

ATTITUDES TO GENTILES
IN ANCIENT JUDAISM
AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Edited by

David C. Sim and James S. McLaren

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Chapter 13

GENTILES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: NARRATIVE POSSIBILITIES – JOHN 12.12-43

Mary L. Coloe

The Gospel of John poses a particular problem when considering the early Christian missionary movement beyond the world of Judaism and into the world of the Gentiles. The problem in the Gospel of John is that Jesus is never seen outside the borders of first-century Palestine; he travels in Galilee, in Samaria and in Judea but there is no journey to the Decapolis or to Tyre and Sidon as we find in the Synoptic Gospels.¹ J. A. T. Robinson argued very strongly that in John there is no presence of a Gentile mission. He states, ‘The remarkable fact is that there is not a single reference to “the Gentiles” in the entire book. The Fourth Gospel, with the Johannine Epistles, is the only major work in the New Testament in which the term τὰ ἔθνη never occurs.’²

The only two pericopes that some scholars consider represent the future Gentile mission of the church are the cure of the royal official at Cana (4.46-54),³ and the coming of ‘some Greeks’ to Jesus’ disciples and their request to see Jesus (12.20). In the present study, I will focus on the second episode using narrative-critical methods, to examine if these ‘Greeks’ could be Gentiles and, if so, what significance this might have

1 For a listing of the numerous Synoptic references to non-Jews, see J. A. T. Robinson, ‘The Destination and Purpose of St John’s Gospel’, *NTS* 6 (1959–60), pp.117–31 (119).

2 Robinson, ‘Destination’, p.124.

3 The structural context of Jn 4.46-54, which concludes the ‘Cana to Cana’ section, suggests, though not necessarily demands, that the royal official is a Gentile. A very thorough discussion of this section can be found in F. J. Moloney, ‘From Cana to Cana (John 2:1–4:54) and the Fourth Evangelist’s Concept of Correct (and Incorrect) Faith’, *Salesianum* 40 (1978), pp.817–43. Robinson argues that the official, called a βασιλικός, ‘was in all likelihood a Herodian’; see Robinson, ‘Destination’, p.120.

in the Gospel narrative. In the light of these considerations, the present study will then conclude with a discussion of the Johannine community and the claims made that this community included both Jews and Gentiles.

1. *The Greeks (John 12.20)*

The first question to be considered in discussing Jn 12.20 is the identity of these Ἕλληνες. Are they Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora who have come up to the feast, or are they Gentiles, who in some way have been attracted to Judaism?⁴ Robinson states categorically that they are not Gentiles, and that the only certainty that can be deduced is that they spoke Greek rather than Aramaic.⁵ Robinson's position on the identity of the Ἕλληνες is part of a wider discussion of the purpose of the Gospel, which he considers is written to convince Jewish believers in Judea to remain faithful under pressure from the synagogue, and also to make an appeal to Jews in the Diaspora.⁶ In Robinson's view, the Gospel emerges from 'the heart of southern Palestinian Judaism',⁷ and he proposes an early dating for the Gospel.⁸ Others have disputed the

4 As part of Robinson's argument that the term Ἕλληνες must refer to Jews, is the fact that they have come up to Jerusalem to worship at the feast ('Destination', p.120). Against this Cohen discusses seven ways a Gentile can show affection or attraction to Judaism, with only the seventh being a full conversion. See S. J. D. Cohen, 'Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew', *HTR* 82 (1989), pp.13–33. See also P. F. Stuehnenberg, 'Proselyte', in *ABD*, V, pp.503–5.

5 Robinson, 'Destination', p.121. Among Johannine scholars, the majority view is that the term Ἕλληνες does mean a non-Jew, whether a proselyte or a God-Fearer. According to Dodd, 'they stand for the great world at large, primarily the Hellenistic world which is his (the evangelist's) own mission field'. See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p.371. For a listing of other scholars who take this position, see H. B. Kossen, 'Who Were the Greeks of John XII.20?', in J. N. Sevenster (ed.), *Studies in John Presented to Dr. J. N. Sevenster on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (NovTSup 24, Leiden: Brill, 1970), pp.97–110 (97, esp. nn.1–4).

