

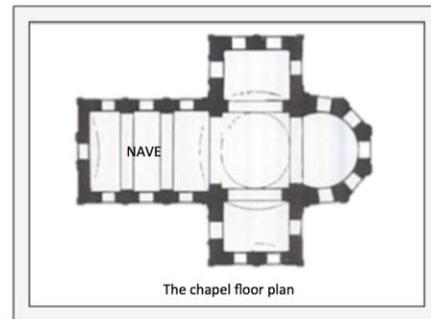
The Gospel of John – The Miracles in John

New Testament Survey – Lesson 11 (Part 2)

How do you make choices? On some things, I can make them quite quickly. The color of a car? Eh... I don't care *that* much, so give me 60 seconds and I can pick that out. There are other decisions, however, that merit a lot of careful thought!

As we prepared to paint the ceiling in our chapel, I had the fun opportunity to figure out exactly how I wanted it painted. This decision was important to me, so it was not easily made. I wanted the chapel ceiling to tell the Bible's redemptive storyline, from Genesis through Revelation.

The chapel is shaped like a cross, and it became apparent that the large sitting area (the "nave") would be the best area for the Old Testament passages. We wanted passages that spoke prophetically of Jesus.



There was enough room for our painter to put 30 scenes onto that section of the ceiling. The chore was deciding which thirty to use! There are hundreds of passages in the Old Testament that speak of Jesus. Some speak of him directly, some allegorically, some as a foreshadowing, and some simply by setting up a theological point or storyline. Which thirty should we choose? After much deliberation, and a measure of debate, we picked our thirty. Then over the arch leading to the nave we wrote in Greek from the passage that begins the book of Hebrews:



“Long ago God spoke to our fathers by the prophets” (Heb. 1:1).

The scenes we selected were those that we thought bore out the truth of that passage. They were Old Testament events that were God's voice through prophets to the Hebrew fathers about the coming Messiah.

Then we had the issue of the New Testament. Where would we paint the gospel scenes? We decided to put them in the wings. Over the arches of the wings we

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wrote a section from John 20:30-31 as written in Greek. The portion we chose translates into English as:

Now Jesus did many other signs, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Again, we were not able to paint every gospel scene or teaching, but we did get a lot painted! The selection was made carefully, in hopes of best conveying our message.

We were not the first to face the challenge of selecting one gospel message over another. Far from it! The apostle John did the same thing in composing his Gospel. This is the thrust of the John 20:30-31 passage we used over the arch. In its full-unedited version, it reads:

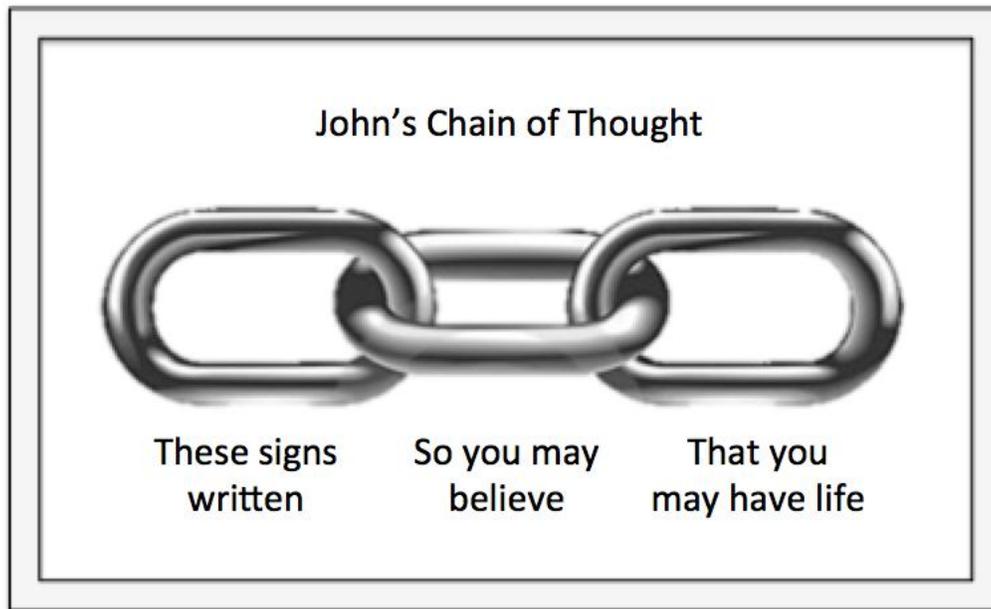
Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John's selection comment leaves no doubt about two things: (1) there were many other signs and miracles done by Jesus that were not mentioned; and (2) John purposely chose the signs he did for a purpose. His choice was not simply the first seven miracles that came to mind. Nor did he pick them randomly out of a hat. John chose those seven miraculous signs for a reason. In this lesson, our goal is to examine those seven miracles and see what, if any, reason John gives for their inclusion.

