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# The Passover Sign: The People See the Prophet-King

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THE PASSOVER SIGN:  
THE PEOPLE SEE  
THE PROPHET-KING

by

RANDAL D. REYNOLDS

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Luther Seminary  
In Partial Fulfillment of  
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## CHAPTER 1

### THE SIGN AT PASSOVER: JOHN'S UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

The sign at Passover in the Gospel of John presents us with a unique opportunity to speculate about the shaping of a familiar story, the feeding miracle, to fit the theological interests of the Fourth Gospel. With this sign we have one of the few story parallels that John shares with the Synoptic Gospels;<sup>1</sup> this parallel thus sets the stage for the following discussion. This paper will begin with an English translation of John 6:1-15 from the Greek text. I will then consider the sign at Passover in light of the feeding-miracle stories found in the Synoptics. This comparison will largely find in John a particular, but not exclusive, connection that grows out of the Mosaic tradition not emphasized or found in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>2</sup> To fully appreciate the possible implications of these differences, this paper will provide a third major section that considers the developmental history of the Johannine community. Presumably different growth stages of the community provided various and unique pressures that molded the theology of the community. The feeding-miracle tradition provides one valuable

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<sup>1</sup> The Fourth Gospel does, for example, share with the Synoptics the Passion Narratives, which provides a more extended opportunity for another comparative analysis.

<sup>2</sup> John 6:1-15 does not mention Moses himself, but the very nature of the story will for the first reader provide an historical anchor in the Moses tradition. This paper will not delve into an extensive discussion of the Moses tradition as it emerged in the second-temple period, but this paper will assume well-developed ideas about Moses in this period. Harstine concludes that the character of Moses in John provides an historical anchor, witness, and point of conflict. Stan Harstine, *Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 161.

instance for exploring the Fourth Gospel's unique theology, set in sharp relief with the other three Gospels with which it shares this story.<sup>3</sup>

Various scholars during the 20<sup>th</sup> century have speculated on the editorial development of the text of the Fourth Gospel. A full consideration of this process in terms of the Gospel as a whole goes well beyond the scope of this paper. However, the basic thrust of this paper will presume such a process, and I close this paper with a brief consideration of the developmental process as it relates to John 6:1-15. Until I reach that concluding discussion, the reader should understand that I have typically used the term "narrator" to refer to the one who narrated the story as we have it in our pericope, and to the "Evangelist" who later took the narrator's tradition and developed a theology around this material now found in the discourse (Jn 6: 22-71) that follows our text. The reader should nevertheless understand such delineations as quite tentative and primarily serving as speculations concerning the assumed stratified history of the text and the possible resulting theological developments within these strata. Furthermore, I will assume that the narrator had at his disposal some traditional feeding-miracle story, similar to traditional material available to the writers of the other Gospels, but, of course, uniquely contextualized by the Johannine narrator and largely placed intact within John 6:5-13. I say contextualized because the narrator significantly shifted the focus of John 6:5-13 by adding a unique context to the feeding miracle by appending the story with the material found in John 6:1-4. Furthermore, the narrator shifted the

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<sup>3</sup> Terms that reference the Gospel itself, such as "John" or the "Gospel of John," or the "Fourth Gospel," do not serve to support any particularly theory regarding the Gospel or the author's identity, but merely serve as conventional terms to refer to this completed work as a whole. Because tradition has viewed the author as "John", I will use masculine pronouns in referring to the writer in this paper while acknowledging the absence of evidence to support this usage.

tradition's focus from *miracle* to *sign* by adding verses 14 and 15, which effectively become the new denouement of the Fourth Gospel's transformed story.

Finally, I will assume that the "Evangelist" took this modified pericope and out of respect for the narrator's material left it largely unaltered, as we find it in John 6:1-15, but added to it an extensive discourse (Jn 6:22-71) that serves to ultimately determine the final theological bearing for this story. A consideration of this discourse also goes far beyond the scope of this paper.



## CHAPTER 2

### ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF JOHN 6:1-15

1. After these things Jesus went to the other side of the sea of Galilee to Tiberius.
2. And a large crowd kept following him since seeing the signs he was doing on those who were sick.
3. Then Jesus went up into the mountain and there he was sitting with his disciples.
4. Now it was near the Passover, the feast of the Jews.
5. When Jesus lifted up his eyes and after seeing that a great crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, “Where will we buy bread in order that they may eat?”
6. Now this he said to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.
7. Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii of bread is not sufficient for them in order that each might receive a little.”
8. One of the disciples of him, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him,
9. “Here is a young child who has five loaves of barley and two fish, but what are these for so many?”
10. Jesus said, “Make the people to recline.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men reclined, a number of about five thousand men.
11. Jesus then received the bread and giving thanks and distributed to those reclining; likewise also from the fish as much as they desired.

12. When they were satisfied, he said to the disciples of him, “Gather the abounding fragments in order that nothing should be wasted.”
13. They gathered them and filled twelve baskets of broken bread from the five loaves of barley which abound for those who ate.
14. The people, then, when they saw that he had done a sign, began saying, “This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world.”
15. Jesus then, knowing that they were about to come and seize him in order to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain by himself alone.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE NARRATOR'S THEOLOGY AND EMPHASIS

As we will find from the review of the text itself and from the consideration of the Johannine community, particularly in its early stages, the Moses tradition played a significant role in the narrator's additions to the feeding miracle. Because the community of John has some special sensitivity or attraction to the Moses traditions, we would naturally expect to find the influence of these traditions impacting the Gospel narrative itself. The feeding-miracle stories provide a nice opportunity to explore this possibility because, as noted, we find parallel traditions across all four gospels (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:32-44, 8:1-9, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-15). In assuming some semblance of a shared tradition, the observed variation in John 6:1-15 in context, narrative content, grammar, and so on, should allow for speculation about the narrator's theology and emphasis.<sup>1</sup> We will first explore John 6:1-15 with an eye toward Moses and speculate about how this focus may have shaped the composition of the Feeding Sign found in John 6.

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<sup>1</sup> The following serve as just two examples of numerous scholars that make this same conjecture: Ernst Haenchen, R.W. Funk, & U. Busse, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 273; and Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (New York: The Anchor Bible Doubleday, 1966), 237.

## John 6:1-15: Selected Comments

### John 6:1 Μετὰ ταῦτα

The Feeding Sign in John 6:1 opens with the words, Μετὰ ταῦτα, “After these things,”<sup>2</sup> a common transitional phrase in John,<sup>3</sup> but words that also encourage a recollection of previous narrative content. In chapter 5 we found Jesus in pitched conflict with “the Jews,” who want to kill Jesus (Jn 5:18) after two serious violations of Jewish tradition: healing a sick man on the Sabbath and calling God his Father.<sup>4</sup> After asserting his authority as “the Son” (Jn 5:19) and invoking witnesses on his behalf, the chapter ends with references to Moses, on whom his opponents “set their hope,” but who, shockingly, will accuse Jesus’ opponents before the Father (Jn 5:45).<sup>5</sup> The chapter ends with, “If you believe Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do

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<sup>2</sup> Lockman Foundation, *New American Standard Bible*, 1st ed. (La Habra, CA: Foundations Publications, Publisher for the Lockman Foundation, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> We find this phrase used seven times in John. The first five occur as transitional phrases, as in Jn 6:1. Its occurrence in Jn 13:7 does not have this transitional function. Its final usage in Jn 21:1, an appendix to the Gospel, mimics the use of this transitional phrase used in John 1-12. Brown, on the phrase Μετὰ ταῦτα differentiates between the plural and singular form of τοῦτο by describing the plural form as a “vague” reference and the singular as referencing a “real chronological sequence,” a distinction of no consequence for this paper. However, as with the plural form, we find three of the four singular forms also in John 1-12. See Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 122.

<sup>4</sup> Bultmann writes, “The present order of chs. 5 and 6 cannot be the original one. Since in 6.1 Jesus goes ‘to the other side’ (πέραν) of the lake, he must have been at the lake-side beforehand; but in ch.5 he is in Jerusalem.” Bultmann concludes the original order of John in this section as chapters 4, 6, 5, and 7, which eliminates the geographical discontinuity. But the fact that the final editor left the text in its present order, despite this geographical discontinuity, seems to only strengthen the argument here that the editor wanted the Passover Sign to follow the material of chapter 5, including the preceding remarks concerning Moses. See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 209.

<sup>5</sup> Lierman notes that the Moses tradition always has Moses as the *advocate* of Israel, never the *accuser*. Furthermore, he also notes the “active, dynamic figure” of Moses in this section of John 5, as opposed to referencing some text written by Moses, an observation that fits with Harstine’s “point of conflict” in the character of Moses in John. See Lierman in “The Mosaic Pattern of John’s Christology,” in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. by John Lierman (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 216-217, and Harstine, *Moses as a Character*, 161.

not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?” (Jn 5:46-47). At minimum, we might interpret this concluding remark as suggesting some degree of correspondence between Moses and Jesus.<sup>6</sup> But whatever we make of chapter 5, the words, “After these things,” as a possible backdrop to John 6:1-15, this background clearly deviates from the context of the Feeding Miracle found in Mark, for there we find in the preceding verses (6:14-29) the recounting of the death of John the Baptist by King Herod. Assuming Markan priority, Matthew and Luke, not unexpectedly, provide the same context to their recounting of the story. Mark also contains a second Feeding Miracle in chapter 8, the Feeding of the 4000, which provides another non-Johannine context, but which fits within the structure of Mark that combines two groupings of miracle stories, with a Feeding Miracle in each group. However, similar to Johannine context, Mark has placed the Feeding Miracle stories in the context of crowds with clear messianic and eschatological expectations.<sup>7</sup>

The Evangelist’s placement of the Feeding Sign at this juncture in the Fourth Gospel seems designed to address for the reader an awareness known in the Johannine community about a tension between those who follow Jesus and the Jewish community who “set their hope” on Moses (Jn 5:45). The Evangelist seems to say to his community through the context in which he places the feeding story that the notion that you must choose between Jesus or Moses provides a false dichotomy (Jn 5:46). At the same time,

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<sup>6</sup> Beyond this, Meeks sees in the story of chapter 5 a “relationship between an early Christian group and a hostile Jewish community. What is significant for present purposes is that in both chapters [chapters 5 and 9] Moses is mentioned as of central importance in the religion of Jewish opponents. From the details of the two stories it is possible to reconstruct some important aspects of the *Sitz im Leben*,” Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 293.