6 Robinson, 'Destination', p.131.

7 Robinson, 'Destination', p.124.

8 Robinson argues for four stages in the development of the Johannine Gospel and Epistles: Stage 1, shaping the Gospel in dialogue with Palestinian Judaism (30–50 CE); Stage 2, a first edition of the Gospel in Ephesus (50–55 CE); Stage 3, the Epistles (60–65 CE); Stage 4, a final edition of the Gospel with Prologue and Epilogue (65 CE+). See J. A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (London: SCM, 1985), p.67 n.150.

details of all Robinson's claims and so the present study will not directly contest his view.⁹ Rather, I will look at the broader narrative context of 12.20 to see if it may shed light on the identity and significance of the term Ἕλληνες at this point in the Gospel.

a. *Narrative Context*

The statement about some Greeks coming to see Jesus occurs in a long section describing Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and various responses to this event (12.12-43). Following this is a brief conclusion to the first part of the Gospel (vv. 44-50). I divide this passage into three sections using the explanatory comments by the narrator to indicate the conclusion of each section:

- Section 1. The entry into Jerusalem – the crowd and Jesus' response (vv. 12-14)
(narrator's explanation vv. 15-18)
- Section 2. Various responses – the Pharisees, the Greeks, Jesus, the Father, the crowd (vv. 19-32)
(narrator's explanation v. 33)
- Section 3. Concluding reactions – the crowd and Jesus' response (vv. 34-36)
(narrator's explanation vv. 37-43)

b. *Section 1. The Entry into Jerusalem: vv. 12-18*

The Johannine account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is noticeably different to the Synoptic accounts. In the Synoptics, Jesus initiates the event by sending disciples to procure a donkey for him to ride into Jerusalem (Mk 11.1; Mt. 21.2; Lk. 19.30). The crowd then respond to Jesus' actions by spreading cloaks on the road, waving branches and shouting acclamations. This sequence is reversed in John. The crowd, motivated by the raising of Lazarus (12.9), takes branches and goes out to meet Jesus, crying 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel' (12.13). It is in response to the crowds that Jesus finds a young donkey and sits on it. The narrator then offers two explanations about this event: first, in terms of what is written in the Scriptures, which, according to the narrator, the disciples did not understand or remember until after Jesus was glorified (12.16); second, the crowd have acted as they did because of the sign of Lazarus (12.18).

⁹ See the cogent arguments of Kossen, 'Who Were the Greeks?', pp.97–110; and J. Beutler, 'Greeks come to see Jesus (John 12:20f)', *Bib* 71 (1990), pp.333–47 (342–3).

To understand the meaning of this event, I propose examining the explanations given by the narrator,¹⁰ through the Scripture citation, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold your king is coming, sitting on an ass's colt' (v. 15). This citation, drawing on both Zephaniah and Zechariah, repeats the title 'king' from the crowd's acclamations. On the lips of the crowd, the title 'king' expresses Jewish nationalist hopes such as at the time of David or the Maccabees.¹¹ The crowd cites Ps. 118.26, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord', and then adds their own acclamation calling Jesus 'the king of Israel'. Jesus' action, in response to this, when interpreted through the narrator's Scripture citation, corrects the crowd's limited nationalistic perceptions.¹²

The first part of the Scripture citation, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion', follows closely the MT of Zeph. 3.16 – 'Fear not, O Zion'.¹³ The reason

10 In this ancient text, unlike some modern narratives, I am assuming the narrator speaks reliably on behalf of the author. The narrator's explanatory comments therefore offer the reader a clue to interpreting the events. In his analysis of narrative techniques, Moloney states: 'What the narrator communicates directly to the reader through commentary is a reliable representation of the overall point of view of the omniscient author'. See F. J. Moloney, 'Who Is the Reader in/of the Fourth Gospel?', *ABR* 40 (1992), pp.20–33 (23).

11 The Fourth Gospel describes the palm branches, naming them τὰ Βαῖα τῶν φοινίκων. These are the palm branches used when Simon arrives triumphantly in Jerusalem following his victory over the 'yoke of the Gentiles' in 1 Macc. 13.41. According to Schuchard, the 'palm was for the Jews a symbol which, at least from the time of the Maccabees, stood for the nation and functioned as an expression of their hope for an imminent national liberation (see 1 Macc. 13.51; 2 Macc 10.7; cf. *Test. Naph.* 5.4; Rev 7.9)'. See B. G. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture: The Interrelationship of Form and Function in the Explicit Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John* (SBLDS 133; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), p.77. This allusion gives added meaning to the crowd's hailing Jesus as 'king'.

