

John

Chapter 1

1:1. “In the beginning.” There are elements of John 1:1 and other phrases in the introduction of John that not only refer back in time to God’s work in the original creation, but also foreshadow the work of Christ in the new administration and the new creation. Noted Bible commentator F.F. Bruce argues for this interpretation:

It is not by accident that the Gospel begins with the same phrase as the book of Genesis. In Genesis 1:1, ‘In the beginning’ introduces the story of the old creation; here it introduces the story of the new creation. In both works of creation the agent is the Word of God. (F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 28 and 29).

The Racovian Catechism, one of the great doctrinal works of the Unitarian movement of the 14th and 15th centuries, states that the word “beginning” in John 1:1 refers to the beginning of the new dispensation and thus is similar to Mark 1:1, which starts, “The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ.”

In the cited passage (John 1:1) wherein the Word is said to have been in the beginning, there is no reference to an antecedent eternity, without commencement; because mention is made here of a *beginning*, which is opposed to that eternity. But the word *beginning*, used absolutely, is to be understood of the subject matter under consideration. Thus, Daniel 8:1, “In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, even unto me Daniel, after that which appeared unto me AT THE FIRST.” John 15:27, “And ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with me FROM *the beginning*.” John 16:4, “These things I said not unto you AT *the beginning* because I was with you.” And Acts 11:15, “And as I began to speak the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us AT *the beginning*.” As then the matter of which John is treating is the Gospel, or the things transacted under the Gospel, nothing else ought to be understood here beside the beginning of the Gospel; a matter clearly known to the Christians whom he addressed, namely, the advent and preaching of John the Baptist, according to the testimony of all the evangelists [i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke and John], each of whom begins his history with the coming and preaching of the Baptist. Mark indeed (Chapter 1:1) expressly states that this was the beginning of the Gospel. In like manner, John himself employs the word beginning, placed thus absolutely, in the introduction to his First Epistle, at which beginning he uses the same term (logos) Word, as if he meant to be his own interpreter [“That which is from the beginning...concerning the Word (logos) of life.” 1 John 1:1]. (*The Racovian Catechism*; Reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship, pp. 63 and 64).

While we do not agree with the *Catechism* that the only meaning of beginning in John 1:1 is the beginning of the new creation, we certainly see how the word beginning is

a double entendre. In the context of the new creation, then, “the Word” is the plan or purpose according to which God is restoring His creation.

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

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

Any good Greek lexicon will also show the wide range of meaning of *logos*. The definitions below are from the BDAG Greek-English lexicon (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*; University of Chicago Press, 1979). The words in italics are translated from *logos*:

- Speaking; words you say (Rom. 15:18 NIV84, “what I have *said*”).
- A statement you make (Luke 20:20 NASB, “they might catch him in some *statement*”).
- A question (Matt. 21:24 NIV84, “I will also ask you one *question*”).
- Preaching (1 Tim. 5:17 NIV84, “especially those whose work is *preaching*”).
- Command (Gal. 5:14 NIV84 , “the entire law is summed up in a single *command*”).
- Proverb; saying (John 4:37 NIV84, “thus the *saying*, ‘One sows, and another reaps’”).
- Message; instruction; proclamation (Luke 4:32 NIV84, “his *message* had authority”).
- Assertion; declaration; teaching (John 6:60 NIV84, “this is a hard *teaching*”).
- The subject under discussion; matter (Acts 8:21 NIV84, “you have no part or share in this *ministry*.” Acts 15:6 NASB, “And the apostles... came together to look into this *matter*”).
- Revelation from God (Matt. 15:6 NIV84, “you nullify the *Word of God*”).

- God’s revelation spoken by His servants (Heb. 13:7 NIV84, “leaders who spoke the *Word of God*”).
- A reckoning, an account (Matt. 12:36 NIV84, “men will have to *give account*” on the Day of Judgment).
- An account or “matter” in a financial sense (Matt. 18:23 NIV84, “A king who wanted to settle “*accounts*” with his servants”).
- A reason; motive (Acts 10:29 NASB), “I ask *for what reason* you have sent for me”).

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

“The Word” is not synonymous with Jesus, or even “the Messiah.” The word *logos* in John 1:1 refers to God’s creative self-expression—His reason, purposes and plans, especially as they are brought into action. It refers to God’s self-expression, or communication, of Himself. This has come to pass through His creation (cp. Rom. 1:19 and 20), the heavens being one example the Word points out to us (cp. Ps. 19). It has also come through the spoken word of the prophets and through Scripture, the written Word. Most notably and finally, it has come into being through His Son (Heb. 1:1 and 2). The renowned Trinitarian scholar, John Lightfoot, writes:

The word *logos* then, denoting both “reason” and “speech,” was a philosophical term adopted by Alexandrian Judaism before St. Paul wrote, to express the *manifestation* of the Unseen God in the creation and government of the World. It included all modes by which God makes Himself known to man. As His *reason*, it denoted His purpose or design; as His *speech*, it implied His revelation. **Christian teachers, when they adopted this term, exalted and fixed its meaning by attaching to it two precise and definite ideas: (1) “The Word is a Divine Person,” (2) “The Word became incarnate in Jesus Christ.”** It is obvious that these two propositions must have altered materially the significance of all the subordinate terms connected with the idea of the *logos*. (J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, pp. 143 and 144. Bold emphasis ours, italics his).

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

There is no word in English answering to the Greek word *logos*, as used here [in John 1:1]. It was employed to denote a mode of conception concerning the Deity, familiar at the time when St. John wrote and intimately blended with the philosophy of his age, but long since obsolete, and so foreign from our habits of thinking that it is not easy for us to conform our minds to its apprehension. The Greek word *logos*, in one of its primary senses, answered nearly to our word

Reason. The *logos* of God was regarded, not in its strictest sense, as merely the Reason of God; but, under certain aspects, as the Wisdom, the Mind, the Intellect of God (Andrew Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*, p. 229).

Norton postulates that perhaps “the Disposing Power of God” would be a good translation for *logos* (p. 235). Buzzard sets forth “plan,” “purpose” or “promise” as three acceptable translations. Broughton and Southgate say “thoughts, plan or purpose of God, particularly in action.” Many scholars identify *logos* with God’s wisdom and reason.

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

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

2. Most Jewish readers of the Gospel of John would have been familiar with the concept of God’s “word” being with God as He worked to bring His creation into existence. There is an obvious working of God’s power in Genesis 1 as He brings His plan into concretion by speaking things into being. The Targums are well known for describing the wisdom and action of God as His “word.” This is especially important to note because the Targums are the Aramaic translations and paraphrases of the Old Testament, and Aramaic was the spoken language of many Jews at the time of Christ. Remembering that a Targum is usually a paraphrase of what the Hebrew text says, note how the following examples attribute action to the word (from Dr. John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, Vol. 3, p. 238).

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

The above examples demonstrate that the Jews were familiar with using the idea of God’s “Word” to refer to His wisdom and action. This is especially important to note because

these Jews were fiercely monotheistic, and did not in any way believe in a “Triune God.” They were familiar with the idioms of their own language, and understood that the wisdom and power of God were being personified as “word.”

Like the Aramaic-speaking Jews, the Greek-speaking Jews were also familiar with God’s creative force being called “the word.” J. H. Bernard writes, “When we turn from Palestine to Alexandria [Egypt], from Hebrew sapiential [wisdom] literature to that which was written in Greek, we find this creative wisdom identified with the Divine *logos*, Hebraism and Hellenism thus coming into contact” (The International Critical Commentary: St. John. Vol. 1, p. cxxxix).

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

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

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

Although the myths were often irrational, they nevertheless had been widely accepted as the “revelation of the gods.” The pervasiveness of the *muthos* in the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament can be seen sticking up out of the New Testament like the tip of an iceberg above the water, and archaeology confirms the widespread presence of the gods in the everyday life of the Greek and Roman people of New Testament times. The average Greek or Roman was as familiar with the teachings about the adventures of the gods as the average school child in the United States is familiar with Goldilocks and the Three Bears or Snoopy and Charlie Brown. Thus, when Paul and

Barnabas healed a cripple in Lystra, the people assumed that the gods had come down in human form (Acts 14:11), and no doubt they based their assumption on the legend that Zeus and Hermes had once come to that area in human form. While Paul was in Athens, he became disturbed because of the large number of idols there that were statues to the various gods (Acts 17:16). In Ephesus, Paul's teaching actually started a riot. When some of the locals realized that if his doctrine spread, "the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty" (Acts 19:27). There are many other examples that show that there was a *muthos*, i.e., a body of religious knowledge that was in large part incomprehensible to the human mind, firmly established in the minds of some of the common people in New Testament times.

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

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

Gnosticism took many forms, but generally Gnostics taught that there was a supreme and unknowable Being, which they designated as the "Monad." The Monad produced various gods, who in turn produced other gods (these gods were called by different names, in part because of their power or position). One of these gods, called the "Demiurge," created the earth and then ruled over it as an angry, evil and jealous god. This evil god, Gnostics believed, was the god of the Old Testament, called *Elohim*. The Monad sent another god, "Christ," to bring special *gnosis* (knowledge) to mankind and free them from the influence of the evil *Elohim*. Thus, a Gnostic Christian would agree that *Elohim* created the heavens and earth, but he would not agree that He was the supreme God. Most Gnostics would also state that *Elohim* and Christ were at cross-purposes with each other. This is why it was so important for John 1:1 to say that the *logos* was *with* God, which at first glance seems to be a totally unnecessary statement. The opening of the Gospel of John is a wonderful expression of God's love. God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). He authored the opening of John in such a way that it reveals the truth about Him and His plan for all of mankind and, at the same time, refutes Gnostic teaching. It says that from the beginning there was the *logos* (the reason, plan, power), which was with God. There was not another "god" existing with God, especially not a god opposed to God. Furthermore, God's plan was like God; it was divine. God's plan became flesh when God impregnated Mary.

"and what God was, the Word was." Although almost every English Bible translates the last phrase of John 1:1 as, "and the Word was God," it should not be translated that way. To understand that, we first should be aware of how the Greek text of

the New Testament was written and how the Greeks used the word *theos*, “God” or “god.”

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

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

When we are trying to discover what GOD (ΘΕΟΣ; THEOS) is referring to in a verse, the context is always the final arbiter. However, we do get some help in that it is almost always the case in the New Testament that when “GOD” refers to the Father, the definite article appears in the Greek text (this article can be seen only in the Greek text, it is never translated into English). Translators are normally very sensitive to this. The difference between *theos* with and without the article occurs in John 1:1, which has 2 occurrences of *theos*: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with **the** *theos*, and the Word was *theos*.” Since the definite article (“the”) is missing from the second occurrence of “*theos*” (“God,”) the most natural meaning of the word would be that it referred to the quality of God, i.e., “divine,” “god-like,” or “like God.” The *New English Bible* gets the sense of this phrase by translating it, “What God was, the Word was.” James Moffatt, who was a professor of Greek and New Testament Exegesis at Mansfield College in Oxford, England, and author of the well-known *Moffatt Bible*, translated the phrase, “the *logos* was divine.”

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

In a case like this we cannot do other than go to the Greek, which is *theos en ho logos*. *Ho* is the definite article, *the*, and it can be seen that there is a definite article with *logos*, but not with *theos*. When in Greek two nouns are joined by the verb “to be,” and when both have the definite article, then the one is fully

intended to be identified with the other; but when one of them is without the article, it becomes more an adjective than a noun, and describes rather the class or sphere to which the other belongs.

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

[In the last clause of John 1:1] John has no article before *theos*, God. The *logos*, therefore, is not identified as God or with God; the word *theos* has become adjectival and describes the sphere to which the *logos* belongs. We would, therefore, have to say that this means that the *logos* belongs to the same sphere as God; without being identified with God, the *logos* has the same kind of life and being as God. Here the NEB [*New English Bible*] finds the perfect translation: “What God was, the Word was” (William Barclay, *Jesus as They Knew Him*, pp. 21 and 22).

Daniel Wallace is a Trinitarian and a scholar of Greek grammar. After examining the grammatical possibilities in John 1:1 and whether the last *theos* in John 1:1 is indefinite (“a god”), definite (“the God”), or qualitative (that the *logos* has the qualities of God; the noun *logos* is being used to function like an adjective and give qualities to the noun *logos*), he concludes, “The most likely candidate for *theos* is qualitative. ... Possible translations are as follows: ‘What God was the Word was’ (NEB)... The idea of a qualitative *theos* here is that the Word had all the attributes and qualities that ‘the God’ (of 1:1b) had” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Zondervan, 1996, p. 269).

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

As we said above, however, although the wording of the Greek text of John 1:1 certainly favors the translation, “and what God was, the Word was” over the translation “the Word was God,” the context and scope of Scripture must be the final arbiter. In this case we have help from the verse itself in the phrase “the Word was with God.” The Word (*logos*) cannot both be “with” God and “be” God. That is nonsensical. It is similar to us being able to discern that Jesus Christ is not God from reading 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15, which say that Jesus is the image of God. One cannot be both the image of the object and the object itself. We Christians must become aware of the

difference between a genuine mystery and a contradiction. In his book, *Against Calvinism*, Roger Olson writes: “We must point out here the difference between mystery and contradiction; the former is something that cannot be fully explained to or comprehended by the human mind, whereas the latter is just nonsense—two concepts that cancel each other out and together make an absurdity” (Roger Olson, *Against Calvinism*, p. 105). Richard Daane uses the term “verbalism” which he applied to certain aspects of Calvinism, but we feel it is appropriate when applied to many of the explanations of the Trinity. He wrote: “...verbalism, a theoretical game in which words really carry no ascertainable sense and phrases no ascertainable meaning.” Richard Daane, *The Freedom of God*, p. 71). Most Trinitarians assert that the Word being with God and also being God is a mystery. We assert it is a plain contradiction, a verbalism, and the truth in the verse is actually simple: the *logos*, the plan, purpose and wisdom of God, was with God, and what God was (i.e., holy, true, pure, righteous, etc.) his *logos* was too.

For more on the Gospel of John, John chapter 1, and John 1:1, see *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*, by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit.

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

1:4. “In it was life.” The pronoun refers to the *logos*, which is an “it” not a “him.” See commentary on verse 3.

1:5. “And the light shines in the darkness.” The word “shines” is the Greek verb *phainō* (#5316 φαίνω) and is in the present tense, active voice, and refers to continuing to shine. The darkness tried to overcome it, but the light continues to shine in spite of the opposition.

“and the darkness did not overcome it.” The words “did...overcome” are from the Greek verb *katalambanō* (#2638 καταλαμβάνω), which can refer to “overcome; conquer,” or “comprehend; grasp.” Thus the phrase can be translated either as “the darkness did not understand it,” or “the darkness did not overcome it.” C. K. Barrett

comments: “*Kathlambanein*, ‘to seize,’ may mean ‘to overcome’ or, especially in the middle [voice], ‘to grasp with the mind’, ‘to understand.’ Here it seems probable that John is (after his manner; see on 3:3) playing on the two meanings.... Since the Greek word itself bears both meanings... The darkness neither understood nor quenched the light.” (*The Gospel According to St. John*, second edition, p. 158. Cp. also Sanders and Mastin, *The Gospel According to John*).

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

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

1:7. “for testimony.” Most versions translate this phrase, “He came as a witness, to testify.” However, this does not bring out the emphasis in the Greek. The Greek phrasing here is *eis marturian*, composed of the preposition *eis* (#1519 εἰς), which here means “for the purpose of,” and *marturia* (#3141 μαρτυρία) meaning “testimony,” or “confirmation based on personal knowledge” (BDAG). John came for the purpose of testimony, that he may testify. To say that John came “as a witness” places emphasis on the personhood of John as the one giving testimony, when the emphasis in the Greek is on the *purpose* of John’s coming. He came “for testimony, so that he may testify.” (The repetition of both noun and verb forms together is the figure of speech polyptoton [Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*]. See also 1 John 5:10).

1:10 “and the world was made through him.” This is a wonderful verse telling us how much God cares for His creation, and highlights how God keeps on loving and giving to His creation and His people despite the fact that they are not thankful for it. Many Trinitarians think this verse refers to Jesus Christ, and use it to try to support the doctrine of the Trinity, but the verse is about the Father, not Jesus Christ.

A study of the context reveals that this section opens in verse 6 by telling us, “There came a man who was sent by God.” We are told, “God is light,” and that God’s light shown through Jesus Christ and made him “the light of the world.” Though God was in the world in many ways, including through His Son, the world did not recognize him. He came unto his own by sending Jesus Christ to them, but even then they did not receive God, in that they rejected His emissary. The fact that the world did not receive Him is made more profound in the context as Scripture reveals how earnestly God reached out to them—He made his plan and purpose flesh and shined His light through Christ to reach the world—but they did not receive Him, even though He was offering them the “right to become children of God” (v. 12).

Some scholars think the phrase, “the world was made by him,” is a reference to the new creation only (cp. Col. 1:15-20 and Heb. 1:1,10), but if it is, then it is only so as a double entendre referring to both the original and the new creations. For more

information, see the *Racovian Catechism* pp. 89-91 (available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship).

1:12. “name.” See 1 John 3:23 note “on the name of his son Jesus Christ.”

1:13. “who was born...of God.” This verse is speaking of the birth of Jesus Christ, not the new birth of Christians (see footnote on John 1:13 in *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul.*)

“not of bloods.” The only time in the NT that blood is used in the plural. Jesus was not born of the mixture of two human “bloods,” i.e., the contribution of two humans. God contributed the sperm (via creation) that impregnated Mary. Although many Christians believe that Jesus Christ was “incarnated” into the flesh, in other words, placed in Mary as a complete baby at some form of development, that is not what happened. The Bible makes the case that Mary was the true mother of Jesus Christ, not just a surrogate mother for God. How could Jesus be a true descendant of David if there were no actual genetic link to the line of David? Furthermore, what would be the point of the genealogy in Matthew? The link between Mary and Jesus in Matthew 1:16 would not be a genetic link at all. If God simply had Mary “carry” Jesus, then his only genealogy is 100% from God, not at all from David.

“the desire of the flesh.” The word “desire” is the same word as “will” in “will of man” in the next phrase, but the flesh does not “will” so much as it “desires.” We are well aware of the “desires” that our flesh has for sleep, food, sex, etc. Christ was not born “accidentally” as it were, because of the “desire of the flesh.”

“the will of man.” Man’s will did not bring the Messiah.

1:14. “And the word became flesh.” The key to understanding this verse is realizing that “the word” is the wisdom, plan or purpose of God, just as it was in John 1:1 (see commentary on John 1:1). The word, the plan and purpose of God, “became flesh” as Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus Christ was “the Word in the flesh,” which is shortened to “the Word” for ease of speaking. Scripture is also the Word, but it is the Word in writing. Everyone agrees that the “Word” in writing had a beginning. So did the Word in the flesh. In fact, the Greek text of Matthew 1:18 says that very clearly: “Now the beginning of Jesus Christ was in this manner.” Some ancient scribes were so uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus having a “beginning” that they tried to alter the Greek text to read “birth” and not “beginning,” but they were unsuccessful. The modern Greek texts all read “beginning” (*genesis*) in Matthew 1:18 (see commentary on Matthew 1:18).

In the beginning, God had a plan, a purpose, which “became flesh” when Jesus was conceived. To make John 1:14 support the Trinity, there must first be proof that Jesus existed and was called “the Word” before he was conceived in Mary. We do not believe that such proof exists. There is a large body of evidence, however, that shows that Jesus was foreknown by God. Furthermore, the use of *logos* to refer to a plan or purpose is also well attested. We contend that the meaning of John 1:14 is straightforward. God had a plan (the Word) and that plan became flesh when Jesus was conceived. Thus, Jesus became “the Word in the flesh.”

It is important to ask why John would say, “the Word became flesh,” which is a statement that seems so obvious to us. Of course Jesus Christ was flesh. He was born, grew, ate and slept, and Scripture calls him a man. However, what is clear to us now was not at all clear in the early centuries of the Christian era. The Bible must be understood in the context of the culture in which it was written. At the time of John’s writing, the

“Docetic” movement was gaining disciples inside Christianity (“Docetic” comes from the Greek word for “to seem” or “to appear”). Docetic Christians believed Jesus was actually a spirit being, or god, who only “appeared” to be human. Some Docetics did not believe Jesus even actually ate or drank, but only pretended to do so. Furthermore, some Jews thought that Jesus was an angel. In today’s theological literature, theologians refer to this as “angel-Christology.” John 1:14 was not written to show that Jesus was somehow pre-existent and then became flesh. It was to show that God’s plan for salvation actually became “flesh,” that is, Jesus was not a spirit, god or angelic being, but a real flesh-and-blood human being. A very similar thing is said in 1 John 4:2, that if you do not believe Jesus has come “in the flesh,” you are not of God. For more on this, see J. S. Hyndman, *Lectures on The Principles of Unitarianism*, 1824, p. 113, and the *Racovian Catechism*, pp. 117-119 (both available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship).

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

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

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

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

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

1:15. "has advanced in front of me." John the Baptist set a wonderful example for all believers in that, as great as he was, he consistently pointed people to the Messiah. Furthermore, he recognized and humbly accepted that Jesus was his Lord, openly pointing out that Jesus was more important than he was. The words "has advanced in front of me," points out that Jesus' ministry had, even in this early stage, well surpassed John's and John was pointing to Jesus and saying he was the Messiah. The Greek uses the perfect tense of the verb *ginomai*, "to become," and the word *emprosthen*, which means "to be before, ahead of, or higher in position or rank than someone." "To become" of a higher rank than someone is to "advance in front of someone" or to surpass him, thus, "has surpassed me" (NIV84) is a good translation. No one argues that Jesus had surpassed John the Baptist in every way.

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

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

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

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

Many versions have the translation that Jesus “was before” John. In that translation, the Greek word translated “was” is the verb ἦν (ἦν), which is in the imperfect tense, active voice of *eimi*, (εἶμι) the common word for “to be” (which occurs more than 2000 times in the New Testament). In this context it is vital that we understand that the force of the imperfect tense is, “he was and continues to be.” Then comes the Greek word *protos*, which means “first.” It can refer to being “first” in time, and thus be translated “before,” or it can mean first in rank, and be translated “chief,” “leader,” “greatest,” “best,” etc. There are many examples referring to people being *protos* where *protos* refers to highest in rank or importance (cp. Matt. 19:30, 20:27; Mark 6:21; 9:35; 10:31, 44; Luke 19:47; Acts 17:4; 25:2; 28:17; and 1 Cor. 12:28). Similarly, *protos* is used of things that are the best or most important. For example, the “first” and great commandment was the first in importance, and the “first” robe was the “best” robe (Luke 15:22).

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

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

By translating John’s statement as, “...he ranks ahead of me,” we catch the essence of the verse without much ambiguity. It is clear in the context that the primary reason for John’s statement was to magnify Jesus Christ in comparison to himself, and “ranks ahead of me” does that. Furthermore, “he ranks” is timeless. The Messiah has always ranked ahead of the other prophets.

1:16. “grace in place of grace.” The Greek is *charis anti charis*, literally, “grace instead of grace,” or “grace for grace,” or “grace in place of grace.” There has been much theological debate about exactly what John meant by that phrase, but we find the argument by D. A. Carson to be convincing: “...it appears that the grace and truth that come through Jesus Christ is what replaces the law; the law itself is understood to be an earlier display of grace” (*The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*; note on John 1:17). We believe that Carson has put his finger on the primary meaning of the phrase, and we also believe that a secondary meaning, which is reflected in the many modern translations that have “grace upon grace,” is that God’s grace is

continually flowing. The grace of God is not a one-time event, but rather something that flows continually from the fullness of God. We see no need to pick one of these two meanings to the exclusion of the other, but see that in the wording of the verse God has included both meanings, and both are true, which is a reason for the continual scholarly debate about them.

There had been grace in the Old Testament before Christ came, and with the coming of Christ God has given us more grace in place of the grace we already had. However, because we have received this grace “from his fullness,” the Greek phrase also includes the idea that the grace is flowing from God and one grace follows quickly upon another grace, thus the translation in some Bibles, “grace upon grace.” The word “grace” can be used of a gift of grace, so the translation “blessing” (NIV) or “gracious gift” (NET) both are good translations.

1:18. “seen God.” In this case, “seen God” refers to knowing Him for who he really is, not seeing Him with the eye. In many languages, “to see” is a common idiom for “to know.” In the Hebrew language, one of the definitions for “see” (Hebrew = *ra’ ah*) is “see, so as to learn, to know.” Similarly, the Greek word translated “see” in verse 18 (*horaō*) can be “to see with the eyes” or “to see with the mind, to perceive, know.” Even in English, one of the definitions for “see” is “to know or understand.” For example, when two people are discussing something, one might say to the other, “I see what you mean.”

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

Further evidence that “see” means “know” in John 1:18 is that the phrase “no man has seen God” is contrasted with the phrase “has made Him known.” So from the context and vocabulary in John 1:18, we can see that it is not talking about “seeing” God with one’s eyes; it is saying that the truth about God came by Jesus Christ. Before Jesus Christ came, no one really knew God as He truly is, a loving heavenly Father. For more information on the idiomatic uses of “seen,” see commentary on Luke 1:48; for more information on the idiomatic uses of “seen” and people who saw God, see commentary on and Acts 7:55].

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

We have concluded to our satisfaction that “only begotten son” was more likely the original text in John 1:18 based on the evidence. We will summarize some of the important arguments and why we have decided “Son” was likely the original reading. First, our study of the scope of Scripture reveals that Jesus is not God. That is the plain reading of dozens of verses of Scripture. There is no description of the Trinity anywhere in Scripture, or of the “hypostatic union,” or of the “incarnation,” and the fact is that every single “Trinity proof text” can be explained from the position that Jesus is the Son

of God, not God. In contrast, there are dozens of points of logic that cannot be explained if the Trinity is true, such as why, after his resurrection, Jesus spoke of having a “God.” God does not have a God—He is God.

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

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

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

“This is not simply a case of one reading supported by the earliest and best manuscripts and another supported by late and inferior one, but of one reading found almost exclusively in the Alexandrian tradition and another found sporadically there and virtually everywhere else” (*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. 79).

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

Another reason for believing that “Son” is original is the word *monogenēs* (“only begotten,” actually referring to “one of a kind,” some say “unique”). The fact is that *monogenēs* can mean “only begotten,” and that usage fits perfectly with Jesus Christ as the Son of God. There is a sense that the verse could read “unique Son,” but to what

purpose? Just because a word can mean something does not mean that definition should be used. Occam's razor, that simpler theories are the most satisfactory unless a more complex theory has greater explanatory power, applies here. Why create the difficult phrase "unique Son" when the translation "only begotten Son," which occurs three other places in John's writings, is understandable and biblical? Yes, Jesus was unique, but as the Son (not as "God," because if Jesus, as part of the Trinity, was unique, then so are the Father and Holy Spirit, which would make three unique Gods, and defeat the purpose of using "unique" in the first place).

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

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

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

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

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

known. The fact is that the reading “the only begotten Son” is textually substantiated, fine from a translation standpoint, and makes perfect sense in the context, even to Trinitarians.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The general use of “Jew” is always used in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (except perhaps Luke 7:3). That situation changes dramatically in John, where the word “Jew” occurs 70 times and is mostly used in its more restricted sense, meaning the rulers of the

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

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

1:21. “Elijah.” For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was called “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

1:23. Quoted from Isaiah 40:3.

1:25. “Elijah.” For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

1:28. “Bethany.” This site is unknown, and its location has been the source of much scholarly discussion. Nevertheless, it seems clear that it was within a day’s walk from Bethany near Jerusalem, and likely would have been close to directly east of Jerusalem, thus explaining its name as “Bethany beyond Jordan.” When two towns are quite far apart, there is usually no such description: people simply recognize that the towns cannot be the same due to the distance they are separated from each other. It seems clear the messengers that came to tell Jesus that Lazarus was dead could make the journey in a day (see commentary on John 11:6). The Church Father Origen (184/185 – 253/254) went to Palestine and said that he could not find any town named Bethany, and so concluded that Jesus must have been at Bethabara (actually, there is a large variation in the manuscripts, apparently in some measure due to Origen’s report). Origen did say “We are aware of the reading which is found in almost all the copies, ‘These things were done in Bethany.’” However, when Origen is studied, it seems he did not go beyond the Jordan himself, but relied on what people said. R. D. Potter writes, “How did the name disappear in 100 or 150 years? The answer is that Origen, despite his pious assertion about visiting the scenes of Redemption, had never been there. He is reporting hearsay.... He never discovered Bethany beyond Jordan because he never went to look.” (Potter and Origen quoted in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*).

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

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

1:30. “ranks ahead of me.” See commentary on John 1:15.

1:31. “I did not know him.” John almost certainly knew Jesus as a person, but what he means here is that he did not know Jesus as the Coming One. Even if he had a personal opinion based on the testimony of his parents—and it seems certain he would have their testimony since his mother was the one whom Mary visited when both women were pregnant and John leapt in Elizabeth’s womb—he still had no divine confirmation on his own until the baptism. In this phrase, the “I” is emphatic in Greek.

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

1:33. “in holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

1:38. “What are you seeking?” The question is a deep one. It can have the essence of the NET translation: “What do you want?” But it also asks them the deep question of the heart: What is it that they really wanted in life? Were they in touch with the deep needs of their life? It is a question we should all ask ourselves: What are we really seeking in life?

1:39. “it was about *the* tenth hour.” The figure of speech, Epitrechon (see Bullinger, *Figures*), is a type of parenthesis.

The “tenth hour” is 4 o’clock in the afternoon. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

1:41. “first.” The word “first” is debated in the text. Lenski does a good job with it. Andrew was the first of the two disciples of John to find his brother. The other disciple of John, the one not mentioned by name, would have been either James or John (the author of John), and he also found his brother, thus being the “second” to bring his brother, Andrew being the “first.”

1:47. “truly.” This is the adverb *alethōs* (#230 ἀληθῶς), truly. Although some versions have translated it as if it were an adjective (cp. “Here is a true Israelite” HCSB) the more

likely explanation is not that Jesus is saying Nathaniel was a “real” Israelite; lots of Jews from Galilee were likely “real” Israelites. The adverb likely modifies the whole phrase, “an Israelite in whom is no guile.” Finding a truly honest person who had no guile was certainly more difficult than finding a real Israelite, and Jesus opened his conversation with Nathaniel by commenting on his character, something Nathaniel would certainly have recognized, and something that ties in with John 2:25 which says that Jesus knew what was in people, i.e., in their hearts.

1:51. “you all.” The you is plural.

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

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

Chapter 2

2:4. “Woman, what *is that* to me and to you?” This puzzling verse is explained well by Lenski. Of course Jesus’ mother is putting pressure on him to do something in the situation, but as it is in English the verse seems to make Jesus disrespectful and uncaring of the situation entirely. This verse has both Greek idiom and the figure of speech ellipsis. This makes it difficult to translate the Greek into English in an understandable way without taking serious liberty with the text.

Keys to the meaning can be found in the context, especially verse 5. Not only is Mary not upset with Jesus’ response to her, but she expects Jesus will do something to help the situation. Jesus’ statement, “what *is that* to you and me” is not an insult to Mary, or a statement of disregard of the situation. Rather it is a statement that Jesus *himself* is Messiah and Lord, and that he and Mary are not a team. The verse should be read something like: “what is that to you **and** me, I will deal with it alone.” He alone would take care of the situation now, just as he alone would take care of the situation when “his hour” had come, at the time of his torture and death. Mary understood his communication, and went to the servants and told them that whatever “he” said, do it.

2:6. “stone water jars.” These jars were very hard to make and expensive, since they were made of stone, not clay. The reason for the stone was that clay would absorb a little of what was put in it, and so clay vessels became unclean very easy and could not be cleansed once they were unclean. Stone, on the other hand, was harder to make permanently unclean because it could usually be cleansed by washing.

2:12. “down.” This is literally true. Capernaum was on the Sea of Galilee, which is about 700 feet below sea level, while Cana is in what is known as the Upper Galilee, which is well above sea level.

“Capernaum.” Jesus made his home in Capernaum after he left Nazareth (Luke 4:29-31). [For more information on Jesus’ move to Capernaum, see commentary on Mark 2:1].

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

2:15. “drove *them* all out of the temple, also the sheep and the oxen.” This is Jesus’ first appearance in the Temple after starting his ministry, and he is already demonstrating the fact that he is the representative of his Father, and actively judging, and correcting, right from wrong and dismantling the oppressive systems the world uses to keep God’s people in bondage. The wrath that he showed in his Father’s house will be mirrored and magnified at the Judgment, when sinners will be excluded, not just from an earthly Temple, but from the Kingdom of Heaven itself. When Jesus saw the evil merchants, he acted quickly and decisively, as is indicated by the fact that the four verbs in the verse, “made...drove...poured out...overturned” are all in the aorist tense.

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

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

2:16. “Stop making.” The verb “making” is *poieō* (#4160 ποιέω), which means to do or to make. In this verse, it is in the present tense, imperative mood. The present tense indicates the action is ongoing. If we translate the verse “Do not make,” it repeats the verb into “do, make,” and it also loses the force that this was something they had been doing and were continuing to do. The imperative mood also is the reason for the exclamation point at the end of the sentence.

2:17. Quoted from Psalm 69:9.

2:18. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

2:19. “Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.” This was a very fitting answer to the question the Jews were asking, which was basically, “What sign are you going to show us that proves you have the authority to do what you are doing?” Jesus had the authority to cleanse the Temple because he was the Messiah, but what sign showed he was the Messiah? The Resurrection! Jesus made this clear when he said that no sign (that is, no clear incontrovertible sign) would be given to that generation except the resurrection (Matt. 12:40). Furthermore, in his teaching on the Day of Pentecost, Peter made it clear that it was the resurrection that absolutely showed that Jesus was Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

The obvious problem in the verse is that Jesus said “I” will raise up this sanctuary, but he was dead. What did he mean? Many verses plainly state that it was God who raised Jesus (cp. Acts 2:32; 4:10; 5:30; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:9, 10). This is the only verse that implies Jesus raised himself, and so it is very unusual. What did Jesus mean when he said that he would raise up “this sanctuary?”

Jesus was speaking to the Jews after he turned over their tables and drove their animals out of the Temple (this was the first of the two times when he did that; he did it again at the end of his ministry, cp. Matt. 21:12; Mark 11:15; Luke 19:45). The Jews were angry and unbelieving, and Jesus was speaking in veiled terms, so much so that the Gospel of John adds, “but he was speaking of the temple of his body,” so that people reading the Gospel would understand what he said. Since Jesus was standing in the actual Temple when he said, “Destroy this sanctuary,” the natural assumption would be that he was speaking of the Temple where he was standing at the time, and indeed, the people listening to him thought he was speaking of destroying the physical Temple he was standing in.

The fact that Jesus was speaking in veiled terms to an unbelieving audience should make us hesitant to build a doctrine on this verse and say that Jesus somehow raised himself, especially when the other verses about the resurrection say “God” raised Jesus. Tempers were flaring and the Jews were against Jesus anyway. It was common for Jesus to speak in ways that unbelievers did not understand. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels will show a number of times when Jesus spoke and the unbelievers who heard him (and sometimes even the disciples) were confused by what he said.

In what sense could Jesus say “I” will raise “this sanctuary?” He was referring to the fact that he was to a degree responsible for his resurrection, just as we are for our salvation. How so? We are responsible for our salvation because we must accept the Lord Jesus in order to be saved. In a similar way, Jesus was responsible to keep himself “without spot or blemish” and to fully obey the will of the Father in order to be able to be resurrected. Jesus was the sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and a sacrifice that was blemished was unacceptable to the Lord (Lev. 22:17-20; Mal. 1:6-8). Since this event in John was at the start of his ministry, Jesus knew he had a long and hard road ahead and that obedience would not be easy. If he turned away from God because he did not like what God said to do, or if he sinned, his sin would have been a “blemish” that would have disqualified him as the perfect sacrifice. Then he could not have paid for the sins of mankind, and there would have been no resurrection. Jesus did not go into the Temple and turn over the money tables because he “just felt like it.” Scripture says he was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy and the will of God, which he always did. Had he not fulfilled this prophecy, he would not have fulfilled all the law and would have been

disqualified from being able to die for the sins of mankind. Thus, his destiny was in his own hands, and he could say, “I will raise it up.”

It is common in speech that if a person has a vital part in something, he is spoken of as having done it. An example from ordinary life would be if a homeowner hires a worker to remodel his kitchen. In conversation about it he would ordinarily say, “I remodeled my kitchen last year,” even though he only paid to have it done by someone else. The Bible uses that same kind of language. For example, the Gospels say that Roman soldiers crucified Jesus (Matt. 27:35). Yet Peter said to the rulers of the Jews, “you” crucified the Lord (Acts 5:30). Everyone understands that the Jews played a vital part in Jesus’ crucifixion, so there really is a sense in which they crucified him, even though they themselves did not do the dirty work. An example from the Old Testament is in 2 Samuel 5 and 1 Chronicles 11. David and his men were attacking the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. The record is very clear that David had sent his men ahead into the city to fight, and even said that the first one into the city would be the general. Yet the record says, “David captured the stronghold of Zion,” because David played a vital role in the capture of Jerusalem. This same type of wording that is so common in the Bible and indeed, in all languages, is the wording Jesus used. He would raise his body by virtue of the fact that he would play a vital part in it being raised.

2:20. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary, and will you raise it up in three days?” The Temple, and the complex around it, took many years to build. Then it stood in its completed form for less time than it took to build because it was destroyed in 70 AD. The saying in Jewish tradition was, “He that has not seen the Temple of Herod has never known what beauty is” (Edersheim, *Life and Times*, Book II, p. 120).

2:22. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

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

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

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

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

“believed in his name.” This means that people were believing that Jesus was the Messiah. What is not stated, but is very important, is that the people back then thought very differently about the Messiah than we do. We, with 20-20 hindsight, know about his suffering and death, his two comings (one to suffer and die; one, still future, to conquer and set up his kingdom), etc. In contrast, the people of Jesus’ day believed that as the Messiah he would simply come and at some point muster an army, overthrow the Romans and other governments of the world, and set up his kingdom on earth. Even his closest men, the Apostles, did not understand about his death and resurrection until after he was raised and had appeared to them (Luke 24:45-48). So when the Scripture says the people believed “in his name,” they “got” that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but they did not “get” what that meant as far as how Jesus would have to live out his life. For more on the custom of “the name” and “the name of Jesus Christ,” see commentary on 1 John 3:23.

2:24. “Jesus did not trust himself to them.” Even though Jesus was surely glad that people were recognizing that he was the Messiah, he did not trust himself to them. He knew that they did not really understand what the Messiah would do. Even his mother Mary came to believe he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21). See commentary on John 2:23, “believed in his name.”

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

It is obvious from Scripture that Jesus did not know everything, for he grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52), and he did not know certain things (Matt. 24:36). Whenever the word “all” is used, the student of Scripture must be careful to ascertain from the context whether it means “all” in a totally inclusive sense, or whether it means “all” in a more limited sense (see note # 5 on Col. 1:15-20). For example, 1 John 2:20 says of Christians, “you know all things.” Surely there is no Christian who actually believes that he knows everything. The phrase is taken in a limited sense of “all” according to the context.

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

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

There is no place in Scripture where the doctrine of the “dual nature” of Christ is actually stated. It is an assumption based on piecing verses together. What the Bible does say in a straightforward manner is that Jesus was flesh and bone, not spirit; that he was a

man, and that he partook in our humanity. Also, the very concept of the dual nature of Christ involves a self-contradiction. God is infinite and man is finite, and so Christ would have to be a finite-infinite being, which we believe is inherently impossible. That is not the Jesus described to us in the Bible. No wonder Tertullian, an early Trinitarian, said, “*Credo quia impossibile est*” (I believe because it is impossible). We realize it is not only “impossible,” but also *unscriptural*, so unlike Tertullian, we choose not to believe it.

Jesus needed to hear from God to know how to judge (John 5:30), and he knew all men the same way—by hearing from God. In saying that Jesus knew all men, the Bible was confirming that Jesus was in touch with God just as were the prophets of old (but of course, much more intimately). Charles Morgridge writes: “It was an opinion prevalent among the Jews, that prophets knew the thoughts and characters of those with whom they conversed. Luke 7:39: “Now, when the Pharisee which had bidden him, saw it, he spake within himself, saying, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him” (*The True Believer’s Defence (sic) Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians*, pp. 124-126). Furthermore, it is substantiated in Scripture that God did show prophets what people were thinking. Nathan knew of David’s secret sin (2 Sam. 12:7). Ahijah knew what the wife of Jeroboam wanted, and who she was, even though he was blind and she was wearing a disguise (1 Kings 14:4, 6). Elijah knew that Ahab had committed murder by framing Naboth (21:17-20), and he knew the information that the king of Israel wanted to know (2 Kings 1:1-4). Elisha knew that Gehazi was lying and knew of the greed in his heart (2 Kings 6:19-27). Daniel knew Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, even though Nebuchadnezzar had not revealed it to anyone (Dan. 2:5,28ff). By saying that Jesus knew all men, Scripture confirms that he was, like the prophets of old, in communication with God.

2:25. “he did not need anyone to testify about man.” This statement sets up the record of Jesus and Nicodemus, which starts, “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus.” Because Jesus did not need anyone to testify about people, and knew what was in people, when Nicodemus came to him he already knew what Nicodemus wanted and needed. That explains why Jesus so abruptly spoke into Nicodemus’ life, saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born from above, he is not able to see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Chapter 3

3:1. “one of.” A partitive genitive. Nicodemus was “of” the Pharisees, meaning he was one of them. Some versions simplify the verse and just have, “Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodmus.” That is certainly what the text means.

“Pharisees.” The Greek word is *Pharisaios* (#5330 Φαρισαῖος), a transliteration of the Aramaic word *perishaya*, from the Aramaic word that means “separated.” The Pharisees separated themselves from things that made them unclean or were ungodly, and also separated themselves from others who they considered not godly. Our knowledge of them is limited by the sources we have. The Greek term is found for the very first time in the New Testament and it occurs in Josephus, but not in any other Jewish or Greco-Roman writings of the New Testament era. The group no doubt existed before the time of Christ, which is why it was so influential in the New Testament, but no description of it

survives from that time. The term is found in the non-canonical and later Christian texts (e.g., *The Gospel of Thomas*), and in the writings of the Church Fathers. The text called “The Psalms of Solomon,” perhaps written in the mid first century BC, has been thought of as a Pharisaic text, but never specifically identified as such.

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

That John 3:1 specifically refers to Nicodemus as a Pharisee helps us understand one reason why Jesus spoke to him about the resurrection from the dead. Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount with a teaching about the future Messianic Kingdom on earth because almost no one understood it [Matt. 5:3-12; see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”]. Similarly, one reason he opens his discussion with Nicodemus about resurrection into the Kingdom was because Nicodemus did not understand it.

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

3:2. “came to Jesus.” The Bible is silent as to why Nicodemus came to Jesus, which means that either we can figure it out on our own, or it is not really important. In this case, the Bible gives us enough information that we recognize some very plausible reasons Nicodemus came.

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

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

There is a wide gap between believing someone is a teacher sent from God and believing that he is the Messiah.

