

JESUS, KING OF ISRAEL

*Toward a Final Quest
For the Historical Jesus*

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Chapter 2

The Primitive John 21

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The Primitive John 21

John 21 is commonly assumed by NT scholars to be an appendix that was added to the Gospel of John soon after it had attained its canonical form through the end of ch. 20. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate that John 21 is a primitive composition with a political agenda. Accordingly, consideration should be given to the possibility that it was added to an early edition of John related to the semeia source and a primitive passion narrative, under politically contentious circumstances within the primitive Jesus movement. The evidence in this chapter and the next will establish that this was indeed the case.



In the first chapter I have drawn attention to the fact that significant features of an ideal conclusion to the *Gospel of Mark* beyond 16.8 appear to have been preserved in edited form, under circumstances unknown, in John 21. This is a departure from conventional academic theory, as NT scholars rarely recognize or acknowledge the literary parallels between John 21 and the missing end of Mark. For under conventional assumptions it is difficult to imagine a scenario under which the missing end of Mark and the appendix in John could be related literary phenomena. As noted, many Markan scholars commonly argue that the author of Mark *intended* to finish his gospel abruptly in mid-sentence at 16.8 for theological or socio-political reasons, so for these scholars even the idea that Mark's ending may be missing is itself a dubious proposition.

Yet, even for scholars who view Mark's truncated ending at 16.8 with suspicion, the idea that it could relate to John 21 seems absurd. For the *Gospel of John* and the *Gospel of Mark* are radically different in outlook; they appear to have been composed several decades apart under different circumstances, in different locales, and for different audiences. Chronological problems are also evident in that

Matthew and Luke both appear to have used copies of Mark that ended at 16.8, so if there was an original conclusion to the *Gospel of Mark* beyond 16.8, it must have been lost or suppressed from Mark long before ch. 21 is traditionally assumed to have been added to the *Gospel of John*. So it is difficult to imagine they are related events in time. And even if the opportunity had existed to transfer the ending from one to the other, it is difficult to visualize the motive or the logistics. What would have been the purpose of such a radical manipulation of the texts? Why would the *Gospel of Mark* have been left without its conclusion in a severely diminished condition? Who would have had the authority or opportunity to perform such edits? These appear to be insurmountable problems for the theory. Most scholars have, quite understandably, never given it any consideration.

Despite this mountain of conventional academic wisdom, it is evident that a profound and comprehensive literary conclusion to Mark beyond 16.8 currently resides in John 21 where it does not fit at all. The opening premise in John 21, that an unlikely group of disciples who had just seen the risen Lord in Jerusalem would respond by embarking upon a 120-mile journey to Galilee to try their hand at commercial fishing, makes no practical sense as a continuing narrative beyond John 20. Not only is it unexpected behavior, but none of the disciples have ever been identified as fishermen in John. However, the story in John 21 fits the end of Mark like a glove, resolving not only its prediction of a *first* reunion with the risen Jesus in Galilee, but completing the bracketed structure of Section Six with remarkable literary precision. Furthermore, with the basic narrative in John 21 appended to Mark 16.8, a compelling interpretive seventh frame comes into view—the catch of 153 fish becomes visible as an ingenious Markan creation intended to depict a fulfillment of Jesus’ opening promise in Mark 1.17 to make the disciples fishers of men. It would be difficult to conceive of a more precise and inspiring conclusion to the *Gospel of Mark* than the narrative in John 21. The essential questions, then, are why and under what unimagined circumstances could such a precisely tailored ending to Mark have ended up as an appendix to the *Gospel of John*?

John 21: A Primitive Text

At the outset of the inquiry there is a common problematic assumption that must be set aside. NT scholars almost universally assume that John 21 was a *later addition* to an otherwise largely complete John 1–20. And at face value, it surely has the appearance of a literary afterthought since it stands out as an independent

appendix. The opening language in 21.1, “*after these things Jesus revealed himself again*” indicates that an appendix is being added to John 20, so the most obvious inference would be that ch. 21 was a later addition to a John 1–20 that had, for the most part, attained its canonical form.¹ Yet this assumption is commonly accepted without any critical examination. For it is certainly possible that ch. 21 could have been added to a primitive edition of the gospel at an early stage of its development, and that the more advanced interpretive material for which John is known was incorporated in later recensions. Such a scenario would explain why much of the material in John 1–20 reflects a more sophisticated Christological interpretation of Jesus than does John 21. For the editor of ch. 21 does not carry forward *any* of the high Christology in John 1–20. Why, one might wonder, was a late editor so intensely preoccupied with the relative ecclesial status of two rival disciples that he did not bother to affirm, or even reveal an awareness of, the central Johannine interpretations of Jesus as eternal Son of God or the one sent from heaven?

Moreover, numerous grammatical elements that are key features of the *Gospel of John*’s advanced interpretive material do not appear in John 21. As examples, John 1–20 contains 80 references to God as “*the Father*,” but this distinctive phrase does not appear in 21. The need to *believe* (*pisteuo*) occurs 91 times in John, but not once in 21. Jesus as metaphoric *light* (*phos*) of the world appears 23 times in John and is prominent in the prologue, but is absent in 21. So with the terms *life* (*zoe*) which occurs 47 times, and *judge* and *judgment* which occur 30 times in John, but not in 21. A dominant interpretive theme that recurs throughout John 1–20 is that Jesus is the *one sent from heaven*.² This essential concept appears in fifteen chapters in John, but it is not mentioned even once in ch. 21. With respect to titles, Jesus is referred to as the “Son of man” 13 times, the “Son of God” nine times, and Christ or “the Christ” 18 times in John. None of these titles appear in ch. 21. Nor is there any mention of the *paraclete* featured in chs. 14 and 16. There is, in short, an astounding absence of Johannine ideology and grammar that one would expect to find in an appendix to John had it emerged out of the same Johannine traditions. One might argue that the reason all these terms and concepts are absent in ch. 21 is that the subject matter does not call for their usage. Yet the question remains, why would a redactor who was creating an appendix to John not bother to reflect an awareness of at least a few of the primary themes of the book

¹ With the exception of the adultery pericope, John 7.53–8.11

² This phrase occurs in 3.17, 3.34, 4.34, 5.23–30, 5.36–37, 6.38–39, 6.57, 7.16–18, 7.28–29, 8.16–17, 8.26–29, 9.4, 10.36, 12.44–49, 13.16–20, 14.24, 15.21, 16.5, 17.17–25, 20.21

he was appending? Why forego all of this to focus exclusively on the relative status of Peter and the Beloved Disciple?

