.

V10-11 Peter, suddenly defiant, attempts to attack the group, but Jesus quickly stops him – this is pretty similar to when Jesus calls Peter satan and tells him to move out of the way and to stop focusing on earthly things. Pretty clearly, Peter still doesn't quite understand what Jesus up to even though he presumably joined the other disciple in affirming they did back in chapter 16 (16:29-30).

There is no mention here of Jesus healing Malchus' ear.

V12-14 Jesus is taken first to the home of Annas. Caiaphas' speech to the council was back in chapter 11 (11:50).

Annas (aka Ananias) had been high priest from 6-15AD (the first one directly appointed by the Roman governor). He was appointed by Quirinius, who is mentioned in regard to the census at the beginning of Luke that gets Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.

Caiaphas, his son-in-law was the high priest for nearly twenty years (18-36AD). The high Priests were appointed directly by the Roman governor, for annual terms. So, Annas, Caiaphas and their family were clearly on good terms with the Roman authorities.

Ananias was clearly a "power behind the throne" as he was succeeded by his son, his son-in-law, and then by four more sons, the last of whom (also named Annas) was assassinated by zealots for his advocacy of maintaining friendly relations with the Romans in the lead up the Jewish War of 70AD.

V15-16 The identity of the other disciple is unknown and though many associate them with the "disciple Jesus loved," that is not the descriptor used here. John's gospel only names 7 disciples; Peter, Andrew, Nathanael (who may be aka Bartholomew), Philip, Thomas, Jude (the zealot), and Judas Iscariot.

Assuming it's one of the twelve, and not one of those named by John, the most likely candidate (to me anyway) is Matthew, who from very early tradition was considered

learned and the Gospels identify him as a tax collector (in other words a Roman collaborator) and so seems most likely to have come from a high-class family with Roman connections that may have known the family of the high priest.

It could have been John, the reputed author, but he is so closely connected as one of the sons of Zebedee and being a Galilean fisherman, it seems unlikely he would have been hob-nobbing with the high priest.

Or it could be somebody else entirely and not even one of the twelve or even a man, who knows?

V17-18 Peter's makes his first denial before cozying up around a fire with the rest of the little people.

V19-24 Jesus is questioned by the religious authorities and clearly the person doing the questioning is Annas who is called high priest even though he isn't technically the high priest, but in the same way we might call a former official by their former title, such as Senator, Ambassador, etc.

Many things about this "trial" are extraordinary. First it is held in a private home and not before the public as was usual, secondly trials at night and during Passover were specifically forbidden by the legal code established by which Jerusalem had been governed for the preceding 200 years. All of which suggest that Jesus was seen as such an extraordinary threat that extreme measures to deal with him were necessary.

V25-27 John's telling of Jesus' final earthly night switched back and forth between scenes, focusing mainly on Jesus and Pilate, but here we get a crossover to Peter.

Peter is asked twice if he is one of Jesus' followers and he denies it each time, fulfilling Jesus' words about him denying Jesus 3 times before the "cock crowed." Peter is probably motivated by fear for his safety, and I imagine most of us would have done exactly the same.

V28 We skip whatever happened at the home of Caiaphas without explanation. Though in the other gospels, the confrontation at Annas' house is described as happening at Caiaphas' house. At any rate, they have brought Jesus out of the city of David where the priests lived to the Roman headquarters in the city just north of the Temple mount.

To enter into the home of someone who didn't follow the dietary laws would render someone "unclean" and the means to ritually purify oneself would take too long to be ready for the Passover meal.

V29-32 So, this really early in the morning, like dawn early. Sunrise today in Jerusalem was at 5:50 and the rooster would have crowed well before that. I can't imagine Pilate was super happy about being roused that early.

Pilate was governor of Judea for ten years from 26-36AD. Normally the governor lived in Caesarea on the coast and only came to Jerusalem occasionally, apparently mostly at festival times when trouble was more likely to occur because of all the pilgrims entering into the city.