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

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

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

"at night." Nicodemus came to Jesus at night so that he might not be recognized. This is not cowardice, but wisdom: careful caution. Lenski writes that Nicodemus "was not sure about this young Rabbi from Galilee who might turn out a disappointment after all. So he cautiously investigates."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The New Birth is part of the Administration of Grace, which is also called “the Administration of the Sacred Secret (see commentary on Ephesians 3:2 and commentary on Ephesians 3:9). John 3:1-12 is not referring to the Christian New Birth. Jesus was speaking about a “birth from above” that the Jews were supposed to know about and understand. That is why Jesus chided Nicodemus, saying, “Are you the *well-known* teacher of Israel, and *yet* do not know these things?” (John 3:10). Thus we have to look in

the Old Testament for the kind of birth Jesus spoke of, which is the birth of the body from the ground, which will happen at the resurrection (Isa. 26:19 (NIV); Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2). Unfortunately, at the time of Christ, most Jews were ignorant about the resurrection from the dead and entrance into the Messianic Kingdom. The Sadducees did not even believe in a resurrection (Matt. 22:23). The Pharisees, on the other hand, of which Nicodemus was one, generally believed in immediate life after death, like the Greeks (see commentary on John 3:1; “Pharisee”). So when Jesus told Nicodemus about being born from above, he did not understand what Jesus was saying. Nicodemus, who had read the Old Testament many times, should have known what Jesus was talking about. Instead, however, due to his theology, he was confused by the “birth” terminology.

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

In summary, what Jesus said to Nicodemus is actually very simple: no one will see God’s Messianic Kingdom unless he is “born from above,” i.e., raised from the dead by God.

3:5. “born of water.” This phrase refers to the birth of the person from his mother’s womb, and Jesus used it because Nicodemus spoke of being born from the womb, somewhat sarcastically asking if a person could enter into the womb a second time. Jesus patiently pointed out that was not necessary, but to enter the Kingdom of God a person had to come from the womb once and be born of water (cp. that which is born of “flesh is flesh;” v. 6), and then he must be born from above, via resurrection.

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

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

Jesus just said the phrase “born of water” when he was speaking to Nicodemus, but he never explained it, so it must have referred to something that Nicodemus could understand without any explanation. Based on that, and the context that “that which is born of flesh [with water] is flesh,” the best conclusion is that “born of water” is literal, and should be understood literally. In the context in which Jesus was speaking, before the Church Age, in order to be saved a person had to be 1) born of water (when he is born from his mother) and 2) born of the spirit (when the earth gives birth to him: Ezek. 37:12-14; Isa. 26:19.) For a more thorough understanding of Nicodemus and John 3, see Appendix H, in *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*, by John Schoenheit.

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

3:6. “the Spirit.” God is “spirit,” so it is natural that one of the names of God is “the Spirit.” It is God who creates spirit in the dead bodies of believers and gives them life.

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

3:7. “you must all be born from above.” The “you” is plural in the Greek. Thus, Jesus shifts from the singular in verse 3, “unless someone is born from above,” to the plural, “you all must be born from above” or “you must all be born from above,” making the point that the birth from above is not just for Nicodemus, but applies to everyone. The only way anyone is going to enter the Kingdom is by being “born from above,” that is raised from the dead as per Ezekiel 37:12-14.

3:8. “the Spirit breathes where it wants to, and you hear its voice.” The traditional translation of this verse is “the wind blows,” not “the Spirit breathes.” However, the Greek word *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα) can mean “spirit” or “wind;” *pneō* (#4154 πνέω, pronounced pnew’-oh) can mean “breathe” or “blow;” and *phonē* (#5456 φωνή, pronounced phoe-nay) can mean “voice” or “sound.” Therefore, “the Spirit breathes and you hear its voice,” and “the wind blows and you hear its sound” are both legitimate translations of the Greek words. In this situation we must determine what Jesus was saying from the context and scope of Scripture, not just from the Greek words themselves.

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

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

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

From studying the Old Testament, Nicodemus should have known about the resurrection and the Messianic Kingdom, but he had no way of knowing about the Christian “New Birth” (being “born again”). It is because most commentators think that this chapter is about the Christian “New Birth” that it does not occur to them to look in the Old Testament for clues to understand what Jesus is trying to teach Nicodemus. [For more on John 3 not being about the Christian new birth, see commentary on John 3:3].

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

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

There is also good evidence that *pneuma* should be translated “Spirit.” The word *pneuma* occurs about 380 times in the New Testament (385 in the manuscript on which the KJV is based, 279 times in the Nestle-Aland 27 Greek text), and in the KJV this is the only place *pneuma* is translated “wind” (the NIV has “wind” here and one other place; which also could easily be translated “spirit”). In contrast to *pneuma*, the Greek word *anemos* (#417 ἄνεμος) occurs 31 times in the New Testament and always refers to wind (cp. Matt. 7:25; 8:26; 14:24; Eph. 4:14; Rev. 6:13). What is quite compelling evidence that *pneuma* should be translated “Spirit” is that *pneuma* occurs four times in four verses

(3:5-8), and it would seem incongruous if three of them were “spirit” and one “wind.” Leon Morris expresses this plainly: “. . . we would expect the meaning [of *pneuma*] to be unchanged. The passage then would mean that man cannot predict the movements of the Spirit” (*The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John*). The flow of Jesus’ teaching and his implied references to the Old Testament all argue for the translation “Spirit.”

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

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

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

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

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

Ezekiel 37:9 (Rotherham):

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

Since the prophecy in Ezekiel was that the “spirit” would “breathe” into the dead and they would come to life, we can see why, in the context of the resurrection, Jesus

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

Jesus concludes his teaching to Nicodemus by saying, “this is how it is with everyone who is born by way of the Spirit.” The phrase “this is how it is” is from the Greek *houtōs* [#3779 οὕτως], which generally means, “thus, so, in this manner, in this way,” etc., (cp. *Complete Jewish Bible* by Stern). Furthermore, we say “by way of the Spirit” because the Greek text is not a simple genitive, but *ek tou pneumatos* (literally, “from [by way of] the Spirit”). The preposition *ek* (#1537 ἐκ) only takes the genitive case, which is why “Spirit” is in the genitive case in the sentence. The preposition *ek* is generally used in one of these six ways: 1. Source: *out of, from*; e.g., “she was found to be with child *from* the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18; Luke 3:8). 2. Separation: *away from, from*; e.g., “*Out of* Egypt I called my son” (Matt. 2:15). 3. Temporal: *from*; e.g., “he saw a man blind *from* birth” (John 9:1; Acts 15:21). 4. Causal: *because of*; e.g., “And if by grace, then is it no more *of* works” (Rom. 11:6; cp. Mark 9:15). 5. Partitive (in place of a partitive genitive): *of, from*; e.g., “they will put *some of* you to death” (Luke 21:16; cp. 2 John 1:4). 6. Means: *by, from*; e.g., “supporting them *from* their possessions” (Luke 8:3; cp. 16:9).

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

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

Jesus ignores the sarcasm and presses forward with his teaching, referring to how the Old Testament says the dead will be raised: “The Spirit breathes where it wants to, and you hear its voice, but do not know where it comes from and where it goes; this is how it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus again did not grasp what Jesus was teaching, and said, “How are these things able to happen?” At that point Jesus

openly challenges Nicodemus' ignorance, saying, "Are you the well-known teacher and don't know this?" Then Jesus goes on to make a sweeping statement about how in general the leaders of the Jews ("you people;" the "you" is plural in Greek) do not accept what Jesus is teaching, and he expresses some futility about teaching them deep spiritual truths: "If I told you *people* about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

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

"by the Spirit." In this case, "Spirit" has a capital "S" because it refers to God. The Old Testament revealed that God (also called, "the Spirit), was the one who will give birth from the dead. [See Appendix H in *The Christian's Hope*, by Schoenheit.] This is not referring to the gift of holy spirit or the Christian New Birth.

3:11. "you people." The "you" is plural in Greek, here represented by "you *people*." When Jesus says, "you people," he is specifically referring to the Jewish leaders. Although Jesus was no doubt upset by the fact that the Jews in general had not accepted him or his teaching, in this case he is most specifically speaking about those people in leadership positions among the Jews. John 3:1 told us that Nicodemus was a "ruler" of the Jews, and John 7:50 lets us know that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of 70 men, so Nicodemus was a very powerful man.

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

3:12. "earthly things." The things that Jesus taught about, though having to do with God or having originated from God, were also related to the earth. For example, the Messiah himself, the Laws of God, and the resurrection. These things had to do with God's relation to earth and were also part of the revelation of the Old Testament. There should have been no (or very little) debate about them. Instead, the religious world was

completely perverted by tradition and wrong teaching. Yet when Jesus tried to correct the situation by his teaching and signs, the religious world stood against him and the common people were usually confused. Frankly, the same situation exists in the Christian religion today. There are so many unbiblical beliefs and traditions that someone presenting the truth is usually either scoffed at or ignored.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Beyond a plain and straightforward reading of the Greek text, which places the events after verse 12 in the past, another reason to believe that Jesus stopped speaking in verse 12, and verse 13 resumes the narrative of John, is that from verse 3 to verse 12, whenever Jesus speaks, he uses “I.” However, after verse 12, we find the third person “him” in the text. The logical reason for that shift is that from verse 13 on, the Apostle John was writing about “him.” In verse 3, Jesus is speaking and he says, “I say.” In verse 5 he says, “I say.” In verse 7 he says, “I said.” In verse 11 he says, “I say,” and in verse 12 he says, “I told” and “I tell.” In verse 13, there is a sudden shift. We no longer see “I,”

we see “him,” and other references to Jesus in the third person. For example, in verse 13, the text refers to “the one” from heaven, and in verse 14, instead of saying “everyone who believes in me” (which Jesus did many times in the Gospel of John, cp. John 6:35; 7:38; 11:25, 26; and 12:44, 46), the text says, “everyone who believes in him.” When the evidence is weighed, the words from John 3:13 to the end of the chapter were not spoken by Jesus, but penned by the narrator, the Apostle John, long after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

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

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

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

While the phrase “who is in heaven,” seems out of place to the ordinary reader, this was even more true in Egypt, where huge debates about the Deity of Christ were going on, and where many scribes did not believe in the Trinity. At least the Trinitarian

scribes believed that Jesus could be on earth and in heaven at the same time, so they would not have seen a need to modify the verse by omitting the phrase (R. C. H. Lenski is an example of a Trinitarian commentator who has no problem with Jesus being both in heaven and on earth at the same time: "...he is both here and is still in heaven" p. 252). But to the non-Trinitarian scribes in Egypt, it would make no sense at all that Jesus could be on earth and in heaven at the same time. Thus in Egypt, there would have been pressure to omit the difficult phrase, "who is in heaven."

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

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

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

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

According to orthodox teaching, what happened to the righteous souls in Paradise that were awaiting Jesus' death and resurrection? They waited in "Paradise" until Jesus ascended to heaven, at which time he took all those righteous souls with him to heaven.

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

In examining John 3:13, we assert that the textual evidence shows the final phrase is original: Jesus had ascended into heaven and was in heaven, but no one else was in heaven. We also assert that the textual evidence shows that Jesus did not speak the verse, but rather it is part of the narrative of the Gospel of John. That makes this verse one of many verses in the Bible that teaches that no one is in heaven. The dead are asleep until Jesus comes and raises them up at the Rapture, the First Resurrection, or the Second Resurrection (see the commentary on 1 Cor. 15:26; and Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *Is There Death After Life?*).

3:14. “Even as Moses lifted up the serpent...the Son of Man was lifted up.” Although almost all the versions treat Jesus’ lifting up as if it is future, a quick look at the Greek text shows that, from the writer’s standpoint, it is in the past. The Greek verb “to lift up” is the same for both the serpent and the Son of Man, *hupsoō* (#5312 ὑψώω), and both are in the aorist tense. The translators ignore this, believing that Jesus is the one speaking in the verse and therefore referring to his future crucifixion, but the fact is that Jesus was not saying it, John was, as part of the narration of the Gospel of John, and the crucifixion was many years in the past when John was writing. [For verse 14 not being the words of Jesus, see commentary on John 3:13, “And no one”].

3:15. “life in the Age to come.” The Greek phrase that we translate “life in the Age to come” is *zōē aiōnios* (#2222 ζωή; #166 αἰώνιος). The word *zōē* is the noun, “life,” while *aiōnios* is the adjective, “Age.” (Occasionally the phrase occurs as *aiōnios zōē*, with the noun last; John 17:3; Acts 13:46, but that is the exception, and there is no difference in meaning).

English Bibles usually translate the phrase *zōē aiōnios* as “eternal life” or “everlasting life,” but we feel that most of the time that is not a good translation, and can even be confusing. The phrase *zōē aiōnios* (“Age life”) refers to everlasting life which begins in the Messianic Age, also known as the “Millennial Kingdom” (cp. Rev. 20:1-6). [For more information on everlasting life, see Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

3:16. “For God.” Jesus did not speak the words of this verse to Nicodemus but they are part of the narration of the Gospel of John, penned by John long after Jesus had ascended to heaven. One way we can tell this is that John 3:16 is the teaching about how to be saved after Jesus died and resurrected, not before. When Jesus told people how to be saved when he was alive, although he did tell them to believe in him, he also told them to

keep the commandments. For example, he told the rich young ruler that to have everlasting life he had to keep the commandments (Matt. 19:17). More evidence that John 3:16 is part of the narration of the Gospel of John and not Jesus speaking to Nicodemus is that the verse says, “He **gave** His only begotten Son.” This refers to Jesus’ death as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and it is referred to as a past event. But God’s giving His Son was still future when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus. [For more on verse 16 not being the words of Jesus, see commentary on John 3:13, “who is in heaven”].

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

“so that.” The Greek word *hina* (#2443 ἵνα), plus the verb in the subjunctive mood shows this to be a purpose-result clause (see commentary on Matt. 2:15), “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” By giving his Son, God both intended to, and His action resulted in, saving those who believe.

“will not perish.” The Greek verb *apollumi* (#622 ἀπόλλυμι) means “perish.” It is in the subjunctive mood, which is usually known as the mood of condition, reflecting an “if” or a possibility. This verse is an example of when translating the Greek text literally can cause problems for an English reader. The average English Bible student reads John 3:16 in most versions, and reads something like, “that whoever believes in him should not perish.” But why the word “should?” The word “should” makes it seem like if a person believes, he “should” not perish (or “may” not perish, as the NRSV, Darby, and Young’s Literal Translation say), but maybe he will perish.

The key to understanding the verse is that the subjunctive mood of the verb *apollumi* is due to its association with *hina*, “so that,” which often takes a subjective mood (see commentary on “so that” above in this verse). So the subjunctive mood in this case is due to a grammatical construction, not due to there being an “if” about our salvation. Some modern versions besides the REV, such as the HCSB and the NET, are ignoring the “literal” translation due to the confusion it causes, and translating the verse the way a Greek reader would have understood it—that if anyone believe in the Son, that person will have everlasting life.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.] **3:17. “send the Son into the world.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

“to judge.” It was not God’s purpose or intent to send Jesus into the world to judge the world. God sent Jesus into the world to save the world. However, because of mankind’s rejection of God, Jesus will judge the world to insure that those who accept God will have a wonderful everlasting future.

3:18. “name.” See 1 John 3:23 note “on the name of his son Jesus Christ.”

3:20. “worthless.” The Greek is *phaulos* (#5337 φαῦλος), and means, “worthless, “good for nothing.” It is not necessarily that the works are “evil,” but just worthless. We are created to do good works (Eph. 2:10), and if we waste our lives in that which is worthless to God, there is a consequence for that.

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

3:25. “ceremonial cleansing.” The Greek is *katharismos* (#2512 καθαρισμός), and it refers to “cleansing,” especially ritual or ceremonial cleansing, that is a cleansing that is ritual in nature and does not actually cleanse in and of itself. For example, baptism is a “ritual cleansing,” because no amount of washing in water will wash away sin. Yet, if God commands it, and the person obeys, then God sees the act of obedience and cleanses the person from sin.

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

3:28. “can testify.” John’s point here is not that his disciples were in fact testifying that he did not claim to be the messiah, but that they could. He calls on them to be witnesses on his behalf. The Greek reads, “You all testify for me,” using the dative of advantage.

3:29. “the friend of the bridegroom.” In this context, the friend of the bridegroom is John himself. This is a general, not a specific, reference to the Eastern wedding, where the friend of the bridegroom is a true friend and is just happy that the bridegroom is so happy. John had been faithfully ministering and baptizing, but now “all” were going to Jesus (v. 26.). Was John envious? Not at all, and he illustrated his point by comparing his feelings to a common occurrence: the happiness of the friend of the bridegroom because the bridegroom was happy.

3:32. “no one.” The figure of speech, *hyperbole*, exaggeration, as the next verse shows (and we know Jesus had some disciples). The phrase “no one” harkens back to 3:11, that the rules did not accept Jesus’ testimony, and also states hyperbolically that the majority of the people rejected him as well. As his ministry went on, more and more people believed in him.

3:36. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

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

Chapter 4

4:6. “just as he was.” The Greek is *houtō* (#3779 οὕτω; pronounced hoo'-toe), and it means “in this manner, thus, so, in this way.” Lenski points out that in this context it means “as he was.” As Robinson points out, the “thus” [of the KJV] refers to his weary state (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*). Jesus got to Jacob’s Well about noon, worn out from the trip, and sat down “just as he was,” in that tired condition, by the well, while his disciples went to town to buy food. Jesus was human, and got tired like all of us do. Yet even in his tired state he draws energy from his faith and conviction, and speaks with the woman at the well, then the Samaritans. Verses like this should provide great inspiration to us as Christians. When the Bible says that Jesus Christ loved us, and did his Father’s will, not his own, verses like these are the proof. Jesus pushed himself to love people and do the will of the Father, and we should follow his example.

“the sixth hour.” The “sixth hour” was about our noon. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

4:10. “you would have been the one to ask.” The emphasis in the Greek is hard to reproduce in English, but it is very important to get the impact of what is being said. In both verse 9 and verse 10 the “you” is emphatic, being expressed on its own and not as part of the verb. We might get the sense by capital letters: ⁹So the Samaritan woman says to him, “How is it that YOU, a Jew, asks me for a drink, since I am a Samaritan woman?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is the one who is saying to you, ‘Give me to drink,’ YOU would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

“living water.” In Jewish terminology, “living water” is flowing water, especially water that flows from a source such as a spring or river, and is not stagnant, such as well water.

4:11. “Lord.” One of the uses of “Lord” was a title of polite address, like we today say “Sir.” This woman did not know who Jesus was at this time, but still used the polite and formal form of address.

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

4:14. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

4:15. “come all the way here.” A brief look at how much work it took to live before modern water pumps and pipes. Just getting water to drink and cook with was hard work.

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

4:24. “spirit.” God is “spirit,” that is, He is an immaterial substance. The word “spirit” has many meanings. This is true in English, and also true in Hebrew (*ruach* = spirit) and Greek (*pneuma* = spirit). The Greek noun *pneuma* comes from the verb *pneō*, “to blow or breathe.” Thus, to the ancient Greeks, *pneuma* was “breath,” and it came to be associated

with invisible things that exerted a force or power. Although *pneuma* is a noun, it is a “verbal noun,” (a noun that has the inherent characteristics of a verb or is grammatically related to a verb), so *pneuma* is always associated with the invisible power exercised by it. The word “wind” is a good example of a verbal noun, a noun that cannot be divorced from the power or force associated with it. There is no such thing as “wind” without action, even though “wind” is a noun. Similarly, *pneuma* is associated with its action or power. In fact a good basic definition of *pneuma*, “spirit,” is something invisible that exerts a force. That is why some of the things that are called “spirit” in the Greek language are: God (John 4:24); the gift of God known as holy spirit (Acts 2:38); angels (Heb. 1:14); demons (Matt. 8:55); “breath” or “life” (Luke 8:55); wind; and attitudes, thoughts, or emotions (Matt. 26:41). All of these things are invisible but exert force or power. [For more information on “spirit” and its different uses, see Appendix 6: “Usages of Spirit”.]

4:26. “I...am he.” A clear indication of Christ’s love. He clearly reveals himself to this woman, whose heart is pure and simple, so that she can believe. To others he veiled his identity and had them search (cp. John 10:24-26).

4:27. “with a woman.” The Greek reads with “a woman,” not “the woman,” as some versions have. The separation between the sexes in public was such that the disciples were amazed that Jesus was speaking publicly with any woman at all.

4:28. “left her water jar.” The woman believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, so she left the mundane things of her life behind in order to share the news. Many of us would do well to do the same. How much “life” consumes our time and energy such that we cannot share the Messiah with others? The text notes that she left the water jar she was going to bring her water back to town in, but there were other things, such as her rope (which would have been very valuable) that she must have left also which are not mentioned. The point was not to give a laundry list of what she left behind. A reader familiar with biblical life, upon hearing she left the water she came for, would realize she left the other stuff as well.

4:29. “everything.” Of course Jesus did not tell the woman everything she ever did. However, it is often the effect of personal prophecy that a person feels very connected to God and the one who gives the prophecy.

4:32. “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” It was the custom that people did not usually eat and talk. Meals were customarily eaten in silence. Thus Jesus did not want to start eating when the people were coming to talk to him.

4:34. “the will of him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

4:35. “You have a saying.” The Greek is a question that expects an affirmative answer. The evidence is that Jesus was referring to a common saying or proverb of his time. It is not attested in the literature we have found, but that would be true of many sayings today. They are not written down much and would be easily lost. We do not have much “common literature” from the time of Christ.

The evidence is good that Jesus is not making a literal statement; that is, it was not literally four months until the literal harvest. It seems clear that he was traveling in hot weather. He was tired from the travel (4:6), and it was about noon, so it would be

understandable that he was thirsty. If he was traveling in or near summer, the harvest would have already started. If he was traveling a full four months before harvest then it would have been the rainy season and much colder, and there would be plenty of water so that he would not have had to ask a Samaritan woman for some.

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

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

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

4:47. “down.” This is literal. See commentary on John 4:49, “come down.”

4:49. “come down.” This is quite literal. Capernaum was almost 700 feet below sea level. Most people know that the Dead Sea is the lowest spot on the face of the earth. The surface of the Dead Sea is almost 1300 feet below sea level. But the Sea of Galilee is also below sea level, almost 700 feet, and Capernaum is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

4:52. “seventh hour.” About our 1 PM. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

4:54. “when he had come out of Judea into Galilee.” This was not Jesus’ second sign, but his second sign in Galilee. John does not include the signs he did in Judea in this counting (cp. John 2:23).

“again.” The word again goes with “did,” Jesus “did again” signs in Galilee. He had done them in Judea. John 2:23 says he did “signs” (plural). Besides that, he demonstrated his prophetic ministry to Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John 4). When Jesus did return to Galilee, the people welcomed him because they had seen the signs he did in Jerusalem at the Feast of Passover (John 4:45). This second sign in Galilee was a healing, and we can certainly assume that some of the signs in Judea were healings. Now Jesus heals “again” in Galilee as a sign of his being the Messiah.

Chapter 5

5:3. See commentary on verse 4.

5:4. The last sentence in John 5:3 (that occurs in some versions such as the King James) and John 5:4, were added to the text as an explanatory note. They were not part of the original text. There are many pieces of evidence to support the conclusion that this part of

the text was not original: it is omitted in the earliest and best manuscripts; in more than twenty Greek witnesses there are markings that it was not original; it has a number of words that are not found elsewhere in John's writings; and it has a number of variant forms in the manuscript tradition, showing that when it was added, different scribes added it differently [For more information, see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*].

The information that became our John 5:3, 4 likely started as a marginal note that explained what the man in our 5:7 was talking about, when he said he did not have anyone to lower him into the pool when the water was stirred. We have evidence from the Church Father Tertullian (145-220) that he knew of the tradition or belief that an angel stirred the water. At some point, the note by our 5:7 got copied into the text and became the 5:3, 4 of some of the early English versions, such as the KJV.

In the early manuscripts, which were all hand written, when a scribe would accidentally omit a word or phrase, the only way to preserve it was to write it in the margin so the next scribe could copy it back into the text. But this created a problem because sometimes the marginal commentary of the scribes got copied into manuscripts as if they were part of the original text. Thankfully today, due to the fact we now have discovered over 5,700 Greek manuscripts and we can compare them all by computer, most marginal readings (like this one in John 5:3, 4) can be decisively determined to be an addition and taken out of the modern versions.

5:10. "Jews." This is the restricted use of the word "Jews," referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

"the man who had been healed." The Greek is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun), and simply reads, "The Jews said to the healed,..." [For more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37].

5:15. "Jews." This is the restricted use of the word "Jews," referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

5:16. "Jews." This is the restricted use of the word "Jews," referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

5:17. "is always working." The verb working is in the present tense, which Lenski calls the durative present, and thus the word "always" is implied in the verb in this context, or as Neuman and Nida assert, the phrase "until now" means "always;" God has always been at work, without taking a break (cp. NIV: "My father is always at His work"). The Jews were upset with Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath. Jesus' answer to them was short and to the point. God is always working, even on the Sabbath, and so is His Son, Jesus. That is why the Jews correctly concluded that he was making himself equal to God. Not identical with God, but equal to Him, as His Son, in the way he operated.

5:18. "Jews." This is the restricted use of the word "Jews," referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

"but also was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." This verse shows us that Jesus knew who he was and what he was doing. It is sometimes taught that Jesus either never claimed to be the promised Messiah, or that he only took on that role as his ministry progressed and he realized that the people thought he was the

Messiah. But the truth is that Jesus knew he was the Messiah and lived his life in obedience to the will of his heavenly Father.

Some Trinitarians claim that this verse is evidence that Jesus was God, because it speaks of Jesus making himself equal with God. That is not what the verse is saying. The people in the time and culture of the Bible knew that children often carried the authority of the family. For example, the son of a king had authority. When Christ said that God was his Father, the Pharisees correctly interpreted that to mean that he had God's authority on earth, something that Jesus *was* in fact saying (cp. John 5:17ff).

Actually, this verse is unsupportive of the doctrine of the Trinity. It accurately records that Jesus was saying that "God" was his father, not that he was himself God, or that he was "God the Son." It is clear that Jesus' authority came from the fact that he was the Son of God, not God Himself.

There are a couple fundamental ways of understanding John 5:18, and neither supports the Trinity. One is that Jesus was "equal" to the Father in a limited sense because in that culture children carried the authority of the family. The second is that it was the Jews who claimed that Jesus was making himself equal with God, and they were wrong.

Jesus could have been making himself equal to the Father in a limited sense. For example, in John 5 he spoke of people honoring the Son just as they honored the Father. Also, he spoke about dead people hearing his voice and coming up out of the graves. The concept of people being "equal" is found in several places in the Bible. For example, when Joseph was ruling Egypt under Pharaoh, Judah said to him, "You are equal to Pharaoh himself" (Gen. 44:18). Paul wrote about men who wanted to be considered "equal with us" (2 Cor. 11:12). No Christian we are aware of believes that Joseph and Pharaoh or Paul and his opponents are "of one substance," and make up "one being" simply because they are called "equal." We believe that John 5:18 should be handled like the others verses that mention equality. Jesus was using God's power and authority on earth, and was thus "equal" to God in the same way Joseph, who was using Pharaoh's authority and power, was equal to Pharaoh.

It is also possible that the Jews were claiming that Christ was saying more than he actually was saying, and that Jesus almost always emphasized that his Father was greater than he was. In fact, in the very next verse, John 5:19, Jesus says that the Son can only do what he sees the Father doing.

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

[For more discussion on this verse see, Charles Morgridge, *True Believer's Defense Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians*, 1837, p. 118; and *The Racovian Catechism*, in Polish 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818; both books are available through Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, p. 133. See also Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition*, pp. 173-185].

5:19. "the Son is not able to do anything on his own." This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

“the Son also does in the same way.” Cp. NRSV. The Greek for “likewise” is *homoiōs* (#3668 ὁμοίως), meaning, “likewise, so, similarly, in the same way” (BDAG). **5:20. “is a friend to.”** The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the verb *phileō* in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say “the Father loves the Son,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of *phileō* here. We could say, the Father is friendly to the Son,” or “the Father is fond of the Son,” but these seem too weak. We meet “friendly” people all the time, but they are not friends. We could say the father “befriended” the Son, but the verb in Greek is in the present tense, and “befriended” seems to be a past action. We think “is a friend to” is the best way to carry the meaning of the Greek text into the English. For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, and how it is different from *agapē* love, see the note on John 21:15.

“so that.” Purpose-result clause. See Matthew 2:15 commentary, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” These works are done for the purpose of marveling, and are performed with the result that people marvel.

5:23. “the Father who sent him.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

5:24. “is hearing...is believing.” Both the verbs “hearing” and “believing” are in the present tense, active voice, meaning the action is currently occurring. It is important to remember when reading the Gospels that there was no new birth with its guarantee of salvation before the Day of Pentecost; the new birth is an aspect of the Administration of Grace [For the guarantee of Christian salvation, see 1 Peter 1:23, “born again”]. In the Old Testament and Gospels a person had to maintain his faith to be saved, so the fact that the hearing and believing were a current reality is important to the proper understanding of the verse.

“him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

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

Because “the one who is hearing my word and is believing him who sent me” was believing at that time, he has everlasting life at that time too (of course, if he quits believing, his everlasting life is not guaranteed). The present/future tension in the Bible is a challenge to translators as well as believers. We have to take the time to learn what God

is trying to tell us when He goes back and forth between the past, present, and future. In this case, although the Day of Judgment is future, God is continually reckoning people's sins and their good works, so although a person's judgment and condemnation (or exoneration) will not be fully realized until the Day of Judgment, there is a sense in which that condemnation is happening today, and the Greek communicates that sense by having "does not come" in the present tense.

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

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

"life in the Age to come." This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: "Life in the Age to Come".]

5:25. "live." This refers to living forever. See commentary on Luke 10:28.

5:28. "in the tombs." This verse, among many others, clearly shows that when a person dies, he is dead in the ground. Jesus did not think, or teach, that when a person died only his body went into the ground, but his soul (or spirit) went to "heaven" or "paradise." The people are in the tombs, and they will be resurrected to life from being dead in the ground.

5:29. "Resurrection of Life." The "Resurrection of Life" is also called the "first resurrection" and the "Resurrection of the Righteous" (see commentary on Acts 24:15). The word "life" is sometimes used for "everlasting life" or "life in the Age to Come." Here it is obvious when Christ says the Resurrection of Life that he is referring to the life that will last forever. Most Christians misunderstand the verses about the resurrection because they think dead people are already alive in heaven or hell. In that case, why have a resurrection? But it is tradition that the soul or spirit lives on after the death of the body. The Bible says the dead are fully dead until they are raised from the dead at the Rapture or a resurrection (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:29, "death").

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

5:30. "am not able to do anything on my own." This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

"the will of him who sent me." The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

5:36. "that the Father sent me." The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts.

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

5:37. “the Father that sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

“nor seen his form.” This verse, and there are many others like it, is a problem for Christians who have been taught that no one has ever seen God. Actually, God does come into concretion in a human form that we (and angels) can see and understand. He does this so that He can better relate to His creation. God created mankind so He could intimately fellowship with us, so it is reasonable that He occasionally becomes visible and takes on human form to be intimate with His creation. This also fits with Genesis saying that God created us in His image. There are Old Testament verses in which Yahweh appears in the form of a man, and those appearances continue in the New Testament. Scripture records a number of people to whom God appeared: Adam and Eve (they heard His footsteps, Gen. 3:8), Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:1; 17:1;18:1), Jacob (Gen. 28:13), Moses and the elders of Israel (Exod. 24:9-11), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), Solomon (two times: 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; 11:5), Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-22), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26-28), Amos (Amos 7:7), Daniel (Dan. 7:9-14), Stephen (Acts 7:56) and the Apostle John (Rev. 5:1-8). In contrast to many great men and women of God who saw God in a visible form, Jesus upbraided the unbelieving Jews by saying: “You have never heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form” (John 5:37). For more on God taking on human form, see the commentary on Acts 7:55.

5:38. “him who he sent.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

5:39. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

5:40. “life.” This refers to “everlasting life”. See commentary on Luke 10:28.

5:47. “since.” The Greek word “if” often has the meaning, “since.”

Chapter 6

6:4. [the Passover]. There is excellent contextual and ancillary evidence that the words, “the Passover” were not in the original text, even though they are in the Greek texts that we have today. See Walter Cummins, *The Acceptable Year of the Lord*, p. 65-73.

6:9. “young boy here who has.” The fact that the boy had so much when other people had nothing suggests that he was an enterprising young man who brought bread and fish to sell to the crowd that was following Jesus. If so, Jesus would have paid for the food and then given it to the multitude.

6:10. “sit.” The Greek word literally means “recline,” *anapiptō* (#377 ἀναπίπτω). The Jews of this period followed the Greek custom of reclining, or leaning on one’s side to eat. Here Jesus commands the disciples to have the people recline, which, functionally,

would mean *get ready to eat*. Contrary to popular artistic renditions, Jesus himself and the disciples were reclining at the Last Supper (Luke 22:14; John 13:12).

6:14. “the prophet.” The crowd was referring to the prophet that Moses said would come (Deut. 18:15). There has been much scholarly discussion about who the Jews thought this prophet was. Likely the designation “prophet” is used here because that is the bottom line truth that everyone agreed on—that this man was the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15. Beyond that, it seems clear from what we know of the Jews in that time period and area (Galilee; the home base of most of the Pharisees, there was more influence of the Sadducees around Jerusalem) that some of them believed “the prophet” was the Messiah himself, some believed the prophet was a forerunner to the Messiah and distinct from the Messiah (cp. 1:20, 21), and some likely believed that the man who started as the prophet may have become the Messiah (F. L. Godet; *Commentary on John’s Gospel*).

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

6:15. “Therefore, when.” There is much detail left out of this part of John that is important to understanding the record. See commentary on Mark 6:45.

6:17. “to Capernaum.” Jesus and his apostles actually landed in “Gennesaret” (Matt. 14:34; Mark 6:53). The Gospel of John says that they sailed “to Capernaum.” It is likely that Jesus planned to go to Capernaum shortly, but landed at Gennesaret and healed people there, then made the short walk to Capernaum, where he was when the people found him (John 6:24). For more information, see the note on Matthew 14:34.

6:21. “and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.” Several times the Bible records that God miraculously moved people from one place to another, and this is one of those times. Another was when God moved Phillip to Azotus (cp. Acts 8:39).

6:27. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

6:29. “in him who he has sent.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

6:31. Quoted from Exodus 16:4, Psalm 78:24.

6:33. “life.” Here the word “life” refers primarily to “life in the Age to Come,” which we can tell by reading the context (see commentary on John 5:40). However, it also has overtones of “life” now, life that is real life. Jesus came so that our lives now would be rich and meaningful, and also so that we would have everlasting life.

6:35. “bread of life.” This is primarily a genitive of production, i.e., “the bread that produces [and sustains] life.” See commentary on John 6:48.

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

6:37. “All those whom the Father gives me will come to me.” The ones that God “gives” to Jesus are the ones He “draws” to Jesus (see commentary, John 6:44). God “draws” people and gives to them as they respond to Him and come closer and closer to Him. The Father does not “give” people to Jesus apart from their freewill, or make choices for people that they are then forced to follow. A simple reading of the majority of the Bible shows this. God is constantly commanding people to do things that they do not do. That alone shows people’s freewill.

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

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

6:38. “I have come down from heaven.” Jesus said that he came from heaven, meaning that He came from God; God was his source. The Jews would not have taken Christ’s words to mean that he “incarnated” or was somehow God. It was a common use of language for them to say that something “came from heaven” if God were its source.

James 1:17 is a good example about things coming down from God. It says that every good gift is “from above” and “comes down” from God. What James means is clear. God is the Author and source of the good things in our lives. God works behind the scenes to provide what we need. The verse does not mean that the good things in our

lives come directly down from heaven. We use the same language today. Many Christians say “the Lord” blessed them when they receive a blessing by way other people but realize that the ultimate source of the blessings was the Lord. Some people even use the phrase “blessings from heaven,” just meaning that God ultimately somehow was behind the blessings that were given. Jesus’ words should be understood the same way we understand James’ words—that God is the source of Jesus Christ, which He was. Christ was God’s plan for the salvation of mankind, and God directly fathered Jesus. The fact that Jesus said he came down from God does not make him God, as some Trinitarians claim.

It was common to speak of things coming from heaven when what was meant was only that God was the ultimate source. When God wanted to tell the people that He would bless them if they gave their tithes, He told them that He would open the windows of “heaven” and pour out a blessing (Mal. 3:10). Of course, everyone understood the idiom being used, and no one believed that God would literally pour things out of heaven. They knew that the phrase meant that God was the origin of the blessings they received. So, for example, one way God would “pour blessings out of heaven” was to give the rain and sun so the crops were abundant. Still another example is when Christ was speaking and said, “John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven or from men?” (Matt. 21:25). Of course, the way that John’s baptism would have been “from heaven” was if God was the source of the revelation. John did not get the idea on his own, it came “from heaven.” The record about John’s baptism makes the idiom about heaven clear: things could be “from heaven,” *i.e.*, from God, or they could be “from men.” The idiom is the same when used of Jesus. Jesus is “from God,” “from heaven” or “from above” in the sense that God is his Father and thus his origin. [For discussion on a related point, that God “sent” Jesus, see commentary on John 6:57].

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

“the will of him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

6:39. “the will of him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

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

This verse contains the figure of speech anacoluthon (cp. Lenski), which is why it reads in such a choppy fashion.

6:40. “sees...believes.” The verbs are singular. See commentary on John 6:35.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

6:41. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

6:44. “No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” This verse is sometimes used to prove the theory of predestination or to assert that God chooses those who will be saved and those who will not. However, if we examine the verse in its context and in light of the whole scope of Scripture, we will see that this verse is not speaking of predestination, but is referring to God’s constant efforts to help and bless people, and to bring them to Himself. In fact, instead of being a verse supporting predestination, when it is properly understood, this verse and the verses around it are a testimony to the freewill of man and that we humans ultimately decide whether or not we will believe and obey God, and thus determine our own eternal fate.

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

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

Isaiah 54:13 and other verses make the point that God's will is that everyone come to Him (cp. 1 Tim. 2:4). That these Jews did not believe in Jesus due to their failure to listen to God was their choice and their problem, not God's.

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

"the Father who sent me." The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

6:45. Quoted from Isaiah 54:13. See commentary on John 6:44.

6:47. "whoever believes." The noun and verb are singular. See commentary on John 6:35.

"life in the Age to come." This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: "Life in the Age to Come".]

6:48. "I am the bread of life." This verse is a metaphor. The phrase, "bread of life" is primarily a genitive of production, i.e., "the bread that produces [and sustains] life."

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

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

6:50. "eat." See commentary on verse 54.

6:51. "I am the living bread." Jesus repeats the metaphor he had used in verse 48 (see commentary there), but added the word "living." Christ does not abandon the metaphor

of bread, but now expands it, because bread sustains our life but is dead; it is not a living thing. In contrast, Jesus will give us life and is himself living. He continues the figurative comparison of himself to bread when he says that the bread he will give is his flesh, that he will give for the life of the world.

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

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

6:52. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

6:53. “eat the flesh...drink his blood.” See commentary on verse 54.

“life.” Here the word “life” refers primarily to “life in the Age to Come,” which we can tell by reading the next verse, John 6:54. However, it also has overtones of “life” now, life that is real life. Jesus came so that our lives now would be rich and meaningful, and also so that we would have everlasting life (see commentary on John 5:40).

6:54. “The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood.” Jesus had already referred to himself as bread (see commentary on verse 48, 51). Now when Jesus spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he was using idioms that were common enough in his day that they should have understood him. Nevertheless, people did not understand, not because they did not understand the idiom, but because they did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, or that being committed to him was the way to everlasting life. Therefore, when he spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, they were confused. Eating and drinking were common activities that required personal involvement, so it is easy to see why they became idioms for involvement and commitment. For example, Jeremiah 15:16 (KJV) says, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.” By saying he ate the Word, Jeremiah portrays his enjoyment of it and commitment to it. Of course, the idiom “eat” can be used in a destructive sense too, such as when Psalm 53:4 (ESV) says evildoers “eat up” God’s people like bread (cp. Micah 3:3). To eat the bread of sorrow (Ps. 127:2 KJV) is to have or receive sorrow. To eat the fruit of your way (Prov. 1:31) is to receive consequences for your actions (cp. Isa. 3:10).

The word “drink” was also used idiomatically for involvement. Proverbs 4:17 says the wicked will drink the wine of violence, meaning they will be committed to violence and be intoxicated by it. Jeremiah 2:18 has a great example of using “drink” to show commitment. God asks the “house of Jacob” (Jer. 2:4), “And now what do you gain by going to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates?” No one would travel from Israel to Egypt or Assyria just to drink from their rivers. God is reproving His people from going to those pagan lands to “drink,” i.e., be committed to, their pagan ways. Job 21:20 speaks of

drinking the wrath of God in the sense of being involved with it, i.e., receiving it (cp. Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:22; Jer. 9:15; 25:15-17; 49:12; Ezek. 23:32). Psalm 36:8 speaks of godly people who drink of the river of God's delights. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that Christians have been made to "drink" of the spirit of God; we have received it and are involved with it in our daily activities. Eating and drinking are also used idiomatically in English to describe mental activities. If someone really liked something, we say he "ate it up." If someone believes something without properly thinking it over, we say he "swallowed it," or "swallowed it whole." If we have learned something, but have not had time to fully comprehend it, we say we "have not digested it yet."

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

"life in the Age to come." This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: "Life in the Age to Come".]

6:57. "the living Father sent me." The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. That God sent Jesus into the world can have a couple different nuances. For one thing, Jesus is the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45), and just as God created Adam, so God created Jesus by Fathering him in Mary. Thus, God's sending Jesus can refer to his conception and birth, and then subsequent ministry to save mankind, or it can simply refer to the much later event of God sending Jesus to fulfill his ministry to be the savior of mankind. That latter meaning, for example, is what John 17:18 (NET) means when Jesus prayed to God and said: "Just as you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world." Jesus commissioned his apostles and sent them out just as God had commissioned him and sent him out.

There are Trinitarians who insist that because God "sent" Jesus, Jesus must be God. But that is reading far too much into the simple concept of being "sent." The idea that something has been "sent" by God was commonly used and simply means that God is the ultimate source, or "sender," of what was sent. There is no reason to believe that Jesus' being sent by God makes him God—nothing else that is "sent" by God is God. The phrase just means what it says, that God sent Jesus. The Bible has dozens of examples of things being sent by God, all meaning that God was the source. God sent bad weather on Egypt (Exod. 9:23), fiery serpents upon the Israelites (Num. 21:6), Moses (Deut. 34:11), prophets (Judges 6:8), and many more people and things. John the Baptist was a man "sent from God" (John 1:6). The words of John the Baptist about being sent are very clear and, if taken the same way some Trinitarians take Jesus being "sent" by God, would make John God too. John said, "I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of Him" (John 3:27 HCSB). We all know that what John meant by "I've been sent ahead of him" simply means that God commissioned John at a time that preceded the Messiah. But if someone already believed John to somehow be a fourth member of the Godhead, then what John said could be used as evidence supporting that belief. The point is that the only reason someone would say that Jesus' being "sent" by God meant that he was God or was pre-existent in heaven would be if he already held that belief. The words themselves do not say or mean that.

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

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

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

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

6:62. This verse does not refer to the ascension but to Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead. See *One God & One Lord*.

