



CHAPTER 4

John's Portrait of Jesus

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In John we have a visionary – a theologian and poet, a mystic and a realist. Whatever we may discover about the identity of “John,” he writes from his experience of the Jesus-event. Only one who knows experientially could make the claims that he does: “we have beheld his glory” (1:14), “from his fullness we have all received” (1:16), “he who saw it has borne witness” (19:35). Writing from within the experience of Jesus, after decades of community living, oral storytelling, proclamation, and reflection, the author of John’s gospel offers a distinctive portrait of Jesus. Where Mark’s narrative begins with Jesus’ adult baptism as the moment of his divine acknowledgment, “You are my beloved Son,” (Mark 1:11), and Matthew and Luke take that moment back to his conception (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:32), John places Jesus’ divine origins, “in the beginning ...” (John 1:1). Jesus, according to John, can only be fully understood from the perspective of God’s own timelessness.

The Prologue (John 1:1–18) is the first place to begin looking for clues to John’s christology. According to Carson (1991, 249–277), these verses function as a foyer in a building, “simultaneously drawing the reader in and introducing the major themes.” The reader thus knows, before the narrative begins, essential information about Jesus’ identity and mission, and this knowledge guides the reading process and adds to its drama. The reader shares a certain omniscience that the characters in the narrative do not have. As readers, we watch the development of the traditional Jesus story and observe the characters in the story as they struggle to understand who Jesus is and what he is doing. Our knowing what the characters do not know adds an ironical edge to the reading process.

There are many varied approaches to John’s portrait of Jesus. The three major clues in the Prologue that I wish to focus on are presented with disarming simplicity: Word (1:1), Tabernacle (1:14), and Son (1:14, 18). I have chosen these three images because they are introduced in the Prologue, giving them a particular hermeneutical significance; they then continue to operate across the entire narrative, and, as I will show, they interact with each other, especially in “the hour” of Jesus’ passion, thus providing narrative and theological coherence to the gospel. This chapter will

show that these three terms are fundamental to John's portrait of Jesus both in his identity and in his mission.

Jesus the Word/Wisdom of God

"In the beginning was the word/*logos*" (1:1)

A first-century audience, familiar with the Jewish scriptures, on hearing the opening lines of the gospel would immediately recall the first chapter of Genesis and its narrative of creation. In Genesis, God's word is the agent of creation, drawing light from darkness, separating the waters, populating the land. The Prologue then continues by stating the theological and christological mystery at the heart of this gospel: "the word was with God and the Word was God" (1:1). "Was with" expresses a duality: the "word" and "God." "Was" expresses a singularity: "Word/God." What sense could a first-century audience make of this startling claim that appears to refute the heart of Israel's faith acclamation: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One"?

For some centuries, Israel's theologians had been struggling to name their experience of God as both Other, the utterly transcendent One, and immanent, as a creative and salvific presence known in their history and in creation. In the post-exilic writings, these two experiences of God were expressed in two different types of literature, known as "Apocalyptic" and "Wisdom." Where Apocalyptic writing stressed God's transcendence, the Wisdom writings affirmed an experience of God's immanence. The prophets had spoken of the Word going forth from the mouth of God to accomplish God's purpose in the world (Isa 55:10–11), of the Spirit being set within Israel (Ezek 22:26; 37:14). The sages in the post-exilic community chose the term "Wisdom" (*hokmah/sophia*) to describe God's self-being in the world.

At first, God's Wisdom, like God's power, God's majesty, God's compassion, was simply an attribute – a way of saying "God is wise," just as "God is powerful," "God is compassionate." In time, with the freedom of poetic imagination, Wisdom developed into a figure of speech, a personification of God's self. And Wisdom, like the Johannine Word, is described as being with God at the dawn of creation.

The Lord created me, the beginning of his ways for his works. Before eternity he established me, in the beginning before he made the earth ... When he prepared the heavens, I was with him, ... I was beside him, his "darling child" (*ānôn*) rejoicing before him always.¹ He rejoiced when he finished the world [lit. dwelling place], and rejoiced in the midst of humanity. (Prov 8:22–31, Septuagint)

Word and Wisdom

Israel's prophets frequently spoke of the power and effectiveness of God's word, but this word never took on the personification we find with Wisdom. The only text

where God's word takes on a quasi-personal reality is in the book of Wisdom, and its use here can be instructive for understanding John's use of the term *Logos*:

For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word (*logos*) leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on the earth. (Wis 18:14–16)