Raymond Brown attempted to rationalize this by proposing that a disciple of the author of John has appended a primitive Johannine tradition that did not make it into the first edition of the gospel:

We think of [the redactor of John 21] as a Johannine disciple who shared the same general world of thought as the evangelist and who desired more to complete the Gospel than to change its impact. As we mentioned in vol.29, p.xxx, we do not agree with Bultmann who thinks of the redactor as adding in ch.xxi and elsewhere an ecclesiastical and sacramental outlook that was foreign and even contrary to the mind of the evangelist. Rather, we believe the redactor has incorporated here some ancient material that was not included in the first edition of the Gospel, including the story of Jesus' first post-resurrectional appearance to Peter.³

In my view, Brown's proposition is unsatisfying on several counts. Practically speaking, it is a stretch to imagine that the author of John 21 "shared the same general world of thought as the evangelist." This proposition does not address the redactor's inability or reluctance to integrate what Brown rightfully recognizes as "ancient material" with the grander vision of the gospel. Nor does it explain how several uniquely Synoptic elements came to appear in John 21, including the mention of "those of Zebedee" (presumably the two sons James and John, 21.2), the anticipation of Jesus' return (21.22), and indeed (most dramatically) the "disciples as fishermen" motif itself.

Brown's claim that the redactor had no desire to change the impact of the gospel is also difficult to accept. The primary effect of ch. 21 is to reverse the political status of Peter and the Beloved Disciple (BD); it surely elevates Peter to a leading role, the duly anointed shepherd, but in the process it demotes the BD to a secondary role, quite the opposite of their respective treatments in John 1–20. The striking image in 21.20 of the BD tagging along behind Jesus and Peter while they discuss his fate between them is a startling reversal of status compared to the BD's uniquely favored intimate association with Jesus at the Last Supper (13.23–25). In short, ch. 21 in significant measure transforms the *Gospel of John* from an anti-Petrine to pro-Petrine treatise. Since this is its effect, one must suspect that this was the redactor's objective. And this is of no small consequence. As will be discussed below, the *Gospel of John* through the end of ch. 20 is not merely anti-Petrine, but

³ Brown, Raymond, *The Gospel According to John XII-XXI*, p. 1081

virulently so—the meticulously composed denigration of Peter’s moral integrity is a complex and sustained theme in John through ch. 20. Readers who are not yet aware of this may wonder whether this assessment is hyperbolic. It is not. The overtly hostile treatment of Peter will be reviewed in detail below, for the anti-Petrine rhetoric in the *Gospel of John* speaks directly to the political motive for the appending of ch. 21.

Since John 1–20 contains anti-Petrine material that is nullified in ch. 21, it appears that the redactor of ch. 21 was intending to alter the gospel on this one key issue of Peter’s ecclesial authority versus that of the BD. And this political conflict within the Jesus movement looks suspiciously primitive as does the entirety of ch. 21. Intuitively, one might anticipate that a contentious dispute between Peter and a leading rival over their leadership status would have taken place in the early decades of the movement. The vilification of Peter in John 1–20 and the negating response in ch. 21 seem most likely to have taken initial literary form at a time when a dispute of this nature was underway and unresolved. Furthermore, the uninspiring anti-Petrine narrative in John is entirely at odds with the high Christology and refined spiritual meditations that are prominent in material that appears to have been added in later recensions of the *Gospel of John*.

In short, there appear to be two countervailing traditions preserved together in the *Gospel of John*. There is evidence of a contentious rivalry between two leading disciples being documented by an author who was at the same time promoting a New Commandment that the disciples must love one another (13.34–35, 15.12,17). One might wonder, if John was composed at the end of the first century, why would anyone at that time have dared to question the moral integrity of Peter after he had died a martyr? Even more puzzling—why would such a problematic narrative have been embraced and sanctioned as authoritative by a pro-Petrine faction of the church that appears to have gained ascendancy by the end of the century? These pieces of the puzzle do not fit comfortably with the conventional perception that the *Gospel of John* was the last and most spiritually refined of the NT gospels.

A logically viable solution that resolves much of this conflicting data has already been suggested. Rather than assuming John 21 to be a late appendix, let us consider that it may have been appended to a primitive Johannine narrative, perhaps

the semeia source⁴ or a proto edition of the *Gospel of John* related to the semeia source. Let us suppose that this primitive edition of John, with the appendix ch. 21 already incorporated, then underwent subsequent recensions incorporating increasingly sophisticated interpretations of Jesus, until the gospel attained its canonical form. Such a textual evolution would help to explain why ch. 21 looks like a primitive text focused on a pedestrian political dispute between two rival leaders, and why it is virtually free of advanced Johannine ideology.

Therefore, for the balance of this discussion, I would ask the reader to hold in temporary abeyance the traditional assumption that ch. 21 must have been added as one of the final additions to an otherwise complete John 1–20, and to consider this proposed evolution of *John's Gospel* as a conceivable alternative. In due course, I will offer concrete evidence that will serve to justify this assumption.

Anti-Petrine Invective in the *Gospel of John*

In order to consider the possibility that John 21 was composed as an antagonistic response to material in John 1–20, one must first recognize the remarkable hostility that the author of John 1–20 directs toward Peter. At the outset, I acknowledge that some highly respected scholars resist this interpretation. James Charlesworth, in his monumental work *The Beloved Disciple*, states unequivocally the following:

For well over a century, scholars have observed in the *Gospel of John* some subtle polemical relation between the Beloved Disciple and Peter.^{FN} Once experts saw the rivalry as hostile in which Peter is embarrassed and the Beloved Disciple lauded. Now it is imperative to inculcate the scholarly perception that the narrator of chapters 1 through 20 and the author who added chapter 21 support Peter, but elevate the Beloved Disciple over him.