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

When this verse is understood in its context, it is a powerful testimony of how closely Jesus walked with his Father. First, there is nothing in the context that would in any way indicate that the word “beginning” refers to the beginning of *time*. Jesus had just fed the five thousand, and they said, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world” (6:14). Right away that tells you that the people did not think Jesus was *God*, but a prophet. The people wanted to make Jesus king, but only because he filled their stomachs (6:15, 26). When he challenged them to believe in him (6:29), they grumbled (6:41). As Jesus continued to teach, the Jews began to argue among themselves (6:52),

and even some of Jesus' disciples began to grumble at the commitment Jesus was asking from them (6:60, 61). Jesus, knowing his disciples were upset with his teaching, did not back off, but rather pressed on, even saying that he knew some would not believe (6:64). The result of this discussion was that some of his disciples left him (6:66). It is telling that the disciples left him at a time when Jesus was asking for their personal commitment. The fact is, and always has been, that some believers are more than happy to hang around as long as you do not ask much of them, but when they are required to give much of themselves, then they leave. Jesus taught that in the Parable of the Sower, when he said that some believers leave as soon as persecution arises. [For more on this verse not supporting the Trinity, see Don Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*, p. 215]. **6:65. "no one is able to come to me, unless it is given to him by the Father."** This is a restatement, in different words, of verse 44, and a reflection of verse 37 (see commentary on John 6:37 and 6:44). God is always trying to draw people to Him. We can understand why God has to draw people to Him in order for them to come to Him. Of course, He cannot, and does not, act against a person's free will, but when they want to come to Him, they need His help. For one thing, God is spirit. He is invisible and immaterial, so people who come to Him have to get some guidance as to how to do it. For another thing, people who believe and strive to live godly lifestyles are fighting against their sin nature, which is pushing them toward selfishness and a self-centered lifestyle. People can become selfless and God-centered in their lives, but it takes a diligent effort and some help from God. Thirdly, there is the spiritual battle that we need help from God to fight. The Adversary is always trying to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), to oppress and ensnare people (Acts 10:38; 1 Tim. 2:26), and pervert the ways of God (Acts 13:10). Since the Adversary is constantly working behind the scenes to keep people from God, God has to be constantly working behind the scenes to make a way for people who want to come to Him to do so. With all that is working against people being godly, if God were not working to bring people to Him, they could not come, which is why it makes perfect sense for Jesus to say, "no one is able to come to me, unless it is given to him by the Father."

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

hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.” (John 3:19, 20).

6:68. “words of life.” The possibilities for understanding this genitive are multiple. The genitive of relation would make the phrase, “words relating to life,” or “words about life.” Also, the genitive of production would make the expression say, words that produce, or lead to, life in the Age to come. This record is associated with the feeding of the 5,000, which is Matthew 14, and before Peter declared that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16). So although Peter may not have been certain Jesus was the Messiah at this time, he still knew that Jesus had the words that were about, and led to, life in the Age to come.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

6:70. “a Slanderer.” “Slanderer” is a name for the Devil. The Greek is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word *diabolos* means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. Jesus was using a name for the Devil to import that meaning into the text. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

Chapter 7

7:1. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

7:5. “for not even his brothers believed in him.” Jesus’ brothers were James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matthew 13:55). It is an amazing truth that Jesus’ own brothers did not believe he was the Messiah, and there is no evidence that any of them did until after his resurrection (cp. Acts 1:14; 15:13; 1 Cor. 15:7). In fact, it is possible that one of the reasons for Jesus going to Galilee after his resurrection was to see his family. We know Jesus went to Galilee after his resurrection, and met with many people there, apparently including one meeting in which were more than 500 people (cp. Matt. 28:7, 10; Mark 14:28; John 21:1; 1 Cor. 15:6. It is assumed that the meeting with more than 500 took place in Galilee because on the Day of Pentecost, only about a month later, there were only 120 disciples gathered in Jerusalem. In contrast, it seems that Jesus could have gathered more than 500 in Galilee).

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

One of the reasons we know that none of Jesus’ brothers believed that he was the Messiah until after his resurrection was at the crucifixion Jesus told the Apostle John to take care of Mary his mother, and he told Mary that John would take care of her (he did this by saying to John, “Look! Your mother.”) Jesus would have only done this if Joseph, Mary’s husband and Jesus’ step-father, was dead, and if none of Jesus’ brothers were considered to be an appropriate caretaker to Mary. Since Mary was a believer of great

faith, it would not have been in her best interest to be taken care of by her children who did not even believe their brother was the Messiah she claimed him to be. Their consistent refusal to believe that Jesus was the Messiah in spite of what he and Mary no doubt did to try to convince them would have made them inappropriate caretakers for Mary [For more on this, see commentary on John 19:27].

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

7:6. “right time.” The Greek word is *kairos* (#2540 καιρός), here meaning the right or proper time. Jesus had a mission from God, and a “right time” to go to Jerusalem. Nyland (*The Source New Testament*), catches the meaning in her translation: “It isn’t the right time for me yet—but for you, any time is right!”

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

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

7:8. “I am not going up to this feast because my time is not yet fully come.” Jesus said he was not going up to the feast, but then he went. There is an apparent contradiction here, which is solved by understanding the subject being discussed. The brothers wanted him to go up to the feast to make him known as the Messiah because they did not believe in him (v. 5). He was going, but not as they asked, i.e., to make himself known as Messiah.

7:10. “as if.” There is a textual debate surrounding the originality of the particle *hos* (#5613 ὥς) in this verse. *Hos* means “like,” “as,” or “as though.” Some translations such as the NASB keep it in the text, “He Himself also went up, not publicly, **but as if**, in secret” (emphasis added); others leave it out: “he went also, not publicly, but in secret” (NIV). The textual sources that include the “as if” are better, but the transcriptional probability of *hos* being added is also very likely; the evidence is divided (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*). We believe the particle is original, however. It is not that Christ went to feast in secret, but his late arrival at the feast was *as though* he came in secret; that is, everyone else had already arrived and he came in *like* one who would come in secretly. The *hos* softens the meaning. After the roads had cleared, Jesus came so as not to make a show of himself to the world as his brothers would have liked (vv. 3-8).

7:11. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

7:13. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

7:15. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

7:16. “My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

“that sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

7:18. “of one who sent him.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

7:28. “on my own.” Greek is *ap’ emautou*, literally, “from myself.” The word *ap’* is a contracted form of the preposition *apo* (#575 ἀπό), which in this case indicates the idea of *agency* [see Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. Jesus is saying he does not stand as his own representative; he is not an agent, as it were, sent from himself, but rather it was the father who sent him. To communicate this denial of self-agency, the NET translation reads, “on my own initiative,” and that is the general idea of the verse, but we thought just saying, “on my own” communicated well.

“he who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

7:29. “he sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

7:33. “to the one who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

7:35. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

7:37. “Now on the last day, the great day of the feast.” The Feast of Tabernacles started on the 15th day of Tishri (the seventh month—usually in our September) and lasted 8 days (Lev. 23:34-36). Although there are several scholars who feel that the last and great day of the feast is the seventh day, most scholars feel that the last and great day

was the final day, Tishri 22, which was a special Sabbath like the first day. As a special Sabbath, it was a specially appointed time of gathering (a solemn assembly, Lev. 23:36). **7:38. “The one who is believing in me,...out of his belly...”** This is the figure of speech, Anacoluthon, in which the flow of a sentence is abruptly changed (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*).

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

“as the Scripture has said.” This phrase does not have to be a formula for a direct quotation from the Old Testament (there is no such verse), but rather an introduction of scriptural thought, i.e., the essence of what Scripture teaches. As long as what is being spoken reproduces the essential meaning of the biblical text, it is “as the scripture has said.” Modern preachers and teachers do this all the time. They say, “The Bible says...” but give the essence, rather than a quotation. Isaiah 58:11b states, “You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.” Zechariah 14:8 mentions that living waters will flow from Jerusalem, and it is thought by many that Jesus was relating this to what he was saying, because that verse was one of the traditional readings at the Feast of Tabernacles. The Scripture foretold that the spirit would be poured out into the believer (cp. Isa. 44:3-5; 59:21; Joel 2:28, 29; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26, 27; 37:14). Jesus here adds that the ones who receive the spirit of God are those who believe in him.

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

“Out of his belly.” Theologians have disputed whether or not “his” refers to the Messiah or the believer. In the Old Testament, God was the fountain of living water, the source of spiritual and physical sustenance, and Christ then became the source of holy spirit after he was glorified. However, the Greek text naturally refers “his” to the believer, not the Messiah (cp. Lenski, C.K. Barrett). Although the believer is the most obvious “him,” it is not impossible that the Messiah is also being indirectly referred to. In John 4:14 Jesus speaks of spiritual water, and makes the point that he is the source, although it comes “springing up” (NASB) or “gushing up” (NRSV) from within the believer.

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

7:39. “as yet there was no spirit.” The Greek text says “...for as yet there was no Spirit...” This clearly shows that the gift of holy spirit in the Millennial Kingdom, which Christ knew about and understood, was going to be so completely different from the gift of holy spirit that God gave in the Old Testament that the promised holy spirit did not exist yet. We have today what was promised to Israel. The obvious presence of holy spirit in the Old Testament and people’s not realizing that this “spirit” was the gift of God that would be different in the Millennial Kingdom (and for us) than it had been in the Old Testament, had a serious consequence. Wanting it to “make sense” to them, men who copied the Bible added to this verse as they copied it. Therefore, among the thousands of Greek texts in existence, there are several different later renditions, among them that the spirit “was not yet given,” “was not yet upon them,” and “not yet came.” See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 218.

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

Although the Christian Church was a sacred secret, hidden in God and not foretold in the Old Testament, God has given the Christian Church the gift of holy spirit that He promised to give in the Millennial Kingdom. Thus in Acts and the Church Epistles this new holy spirit is sometimes referred to as “the promised holy spirit (Eph. 1:13; cp. Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:23).

When a person believes Jesus Christ is Lord, he is “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3, 23; Titus 3:5; James 1:18), and what gets born inside the Christian is this new gift of holy spirit. [For more on the holy spirit and new birth, see Appendix 1, “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”].

7:53-8:11. A lot has been written from a textual point of view about the record of the woman caught in adultery. Every indication is that it was not part of the original text. The oldest and best manuscripts do not include it. Furthermore, it is absent from a diverse number of manuscripts from different manuscript families (see Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on The Greek New Testament*)

One of the signs that shows scholars the record is not original is different scribes put it in the Bible in different places. For example, in the Greek manuscripts that do have the record, it occurs in four different places in John, and even occurs in the Gospel of Luke. If the record were original but taken out of some manuscripts by zealous scribes who did not like the idea of Jesus letting adultery go unpunished, the manuscripts that still contained the record would always have it in the same place. That the record of the woman caught in adultery occurs in different places is very good evidence it is not original.

Very importantly, the record breaks the flow of Jesus’ presentation in the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. This is the most compelling reason for removing the record from John 8 and moving it to the end of the book of John, and why we do so in our version. Jesus began his teaching in John 7 during the Feast of Tabernacles, which was the longest of the three feasts of the Mosaic Law that every Jewish male was commanded to attend (Exod. 23:14-17). By the first century, many people did not journey to Jerusalem three times a year, which was a three-day walk from Galilee. Many people would come only one time a year, and if they lived much further, not even that often. When they would make the journey for the Feast of Tabernacles, it often made sense to stay for the entire festival season, which, in the Jewish calendar, was longest in the month of Tishri (our September/October). The month of Tishri had the Feast of Trumpets (Tishri 1), the Day of Atonement (Tishri 10), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Tishri 15-22). After the Feast of Tabernacles, the festival season came to a close and people started to return home.

Jesus started his powerful presentation in John 7 inside the Temple, about midway through the Feast of Tabernacles (7:14) by confronting the Jews about trying to kill him and saying to judge rightly (7:17-24). He was accused of being demon-possessed (7:20).

On the last and most important day of the Feast (7:37), Jesus taught about holy spirit coming to those who believed in him (7:37). This caused some to believe he was the Christ (7:41) and the Jews to try to arrest him (7:45-52). Undaunted by the apparent danger, Jesus continued to try to wake up the huge crowd that would be gathered at that last day of the Feast. He told them he was the light of the world (8:12), and was contradicted at every turn by the Jewish leaders. Finally, he addressed those who believed in him about being his disciples and being set free (8:31) while directly confronting his Jewish adversaries and telling them plainly they were from the Devil (8:41-47). The intense debate continued until the Jews finally picked up stones to kill Jesus, and he left the Temple area (8:59). There is no way to tell how large the crowd would have been who heard Jesus reveal in quite clear ways that he was the Messiah, but it would have been well into the thousands.

If John 7:53-8:11 is left in place, then it ends the Feast of Tabernacles, and begins a new “regular day” at the Temple (John 7:53-82). Thus, not only is the debate between Jesus and the Jews interrupted, but the huge crowd that would have heard him speak about being the Messiah and how the Jews were of the Devil would have not been present because they would have gone home the day before. Thus, we feel compelled to do more than just put the record of the woman caught in adultery in brackets, but to move the record to the end of John to preserve the powerful presentation of Jesus on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

In spite of the textual evidence that the record was added, we keep it in John because it has all the earmarks of being a true story. It is likely that it was an amazing event in Jesus’ life that was well remembered by his followers and at some point written down and then inserted into the Gospel of John (and Luke), but scribes could not agree where to put it.

Chapter 8

8:1-11. See commentary on John 7:53 above.

8:9. “in the midst.” At first reading this phrase seems to contradict the context, which says the accusers left. However, the accusers were not the only people at the scene. One can just imagine how the religious leaders brought the woman to Jesus and thrust her toward him saying she had been caught in the act of adultery, and demanding to know how he would judge the case. In short order these vicious men would have formed a circle or semicircle around Jesus, each wanting to hear exactly how he would answer them. Behind these men onlookers and curious people would gather, mixed with the disciples of Jesus. When Jesus answered the religious leaders and they melted away one by one, the outer circle would still remain and thus the woman and Jesus, though left alone from the accusers, would still factually be “in the midst” of the crowd.

8:11. “do not sin any more.” The record of the woman caught in adultery is sometimes quoted to show that the death penalty that God commanded in the Old Testament is no longer valid, and we should not use it. It is argued that since Christ forgave a criminal (an adulteress) we should forgive the criminals in our society. However, when we take the time to study the record, we can see why Jesus said, “Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

First, it is easy to prove that the religious leaders who brought her to Jesus were not interested in justice. Jesus was not a judge in Judea, especially not of capital cases. Capital cases were tried by the Sanhedrin, the ruling counsel of the Jews. Therefore Jesus had no recognized legal authority to render judgment on the case. That leads us to ask, “Why did the Jews bring the woman to Jesus in the first place?” John 8:6 answers that question—to have something with which to accuse him.

Secondly, the religious leaders were themselves breaking the Mosaic Law by bringing the woman without the man with whom she committed adultery. The Law of Moses clearly said that both the man and the woman were to be executed (Lev. 20:10 and Deut. 22:22). If this woman was caught “in the act” of adultery as the Jews stated, then why did they not bring the man too? The answer is obvious: the woman was set up. For those reasons, Jesus knew that this was a trap, and not “justice” in any sense of the word.

The Jews had indeed formed a clever trap. The Romans had forbidden them to execute people (John 18:31), so if Jesus said to stone the woman, the Jews would have had Jesus arrested for breaking Roman law. However, if Jesus said not to stone her because the Romans forbade it, then the Jews would have defamed him for elevating Roman law over Mosaic Law. It seemed that no matter what Jesus said, he would “lose.”

Jesus got out of the trap by convicting the people’s consciences, which in this case was made easier by the fact that the accusers knew in their hearts that they were willing to take this woman’s life just to trap Jesus. The Jews were already almost certainly guilty of conspiring to commit adultery and also the sin of perjury in the situation, which in a capital case meant getting the penalty of the crime—in this case, death (Deut. 19:16-21). Had Jesus led a mob and stoned the woman based on their testimony, they would have also been guilty of murder. It was obvious from Jesus’ answer to them that he had figured out their sin, and challenged them, saying if they were without sin they could cast the stone; and so one by one they left until there were no accusers left. That is a very important fact, because according to Mosaic Law there had to be eyewitnesses if someone were to be executed. In fact, the witnesses had to cast the first stone (Deut. 17:6, 7). Since Jesus was not a witness, he, by law, could not condemn the woman.

Although Jesus could not legally condemn the woman according to the demands of the Mosaic Law, he nevertheless knew she was in trouble because of her wayward lifestyle, and so he warned her to leave her sinful life. If she did not, not only would she incur the wrath of God on Judgement Day, but at some point she was likely to get caught and executed for her adultery. Thus he said to her, “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

A careful reading of this record with a knowledge of the Mosaic Law and the Roman law in force at the time clearly reveals that this record has no bearing on whether or not there should be a death penalty today. Jesus did not simply excuse a criminal, he prevented a perversion of justice. The Romans executed many criminals during the life of Jesus, and there is no record of him ever trying to intervene in the criminal justice system in any way.

8:12. “the light.” Jesus referred to himself as “a” light in John 9:5 and 12:46 (Greek text; cp. YLT). He reflected the light of God, and knew that other people who reflected the light of God into the world were also lights. The only time Jesus referred to himself as “the” light is John 8:12, and when we read what he said in its context, we understand why he did that.

Jesus said he was “the” light while speaking at the Feast of Tabernacles (also sometimes called “the Feast of Booths,” John 7:2), which is one of the three feasts that the Law of Moses said the Jews were to attend each year (Exod. 23:14-17;ESV). The Feast of Passover occurred in the spring, the Feast of Pentecost occurred in the summer, and the Feast of Tabernacles occurred in the fall, usually our September. The way it was celebrated at the Time of Christ, the Feast of Tabernacles was an eight day feast, and the Feast of Tabernacles that is recorded in John 7 and 8 was the last of the three major feasts of Exodus that Jesus attended before he was killed at the Passover Feast the next year.

In the record in John 7 and 8, Jesus was trying to reveal that he was the Messiah, but was doing so in a way that those with an open heart would understand, while those with cold hearts would not. Jesus’ words and actions did indeed convince people, because day after day as the Feast progressed, more and more people believed in him. John 7:31

says “many in the crowd put their faith in him.” Then, John 7:41 says people declared, “He is the Christ.” Then, on the last day of the feast, John 8:30 says, “Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.” Thus, in the context of revealing that he was the Messiah, it makes sense that Jesus said he was “the” light of the world. He was not being exclusive and claiming to be the only light, he was claiming to be the major light, the promised Messiah.

The fact that Jesus said to the people, “you are the light of the world,” (Matt. 5:14) shows us that he did not think of himself as the only light. We all have the privilege and responsibility to reflect God’s light. In contrast to people and even the Messiah, who all reflect the light of God, God Himself is not “a” light, or even “the” light, God is “light” (1 John 1:5). In God is no darkness at all. He shines brilliantly and has done so forever.

“life.” Here the word “life” refers primarily to “life in the Age to Come,” which we can tell by reading the context. For example, verse 21 speaks of people dying in their sin. However the word life also has overtones of “life” now, life that is real life. Jesus came so that we would have everlasting life but also so that our lives now would be rich and meaningful (see commentary on John 5:40).

8:16. “for I am not alone in my judgment, but I and the Father that sent me.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

“the father that sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

8:18. “the Father that sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

8:22. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

8:25. “You—who are you.” The second person singular of “to be” makes the “you” at the beginning of the phrase emphatic. The Jews were asking and asking who Jesus was, but not accepting his answer (cp. 7:19ff; 7:30ff; 8:13ff). Jesus’ answer in this verse is difficult in the Greek, and Lenski writes, “The reply of Jesus constitutes one of the most disputed passages in the New Testament...” Nevertheless, Lenski gives an excellent explanation of it. First, *ten archen* does not have the force of “the beginning,” but rather “in general,” or “altogether” (Lenski; Thayer on *archē*). Second, the word *lalō* (from *laleō*) is a present active, although almost all versions translate it as a past tense. Christ was telling the Pharisees who he was even as they were asking him who he was, so he answered, “I am what I am [presently] telling you.” Christ had just told them (v. 12) that he was the light of the world, an obvious Messianic reference (“a light for the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:6) and the glory of Israel). Because they did not know that Jesus was speaking of the Father (v. 26) then they certainly did not understand that he, the one sent by the Father was obviously the Messiah.

8:26. “he who sent me is true.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

8:28. “lifted up.” This refers to the crucifixion, as is clear from that fact that Jesus says, when “you” (Jews) have lifted up the Son of Man.” The reason there is any confusion at all is that there is no evidence in the writings that have come down to us from antiquity that the term “lifted up” was used of crucifixion. However, that does not mean it was not used that way, or it may have been that Jesus was being purposely obscure, which he sometimes was.

“then will you know that I am *the one*.” The sentence should end after “one” (or “he” if the translation is “that I am he”). “The one” refers to the one whom they were expecting: the Messiah. There is no connective, such as “that,” between that statement and the next one, even though the major versions (KJV; HCSB; ESV; NIV; NRSV; etc.) all put one in the text. D. A. Carson writes, “Probably we should read a full stop after “I am.” In the next words, nothing in the Greek text corresponds to the NIV’s ‘that.’” Rather, Jesus goes on to say, ‘And I do nothing on my own...’ recapitulating the argument of 3:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:16; etc.” (*The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*). Other scholars agree, cp. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*.

Lenski (*The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*) points out that the word “know” is an ingressive aorist, and means “come to know” The “then” is not tied to the immediacy of the crucifixion, as if as soon as Jesus was crucified the Jews would know he was the Messiah, but to the whole context. We approach Jesus’ words as they are written, but we must remember that they were spoken in a quickly moving and tense verbal context. Thus the Jews “coming to know,” or “coming to realize” that Jesus was the Messiah was tied to his crucifixion and what would happen after it, all of which are part of the context of Jesus’ statement.

“And I do nothing of myself.” A new sentence starts with the word “And.” When deciding how to punctuate a verse, we must be sensitive to the grammar, context, and scope of Scripture. In this case, Jesus continues a theme that he taught over and over in John, that he had not come on his own and that he was not acting on his own initiative or from his own power (cp. 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:16, 28, 29; 12:49, 50). Thus this verse is a continuation of something he had been teaching all along. Furthermore, there is no compelling to connect the two halves of the verse. The verse makes much more sense, and flows with the teaching of Jesus, to have it read as two separate sentences. Then also, the last sentence in the verse flows seamlessly into the next verse, verse 29.

This verse, and the other verses mentioned above that are similar to it, show the dependency that the Son had upon the Father. This is very good evidence that Jesus is not God in the flesh, but the Son of God. Even Jesus’ statement to the Jews, that he was “the one,” reflected back to the Messiah they were expecting, and they were expecting a human being, a man from the line of David. If Jesus were God, and especially if a person had to believe that to be saved, this was a perfect time for Jesus to say so. Instead, he said he was the Messiah the Jews were expecting.

8:29. “and he who sent me is with me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different

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

“for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28

8:42. “came from God.” God created Jesus when he was conceived in Mary. [For more explanation of the phrase that Jesus came from God, see commentary on John 6:38].

“but he sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

8:44. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word *diabolos* means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

8:48. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

8:51. “see death.” This is an idiom for “die,” and in this case “see death” is used idiomatically for experiencing “everlasting death.” Jesus is not saying that a person who keeps his word would not die in the flesh, but that he would not die an everlasting death. The words “live” and “life” were sometimes used of everlasting life (see commentary on Luke 10:28), and the words “die” and “death” were sometimes used of everlasting death, as is the case here in John 8:51.

8:52. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

8:53. “Surely.” The “surely” is implied by the *me* (not) which expects a negative answer.

8:54. “He is our God.” Early manuscripts say “He is our God,” and early manuscripts say “He is your God.” It is more likely that the “our” was changed to “your” as the scribes would not like to possibly imply that the Jews were saying that God was Jesus’ God also. The punctuation that makes the reading clear was not in the early texts.

8:57. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

8:58. “I am the one.” Trinitarians argue that this verse states that Jesus said he was the “I am” (*i.e.*, *Yahweh*, the God who revealed Himself to Moses in the Old Testament), so he must be God. Saying “I am” does not make a person God. The Greek that is translated as “I am” is *egō eime*, and it was a common Greek way to identify oneself. For example, only ten verses after Jesus said, “I am,” the man who Jesus healed who had been born blind identified himself by saying exactly what Jesus said; *egō eime* (“I am,” John 9:9). Thus, Jesus and the man born blind both identified themselves by *egō eime* (“I am”) only ten verses apart.

Sadly, unless a person looks at the Greek text, he will never see that “I am” was a common Greek way to identify oneself. In what seems to be a clear case of Trinitarian

bias in translating the Greek text, when Jesus says, *egō eime* (“I am”) in John 8:58, our English Bibles read, “I am.” But when Jesus says *egō eime* in other places in the New Testament, or other people say *egō eime* (“I am”), the Greek phrase gets translated differently. So, for example, some English translations of what the man born blind said are: “I am the one” (or “I’m the one;” CJB; HCSB; NASB; NET); “I am he” (BBE; ERV; KJV; YLT); “It is I” (Darby); and, “I am the man” (ESV; NIV). The only English Bible we know of that has “I am” in John 9:9 is the New American Bible.

There are many other examples of the phrase *egō eime* (“I am”), being translated as “I am he” or some other similar phrase. Jesus taught that people would come in his name, saying “I am,” and will deceive many (Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8).

Jesus said *egō eime* (“I am”), in a large number of places, but it is usually translated “I am he,” “It is I,” or “I am the one,” which are good translations because *egō eime* was used by people to identify themselves. Examples of Jesus using *egō eime* include: John 13:19; 18:5, 6, and 8; Jesus identifying himself to the apostles on the boat: Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50; and John 6:20; and Jesus identifying himself to the Jews, saying *egō eime*, translated “I am the one I claim to be” (NIV84, John 8:24 and 28.). These translations where Jesus says *egō eime* but it is not translated “I am” shows that the translators understand that just saying *egō eime* does not mean you are claiming to be God.

At the Last Supper, the disciples were trying to find out who would deny the Christ. They used *egō eime* as the standard Greek identifier. Jesus had said one of them would betray him, and one after another they said to him, *mēti egō eime, Kurie* (literally, “not I am, Lord;” Matt. 26:22 and 25.) The apostles were not trying to deny that they were God by saying, “Not I am.” They were simply using as the common personal identifier *egō eime* and saying, “Surely not I, Lord”

In Acts 26:29, when Paul was defending himself in court, he said, “I would to God, that . . . all who hear me this day, might become such as I am [*egō eime*].” Obviously Paul was not claiming to be God. There are more uses of the phrase “I am,” and especially so if we realize that what has been covered above is only the nominative singular pronoun and the first person singular verb than we have just covered. The point is this: “I am” was a common way of designating oneself, and it did not mean you were claiming to be God. C. K. Barrett writes:

Egō eimi [“I am”] does not identify Jesus with God, but it does draw attention to him in the strongest possible terms. “I am the one—the one you must look at, and listen to, if you would know God” (*The Gospel According to St John*, p. 342).

A major problem that occurs when we misunderstand a verse is that the correct meaning goes unnoticed, and that certainly is the case with John 8:58. If the phrase *egō eime* in John 8:58 were translated “I am he” or “I am the one,” like all the other places where Jesus says it, instead of coming to the erroneous conclusion that Jesus is God, we would more easily see that Jesus was speaking of himself as the Messiah of God who was foretold throughout the Old Testament.

Trinitarians assert that because Jesus was “before” Abraham, Jesus must have been God. Jesus did not literally exist before his conception in Mary, but he “existed” in the plan of God, and was foretold in prophecy.

It is also worth noting that many people misread John 8:58 and think it says Jesus saw Abraham. We must read the Bible carefully, because it says no such thing. It does not say Jesus saw Abraham, it says Abraham saw the Day of Christ. The text does say that Christ was before Abraham, but that does not have to mean Jesus existed literally as a person before Abraham. We did not have to literally exist as people for God to choose us before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), we existed in the mind of God. Similarly, Jesus did not exist as an actual physical person during the time of Abraham, but he “existed” in the mind of God as God’s plan for the redemption of man.

A careful reading of the context of the verse shows that Jesus was speaking of “existing” in God’s foreknowledge. John 8:56 says, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.” This verse says that Abraham “saw” the day of Christ (the day of Christ is usually considered by theologians to be the day when Christ conquers the earth and sets up his kingdom—it is still future). That would fit with what the book of Hebrews says about Abraham: “For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). The Bible says Abraham “saw” a city that is still future. In what sense could Abraham have seen something that was future? Abraham “saw” the day of Christ because God told him it was coming, and Abraham “saw” it by faith. Although Abraham saw the day of Christ by faith, that day existed in the mind of God long before Abraham. Thus, in the context of God’s plan existing from the beginning, Christ certainly was “before” Abraham. Christ was the plan of God for man’s redemption long before Abraham lived.

Jesus did not claim to be God in John 8:58. In very strong terms, however, he claimed to be the Messiah, the one whose day Abraham saw by faith. Jesus said that before Abraham was, “I am the one,” meaning, even before Abraham existed, Jesus was foretold to be the promised Messiah. Jesus gave the Jews many opportunities to see and believe that he was in fact the Messiah of God, but they were blind to that fact, and crucified him.

Some other sources that comment on John 8:58 and conclude that Jesus’ using “I am” did not make him God are: Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*; Mary Dana, *Letters Addressed to Relative and Friends Chiefly in Reply to Arguments in Support of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1845; available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship); Charles Morgridge, *The True Believer’s Defence Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians* (1837; available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship); Andrews Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*; Don Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*; Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition?*
8:59. “they picked up stones to throw at him.” The Jews were so arrogant that they thought if anyone was the Messiah they would know it, so they considered it blasphemy and worthy of death if someone claimed to be the Messiah. Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, so they picked up stones to kill him.

Trinitarians claim that the Jews picked up stones to stone Jesus because he was claiming to be God (John 8:59), but that is an assumption. There is a different explanation that is supported by better evidence: the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus because they understood he was claiming to be the Messiah. At Jesus’ trial, the High Priest asked, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). First of all, we should notice that no one at the trial asked Jesus if he were God. However, if they thought he had been claiming to be God, that

would have certainly been a question they would have asked. At the trial the High Priest asked Jesus in very clear terms if he was the Christ because that is what the Jews knew Jesus was claiming to be. Second, when the Jews heard Jesus' clear answer ("Yes, it is as you say"), they accused him of blasphemy and said, "He is worthy of death" (Matt. 26:66). They felt he was worthy of death in the record in John 8, but in that record they picked up stones to kill him, while after hearing his "blasphemy" at the trial, they took him to Pilate and got the Romans to execute Jesus. It was technically illegal for the Jews to execute anyone, but in times of great emotion the law was sometimes ignored. That would have happened in John 8 if Jesus had not gone away, it almost happened to Paul in the Temple (Acts 21:31), and it did happen to Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:58-60).

Chapter 9

9:1. "And as he passed by." The record reads like Jesus just left the Temple and saw the blind man. It is possible, but not necessary, that that is what happened. The man was healed on a Sabbath day (9:14), and the last day of the Feast was a Sabbath. John 7:37 mentions "the last, the great" day of the feast, which most scholars believe is the eighth day of the feast, which, according to Leviticus 23:36 was a Sabbath. Thus, it is possible that Jesus simply left the Temple on that last day of Tabernacles and saw a man who was blind who had been brought there, likely to beg, much like the lame man in Acts 3. However, it is also possible that Jesus simply remained in Jerusalem after the Feast of Tabernacles and the record of the blind man occurred later, on another Sabbath.

9:2. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents." The Jews taught that the sins of the parents could cause a baby to be afflicted. However, the full question of the disciples seems very strange to us, because how could the man sin before he was born? The answer is not reincarnation or some form of transmigration of the soul (i.e., the person did not sin in an earlier life), but rather that that Rabbis taught that a person could sin even in the womb (Cp. John Lightfoot: *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*; and William Hendriksen: *New Testament Commentary: John*). If this man sinned in the womb so that he was born blind, then he would have then been born "entirely" in sin, as the religious leaders confidently asserted in verse 34.

"so that he was born blind." *Hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood result clause, see Matthew 2:15 entry, "resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled." The disciples assumed that someone's sin unintentionally resulted in this man's blindness. Jesus specifically rejects this thinking in verse 3. His response takes the disciples' thoughts away from who is to blame, and leads them to think only of working the healing works of God in this man's life.

9:3. "Neither did this man sin nor his parents." Here Jesus specifically refutes a common thought of his day, that a child could sin in the womb and bad things happen to people because of sin.

"let the works of God be revealed in him." This phrase is open to several different translations. The translator's understanding of the passage, how he believes it fits into the context and the scope of scripture, in accordance with his theology, will determine his opinion as to how it is best brought into English. The Greek reads, *hina phanerōthē ta*

erga tou theou en autō. The controversy surrounds the use of the particle *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) with *phaneroō*, the verb for “revealed” (#5319 φανερόω), in the subjunctive mood. The question is whether this use of *hina* with the subjunctive is to be understood here to indicate *purpose* or *command*. This same Greek construction can be used in purpose and command clauses, with purpose clauses being the more common of the two (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 471-72, 476-77). A purpose clause indicates *why* something happened, it shows the intention behind the action: e.g., “Children were being brought to him in order that he might lay [Greek = *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood] his hands on them and pray” (Matt. 19:13). A command clause, on the other hand, *issues an order* or *command*: e.g., “Come and lay [Greek=*hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood] your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live” (Mark 5:23). [For more on result clauses, see Matt. 2:15 commentary “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled”].

Because it is the same Greek form of *hina* with the subjunctive, there can be disagreement as to whether purpose or command is meant. This disagreement shows up in the varying translations of Mark 5:12 for instance, when the demons plead to go into the herd of swine. Some versions translate the second part of their plea as purpose, “Send us into the pigs *so that* we may enter them” (cp. NASB; HCSB; KJV; ASV), while most modern versions translate it as a command: “Send us into the pigs. *Let us* enter them” (cp. ESV; NIV; NRSV; NET; NAB; NJB). Interestingly, we see precisely the same split between the translations with regard to Titus 3:13, “see that they lack nothing” (command: ESV; NIV; NRSV; NET; NAB; NJB) as opposed to “so that they lack nothing” (purpose-result: NASB; HCSB; KJV; ASV). (See also Revelation 14:13 for similar disagreement between translations).

Since John 9:3 has *hina* with the subjunctive, we must ask whether it is meant to be a purpose or command clause. It is rendered as a purpose clause in most translations, “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (NRSV); however, this translation has serious consequences to the meaning of the text. It makes the man’s blindness intentionally brought upon, so that he could not see for the better part of his life, simply for the purpose of being healed this day—that “God’s works” may be manifest by his healing. Such an interpretation goes against the teaching of scripture, that God is love (1 John 4:16), has plans not to harm us (Jer. 29:11), and that it is Satan who is our enemy, the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) who has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), his ministry was to heal those oppressed by Satan (Acts 10:38). The Gospels nowhere portray this warfare mindset of Jesus as going about healing those *oppressed by God* (See Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 231-34).

Accordingly, a number of scholars agree that John 9:3 should be read as a command clause, “But let the works of God be revealed in him.” (see Boyd, *God at War*, pp.231-34; Boyd also notes M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, trans. J. Smith, pp. 141-42; C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed., pp. 144-45; Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament*, p. 145ff.) In this way, the Greek is understood just like Ephesians 5:33, which has the same construction: “let [Greek=*hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood] the wife see that she respects her husband.” [For other command clauses see also: Matt. 20:33; Mark 5:23; 10:51; 12:19; 1 Cor. 7:29; 16:16; 2 Cor. 8:7; 2 Cor. 8:7; 1 John 3:11; 3:23]. This translation fits best with the

context of the verse, as well as the rest of the gospels and the scope of scripture. In the context, the disciples falsely assume that someone's sin resulted in this man being born blind. Jesus corrects this wrong thinking, saying it was not the result of anyone's sin, and then he points them to the proper response of seeing such a man. He models what he came to do—to destroy the work of the devil and heal those oppressed by him—“Let the works of God be manifest in him,” he says, showing compassion for the man. Then he turns to his disciples and reminds them that they must work the works of God while it is day. Rather than painting a picture of a capricious God who makes a man blind for the purpose of healing his blindness, this passage reveals the son of a loving God, who makes the works of his Father manifest by healing a man oppressed by the devil.

There are two other grammatical options for understanding this verse, which we feel are less likely than the command clause but are worth mentioning here. First, it is also possible that Jesus' words should read as a result clause. On this understanding the verse would not be speaking of the purpose of the man's blindness, but only of its result, “he was born blind with the result that the works of God are manifest in him.” This understanding, like the purpose clause reading, requires that the phrase, “he was born blind” be supplied since it is not in the original Greek. This view has for it the fact that the disciples used a result clause in verse 2, asking Jesus whose sin resulted in the man's blindness. To this Jesus reverses their thinking from whose sin resulted in the blindness to how the blindness can result in the manifestation of the works of God.

Secondly, there is the option that the phrase is in fact a purpose clause, but nevertheless is not to be read that he was born blind for a purpose. Rather, it should be read with what follows. In that case it would read: “Jesus answered, “Neither did this man sin, nor his parents. But in order that the works of God be revealed in him, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.” But this is highly unlikely, for there is no other clear instance of a purpose clause gathering its main verb from what follows, usually the action comes from what precedes the *hina* clause not after. Romans 7:13 is a near parallel, but it is a result clause, not purpose.

9:4. “We.” There are texts that read “I,” but the better textual support is for “we.” It is understandable that the copyists, particularly early in the Christian era, would be uncomfortable with “we,” wanting to put all the focus and power upon Jesus. Nevertheless, the true reading is very empowering to those who work for the Lord. “We” must all work, if work is to get done for the Lord. The “night” that Jesus referred to would be during the Tribulation period, after the Rapture, when not much work will be done for God. That will be a dark time indeed.

9:5. “a light of the world.” Although almost every translation reads, “the” light of the world, the Greek text does not read that way. John 8:12 says Jesus is “the” light, but not this verse. In the context of “we” must work the work of God, Jesus is “a” light, and we are lights also. Believers have always been lights in the world, shining the way to God (Matt. 5:14).

9:17. “the blind man.” Here “the blind man” is used as a commonly known designation for the man. He was actually no longer “the blind man” since he could see.

9:18. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

9:22. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

9:34. “And they cast him out.” After at first not believing that he was blind (v. 18), because that would then give credit to Jesus for healing the man and doing a great miracle, the religious leaders now refer back to the fact that he was “born” blind, and accuse him and excommunicate him on that basis. The Rabbis believed that a person could sin while in the womb, and reap the result of that sin at birth (see commentary on verse 2). Because the man was born blind, the Jews assert that he was born “entirely” in sin, and was in no position to teach them anything. This is spiritual blindness and evil at its worst, yet it happens often in religious circles. It often happens that someone who is healed supposedly gets his healing “in the wrong way” or “from the wrong person” and is excluded from fellowship on that basis. The leaders ignore the healing that has occurred and hurt is piled upon hurt by supposedly well-meaning people.

9:38. “bowed down before him.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2. When he was healed, this man believed that Jesus was a prophet (v. 17). It is clear from the record that the man does not believe Jesus is God. He spoke of God not hearing sinners, but hearing this “man,” Jesus. Jesus, however, sought him out, and asked if he believed on “the Son of Man,” a Messianic title. The man answered, “Who is he, Lord (in this case, “Lord” is the cultural equivalent of “sir.”). When Jesus identified himself as the Son of Man, the man said, in clear terms, “I believe you,” thus accepting Jesus as the Messiah. At that point it would have been appropriate and cultural for him to bow (or fall on his face) before Jesus. This is where the exact action that accompanies *proskuneō* is not clear. What is clear is the act of homage the man paid to Jesus.

9:39. “will see.” The verb with “blind” and “see” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” instead of will. But the Greek conjunction *hina* is the reason the verb is subjunctive, (#2443, *hina*, ἵνα; usually translated “that,” “in order that,” or “so that,” but see commentary on Matthew 2:15). Thus, when *hina* is used, the verb must be translated according to the context, not strictly by the mood of the verb. Jesus says he came for judgment, which will mean that those who are blind will see, while those who say they see will be blind.

Chapter 10

10:1. “Truly, truly.” The Greek is *amēn amēn* (#281 ἀμήν). It was a strong affirmation or way of emphasizing what someone was about to say. In the three other Gospels it is not doubled, it is only, “truly I say to you.” However, it occurs 25 times in John and is always doubled. The doubling adds emphasis, and is technically the figure of speech *geminatio*, a form of *epizeuxis*. The figure *geminatio* occurs when the same word is repeated with the same meaning for emphasis with no words between the word that is repeated (see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*).

This teaching of Jesus is very much like a parable in that it contains many figures of speech and has many levels (thus it can be called a parable). It certainly was an illustration from everyday life in biblical times, and the sheepfold, shepherd, doorkeeper, and sheep would be familiar to everyone. Beyond that simplicity, the teaching becomes

complex, involving the figure metaphor (“I am the door,” etc.) and hypocatastasis (“sheep.” We learn from the scope of Scripture that “sheep” are believers).

A sheepfold was an open area in the countryside surrounded by a wall that was usually topped with interwoven briars and thorns so that wild animals and thieves could not get to the sheep inside. The folds were often quite large, and would accommodate several flocks at once. That is why it was so vital that the sheep knew the shepherd’s voice, who not only called to them, but often called them by name, as in this parable (10:3). As the shepherd called to his sheep, often in the early morning while it was still quite dark, the sheep would know the shepherd’s voice and leave the other sheep and go out with their shepherd (10:3). The sheep would not know the voice of a stranger, and so would never follow a stranger (10:5). The biblical shepherd went ahead of his flock, calling, speaking to them, or singing, and his sheep would follow him (10:4). This is in contrast to the Western shepherd, who herds his sheep in front of him, and follows them. The doorkeeper of the fold would let legitimate shepherds and hired hands in, but not allow unauthorized people to enter. The doorkeeper is not named in this teaching, but the scope of the teaching shows us it must be God.

This parable of Jesus has multiple layers of meaning. For example, Jesus is both the door of the fold, and the Good Shepherd. The multiple layers of meaning draw us deeply into the teaching, inviting us to spend time reading and re-reading the parable, considering all that it is saying to us. Because of the layers of meaning, it cannot be read once through and “simply understood.” Often the multiple layers of meaning are confusing to an unsaved or unspiritual person, who thinks the biblical writers should have written something simple and straightforward. They wonder, “How can Jesus be both the door and the Good Shepherd? How can the fold represent everlasting life and also just safety on this earth?” It is that kind of information that can be confusing that causes some scholars to call the teaching “nonsense” (cp. *The Gospel and Letters of John* by Urban von Wahlde). In reality, it is the profound Word of our Heavenly Father who loves us on multiple levels and wants us to explore that with Him as we read and pray.

The sheepfold represents two different things in the parable. The “fold” is everlasting life (“If anyone enters by me, he will be saved;” 10:9). However, it also is simply a place where the sheep can be safe, because they “go in and out, and find pasture” (10:9). It is easy to understand the two meanings, because while it is true that God’s sheep have everlasting life, they also need the guidance and support of the Good Shepherd right now, while they go in and out in life.