12 Note the use of the adversative conjunction δέ: 'But Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it' (v. 14).

13 The expression 'daughter of Zion' occurs just above in Zeph. 3.14. In a detailed discussion of this citation, Schuchard (*Scripture within Scripture*, pp.74–84) argues that the allusion is to Isa. 44.2. His argument is based on the fact that the acclamation of the crowd, 'the king of Israel' (βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ), is found only once in the Greek version of the Scriptures in Isa. 44.6, but in my opinion, the words 'Fear not', in close association with 'daughter of Zion' in Zech. 3.14, 16, are more compelling. Also, the phrase βασιλεὺς Ἰσραήλ is found in Zeph. 3.15 (LXX). See also the discussion in R. Sheridan, *Retelling Scripture: 'The Jews' and the Scriptural Citations in John 1.19–12.15* (BIS 110; Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp.226–7. Menken considers both Isa. 40.9 and Zech. 3.16 as likely sources for John's citation. See M. J. J. Menken, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form* (CBET 15; Kampen Kok Pharos, 1996), pp.83–4.

why Zion/Jerusalem is not to fear is because ‘The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst (Zeph. 3.15).¹⁴ In Zephaniah the coming of the king is to have implications well beyond Israel’s nationalistic hopes: ‘For my decision is to gather nations’ (Gr. ἐθνῶν; Heb. עַמְּוָלָם; Zeph. 3.8), then the speech of all the people will be changed ‘that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord’ (Zeph. 3.9). As Brown comments, the crowd ‘should not be acclaiming him as an earthly king, but as the manifestation of the Lord their God’, who has come to gather all the nations.¹⁵

The second part of the Scripture citation – ‘behold your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt’ – continues the universalist outlook of Zephaniah by adding a citation from Zechariah: ‘Behold your king comes to you; (triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey) on a colt, the foal of a donkey’ (Zech. 9.9).¹⁶ By omitting part of the quotation, the Gospel refrains from interpreting the action as a gesture of humility. Once again the context in Zechariah is most significant, for this king will ‘command peace to the nations (ἐθνῶν); his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth’ (Zech. 9.10). While the crowd acclaimed Jesus with the title, ‘king of Israel’, Jesus’ actions, understood through the Scripture citations, correct this title; Jesus comes into Jerusalem for the gathering of all the nations, not simply for the children of Israel.

c. Section 2. Various responses: vv. 19-33

The crowd’s acclamations and Jesus’ corrective response cause various reactions. The Pharisees declare their helplessness and say, ‘Look, the world has gone after him’ (v. 19). In confirmation of these words, some Greeks approach Philip saying, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus’ (12.22). Jesus’

14 This title ‘the king of Israel’, from Zeph. 3.15 may lie behind the Johannine addition to the psalm acclamation in 12.13. See R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (AB 29, 29A; 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1970), I, p.458 n.15.

15 Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I, p.462. In the later prophetic literature, as part of Israel’s eschatological hopes, many nations were to be gathered to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel (Isa. 55.5; 60.5-6; Zech. 2.11; 8.21-23; 14.16; Zeph. 3.9; Mic. 7.12). The Temple was to become ‘a house of prayer for all nations’ (LXX πάντων τοῖς ἔθνεσιν in Isa. 56.7). See D. L. Christensen, ‘Nations’, in *ABD*, IV, pp.1037-47 (1044-5).

16 There is no argument from scholars about the source of this citation from Zechariah. See Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, pp.73-84; and Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, pp.88-95. Both also consider the description in 1 Kgs 1, where Solomon sits upon David’s own mule, as the sign that he is David’s heir.

response to the request of the Greeks is to declare 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified' (12.23). His response concludes with an invocation: 'Father glorify your name' (v. 28). The Father's voice is then heard: 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again' (v. 28). On hearing this, some in the crowd think this is simply thunder, while others think it is an angel (v. 29). Jesus explains to the crowd that the voice they heard was for their sake and then continues in vv. 31-32: 'Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all (πάντα/ς) men/things to myself'.¹⁷ The narrator then concludes this dense theological exchange with his explanation: 'He said this to show by what death he was to die' (v. 33).

The perspective in this section continues the shift from the limited, nationalist hopes of the crowd to a cosmological judgment that the 'ruler of this world' will now be vanquished, and linked to this 'now' is the declaration that the 'hour', spoken of throughout the Gospel,¹⁸ has arrived. The shift in perspective to a cosmological victory is triggered by the arrival of 'some Greeks'. Their arrival on the scene brings the first part of the Gospel, the 'Book of Signs', to its conclusion and announces the movement into the 'Book of Glory'. Who are these Greeks whose arrival is so portentous that it draws into the narrative for the first time the heavenly voice of the Father?