FN: Some scholars have exaggerated the tension between the BD and Peter. It is not overt, and Peter is neither presented as the disciple who denied Jesus, nor is he the Evangelist's bête noire.⁵

⁴ In the *Gospel of John*, Jesus performs miracles which are collectively referred to as “signs” (Greek: semeia) of his authentic Messiahship. Rudolph Bultmann proposed that the author of John may have had access to a primitive “semeia source” from which he drew the signs material.

⁵ Charlesworth, James H., *The Beloved Disciple*, Trinity Press International, 1995, p. 390

In my view, Charlesworth's comments are not an accurate assessment of Peter and the BD in the *Gospel of John*. It is not possible to exaggerate the tension between the BD and Peter, who is indeed the author of John's *bête noire*—this author appears to detest Peter. To the extent that there may be a “scholarly perception” that the narrator of John 1–20 and the editor of John 21 both support Peter but elevate the BD over him, it is demonstrably false. As will be illustrated below, the author of John 1–20 does not simply treat Peter with a modicum of disrespect. He goes much further by associating Peter with the betrayer Judas, with the intent to portray Peter as a dangerous threat to the movement. The author of John 1–20 denigrates Peter as a self-serving coward and liar, and even intimates that Peter should be regarded as a second betrayer of Jesus.

The reader will surely be wondering whether this assessment is an over-reach. For many readers, the notion that hostile sentiments were driving some of the composition of the *Gospel of John* is difficult to imagine, as it is universally regarded as the most theologically advanced *spiritual gospel*. Yet this is the quintessential enigma of the Fourth Gospel—indications of uncivil discord and hostility within the movement exist side by side with advanced theological meditations in the same text. And since the spiritual and Christological elements of John are the primary features for which the gospel is recognized, the author's underlying animus toward Peter tends to be overlooked. Accordingly, it is understandable that scholars either discount, or do not notice at all, the *Gospel of John's* undercurrents of animosity toward the apostle Peter. Yet the author's carefully constructed attack on the moral integrity of Peter is not as subtle as one might imagine, and it can be brought into focus with a sequential review of the passages in which Peter appears.

Peter does not have a speaking role in the Fourth Gospel until ch. 6. In this passage, Jesus has just delivered a disturbing teaching that repels not only his larger audience, but many of his own followers as well:

63 [Jesus said,] “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But there are some of you that do not believe.” **For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him.** 65 And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” 66 After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. 67 **Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?”** 68 **Simon** Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” 70 Jesus answered them, “**Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is**

a devil?" 71 He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was to betray him. (John 6.63–71)

This episode, Peter's Confession of Faith, is attested in various forms in all four gospels (Mk 8.27–30; Lk 9.18–21; Mt 16.13–20). It is universally interpreted as consistent with Peter's leadership role in the primitive Jesus movement. However, the story in John is quite different in form compared to the Synoptic accounts. First, note that in John, Peter's appearance is sandwiched between two predictions of Jesus' imminent betrayal. This sequence of themes is not accidental. It is a form of *intercalation*, the inserting of one idea or story between two parts of another. The author's purpose in juxtaposing the two stories is to allow one to interpret the other. Intercalation appears frequently in John and Mark; the author of John makes repeated use of it in his portrayal of Peter.

Note also that the author draws attention to the fact that the father of Judas is *Simon*. This is not an irrelevant detail given the author's repeated referral to Peter as *Simon* Peter. Nor is it accidental. The same intentional juxtaposing of *Simon* Iscariot and *Simon* Peter occurs two more times.

The context here is interesting as well. The discussion in 6.67–71 is the passage in the *Gospel of John* in which the author reveals his awareness that Jesus had chosen a select group of twelve disciples. There is one other incidental reference to Thomas as one of "the twelve" (20.24). But this scene in 6.67–71 is the only instance in John in which Jesus interacts with the twelve, or identifies them as a unique group chosen by Jesus. And it is not a flattering portrayal; Jesus addresses them in a derisive tone—"do you also wish to go away? ... Did I not choose you and one of you is a devil?" With the exception of this passage and the incidental reference in 20.24, the author of John has written the existence of the "twelve" entirely out of the gospel, while at the same time promoting himself uniquely as *the disciple whom Jesus loved* (21.24). Accordingly, it is not difficult to detect a personal disregard that this author harbors toward the twelve as well as Peter in particular.

A singular element in this passage is Jesus' caustic response to Peter which does not coherently follow from Peter's glowing recognition of him. C.K. Barrett attempts to rationalize this response:

...Peter's confession of faith, which is true so far as it goes . . . must not be allowed to suggest that the maker of it is in any sense conferring a benefit upon Jesus. The Twelve have not chosen him; he has chosen them.^[15]

According to Barrett, Jesus' hostile response is intended to negate the uniqueness of Peter's statement of faith as an individual revelation. Since Jesus has chosen the twelve, any of them presumably could have made this confession of faith. This might be a viable interpretation *if* the passage is authentic and original. However, I will present evidence in Chapter 3 that the underlined/italicized text in 6.68b–69, which is the essence of Peter's confession, is a later interpolation by a pro-Petrine editor inserted to harmonize John with the Synoptic tradition. It is this insertion that produces the jarring discontinuity in the passage. If it is lifted out, the remaining dialogue reads more coherently as originally composed. However, whether Peter's Confession is recognized as a gloss or not, the observation regarding the general structure of the passage with references to betrayal is not affected.

John's rendering of this event is muted compared to the Synoptic accounts, especially that of Matthew, in which the author indicates that Peter's confession springs from a unique revelation that *he alone* has been privileged to receive, and Peter will be the "rock" upon which the Church will be built. Conversely, the author of John dismisses the confession. There is no hint in John's account that Peter will have any leadership role in the movement due to his insight.