Before we delve into the seven miracles in greater depth, we first examine this passage. We see in this passage that John had an express purpose behind his choice, and understanding that purpose helps us understand his choices. The key to understanding *why* John chose the miracles he did, is found in dissecting John 20:30-31. It not only unlocks the reason for the miracles, but also the purpose of the gospel as a whole.

JOHN'S PURPOSE STATEMENT

Scholars readily accord this statement as John's "purpose statement," meaning it expresses his purpose behind composing his Gospel. It clearly does so, in very explicit terms, but it does more than that. It also serves as a good summary for what John has written. Before exploring its summarizing feature, look carefully at the purpose statement. As John explained his purpose, there are three ideas that are linked together:



John selected from many signs done by Jesus, seven miracles that he detailed. Lest one fail to keep track of the number, he even begins numbering them for his readers! (Jn. 2:11 – “This, the **first** of his signs”; Jn. 4:54 – “This was now the **second** sign”). John was always a stickler for numbers and their significance. Although some scholars dispute whether the Revelation or the Epistles of John were written by the same author as the Gospel (something we will cover once we reach those books), all of the Johannine writings use numbers consistent with their symbolic meanings of the day. Seven represented a complete number, and is the number of signs John chose for his Gospel.¹ (John also explained Jesus made an important post-resurrection appearance to seven disciples – Jn. 21:1-2).

Those signs were written “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.” When we painted this in our chapel arch, we had an important decision to make. We were painting in Greek, and scholars have a minor dispute over one letter in John’s original Greek text. The question concerns a Greek “s” (*sigma* – σ). The letter is either found as the 7th letter in the word translated “you may believe” or it isn’t. When I was in school, I was taught that the letter was *not* supposed to be there. Yet in fairness, several strong Greek scholars believe it *should* be there. What difference does it make? Well, in a literal Greek sense, it makes a difference. This difference helps illuminate the Gospel and these actual verses as well. We

¹ They are also used repeatedly in Revelation where we have seven churches, seven lampstands, seven stars, seven torches, seven spirits, seven seals, creatures with seven eyes and seven horns, seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven mountains, seven plagues, seven bowls of wrath, creatures with seven heads, seven angels, and 7 thousands dying from an earthquake.

still add, however, that in practical Greek writing and by common sense of readership, it really makes little to no difference at all. The Gospel of John has the same effect either way, you just work a bit harder to get there one way versus the other!

Reading With An “S”

Because we think this is important, we need to understand the difference this “s” makes in literal Greek. If you include the “s,” then the Greek reads: ἵνα πιστεύσητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς... or “in order that you might come to believe that Jesus...” This makes the verb an “aorist tense” and within the context would mean: **that one might begin to believe**. This would be important to people who were devout Jews or even Greeks that attended synagogue, but were uncertain about whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah. A devout Jew would need Jesus attested to by two sources or witnesses. John then gives one witness as Jesus and the seven signs he performed. The second witness for them in John’s Gospel would be provided by the miracle done TO Jesus as opposed to BY Jesus. Namely, God raised Jesus from the dead. This miracle was a second witness to Jesus as Messiah. By thus writing, John was giving those looking for two witnesses, two very compelling ones! John explained this earlier in John 8:17-18 where he recorded Jesus saying,

In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.”