The context of the narrative strongly suggests that these Greeks are Gentiles. As shown above, the Scripture citations from Zephaniah and Zechariah have in view the final eschatological judgment of God on the nations, and the establishing of God's reign over all. The Pharisees' comment, 'Look, the world has gone after him' (v. 19), recognises that Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem has world-wide implications. While there is no direct scriptural quotation,¹⁹ a passage that reflects the action of the Johannine scene is from Zechariah 8:

17 There is disagreement in the manuscript tradition as to whether the term should be πάντα ('all things') or πάντας ('all people'). Φ^{66} and \aleph are strong witnesses to πάντα and the cosmic dimension of Jesus' mission has just been announced, making 'all things' a credible reading; it is also possible that the final sigma was added by a copyist who found πάντα ambiguous. See the comments in Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p.202.

18 Jn 2.4; 4.21, 23; 5.25, 28; 7.30; 8.20.

19 But note that the final part of Zech. 8.23, 'God is with you', corresponds with Zeph. 3.15, 17, 'the Lord is in your midst', which formed part of the preceding Scripture citation in Jn 12.15, as discussed above.

Many peoples and strong nations (λαοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ ἔθνη πολλὰ) shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts. In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'. (Zech. 8.22-23)

As Jn 12.15 is a clear citation of Zechariah 9, there is a strong likelihood that the above passage, at the end of Zechariah 8, could be in mind. Zechariah 8 combines a number of oracles of end-time salvation. These oracles include the following themes, all of which are relevant to the Johannine passage: the gathering of Israel in Jerusalem (Zech. 8.8); the repetition of the phrase, 'Fear not' (8.13, 15); the image of sowing and fruitfulness (8.12), which will be developed in Jesus' image of the seed that must die in order to bear fruit (12.24); and the gathering of the nations to Jerusalem (8.20-23). In addition to these themes, there is the depiction in 8.23 of Gentiles coming to a Jew seeking the 'God who is with you'. This is what happens in John. Greeks come to Philip seeking Jesus. Coming immediately after the Pharisees' comment that 'the world has gone after him', these Greeks are representative of that world, confirming the prophetic character of the Pharisees' comment.²⁰

With the coming of the Greeks/Gentiles, Jesus' immediate response is to recognise that 'the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified' (12.23).²¹ Several times in the narrative so far, the reader has been told that the 'hour' has not yet come (2.4; 7.30; 8.20). That this 'hour' involves his death is made clear in the brief parable of the seed that must die in order to bear fruit (12.24), but in John this death is also the 'hour' of his exaltation (12.32), his glorification, as the divine voice testifies, (12.28), and the defeat of 'the ruler of this world' (12.31).

20 Similarly, Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I, pp.463-4; F. J. Moloney, *John* (SP 4; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1998), p.351.

21 With the exception of 5.27 and 9.35, the Son of Man title has always been used with the cross in view (3.13, 14; 6.27, 53, 62; 8.28), and even 5.27 and 9.35 are linked to the cross through the themes of judgment and revelation. Moloney writes, 'the Son of Man revealed God to men [*sic*] and brought judgement to men through his presence, as a man, among them. The high point of this revelation and judgement took place on the Cross.' See F. J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man* (BSR 14; Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1978), p.213. See also his recent work on this title 'Son of Man' and its relation to Jesus' death in F. J. Moloney, 'The Johannine Son of Man Revisited', in G. van Belle, J. G. van der Watt, and P. Maritz (eds.), *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (BETL 184; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), pp.177-202 (202).

The coming of the Greeks, representative of 'the world' in the words of the Pharisees, sets into motion the ultimate cosmic victory of God. The cosmic dimension of the coming struggle is indicated by the breaking into this world of the Father's voice (12.28). What appears to be a struggle between Jesus and the Jewish authorities is in fact the final eschatological struggle between God and Satanic powers. Jewish thinking at this time considered that the world was under the dominion of a power of evil, named as Satan, the devil, Belial and here, the 'ruler of this world'.²² Conventional Jewish eschatology expected that the kingdom of evil would one day be overcome by the power of God, through a saviour-figure who would engage in a final and decisive cosmic battle and whose victory would inaugurate the reign of God in peace and a full flourishing of life.²³ Jesus' announcement indicates that the time of this final battle has now arrived.