<sup>7</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 319.

the fact that the Evangelist has had to provide the feeding story in this context seems to confirm the reality that even within the Johannine community some may still struggle with this dichotomy—a reality with which the entire community presumably struggled in its earlier developmental history.<sup>8</sup>

John 6: 2 ὅτι ἐθεώρουν τὰ σημεῖα

With Jesus' transition to a new locale, all four gospels in various ways also reference crowds arriving at the place where Jesus had gone, but only in John 6:2 do we find an explicit reason for the crowd following Jesus—"because they saw the signs"<sup>9</sup> (ὅτι ἐθεώρουν τὰ σημεῖα), an explanation that includes the theologically significant word, σημεῖον. This distinct term used to identify Jesus' special role in the Gospel of John (Jn 2:11, 2:23; 6:2, 6:14; 7:31; 11:47) seemingly replaces the term δύναμις used in the synoptic gospels where the people identify God's representative by deeds of power (e.g., Mt 13:54, Mk 6:1, Lk 19:37).<sup>10</sup> Although the term σημεῖον occurs in the Synoptics, neither the narrator nor the Evangelist in John ever use the word δύναμις. Further amplifying the importance of σημεῖον in John, the narrator and the Evangelist only apply this term to Jesus,<sup>11</sup> whereas δύναμις in the Synoptics applies not only to Jesus, but Elijah

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<sup>8</sup> For an extended discussion of this possible developmental history see below, where I will briefly survey several formulations of the Johannine community as outlined by Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 38; Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, Third Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 147; and A. J. Mattill, Jr., "Johannine Communities behind the Fourth Gospel: Georg Richter's Analysis," *Theological Studies* (1977), 298-299.

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all biblical quotes will come from the NRSV. Wayne A. Meeks and Jouette M. Bassler. *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Karl Heinick Rengstorf, "σημεῖον," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VII ed. Gerhard Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995): 200-269.

<sup>11</sup> In John 10:41, the Evangelist explicitly has the people say, "John performed no sign."

(Lk 1:17), John the Baptist (Mt 14:2) and the disciples (Lk 9:1).<sup>12</sup> Even more, the narrator's and Evangelist's use of this term points to the overall structure of the Gospel where, aside from the summary verse of John 20:30, they exclusively use this term in the first 12 chapters of John, leading some exegetes to designate these chapters as the "Book of Signs."<sup>13</sup>

The importance of σημεῖον in the Gospel of John therefore raises the obvious question as to its theological function in this Gospel. A survey of the occurrence of σημεῖον within the first half of the Gospel of John shows the term as not simply a parallel term for miracle, but rather as a "sign" pointing to the "dawn of the Messianic age" whereby these events serve as "Messianic epiphany-miracles."<sup>14</sup> If the signs of Jesus within the Gospel of John go beyond simply highlighting the miracles of Jesus and thereby the power of Jesus, we find in this Gospel some restricted notion of this term as compared to the more expansive description of Jesus' activity as ἔργον, (e.g., Jn 4:34; 5:20, 36; 7:3, 21; 10:25, 32, 33, 37, 38; 15:24; 17:4), a term strikingly absent in the Synoptics. Although John restricts the term σημεῖον to Jesus, we find the disciples as participating in the ἔργον of God (Jn 14.12). The combination of these two terms, σημεῖον and ἔργον, finds its theological roots within the Exodus tradition,<sup>15</sup> and specifically to Moses' activity.<sup>16</sup> Boismard has elaborated on this Moses-Jesus

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<sup>12</sup> Rengstorf, σημεῖον, 245.

<sup>13</sup> Although a widely accepted designation, C.H. Dodd may have first used this label in his commentary, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 290.

<sup>14</sup> Rengstorf, σημεῖον, 246.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

connection by arguing, for example, that an early tradition used by the Evangelist of the Fourth Gospel consisted of three initial “signs” within Galilee (i.e., 2:11, 4:54 and 21:14) that would have reminded the early community listeners of three signs given to Moses as proofs of his divine commission as God’s appointed deliverer.<sup>17</sup> These signs in the Gospel of John would have prompted in the listeners thoughts of the promise of God to raise up another prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15, 18), a point on which the narrator skillfully ends his feeding-sign story: “When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world" (Jn 6:14), an observation that will receive more discussion below.

John 6:1, 3 ἀπῆλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς . . . ἀνῆλθεν δὲ εἰς τὸ ὄρος Ἰησοῦς

The opening verses of chapter 6 also provide several geographical details unique to the Fourth Gospel’s rendition of the Feeding Miracle that highlight the Mosaic-Exodus symbolism. Although the Synoptic stories each imply the crossing of water with the mention of a boat, only the Fourth Gospel uses a word with a verbal root of ἔρχομαι, in the aorist tense, active voice, as also found in Exodus 14:22 (LXX). Both John 6:1 and Exodus 14:22 also use the word θαλάσσης in the singular, genitive form. Although the connection here seems quite minimal and perhaps incidental, the connection to the Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea at the time of the exodus from Egypt echoes in the

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<sup>17</sup> As to the third sign, Marie-Emile Boismard provides a lengthy discussion as to the displacement and modification of this third sign as now found in John 21:14. Marie-Emile Boismard, *Moses or Jesus: An Essay in Johannine Christology*, trans. by B.T. Viviano (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 45-52.



story of Jesus walking on water, a story that follows the Feeding Miracle in four of the five Gospels renditions.<sup>18</sup>

In verse 3 the narrator has also added the geographical detail of τὸ ὄρος with the definitive article, thus raising the question of what mountain. A discussion of “this mountain” had previously occurred with the Samaritan woman in which she asserted “this mountain” as the appropriate place of worship (Jn 4:20-21). This mountain, traditionally understood by the Samaritans as Mount Gerizim, served as the place of worship for Samaritans, as opposed to Jerusalem;<sup>19</sup> it also serves as the appropriate place for the Samaritans to celebrate the Passover.<sup>20</sup> Moses, of course, also ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. We learn from John 1:17 that “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” This Jesus sat on the mountain and thus taught this grace and truth to his disciples. Whatever we make of τὸ ὄρος, this geographical detail combined with the just mentioned sea crossing thus provides a “picture-perfect” setting for the story to come.<sup>21</sup>

John 6:4 ἦν δὲ ἐγγὺς τὸ πάσχα

These geographical details, however, immediately become swept up and crystalized by the crowning temporal detail of the Feeding Sign found in verse 4: ἦν δὲ ἐγγὺς τὸ

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<sup>18</sup> We should recognize that actually the feeding-miracle story had the walking-on-the-sea story connected to it in its original tradition as evidence by the presence of this complex in three of the four Synoptic Gospel renditions.

<sup>19</sup> E. Freed, “Samaritan Influence in the Gospel of John” in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (1968), 582.

<sup>20</sup> Warren Joseph Moulton, “The Samaritan Passover,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 22 (1903), 187.

<sup>21</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*. Vol 25A, of *New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 249.

πάσχα (“Now it was near the Passover,” author’s translation). The synoptic gospels say nothing of the Passover, nor even intimate this as the setting for the miracle story. Only the Johannine narrator introduces this temporal context for the Feeding Sign and in so doing orients the story toward its unique theological goal that will come to full expression with verses 14 and 15, and then further modified by the Evangelist in the extensive discourse (Jn 6:22-71) that follows the two connected sign stories in John 6:1-21.

The first-century listeners of John’s Gospel would have had an intimate familiarity with both the ritualistic practices of the cultic temple sacrifice and the subsequent domestic meal associated with the Passover commemoration. As one of three annual festivals, wherein many Jewish pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem, the head of each family group needed to secure a lamb for the temple sacrifice and a room for the domestic eating of the now sacrificed lamb (cf. Mark 14.13-16). This festival commemorated God’s rescue of Israel from Egypt as recounted in Exodus. This story begins with God coming to Moses in a burning bush to commission him to deliver the people of Israel because God has “observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt” (Ex 3:7). Because Moses feared the people would not “believe” him (Ex 4:1), God gave Moses three signs to validate his commissioned status as God’s servant in rescuing Israel.<sup>22</sup> (The mention of “the people,” Ex 3:7, LXX, in this text may connect with the narrator’s similar usage in John 6:14-15, which we will discuss below, although such an argument would be strengthened if both sources used the same Greek word.) Of course, Pharaoh’s resistance to letting the people go prompted the ten plagues, with the last and most consequential plague involving the death of every firstborn in Egypt. The people of

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<sup>22</sup> Mariann Meyre Thomas, “Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* (1991), 101.

Israel could avoid this fate, however, by slaughtering a lamb and sprinkling its blood on the two door posts (Ex 12:7). This prompted the subsequent “ordinance for the passover” (Ex 12:43). Although the twelfth chapter of Exodus mentions this new ordinance associated with the events of Israel’s rescue from Egypt, this same chapter mentions the establishment of another celebration, the “Festival of Unleavened Bread” (Ex 12:14-20). Although John 6:4 states, “Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near,” this descriptor probably represents a consolidating term for a complex of ritual activities associated with the Passover itself combined with the Feast of Unleavened Bread;<sup>23</sup> the former, the Passover, originally represented only the domestic eating of the Passover lamb on the eve of the fourteenth day of the first month (Nisan) (Lev 23:5) while the following 7 days celebrated the festival of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:6). Other New Testament texts show the variety of verbal formulations used for this complex of ritual activities; compare, for example, “It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread” (Mk 14:1) with “Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near” (Lk 22:1). Although the three Synoptic Gospels each mention the festival of Unleavened Bread, the Fourth Gospel never makes use of this descriptor.