Peter's second speaking role in the *Gospel of John* occurs in ch. 13:

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. **And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him,** Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciple's feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to him, "Lord do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, **but not every one of you.**" **For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "You are not all clean."**(John 13.1–11)

In this second sequence the same pattern appears. Peter is once again sandwiched between two reflections on Jesus' imminent betrayal. Here also is a second reminder that Judas is the *son of Simon*. By framing the appearances of Peter with the betrayal theme, the author appears to associate Peter with Judas. By repeating the irrelevant detail that Simon is the father of the betrayer, the

association with Simon Peter is reinforced. In this scene, Peter is portrayed as well-intentioned, but ignorant of the meaning of Jesus' act. Peter's incomprehension of Jesus' purpose will appear several more times.

In these first two scenes in which Peter speaks, it appears that he is being treated positively by the author. Peter's Confession in 6.68b–69 is a strongly pro-Petrine declaration that reflects well on him despite Jesus' abrupt rejection of it. As noted, I will illustrate in the next chapter that 68b–69 is a later interpolation added precisely to cast Peter in a more attractive light, and to remedy the otherwise negative treatment of him in this text. This interpolation effectively diverts the reader's attention from the fact that Peter is being associated with Judas. In the second passage, Peter is portrayed as initially uncomprehending, then overly exuberant, desperate to please Jesus in a way that is not required. His inability to understand Jesus diverts the reader's attention from the basic structure of the passage that again subliminally associates Peter with Judas. Accordingly, in these first two scenes, the more sinister implications of the sandwiched betrayal references are easily overlooked. Yet they become more ominous as we proceed through the rest of the gospel.

The third dialogue involving Peter occurs later in ch. 13, wherein the author constructs the pattern once again:

When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, "Tell us who it is of whom he speaks." So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered him, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it." **So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. (John 13.21–27)**

In this third appearance of Peter, he is again preceded and followed by references to betrayal. The sequence opens with Jesus declaring that he is about to be betrayed, and closes with Satan entering into Judas, guaranteeing the impending betrayal. Also, it is essential to note Peter's question, "*Tell us who it is of whom he speaks.*" This question on the lips of Peter is intended as irony. For in Johannine theory, it is *Peter himself* who will soon deny Jesus three times and thus betray Jesus through his weakness of character and his failure to grasp Jesus' purpose and mission.

In this passage the author reminds us for a third time, quite unnecessarily, that Judas was the son of Simon. There are the only three references to Judas as *son*

of *Simon* in the NT, and they appear in these first three passages in which Peter and Judas appear together in the *Gospel of John*. Conversely, in *The Anointing at Bethany* (John 12.1–8), Judas is present while Peter is not. In this pericope, the author does not identify Judas as the son of Simon, presumably because there is no occasion to associate him with Peter. So John's three references to Judas as the *son of Simon* appear intended to suggest an association of Judas with Simon Peter. Each will betray Jesus in his own way. Judas stands against Jesus through an act of the will; Peter stands against Jesus in his dangerous misunderstanding of Jesus' will and purpose, and in his abject moral cowardice.

Further Appearances of Peter in John 1–20

There are three more scenes in the Fourth Gospel in which the statements or actions of Peter continue to develop this more sinister theme. The next passage in which Peter speaks is in the dialogue at the Last Supper:

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times." (John 13.36–38)

Here Jesus predicts that Peter will deny him three times before the evening is over. It now becomes evident that the author has foreshadowed the three denials of Peter with the three *betrayal/Peter/betrayal* sandwiches. The author has constructed the gospel to lead to the three denials of Peter as a momentous moral failure. And there is a repetition of established themes. Peter appears not to know what Jesus is saying. This passage features the second of three caustic rebukes of Peter by Jesus in the *Gospel of John*, and it exposes Peter's promise of brave allegiance as frivolous.

Peter and Judas appear together a fourth time in John, in the garden scene where Jesus is betrayed and arrested in John 18.3–12. This scene is presented below in sequential indentations to illustrate its deliberately crafted structure. The notations *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D* are inserted to illustrate the author's intentional replication of structure that associates Peter with Judas:

So Judas, procuring a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said,

(1A) “Whom do you seek?”

(1B) They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

(1C) Jesus answered, “I am he.”

(1D) **Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.** When he said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

Again he asked them,

(2A) “Whom do you seek?”

(2B) And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

(2C) Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he; so, if you seek me, let these men go.” *This was to fulfill the word which he had spoken, “Of those whom you gave me I lost not one.”*⁶

(2D) **Then Simon Peter**, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s slave and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath;

shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?”

So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him. (John 18.3–12)

The scene above begins and ends with references to the band of soldiers and officers of the Jews, which constitute the outer brackets of the scene, operating as a set of parentheses. Within this outer bracket there is a secondary bracket that reflects on the inevitability of the betrayal; in the first, the author says that Jesus knew all that was to befall him. In the second, Jesus asks, “shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” Embedded within these two bracketed elements are two identical vignettes, the first highlighting Judas as the betrayer, and the second highlighting Peter as one who acts against Jesus’ will and purpose.

Note that John 18.3–12 opens with a reference to Judas as the one who procured the soldiers and led them to Jesus. Readers/hearers know quite well that Judas is present; they are also well aware that Judas was the betrayer. So the second reference to Judas as the betrayer in line 1D (*Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them*) is conspicuously redundant from a storytelling perspective. Yet it has a literary purpose—its function is to establish an explicit structural parallel between Judas at 1D and Peter at 2D.

⁶ This underlined/italicized is another interpolation. It is not likely to have been an original part of this pericope, which in all other respects appears to be original. This will be illustrated in Chapter 3

Prior to this point in the gospel the betrayal has been predicted three times, and both Judas and Peter have appeared together in each prediction. In this scene, the betrayal by both is actualized. Judas leads the authorities to Jesus, while Peter commits a violent act even as Jesus is pleading for the soldiers to let his disciples go free. Peter's ignorant impetuosity is at odds with Jesus' purpose. Jesus wishes to fulfill his destiny while Peter resorts to violence in order to prevent it, thus earning his third rebuke from Jesus.