As a consequence of the defeat of the 'ruler of this world' through the lifting-up of Jesus in his 'hour', 'all people/things – πάντα/ς' will be drawn to him (12.32). Jesus' statement continues the universal perspective that has been running through this entire passage through the use of the previous scriptural citations and allusions. Jesus' death is not only for the people of Israel; it is for all. The coming of the Greeks/Gentiles in 12.20 proleptically testifies to the fruitfulness of the 'hour'. The seed will fall into the ground, and when it dies, it will bear much fruit. The explanatory comment by the narrator brings this section to closure by signalling that the term 'lifted up' indicates, with artistic irony, that the 'hour' is both the crucifixion and the exaltation of Jesus.²⁴

22 On Jewish understanding of the cosmic power of evil in the first century, see L. T. Stuckenbruck, "'Protect them from the Evil One" (John 17:15): Light from the Dead Sea Scrolls', in M. L. Coloe and T. Thatcher (eds.), *John, Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate* (EJL 32; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), pp.139–60 (145–59).

23 A helpful discussion of the 'Cosmic Battle' theme in relation to John's Gospel can be found in J. L. Kovacs, "'Now shall the ruler of this world be driven out": Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20-36', *JBL* 114 (1995), pp.227–47.

24 Space does not permit further development of the major Johannine theme of 'lifting up' to mean both death and exaltation, and the associated theme of glorification. Kovacs argues that these themes are part of the Johannine portrayal of Jesus' 'kingship' and his enthronement as king through the defeat of the 'the ruler of this world'. She writes: 'For the evangelist, the glorification of 12:23 involves more than Jesus' return to the "glory" he had before (John 17:5); the cross is not merely the metaphorical jumping off point for Jesus' reascent to his heavenly Father. It is the locus of a cosmic battle, in which Jesus achieves a decisive victory over Satan.' See Kovacs, 'Now shall the ruler of this world be driven out', pp.244–7 (246).

d. *Section 3. Concluding Reactions: vv. 34-43*

The passage so far has depicted two contrasting responses to Jesus. In the first section, the crowd fails to understand Jesus' messianic identity and role. They are limited by their nationalistic hopes. By contrast, the second section depicts some Greeks who come wishing to see Jesus. The third section opens with a typical misunderstanding by the crowd (12.34). They understand Jesus' statement about being lifted up from the earth as something akin to an ascension. This puzzles them. The comment from the crowd that the Christ, the messiah, is to remain forever, reveals that with the raising of Lazarus they had believed that the messianic age had arrived, for the resurrection of the dead had become part of Jewish thinking by the first century, at least for some. In his study of Judaism in the first century, Schürer states: 'In this glorious future kingdom not only the dispersed members of the nation, but also all *deceased Israelites* are to participate. They will come forth from their graves to enjoy, with those of their fellow-countrymen who are then living, the happiness of the Messiah's kingdom.'²⁵ In Jewish writing contemporary with the New Testament we find evidence of a first-century theology linking the resurrection of the dead with the coming of the messiah: 'And it shall come to pass after these things, when the time of the advent of the messiah is fulfilled, that he shall return in glory. Then all who have fallen asleep in hope of him shall rise again' (*2 Bar.* 30.1-2).²⁶ But in these Jewish perceptions of the messiah, there was no thought that this figure would then return to the heavens.

The resurrection of Lazarus has led some of the people to consider that Jesus might be the messiah, but if Jesus is to be lifted up from the earth, that is, return to the heavens, then that would disqualify him from being the messiah, since they '*have heard*, from the Law, that the Christ remains forever' (12.34). Their words are in sharp contrast with the words of the Gentiles in Zechariah 8. In Zechariah's oracle, the Gentiles '*have heard* that 'God is with you' (8.23), while the Jews in John, because of their Law, are blind and fail to see the presence of the Christ in their midst.

²⁵ E. Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, Second Division* (4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890), II, pp.174-5.

²⁶ *2 Baruch* is a compilation of independent writings belonging to various dates between 50 and 90 CE. For a discussion of this complex text in its multiple versions, see R. H. Charles, 'II Baruch: The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch', in R. H. Charles (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, 2004), II, pp.470-527.