This large and most important festival, then, celebrated God’s redemption of the people of Israel from foreign oppression. Participants joyfully and naturally assumed a retrospective orientation in celebrating God’s past actions of redemption; but equally naturally, set within the first century context, this festival served as a focal point that galvanized the

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<sup>23</sup> Joachim Jeremias, “πάσχα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Volume V*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 897.

collective resentment of an oppressed people concerning Roman occupation and rule of Judea, and even more this fervor energized expectations concerning God's imminent deliverance of the nation.<sup>24</sup> God has in their past time of need provided a deliverer in Moses, and God would provide another deliverer in this present time of need.<sup>25</sup> Although it may go too far to suggest the Galilean Passover pilgrims accounted for the "large crowd" (Jn 6:2) encountered by Jesus,<sup>26</sup> it seems safe to assume that the narrator had an awareness of the eschatological-oriented first-century expectations associated with the Passover and deliberately inserted the words, "Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near" (Jn 6:4) into his feeding-miracle tradition to provide a contrasting, Christ-centered perspective of Passover for the Johannine community.

Each of the three Passovers celebrations mentioned in John have the clarifying comment, "the festival of the Jews" (Jn 2:13, 6:4, and 11:55). A full consideration of the words "the Jews" goes beyond the current discussion,<sup>27</sup> but we may suggest that at minimum the narrator's addition of these words provides a contrasting view between the Passover, as understood by "the Jews" and as understood by his community. The feeding story, of

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<sup>24</sup> Federico M Colautti, "Passover in the Works of Josephus," *Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism*, v. 75 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 217.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Bauckham lists numerous charismatic rebel leaders in response to Roman oppression who assumed a Moses-like mantle thus raising expectation of freeing the people from Roman oppression. See Richard Bauckham, "Messianism According to the Gospel of John," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, edited by John Lierman (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 43.

<sup>26</sup> Jeremias, *πάσχα*, 899.

<sup>27</sup> As an example of such a discussion, see R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of John and the Jews," *Review & Expositor*, 84 (1987): 273-288.

course, provides the springboard for a long discourse in chapter 6 on how his community now views the Passover. Because the Samaritans also have their own Passover tradition, as distinct from that of “the Jews,” we might also assume the narrator’s distinctions drawn in the discourse of chapter 6 would equally apply to the Samaritan traditions as well (see Jn 4:20-21 for a parallel distinction).

#### John 6:5-6 Φίλιππον

Verse 5 of our story introduces, Philip, a disciple not mentioned in the three Synoptic feeding stories. The reason for his introduction into the story remains speculative. John 1:44, however, mentions that Philip came from Bethsaida. “If the [feeding] scene takes place in Bethsaida, as in Luke [9:10], a question to Philip becomes logical since he came from Bethsaida,”<sup>28</sup> and may represent some historical artifact of the story. At the same time, we should also mention that John’s Gospel has not mention Philip since his first appearance in the Gospel, where, after his introduction, John places on his lips a seemingly pertinent confession about Jesus’ identity: “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” (Jn 1:45). That Philip has this special understanding of Jesus’ identity provides then the ground for the question, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” (Jn 6:5). Verse 6 characterizes this question as a “test...for he [Jesus] himself knew what he was going to do” (Jn 6:6), and so should Philip as evidenced by his previous confession and his knowledge of what Moses had done for the hungry people in the wilderness.

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<sup>28</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 233.

### John 6:7-13 Stock Elements of Feeding Miracle

Verses 7 through 13 in John provide many of the stock elements of the feeding-miracle tradition as also found in the synoptic accounts. These common details would include the two hundred denarii (Jn 6:7 and Mk 6:37), five loaves and two fish (Jn 6:9, Mt 14:17, Mk 6:38, and Lk 9:13), making the crowd sit down (Jn 6:10, Mt 14:19, Mk 6:39, Lk 9:14), on grass (Jn 6:10, Mt 14:19, Mk 6:39), identifying the crowd size as 5,000 men (Jn 6:10, Mt 14:21, Mk 6:44; Lk 9:14), the taking, giving thanks, and distributing of the bread (Jn 6:11, Mt 14:19; Mk 6:41; Lk 9:16), the satisfaction of the crowd after eating (Jn 6:11, Mt 14:20, Mk 6:42; Lk 9:17) and the gathering of twelve baskets of broken “pieces” or in John “fragments” (Jn 6:13, Mt 14:20, Mk 6:43, Lk 9:17). This litany of common elements should not imply the absence of variation across the four accounts. As already noted, unlike the synoptic accounts, John mentions specific disciples, including Philip and Andrew; John also mentions “barley loaves” and “much grass.” We find slight variations in the ordering of details. For example, Matthew and Mark both mention “five thousand men” at the end of the story, presumably for dramatic effect. The role of the disciples seems quite consistent across the three synoptic gospels, but in John we find variation in the one initiating and completing actions. For example, John has Jesus initiate the concern about feeding the people as part of his “test” of Philip, whereas the disciples initiate this concern in the Synoptics. In John, like Luke, Jesus mediates the command through the disciples for the crowds to sit down, whereas in Matthew and Mark he directly commands the crowds himself. In John, Jesus directly distributes the blessed food, whereas in the Synoptics the disciples distribute the food. Finally, in John Jesus orders the collection of “fragments” which may have taken on some kind of symbolic

meaning whereas the Synoptics simply report the disciples collecting the twelve baskets of “pieces,” presumably for dramatic effect. Taken together, however, we may conclude that, in comparison with the synoptic accounts, the narrator has largely left his received feeding tradition intact, as found in verses 7 through 13. We find slight variations, possibly driven by some theological emphasis or stylistic preference of the narrator, but we also find slight variations to the presumed tradition across the Synoptics.

Dramatically and most importantly, however, we find that the narrator has altered the context and thus the import of the received tradition of the Feeding Miracle by adding significantly different details to the beginning, as already discussed, and also to the end of the received story, which we shall discuss now.

John 6:14 ἀληθῶς ὁ προφήτης ὁ ἐρχόμενος εἰς τὸν κόσμον

The feeding story in John ends with the addition of two verses completely absent from the Synoptics that serve to dramatically emphasize the question of Jesus’ identity in the context of the Feeding Sign. With John 6:14 we find a participle clause that forms an inclusio with 6:2. In this clause we have a second reference to σημεῖον (sign) in this story, now in a singular form as opposed to the plural form in verse 2 (σημεῖα), which points to what Jesus has just ἐποίησεν (“done”), in an aorist tense as opposed to ἐποίει (“was doing,” in an imperfect tense), and which the ἄνθρωποι (“people”), as opposed to the ὄχλος πολύς (“large crowd”) in verse 2, had ἰδόντες (“saw”) in aorist tense, participle form, as opposed to ἐθεώρουν (“saw,” in an imperfect tense). The discussion below will suggest that the change of words from “large crowd” of verse 2 to “the people” of verse 14 serves as a clarification because we have some reason to believe that “the people” represent the common folk as opposed to the educated Jewish leaders. In

the fifth chapter of John, Jesus engages in a contentious debate with “the Jews” (Jn 5:18). In this discussion Jesus states, “You search the scriptures...,” (Jn 5:39), a statement that indicates a literate group with whom he debates. Likewise, in chapter 7, in another discussion concerning Jesus’ identity (Jn 7:40-43), some in the “crowd” argue, “Has not the scripture said...,” (Jn 7:42), a statement that indicates here the presence of the educated class among the crowd.<sup>29</sup> In the feeding story, as developed by the narrator, we find no indicators pointing to the presence of the educated Jewish leaders, although in the discourse that follows (Jn 6:22-71) they have arrived.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, in the discussion of Jesus’ identity in verses 14 and 15 we find no formula indicating a direct reference to scripture.

The opening clause in verse 14 thus sets the final stage for the narrator’s effort in re-orientating the focus of the feeding story, thus forming a new denouement involving the people’s understanding of Jesus’ true identity as revealed by this sign: “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.” (Jn 6:14). With this statement, the narrator references the common peoples’ understanding of a significant second-temple ideology, a “little tradition” that may show some variance with the “great tradition” held by the educated elite.<sup>31</sup> Who is “the prophet who is to come into the world”? Scholars almost

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<sup>29</sup> Martyn notes the same formulation concerning the Jews and Nicodemus in John 7:52, and argues for the distinction between the educated elite and common folks. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel, Third Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 112.

<sup>30</sup> In the discourse that follows we can presume the presence of the educated elite, who say, “as it is written...” (John 6:31).

<sup>31</sup> Robert Redfield offers an analysis of the transmission of cultural ideas from the “intelligentsia” to the common folks so that in a given culture some semblance of correspondence emerges between the “great tradition” and the “little tradition.” I will assume the possibility of such a mechanism in the discussion that follows. *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 60, 70.



universally recognize that in part this statement relates to Deuteronomy 18:15, where the Deuteronomist places on Moses' lips the promise: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet." A contextual reading of the Deuteronomy text finds an emphasis on God's promise of providing Israel with God's prophets who will guide Israel according to God's ways—a promise designed to calm fears arising because of the presumed imminent absence of Moses. Also, the promise of such prophets contrasts Israel's guidance to that of the nations who rely on witchcraft and diviners (Deut 18:14). Although this understanding fits with Rabbinic Judaism,<sup>32</sup> the *Sitz im Leben* of the first century<sup>33</sup> evoked in the common people thoughts of an eschatological prophet like Moses.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Samaritan Tradition and the Eschatological Prophet like Moses**

Several late second-temple movements show the various strands of ideas that developed around Deuteronomy 18:15. Moses plays a particularly important role in Samaritan sources.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, a Samaritan expectation of an eschatological figure not linked to Moses, in the tradition of Deuteronomy 18:15,

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<sup>32</sup> Wayne Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 199-200. As to the transition to an eschatological understanding, as presumed in John 6:14, Ferdinand Dexinger argues for a two-step process. First, the tradition moved from a "distributive" to an "individual meaning" of the text. Second, it moved beyond its historical basis to an eschatological understanding. "Reflections on the Relationship Between Qumran and Samaritan Messianology," in *Qumran-Messianism*, eds. James H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberge, and Gerbern S. Oegema, 83-99 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 90-91.