Beginning in chapter 10, the Book of Wisdom recounts Israel's history, and Sophia/Wisdom is named as the one who delivered Israel from Egypt, guiding them by day and night, leading them through deep waters and drowning their enemies (e.g., Wis 10:15–19; cf. Sir 24:1–34). The change in chapter 18 from "Wisdom," which is given feminine gender in both Hebrew and Greek, to "Word," which is given masculine gender, may have been needed because in the passage quoted above, the savior figure is imaged in masculine terms as a "stern warrior."²

There have been a number of studies on the influence of the Wisdom Literature on the Fourth Gospel. Some of these deal with specific themes or sections of the gospel (Ashton 1986; Cory 1997; Ringe 1999), while others present a systematic study of Wisdom across the entire gospel (Willett 1992; Scott 1992; Witherington 1995; Ringe 1999). Here, I will briefly outline some major points of similarity between Wisdom and the Johannine Word and then examine in greater detail one characteristic of Wisdom as it operates in the narrative.

In considering the possible background to the Prologue, Schnackenburg states, "The closest parallels in thought are to be found in Jewish Wisdom speculation" (1968–1982, 1:481; cf. Dodd 1953, 274–275; Brown 2003, 259–265). The Johannine Word, like Wisdom, pre-exists with God (Sir 1:1; Prov 8:23; John 1:1), is an active agent in creation (Prov 8:27–31; John 1:3), and has come to dwell in Israel (Sir 24:8–12; Bar 3:36–4:1; John 1:11a). The Word and Wisdom are both described as "one of a kind" (*monogenes*; Wis 7:22; John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; Willett 1992, 41 n. 123), and both are described as having a parent–child relationship with God (Prov 8:30; John 1:18). Like Wisdom, the Word has received various responses, both rejection and acceptance (1 Enoch 42:1–2; John 1:11b). The gospel narrative continues to present similarities between the Word and Wisdom, who gathers disciples, inviting them to dwell with her (Sir 51:23; John 1:35–51; Feuillet 1965, 89–91), offering them nourishment (Sir 24:19–22; Prov 9:1–6; John 6) and salvation (Wis 9:18; John 3:16; Sinnott 2004). The disciples of Wisdom are called children/sons (Prov 2:1; Sir 2:1; 4:10–11; Wis 2:13; John 13:13) and friends (Wis 7:27; John 15:15). Wisdom lives with God and is loved by God (Prov 8:30–31; Wis 8:3; John 5:20; 10:17); she is an initiate in the knowledge of God and an associate in God's works (Prov 8:30; Wis 8:4; John 8:29, 38, 42, 55). In the words of Michael Willett: "Wisdom strides through the Gospel in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is Wisdom incarnate, God reaching out to humanity to the fullest extent, as a human being" (1992, 127).

Wisdom/Creation christology

A striking feature of Wisdom in the Old Testament is her involvement in creation. It is this aspect of Wisdom that is given great emphasis in the Fourth Gospel. Not only does this gospel begin with the first words of the Genesis creation narrative, but the Prologue appears to follow the structure of this narrative. The Prologue has an introduction (vv. 1–2) and a conclusion (v. 18) that recapitulates and develops the opening verses – the process of this development is shown in the intervening verses (3–17). The central section can be set out in a parallel array that traces the historical development of the Word's presence in the world (vv. 3–5, 14), the prior witness of John the Baptist (vv. 6–8, 15), then the arrival and responses to the Word (vv. 9–13, 16–17). At first the story of the Word in the world is reported in the third person (vv. 3–13), but at verse 14 the report changes to personal testimony, using first person verb forms and pronouns – “us,” (14b), “we” (14c, 16b), “I” (15c), and “me” (15c, d, e).

This structure can be shown schematically:

Introduction (1–2): Logos/Theos in eternity		
The story of the Word/reported		The story of the Word/Testimony
A (3–5)	<i>have seen</i>	A' (3, 4)
B (6–8)	have heard	B' (15)
C (9–13)	have experienced	C' (16–17)
Conclusion (18): Son/Father in history		

The introduction (vv. 1–2) establishes the relationship between the Word and God before moving to the relationship between the Word and the created world. These opening verses echo the description of Wisdom, with God from the beginning (Prov 8:22–26), the first of God's creative acts (Prov 8:22), and beside God in the process of creation (Prov 8:30). The Word is within the world of history from v. 3, from the very moment when all things came into being through him. The presence of the Word in creation and human history draws on traditions of both Wisdom and Word, whereby the world is the locus of divine revelation (von Rad 1972, 62; Brown 2003, 25).

