



Alfred Handel, stained glass of Jesus as the Good Shepherd at St. John the Baptist's Anglican Church, Ashford, New South Wales. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

JOHN 7-10

FEASTS OF TABERNACLES AND DEDICATION: JESUS'S FIFTH AND SIXTH DISCOURSES AND SIXTH MIRACLE IN JOHN

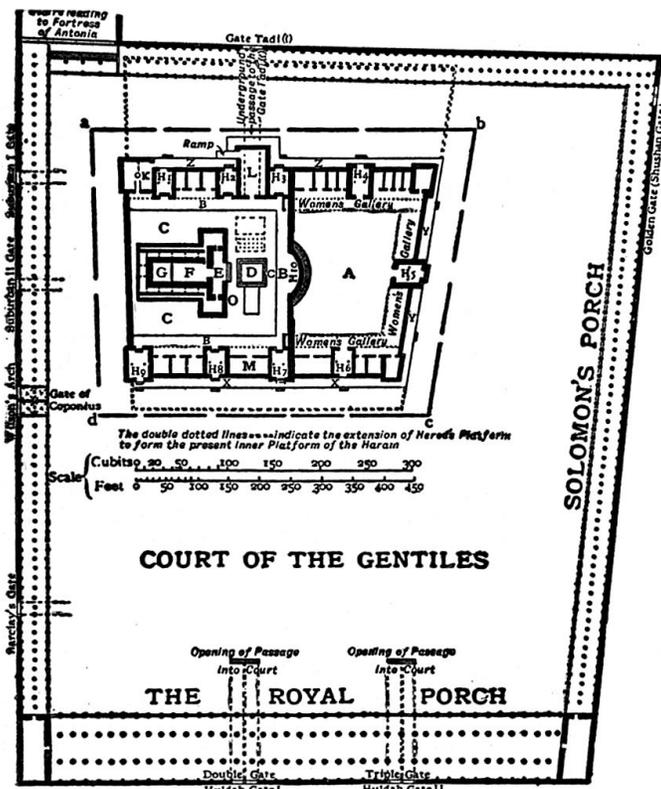
LYNNE HILTON WILSON

Introduction

John's Gospel is known as the spiritual Gospel. Jesus's discourses found in it can stretch us to help us see an eternal perspective and a spiritual view of life. In these four chapters, John includes discussions of many opposites: light and darkness, living water and spiritual thirst, eternal freedom and slavery to sin, spiritual inheritance and earthy lineage, physical and spiritual blindness, and good and bad shepherds.

Setting: Temple Mount Moriah

Herod's extension of Zerubbabel's temple included leveling Mount Moriah to create an enormous space of more than 172,000 square yards, approximately 33 to 36 acres (or 144,000 square meters).¹ About



Plan of Herod's Temple and Courts, from Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed. (1911), s.v. "Temple." Image via Wikimedia Commons.

twenty-seven soccer fields, or thirty-two American football fields, would fit on Herod's expanded temple mount—one of the largest in the Roman world. Rome's Forum was only half its size, and the Acropolis in Athens was one-fifth its size. The largest temple complex in the world at the time, Karnak in Upper Egypt—which the Egyptians built over two thousand years—was only a third as large. In the modern world, Salt Lake City's Temple Square covers ten acres, less than one-third the size of Herod's temple complex.²

The temple mount was beautifully paved and offered stunning views of the region. Over thirty acres of paved stones were divided into concentric rectangular courtyards, each progressively more sacred until the Holy of Holies at the center of the sanctuary. The outermost space and largest courtyard was known as the Court of the Gentiles. All people were allowed to gather there. People came from all over the Roman Empire to discuss and debate issues of life.

Along the exterior border of the rectangular Court of the Gentiles, Herod designed covered areas known as porches, halls, or cloisters. Each outer wall was covered by a porch with a flat roof supported by rows of Corinthian columns. The southern wall was the Royal Stoa, or royal porch, that was supported by 160 pillars arranged in four rows of 40 pillars each. Some of the pillars were one hundred feet high. The eastern retaining wall overlooked the Kidron Valley 450 feet below that rose again into the Mount of Olives. This porch was the most beautiful and was created with remains from King Solomon's palace. The columns were thirty-seven and a half feet high, each cut from a single block of marble.³

Feast of Tabernacles

The setting for the next three chapters (Jn 7–9) is in Jerusalem at one of the three major pilgrimage feasts at the end of the harvest known as the Feast of Tabernacles, "feast of ingathering [*sukkot*]" (Ex 23:16–17), or the Feast of Booths (Lev 23:39–44; Jdg 21:19). This feast happens in the early fall, about six months after the second Passover in Jesus's ministry (Jn 6:4). Jesus built His discourse around the setting. In appreciating the interplay between the feast and Jesus's sermon, it is helpful to know a few details about the Feast of Tabernacles.

- The feast fell in the early fall, on Chislev 14–21. Jews from around the Roman Empire came to Jerusalem to worship at their temple for seven days and to celebrate on the eighth day a holy convocation of rest. They remembered the Israelites’ forty years of wandering in the wilderness by creating little huts or booths out of branches and palm fronds. For the week of the feast, Israelite men lived in these makeshift tents as their ancestors had while traveling from Egypt to their promised land.⁴ (In the Book of Mormon, it appears that King Benjamin’s sermon also fell this on this holy week. Note that the Nephites lived in tents facing the temple, rehearsed the law, had a coronation, and made covenants around the time of the sermon.)⁵
- During the feast, Jews offered sacrifices, celebrated the harvest, and prayed for early rains. The priests enacted this as a ritual. Each day they formed a procession, carrying golden pitchers, and paraded up and down Mount Moriah to the pool of Siloam. They sang Isa 12:3 (“With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation”) as they filled golden pitchers with water and then carried them up the mount to the temple, where they poured out the water on the altar as a libation. In the procession they sang the Hallel psalms (Ps 113–118), which end, “Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: . . . send now prosperity” (Ps 118:25).
- The Court of Women was lit with massive eighty-five-foot-high menorahs in each of the four corners. They were, figuratively, trees of light and life.
- Anciently, the prophet Nathan dedicated Solomon’s temple during the Feast of Tabernacles, so the celebration often includes a temple motif.
- The Jews renewed their covenants and read the law during the feast.

Feast of Tabernacles, Scene 1: Jesus Goes from Galilee to Jerusalem—Jn 7:1–13

Jn 7:1. “*Jesus . . . would not walk in Jewry.*” Because the Jews in Jerusalem want to kill Jesus for breaking the Sabbath and attacking their oral traditions, He has stayed in Galilee for several months. He sent his disciples ahead to Jerusalem, and He follows later.

Jn 7:5. “*neither did his brethren believe in him.*” By the context, we interpret the word “brother,” *adelphos*, as referring to Jesus’s half-brothers (but the Greek word is also used for kin, countrymen, or disciples). It appears that during Jesus’s ministry, His siblings did not have much interest in following or faith in their big brother. Mk 6:3 and Mt 13:55 list four other sons born to Mary and Joseph—James, Joses, Juda, and Simon—as well as unnamed daughters.

Seemingly, most of Jesus’s miracles up to this point had been done in Galilee, so Jesus’s half-siblings encourage Him, “Shew thyself to the world” (Jn 7:4). Yet, their request for Jesus to go show the crowds His miracles sounds similar to Satan’s temptations. Do you recognize it as another form of the devil wanting Jesus to display His power at the temple for all to see? The author of John does not want us to

fall into the trap of thinking that signs precede faith, so he notes that their request for miracles in 7:3 did not lead to faith in 7:5.

After the Resurrection, Jesus's family was more actively involved in the growth of Christianity. His brother James became the bishop, evangelist, or leader in Jerusalem, and possibly even later was an Apostle.⁶ Tradition holds that he also became the author of the book of James. In AD 62, James was such a strong leader for Christianity that the Sanhedrin had him stoned. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Ananus "assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others . . . ; he delivered them to be stoned."⁷

Jn 7:6, 8. "*My time is not yet come . . . go ye up unto this feast.*" Jesus, not interested in human praise in the slightest, answers His siblings in a way that prophesies of His future glorification or return to His Father. His time of death and resurrection is not yet. When John records the phrase "go ye up" (7:8), he emphasizes the double meaning of "go up on the cross," which will become "the inevitable result of showing his glory in Jerusalem."⁸ John regularly uses wordplay and records Jesus's frequent use of words with double meanings (for example, living water, being born again, and drinking Christ's blood).

