

**JESUS,  
KING OF ISRAEL**

**TOWARD A FINAL QUEST FOR  
THE HISTORICAL JESUS**



*Chapter Four*

**The Ur-John Thesis**

**Evan Powell**

**Copyright © Evan Powell 2024**

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

~ 4 ~

## THE UR-JOHN THESIS

*The objective of this chapter is to illustrate that a primitive Johannine narrative gospel, to be referred to as **Ur-John**, has been largely preserved by redactors as a primitive layer of the Gospel of John. It was preserved due to an observable reluctance on the part of subsequent redactors to compromise the integrity of the original text. Since this primitive narrative has been intentionally and carefully preserved by early redactors, it can be isolated and reconstructed with confidence.*



The *Gospel of John* is universally interpreted as the most spiritual and ideologically advanced of the NT Gospels. Most scholars believe John to be the last of the four NT Gospels, and it is typically dated to around 100 CE. Though second century patristic tradition uniformly declares it to have been written by the apostle John, son of Zebedee, modern scholarship rejects this as a realistic possibility due to its late composition, its evolved theological interpretations, and doubts that John could have been literate enough to produce such a work. In modern academic thought, the *Gospel of John* is presumed to be the work of an unknown “Fourth Evangelist,” a final redactor who was responsible for producing the canonical text. Unfortunately, this theory carries with it an unspoken assumption that the Fourth Evangelist was an *author* who had exercised meaningful editorial control of the final product. However, the textual evidence suggests otherwise.

Though the *Gospel of John* is widely acclaimed as a masterpiece of religious literature, a critical reading of John will lead many to conclude that it is anything but a masterpiece. When viewed through an objective lens, it is an unpolished composition that features logically incoherent dialogues,

inherent contradictions, breaches in continuity, and in some cases glaring errors. At face value, it reads as a heavily marked up and annotated rough draft that was never subjected to a final edit for literary coherence and continuity. Accordingly, the critical reader of John might reasonably wonder whether the “Fourth Evangelist” lacked either the authority, the talent, or the desire to produce a logically coherent text.

There is also another mystery. Though the *Gospel of John* is presumed to have been compiled around the end of the first century, it contains suspiciously primitive material that has been preserved under circumstances that are not clear. For instance, it claims that Jesus had been engaged for a while in direct competition with John the Baptist (3.22–28, 4.1), which is a striking departure from the Synoptic tradition. There are also related signs of an active dispute between the followers of Jesus and the Baptist as to which of the two was the genuine Messiah (1.21, 3.28, 10.41). There is no similar indication of such a controversy in the Synoptics. Nobody knows when the Baptist’s movement died out, but at face value, a debate between followers of Jesus and John the Baptist as to which was the authentic Messiah makes more intuitive sense as a dispute between Jews in mid-first century Judea rather than a newly fabricated controversy in Ephesus or elsewhere in the diaspora circa 100 CE.

The proposition that Jesus was doing “signs” to support his claim to Messiahship appears throughout the first twelve chapters of John, as well as the concluding verses of the original text (2.11, 2.23, 3.2, 4.48, 4.54, 6.2, 6.14, 6.26, 6.30, 7.31, 9.16, 10.41, 11.47, 12.18, 12.37, 20.30). Thus, the “signs” material suggests some degree of primitive literary cohesion, as if it has been drawn from an earlier “semeia source” as observed by Bultmann.<sup>1</sup>

One might also point to the hostile interrogation of Jesus by Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest Caiaphas, as a suspiciously primitive element in John. Why would a Fourth Evangelist writing circa 100 CE have chosen to eliminate the trial before the Sanhedrin featured in the Synoptic gospels, and instead, present an alternate account in which Jesus is first subjected to interrogation by Annas, then transferred to Caiaphas, then to Pilate, implying that the Sanhedrin trial had never occurred? What indeed would have motivated a late first-century author to fabricate the detail that the interrogation had been conducted by Annas rather than Caiaphas, and that

---

<sup>1</sup> Bultmann, Rudolf 1941, translated as *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Westminster, John Knox Press, 1971

Jesus had then been momentarily transferred to Caiaphas for no apparent reason prior to being delivered to Pilate?

One might also note the surprisingly candid suggestions in John that the disciples had been subject to arrest along with Jesus. In John's arrest scene, Jesus pleads with the soldiers to let his disciples go (18.8), implying that his disciples were being sought as well. There is no explicit indication as to whether this request was honored, but this account contradicts the Synoptic story of the kiss of Judas, the primary purpose of which is to establish that Jesus was the only one to be seized and led away (Mark 14.44–46). The *Gospel of John* also indicates that Joseph of Arimathea needed to keep his discipleship a secret for "fear of the Jews" (19.38), and after the crucifixion, the disciples were in hiding for the same reason (20.19). Both of these references carry a tacit implication that followers of Jesus were subject at least to persecution if not arrest.

Remarkably, the account of the two persons crucified with Jesus reads quite differently in John than in the Synoptics. John eliminates the negative aspersions that the Synoptic authors cast upon these two. They are no longer robbers or bandits; John treats them simply as two additional victims being crucified in intimate proximity to Jesus (19.18). If the reader is not aware of the disparagement of these two in the Synoptic gospels, John's report at face value encourages the reader to suppose that they must have been disciples. The staging of the crucifixion scene by the Romans as described in John would have been intended to represent these two as followers of Jesus, and passers-by who were viewing the spectacle would have naturally inferred as much. John even draws unnecessary sympathetic attention to the suffering of these two by noting that their legs needed to be broken to hasten their deaths.

Within the context of John, the two crucified with Jesus appear to be significant characters whose identity has been cloaked by the author in a manner similar to the treatment of the unknown first follower of Jesus (1.35–40), the mysterious disciple who accompanies Jesus into the interrogation (18.15–16), and of course the Beloved Disciple.<sup>2</sup> In each case, the author surely expects his readers to ask and discuss among themselves, "*who were they?*" It seems unlikely that the author would have drawn attention to such

---

<sup>2</sup> John's portrayal of the two crucified with Jesus must not be read through the interpretive filter of the Synoptic gospels' claim that the two were unknown criminals not previously associated with Jesus. There is no evidence that the author of John would have assumed the readers' prior knowledge of the Synoptics and thus intended for readers to interpret the two through Synoptic theory.

noteworthy figures without expecting his readers to know who they were. If the two who died with Jesus were known to John's audience, his treatment of them reads as a silent tribute to two followers who were martyred with Jesus. If they had indeed been followers or disciples of Jesus, there is no mystery why the author would have cloaked their identity, as such a disclosure would have indicated that the movement at large had been condemned as subversive. Yet a key point to be considered is that, since the author appears to assume that his readers/hearers would know who these two were, this reads like another primitive tradition from the mid-first century. For it seems unlikely that this was a new story being introduced for the first time in 100 CE, long after anyone would have remembered who they might have been.

In summary, the *Gospel of John* contains several stories that appear to reflect unrefined primitivity. Moreover, these primitive traditions often appear to be politically problematic relics of the past that have been preserved despite their inherent disadvantage to the interests of a movement attempting to survive under Roman rule. Why would a gospel compiled in 100 CE retain explicit memories that Jesus' followers had hailed him as the pending *King of Israel*, or of his disciples being subject to arrest, or of Jesus being unambiguously condemned for sedition for challenging the authority of Caesar? Moreover, why would the evolving church at the end of the first century have accepted as authoritative a new gospel with such extensive and problematic revisions to their established Synoptic traditions? In short, how is the *Gospel of John's* integration of highly evolved Christology with apparently primitive and politically awkward material to be explained?

### **The Ur-John Thesis**

My objective here is to argue that a primitive Johannine narrative was intentionally preserved, largely intact, in canonical John, and that it can be isolated and reconstructed with confidence. I will refer to this narrative as *Ur-John*, for it appears to be an early if not original edition of what eventually developed into the canonical gospel. The foundational premises of the Ur-John thesis are as follows:

1. Redactional behavior in the *Gospel of John* reflects a persistent reluctance on the part of editors to alter or delete problematic elements in a preexisting narrative that they were enhancing or correcting. When editors encounter material that appears to be

erroneous or contrary to the interests of the evolving church, they typically *insert* corrective glosses or new interpretations without modifying or omitting the offending text. Accordingly, redactional glosses tend to *reduce* the literary integrity and/or logical coherence of the text as it existed in its pre-edited form. Moreover, editors behave as if the reduced narrative coherence that their insertions produce is an acceptable price to pay compared to the alternatives of either altering or deleting the problematic material, or leaving it uncorrected. This editorial behavior is responsible for the many logical aporias noticed by Johannine commentators.

2. The redactors' reluctance to tamper with problematic text indicates that they viewed the text they had received as inviolable for some reason, perhaps out of respect for earlier established tradition, or possibly respect for perceived apostolic authority. The corollary inference is that if editors were unable or unwilling to alter or delete even overtly undesirable references, then a primitive narrative has been preserved, at least to some significant degree, embedded within the canonical text.
3. If the *Gospel of John* consists of (a) a primitive narrative and (b) a series of redactional insertions that were incorporated into the gospel in subsequent recensions, then it is likely that a procedure may be defined by which this editing process can be reversed, thereby isolating significant portions of the original narrative that were being treated as inviolable.
4. Once the most probable elements of the Ur-John text have been isolated, an analysis of the distribution of grammatical and ideological elements in the apparent Ur-John vs. recension material will reveal that many of these elements are either exclusive to or dominate either the isolated Ur-John layer or the subsequent recensions, thereby providing confirming evidence that Ur-John did exist at one point in time as a discrete document with its own compositional history.
5. As the recovery of the Ur-John text proceeds, other unrelated grammatical patterns emerge which serve to confirm that Ur-John once existed as a discrete primitive document.

## **Academic Observations of Multiple Layers in John**

The theory that a primitive narrative has been preserved in canonical John is not new. Many scholars have sensed the existence of multiple layers of tradition within the gospel. Richard Bauckham writes:

Closely associated with [Martyn's] two-level reading is a view of the Gospel [of John] as a multilayered work in which texts from various stages of the community's history have been preserved alongside each other. A complex history of literary redaction is treated as the key to the community's social and theological history. // The distinguishing of various sources and levels of redaction depends primarily on detecting aporias (apparent difficulties in the text) and ideological tensions between different parts of the Gospel.

In this area there are two main issues that Johannine scholarship has not yet adequately faced or resolved. One is the relationship between, on the one hand, the kind of critical approach to the text (going back to Rudolf Bultmann and beyond) that seeks discontinuities of all kinds as indications of sources and redactional layers, *and on the other hand, the newer literary criticism, which treats the final form of the text as a literary and rhetorical whole*. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive methods, but nor are they without relevance to each other. In the light of the greater sensitivity to the literary strategies of the text, which literary criticism fosters, many of what seemed aporias to the source and redaction critics appear no longer to be so. *A passage that seems awkward to the rather prosaic mind of the source critic, whose judgment often amounts merely to observing that he or she would not have written it like that, can appear quite differently to a critic attentive to the literary dynamics of the text*. Thus, literary criticism of the final form of the Gospel is not just an approach that can be added to source and redaction criticism, leaving their results intact, as most Johannine scholars seem still to suppose. (emphasis added)<sup>3</sup>

I quote Bauckham at length to draw attention to two particular claims which may appeal to some, but to which I will take exception. The first is the implication that traditional attempts to identify sources and redactional layers have been successfully supplanted by “newer literary criticism which treats the final form of the text as a literary and rhetorical whole.” I will argue that the notion that the *Gospel of John* may be interpreted as a “literary and rhetorical whole” is itself problematic, for there is little evidence that a Fourth Evangelist or final redactor produced the text with the editorial authority required to produce a unified rhetorical whole. One might begin with the

---

<sup>3</sup> Bauckham, Richard, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, Baker Academic, 2007, p.118

observation that the gospel presents two countervailing portraits of Jesus that are difficult to reconcile. On the one hand, we find in John the spiritual Jesus, the eternal, preexistent Son, the one sent from heaven who brings indwelling peace, who counsels that believers are to love one another, and whose mission is to prepare a heavenly dwelling place for those whom he loves so that he may take them out of the world to their destiny of eternal life. On the other hand, there is the earthly Jesus, an aggressive, confrontational self-promoter who competes with John the Baptist for followers, and who performs magic tricks and miracles as public spectacles to promote and confirm his identity as the legitimate Messiah. This earthly Jesus argues with Pharisees over Sabbath law, is hailed by his followers as the pending King of Israel, and is put to death for challenging the authority of Caesar.