The motif of Divine Wisdom continues in verses 9–13, where there are echoes of two contradictory Wisdom myths. In one myth, Wisdom finds a dwelling within Israel and is identified with the Torah:

Among all these I sought a resting place; I sought in whose territory I might lodge. Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent, and said, “Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.” From eternity, in the beginning, he created me, and for eternity I shall not cease to exist. In the holy tabernacle I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion. (Sir 24:7–10)

All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob. (Sir 24:23; cf. Bar 4:1)

The book of Enoch presents a contradictory myth where Wisdom finds no home in the world and so returns to the heavens:

Wisdom found no place where she might dwell; then a dwelling-place was assigned her in the heavens. Wisdom went forth to make her dwelling among the children of men, and found no dwelling-place: Wisdom returned to her place, and took her seat among the angels. (1 Enoch 42:1-2; in Charles 2004, 2:213)

According to the Prologue, the Lord's heritage (*ta idia*) who have embraced Wisdom now reject the *logos*. But there are some who do receive him, who believe in his name, and these are gifted with the power to become children of God (John 1:12).

The bipartite structure of the Prologue outlined above, framed by an introduction and conclusion, is found in the first creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:4a.

Johannine Prologue		Genesis	
Introduction (1-2)		Introduction (1-2)	
A (3-5) have seen	A' (14)	A (3-5) light \Leftrightarrow darkness	A' (14-19)
B (6-8) have heard	B' (15)	B (6-8) heaven \Leftrightarrow earth	B' (20-23)
C (9-13) have experienced	C' (16-17)	C (9-13) land \Leftrightarrow waters	C' (24-31)
		Climax: The Sabbath (2:1-3)	
Conclusion (18)		Conclusion (2:4a)	

Genesis has one significant difference, in that the six days of creation in this narrative from the Priestly tradition lead to the establishment of the Sabbath on the seventh day: "Thus the heavens and earth were finished and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished (LXX *suneteleō*) the work that he had done ..." (Gen 2:1-2a).

The Prologue has no equivalent to the "seventh day" in its structure, which suggests that in the Johannine perspective, the creative work of God had not been completed "*in the beginning*." The gospel narrative then presents Jesus/Sophia as one continuing the creative work of God. Jesus says to his disciples, "my food is to do the will of the One who sent me and to finish (*teleiōsō*) the work" (4:34). In John 5, "the Jews" "persecute" Jesus for working on the Sabbath, and Jesus states, "My Father is working still and I am working" (5:17). As Divine Wisdom incarnate, Jesus continues God's creative work and for this is he rejected. The ultimate rejection of Jesus/Sophia is presented in the "hour" of the passion, which this gospel presents as the completion of Wisdom's creative work.

The "hour" continues to draw upon the Genesis creation narrative (Manns 1991, 401-429; Barker 1991, 57-95). Only in this gospel is Jesus arrested and buried in a garden (18:1; 19:41). As Frédéric Manns notes, "The symbol of the garden frames

this section" (Manns 1991, 409). At the center of the garden, as in Genesis, is a tree of life (Gen 2:9; John 19:18). Standing at the foot of this "tree" is a man, and a woman who is called "mother" (*mētēr*, 19:25), echoing the name Adam gave the woman in Genesis because "she is the mother (*mētēr*) of all the living" (Gen 3:20). This garden will be the crux of a new creation in John's resurrection narrative, where the first scenes with the women and the disciples take place at the garden tomb (20:1–18). The first day of a new creation dawns with the resurrection, and the second gathering of disciples, including Thomas, occurs "eight days later," again making this the Sunday evening, since the beginning and end day of a period of time are both counted (Schnackenburg 1968–1982, 3:331). In early Christian symbolism, the eighth day signaled the dawn of the new eschatological age, and this terminology first appears in Christian literature in the Epistle of Barnabas (ca. 95–135).

He further says to them, *Your new moons and Sabbaths I disdain. Consider what he means: Not the Sabbaths of the present era are acceptable to me, but that which I have appointed to mark the end of the world and to usher in the eighth day, that is, the dawn of another world. This, by the way, is the reason why we joyfully celebrate the eighth day – the same day on which Jesus rose from the dead; after which He manifested himself and went up to heaven.* (Barn 15:8–9)

In the gospel, the disciples gather "on the first day" and then again, "eight days later." The theme of the eschatological new creation is suggested by these two details of time, particularly given the placement of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection in a garden (18:1; 19:41).