Only John among the four gospels tells of Jesus' appeal to the soldiers to let his disciples go free, and only John depicts the sword-wielding Peter as being at cross purposes with this objective. Mark, Matthew, and Luke record the incident of the sword attack, but in these gospels the bystander with the sword is unnamed. It is not even clear in the Synoptics that the bystander was a disciple; the wording intentionally muddles the issue. Not so in John; this author wants readers to know that the sword-wielding bystander was Peter.

The Denials of Peter

The final sequence of events in which Peter speaks in John 1–20 consists of the three denials of Peter and the interrogation of Jesus by Annas. In this passage, John 18.15–27, the author has constructed a blistering final indictment of Peter. The bold and italicized fonts draw attention to the literary devices the author has used to condemn Peter:

18.15 **Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple.** As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept the door, and brought Peter in. *The maid who kept the door said to Peter, "Are you not also one of this man's disciples?" He said, "I am not."* Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves; **Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.**

The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teachings. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; I have said nothing secretly. **Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said.**" When he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. *They said to him, "Are you not one of his disciples?" He denied it and said, "I am not."* One of the servants of the high

priest, a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him.” Peter again denied it; and at once the cock crowed. (John 18.15–27)

In this passage, note first that Peter is accompanied by another disciple who is usually assumed to be the unnamed “Beloved Disciple,” although this association is unclear. This disciple is alleged to be known by the high priest and by the maid to be a follower of Jesus, yet he bravely accompanies Jesus into the court of interrogation. Meanwhile, Peter denies his association with Jesus. The counterpoint between the two could not be more pronounced; Peter’s cowardice and deceitfulness stand in stark contrast to the faithfulness of this other disciple. The author’s portrayal of Peter as one who blatantly lies to protect himself will be an essential key to the interpretation of the political conflict that is embedded in the gospel.

Note further that the author has double bracketed Jesus’ interrogation with the denials of Peter. The passage takes the following form:

A. Peter denies Jesus

B. *Peter warms himself by the fire*

C. Jesus is abused, requests testimony of witnesses

B’ *Peter warms himself by the fire.*

A’. Peter denies Jesus

During the interrogation, Jesus appeals to the high priest to “*ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said.*” That Jesus’ plea for witness testimony is bracketed by Peter’s denials is irony in the extreme. Jesus can only rely on those who have heard him to testify on his behalf, while Peter remains silent. Yet the author intentionally creates a second set of brackets—Jesus is physically abused while Peter is twice portrayed as warming himself by the fire. What has motivated the author to depict Peter as warming himself while Jesus is being beaten? This detail is not required if the author’s only objective was to illustrate Peter’s lack of moral courage by denying his association with Jesus. Yet here he takes his denigration of Peter a step further by suggesting that Peter is not only untrustworthy, but one who selfishly seeks his own personal comfort while Jesus is being abused. Through the double bracketing of the interrogation of Jesus between the self-serving denials of Peter, the author has constructed a remarkably scathing indictment of Peter.

Yet the author is not finished. At the end of the passage, as a final *coup de grace*, the author reminds us once again of Peter's act of violence in the garden. Peter's third opportunity to deny Jesus is occasioned by a relative of the man whose ear he had severed in the sword attack. This is yet another unnecessary detail that the author uses to remind readers of Peter's sordid performance. After this, the cock crows and Peter disappears from the scene without further comment. There is no indication that Peter recognizes his failure or is upset by it. Conversely, the Synoptics report that upon realizing what he had done, Peter was overcome with grief (Mt 26.74–75; Mk 14.72; Lk 22.61–62). By portraying Peter as a remorseful and grieving soul, the Synoptic authors encourage readers to interpret Peter's failure with sympathy. The author of John does not.

This completes the review of the dialogues that feature Peter in John 1–20. There is one last appearance of Peter in which he does not speak—after Jesus' death he is seen racing to the empty tomb with the figure known as *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. The Beloved Disciple arrives first, and after entering the tomb, he understands what has happened and believes. By the author's silence regarding Peter, the gospel issues a final statement that after the resurrection, the Beloved Disciple remains astute and aware while Peter is still uncomprehending (20.1–10).

In light of the foregoing, it is not surprising that the author of John fails to mention Peter's presence in the resurrection scenes. John 20 recounts three resurrection appearances of Jesus, and Peter is not mentioned as present in any of them. He is not specifically excluded, as he may be one of the disciples mentioned in 20.19. Yet this is a striking omission since NT tradition otherwise gives Peter prominent recognition. Mark 16.7 anticipates a prompt meeting between Peter and Jesus; Luke 24.34 reports a timely appearance of Jesus to Peter; and Paul writes that Jesus was raised on the third day and appeared first to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve (1 Cor. 15.5). Acts 1 names Peter first among the disciples and portrays him in a leading role. So John 20's silence on the presence of Peter in the resurrection accounts is quite noticeable.

In short, the author of John's denigration of Peter is premeditated, methodical, and sustained throughout John 1–20. The gospel as originally composed ended at 20.31 with its negative assessment of Peter unresolved. It is obvious that the author put a great deal of creative energy into constructing the numerous literary associations of Peter with Judas, including the carefully composed arrest scene wherein Judas and Peter each betray Jesus in turn. The author's dim view of Peter is plainly visible in the counterpoint between the faithful disciple who accompanies

Jesus during his interrogation while Peter warms himself by the fire. There can be no question that the author of this Peter/Judas material that has been preserved in the *Gospel of John* wanted readers to conclude that Peter was cowardly, deceitful, self-serving, and untrustworthy.