Reading Without An “S”

The alternative reading of John 20:31 that does not have the “s” is the exact same in the Greek except for this missing letter: ἵνα πιστεύητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς... By taking out the “s,” the verb is no longer an “aorist tense” but instead is a present tense verb. So if John did not include an “s” in his original, the text would mean John was writing “in order that *you might continue to believe* that Jesus...” In other words, John’s purpose in writing was to encourage, strengthen, and aid believers in their faith.

There are strong early texts that attest to both readings. The general weight of scholastic authority seems to be that the present tense reading was John’s original (*i.e.*, NO “s”).² It makes sense of the passages in John where he writes as if the

² For those scholars who think the reading is present tense (no “s”) and hence written for believers, see Ridderbos, Herman, *The Gospel of John, A Theological Commentary*, (Eerdmans 1997) at 651ff; Morris, Leon, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of John* (Eerdmans 1995), at 755; Keener, Craig, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary – Volume Two* (Hendrickson 2003), at 1215f. For those scholars who think it an aorist tense (“s”

readers were already believers (Jn. 1:16 – “For from his fullness *we* have all received, grace upon grace.”). Furthermore, the Gospel is not written as a beginner’s primer, but is a fairly sophisticated piece of theological work!³

Aside from the niceties of the Greek language, in reality, the difference it makes is negligible. First, there is serious debate over how precise John was in such tenses, for this is truly a very particular reading in the Greek. Second, John’s purpose need not be limited anyway. For something that was encouraging to believers could certainly be used to bring faith in non-believers. By the same token, something written to bring faith to non-believers could also be quite encouraging to believers.⁴

While the result is the same under either reading, if we agree that John wrote with believers as his intended audience, we can get to that result a bit quicker! The thrust of what John wanted to achieve is the same under either reading: to prompt or solidify belief in Jesus as the Messiah (“Christ”), the Son of God. This was important to John for yet another reason, or link in his reasoning: that by believing, they may have life in Jesus’ name. But we understand the link a bit more as we focus on people who may have put their faith in Jesus already, but might have needed a bit more insight and information to appreciate the fullness of Jesus as Messiah.

In his purpose passage, John uses a number of words that are intensely John words! To a careful student of John, several words stand out pronouncedly as words and concepts John used repeatedly. Look at each word set out below:

Signs *Believe* *Christ* *Son of God* *Life* *Name*

These words form the chords that John plays over and over in his Gospel. We will set aside “signs” until we look at the miracles later in this lesson. We begin our closer examination with the word “believe.”

included) written for non-believers, see Carson, D. A., *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans 1991), at 661ff.

³ If we go to one of the New Testament’s strongest manuscripts used by scholars, Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲙ), we see that it was originally written in that text as a present tense, but a later editor came and added an “s” to that manuscript. This makes more sense that later textual copiers would add an “s” thinking it was unintentionally omitted, than that someone would delete the “s” thinking it was wrongfully inserted.

⁴ Bruce, F. F., *The Gospel Of John, Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Eerdmans 1989), at 395.

Believe

The word “believe,” in various forms, is one of John’s central ideas. Consider it from a simple statistics framework: Matthew uses the word 11 times. Mark uses it 14 times, and Luke uses it 9. The three synoptics use “believe” a grand total of 34 times. John uses “believe” in his gospel 96 times, right at three times more than all the other gospels combined. (It is also used frequently in the short little epistle of 1 John nine times).

The Greek verb translated “believe” is πιστεύω (*pisteuo*).⁵ Originally in Greek, the word was a noun, but by the seventh century BC was used as a verb. The word, whether in noun form (where it is typically translated “faith”) or in verb form (where translated “believe”) has always carried the idea of “trust” or “rely on.” We see this in Plato where he chides the lazy hunter who “trusts [πιστὸν] to nets and snares” rather than actually tracking and hunting.⁶ Plato (427-347BC) used the word to speak of one trusting in weapons to do their work for them, as opposed to trusting in their own skill. Similarly, the Greek Xenophon (c.430-c.354 BC) wrote about generals and captains going into a military conference unarmed because they were “relying [πιστεύσαντες] upon” a truce.⁷ By the time we get to the Greek of the New Testament, there is no real change in the usage of this word.