These two visions of Jesus appear to have little to do with one another. Rather, they appear to be radically different interpretations of Jesus developed at different times and under different circumstances. At face value, it appears that a primitive remembrance of the earthly Jesus has been preserved in the gospel, and a more theologically advanced reinterpretation of Jesus as a serene, eternal spiritual being has been overlaid onto the earlier tradition.

Beyond the difficulty of these disparate portraits of Jesus, the text of John contains jarring and logically incoherent dialogues. When the decision is made to go to Lazarus, the disciples ask Jesus, "*Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?*" To this Jesus responds with irrelevant philosophizing that has nothing to do with the question at hand: "*Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.*" (11.8–10). One must wonder, how is Jesus' response in any way related to the question at hand? Why would an author have composed a dialogue in this fashion?

Peter proclaims his famous confession, "*Lord, ... you have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.*" To this generous confession, Jesus inexplicably responds with the angry and abrupt "*Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?*" (6.68–69). Again, one must wonder, why would an author have composed such a dialogue?

In addition to noticeably incoherent dialogues, John also contains odd and seemingly out of place contradictions. An example: Despite representing Jesus as a Jew from Nazareth of Galilee, the gospel contains fragments of an

alternative tradition that he was a Samaritan. While Jesus is in Samaria, the text offers this odd statement:

4.43 After the two days he departed to Galilee. 44 **For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.** 45 **So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him**, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast

This passage candidly implies that Jesus has not found honor in his own country of Samaria, but was well-received in Galilee. Following this, in 8.48 we find the following interaction:

48 The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" 49 Jesus answered, "I have not a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me.

Here Jesus denies that he has a demon, but does not deny that he is a Samaritan. In light of the reference in 4.44–45, it is difficult to avoid the inference that the author has incorporated a conflicting tradition that Jesus was a Samaritan into the gospel, in uncomfortable contradiction of its claim that he was a Jew from Nazareth.

The *Gospel of John* also contains glaring errors that do not reflect well on Jesus. In 7.22, Jesus claims erroneously that circumcision is from Moses, and in 7.23 he states, "*If on the sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken...*" yet in fact it is the Abrahamic covenant that is being followed, not the law of Moses. An editor is evidently aware of the error and inserts a partial correction in 7.22b, but the error is left to stand, and the passage makes it appear as if Jesus does not know whereof he speaks. Similarly, in 16.5, Jesus chastises his disciples for not asking him "*Where are you going?*" when Peter had just asked him precisely that (13.36). The gospel makes it appear as if Jesus had simply forgotten that Peter had just asked the question.

Basic narrative continuity is occasionally disturbed as well. At the end of ch. 5, Jesus and his disciples are in Jerusalem, but in 6.1 they are said to cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Their sudden unexplained presence in Galilee is a continuity breach in the narrative. In 11.2, Mary is introduced as the woman who had anointed Jesus with ointment, but this event does not occur until the following chapter in 12.1–8. And the disciples'

decision to go fishing in Galilee (21.2) is a bizarre response to their having just seen the risen Lord twice in ch. 20, yet it is presented without explanation.

As noted then, the *Gospel of John* reads at face value as a marked-up rough draft that never went through a final edit for continuity or logical coherence. Errors, attempted corrections, and logical incongruities are commonplace. The logical coherence of dialogues is often compromised by apparent interpolations. The two competing interpretations of Jesus, in practical terms, bear little relation to one another. Accordingly, the most fundamental observation one can make in regard to the *Gospel of John* is this: There is no evidence that a Fourth Evangelist ever exerted any meaningful editorial control over the final product, for if an editor had indeed possessed the authority and the desire to produce an ideologically coherent gospel, he would surely have attempted to resolve some of the gospel's most glaring defects. Absent any evidence that the author had the authority to edit in a manner that would produce a "literary and rhetorical whole," there is no reason to approach the exegesis of the gospel as if it were composed by a Fourth Evangelist with such an objective in mind.

Returning to the quotation of Bauckham above, the second assertion in Bauckham's statement to which an objection may be raised is his dismissive comment that "*a passage that seems awkward to the rather prosaic mind of the source critic, whose judgment often amounts merely to observing that he or she would not have written it like that, can appear quite differently to a critic attentive to the literary dynamics of the text.*" Here, he seems to allege that critical attention to an undefined, amorphous "literary dynamics" of the text will yield interpretive results superior to those obtained by source critics who seek redactional layers in the discontinuities and aporias. While source criticism is indeed more of an art than a science, Bauckham claims that the limit of the source critic's contribution is to merely observe "*that he or she would not have written it like that.*" In reality, the source critic will often tend to observe, in my view quite rightly, that it is difficult to imagine that *anyone* would have written it like that, and it is legitimately suspicious for that reason.

In any event, my objective in this chapter is to illustrate a procedure whereby source criticism and redaction criticism can be allowed to proceed with all due caution by exercising a workmanlike, logical control over what is flagged as a probable interpolation into a preexisting text. The objective is to avoid the simplemindedness that Bauckham believes to be inherent in source criticism.

## **Ur-John: A Preserved Primordial Narrative**

Robert Fortna, a student of Rudolf Bultmann, was explicit in his proposition that a later writer, the “Fourth Evangelist,” had so carefully redacted an earlier source that *the source itself remains intact*:

This [later] author, known traditionally as “John,” we refer to as the Fourth Evangelist (hereafter 4E). Her or his recasting of the source material was by no means mere editing but, rather, creative transformation, the kind of authorship known technically as redaction. Yet this redaction has been carried out so carefully that *the text of the source survives on the whole intact within the present Gospel*, and can therefore be reconstructed with some facility and confidence, often simply by lifting off the patently redactional material.<sup>4</sup> (emphasis original)

The Ur-John thesis that I will present here is largely in harmony with Fortna’s general observations, although the procedure I use for recovering the text and validating the recovery results is somewhat different. In my view, it is certain that a primitive gospel text has been carefully and intentionally preserved in canonical John, and I agree with Fortna that it can be reconstructed in large part by lifting out the redactional material. The monumental challenge of course is twofold:

- (1) How does one identify redactional material with certainty?
- (2) How might we demonstrate with confidence that the results of the reconstruction do indeed represent a recovered primitive text?

We will require independent confirming evidence that a discrete primitive text has been recovered once apparent “redactional material” is removed. And this evidence *must not* consist of data or observations that would be the predictable consequence of the lifting out of suspected redactional elements, otherwise the circularity in reasoning will produce vague and unconvincing results.

I have taken an approach to the reconstruction procedure that I believe produces such independent confirming evidence. The results overlap in significant degree with Fortna’s findings, which is to be expected since many of the primitive elements in John stand out in bold relief once one reads the

---

<sup>4</sup> Robert Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and its Predecessor*, Fortress Press, 1988, p. 7

*Gospel of John* under the suspicion that a primitive narrative is preserved therein. However, one of my essential points of disagreement with Fortna relates to the material in John 21. Like most scholars, Fortna assumed that ch. 21 was a late appendix, one of the final additions to the gospel after it had largely attained its canonical form. As I have and will continue to argue, this assumption is erroneous, and it radically compromises one's ability to interpret the identity and motives of the Beloved Disciple and the political fault lines associated with him, as well as the authorship and evolution of the gospel text itself.

### **A Critical Observation**

The assumption that a primitive Ur-John text is embedded within canonical John, and that it may be isolated and reconstructed, represents a departure from conventional approaches to John, and thus will meet with skepticism. My intent is to overcome such skepticism by presenting numerous examples of textual data that support the theory. At the outset, the foundational observation is critical:

*Editors/redactors of John routinely behave as if they have the authority to **insert** new commentary or corrective matter into an established text, but they do not have the authority to delete or alter the original text as they had received it.*

Of course, *if* there is a demonstrable reluctance or inability of editors to alter or delete problematic text that they have inherited, the corollary inference is that a preexisting text has been intentionally preserved for whatever reasons the editors may have had. Therefore, the tendency for editors to retain and preserve problematic text must be demonstrated. We can establish this by examining a series of passages in which obvious corrections exist. We may begin by revisiting the puzzling error in 7.22–23:

7.22 Moses gave you circumcision (**not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers**), and you circumcise a man upon the sabbath. 23 If on the sabbath a man receives circumcision, **so that the law of Moses may not be broken**, are you angry with me because on the sabbath I made a man's whole body well?

In this passage, the original author was under the impression that circumcision was instituted by Moses when in fact it was a feature of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17). An attempt has made to correct this error in 7.22b, but then, quite oddly, the error is repeated in 7.23—if on the sabbath a man receives circumcision, it is so that the *Abrahamic covenant* may not be broken, not the law of Moses. This passage makes it appear as if Jesus does not know what he is talking about. The essential question, therefore, is under what circumstances would such an obvious error have been preserved in the *Gospel of John*?

The underlined/italicized text in 7.22 is most likely a redactional insert—an editor appears to be aware of the error and is attempting to resolve it with this clarification. Yet there is no attempt to eliminate the problematic references to Moses. In theory, the editor could have corrected 7.22 to read, “*The fathers gave you circumcision, and you circumcise a man upon the Sabbath,*” and then omitted “*of Moses*” in 7.23, thereby eliminating the error and the need for the inserted correction. Yet what survives is the erroneous “*Moses gave you circumcision*” followed by a correction in 22b, then a reassertion of the error in 23. Now, this contradiction could have been eliminated if the editor *had possessed the authority to alter the original text and delete the erroneous phrase*. That he did not suggests that he may have viewed the original text as unfringeable—he behaves as if he had the authority to *insert* a new corrective comment, but he was prohibited from altering or deleting the original material. If this were the case, it would explain the convoluted condition of the passage.

Now, one might propose that the original author had immediately realized his mistake as he was composing, and accordingly corrected himself in 7.22; perhaps he had already invested significant time and resource in the writing of the document and did not want to discard it? This is possible, yet it seems unlikely that, having realized and corrected his error in 7.22b, he would explicitly reproduce it in 7.23. Notice that if the underlined/bold text in 7.22 above is lifted out, the passage reads with full logical coherence as the author would have originally composed it had he not been aware of the error. What has survived is a text in which an editor has inserted a correction without making any attempt to eliminate the error. The result is a text with *diminished logical coherence* compared to the original. Furthermore, many redactors and scribes would have had the opportunity to rewrite this passage, but for some reason it has survived over the centuries with the original error intact. Thus, the initial editor and all subsequent redactors have evidently

behaved as if they did not have the authority to alter or delete the text as they had received it.

Another example of corrective editing is found in John 4.2, which is commonly recognized as a correction intended to negate the impression created by the preceding discussion that Jesus had personally performed baptisms:

3.22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; **there he remained with them and baptized.** 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people came and were baptized.

4.1 Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that **Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples** than John, 2 (***although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples.***) 3 he left Judea and departed again to Galilee. (4.1–3).

Since 3.22–23 and 4.1 both candidly state that Jesus himself was baptizing, they are not likely to have been composed by an author who thought it important to avoid the impression that Jesus had performed baptisms. The correction in 4.2 appears to reflect a subsequent ecclesial realization that those baptized directly by Jesus might be perceived as enjoying a special status compared to those baptized by disciples or others. (Paul's sensitivity to this issue is apparent in 1 Cor 1.12–14.) Accordingly, 4.2 reads as an editor's correction of the previous statements. Note that 3.22–23 and 4.1 could have been reworded by editors to eliminate the confusion. However, the solution was simply to insert a corrective gloss at 4.2 which draws attention to the previous errors, without any attempt to correct the problematic text itself. Thus, the editor again behaves as if he has the authority to *insert* corrective material into the narrative, but not to omit or alter the problematic text that he had received.

A third, somewhat humorous example of corrective editing occurs in 11.42:

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "**Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 *I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that you did send me.***" 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."