Political Conflict in the Primitive Movement

The foregoing analysis may be unsettling for those who are accustomed to thinking of the *Gospel of John* as the most refined, theologically evolved, and spiritually sophisticated of the four NT gospels. For those who assume that the gospel was composed circa 100 CE by a Fourth Evangelist, it will be difficult to reconcile the fact that this author was writing the lofty spiritual meditations in John and promoting the New Commandment that the brethren must love one another, while at the same time documenting a mean-spirited effort to malign the apostle Peter. These countervailing pieces of the puzzle do not square comfortably with the conventional academic theories on the nature and dating of John. While it is quite apparent that the advanced theological features of the *Gospel of John* are sophisticated interpretations most likely developed late in the century, it also appears that primitive literary material from earlier in the century found its way into the canonical gospel and was preserved therein. For the argument that Peter was untrustworthy is built up over several chapters in John, and the literary devices used to malign Peter are complex constructions that would have required significant compositional premeditation; they were not thrown together haphazardly.

This embedded sequence of anti-Petrine units appears to be primitive material that has been preserved largely intact by the final redactor of the gospel. Though there are attempts to mitigate it to some degree, such as the insertion of Peter's Confession of Faith in 6.68–69, there is enough of the original invective in John to be recognizable as a sustained anti-Petrine argument. Whoever created this material initially appears to have harbored an intense disregard for Peter, and it is difficult to imagine that this could have been the final redactor of the gospel. Yet from the fact that this anti-Petrine material was ultimately preserved by the final redactor in its complex literary form, we may infer the existence of an earlier written source. The creator of this primitive source must have been an adversary of Peter, and given that his work has been retained in John by the final redactor, he was most likely regarded as an influential figure in the primitive Jesus movement.

Under what circumstances would an adversary of Peter have gone to the extreme of publishing a written denunciation of Peter? The fact that this material had taken written form suggests that its author was highly motivated to alter his community's opinion of Peter. Accordingly, he may have viewed Peter as a formidable political opponent, perhaps an adversary in their common pursuit of leadership status and authority within the community. In this regard, the scene at the Last Supper in which the Beloved Disciple (BD) *reclines on the bosom of Jesus* is most instructive. The literal Greek text cites this riveting image twice:

13.23 And there was **one of His disciples reclining in the bosom of Jesus**, whom Jesus was loving; 24 Simon Peter, then, beckons to this one, to inquire who he may be concerning whom He speaks, 25 and **that one having leaned back on the breast of Jesus**, responds to Him, "Lord, who is it?" (Literal Standard Translation)

The explicit *reclining in the bosom* language in John 13.23 is intentionally mistranslated in English editions of the Bible to suggest that it means nothing more than the BD was sitting close to Jesus. Examples include:

NRSV: One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him

NET: One of his disciples, the one Jesus loved, was at the table to the right of Jesus in a place of honor.

GOOD NEWS: One of the disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was sitting next to Jesus.

NIV: One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.

Christian Standard: One of his disciples, the one Jesus loved, was reclining close beside Jesus.

Contemporary English Version: Jesus' favorite disciple was sitting next to him at the meal

These mistranslations are unfortunate but understandable; NT translators want to eliminate the homoerotic connotations that the literal translation carries in modern English. And rightfully so. The difficulty stems from the fact that the symbolic meaning of *reclining in one's bosom* is lost to modern readers. In its original cultural context, this figure of speech does not carry sexual connotations. Rather,

to recline in one's bosom signifies a testator/ inheritor relationship. Examples of its usage in this context include Luke's parable of *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, wherein the poor man is carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, where he is now to inherit the promise of Abraham. This passage is also falsely translated in modern English versions, but in the Greek, the specific reference to Lazarus being in Abraham's bosom occurs twice, and carries no sexual connotations:

Luke 16.22 The poor man died and was **carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom**. The rich man also died and was buried; 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and **saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom**. 24 And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

Similarly, in John 1.18, the Son is said to be *in the bosom of the Father*, and in 16.15 Jesus declares, "*All that the Father has is mine.*" In John 17.6–7, Jesus proclaims his role as inheritor of that which has been given to him by the Father.

17.6 "I have revealed your name to the men whom you have given me out of the world; they were yours, and you have given them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you."

John A.T. Robinson credits W.H. Brownlee for the original observation that to lie in one's bosom signifies a testator/inheritor relationship:

The description of the Beloved Disciple as reclining in the bosom of Jesus means far more than a relationship of affection and intimacy, as is shown by Jubilees 22.26 where 'Jacob slept in the bosom of Abraham.' This occurred when the older patriarch was about to die, but he first conferred his final blessing (along with much moral exhortation) on his grandson. *Lying in the testator's bosom seems to designate one as true son and heir.*

In Luke 16.19–23 it is Lazarus the poor beggar who lies in the patriarch's bosom. It was just like Jesus to show in this way that the social outcast rather than the rich man is the true son of Abraham.

Jubilees 22.26 is in the context of Abraham's final blessing and testamentary exhortation. It is on a like occasion that the Beloved Disciple lies on Jesus' breast. *This means that he and all true disciples (whom he symbolizes) inherit the task, the Spirit, and the peace which Jesus has bequeathed.* (emphasis added)⁷

⁷ W.H. Brownlee as quoted by John A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, 1985, p. 98

Some scholars have imagined that the figure of the Beloved Disciple was not an individual at all, but rather a literary cypher intended to symbolize all true believers, or the “ideal” believer. However, the redactor of John 21 recognizes him not only as an individual, but as the author of the “book” he is appending. Seen in this light, the most straightforward interpretation of John 13.23–25, wherein the BD reclines in the bosom of Jesus while Peter sits to one side, is that *the author is representing himself to be the true heir to the legacy of Jesus*, with implications regarding his leadership authority. This occurs on the night before Jesus’ death, just as Jacob slept in the bosom of Abraham when he was about to die. So the testator/inheritor relationship is apparent. In short, the author of John not only vilifies Peter, but he does so while promoting himself as the rightful heir to leadership in the movement. This political rivalry between Peter and the author of this material in John (representing himself as the Beloved Disciple) is directly related to the addition of John 21.