From a purely formal standpoint there is nothing very distinctive in the usage of the New Testament and early Christian writings as compared with Greek usage. As in Greek, πιστεύειν means “to rely on, “ “to trust,” “to believe.”⁸

We see this in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the “Septuagint”). There the Greek word πιστεύω is used in the sense of “trust” and “believe.” For example, when David fled to the Philistine lands and lived under the care of Achish, King of Gath, David would raid other Philistine territories, killing the inhabitants. Achish asked David where he had been and David would recite false reports. Achish never challenged David in this because,

⁵ In Greek, there is a root to most words and then there are various endings applied that denote tense, speaker, number, and various other information about the word. The root for this set of words is the Greek **πιστ-**. For the benefit of Non-Greek readers slogging their way through this section, we will bold the root in each word form so it is easier to identify.

⁶ Plato, *Laws*, Book 7, paragraph 824 (Loeb translation).

⁷ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, Book 3, Paragraph 1:29 (Loeb translation).

⁸ Kittel, Gerhard, *et al.*, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Eerdmans 1973), Vol. VI, at 203.

Achish trusted [ἐπιστεύθη] David, thinking, “He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant” (1 Sam. 27:12).

We can take this word study into John and better appreciate his usage of “believe.” For John, “believing” in Jesus meant more than a simple mental recognition of who Jesus was or was not. It was a trusting and relying upon the idea that Jesus was not simply a man, but was the Messiah, the Son of God. We see this clearly in passages like John 2:23-24,

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed [ἐπίστευσαν] in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust [ἐπίστευεν] himself to them, because he knew all people.

This is an elegant passage because it contrasts people responding to Jesus with Jesus responding to people. The balance of the passage is only seen when one sees that John has used πιστεύω twice. The first time it is translated as “believe,” the second time as “trust.” John is saying, in essence, “The people trusted Jesus because what he was doing showed who he really was, but Jesus did not trust the people because he knew who they really were!”

Understanding the “trust” and “reliance” meaning behind πιστεύω also helps understand passages like John 5:46-47,

For if you believed [ἐπιστεύετε] Moses, you would believe [ἐπιστεύετε] me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe [πιστεύετε] his writings, how will you believe [πιστεύσετε] my words?”

Jesus rightfully challenged the reliance the people had on the writings of Moses. They gave lip service, and some even seemed to follow rigid sets of commands from Moses, but where was their true reliance and trust in what Moses wrote? It was not in those people. So Jesus told them they would never rely on Jesus when they would not rely on what Moses wrote about Jesus.

A useful exercise is to pull out a concordance and do a word search in John for the verb “believe.” Then looking at each passage, try to understand it in light of a fuller flavor of not only a mental acceptance, but of a trust and reliance.

Christ

“Christ” is a word that is used by all the gospel writers, more so by Matthew and John, but not to any great extent. Still it is a word that has special meaning, and is worth noting. The Greek Χριστός (*Christos*) means “anointed,” and it was the

Greek word used to translate the Hebrew word for “anointed” – “Messiah.”⁹ John explained this early in his gospel writing in John 1:41,

He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah [Μεσσίαυ]” (which means Christ [Χριστός]).

This was a title, a specified role of someone that the Jews were awaiting. John the Baptist clarified that he himself was not the Χριστός:

He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ” (Jn. 1:20).

While the idea of the “Christ” might seem straightforward to us, it is actually a bit more complicated. Trying to chase down the word “Messiah” in the Old Testament, we meet up with a number of places where we read of an “anointed” one (37 to be precise). But, most of those are not speaking most directly of a prophetic coming Messiah (with a capital “M”) that we would understand to be Jesus. For example, in Leviticus 4:3 we read of a “messiah” or “anointed” priest in a way that clearly does not reference Jesus (hence the lower case “m”):

...if it is the anointed [“messiah”] priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering.