Jn 7:10 (HCSB). "*He also went up . . . secretly.*" Jesus's instructions for others to go up to the feast does not contradict his later decision to go to Jerusalem.

Jn 7:11–12. "*Jews sought him . . . much murmuring.*" John points out the division between the Jews. *Murmuring* literally means "guarded debate." Privately, many debated if He were a good man or a deceiver. At this point, the discussions were not in public "for fear of the Jews" (7:13). I think these verses apply to our generation too. There is lots of diversity in thought about who Jesus of Nazareth was, even among Christians.

Feast of Tabernacles, Scene 2: Jesus Teaches at the Temple—Jn 7:14–39

Jn 7:14. "*the midst of the feast.*" Jesus arrived on day three of four of the feast week. Herod's expansion to the temple provided large courtyards for gathering and teaching. The Court of the Gentiles was the largest area, but Jews preferred to meet in the Court of the Women for discussions and teaching because only Jews could gather there. (Ironically, even though the it was called the Court of the Women, women were not to join in the discussions but were secluded on a raised gallery along three walls.)

Jn 7:15 (NASB). "*How has this man become learned, having never been educated?*" This is the day of great tutors like the Greek Socrates and Aristotle and the Jewish rabbis Hillel and Gamaliel. Master teachers were quoted by students or disciples as the source of knowledge. Rabbinic literature is filled with "Rabbi So and So says . . ."⁹

Jn 7:16. "*My doctrine is . . . his that sent me.*" Jesus defends His teaching by explaining that He learned and passes on messages from God, His Father. He speaks His Father's words. John has used the word "sent" over thirty times so far in his Gospel, but here and in the next three chapters, it takes on

special meaning in a wordplay that becomes an important theme in this section. In Greek, one sent with authority is an *apostéllō*.

Jn 7:17. “do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.” Jesus outlines another favorite guideline to learn truth: live Christ’s teachings and see if they bring you to God. Jesus challenges His listeners to learn by experience. He is not trying to glorify Himself, only God.

Jn 7:19. “none of you keepeth the law.” Jesus remembers what happened the last time He was in Jerusalem—the Jewish leaders tried to kill Him for healing a man on the Sabbath. Now Jesus challenges them, and they deny their motives to save face.

Jn 7:24 (JST). “Judge not according to your traditions, but judge righteous judgment.” There are very few JST changes in this chapter, but this one is significant. We often judge according to our culture, perspective, and traditions. Jesus justifies His healing on the Sabbath on humanitarian grounds. If circumcision is appropriate on the Sabbath, why isn’t healing? In response, the Jews brush Him off as one possessed with a devil who is corrupting the Sabbath and teaching false doctrine. The problem was that according to the Jewish oral laws, healing made the body work; hence, “one may not perform an act of healing on the Sabbath.”¹⁰ For example, you couldn’t set a dislocated shoulder, take out a splinter, or even put cold water on an injury. Traditions like these are the ones that Jesus repeatedly attacked.

Jn 7:26. “Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?” The title Christ is Greek for *Messiah*, and in English, it means “Anointed One.” Initially, the earliest disciples used the phrase “Jesus the Christ” and only later in the epistles shortened it to “Jesus Christ.” In this situation, the Lord’s audience is divided as He does not fit their conception of the promised Messiah.

Jn 7:32. “sent officers to take Him.” The officers were the Levite temple police that kept order within the temple courtyard.

Jn 7:33. “I go unto him that sent me.” The police are sent by their leaders, but Jesus explains that He too has been sent and that He will go back and report. John includes these wordplays knowing that Jesus’s audience missed them.

Jn 7:34. “seek . . . not find.” Those who seek for Jesus without the proper motives or to do harm will not find Him. But those who meekly seek with a repentant and broken heart will find Him. Deut 4:29 taught, “Thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” Jesus’s message on seeking and finding opens the way for a discourse on how to find and accept Jesus.

Jn 7:35. “will he . . . teach the Gentiles?” John includes irony regularly—here it is the angry Jewish leadership’s proposition that Jesus teach the Gentiles, which is exactly what His Church will do.

Feast of Tabernacles, Scene 3: Last Day of the Feast—Jn 7:37–52

Jn 7:37. “If any man thirst, let him come unto me.” After seven days of watching the priests’ daily ceremony of walking up and down Mount Moriah to refill their pitchers of water as a petition for early

rains, the pilgrims in Jerusalem now heard Jesus proclaim Himself to be the real source of water. He enlightens them on how to receive eternal refreshment. But they do not recognize who it is that stands in their midst.¹¹ Jesus looks at both the Israelite history and Isaiah's summary of it: "They thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out" (Isa 48:21; see Isa 12:3). It was Jesus, as Jehovah, who empowered the prophet to receive water from the rock.

Note how Jesus associates the water of life with the tree of life. He is the source of living water, the true vine, and the heavenly bread.

Jn 7:38. "**He that believeth on me . . . shall flow rivers of living water.**" Water was the most important resource in ancient Israel. Clean water was essential to sustain life, yet it was a limited commodity. Unlike rainwater stored in a cistern, "living water" flowed and was pure enough to drink. Jesus speaks of flowing water as a symbol for how He, and later the Holy Spirit, will offer life. Jesus refers to Ps 78:15–16 and 104:41 and equates that water to Himself. Without drinking that water or internalizing His teachings, we cannot attain eternal life.

The symbol of water in the Bible gives a powerful image, like "mighty rushing waters" (Isa 17:12–13). In the context of living water, even the great flood and Noah's ark become symbols of our future Redeemer. Noah, and thus all humanity, and all land-dwelling animals were saved by water and wood—just as Christ saves through baptism and acceptance of His sacrifice on the cross.

It is through the Holy Spirit that we hear God's voice. The Spirit also is the agent by which the Atonement is efficacious in our lives. Jesus suffered for us, and His Atonement covers our sins if we repent, but the Spirit is the agent that carries out the atoning gift and cleanses our souls.¹²

Jn 7:39 (JST). "**the Holy Ghost was promised unto them who believe, after that Jesus was glorified.**" The Prophet Joseph Smith's addition seems to say that God's Spirit was not felt in the same way during Jesus's life as it was after. If taken in the context of the whole verse, this promise may mean that Jesus's words are internalized by people through the Spirit.

Division among the Jews—Jn 7:40–52

Jn 7:40. "the Prophet." This reference goes back to Moses's prophecy from Deu 18:18–19: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." This prophet is the promised Messiah. The Jews did not see Jesus as a new Moses, though. Yet the Jews' great Lawgiver, Moses, was just a type of the Lawgiver to come, the source of living water from the rock and of eternal life. Hos 12:10 teaches that the lives of the prophets were to typify that of the coming Messiah. We see this all the way back to Adam. Jesus was also a new Adam, the next "son of God" (1 Cor 15:47).

Jn 7:41. “Shall Christ come out of Galilee?” John’s record of these questions suggests he knew Jesus was born in Bethlehem even though most of Jesus’s listeners assumed that He was born in Nazareth. John has already emphasized the question, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1:46; see also Mk 1:9). It appears that the birth accounts at the beginning of Luke’s and Matthew’s Gospels were written last because no reference is made to that information throughout the Gospels and those narratives can stand alone.¹³ Most first-century Jews, not just Herod’s chief priests and scribes, found a scriptural relationship between Bethlehem and the Messiah.

Throughout the Gospels it is assumed that Jesus’s literal father was Joseph: “Whence hath this man this wisdom . . . ? Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Mt 13:54–55), and so the underlying assumption of the crowd in Jerusalem is that Jesus was human. John’s silence emphasizes his knowledge of Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem.

Jn 7:45–46. “Why have you not brought him? . . . Never man spake like this.” Even though the Jewish leaders do not believe, the temple police acknowledged Jesus’s powerful words.

Jn 7:50–51. “Nicodemus saith . . . Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him . . . ?” The Jewish leaders claim that no one who is educated has been convinced of Jesus’s messiahship. Then the previously timid Nicodemus provides a witness that some of the educated class did hear and believe. “Nicodemus is the living proof that in claiming knowledge they are ignorant, but his plea for justice is met with contempt.”¹⁴

Feast of Tabernacles, Scene 4: Woman Called an Adulteress—Jn 8:1–11

Jn 8:1 (NIV). “Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.” All four Gospels record that when Jesus was in Jerusalem, He often spent His days teaching at the temple and His nights outside the city wall in the olive orchards. From the temple on Mount Moriah, He would have walked down the sloped hillside to the seasonal brook Kedron and then over the base of the Mount of Olives that rises up on the opposite side, or He would have walked across the bridge connected the temple mount to the mount of Olives to the east.