A point of the parable that we should not miss is that the thieves and robbers enter the fold by stealth, not to stay there and have everlasting life (if they wanted that, they would just enter by the door and be a sheep), but to get to the sheep. They come to steal, kill, and destroy (10:10), not to have everlasting life. They are thieves, robbers, strangers, and wolves (10:1, 5, 12). Often God’s people are naïve about how many thieves and robbers there are who do not love the flock, but by design or ignorance, hurt the sheep. Also, there are good people who try to shepherd the flock but who do it for reward, not out of love and devotion, and these “hired hands” do not adequately protect the sheep and thus contribute to their being hurt (10:12).

We can tell from the use of “thieves” in 10:1, that “the thief” in 10:10 is anyone who is trying to take the sheep away from the Good Shepherd, but it also certainly points

to that Great Thief, the Devil, who is ultimately behind all the attacks on the sheep. All those who work to destroy the sheep are doing the work of the Devil.

“fold.” The Greek is *aulē* (#833 ἀλή; pronounced ow-lay'). It was used in the time of the Greek poet Homer (c. 850 BC) to refer an uncovered space surrounded by a wall in which was the house and stables for livestock. So in the biblical culture it came to be used for a roofless area enclosed by a wall out in the open country in which flocks were kept at night, a sheepfold. It was also used for the uncovered court-yard of a house. Also, in the Septuagint it was used of the open courts of the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle), and the Temple in Jerusalem, and the New Testament uses *aulē* of the Temple courtyard as well (Rev. 11:2).

“door.” The Greek word is *thura* (#2374 θύρα), “door.” The meaning of “door” is just as we use it today, usually the door to a building, or room in a building. It was different from “gate” (Greek: *pulē*, #4439 πύλη; pronounced poo'-lay), which often referred to gates that opened into courtyards or wide areas (such as the gate of the Temple **10:4. “he goes before them.”** This is a custom of shepherds in biblical times. The Western shepherd drives his sheep, the Eastern shepherd leads them.

10:6. “veiled language.” The Greek is *paroimia* (#3942) and it occurs 5 times in the NT. It is “a brief communication containing truths designed for initiates, *veiled saying*, figure of speech, in which esp. lofty ideas are concealed” (BDAG Greek-English Lexicon). It is also translated “proverb” in 2 Peter 2:22.

10:10. “kill.” The word is from the Greek word *thuō* (#2380 θύω), meaning “to sacrifice.” Elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments it is used nearly exclusively to refer to the killing of animals (for ritual sacrifice or celebration). There were several other Greek words for kill (e.g., *apokteino*, *anaireo*, *diaxeirizomai*, *phoneuo*), so it is very telling that the Lord used this word to describe the Thief (the devil). The choice to employ *thuō* shows us that humans are just like animals to the devil, and he seeks to kill us with no regard, just like animals. (See Acts 10:13 for another interesting usage of this word).

10:11. “life.” The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that shows that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal. [For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

10:15. “life.” See commentary on John 10:11.

10:17. “life.” See commentary on John 10:11.

10:19. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

10:24. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“souls.” The Greek word translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē*

is used broadly, and means “us” (as it is translated in most versions), but the fact that “soul” is used and not just the Greek word “us” lets us know that these religious leaders were emotionally invested in getting an answer to their question. The Greek has *psuchē* in the singular, “our soul,” but in English we would say, “our souls.” Note how this section of John shows us some of the common uses of *psuchē*, because it refers to human “life” in 10:11, 15, and 17. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

10:26. “of my sheep.” This is the partitive use of the preposition *ek* (#1537 ἐκ) and the genitive case. The partitive usage indicates a part of some greater whole; in this case, Jesus denies that these Jews were a part of the larger group of “his sheep.”

10:28. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].]

10:30. “I and the Father are one.” Jesus and the Father operate in perfect unity, and it should be the goal of every Christian to be “one” with them, even as Jesus wanted us to when he prayed to God: “that they may be one as we are one; I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be perfected into one” (John 17:22, 23 *Young’s Literal Translation*).

There is no reason to take this verse to mean that Christ was saying that he and the Father make up “one God.” To be “one” was a common idiom, and in fact it is still used the same way today when two people say they are “one. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his ministry in Corinth, he said that he had planted the seed and Apollos had watered it. Then he said, “he who plants and he who waters are one” (1 Cor. 3:8 *KJV*). In the Greek texts, the wording of Paul is the same as that in John 10:30, yet no one claims that Paul and Apollos make up “one being,” or are somehow “of one substance.” Furthermore, the *NIV* translates 1 Corinthians 3:8 as “he who plants and he who waters have **one purpose**.” Why translate the phrase as “are one” in one place, but as “have one purpose” in another place? The reason is the translator’s bias toward the Trinity. But translating the same Greek phrase in two different ways obscures the clear meaning of Christ’s statement in John 10:30: Christ always did the Father’s will; he and God have “one purpose.” The *NIV* translators would have been exactly correct if they had translated both John 10:30 and 1 Corinthians 3:8, instead of just 1 Corinthians 3:8, as “have one purpose.”

Jesus used the concept of “being one” in other places, and from them one can see that “one purpose” is what he meant. John 11:52 says Jesus was to die to make all God’s children “one.” In John 17:11, 21, and 22, Jesus prayed to God that his followers would be “one” as he and God were “one.” We believe the meaning is clear: Jesus was praying that all his followers be one in purpose just as he and God were one in purpose, a prayer that has not yet been answered.

Sadly, the Trinitarian bias in reading John 10:30 has kept many people from paying attention to what the text is really saying. Jesus was speaking about his ability to keep the “sheep,” the believers, who came to him. He said that no one could take them out of his hand and that no one could take them out of his Father’s hand. Then he said that he and the Father were “one,” *i.e.*, had one purpose, which was to keep and protect the sheep. No wonder Jesus prayed that we believers be “one” like he and his Father. Far too many believers are self-focused and do not pay enough attention to the other believers around them. Cain thought he did not have to be his brother’s keeper, but we should

know differently. If we are going to be “one” like God and Jesus are “one,” then we need to work hard to help and bless God’s flock [For more information on “I and the Father are one,” see, Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Christianity’s Self-inflicted Wound*, p. 289-291; Frederick Farley, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, 1873, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 60, 61; and Charles Morgridge, *True Believer’s Defense Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians*, 1837, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship, pp. 39-42.]

10:31. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

10:33. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“defaming words.” The Greek noun is *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. See “defaming words,” 10:36. [For more on *blasphēmia*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

“a god.” The Greek word *Theos* (2316 θεός), God or god, does not have the definite article and should be translated “a god” or “divine.” Since the Jews would never believe a man could be Yahweh, and since it was common in the Aramaic and Hebrew to call an important man “god,” that is the way we translated it. [For a much more detailed explanation on the words for “God” being used of God’s representatives, see commentary on John 20:28 and Hebrews 1:8].

10:34. Quoted from Psalm 82:6.

10:36. “him whom the Father made holy and sent into the world.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

“You speak defaming words.” The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. The religious leaders thought it was defaming and insulting to God that Jesus would refer to himself as the Son of God. [For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

10:38. “come to know and continue to know.” The Greek verb, used twice, is *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω). The first *ginōskō* is in an aorist tense active voice and here means, “come to know,” or “get to know.” The second *ginōskō* is in the present tense, active voice and refers to an ongoing knowledge, “continue to know.” Lenski’s commentary has, “that you may come to realize and go on realizing.” The force of the two verbs is expressed more idiomatically, but correctly in *A Translator’s Handbook to the Gospel of John*: “that you may know once and for all...” Most modern versions say something similar to “know and understand,” using “understand” to express ongoing knowledge, but there is a fundamental difference between knowing something and understanding it. Also, there is the fact that it would not just be one work that would convince people that Jesus was the Christ, but ongoing works that could be seen and believed, thus continuing to reinforce the knowledge that Jesus was the Christ.

“the Father is in union with me, and I am in union with the Father.” This is the use of “in” that refers to the sense of sphere and relation, which some Greek grammars refer to as the “static *en*.” It often refers to being in a relationship, and that is certainly true with the phrase, “in me” and “in the Father.” The preposition *en* (#1722 ἐν), like all prepositions, has many different meanings, depending on the context. In fact, the BDAG Greek-English lexicon says of *en*:

“The uses of this preposition are so many and various, and often so easily confused, that a strictly systematic treatment is impossible. It must suffice to list the main categories, which will help establish the usage in individual cases.”

What BDAG is saying is that there are so many meanings of the preposition *en* (“in”), that we need to get an understanding of its major uses and then we can gain a feel for how it is used in specific places. The important meaning of *en* for the study of these verses in John and the many other verses that speak of us being “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” “in him,” etc., is that it signifies a close association or relationship. The BDAG Greek-English lexicon says:

“Especially in Paul or Johannine usage, [*en* is used] to designate a close personal relation in which the referent of the ἐν-term is viewed as the controlling influence: *under the control of, under the influence of, in close association with*...In Paul the relation of the individual to Christ is very often expressed by such phrases as ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ], ἐν κυρίῳ [in the Lord], etc.,...*in connection with, in intimate association with, keeping in mind*.”

In light of what the BDAG Greek-English lexicon is saying, some of the ways the preposition *en* can be translated include, “in connection with,” “in association with,” or “in union with.” When two people (or groups of people) are “in” one another, they are in relation to each other, and the degree of intimacy and connection is defined by the context and scope of Scripture. Thus, for example, in John 10:38, Jesus speaks of the Father being “in” him and he “in” the Father, which is certainly a very close relationship. Some time later, during the Last Supper, Jesus again says he is “in” the Father and the Father “in” him (John 14:10, 11). Then Jesus developed his teaching to show that because the Apostles follow Jesus he can say, “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (John 14:20).

When Jesus says to the Apostles, “you in me, and I in you,” he is using the same wording that he used when he speaks of being “in” the Father. In fact, Jesus prayed in John 17:21 that people will believe so “that they also may be in us” (in the Father and Jesus).

A study of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper shows that he placed a lot of emphasis on he and the Father being “in” each other (John 14:10, 11, 20; 17:21, 22), and similarly taught about the disciples being “in” him and he “in” them (John 15:4-7). Thus, just as God and Jesus have an intimate relationship and are in union with one another, so God, Jesus, and believers are to be in an intimate relationship with one another. This

intimate relationship is expressed by the word “fellowship” in 1 John 1:3, and according to that verse our fellowship, i.e., our full sharing and intimate joint participation, is to be with each other, God, and Jesus. Thus 1 John 1:3 expresses by the word “fellowship” what the Gospel of John expresses by the word “in.”

Another word in John that expresses the union and fellowship between God, Jesus, and the believer is the word “one.” Jesus said that He and the Father were “one” (John 10:30), meaning one in purpose, unified, in intimate relationship with each other. The Jews were offended at his statement, but he explained it by saying he was “in” the Father and the Father “in” him (John 10:38). Jesus expanded what he said about He and his Father being “one” at the Last Supper, when three times he prayed about the believers being “one” just as God and Christ were one. He prayed, “that they may be one, just as we are” (17:11), and “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, *are* in me and I in you, that they also may be in us” (17:21), and “so that they may be one, just as we *are* one; I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one” (17:22, 23). It is clear from all the uses of “one” that Jesus and God being “one” does not refer to them being “one God and of the same essence,” but rather one in purpose.

That the word “in” is referring to a relationship, a very close relationship, is clear from Jesus elucidating his teaching by using the same vocabulary and speaking of a branch being “in” a vine: “Remain in me, and I *will* in you. As the branch is not able to bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine...” (John 15:4). The branch is not “inside” the vine, nor is “in” referring to being of the same mystical essence. It is a simple truth that the branch is in union with the vine; in an intimate relationship with it and united for the same purpose: to produce fruit. Similarly, God and Christ are in an intimate relationship and are in union with each other, and believers are to be in union with them in their hearts and minds.

A few English versions make the relationship between God, Christ, and us somewhat clearer by translating the *en* (in) as “in union with,” or “unified with” instead of simply “in.” So, for example, in John 10:38, Charles Williams’ translation reads, “the Father is in union with me and I am in union with the Father” (he also uses “in union with,” rather than just “in” in other places in John). The New Testament translated by Edgar Goodspeed also uses “in union with” in John 10:38; 14:10, 11, 20; and “united with” in John 15:4, 5, 6, 7). The Complete Jewish Bible by David Stern also reads, “united with” instead of just “in” in John 10 and 14. The New English Bible uses “united with” in John 14:4. The point is that when the Bible says that the Father, Jesus, and believers are “in” each other, or being “one,” it refers to being in a relationship with each other; being in union with each other.

After the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost, and salvation via the New Birth became available, the Church became “in” Christ, “in union with” Christ, in an even more powerful way. Christians have the blessings they have by virtue of being united with Jesus Christ (see commentary on Ephesians 1:3).

Although the concepts of “in” and “one” in John 14-17 are very simple and point to a close relationship, the concepts are greatly complicated by the doctrine of the Trinity. According to the Trinity, Jesus and the Father are “one God,” so when the Bible says they are “in” each other and “one,” Trinitarians have to give these words a mystical meaning and say they refer to God and Jesus being unified in essence and one-and-the-same being. However, that understanding of “in” and “one” can come only when those words

are taken away from the straightforward reading of the whole Gospel, especially the narrative of the Last Supper, and a pre-conceived understanding of the Trinity is read into the verses.

God being in Christ, Christ being in the disciples, the disciples being in Christ, and the branch being in the vine, should all have the same meaning in the same teaching. If we simply read the entirety of Jesus' teaching, using all the verses that use the same Greek construction with "in" to guide our interpretation, the conclusion is an easy one. God and Christ are "in" each other and want the disciples to be "in" them; and God and Christ are "one" with each other and want the disciples to be "one" with each other and "one" with them. God, Jesus, and the disciples should be in close relationship with each other.

Another difficulty caused by Trinitarian doctrine is that in John 17 Jesus prays that the disciples "may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us... that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one" (17:21-23). We should pay attention to the fact that when Jesus prayed, "that they may be one **even as** we are one," the words "even as" are the translation of the Greek word *kathos* (#2531 καθως), which means "in the same manner," "in the same way." The only way all the disciples can be "one" is if they are united in heart and mind, and since Jesus was praying that the disciples would be unified "in the same manner" in which he and God were unified, we can know that Jesus was united with his Father by being of the same heart and mind. There is no difficulty here unless it is created by Trinitarian doctrine.

Meyer, himself a Trinitarian, confirms that the unity being spoken of in John is a unity of the heart and mind. He says that the unity referred to in John 10:38 is not "essential unity," as in the Trinitarian understanding, which Meyer identifies as the "old orthodox explanation," but rather it is a "dynamic unity." He identifies this "dynamic unity" as "nothing else than that of inner, active, reciprocal fellowship" (*Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament*). [For more on "in" and the relationship it refers to, see commentary on Ephesians 1:3]. (The Greek preposition *eis* can have the same meaning as *en* and refer to a relationship; see commentary on Romans 6:3).

Chapter 11

11:3. "friend." The Greek is the verb *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω), "to be a friend to." It is hard to translate the verb *phileō* in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we translated quite literally, which is simply not the way we would talk in English, we would have to say, "He who is your friend is sick," and understand the verb to be "is your friend."

Jesus had a special attachment to Lazarus. For a similar construction see commentary on "is a friend to," in John 5:20, and for a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see the commentary on John 21:15.

11:4. "is not ending in death." The Greek has an unusual construction here. The Greek phrase πρὸς θάνατον would literally mean something such as "with a view to death," as if you could translate it, "This sickness is not with a view to death." The point was not that Lazarus would not die, because in fact he was already dead (see commentary on John 11:6). The phrase means that the final result of the sickness would not be death. Jesus

already knew he would raise Lazarus from the dead, something he plainly stated in 11:11. Newman and Nida write: “The Greek expression ‘this sickness is not to death’ means that ‘death will not be the final result of this sickness’ (*A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of John*). While Newman and Nida say “final result,” Robertson (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*) and Vincent (*Vincent’s Word Studies*) both say death would not be the “final issue.” H. Meyer translates the phrase: “it is not to have death for its result.” Also, the verb is in the present tense, although that makes it hard to translate into English without it being awkward English. Thus some translations read, “will not” end in death, while the REV attempts to keep the present tense verb and also communicate that the phrase is speaking of an ultimate result: thus, “is not ending in death.”

Jesus knew Lazarus was dead when the messengers arrived to say he was sick, something we learn by putting the record together, understanding the context, scope of Scripture, and geography. Nevertheless, he did not tell people that, but worded his statement in a way that was true without revealing what he knew. He did not say Lazarus would not die, what he said was that the final result of the sickness would not be death. If the messengers returned to Mary and Martha and told them exactly what Jesus had said, they could have rested in hope that no matter what happened to Lazarus, he would live.

If we translate the phrase, “This sickness will not end in death” (HCSB; NIV); or “This sickness will not lead to death” (ESV; NET), we can see what it is saying when we realize that Jesus knew Lazarus was already dead. For Jesus to say the sickness would not end in death when Lazarus was already dead was a way of saying he would raise Lazarus from the dead.

Some commentators think that Lazarus did not die until after the messengers left Jesus and headed back to Bethany, and Jesus knew that by revelation that Lazarus had just died and stayed where he was for two more days. It seems more likely, both from when the messengers would have arrived where Jesus was, and what Jesus said, that Lazarus was already dead when the messengers arrived.

“but to the glory of God.” The sickness would result in God’s being glorified. That does not mean God made Lazarus sick; no verse says that. God does not make people sick just to make them well. As to the preposition *huper*, it can mean “to do or suffer anything” (Thayer). [For more on how God was glorified, see commentary on John 11:6].

“glorified.” The Greek word is the verb *doxazō* (#1392 δοξάζω pronounced dox-ad'-zo), and it refers to glory: i.e., holding in honor, show and acknowledge the dignity, power, and worth of someone. It is related to the noun “glory,” which is *doxa* (#1391 δόξα). In the Greek and Roman culture, the idea of “glory” also often contained the idea of power or might, and that is the case here. It is not just that raising Lazarus from the dead would show Christ’s dignity and worth, but that it would also reveal that he and God have the power to raise the dead after an extended period of time, which the disciples needed to be completely convinced of, because they had to believe that Jesus could come back from the dead after he had been in the grave three days and nights (see commentary on John 11:6, “stayed two more days.” For more on glory being associated with power, see commentary on Romans 6:4).

11:5. “loved.” The Greek verb is *agapaō* (#25 ἀγαπάω), and is very important here. *Agapē* love (agapē is the noun form), is a love that often runs against the feelings. God so loved that He gave His Son when He did not want to. Christ so loved he gave his life when he did not want to. We are told to love our enemies. In this case, Jesus knew he had

to follow the guidance he was being given by God even though his absence was very hard on Mary and Martha. Nevertheless, Jesus loved them with *agapē* love, and did the difficult, but loving, thing, following the revelation he got from the Father. Lazarus was already dead, and the people needed to be completely convinced that God could raise the dead even after three days (as to why four days were important, see commentary on John 11:6)

11:6. “so when.” The Greek phrase *hōs oun* that starts this verse should be translated as “so when” as many modern versions do (cp. BBE, HCSB, ESV, NET, NIV, RSV); or with a “therefore,” as “When, therefore,” or “Therefore, when” (cp. ASV, Darby, NASB, Rotherham, YLT). Although almost all versions end verse 5 with a period and start verse 6 as a new sentence, the text does not have to be punctuated that way. The Greek connective *oun* ties the two verses together. The point of verses 5 and 6 is so counterintuitive that it grabs our attention and requires study, reflection, and prayer. They say that it was because Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus that he stayed where he was for two more days. But how can that be? There are several reasons, but a major part of the record is that when he heard from the messengers that Lazarus was sick, he also knew by revelation that he had already died (see commentary on “stayed two more days” below).

“stayed two more days.” When we piece together what we know about the character of God and Christ, the geography of the area, the four-day time period involved, and the beliefs of the people at the time, we can see both why Jesus knew Lazarus was already dead when the messengers arrived and told him Lazarus was sick, and also why Jesus waited two extra days to raise him from the dead.

As to the character of Christ, that he walked in love and would never let a person die from sickness if it could be prevented, nothing needs to be said. If Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick and could have arrived in time to keep him from dying, he would have left immediately to help him. However, it seems most likely that sometime around the arrival of the messengers, shortly before they arrived or just as they arrived, God let Jesus know Lazarus was already dead. That kind of revelation is quite in character with the entire Gospel of John. The first day that Jesus began to gather disciples he demonstrated that he walked with God by renaming Simon and calling him “Peter” (John 1:42), and very shortly after that he told Nathaniel that he saw him under the fig tree (John 1:48). John 2:25 says Jesus knew what was in people, and many other verses in John highlight and confirm his walk by revelation (cp. John 4:17, 18; 5:19, 20; 6:6, 70; 7:16; 13:10, 11, 38). God telling Jesus that Lazarus had died explains why he did not immediately leave for Bethany. F. F. Bruce writes: “...Lazarus must have died shortly after the message was dispatched, and Jesus knew that he had died” (*The Gospel & Epistles of John*). Leon Morris concurs, and writes that the “therefore” (or “so when” as the REV translates it) that opens verse 6, “cannot mean that Jesus deliberately waited for Lazarus to die. Indeed, the death must have already taken place when the messengers arrived” (*The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel according to John*). J. Dongell writes: “Lazarus must have died almost immediately after the messenger left to find Jesus. The delay of Jesus, then, was not designed to permit Lazarus to die” (*John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*). Newman and Nida write that “verses 17 and 39 suggest that Lazarus was already dead at the time Jesus received the message” (*A Translators Handbook on the Gospel of John*).

As to the geography and the timing of the four days, we do not know exactly where Jesus was staying. John had been baptizing at “Bethany” beyond the Jordan (John 1:28) and the exact location of that place was unknown. However, it is most likely close to the Jordan river across from Jericho (see commentary on John 1:28). Since the other Bethany, the town of Lazarus, was east of Jerusalem, it would not have been a full day’s journey to go from where Jesus was staying to where Lazarus was buried. Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus arrived. Leon Morris succinctly writes: “The four days are accounted for by allowing a day for the journey of the messengers, the two days that Jesus remained where He was, and a day for Jesus’ journey.” In the culture of Palestine, burials occurred the same day as the person died, and by the time Jesus arrived Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days (John 11:17).

A vital final thing we need to understand in order to understand the record is why Jesus would stay where he was for two more days. The answer to that question comes from the beliefs of the people. Rabbinic literature from after the time of the New Testament shows that the rabbis taught that the soul hung around the body for three days looking for an opportunity to re-enter it, but when decomposition set in on the fourth day, the soul left (cp. Leviticus Rabba (Rabbinical commentary) 18.1 (Leviticus 15:1)). Although that particular rabbinical commentary post-dates the New Testament, Jesus purposely staying away from Bethany for four days is good evidence that the belief was in existence at the time of Christ.

Even though Lazarus died close to the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, the death and resurrection of Christ was still unknown to the Apostles and disciples. Jesus had told them over and over about it, but they just could not grasp it. The cultural belief that the soul would not re-enter the body after 3 days would have made Jesus’ resurrection very hard for some people to believe. That Jesus raised Lazarus after four days would confirm to people that God could raise the dead even if they had been in the grave for four days.

Jesus’ powerful miracle of raising Lazarus showed that God could raise the dead even after four days, and helped people, even the Apostles, believe in the resurrection. This is clear from 11:15: “I am glad I was not there [to heal him] so that you may believe.” The raising of Lazarus did something besides get people to believe Jesus was the Messiah and believe in the resurrection. It was because of the miracle of raising Lazarus that the enemies of Jesus went in high gear in their plans to kill Jesus.

Jesus’ miracle in raising Lazarus after he had been dead was so great, and so undeniable, that many of the Jews believed in him (John 11:45). In contrast to those pure-hearted Jews, the religious leaders realized if they let Jesus go on doing miracles, “everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our Place and our nation” (John 11:48). Then Caiaphas prophesied that it was better for one man to die than for the nation of Israel to perish (John 11:50-52). The result of all this was that from the very day that Jesus raised Lazarus, “from that day on they made plans to kill him” (John 11:53). It was only a short time later, at the time of the Passover, that their plans were fulfilled, and Jesus was crucified.

It was Jesus’ delay to go to Lazarus that made the raising of Lazarus so amazing and undeniable, and started the intense religious fervor to arrest and kill Jesus. Jesus had said that Lazarus’ death was “to the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it,” and now we can see the fullness of what he meant. The death and resurrection opened the door for God to be truly glorified by giving His only Son and

providing for the salvation of mankind so that anyone who believed could have everlasting life.

11:9. “twelve hours in a day.” At the time of Christ, in both Jewish and Roman reckoning of time, the “day” was divided into 12 hours. Also, both the Jews and Romans divided the night into four “watches,” each being three hours long. (See commentary on Mark 6:48).

Jesus was obviously making a point in John 11:9 and 10 when he spoke about the hours of the day, but he did not explain it so there are many opinions about what he meant. We believe that here, like in many other places, Jesus is using something physical to make a spiritual point, actually more than one point. There are 12 hours in a day, and Jesus’ “day” was running out. He would soon die in Jerusalem. After Jesus’ day was over and he was gone, we would be left to “see in a mirror, darkly,” and would stumble (1 Cor. 13:12). Furthermore, Jesus knew that “night is coming, when no one will be able to work” (John 9:4). After the resurrection and ascension, people would not see clearly and stumble, and eventually the time of the Antichrist would come with its full darkness, when even the believers would be handed over to evil (Dan. 7:21; Rev. 13:7).

While it is “day” there is light, but the light is not “in him” (v. 10), it comes from outside him, from God. Jesus could go back to Judea even though the Jews were trying to kill him because he walked in the light, i.e., by the revelation God gave him. Thus it also seems clear that part of the meaning of what Christ said was that by walking by revelation a person could be safe even in situations that were normally very dangerous. This would turn out to be a good lesson for the disciples after Jesus’ ascension when they were being hunted by the authorities.

11:11. “fallen asleep.” The Greek verb is *koimaō* (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

“to awaken him.” In the Greek, the *hina* phrase indicates purpose and is also the reason the verb is subjunctive mood. But Jesus was not going so he “may” awaken him, he was going “to awaken him,” so that is the better translation here.

11:12. “fallen asleep.” See commentary on John 11:11.

11:13. “sleep.” The Greek word is *hupnos* (#5258 ὕπνος), “sleep.” Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

11:15. “rejoice.” The Greek word is *chairō* (#5463 χαίρω), which usually means “rejoice.” Although “glad” is within the semantic range of meanings of *chairō*, it did not seem to carry the full meaning of what Jesus was feeling, and perhaps even seemed too smug. It was a difficult time, emotionally. Jesus knew he was very close to his death, and his friend had just died and the family he loved was obviously very hurt. Yet we can have joy and rejoicing in those times because of what we see lies ahead. He was not happy about the death of Lazarus, or the four days he would wait to raise him from the dead, but he rejoiced for the disciples and that what happened to Lazarus would help them to believe in his own resurrection.

“that you may believe.” Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the grave after four days was clear proof that God could raise the dead even if they had been dead a long time. The historical evidence supports the fact that the rabbis taught that the soul (or spirit; life force) of the body hung around the dead body for three days, but by the fourth day, when decomposition had definitely started, it left and would not return. Thus, culturally, many

people would likely have rejected Jesus' resurrection solely on the basis that he had been dead for three days and nights. However, with Lazarus alive and among the disciples, that objection would melt away.

Although Jesus taught about his death and resurrection many times, the disciples just could not seem to grasp it until after the resurrection when Jesus opened their minds to the Scriptures. No doubt the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus helped the disciples believe in the resurrection, and also helped them witness about Jesus' resurrection after he ascended to heaven. [For more information on the disciples understanding Christ's suffering and death, see commentary on Luke 18:34].

11:16. “die with him.” Although Thomas generally has a bad reputation in Christian circles, verses like this one show he was a man of great devotion and courage. We do not know anything about the life of Thomas, but here he boldly declares that death with Jesus is better than life without him. So true; and such a wonderful spiritual lesson! Jesus taught that if we lose our life for his sake we will actually find our life.

Thomas was courageous, but his courage was based on misunderstanding. It seems clear that Thomas did not grasp that Jesus was the “Lamb of God” and had to die for the sins of the world (Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2), and he also was obviously ignorant of the fact that Jesus' atoning death was something that Jesus alone could accomplish. No one else, by dying with Jesus, could help with the atonement.

11:17. “found.” The Greek word is *heuriskō* (#2147 εὕρισκω), and means to find; come upon; discover for oneself; find by searching, or accidentally, or by thought and reflection; to “see;” discover, understand, experience. Jesus knew Lazarus was dead four days, but now he sees that fact personally for himself.

11:18. “fifteen stadia.” About 1 ¾ miles (2.8 km). The Greek word is *stadion* (#4712 στάδιον), and it a stadia is about 600 feet (185 meters); or 1/8 of a Roman mile. Thus the 15 stadia is very close to 1¾ miles. People who lived in Palestine and went to the feasts likely were very familiar with the distance, but people outside of Palestine were not, and the distance is likely given in the text to show us how close to Jerusalem Jesus went, and therefore how dangerous the situation was for him and the Apostles.

The description, “fifteen stadia,” would have let everyone know the distance from Bethany to Jerusalem. Historically, the one *stadion* race was very popular in the Greco-Roman world, and was one of the events in the Panhellenic Games, of which the Olympic Games was one of the games. In fact from 776 to 724 BC, the stadion race was the only Olympic event. This stadion race, this 200 yard sprint, was so prestigious that the “Olympiad,” the span of four years, was named after the winner of the stadion race. The *stadion* unit of measurement got its name from the place where the race was held, which then came into Latin and English as a place where events were held: a stadium (the Latin and English are spelled the same way).

11:19. “many of the Jews.” This is one of the several indications that Lazarus and his sisters were a wealthy and influential family. It was Mary who poured the ointment on Jesus that was worth 200 denarii, or about a full year's salary (John 11:2). It is not unlikely that some of the visitors were some of the “chief priests” that would soon try to kill Lazarus because of the witness he was to Jesus (John 12:10). These Jews were so willing to comfort the sisters concerning their dead brother, but they wanted him dead again when his living witness supported that Jesus was the Christ. This is the blindness

and nature of evil: it dismisses reality and does not mind even murder if it furthers its cause.

11:20. “Mary remained seated.” The records of Martha and Mary show that Martha is the more active and perhaps even the more aggressive one. She is often belittled because she served while Mary sat and listened to the Lord (Luke 10:38-42). But then we do not know how much private time they and their brother got to spend with Jesus, and how many people needed attending to when Jesus visited their home. In this record there is no indication that Jesus called for Martha; it seems to be her more aggressive nature that she would take the initiative to go see him. Perhaps Mary was affected more deeply by the death of her brother; she is the only one who is said to be crying (11:33). Perhaps Mary felt betrayed by circumstances. She, like Martha, believed that had Jesus been around when Lazarus was still sick that Jesus could have healed him and kept him from dying (11:21, 32). And Jesus had been around until just shortly before Lazarus got sick, but his confrontation with the Jews was so intense that they were seeking to arrest him (10:39), and so he had left and traveled beyond the Jordan, out of Judea (10:40). That kind of circumstance naturally leaves people with an “If only” mindset.

Martha’s faith shines clearly in the record as she declares that she knows her brother will be in the resurrection. By staying home Mary missed out on one of Jesus’ very powerful and oft-quoted statements: “I am the resurrection and the life.”

11:25. “life.” Here the word “life” refers to “life in the Age to Come, which is clear from the next verse, John 11:26.” See commentary on John 5:40.

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

11:26. “in the Age to come.” A translation of *eis ton aiona*, “to (and through) the Age.” The Greek word *eis* does not just mean *to*, but *fully into*, and in this case, by inference, *through it*. The preposition *dia* might have been used, but *dia* has the added meaning of through and passing out of (Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, Appendix #104.) No resurrected person dies in the middle of the Messianic Age. In the mind of Jesus’ audience, the Messianic Age that was to come was established on earth and lasted forever. The details of it coming to an end and an eternal kingdom following it were not revealed in the Old Testament (Cp. John Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope*).

11:27. “believe.” The Greek word *pisteuō* (#4100 πιστεύω), is in the perfect tense, active voice, which generally refers to something that started in the past and still is continuing. Martha’s believing that Jesus was the Christ seems to be a firm conclusion she had reached some time earlier and had not wavered in, thus Nyland (*The Source New Testament*) translates it “firmly believe.” On the other hand, it is possible that the perfect tense is being used for emphasis: “I do believe” or “I really believe.”

11:32. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Mary makes the same basic statement that Martha did, only the position of “my” in the Greek text is different. No doubt they had expressed the sentiment to each other many times, and both expressed it to Jesus (11:21, 32). But whereas Martha was more in control of her emotions, and enters into a dialogue with Jesus, Mary, upon seeing him, falls down at his feet crying.

11:33. “was deeply angered.” The Greek is *embrimaomai* (#1690 ἐμβριμάομαι), and it occurs 5 times in the New Testament. It has the overtone of anger or indignation, and can mean to sternly warn (Matt. 9:30; Mark 1:43) to harshly scold because of anger or indignation (Mark 14:5), or be moved with anger or indignation. Robertson (*Word*

Pictures in the New Testament) writes, “First aorist middle indicative of *embrimaomai*, old verb (from *en*, and *brimê*, strength) to snort with anger like a horse. It occurs in the LXX (Da 11:30) for violent displeasure. The notion of indignation is present in the other examples of the word in the New Testament (Mark 1:43; 14:5; Matt. 9:30). So it seems best to see that sense here and in verse 38. The presence of these Jews, the grief of Mary, Christ’s own concern, the problem of the raising of Lazarus—all greatly agitated the spirit of Jesus (locative case *tôi pneumati*). He struggled for self-control.” The New Living Testament translates this phrase, “a deep anger welled up within him,” which catches the sense very well. Most modern versions say something such as Jesus was “deeply moved.” However, to our modern ears this seems like a touching sympathy, not an anger and indignation about what the Devil had been able to do in the situation, causing such pain and hopelessness. When faced with the pain of the sisters and even some of the crowd, and the realization that they thought that Jesus could have saved Lazarus if he were just sick but could do no more once he died, a deep anger and indignation arose within Jesus. Often that is what happens to men and women of God who are faced with not only the effect of the Devil’s work (destruction and death) but also the fact that the people are confused and deceived and thus faithless and hopeless. A deep resolve born of righteous anger wells up, and the sword of the Lord is bared to do its work as the believer steps forth to do the will of God.

“**was troubled**” (*etaraxen heauton*). First aorist active indicative of *tarassô*, old verb to disturb, to agitate, with the reflexive pronoun, “he agitated himself” (not passive voice, not middle). “His sympathy with the weeping sister and the wailing crowd caused this deep emotion” (Dods). Some indignation at the loud wailing would only add to the agitation of Jesus.

11:35. “burst into tears.” The Greek word is *dakruō* (#1145 δακρῶ pronounced dack-roo'-ō). The verb literally means “to shed tears,” and thus means to cry or weep, and this is the only time it is used in the New Testament. The cognate noun, *dakruon*, which occurs ten times in the New Testament, is a “tear,” and the plural noun can refer to “tears” or “weeping.” *Dakruō* usually means to weep or cry quietly without loud wailing, and it means that here in John 11:35, and is in stark contrast to *klaiō* (#2799 κλαίω pronounced kly'-ō), which means to cry, weep, or mourn, usually with loud and open crying or mourning (John 11:31, 33). *Klaiō* occurs some 40 times in the New Testament.

Here in John 11:35 *dakruō* is in the aorist tense, active voice, and as such most likely means “burst into tears.” (cp. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*; also, C. K. Barrett; H. Meyer; Sanders). C. William’s translation renders it: “Jesus burst into tears.” In contrast, when Jesus got over the Mount of Olives and could see Jerusalem he “burst into sobs,” broke into audible crying. In Luke the Greek word is *klaiō*, while John 11:35 uses *dakruō*, but both verbs are in the aorist tense active voice, and refer to a sudden outburst of emotion. In Luke Jesus bursts into audible sobs, here he bursts into tears. Here he holds back his voice but experiences the deep emotion from the circumstances around him: the death of his friend, the pain of Mary and Martha, the misunderstanding of his Apostles, the ignorance and duplicity of the Jews.

Verses like this show us the true humanity of Jesus—that he was fully human and the Son of God, not God the Son. If he were God in the flesh he would have been better prepared for the situation and not, it seems clear, overcome with emotion. Indeed, Trinitarians have wrestled with this verse. Most point out that this verse shows Jesus’ true

humanity, but that glosses over the fact that he was also supposedly God. God would not have been so overcome by emotion. For that to happen Jesus' humanity would have had to have overridden his godhood, but how could that happen? So this verse has caused problems. Hippolytus of Rome (170-235) wrote that Jesus wept "to give us an example." Peter Chrysologus (c. 380 – c. 450), a bishop and doctor in the Church, wrote that Jesus did not weep out of human weakness, but "because he was welcoming him [Lazarus] back." Potamius of Lisbon, a bishop in the mid-4th century AD, wrote that one reason Jesus wept was to "moderate the sisters' outpouring of grief." Augustine (354-430) said that Jesus wept to teach us to weep. Basil of Seleucia (d. c. 460) taught that Jesus wept to set "a law with his tears...He defined the bounds of grief." (All examples from Joel Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*).

All of these explanations fundamentally deny that Jesus had true human emotions and was overwhelmed by them. But having strong emotions is not a sin, and not even a sign of weakness. Indeed, quite the opposite. Jesus' strong emotional reaction in the situation shows how deeply he was both in touch with how he felt (he did not have a head-heart disassociation problem), and that he had very deep emotions. No wonder Isaiah foretold that Jesus would be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3 ESV). Thus, in his sobbing and weeping, Jesus again sets a standard that we strive to emulate: having very deep feelings, but not losing control of ourselves in the midst of those feelings.

11:36. "was a friend to him." The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the verb *phileō* in this context and keep the English as a verb. Jesus had a special attachment to Lazarus. See commentary on John 5:20 and 11:3, on "is a friend to." For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see commentary on John 21:15.

11:38. "deeply angered." See verse 33. The anger that Jesus initially felt when he saw the pain and weeping of Mary and the Jews subsided (as emotions do) as they all walked to Lazarus' tomb. However, upon arriving at the tomb, the anger was rekindled.

11:42. "so they believe that you sent me." The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

11:48. "our Place." The word "place" was a designation of the Temple (see commentary on Matthew 24:15; *topos*.)

11:50. "People." This is a good example of the use of the word "People" as meaning the Jewish nation, "the Jews," hence the capital "P." See commentary on Matthew 2:4.

11:51. "Now he did not say this of himself." Before the Day of Pentecost God could place His gift of holy spirit upon people so that they would accomplish His work. This is a good example. Caiaphas, though not a godly man, was still High Priest and God placed holy spirit upon him at least so that he could give an accurate prophecy about Jesus, which then became a prime motivator for them to seek his death (see v. 53). This is an example of how God works in history to bring about His purposes without the need of perfect foreknowledge. God, by His power, can influence things He wants accomplished.

11:53. "plans." The middle voice of the verb indicates they worked together (cp. NASB).

11:54. "Ephraim." A city close to the Arabah desert, about 13 miles (20 km) NNE of Jerusalem. From here Jesus went north through Samaria, into Galilee, across the Jordan

River, traveled south through Perea, crossed the Jordan River again and came to Jericho, and then traveled west to Jerusalem. The Gospel of John omits this entire final itinerary of Jesus. See commentary on Luke 17:11.

11:56. “were seeking.” *zeteō* (#2212 ζητέω), “to seek.” The verb is in the imperfect tense, active mood, so the Jews were seeking Jesus. Caiaphas had given a prophecy that one man should die for the nation instead of the nation being destroyed, and so the Jews were now zealously seeking to kill Jesus.

“Surely he will not come to the feast?” The form of the question assumes strongly that Jesus will “absolutely not” (the Greek uses two negatives for emphasis: *ou mē*) dare to come this time (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). The translation in many modern versions loses the fact that the question expects a “no” answer. This shows that the people knew their leaders were trying to arrest and kill Jesus, and so they assumed that he would know that too, and not show up at Passover.

Chapter 12

12:1. “six days before Passover.” As Lenski points out in his commentary on this verse, when the Greeks counted, they counted backward from the termination, and the Passover fell on the 14th of Nissan (that was the day the lamb was killed at about 3 PM; the Feast of Unleavened Bread started the next day, the 15th, which was at sunset). That made six days before the Passover the 8th of Nissan, which was a Saturday.

This chronology poses a problem for those people who believe what tradition teaches, that Jesus was crucified on Friday, because it would mean that the simple and straightforward reading of the text would be that Jesus walked from Jericho to Bethany on the Sabbath, a distance of some 15 miles (24 km), far greater than the standard “Sabbath day’s journey,” (just over ½ mile or .8 km) allowed by the law the religious leaders enforced. This leads to some very inventive solutions.

A common solution is that Jesus walked almost to Bethany on Friday (within ½ mile or .8 km), and then walked into Bethany on the Sabbath. At face value, however, this is absurd. For one thing, there are no known good resting places on the downhill slope of the Mount of Olives that close to Jerusalem. The “Jericho Road” had an inn on it (cp. the parable of the Good Samaritan; Luke 10:34), but it would have been much further down the slope toward Jericho. But the real problem with that solution is that no one who has walked uphill for some 15 miles (24 km) would stop within a few minutes of their destination and friends and food. There would simply be no reason for such a halt.

Lenski, Hendriksen, and other commentators say that the Passover Lamb was killed on Thursday the 14th, so that day was “Passover,” and thus the Last Supper that Jesus ate with his disciples was the Passover. Then Jesus’ death was Friday, Nisan 15. In that scenario, six days before “Passover” (Thursday) was the previous Friday, and thus Jesus was free to travel on that day. Many commentators have a problem with that construction of events, and rightly so, because Jesus could not have been the “real” Passover Lamb if he was not killed when the Passover Lamb was being killed in the Temple.

It is suggested by some commentators that Jesus simply broke the Sabbath and acted in a similar way to when his disciples picked grain on the Sabbath. But this was very different. First, there was no law about eating raw grain on the Sabbath. You could not

light a fire and cook, but that was not what the disciples were doing. They were eating the raw standing grain just the same as they would have taken a drink from a flowing brook. Second, this time Jesus was accompanied by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of followers, and they would not have broken the Sabbath and would have doubted that Jesus was the Messiah if he had done so.

A more reasonable solution, but an unlikely one, is that the sun set just as Jesus was entering the Bethany area, which means he would have walked the last ½ mile to Bethany in the dusk on the Sabbath. The problem with that solution is its improbability. Jesus had left Jericho many miles and many hours earlier, and, as anyone who hikes long distances knows, it is very hard to judge any arrival time with much accuracy. Jesus and the people following him would have known that the next day was the Sabbath and allowed plenty of time for the journey, which could be made in one long day. The thought that Jesus and the people following him would have cut their timing so close and may have had to stop traveling and be stuck for the Sabbath day in the open only a mile or so from Bethany and Jerusalem is improbable in the extreme. People knew they could not travel on the Sabbath and made sure not to get stranded in a difficult place. Furthermore, if Jesus arrived on the Sabbath to Bethany, which was a small village on the east slope of the Mount of Olives, it is likely that a good portion of the people with him would have needed to go to Jerusalem to get food and lodging. But to do that those people would have to travel more than a Sabbath day's journey, because if they had already walked part of a Sabbath day's journey to reach Bethany, and so they could not go on to reach Jerusalem without breaking the law.