<sup>33</sup> Teeple clarifies that prevailing pressures of the first century gave rise to the hopes for an eschatological leader, not the Deuteronomy 18 text itself. It seems quite reasonable to assume the possibility that "little traditions" also work to influence "great traditions," as seemingly happened with the emergence of first-century peasant leaders and the subsequent interpretation of such movements by the intelligentsia. See H.M. Teeple, in *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (Philadelphia: Scholars, 1957), 87

<sup>34</sup> For additional discussion, see Wayne Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 319; and John Lierman, *The New Testament Moses* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 85.

<sup>35</sup> Robert T. Anderson and Terry Giles, *The Samaritan Pentateuch: An Introduction to Its Origin, History, and Significance for Biblical Studies* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 23.

18, does not exist in known Samaritan documents.<sup>36</sup> The Samaritans tradition shows Moses held in highest regard, “like whom there is no prophet from the whole human race.”<sup>37</sup> Although this saying echoes Deuteronomy 34:10, which speaks of the uniqueness of Moses, the titles given to Moses in Samaritan literature often exceed or exaggerate Moses’ prominence relative to a biblical understanding.<sup>38</sup>

The theology of an eschatological figure like Moses arose from socio-political pressures<sup>39</sup> of the late second-temple period that molded expectations to produce numerous eschatological figures like Moses.<sup>40</sup> Naturally, the expectation for confirmatory signs arose concurrent with the rise these self-proclaimed figures. The proliferation of these Moses-like leaders prompted within the Samaritan literature a corrective tradition that countered Deuteronomy 18-15, 18 text: “There is none like Moses the prophet and none will ever arise,”<sup>41</sup> a conclusion that ultimately demands a Moses redivivus rather than simply a Prophet like Moses.

Whether the coming eschatological figure will be Moses redivivus or simply a Prophet like Moses remained an equivocal issue within the Samaritan

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<sup>36</sup> Dexinger, “Reflections,” 88, 90.

<sup>37</sup> Memar and John McDonald, *Memar Marqah: The Teaching of Marqah*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 84 (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1963), 240. See also Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 220-221, for a nice review of the exalting titles given to Moses by the Samaritans.

<sup>38</sup> Dexinger “Reflections,” 96-97.

<sup>39</sup> Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Bauckham, “Messianism,” 41-44.

<sup>41</sup> Dexinger, “Reflections,” 98.

tradition, but in either case when this One comes he will rule from Shechem and from the holy mountain of Garizim.<sup>42</sup> The Samaritan woman in her conversation with Jesus makes reference to “this holy mountain,” presumably Mount Garizim, where “our ancestors worshipped” (Jn 4:20). The coming eschatological figure will also show himself with “unusual signs and wonders,” language that echoes the Deuteronomic texts found in Exodus and Deuteronomy where YHWH displayed power for Israel’s deliverance from Egypt through Moses (Ex 7:3; Deut 4:34, 6:22). In the late-temple period eschatological figures performed “signs” that raised expectations of deliverance from the oppressive Romans.<sup>43</sup>

A significant limitation to any discussion regarding first-century Samaritan traditions, including those involving an eschatological Moses-like figure, involves the paucity of early Samaritan texts, most of which date well beyond the fourth century CE. This leaves scholars largely speculating about the nature of Samaritanism in the first century,<sup>44</sup> thus raising questions about the proper direction of influence.<sup>45</sup> So, for example, rather than assuming that the Samaritan Woman story in the Gospel of John reflects established Samaritan tradition, someone might reasonably argue for a reversed direction of influence given that the Gospel of John precedes most Samaritan texts. Some early texts,

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<sup>42</sup> Abdullah Ben Kori Jacob and William Eleazar Barton, *The Messianic Hope of the Samaritans* (Unknown City: Nabu Press, 2010), 31.

<sup>43</sup> Bauckham, “Messianism,” 43.

<sup>44</sup> Meeks lists these sources and suggests the earliest material dated to the fourth century. *Prophet-King*, 219.

<sup>45</sup> Margaret Pamment, “Is There Convincing Evidence of Samaritan Influence on the Fourth Gospel?,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche*, 73 (1982), 221.

however, provide some evidence of late second-temple Samaritan beliefs regarding eschatological figures.

An early source of evidence concerning the anticipation of eschatological Moses-like figures comes from the Samaritan Pentateuch, a variant translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch. The Samaritan Pentateuch presumably emerged around the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E to early 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E<sup>46</sup> as evidenced by similar alterations also found in the some Hebrew Pentateuch, LXX. The Decalogue in the Samaritan Pentateuch compressed the Ten Commandments of the Hebrew tradition to nine, thus allowing a comparatively large addition of a 10<sup>th</sup> commandment in the Samaritan Decalogue—an expansion that throws significant light on several theological positions held by the Samaritans. The addition roughly follows Deuteronomy 27:2-8 with the modification of “Mount Ebal” in the Masoretic text to “Mount Gerizim.”<sup>47</sup> The Samaritan narrative that follows the inserted 10<sup>th</sup> commandment then follows Exodus 20:18ff (MT text) in recording the people’s reaction, including their request for Moses to serve as an intermediary for them before God. At the point of recording YHWH’s response in Exodus 20:22, the Samaritan text inserts Deuteronomy 5:28ff to provide YHWH’s response which endorses the people’s request, “I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have

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<sup>46</sup> Anderson and Giles, *Samaritan Pentateuch*, 22.

<sup>47</sup> John Bowman and Shemaryahu Talmon, *Samaritan Decalogue Inscriptions* (Manchester: John Rylands Library, 1951), 217.

spoken” (Deut 5:28). At this point the Samaritan text then also inserts Deuteronomy 18:18ff to reference a Prophet-like Moses.

A similar analysis compares the Samaritan Pentateuch with Qumran texts.<sup>48</sup> Specifically, just as we find Deuteronomy 18:18ff (MT) following Deuteronomy 5:28ff (MT) in the Samaritan text of Deuteronomy 5:28, so the Qumran fragment (*4QTestimonia*) involves the same Deuteronomy 18:18ff insertion. But unlike the Samaritan text, we find the insertion of an oracle concerning the Davidic royal figure (Num 24:15-17) and an oracle concerning a priestly figure (Deut 33:8-11). This Qumran text, then, shows the existence of an eschatological-figure like Moses tradition carried forward not only in the Qumran community but also in the Samaritan community. Equally important, this text also highlights the plurality of eschatological traditions existing in the late second-temple period with various communities shaping received traditions to meet their own theological interests. The Gospel of John obviously engaged in this same process.

### **Qumran Traditions and Eschatological Figures**

While the Samaritan tradition understands a Prophet like Moses as the sole eschatological figure, other late-temple traditions show a diversity of eschatological figures. The Qumran literature not only provides variant traditions to Samaritanism, but also variant traditions across its own two hundred-year

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<sup>48</sup> Dexinger, “Reflections,” 92-93.

history.<sup>49</sup> The Qumran texts imagine three eschatological figures: A Priestly Messiah, a Messiah of Israel, and a Prophet like Moses. The Prophet like Moses, like the Samaritan tradition, has its basis in Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, (*4QTestimonies* [4Q175]). With the diversification of eschatological figures within the Qumran tradition, the role of Moses largely related only to Torah.<sup>50</sup> The emphasis on the connection between Moses and Torah possibly led to a later community understanding of the eschatological prophet as fulfilled in the Teacher of Righteousness, the one who rose up to instruct the community in proper Torah observance.<sup>51</sup>

### **Other Late-Temple Traditions**

As we can see from this brief discussion, the Samaritan and Qumran communities centered their understanding of the tradition of “the Prophet like Moses” around a theologically-oriented understanding of Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, but the notion of an eschatological prophet assumed a larger scope of reference in other late-temple traditions. An early reference to a coming eschatological figure appears in Malachi 3:1; it does not reference a Prophet like Moses specifically, but more generally “my messenger,” and a “messenger of the covenant” (Mal 3:1), later identified as Elijah of whom they waited, “before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes” (Mal 4:5). Both of these texts reference “the coming”

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<sup>49</sup> Hermann Lichtenberger, “Messianic Expectations and Messianic Figures in the Second-temple Period,” in *Qumran-Messianism*, eds. by James H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern S. Oegema (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 20.

<sup>50</sup> Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 171.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

of this one, “the messenger.” In John 6:14 we find the participle ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“the coming one”), a term that quite naturally falls within the thought structure of an eschatological figure.<sup>52</sup> A later writer in 1 Maccabees 4:44-46 also referenced an eschatological figure in the context of the defilement of the temple that required them to wait “until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them” (1Ma 4:46), that is, with the desecrated stones of the temple. This text suggests the “practical need” that possibly pressured a “little tradition” behind waiting for the Prophet like Moses, as opposed to a theologically derived expectation, the “great tradition,”<sup>53</sup> based on Deuteronomy 18:15, 18.<sup>54</sup> Maccabees 14:41 provides another example of waiting “until a trustworthy prophet should arise” (1Ma 14:41).

### **Little Traditions and Eschatological Prophets**

The discussion above has considered sacred texts from which come various theologies, “great traditions,” including those notions concerning eschatological figures. Only the educated class, of course, would have the capacity to engage in this study of the scriptures. The masses, remaining illiterate, could not engage in the formal study of the scriptures, but they would nevertheless also have theological understandings, “little

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<sup>52</sup> Prior to its use in John 6:14 we find ὁ ἐρχόμενος used four times in the Fourth Gospel, twice by John the Baptist in identifying the “who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me” (Jn 1:15), and again “the one who is coming after me (Jn 1:27), and twice as a self-designation by Jesus: The one who comes from above is above all” and “The one who comes from heaven is above all” (Jn 3:31). Examining this term, in its various forms led Johannes Schneider to write, “In John’s Gospel the theological context of ἐρχεσθαι sayings is even more pronounced than in the Synoptics.” Johannes Schnider, “ἔρχομαι,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Volume II (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 671.