Jn 8:4. “this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.” The best Greek manuscripts of John do not include this story. Some have it in Luke, where the Greek matches better.¹⁵ In any case, the story is another no-win situation for Jesus. If He authorizes death by stoning, he violates Roman law; if He advocates for mercy, He violates the Mosaic law.¹⁶ It appears that the whole thing is set up to ensnare Jesus. If the woman truly had been “caught in the act,” where is the guilty man? The Pharisees use the poor defenseless woman as a pawn—possibly she was a rape victim. Women had only a few rights at that time, and they couldn’t testify or act as legal witnesses even to defend themselves.¹⁷

Jn 8:5. “Moses . . . commanded us.” Repeatedly the law of Moses requires that anyone who breaks the law of chastity be stoned.¹⁸ Some biblical scholars wonder whether the Sanhedrin had already tried her before she was brought to Jesus to see if He can prophetically duplicate the council’s verdict.¹⁹ The question

that the scribes pose requires Jesus to violate a law in either answer. The battle between the Jews and Romans played a significant role in the Jews' anticipation and acceptance of their promised Messiah.

Jn 8:6. “This they said . . . to accuse him.” Jesus refuses to play the Pharisees' game and appears to ignore them. He bends down and draws in the dirt. Interestingly, in Roman legal practice, the judge first wrote the sentence and then read it aloud.²⁰ Scholars debate what Jesus wrote in the dirt. An old Christian tradition traced to Jerome suggests that Jesus wrote the sins of the accusers. Another tradition connects this with Dan 5:24, and yet another suggested that He wrote Ex 23:1: “You shall not join hands with a wicked man” (ESV). Possibly the writing dealt with judgment. All is mere speculation since the author was silent on this point. John did not think what Jesus wrote was important enough to record and instead focused on the relationship between the woman and Jesus.

Jn 8:7. “He that is without sin . . . cast a stone.” Jesus's answer put the burden back on the questioners. This is a good example for us of handling unrighteous judgment—leave it alone. I think it is admirable that the accusers were honest enough with themselves to allow their consciences to convict them. Or perhaps they left because Jesus did not respond as hoped. The point is that we are *all* sinners.

Jn 8:11 (JST). “go and sin no more. And the woman glorified God from that hour, and believed on his name.” An additional lesson can be learned here from the JST, which suggests that the woman was soft hearted and became a converted witness of Jesus. The scene closes in great drama: the sinless Jesus and the sinful women stand alone.²¹ In the ancient world women were horrifically abused, and Jesus wanted to free this woman from whatever had caused the situation. We usually use this story to tell how Jesus as the serene Judge balances justice and mercy or else to illustrate that Jesus does not condone the sin but forgives the sinner. We all can learn from the Lord's great challenge to “sin no more.”

Feast of Tabernacles, Scene 5: Jesus's Sixth Discourse—Light of the World— Jn 8:12–20

Jn 8:12 (NIV). “I am the light . . . never walk in darkness.” Jesus announces Himself as the Creator. In the beginning God created light, thus making Jesus's claim literally and figuratively true. The imagery of this claim flows from the Feast of Tabernacles. For a week all have seen the great golden lampstands that stood eighty-five feet high in the four corners of the temple courtyard. These lampstands represent the pillar of light that blazed at night to guide the children of Israel while wandering in the wilderness. Their light seems to have prompted this sermon, allowing Jesus to announce His messianic fulfillment of this festival. As the Creator, He is the source of all light, including the pillar of light given in the wilderness.

As the Light of the World, Christ exposed the depths of moral and spiritual darkness and called His disciples to do the same (Mt 5:14). Yet, we can only do that when we reflect His light. Jesus taught the Nephites, “Hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up” (3 Ne 18:24).

This discussion of light also recalls the Urim and Thummim (meaning “lights and perfections”), which also symbolizes Jesus’s power to enlighten with truth. Jesus fulfills Isa 60:1–3: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” Many scriptures describe the Creator’s relationship with light.²²

John’s Gospel includes seven titles for Jesus that use the divine name “I AM.”

- The Bread of Life (Jn 6:35, 41, 48, 51)
- The Light of the World (Jn 8:12, 58; 9:5; 12:46)
- The Door of the Sheep Fold (Jn 10:7, 9)
- The Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11, 14)
- The Resurrection (Jn 12:25)
- The Way (Jn 14:6)
- The Vine (Jn 15:1, 5)

Jn 8:14–16. “*my record is true. . . . Ye judge after the flesh . . . my judgment is true.*” Jn 5 and 7:51–53 also addressed the theme of witnesses in judgment. The Jews from the second temple era held the law of witnesses as essential. The Jewish holy writ, the Law and the Prophets, witnesses of Jesus and the disciples witness of Him, yet the Pharisees do not hear these other voices. Jesus tells them that because they have rejected this witness, they do not know how to judge.

Jn 8:18. “*I . . . bear witness . . . and the father that sent me beareth witness of me.*” Jesus acknowledges that two witnesses are required by the law, so He explains that He and His Father testify of the same truths. This makes Jesus’s argument irrefutable. It also reflects John’s theme of unity between the Father and Son.

Jn 8:19. “*Where is thy Father?*” The Jews assumed Jesus’s father was a mortal. Ironically, the people ask to see the Father “while the image of the Father is standing before their eyes.”²³ They thought they knew Jesus. But many generations have stood in their same shoes.

Jn 8:20. “*in the treasury.*” Within the temple the first level of sacred space was the Court of the Women, a large open courtyard where men gathered to discuss, teach, and learn. Along three of the outside walls of that courtyard were covered colonnades. Underneath the portico were thirteen chests for charitable contributions. This is likely the place referred to as “the treasury.”²⁴ At times the contributions had become corrupted, but they were supposed to go toward the sacrifices. Jesus is the sacrifice, and this location speaks of Jesus’s message.

Discussion with the Jews—Jn 8:21–29

Jn 8:21 (ESV). *“you will die in your sin.”* The KJV word “sins” is singular in Greek (and all other English translations I found). What was the sin Jesus referred to? Jn 8:24 repeats this and adds, “For if ye believe not that I am he,” which suggests that the sin is refusing to believe Jesus. All other sins are merely an outgrowth of that.

Jn 8:22. *“Will he kill himself?”* This verse screams with irony—in a few pages, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd who will voluntarily lay down His life for His sheep.

Jn 8:23. *“I am not of this world.”* Jesus also taught this to Nicodemus in Jn 3:13–15. John often recorded the Lord using opposites. The comparison makes the differences more salient. In a sense, we too can be not of this world when we do not value worldliness. When we follow Jesus, we seek a better world. This is a regular theme in the Book of Mormon.²⁵

Jn 8:24. *“if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”* John records dozens of “I AM” statements spoken by Jesus, all of which build to the dialogue at the end of this sermon. Jesus refers to Himself as the God of Israel, Moses’s leader from the burning bush to the top of Sinai.

Jn 8:25. *“Who art thou?”* The Jews repeat their question to Jesus, but He has already answered them in several ways. His messiahship should have been apparent through His miracles, discourses, and other actions. The problem is the people do not exert the faith necessary to hear, see, or feel it, so they keep asking without hearing His answers. Hearing the Lord’s answers requires faith and meekness.

Jn 8:26 (ESV). *“I declare to the world what I have heard from him.”* Jesus claimed two witnesses: His own and that of His Father. With God as the second witness, there should not be any question about Jesus’s witness being true. Unfortunately, many do not believe either witness yet. Jesus prophesies that the people will not believe until He is lifted up at His Crucifixion and then later at the Ascension. As God lifts Jesus up, He draws us up to Him as well.

Jn 8:29. *“I do always those things that please Him.”* At this point, the Father had never left Jesus. Perhaps this is why that awful moment on the cross was even harder for Him. Just as God was always with Jesus because Jesus always did what His father asked, for us to always feel the Spirit, we must likewise “do always those things that please” God.

“The truth will make you free”—Jn 8:30–36

Jn 8:31. *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples.”* Jesus instructed those Jews who believed His words to continue, which is also translated as, “hold,” “abide,” “remain,” or “obey” (NIV, ESV, NAB, CEV).

Jn 8:32. *“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* By learning more truth, we will find ultimate freedom. Jesus’s Atonement and doctrine will free us from sin. On the other hand, Satan’s lies enslave us. Jesus teaches that of the many bondages we can experience in mortality, bondage to sin is the worst. We must seek real freedom and peace, not political counterfeits (Jn 8:36).