Jesus then sums up the struggle depicted in this passage between himself and the crowd. From the opening scene, when they hail him as the king of Israel, their understanding has been limited by nationalistic hopes. Neither his actions nor his words have been able to change their perception. Using the image of 'walking in the light' or 'walking in the darkness', Jesus makes a final appeal to them to believe, and so to become children of the light (vv. 35-36).²⁷

Jesus' words are followed by the narrator's comment (12.37-41), which brings this long passage to a close and sums up the theological insight that this passage has revealed and passes a commentary on the entire public ministry of Jesus. The narrator cites two passages from Isaiah (53.1 and 6.10) which continue the contrast between belief and unbelief, blindness and sight. These narrative comments reflect the perplexity of the Johannine community as they try to make sense of the fact that Jesus, and the later Gospel message, was unacceptable to many within Judaism, while the community's post-Easter mission to Gentiles was successful. How could this be possible? The narrator's answer is that this was to fulfil the Scriptures.

The first citation in 12.38 is an exact citation of Isa. 53.1 (LXX), part of the fourth Servant Song, which begins: 'Behold my servant shall prosper, he shall be lifted up and glorified (ὕψωθήσεται καὶ δοξασθήσεται, Isa. 52.13). This one verse has in close proximity two themes found in Jn 12.19-33, namely exaltation and glorification. The Song continues with the rejection of the servant (Isa. 53.3), his death and burial (Isa. 53.8-9) and yet the Servant will see his offspring and from the anguish of his soul (τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ, Isa. 53.11) he will see the light (φῶς), and his suffering will benefit many (πολλοῖς, 53.11; πολλῶν, 53.12). These words and themes are echoed in John 12. Like the Servant, Jesus is rejected (12.37); his soul (ἡ ψυχὴ μου) is troubled (12.27); he speaks of himself as the light (τὸ φῶς, v. 35) and in his lifting up in death he will draw all (πάντα) to himself (v. 31). The citation of Isa. 53.1 and the correspondence between the fate of the Servant and Jesus identify that Jesus fulfils the role of the Servant who is chosen and endowed with God's spirit (Isa. 42.1).

²⁷ The images of walking in darkness and walking in the light may be an allusion to Isa. 50.10 where these same phrases occur at the close of the third Servant Song. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that following Jesus' words the narrator cites Isa. 53.1, which is part of the fourth Servant Song. For more on the influence of the Servant Songs on Jn 12.20, see Kossen, 'Who Were the Greeks?', pp.103-4; and Beutler, 'Greeks come to see Jesus (John 12:20f)', pp.341-2.

The exact citation of the LXX version of Isa. 53.1 offers a significant insight into the evangelist's consistent universalist theme across this entire episode. In its context, Isa. 53.1 is directly related to the preceding verse: 'so he shall startle many nations (ἔθνη πολλὰ); kings shall shut their mouths because of him; those (οἷς) who have not been told concerning him – they shall see, Those who had not heard – they shall understand. Who has believed what we have heard' (53.1).

The original MT of Isa. 52.15 text uses the relative pronoun *esher* in its neuter sense and so reads: 'That (*esher*) which was not been told them they shall see', and 'that (*esher*) which they have not heard they shall understand'. The LXX translates this pronoun in a personal sense using the masculine plural pronoun οἷς. So the LXX version speaks of 'Those (οἷς) who have not yet come to knowledge of the Servant will see, and those who have not yet heard (about him) will hear'.²⁸ The LXX reading, in conjunction with the use of nations (ἔθνη, Isa. 52.15a),²⁹ indicates the Servant's broader mission to the Gentiles, which is consistent with the mission indicated in earlier Servant songs. The first Servant Song commissions the Servant to establish 'judgment upon the earth' (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κρίσιν) and then describes the 'nations (ἔθνη) awaiting his name' (Isa. 42.4).³⁰

Added to the citation from the fourth Servant Song in Jn 12.38 is a second citation from Isaiah offering the narrator's judgment on why Israel could not believe. While the quotation obviously draws on Isa. 6.10, the Johannine wording does not agree exactly with either the LXX or the MT text. A question then follows: Is the evangelist citing here from memory in a free manner or is he deliberately altering the text for his own purpose? Most scholars attribute the text to the evangelist's redaction of Isaiah.³¹

The structure of the LXX shows reverse parallelism, while John shows synthetic parallelism:

28 Beutler, 'Greeks come to see Jesus (John 12:20f)', p.342 (emphasis mine).

29 The term ἔθνη is used to speak of Gentiles, as distinct from the λαός, the people of God. See G. Bertram, 'ἔθνος, ἔθνικός', in *TNDT*, II, pp.364–9.

30 Where the MT speaks of the islands or coastlands awaiting his Law, the LXX has translated this as the nations (ἔθνη) awaiting his name – possibly influenced by what follows in Isa. 42.6–8, which speak of the Servant being a light to the nations (εἰς φῶς ἔθνῶν, 42.6).