<sup>53</sup> See footnote 34 above.

<sup>54</sup> Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet*, 70.

traditions,” including ideas concerning eschatological figures. These ideas may reflect varying degrees of cultivated ideas, transmitted through local teachers and synagogue leaders, or by folklore transmitted through oral traditions.<sup>55</sup> We find in the Fourth Gospel several examples where the educated teachers show disdain toward common folk either because of their ignorance (Jn 6:31, 7:40-42), or more infuriatingly because of their presumption (Jn 7:15, 9:34),<sup>56</sup> thus supporting the contention that these various types of traditions interacted and subsequently found themselves reflected in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel itself.<sup>57</sup>

If this argument carries any validity, the review above of the Samaritan literature, Qumran texts, and late second-temple writings, by definition, reflects the theology of the educated class, who ultimately transmitted the great tradition in its final written form. This same logic may itself partially account for the delimiting of eschatological figures to the peripheral groups of the Samaritan and Qumran communities in second-temple Jewish literature.<sup>58</sup> The inattention of most second-temple literature, composed by the scholarly element of society, may largely reflect the disinterest of the upper strata of society in matters that envisioned the disruption of established social structures.<sup>59</sup> The priestly scholars as interpreters and authorities on scripture tended to rebuff ideas of

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<sup>55</sup> Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*, 70, provides such an analysis concerning peasant groups across various cultures, which seems applicable to John’s use of the terms “people” and “crowd.”

<sup>56</sup> Jesus’ interaction with Nicodemus provides a reversed example, although Martyn rightly argues that the Evangelist does more than this in this story. Rather, the “issue is not midrashic. . . . It is a decision of the will in the electing presence of God’s emissary.” J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, Third Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 118-119.

<sup>57</sup> Specifically to this discussion, see the tradition noted in John 6:14.

<sup>58</sup> R. A. Horsley, “Like One of the Prophets of Old, Two Types of Popular Prophets at the Time of Jesus,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 47 (1985): 437.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.



eschatological figures whose purpose envisions the upending of society, the very social structure that provides support for their authority.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, within the first century, prior to the destruction of the temple, the illiterate and suffering peasants, who comprised of the masses had ample reason for thinking about a needed change in social structures, and their folklorist ideas undoubtedly reflected revolutionary change. Furthermore, out of the peasant class itself many revolutionaries arose.<sup>61</sup> Josephus, not unexpectedly, disdainfully referred to such individuals as “imposters” and “deceivers,”<sup>62</sup> but in the eyes of the masses many of these figures appeared as a Prophet like Moses.<sup>63</sup> So, for example, Josephus mention Theudas, a “charlatan,” who in 46 C.E. led his follower to the Jordan, and as a sign of his status promised to divide the waters of the Jordan. The Roman’s dispersed his followers and beheaded Theudas (*Ant.* 20.97-99). We find reference to this same individual and this incident in Acts 5:36. Josephus mentions another revolutionary labeled as an “Egyptian false prophet...who was a cheat,” and who, sometime in the mid-first century, led “thirty thousand men” around in the wilderness (*Jewish War*, 2.261-262). Again, we seem to find reference to this same character in Acts 21:38 where the Roman soldier questions Paul, attempting to

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<sup>60</sup>Horsely notes, for example, “In order to remain loyal subjects, the postexilic Judean elite would have obediently suppressed any Judean royal or ‘messianic’ pretensions.” R. A. Horsley, “Popular messianic movements around the time of Jesus.” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 46 (1984): 497. Of course, this argument would suggest that with the destruction of social structure, such as the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E., the displaced scholarly class may itself yearn of an eschatological figure. Meeks reviews the Palestinian Targum and midrashim, highlighting the eschatological features related to Moses (cf. *Prophet-King*, 211-214).

<sup>61</sup> Lichtenberger, “Messianic Expectation,” 20. See also Gerald Wheaton, *The Role of Jewish Feasts in John’s Gospel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 94.

<sup>62</sup> Horsley, “Like One of the Prophets of Old,” 455.

<sup>63</sup> Bauckham, “Messianism,” 42.

clarify his identity: “Then you are not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?” That Luke relates this story in the context of Paul’s mission seems to highlight the prevalence of revolutionary activity in the first half of the first century. Understandably, given its proximity to the mounting Roman-Jewish conflict, this activity escalated in the second half of the century. Josephus mentions, for example, “one Jonathan, a vile person, and by trade a weaver” who led “a small number of the poor sort” into the desert, “promising to give them signs and apparitions” (*Jewish War*, 7.11, 1). Josephus mentions other such figures that remained unnamed but who also arose in the mid to late first century (*B.J.* 2.258-260, 6.283-287; *Ant.* 20.167-168, 188).<sup>64</sup> Although Josephus denigrates these characters and certainly does not attempt to understand their activity from the perspective of the peasants, he, himself participated in this prevailing Jewish peasant belief system. When captured by the Roman commander Vespasian and needing to save himself, Josephus claimed his own prophetic capacity and claimed Vespasian would not only “lord over me, but over the land and the sea, and all mankind” (*Jewish War*, 3, chap 8.9). Ironically, this “prophesy” came true when Nero committed suicide in 68 C.E.<sup>65</sup>

This first century context, as exemplified by Josephus’ history, provides perspective on the common people’s worldview as portrayed in John 6:14: seeing the sign performed by this one named Jesus they excitedly proclaim: "This is

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>65</sup> In her discussion of Nero, Collins relates his death to prophecies in Revelation 13 and 17 regarding Nero’s return as understood by the “common people.” Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 59.

indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." (Jn 6:14). That John does not have the common people quote scripture in their characterization of Jesus fits with the analysis provided above in terms of the narrator's differentiation between the educated class and the common masses in handling scripture. Although this quasi-scriptural characterization may typify an element of the folklorist theology held by the first-century peasants, we should also recognize that within this characterization of the people lays a kernel of John's own theology: "εἰς τὸν κόσμον" (Jn 6:14). John uses this phrase fourteen times, nearly twice its occurrence in the rest of the New Testament. Twelve of these occurrences refer to Jesus, with ten put on Jesus' own lips about himself. Eight of the fourteen occurrences involve some form of the verb ἔρχομαι, with another five involving the verb ἀποστέλλω, that is, sent by the Father. The subject of these verbs involves the "light," "Son," "prophet," and "one." Five occurrences involve Jesus speaking of himself in the first or second person. Clearly we have here an element of John's "realized eschatology"<sup>66</sup> manifest not in the "kingdom of God" but in the eschatological figure who has come. John 6:14 offers this figure as "the prophet" who has now come. Although the Gospel of John never dismisses this characterization of Jesus, the Evangelist does not leave it as such, but rather uses this characterization to launch into a more complete and full understanding of Jesus's identity, as found in the extensive discourse that follows in the rest of chapter 6. But before moving on to such a discussion, the narrator rounds out this pericope with one final characterization.

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<sup>66</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1953), 447.

## John 6:15: βασιλεύς

In John 6:15 the narrator reports that Jesus ἀνεχώρησεν (withdrew), a word that may serve as a synonym for the word ἀπῆλθεν, which the narrator used in the opening verse of this pericope, thus rounding out the concluding frame of the enclusio begun in verse 14. But the narrator has only used the word ἀνεχώρησεν here in John. We do find the same word used seven times in Matthew, six times relative to Jesus and in each case having him leave some undesirable or even dangerous situation. So this aspect of the word amplifies the most significant feature of this verse—Jesus left the crowd because he knows they plan to seize him to make him king, perhaps a startling statement for the modern reader, but not unexpected for the first readers, as we will discuss below. This Gospel has already prepared the reader for this designation of king at the opening of the Gospel narrative with Nathanael’s exclamations, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (Jn 1:49). Of course, we should understand these two designations as a parallelism, although “Son of God” does not appear elsewhere in the Gospel. Aside from John 6:15, the designation of “king” becomes a point of contention only later in the Gospel as the reader comes to the passion narrative (Jn 18:39, 19:12, 15).

The confession of Nathanael followed Andrew’s confession (Jn 1:41) of, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed)." We find the term Μεσσίας, the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew term מָשִׁיחַ , used only here and on the lips of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:25) in the entire New Testament. With the Synoptics, the Evangelist prefers the Greek term, χριστός, a word that

references the ancient near eastern practice of some cultures in anointing divinely appointed public figures thus providing them with “power, strength, and majesty,”<sup>67</sup> including prophets, priest, but mostly kings.<sup>68</sup> In late-temple Judaism messianic expectations generally evoked thoughts of the Davidic royal lineage, as extensively developed in the royal psalms and in Isaiah of the OT. But the Fourth Gospel, as compared to the Synoptics, does not assume this Davidic orientation. Only at John 7:42 does this Gospel mention the Davidic messiah and only in the context of an unresolved dispute concerning Jesus’ identity. In the context of John 6:15, the designation “king” stands juxtaposed to the term “prophet” in verse 14, an observation that has produced considerable debate as to its meaning. Should we understand “king” in parallel to the designation “prophet” in verse 14,<sup>69</sup> or should we understand these as distinct term?<sup>70</sup>

### **Royal Messianism in Great Traditions**

As discussed above concerning a differentiated understanding of prophetic movements in terms of great and little traditions, we will here also examine royal movements from the perspective of the literate class as those who studied scriptures and composed first century literature leading to the enculturation of

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<sup>67</sup> Franz Hesse, "מִשָּׁח and מְשִׁיחַ in the Old Testament," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume IX, eds. by Gerhard Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 492ff.

<sup>68</sup> Horsley, “Like One of the Prophets of Old,” 473.

<sup>69</sup> Meeks, after an extensive review of second-temple literature understands the terms of complimentary, thus naming his book *Prophet-King*.