Jn 8:33. “We be Abraham’s seed.” The Jews’ nationalistic pride is ironic in light of the fact that the Romans ruled Jerusalem right then (and it had previously been under Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Greek rule). The people did not understand that Jesus did not speak to them of political freedom. Throughout John, Jesus’s audiences are often on a different level of understanding and miss the significance of Jesus’s messages.

Jn 8:34. “the servant of sin.” This teaching is even more powerful when we realize that the word *servant* could also mean “slave” in Greek. One-third of the Roman Empire and one-half of those in Jerusalem were enslaved or in servitude. Jewish and Roman culture was steeped in social hierarchy. The people understood what it meant to obey a master and be a servant to a mistress. Their social cast was generational, as people rarely married outside of their class rank.

Paul and Peter later repeat Jesus’s teaching: “Ye were the servants of sin,” and “servants of corruption.”²⁶ In God’s kingdom, we can become free through receiving and living the truths taught there. Our Master invites us to become joint heirs if we leave the servitude of Satan by forsaking our sins and serving Jesus (Rom 8:17).

Children of Abraham or the devil

Jn 8:39. “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.” Abraham was the most important person in the genealogy of the Jewish people. The Jews had replaced the responsibility of Abraham’s posterity to bless the earth with the selfish hope of being blessed “into the kingdom of God no matter what their personal lives had become,”²⁷ believing that their genealogy could protect them from God’s wrath. Jesus and John the Baptist repeatedly spoke out against this false notion (Mt 3:7–10; 8:11–12; Lk 16:24). Jesus taught that the Jews’ genealogical link to Abraham was not enough. One needs a heart like Abraham’s in order to be his child. Jesus restored the truth that in heaven we are judged on our own merits to determine one’s eternal inheritance. Only if one acts like Abraham is one worthy of being his descendant. The same holds true with being a descendent of God the Father.

Sinners are not of God

Jn 8:41. “We be not born of fornication.” With this response, the Jews may have been defending their birthright from Abraham, or perhaps they were alluding to potential rumors of Jesus’s birth being illegitimate. The Jews’ response suggests they may have understood some of the doctrine of premortality. (Among modern Christianity, a premortal life is unique to the Restoration.)

Jn 8:42. “If God were your Father, ye would love me.” Jesus tries to teach a higher law—our mortal birthright is not as important as our spiritual adoption. Jesus challenges the Jews’ status as God’s people, but they have become so obdurate that they can’t hear His message. In our dispensation, Jesus restored that we must choose to be His chosen people by our actions: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son

of God. I am the life and the light of the world. . . . [As] many as receive me, to them will I give power to become the sons of God” (D&C 11:28, 30).

Jn 8:44. *“Ye are of your father the devil.”* Jesus first pointed out that the fault finders were acting as children of the devil. Satan is the father of contention. He became a liar and was self-serving before the Council in Heaven. He lied in the Garden of Eden and deceived our first parents by usurping the Lord’s role and counterfeiting God. However, at one point in his first estate, he was a bright light; the name Lucifer means “shining one” or “morning star.”

Jn 8:46 (CSB). *“Who among you can convict me of sin?”* The juxtaposition of this question with story of the woman convicted of adultery is interesting. In Jn 8:7–9, the scribes and Pharisees admit they have all sinned and convict themselves. Jesus has no sin. Isaiah prophesied, “He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth” (Isa 53:9; see Heb 4:15).

Jn 8:47 (JST). *“He that is of God receiveth God’s words.”* The JST changes “heareth” to “receiveth,” thereby emphasizing the need for disciples to actively participate as God’s children.

Jesus declares His messiahship and is rejected

Jn 8:49. *“I have not a devil; but I honour my Father.”* The Jews return the blow (from Jesus’s accusation in Jn 8:44) and call Jesus a Samaritan and say He is possessed with a devil. The Samaritans, enemies of the Jews for centuries, were famous for their magicians and diabolical possessions.

We find an interesting juxtaposition here. In Jn 4, the Samaritans accept Jesus as their Messiah, one who is greater than Moses. But here, these Jews reject His divinity and call Him a devil and Samaritan. Jesus warns them that such blasphemy will be judged by the Father.

Jn 8:51. *“keep my saying.”* Keeping is more than hearing; Jesus asks disciples to “hear and obey.” Similarly, “never see death” is not referring to mortal death, which comes to most mortals, but to the promise of eternal life (see D&C 88:3–7).

Just as Jesus has done in many other conversations, when the audience refuses to understand or cannot grasp His message, He adds something totally unexpected or shocking to shake them up and get them thinking in a different direction. The jolt comes when He promises that those who keep His saying will not die.

Jn 8:53. *“Art thou greater than . . . Abraham, which is dead?”* The conversation is beautifully set up for Jesus to testify of His messiahship. After hearing the startling news that some will not die, the attackers immediately find fault in Jesus’s logic. Their greatest ancestor has died, so Jesus must be speaking nonsense. They cannot understand Jesus without stretching their view to see an eternal perspective. At times we have the same problem. We see on a physical plane instead of a spiritual one, so we don’t understand God’s direction.

Jn 8:58. *“Before Abraham was, I am.”* This is the most direct and intentionally stated divine “I AM” statement in John’s Gospel. Moses asked God for His name and was told, “I AM THAT I AM: and he

said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Ex 3:14). The names for God became so sacred that the Jews did not use them. Even when reading their holy writ, they vocalized “Lord,” ‘ā-ḏō-nî, instead of pronouncing the name Jehovah (*Yah-weh*, יהוה). Jesus’s bold statement was extremely offensive to the Jews. He placed Himself above Moses and Abraham and even as an equal to God. In their ears, this was blasphemy. They missed that Jesus was Emanuel, “God with us.”

John’s Gospel records Christ using “I AM” statements forty-one times to declare His messianic divine nature, and the Synoptic Gospels record these statements seventeen times. Someone charged with blasphemy was usually punished by being stoned to death. We don’t know whether the Romans gave the Sanhedrin power to inflict capital punishment, but the Sanhedrin tried on multiple occasions (see, for example, Act 7:59).

Feast of Tabernacles, Scene 6: Jesus’s Sixth Miracle—Healing the Man Born Blind—Jn 9:41

Jn 9 describes a triumph of light over darkness. As a sign that Jesus is the Light, He gives sight to the blind. The healing of the blind was a sign of the promised Messiah as no one in the history of the world had ever healed blindness before Jesus. In the follow-up discussion after the miracle Jesus declares that physical blindness is not caused by sin, but spiritual blindness is.

Jn 9:1. “Jesus passed by.” Jesus is still in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles. It is now the Sabbath (see Jn 9:14). Even though some Jews wanted to stone Him in the last scene, Jesus is not in hiding but walks in a public place and is about to demonstrate something that will draw even more attention to Him. He also is about to provide evidence for everything he just talked about: He is the Light of the world, He is the righteous judge, He is the Messiah, and He is the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. This is one of the boldest examples He offers in Jerusalem that He is the Son of God.

Jn 9:1. “blind from his birth.” John emphasizes that this man’s blindness is not from an accident or illness. (Matthew, Mark, and Luke include five other accounts of Jesus healing the blind because it was an important sign of the Messiah.) Jews wrongly assumed that God gave birth defects, afflictions, illnesses, and premature death to people because of sin. This belief perpetuated false conceptions about disabilities.²⁸ The rabbis debated over whose fault birth defects were: the parents’ or the child’s?²⁹ Some Rabbis interpreted Ex 20:5 as saying the sins of the parents could leave a mark on their infants. They went as far as supposing that an infant could sin in utero.³⁰ Jesus attacked this fallacy by healing the man born blind.³¹

Jn 9:2. “who did sin?” A group of Jesus’s disciples call Him Master (or *rabbi* in Greek). This is John’s first reference to disciples since chapter 6. The disciples were so immersed in the cultural baggage of seeing disabilities and trials as punishments that Jesus had to correct them.

The disciples’ question hints at knowledge of a premortal existence.³² This notion of a pre-earth life may have been maintained or fostered by scriptures like Jer 1:5: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee” (see also Job 38:4, 7; Ps 82:6).