Wisdom's work of creation is only completed in the life and death of Jesus. His dying word, "It is finished" (*tetelestai*), echoes the use of the same verb (*teleō*) used in the Greek version of Genesis to announce the finish of God's initial work of creation (Gen 2:1). In the death of Jesus, the scriptures that opened with the words "In the beginning ..." (Gen 1:1; John 1:1) have been brought to fulfillment. "The work is now finished, and the Sabbath that begins after Jesus' death (xix 31) is the Sabbath of eternal rest" (Brown 2003, 2:908, cf. 1:217).

Toward the end of the first century, after the destruction of the Temple by Rome, two groups with origins in Second Temple Judaism were struggling to express their identity in this new situation. Both groups looked to their traditions, seeking continuity with the God who had acted in their past, in order to articulate faith in the ongoing activity of God in the present. One group looked to the Law as the embodiment of Wisdom, while the Johannine community saw Wisdom incarnate in Jesus. The rabbinic leadership at Jamnia and the local synagogue found God's Wisdom in the Torah that God revealed to Moses; John's community, however, found it in Jesus (Carter 1990, 47).

The six-strophe structure of the Prologue, like the six days of creation in Genesis 1, requires one final act to bring it to completion. For the gospel, this act begins in 1:19 with the narrative of God's final work, to be accomplished in the life and death

of Jesus. Until this story has been told, there can be no “seventh day.” Wisdom’s creative activity is still unfolding, and the final creative word has not yet been spoken. Israel’s past history and traditions are part of this unfolding activity, which is now being brought to fulfillment when Wisdom/Word is spoken in a new way within human history: “the Word became flesh ...”

Jesus the Tabernacle/Temple

“The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” (1:14)

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke speak of God’s coming into human history as a birth; John’s gospel draws on Israel’s long history of God’s presence in its midst and speaks of the Word/Wisdom’s tabernacling (*eskēnōsen*) among us. The verb *skēnoō* means to pitch a tent, and the noun form *skēnē* is used in the Greek Old Testament to speak of the tabernacle. Again this verse develops the Word/Wisdom imagery, for in the book of Sirach Wisdom says,

Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment,
and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent (*skēnēn*)
And he said, “Make your dwelling (*kataskēnōson*) in Jacob” ...
In the holy tabernacle (*en skēnē hagia*) I ministered before him
and so I was established in Zion. (Sir 24:8, 10)

This passage from Sirach draws on Israel’s experience of God’s presence in the wilderness of Sinai. Following the Exodus and the revelations at Sinai, Moses was commanded to “make an ark of acacia wood” (Deut 10:3). In the Deuteronomic tradition, the ark was a box containing the stone tables of the law, and the people carried this with them on their journey. This box becomes the symbol of God’s presence guiding and protecting Israel (Num 10:35–36). After David’s capture of Jerusalem, Solomon built a temple, and the ark was brought into the Holy of Holies at the heart of the temple (1 Kings 8:6). The memory of the Exodus ark and Tent of Meeting (Exod 33:7–11) was developed further in the later Priestly tradition of the tabernacle (Exod 35–40). So when the sage writes of Wisdom coming to dwell in Zion within the holy tabernacle (Sir 24:10), he summarizes Israel’s long history of God’s immanence, which came to be symbolized in the temple.

The temple was the great symbol and physical reality that proclaimed to the people of Israel that “God dwells in our midst.” When the Solomonic temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, the prophets of Israel’s exile kept alive a future hope of restoration when once more God would establish God’s dwelling in the midst of a renewed people (Ezek 37:26–28). A new Israel would then settle in a cleansed and revitalized land with the temple as its center. When the temple was rebuilt by the returning exiles (ca. 516 BCE), it failed to usher in the longed-for restoration, so Israel’s hopes were projected to a future end-time when God would

intervene and raise up the eschatological temple in a new and glorified Jerusalem (Zech 12–14).

An aspect of the temple's significance lies in its mythological meaning (Barker 1991; Rubenstein 1995). As the earth's navel, it is the very center point of God's life-giving contact with the earth (Terrien 1983, 192; Levenson 1984, 284). This mythic understanding of the temple transcends the history of a particular building in Solomon's Jerusalem. It perceives the temple in cosmic terms as the link between heaven and earth, as the place in this world that corresponds to the heavenly throne of God and where the life-giving waters of God's throne make first contact with earth. The temple, as a cosmic symbol of God's presence, reaches back in time to the first acts of creation, when God's Spirit hovered over the waters of the deep (Gen 1:2) and God caused water to rise and form the four rivers bringing life to Eden (Gen 2:6, 10–14).