A further indication that the Old Testament Scriptures are not fully straightforward on the expectations of the Messiah is found in Luke’s narrative about Jesus teaching his disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection. Luke says that Jesus was speaking with his disciples who were bewildered about what had happened. Jesus then explained,

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ [Χριστός-Messiah] should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Lk 24:25-27).

Clearly, they did not understand what the Old Testament said about the Messiah. Anointing in the Old Testament was a practice that conferred “special power, authority, honor, and glory” on one who was deemed ritually pure after the

⁹ More precisely, our English word “messiah” comes from the Latin word “messias.” Jerome made the Latin word, borrowing directly from the Greek word μεσσίας (“messias”). The Greek is an imprecise transliteration of the Hebrew *mashiach* (מָשִׁיחַ).

anointing.¹⁰ We see in the Old Testament people anointed as prophets, priests, kings, and rulers, but very few usages of “Messiah” that clearly refer to Jesus.

We do not easily come to understand this, because we live in a post-apostolic age where the church has taught and understood for nearly two thousand years that “Jesus” and “Messiah” or “Christ” go together. So much so, that young children often think the “Jesus Christ” is just the full name of “Jesus.” But take the time to try and find the Old Testament teaching about the upper case “M” Messiah. You will quickly come up short.

Here we begin to unlock some of the significance of John’s purpose statement. The Old Testament is not a clear source for understanding who the “Messiah” was, as that term was used in the New Testament. That is not to say that there are not very clear Old Testament prophecies about the coming Son of Man (in Daniel), the coming Suffering Servant (in Isaiah), and the offspring of Abraham who would bless all the nations. As we discussed in the opening of this lesson, there are many, many prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament. But less than a handful are clearly linked to the word “Messiah.”

The term Messiah permeated Jewish thought at the time of Christ and afterwards when John was writing, but it was a term that we can better understand from other Jewish literature than from the Old Testament. We can begin to get a glimpse from studying two different sets of source documents for the period. First, we can consider the Dead Sea Scrolls, and second we can look to the *Targumim*.

In the Dead Sea Scrolls (“DSS”), we have contemporary documents to the New Testament time period that reflect teaching and thoughts of a sect of devout Jews at the time. Most scholars accept that these documents, found principally in caves around the ancient Dead Sea community of Qumran, belonged to that community. The community is generally regarded as one scholars have known as “Essenes,” although some contest that identification.¹¹ Approximately two-thirds of these documents are non-biblical, illustrating life and ideas of second temple Judaism (the time of Christ).

While more and more fragments are still coming to light, we already know from major DSS publications that there was a conscious understanding at the time of Jesus that a “Messiah” was expected for Israel. In anticipation of a restored Israel,

¹⁰ Hess, Richard and Carroll, M. Daniel, ed’s, *Israel’s Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (Baker Academic 2003), at 24.

¹¹ A marvelous short history of the Scrolls is found in Fields, Weston, *The Dead Sea Scrolls – A Short History*, (Brill 2006). He also has a multi-volume longer history with the second volume preparing for publication.

the DSS documents spoke of a coming “messiah” or “anointed” High Priest who would serve in the temple righteously. A good example that is fairly on point is found in the *Apocryphon of Moses*, a text claiming association with or attribution to Moses. The passage speaks of the end times where one would rise who would be an “anointed [*mashiach*] priest upon whose head the oil of anointing has been poured.”¹²

The DSS also indicate that a number of Old Testament Scriptures were seen as prophesying the coming Messiah.¹³ One example of such a passage is Gen. 49:10. In Genesis 49:10 we read Jacob prophesying over his son Judah,

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

The DSS community understood this to mean that “the feet” referenced are those of the “righteous Messiah...the branch of David.”¹⁴

A well-discussed passage in a DSS called “The Damascus Document” lays out the rules of life that should govern behavior “until there arises the messiah of Aaron and Israel.”¹⁵ Many scholars use this and other passages to support the idea that in Qumran, there was an expectation of two Messiahs, one of Aaron and one of Israel.¹⁶ Recently deceased scroll scholar Frank Cross wrote of the “consistent doctrine” in the DSS of “only two messiahs—one of Aaron and one of Israel” that he considered “evident throughout the sectarian Qumran literature.”¹⁷

Another DSS that set out the rules of the community is commonly termed the Rule of the Congregation. In this text, we read of the coming time they anticipated when God would “begat the Messiah” who would sit down with the men of

¹² 4Q375, verse 8.