Jn 9:3. “Neither hath . . . sinned.” Jesus does not address a premortal life but attacks the heresy that all disabilities result from sin. Jesus teaches that the real reason this man was born blind was so that God could demonstrate His glory in the miracle about to happen. This man had a premortal mission to be a witness of the Messiah’s healing. Nowhere in the Old Testament are the blind healed. That was a miracle reserved to the promised Messiah: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened.”³³

Jn 9:4. “work the works of him.” Jesus’s mission was dedicated to doing the Father’s work. The same is true for all disciples’ missions. The JST adds, “While *I am with you; the time cometh when I shall have finished my work, then I go unto the Father.*” When Jesus is present it is daytime, but after He is put to death, it will be night.

Jn 9:5. “I am the light of the world.” John ties this story back to Jesus’s discourses in chapters 7 and 8. Jesus now puts action to His words and will act out the message as another witness of His divinity. Jesus offers a demonstration of light and darkness with a faith-filled man who receives sight.

Jn 9:6. “he spat on the ground.” John mentions where Jesus spat because spitting on the ground was a form of breaking the Sabbath. (The oral laws took the thirty-nine forbidden works on the Sabbath and divided them into hundreds of rules. You could spit on a rock but not on the ground because it was considered cultivating).³⁴

Jn 9:6. “made clay . . . and he anointed.” The reference to working with dirt or clay evokes the Creation. God created Adam from the dust in Eden. Jesus’s miracle also evokes a story from Enoch: “And the Lord spake unto Enoch, and said unto him: Anoint thine eyes with clay, and wash them, and thou shalt see” (Mose 6:35). The title Messiah means “Anointed One.” It is as if Jesus shares His anointing with the blind man. Early Christians also anointed their eyes in initiation rites.³⁵

Jn 9:7. “wash in the pool.” Jesus had the blind man wash off the mud in the Pool of Siloam, near the temple. This is reminiscent of Elisha’s healing of Naaman in the Jordan River (2 Kng 5:10–13). The Lord sends the blind man on this quest to wash rather than just healing him immediately—almost as a test of faith or as a representation of the teaching that “faith without works is dead” (Jam 2:26). The early church fathers Tertullian and Augustine saw this washing in the Pool of Siloam as symbolic of baptism and used it to prepare converts for baptism.³⁶

Jn 9:7. “pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent).” Siloam, “sent,” symbolically corresponded to Jesus as the One sent from God. This is a favorite theme in John. Up to this point in his Gospel, we find the word “sent” used thirty-three times in reference to a divine commission (and three times in common use). It was to this Pool of Siloam that the procession of Levites went to fill their golden pitchers on the “last and great day” of the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:37) to bring water to pour over the sacrifice in memory of water from the rock of Rephidim (Ex 17:1–6). Archeologists have identified two possible locations for the pool of Siloam.³⁷ Josephus tells us that in his day the water there was “sweet and abundant.”³⁸

Shortly before this miracle, Jesus made an illusion to the Pool of Siloam when He cried, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (Jn 7:37). Then Jesus sends the blind man to the same pool to

wash off the clay from his eyes. The man's healing comes only when he is washed or baptized by the "one sent." Symbolically, Jesus sends all disciples to wash and see. God gives new sight and light to those in darkness. However, those who were blind in their sins remain in darkness.³⁹

Three Interrogations

1. Neighbors—Jn 9:8–12

Jn 9:11. "anointed . . . washed . . . received sight." As the healed man tells his story to his neighbors, he uses verbs that have double meanings to John's readers. They speak emblematically of initiatory promises that the early Christians practiced.⁴⁰

Jn 9:12. "Where is he?" This question is applicable today for all of us. Sadly, the healed man did not know the answer. I presume that the crowds who came as pilgrims for the feast made it difficult for Jesus and the man to reunite. It appears that this interrogation helped the man realize the truth of who Jesus was. Because we have the story, I assume the man became a devoted disciple of Christ after his healing, but miracles do not replace the need for faith.

2. Pharisees—Jn 9:13–34

Jn 9:16. "this man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath." The next interrogation unfolds when the neighbors bring the healed man to the Pharisees. The man tells them the same simple truth. The Pharisees were trying to condemn Jesus for something. Like the healing at Bethsaida, this miracle happened on the Sabbath. Jesus had kneaded the clay with His spit to make mud, which was against the oral laws. In Jewish thought, since the man's life was not in jeopardy, the healing should have waited for another day.

John's theme of imminent judgment is brought out again. Underlying the Pharisee's belief is the understanding that if God worked miracles through a rabbi, then God approves of the rabbi's teachings. These Pharisees cannot get over their traditional view of the Sabbath even though Isa 56:2; 58:13 taught that the Sabbath was a time to do God's work. Instead, for generations Isaiah's perspective was overshadowed by the adopted oral laws.

Jn 9:17. "What sayest thou of him . . . ? He said, He is a prophet." To help settle the dispute, the Pharisees ask for the healed man's perspective, and he testifies that Jesus is a man of God. The healed man does not know much about Jesus yet, but he knows what is most important.

Jn 9:20–21. "His parents answered . . . ask him." Blind men were disqualified from bearing a legal witness according to a strict reading of Lev 5:1. Yet the healed man can now see, so he can testify. This also tells us that the healed man was of legal age to testify, so he was at least thirteen and probably over twenty years old.⁴¹

This scene also addresses those too fearful to testify. To the early Christian community this was a matter of those who died for the faith and those who weakly denied their beliefs. The parents witness only the

obvious—their son was born blind. They are cowards in the face of the questioning Pharisees and shy away from acknowledging Jesus’s great miracle. The parents fear excommunication and losing their place in society more than they want to stand up for their son’s healer.

Jn 9:24. “Give God the praise.” This phrase was an old oath. Ironically, the blind man does give God the glory by telling the truth about Jesus’s healing, but the Jews deny the miracle as a sign or witness of His messiahship.⁴²

Jn 9:25. “I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” The healed man’s courageous answer to the Pharisees borders on sarcasm. This opens a dialogue that lasts for ten verses and is one of the best in the New Testament.

Jn 9:27 (JST). “ye did not believe.” This one-word change offers a significant change in message from “hear” to “believe.” Why were the Pharisees not content with the repeated answer? Are they trying to trap the man as well as Jesus in his words? They ask if Jesus has miraculous power, and John in the text answers a resounding yes. The law of Moses spoke against magicians, and it appears the Pharisees class Jesus in this category.

Jn 9:28. “we are Moses’ disciples.” Many rabbis did not believe in *another* Moses (or Lawgiver). If they were Moses’s disciples, they would be followers of Jesus too. The problem was that at the end of the second temple period, the law of Moses had become contaminated with the oral laws so that it no longer clearly pointed to the coming of Messiah. Sadly, those who reject Jesus are disciples of the devil, not Moses (Moro 7:16–17). Moses’s and David’s lives foreshadowed that of the promised Messiah to help the people recognize Him as a great king.

Table 1. Parallels between Jesus and Moses and David

Parallels with Moses	Parallels with David
Wicked kings tried to kill Moses and Jesus at birth	Came when God had rejected those in authority
Meek	Came from Bethlehem
Went to the wilderness to commune with God	Came through Jesse
Fasted forty days, confronted by Satan	Good shepherds
Called from Egypt to fulfill prophecy	Called “beloved son” (the meaning of the name David)
Served as mediators, judges, and redeemers of Israel	Overlooked
Miracle workers—including controlling the elements	Destroyed the enemy of Israel (Goliath, Satan)
Turned water red (blood/wine)	Anointed to be kings of Israel
Lawgivers and restorers	Became kings at age thirty
Miraculously fed thousands of people	Sacrificed on Mount Moriah to stop (the plague of) death
Carried by the Spirit to a mountain and shown the world	
Healed by looking up with faith	
Rejected when first came to redeem Israel	
Brought the children of Israel to the promised land	

Jn 9:30. *“ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.”* The healed blind man points out Pharisees’ faulty logic. The man references the well-known sign of the Messiah (Jn 9:6). If Jesus brought sight, why isn’t He recognized as the Messiah? Even though it appears that the Pharisees do not change their hearts through this conversation, the healed man strengthens his faith by defending Jesus and coming to ultimate truth. Interestingly, the persecution increases his belief. This conversation has similarities with the Lord’s conversation with Nicodemus. Both men have an uncertainty about the divinity of Jesus and both initially do not hear with faith. (Fortunately, Nicodemus developed more faith later and became a key figure at Jesus’s burial.)