In this passage, Jesus thanks the Father for hearing him in 41b, which is coherent as far as it goes. However, the phrasing appears to suggest that Jesus may imagine that the Father does not always hear him, and that he is grateful that the Father has heard him in this instance. In light of this, 42 reads as an apparent editorial “clarification” that the Father does indeed always hear Jesus. Yet it creates the odd spectacle of Jesus explaining to the Father why he has just said what he said. Editorial side comments explaining “why something was said” occur frequently in John. As we will observe, this will become one of the indicators that help to separate Ur-John material from recension text. This repeating pattern of corrections or clarifications being inserted into the narrative suggests the existence of a preexisting text that the editors regarded, for whatever reason, as sacrosanct.

A fourth example of corrective editing occurs in John 12.37–43:

**12.37 Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him; 38 it was that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"**

*39 Therefore they could not believe. For Isaiah again said, 40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them."*

41 Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him. 42 Nevertheless many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: 43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

These seven verses are remarkable for their logical discontinuity. In 12.37, the author claims that the many signs Jesus had done had failed to convince witnesses to believe, an admission that at face value is rather startling. Sensing that this might unsettle readers, the author rationalizes this failure in 38 by citing an alleged prophetic anticipation that the message would not be believed (Is. 53.1). Thus, according to this author, since unbelief was expected as part of prophetic fulfillment, he wishes to assure readers that there is no cause for alarm.

However, in 39–40 the author changes course and presents an alternative theory for their unbelief—it was not simply that they *did not believe* in order to fulfill Is. 53.1, they *could not believe* because God had blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. This was to fulfill a different

prophecy in Is. 6.10. For readers of 37–38 who may have been concerned that Jesus’ signs were simply inadequate to inspire belief, the author now says that that no matter how compelling Jesus’ signs may have been, it was *not possible* for witnesses to believe due to heaven-induced blindness.

Though this alternative explanation in 39–40 addresses concerns that Jesus’ signs were not sufficiently convincing, it introduces another problem: *Why was Jesus performing signs for an audience that had been prevented by God from believing them?* Does this not imply that Jesus was wasting his time, or that God was cynically toying with his creation? It appears that the author realizes that this would not reflect well on the character of God, for he then nullifies his two assertions that they *did* not believe and *could* not believe—in 42 he claims that many had believed after all, but were afraid to confess it. Thus, in the span of seven verses, the text represents that the people (a) did not believe as anticipated in one prophecy, (b) had been blinded and could not believe per a second prophecy, and (c) actually did believe but were afraid to acknowledge it.

These rapidly shifting justifications for the inefficacy of Jesus’ signs must cause one to question whether 12.37–43 is the work of a single author. If it is, he appears not to have been thinking ahead as he composed, for he has corrected himself twice in succession as new explanations occurred to him. On the other hand, if the author had imagined from the outset that many had believed but were afraid to confess it per 41–43, why would he have opened with two false premises and attempted to rationalize them with two different claims of prophetic fulfillment, only to nullify them with a contradictory account in the end? In either case, this appears to be unlikely storytelling by a single author.

This passage becomes easier to rationalize when one considers that it may consist of original text in 12.37–38, followed by two redactional “clarifications” in 39–40 and 41–43. For one can understand that a redactor, having copied 37–38, would be alarmed at the suggestion that Jesus’ signs simply did not convince witnesses. There is an obvious motive for a redactor to have inserted what he believed to be a more compelling rationale for their lack of belief. And this second of the three rationalizations—that they *could not believe* due to blinded eyes—appears to be a more substantive argument than the initial justification in 12.38. So it would not be surprising to discover that a redactor had inserted 39–40 as a correction to the original text. Similarly, it would not be surprising that another later redactor, having copied the entirety of 37–40 from the text he had inherited, would be troubled both

with the initial suggestion of unbelief in 37–38, and the disturbing notion that Jesus was, for some reason, performing signs for persons who had been rendered incapable of recognizing them by God. Thus, a compelling motive is at hand for a subsequent redactor to have inserted the correction in 41–43 that many witnesses did in fact believe after all.

If this multi-author theory of composition is correct, it carries with it an essential corollary that is consistent with earlier observations—an initial narrative text (37–38) was in existence that was being appended for corrective purposes by subsequent editors who *acted as if they had no authority to delete or modify the original*. Note that the first of the two suspected editorial corrections, 39–40, was made by someone who might well have preferred to delete the original proposition and substitute his more compelling rationale for their unbelief, along with its associated prophetic fulfillment, rather than to insert a second alternative that appears to be a “better explanation.” Yet this redactor allowed 37–38 to stand without modification. The second insertion, 41–43, was made by another redactor who might have been tempted to delete 39–40 due to its troubling implications regarding the character of God. He might also have preferred simply to erase both references to non-belief, and altered the entire passage to read, “*Though Jesus had done so many signs before them, many of the authorities were afraid to confess their belief for fear of the Pharisees...*” Such an alteration would have eliminated the direct contradiction he was introducing into the narrative by inserting 41–43, and he would have created a more coherent story. However, there was no attempt to edit the text in this manner. Thus, this confusing sequence of three explanations in 12.37–43 can be resolved under the theory that two redactors, each working with a problematic text that they had inherited, had acted as if they had the editorial latitude to *insert* new interpretive and/or corrective commentary, but for some reason did not have the authority to delete or alter the earlier problematic text as they had received it.

### **A Clue to Multiple Recensions**

If this sequence of explanations in 12.37–43 is indeed the combined work of an original author and two subsequent redactors, the implications are significant. First, it suggests that an early narrative fragment in 37–38 has been preserved in the canonical text, apparently due to the redactors’ inability or unwillingness to delete or alter it. This is in harmony with previous

observations that other problematic and apparently primitive portions of the *Gospel of John*, such as the competition between Jesus and the Baptist, have also survived, having been preserved at least to some degree intact in the canonical text. Since in all cases this material appears to be primitive in nature, we have reason to suspect that fragments of an early narrative gospel have been preserved in canonical John due to redactors' reluctance or lack of authority to compromise them.

Second, 12.37–41 suggests that the gospel underwent at least two recensions over some extended period of time. For 39–40 appears to be an intermediate stage insertion that had become established. Notice that if 39–40 is lifted out, the text reads with perfect coherence from 37–38 to 41–43. Thus, 39–40 serves no productive purpose. The editor who inserted 41–43 would surely have recognized this. It would be remarkable if he had not been tempted to delete 39–40. Yet he retained not only the original 37–38, but also the disturbing 39–40 which increases the incoherence of the entire narrative. Why would he have done this? Again, one may suspect that he did not have the authority to delete it. And this may indeed have been the case if 39–40 had become a recognized element in an intermediate edition of the gospel already in circulation. Therefore, one must consider the possibility that some period of time had elapsed between the insertions of 39–40 and 41–43 during which 39–40 had become a recognized feature of the gospel.

An obvious question would then be, is there any further evidence in John of editorial insertions of this nature, and in particular, of multiple redactional insertions in sequence? Fortunately, the rare term *aposynagogos* appears in this passage in 12.42. It represents an independent clue to multiple recensions. This term occurs only three times in the *Gospel of John* and nowhere else in the NT. But in 12.42 it appears as part of the third attempt to resolve the problem of Jesus' signs. Do the other two occurrences of *aposynagogos* appear to be similarly inserted into preexisting text? And do either of them appear to be secondary interpolations? The first of the three uses of *aposynagogos* in John's Gospel occurs in 9.22:

**9.18 the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they**

feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue (aposynagogos). 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age, ask him." **24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner."** **25 He answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."**

In this passage, the italicized/underlined 9.22–23 reads as an editorial side comment inserted into a preexisting narrative rendered in bold. There is no indication that it is a secondary insertion as 12.42 appears to be. But it is a parenthetic comment that interrupts the narration, inserted either by the author or a subsequent redactor. Note that if 9.22–23 is lifted out, the remaining narrative reads naturally and coherently, most likely as it was originally composed. 9.23 repeats the parents' statement in 21, and appears to be an attempt by the redactor to return the reader to an existing original storyline after his disruption of the narrative. There is also an unusual use of *Christ* (*Christon*) as a proper name in 22, without an article. Typical usage in John is "the Christ," (*ho Christos*) incorporating the article, so it is normally used as a reference to the Messiah rather than a proper name. The atypical usage of *Christon* in 22 adds to the suspicion that this is an insertion by a later redactor.

Therefore, the first two occurrences of the term *aposynagogos* in 9.22 and 12.42 both appear, for a variety of reasons, to be clarifying commentaries inserted into a preexisting narrative. In both cases, the author or redactor is making an editorial side comment to explain "why" something has been said. In 9.22, "*His parents said this because...*", and in 12.41–2, "*Isaiah said this because...*". This pattern appears again in the third use of *aposynagogos* in 16.1–2, where Jesus himself explains why he is saying something:

15.26 But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; 27 and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.

16.1 "*I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogues (aposynagogos); indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. 3 And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me.*"

4 But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

Now in this case, 16.1–3 has a similar explanatory character, and it appears to be a discrete literary unit focused on violence which is not addressed in either the preceding or following text. Indeed, the surrounding text remains coherent if these verses are lifted out. Yet this unit does not stand out quite as distinctively as a later insertion into preexisting material to the same degree that 9.22–23 and 12.41–43 do. To the contrary, it appears to be somewhat comfortably integrated into the larger context of chs. 15 and 16.

However, when viewed from a greater distance, the entire block of chs. 14–17 stands out suspiciously as a series of interpolations. For if a Fourth Evangelist was inserting ideologically advanced material into a preexisting narrative, the most glaring example of it would be chs. 14–17, a large block of expositive commentary largely in monologue format that appears to be inserted into a narrative that is suspended at 13.38 and resumed at 18.1. Notice that in John 13.38, immediately following the Last Supper, Jesus informs Peter of his impending denials. Then in 18.1, Jesus and the disciples relocate to the garden:

John 13.37 Peter said to him, "Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." 38 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 18.1 When Jesus had spoken these words, **he went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley, where there was a garden**, which he and his disciples entered.

What is riveting is that precisely this same sequence of events following the Last Supper appears as a *continuous narrative* in the *Gospel of Mark*:

Mark 14.29 Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." 30 And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you, this very night, **before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.**" 31 But he said vehemently, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same. 32 **And they went to a place which was called Gethsemane;** and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I pray."

Thus, the *Gospel of Mark* provides independent evidence of an early narrative in circulation in which the relocation of Jesus and the disciples to the garden followed immediately after Jesus' warning to Peter. The fact that the narrative "storytelling" literary format in John is suspended at 13.38 and resumed at 18.1 suggests that, in similar fashion, there may have once been a primitive Johannine narrative in which these events appeared in continuous sequence just as they do in Mark. If so, chs. 14–17 represents a block of later interpolations.

A confirming indication that chs. 14–17 have been inserted by a separate author is found in the odd and highly frequent use of *oun* (οὖν) in John's Gospel, typically translated *so* or *therefore*. This term occurs 202 times in John and 502 times in the entire NT, so 40% of the uses of *oun* in the NT are located in John. Since John comprises 10% of the NT text, on average *oun* occurs with four times the frequency in John as it does in the rest of the NT. And in many cases, C.K. Barrett notes that it is used as a simple narrative link lacking any argumentative force, which is unusual usage of the term.<sup>5</sup> Barrett observes that the odd and frequent usage of *oun* is a distinctive idiosyncratic feature of the writing style of the "author of John."

However, what is most striking is that the 202 uses of *oun* in John do not occur at random, as is illustrated in Table 4.1 on the following page. Indeed, *oun* occurs in very high concentrations in some blocks of text and infrequently or not at all in others. It averages about ten occurrences per chapter. But most notably, it does not appear even once in chs. 14, 15, and 17, and only three times in ch. 16. Thus, in chs. 14–17 there is a conspicuous void in which the "author of John" abandons his idiosyncratic and frivolous use of *oun*, only to resume it with unbridled gusto in ch. 18. These data suggest that chs. 14–17 were composed by a separate author, a later redactor who did not share the original author's enthusiasm for the term *oun*.