He was removed from office because of increasing complaints of his brutalization of the local populace. There was a tradition, popular in the east and in Egypt, that Pilate and his wife later became Christians themselves.

V33-38a Pilate interview Jesus directly. Also, just fyi, this conversation would most likely have been in Greek, which served as the *lingua franca* of the empire.

V33-35 Pilate tries to understand exactly what Jesus is being accused of and whether it something that should even involve him.

The religious leaders opposed to Jesus are convinced that Jesus imagines himself a modern day Judas Maccabee who is fomenting a violent revolution that threatens them (and the Romans).

V36 Jesus claims pretty clearly that he is not threatening a political revolution. Pilate may believe he is a little crazy, imagining himself the king of a make believe world, but that may not necessarily be a threat.

Also, remember, everyone here (except Pilate) is a Jew.

V37-38a Jesus affirms he is a king, but that he only uses a such a description because that is something even the simple can understand. What He really is, is more complex than that. In Pilate's answer I get a similar vibe to when someone says "whatever." In other words, Pilate doesn't really care about who or what Jesus is, he is only concerned with the political implications.

V38b-40 Pilate, deeming Jesus to be not a real threat, goes back out to the group who had brought Jesus to him and offers a compromise. Ironically, Barabbas was actually guilty of something similar to what Jesus is being accused of – he is actually a violent threat to order.

Also, there is no record of such a custom outside of the New Testament.

Gospel of John

Chapter 19

Chapter 18 left off with Pilate saying he didn't think Jesus was any threat and trying to get the group who brought Jesus to him to let it go, to no avail. Clearly, Pilate has the authority to let Jesus go if he truly wanted to. Pilate, whom history records as being particularly cruel and indifferent to Jewish concerns, is here shown to be uncharacteristically constrained by the demands of Jerusalem's leading men. All of the gospels seem to want to at least partially absolve Pilate, and the Romans generally, of responsibility for Jesus' execution. Though clearly, the Jerusalem elite saw Jesus as a threat, it was the Romans who tried and executed Jesus.

V1 Generally, in Roman Law, one was flogged only after being judged, but Jesus is flogged prior to the judgment which suggests that Pilate wasn't being sincere in his suggestion that Jesus was innocent. Flogging was a horrible punishment that was often fatal.

V2-3 Purple was the universally understood symbol of royalty (due to the high cost of purple dye) and so to drape Jesus in purple underscores the charge of sedition (which is further supported by the crown) – it is a mocking of his claims to kingship (even if only of the spiritual kind).

V4-7 To witness this spectacle would likely induce us to believe that Pilate was merely toying with Jesus. The text, as we will see, seems to suggest otherwise but I find no reason to believe that Pilate really thinks Jesus fully innocent.

I will note though that the only people calling for Jesus' death are the chief priests and their hired muscle.

V8 I think we should question why Pilate would be afraid. He is not Jewish, he is Roman. He doesn't believe in God, in fact all the historical evidence suggests he was condescending to the Jewish people and presumably their God as well. This is the kind of sympathetic depiction of Rome I mentioned earlier. It seems unlikely that any of Jesus' followers would have been a witness to what happened behind closed doors between Jesus and Pilate, and even less likely they would have had any insight into Pilate's frame of mind.

V9 The other three gospels report that Jesus refused to speak to Pilate after their brief initial reaction where Jesus' only words in response to the question are you a king, said "You say so."

V10-11 What Jesus is really saying here is that Pilate isn't taking Jesus' life, Jesus is giving his life on behalf of God's people. This is pretty important to our understanding of the atonement. Jesus gave his life, knowing that it was the path to greater life for many. Death was not imposed on him, He chose death and in doing so took away its power.

V12-16a Again, Pilate had full authority to release Jesus if he wanted to. It is interesting to note that the claim of the those calling for Jesus' death has moved from a violation of Jewish Law (blaspheming by calling himself Son of God) to a violation of Roman Law against sedition (claiming authority in contravention of the emperor).