Jn 9:33 (JST). *“except he be of God.”* This change ensures that God performed this miracle; it is not a magic trick. For scriptures on the messianic healing of the blind, see Ps 146:8; Is 35:5; 42:7. Look at the progress in the man’s testimony between Jn 9:11, when he identifies the healer as “a man they called Jesus”; Jn 9:17, when he calls Him “a prophet”; Jn 9:33, when he says Jesus is “from God”; and Jn 9:37, when he calls Him “the Son of Man.” Simultaneously, the antagonists decrease their faith and vilify Jesus (Jn 9:15–17, 29, 34).

Jn 9:34. *“they cast him out.”* The Pharisees begrudge the man born blind and those whom they feel are unclean. They resort to condemning the man as a sinner and excommunicate him from the synagogue.

3. Jesus—Jn 9:35–41

Jn 9:35. *“Jesus heard . . . and . . . found him.”* Interestingly, the healed man does not go find Jesus on his own. But fortunately for him (and all of us), Jesus seeks him out. His first question is one for all disciples: “Do you believe on the Son of God?” (NIV).

Jn 9:36. *“Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?”* This touching level of faith and spontaneous worship is refreshing after the “blindness” of the Pharisees. John’s record emphasizes the miracle again by adding Jesus’s statement, “Thou hast . . . seen him” (Jn 9:37; emphasis added).

Jn 9:39. *“For judgment I am come into this world.”* Jesus expounds on His role as Judge after just discussing it a few days earlier in the temple (Jn 7:24). He claims to be a judge who intimately knows the challenges of the world. Our Judge helps us become aware of our sins, which leads us to become more humble, more meek, and more motivated to change. Also, the process of seeing through our pride allows us to more clearly understand what life is all about. Those who are blinded by pride are not able to come unto Christ with full purpose of heart.

Jn 9:39. *“they which see not might see . . . they which see might be made blind.”* Jesus introduces another opposite. He is not speaking on a physical level of hurting anyone’s sight but is rather trying to point out blind spots to those in need of repentance. The irony of spiritual blindness dims the spiritual vision of the proud and well-educated. God has the power to give new sight and light to myopic mortals in darkness.

Jn 9:40. “Are we blind also?” Jesus seems to have a steady crowd around Him listening and asking questions. His warning answer is for a much larger crowd though. We all need to meekly accept divine change and direction even when it goes counter to our cultural norm. The Lord also addresses faith. Those who can but will not see with an eye of faith, like these Pharisees, have a worse form of blindness than physical blindness because they choose not to see. In a way, He teaches them that their lack of faith is a choice.

Jn 9:41. “your sin remaineth.” This word, “sin,” is singular in the Greek text, possibly referring to the sin of not accepting the Savior. By rejecting Jesus, the people chose to follow the devil by default. This tragic flaw will breed more sins as they do their master’s bidding.

The Good Shepherd

The setting for this section appears to continue in Jerusalem from the same fall Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7–9). Otherwise, it may also be a prelude to the Feast of Dedication that begins in Jn 10:22. As Jesus continues to preach at the temple, He uses the themes of sheep and shepherds overlapping with many shepherd texts in the Old Testament. For example:

- Ps 23:1–2: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.”
- Isa 40:11: “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”
- Isa 53:6–7: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . [He] is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”
- Jer 31:10: “He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock.”
- Ezk 34:11–12: “I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock . . . so will I seek out my sheep.”

This latter citation is part of a larger shepherd text that fills the better part of the whole chapter (Ezk 24:1–23). This chapter was read in the Jewish synagogue in the winter as part of the weekly cycle of scripture study.⁴³

Jesus builds on shepherd and sheep texts from the Old Testament to create another theme in the New Testament.⁴⁴ Jn 10:1–7 is as close as John’s Gospel ever gets to a parable (but it is usually distinguished as an allegory).

The door—Jn 10:1–7

10:1. “the door into the sheepfold.” Sheepfolds were built in many ways, but in Palestine, most were either in the yard adjacent to one’s house or tent (which was most common) or were out in the

field as an enclosure surrounded by low stone walls and topped with briars. At night the sheep slept in these enclosures, and the shepherd came in the morning and took their sheep to the pasture by calling to them.

Jn 10:1. “a thief and a robber.” In Jesus’s parable, the thief or robber represents anyone who teaches against Jesus, like the Pharisees. As the law of Moses requires, Jesus differentiates between a thief and a robber or bandit. There is a significant difference between the Greek *kleptēs* and *lēstēs*, as John W. Welch explains:

Although there is only a little difference between a thief and a robber in most modern minds, there were considerable differences between the two under ancient Near Eastern law. A thief (*ganab*) was usually a local person who stole from his neighbor. He was dealt with judicially. He was tried and punished civilly, most often by a court composed of his fellow townspeople. A *robber*, on the other hand, was treated as an outsider, as a brigand or highwayman. He was dealt with militarily, and he could be executed summarily.⁴⁵

This definition also sheds light on 1 Ne 3, in which Laban calls Laman a robber. He no longer identified him as an insider.

Jn 10:2 (BSB). “the one who enters by the gate is the shepherd.” Jesus introduces Himself as the shepherd (and later as the gate of the sheepfold; Jn 10:7, 9). It harks back to Num 27:17–18, in which the Lord chooses Joshua (which is the Hebrew name for Jesus) as the shepherd of the children of Israel: “Appoint a man over the congregation . . . who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd. . . . Take thee Joshua” (LXX).

Other Old Testament references apply here too.⁴⁶ Lots of stories tell of sheep knowing their shepherd’s voice. Sheep are very social—they eat with their heads together, cry when separated, and don’t seem to mind different sheepfolds drinking from the same watering trough. If taken or caught by a predator, sheep become submissive. They are generally docile, quiet, and patient.

Jn 10:4. “goeth before them, and the sheep follow him.” A shepherd who is known by his sheep can walk ahead of the sheep, and they will follow. If multiple herds of sheep are gathered, they can recognize their individual shepherd’s call and spontaneously follow the voice they know. But in Jn 10, the people of Jerusalem do not follow Jesus. This is because they are not His sheep.⁴⁷

Like sheep without their shepherd, people are helpless without the Savior. If they recognize His Spirit, they gladly follow Him. But if not, they follow another voice or initially need to be pushed through the gate.

Jn 10:6. “they understood not.” The Lord resorted to speaking in parables in the Synoptic Gospels when the people proved they couldn’t comprehend His plain speech. This way only those who understood are held accountable.

The gate—Jn 10:7–10

Jn 10:7 (NIV). “*I am the gate for the sheep.*” Unlike the many Old Testament links to sheep, Jesus’s explanation of the parable centers in on His main point—entering through the gate or door. “I am the door.” This also implies an entrance or a way, which prepares Jesus’s listeners for His teaching that “I am the way” (Jn 14:6). While the Synoptic Gospels quote the phrase “the kingdom of God [or heaven] is like . . . ,” John uses a parallel message with his many “I AM” statements (Jn 10:7, 9, 11, 14). Mt 26:31, Mk 14:27, and Luke 12:32 also use shepherd imagery for the Lord.

Jn 10:8 (JST). “*came before me who testified not of me are thieves.*” The JST clarifies that these verses do not refer to all past prophets but rather refer to prideful leaders who do not lead the flock to Jesus. God provides only one way to be saved and to find lasting joy, and that is through the narrow opening (also written, a strait) where our Savior stands. Jesus’s Atonement and the saving ordinances become the door to heaven and eternal life.

The pasture is the fullness of life. Jesus opens the gate to full eternal life. Jesus’s work and glory is to open that gate for all mortals to enter through (Mose 1:39).

The shepherd—Jn 10:11–21

Jn 10:11. “the good.” In this usage, “good” can mean “beautiful by reason of purity of heart and life, and hence praiseworthy; morally good, noble.”⁴⁸ This contrasts with the custom of the day that considered shepherds as dishonest and outside the law. Early rabbis excluded shepherds (along with women) from acting as witnesses or judges in courts of law. They rationalized that many shepherds grazed their flocks on other people’s lands, so they must be dishonest.⁴⁹ Ironically, the scriptures describe shepherds as righteous, humble, devoted followers of the God (like Jacob, Joshua, and David, for example).

Jn 10:11. “the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” Jesus gave His entire life—His growing years, mission, and atoning sacrifice—as a sacrifice for us. He feeds His sheep with truth (“I am . . . the truth”; Jn 14:6). The earliest Christians saw the Lord referring to Himself as the Good Shepherd, and repeated the symbol in Heb 13:20 and 1 Pet 5:4.

Jn 10:12. “an hireling.” Unlike a true shepherd, a day worker works for pay, not for love. The outcome makes all the difference; one builds and the other takes. When danger or challenges come the day worker flees, but the good shepherd stays beside his sheep because of his love for them.