Furthermore, scholars commonly assume that the "author of John" also composed the three Johannine epistles since they share an array of common thought and grammar. It is therefore remarkable that the term *oun* does not appear at all in *1 John* or *2 John*, and is used only once in *3 John* 1.8. The almost total aversion to *oun* in the Johannine epistles corresponds to the aversion of the term in chs. 14–17, and is compatible with the notion that

---

<sup>5</sup> Barrett, C.K., *The Gospel According to St. John, Second Edition*, 1978, p.7

the author of the Johannine epistles was responsible for the inserted material in John 14–16, and possibly ch. 17.

**Table 1.1 Distribution of *OUN* in John**

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Uses of οὖν</u>
1	4
2	3
3	2
4	14
5	4
6	20
7	14
8	16
9	14
10	3
11	19
12	13
13	10
14	0
15	0
16	3
17	0
18	21
19	22
20	11
21	9

**The Literary Justification for Expansions to the Gospel**

If chs. 14–17 were significant redactional expansions being inserted into a sacred gospel with which the primitive church was already familiar, by what authority would editors have been able to make such insertions? Evidently the redactors recognized that a justification for inserting chs. 14–17 was required, for they call specific attention to the revelatory activity of the *paraclete*, often translated “counselor,” an ostensible reference to the

Holy Spirit. In ch. 14 the *paraclete* brings forgotten words of Jesus to memory, and in ch. 16 the *paraclete* reveals new words from heaven never spoken by the earthly Jesus. The implication is that ch. 14 may be accepted as an authoritative expansion of the gospel *because* it consists of “forgotten” words originally spoken by the earthly Jesus that have now been brought to remembrance by the *paraclete* (14.25–26). Furthermore, ch. 14 appears to represent a discrete insert between 13.38 and 18.1 that occurred at an intermediate stage of the gospel’s development. There are two indications to this effect. First, the final phrase in 14.31b, “*rise up, let us go from here*” anticipates their relocation to the garden in 18.1, not the continuing monologue in chs. 15–16 or the prayer in 17. The phrase in 14.31b only make coherent sense if the gospel circulated for some interim period of time with ch. 14 as the only insert between 13.38 and 18.1. The retention of 14.31b as a fragment that no longer makes logical sense after chs. 15–16 were inserted is another sign of the redactors’ reluctance to alter or delete any material that was present in earlier forms of the text that they had inherited.

The second indication that ch. 14 was an intermediate stage recension is the fact that the revelatory function of the *paraclete* changes substantively between ch. 14 and ch. 16. For in ch. 16 the *paraclete* no longer brings forgotten words of the earthly Jesus to memory. Instead, the *paraclete* reveals *new words never spoken by the earthly Jesus* as speech being transmitted from heaven for the first time (16.12–13). The fact that the essential revelatory function of the *paraclete* has fundamentally changed suggests a time lapse between the insertion of ch. 14 and chs. 15–16. For after having inserted ch. 14 as *forgotten words of the earthly Jesus* now brought to remembrance by the *paraclete*, it would have been difficult to claim that chs. 15–16 were being inserted later as yet more forgotten words of the earthly Jesus that the *paraclete* had neglected to mention the first time. A secondary recension consisting of chs. 15–16 required a new theory of the revelatory behavior of the *paraclete*. Thus, in ch. 16 the *paraclete* begins to reveal new words from the heavenly Jesus never spoken previously. In both cases, however, the key point is that these highly creative justifications for the expansion of the gospel indicate that an earlier narrative gospel had been in circulation which was so well known and accepted as an authoritative work in the primitive church that extraordinary appeals to revelations of the *paraclete* were required to justify redactional expansions to it. The original narrative must therefore have been recognized as one possessing exceptional authority and gravitas. Under these circumstances it is little wonder that

redactors behaved as if they had no authority to alter or delete the original wording.

With this perspective on the interpolated nature of chs. 14–17, we may return to the issue of the third use of *aposynagogos*. Its use in 16.2 places it in material that appears to be a secondary recension consisting of new words revealed by the *paraclete* directly from heaven. This is consistent with the fact that the *aposynagogos* in 12.42 also appears to be located in a corrective secondary interpolation that follows 12.39–40. So in two of the three cases, the *aposynagogos* references appear to be late stage insertions into the evolving gospel. Meanwhile, 9.22–23 is an insertion into the original narrative without any evidence of a previous intermediate interpolation, so there is no evidence to suggest when it might have been added. Nevertheless, all three instances of *aposynagogos* occur in passages that read as if they are later interpolations. Accordingly, they constitute evidence that the *Gospel of John* consists of a primitive narrative that has been preserved, at least to some degree, and that this narrative has been subjected to at least two significant recensions.

### **Further Gaps in the use of *OUN***

Since there are no uses of *oun* in chs. 14, 15, and 17, and only three in ch. 16, this suggests that the gospel was redacted/expanded by at least one writer for whom the frequent and frivolous use of *oun* had little appeal. That this Johannine redactor was also responsible for the epistles in which *oun* is rare is further evidence that *oun* is rarely used by this writer. And the absolute avoidance of *oun* altogether in chs. 14, 15, 17, as well as the six chapters in 1 & 2 John, suggests that this redactor had an unusual aversion to its use even in comparison to other NT writers, for *oun* appears three hundred times in the NT other than the Johannine corpus—often averaging two to three occurrences per chapter in most books.<sup>6</sup> An important inference may be drawn from this: *Any further redactional expansions to Ur-John that might have been inserted by this redactor are likely to reflect an equally rare use of oun.* Since there are 202 occurrences of *oun* in John, and only three are in chs. 14–17, there remain 199 uses in the other seventeen chapters, which have 762

---

<sup>6</sup> The term *oun* appears in Matthew an average of 2.0 times per chapter, Luke 1.9, Acts 2.4, and Romans 3.0. Though the average chapter length varies between documents, the general pattern of frequency is evident.

verses. If these 199 uses of *oun* occurred at random from the hand of a single author, we should see an average of 11.7 *ouns* per chapter, or an average of one every 3.8 verses. Now, of course we would not expect to see a perfectly even distribution of the term every 3.8 verses, but large blocks of text in which *oun* does not appear may warrant scrutiny as material that may have been inserted either by this redactor or another with a similar aversion to the term.

The absence of *oun* in chs. 14–17 draws attention to the fact that this material is also essentially monologue in literary format—Jesus is either issuing long expositions on theological issues, or responding to disciples who pose questions to which he responds either at exceptional length or with formal theological/Christological proclamations that are not typical of normal dialogue. Thus, for example, the inquiry of Thomas in 14.5 “*how can we know the way?*” tees up the opportunity for Jesus to formally declare “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.*” (14.6) This literary form is qualitatively different from the conversational narrative “storytelling” which characterizes much of the rest of the gospel. Indeed, the gospel oscillates back and forth between these two distinct literary forms of simple narrative storytelling and extended formal expository monologue, and for the most part the transitions between the two are abrupt. Nowhere is this more apparent than the interface between 13.38 and 14.1, which is a switch from simple narrative to monologue/question-response format, and the corresponding resumption of simple narrative at 18.1. There is therefore a noteworthy absence of *oun* in the monologue format. Yet *oun* is typically used to advance an argument, and the monologue material is explanatory and argumentative in nature—there is no reason to imagine that a single author would have used it extensively in narrative storytelling but abandoned its use in monologue/expositional material. So large blocks of text in which *oun* is absent should be examined closely as potential interpolations.

Other than chs. 14–17, another block of text in which *oun* is absent is John 5.20–6.5, which is 33 verses. Notably, this incorporates a lengthy monologue of Jesus in 5.19–47 which is an advanced theological meditation on the relationship between the Father and the Son. Upon the completion of this monologue, the literary format then reverts to narrative storytelling at 6.1. This monologue could be interpreted as commencing at 5.17–18, but the fact that Jesus is reconfirmed as the speaker in 5.19, and that 5.19–47 reads as a clarification of the claim in 5.18 that Jesus had made himself equal with God, the possibility must be considered that 5.17–18 and 5.19–47 are two

separate redactional insertions. *Oun* appears twice at the opening of this monologue, once in 5.18 and again in 5.19. The extended monologue in 5.19–47 is consistent in style with the monologue format in chs. 14–17. After the initial use of *oun* in 5.19, it is not used again in the rest of the monologue which is 28 continuous verses. Once the literary form returns to narrative storytelling at 6.1, *oun* begins to reappear at 6.5, and is used 20 times throughout the rest of chapter 6, or an average of once every three verses in this chapter.

This pattern occurs again in John 2.23–3.24, which is a sequence of 27 continuous verses in which *oun* does not appear. However, within this sequence is Jesus speaking largely in monologue/question-response form beginning in 3.3 in formal response to two questions from Nicodemus. This speech continues to 3.21. The term *oun* does not appear in this extended monologue. The literary form then reverts back to narrative storytelling in 3.22, and the next occurrence of *oun* appears three verses later in 3.25. However, the form switches back to monologue in 3.29 for the remainder of the chapter. Notably *oun* is used in 3.29, but in this context with clear argumentative force as it is in 3 John 1.8 and as is more typical in non-Johannine usage. So 3.29 appears as if it could be an example of infrequent usage of *oun* by the redactor. *Oun* is not used in the rest of this monologue through v. 36, but when this speech ends and the literary form reverts to narrative storytelling in 4.1, the resumption of the use of *oun* is immediate in 4.1, 5, 6, 9, and 11.

The same phenomenon occurs at 18.1, where the literary form returns to narrative storytelling after the extensive monologues in chs. 14–17. At this juncture the use of *oun* appears promptly in 18.3 with an additional twenty uses through the rest of ch. 18, averaging a high concentration of one occurrence every two verses. Note that ch. 18 is almost exclusively straightforward narrative storytelling with no extended monologue material. Chs. 19 and 20 also consist of extensive narrative with little monologue. Together they contain 33 uses of *oun*, averaging one every 2.2 verses, an extremely high frequency. And of particular note, John 21 consists entirely of narrative with no monologue; it features nine uses of *oun* in its short 25 verses, averaging one every 2.8 verses. Therefore, the editorial behavior of the editor of John 21 with respect to the frequent use of *oun* is consistent with that of the author of the narrative portions of the rest of the gospel, and not the redactors of chs. 14–17 and other blocks of monologue. In other words, the prevalence of *oun* in John 21 is independent evidence of its distinct primitivity.

As with chs. 18–21, John 9 and 11 both reflect similar correlations between narrative storytelling and the frequent use of *oun*, which occurs 14 times in ch. 9, and 19 times in ch. 11; both chapters consist of extensive narrative with little extended speech. Yet when the literary format switches to monologue in John 10, we suddenly encounter the same sparsity of *oun* in monologue material. The term occurs only three times in ch. 10. Yet 10.1–18 is essentially monologue with *oun* occurring just once in a brief narrative link in v.7. It occurs again in 24 and 39, both of which are in interlaced narrative form. There is extended expository speech of Jesus in 10.25–30 and again in 10.34–38, and *oun* does not appear in these blocks of speech.

Therefore, there is a direct correlation between the literary form of a passage in John and the tendency of the author/redactors to deploy the term *oun*. It is used to tremendous excess in narrative storytelling, and rarely in monologue or extended speech. The fact that *oun* largely disappears in extended blocks of speech material while being deployed excessively in narrative is a key to the gospel's literary fault lines.

### **Logically Incoherent Dialogue in John**

Another significant and repeating pattern of editorial behavior in the *Gospel of John* is that dialogues tend to be rendered logically incoherent *when they contain material that parallels material in the monologue sections of the gospel*. An example of this occurs in 13.33–38:

**33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'**34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.** **36 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."****37 Peter said to him, "Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."** **38 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.**

In this passage, Jesus opens by saying he is leaving and going where the disciples cannot follow. Then he changes the subject to the New Commandment in 34–35. At 36, the subject returns to the question of where Jesus is going. Peter's response in 36 indicates that he either does not hear the New

Commandment, or that he ignores it; he responds only to Jesus' previous declaration in 33b. If the New Commandment in 34–35 is lifted out, the remaining text reads with more logical coherence as Peter responds directly to Jesus' statement that he is going away. Now, the New Commandment appears also in John 15.12 and 15.17, which as noted previously appears to be material added to the gospel in a secondary recension. Moreover, the pressing need for the brothers to love one another is a concept with which the author of *1 John* is uniquely preoccupied; he is evidently trying to suppress a contentious conflict within the movement (this will be explored further in the next chapter). If the author of *1 John* has inserted the monologue material in chs. 14–16 into a preexisting gospel, one might reasonably suspect that he has also inserted 13.34–35 as an ideological enhancement to the original narrative. The effect is to enrich the passage from a content perspective while reducing the logical coherence of the dialogue.