<sup>70</sup> Horsley, argues for a distinction between prophetic and messianic movements (“Like One of the Prophets of Old,” 472).

great traditions. Similarly, we will also examine historical royal movements that nearly completely consisted of peasants groups, a process that allows some contact with little traditions.

In the relevant literature generated by the scholarly groups, some texts within the Rabbinic and Samaritan traditions show the offices of prophet and king consolidated in a single person. Early Jewish commentary appears to take the kingship of Moses for granted, much of it stemming from Deuteronomy 33:5.<sup>71</sup> Although rarely described as king in Samaritan tradition, those existing references to Moses as king also rely on Deuteronomy 33:5.<sup>72</sup> In contrast, the Qumran literature, consistent with the majority of Jewish literature of the period, differentiates between the offices of prophet, priest and king.<sup>73</sup>

Available Samaritan texts show a number of unique theological developments in the late-temple period<sup>74</sup> but also show congruence with early Christian tradition, as especially found in the Gospel of John. Some Samaritan tradition suggests the Messiah will come from the children of Joseph.<sup>75</sup> The

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<sup>71</sup> Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 182-186.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>73</sup> Lichtenberger, "Messianic Expectation," 9.

<sup>74</sup> Pummer writes, "there was no schism between Samaritans and Jews in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E." Reinhard Pummer, "The Samaritans and Their Pentateuch," in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, eds. Gary Knoppers and Bernard Levinson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 257.

<sup>75</sup> Although the Samaritan woman at the well refers to the "Messiah," later Samaritan tradition used the term "Taheb." Pamment suggested "ignorance of the Samaritan belief" in Taheb on the part of the Evangelist in using the term "Messiah" (Jn 4:25,29). Margaret Pamment, "Is There Convincing Evidence of Samaritan Influence on the Fourth Gospel?" *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, 1982, 223. John Macdonald also suggests the term arose around 70 C.E., the time of the destruction of the temple. John McDonald, "Samaritans," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. 2<sup>nd</sup>, eds. by Fred Skolnik, Michael Berenbaum, and Thomson Gale (Farmington Hills, MI: ThomGale, 2007), 727. However, Dexinger, in "Reflections," 87, notes the absence of the term "Taheb" in any literature before the

Samaritans trace their lineage to Joseph, and from Joseph's offspring would come the Messiah.<sup>76</sup> In the story of the Samaritan woman we find a slight nod toward the Joseph tradition, for example, in the introduction where the Evangelist adds a detail that Jacob's well sat on a plot of ground that Jacob "had given to his son Joseph" (Jn 4:5), a seemingly superfluous detail but not to anyone listening from the Samaritan community. This line of thinking possibly gives additional meaning to Nathanael's added comment, "son of Joseph" (Jn 1:45).<sup>77</sup> This descent-from-Joseph tradition stands in stark contrast to the Jewish tradition that the Messiah will come from David's lineage,<sup>78</sup> a tradition, as discussed above, seemingly minimized in the Gospel of John.<sup>79</sup>

### **Royal Movements and Little Traditions**

Within the peasant world of the first century, as known mostly through the reported history of Josephus, we find a significant differentiation between the prophetic movements and popular royal movements.<sup>80</sup> In general, the royal

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4<sup>th</sup> century C.E., an observation that possibly makes Pamment's argument itself anachronistic. In any case, the introduction of the term Messiah, whether a prophet messiah or a royal messiah, raises its own issues which I will try to summarize with additional discussion.

<sup>76</sup> Jacob and Barton, *The Messianic Hope of the Samaritans*, 533.

<sup>77</sup> George W. Buchanan, "The Samaritan Origin of the Gospel of John," in *Religions in Antiquity*, edited by J. Neusner, (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 160. Boismard, makes a similar argument (*Moses or Jesus*, 34). Pamment argues these semantic links as a confusion of the language ("Is there Convincing Evidence," 222).

<sup>78</sup> S. Talmon, "The Concepts of Messiah and Messianism in Early Judaism," in *The Messiah*, edited by J.H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 91.

<sup>79</sup> John Lierman, "The Mosaic Pattern of John's Christology," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, edited by John Lierman (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 217

<sup>80</sup> Horsley argues that only in one case does the historical record show a "king" movement associated with another movement, and that other movement involved a Sicarii movement, not a prophetic movement ("Popular Messianic Movements," 472).

movements involved the rise of a charismatic leader similar to early Israelite history of figures like Saul and David<sup>81</sup> (I Sam. 10:23; I Sam. 22:1-2) who had garnered the support of a large group of common people in achieving some revolutionary change.<sup>82</sup> The consolidation of this support in ancient Israel resembled a primitive form of democracy that ultimately resulted in the ascendancy of one of their own as “king.”<sup>83</sup> This possible reality did not escape the notice of Roman occupiers in the first century, either. Josephus reports of several revolts that exemplify the process of establishing such kings by common assent.<sup>84</sup> During the reign of King Herod, for example, an individual identified as Athronoeus, a shepherd in background, began attacking both Roman and Herodian power centers. His success attracted additional followers and he began to “act like a king” and set a “diadem” on his head (*Jewish Wars* 2.4, 3). Josephus, from his position of supporting established power structures, does not write in such a way that would emphasize the populism of Athronoeus’ revolt, but its temporary success obviously depended upon it. Another leader of humble origin, a former slave of Herod, Simon of Peraea, also arose by popular acclamation as king to lead the people in revolt against the Romans, culminating in his beheading by the Romans (*Ant.* 17.10, 6). Josephus provides many more

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<sup>81</sup> McKenzie describes David’s “outlaw” activities with his band of followers (Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 89ff.

<sup>82</sup> Horsely, “Popular Messianic Movements,” 477.

<sup>83</sup> King David, a shepherd, became king by this very process, and seemingly served as a prototype for first century king movements. C. Umhau Wolf, “Traces of Primitive Democracy in Ancient Israel,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (1947), 106-107. See also Horsely, “Popular Messianic Movements,” 473ff.

<sup>84</sup> Hesse notes the practice in ancient Israel of the King’s anointing “performed by the people.” Franz Hesse, “מִשָּׁח and מְשִׁיחַ in the Old Testament,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*,



examples of such individuals who arose from the peasant class, garnered the support of their fellow peasants and who purposed to throw off the tyranny of their oppressors and establish an egalitarian state.<sup>85</sup>

This historical material provides a contextual background for approaching John 6:15. To the extent that this verse provides any historical connection to the historical Jesus, we might easily imagine his rejection of the people's intent, which had gathered its own energy "to take him by force and make him king" (Jn 6:15). At minimum, however, this verse reflects the narrator's intent to communicate to his audience the nature of Jesus' true mission, which stands apart from the presumably well-known history of such first-century insurgent royal figures, thus leaving open for his audience the question, "How should we understand this one who performs these signs?" The nature of this question does not inherently require us to assume any type of parallelism between verses 14 and 15 in terms of these two roles,<sup>86</sup> although as we have seen, the overall thrust of this pericope has oriented the reader's thinking toward Mosaic typology. A differentiated royal messianology, then, apart from the building Mosaic orientation up to this point in the Gospel of John would seem to strike a dissident note, unless some detail of the narrator's theology or the orientation of the

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*Volume IX*, eds. by Kittel, Gerhard, G. W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans., 1974), 497.

<sup>85</sup> For a nice discussion of such movements, see R.A. Horsely, "Popular Messianic Movements around the Time of Jesus," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 46 (1984): 471-495.

<sup>86</sup> Bauckham writes: "In view of the clear distinction between the prophet and the Messiah both in 7:40-41 and in 1:20-21, it would seem inappropriate to conclude too readily that 6:15 fudges this distinction." ("Messianism," 50). As already noted, however, Meeks, *Prophet-King*, comes to a very different conclusion.

receiving community's understanding provided additional clarification. As we will see below, a review of the history of the Johannine community will support an understanding of an emergent theology that led to a Prophet-King connection, at least in its early stages of this community.

CHAPTER 4  
DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY OF THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

We might reasonably ask about the nature of the community that received this Fourth Gospel, a gospel, as noted, that stands somewhat apart from the Synoptic Gospels. Below I will briefly consider three outlines forwarded by three twentieth century scholars concerning the development and orientation of the Johannine community.<sup>1</sup>

**J. Louis Martyn**

In recalling his development as a biblical scholar, J. Louis Martyn discussed the influence of the “two Bau(e)rs”<sup>2</sup> on his exegetical thinking, each associated with one of two basic considerations. Concerning the first, referencing the influence of Walter Bauer, Martyn writes: “On the way toward ascertaining the intention of an early Christian author, the interpreter is first to ask how the original readers of the author’s document understood what he had said in it.”<sup>3</sup> As Martyn immediately notes, the

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years, debate has arisen concerning the notion of the “Johannine Community.” This discussion ultimately raises questions concerning the historical-critical approach to scripture verses a narrative approach. See for example, Adele Reinhartz, “Reading History in the Fourth Gospel,” in *What We Have Heard From the Beginning: The Past, Present and Future of Johannine Studies*, by Tom Thatcher (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> J. Louis Martyn, “Listening to John and Paul on the Subject of Gospel and Scripture,” *Word and World*, 12 (1992): 68.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

simplicity of this “hermeneutical rule” should not fool us into imagining the ease of the task before the exegete, for this rule demands the exegete, by all means possible, to enter the world of the original audience.<sup>4</sup> So, to properly understand a given text the scholar must appreciate the language of the original audience, and the cultural circumstances of the audience, including the context in which the original listeners heard the text. As Kyser dolefully notes, this orientation assumes the biblical reader of the New Testament must thus become a first century biblical historian in order to enter the world of these first listeners.<sup>5</sup> Martyn’s second hermeneutical rule, attributed by him to Ferdinand Christian Baur, extends the demand of this historical perspective by requiring the exegete to also understand the cacophony of competing theological perspectives through which the original listener had to grapple in order to discern the intended theological perspective of the writer.