Jn 10:15. “I lay down my life for the sheep.” Jesus adopts Moses’s and young David’s role as the good shepherd (see Ex 3:1, 1 Sam 17:34–35). Both two great Israelite leaders foreshadowed Jesus, and both prophesied that another would follow in their steps. Jesus goes beyond the service rendered by these earlier good shepherds to lay down His life and become the “great and last sacrifice . . . an infinite and eternal sacrifice” (Alma 34:10).

Jn 10:16. “other sheep.” This is our clearest reference in the New Testament to the Nephites and other children of Israel we don’t know much about yet (compare 3 Ne 16:1).

Jn 10:18. “*no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.*” Jesus declares this as the reason why His Father loves Him—He willingly will give Himself as our Redeemer and Savior. John’s theme of Jesus’s power over death is seen throughout the Gospel, including the controlled and willing manner that John illustrates Jesus as possessing in his Passion narrative (which we will see in a few weeks as we compare each of the Gospel accounts of the Lord’s death).

Jn 10:19. “*division . . . again among the Jews.*” Do you see the same arguments today used against Christianity and the restored Church of Jesus Christ?

Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah

Jn 10:22. “*it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter.*” John moves his narrative two or three months forward to Chislev 20–27 (usually December), which is also called the Feast of Lights, or Hanukkah,⁵⁰ a holiday that began between the Old and New Testaments. After the Maccabean Revolt against the Greeks (164–160 BC), the priests rededicated their temple. Later, in 138 BC, Israelites in Jerusalem commemorated the event with another annual celebration.⁵¹ Looking back at the second temple’s rededication, the winter feast was also based on the tradition that a one jar of sacred temple oil lasted for eight days of ceremonial needs after the Maccabees reclaimed and rededicated their temple—a miracle indeed.⁵² The winter celebration evolved into eight days of feasting, special worship services, and extra light. John’s Gospel includes a series of feasts from Jn 5 to 10 (the Sabbath, Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, and now Feast of Dedication).

Jn 10:23. “*Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon’s porch.*” Jesus came to the easternmost porch on the top of Mount Moriah, still in the Court of the Gentiles but out of the wind and overlooking the Mount of Olives. It was called Solomon’s Porch because of its reciprocity with King Solomon’s stables. It was the oldest and loveliest porch.

Jn 10:24. “*If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.*” Jesus’s audience looked for a conquering Messiah, who was politically involved and could make advances against the Romans. Jesus did not want to encourage this nationalist image. Instead, His response recalled His works as a witness of who He was to take them back to the biblical context.⁵³ To unbelievers, Jesus’s answers must include witnesses. So He explains that His works witness of Him.

Jn 10:27. “*My sheep hear my voice, . . . and they follow me.*” Jesus reintroduces the theme of sheep and ties the two halves of chapter 10 together (see Jn 10:11). He recaps that if people don’t follow Him, it is not because He is not the Shepherd but because they are not His sheep.

Jn 10:28 (ESV). “*I give them eternal life.*” The Restoration teaches that eternal life is synonymous with exaltation. It includes living in the realm of God the Father, who is “greater than all.”

Jn 10:30. “*I and my Father are one.*” Trinitarian controversy hinges on this verse. Note the plural “are” in this verse. Jesus defines His use of “one” in Jn 10:38: “The Father is in me, and I in him,” and in His Intercessory Prayer (Jn 17:11, 21–23).

Jn 10:32. “for which of those works do ye stone me?” Ironically, when Jesus answers the people’s question, they cry blasphemy and try to stone Him. Their two basic questions include whether Jesus is the Messiah and whether Jesus makes Himself God (Jn 10:24, 33).

Jn 10:34. “Ye are gods.” Jesus quotes Ps 82:6 and then defines *gods* as “those through whom God speaks.”⁵⁴ If God’s mouthpieces can be called on to speak for God, why do we not believe that the Word of God is the Son of God?

Jn 10:36. “the Father hath sanctified.” Jesus also returns to the theme of the Feast of Rededication. Even more than the temple was sanctified then, it is sanctified now with the fulfillment of ancient temple ordinances about to take place. *Sanctified* also means “consecrated.” As the one who will bear the sins of the world vicariously, Jesus is consecrated to become the living temple altar and Lamb of God. Many sacred things in the temple pointed to or represented the promised Messiah (namely, the brazen sea for washing, the anointing oil, the veil as a connection between the presence of God and earth, the Holy of Holies, and so on). If we can see Jesus as a temple, as it were, as one who bridges heaven and earth and realize that His body literally houses our God, then this connection with the temple is even more powerful.

Jn 10:36. “sent into the world.” Jesus returns to the theme of being sent from God again. Jesus is the only being sent as literally the Son of God. Disciples, too, are commissioned or sent forth to do God’s works, and angels are also sent. But only Jesus is sent with the title Emanuel, God with us.

Jn 10:38. “believe the works.” Jesus’s logic is beautiful. If He is doing God’s works, then God is working through and in Him. He represents the Father. John also lets us know that Jesus escaped again. Jesus’s enemies had no power over Him.

Jesus withdraws across the Jordan River—Jn 10:40–42

Jn 10:39–42. This is the conclusion of part 3 of John’s Gospel, which deals with the principal feasts (chapters 5–10).⁵⁵ Some scholars call it the Book of Signs because in these chapters Jesus demonstrates signs of his messiahship.⁵⁶ He now leaves the hostile land and people of Palestine and crosses the Jordan River into Perea. Many follow Him. There He finds the faith that was lacking in His own land. The author John deliberately reminds us of John the Baptist. The scene takes place near where John the Baptist was baptizing across the Jordan, reminding us of fact that he bore witness of Jesus as the Son of God.

Book of Mormon Insights

We find many of the same themes found in the Book of Mormon. To augment our New Testament study, here is a small sampling of references that consistently come from God to His “other sheep” (3 Ne 15:21).

- Jesus as Life and Light of the World: Mosi 16:9; Alm 38:9; 3 Ne 9:18; 11:11; Eth 4:12
- Jesus healing the blind as a sign of the Messiah: Mosi 3:5; 3 Ne 17:7–9; 26:15; 4 Ne 1:5
- Jesus as the Good Shepherd: Alm 5:38–39, 41, 57, 60; Hel 7:18

Notes

- 1 Stephen Miller, *Understanding Jesus: A Guide to His Life and Times* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour, 2013), xx.
- 2 Mark Kamsu, *Truth or Deception, Choose: The Extraordinary Harmony between History and Biblical Prophecy* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu, 2018), 29–30.
- 3 Merrill C. Tenney and Silva Moisés, eds., *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5 of 5, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), xx. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple—Its Ministry and Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), chapter 2.
- 4 *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference USA, 2007), s.v. “Sukkah.” Anciently entire families celebrated and lived in booths, but after the time of the New Testament, rabbis wrote: “It is obligatory to eat in the *sukkah* [booth or tent]. . . . These laws do not apply to women, slaves, and infants.” Mishnah, Sukkah 2.8.
- 5 John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, *King Benjamin’s Speech: That Ye May Learn Wisdom* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 148. We find evidence of many Jewish feasts in the Book of Mormon even without them being named. We are also told to things like “feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.” 2 Ne 32:3; see also 2 Ne 9:51; Jac 2:9; 3:2.
- 6 There are multiple Jameses in the New Testament, but scholars assume that Jesus’s half-brother is the one referred to in the Resurrection accounts listed in 1 Cor 15:7 (“After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles”). Paul also mentions visiting “James, the Lord’s brother” in Jerusalem (Gal 1:19) and refers to him in the same letter as one of the pillars of the Church (Gal 2:9). We understand that this James could not be Zebedee and Salome’s son James, the brother of John. We think of Zebedee and Salome’s James as a member of the First presidency at Times as he worked closely with Peter and John the Beloved when they saw the Lord transfigured and were asked to pray in Gethsemane. Act 12:2 records that Herod Agrippa kills this James near a Passover sometime before Herod’s own death in AD 44.
- 7 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.200.
- 8 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 48.
- 9 Brown, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 49.
- 10 Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: Religious Perspectives* (Boston, MA: Brill, 1999), 119. See also Mishnah, Shabbath 22:6; 17:2; 14:3; 6:10.
- 11 Brown, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 50.
- 12 Moro 6:4; “Discourse, 9 July 1843, as Reported by Willard Richards,” p. [304], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-9-july-1843-as-reported-by-willard-richards/5>. The Prophet Joseph taught, “You might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost.”
- 13 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 412 and the introduction.
- 14 Brown, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 51.