¹³ Hess and Carroll, at 91ff.

¹⁴ 4Q252, Col. V, 3-4.

¹⁵ 4Q266 9 II-III.

¹⁶ The seminal treatment of this is Kuhn, K. G., “The Two Messiahs of Aaron and Israel,” *NTS* 1 (1954-1955), but there are a large number of scholarly articles in support of the theory, and a few against.

¹⁷ Cross, Frank M., “Notes on the Doctrine of the Two Messiahs at Qumran and the Extra-Canonical *Daniel Apocalypse* (4Q246),” *Current Research and Technological Developments on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Conference on the Texts from the Judean Desert, Jerusalem, 30 April 1995*, (Brill 1996), at 2.

renown, the leaders of Israel, the Chief Priest, and other notables. The Messiah would enter the gathering and sit at the head of the table as the group enjoyed a royal banquet.¹⁸

To understand the different ideas of the Messiah at the time of Jesus and the Gospel of John, we can also look to the literature we call “*Targumim*” (plural of “*Targum*”). These were Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament made both before and after the time of Christ. It was an effort both to put the Old Testament into the more common language of Aramaic, but also to put it into a paraphrase form at the time to increase understanding. We can find in these writings many Jewish ideas about the Messiah.

For example, our Isaiah 11:1-6 reads,

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips she shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.

The Targum saw this as a statement about the Messianic age and even translated verse one as,

And a king shall come forth from the sons of Jesse, and the Messiah shall be exalted from the son of his sons.

Verse six that speaks of the wolf lying down with the lamb is introduced as,

In the days of the messiah of Israel...¹⁹

The Targum Onkelos translates and paraphrases the Old Testament book of Numbers. In the passage of Numbers 24:17 we read in our translations the words of the prophet Balaam saying,

¹⁸ *1Q28a II.*

¹⁹ *Targum Isaiah.*

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.

In the Targum commentary, which is generally dated to the New Testament time period, the passage is rendered as “a king shall arise out of Jacob and be anointed the Messiah out of Israel.”²⁰

There were differing thoughts at the time about what the Messiah would be. Many thought him a conquering king who would liberate Israel. Our ancient rabbinic sources teach us that many claimed the mantle of “Messiah” and sought to elevate themselves to military leader and conqueror. A particularly illustrative example was a man named Simon bar Kosiba (“Simon son of Kosiba”). His followers thought him the Messiah. Rabbi Akiva gave Simon the nick-name “Simon bar Kokhba,” meaning “Simon son of the star.” This name was based on the prophecy of Numbers 24:17 and the Targum translation given above. Simon was seen as the Messiah to restore Jerusalem and liberate Israel from the Roman oppression and embarrassment of the temple destruction from 70AD. Simon bar Kokhba challenged Rome (still known as the “bar Kokhba revolt”), and successfully ran a Jewish state for three years before his defeat and death in 135AD. After his defeat, the rabbis changed his name to Simon bar Kozeba, meaning “Simon Son of the Lie.” He was a false Messiah.²¹

The fuller treatment of first century views of Israel’s Messiah would take a good size book to deal with them adequately, and even then there is much unknown and in dispute. One reason is that we can read one idea of the Messiah in one text, and another idea in a different text. Evidently, there was no settled idea on what Israel’s anointed Messiah would be. Would he be one or two (or more)? Would he be prophet, priest, or king? Would he be a military ruler establishing the physical kingdom of Israel for the ages?