Martyn assumed an historical/developmental approach in his study of the Johannine community and its theology, outlined in *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*,<sup>6</sup> and found that this exploration requires that “[w]e must see with the eyes and hear with the ears of that community.”<sup>7</sup> The legitimacy of this effort has been strengthened by findings that within the Gospel of John we have some of “the most accurate statements about Jewish thought in the whole of the New

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Kysar, “What’s the Meaning of this?—Reflections upon a Life and Career,” in *What We Have Heard From the Beginning: The Past, Present and Future of Johannine Studies*, ed. Tom Thatcher (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), Kindle Edition, chap 9.

<sup>6</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, Third Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 145.

<sup>7</sup> J. Louis Martyn, “The Johannine Community among Jewish and Other Early Christian Communities,” in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present and Future of Johannine Studies*, ed. Tom Thatcher (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), Kindle Edition, chap 10.

Testament,”<sup>8</sup> thus allowing for assumptions in anchoring the Gospel in the history and theology of the first century. Furthermore, and particularly pertinent to this study, we will find that the development of this community, as outlined by Martyn, significantly relates to its evolving understanding of Jesus’ identity. From biblical and extra-biblical materials, Martyn concludes that “there was a fairly widespread hope in Jewish thought of the first century for a figure whom we may accurately call the Prophet like Moses,”<sup>9</sup> just as Moses promised: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet” (Deut 18:15). Martyn then offers a three-stage developmental history of this community.

In the “The Early Period,” some Jews within the synagogue came to believe God sent Jesus as the Prophet like Moses.<sup>10</sup> This particular belief created no animosity with others within the synagogue, for, again, the hope of finding such a prophet permeated the first century zeitgeist. In examining the Jewish texts, both biblical and nonbiblical, Martyn offers some of the finer details concerning first century eschatological hopes as they relate to the Moses traditions. By the first century, the perspective of looking at Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 as the promise of an eschatological figure (or figures) dominated expectations, rather than taking this text in its original sense as a promise of successive prophets. Furthermore, the nature of the hoped-for eschatological figure also grew

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<sup>8</sup> Martyn, *History and Theology*, 103.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

in complexity so that by the first century expectations centered not just on a Prophet like Moses, the oldest tradition, but evolved to include both the Mosaic-Prophet figure with that of a Messianic figure, a Mosaic Prophet-Messiah, a consolidation seemingly behind the texts of John 6:14-15 and John 7:40-41, as argued by Martyn. Martyn notes that the occurrence of these two textual witnesses within the Gospel of John, one associated with the multiplication of bread and the other with rivers of living water represent two of the three signs associated with the “Moses-Messiah typology” as found in rabbinic sources.<sup>11</sup> Although a discussion of the compositional origin and role of “signs” within the Gospel of John raises significant arguments beyond the current discussion,<sup>12</sup> we may note simply at this juncture the narrator does clarify an expectation in the synagogue that the Prophet like Moses would perform signs (Jn 6:30). Furthermore, Martyn also speculates about the existence within this early community of a written record of Jesus’ signs, an evangelical document developed to persuade synagogue members of Jesus’ fulfillment of the Prophet-Messiah role.<sup>13</sup>

The turbulence within the second stage of development, “The Middle Period” of the Johannine community, stands in marked contrast to the fairly harmonious relationship that the disciples of Jesus had within the synagogue

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>12</sup> Again, Bultmann argues that the “signs” in the first twelve chapters of John, come from a more primitive signs source, which the Evangelist integrated into two other sources, the revelatory discourse and the passion and resurrection story. Bultmann thus argues the feeding miracle comes from the sign source (Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 211).

<sup>13</sup> Martyn, *History and Theology*, 114.

during the first stage of development.<sup>14</sup> Martyn suggests that the exuberant acceptance among “rank-and-file members” of the synagogue to the unimpeded missionary efforts about Jesus’ identity as the Mosaic Prophet-Messiah,<sup>15</sup> prompted alarm and resistance from the educated leaders within the synagogue. Approaching the Gospel as a two-level drama,<sup>16</sup> Martyn finds evidence of this resistance within the Gospel of John itself. For example, set in the time of Jesus’ ministry (one level of drama) concerning Jesus’ identity (Jn 7:40-41) the Evangelist writes, “Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?” (Jn 7:48), a comment also pertinent to an early nascent believing community (a second level of drama) wherein the educated in the synagogue who, unlike the believing common folk, can search the scripture regarding the legitimacy of one who claims being sent by God (Jn7:52).<sup>17</sup> Martyn finds in the ninth chapter of John an even more pointed manifestation of the two-level drama in the reaction of synagogue leaders, who, on the second level of drama, threaten excommunication toward those deciding to follow Jesus (Jn 9:22), a practice in the late first century involving the expansion of a traditional Jewish benediction used during worship, the Birkath ha-Minim.<sup>18</sup> The addition of the words, “Let the Nazarenes [Christians] and Minim [heretics] be destroyed in a moment and let them be blotted out of the Book of Life and not be inscribed together with the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 46ff.

righteous,”<sup>19</sup> served to identify hidden followers of Jesus and subsequently excommunicate them from the synagogue.

The increasing resistance and even hostility of synagogue leaders toward followers of Jesus within their midst served as a pressure that shaped the theology of the Johannine community, the deposits of which we find left within the Gospel of John itself. Strategically, the community had to address its members, including the secret believers afraid of identifying themselves within the synagogue. As noted above, the synagogue leaders trained to settle issues based on midrash naturally assumed such issues concerning Jesus’ identity would find resolution in Hebrew scriptures. The Evangelist, says Martyn, rejected this approach (Jn 5:39) and transforms the theology of the early community<sup>20</sup> to reflect a radical dualism including notions of God’s election.<sup>21</sup> In the story involving a specifically named secret believer, Nicodemus, this “leader of the Jews” attempts a mishashic discussion but Jesus turns the discussion to one of election (Jn 3:5). Martyn even finds the dualism of election as the primary theme in John 6, which begins with its Passover element, but finds full expression in the subsequent and expansive discourse that addresses the question of “The Origin of Life.”<sup>22</sup>

Entering the “The Late Period,” the Johannine community, having experienced its disintegrating relationship with the synagogue and grappling with the either or proposition foisted upon it by Jewish leaders—either you are

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 153, 156.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 119.



disciples of Moses or you are disciples of Jesus (Jn 9:28)—the newly individuated community developed its own self-identity that held both an inward and outward perspective. First, they now understood Jesus himself as commanding a complete and absolute abandon of all else and *only* holding to his word: “You Jews who have believed in me! If you take a constant stand absolutely in *my* word you are *truly* my disciples.”<sup>23</sup> Second, as Martyn suggests concerning this late period, the Johannine community, because of persecution had been “scattered” (Jn 10:12) and found itself in association with “other sheep,” other Christian Jews (Jn 10:16),<sup>24</sup> and perhaps having contact with other churches resulting from Gentile missions.<sup>25</sup>

### **Raymond Brown**

Brown, in his monograph *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, offers his perspective concerning the history of those hearing the first renderings of John’s Gospel. Like Martyn, Brown suggests the origins of the Johannine community had its roots within the Jewish synagogue and so shared with the synagogue a common theological background. Brown furthermore argued that the founding members of other early Christian communities, those behind the Synoptic, also held a similar theological background as evidenced by the correspondence between John 1:45 and Luke 24:44. Pertinent to the present study, we should note that both these texts reference Moses and his law as an

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 167.

authenticating basis for identifying the one whom these early followers believed—a connection that clearly shows the soil from which these early believers sprang.<sup>26</sup> Like Martyn’s understanding of John’s literary form that speaks simultaneously to the historical setting of Jesus’ time while also speaking directly to the time of the community of believers, the two-level drama, Brown also notes the autobiographical features of the Gospel of John concerning the nascent community. So, for example, John puts in the mouths of the earliest followers a confessional statement at the beginning of the Gospel (Jn 1:45-49), whereas Luke, by contrast, allows for the natural developmental progression of this awareness to unfold within the narrative progression so the same confessional statement naturally occurs at the end of his Gospel (Lk 24.44); Luke then adds a second volume to detail the emergence of the Christian community.<sup>27</sup>

Remaining with his autobiographical analysis of the community, Brown also sees the opening chapters of John as generally congruent with the materials of the Synoptics and reflecting the earliest developmental stage of the Johannine community, which largely spoke to members within the traditional Jewish synagogue. This developmental stage roughly corresponds to Martyn’s second phase of community development, as described above. Although Martyn identifies this period of the life in the community as marked by significant growth and an increasingly fractious relationships among members within the synagogue,

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<sup>26</sup> Harstine makes the important observation, however, that unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the Fourth Evangelist never uses Moses to cite his own writings. So, rather than functioning as simply an “ancient authority . . . , Moses is present as a character who is still active in the society of the narrative.” Harstine, *Moses as a Character*, 162.

<sup>27</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 35.

Brown understands this developmental stage in terms of the theological shifts precipitated by new believers—theological developments that intensified the animosity with the traditional synagogue leaders. With chapter 4 of John, for example, Brown finds autobiographical material suggesting the influx of new members into the developing Johannine community, those coming from outside the synagogue, like Samaritans. Although characterizing these new members of this developmental period as only Samaritans may oversimplify the composition of these new members, Brown highlights the theological elements of this period as involving an anti-temple perspective, a displacement of Davidic messianism, and an increased focus on Mosaic piety<sup>28</sup>—all, interestingly enough, theological tenants associated with Samaritanism. As Brown notes, the Evangelist of the Fourth Gospel colorfully captures the theology of this stage in the story of the Samaritan woman of chapter 4—a story that rehearses a theology which would have roiled the traditional Jewish leadership with whom the early Christian-Jews mingled.

Brown does not identify a separate developmental stage that corresponds with Martyn’s “Late Period,”<sup>29</sup> but he does reference the emergence of a “higher Christology” that seems to fit with Martyn’s third stage of development.<sup>30</sup> Again, as discussed above, Brown sees the influx of new members as leading to Moses-focused, non-Davidic

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>29</sup> Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, Third Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 157.