- 15 Brown, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 51: “Some manuscripts place it in Luke among the cunning question presented to Jesus during Holy Week; this would be a far better setting . . . the Greek style is closer to Luke than to John.”
- 16 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 337.
- 17 Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of Women in the New Testament* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Sound Publishing, 2015), chapter 1.
- 18 See, for example, Lev 20:10, 22:15; Ezk 16:38–40.
- 19 Brown, *John I–XII*, 334–337.
- 20 Brown, *John I–XII*, 334.
- 21 Augustine said, “*Relicti sunt duo, misera et misericordia.*”
- 22 Isa 49:6: “To restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” In D&C 88:7–9, Jesus announces that He is the source of all light, within and without. Jesus is “the light of the sun . . . the light of the moon . . . the light of the stars.” Other scriptures explain that He is the “true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (Jn 1:9; D&C 93:2; Moro 7:16–19). During the Millennium we will “need no candle, neither light of the sun,” for the Lord will be their light (Rev 22:5; Isa 60:19).
- 23 Brown, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 52.
- 24 Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple—Its Ministry and Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 48. These chests were narrow at the top and wide at the bottom like a trumpet, and hence were called “trumpets.”
- 25 See 1 Ne 22:23; Alm 39:14; 60:36; 3 Ne 6:15.
- 26 Rom 6:17; 2 Pe 2:19. See also Heb 3:5–6; Rom 8:2.
- 27 Brown, *John I–XII*, 361–362.
- 28 Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 34, 107: “Any illness may result from sin.” Ancient Jewish society incorrectly presumed that physical imperfections made one a sinner because priests with birth defects were not allowed to serve at the altar of the temple: “No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire” (Lev 21:21).
- 29 Margaret Barker, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010), 232.
- 30 Brown, *John I–XII*, 371.
- 31 Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of Women in the New Testament* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Sound Publishing, 2015), chapter 7. “In antiquity, blind people filled the cities and temples as alms collectors. Most blind people did not reach their potential, were considered worthless to society, were frequently hungry and sometimes starved to death. Blindness was universally considered to be a great tragedy, and mostly as punishment for sin.” Steinberg, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics*, 106.
- 32 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ doctrine of a premortal life is not generally shared by Jews or Christians currently.

33 Isa 35:5–6; see also Isa 42:6–7; Ex 4:11; Ps 146:8; Mosi 3:5–7.

34 Brown, *John I–XII*, 372. The Mishnah recorded a curse on anyone who uttered charms over a wound, notably, while spitting.

35 Alonzo Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols: Finding Meaning in Rites, Rituals and Ordinances* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2017), 41–42. Cyril (AD 313–386) elaborated on early Christian anointings: “Ointment is symbolically applied to thy forehead and thy other senses; and while the body is anointed with the visible ointment, thy soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit. Ye were first anointed on the forehead, that ye might . . . *reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord. Then on your ears; that ye might receive the ears which are quick to hear the Divine Mysteries, of which Esaias said, The Lord gave me also an ear to hear [Isa 1:4 and Mk 4:9]. . . . Then on the nostrils. . . . Afterwards on your breast; that having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ye may stand against the wiles of the devil*” (emphasis added). The Bible records ritual anointings of priests, kings, sacrifices, lepers, and tabernacle and temple furnishings. Lev 14:15–18; Ex 29:4–8, 29, 36; 40:9–15; Num 3:3; 6:15; 1 Sam 16:1, 13; 1 Kng 1:39. They kept their special olive oil for anointings in horns to consecrate things or people to God (1 Sam 16:1).

36 Brown, *John I–XII*, 380–381.

37 One possible site is near the Ghihon spring in the Kidron Valley; the other is just south of the temple, outside the wall.

38 Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 5.140.

39 Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scriptures*, vol. 5, *The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 121.

40 Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols*, 39. Tertullian (160–225 AD) explained that what we do to the body is really for the Spirit: “The flesh, indeed, is washed, in order that the soul may be cleansed; the flesh is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; . . . the flesh is shadowed with the imposition [or laying on] of hands that the soul may be illuminated by the Spirit.”

41 The Talmud recorded a man may be a witness of moveable objects starting at age thirteen, and of anything by age twenty (*Edut*, 9:1, 8; *Baba Batra*, 155b). The Mishnah (*Abot* 5:21) outlines stages of the ideal male life: “At 5 to Scripture, 10 to Mishnah, 13 to religious duties, 15 to Talmud, 18 to the wedding canopy, 20 to responsibility for providing for a family, 30 to fullness of strength, 40 to understanding, 50 to counsel, 60 to old age, 70 to ripe old age, 80 to remarkable strength, 90 to a bowed back, and 100—he is like a corpse who has already passed and gone from this world.”

42 Brown, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 57.

43 Brown, *John I–XII* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 389. “In particular, Ezek xxxiv, which, as we shall see, is the most important single OT background passage for John x, served as the *hapharah* or prophetic reading in the general time of Dedication in the second year of the cycle.”

44 See Mt 18:12; 25:32; Act 20:28–29; 1 Pe 5:2–4; Heb 13:20; and so forth.

45 John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1992), 248.

46 See Mic 2:12–13; Ezk 34:9–17; and Isa 55:4.

47 Jackson and Millet, *The Gospels*, 140.

48 Brown, *John I–XII*, 386.

49 Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969), 374. Women were considered dishonest and the source of all sin since Eden.

50 B. H. Roberts, *Seventy's Course in Theology*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1907–1912), 1:57. In 198 BC, “after a series of contests Palestine was taken from Egypt by Antiochus the Great, annexed to Syria, and divided into five provinces, viz., Judea, Samaria, Galilee (W. of Jordan), Peraea [sic], and Trachonitis (E. of Jordan). From this time, owing to its position between the two great powers Egypt and Syria, this country [Israel] became a frequent prey to both, until Antiochus Epiphanes took Jerusalem (B. C. 170), foully polluted the temple, and compelled the Jews to sacrifice to idols. He erected the statue of Jupiter on the altar of burnt-offering, committed all books of scripture to the flames, and prohibited the worship of God. The high priests, corrupted by Greek licentiousness, prepared the way for declension, and encouraged the adoption of foreign customs. But the attempt to finally stamp out Judaism produced a recoil. It culminated in the attempt of Antiochus to force the Jews publicly to eat the flesh of swine sacrificed on God’s altar to the honor of Jupiter. One aged scribe refused, was followed by a mother and her seven sons, who all suffered martyrdom with the extremes of torture. This was followed by Mattathias, a priest of the Hasmoean family, who killed both a renegade Jew, when about to offer idolatrous sacrifice, and the royal officer who presided. Aided by his five sons, he rallied the faithful round him, threw down the heathen altars, fled to the mountains and raised the standard of liberty, on which were inscribed M. K. B. I., the initials of their Hebrew war-cry, *Mi-Kamoka Baelim, Ihovah*, ‘Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?’ (Ex xv: 11), from which the insurgents got the name of ‘Maccabees,’ whence the eldest son and successor of Mattathias is known in history as Judas Maccabaeus. Under him they were victorious. Antiochus died of a loathsome disease, stricken by God.”

51 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.323–325.

52 The apocryphal books 1 and 2 Maccabees give two different origins of the holiday. As previous accounts of Moses’s tabernacle and Solomon’s temple included God’s blessing with extraordinary light, the later tradition including a miracle of light unfolded in 2 Maccabees. James E. Talmage also found records of this tradition: “After almost three years, Judas, son of the priest Mattathias had the Jews return to Jerusalem and found the Temple deserted, as it had been left by the army of Antiochus. Its gates had been broken down and burned; and within the walls weeds were growing. Judas tried to cleanse and rehabilitate the House; he brought in new vessels, and replaced the candlestick, the altar of incense, the table of shewbread, and the veils, and built a new altar for burnt offerings.” James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1912), 44. On the third anniversary of the day that it was polluted, Zerubbabel’s temple was purified. Decades later, the Jews began celebrating this with another feast. The tradition claims that only one consecrated jar of oil was intact and bore the high priest’s unbroken seal. Miraculously, this jar of oil burned for all eight days of the temple rededication.

53 Brown, *John I–XII*, 406. Also see *Psalms of Solomon* 17:21–25, dating from first and second century BC.

54 Compare 1 Sam 15:10; Hos 1:1; Jer 1:2.

55 Brown, *John I–XII*, 404.

56 Brown, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 24.