31 Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, p.121; see also p.100 n.7 on peshar exegesis and p.106 n.26; Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, pp.98–106; and C. H. Williams, 'Isaiah in John's Gospel', in S. Moyise and M. J. J. Menken (eds.), *Isaiah in the New Testament* (NTSI; London: T&T Clark International, 2005), pp.101–16 (109–15).

<i>Isaiah 6.10 LXX</i>	<i>John 12.40</i>
A Make the heart of this people fat, B and dull their ears, C and shut their eyes; C' lest they see with their eyes, B' and hear with their ears, C' and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.	A He has blinded their eyes B and hardened their heart, A' lest they see with their eyes, B' and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them.

In leaving out the reference to hearing with their ears, the Gospel emphasises the importance of correct sight, or seeing the signs and recognising the glory of God now revealed in Jesus. By redacting the Isaian passage in this way, the evangelist has scriptural confirmation that the Jews in the Gospel narrative have been blinded, and are therefore unable to perceive the signs correctly. The Scriptures of Israel thus confirm that in some way the rejection of Jesus by the Jews and the successful mission to the Gentiles is part of the mysterious plan of God. Unlike Paul, John does not offer further explanation of this divine action and how it might be resolved in the future, but he does offer a glimmer of hope in the final comment by the narrator: 'Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him...' (v. 42). The added comment that they feared to confess this lest they be put out of the synagogue (v. 42) is a further indication that this passage is the evangelist's theological reflection on the later community's experience.³²

2. The Johannine Community and the Gentiles

Having examined a significant text in the Fourth Gospel that provides narrative clues supporting a future mission to the Gentiles, I will now turn to the possible historical development of the Johannine community and its inclusion of Gentiles. At the outset, we must note the difficulty of having any historical certainty due to the lack of clear archaeological evidence that can identify the location(s) of this community. J. L. Martyn

³² For a recent appraisal of the texts which speak of being put 'out of the synagogue' (9.22; 12.42; 16.2) and their relation to the 12th Benediction as proposed by J. L. Martyn, see Joel Marcus, 'Birkat Ha-Minim Revisited', *NTS* 55 (2009), pp.523–51. In a more nuanced manner, Marcus supports Martyn's hypothesis that the use of the term ἀποσυνάγωγος reflects a 'decision by "the Jews" (9.22) or "the Pharisees" (12.42) to put out of the synagogue and the Jewish community in general anyone who confesses Jesus as the Messiah, and it is easy to see the self-curse of Birkat Ha-Minim as a weapon for enforcing such an edict' (p.533).

likened the Gospel narrative to an archaeological 'tell' and all reconstruction of the Johannine community and theories about their missionary outreach at present can only be based on this sole 'tell' and the skill of the interpreter.³³

In the mid-70s, a number of Johannine scholars attempted to reconstruct the history of the development of Johannine theology, the community and the Gospel.³⁴ Among these hypotheses, the work of R. E. Brown has gained the widest acceptance.³⁵ Since his work considered not only the development of the Gospel's theology but also the community's social makeup I will focus on his reconstruction, giving particular attention to his theory about the Gentiles within the community. Brown postulates four phases in the development of the community.³⁶

Phase 1 (mid-50s to late 80s). In or near Palestine, an originating group of Jews, including disciples of John the Baptist, accept Jesus within traditional Jewish concepts as a Davidic messiah. To this group was added a second group of Jews and Samaritans who understood Jesus in terms of a 'prophet like Moses', rather than as a Davidic figure.³⁷ The addition of this group led to a high, pre-existence Christology resulting in conflict with other Jews and eventually those believers openly confessing faith in Jesus were expelled from the community (9.22; 12.42; 16.2).

33 J. L. Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History: Essays for Interpreters* (New York: Paulist, 1979), p.90.

34 G. Richter, 'Präsentische und futurische Eschatologie im 4. Evangelium', in P. Fiedler and D. Zeller (eds.), *Gegenwart und kommendes Reich: Schülergabe Anton Vögle zum 65. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1975); W. Langbrandtner, *Weltferner Gott oder Gott der Liebe: Die Ketzerstreit in der johanneischen Kirche* (BBET 6; Frankfurt: Lang, 1977), pp.373–404; M.-É. Boismard and A. Lamouille (eds.), *L'Évangile de Jean* (Synopse des quatre évangiles en français 3; Paris: Cerf, 1977); O. Cullmann, *The Johannine Circle: Its Place in Judaism among the Disciples of Jesus and in Early Christianity. A Study in the Origin of the Gospel of John* (London: SCM, 1976); and Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History*.