Friend of the Emperor was an actual title given in the Roman empire, like Groomsman of the Stool in England.

So, fun fact, Gabbatha is actually Aramaic and not Hebrew and does not mean "place of the stone pavement" but actually refers to a raised mound. The actual Greek is *Lithostrotos*, and refers to the mosaic tiles at the place of judgment.

The significance of the day and the time is that noon on the day of Preparation is when the lambs for the feast would have been being slaughtered at the Temple.

V16b-17 John tells little of the journey from Pilate's palace across the city to the site of execution, and does not mention Simon of Cyrene. Jesus likely would have only carried the crosspiece rather than the whole cross. Typically, the upright pole would already be in place (and used for multiple persons) as digging a hole and hoisting it anew each time would take a lot of effort.

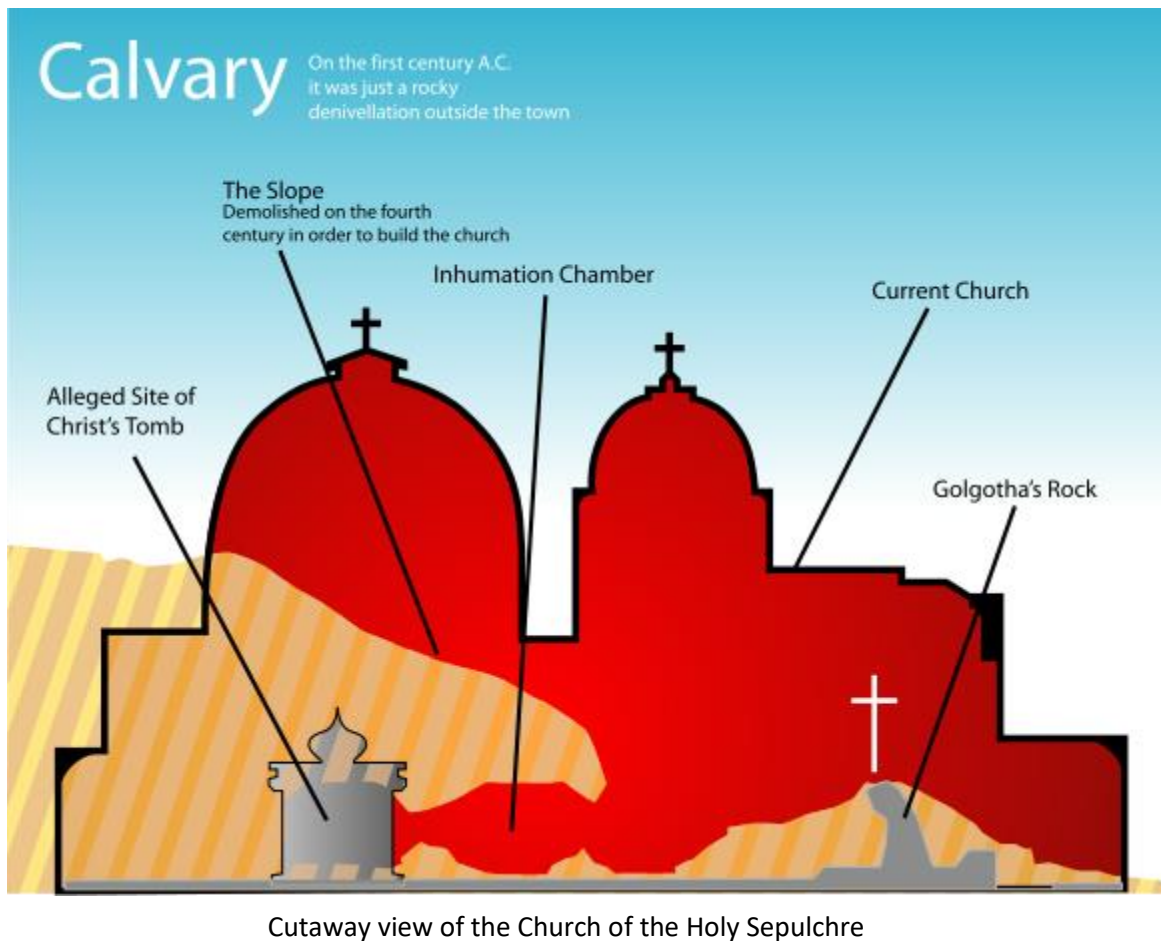
Golgotha is Aramaic for skull and may have referred to the shape of the hill.