It is possible that even one who believed in the redemptive work of Christ, might also ascribe to a view that there were other Messiahs still to come. If we shed our 21st century viewpoint of who and what the Messiah was (and is), we realize that at John’s time, there were still many theories and attributions made. This is where we begin to unlock some of the significance of John and his choices of “signs.” John wanted his readers, even as believers, to realize that Jesus was “ὁ Χριστὸς,” meaning he was not “a” Christ, but he was “*the*” Christ. Jesus was the Messiah.

²⁰ *Targum Onkelos.*

²¹ This history and the discovery of documents in the caves around the Dead Sea further illuminating Kokhba’s real name, as well as more of his history, are found in Yadin, Yigael, *Bar Kokhba*, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1971).

There was no other. It was not that Jesus was one of several Messiahs. Nor was it the case that Jesus was just a special redeemer. Jesus was THE Messiah and anyone who thought there was or would be another was wrong.

Son of God

John then linked the Messiah title of Christ to another fact, Jesus was “the Son of God.” This phrase is not unique to John; Matthew, Mark and Luke used it a total of eight times (Matthew – 3; Mark – 2; Luke – 3). But John uses it as much as the other three writers put together (eight times) in his Gospel and another six times in his First Epistle.

We will explore this usage as we continue this lesson next week.

CONCLUSION

When we begin to consider how John chose the scenes from the life of Christ that he painted in his Gospel, we look to the overriding purpose of the Gospel. We see that John was intent on believers (and non-believers) appreciating the full role of Jesus in God’s redemption. Jesus was not only a spiritual savior. He was the answer for all the promises of Scripture. Jesus was the Messiah, Christ. This is important for the people in John’s day, a day when many thought there were more anointed people to come in God’s plans for the ending of time. But John wanted to make it clear before he died that Jesus was God’s plan for the end of days, just as he was God’s plan for the current day.

We will have a chance to appreciate this more as we continue to unpack these verses in the coming lessons.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “...*these are written so that you may believe...*” (Jn 20:31).

“Believe” is an interesting word in English. As we use it in our Biblical studies and in our lives, we must never forget the idea behind the Greek word. Believe is not some simple assent or mental awareness. That is a *part* of belief, but not the real essence of belief. That is why James wrote that the kind of belief that demons have, a simple recognition that Jesus truly is who he is, is not a true saving faith. As James wrote it in the direct Greek, which admittedly is not as smooth as English, translators have to

make it, “that kind of faith” cannot save anyone! The faith of the Bible, the “believing” that is the Greek word, is a trust and reliance. It changes who one is and what one does. It most assuredly leads one to good deeds and a life called forth by the one upon whom we rely! Let us look to rely on Jesus, not only in the eternal sense of redemption from our sins, but also in a present sense. Let us rely on him to lead us. Let us have confidence in what he taught us. Let us trust him not to mislead us, but to give us right direction for living.

2. “...*Jesus is the Christ...*” (Jn. 20:31).

Our ongoing daily belief is not just that Jesus saves, but that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the awaited deliverer. He is the proof of God who keeps his word. He is the prophetic fulfillment of Genesis 49:10 “The scepter shall not depart from Judah,” and of Numbers 24:17 “a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.” God has been faithful to his prophetic word throughout the centuries; he will not fail to be faithful to his word today. We can rely on him as assuredly as the believers in John’s day. We will see this unfold more as we look at the miracles where Jesus is shown victorious and reliable in matters ranging from the simple supply of wedding necessities to the retrieval of Lazarus from the dead. Jesus as Messiah is evidence of our faithful God that we can rely upon.

3. “...*the Son of God...*” (Jn 20:31).

There is more to come in this verse. So much of the Bible is easy for us to read and we pass right through it because it fits our frame of reference and our core Christian understanding. I want to be sure to read it slowly. I want to pause and ask what is being said and why it was important to say it. I want to understand more fully the precious words of life that God has ensured for us in his word. Let us commit together to continue this study! Read John this week and make notes about the ways he explains the Messiahship of Jesus and the fact that Jesus was no ordinary man, but was the Son of God in whom we find LIFE!