A similar example of logical incoherence in dialogue is present in John 13.66–71:

**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.**

In this case it is Jesus who acts as if he has not heard Peter's confession of faith. Indeed, Jesus ignores Peter and focuses exclusively on his impending betrayal. One must wonder, what would have justified Jesus' abrupt response to Peter's generous confession? However, just as the New Commandment in 13.34–35 has parallels in the monologue material of ch. 15, so the reference to *eternal life* in 13.68b is a recurring concept in monologue material that contains only rare uses of *oun* (3.15,16,36, 5.24,39, 12.50, 17.2,3). If more advanced interpretive material is being inserted into a preexisting narrative, then 68b–69 appears to be another example of a later redactional insertion into the narrative sections of the gospel. Note that 68b–69 reflects exceptionally well on Peter and helps to mask the undercurrent of hostility toward him that was constructed by the original author. Accordingly, one might suspect that this confession was inserted by a pro-Petrine redactor to bring this text into harmony with Synoptic tradition. And once again, as with the New

Commandment in 13.34–35, if the underlined text in 13.68b–69 is lifted out, the remaining dialogue reads coherently, apparently as originally composed.

Another passage that shows both logical discontinuity and harmony with monologue material is 4.13–15:

**4.13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."**

In this dialogue the woman does not react to the promise of eternal life, which to the reader will appear to be the issue of most consequence in the declaration. Instead, the woman is enthused at the prospect of a water source that will resolve her need to come to the well, which is unrelated to the promise of eternal life. Now again, the phrase *eternal life* is a recurring feature in distinctive blocks of monologue material (3.15–16, 5.24, 5.39, and 17.2–3), so the parallel between this suspected insert and monologue ideology is present. In essence, 14b reads as if it is a redundant and secondary theological reinterpretation of the clause in 14a. If 14b is lifted out, the dialogue reads with greater logical coherence, as it likely would have been composed in a more primitive edition of the *Gospel of John*.

This same pericope of the woman at the well has signs of another editorial embellishment:

**4.21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."**

Here is another dialogue lacking logical coherence. In 4.22, Jesus says that salvation is from the Jews. The woman's response in 25 that she knows Messiah is coming is a direct response to Jesus' statement in 22. However, she has no apparent awareness of the theological exposition in 23–24. Note also the phrase *the hour is coming* in 21 is repeated and amended with *and now is* in 23a. This suggests that an update to the narrative is being inserted.

In addition, the phrase *and now is* parallels the same phrase in the monologue 5.25 and a similar phrase in monologue 16.32. If 23–24 is lifted out, this passage also reads with improved logical coherence, most likely as originally composed. At face value, 23–24 reads as a theological amplification that is more consistent with monologue exposition than it is to narrative storytelling.

As an aside, the concept of Jesus' "hour" is worthy of specific attention. In the narrative storytelling portions of the *Gospel of John*, the idea that Jesus' hour is coming but not yet arrived is a repeating theme. Throughout the gospel, his hour has *not yet come* until the Last Supper, at which Jesus knows that his hour has indeed come. It appears in the following passages:

2.3 When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? **My hour has not yet come.**"

4.21 Jesus said to her, "**Woman, believe me, the hour is coming** when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship *the Father*."

7.30 So they sought to arrest him; but no one laid hands on him, **because his hour had not yet come.**

8.20 These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, **because his hour had not yet come.**

12.27 (after the Triumphal Entry) "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, **for this purpose I have come to this hour.**

13.1 [at the Last Supper] Now before the feast of the Passover, **when Jesus knew that his hour had come**

In short, this recurring dramatic element of the coming "hour" is built upon through the entire narrative. The hour is coming, and it ultimately leads to the hour of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. However, in three monologue sections of the gospel which appear to be interpolations to the original narrative, the hour is said to be coming *and now is*. Inexplicably, the hour has already arrived:

4.23 **But the hour is coming, and now is**, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.

5.25 "Truly, truly, I say to you, **the hour is coming, and now is**, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

16.31 Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? 32 **The hour is coming, indeed it has come**, when you will be scattered, every man to his home, and will leave me alone; yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.

These three citations that the hour "is coming and now is" disrupt the logical development of the theme in the baseline narrative. Jesus' hour, according to the original Ur-John narrative, culminates with his death on the cross, and his hour has not yet come until that time. Yet redactors have inserted representations that the coming hour "now is" quite early in the gospel, in chs. 4 and 5, which is consistent with the inference that a preexisting narrative has been compromised with later redactional insertions of a theological nature.

Another apparent insertion of advanced ideology into a primitive narrative is visible in John 6.26–31:

**6.26 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30 So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"**

Here we find a redactional insert consisting of 6.27–29. These three verses contain extensive and precise parallels with the monologue in 5.19–47. The concepts of *eternal life* (5.24,39), God as *the Father* (5.19,20, 21,22,23,26,36, 37,45), Jesus as the one *whom he has sent* (5.23,24,30,33,36,37,38), Jesus as the one who gives *life* (5.21,40), the need to *believe in him* (5.28,38,44,46), the performance of *works* (5.20,36) and the title *Son of man* (5.27), are all paralleled in 5.19–47. They also frequently appear in several other blocks of monologue text. And once again, if the italicized verses 27–29 are lifted out, the remaining bold text reads as a coherent narrative. Note that 26 is in the form of storytelling narrative, at 27 the speech of Jesus becomes expositional, then at 30 the style reverts to narrative storytelling.

Another apparent redactional insertion occurs at 7.39, which is another example of the author/narrator pausing the storytelling to make an interpretive comment as to *why something was said*:

**7.37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. 38 He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. 40 When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This is really the prophet." 41 Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? 42 Has not the scripture said that the Christ is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" 43 So there was a division among the people over him.**

In this case the redactor interprets the words in 38 as a reference to the Holy Spirit which was yet to be given. This parallels the monologue material related to the *paraclete* in chs. 14 and 16. The concept of the glorification of Jesus in 39b is also an advanced interpretive theme paralleled in 14.13, 16.14, 17.1,4,5,10, and several other evident interpolations. Thus, 7.39 appears to be a redactional insert intended to "update" this passage and bring it into harmony with chs. 14–17. Note that in 7.40, the phrase "*when they heard these words*" refers to the proclamation of Jesus in 37–38, not the theological interpretation in 39. So if 39 is lifted out, the remaining dialogue is logically coherent, and appears to read as it was originally composed.

It should be apparent by now that the removal of discrete units of advanced interpretive commentary from dialogues often reveals a more coherent underlying dialogue. This is an identifiable structural feature of the text of John. And it does not occur by accident. It is occurring because redactors have inserted more advanced reinterpretations of the material into a preexisting narrative, and they routinely show no concern for the fact that their insertions compromise the logical integrity of the dialogues.

Another editorial insert is found in 11.5–14:

**11.5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the**

day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." 11 Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead"

Several clues point to 11.9–11a as being an advanced interpretive comment inserted into an earlier narrative. A key to the puzzle is the redactor's clumsy and self-conscious attempt in 11a to return the inserted material to the original narrative in 11b, with the phrase "*Thus he spoke, and then he said to them...*" The fact that the text which follows 11a is a logical response to the original question posed by the disciples in 8 is a red flag that a preexisting text has been embellished with an ideological insert. As the canonical text reads, Jesus' response in 9–10 is incoherent philosophizing and irrelevant to the issue at hand. It also cites *light* and *this world (kosmos)*, both of which are prominent elements in monologue texts. If the underlined text in 9–11a is lifted out, the remaining dialogue is restored to what appears to be a coherent state as originally composed, for Jesus' response in 11b makes practical sense as a simple narrative response to the disciples' question in 8.

This pattern appears again in 8.30–41. As in 11.9–11a, Jesus' initial response in 8.34–36 is advanced exposition that functions as a preamble to his direct and more straightforward response to their question, which begins abruptly at 37:

**8.30 As he spoke thus, many believed in him. 31 Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33 They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will be made free?'" 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you. 38 I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father." 39 They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did, 40 but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God; this is not what Abraham did. 41 You do what your father did."**

Here in 36, Jesus refers to himself in the third person as “the Son.” This occurs frequently in the monologue 5.19–27. It also occurs in the monologues of 3.17, 3.35–36, 14.13 and 17.1, but it is rare in the rest of John. The notion that the Son continues forever is paralleled in the prologue and ch. 17. Thus, 34–36 contains elements of advanced interpretation that parallel the ideology of other evident inserts, and these elements cause 34–36 to stand out as distinctive from the surrounding material. There is also a radical divergence in Christology between the idea that the Son continues forever (in 35) and Jesus’ description of himself as a “man who has told you the truth which I heard from God” (in 40), which on its face appears to be a remarkably primitive interpretation of Jesus. Once again, if the underlined text in 34–36 is lifted out, the remaining text reads as a coherent dialogue as it may have been originally composed.

There is, therefore, a distinctive recurring pattern in the *Gospel of John*: simple narrative dialogue material throughout the gospel appears to be routinely interrupted and embellished with advanced concepts that have parallels in key blocks of monologue material. When these units are lifted out, the text appears to be restored to a simpler and more logical narrative storytelling condition. The implication is that a primitive narrative has been preserved, that it constitutes the literary skeleton of the gospel, and that this primitive narrative has been repeatedly disrupted with redactional interpolations that are in harmony with ideologically advanced monologue extensions to the original narrative.

### **Toward a Restoration of Ur-John**

The observations thus far suggest that the redactors who inserted the large blocks of extended monologue material into the preexisting Ur-John narrative have also inserted specific components of that material throughout the original narrative to make the entire gospel appear more homogenous and integrated. If this was the compositional process, then a straightforward reversal of this procedure may serve to isolate the original narrative. The reversal of this editorial process proceeds as follows:

1. **Control Texts.** The first step is to define the most obvious large blocks of monologue material that show an absence or rare use of the term *oun* as “control texts.” These blocks of material are “control texts” in the sense

that they represent the ideological beliefs, interpretive biases, grammatical proclivities, and concerns of later redactors. The large blocks of extended monologue and expository declarations that will be used as control texts are those that have been cited previously:

- A. The prologue, 1.1–18
  - B. Jesus' speech to Nicodemus, 3.3–21
  - C. Jesus' speech, 5.19–47
  - D. Jesus' signs and extended speech, 12.41–50
  - E. Chapters 14 through 17
2. The second step is to scan the remaining sections of the gospel sequentially to seek each occurrence of ideological units or distinctive words/phrases that have obvious or frequent parallels in the control texts. Examples of this already cited include the *New Commandment* in 13.34–35 which is paralleled in control texts 15.12,17, *apodynagogos* in 9.22 which is paralleled in control texts 12.42 and 16.2, and the numerous other illustrations above. In each case where a parallel exists, the task is to evaluate whether the reference appears to exist within a discrete literary unit that can be lifted out, and if so, to what degree its removal alters the logical coherence of the narrative. If the coherence of the remaining narrative is improved by the deletion of the parallel unit, then the unit will be flagged as a *probable* interpolation inserted by the redactor(s) who added the control texts. If the logical coherence of the remaining text is diminished, then the extracted unit will be defined as likely integral to the original composition.