The Johannine temple

The historical and mythic significance of the temple, described above, lies behind its use in the Fourth Gospel (Coloe 2001; Kerr 2002; Fuglseth 2005; Hoskins 2006). As a time-transcending symbol, it reaches back to the protological beginnings of creation and forward to its eschatological fulfillment. In John, the temple scene is placed as Jesus' first public act in Jerusalem, and in this scene Jesus renames Israel's "house of God" as the "house of my Father" (2:16). The renaming of the temple is the first of a number of changes made across the Johannine narrative, through which the meaning of the temple, as the place of God's dwelling, is transferred to the person of Jesus and then to the community of disciples.

The first movement in this transfer of meaning is in John 2, when Jesus enters the temple, dispels the sacrificial animals, and overturns the tables of the money changers (2:13–17). At Passover time, the money changers enabled pilgrims to change their Roman coinage, inscribed with the head of Caesar, to non-idolatrous Tyrian coinage, with which they paid their annual temple tax to support the temple's ongoing sacrificial system. The tables for the money changers were set up in the outer precincts of the temple in the weeks leading up to Passover. Similarly, having sacrificial animals in these outer precincts aided the many pilgrims coming to the feast. The money changers and animals do not therefore represent a corruption of Israel's worship: "their presence made possible the cultic participation of every Israelite, and it was not only not a blemish on the cult but part of its perfection" (Neusner 1989, 289). Because the money changers and animals are essential for Israel's cultic system, it is incorrect to call this scene a temple "cleansing." Jesus is enacting a prophetic critique of the temple and announcing that Israel's sacrificial system and cultic way of coming to God is over (Neusner 1989, 290). This is stated quite explicitly in the dialogue following the temple action, when Jesus announces that the temple will be destroyed but he will raise it in three days. The narrator then adds, "He spoke of the temple of his body" (2:21). From chapter 2, the temple

provides a major symbol of Jesus' identity and also a major focus for the ongoing plot of this gospel. In telling the traditional story of Jesus, the fourth evangelist is going to depict it from a new perspective, for alongside the narrative of a death and resurrection, this gospel will narrate the destruction and raising of a temple. Utilizing the temple as a major christological image is an aspect of John's unique portrait of Jesus.

In the festival of Tabernacles, Jesus appropriates the key symbols of the feast. He is a source of water for the thirsty (7:37) and light for the world (8:12), and it is during this feast that the temple symbolism begins a second transference of meaning from being the "temple of his body" to being a future temple of believers. Just as the temple is imbued with a mythological meaning as the source of creation's life-giving waters, Jesus speaks of himself as a source of water for those who thirst: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me" (7:37a). His next words speak of a future time when the Spirit will be given, and at that time believers will also become sources of water.

"As the scripture has said, 'Out of his [the believer's] heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (7:37b-39)³

The third and final transference of meaning occurs within Jesus' farewell meal with his disciples (John 13-17): "In my father's house are many dwellings; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:1-2). In chapter 14, the phrase "in my father's house" needs to be interpreted in the light of the similar expression in chapter 2, where "my father's house" referred to the Jerusalem temple, the building (2:16). The scene in chapter 2 begins in the physical temple building, but by the end of the chapter the temple has been reinterpreted as a person: "he spoke of the temple of his body" (2:21). In chapter 2, the meaning of "my father's house" is thus transferred from a building (the temple) to a person (Jesus). In the Hebrew scriptures, the phrase "my father's house" always has a personal sense, in that this phrase refers to the group of people who make up the household, such as the parents, children, servants, and even the future descendants. The following example illustrates this usage:

Now then, swear to me by the LORD that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign, and save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death. (Josh 2:12-13)

In speaking of the temple with this phrase in chapter 2, the evangelist began to move away from temple-as-building to something personal and relational – the temple of his body (2:21). In chapter 14, this movement continues and extends beyond one person, Jesus, to a group of people in a household or in familial relationship. Chapter 14 develops this personal and relational understanding even further with the shift from the word "house" (*oikos*), the term used in chapter 2, to "household" (*oikia*), used in chapter 14.

The shift from a building to personal relationships suggested by the phrase “in my father’s household” requires a similar shift in understanding what the evangelist means by “many dwellings.” What are these many dwellings? The chapter itself provides the best interpretive clue to the particular Johannine meaning of this phrase.