Golgotha at the time of Jesus' execution



Church of the Holy Sepulchre, covering Golgotha, as it appear today



V18 John doesn't mention anything about who the other two being crucified were nor does he report any conversations between them.

V19-22 The Jewish authorities here are upset because Pilate is basically saying Jesus was executed for being who He said He was, not because he was a pretender who challenged their authority. This, again, seems to remove responsibility from the Romans.

In Latin it would be *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum* which is why you sometimes see INRI in paintings of the crucifixion above Jesus.

V23-25a The quote is from Psalm 22 and here "clothing" refers to a long wrap-like garment like a shawl while the tunic was the simple piece of clothing that would like a really long T-shirt that was the common piece of clothing throughout the Mediterranean world.

V25b-27 The women who followed Jesus are with Him, whereas the men seemed to have disappeared into hiding somewhere. Jesus then asks that the disciple whom He loved take care of his mother (which would have been the obligation of the eldest son).

Clopas is sometimes identified with Cleophas, one of the disciples from Luke's story of Jesus meeting Cleophas and another on the road to Emmaus and sometimes as the brother of Joseph.

V28-30 The first quote of Jesus is from psalm 69:21

Psa 69:21 They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

The wine and the hyssop branch are likely symbolic as there is no reason for there to have been some wine handily lying about and hyssop is a shrub whose branches would be far too short for the use depicted here. Hyssop, however, was used in some purification rites, including at the Passover. What's important to the author isn't complete historical accuracy but rather to show that Jesus' death is fulfilling scripture.

V31-34 Crucifixion kills by slow asphyxiation as the body loses its strength. Breaking legs would hurry this along by removing the possibility of the victim bracing their legs on the cross to enable them to breathe.

There isn't any real practical reason to spear Jesus' body, other than perhaps to verify he was truly dead. And physiologically speaking, it is unlikely that someone stabbed in the side would have blood and water exit the wound, so the author is using symbolism to convey something thought what exactly isn't clear, though many ideas have been presented, usually suggesting a connection between Jesus' death and the sacraments.

V35 And because people in the first century would also be wondering the same things as us, the author adds a kind of sworn testimony.

V36-37 Again, the author wants to make sure that Jesus' death is foreshadowed in scripture, though the first quote here isn't directly found in scripture (at least as we know it today) it can sorta kinda be taken from a mashup of other passages, some referring to the Passover lamb.

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD rescues them from them all.
He keeps all their bones; not one of them will be broken. Psalm 34:19-20*

It [the Passover Lamb] shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. Exodus 12:46

They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute for the passover they shall keep it. Numbers 9:12

The second quote is taken from Zechariah, where God is speaking of the Day of the Lord;

And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. Zech 12:10

V38-42 Joseph of Arimathea is actually quite brave here as, generally speaking, crucified bodies were left in place as a warning to others and a reminder of Rome's firm hand. Joseph is, essentially, outing himself as one of Jesus' followers at some personal risk as that would suggest he was a co-conspirator with Jesus in fomenting rebellion.

Usually, it would have been women who prepared a body for burial.

Also, by doing this, Joseph and Nicodemus are making themselves ineligible to participate in the Passover meal since handling the dead would definitely make one "unclean." For me, this is one of the most loving and grace-filled occurrences anywhere in the scriptures and a real model for us. Also there is no mention that the tomb belonged to Joseph, though we could infer it since presumably whomever it was made for wouldn't have been too happy to find someone else there – though in case it is only a temporary residence.

And so the passion ends, as it began, in a garden.