### **An Illustration of the Procedure: World (κόσμος)**

The term *world* (*kósmos*) occurs 186 times in the NT. The majority of these are located in the Johannine corpus (the *Gospel of John* 78 times and the epistles 24 times). So *kósmos* is a distinctive component of Johannine expression. However, of the 78 uses of *kósmos* in John, 50 are located in the material we have just defined as control texts—it occurs four times in the prologue, five times in 3.3–21, three times in 12.41–50, and 38 times in chs. 14–17. Since *kósmos* also appears 24 times in the Johannine epistles, the high concentration of *kósmos* in the control text material is another indicator consistent with the inference that the author of the epistles was responsible

for the insertion of chs. 14–16. Under the Ur-John thesis, the proposal is that this redactor, in addition to inserting the large blocks of control text, has also inserted *kósmos* into other narrative texts throughout the gospel. The question is, to what extent do the 28 occurrences of *kósmos* that are not located in the control texts appear to be insertions into preexisting narrative? An example of this is 9.1–7:

**9.1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. 4 *We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work.* 5 *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*" 6 As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, 7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.**

In this passage, 4–5 constitutes a theological amplification that is different in tone and character than the comparatively pedestrian narrative that surrounds it. It reflects a higher Christology than the simple “Rabbi” that precedes it in v. 2. The declaration “*I am the light of the world*” is somewhat jarring and intuitively inappropriate in this particular social context. And the phrase “*him who sent me*” in 4 is a recurring phrase in the control texts (5.24, 5.30, 12.44, 45, 15.21, 16.5). That Jesus has come as light into the world is replicated in control text 12.46, and in this passage it also follows immediately after two references to “*him who sent me*” in 12.44–45. *Light* is also a key thematic element in the prologue and 3.3–21. Therefore, the italicized unit 4–5 contains several elements that parallel control text thought and grammar. Notice that if 4–5 is lifted out the remaining narrative reads with improved logical coherence and flows more naturally, most likely as originally composed. Accordingly, 9.4–5 is flagged as a *probable* interpolation in the reconstruction procedure.

Another intriguing occurrence of *world* is found in Jesus’ response to Annas:

**18.19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. 20 Jesus answered him, "*I have spoken (lelalēka) openly to the world (kosmo); I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together; I have said nothing secretly.*" 21 Why do**

**you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said."**

In this passage, Jesus appears to make a grand proclamation that he has spoken openly to the world, then follows with the more prosaic clarification that he has taught in synagogues and the temple where all Jews come together. However, a key to this unit is found in the use of the rare term *lelalēka* (*have spoken*), which is a term exclusive to the *Gospel of John* in the NT. It occurs eleven times in John, but eight of them are located in control text chs. 14–16 (14.25, 15.3, 15.11, 16.1, 16.4, 16.6, 16.25, 16.33). So there is a strong correlation between both *lelalēka* and *kosmo*, and the grammatical proclivities of the redactor who added 14–16. Since the primitive edition of Ur-John was composed for a Jewish audience, Jesus' proclamation in 18.20b that he had "always taught in synagogues and in the temple where all Jews come together" would have been appropriate and sufficient. But decades later, when the gospel was being taken to the world, redactors realized that Jesus' declaration required an expansion for more universal appeal. Hence the interpolation in 18.20a. And once again, the removal of the underlined phrase in 18.20a leaves the remaining text in a logically coherent condition, apparently as originally composed. Therefore, the underlined/italicized proclamation in 18.20 that Jesus has spoken openly to the world is flagged as a probable interpolation. Its removal leaves the remaining text coherent and viable as an original composition.

A third example of an unusual use of *world* is found in the Woman at the Well:

**4.39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer (*ouketi*) because of your words that we believe, for we have heard (*akēkoamen*) for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." 43 After the two days he departed to Galilee. 44 For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.**

The underlined/italicized text (4.42) in this passage appears to be a theological amplification inserted into the primitive narrative that precedes and follows it. Indications to this effect include the phrase *Savior of the world*, which occurs nowhere else in John, but is found in *1 John* 4.14. The term

*ouketi* (*no longer*) occurs twelve times in John, but eight of them are in control text chs. 14–17 (14.19, 14.30, 15.15, 16.10, 16.16, 16.21, 16.25, 17.11), so it is a term commonly used by the redactor(s) who inserted 14–17, but rarely in the remaining narrative. The term *akēkoamen* (*we have heard*) is rare and occurs in this form only six times in the NT. This is its only use in the *Gospel of John*, but it occurs three times in *1 John* 1.1, 3, and 5. So the grammatical correlations between v. 42, chs. 14–17, and *1 John* are glaring. Accordingly, 42 reads as an interpolation by the author of the epistles. Yet again, if it is lifted out, the remaining text reads logically and coherently in a more primitive form. So 42 is flagged as a *probable* interpolation in the reconstruction.

This is not to suggest that all occurrences of *kósmos* in the *Gospel of John* have been inserted by redactors. In three cases the term appears to be rooted in the original Ur-John narrative, and there is one in the appendix ch. 21:

6.14 When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the **world**!"

9.32 Never since the **world** began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.

12.19 The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see that you can do nothing; look, the **world** has gone after him."

21.25 But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the **world** itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Nevertheless, 74 of the 78 uses of *kósmos* in the *Gospel of John* appear either in control texts or other passages that, according to the reconstruction procedure illustrated above, are likely to have been redactional insertions into a preexisting narrative.

This same procedure can be applied to every key word and phrase in the *Gospel of John*, including *light*, *judge/judgment*, *life*, *joy*, *rejoice*, *receive testimony*, *glory/glorification*, *eternal life*, *Son of God*, *Son of man*, *Lord*, *Rabbi*, *teacher*, and so forth. For the most part it becomes apparent that each of these terms are either (a) rooted in the Ur-John narrative, or (b) characteristically distinctive features of the redactional expansions. On infrequent occasions certain grammatical elements are found in both (e.g., while *Lord* is

commonly rooted in Ur-John it occurs three times in ch. 14 as well). Accordingly, this reconstruction method separates the text of the *Gospel of John* into two categories: (1) text that appears most likely to consist of a primitive Ur-John narrative, and (2) text which appears most likely to be a redactional insertion into the Ur-John narrative. On a few occasions there are insufficient clues to determine whether certain units may have been original or interpolated, but passages with uncertain provenance comprise less than 3% of the total text. For the most part, the gospel separates rather dramatically into one of the two primary categories, like oil and water. In general, about 52.5% of the total text of John appears to consist of a preserved Ur-John narrative, 3.7% is John 21, and the remainder consists of redactional expansions/corrections inserted into the original narrative. The line-by-line reconstruction of Ur-John is presented in Appendix I.

### **Validation of the Reconstruction Procedure**

The Ur-John gospel that emerges from this reconstruction method is more ideologically and grammatically coherent as a work of literature than canonical John since the method itself, by definition, resolves many of John's logical disjunctions and aporias. Now, it would be circular logic to argue that since Ur-John *appears to be a more coherent primitive text*, that it therefore must have originally existed as a discrete, independent proto-John narrative. What is required to tilt the needle toward this conclusion is independent evidence of unique literary attributes that exist exclusively or predominantly in either the isolated Ur-John narrative, or in the redactional expansions, that *cannot be explained* as probable byproducts of the reconstruction procedure. There are several literary features of this nature:

1. **Distribution of *OUN*:** The 202 occurrences of *oun* in John occur in the Ur-John reconstruction in one of four discrete sections of the text: (1) the original Ur-John narrative, (2) the appendix John 21, (3) the subsequent Greek recension material added in the late first century, and (4) the adultery pericope (7.53–8.11) inserted as a final addition in the third or fourth century.

	<b>Occurrences of <i>OUN</i></b>	<b>% Total Text</b>
Ur-John	175	52.5%
John 21	9	3.7%
1 <sup>st</sup> . Cent. Greek Expansions	14	42.6%
7.53–8.11	4	1.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

After the Ur-John reconstruction, we find that 42.6% of canonical John consists of the redactional expansions to the Greek edition. Only fourteen uses of *oun* appear in this text. This is partially accounted by the fact that the five blocks of control texts were chosen in part due to the rarity of *oun* in these texts. However, the control texts comprise 22% of the total text of John and they contain five uses of *oun*, so if the remaining 197 instances of *oun* were distributed at random throughout the remaining 78% of the text, then the redactional expansions beyond the control texts would contain 53 instances of *oun*, not 14.<sup>7</sup> There is, therefore, a far higher concentration of *oun* in Ur-John + John 21, and a far lower incidence of *oun* in the redactional expansions than can be accounted for by the isolation of the control texts.

Furthermore, the presence or absence of *oun* in any given literary unit has no effect on the degree to which the unit's removal will affect the perceived logical coherence of the remaining text. Thus, its presence or absence in any given passage is irrelevant and was not considered as a factor in the reconstruction procedure other than in the special case of 16.17–19. This block of text contains two uses of *oun* as well as a rare occurrence of asyndeton that does not otherwise exist in chs. 14–17. Accordingly, it was identified as of probable Ur-John origin after the fact. Nevertheless, the Ur-John layer and John 21 together contain 90% of the gospel's uses of *oun*, while representing only 56.2% of the text of canonical John.

This distribution pattern reveals that the “author of Ur-John” was responsible for the excessive deployment of *oun*, using it with an

---

<sup>7</sup>  $197 / 78 = 2.53$  instances of *oun* per each percentage of text. The redactional expansions make up about 43%, or an additional 21% beyond the control texts. So  $21 \times 2.53 = 53$

extraordinary frequency of about seven times that of other NT writers. Conversely, the redactional expansions (excluding the adultery pericope), collectively comprise about nine chapters of text. The uses of *oun* in this material average about 1.6 per chapter, which is statistically on par with other NT works (e.g, Matthew, 2.0 times per chapter, Luke 1.9).

Nevertheless, critics will rightly question the degree to which these data are biased due to the fact that the control texts used in the reconstruction have been chosen in part due to the scarcity of *oun* in them. What is required are further data that are not related at all to the control text assumptions, and yet still point to Ur-John as a discrete document.

2. **Aramaic and the Presence of Asyndeton.** C.K. Barrett made a noteworthy observation in his commentary on John—that it was *probable that the author of John was accustomed to thinking and speaking in Aramaic* as well as in Greek.<sup>8</sup> Among his observations in support of this, he notes that asyndeton is common in Aramaic but not normally found in Greek other than in sentences beginning with a verb of speaking. Once these are excluded, Barrett cites 36 instances of asyndeton in John that suggest Aramaic origin or influence.<sup>9</sup> When cross-referencing Barrett’s citations against the Ur-John reconstruction, we find that 31 of the 36 are located in the Ur-John layer, and the remaining five are in John 21:

Occurrences of Asyndeton	Layer
1.40, 42, 45, 47	Ur-John
2.17	Ur-John
4.6, 7, 30	Ur-John
5.12, 15	Ur-John
6.23	Ur-John
7.32, 41	Ur-John
8.27	Ur-John
9.9, 13, 16, 35, 40	Ur-John
10.21, 22	Ur-John
11.35, 44	Ur-John

---

<sup>8</sup> Barrett, C.K., *The Gospel According to St. John, Second Edition*, 1978, p. 11

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7. Here Barrett claims that there are 39 instances of asyndeton, but only 36 of them are itemized in his list.

*The Ur-John Thesis*

12.22, 29	Ur-John
13.22, 23	Ur-John
16.19	Ur-John *
19.29	Ur-John
20.18, 26	Ur-John
21.3, 11, 12, 13, 17	John 21

*\* As noted in the Appendix, 16.16–19 is identified as a probable Ur-John text that has been transferred from its original location in 13.32–33.)*

Several observations may be noted. First, as with *oun*, the presence or absence of asyndeton is not a factor in the reconstruction procedure, for it has no bearing on whether a literary unit's extraction will have an impact on the perceived logical coherence of the remaining narrative. Thus, the fact that 31 of the 36 instances of asyndeton cited by Barrett reside in the reconstructed Ur-John text must be explained by other means. Second, the fact that five occurrences of asyndeton are present in John 21 along with nine uses of *oun* provides further support for the premise that this appendix had been added to Ur-John at an early stage of the gospel's development, and was subject to the same literary transmission influences that produced Ur-John. The data are consistent with the inference that both Ur-John and John 21 were originally composed in Aramaic. In short, the data suggest that the reason C.K. Barrett is able to detect that the author of John was "accustomed to thinking and speaking in both Aramaic and Greek" is that about 56% of the text of John (Ur-John + ch. 21) was composed in Aramaic, and about 44% (later 1<sup>st</sup> century recensions + the adultery pericope) was composed in Greek.