The “problem” caused by John 12:1 is not a problem at all. Jesus was crucified on Wednesday the 14th of Nissan, and his arrival in Bethany was six days earlier, Thursday, the 8th of Nissan. [For more information on the last week of Jesus' life, see commentary on John 18:13; 19:14; and Luke 23:50].

“**came to Bethany.**” He was traveling up from Jericho. This is clear from reading the record in John and comparing it to the other Gospels. [For more information of Jesus' travels in the last weeks of his life, see commentary on Luke 17:11].

“**out from among the dead.**” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

12:2. “So they made him a supper.” This event is out of chronological order, in John coming before Jesus enters Jerusalem (John 12:12), and in Matthew and Mark after he did. There is no problem with that, because the chronology is not being emphasized here, but rather that the people would have it on their heart to honor Jesus, and thus the supper is mentioned at the beginning of his last time in Jerusalem.

“**Martha was serving.**” The anointing occurred in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3), which is why John specifically says Martha was serving. If the supper occurred at the house of Mary and Martha that would never be stated because it would be obvious and expected.

“**Lazarus was reclining with him.**” Thus Lazarus is mentioned as an honored guest. This would never be mentioned if the supper was at Lazarus' house.

12:3 “pound.” A Roman pound was 12 ounces, three-quarters of our English pound.

“**Spikenard**” is a plant native to northern India and was a favorite perfume in the ancient world. The prefix “spike” refers to the shape of the plant. The best nard was imported from India in sealed alabaster boxes, which were only opened on special

occasions. The Roman historian Pliny commented on the expensive nature of Indian nard (Pliny; *Natural History*, 12. 24-26 [41-46]). For “perfume of pure nard” see Lenski.

“anointed the feet.” This record of Mary pouring the oil on Jesus occurs in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:1-8. The anointing occurred in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3), which is why John specifically says Martha was serving. If the supper occurred at the house of Mary and Martha that would never be stated because it would be obvious and expected.

At first glance there seems to be a contradiction between Matthew, Mark, and John, because Matthew and Mark say the ointment was poured on Jesus’ head, while John 12:3 says Mary poured the ointment on Jesus’ feet. The key is to realize that a flask of oil worth a year’s salary would be quite large, and covered both his head and feet. That is why Jesus said that the woman “poured this perfume on my body” (Matt. 26:12).

12:6. “money box.” The Greek word, *glossokoman* is from *glossa*, “tongue” and *komeo*, “to keep, to preserve.” It technically referred to a small box or container in which reeds for wind instruments were kept, but, as with all boxes, eventually all kinds of things are kept there. “Money box” is probably better than “money bag” since the reeds would never be kept in a bag.

12:7. “It was that she kept this *until now* for the day of my burial.” The similar records in Matthew 26:12 and Mark 14:8 are clearer, and from them we build the full meaning of this record. Lenski does a wonderful job. “...it was that...” see Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. We added *until now* for clarity’s sake. Versions such as the NASB, “...Let her alone, in order that she may keep it for the day of My burial...” make no sense—she had just poured out the oil, how could she now keep it? Or, “Leave her alone. *It was intended* that she keep this for the day of my burial.” In other words, she had intended to keep this for Jesus’ burial anyway, but had poured it out now.

12:9. “the common people of the Jews” This is the partitive use of the preposition *ek* (#1537 ἐκ) and the genitive case. The partitive usage indicates a part of some greater whole; in this case, it is a *part* of the whole group of Jews that have gathered in a crowd.

“out from among *the* dead.” See commentary on Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

12:10. “that they might put Lazarus to death...” This is religion at its worst. The religious leaders were willing to kill an innocent man to protect your power and doctrine. The Devil’s way is to steal, kill and destroy, and you know his followers by their fruit.

12:13. Quoted from Psalm 118:25, 26.

“Hosanna.” The people who were shouting praises to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem were for the most part not the same group as the group that shouted, “Crucify him” only a few days later. See commentary on Luke 23:21 and 27.

12:15. Quoted from Zechariah 9:9.

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

12:17. “meanwhile.” Cp. HCSB. The Greek word is *oun* (#3767 οὐν), it is understood to be used here as a continuation of narrative (BDAG, def. 2), which the translation “meanwhile” captures beautifully here.

“crowd.” This is the crowd (the multitude of people) who followed Jesus from Jericho, where Jesus had performed miracles such as healing blind Bartimaeus and his

blind companion (Matt. 10:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). It is different from the crowd in verse 18, who were the people who came out of Jerusalem to see Jesus when they heard he was approaching and went out to see and welcome him (John 12:12, 13). (There were two crowds that merged into one huge multitude as Jesus reached the top of the Mount of Olives).

“out from among *the* dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

12:18. “the crowd went and met him...” A different crowd than the crowd specifically mentioned in verse 17 (see commentary on John 12:17).

12:19. “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look!, the world has gone after him.” The religious leaders had been looking for Jesus to arrest him. They can find him now easily enough! But they dare not to take him.

12:20. “worship.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

12:25. “is overly attached to.” The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). Although most versions say “love his life,” in doing so we confuse *agapē* love (“love” in the REV) and *phileō* love. *Phileō* love has an attachment, and it is the attachment between good friends. However, we would not say, “If anyone is a friend of his life....” We could say, “is attached to his life,” but that would be confusing because there is an appropriate attachment to life that we must all have or we would commit suicide during difficult times. For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see the note on John 21:15.

“life” (first 2x). The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that shows that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal. [For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“life in the Age to come.” In this phrase, “life” is *zōē* (#2222 ζωή; pronounced zō-ā’), life, animal life that animates the body. This verse contrasts two words that are used for “life.” *psuchē*, soul, is used more broadly, while *zōē* is used more specifically of the “life” in man and animals. This verse could be translated: “Whoever is overly attached to his soul loses it, and whoever hates his soul in this world will keep it, resulting in life in the Age to come. “Life in the Age to come” is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

12:27. “troubled.” The Greek word is *tarassō* (#5015 ταρασσω), and it has a broad range of meaning, including, to trouble, agitate, disturb, make restless, stir up, be in fear or dread. This record in John occurs in the last few days of Jesus’ life, and Jesus was agitated and troubled in his soul. Man’s redemption was on the line, and his task was neither easy or fun. There were many details that had to happen exactly on time and as prophesied. The night of his arrest he was even more deeply troubled; see commentary on Matthew 26:38.

12:31. “ruler.” The Greek word is *archon* (#758 ἄρχων), which is from *archē*, “first,” and it means the one who is first, thus the “ruler, commander, chief,” etc. The Slanderer (Devil) is indeed the “ruler of this world.” Although most Christians believe that God is the ruler of the world, all we have to do is look around us at life to realize this world is not being ruled by God. God gave the world to Adam and Eve to steward (Gen. 1:28). In

the Fall, the Devil somehow took the control of the world from Adam and Eve. It immediately began to show the effects of the Devil's rulership both in the physical aspects of the world ("the ground is cursed" "it will produce thorns and thistles;" Gen. 1:17, 18), and in his effect over people (Cain killed his brother Abel and lied about it; Gen. 4:8, 9). The Devil told Jesus he had been given authority over the world (Luke 4:6). Furthermore, it is because the Devil is the ruler of this world and has authority over it that he could offer that authority to Jesus, and Jesus did not deny the Devil's claim (Luke 4:6). [For more on the power the Devil exercises as the "ruler" and "god" of this world, see commentary on 2 Cor. 4:4 and 1 John 5:19. For more names and characteristics of the Devil, see Appendix 14: "Names of the Slanderer"].

"of this world." The Greek word for "world" is *kosmos* (#2889 κόσμος), and it has a wide range of meanings in Greek, but here it just has a standard meaning of "world," the inhabited earth.

"Now the ruler of this world will be cast out." The Adversary had been able to go into heaven, into the presence of God (Job 1) when he wanted, and thus he "accuses them before our God day and night" (Rev. 12:10). However, before Armageddon, the Adversary will be cast out of heaven by Michael and his army (Rev. 12:7-10). The ruler of the world will first be cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:8 and 9) and then out of the world as we know it when he is chained in the Abyss (Rev. 20:1-3). Christ was anticipating that event not many years after his death. He did not know the Sacred Secret.

12:34. "We have heard from the law that the Christ will remain forever." In this verse, the people are using the word "law" in its broader sense of the entire Old Testament, not just the five books of Moses. The people correctly understood that when the Messiah finally set up his Kingdom it would last forever. What they did not see was that would happen the second time the Messiah came. The first time he would be killed, resurrected, then ascend to heaven. There is no verse that specifically says that the Messiah would live forever and not die. However, that doctrine was being taught, based on all the prophecies that his kingdom would never end, such as Psalm 110:4 ("You are a priest forever"), Isaiah 9:7; Ezekiel 37:25; Daniel 2:44; 7:14. There were Jewish teachings that the Messiah would die, so what the crowd is voicing here was not the only Jewish teaching, but was probably the predominant one, and the one that had to be overcome for the people to understand what happened to Jesus.

12:38. Quoted from Isaiah 53:1.

"with the result." The Greek is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood result clause, see Matthew 2:15 entry, "resulting in... what was spoken being fulfilled." For commentary on this passage see entry on Matthew 13:13. To fully understand this passage, we must see how Matthew's record portrays the human side of the events, John's the spiritual side, and Mark and Luke's records combine the two into one.

Their decision of unbelief resulted in the word of Isaiah being fulfilled. The decision to believe or disbelieve was the free choice of those present. Hence, the verse should not be translated as a purpose clause: "they did not believe in him, in order that the word which Isaiah the prophet spoke might be fulfilled..." (NAB). Those who were unbelieving did not intend on fulfilling the passage in Isaiah, neither did God overstep their freewill and control their belief with the purpose of fulfilling the word. Rather, this is a result clause, indicating that these Jews' unbelief, their own free decision of unbelief,

resulted in this passage's fulfillment. See also John 15:25 entry on "but let the word... be fulfilled" for a similar passage employing a command clause.

12:39. "for this reason." The reason refers to what was spoken in verse 37: they still did not believe in him. It was because of this persistent unbelief that they were hardened. See commentary below, and on Matthew 13:13.

"they were not able to believe." The people were "not able to believe" because they had allowed their hearts to become hardened to the possibility that Jesus could be the Messiah. They had let their interpretation of the Law blind them to the truth being revealed through Jesus' teaching and actions. For example, they decided that healing on the Sabbath was wrong, but God never said it was, and Jesus proved that it was not (Matt. 9:12-14; Luke 13:14-17). So when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, instead of being open to the possibility they were wrong, and adjusting their doctrine, they arrogantly held to their doctrine and concluded Jesus was a sinner (John 9:24). Eventually their hearts were so hard and blind that they were not able to believe based on the signs that Jesus did. When a person's heart becomes that hard, it takes much love and prayer to change it.

12:40. Quoted from Isaiah 6:10.

"he has blinded...hardened." Quoted from Isaiah 6:10. We need to realize this was a Semitic way of saying that God permitted the people to be blinded, and permitted their hearts to be hardened. This is the idiom of permission, just the same as Exodus 4:21. (Bullinger; *Figures of Speech*; "idiom"; see commentary on Romans 9:18). "Active verbs were used by the Hebrews to express, not the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do" (p. 823. Cp. *Don't Blame God*, chapter five).

Rotherham's Emphasized Bible translates Exodus 4:21 as, "...but I will let his heart wax bold [hard], and he will not suffer [allow] the people to go." Then his marginal note reads, "...the translation...is thoroughly justifiable on the two grounds (1) of the known character of God, and (2) the well-attested latitude of the Semitic tongues, which are accustomed to speak of *occasion* as *cause*." God has given mankind freedom of will, and when we make up our minds to do something, God respects the free will we have and allows us to make bad choices. That is why He so often in His word reminds us, even commands us, to make good choices. These people who were blinded and hardened had made a series of bad choices in their lives, and even held to their error when they could have repented and changed. However, not everyone was so hardened. Only two verses later (12:42) we read about leaders of the Jews who were not hardened and who believed on Jesus.

12:42. "even many of the rulers believed in him." This verse shows the great power of fear and of wanting success in this life. The versions are divided as to the wording of the verse. Some versions read as if the verse is saying "many people, including some of the rulers, believed in him" (NAB, NJB, NRSV), while other versions read like the verse is saying "many of the rulers believed in him" (HCSB, NET, YLT). The natural reading of the Greek text is that many of the rulers believed. However, that reading seems difficult to believe because we wonder, "If many of the rulers believed, why do we not see more evidence of it? Where is the support from these leaders that Jesus needed?" The answer to those questions is in the verse itself. These rulers loved their earthly life and positions of authority, and knew that if they openly confessed what they believed then they would lose their position in the synagogue and with it the glory of men they received every week. It is verses such as this that show us the Word of God is living and real, and as

relevant today as when it was written, for it is clearly true that many people in authority do not speak up about what they really believe because of fear of losing their earthly possessions or positions. Jesus Christ often tried to help people deal with earthly concerns, and told us to not be afraid of those who could only kill the body, but to fear God (Matt. 10:28). To those to whom much has been given, much will be required (Luke 12:48).

12:44. “Jesus had cried out and said.” The Greek sentence starts with the word *de*, which is often the signal of a new subject and left untranslated, as we have here (cp. CJB, KJV, NLT). John 12:36 said Jesus left the feast and was not in public, so he cannot now be speaking in public. Verses 12:44-50 are a continuation, and in a sense a summary of what he had spoken publicly. In that light, it is not correct to translate the *de* as “then,” as many versions do, for this is something that Jesus had said earlier, not a continuation of his teaching when at the feast. The verbs “cried out” and “said” are in the aorist tense in Greek, and thus in this context indicate something that had already occurred.

We could and should ask, “Why would God separate this part of what Jesus said from the body of his teaching, and place it alone by itself?” The answer seems to be that this summary is the “chewy caramel center,” of what he said, a very important and central point to his teaching.

“but in him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

12:45. “him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

12:46. “...a light.” Not just “light” as some translations have, although the Greek could be read that way. Jesus was “the light, and “a light,” because other prophets were light too (John 5:35).

12:49. “speak.” The English does not do justice to what is being communicated here. The difference between “say” and “speak” is that “say” in the Greek refers to the communication, the message, but “speak” can, in the range of the word, refer to the utterance itself. Thus, Jesus got even the tone of what he said from God (Cp. Lenski).

“for I did not speak on my own.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. [For more information on Jesus not speaking on his own, see commentary on John 8:28].

“the father who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. [For more information and in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57].

12:50. “His commandment is life.” The “commandment” is not in and of itself life, as if a person could have everlasting life by just knowing the commandments. This is the figure of speech Metonymy (metonymy of the effect), whereby the commandment is substituted by metonymy for believing and obeying the commandment, which is what produces the effect of having everlasting life (cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*). A similar example in common English is the saying, “knowledge is power.” Knowledge is not

power unless the knowledge is recognized for what it is and then properly applied. So just as “knowing and obeying” the commandment results in everlasting life, “recognizing and properly applying knowledge results in power.

Jesus had been saying that he was speaking on the authority of God, and teaching about believing and obeying what he was saying (12:44-47). The metonymy emphasizes the “commandment,” which is from God, instead of the believing and obeying, which is works that people do.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [For more information on the translation “life in the Age to come,” see Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

“the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has said to me.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

Chapter 13

13:2. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word *diabolos* means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

13:5. “began to wash the disciples’ feet.” This was much easier to do in Jesus’ world than it would be in the modern Western culture, for the people eating were reclining and their feet were very accessible.

13:18. Quoted from Psalm 41:9.

“let the scripture be fulfilled.” Judas was not fatalistically damned to fulfill this passage (see also commentary on John 17:12, “resulting in the scripture being fulfilled”). Rather than a purpose clause, “so that the scripture might be fulfilled,” the phrase should be understood as a command clause. [For more on command clauses, see entries on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him,” and John 15:25, “but let the word... be fulfilled”]. The HCSB translates this phrase as a command, but uses the word “must.” See comments on John 15:25 for why “let” is a better translation of the command clause. See also Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament*, p. 147-48 as cited in Boyd, *God at War*, p. 379.

13:19. “will believe.” The verb “believe” is in the subjunctive mood, but that comes from the *hina* (“so that”) at the start of the phrase that requires a subjunctive. Jesus was not telling the apostles things ahead of time just so they “may” believe,” but so that they will believe.

13:20. “him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

13:24. “nods” The Greek is clear, and means to signal with a nod of the head. “...to give a nod; to signify by a nod...followed by an infinitive of what one wishes to be done,” John 13:24; Acts 24:10. (From Homer down; the Septuagint Prov. 4:25) (Thayer). Peter was not close enough to John to whisper, and if he spoke it loudly, Jesus would have heard also. The intimate connection between Peter and John shows clearly here. Peter simply nods his head and John knows what he should do.

13:26. “piece.” The word “morsel,” used in many versions, in today’s English communicates a very good tasting bite of something. The Greek does not necessarily mean that the piece tasted good, just that it was a small piece. So we used “piece.”

13:27. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

Luke 22:3 tells us the Adversary entered in Judas earlier, and thus Judas had already gone to the priests to betray Jesus, which had started the process of betrayal. That was why Jesus says, “What you **are** doing...” In the Greek text, the verb “do” is a “conative present” (Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 880; cp. Lenski), thus it means “are doing.” Furthermore, the words usually translated “do quickly” should be translated as, “do more quickly.” Lenski writes, “The adverb *tachion* [“quickly”] is comparative and does not mean “quickly” (our versions) but “more quickly.” Robertson writes, “Sometimes the comparative form is used absolutely...that is because the context makes the point perfectly clear” (Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 664). Robertson goes on to say that Jesus’ statement to Judas may have well been the factor that caused Judas to act as quickly as he did, after all, it is clear from Scripture that Judas had been exposed in front of the other apostles: “Jesus testified and said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray me. It is he to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it.’ So when he had dipped the piece, he gives it to Judas” (John 12:21-26 abridged).

Jesus knew that he had to be the Passover lamb that year, which meant that Judas did have to move quickly. We do not know, but it well may be that Judas and the religious leaders might have preferred to arrest Jesus after Passover. After all, Jesus had touched the lives of many people all over Israel, and many of those people would be in Jerusalem for Passover. The possibility of a riot could have made an arrest at Passover less desirable than simply waiting a week until all the crowds were gone. But now that option was not available. Jesus had exposed Judas in front of the other apostles. Even though it is likely that the other apostles did not understand what Jesus meant when he spoke of being betrayed, Judas did, and the evil in his heart convicted him. He left the room immediately and arranged for Jesus to be arrested that very night.

13:31. “now is the Son of Man glorified.” Jesus was not yet literally glorified when this was spoken, yet in the Greek, the verb “glorified” *doxazō* (#1392 δοξάζω) is in the aorist tense, which would be well represented in English as “has been glorified.” This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect, when something that was absolutely going to happen in the future was spoken of as if it had already happened to emphasize the fact that the event was surely going to happen.

Robertson (*Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 847) points out that we know the two aorist “glorify” verbs in verse 31 refer to a future event because the verbs

are in the future tense in verse 32. We also know it is a prophetic perfect because the actual glorification did not occur until the resurrection, but Jesus' arrest and the process of his death leading to the resurrection started that night.

The prophetic perfect is a very common idiom, but translating it can be very difficult because if we translate it as a future event, true to facts but not representing the certainty of the original text, we lose what the actual text is saying and the certainty being communicated by the past tense, but the meaning is clear. Hence the NLT translation: "Jesus said, 'The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because of him.'" However, if we translate the verb as a past tense we risk confusing and reader and leading them to the wrong conclusion. [For more on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Ephesians 2:6].

13:32. "immediately." This is a hyperbole, an exaggeration (cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, "hyperbole"). It would be very soon.

13:34. "you also are to love one another." The Greek is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood command clause. For an explanation of this construction, see John 9:3 entry, "let the works of God be revealed in him."

13:37. "life." The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated "soul." The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it "life," which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that shows that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal. [For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, "soul," see Appendix 7: "Usages of 'Soul'"].

13:38. "life." See commentary on John 13:37.

"the rooster will absolutely not crow before you have denied me three times."

Jesus can make this statement, knowing that God would back him up. God backed up Joshua when the sun stood still (Josh. 10:14), and He backed up Samuel when he called upon Yahweh (1 Sam. 12:17). Our relationship with God and Jesus is one of fellow-laborers. We can make requests of God, and He can answer them (we should be praying, asking, all the time). Jesus could make this statement, knowing that God would honor it. It is not hard for God to make a rooster crow, or keep a rooster from crowing.

Chapter 14

14:1. "Continue to trust in God and continue to trust in me." This occurs in the shadow of Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, and the events of Christ's last night, when he will not look like the Christ at all, but rather appear to be conquered. So the Lord is not simply commending belief in God to disciples who already believe in God, but telling them of the necessity to *continue* to trust God and his messiah considering what is about to happen. This use of the present tense is known as the "iterative" present (cp. Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, pp. 520-21).

14:2. "are many places to live." The word translated "mansions" (KJV), or "rooms" (NIV) is *monē* (#3438 μονή, pronounced moe-nay'), and it is translated "dwelling places" in the NASB. It refers here to a place to live. In God's "house" (i.e., kingdom) are many places to live. The fact that Jesus says, "are" many places to live causes some

commentators to assert that the places already exist, and people are living in them in heaven. From the scope of Scripture we can see that is not the case. Things in heaven are often spoken of by the Jews as if they physically exist when they exist in the mind of God and will come into concretion in the future. So, for example, Jesus taught us to store up our treasure in heaven as if there were already storehouses there where things could be stored (Matt. 6:20). But there is nothing like that in heaven and we cannot put things there. Similarly in Matthew 5:12 Jesus spoke of people's reward as being "in heaven," when he meant that God kept a record of it and would bestow it on the believer at the resurrection. Similarly, God was keeping track of the believers and would have a place for each of them to live in the Kingdom. Thus one of the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom on earth will be that "Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree" (Micah 4:4 NIV84, cp. Zech. 3:10).

"I go to prepare a place for you." This statement has been misunderstood due to the traditional teaching that when people die, their soul goes to heaven and lives with God and Jesus forever. Scripture teaches that Jesus will come to earth and set up a Kingdom that lasts 1000 years; then there is a final war; then a White Throne Judgment; then the New Jerusalem, a gigantic city with streets of gold, descends from heaven and lands on earth, [For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Matthew 5:5. For more on the final war and the New Jerusalem see Revelation 20-22].

The statement "I go to prepare a place for you" is very broad. We should not define our understanding of Christ's reign on earth or the future New Jerusalem in terms of this one statement, but rather understand this statement in terms of what we know about the coming Kingdom. We do not know much about what Jesus' preparation for the future earth includes. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you," at the Last Supper, and the indication is that although Christ said he did not know when his Second Coming would be, he did think it was going to be very quickly, while that generation was still alive (Matt. 24:34). He was thinking there was lots of preparation to do very quickly.

No doubt Jesus knew there was a lot to be done before God's kingdom could come on earth. He had to fully understand his role as king and Lord over God creation. Also, there was much to do when Jesus set up his kingdom that had to be prepared for. Satan had to be defeated (Rev. 19:11-20:3), the people of earth judged (Matt. 25:31-46), assignments had to be given to resurrected believers who would have jobs in the Millennial Kingdom, the New Temple and New Jerusalem had to be built as per Ezekiel's prophecy, and much more. Jesus knew that when he went away he would have to prepare to receive believers.

We do not know how much Jesus had to learn, or how much information God would "divinely implant" into his mind, but Jesus knew that once he ascended to heaven he would not just be "sitting around" enjoying himself. He would be working on things concerning his return and preparing for his kingdom on earth.

14:3. "I will come again," Christ will come back to earth in the event known as the Second Coming. The "Second Coming" is not the same event as the Rapture of Christians, which is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. At his Second Coming, Jesus will come down from heaven with his armies and conquer the earth, an event described in Revelation 19:11-21. Christ's conquest of the earth was foretold in scriptures such as Isaiah 63:1-6 and Zechariah 14:3-10, and scriptures such as Daniel 2:35, 44-46 speak of Christ's kingdom filling the earth.

Many prophecies speak of the Second Coming of Christ, and Jesus himself spoke quite often about it and the events associated with it (Matt. 16:27, [cp. Mark 8:38 and Luke 9:26]; Matt. 24:30-44, [cp. Mark 13:26 and Luke 21:27]; Matt. 25:31-46; 26:64 [cp. Mark 14:62]; Mark 8:38; Luke 12:40; 17:24-30; John 14:3, 18; 21:22).

The Old Testament does not show clearly that Christ's "coming" would be in two distinct stages: his first coming when he was crucified, and his Second Coming when he comes from heaven and conquers the earth. The information is there, but it is unclear and much more clearly seen in hindsight through the lens of the New Testament than when it was read by the people living before Christ. The New Testament, of course, is very clear about the first and second comings of Christ. Nevertheless, even though they are somewhat veiled, Old Testament passages that speak of the Second Coming of Christ include Isaiah 63:1-6, Daniel 2:34, 35, 44; Zechariah 14:3-6, and there are many more that speak of Christ ruling the earth (see commentary Matt. 16:27).

The Greek text emphasizes the word "again" by moving it to the front of the sentence: "Again I will come and will receive you to myself." Christ came to earth once, and he will come again as conqueror and king.

"and will receive you to myself." There has been mistranslation and misunderstanding of this phrase due to the traditional belief that when a saved person dies his soul goes immediately to heaven and is with Jesus. Actually, the verse is simple. Jesus said that it would be when he came back that he would receive believers to himself. Jesus' statement applies to two different classes of believers: those who are dead when Christ comes back and those who are still alive. Christians are in a different category entirely, because Christians experience an event known as the Rapture, which occurs before the Second Coming. At the Rapture, both living and dead Christians will be taken into the air to be with Christ and then will return to earth with him at his Second Coming [For more information on the Rapture of Christians, see commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:17].

We will first discuss Jesus's statement, I "will receive you to myself," in terms of those believers who are alive on earth at the Second Coming. The Bible is clear that the Great Tribulation and Armageddon will not kill everyone on earth. Many people will still be alive, and so when Jesus comes to earth he will gather all the nations before him and judge them. Those people who are judged unworthy will be thrown into the lake of fire, while those people who are judged worthy will enter into Christ's Kingdom on earth (Matthew 25:31-46). Thus, at Christ's Second Coming, believers who lived through the Great Tribulation will be "received" by Christ and will enter into his kingdom.

The believers who are dead at the time of the Second Coming will be raised from the dead and received by Christ into his kingdom on earth. The dead believers who Christ will raise will be those believers who died before the Day of Pentecost or who died after the Rapture but before the Second Coming (in other words, Christ will raise every dead believer from Adam to his Second Coming with the exception of the Christian Church, because Christians will have been raised earlier, at the Rapture). At the Second Coming, when Christ comes back to earth, he will call the dead believers out of the ground and receive them to himself.

This verse settles the argument about whether or not Old Testament believers are in the Rapture. They are not. They are, like Ezekiel 37:12-14 says, raised from the ground and return to Israel. This is further substantiated by Revelation 11:18. The time to give

rewards to the believers is when they are raised from the dead, which happens immediately after the Second Coming.

The Bible does not teach that people are alive after they die, they are truly dead and awaiting being raised from the dead [for more information on this, see Appendix 4, “The Dead Are Dead”]. Jesus was speaking before the Day of Pentecost, and the Old Testament taught that believers would be dead until they were resurrected (cp. Ezek. 37:12-14), and Jesus taught that the resurrection would occur when the dead heard his voice (John 5:28, 29), which we learn from John 14:3 is when he comes again.

The word “receive” in John 14:3 is the verb *paralambanō* (#3880 παραλαμβάνω), and it is in the future tense, middle voice. Thayer’s Greek-English lexicon speaks specifically about John 14:3 and says, “middle [voice] with πρὸς ἑμαυτόν [to myself], [means] to my companionship, where I myself dwell.” Friberg’s Analytical Lexicon agrees, and also references John 14:3 and says that in John 14:3 *paralambanō* means “receive to oneself,” and the BDAG Greek-English lexicons also references John 14:3 and has “I will take you to myself.” When Jesus raises the dead he has already come from heaven to earth, and thus when he calls and wakes the dead, he “receives” them to himself and into his kingdom. That is why Ezekiel 37:12-14 says that when the dead get up they will go to the land of Israel. Jesus is there, ruling from the newly rebuilt city of Jerusalem (the boundaries of Israel including the size of Jerusalem are described in Ezek. 47 and 48).

In John 14:3 Jesus spoke to the Apostles and told them he “will come back and will receive you [“you all,” the “you” is plural] to myself so that where I am you will be also.” What Jesus was saying to the Apostles was in essence: “I will come back to earth at my Second Coming, and receive all the believers to me so that where I am, on the wonderful new earth, they will be too.”

14:6. “the life.” Here the word “life” refers to “life in the Age to Come.” See commentary on John 5:40.

“except through me.” This phrase uses the Greek preposition *dia* with a genitive object, and thus is correctly translated “through.” Here Jesus is focusing on his role as the mediator between God and mankind. In the biblical world it was customary that people did not get to see an important person without going through some kind of mediator. So, for example, when some Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they went to Phillip, one of the apostles (John 12:21). The centurion who wanted his servant healed sent a delegation of Jews to Jesus (Luke 7:3-5). Here Jesus correctly teaches that now that the Son has come, if a person is going to get close to God, he or she must go through His Son.

14:10. “I am in union with the Father, and the Father in union with me.” See commentary on John 10:38 “the Father is in union with me, and I am in union with the Father.”

14:11. “Keep on believing...keep believing.” The Greek is *pisteuō* (#4100 πιστεύω) in the imperative present active. Robertson notes that this stresses, especially in this verb, the continuance of the faith (*Grammar*). Jesus was not asking for short lived belief, but continued belief in what he was saying and teaching. It is important to note that Jesus says “or else keep believing me for the very works’ sake.” In other words, if you cannot believe in me (what I am saying) on its own, believe what I am saying based on the works that I do. The works are a witness to the teaching, and vice versa. Many people today want to “just do good works,” if that were enough. But that does not point to right

doctrine, only to the kind heart of a good person. We must, like Jesus, let our good works testify to what we are saying.

“I am in union with the Father, and the Father in union with me.” See commentary on John 10:38 “the Father is in union with me, and I am in *union with the Father.*”

14:12. “continues to believe.” The Greek uses the present participle in the active voice. R. C. H. Lenski (*The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*) correctly writes: “The substantivized present participle characterizes the person as one who continues in this faith.”

“in me” This does not mean just that Jesus existed. In the biblical culture, to believe in someone meant that you believed, and thus acted upon, what the person said. So, for example, Jesus said to pray. If a person never prays, then he does not believe “in me,” even if he thinks Jesus existed as a person.

“he will do also.” The Greek is *poieō* (#4160 ποιέω) in the indicative future, so there is no question or argument: the one who is believing in Jesus will do what he did.

“because I go to the Father.” Jesus would not be on earth, so if good works are going to be done, believers must do them. Furthermore, Jesus knew that the gift of holy spirit would be poured out (Joel 2). Jesus did not know about the Christian Church at that time (the Sacred Secret), and that holy spirit would be poured out as it was on the day of Pentecost, but he did know that holy spirit would be poured out after he was raised.

14:14. “If you....” John 14:14 is in the original text. Although the last words of verse 13 and all of verse 14 are omitted in a scattering of manuscripts, some of them ancient, scholars have concluded from the totality of the manuscript evidence that the omission was due to the fact that the Greek word *poiēsō* occurred in the middle of verse 13 and the end of 14. The lines in between the two uses of *poiēsō* were skipped by some scribes when they were copying the text. The copyist’s eye skipped from the first *poiēsō* to the second one. In textual studies that is something scholars see regularly, and they have named it “haplography.” Books on the text of the Bible have many examples of haplography occurring in the manuscripts, and thankfully due to the over 5,700 Greek manuscripts we currently have, by comparing them, scholars can usually spot the erroneous manuscripts and the original text can be reconstructed.

“ask me.” The manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being in the original text. Modern textual scholars have concluded that some of the scribes copying the Greek text either thought that the wording, “ask me anything in my name” seemed strange, or they wanted to avoid what they thought was a contradiction to John 16:23, so they omitted the word “me” from the manuscripts they were copying (but in a couple of manuscripts scribes changed “me” to “the Father”). This explains why “me” is not in the King James Version—the manuscripts used in making the King James did not have the “me.” However, the weight of the manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being original, which is why almost all modern versions include it.

Very strong evidence that the word “me” is in the original text is that we can see from Acts and the Epistles that the early Christians did indeed ask Jesus for things, which is what the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord Jesus” refers to (1 Cor. 1:2). [For more information on John 14:14 not contradicting John 16:23 see commentary on John 16:23. For more information on talking to and praying to Jesus as well as a further discussion of

the manuscript evidence that “me” is original, see Appendix 15: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”].

14:17. “it...it...it...it.” The gift of holy spirit is an “it,” not a “he.” To understand why some versions differ from others in the translation of the pronouns associated with holy spirit, we must understand how pronouns are used in languages such as Greek. Unlike English, but like many languages, including Spanish, French, German, Latin, and Hebrew, the Greek language assigns a gender to all nouns, and the gender of any associated pronoun must match the gender of the noun. This gender assignment happened in ancient antiquity, and often there seems to be no reason why a particular noun has a particular gender assigned to it. The gender of nouns never changes.

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

And just as we would not say, “the desk, he,” we would **never** insist that a table or desk was somehow a person just because it had a masculine or feminine pronoun associated with it. Furthermore, good English translators recognize that even though a noun is assigned a gender in another language and the pronoun follows the noun, their job is to bring the meaning of the original into English, not introduce confusion as they translate. Hence, someone translating from French to English would use the English designation “it” for the table and the desk, in spite of the fact that in the original language the table and desk have a masculine or feminine gender.

What is true in the examples from the French language is true in any language that assigns a gender to nouns and then uses pronouns with that same gender. For example, the Greek word for “lamp” is *luchnos*, a masculine noun, and therefore proper grammar dictates that any pronoun associated with it is masculine. Thus, if the Greek text of Matthew 5:15 were translated literally, it would read, “Nor do they light a lamp and place **him** under the bushel.” However, every version we checked said, “it,” as proper English dictates, and not “him,” which would have been literal. The Greek word for wine is *oinos*, a masculine noun, so it takes a masculine pronoun. Christ taught that no one puts new wine in old wineskins, because the wineskins would burst and the wine, “**he** will be poured out.” English versions, correctly, say “it” will be poured out.

The same grammatical rule that the pronoun must agree with the noun is followed when the noun is feminine. According to the literal Greek text, Christ told his disciples that when they entered a “city” (*polin*; a feminine noun) or “village” (*kome*; a feminine noun), they should “find out who in **her** is worthy” (Matt.10:11; literally translated). The English versions correctly read, “it” instead of “her.” Similarly, the Greek word for “fig tree” is *sukē*, a feminine noun. When Jesus was entering Jerusalem, he saw a fig tree, but when he came to “her” he found nothing but leaves (Mark 11:13). Again, all the English versions read “it,” not “her.” When translating from another language into English, we have to use the English language properly. Students of Greek, Hebrew, Spanish, French, German, *etc.*, quickly discover that one of the difficult things about learning the language

is memorizing the gender of each noun—something we do not have in the English language.

Once we clearly understand the gender of a pronoun is determined by the gender of the noun, we can see why one cannot build a doctrine on the gender of a noun and its agreeing pronoun. Only confusion would result from that kind of erroneous exegesis. For example, the noun *pneuma* (spirit) is neuter in gender and thus any pronoun associated with it is neuter and naturally translated “it.” However, because the holy spirit helps us in many ways, it is called the *parakletos*, (John 14:16, etc., “Helper;” or in some versions “Comforter” or “Counselor”), which is a masculine noun and takes a masculine pronoun.

Since *parakletos* is masculine, and spirit (*pneuma*) is neuter, are we to believe the gender of holy spirit changes somehow depending on what it is called? When it is “spirit” it is neuter and when it is “the helper” it is masculine? Of course not, that would be ridiculous. Worse, since “spirit” in Greek is neuter, but “spirit” in Hebrew is feminine, are we to believe the sex of the holy spirit changed after the time of Jesus when the believers started to speak and write in Greek? Of course not. Again, the gender of the noun is assigned in the language, and is not the “real” gender of the noun in question, which usually has no gender.

Another good example of how confusing things would become if someone tried to build their theology from the gender of pronouns involves nouns used to describe the Word of God. Sometimes the Greek word *logos* is used to refer to the Word of God (Luke 5:1), and *logos* is a masculine noun. Sometimes the Greek word *rhema* is used of the Word of God (Matt. 4:4), and *rhema* is a neuter noun. Are we to believe that, first, the Word of God even has gender, and second, that it somehow changes gender? Of course not. The gender of the noun was assigned in antiquity as a linguistic necessity, it is not designed to refer to some kind of actual sexual orientation.

The point is this: no translator should ever use the gender of the nouns or pronouns in a language to build a theology. Only error could result from that kind of exegesis. The way to properly translate the Scripture from a language that assigns gender to nouns is to study the subject matter and understand the subject being discussed, and then translate accordingly. Does *pneuma hagion* have a gender? We know people come in two genders, masculine and feminine, so references to people should be either “he,” or “she.” Animals also have a gender. Rocks do not, and should be “it” (by the way, in Greek, the noun “rock” is feminine, while in Hebrew it is masculine). In the case of *pneuma hagion*, when it is used as a name for God, and refers to God, it is proper to use the pronoun “he,” or other personal pronouns such as “who.” (There has been much discussion in recent years about the gender of God and if He is male or female, but this is not the place for a discussion about that. Although we believe that God has no actual gender, in Scripture He presents Himself as masculine. He presented himself as a man to Abraham (Gen. 18:1 and 2), and to many others (cp. Exod. 24:10; Dan. 7:9).

When it is referring to God’s gift, the gift of holy spirit, it is proper to use pronouns such as “it,” “which,” and “that,” because the gift of holy spirit is not a person. Trinitarians, of course, disagree with that conclusion. They view the “Holy Spirit” as the third person of the Trinity, so even though *pneuma*, spirit, is a neuter noun, they use masculine personal pronouns with it. If the Trinitarians were correct, then the fact that they translate the Greek neuter pronoun as the English masculine pronoun is the right

thing to do. A good example is the NIV translation of John 14:17, which we have produced, showing in brackets the actual gender of the noun and pronoun.

John 14:17 (NIV): “the Spirit [neuter noun] of truth. The world cannot accept him [*autos*, neuter pronoun, not masculine], because it neither sees him [*autos*, neuter pronoun, not masculine] nor knows him [*autos*, neuter pronoun, not masculine]. But you know him [*autos*, neuter pronoun, not masculine], for he [pronoun not in Greek text] lives with you and will be in you.”

Almost every English version does what the NIV does, and uses the masculine personal pronouns “him” and “he,” even though the Greek pronouns are neuter. This shows that Trinitarian scholars do not use the gender of the pronoun, but the subject being discussed, to determine how the English should read, which is what every translator should do. However, it reveals an inconsistency in one of their standard arguments for the existence of the Trinity. Many Trinitarians say that because masculine pronouns are sometimes used when the subject is the “Holy Spirit,” it must be masculine and therefore the third person of the Trinity. But if that argument is valid, then it would be just as valid to say that because the Greek text has neuter pronouns referring to spirit (indeed, especially since the noun “spirit” itself is neuter) then “holy spirit” must be a thing, not a person. In reality, as we have seen, we must never build our theology from the gender of pronouns.

A case in point is the Greek word *parakletos*, which is masculine, and which is usually referred to as the “Helper,” “Comforter,” or “Counselor,” depending on the English version being used. Greek grammar demands the use of masculine pronouns, such as *ekeinos*, to describe the “Helper,” because of *parakletos*, which is masculine (John 14:26), but Trinitarians have said that the use of *ekeinos* is evidence that “the Holy Spirit” is masculine (cp. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*; note on John 14:17). But the Trinitarians cannot have it both ways. If the gender of the pronoun is evidence for the actual gender of the noun, then the “helper” is masculine, but the “holy spirit” is neuter—certainly not a person.

Once the above information is understood, it becomes clear why some versions of the Bible use personal pronouns such as “who” or “whom” when referring to *pneuma hagion*, while versions such as the REV uses “it” and “that.” If the translators believe *pneuma hagion* refers to the third person of the Trinity, they will use masculine pronouns and personal pronouns. Thus, their versions read “the Counselor...he” in the Gospel of John, and “he” “who” or “whom” in other places in the New Testament. However, if *pneuma hagion* refers to the gift of God, which we believe it does, then pronouns such as “it,” “which,” and “that,” are the proper English pronouns to use. Since no one can conclude from the use of pronouns whether or not “spirit” refers to a person or a thing, the only way to find that out is by studying it through the whole Bible. After we discover what “holy spirit” is, then we will know how to translate the pronouns associated with it. (This entry has focused on noun-pronoun agreement. For the integration of pronouns into the translation of verbs, see commentary on John 16:13).

14:18. “orphans.” The Greek word is *orphanos* (#3737 ὀρφανός), and it means to be without parents, an orphan. Our English word “orphan” comes directly from the Greek *orphanos*. Someone could be an *orphanos* because the parents were dead or permanently gone, or because they were simply not functioning as parents. It was sometimes used on a

more limited scale to mean without a father, because the father was the primary support and protection of the family. By extension, it was also used for someone who had lost a “father.” To the Jews, a trusted teacher and mentor was a “father,” and so the rabbis applied the word *orphanos* to those disciples who had lost their teacher (cp. Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John*). In that light, for Jesus to say, “I will not leave you as orphans” was very meaningful, because it communicated to the disciples that Jesus would not abandon his role of teacher and mentor, but they could expect that continued teacher/mentor relationship.

Jesus’ use of “orphan” in his teaching at the Last Supper was especially meaningful because orphans were often taken advantage of in society and needed an “advocate,” someone to support, guide, and protect them. In that light, it is a wonderful truth that it was at the Last Supper that Jesus introduced the coming holy spirit as “the *paraklētos*” (#3875 παράκλητος), and one of the primary meanings of *paraklētos* is “Advocate” (which the KJV calls the “Comforter,” the ESV and REV call the “Helper,” and the NET and NIV2011 call the “Advocate”). Although there had been a few teachings that mentioned the holy spirit before the Last Supper (cp. Luke 3:16; 11:12; 12:12), Jesus clearly referred to the *paraklētos* as “the spirit of truth” (14:17) and “the holy spirit” (14:26). It is also noteworthy that only at the Last Supper, just before Jesus would leave his disciples as “orphans,” that Jesus called the holy spirit “the *paraklētos*” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26, and 16:7; its only other use *paraklētos* refers to Jesus himself; cp. 1 John 2:1). The gift of holy spirit is the way that Jesus Christ will help and advocate for his followers. That is why Jesus said “it will not speak on its own, but whatever it hears it will speak” (John 16:13). Like the gift of holy spirit in the Old Testament that God put upon people that better allowed Him to communicate directly with them, the gift of holy spirit, the Helper, would allow God and Jesus to communicate more efficaciously with believers. [For more information on God putting holy spirit on people in the Old Testament, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”. For more information on how God and Jesus communicate with us via the gift of holy spirit, see the commentary on “revelation” in Galatians 1:12].