<sup>30</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 43.

theology that ultimately served as the “catalyst”<sup>31</sup> for a higher Christology that involved a “theology of descent from above and pre-existence.”<sup>32</sup> Brown further argues that this uniquely Johannine higher Christology precipitated the final break with the synagogue whose leaders charged the Johannine members with ditheism as autobiographically references in John 8:58-59 and 10:33 suggest.<sup>33</sup> Brown notes that the increasingly differentiated Johannine community allowed for them to open their community to Gentiles, and collectively understand themselves as distinct from the traditional synagogue members, the “Jews.”<sup>34</sup>

### Georg Richter

Mattill offers an English synopsis of Richter’s 1975 article<sup>35</sup> in which we find another brief developmental history of the Johannine community.<sup>36</sup> In the first stage of development, Messiah-Christology, Richter finds textual evidence within the Gospel of John that shows the foundational understanding of Jesus as a Prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-19), who showed himself by signs, and whom the community understood as a man, the son of Joseph but not the son of David.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>35</sup> Georg Richter, “Präsentisch und futurische Eschatologie in 4. Evangelium,” in *Gegenwart und Kommendes Reich*, ed. Peter Fiedler und Dieter Zeller (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1975): 117-152.

<sup>36</sup> A. J. Mattill, Jr., “Johannine Communities behind the Fourth Gospel: Georg Richter’s Analysis,” *Theological Studies*, 38 (1977): 297.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 297.

Richter imagines this Jewish-Christian community as already expelled from the synagogue because of its understanding of Jesus as the Mosaic Messiah, a community then located in the region north of Jerusalem and even the territory of Judea itself. Another distinguishing mark of this early phase of the Johannine community involves its understanding of eschatology, the coming kingdom of God, that assumes a rather traditional view of that time: the general resurrection from the dead, and salvation of those baptized in the Holy Spirit, who thereby confess Jesus as the Messiah—the one who would return from heaven as the Son of Man at the end of the age.<sup>38</sup> Richter also imagines this community as having a “foundational document,” a type of gospel, based on traditions independent of the traditions used by the Synoptic Gospels, and focused primarily on Jesus as the Mosaic Messiah.<sup>39</sup>

The second phase of the Johannine community involved the adoption of a high Christology and so carries the label Son-of-God Christology because it sees Jesus as the eternal son sent by the Father to bring salvation to those who believe.<sup>40</sup> A theological change within the community involved a transformation of the traditional future-based eschatology into the present realization of eschatology. Most significantly, of course, involved the present reality of the Son of God descended from heaven (bringing with him all eschatological benefits now experienced by the Johannine community including the present reality of eternal

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 298-299.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 301.

life (Jn 5:25; Jn 11:25-26) a major theme we also find in the Bread of Life discourse (Jn 6:35, 40, 48-51). Richter understood this transition in orientation from a Prophet like Moses theology to Son-of-Man theology as causing an eruption *within* the community itself similar to that which had occurred in an early period within the synagogue between Jews and Christians Jews. Richter's analysis thus argues at this stage the emergence of new Son-of God oriented Johannine community.

A member of this new community, the Evangelist, so named because he took the foundational document and expanded it to include new material reflective of the theological adaptation and thus produced the basic structure of the gospel we now recognize as the Gospel of John.<sup>41</sup> As both Martyn and Brown also suggested, Richter viewed the Evangelist as “retrojecting” contemporary issues back into the time and words of Jesus, but nevertheless directly speaking to the Evangelist's community.<sup>42</sup> So, for example, John 8: 27-28 has Jesus providing clarifying statements concerning Son of God theology. The Evangelist also added John 1:1-13 as a prologue to the foundational document.

If the Son-of-God Johannine represented a transition from low to high Christology, the third developmental stage, Johannine Docetism, involved the apogee of the high Christology—the exclusive heavenly origin of the Christ.<sup>43</sup> This represents a complete break with the first stage of development, which only

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 306.

recognized Jesus as a human Prophet like Moses. The divinity of the Christ rendered the appearance of his body, along with his experiences, including his death and resurrection, as illusory. Richter asserts that although this theology resulted in a separation from other Johannine communities, this theological development did not leave its mark on the Gospel of John in its final form.<sup>44</sup>

The fourth and final stage of development within the Johannine community, as found in the final form of the Gospel, involved a moderating position between the initial Jewish Christian theology and high Christology. The “Anti-Docetic Redactor” edited the gospel to reflect this theology, as characterized most succinctly in the statement, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn1:14), the opening line to an appendage (Jn 1:14-18) to the Evangelist’s Gospel opening (Jn 1:1-13).

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 306.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE SIGN AT PASSOVER: THE PROPHET-KING COMES TO THE PEOPLE

The survey of this small pericope forces us to grapple with several observations concerning the composition of the text itself. Verses 5-13 appear to have largely come from a commonly available tradition as evidence by the many features it shares with parallel stories found in the Synoptic Gospels. This story may have simply had an oral history for years, but ultimately found its way in some form to the writers of the gospels. In the case of the Fourth Gospel, Bultmann speculated that this story first came in a “literary source,” also known as a “signs source,” used by the Evangelist.<sup>1</sup> Fortna detailed the outlines of this signs source.<sup>2</sup> Whether the Feeding Sign represented part of the foundational document, as per Richter, or came as part of the “signs source,” as per Bultmann and Fortna, goes beyond the scope of this paper to resolve, and seems largely irrelevant to the discussion at hand. From the perspective of the current analysis, examining the Feeding Sign with an eye toward the Moses tradition, I have concluded that the Johannine narrator appended the received feeding-miracle tradition with verses 1-4 (5-6) and 14-15, thus accomplishing his theological transformation of this received

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 210-211.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Tomson Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 80.



story away from the feeding miracle itself to a new denouement that reveals Jesus' identity to the people.

The apparent distinctive editing of the traditional story also raises the question of authorship. Brown argues that the "Beloved Disciple," likely an unknown minor disciple,<sup>3</sup> "was responsible for the basic testimony/witness that was incorporated into the Fourth Gospel. But others were responsible for composing the written Gospel and redacting."<sup>4</sup> Reading the passover-sign story, as we now have it, one hears the narrator, so I have simply identified this person as the "narrator," passing on the opportunity of further authorship discussion. The resulting Passover Sign then found itself appended with a massive expansion, the discourse (Jn 6:22-71), and I have designated this person as the "Evangelist," a leader in the Johannine community but not an eyewitness of Christ's ministry itself.<sup>5</sup> Again, a full discussion of this editorial process and of the discourse text itself obviously goes beyond the focus of this paper. Most pertinent to the current discussion involves the observation that the early stages of the development of the Johannine community, as outlined by Martyn, Brown and Richter, seems to fit with the general Mosaic-focused theology found in John 6:1-15, although we must also admit we have here the danger of circular reasoning.

With this assumed background, we may ask about the intent of the Johannine narrator: What did he hope for his listeners to hear in this pericope? Based on the above discussion, three interconnected and uniquely Johannine themes emerge: A sign has been

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<sup>3</sup> Raymond E. Brown and Francis J. Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 195.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-196.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

given that shows the fulfillment of the ancient Mosaic *prophet-king* promise, a promise fulfilled by Jesus' *coming* as this prophet-king *into the world*, and this prophet-king in the person of Jesus has specifically come to *the people*. So, as to the first theme, I have argued here that the main emphasis offered by the narrator in John 6:1-15 involves the "signs" theology. This pericope opens with the mention of the people seeking Jesus because of "signs" and it ends with the people proclaiming Jesus as "The Prophet" and wanting to make him "King" after seeing the "sign." Although the Evangelist at a later developmental stage appends this Passover Sign with an extensive discourse that transforms the whole question of Jesus' identity, we should recognize that part of the artful and theological beauty of this addition comes to light in the observation that it does *not* dismantle this earliest formulation and emphasis concerning Jesus' identity.

As to the second theme, I have noted that in this pericope, as we have it, that the narrator has deliberately inserted Philip into the story, the one who had previously confessed Jesus to Nathanael: "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." (Jn 1:45). Of this same Philip, Jesus, in our story asks, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" (Jn 6:5). This question shows, first of all, that Jesus initiated the concern for the people.<sup>6</sup> But to understand the sign as merely meeting a temporal need misses the point of the sign because then "these miracles leave mankind within the sphere of this world and do not basically alter the character of life."<sup>7</sup> The narrator would have us recognized that the "people" within the story did not understand the sign as meeting their physical need, for

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<sup>6</sup> The Synoptic feeding-miracle stories have the disciples initiating the concern for the peoples' need for something to eat.

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Haenchen, et al., *John 1*, 178.

the narrator dramatically shifted the focus from a feeding miracle to a revelation sign: the high point of the story thus becomes the people proclaiming Jesus as the prophet and wanting to make him king. Even more dramatically, the narrator uniquely sets this received tradition into a Passover context so that the people rightly understand that the sign shows Jesus, who has come “into the world” for them, fulfills God’s promise to send the Prophet-King because of God’s initiated concern for them, just as God saw the suffering people, their ancestors, in Egypt and rescued them.<sup>8</sup>

As to the final point, this story begins by naming a particular audience who sought the “signs”: “a large crowd.” As the story develops, we come to realize this crowd represents the poor, hungry, illiterate “people.” As such they have come to believe in Jesus as Prophet-King not because of midrashic study of scripture so as to determine if Jesus properly fulfilled the Prophet-King requirements; rather, they simply believed after seeing the sign. Although their understanding remains incomplete, for they tried to elect Jesus as King, the narrator uses their story for his audience to show that the proper focus is not one of our election of a king, but God’s election of us.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>“Every ‘sign’ performed earlier is an anticipation, a preview of the final one [Jesus’ death and resurrection].” Ibid., 173.

<sup>9</sup>“The issue is not a matter of better exegesis but rather of election.” Martyn, *History and Theology*, 125.

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