Third, as noted, the one odd instance of asyndeton that occurs in chs. 14–17 is in 16.19 which coincides precisely with the three anomalous uses of *oun* in this same block of text (16.17, 18 and 22); this odd confluence of "Ur-John features" warrants scrutiny. As noted in the Ur-John reconstruction (Appendix 1), 16.16–19 appears to be a narrative Ur-John unit that was originally located at or near 13.32–33, so it was flagged as probable Ur-John text once the asyndeton was identified as being co-located within the cluster of three rare uses of *oun* in chs. 14–17.

### 3. Historic Present Tense Verbs in John's Gospel

C. F. Burney observed that a common distinctive feature of the *Gospel of John* and the *Gospel of Mark* is their frequent use of verbs in the Historic Present tense. He finds 164 occurrences in John<sup>10</sup> and 151 in Mark. Matthew, though a much longer text, has only 78, and the use of the Historic Present is rare in Luke, with just four. So the authors of John and Mark are noteworthy for their frequent use of this verb construct. Burney argues that this is relevant to the question of Aramaic origin:

The use of the Historic Present in Mark and John strongly resembles a common Aramaic idiom in which, in a description of past events, the Participle is employed to represent the action described as in process of taking place.

...instances of this participial usage are found in the Aramaic chapters of the Book of Daniel.

The fact that in the 199 Aramaic verses of Daniel, we find no less than 99 instances of this participial usage describing a past action shows how highly characteristic of the language this idiom is. That this usage naturally lends itself to representation in Greek by the Historic Present or Imperfect is obvious to an Aramaic scholar.

That the frequent use of the Historic Present in Mark is due to Aramaic influence is maintained by Allen ... and by Wellhausen. It can be hardly doubted that in John also the same theory offers an adequate explanation of the same phenomenon.<sup>11</sup>

In Burney's analysis, he follows the conventional academic assumption that the *Gospel of John* is to be interpreted as a unified literary whole. He argues that the entire Greek text may be considered as derived from an Aramaic original, or at least subject to Aramaic influence, one of the indicators being the high frequency of the Historic Present. In this study, I propose that a primitive Ur-John narrative has been preserved within John, and it is *only* this primitive narrative that was originally composed in Aramaic. I further maintain that John 21 was rendered in Aramaic and appended to the Aramaic

---

<sup>10</sup> C.F Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford University Press, 1922, p. 87. Though Burney counts 164 occurrences in John, I locate only 162.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 88-91.

Ur-John at a very early stage of the gospel's development. This composition was subsequently rendered in Greek (most likely around 70 or soon thereafter), and all further redactional expansions were performed on the evolving Greek text. Thus, only "Ur-John + ch.21" are presumed to have originated in Aramaic.

It is therefore of keen interest to discover whether the 162 instances of the Historic Present in John are dispersed at random throughout the gospel, or whether they tend to be isolated to the Ur-John and John 21 material. I have cross-referenced the 162 citations of the Historic Present documented in Burney's treatise. The results are as follows:

<b>Historic Present Verb</b>	<b>Ur-John</b>	<b>Ch. 21</b>	<b>Redactional Expansions</b>
<u>agousin</u>	9.13, 18.28		
<u>apokrinetai</u>	12.23, 13.26,38		
<u>ballei</u>	13.5		
<u>blepei</u>	20.1	21.20	1.29
<u>blepousin</u>		21.9	
<u>didōsin</u>	13.26	21.13	
<u>egeiretai</u>	13.4		
<u>erchetai</u>	4.5,7 11.38, 12.12,15,22ab, 13.6, 18.3, 20.1,2,6,18,26	21.13	
<u>heuriskei</u>	1.41,43,45, 5.14		
<u>theōrei</u>	20.6,12,14		
<u>theōrousin</u>	6.19		
<u>lambanei</u>	13.26	21.13	
<u>legei</u>	1.21,36,38,39,41,43,45,46, 47,48 2.3,4,5,7,8,9, 4.7,9,11,15,16,17,19,21,25, 26,28,49,50 5.6,8, 6.5,8,12,20, 7.6,50 8.39, 9.12 11.11,23,27,39ab,40,41, 12.4,22 13.6,8,9,10,24,25,27,31,36, 37 18.4,5,17ab,26, 19.4,5,6,9,10,14,15,26,27,2 8,35 20.2,13,15ab,16,17,19,27,2 9	21.3,5,7,10 ,12,15,16, 17ab,19,21, 22	1.29,51 3.4, 4.3,4 11.7,24 14.5,6,8,9,22 18.3,8 19.37 20.2,2
<u>legousin</u>	9.17, 11.8,31, 12.22, 20.13	21.3	16.29
<u>martyrei</u>			1.15
<u>neuei</u>	13.24		
<u>tithēsin</u>			13.4
<u>trechei</u>	20.2		
<u>phainei</u>			1.5
<u>phēsin</u>	18.29		
<u>phōnei</u>	2.9		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>

The data in the table above reveal an extreme concentration of Historic Present verbs in the Ur-John layer of the gospel (roughly one every 3.5 verses), and an even higher concentration of this verb tense in John 21 (one every 1.4 verses). Conversely, the redactional expansions which consist of about 400 verses contain only 19 instances of Historic Present, or one every 21 verses. To the extent that the high frequency of Historic Present in the *Gospel of John* is an indicator of Aramaic origin, these data are consistent with the theory that Ur-John and John 21 were translated into Greek from Aramaic originals, while the redactional expansions to the gospel were not.

Furthermore, the high frequency of Historic Present verbs in John 21 correlate directly with the distributions of *oun* and asyndeton. Since there is a high concentration of *oun* and asyndeton in John 21, it is not surprising to find a high frequency of the Historic Present as well, which adds further weight to the theory that John 21 was added to the primitive Aramaic narrative at an early stage of the gospel's development.

As with *oun* and asyndeton, the presence or lack thereof of the Historic Present tense in a suspected interpolation has no bearing upon the logical coherence of the residual text in the reconstruction procedure used to isolate Ur-John. Since these three independent and unrelated grammatical features all show high concentrations in the Ur-John and John 21 strata, and are rare in the redactional expansions, these data collectively support the proposition that a primitive Ur-John narrative originally composed in Aramaic has been preserved in the canonical text by the gospel's redactors. The fact that the 56.2% of the canonical gospel represented by Ur-John + John 21 contains an isolated and extreme concentrations of grammatically unrelated elements such as *oun* **and** asyndeton **and** the historic present verb form is compelling evidence of the independent literary origin and transmission of Ur-John and John 21.

As a side note, the equally high frequency of Historic Present in the *Gospel of Mark* is worth contemplating. These data contribute to the suspicion that a proto edition of Mark may have been composed in Aramaic as well. The evidence strongly points to the inference that the story in John 21 was originally composed by the author of Mark as his conclusion beyond 16.8, and the data also suggest that this first post-resurrection appearance of Jesus was edited and appended to an

Aramaic Ur-John. But the greater implication is that Mark was writing in response to Ur-John. There are numerous indications that the author of Mark was in fact writing his gospel as a comprehensive rebuttal of Ur-John. The evidence for this will be presented in Chapter Five. However, the point to be made here is that if Mark was indeed writing a direct rebuttal of an Aramaic Ur-John, it would have been most culturally appropriate for his response to have been composed in Aramaic as well. In this event, the transfer of Mark's ending to Ur-John, though requiring editing to incorporate the obvious Johannine accommodations, would not have required a translation from Greek to Aramaic.

An Aramaic proto-Mark would also account for the many Aramaisms in Mark, including:

Boanerges “sons of thunder” (3.17)  
Beelzebul (3.22)  
talitha cum – “Little girl, get up” (5.41)  
Corban – offering to God (7.11)  
ephphatha – “be opened” (7.34)  
Rabbi (9.5)  
Bartimaeus – son of Timaeus (10.46)  
rabbouni (10.51)  
Hosanna (11.9–10)  
rabbi (11.21)  
Abba – father (14.36)  
o rabbi (14.45)  
Golgotha – place of a skull (15.22)

I do not wish to belabor the possibility of an Aramaic proto-Mark here, as ultimately the main thesis herein is not dependent upon it. It is simply an idea worth considering since the data point rather insistently in this direction. Yet it is also possible that the author of Mark's engagement with, and rebuttal of, an Aramaic Ur-John may account for the high concentration of Historic Present in the Greek Mark, as well as the general Aramaic influence that scholars have detected in the *Gospel of Mark*.

4. **Aramaic Translations.** Canonical John contains eight instances of Aramaic to Greek translation, as well as three references to “Thomas called the Twin”:

- 1.38 And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"
- 1.41 We have found the Messiah (which means Christ).
- 1.42: You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).
- 4.25 "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ)
- 9.7 "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent).
- 19.13 at a place called The Pavement, and in Hebrew, Gabbatha.
- 19.17 to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha.
- 20.16 She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

All eight of these translations reside in the Ur-John layer as reconstructed. They read as clarification details understandably included in the baseline narrative. In addition, the *Gospel of John* is unique among the four gospels in referring to the apostle Thomas as “Thomas called the Twin.” This is noteworthy for the fact that Thomas is derived from an Aramaic word meaning “twin,” and in the *Gospel of John* the name is usually followed by the translated Greek term for twin (*didymos*). The translation thus indicates the author’s awareness of the Aramaic meaning of Thomas, and a need or desire to clarify it for Greek readers. The first two citations of Thomas “called the Twin” are found in 11.16 and 20.24, both of which are in the Ur-John layer. The third reference occurs in the appendix John 21.2, a further data point consistent with an Aramaic John 21. Since the sample size is limited, one cannot draw definitive conclusions from this particular data set. Yet these data are at a minimum compatible with the theory that Ur-John originated as an Aramaic document.

However, there is one glaring anomaly related to Thomas. In the *Gospel of John*, he is in all cases referred to as “the Twin” *except* in 14.5. Here we find Thomas being cited without the translation. It is perhaps no surprise that this lack of translation occurs in ch. 14, which consists of words later revealed by the *paraclete* as forgotten words of Jesus. Under the Ur-John thesis, 14.5 is a redactional expansion composed in Greek and inserted into the gospel in a later recension. No translation would have been required.

## **A Convergence of Apparent Primitive Elements**

Therefore, four unrelated grammatical indicators each point to the conclusion that Ur-John was a discrete composition originally written in Aramaic. It is no surprise that the content of the Ur-John narrative appears to be decidedly primitive across the board. As discussed, the belittling of Peter's moral integrity and the rivalry over leadership status reflects a dispute that most likely would have been relevant prior to Peter's martyrdom. The debate as to whether Jesus or the John the Baptist was the true Messiah is also most likely to have taken place among Jews in Judea in the mid-first century, which increases the likelihood that would have been argued in Aramaic. The idea that Jesus had split from and competed with John the Baptist makes more intuitive sense as an authentic primitive historical remembrance, rather than a new twist on the Jesus tradition invented by a fourth evangelist at the end of the first century. Likewise, the indications that the disciples had been subject to arrest make little sense as a post-Synoptic embellishment. That Jesus is explicitly condemned for challenging the authority of Caesar ("*we have no king but Caesar*" 19.15) also reads as a primitive remembrance that was eventually swept under the rug by the Synoptics with their claim of a midnight trial for blasphemy. And of course, the recurring theme that Jesus performed signs to authenticate his Messianic identity has long been suspected as a primitive tradition drawn from a possible semeia source. It is a small step to the inference that this semeia source was actually the primitive Ur-John narrative preserved in canonical John, for all this primitive material appears in the Ur-John layer.

## **An Updated Formulation of the Ur-John Thesis**

Based upon the foregoing, the Ur-John thesis may be refined as follows:

1. Ur-John was first composed in Aramaic by or under the auspices of a leading archrival of Peter sometime during the middle of the first century, prior to the death of Peter, apparently in Jerusalem. This archrival was most likely the apostle John.
2. Ur-John was subsequently translated into Greek soon after 70 in the aftermath of the war. The editor who translated the Aramaic Ur-John into Greek was responsible for the excessive and idiosyn-

cratic use of *oun*, the frequent use of the Historic Present, the retention of asyndeton from the Aramaic original, and the production of Aramaic to Greek translations of key terms.