Chapter 14 uses derivatives of “dwell” (*menō*) and “dwelling” (*monē*) to describe a variety of interpersonal relationships between the Father, Jesus, the Paraclete, and believers. The relationships are usually described with the translation “abiding” or “dwelling.” These series of relationships are introduced by the phrase “many dwellings”: “In my father’s house are many dwellings ...” (14:2) – namely,

- the Father is “dwelling” (*menōn*) in Jesus (v. 10);
- the Paraclete “dwells” (*menēi*) with believers and in the future will be in them (v. 17);
- the Father and Jesus will make their “dwelling” (*monēn*) with the believer (v. 23);
- and Jesus is “dwelling” (*menōn*) with the disciples (v. 25).⁴

Many commentators would see the metaphor as a reference to God’s heavenly dwelling, where the believers will abide at some future time. But the subject of the verb “dwell” throughout chapter 14 is not *the believer* but *God*. The action therefore is not the believers coming to dwell in God’s heavenly abode, but the Father, the Paraclete, and Jesus coming to dwell with the believers. Given that the emphasis in chapter 14 is on the Divine dwelling with the believers, it is appropriate that this theology is introduced with an image that draws on Israel’s symbol of the divine presence dwelling in its midst – the temple, Israel’s “house of God,” which had been renamed by Jesus in chapter 2 as “my father’s house” (2:16).

From the above analysis, the statement “in my father’s house are many dwellings” is best understood, within the context of this gospel, to refer to a series of interpersonal relationships made possible because of the indwellings of the Father, Jesus, and the Paraclete with the believer. These divine indwellings in the midst of a believing community make it appropriate to speak of the community as “the father’s house,” a living temple, where God can now be found. The community is the “house (household) of God.” In the words of David Aune, the term “house/household,” as it is used here and in 8:35, “reflects the self-designation of the Johannine community” (1972, 130).

Faced with the impending death and loss of Jesus, the disciples are offered words of consolation that the experience of Jesus’ departure will at the same time usher in a new experience of God’s presence. They will not be left orphans (14:18). The divine presence, who tabernacled in the flesh of Jesus, will continue to dwell with them. The indwelling relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit will become their relationship, building them into a temple/household of God.

Why use the temple as the great symbol of God’s presence, not only in the life of Jesus, but in the ongoing life of the Christian community? To understand this, we

need to realize that this gospel was written at a time when the magnificent temple of Jerusalem no longer existed, just as the historical Jesus was no longer present with disciples.⁵ At the same time as the fourth evangelist was offering consolation to his community, the Jewish rabbis were trying to understand how they could maintain contact with their God in the absence of the temple, its priesthood, and its system of sacrifices. Both communities faced the stark loss of their point of contact with God. For both groups, the temple represented most dramatically a past presence of God and evoked the current painful possibility that God had abandoned the world.

The rabbis turned to the Torah, seeing in Torah the promise of God's abiding presence. Once again the Wisdom traditions provide the interpretive means of associating temple and Torah.

Afterward she [Wisdom] appeared upon earth and lived among men. She is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures for ever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die. (Bar 3:36–4:1; see also Sir 24:7–12, 23, quoted above)

The rabbis sought a theological meaning for the temple's destruction and alternative ways of living lives acceptable to God. The Torah provided this alternative, as is illustrated in this later rabbinic tale: Once as Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Joshua observed the temple in ruins, Rabbi Joshua lamented that the place of atonement for the iniquities of Israel had been destroyed.

"My son," Rabban Yohanan said to him, "be not grieved. We have another atonement as effective as this. And what is it? It is acts of loving kindness, as it is said, *For I desire mercy and not sacrifice.*" (Hos 6:6) (Avot de Rabbi Natan, ch. 6; quoted in Neusner 1972, 324)

Following the destruction of Jerusalem, the evangelist is engaged in the same task as the Jewish rabbis. The rabbis sought to ensure the survival of Judaism and the means of redemption without the Temple cult, and their answer was Torah. The Johannine community focused on the person of Jesus. Both groups turned to their common tabernacle/temple traditions and the Wisdom myth to find the means of expressing their claims to cultic continuity. For the Johannine community, holy Sophia/Logos, present with God in the beginning, had tabernacled in the midst of Israel in the flesh of Jesus, the one and only Son.

Jesus the Son

"No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him known" (1:18)

In examining the two terms given in the Prologue so far, Word/Wisdom and Tabernacle, we have seen that there is a strong resonance between them, as Wisdom took up her dwelling in the tabernacle. This overlap of terms continues when we

consider the third image offered in the Prologue, Jesus as the one and only Son.⁶ The Fourth Gospel gives a unique emphasis to Jesus' sonship, whether it be as Son of God, Son of Man, or simply Son (Moloney 1978; Kim 1983; Burkett 1991; 1999; Pazdan 1991). The title "Son" draws together and gives added meaning to the two themes discussed above: Jesus as the creative Word/Wisdom of God and Jesus as the tabernacle/temple of God's presence.