Gospel of John

Chapter 20

The last chapter ended with Jesus' death and burial on Friday afternoon; chapter picks up early on Sunday morning.

V1 Mary was just introduced to us in the last chapter when she was briefly mentioned as being one of the women at the cross. She seems to have been an important person in Jesus' circle and in the early church, but we don't actually know very much about her. Her name is mentioned in all four gospels and her name appears more than all of the 12 disciples except Peter, James, John, and Philip. Magdalene likely refers to her being from the Galilean village of Magdala. The gospels never say that she was a prostitute; that idea comes from a 6th century sermon of Pope Gregory I. Mary may have come into disrepute because of her later adoption by Gnostic sects as one of their own.

Magdala was located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, just a few miles from Capernaum and was later destroyed by the Romans during the Jewish War.

V2 The text only mentions Mary, but when Mary goes to Peter and the "other" disciple, she says "we" which suggest she had been at the tomb with others, possibly other women, as mentioned in the synoptic gospels.

At this point they think that Jesus' body has been stolen from someone, possibly to ensure that Jesus' followers wouldn't have any location at which they could focus their grief, making it harder for his movement to continue.

V3-4 The two men, Peter and the "other" run to the tomb – why they are in such a hurry though is unclear.

V5-10 Upon finally entering, the two men see the linen wrappings and begin to realize that Jesus' body wasn't stolen – after all who would go to the gruesome trouble of unwrapping the body? But, the text tells us, they haven't quite connected all the dot yet. The last verse here, verse 10, though has always suggested to me a thoughtful walk home full of unanswered questions.

v11-13 Mary hasn't been in the tomb herself yet and it isn't clear what if anything, Peter and the "other" disciple said to her, but she is definitely grieving. When she does enter the tomb, she presumably sees the discarded burial wrappings but she also sees two angels. Unlike the other gospel accounts, here the angels are not recorded as saying

what happened to Jesus nor do they command her to go and tell what she has learned. Instead she is still deeply distraught at the body's disappearance and the angels don't really offer any consolation.

v14-15 Mary turns to see Jesus, but does not recognize; presumably because she does not *expect* to see him. And in not recognizing him, she presumes he is the one who has taken Jesus' body (which, in a way, he kind of is).

v16-18 It is only when Jesus says her name that she realizes who he is. I don't think we can possibly imagine the swirl of emotions, most prominently surely joy and confusion she must have experienced.

Jesus then gives her the instructions to go and tell the rest of his followers, which she does – apostle to the apostles. There is something important I think that in all the accounts of the resurrection, Jesus always appears first to his female followers and never to the twelve. I can't pinpoint it exactly, but it does fit with God's overall pattern of entering into human life from unexpected places and through unexpected people.

v19 Finally, later that day as the disciples were hiding out in fear of the authorities, behind a locked door, Jesus appears to them.

Two characteristics of all the resurrection appearances are that Jesus has a physical body and that Jesus can appear and disappear. He isn't a ghost or a projection of some sort but a physical being with substance and mass that can seemingly enter into and exit out of physical reality.

v20-23 Jesus' body retains the wounds received in His earthly life – it is, in fact, one of the ways the disciples are reassured that it is him. Jesus gives them a commission and authority; then the gift of the Holy Spirit by breathing on them (this differs from the other gospels and we usually associate the gift of the Spirit with Pentecost as told in Acts).

v24-29 Thomas, quite reasonably I think, does not accept his fellow disciple's tales of Jesus' appearance until a week later, Jesus appeared again and has Thomas do what he says he would need to do to believe. Jesus then kind of mildly reproves Thomas by saying that those who believe without seeing will be blessed – meaning us.

And though we don't see the bodily Jesus that Thomas saw, I think we can experience the presence of Jesus, or at least perhaps the presence of the Holy Spirit (which is kind of the same thing). So we don't really need to depend wholly on faith maybe.

v30 The chapter closes with the author kind of apologizing that he couldn't include everything about Jesus but that hopefully this account might be enough to assuage the doubts of those who read or hear this gospel about Jesus Christ. It also suggest that this might have been the original ending of the gospel.