35 R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist, 1979). In an appendix (pp.171–82), Brown provides a brief summary of earlier reconstructions of the community by Martyn, Richter, Cullmann, Boismard, and Langbrandtner. See also the summary by Moloney in R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John: Edited, Updated, Introduced and Concluded by F. J. Moloney* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2003), pp.70–5.

36 Brown's early hypothesis about the development of the Gospel and the Johannine community was only slightly modified in a later work, which was edited and published posthumously, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, pp.64–89.

37 Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, p.68.

Phase 2 (during the 90s). By this time the group may have moved into the Diaspora and here they began to make Gentile converts.³⁸ During this time, the final form of the Gospel was produced. The Christological debates with Judaism led to some within the Johannine community breaking away.

Phase 3 (c. 100). By the end of the first century, those in the break-away group were placing such emphasis on the divinity of Jesus they were losing sight of his humanity. The main group continued to emphasise the humanity of Jesus and this group is responsible for the Johannine Epistles and the strong condemnation against the breakaway group.

Phase 4 (the second century). The main group is assimilated into the broader Apostolic Church, while the breakaway group, who may have had greater numbers, moved into Docetism and Gnosticism.

During the first pre-Gospel phase, Brown suggests that the originating group of believers was joined by Samaritans and also by a group of Jews with anti-Temple views that led to the formation of a higher, pre-existence Christology. This higher Christology caused tension and finally rupture with the Jewish synagogue. Brown suggests that 'it was particularly when the Johannine Christians of Jewish descent were rejected by Judaism and no longer thought of themselves as "Jews" that they received numbers of Gentiles into the community'.³⁹ He points to the explanations of Jewish terms such as 'Rabbi' and 'messiah' as evidence that there were non-Jews within the community. He also sees evidence for Gentiles within the community in the events narrated in John 12 with the coming of the Greeks and use of Scripture (12.37-40) to understand why Jesus was rejected by the Jews. He cites Gospel passages that insist that the true child of God is not determined by ethnic origins such as birth, since entry into the kingdom requires being begotten by God (1.12; 3.3, 5). John's Gospel therefore reformulates what it means to be one of 'the children of Israel': 'The real Israel consists of those who receive the revelation of Jesus (1.37, 47) and so Jesus is the 'king of Israel' (1.49; 12.13).⁴⁰ I would also consider that the statement, 'I am the true vine' (15.1), is part of this polemic to reconfigure Israel in terms of Jesus and his followers since the vine was an ancient symbol of Israel.⁴¹

38 On this point Brown takes the opposite position to that of Martyn, who considers that there was no 'knowledge of the mission to the Gentiles', or at least the community was not involved in such a mission. See Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History*, p.101.

39 Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, p.55.

40 Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, p.48.

41 'The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel' (Isa. 5.7).

3. *Conclusions*

The episode in Jn 12.20, describing the coming of ‘some Greeks’ when read within its narrative context (12.12-43) offers, what I consider, compelling evidence that the Johannine community was engaged in a mission to the Gentiles. While the clues are subtle, it must be noted that writing towards the end of the first century the evangelist is dealing with two historical periods. One is the time of Jesus, where there is little evidence that he was involved in a Gentile mission, and the other is the later time of the early Christian community, which quite obviously had been involved in such a mission since the time of Paul. The evangelist has negotiated this by turning to the ancient prophecies that in the final days Gentiles would be included within Israel’s worshipping community. The Scripture citations, drawing on Zephaniah and Zechariah, evoke the eschatological theme of the gathering of the nations. The Pharisees are the first to recognise this in their ironic statement, ‘Look the world has gone after him’ (12.19). Confirming this statement, some Greeks then approach Philip desiring to see Jesus. In response to the desire of the Greeks, Jesus recognises that his ‘hour’ has come. This ‘hour’ will be both his death and glorification, and through the events of this ‘hour’, the eschatological promises will be realised. The final citations from Isaiah comment on why Jesus (and the gospel) was not received within Judaism and yet was received in the post-Easter mission to the Gentiles. The Fourth Gospel therefore remains within the parameters demanded by the life and ministry of the historical Jesus, while at the same time it proleptically speaks of the future fruitfulness (12.25) of the Gentile mission in the time of the later community.

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