As mentioned above, the evangelist makes use of two different Wisdom myths to describe the coming of the Word into the world: one where Wisdom is accepted and dwells in Zion, and another where Wisdom finds no place and returns to the heavens. In the Prologue, these two myths are expressed in the form of two responses to the Logos: "He came to his own (*eis ta idia*), and his own did not receive him, but those who did receive him, he gave them the power to become the children (*tekna*) of God" (1:11–12). Once again the Prologue hints at what the gospel narrative will reveal. As Son, Jesus is the one and only revealer of the Father, and nowhere is his sonship more critical than in the hour of his passion.

The royal temple-builder

Two of the unique elements in the Johannine passion are the title placed above Jesus' head (19:19) and the scene with the mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple (19:25–30). These elements will draw together the two images from the Prologue presented so far, Divine Wisdom/Logos, who participates in God's ongoing creative activity, and the temple as God's dwelling place in the world.

Pilate insists on the title "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews" (19:19). In fact, two titles are used synonymously, "the Nazarene" and "the King of the Jews," and only the Fourth Gospel calls these words a "title" (*titlon*).⁷ Because the Fourth Gospel does not emphasize Jesus' upbringing or ministry in Nazareth, the evangelist is able to use "Nazarene" as a unique and emphatic title for Jesus in his hour (18:5, 7; 19:19).

The words "Nazareth" and "Nazarene" have their root meaning in the Hebrew word *netzer*, describing the future royal branch from the house of David: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch (*netzer*) shall grow out of his roots" (Isa 11:1).⁸ As well as referring to royal line of David, the term "branch" is also the symbolic name of the one who will build the future temple:

Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it upon the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and say to him, Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Behold, the man whose name is the Branch (*tzamah*): for he shall grow up in his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD, and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule upon his throne." (Zech 6:11–13)

Although the Hebrew words for "branch" are different in Isaiah (*netzer*) and Zechariah (*tzamah*), by the first century the words are used as equivalent terms, as

evidenced in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The community of Qumran looks to a future son of David and applies to him the term “branch”: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch (*netzer*) shall grow out of his roots” (Isa 11:1). The quotation from Isaiah follows the Hebrew text and uses *netzer* (branch), but, in the commentary immediately following, the term *netzer* is rendered “the shoot (*tzamah*) of David,” using the term for “branch” from Zechariah 6:12 (4Q161 [4QpIsa^a line 11] in García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1997, 1:316).⁹ These texts show that, by the time of the Qumran writings, the two terms *tzamah* and *netzer* are synonymous and the roles of both have become fused. The man named “Branch” who will build the temple of the Lord, according to Zechariah 6, has been identified as the Messianic shoot of David, the *netzer*.

Jesus is identified as the Nazarene only in his “hour” (18:5, 7; 19:19). When the soldiers come to the garden, they ask twice for Jesus “the Nazarene” – *ton Nazōraion* (18:5, 7), then Jesus is lifted up on the cross bearing Pilate’s title, “the Nazarene” (19:19). This is the formal charge and final title applied to him in the pre-Easter narrative. Given this particular narrative usage, its historical background in contemporary Jewish literature, as well as the overall emphasis on the temple across the entire gospel, this title “Nazarene/Branch” is a reference to Jesus’ messianic role as the builder of the eschatological temple (Zech 6:12). Jesus is condemned and dies as the Nazarene temple-builder. As his body is lifted up on the cross, his prophetic words in chapter 2 are fulfilled, the temple of his body is destroyed, but as “the Nazarene,” the “Branch” of Zechariah, he is simultaneously raising a new temple.

The new temple/household of God

At the foot of the cross stand the mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple (19:25–26). The form of the words Jesus speaks to each of them – “Woman behold your son ... behold your mother” (vv. 26–27) – is very similar to the formula of adoption. The double use of the term “behold” (*ide*) informs the reader that Jesus’ words are a prophetic revelation (de Goedt 1961–1962; Barrett 1978, 552). These two phrases, “behold your son” and “behold your mother,” create a new relationship between the disciple and the mother of Jesus (mother/son), and in so doing they establish a new relationship between the disciple and Jesus as brothers (de Goedt 1961–1962, 145).