Gospel of John

Chapter 21

This final chapter, which feels a bit like it was tacked on, largely centers around a third and final resurrection appearance of Jesus. Many scholars believe it was added late in the development of the gospel in order to incorporate later church traditions such as Peter's leadership. John's gospel leaves off, somewhat abruptly, with Peter following Jesus down the road and without any mention of an ascension or other departure of Jesus.

V1 The Sea of Tiberias is another name for the Sea of Galilee (aka Lake Gennesaret). The previous two appearances in this gospel both occurred in Jerusalem, but this one is in Galilee (as in Mark and Matthew).

V2 The author says seven of the 12 (now 11) disciples are present – so presumably the “disciple Jesus loved” is likely one of them (though very definitely not Peter, as we will see). The text doesn't say where in Galilee they are, only that they are near the lake.

V3-6 This story of the enormous catch is very similar to the story told in Luke 5:1-11.

- They have fished through the night
- They caught little or nothing
- Jesus yells out from the shore to put their nets in again in a different spot
- There are so many fish the men struggle to handle them

V7-8 the words “he put on some clothes” could be translated as “belted his outer garment” which may suggest that rather than being fully nude, Peter was merely exposed. Nevertheless, Peter is dressed casually for work and he feels that it is disrespectful to encounter Jesus this way.

The Sea of Galilee is famously shallow, its max depth is only about 140ft and it averages about 80' deep – more like Onondaga or Oneida lake than one of the Finger Lakes.

V9-11 One of the takeaways from this scene is that Jesus, presumably, is material enough to eat – again he is not a ghost or spectre of some kind.

The number of large fish is oddly specific, 153, but whether that is meant to signify some deeper meaning is unclear though, fun fact, it is the sum of the whole numbers between 1 and 17. If this story is about Peter's leadership of the church, then it probably

is meant to symbolize the growth of the church in Peter's lifetime so long as he follows Jesus' directions.

V12-14 That they don't recognize Jesus seems curious; they didn't seem to have any trouble recognizing him when he came to the locked room. So, what has changed?

V15-17 Here Jesus asks Peter three times to affirm his love for Jesus, in what seems a pretty clear parallel with Peter's three earlier denials of Jesus. In each case though, Jesus seems to be calling on Peter to be a shepherd for Jesus' followers, asking him, in turn, to

- Feed my lambs
- Tend my sheep
- Feed my sheep

There are two different Greek words translated here as "love." In Jesus' first two questions he uses *agapan* while in the third question and in all of Peter's replies it is *phiein*. In ancient Greek, Agape was often used to describe love between family members, especially the love felt for one's children. Philia often described something more like loyalty, such as the love felt between comrades-in-arms. It isn't really clear what distinction the author may have been trying to make, if any.

V18-19 This is clearly a reference to the tradition that Peter himself was crucified in Rome – though famously upside down (which seems unlikely).

V20-23 Jesus says "follow me" (which is what he said to Philip back in chapter 1) and it appears from the context here, that Jesus didn't mean it metaphorically because it appears as though He and Peter are actually walking somewhere as Peter turns and sees the "disciple Jesus loved" following him following Jesus.

My takeaway here is that Jesus is clearly naming Peter as the leader of his followers and so Peter is asking Jesus about where the "beloved disciple" fits in and Jesus' answer is a bit of a non-sequitur though clearly Jesus wants Peter's eyes on Him and not on his perceived rivals.

This passage is clearly meant to address a controversy about the beloved disciple within the community which created this gospel. John has long been associated with this beloved disciple, though the text makes no such explicit suggestion, and in several cases such a choice would seem to be countered by the text itself. Nonetheless, the disciple John, by tradition, lived to a very advanced age and his death may have been seen as a crisis within the community, assuming he is the beloved disciple.

V24-25 This is pretty much v30 and 31 of chapter 20 (the likely original ending) repeated.