“I am coming to you.” The Greek is in the present tense, although in this case it refers to a future action, which is why most versions says, “I will come to you.” The present tense indicated that the disciples did not have to wait long until Jesus came, and indeed, they did not. This “coming” does not refer to the Second Coming, but to the fact that after his resurrection, and even after his ascension, Jesus would be “with” his disciples (cp. Matt. 28:20).

14:19. “will see... will see.” The Greek text has the verb for “see” in the present tense, so literally it reads, “Yet a little while and the world sees me no more, but you see me.” This is a clear example of the figure of speech *heterosis* of tense (Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*). In the Greek the present tense is used in place of the future.

When Jesus spoke of his disciples seeing him, he was not primarily speaking of the disciples seeing him during the forty days after his resurrection and before his ascension. Some theologians teach that the primary meaning of Jesus’ statement refers to the apostles being able to see Jesus after his resurrection and before his ascension. We do not think that is the case for a number of reasons. For one thing the verse says that the world will not see Jesus, but during the forty days after his resurrection the world was

able to see him. But after his ascension his disciples see him (cp. Stephen, Ananias, Paul, and John), but the world does not see him.

Also, the word “see” does not necessarily mean to see with the physical eye, although many disciples have actually seen Jesus, but it means to see him via what he does and via our relationship with him. For example, Jesus often communicates with us directly via the gift of holy spirit. The promise that true disciples would “see” Jesus was more than just a way of saying we would “know about” him or recognize that he was at work in the world, although those things are included too.

When Jesus said that the disciples would see him, he also said he would not leave them as orphans but would come to them. But if they were only “orphans” for the three days he was dead, and then only not orphans for forty more days, and have now been orphans again for the last 2000 years, then Jesus’ statement that he would not leave us as orphans is hollow. We are not orphans because even though Jesus is not with us physically, he is still genuinely with us.

Jesus made a number of statements at the Last Supper that paralleled this one about “seeing” Jesus. These included: he said that he would not leave the disciples as orphans, but would come to them (John 14:18), the disciples would be in union with Jesus and the Father (John 14:20), he would show himself to them (John 14:21), he and the Father would make their home in them (John 14:23; *monē* means “home,” “residence,” “dwelling place”), he said that he and the disciples would be “friends” (John 15:14, 15), and they could ask him for what they needed (John 14:14). Jesus knew at the Last Supper that in only a couple hours he would be taken from the disciples and after that his relationship with them would change dramatically as he would be the risen, then ascended, Lord. He did not want them to think that after his ascension they would be without his help and guidance, so he told them they would “see” him.

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

14:20. “in union with.” See commentary on John 10:38 “the Father is in union with me, and I am in *union with* the Father.”

14:22. “how is it that.” An alternate translation could be, “what happened that?” (Cp. NASB; NET; NAB; NJB).

14:24. “the Father’s who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

14:26. “And.” The Greek word *de* (#1161 δέ) can express a small contrast, but can also just express a change of subject. In this case, “but” is too strong a contrast. Some English versions leave the *de* untranslated and just start the English sentence with the subject, the Helper (cp. CEB), Others translate it “And” (cp. Young’s Literal Translation; Lenski). Jesus was speaking with his disciples while he was still alive, and his point was that after he was personally gone from his disciples, the Helper would teach them what it heard.

“the holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God, poured out on the Day of Pentecost. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

14:29. “believe.” The verb “believe” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” believe, but the Greek conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) that started the phrase is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore we must get the sense of the verb from

the context. In this case, Jesus' purpose was to tell the disciples what would happen before it happened so that they "will" believe, not just so they "may" believe." Versions that use "will" include (CEB; CJB; GWN; NIV; NLT; and The Source New Testament.) It was not that the disciples were not believing, but just as they had not understood what Jesus had told them about his death because it was so different than what they were taught, now they were about to expand what they believed and take it to new levels.

14:31. "Get up, let us go from here." At this point the disciples started getting ready to leave the Upper Room and the Last Supper. However, Jesus continued teaching and praying, and the disciples did not leave until 18:1.

Chapter 15

15:2. "takes it away." Some argue that "to take away" here means "to lift up." Although that could be the case grammatically, it does not fit contextually. Verse 6 makes it clear that if a person does not bear fruit, he is cast into the fire. This parable parallels the parable of the servants in the talents. If a servant does not bear fruit with his talents and buries it in the ground, he is wicked and lazy, and is thrown out into the darkness.

15:4. "live." For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

"in union with." See commentary on John 10:38 "the Father is in union with me, and I am in *union with* the Father."

15:5. "lives." For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

15:6. "lives." For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

15:7. "live." For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

"in union with." See commentary on John 10:38 "the Father is in union with me, and I am in *union with* the Father."

"want." The Greek word is *thelō* (#2309 θέλω) and means want or desire.

15:9. "live." For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

15:10. "live." For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

15:13. "life." See commentary on John 13:37.

15:14. "friends." John 15:14 and 15 mark an important shift in the relation between Jesus and those who closely follow him and obey him. Jesus now says he will not call his close disciples "servants," but friends, denoting an intimate and affectionate relationship. Jesus had referred to his disciples as friends earlier, in Luke 12:4, but that was in the context of his protecting and blessing them, and teaching them not to fear the world. He was not making the much more personal and intimate statement that he was making at the Last Supper, at most only a couple hours before his arrest.

To understand the importance of what Jesus says here at the Last Supper, it is important to understand the word "friend" and what it really implies. Since so much has been spoken of in the Christian world about *agapē* love, we will discuss that also. In American culture the word "friend" has lost some of its true meaning and value. Today we call people "friends" when we have only met them a few times. Biblically, a "friend" was someone you knew well and really trusted. It is exemplified by the word "companion," which comes from the Latin, "com" (with) and panis (bread). A friend, a companion, was someone you would trust in your house and eat with. When Jesus calls

us friends, he is referring to a deep and intimate relationship. In the Bible that deep relationship is represented by the word *philos*.

Greek has four different words for love, and the Greek word that refers to the God's love for us is *agapē* (the verb form is *agapaō*, Strong's number 25, ἀγαπάω, the noun form is *agapē*, Strong's number 26, ἀγάπη). *Agapē* love is the very nature of God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-12, 16). The big key to understanding *agapē* is to realize that it can be known from the action it prompts. People today are accustomed to thinking of love as a feeling, but that is essentially not the case with *agapē* love. *Agapē* is love because of what it *does*, not because of how it *feels* (cp. the list of actions prompted by *agapē* in 1 Corinthians 13).

God so "loved" (*agapē*) that He gave His Son. It did not feel good to God to do that, but it was the loving thing to do. Christ so loved (*agapē*) that he gave his life. *Agapē* love is not simply an impulse generated from feelings, rather it is an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice. This is why God can command us to "love" (*agapē*) our enemies (Matt. 5:44). He does not command us to "have a good feeling" for our enemies, but to act in a loving way toward them (cp. the loving actions in Exod. 23:1-5). That is not to say the *agapē* love cannot have feelings attached to it, and the ideal situation occurs when the loving thing to do also is what we want to do, such that we combine the feeling of love with loving action.

The Greek word *phileō*, which is translated as "love" in many English Bibles, is different from *agapaō* love. *Phileō* means "to have a special interest in someone or something, frequently with focus on close association; have affection for, like, consider someone a friend" (William Arndt and F. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*.) *Phileō* (#5368 φιλέω), is the verb form and *philos* (#5384 φίλος), is the noun form and refers to a "friend."

It would be helpful if *phileō* were never translated "love," because it refers to a strong liking or a strong friendship. Of course, *phileō* gets translated "love" because in modern culture we say we "love" things that we strongly like: "I love ice cream" or "I love my car." The word *phileō* implies a strong emotional connection, and thus is used of the deep friendship, and it is also used of the way people "really like" things. Thus, we can *agapē* our enemies because we can be kind to them whether we feel like it or not, but we cannot *phileō* our enemies; we cannot be true friends with them.

In Christian circles it is very common to hear people compare *agapē* and *phileō* and disparage *phileō* as if it were a "lesser" kind of love. Nothing could be further from the truth. *Phileō* refers to that deep friendship relationship and the wonderful friendly feeling that everyone craves: we all want friends. Lenski writes about friendship, and says that the word *philoī*, friends, "denotes an affectionate and intimate relation" (note on John 15:14). Although *agapē* can have that deep friendly feeling, it can also be "cold love," and manifest itself as godly acts done without a true "loving" feeling. Both *agapē* and *phileō* are very important. If we are going to win the people of the world, we must be able to "love" them even in the most unlovable circumstances, and that takes *agapē*. *Agapē* was the reason that Paul went to city after city to teach the Word, even though he was defamed, beaten, and jailed. He did not like those experiences, but he knew that given the specific ministry Christ gave him, it was how he was to obey God. In contrast, what we really crave in our hearts is the most intimate friendship relationship, and that is what *phileō* offers.

The difference between *agapē* and *phileō* becomes very important in John 21. Jesus was asking Peter if he “loved” Jesus (*agapē*) because Jesus wanted Peter to be committed to following Jesus even though it would often be neither easy nor likeable. Peter, on the other hand, used *phileō* because he wanted to see if his friendship with Jesus was still intact: was Jesus still an affectionate and intimate friend to him even though Peter had publicly denied him? Jesus wanted commitment no matter what the circumstances, Peter wanted close friendship with Jesus—and the Word tries to communicate their desires by the specific vocabulary it uses for their verbal exchange.

Here in John 15, Jesus now tells the apostles that they are his “friends” (*philos*), if we do what he commanded us. In fact, he shows his apostles what he means, and proves to them that they are indeed his friends by telling them that he has told them what he heard from his Father—intimate communication that he would only tell his friends about. Jesus’ invitation to be his friend is not only here in the Gospel of John, it is in the book of Revelation. Jesus says, “Look!, I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). Anyone in the biblical culture would immediately understand that for Jesus to come in to a home and eat would mean there was a deep friendship between Jesus and the person.

What Jesus said at the Last Supper, very shortly before his arrest, has huge implications for Christians, because he was telling his disciples things that would define their roles and relationship after his resurrection and ascension. Jesus has now opened the door for us to be “friends” with him. And nothing could be of greater worth. No wonder Paul said that he counted all his worldly credentials as dung in comparison to “knowing” Jesus, that is, having a firsthand, experiential relationship, or “friendship,” with Christ (Phil. 3:8-10, and see the commentary on those verses).

Having a genuine friendship relationship with Jesus Christ is part of the very fabric of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. Jesus spoke of his relationship with his disciples in a number of different ways, including: he said that he and the disciples would be “friends” (John 15:14, 15), they would “see” him (cp. John 14:19), they would be in union with Jesus and the Father (John 14:20), he would show himself to them (John 14:21), he and the Father would make their home in them (John 14:23), and they could ask him for what they needed (John 14:14). Jesus knew what his disciples did not know: that in a few hours he would be arrested then crucified, and after that his relationship with them would be on a different level. Even with Jesus gone, his disciples had to be confident that he would be in close contact with them even though he was in heaven and they were on earth. That is why he took the time to communicate in many different ways that he and his disciples would be friends—ones who have an intimate and affectionate relationship. [For more on the difference between *agapē* and *phileō*, and information on all four Greek words for “love,” see commentary on John 21:15].

15:16. “live.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

15:17. “These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” The grammar of the verse, and the context, favors this translation over something simpler, such as “This I command you: love one another.” “These things” comes from the Greek *tauta*, a plural pronoun, and the conjunction *hina* that starts the second phrase is most naturally “so that,” or “in order that.” It is not clear how far back in Jesus’ teaching he was referring to when he said “these things.” It is clear, however, that in the context,

Christ had been teaching and directing the disciples concerning love and his love for them. His discourse included commands, as well as general information. Now he tells them that he has said these things “so that” they will love one another. This is a wonderful demonstration of the principle in 1 John 4:19, that we love because he first loved us. Jesus clearly told the disciples of his love for them, and told them to remain “in” his love, i.e., connected to him and the blessings that would flow to them through him. Thus here, many years before 1 John was written, Jesus was telling his disciples about his love for them and commanding them to remain in him so that they would love one another.

15:19. “befriend you.” The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). Although most versions say “love,” doing so confuses *agapē* love (“love” in the REV) with *phileō* love. *Phileō* love has an attachment, and it is the attachment between good friends. The world “befriends” those who are of the world. For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see the note on John 21:15.

15:21. “the one who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

15:22. “they would not have had sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.” This is a good example of how important it is to get the scope of Scripture and not “proof-text” to make a point. Jesus is not speaking of sin in general, as if the religious leaders would have had no sin at all unless Jesus had spoken to them. Rather he is speaking in the context of his life, and particularly being the Last Supper, his death, and saying that the sin of not believing and not obeying Jesus would now be reckoned to them, because they heard him, but turned away.

15:25. Quoted from Psalm 69:4.

“but let the word...be fulfilled.” We feel this is a command clause rather than a purpose clause (see John 9:3 entry, “let the works of God be revealed in him”) or a result clause (cp. Matt. 1:22), although it could be a result clause. In the Greek there is no phrase “they have done this” which must be supplied for it to read either as a purpose clause: e.g., “But *they have done this* to fulfill the word that is written in their Law” (NASB), or as a result clause, “with the result that...”

We do not believe this could be a purpose clause. Why would these men hate *with the purpose* of fulfilling Old Testament prophecy? They wouldn’t. On the other hand, if it is God who instigates the purpose behind their hatred of the Messiah, then God would be making them hate just so a prophecy would be fulfilled, which goes against God’s character and nature. Although it could be a result clause, “This happened with the result that the word was fulfilled,” it does not seem as likely that Jesus would say that to his disciples, although he could have.

To us the reading that makes the most sense in the context is that Christ was making a simple statement in reaction to the men’s hatred; “let the word that is written in their law be fulfilled, ‘they have hated me without a cause.’”

Like our translation, the ESV renders the phrase as a 3rd person command but uses the word “must”: “The word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled.” This is a possible rendering of the command, just as using the word “let” and saying “let the word be fulfilled,” is possible. However, we believe that Jesus was not telling his disciples

about what “must” happen, but pointing out what was happening. In that sense, this verse compares to the translation of *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood in Ephesians 5:33, which is also translated by “let”: “Let the wife see that she respects her husband” (ESV) and “the wife must respect her husband” (NIV). We feel the “let” translation is better because in English the word “must” could be misunderstood to be implying some metaphysical necessity for fulfillment, which is not being communicated by the Greek grammar of the command clause. See also entry on John 13:18, “let the scripture be fulfilled.”

15:27. “testify.” The verb “to testify” is in a form that can be either indicative (you *will* testify,” picking up “will” from the context), or imperative (“you must testify,” picking up “must” from the imperative form of the verb). The key to which is in the sentence itself. The word “because” dictates the imperative. Anyone could testify of Christ, whether they had been around since the beginning of his ministry or not. However, these apostles had been given much, and now much was required. “Because” they had been with Jesus since the beginning, they must now testify of him (or suffer severe consequences). This verse is also good evidence that the helper, holy spirit, will be poured out during the tribulation.

Chapter 16

16:4. “will remember.” The verb “remember” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” remember, but the Greek conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) earlier in the sentence is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, Jesus’ purpose was to tell the disciples what would happen before it happened so that they “will” remember, not just so they “may” remember.” Versions that use “will” include (CEB; CJB; NET; NIV; NLT; and The Source New Testament).

16:5. “to the one who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

16:7. “I will send it to you.” The Greek pronoun translated “it” is αὐτόν, the masculine singular pronoun that is associated with “helper,” which is the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος). We translate it “it” because the “Helper,” the gift of holy spirit, is not a person but a thing, the gift of God. In inflected languages like Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, etc., the gender of the pronoun has to agree with the gender of the noun, so we do not learn the gender from the pronoun itself, but from what person, place or thing the noun is. See commentary on “it” in John 14:17.

16:8. “it.” In Greek, the pronoun *ekeinos* (#1565 ἐκεῖνος) is masculine because it is governed by the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. However, the “Helper” is a word describing the gift of holy spirit (John 14:17), which is not a “he” but an “it.” See commentary on John 16:7 and John 14:17.

16:11. “has been judged.” This is the prophetic perfect, when something in the future is so certain it is spoken of in the past tense (see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6). Lenski writes, “Jesus speaks of the devil’s final judgment as having already been

effected because his own death and resurrection, which pronounced the final judgment on the devil, are already at hand, are as certain as though they had already been completed.” (See Schoenheit, Graeser & Lynn, *The Christian’s Hope*, Appendix E.)

16:13. “it.” In Greek, the pronoun *ekeinos* (#1565 ἐκεῖνος) is masculine because it is governed by the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. However, the “Helper” is a word describing the gift of holy spirit (John 14:17), which is not a “he” but an “it.” See commentary on John 14:17.

“it will guide...it will not speak...it hears, it will speak...it will declare.” Greek verbs have no gender, and therefore any gender associated with any given verb has to be assigned from the context and the subject being discussed. Usually this is not confusing to translators because the subject is understood. However, sometimes the context and subject matter of the verse is debated. For example, when a verb refers to something the “holy spirit” will do, then Trinitarians, who assert that the “Holy Spirit” is a person, assign a masculine pronoun to the verb. In contrast, Biblical Unitarians, who see the “holy spirit” as a gift from God or the power of God, assign a neuter pronoun to the verb. Since almost all English translations of the Bible are done by Trinitarians, they almost all have masculine pronouns associated with verbs relating to holy spirit. This makes the average person reading the English Bible believe that “the Bible” says the holy spirit is a person. However, the masculine personal pronoun was placed in the text because of the theology of the translator, and not because the Greek text demanded it.

A verse where the different theology of Biblical Unitarians and Trinitarians greatly influences their translation is John 16:13. The NIV translation reads:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Although the word “he” appears in the NIV translation six times, it is only in the Greek text one time, and that one time it is a translation of the pronoun *ekeinos* (#1565 ἐκεῖνος), which is masculine because it is governed by, and thus has to match the gender of, the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. The other times that “he” occurs in the NIV text are an assumption on the part of the translators. They assert that the “Holy Spirit” is a person and is masculine, and therefore a masculine pronoun would automatically be assigned to any verb associated with it. For example, the NIV translates the Greek verb *hodegeō*, as “he will guide,” even though it is simply a third person singular verb, and, as we said, Greek verbs have no gender. But since the verb *hodegeō* has no gender, it could just as easily be translated “it will guide” or “she will guide,” whichever is best supported by the context.

When we understand that any gender associated with verbs has to be assigned from the subject being discussed and the context, then proper translation work demands that we scrutinize the context to see whether the subject being referred to is a “he,” “she” or “it.” In the case of John 16:13, we believe that the context is God’s gift of holy spirit, which is not a person, and that the verse should be properly translated, “it will guide.”

Another example regarding “spirit” is in the Gospel of John. In this verse, Jesus is talking with his disciples about the spirit of truth, and he says, “*but* you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.” (John 14:17b, NASB). The words “he abides” are an interpretation of the Greek, which is simply, “abides” in the third person singular, and thus could be “he abides,” “she abides,” or “it abides.” In this case, because

Jesus is speaking of God's gift of holy spirit, which is a "thing" and not a person, it is proper to say, "it abides."

The fact that Greek verbs do not have a gender, so any assigned to it is the interpretation of the translators, comes up in many areas besides holy spirit. For example, Luke 11:24 speaks of demons, and some versions say that when an unclean spirit comes out of a man, "he goes" through arid places. But are we sure the demon is a "he?" The Greek verb is genderless, and can be masculine, feminine, or neuter. Thus there are some versions that say "he" (cp. KJV; RSV) and some versions that say "it" (cp. NASB; NRSV), but because of mainstream theology, none say "she," although biblically that is a possibility. Although we usually think of angels and demons as masculine, there are both female good spirits (Zech. 5:9) and female evil spirits. The Hebrew word "Lilith" (Isa. 34:14) is the name of a female demon. "Lilith" gets translated many ways in the English versions, including "night monster" (ASV, NASB, Amplified), "night hag" (RSV), "night spectre" (Rotherham) and by her name, "Lilith" (NAB; Tanakh; The Message). Some translators apparently miss the point that Isaiah is referring to a demon at all, and have "screech owl" (KJV) or "night creature" (NIV). Lilith is "a malevolent supernatural being" (Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "Lilith," or "Night Hag"). Unless the context tells us the gender of a demon, using "it" in Luke 11:24 is our best choice because it allows for either male or female gender.

God's holy spirit is a most amazing and valuable gift, and it behooves us as Christians, especially those who translate the Bible, to understand it. Bible students who are not familiar with the original languages can do only this when the Greek and Hebrew texts are properly translated. If the translation is not accurate, then we do not have the Word of God, we have the words of men. Translating Scripture is one of the most important and spiritual of all responsibilities, because millions of people who do not read the original languages trust the translation to accurately represent the original. When it comes to the subject of God's gift of holy spirit, countless Christians have been misled or confused by the improper use of the pronoun "he," or other personal pronouns. When the pronouns associated with *pneuma*, spirit, are translated correctly, it is much easier to see the love and mercy of God expressed to us by His giving to us the wonderful gift of holy spirit. (This entry has dealt with pronouns as they are assigned to verbs. For the agreement of Greek nouns and pronouns, see the commentary on John 14:17).

16:14. "it." In Greek, the pronoun *ekeinos* (#1565 ἐκεῖνος) is masculine because it is governed by the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. However, the "Helper" is a word describing the gift of holy spirit (John 14:17), which is not a "he" but an "it." See commentary on 16:7 and John 14:17.

"it will take from what is mine, and will declare it to you." This is describing a function of the gift of holy spirit; Christ proclaims that it will deliver messages to his disciples by means of taking them from him and declaring the messages to his disciples. The words "from what is mine" in the Greek is *ek tou emou*, "out from the thing of me." It is the partitive use of the preposition *ek* (#1537 ἐκ), where the spirit takes a part of the things (messages) of Christ, and then heralds, *anaggellō* (#312 ἀναγγέλλω), it to the disciples. By using the phrasing, "what is mine," Jesus naturally raises the question, "Do not these messages ultimately come from God, and not you, so why do you say, 'what is mine?'" Jesus anticipates this concern and explains in verse fifteen: "All that belongs to

the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you” (NIV).

16:21. “sorrow.” The word means sorrow, grief, or pain. Here “sorrow” is dictated by verse 22. Christ is comparing the childbirth to what was about to happen to him.

“The woman” is Israel. In conjunction with “in that day” v. 23, it indicates the woman, Israel, in the tribulation. See Companion Bible verse.

“man.” The noun *anthrōpos* is in the masculine singular, but the reason for the translation “man” is that it was the custom in Israel that when a baby boy was born there was music, shouting, and great celebration, but when a baby girl was born there was none. This was due to a number of factors. Boys added to the family, while girls were thought to take from it. When a boy was married, his wife came to live with his family, he did not go to hers, and the grandchildren, of course then, stayed within the man’s family circle. In days when travel was by foot or donkey-cart, if a man and woman lived even what to us would be a short distance apart, the families rarely saw each other. Also, when the girl got married, her family paid the dowry to the man’s family, not, as in the European tradition, the man’s family paying to the woman’s family. So the woman’s family did not just lose the girl herself, they also gave up wealth.

Also, men helped defend the family, which, in the turbulent times of the ancient world was no small help if the family was to survive. All of this contributed to the cultural excitement at the birth of a boy. Of course, after some initial sadness that the baby was a girl, the baby would be warmly accepted into the family. (See, Mackie, *Manners and Customs*).

16:23. “in that day you will not ask me anything.” This phrase is a wonderful example why we have to pay close attention to translation and the context if we are going to properly understand and interpret the Word of God. At first glance, this verse seems to be a clear contradiction of John 14:14, where Jesus said, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” Are we, or are we not, to ask Jesus for things?

A major part of resolving the apparent contradiction lies in the Greek words themselves. In John 14:14, Jesus is clearly speaking of being able to do the works that he had done so the Father would be glorified. And in that context the word “ask” is *aiteō* (#154 αἰτέω, pronounced eye-te’-ō), which means “ask” but very forcefully so. The BDAG Greek-English lexicon defines it as “ask for, with claim on receipt of an answer; ...demand.” The Friberg Lexicon has “ask, request, demand.” In contrast, here in John 16:23 the Greek word “ask” is *erōtaō* (#2065 ἐρωτάω, pronounced err-ō-tah’-ō) and it means “to put a query to someone, ask, ask a question” (BDAG); “ask, seeking for information; question (Friberg’s Lexicon).

In John 14:14, Jesus is speaking of his being gone after his ascension. This is very clear from reading John 13-16. In John 13:33 Jesus told the Apostles he was going away to a place they could not follow, and he continued teaching them he was going away right up through chapter 16 (cp. John 14:1-4, 18, 19, 28; 16:5-10, 16). After Jesus ascends to heaven, having been given all authority in heaven and on earth, we are to ask him for things. In John 14:14, Jesus told his disciples to ask him for things so they could do the works that he had done (14:12). If we just read John 14:12-14 we can easily see that. In 14:12 Jesus told the disciples that if they continued to believe in him they would do the works that he did, and even greater works. Then in 14:13 he told them that he would do those works (i.e., Christ would accomplish those works) so that the Father would be

glorified. Then, continuing that thought he told his disciples that if they “asked” (asked expecting an answer; demanded) of him in his name, he would do it. [For more information on this point, see commentary on John 14:14].

In looking at John 16:23, we must remember that John 14:14 and 16:23 were both spoken at the Last Supper, perhaps only a very short while apart. The disciples were not confused by the “apparent contradiction,” and we should not be either. The disciples had been asking Jesus many questions, and there was a lot they did not understand. So, for example, they asked, “Where are you going” (13:36); “Why am I not able to follow you now” (13:37); “How are we able to know the way” (14:5); “Show us the Father” (14:8); “How is it you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world” (14:22); “What is this that he is saying, ‘A little while?’” (16:17, 18).

Jesus knew the disciples had lots of questions, and carefully navigated his way through them throughout the Last Supper, answering some while not answering others. As he got to the end of the Last Supper, he told his disciples, “In that day you will not ask me anything,” (perhaps Charles William’s translation is clearer: “At that time you will ask me no more questions”). The disciples would not have to ask questions because, for one thing, Jesus said, “I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech, but will tell you plainly of the Father” (16:25), plus, after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, they would understand all the things they had questions about—something that is quite plain in Acts, as we see the once-ignorant and dumbfounded apostles become bold proclaimers of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

16:24. “keep asking.” The verb for “ask” in this verse is in the active voice and present tense, and is what is known as a broadband present, or continuous present (Cp. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, pg. 519-25). This form indicates a continual action that takes place over a long time, rather than a one-time-event. Williams translates the phrase, “But now you must keep on asking.” We are not to just ask once for the things we seek from God, but to repeatedly ask, as the widow asked the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). Wallace explains the present tense in Matthew 7:7 this way: “The force of the present imperatives is ‘ask repeatedly, over and over again...seek repeatedly... knock continuously, over and over again” (Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 521). (Cp. Matt. 7:7, Luke 11:9, and commentary on 1 John 3:22.)

16:27. “treats you as friends...befriended me.” The two Greek verbs are both forms of *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). Although most versions say “loves...loved,” doing so confuses *agapē* love (“love” in the REV) with *phileō* love. *Phileō* love has an attachment, and it is the attachment between good friends. For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see the note on John 21:15.

16:30. “question you.” The Greek verb *erōtaō* (#2065 ἐρωτάω), translated elsewhere “to ask,” can mean to ask a question, or to ask a request. In this context Christ has no need for anyone to ask him questions, because he is speaking plainly, i.e., not in parables.

16:31. “Do you now believe?” Grammatically, in both Aramaic and Greek, this sentence can either be a statement or a question. Translated as a statement it would be something like, “You believe now” (cp. CJB; GWN; NIV 1984). Translated as a question it would be something like, “Do you now believe?” (HCSB; ESV; KJV; NASB; NET; NIV 2011). It is the context that determines whether Jesus made a statement or asked a question, and in this case the context is clear that he asked a question.

Starting in John 14:1, Jesus had been trying to tell his Apostles that he must go away to the Father. These are the same Apostles who could not grasp that he was going to die, no matter how often or clearly he told them. Since they did not know about his death, they certainly could not understand that he was going to ascend to heaven and be with the Father. It seems that Jesus told them so that they might understand at least part of what he was saying, but especially so that after his ascension they would remember that he had told them about it.

Evidence that the Apostles did not understand what Jesus was telling them is throughout the account. After Jesus said he was going to prepare a place for them, Thomas said, “Lord, we do not know where you are going” (14:5). A little later in the conversation Philip spoke up and said, “Show us the Father and that will be enough for us” (14:8). Other statements revealing that the Apostles did not understand what Jesus was talking about are in 14:22 and 16:17 and 18, culminating in them saying to each other: “We do not understand what he is saying” (16:18). At that point Jesus tried one last time to tell them he was going to the Father, but he put the emphasis of his comments on the subject of asking and receiving, God’s love, and his coming from God (John 16:19-28). At that point the Apostles said they understood, but what they understood was not that Jesus was going away to be with God, but rather that “you [Jesus] came from God” (16:30).

Jesus was no doubt pleased that his Apostles understood that he came from God, but was not fooled into thinking they understood about his ascension into heaven. Therefore, it was natural for him to challenge their confidence and try to keep them exploring what his words meant, which he did by asking the question, “Do you now believe?” We know from the Gospel records that Jesus was correct and the Apostles still did not believe Jesus would die, be raised from the dead, or ascend into heaven. Since at this Last Supper the Apostles did not know what Jesus meant when he told them he was going to the Father, it is certain that a few days earlier when they had asked him for signs of his “coming,” they did not mean his coming back to earth from heaven. They were referring to his “coming” (see commentary on Matthew 24:3).

16:32. “Take notice!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοῦ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“each one for himself.” The Greek word *eis* in the phrase is the “*eis* of advantage,” with the sense being, each one for his own advantage. The Greek phrase does not include the word “home,” as many English versions have, and “home” is not accurate, unless it was taken as “the place they were staying.” Most of the apostles had their homes in the Galilee, yet they stayed around Jerusalem. However, they were so afraid that it is not likely that they went to where they were commonly known to be staying, but rather would have found a temporary place to be secluded and protected. Jesus said that the disciples would be “scattered,” and that is no doubt what happened when Jesus was arrested. The disciples “fled” (Matt. 26:56; Mark 14:50), but not as a group. In the panic of the moment, it was each man for himself. Although the Gospels do not track exactly where the disciples went, Peter and another disciple followed Jesus to the house of the High Priest. No doubt over the next days the disciples assembled again, and were together when Jesus came to them (John 20:19). The Complete Jewish Bible has, “each one looking out for himself,” which sums up the meaning very well.

16:33. “I have overcome the world.” This is the prophetic perfect idiom, when something that will happen in the future is spoken of as already being accomplished (see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6).

Chapter 17

17:2. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

17:3. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

“that they know you.” Not “that they may know you.” (See Lenski; Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 992).

“and him whom you sent.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

17:5. “And now, Father, glorify me together with yourself with the glory that I had with you before the world was.” God had planned to glorify His Son, and now that the time of Jesus’ death was drawing near, Jesus prayed that God would bring His plan to fruition.

This verse has been used to prove that Jesus is God because of the phrase, “that I had with you before the world was.” There is no question that Jesus “existed” before the world began. But did he exist literally as a person or in God’s foreknowledge, “in the mind of God?” Both Christ and those called to be in the Body of Christ, the Church, existed in God’s foreknowledge before being alive. Christ was the “*logos*,” the “plan” of God from the beginning, and he became flesh only when he was conceived. It is Trinitarian bias that causes people to read an actual physical existence into this verse rather than a figurative existence in the mind of God. When 2 Timothy says that each Christian was given grace “before the beginning of time,” no one tries to prove that we were actually alive with God back then. Everyone acknowledges that we were “in the mind of God,” *i.e.*, in God’s foreknowledge. The same is true of Jesus Christ. His glory was “with the Father” before the world began, and in John 17:5 he prayed that it will come into manifestation.

Jesus was praying that the glory the Old Testament foretold he would have, and which had been in the mind of God the Father since before the world began, would come into concretion. Trinitarians, however, teach that Jesus was praying about glory he had with God many years before his birth, and they assert that this proves he had access to the mind and memory of his “God nature.” However, if, as a man, Jesus “remembered” being in glory with the Father before the world began, then he would have known he was God in every sense. He would not have thought of himself as a “man” at all. If he knew he was God, he would not and could not have been “tempted in every way just as we are” because nothing he encountered would have been a “real” temptation to him. He would have had no fear and no thought of failure. There is no real sense in which Scripture

could actually say he was “made like his brothers in every way” (Heb. 4:17) because he would not have been like us at all. Furthermore, Scripture says that Jesus “grew” in knowledge and wisdom. That would not really be true if Christ had access to a God-nature with infinite knowledge and wisdom.

We believe that John 17:5 is a great example of a verse that demonstrates the need for clear thinking concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. The verse can clearly be interpreted in a way that is honest and biblically sound, and shows that Christ was a man, but was in the foreknowledge of God as God’s plan for the salvation of mankind. It can also be used the way Trinitarians use it: to prove the Trinity. However, when it is used that way it reveals a Christ that we as Christians cannot truly identify with. We do not have a God-nature to help us when we are tempted or are in trouble or lack knowledge or wisdom. The Bible says that Christ can “sympathize with our weakness” because he was “tempted in every way, *just as we are*” (Heb. 4:15). The thrust of that verse is very straightforward. *Because* Christ was just like we are, *and* was tempted in every way that we are, he can sympathize with us. However, if he was not “just as we are,” then he would not be able to sympathize with us. We assert that making Christ a God-man makes it impossible to really identify with him.

We can tell that Jesus was speaking of being in God’s foreknowledge from the immediate context. Just two verses earlier, in John 17:3, Jesus said that the Father was “the only true God.” Jesus could not have prayed that while at the same time thinking he was God too. The proper interpretation of John 17 is simple and biblical. Jesus knew he was the promised Messiah and Son of God, and God had spoken of his glory many centuries earlier. Now, on the eve of his arrest, he prayed to his Father, the “only true God,” and asked for God’s plan to come to pass.

It also should be noted that Trinitarians have quoted Isaiah 42:8 which says that God will not give His glory to another, to show that Jesus must be God since Jesus had glory from God. The argument is fallacious for a number of reasons. First, the context of Isaiah 42 is idols, and that God will not share His glory with idols. The verse, taken in context, is not saying God will never share any glory with those who obey Him, because He clearly does give glory to those who obey him (cp. 1 Cor. 2:7). Furthermore, John 17:22 says that Jesus gave the glory he got from His Father to his disciples. But if Jesus was God, then he did not get glory “from” his Father, he would have had it all along, and furthermore, if “God” will not give His glory to another, then Jesus would never have given it to his disciples. God glorified His Son, who in turn gives glory to his disciples.

Jesus’ prayer in John 17 sets a wonderful example for us as Christians. He poured out his heart to his Father, “the only true God” (John 17:3), and prayed that the prophecies of the Old Testament about him would be fulfilled. [For more information on John 17:5, see *The Racovian Catechism*, written in Polish in 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818; reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 144-146. Also, Don Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*, pp. 424, 425].

17:12. “son of destruction.” This is a literal translation of the Greek, *huios tēs apōleias*, composed of the word for “son” (#5207 υἱός) and “destruction” (#684 ἀπώλεια) in the genitive case. It is the genitive of character—he is described as a son characterized by destruction, in this case, his destructive behavior. Judas’ character came first, then the consequences of his character; first he was a son of destruction, then accordingly he went to destruction. In other words, this title does not describe how he was *first* to be destroyed

and was thus a “son of destruction” but that he was a son of destruction and thus to be destroyed (Cp. Lenski). Many versions add “the one doomed” (NIV) or “the one destined” (NRSV; NET; NJB), but these words are not in the Greek text.

It was a common Semitic idiom to refer to an aspect of one’s character by referring to him as the “son of” some quality. Thus we have “son of eighty years” means someone eighty years old (Exod. 7:7); “son of stripes” is someone deserving to be beaten (Deut. 25:2); “sons of rebellion” (Num. 17:10); “sons of the army” are soldiers (2 Chron. 25:13); “sons of the pledges” are hostages (2 Kings 14:14); “sons of death” are those who are worthy of death or are going to die (Psalm 79:11); “son of Gehenna” (Matt. 23:15); “son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3); “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36); “son of the devil” (Acts 13:10); this custom even applies to animals: “son of the herd” (Gen. 18:7), and objects: “sons of the flame” for sparks (Job 5:7). The exact meaning of the idiom “son of X” has to be determined from the context, as the examples above show.

“resulting in the Scripture being fulfilled.” This phrase should not be translated as a purpose clause, as most translations do: “so that the scripture would be fulfilled.” This would have the consequence of making Judas intentionally lost for the purpose of fulfilling a prophecy about him. But the text in no way requires such a reading. In the Greek it is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood clause, which could be read to indicate a purpose or simply the result with no intention. Here it would be a result clause; Judas of his own free will was lost, resulting in the scripture being fulfilled, his being lost was not for the purpose of filling scripture. For explanation of purpose and result clauses, see Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” For more on Judas see entry on John 13:18, “let the scripture be fulfilled.”

17:15. “Wicked One.” The Greek is *poneros* (#4190 πονηρός), which the BDAG Greek-English Lexicon describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’” *Poneros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun; for more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37).

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness. [For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

17:17. “by the truth.” The Greek reads, “in the truth” (*en tē alētheia; ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ*). Although the translation “by the truth” is not bad, and the Greek word *en* (“in”) can mean “by,” the Greek is not just communicating that a person is made holy “by” the truth, as if the truth were a hammer pounding in a nail. Rather, *en* (“in”) indicates that the person is “in relation” to the truth, “in connection” with the truth, “in union” with the truth. It is as we are “in” the truth, in a relationship with it, submerged in it, if you will, that people truly become holy in the sight of God. And this use of holy is not just “holy enough to be saved,” but truly “holy,” truly like God. We believers should make it our goal to so immerse ourselves in the Word of God and the things of God that we become holy and like God in every aspect of our lives.

17:18. “Just as you sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For

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

17:19. “by the truth.” The Greek reads, “in the truth,” or more literally, “in truth,” but the phrase makes more sense with the definite article, which it has in verse 17. Although the definite article “the” is not in the text in this verse, it does not have to be. In Greek, a preposition can make the noun it modifies definite without there being a definite article in the phrase. Whether the noun is definite or indefinite can usually be determined from the context, at which point it can be translated in the best way to fit the receptor language (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*; Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996; p. 247). For an explanation of the phrase “in the truth,” see commentary on 17:17.

17:21. “in me and I in you.” See John 10:38 commentary “the Father is united with me, and I am united with the Father.”

“believe that you sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

17:23. “that you sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

17:25. “these knew that you sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

Chapter 18

18:1. “he went out.” Jesus and his disciples had gotten ready to leave the Last Supper in 14:31, but Jesus had continued to teach (chapters 15 and 16), and then pray (chapter 17). Now he goes out of the Upper Room, and out of the walled city of Jerusalem, and heads east across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane.

18:3. “Roman cohort.” Not necessarily the traditional 1/10 of a legion, or 600 men. At this time period, the word was sometimes used of a representative number of a cohort. Thus it could have been part of the cohort, but they were Roman soldiers, not just the guard of the High Priest. They were under the command of their “chiliarch”—translated as “military commander”—see verse 12. They would have come from the Antonia fortress. To get the Roman soldiers, the priests would have gone to Pilate, or even just to the chiliarch himself in Antonia under pretense of stopping a fomenting revolution. Some commentators think the entire group is Jewish, but this is not likely for a number of reasons. First, the vocabulary, especially chiliarch, is specific to the Roman army. Second, the cohort and the Temple police are mentioned as separate groups. If they were all Temple police, saying it once would have been enough. Third, the Temple police had already been sent to arrest Jesus once, and failed (John 7:45). The priests would take no chance this time, especially after they paid all that money to Judas to set the arrest up.

After the mobs had proclaimed him the Messiah (a great crowd yelled “Hosanna” (Save!), and called him the King of Israel; John 12:12 and 13), it would not have been difficult to persuade the Romans to arrest Jesus to keep a riot from occurring.

“Temple police.” The Greek word *huperetai* originally referred to the “under-rowers” in a galley, then it was generalized to mean any servant or underling under a superior. Thus it has a broad usage, and one that may or may not be demeaning, depending on the context. It applies to servants in different capacities: prison guard (Matt. 5:25), minister of Christ (Luke 1:2; 1 Cor. 4:1); Synagogue attendant (Luke 4:20), etc. Here it applies to a police force of sorts that was dedicated to keeping the peace in the Temple, so “Temple” is supplied from the context, and put in italics. See Vincent, *Word Studies*; Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*; Lenski, *Commentary*.

18:9. “so that the word that he spoke was fulfilled.” The Greek is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose-result clause (see Matt. 2:15 entry, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled”). Jesus said “let the men go” with the *intention* of fulfilling his words in John 17:12, and it also *resulted* in them being fulfilled.

18:11. “Am I not to drink...” The strong *ou me* in the Greek has been left as a simple “not.”

“drink the cup.” “Drinking the cup” was a common idiom meaning to experience, whether that experience was good (cp. Ps. 16:5; 23:5; 116:13; Jer. 16:7) or bad (cp. Ps. 11:6; 75:8; Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15). See commentary on Matthew 20:21.

18:12. “commander.” The Greek word *chiliarchos* (#5506 χιλιάρχος) designates a specific rank, namely, a “chiliarch,” which is the rank of a commander of a cohort; it is equivalent to a Roman tribune. We might say, the platoon and the sergeant. Thus the Romans not only sent soldiers, but the commander came along also.

18:13. “And they led him to Annas.” The events of the last week of Jesus Christ’s life are spread throughout all Four Gospels, and different Gospels give different details, which is why we have to be familiar with all four Gospel records to properly reconstruct what happened that week. Every Gospel is written from a different point of view: Matthew portrays Jesus as a king, Mark as a servant, Luke as a man, and John portrays Jesus as the Son of God [for more on these four viewpoints, see commentary on Mark 1:1].

In the case of Jesus’ arrest, only the Gospel of John records Jesus being taken to Annas, and makes it clear that he was taken to Annas first. Annas had been the High Priest from 6-15 AD, which meant Annas had been the High Priest when Jesus was in the Temple at twelve years old (Luke 2:41-52). At that time in the history of Israel, the High Priest was placed in office, or removed, by the Roman governor. Quirinius installed Annas, and Valerius Gratus deposed him, replacing him with Ismael son of Phabi. However, Annas’ power, wealth, and political adroitness were such that five of his sons, then his son-in-law Caiaphas, then a grandson, were all High Priests. Thus there is little doubt that Annas was the power behind the High Priest’s office, and so Jesus was first taken to Annas before he was taken to Caiaphas.

It makes sense that the Gospel of John would record Jesus being taken to Annas, because he did not have an official position, but no doubt had set the tone for the High Priesthood for many years, and in the epic struggle between good and evil and between religion and truth, it would make sense that the Son of God would stand before the “real” spiritual authority in Israel and be rejected by him before being taken to the “official”

authorities. From Annas, Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, the “official” High Priest (John 18:24).

“first.” The events of the last week of Jesus’ life are the pivotal events of history. It was late Monday night when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12). After that, the following events take place, culminating in Jesus’ death.