A Question of Hostile Conflict in John 21

A vital key to this puzzle is to recognize that John 21 was appended under more contentious circumstances related to the rivalry between Peter and the BD than are typically imagined. Now, to be sure, at the first mention of the BD in 21.7, the redactor seems to be following the Johannine script. As might be expected, it is the BD, not Peter, who first recognizes Jesus on the shore. This recalls the BD outrunning Peter and being the first to reach the tomb, as well as being the first to recognize the meaning of the empty tomb (20.2–8). It also brings to mind the opening scene in the *Gospel of John* in which an unnamed disciple (assumed to be a furtive reference to the BD), is one of the first two individuals along with Andrew to recognize and follow Jesus as the Messiah (1.35–37). Peter follows later in a subordinate sequence after being introduced to Jesus by Andrew (1.40). In John, the superiority of the BD over Peter is also clearly portrayed at the Last Supper, where the BD is in a favored position and acts as an intermediary, while Peter sits to one side (13.21–26). So the fact that the BD is the first to recognize the Lord in John 21.7 is consistent with the gospel’s previous characterizations.

However, this initial positive nod to the BD in 21.7 is not maintained through the rest of ch. 21. Note that it is Peter, not the BD, who hauls the net full of fish representing the church to shore (21.11). Then the editor promotes Peter as

the rightful sole heir to leadership; Peter is to be the new shepherd, duly anointed by Jesus to feed the sheep. This promotion of Peter occurs with the BD evidently standing by as a witness. One must wonder—is the redactor’s objective not only to elevate Peter to a position of sole leadership and authority, but to diminish the status of the BD? This becomes clear in 21.20 where the BD is said to follow along behind Peter and Jesus while they discuss his fate between themselves. In this striking image, the redactor’s intent to diminish the status of the BD, even to belittle him, is candidly apparent; contrary to the scene at the Last Supper in which the BD enjoys a position of unique privilege, Peter is now in the favored position relative to Jesus while the BD tags along behind. A further indication of the redactor’s intent to disparage the BD is found in the counterpoint between Peter’s martyrdom, a death by which he “glorifies God” (21.18–19), and the BD’s death which is to be of no consequence and not worthy of concern (21.22–23). The redactor’s final statement is also quite intriguing. He declares that the BD is the author of the text he is appending, and that his testimony is true (21.24). But he does not end on this note—he follows with a suspiciously dismissive final comment, saying that many other things that Jesus did are not included in this book, and that if they were written the world could not contain the books that would be written (21.25). With this hyperbolic statement, the redactor alerts the reader that the “book” that he is appending is not the last word, or even the most relevant word, concerning the traditions of Jesus. This final comment is in remarkable disharmony with the gospel’s original ending proclamation in ch. 20, which claims that, though many other *signs* could be told, those recorded in this gospel have been selected as those most likely to inspire belief (20.30–31). By comparison, the sentiment in 21.25 appears to be dismissive of the book being appended.

Therefore, other than the initial reference to the BD in 21.7, the redactor of John 21 appears to treat the BD with a palpable disregard. Signs of a simmering, unresolved political conflict between this pro-Petrine editor and the BD become visible once the appendix is read in this light. However, these signs of enmity are just the tip of the iceberg, for signs of ideological conflict between the Johannine and Petrine factions of the movement become more obvious once one begins to suspect this to be a formative influence in the texts. The traditional difficulty in perceiving it rests in the fact that we are not accustomed to suspecting hostile motives in the writing and editing of the scriptures. Yet hostile motives are indeed visible.

The Political Response in John 21

Once one recognizes the exceptional length to which the anti-Petrine material in John 1–20 has gone to denounce Peter, the appendix John 21 stands out more clearly as a politically motivated response. For ch. 21 bluntly reverses the condemnation of Peter in John 1–20. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, in ch. 21 we encounter a reunion scene in Galilee quite similar to that predicted in Mark 14.28 and 16.7, in which Peter is absolved, restored to grace, and affirmed as the sole authorized leader of the movement. This positive resolution with Peter is specifically foreshadowed in the young man's directive to the women in Mark 16.7: "tell the disciples, **and Peter**, that he is going before you to Galilee."

The political intrigue is compounded by the fact that Peter is not the only character to experience a reversal of fortune in John 21—the BD, Jesus' most intimate follower in John 1–20, is now portrayed as irrelevant (21.20–25). As noted, his diminished status is clear from the fact that he trails along behind Jesus and Peter as they discuss his fate between them. He is not to die a martyr as Peter would, and his death is not even worthy of concern. However, beyond this, in 21.20 the redactor refers directly back to the riveting image of the BD *reclining on the bosom of Jesus* at the supper:

21.20 Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved, **who had reclined on his bosom at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?"** 21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"

Now, at this point in the gospel, the audience is quite familiar with "the disciple whom Jesus loved." There is no need to identify him any further; indeed, he was just mentioned in 21.7 without any reminders. Yet in 21.20, the redactor deliberately pauses and goes out of his way to remind readers that "*this is the one who, at the supper, had reclined on the bosom of Jesus, the one who had asked who was to betray the Lord?*" Why has the editor gone to this length to identify the BD in this manner at this juncture, specifically highlighting the question once again of *who* was to betray the Lord?

With this citation, the redactor is referring back to the symbolic language that was used by the author of John 1–20 to assert that the BD was the rightful heir to the legacy of Jesus, and by implication leadership. In that scene, Peter asks who

the betrayer would be (13.24). And in that scene, this request of Peter is intended as irony, for the author is insinuating that *Peter himself* will betray Jesus through his cowardice and denials. So here in 21.20, the redactor appears to have turned the tables on the BD/author. He is now using the same irony with the same question—the redactor’s insinuation is clear: *Who indeed has been the real betrayer?* In the view of this pro-Petrine editor, it was not Peter at all, but rather the BD who had betrayed Jesus and the movement with his defamation of Peter and the promotion of himself as a uniquely “beloved” disciple. The redactor’s frustration with the BD comes into clear focus once the language in 21.20 is recognized as dripping with sarcastic irony. And the image of the BD following along behind Jesus and Peter while they discuss his fate becomes obvious as the redactor’s intentional disparagement of the BD. The redactor’s cool dismissal of the BD’s “book” as just one of a world of books that could be written (21.25), comes into focus as a subtle expression of disregard for the work he is appending.