If the woman always called “the mother of Jesus” is presented also as the mother of the Beloved Disciple, then Jesus’ sonship is now extended to embrace others. This scene depicts the fulfillment of the promise of divine filiation given in the Prologue: “to all who received him, who believe in his name, he gave power to become the children of God” (1:12). Here, at the cross, is the moment when believers, represented by the Beloved Disciple, are incorporated, through the Spirit, into the sonship of Jesus. The expression “to his own” (*eis ta idia*), describing the Beloved Disciple’s action at the foot of the cross (19:27), forms an *inclusio* with the same expression

used in the Prologue, "he came *eis ta idia*" (1:11), indicating that the action of Jesus coming to his own is now brought to completion. Verses 26 and 27 are the climax of the narrative, and the narrator confirms this in v. 28 when he relates that "After this, Jesus knew that all was now finished." The personalizing of the temple, begun in the transfer of temple imagery to Jesus, then continued with the promise of the divine indwellings in the community of believers constituting them as "my Father's house/hold" (14:2), is completed in this scene when the disciples become "son/daughter" and "sister/brother." This divine filiation is the ultimate revelation of the "hour" and brings Jesus' mission to its completion. Those who believe, who receive the incarnate *logos*, are drawn into the intimate relationship between Father and Son as the Prologue had promised (1:12; cf. 17:24, 26). The new identity of believers is confirmed in the next chapter, when Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, "Go to my brothers and sisters (*tous adelphous mou*) and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your father, to my God and your God" (20:17).¹⁰ The gift of divine filiation is only possible because of Jesus' unique sonship. In drawing believers into his own sonship, a new humanity comes into being at the cross. As Jesus bows his head and hands down the promised gift of the Spirit (v. 30), a new household of God is created (Barrett 1978, 554; Brown 2003, 2:931). This is the "work" of creation that Jesus, holy Wisdom, has been engaged in across the gospel, and this is why Jesus can now say, "It is finished" (19:30).

Conclusion

The above approach to John's portrait of Jesus has taken its starting point from three images presented in the Prologue: Word/Wisdom (1:1), tabernacle/temple (1:14), and Son (1:18). While there are other approaches to examining the portrait of Jesus in John (Brown 2003, 249–277), the Prologue provides the "key to the understanding of this gospel" (Lightfoot 1956, 78). These three images provide the reader with the necessary interpretive lenses with which to read the following narrative. These images then function across the narrative, serving to reveal Jesus' identity and express his mission. The knowing readers then observe how individuals respond to him with either acceptance or rejection of his claims. In the hour, these images coalesce, as the cross is the moment of a new creative act when believers become children of God, participating in Jesus' sonship¹¹ and in him becoming members of his Father's house/hold and a temple of God's dwelling in the world.

Notes

- 1 I am following Willett's translation of the word *'āmôn*, which could mean "craftsman," "nursling," "counselor" (1992, 12).

- 2 In much the same way, the maleness of Jesus may have necessitated using the masculine gendered "Logos/Word," rather than the feminine "Sophia/Wisdom" in the Prologue.
- 3 John 7:37 is a notoriously difficult verse to understand (see Coloe 2001, 125–134).
- 4 The imagery of "many dwellings" continues into chapter 15 where the verb "dwell" is again used to describe the believers dwelling in Jesus. The shift to the community of believers is reflected by a shift in the metaphor from "house" to "vine," since the vine was a common image for the community of Israel.
- 5 The Gospel of John is dated toward the end of the first century, around 95 CE. Jerusalem and its temple had been destroyed by the Roman army in the year 70 CE.
- 6 On four occasions, Jesus is called the "one-and-only Son" (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). On nine occasions, he is called "Son of God" (1:49; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4; 11:27; 19:7; 20:31). On thirteen occasions, he is called "Son of Man" (1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 34, 34; 13:31). On sixteen occasions, he is called simply "Son" (3:17; 3:35, 36, 36; 5:20, 21, 22, 23, 23, 26; 6:40; 8:36; 14:13), and in his prayer in chapter 17, "your Son" (17:1).
- 7 In Mark and Luke, they are termed an inscription (*epigraphē*, Mark 15:25; Luke 23:38), while in Matthew the words are called the "charge" (*aitia*, Matt 27:37).
- 8 From the Greek, it was not clear if "Nazareth" would be spelt in Hebrew with a *tz* or the simpler *z*. Excavations at Caesarea in 1962 found a clear Hebrew inscription referring to a family from Nazareth using the letter *tz*, thus clarifying that Nazareth is derived from *ntzr* (Strange 1992, 1050–1051).
- 9 For a similar interchange of these words see 4QFlor col 1,11 and 4QpGen col 5,3–4.
- 10 I read *tous adelphous mou* as an inclusive expression, since Mary Magdalene is surely included in "your Father."
- 11 The righteous one who possesses Wisdom can be called a "child" of God (Wis 2: 13), can call God "his father" (Wis 2:16), and is counted among "the sons of God" (Wis 5:5).

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