1. Late Monday night: After his arrest, Jesus was taken “first” to Annas, who would have been at his own home (John 18:13-23).
2. Very late Monday night or early Tuesday morning: Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, the High Priest, who had called together many of the chief priests and Jewish leadership (Matt. 27:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54-65; John 18:24-27).
3. Tuesday sunrise: Jesus was taken to a dawn meeting of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, and this meeting would have been in a chamber inside the Temple (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71).
4. Tuesday morning: The Sanhedrin took Jesus to Pilate early in the morning (John 18:28). This early meeting was not unusual because Roman government conducted business early, and usually quit in the early afternoon. Pilate would have been in the Western Palace, which had been the Palace of Herod the Great (Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1-6; John 18:28-38).
5. Tuesday early to mid-morning: Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas (Luke 23:7-12).
6. Tuesday, close to noon: Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. This second trial before Pilate occurred about 12 noon (John 19:14). Matthew, Mark, and John do not clearly show that Jesus’ trial before Pilate was in two parts, an early morning part (Mark 15:1; John 18:28) and a later part about 12 noon. They show the two trials as one record (actually, it seems that Matthew leaves the early trial out completely, and just focuses on the second trial before Pilate). From the record in Luke, we can see that Barabbas was offered as part of Pilate’s second trial (Luke 23:18), which is helpful in determining the chronology of the other Gospels. Also, Luke notes that at the start of the second trial, Pilate had to call together the chief priests again (Luke 23:13), which makes sense because they would have left his palace and gone about their duties when Pilate sent Jesus to Herod.
7. Tuesday afternoon, night, and Wednesday morning: After Jesus’ second trial before Pilate, Pilate handed him over to his soldiers. They took him to the Praetorium, gathered the entire Roman cohort, and then beat and tortured him through the afternoon and night (Matt. 27:26-31; Mark 15:16-20; Luke and John omit Jesus’ overnight torture by the whole Roman cohort of soldiers).
8. Wednesday morning: Jesus is led out to be crucified about 9 AM (Mark 15:25), and about 12 noon a darkness came over the land that lasted until 3 PM, when Jesus died (Matt. 27:31-45; Mark 15:20-33; Luke 23:26-44; John 19:17-29)
9. Wednesday about 3 PM: Jesus died (Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46; John 19:30).

Jesus died Wednesday afternoon and was raised from the dead three days and three nights later, on Saturday at sunset. [For information on the events and chronology of Jesus’ death and resurrection and his being in the tomb from Wednesday night to Saturday night, see commentary on Luke 23:50].

18:14. “Caiaphas who advised.” This was back in John 11:50.

18:17. “slave-girl.” In this context, slave-girl is the most likely translation of *paidiskē* (# 3814 παιδίσκη, the feminine of *paidiskos*, a young boy or slave; a diminutive of *παῖς*. Cp. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*). She could have been a “servant-girl” or a “slave-girl,” but given the wealth and social status of the High Priest’s family, it is more probable that this woman was a slave-girl. The Greek word was used of a young girl, a servant girl, or a young female slave.

18:18. “servants and the Temple guard.” The Greek words are both general. *Douloi* is slaves or servants, and *huperetai* is also servants or underlings. So what are the specifics of these words? The context would indicate the servants and the Temple guards.

18:21. “Why do you ask me?” Jesus was correct and following the Law by saying this. He knew he was on trial, and the prosecution is supposed to produce witnesses, not try to get self-incrimination. This was one of the many inconsistencies or illegalities with the trial of Jesus. That is also why, after one of the police struck him in the face for supposed impertinence, Jesus said, ““If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong, but if rightly, why do you strike me?””

18:24. “Annas sent him, still tied up, to Caiaphas the high priest.” It is likely that the two of them lived in the same palace-like complex or adjoining homes, with only a courtyard dividing them. It was common for relatives to share a living space, or live close together, and there is no indication that Peter moved from one courtyard to another in the trial of Jesus. Peter was only able to get into the High Priest’s courtyard because of a connection that one of the disciples had with the High Priest (John 18:16), and Peter never again had to ask to gain entrance to another courtyard. After his arrest in Gethsemane, Jesus was taken to Annas first, then sent to Caiaphas. From there he was taken to a dawn meeting of the whole Sanhedrin (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71). Caiaphas was the son-in-law to Annas, and the designated High Priest at that time. The trial of Jesus (indeed, the whole conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders), reveals the extent to which tradition often takes precedent over truth, and how some religious people will go to great lengths to protect their traditions, even at the expense of people’s lives. It was against Jewish Law to conduct a capital trial at night. According to law, any capital trial had to be held during the full light of day, but in this case Caiaphas tired Jesus at night. His “reason” was likely that a full daylight trial of Jesus in Passover season would attract large crowds of his followers, and the uproar might require Roman troops and lead to more Roman control and restrictions, which the Jewish ruling council did not want.

18:28. “the Praetorium.” “Praetorium” was a term used for wherever the governor or the current military commander was staying, so the word itself does not tell us where it was. In this case, it was most likely the Western Place, which had been the residence of Herod the Great.

Scholars are divided over whether Jesus was tried at the Western Palace, or at the Antonia Fortress (the traditional start of the Via Dolorosa). Alfred Edersheim writes: “Although it is impossible to speak with certainty, the balance of probability is entirely in favor of the view that, when Pilate was in Jerusalem with his wife, he occupied the truly royal abode of Herod, not the fortified barracks of Antonia... the inference is obvious that Pilate, especially as he was accompanied by his wife, stayed there [the Western Palace] also” (*Life and Times*, Book 5, p. 566). The Antonia was not at all lavish, and it is hard to believe that Pilate would subject his wife to staying there when Herod’s Palace was

another residence of his in the same city barely a half mile away. We must keep in mind that Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was over a week long, and Pilate likely came from Caesarea to Jerusalem for at least a couple weeks.

Many people believe that the Praetorium was in the Antonia Fortress. One reason, though usually unspoken, is that it is the traditional location, and many people believe that there had to be a good reason for the tradition to get started, which actually there does not. In fact, if tradition is the test, the fact that the Antonia Fortress is the traditional location would witness against its being the actual site. The traditional site of the Transfiguration, the Ecce Homo arch, the stops on the Via Dolorosa, the Pool of Siloam, and much more have all been disproven. The tradition of the current pathway of the Via Dolorosa starting at Antonia started during Medieval time. When Christian pilgrims began coming to the Holy Land in the fourth century, the site of the Praetorium of Pilate had been forgotten. The earliest pilgrims of this period located it below the Jewish Quarter in the Tyropoeon Valley just east of the temple area. Later the pilgrimage site was moved to the Church of Holy Sion on “Mount Zion,” which is actually not far south of where Herod’s palace had actually stood. Then the “traditional site” was reassigned a third time, this time to the site on which now stands Convent of the Sisters of Zion in Jerusalem.

Another reason the Antonia is favored by some people is that because Herod Antipas occupied the Western Palace at the feast of Passover, it is assumed that Pilate could not stay there. However, the Western Palace was huge, and contained at least two completely separate living areas and a military barracks, as well as a huge pavement area for people to assemble and for Pilate to preside and judge. We must keep in mind that when Herod had it built, he needed to be able to house visiting dignitary guests in luxury. When Herod built the palace, he had to be prepared to receive high dignitaries from Rome as well as other countries such as Egypt. Herod was also paranoid about security, so the presence of room for a barracks is understandable. The military presence in Herod’s palace would most likely have been in the northern part of the palace complex, including inside the three huge defense towers constructed there by Herod.

Another reason the Antonia is sometimes favored is that it is said that the governor had to stay close to the troops so he could be firmly in command in case of trouble. But the Western Palace is only about 600 yards (less than 600 meters) from the Temple, so Pilate’s staying there would not be a problem.

Modern historical and archaeological evidence is favoring the Western Palace as the Praetorium where Jesus was taken to Pilate. John 19:13 mentions “the Pavement” (Greek: *lithostrotos*; #3038 λιθόστρωτος). There is a supposed “lithostrotos” under the Convent of the Sisters of Zion in Jerusalem, but this has been conclusively dated as being constructed after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. For one thing, the pavement covers the “Struthion Pool,” which Josephus, speaking about it before 70 AD, said was open to the air. Thus any pavement covering it post-dates the Jewish revolt of 70 AD. In contrast, the huge paved area in the Western Palace dates to the time of Christ, and is so huge it is genuinely worthy of getting the name, “the Pavement.”

Philo of Alexandria, in his *Delegation to Gains*, says Pilate’s residence during the feasts was in “Herod’s palace,” and Josephus makes the point that the governor Florus also stayed at the Palace, and says it had a *bema* (place of judgment) in front of it and a

place where criminals could be whipped (War: 2:301ff). The evidence leans strongly that Jesus was tried in Herod's Palace on the Western side of Jerusalem.

18:29. "Pilate." Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from 26 to 36 AD. [For more on Pilate, see commentary on Matt. 27:2].

"What accusation are you bringing against this man?" This was a standard opening of a trial, and no doubt Pilate had spoken the same words many times before.

18:32. "with the result that." In the Greek a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood result clause. See Matthew 2:15 entry, "resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled."

"clearly indicating by what manner of death he was about to die." Jesus had spoken of being lifted up from the earth, which meant he would be crucified. See John 12:32, 33; and 3:14 and 8:28.

18:34. "Do you say this of yourself." The disciples did not expect Jesus to be killed and then raised from the dead. That is simply not what most first-century Jews believed about the Messiah, so they did not understand what Jesus was speaking of when he spoke of being raised from the dead (cp. Matt. 16:22; Mark 9:10; John 20:9).

18:36. "My kingdom is not of this world." What Jesus means is that his kingdom and "this world" (not "the world," but "this world") have little in common. "This world" is a fallen world, under the control of the Devil (John 14:30; 1 John 5:19). Jesus' enemies were "of this world" (John 8:23), and were children of the Devil (John 8:44). The wisdom of "this world" is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 3:19). Thankfully, the present shape of "this world" is passing away, and one day will be gone altogether (1 Cor. 7:31; Rev. 21:4, 5). Jesus' kingdom was going to be established on earth by the power of God when he came from heaven (Rev. 19), and his authority was going to come from God, not from "this world's" system of things.

We must be careful when reading "My kingdom is not of this world" that we do not think it is saying, "My kingdom will not be on earth," because Jesus will set up his Millennial Kingdom on earth [For more on Christ's earthly kingdom, see Appendix 3: "Christ's Future Kingdom on Earth"].

"in fact." This is the logical, not the temporal, use of the Greek word *nun* (#3568 νῦν). It can be confusing to translate this as "now," because people might take it to mean "not now, but later," but that is not its meaning here. Jesus was not telling Pilate that he would later have a kingdom. He had just told Pilate he did have a kingdom but it was not of this world. Now he was saying that in different words: The fact is that my kingdom is not from here. He was not a rival to Pilate or Rome.

18:37. "You rightly say." See Matthew 27:11 note on "*It is as you say.*" In verse 36 and 37 Pilate discovers that, although Jesus is claiming to be some kind of king over something with which he is unfamiliar, the Jews' blanket accusation that Jesus was making himself a king in a sense that would be threatening to Caesar was false. Thus he reports in verse 38 that he finds no cause for death in Jesus.

Chapter 19

19:4. "to let you know." The verb "know" is *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω), and it is in the subjunctive mood, which is why many translations have "that you may know." However, the Greek conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα), which is a word introducing a purpose, earlier in

the sentence, is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore in these cases we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, there is no reason to use the awkward translation, “so that you may know,” when the meaning is simply “to let you know” (cp. HCSB; NIV; also see CJB and NJB).

19:5. “See!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοῦ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

19:6. “reason for a charge.” The Greek is *aitia* (#156 αἰτία), and means that which is responsible for a condition, *cause, reason*; the actual state of affairs, *case, circumstance, relationship*; a basis for legal action, charge, *ground for complaint*; accusation (BDAG). In this verse, Pilate was telling the Jews he found no reason for a charge against Jesus.

19:14. “sixth hour.” This is about our 12 noon. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For more information on the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

There has been much discussion about the chronology used in the book of John, but there is no genuine reason to believe that John used a different standard of chronology and timekeeping than all the Gospels. The reason some theologians have questioned the timekeeping in John is to try to explain how the Gospel of John can say that Jesus was still with Pilate about noon, the 6th hour, (John 19:14) when other Gospels have him being crucified at the third hour (our 9 AM; Mark 15:25), then darkness coming over the land at the sixth hour (our noon; Luke 23:44), then Jesus dying around the ninth hour (our 3 PM; Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:24-37). Obviously, if Jesus was still with Pilate at noon, and then he was handed over to the soldiers who tortured him, he could not have been crucified at 9 AM, and in fact it would have even been difficult to get him crucified by about 3 PM, when Matthew and Mark say he died.

The answer to the “problem” created by trying to make Jesus’ crucifixion on Friday is that Jesus was not arrested Thursday night and crucified Friday morning, as most Christians suppose. The primary reason that historically people have believed the crucifixion had to be Friday is that it occurred the day before the Sabbath. But Passover Day was a Sabbath, a special Sabbath according to the Law of Moses (see commentary on John 19:31). The accurate chronology is:

- Jesus was arrested Monday night and taken to Annas (John 18:12-14)
- Jesus was soon taken to Caiaphas’ house (Matt. 26:57; [Mark 14:53; Luke 22:54] John 18:24).
- There was a night trial at Caiaphas’ house at which Jesus was condemned to death for blasphemy (Matt. 26:59-67; Mark 14:55-65).
- After the night trial, Jesus was taken at daybreak to a trial before the whole Sanhedrin and was condemned by them (Matt. 27:1; Luke 22:66-70).
- After the daybreak trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus was taken before Pontus Pilate (Matt. 27:2; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1-6; John 18:28).
- Pilate sent Jesus to the tetrarch Herod Antipas to be tried by him (Luke 23:7-12).
- Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate, so Jesus was before Pilate about noon (John 19:14). Most of the Gospels do not have Jesus going back and forth between Pilate and Herod, but blend Jesus’ two trials before Pilate into one record.
- Pilate hands Jesus over to the soldiers who torture him through the night (Matt. 27:26-31; Mark 15:16-20; John 19:16).
- Jesus is crucified around 9 AM Wednesday morning (Mark 15:25).

- Darkness comes over the land from 12 noon to 3 PM (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44)
- Jesus dies sometime around 3 PM (Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46).

The only way to make the traditional chronology work is to say that the “sixth hour” in John 19:14 somehow does not refer to noon, but much earlier. But how could that be? The Gospel of John clearly uses the standard Roman and Jewish hours, as we can see from John 1:39, 4:6, and 4:52. It is sometimes taught said that the Romans reckoned their hours from midnight, and that was technically true or their civil day, but, as R. C. H. Lenski points out, “for ordinary purposes they [the Romans], too, reckoned twelve hours from sunrise to sunset” (*The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, commentary on John 1:39).

John would not use a “special” chronology just in this one verse. R. C. H. Lenski, who believes in the traditional Friday crucifixion, is honest enough to say, “No solution [to the John 19:14 problem] has yet been found.” The solution to the problem is actually simple. Jesus was before Pilate at 12 noon, but on Tuesday. Then, after the trial, Pilate turned Jesus over to the soldiers who tortured him through the night, and he was crucified on Wednesday morning, Passover Day, 28 AD. He arose from the dead three days and three nights after he was buried, so he got up on Saturday evening just before sunset (Matt. 12:40 says Jesus was 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth). Then Jesus first appeared to his disciples on Sunday morning, just as Scripture says (the Bible never says Jesus got up Sunday morning. That is an assumption. It says he appeared to his disciples on Sunday morning). [For more information on the events from Jesus’ arrest to his death, see commentary on John 18:13. For information on the events and chronology of Jesus’ death and resurrection and his being in the tomb from Wednesday night to Saturday night, see commentary on Luke 23:50].

19:15. “crucify him.” This is not the same crowd that had said, “Hosanna,” and “Son of David” some days earlier. See commentary on Luke 23:21.

19:17. “cross.” The Greek word is *stauros* (#4716 σταυρός; pronounced stau-ros'). The “cross” that Jesus was executed on has been a subject of scholarly debate for many years. The problem is that *stauros* can mean several things, including a cross, a single stake, or even just the horizontal cross-piece that was attached to something that was fixed in place such as an upright stake or even a tree. Similarly, the verb *stauroō* (#4717 σταυρόω pronounced stau-ro'-ō) often translated as “crucify,” has a number of meanings, such as “drive a stake” or “crucify” (i.e., execute on a *stauros*), but as with *stauros*, the Greek word itself does not describe the shape of the execution device.

In spite of the ambiguity of *stauros* and *stauroō*, the Bible does give us some help with how Jesus died. John 19:17 says that Jesus started out carrying his own cross, that most likely indicates he was carrying a cross-piece of some kind that would then be attached to an upright stake that was already in place. At some point along the way to Calvary, Jesus could no longer carry his *stauros*, and it was transferred to a man called Simon of Cyrene who carried it after Jesus (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26). It is possible that the *stauros* Jesus carried was a large upright stake that he was then crucified on. However, this is not as likely as him carrying just the cross-piece, because if he carried a large single stake the Romans would have had to have gone out much earlier and dug a hole for that upright stake to fit in securely, which would have been quite difficult. The rocky ground would have made trying to dig a hole right at that time very

unlikely. Nevertheless, scholars such as E. W. Bullinger think Jesus was crucified on a single upright stake.

The Greek text also says Jesus was crucified on a “tree” (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; 1 Pet. 2:24). The Greek word is *xulon* (#3586 ξύλον pronounced zoo'-lon) and it means a tree, log, a piece of timber or wood, or something made from wood such as a beam or cross or club (Mark 14:48), or even the stocks that Paul’s feet were placed in (Acts 16:24). The use of *xulon* to describe the way Jesus died has caused some scholars, such as Earnest Martin, to say that Jesus carried his cross-piece, but when he got to the place of crucifixion, it was nailed to a living tree. However, the word *xulon*, like the word *stauros*, has so many different meanings that we cannot tell from it the exact shape of the “cross” Jesus was crucified on.

From a practical point of view, it is unlikely that Jesus was crucified on a single upright stake that was dropped into a hole that had already been dug. It is also unlikely that Jesus was nailed to a piece of wood that then had to be nailed to a living tree. That would have required a lot of manpower and at least a few living trees, because others were crucified with Christ. It is much more likely that the Romans already had upright stakes in the ground waiting for Jesus and the others who were crucified with him that day, and that they nailed the men to horizontal cross-pieces that were then hoisted into place and secured. If that is the case, then the crosses on which Jesus and the other men were crucified were quite “standard” in shape, looking like a regular tee: “†”. The fact is, however, that we cannot be sure of the exact shape of the cross on which Jesus was crucified.

19:20. “the Place of the city.” The word “place” was a designation of the Temple, see commentary on *topos* at Matthew 24:15.

19:24. Quoted from Psalm 22:18.

“so that.” In the Greek a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose-result, or simply result clause. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” God could have worked in these men—in a way that did not inhibit their free will—to want to draw lots, or it could just be a result clause. The rendering “so that,” is an ambiguous translation in that it could be read as either purpose or result.

“Now this is what the soldiers did.” The context demands that this phrase goes with verse 24, not verse 25. Parting with the ASV, NASB, and NRSV, we followed the verse pattern of the Nestle-Aland Greek text. Although the Greek, *oi men sun* that opens the phrase can be causal, i.e., “so...,” it can also simply be a mark of continuation of the dialogue, in this case sort of a summation of the action of the soldiers. The soldiers did act by their free-will. It is not as if God forced the soldiers to act in a manner that fulfilled the prophecy. Between God’s foreknowledge and Him working behind the scenes in history, the prophecy is fulfilled without curtailing anyone’s freedom of will.

19:26. “Woman.” The Greek is *gunē* (#1135 γυνή; goo-nay'), a woman of any age, a wife. It was a blessing that Jesus referred to Mary as “woman” and not “mother.” Calling Mary “mother” would have only heightened the horrible emotional pain she was already feeling, but more than that, it would have taken her focus in the wrong direction. Jesus, although her biological son, was her Lord, and she his disciple. She needed to begin to think of Jesus’ crucifixion as the will of God and the obedience of her Lord, and as God’s provision of restoration for the whole world.

19:27. “your mother!” As part of his last acts before his death, Jesus took care of his family, which was an important duty, especially since he was the oldest son. Thus he shows by example what the Bible says clearly: “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). It is fair to ask, why Jesus would have told John to take his mother Mary home with him. Although the Bible does not tell us directly, we can deduce that Jesus’ father, Joseph, had died. It also seems certain that Jesus’ brothers still did not believe in him (see commentary on John 7:5).

The Bible does not say directly that Joseph died, but that is the logical conclusion from the scope of Scripture. It seems unlikely that Joseph, who had been a good husband and father, had abandoned the family. Yet he is obviously not around when Jesus told John to take Mary home. We know that in Nazareth, Jesus’ hometown, Joseph took care to raise his boys in a traditional way. He was considered “the carpenter” (or perhaps more accurately, “the builder”), and he had raised Jesus to be a carpenter too. We know this because in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is called a carpenter (Mark 6:3).

By the time Jesus started his ministry, however, there is a complete absence of Joseph. When the family thought Jesus had gone insane, Mary and his brothers came to get him without Joseph (Matt. 12:47; Luke 8:19). As his ministry progressed, his brothers are mentioned, but not his father. In fact, when the Scripture says that “his brothers” did not believe in him, it seems unlikely that the opinion of his father Joseph would have been omitted if he had still been around. The most conclusive evidence that Joseph was dead, however, was that Jesus told John to take Mary home. That would have been unthinkable if Joseph were alive.

The other reasons Jesus would have asked John to take care of Mary is that Jesus’ own brothers were continuing to reject him (see commentary on John 5:7). Scripture says that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, and the disbelief of his brothers would have certainly been a source of pain to Jesus. All of us want the love and support of our family members, but in the case of faith in Jesus, his brothers having faith in him meant more than just family unity, it meant their salvation. There is no scriptural evidence that any of Jesus’ brothers believed he was the Messiah until after his resurrection, and that may have been part of the reason that Jesus went to Galilee after his resurrection. Thankfully, at least some of Jesus’ brothers came to believe in him after his resurrection. In fact, his brother James rose to lead the Church in Jerusalem after the Apostle James was killed by Herod Agrippa (cp. Acts 12:2, 17; 15:13), and he wrote the Epistle of James. Also, his brother Judas rose to prominence and wrote the Epistle of Jude.

19:28. “in order to.” The Scripture that was fulfilled was Psalm 69:21: “for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” In the Greek a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose clause. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in... what was spoken being fulfilled.” By this time Jesus’ mouth would have been utterly dry, not having had any water for over 24 hours. As scripture says of the suffering Messiah, “my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death” (Psalm 22:15, NRSV). Now seeing that all things were completed, he had only to die. But in a last act of grace towards those standing near, he desired to quote Psalm 22 to the onlookers, that they may see he is clearly fulfilling scripture. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” quotes Jesus (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34), but some of those

standing by misheard “Eli, Eli” to be a call for “Elias,” due to the difficulty Jesus would have had in speaking. Therefore, Jesus says, “I am thirsty,” not as a statement of fact, but “in order to fulfill the scriptures,” and also for the purpose of wetting his mouth to allow for annunciation. Having received the sour wine and feeling the unconsciousness of death creeping on, Jesus exclaims, “It is finished” (John 19:30), which the other gospels only record as a “loud cry” (Matt. 27:50; Mark. 15:37). Luke 23:46 gives the further information that during this time he also said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (from Psalm 31:5).

19:30. “It is finished.” This phrase is the translation of the one Greek word *teleō* (#5055 τελέω; pronounced “tel-eh'-ō”). It means “to complete an activity, thus, to finish, to close; to carry out an obligation, thus to accomplish, perform, fulfill; to pay what is due” (BDAG). Interestingly, it has been found in the papyri on tax receipts where it was used as “paid in full,” just as we put “paid in full” on paid receipts today. Thus, this statement is pregnant with meaning. It did mean, “It is finished,” because every obligation and prophecy of the Law, every requirement that was necessary for the salvation of mankind, was finished when Jesus ended his life. It also meant, “Paid in full,” because Jesus was the payment, the sin offering, for mankind’s sin (Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:21).

19:31. “the high day.” The Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the crosses on that special Sabbath that started the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so they wanted to have the legs of the criminals broken. Then the criminals would not be able to support their weight on their legs and would quickly asphyxiate.

The Passover lamb was always killed on the 14th of Nisan (Nisan is the first month of the Jewish year), and the sunset after the Passover lamb was killed started the 15th of Nisan. The 15th of Nisan was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and it was always a Sabbath, no matter on which day of the week it occurred (Lev. 15:7). The Law of Moses decreed that the 15th of Nisan was a special Sabbath, which is why Luke 23:54 says the “Sabbath” was beginning, even though the day that was beginning was a Thursday. We need to be clear on the fact that the “Sabbath” here in John 19:31 and in Luke 23:54 is not the weekly Sabbath, Saturday, but Thursday, the 15th of Nisan (see commentary on Luke 23:54). This point is made clear here in John 19:31, which tells us specifically that this Sabbath was a “high day,” meaning a special Sabbath, not the regular weekly Sabbath.

Most Christians do not realize that when the Bible says Jesus was crucified the day before the “Sabbath,” it does not mean the regular weekly Sabbath, but rather the Sabbath that starts with sunset after the Passover sacrifice. Sunset on the 14th of Nisan, the day the Passover sacrifice is killed, starts the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the 15th of Nisan, and that day is always a special Sabbath, a high day.

The Jews had no love for Jesus, and stories about him got confused as time went on. Yet apparently they retained the historic memory of him dying the day the Passover Lamb was killed, just before the Feast of Unleavened Bread started. Thus they write in the Babylonian Talmud: “On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostacy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!” (*Babylonian Talmud*, Sanhedrin 43a (uncensored version) [Soncino Translation]).

19:36. Quoted from Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20.

“**so that.**” In the Greek a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose-result, or simply result clause. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” God could have brought it about that none of messiah’s bones were broken, or it could just be a result clause. The rendering “so that,” is an ambiguous translation in that it could be read as either purpose or result.

19:37. Quoted from Zechariah 12:10.

19:38. “Joseph...asked Pilate’s *permission* so that he could take away the body of Jesus.” Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus. See commentary on Matthew 27:58.

19:39. “But Nicodemus also came.” The Greek has the particle *de* (#1161 δέ; pronounced deh), often translated “but,” at the beginning of the sentence. However, the *de* in the Greek text has been basically ignored by translators due to the tradition that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus worked together to bury Jesus, even though they did not (see commentary on John 19:40). The most common use of the *de* is to either mark a contrast or mark the start of a new subject. In this verse, it could be translated as a contrast, as in the REV, or it could be seen to start a new subject, but we do not have a good English word that does that (Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible uses “Moreover”). Many English versions show the change in subject by not translating the *de* at all, but we did not feel that was strong enough in this context. We should read John like, “Joseph took down the body of Jesus, but Nicodemus came with spices to bury him.” Although it is true that grammatically there are times when the *de* can be translated “and,” that would be misleading in this case because it would connect Joseph and Nicodemus too closely.

Translations of John 19:39 such as the NIV’s “he [Joseph] was accompanied by Nicodemus,” are in error. They are not what the Greek text says, and thus are not translations, but interpretations, and erroneous ones at that.

“**about seventy-five pounds.**” The Greek is 100 *litra* (#3046 λίτρα), and a *litra* is a Roman pound of 12 ounces, while the American pound is 16 ounces. Thus 100 Roman pounds is 75 American pounds. Quite a few English versions read, “100 pounds,” which is confusing to English readers who only think in terms of American pounds.

This is a huge amount of spices. It is likely that Jesus’ body did not even weigh much more than twice that amount. It has been suggested by many scholars that this large amount was actually fitting for a royal burial, and thus although Jesus’ birth was in less than royal circumstances, it seems his burial, in the tomb of a rich man and with a royal amount of spices, was a royal burial. Had the women watching the burial seen Nicodemus, they would not have gone and bought spices themselves, and we can bet that even though they did buy spices, they did not buy nearly 75 pounds worth, which would have cost a lot of money.

19:40. “they.” Joseph of Arimathea got the body of Jesus down from the cross, wrapped it in clean linen cloth, put it in a tomb, rolled the stone over the door of the tomb, and left, and the women watched him (Matt. 27:58-61). After Joseph of Arimathea left the tomb, Nicodemus and his servants arrived. Nicodemus and his servants are likely the “they” in John 19:40.

We know that Nicodemus and Joseph did not work together because Joseph closed the tomb and left while the women were still watching him (Matt. 27:60, 61). But if the women had seen Joseph and Nicodemus work together to bury Jesus, which is what

the traditional teaching says, then the women would have seen that Jesus had been properly buried, even royally buried, with 75 pounds of spices (see REV commentary on John 19:39). The fact that the women left the tomb after Joseph did, and still thought they needed to buy spices is conclusive evidence that Joseph and the women had left the area before Nicodemus arrived with the spices.

Nicodemus needed to have servants with him for a number of reasons. For one thing, to help him carry the spices, which weighed about 75 pounds (John 19:39). Also, he would have needed help rolling away the stone from the door of the tomb. Also, it was likely that as a member of the Sanhedrin and a wealthy man, he would have traveled with a bodyguard anyway, especially when it was close to dark, and very especially when he was carrying what certainly was thousands of dollars' worth of valuable spices.

Nicodemus brought the traditional burial spices with him, and re-wrapped Jesus' body with them. It is likely that Nicodemus' work was completed after dark, which was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was always counted as a Sabbath, no matter what day of the week it fell on. Nevertheless, he would have had some light even without torches because it was the 14th day of the Jewish lunar month, so there was a full moon. Nicodemus touched Jesus' dead body, making himself unclean for the Passover meal, and this showed how much he loved Jesus.

One reason that tradition teaches that Joseph and Nicodemus worked together is that it seems unlikely that the only two followers of Jesus on the Sanhedrin would not have collaborated together on the burial of Jesus. Even if Joseph and Nicodemus knew about each other, it is possible that they did not find out about each other until the trial of Jesus, when they were asked to vote for his death. It does seem that they both had been very quiet about being followers of Jesus, so much so that it seems that none of the other members of the Sanhedrin knew they were disciples.

It occurs occasionally in the Gospels that even though there are two or more people involved in doing something, some Gospels mention only one of the people while others mention both people. So, for example, when it comes to the men who lived in the tombs who Jesus healed, Matthew mentions both men (Matt. 8:28), while Mark and Luke mention only one of the two men (Mark 5:2; Luke 8:27). However, that kind of scenario does not work for Joseph and Nicodemus, because had they worked together they would have closed the tomb and left together, but the women saw Joseph close the tomb and leave, and the body of Jesus had not yet been properly buried with spices, according to the Jewish custom.

It is possible that Joseph and Nicodemus conferred about the burial of Jesus, but disagreed about how it was to be done. It is more likely, however, that they were supposed to meet at the tomb and work together but Nicodemus got delayed, so Joseph wrapped the body, put it in the tomb and left just before the Sabbath started. Nicodemus, arriving later, realized what happened and went ahead with the royal burial of Jesus. If that is the case, the "they" in John 19:40 could refer to both Joseph and Nicodemus, even though they did not work on the burial of Jesus at the same time. What is clear from the Gospel records is that the women saw Joseph close the tomb and leave without properly burying Jesus, and were not there when Nicodemus came with the spices, which is why they went and bought spices for his burial.

19:42. "because the tomb was nearby." This phrase starts out with the Greek word *hoti* (#3754 ὅτι), which is a conjunction that in this context means "because, since, for." This

little phrase in John is a huge key to properly understanding Jesus' burial. Matthew 27:57-60 informs us that the tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, who was wealthy, while Mark 15:43 informs us that Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of Israel, so he was indeed a wealthy and powerful man. Although he was from Arimathea, his position on the Sanhedrin would have been a reason for him to move to Jerusalem. That is no doubt why he had a tomb already cut out and prepared, surely for him and his family.

Although the exact location of Arimathea is uncertain, it is most likely the modern town of Rentis, about 20 miles (32 km) NW of Jerusalem, and even if Joseph had a family tomb there, it is understandable that he would have wanted a family tomb in Jerusalem that would have been fitting both to his wealth and social status. Also, since at that time people were buried the same day they died, and Arimathea was at least a day's journey, that would have been another reason Joseph would have wanted a tomb in Jerusalem, and why he would have had it prepared long before any of his family died. Death often came suddenly and unexpectedly in biblical times.

Joseph's tomb just happened to be nearby the place where Jesus was crucified, and since he was a disciple of Jesus he willingly allowed his tomb to be used for Jesus' body, including using his position and influence to get the body from the Romans. By the time Pilate's permission could be obtained to claim Jesus' dead body, it was very near sunset, which started the Passover, so there was no time to move the body far.

It has sometimes been taught that Joseph prepared the tomb for Jesus, but that would not be the case. Joseph would have no idea where Jesus was going to be crucified (and most likely, like the Apostles, did not even understand that he would be crucified), and this verse tells us that Jesus was buried there "because" it was near to the crucifixion site.

"So they laid Jesus there." John 19:41 and 42 are a summary describing the burial place of Jesus. The "they" in verse 42 is simply referring to the fact that Jesus was placed in the tomb by people. It does not have to mean that Joseph and Nicodemus worked together. "They" placed him in the tomb: Joseph brought his body there, wrapped it, and shut the tomb door. Nicodemus and his servants opened the tomb, wrapped the body of Jesus with spices, and rolled the stone back over the door (see commentary on John 19:40). [For more information on Jesus being crucified and buried on Wednesday and being three days and three nights in the grave, see commentary on Matthew 12:40].

Chapter 20

20:1. "on the first day of the week." John chapter 19 ended with Jesus being buried, which was Wednesday close to sunset. John chapter 20 starts on Sunday morning before Sunrise, so there has been more than three days and nights between John 19:42 and 20:1.

"Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early." Mary had seen the tomb just before sunset the night before (see commentary on Matt. 28:1). Now she came alone to the tomb "early, while it was still dark." The Greek for "when it was still dark" indicates that the darkness was ending and the daylight was coming on. Biblically, the dimness of just before sunrise was still "dark." We in the Western world tend to think of "dark" as

“black-dark,” but in the biblical world before artificial lights, “dark” meant when it was not yet clearly bright out yet. The haze before sunrise was “dark” to them.

The trip from Bethany, which was on the east side of the Mount of Olives and apparently where Peter and the others were staying, to the tomb area, which we believe was on the west side of the Mount of Olives, is quite short, probably no longer than a 20 minute walk. Even if the tomb is in the vicinity of Gordon’s Calvary (a traditional Protestant site of the tomb) or at the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (the traditional Catholic and Orthodox site of the tomb), the walk would have only taken perhaps a half hour.

It is likely that the other women, who had the spices, were going to meet Mary at the tomb, and arrived at the tomb only a little while later, shortly after sunrise, carrying the spices they had prepared on Friday (see commentary on Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; cp. Matt. 28:5; see commentary on Matt. 27:58). It is also possible, however, that Mary was going early to see if the guard was gone or would let them properly bury Jesus, and return to tell them not to go if they could not get to the body of Jesus. Once Mary saw the open tomb, she completely forgot about the spices and preparing Jesus’ body, and ran off to tell Peter and John that Jesus’ body was missing. The Bible never actually says Mary looked in and saw Jesus’ body was missing, but it seems likely that she did, because she told the disciples it was gone. Mary’s going to tell Peter and John meant that by the time the other women arrived at the tomb, Mary Magdalene had already been startled by the empty tomb and left the area.

20:2. “was a friend.” The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the verb *phileō* in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “loved,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of *phileō* here, and confuse it with *agapē* love. We could say that Jesus was “friendly” or the disciple whom Jesus was “fond of,” but these seem too weak. We meet “friendly” people all the time, but they are not “friends.” It seems that changing the verb “befriended” to the phrase, “was a friend,” is the best way to handle this. For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see the note on John 21:15.

“They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb.” This seemed totally ridiculous to Peter and the other disciple. For one thing, the tomb had been guarded by Roman soldiers. Secondly, who would take Jesus’ body? Not the Romans, they thought he was a common criminal. Not the religious leaders. They had the tomb guarded so no one would take the body and claim Jesus was resurrected. The Jews wanted there to be a body in the tomb to prove he was not the Messiah. Not the disciples. They were not expecting a resurrection themselves, and were more honest than to try to perpetrate some false plot about Jesus being raised. Besides, if Peter and the other disciple (almost certainly John) were not in on such a plot, it was bound to fail anyway. At this point, neither Peter nor the other disciple believed Mary’s report, but they went to check it out. When they saw the empty tomb with their own eyes, they believed Mary was telling the truth about the body being gone (see commentary on John 20:8).

Although the text does not say that Mary entered the tomb, we have to assume that she did. It was dark out and she would not have been able to testify that Jesus’ body had been taken unless she actually saw that it had been taken.

20:3. “So Peter went out, and the other disciple...to the tomb.” Although it does not say so in this verse, we know that Mary Magdalene also went back to the tomb, although she would have walked or slowly ran behind. She may have even arrived at the tomb very

shortly after Peter and the other disciple left, which could have been possible because they were running while Mary was more likely walking. In the biblical culture it was customary for women to follow behind the men, so Peter and John would not have waited for her.

The presence of the angels in the tomb did not startle Mary, so she must have thought they got there after Peter and the other disciple left, or, if she arrived at the tomb while Peter and the other disciple were still there, she likely thought that they did not say anything to her about them being there because they were focused on the missing body of Jesus.

20:5. “stooping down and looking in.” The Greek word is *parakuptō* (#3879 παρακύπτω), and it means to stoop down or towards something in order to look at it, or to look at something with the head bowed forward or with the body bent over. It is also used metaphorically for looking at or into something carefully or intently (cp. Thayer, Freiberg, Bullinger). There is a metaphorical use of the verb in which it is used for a rapid or cursory glance, and some commentators have taken that to be the sense in which Peter, Mary, and the other disciple looked into the tomb, as if they quickly glanced into it. However, that does not fit the situation. When Jesus’ followers looked into the tomb, they were studying it intently, barely believing what they saw, or rather, did not see.

“and looking in, he sees the linen cloths.” There are three times when people who are outside the tomb are said to be able to see where Jesus lay: here, John 20:11 and 12, and Luke 24:12. We believe that the tomb was a standard wealthy person’s tomb, since Joseph of Arimathea was wealthy. That meant it would have had a “weeping chamber” before the room or rooms that had the benches on which to lay the dead. In Joseph’s tomb, the set up was such that a person could stand outside the tomb and see through the weeping chamber to the place where Jesus’ body would have been placed.

20:7. “handkerchief.” The Greek word is *soudarion* (#4676 σουδάριον), a widely used Latin loan-word. The Latin word is *sudarium*, from the Latin root *sudor*, “sweat” (Thayer). As well as being used as a loan-word in Greek, the Romans also introduced it into Palestine where it was picked up and used by the Jews, even appearing in the Mishnah and Talmud (*Smith’s Bible Dictionary*; “handkerchief;” BDAG). A *soudarion*, as the name implies, was usually our equivalent to a handkerchief or sweat cloth, and was used for wiping sweat from the body and cleaning the nose. Due to the heat in Palestine, a word that uniquely described a piece of cloth to wipe sweat from the body was readily assimilated into the culture. Besides being used for wiping sweat, it was also useful for wrapping things (Luke 19:20 records a man hiding money in one, but the rabbinical writings show that practice was considered unsafe; ISBE “napkin”). Furthermore, because it was a face cloth, it was used to cover the face of a dead body, something apparent from the record of Lazarus (John 11:44), and Jesus (John 20:7).

The facecloth was folded, or rolled up (the Greek word can mean either), apart from the rest of the grave wrappings, but the Bible does not explain why. Two plausible theories have been set forth: the first is that it shows the orderliness of the situation, that things were not done haphazardly or in haste, but that, just as with the rest of God’s creation, things are done in an orderly way. The second is that it was folded as further proof that the body was not stolen. If thieves had indeed stolen the body, they likely would have stolen the small face cloth too, but even if they did not want to steal it too, they certainly would not have taken the time to fold it up and set it aside.

In recent years a teaching has arisen in Christianity that the “napkin” (KJV) covering the face of Jesus’ dead body was folded by itself as an indication that Jesus Christ would come back. The teaching goes like this: in biblical times if a master was eating at the table and got up to leave, if he was done eating, he would just throw the napkin down in a heap and the servants knew he was completely finished. If, however, the master folded the napkin and left, the servants knew not to clear the table, because he was coming back. So, it is concluded, Jesus carefully folded the napkin to show us he was coming back. There are a number of problems with this teaching. The first and foremost is that there is absolutely no evidence from ancient times that it is true. There is no ancient evidence that there was any such custom associated with eating, in fact, what we know about ancient meals contradicts this new teaching. People in the East ate with their hands, and after eating they cleansed them by washing in water, not by using a “napkin” (cp. James Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, #329). Second, the word “napkin” is used in the KJV, and from that people get the idea of our table napkin. But as we have seen, the people of the East did not use “table napkins,” and the Greek word used in the verse does not mean “table napkin.” This whole new teaching is presented as if it happened in today’s culture. Even a wealthy man in the ancient Near East would not sit in a chair at a table, use silverware, and wipe his hands with a napkin. He would sit or recline on the floor or a low pillow and eat primarily with his right hand. When he was ready to leave the table for any reason, a servant would clean his hands by washing them in water.

This new “urban legend” about Jesus shows what can happen when a word in the Bible is mistranslated in such a way that the meaning chosen in English (in this case, “napkin”), does not accurately represent the meaning of the word in the biblical culture. **20:8. “and he saw, and he believed.”** Peter and the other disciple both “saw,” and both “believed.” If we read John 20:8 without paying attention, and especially without seeing the Greek text, it can seem like the other disciple was the one who saw and believed. However, the double use of *kai* (and, also) in the Greek text makes it clear that both Peter and the other disciple saw and believed. The other disciple arrived at the tomb first, but did not go in, and hence could not see where the body would have been laying. Peter arrived and went right in, and saw that Mary had been telling the truth: Jesus’ body was gone. Then the other disciple went in, “and he saw and he believed,” or “he also saw and he also believed.” The two of them both believed that the body was actually gone.

“believed.” Believed what? Many people say Peter and the other disciple believed in the resurrection, but that cannot be the case. For one thing, the next verse says they did not know about the resurrection. Although Jesus had tried to tell them he would be killed and raised, there is not one time the Bible indicates they understood what he meant, and they even argued among themselves as to what he was saying (cp. Matt. 9:22; Mark 9:10; Luke 18:34). It was only after the resurrection they understood the death and resurrection of the Messiah (Luke 24:45). In fact, when Jesus did show himself to them when they were behind locked doors, they were frightened and thought they were seeing some kind of spirit (Luke 24:37).

After the crucifixion the tomb was closed, sealed and guarded. So when Mary said Jesus’ body had been stolen, they did not believe her at first (see commentary on John 20:2). Nevertheless, when they went to the tomb themselves, they “saw” it was empty and they “believed” what Mary had said, that the body had been taken. The next

verse confirms this by saying that they did not know the scripture that he would rise from the dead. Peter and John went back home, but Mary remained at the tomb crying, more evidence they did not believe in the resurrection. If she believed Jesus was resurrected, she would have been rejoicing. Even after the whole group of women said they saw Jesus, Peter still did not believe in the resurrection (Luke 24:12).