Furthermore, once the redactor’s hostility toward the BD/author of John is recognized, Peter’s restoration to grace in John 21 reads in a new light. For the author of the anti-Petrine passages in John 1–20 had meticulously developed Peter’s *three denials as the key literary device* by which Peter was shown to be cowardly, deceitful, and by implication unworthy of leadership. The redactor of John 21 has seized upon these three denials of Peter, turned the story on its head, and in somewhat cynical fashion he has *transformed Peter’s three denials into the narrative device by which Peter is confirmed as the unrivaled leader of the movement*. To add an extra touch, he has Jesus refer to Peter three times as “Simon, son of John.” Since the name John means “graced of God,” it is difficult not to interpret the three “Simon, son of John” comments in John 21 as a nullifying retort to the three “Judas son of Simon” references in the narrative he is appending. The redactor of John 21 thereby negates the condemnation of Peter in John 1–20 in a manner that essentially throws the author’s accusations against Peter back in his face. In short, the vilification of Peter by the author of John 1–20 has provoked an equally hostile response from the pro-Petrine editor of John 21.

Further Hints of Hostile Composition

Given the apparent condescension that the editor of John 21 directs toward the BD in 21.20–25 as well as his cynical adaptation of Peter’s three denials as the narrative device by which Peter is established as the sole anointed shepherd, this

editor has provided ample clues to suggest that he not only harbored a negative attitude toward the BD, but that he had approached the task of composing this appendix in an antagonistic frame of mind. When John 21 is interpreted as the work of a redactor harboring a simmering resentment of the BD, other puzzling features of the text begin to resolve in a new light. Chief among them is the conspicuous reference to the disciples' confusion in 21.12b:

10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." **Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.** 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

In context, this is ostensibly the third appearance of Jesus to these disciples after the two in John 20. The redactor hastens to assure the reader of this fact in 21.14, but the need to do so is occasioned by the odd comment in 21.12b, which makes it appear as if the disciples had not yet seen the risen Lord. The redactor could easily have omitted the bold text in 12b, but he chose to retain it. In practical terms, it causes the reader to suspect that this appendix was originally composed as a first post-resurrection appearance. It is the two references in 21.4 and 21.12b that cause modern scholars to recognize that this story originated as a first reunion appearance. The redactor is obviously aware that the language in 12b will carry this connotation, for he hastens to offer a refutation of it in 21.14.

The redactor concludes ch. 21 by affirming that the BD was the author of the narrative to which ch. 21 was being appended (21.24). There is little chance that he was referring to the *Gospel of John* in its canonical form for reasons previously noted—ch. 21 is ideologically primitive compared to the more advanced elements in John, and the canonical gospel is a product of the late first or early second century, beyond the anticipated lifespan of a disciple of Jesus, and beyond the timeframe in which a sordid political squabble between Peter and a competitive rival would be expected to have been created and documented in such literary detail. Furthermore, the exalted theological meditations for which the Fourth Gospel is known, as well as the New Commandment for the disciples to love one another, are not likely to have come from the mind of an author who was intensely preoccupied with the denigration of Peter.

Thus, to resolve the fact that uninspired, squalid political infighting and advanced theological meditations exist side by side in the *Gospel of John*, one might consider the possibility that ch. 21 was appended to a primitive edition of John at an early stage of its development, before it had been expanded to include the advanced theological and spiritual attributes of the canonical edition. If so, the redactor of ch. 21 would have been attributing authorship of just this primitive narrative, not canonical John, to the BD. This is a critical insight, for NT scholars routinely assume that John 21 was added as a late appendix to an otherwise complete canonical John 1–20. This leads to misinterpretations of the authorship attribution in 21.24, including but not limited to the inference promoted by a number of leading scholars that the author of the Johannine epistles (presumably John the Elder), must have been the author of the entire canonical gospel. Under this theory, John the Elder is seen by some as a likely candidate as the Beloved Disciple.

Once the anti-Petrine narrative in John 1–20 and the pro-Petrine appendix John 21 are recognized as the contentious rhetoric of political infighting within the early Jesus movement, the motive for the addition of John 21 becomes apparent. A pro-Petrine editor has taken umbrage with the defamation of Peter in a primitive edition of John, and was in a position to amend it under unknown circumstances. Furthermore, he created the appendix John 21 by adapting a story that appears to have originally been composed as the conclusion to the *Gospel of Mark*. Recall that the scene in 21.15–17 in which Peter is forgiven three times and anointed as the new shepherd functions as a well-crafted closing bracket to Mark 14.27–30, which would have defined the original boundaries of Section Six in Mark. If this was Mark's original creation, it was the *author of Mark* who had first seized upon the three denials of Peter and transformed them into the literary device by which Peter was anointed as the new shepherd of the movement. The corollary inference is clear: this primitive Johannine narrative must have predated the *Gospel of Mark*, and the *Gospel of Mark* was composed, at least in part, as a political response to it.

Who was Peter's archrival?

One pressing question arises from this discussion: Who was this confrontational archrival of Peter who claimed to be a uniquely beloved disciple, and who had dared to challenge Peter's authority? Who would have been in a position of such power and influence that he could document his challenge to Peter in a written

narrative that would have been preserved in the church's gospel traditions? I will argue that the evidence points to one individual—the apostle John. Thus, I maintain that the patristic tradition from the second century is correct, but only as it relates to John's authorship of a primitive edition of the gospel, and not the final canonical text. The evidence pointing to the apostle John as the Beloved Disciple will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.

However, if such an inference is to be regarded as historically credible, we must first weigh the evidence that there was indeed a primitive Johannine gospel in circulation that pre-dated the *Gospel of Mark*, and that Mark was composed (at least in part) as a direct political response to it. This will be the subject of the next chapter, *The Ur-John Thesis*, which will present evidence that a primitive edition of the *Gospel of John* has been carefully and intentionally preserved in the canonical text, and that it can be largely recovered with a high degree of confidence.