3. At the time of its translation into Greek, the material in John 21 had already been incorporated into the Aramaic Ur-John edition, thus accounting for its striking primitivity as well as its five instances of asyndeton, nine uses of *oun*, eighteen Historic Present verbs, and one citation of Thomas called the Twin.
4. The Greek translation of Ur-John+Jn21 subsequently underwent at least two and possibly three recensions during the final decades of the century, during which chs. 14–17, the other noted control texts, and related parallel interpolations throughout the gospel were incorporated in stages. According to the Ur-John reconstruction, approximately 56% of the canonical *Gospel of John* was first composed in Aramaic, while the remaining 44% consists of recension material that originated in Greek.

### **Distinctive Features of Ur-John**

The isolated Ur-John text provides a fascinating glimpse into the author's recollections and interpretations of Jesus as an apparent eyewitness. Among the striking features of Ur-John, in no particular order, are the following:

1. The author of Ur-John writes with four pressing objectives: (1) to argue that Jesus was the true, authentic Messiah and John the Baptist was not, (2) to argue that Peter was untrustworthy and morally unfit as a leader, (3) to promote himself as the rightful leading apostolic authority in the movement, and (4) to mitigate political tensions with Rome by remaining mute on the political speech of Jesus, omitting all kingdom rhetoric, contending that Jesus' primary adversaries were Pharisees and Jewish authorities as opposed to the Romans, and introducing the first attempt to absolve Pilate for the death of Jesus.
2. Regarding titles, the author of Ur-John recalls that Jesus was referred to as *Lord, Messiah/Christ, Rabbi, Teacher, king, and King of Israel*, as well as *king of the Jews* by his adversaries. He has no recollection of Jesus being referred to as *the Son*, or *Son of man*. These higher Christological titles reside exclusively in the redactional expansions.

3. Whether *Son of God* was used in Ur-John is questionable. Of the nine uses of *Son of God* in John, five appear in obvious Greek redactional layers where it is used without an accompanying title such as Christ or King of Israel (1.34, 3.18, 5.25, 10.36, 11.4). On three additional occasions it is used in tandem with another title: “*Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel,*” (1.49), “*I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,*” (11.27), and “*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” (20.31). In these three verses the references to *Son of God* could be deleted without harming the coherence of the passage—so, it appears as if it may have been a redundant reference inserted to bring the text into harmony with the later redactional material.

The one puzzling reference occurs in 19.7, “*We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.*” Since Ur-John recognizes Jesus as King of Israel, and in Jewish tradition the King of Israel is also known as a Son of God, this reference in 19.7 could be original and coherent within the Ur-John narrative—Jesus’ crime was to claim himself to be a king and “Son of God.” Thus, though the theological import of *Son of God* has been amplified in the later interpolations, it is possible that it existed in Ur-John as well, although perhaps only in 19.7.

4. The author of Ur-John is not aware of Jesus as the “one sent from heaven.” Frequent Johannine references to Jesus as the one sent from heaven, or to God as “*he who sent me*” are exclusive to later interpolations.
5. All of the “I AM” proclamations in John are located in the redactional layers, including *I am the resurrection and the life, the bread of life, the good shepherd, the true vine, the light of the world*. The author of Ur-John has no recollection of Jesus making such declarations. There is no indication in Ur-John that Jesus thought he was divine, or that the author believed he was divine. However, Jesus does appear to refer to himself as the bread that has come down from heaven, as well as living water.
6. References to God as “*the Father*” with the definite article occur 80 times in John. They are almost exclusively features of the interpolated material, with just three exceptions that appears to be rooted in Ur-John, “*neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father*” (4.22), “*because I go to the Father*”

(16.17), and "*Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?*" (18.11)

7. The author of Ur-John depicts Jesus as an aggressive, confrontational self-promoter who was put to death for challenging the authority of Caesar. The disciples appear to have been subject to arrest as well. 19.18 treats the two crucified with Jesus sympathetically and 19.31–32 draws further attention to their plight; the author has thus constructed this passage in a manner that encourages readers to infer that the two may have been disciples who had not escaped. The implications in Ur-John are that Jesus was perceived as an anti-Roman Messianic rebel, that the disciples were subject to arrest, and that the movement itself had been condemned as seditious.
8. The author of Ur-John has no recollection of Jesus teaching or speaking in parables or moral aphorisms. In Ur-John, the historical voice of Jesus has been muted—he is a Messiah without a message, other than to proclaim that he was the Messiah.
9. The author of Ur-John has no remembrance of Jesus promoting a *kingdom of God*, although he anticipates becoming King of Israel.
10. The author of Ur-John has no awareness of Jesus or the disciples performing exorcisms or encountering demonic spirits.
11. The author of Ur-John has no recollection of Jesus befriending tax collectors, or encouraging payment of taxes to Caesar.
12. There is no apocalyptic content in Ur-John. References to a *last day* are exclusive to the redactional inserts. Neither Jesus nor John the Baptist are represented as apocalyptic figures as they are in Matthew and Luke.
13. Ur-John indicates that Jesus was from Nazareth, that his father was Joseph, and that he had at least two unnamed brothers who did not believe in him. There is no confusion as to who Jesus' father was. His mother is unnamed. She is treated dismissively in the pericope of the wedding at Cana, but with compassion at the cross as one who would need to be cared for. In Ur-John, there is no mention of Jesus having sisters.
14. The author of Ur-John is aware of a tradition that the Messiah is to be descended from David and must come from Bethlehem, but

he considers it to be either erroneous or irrelevant (7.41–52). There is no claim in Ur-John that Jesus is descended from David, and no one refers to him as son of David.

15. The author of Ur-John records three separate instances of Jesus in dispute with religious authorities over the keeping of Sabbath law (5.1–16, 7.22–23, 9.13–16)
16. The author of Ur-John appears to believe Jesus was in his late forties. The reference to the temple being forty-six years in the making is likely intended as ironic double entendre (2.20–21). This is difficult to envision since Luke’s claim that Jesus was about thirty when he began his ministry is commonly accepted without question (Lk 3.23). Yet forty-six is a strangely specific number by any objective measure. It seems unlikely that anyone would have been aware that the temple had been under construction for precisely forty-six years at the time of this conversation, much less recorded it for posterity for inclusion in a gospel decades later. So “forty-six years” is a detail more likely to have come from the author’s imagination for some particular purpose. The explicit phrase “*he spoke of the temple of his body*” suggests that the author had intended an ironic allusion to Jesus’ age. Indeed, it would be readily interpreted as such by scholars were it not for the claim in Luke.<sup>12</sup> In addition, in 8.57 the author indicates that Jesus was not yet fifty years old, which one would typically say of a man in his mid-forties. It is therefore an independent indication of the author’s perception of Jesus’ age which is consistent with the forty-six years alluded to in 2.20–21.

### **The Collective Case for Ur-John**

There are sufficient data within the text of John itself to establish that a primitive gospel has been carefully preserved therein. The fact that independent and unrelated grammatical features such as *oun*, the Historic Present, and asyndeton all converge in high frequency just in material that

---

<sup>12</sup> By tradition Jewish men were not able to enter the priesthood until age 30. Thus, the reference in Luke may be an assumption based upon this tradition rather than actual historical knowledge. Luke’s grasp of historical detail is questionable based upon his belief that Jesus was born during a census of Quirinius in 6 AD, ten years after the death of Herod. The fact that Jesus was able to inspire the confidence of a significant following suggests that he may have been a more mature man than Luke indicates, so the tradition implied in John is historically credible.

appears on other grounds to be primitive should be alarming. There is no reason to imagine that an author would always deploy these unrelated grammatical features in tandem, but intermittently throughout the composition. There is also no reason to imagine that the use of these features would correlate in any tangible way to the logical coherence of the baseline narrative. This phenomenon cannot be explained on the theory that a late first century Fourth Evangelist was “writing” the gospel as an original composition out of his own creative literary impulses. To the contrary, it appears that the final redactor had little editorial control over the final product.

However, it has been my objective in this study not to rely exclusively on source or redaction criticism in the text of the *Gospel of John* itself to make the case for Ur-John’s existence. We may return to the other unrelated literary phenomena that point decisively toward the existence of Ur-John as a discrete primitive text, including the overtly hostile stance the BD/author has adopted toward the apostle Peter. This hostility was masked, indeed obliterated, by the addition of John 21 and the insertion of Peter’s Confession in 6.68b–69. These two interpolations were astoundingly effective. They were evidently all that was required to lead many scholars to believe that the *Gospel of John* had emerged out of a pro-Petrine tradition. Meanwhile, the methodical association of Peter with Judas, and the vilification of Peter as a coward, a liar, and an implied second betrayer of Jesus that has been carefully preserved in the text through John 1–20 either goes unnoticed entirely, or the implications of it go underappreciated. The odds are that the attack on Peter’s moral integrity was composed prior to his martyrdom as it would have breached the bounds of good taste to malign the character of a martyr after the fact.<sup>13</sup> The survival of the relentless castigation of Peter in the *Gospel of John* through ch. 20 indicates that remnants of a primitive narrative have been carefully preserved in the canonical text. It is an independent indicator of the existence of Ur-John that is unrelated to source and redaction criticism which focuses on the textual aporias and discontinuities.

That the negative assessment of Peter in John 1–20 has been forcefully repudiated by John 21 is a further indication of the acrimonious circumstances under which these texts were forged. Despite the candid belittling of the BD as tagging along behind Jesus and Peter while they discuss his fate

---

<sup>13</sup> Though the historicity of Peter’s martyrdom is sometimes questioned, we have seen evidence in Chapter 2 of the extreme primitivity of John 21 and its attachment to Ur-John in the mid-60s. The allusion to Peter’s crucifixion in John 21.19 is consistent with the tradition of his execution in 64, thus lending credence to the tradition.

between them, scholars have not recognized 21.20 as a sarcastic response to the BD/author's ironic denigration of Peter in 13.23–25. To the contrary, many prefer to interpret ch. 21 as a friendly continuum of Johannine tradition composed by an acolyte of the original author. This, I would submit, is a constitutional error. In my view, it is essential to recognize 21.20 as the redactor's cynical retort to 13.23–25. Unfortunately, many overlook this due to the genteel manner in which the scriptures are often interpreted.

That John 21 fits like a glove with structural precision as the finale of Mark beyond 16.8 is evident, per the data presented in Chapter One. But even this simple observation has remained elusive to an academy steeped in calcified theories that “John” was composed circa 100 CE, and that it reflects the beliefs of an “isolated Johannine community” which must have had little if anything to do with Mark. There is also the popular academic belief that the author of Mark intended to end his gospel at 16.8 for any one of several allegedly profound reasons that have been proposed. Of course, being able to imagine deep meaning in Mark's abrupt ending at 16.8 has no bearing on whether the text actually concluded at this point. For if the original ending of Mark is indeed missing, then scholars are simply reading profound meanings into the truncated text that the author never intended. However, it is indeed conceivable that any of the rationales that scholars have proposed for the abrupt termination at 16.8 may have also been understood by the redactors as a justification for truncating the gospel at 16.8 and leaving it in its apparent unfinished condition.

The existence of Ur-John provides the opportunity to resolve this enigma in an efficient manner. A primitive Ur-John text that predated Mark introduces the possibility of a transfer of Mark's ending to Ur-John that was concurrent with the release of Mark, eliminating the temporal objections that lurk in conventional theory. Furthermore, a compelling motive for such a transfer becomes apparent, for it would have eliminated the most glaring point of political discord between the original Mark and Ur-John, that of the status and authority of Peter. One can readily see that a transfer of Mark's conclusion to Ur-John would have been in the movement's best interest.

This observation that Ur-John, John 21, and the *Gospel of Mark* are closely related in common political discord entails a mandatory corollary— if the story in John 21 was originally composed as the finale beyond Mark 16.8, then the *Gospel of Mark* appears to have been composed, at least in part, as a political rebuttal of Ur-John. As the author of Ur-John had developed the three denials of Peter as evidence of his corruption and unworthiness, so the

author of Mark took up this challenge and transformed the three denials into the literary device by which Jesus anoints Peter as the sole shepherd going forward. This refutation of Ur-John by the author of Mark represents yet another independent vector of inquiry pointing to the existence of Ur-John as a discrete primitive text that pre-dated Mark. We turn to a consideration of this in the next chapter.