Also, although they saw the grave clothes with the spices were in the tomb, that would have only been more confusing to them, not conclusive. We must remember that neither the women nor Peter and John knew Nicodemus had come and wrapped Jesus with spices. The women (and hence the disciples), thought Jesus was buried in a simple linen cloth by Joseph of Arimathea. Thus, the wrappings and spices would have been just one more thing that did not make sense, so the disciples went home and Mary just stayed and wept.

20:9. “did not yet know.” The disciples did not expect Jesus to be killed and then raised from the dead, so they did not expect an empty tomb. (See commentary on Luke 18:34).

“out from among *the* dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

20:11. “crying.” Mary was crying because she believed someone had taken the body of Jesus (see commentary on verse 8, and the reason she gave to the angels as to why she was crying, verse 13).

“stooped down and looked.” The Greek word is *parakuptō* (#3879 παρακύπτω), and it means to stoop towards something in order to look at it (see commentary on John 20:5). The Bible never says that Mary actually went into the tomb. In contrast, the Bible clearly says the other women who came with the spices shortly after sunrise did enter the tomb (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3).

20:12. “[Mary] sees two angels in white, sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.” After seeing the empty tomb, Peter and John went back to where they had been staying, but Mary Magdalene stood outside the sepulcher weeping. As she was crying, she stooped down and “looked” into the sepulcher (she did not go in). Mary had a completely different experience at the tomb than the group of women who arrived at the tomb after she had left. Mary only looked into the tomb, but the group of women went into the tomb. Mary looked in and saw two angels sitting, one at the head and one at the feet of where the body of Jesus had been. When the group of women entered the tomb, they saw only one angel sitting (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3, 4a), but while they were in the tomb with that angel, two other angels suddenly appeared and stood by them (Luke 24:4b).

The angels asked Mary Magdalene why she was crying, they did not tell her Jesus was raised from the dead. It was as Mary started to walk away from the tomb that she met Jesus. In contrast, the angels in the tomb told the group of women that Jesus had been raised from the dead (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6), but then those women also met the Lord personally as they were going to tell the disciples what the angels said (Matt. 28:9, 10).

The presence of the angels in the tomb did not startle Mary, so she must have thought they got there after Peter and the other disciple left, or, if she arrived at the tomb while Peter and the other disciple were still there, she likely thought that they did not say anything to her about them being there because they were focused on the missing body of Jesus. (See commentary on John 20:3).

“in white.” Many clothes in the biblical world were white, such as linen garments and clothes made of white wool, so the white garments were not out of the ordinary and did not indicate to Mary the men she was talking to were angels. The white garments were appropriate to signify the righteousness and purity of the risen Lord, and it also helped Mary to see the men in the dark tomb, which would have been especially dark before the sun was up.

20:13. “Woman, why are you crying?” The greeting, “Woman,” is colder today than it was in biblical times, when it was a proper and respectful way to address a woman, particularly one with whom you were not on familiar terms. The angels only asked Mary why she was crying, they did not tell her Jesus had risen from the dead. This is different from the experience the other women had when they came to the tomb. Angels told the other women that Jesus was not there because he had risen from the dead (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6). After the angels spoke to Mary she turned from the tomb and saw the Lord, but did not recognize him at first.

20:17. “Do not touch me.” John 20:17 is a difficult verse, and to understand it we must pay attention to everything in the verse, the context, and the scope of Scripture. To start our commentary, we should look at the word translated “touch.” The word “touch” is *haptomai* (#680 ἅπτομαι), and in the Greek text it is in the imperative mood, present tense, middle voice. *Haptomai* means “touch,” or “grasp,” and in this verse can legitimately be translated in one of two broad categories. One is, “Do not touch me,” (NET; i.e., Mary has not yet touched Jesus and he is stopping her from touching him). The other is, “Stop clinging to me” (NSAB; i.e., Mary has already taken hold of the Lord and he is asking her to stop). Although some commentators assert that the present tense indicates that Mary was already touching him, that is not correct. Bultman writes: “The present imperative does not necessarily imply that she [Mary] has already touched him, but it need only presuppose that she is trying to do it, and is in the process of doing it” (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary*).

Many scholars say that Mary was already clinging to Jesus based on the fact that *haptomai* usually refers to a firm grasp and not just a light touch. They say that if Mary had not yet touched Jesus, then he would not have used *haptomai*, but would have used another word for touch that referred to a lighter touch. However, that is not a good argument for why *haptomai* was used in the verse. Jesus stopped Mary from doing what she intended to do, and given the circumstances and her relief at seeing Jesus alive, she would not have “lightly touched” him, she would have grabbed him and held him. So it was appropriate for Jesus to stop Mary by saying, “Do not grasp me.”

In the final analysis, because *haptomai* can be translated either as “Do not touch me,” or “Stop touching me,” we must decide how to translate it from understanding the context and what the verse is talking about. In other words, when we discover what Jesus is talking about when he says he is going up to the Father, then we will see how to translate *haptomai*. Jesus then explains why he does not want Mary to touch him when he says that it is because he has not yet “gone up” to the Father (see explanation below).

“for I have not yet gone up to my Father.” Jesus told Mary, “Do not touch me, for I have not yet gone up to my Father.” The Greek word *gar*, translated “for,” is vital to understanding this verse. The normal reading of *gar* is that it gives the reason that Mary cannot touch Jesus. In today’s modern English we might use “because” instead of “for,” and say, “Don’t touch me *because* I have not yet gone up to the Father.” This is a very

simple sentence. It gives the reason that Mary cannot touch (or hold on to) Jesus, which is “because” he had not yet gone up to his Father. If we find out what Jesus’ going up to the Father is, we will understand the verse and also understand whether to translate *haptomai* as “Do not touch me” or “Do not hold on to me.”

Almost every commentator seriously misunderstands this verse because they assume that “going up to the Father” refers to Jesus’ ascension into heaven. This problem is made worse by the fact that most English versions of the Bible translate the common Greek word *anabainō*, which means “to go up” or “to come up,” as “ascended.” This makes it seem like the verse is referring to Jesus’ ascension into heaven, which it does not.

If Jesus told Mary not to touch him because he had not yet ascended into heaven, then why did he allow or invite others to touch him before he ascended? The same morning he told Mary not to touch him, he allowed the other women to touch him and hold on to his feet (Matt. 28:9). Then later that same day Jesus appeared to his disciples when they were behind locked doors and told them, “Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see” (Luke 24:39). The word translated “handle” is *psēlaphaō* (#5584 ψηλαφάω; pronounced tsay-lä-fä'-ō), and it means to handle, to touch and feel. Thus, the same day Jesus told Mary not to touch him, he allowed the other women to not only touch him but to hold on to him, and he also invited all the disciples to handle him to be sure it was him. Then, eight days later, he told Thomas to touch him (John 20:26, 27).

Rudolf Bultman is a commentator who saw the problem about Mary touching Jesus, and wrote: “If the wording were pressed, it would follow that when he had gone to the Father he would subsequently present himself to his followers for fellowship and physical contact....” (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary*). Bultman is correct. If Jesus says the reason not to touch him is that he had not gone to the Father, then once he had “gone up” to the Father, people could touch him. Of course that is exactly what happened. Once Jesus had “gone up” to his Father, which, as we will see, he did when he went “up” to the Temple and then presented himself to the Father there, he allowed people to touch him.

D. A. Carson, thinking the “ascension” was Jesus’ ascension into heaven, saw the problem and wrote: “And why should being ascended make a difference? ...the implication is that the disciples are permitted to touch Jesus after the ascension but not before—exactly the reverse of what might have been expected” (*The Gospel According to John*). Carson is correct that the implication of the verse, indeed, we would say the very meaning of the Greek text, is that people cannot touch Jesus before he “goes up,” but can touch him after he “goes up.” From that evidence alone, we can see that Jesus’ “going up” is not his ascension into heaven. As Carson has seen, if no one was supposed to touch Jesus before the ascension, then he should not have let anyone, including the women and his disciples, touch him. On the other hand, if the women and the disciples can touch Jesus before his ascension, then he should have let Mary Magdalene touch him too. And also as Carson has seen, if we were not supposed to touch Jesus before his ascension into heaven, but we can afterward, how are we supposed to do that? How can we touch Jesus after he goes to heaven?

Thankfully, there is a simple and biblical answer to why Jesus did not let Mary touch him. But before we study it, we should note some of the unsatisfactory solutions

have been postulated to solve it. One is that Jesus did not let Mary touch him because she was touching him out of doubt, not faith. She doubted he was “real” or that it was really him. But the other disciples and Thomas doubted too, in fact, the very reason Jesus told them to touch and handle him was to get rid of their doubt, so that “solution” does not work.

Another unsatisfactory solution is that Mary had grabbed Jesus so she would not lose him again, but if that were the case he would have simply told her she could let go “because” he would be with her forever. Instead he told her to let him go “because” he had not yet gone up to his Father. But if his going up to God is the ascension, then the reason he told Mary to let him go would be incorrect since he let others touch him before his ascension.

Yet another unsatisfactory solution postulated by some Bible teachers is that Mary must have grabbed him in worship, and Jesus was telling Mary not to worship him at that time. But why would he not allow her worship and why would his being in heaven be a better time to worship him? Besides, he let other people worship him before his ascension, including the women who grabbed his feet and the people he met in Galilee (Matthew 28:9, 17).

Still another proposed solution is that he told Mary to let him go so that he was then free to ascend to the Father in heaven; as if he could not ascend while she was holding him. But then when she supposedly let go, he stayed on earth for another forty days. So that “solution” cannot be correct.

Another solution, a quite inventive one, is that the phrase “I have not yet gone up to my Father,” is parenthetical. Removing the words in the parenthesis would make the verse read: “Do not cling to me, for...go rather to my brothers and tell them I am going up to the Father.” In other words, “Let me go so you can go tell my brothers I am going up to the Father.” However, that proposed solution has many problems. Not the least of them is that it requires a very unusual and unnatural way to read the Greek text. Also, if Jesus was going to be around for forty more days, why would Mary have to let go of him and hurry off to tell the disciples about the ascension? Jesus’ allowing Mary to hold him for a few more minutes would not change anything. Also, why would Jesus want Mary to give the disciples a message about his ascension, when they did not understand there would even be ascension? (There will be more on this point later). This solution does not work.

Some scholars explain the verse in a totally different manner, and say that “going up” to the Father refers to some kind of progressive glorification of Christ. These scholars correctly note that the word that most English Bibles translate as “ascended” (*anabainō*; #305 ἀναβαίνω), is a very common Greek word. It occurs more than eighty times in the New Testament, and refers to all kinds of ways of “going up” or “coming up.” In essence, the reasoning of these scholars is that after his resurrection, Jesus went through a progressive glorification, which John 20:17 refers to as an “ascension,” a “going up” (cp. Frederic Godet, *Commentary on John’s Gospel*). In other words, according to this interpretation, after his resurrection, over a period of time, Jesus “went up” to greater and greater state of glorification, and he had just started the process when he met Mary, so he did not want her to touch him. We reject this proposed solution for a number of reasons. The first is that we assert that when God raised Jesus from the dead he was fully glorified and given all authority in heaven and on earth. Also, it does not

make sense that after his resurrection he was not glorified enough to let Mary touch him, but perhaps only about an hour later he was glorified enough that other women could touch him, and by the end of the day he was so glorified that any disciple could touch him.

None of the above explanations of the verse are satisfactory. However, the number of explanations and the wide variety of them shows us that properly understanding the verse will require good translation work, an understanding of the scope of Scripture and Jewish laws and customs, and sound logic. What we will now see is that the solution to the problem is biblical, but to understand it, there is some important background we must understand.

One thing we must understand is that the Greek word most English Bibles translate as “ascended,” is *anabainō*, which is a common Greek word and is used of many types of “going up” in the New Testament. Examples of *anabainō* in the New Testament include when Jesus “went up” out of the water at his baptism (Matt. 3:16); when Jesus “went up” a mountain (Matt. 5:1; 14:23; 15:29), when thorns “came up” out of the soil (Matt. 13:7); when Jesus and the disciples “went up” into a boat (Matt. 14:32); when Jesus and his apostles “were going up” to Jerusalem (Matt. 20:17); and when the multitude “went up” to Pilate (Mark 15:8). The point is that *anabainō* is the common word for “going up” from one place to another. Since the Bible uses *anabainō* for the times when Jesus climbs up a mountain, it would be the normal word the Bible would use to say that Jesus “went up” from the area of the tomb to the Temple, because the Temple was on top of Mt. Moriah. In John 20:17, *anabainō* does not refer to Jesus’ ascension into heaven, and should not have been translated as “ascended.”

Another key to understanding the verse is in the last sentence of the verse: “But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am going up to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.’” Jesus said “I am going up,” using the present tense verb. That indicates that going up to his Father was something that Jesus was in the process of doing or just starting to do. Although there are times when the present tense of a verb is used as a generalization for the future tense of the verb, that does not seem likely here. After all, if Jesus was speaking of his ascension into heaven, then he would have been speaking of an event that was forty days away, so it would have been more natural for him to use the future tense of the verb and said, “I will go up to my Father.” The simple and straightforward reading of “I am going up to my Father” is that his “going up,” was something that was happening or going to happen right then.

Another key to understanding what Jesus meant when he said he had not yet “gone up” to his Father is that Mary knew what he was talking about. Even though the meaning of what Jesus said may not be immediately apparent to us, it was clear to Mary. She was certainly glad (and astounded!) to see Jesus. However, once she grasped that she was really speaking to the resurrected Christ, there is no evidence that she was confused by his message to tell the disciples he was going up to the Father. This should have signaled us from the start that the “going up to the Father” did not refer to his ascension into heaven, because the disciples did not know about his ascension into heaven.

Whenever Jesus spoke of his death or resurrection, the disciples were confused and did not know what he meant (see commentary on Luke 18:34). Similarly, they did not understand what he was talking about when he spoke of his ascension into heaven (John 14:5; 16:17-19). Even after his resurrection, when they finally understood about his

death and resurrection, there is no indication they understood about his ascension. As late as Acts 1:6 the disciples were asking Jesus if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time, and they were speaking of his kingdom on earth (see commentary on Matt. 5:5). They were not expecting him to leave earth, even though he had told them he was going to, which is why they were so caught off guard when he did leave, and angels had to appear and tell them he was coming back (Acts 1:9-11).

Since Jesus told Mary to tell to the disciples that he was “going up,” he could not have been speaking of his ascension into heaven because neither she, nor the disciples knew about the ascension. Even if Jesus had taken time to explain to Mary about his ascension into heaven, she could not have then told the disciples about it. She could not even get them to believe she had seen the risen Christ! How could she have gotten them to believe that this risen Christ was going to go up into heaven?

From the evidence we can see that the “going up” in John 20:17 had nothing to do with Jesus’ ascension into heaven, but instead was something that Jesus told Mary to tell the disciples that would help them believe that they had really seen the resurrected Christ. It had to be something the disciples would have understood and something that they knew he had to do on that Sunday. We will see that what Jesus had to do was present himself in the Temple as the High Priest and the Firstfruits offering.

The Messiah was the fulfillment of the types and symbols in the Old Testament. For example, he was the true Passover Lamb; the true acceptable sacrifice; the true Sabbath rest for God’s people; and the true High Priest. He was also the true “firstfruits” to God, that is, the first of God’s true harvest (God’s true harvest is the harvest of people who get up from the dead to everlasting life, and Jesus was the first one to be raised from the dead to everlasting life). After his resurrection, Jesus was both the High Priest (Ps. 110:4; Zech. 6:13; Heb. 5:5; 8:1) and the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20, 23), and he had to go to the Temple and show himself in both those roles.

According to the Law of Moses, the firstfruits of the harvest were shown to God during the Feast of Unleavened Bread “on the day after the Sabbath.” On that day, the High Priest was to wave firstfruits of the harvest in the Temple (Lev. 23:10, 11). The day after the Sabbath is Sunday, and in the year Jesus was crucified it was Sunday the 18th of Nisan [For more on this occurring the Sunday after the Saturday Sabbath, see commentary on Acts 2:1]. Sunday was the day Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene, but when Jesus met Mary at the tomb, it was still dark and before sunrise (see commentary on John 20:1). It would be proper for him to wait until after the sun had risen before showing himself to God in the Temple. That is because, “the purpose of such [waving] rites was to show the offering to God,” which would logically be after the sun came up (*The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*, Baruch Levine, p. 157.) The firstfruits were publicly waved “so it will be accepted on your [the people’s] behalf” (Lev. 23:11). In other words, the High Priest waved the firstfruits offering publicly and so that it was accepted for the people.

After the sun came up, Jesus Christ, as the acceptable firstfruits, went up from the tomb area to the Temple on Mt. Moriah and showed himself publicly to God and was acceptable in God’s sight to represent the rest of the harvest—all the believers who will be raised from the dead. The High Priest showing the firstfruits in the Temple was something all the Apostles and disciples understood from their Jewish upbringing, and knew was supposed to happen that very day. So if they believed Mary’s testimony that

Jesus had been raised from the dead, they would also understand he had to go up to the Temple and show himself to God there. Therefore, when Mary appeared to them and told them Jesus was alive, she bolstered her statement by telling them that he had to “go up to the Father,” that is, appear in the Temple. We know she told them Jesus had to go up to the Father (in the Temple) because when Mary got to the disciples, she not only told them she had seen Jesus alive, but she also told them what he had said to her (John 20:18).

As both the High Priest and the Offering, Jesus had to remain Levitically clean until after he offered himself, and he would not be Levitically clean if Mary touched him (Lev. 22:1-8). Mary was unclean by virtue of the fact that she had been in the tomb that morning and seen that the body of Jesus was gone. However, after Jesus had fulfilled his role as High Priest and firstfruits offering by showing himself in the Temple, he could let people touch him—and he did. As we saw in Matthew 28:9, the first people he allowed to touch him were the women who came to the tomb to anoint his body with spices. However, the Bible makes it clear that he came to them after the sun had come up (Mark 16:2). So Jesus had time to go to the Temple between the time he saw Mary Magdalene and told her not to touch him and the time he saw the other women and allowed them to grab his feet. We should remember that when Jesus saw Mary he was in the process of starting up to the Temple (“I am going up to my Father;” John 20:17). So by the time he allowed the women to take hold of his feet later that morning, he would have been finished with his brief priestly duties. Also, he could invite the disciples to “handle” him later that day when they were behind locked doors (Luke 24:39).

20:18. “went *and* announced to the disciples.” After seeing Jesus alive, Mary went back to the disciples and told them that she had seen the Lord, but they did not believe her. Since Jesus had met Mary before he met the other women, Mary would have arrived where the disciples were hiding some time before the other women. It is quite possible that Mary arrived to tell the disciples just about the time Jesus was appearing to the other women.

20:19. “Jesus came.” Jesus appeared to the apostles and disciples as they were gathered together behind locked doors. John 20:19 lets us know it is in the evening on Sunday, because it was still the first day of the week. If it was after sunset, then Monday, the second day of the week, would have started.

This was the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples as a group, but Thomas was not with them (John 20:24). Jesus had already appeared to people a number of times: to Mary Magdalene; to the women who came with spices to the tomb, to Peter, and to the two men that he met on the road to Emmaus. All these people were present when Jesus appeared in the room, and we can tell from Luke 24:34 that the people in this room full of disciples were quite convinced that Jesus was alive. Still, he now appeared inside the locked room, which startled and frightened the disciples. This was likely due to the fact that he simply appeared in the room, whereas the Jesus they were used to would have had to knock on the door. Jesus tried to calm them by saying “Peace be unto you,” but they thought they were seeing a spirit. Nevertheless, he corrected them and told them that a spirit did not have flesh and bone like he had. He then showed them his hands and feet.

Jesus had just taught the scriptures about himself to the two men to the road to Emmaus and now he opened the scriptures to these disciples who were gathered together, thus giving them a scriptural as well as an experiential reason to believe that he was alive.

The record of Jesus appearing in the room with the disciples is Luke 24:36-46 and John 20:19-24.

20:21. “as the Father has sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

20:22. “breathed on them.” The Greek word for “breathed on” is *emphusaō* (#1720 ἐμφυσάω ; pronounced em-foo-sah'-ō), and it means to breathe on or to blow on. The word “them” is correctly supplied because the Greek reads, “blew on and says ‘to them’” (*autois*), and the dative pronoun *autois* (to them) governs both the verb “blew” and the verb “says.” When understood as “blew on” we can see that Jesus was instructing his disciples about the Day of Pentecost, when the Temple was filled with the sound of a mighty wind.

The beauty of the two meanings of *emphusaō* is that the Greek text is showing the two things Jesus is doing for his disciples. He is giving instruction for the Day of Pentecost when the Temple will be filled with the sound of a rushing, mighty wind, because he breathed on them, blew on them, and said, “Receive holy spirit.” At the same time, Jesus is making a powerful association between what happened in Genesis, what is foretold in Ezekiel, and what will happen on the Day of Pentecost when he pours out the gift of holy spirit. The use of *emphusaō* here in John 20:22 takes us back to its use in Genesis 2:7 in the Septuagint, where God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and “breathed” into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul. In Genesis, God breathed natural life into Adam, now Jesus foretells when spiritual life will be breathed into the disciples. Also, the Bible foretells that believers will receive resurrection life when the *ruach* (“spirit, breath, wind) “breathes” on the dead bodies of Israel, and they come to life. “Then said he unto me, Prophecy to the wind [*ruach*], prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind [*ruach*], ‘Thus saith the Lord Yahweh: Come from the four winds [*ruach*], O breath [*ruach*], and breathe upon these slain, that they may live’” (Ezek. 37:9; cp. 9-14).

It is important to realize that the disciples did not receive the gift of holy spirit at this time, which was the Sunday that he first appeared to his disciples, starting with Mary Magdalene early that morning. Jesus was giving them instructions for when the holy spirit would be poured out in the near future, which we know from Acts occurred some 50 days later on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus breathed or blew out, making a wind-like sound, and said, “Receive holy spirit.” Some 50 days later, on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were in the Temple when it was filled with the sound of a rushing, mighty wind (but there was no wind; only the sound; Acts 2:2), and the gift of holy spirit was poured out on the Apostles who were filled with it and began to speak in tongues; the first time in history anyone had spoken in tongues (Acts 2:4).

“holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

20:25. “I will not ever believe.” At some point after Jesus left the disciples, Thomas rejoined them. The Bible does not give us a specific time, so it could have been just before sunset and still on Sunday the 18th of Nisan, or after sunset and thus on Monday the 19th of Nisan (this is very likely), or even in the next few days. Even though everyone would have testified to Jesus’ being alive, Thomas did not believe what they said.

20:26. “eight days later.” The Lord appeared a second time in a locked room to all the disciples (including Thomas) eight days later, that is, eight days after he appeared to them the first time. Generally in the biblical culture, when counting set numbers of something, the first and last thing are both counted, so “eight days later” is Sunday to Sunday, eight days. Thus the Lord appeared the first time to the disciples on a Sunday the 18th of Nisan, and they were behind locked doors. Then he waited a week before appearing a second time. His second appearance to all the disciples was also on a Sunday, the 25th of Nisan, and the disciples were still behind locked doors. This time, however, Thomas was with them.

We cannot be sure, but it is possible that the fact that Jesus appeared to the disciples on Resurrection Sunday, then not again until the following Sunday, helped establish the tradition of holding Christian meetings on Sunday.

20:28. “my god.” Any good Greek-English lexicon will give examples of the Greek word *theos*, often translated “God,” also referring to a pagan “god” or “goddess” (Acts 19:37), the Devil or a demon (2 Cor. 4:4), or of people who represent God in some way (John 10:34). The fact that Thomas called Jesus “God” does not mean he thought Jesus was part of the Triune God, but he did think of him as God’s highest representative and worthy to be called “god.”

To understand what Thomas said there is some background information that we must understand. For one thing, Thomas was almost certainly speaking Hebrew or Aramaic, and thus the flexibility of the word “God” in those languages will be covered in some detail below. It is also important to know that the early manuscripts of the Bible were written in all capital letters. That means that technically, both *Elohim* in Hebrew and *Theos* in Greek should always be translated “GOD,” in all capital letters. Since the biblical languages used the word “GOD” to refer to God, lesser divinities such as the Devil, angels, and demons, and also to rulers, judges, and people who represented God Him in some way, Bible readers are forced to use the context and scope of Scripture to determine whether the modern English translation should be “God,” “god,” or “gods.” [For more information on this, see commentary on Hebrews 1:8].

The following few paragraphs are about the biblical, especially the Semitic, way of using the words for “God.” It is quite detailed, but in light of the huge Trinitarian bias to make Thomas say that Jesus is “God,” it seems necessary to quite fully show that in biblical language you could call someone *Elohim* or *Theos* without meaning they were the Most High God. It is helpful in understanding the Bible to know that the Hebrew word *Elohim* (“God”) is a plural form—*Elohim* is always plural. It is a uniplural noun like our English word “deer” or “fish,” and so it has to be translated according to the context and can mean “God,” “a god,” or “gods.” When we see the word “fish” we must determine from the context if it is singular or plural. In a sentence like, “Did you eat the fish?” there may not be enough context to determine whether the person ate one fish or more than one. This problem can occur in the Hebrew text as well, although we sometimes get help in the Hebrew from the accompanying verb.

Elohim is not the only uniplural noun in Hebrew. Two others are “water” and “heaven” (cp. *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd addition by A. Cowley, pp. 244, 246). Trinitarians assert that the reason *Elohim* is plural is because it refers to the plurality in the Trinity, but even if there was a Trinity, and we do not believe there is, that would not be likely. For one thing, God gave the Hebrew language to the Jews, so they should be

the experts in their own language, and they have never believed *Elohim* referred to any plurality in God. Just as “water” and “heaven” are plural in part because they are so vast, *Elohim* seems to be plural because of the vastness and greatness of God.

The majority of the times *Elohim* occurs in the Bible, it refers to the true God. However, even a brief glance through a Hebrew concordance will show that many times it refers to false gods. Dozens of verses could be cited as examples, but a few are: “have no other gods [*Elohim*] before me” (Exod. 20:3); “Do not bow down before their gods [*Elohim*]” (Exod. 23:24); “they chose new gods [*Elohim*]” (Judges 5:8); and, “[Solomon’s] wives turned his heart after other gods [*Elohim*]” (1 Kings 11:4).

There are times when *Elohim* is used to refer to a specific pagan god: for example, Dagon (Judges 16:23, 1 Samuel 5:7), Chemosh (Judges 11:24), and Baal (1 Kings 18:24-27).

Elohim, “God,” can also refer to angels or other spirit beings. One example is Psalm 8:5, which says God made mankind a little lower than *Elohim*. Given the flexible meaning of *Elohim*, the verse could be saying that God made mankind a little lower than He Himself, or it could be saying that He made mankind a little lower than his representatives in the spirit world, i.e., angels. Thankfully, the interpretation is not in doubt because the verse is quoted in Hebrews 2:7, which says “angels,” letting us know that in Psalm 8:5, *Elohim* refers to God’s representatives, the angels. Thus Psalm 8:5 is an excellent example of how the New Testament clarifies our understanding of the Old Testament. Another example is Judges 13:22, where Manoah and his wife saw an angel, but exclaimed, “We have seen God [*Elohim*].” Their statement made perfect sense in the biblical culture because they saw God’s representative.

There are times when God’s representative are called “God” (*Elohim* and even Yahweh!) when they represent God and speak on His behalf. This is referred to as “agency.” The essence of the principle of agency is: “a person’s agent is regarded as the person himself” (Werblowsky and Wigoder, *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, p. 15). The principle of agency is well attested by scholars and occurs quite a few times in the Bible. For example, in Genesis 16:13, even though Hagar was speaking to an angel, she referred to him as Yahweh and *El* (God). In Genesis 31:11 an angel speaks to Jacob, but in verse 13 he says, “I am the God [*El*] of Bethel.” In Genesis 32:28 and 30 it seems Jacob is wrestling with God [*Elohim*], but we learn from Hosea 12:3 that it was an angel representing God. Another example is that Exodus 13:21 says “Yahweh” went before Israel in the pillar of fire, but 14:19 and 23:20-23 let us know it was an angel, a representative of God. So “Yahweh” did go in front of Israel as represented by his angel protector. Similarly, if you read Judges 2:1-4, an angel speaks to the Israelites, but his speech is in first person as if he were God Himself.

Elohim, “God,” can also refer to human rulers, kings, prophets, and people who represent God in some way. Thus Exodus 21:6; 22:8 and 9, almost certainly refer to God’s representatives as *Elohim*, “God” (Exod. 22:27 likely does too. In those verses the accompanying verb is plural, not singular, so the traditional teaching of the Rabbis, that the meaning is “judges,” which is also in the KJV, is almost certainly correct). Psalm 82:1 is noteworthy because it uses *Elohim* twice; at the beginning of the verse to refer to the true God, and at the end of the verse to refer to rulers and people who represent him. The verse says, “*Elohim* [“God”] stands in the congregation of the mighty; he judges among the “*Elohim*” [“gods”].” Furthermore, verse 6 says, “You are *Elohim* [“gods”];

and all of you are sons of the Most High.” As sons of the Most High, these rulers are qualified to be called *Elohim*, [“gods”]. Psalm 97:7 also calls rulers *Elohim*.

There are times when specific individuals are called *Elohim*, “God.” One example is Moses. In Exodus 7:1, God is speaking to Moses and says, “See, I have made you God [*Elohim*] to Pharaoh” (Darby). Given the uniplural nature of *Elohim*, another translation is, “See, I have made you a god [*Elohim*] to Pharaoh” (BBE, KJV), but the fact is that Moses, who represents *Elohim* (“God”) can legitimately be called *Elohim* (“God”) in the biblical culture. Another example is when King Saul wanted to speak to the dead prophet Samuel and went to a woman who was a medium and necromancer (1 Sam. 28:7-15). When she conjured up “Samuel” (actually a demon impersonating Samuel), the woman said, “I see *Elohim* coming up from the ground” (1 Samuel 28:13). This is a good example of a person being called *Elohim*, and we could translate it “God” and understand the custom of God’s representatives being called “God,” or a more easily understood translation for the English reader is simply, “a god;” the woman saw “a god” coming up who she thought was Samuel.

Given the language of the time, and given that Jesus did represent the Father and have divine authority, for Thomas to refer to Jesus as “god” is certainly understandable. In contrast, to assert that Thomas said that Jesus was “God,” and thus 1/3 of a triune God, seems incredible. As was noted above, in biblical times it was common to call God’s representatives “God,” and the Old Testament contains quite a few examples, such as when Jacob wrestled with “God” and it is clear that he was actually wrestling with an angel (Hosea 12:4).

It is common to read commentaries that assert that Thomas shifted from the depths of unbelief to the height of faith and called Jesus his “God.” But on what basis would Thomas do that? The commentators point out John 1:1, that the Gospel says “the Word was God.” First, there is solid evidence it does not actually say that (see commentary on John 1:1). More to the point, however, the Gospel of John was not written until decades after Thomas spoke, and there no evidence that Jesus ever taught the Trinity or that he was “fully human and fully God.” Quite the opposite. He called God, “the true God” (John 17:3); he said the Father was greater than he was (John 14:28); and he referred to the Father as his God both before and after his resurrection (Matt. 27:46; John 20:17). Also, when he did have chances to “correct” people’s understanding about him or to teach the Trinity, such as with the woman at the well (John 4), or the Pharisee who asked him about the first and great commandment (Mark 12), he did not teach about the Trinity or say that he was man but also God. Very importantly, the few verses in the Gospels where Jesus said something that Trinitarians use to show Jesus is God can all be interpreted in a non-Trinitarian way. There is just no evidence that people at the time of Jesus knew about the Trinity or that Jesus was fully God and fully man—there was no teaching about it.

There are many Trinitarian authorities who admit that there was no knowledge of Trinitarian doctrine at the time Thomas spoke. For example, if the disciples believed that Jesus was “God” in the sense that many Christians do, they would not have “all fled” just a few days before when he was arrested. The confession of the two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus demonstrated the thoughts of Jesus’ followers at the time. Speaking to the resurrected Christ, whom they mistook as just a traveler, they talked about Jesus. They said Jesus “was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before

God...and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:19-21). The disciples thought Jesus was the Messiah, a “prophet,” and the Son of God, but not God Himself.

Even in realizing that Jesus was the Christ, they knew that according to the Old Testament prophecies, the Christ, the anointed of God, was to be a man: he was to be an offspring of Eve (Gen. 3:15) and through the line of Abraham and David, and “God” did not fit that description. He was to be anointed with holy spirit by God as foretold in Isaiah 61:1, a verse Jesus quoted about himself (Luke 4:18); whereas God does not need to be anointed with holy spirit. The Messiah was to be “one of their own” (Jer. 30:21), not God. We know how hard Jesus worked to teach the disciples that he would die and be resurrected—how many different times he taught it—and the disciples never did “get it.” Are we to believe that somehow Jesus taught the Trinity, something that went against everything the disciples were taught and believed, but there is no mention of Jesus ever teaching it anywhere and yet the disciples somehow “got” that teaching? That seems too incredible to believe. There is no evidence from the gospel accounts that Jesus’ disciples believed him to be God, and Thomas, upon seeing the resurrected Christ, was not birthing a new theology in a moment of surprise.

Besides the biblical use of the words for “God” being used for God’s representatives, there is a contributing cultural reason Thomas may have used the word “god” to refer to Jesus when Jesus appeared to him. In the Greco-Roman culture it was becoming customary to refer to the emperor as “god,” but usually only after he was dead. So, for example, after Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 BC, the Roman senate voted that he was a god. Elevating great people into the ranks of the gods is a process scholars refer to as “deification.” If dead Roman emperors were “gods,” it is reasonable that Thomas, knowing Jesus had been dead but now seeing him alive, referred to him “god.”

The context of the verse shows that its subject is the fact that Jesus was *alive*. Only three verses earlier, Thomas had ignored the eyewitness testimony of the other apostles when they told him they had seen the Lord. The resurrection of Christ was such a disputed doctrine that Thomas did not believe it (the other apostles had not either), and thus Jesus’ death would have caused Thomas to doubt that Jesus was who he said he was—the Messiah. Thomas believed Jesus was *dead*. Thus, he was shocked and astonished when he saw—and was confronted by—Jesus himself. Thomas, upon being confronted by the *living* Christ, instantly believed in the resurrection, i.e., that God had raised the man Jesus from the dead, and, given the standard use of “God” in the culture as one with God’s authority, it certainly makes sense that Thomas would proclaim, “My Lord and my god.” There is no mention of the Trinity in the context, and there is no reason to believe that the disciples would have even been aware of such a doctrine. Thomas spoke what he would have known: that the man Jesus who he thought was dead was alive and had divine authority. [For more information on this verse and further references, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*].

20:31. “will have life.” The verb “have” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” have life, but the Greek conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) that started the phrase is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, what is written in the Word of God is written so that we will

have life if we believe, not that we “may” have it (cp. A. Nyland, *The Source New Testament*).

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

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

Chapter 21

21:1. “After these things Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples...” After appearing to the disciples as a group on Sunday, Nisan 25, Jesus appeared to the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee. The trip to Galilee usually took three days, so this meeting could have been close to the 28th of Nisan, but judging by the fact that Peter started fishing again, it was likely a while after that. It seems likely that after Jesus appeared to the group of disciples a second time and then them leaving for Galilee, that Peter would have waited a while for the Lord to show up. However, when that did not happen as quickly as he expected, and not being sure of what to do, he went back to fishing.

We should remember that the general populace did not yet believe Jesus had been raised from the dead, so most of the Apostles’ source of money had dried up. Peter therefore took the lead and said he was going fishing, the job he knew. However, Jesus appeared to them, which was the third time Jesus appeared to all the apostles at one time. The first time was the Sunday after his crucifixion (John 20:19-24), and Thomas was not there at the time. The second was the following Sunday, and this time all the apostles, including Thomas, were there (John 20:26-29). Jesus’ meeting the apostles on the Sea of Galilee is the third time he appeared to all of them together (John 21:14), and got them refocused on ministry.

21:3. “I am going fishing.” Jesus appears to the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee. The Apostles finally obeyed and went to Galilee, but seemed unsure of what to do once they got there. With Jesus dead, and the general populace not yet believing that he had been raised from the dead, it seems most of their source of money had dried up, Peter took the lead and said he was going fishing, the job he knew. Jesus appeared to them and got them refocused on ministry.

21:14. “out from among *the* dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

21:15. “do you love me more than these?” Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Jesus more than he loved fishing. Jesus was asking Peter if he would leave the security of his fishing trade to go into ministry full time. Some people think that Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Jesus more than the other disciples did. That is not the case. First, that is the kind of question that fosters division between people. It leads to a proud, braggart position of the heart and sometimes then even gets manifested among the people. Jesus never fostered division among the apostles. Second, the extent that someone loves the Lord is a matter of the heart. We cannot look at other Christians and tell whether we love Jesus more than they do. Jesus knew this, and would never ask Peter to evaluate the love that the other apostles had for him. Third, the context makes it clear what Jesus was asking Peter to do: give up fishing and take on full time ministry, because three times Jesus asked Peter to feed his sheep, i.e., the people.

“**I am your friend.**” This is the best rendition of the Greek we could think of to keep the meaning. To understand this verse, and the ones that follow, it is important to understand the difference between *agapē* love and *phileō* love.

There are four Greek words for love that are important for Christians to understand. They are *agapē*, *philos*, *storgē*, and *eros*. Three of them appear in the Bible. If we are going to understand the Bible and the biblical world, it is important that we understand what these four words mean and how they differ.

The Greek word that refers to the love of God is *agapē* (the verb form is *agapaō* [#25 ἀγαπάω], the noun form is *agapē* [#26 ἀγάπη]). *Agapē* love is the very nature of God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-12, 16). The big key to understanding *agapē* is to realize that it can be known from the action it prompts. In fact, we sometimes speak of the “action model” of *agapē* love. People today are accustomed to thinking of love as a feeling, but that is not necessarily the case with *agapē* love. *Agapē* is love because of what it *does*, not because of how it *feels*.

God so “loved” (*agapē*) that He **gave** His Son. It did not feel good to God to do that, but it was the loving thing to do. Christ so loved (*agapē*) that he **gave** his life. He did not want to die, but he loved, so he did what God required. A mother who loves a sick baby will stay up all night long caring for it, which is not something she wants to do, but is a true act of *agapē* love. *Agapē* love is not simply an impulse generated from feelings. Rather, *agapē* love is an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice. This is why God can command us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Exod. 23:1-5). He is not commanding us to “have a good feeling” for our enemies, but to act in a loving way toward them. In fact, Luke 6:27 says to love our enemies and then tells us how to love them, which is by doing good to them: “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.”

Agapē love is related to obedience and commitment, and not necessarily feeling and emotion. “Loving” someone is to obey God on another’s behalf, seeking his or her long-term blessing and profit. The way to know that we love (*agapē*) God is that we keep His commandments. Jesus said, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me (John 14:21). There are Christians who say they love God, but their lifestyle is contrary to the will of God. These people mistake their feeling of affection for God for true *agapē* love. Jesus made this clear: “He who does not love me will not obey my teaching” (John 14:24). Love is the distinctive character of the Christian life in relation to other Christians and to all humanity. The “loving” thing to do may not always be easy, and true love is not “mushy sentimentalism.” There is often a cost to genuine love. For example, asking someone to leave your Christian fellowship because he persists in flagrant sin is loving, but never easy (1 Cor. 5:1-5). That is not to say the *agapē* love cannot have feelings attached to it, and the ideal situation occurs when the loving thing to do also is what we want to do. Christians are to be known for their love to one another (John 13:35).

Phileō, which is translated as “love” in many English versions, is different from *agapaō* love (*philos* is the noun form (#5384 φίλος), and *phileō*, (#5368 φιλέω) is the verb form of the root word.) *Phileō* means “to have a special interest in someone or something, frequently with focus on close association; have affection for, like, consider someone a friend” (William Arndt and F. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*). It would probably be helpful if *phileō* were never translated “love” in the New Testament, because it refers to a strong liking or a strong friendship. Of course, we see how *phileō* gets

translated “love,” because in modern culture we say we “love” things that we strongly like: “I love ice cream” or “I love my car.” The word *phileō* implies a strong emotional connection, and thus is used of the deep friendship between friends, and is used of the way people “really like” things, or get mentally attached to them. Thus, you can *agapē* your enemies, but you cannot *phileō* them.

The difference between *agapē* and *phileō* becomes very important in John 21, but unfortunately it is obscured in most English translations. After being raised from the dead, Jesus met Peter. Here is the short version of what they said to each other.

Jesus: Simon...do you love (*agapē*) me more than these [fish?].

Peter: Yes, Lord; you know that I love (*phileō*) you.

Jesus: Simon...do you love (*agapē*) me?

Peter: Yes, Lord, you know that I love (*phileō*) you.

Jesus: Simon...do you love (*phileō*) me?

Peter: [Grieved] “Lord, you know that I love (*phileō*) you.”

Why did Jesus use *agapē* and Peter use *phileō*? Jesus was asking Peter if he loved him with the love of God, a love that may require sacrifice. After all, Jesus had just gone through something he did not want to do but did anyway because of his *agapē* love. In contrast, Peter avoided possible torture by denying Jesus. Thus, Jesus twice asked Peter, “Do you *agapē* me?” In other words, “Are you willing to do things for my sake that you do not want to do?” Peter, on the other hand, still felt the sting of having denied Jesus, and was hopeful that their friendship was intact. Peter wondered if Jesus held Peter’s denial against him. Would Jesus still treat Peter as a close friend? Peter was not sure where he stood with Jesus, so he was trying to let Jesus know that he was still a true friend, and had *phileō* love for Jesus.

The third time Jesus spoke to Peter, he came to Peter’s level and asked if Peter were indeed a true friend (*phileō*), which grieved Peter. Nevertheless, it was important, because Jesus knew what Peter did not know—that Jesus would ascend into heaven, and Peter and the others would be left to carry out his work on earth, which would require that they do things they did not want to, even, it turned out, die as a martyr.

The third Greek word for “love,” which refers to sexual love or passionate love is *eros*, and we get English words such as “erotic.” When *Eros* was used as a proper noun, it referred to the Greek god of love. The Greek word *eros* does not appear in the Bible, so we will only just mention it here, but it has had such an impact on English and our view of sexual love that it is important to mention.

The fourth Greek word we need to understand is *storgē*, which is the love and affection that naturally occurs between parents and children, can exist between siblings, and exists between husbands and wives in a good marriage. It occurs in Romans 12:10, and for more on *storgē* see the note on that verse.

If one is going to have a wonderful Christian life, obedient to the voice of God and have rich fellowship with other Christians, he or she will need to exercise all three kinds of love that are in the Bible. We need *agapē* love because some of the things that God requires of us are not fun or easy, but need to be done. We need to have *phileō* love because we need true friends to stand with us, people who are emotionally connected to us and with whom we can share our deepest thoughts and feelings. Lastly, we Christians need to have *storgē* love between us, a deep family affection that comforts us and helps us feel connected to all our spiritual family.

21:16. “love...I am your friend.” See commentary on John 21:15.

21:17. “are you my friend...are you my friend...I am your friend.” See the note on John 21:15.

21:22. “**You follow me!**” Jesus did not reveal the Sacred Secret. He still spoke as if his return was imminent.