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**Thematic Development and the Purpose of
Election in the Gospel of John**

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Introduction	1
Salvific Sovereignty Theme & Theme of false or incomplete faith.....	2
A. Thematic Development in John’s Gospel.....	5
B. Development of the True/False Faith theme in John	7
1. John 2:23-4:54, The Emphasis of the Cana Cycle.....	8
C. True and False Faith contrasted in the Sabbath Healings (5:1-10:42).	10
1. John 6 and the disciples who turned away	10
2. John 8:30-31 and “the Jews who believed in him”	13
3. John 9 and 10, An Example of True Faith and Contrasting Unbelief	15
4. John 11-12, The Climactic Sign	16
5. John 15 and Faith that Continues	17
6. “Believe” in John 14-17	18
D. “Believe” in the Purpose Statement of John 20:30-31	20
Conclusion.....	25

Introduction

Election in the Gospel of John has been well covered in the recent literature, so the object of this paper is to assume the sovereignty view and relate its significance to the thematic development in the Gospel of the faith theme and especially the manner in which true and false (or inadequate faith) is portrayed. This

theme interacts with the ‘signs theme’, the purpose of the Gospel, and the audience or implied readers. The purpose of the ‘sovereignty theme’ in John’s Gospel is to resolve some of the tension that exists in John’s presentation of both true faith in some passages and an incomplete or false faith in others. Here is the evidence for thematic development of both topics in John:

Salvific Sovereignty Theme:

1:12-13, all who received, born “of God”
3:5-8, born “of the Spirit”
[3:27, ‘given from heaven’
6:37, “all ... the Father gives me”
6:44, “No one can come unless the Father ... draw him.”
6:45, “they will all be taught by God”
6:64, “Jesus knew **from the beginning** who those were who did not believe ...”
6:65, “no one can come to me unless...”
6:70, “Did I not choose you, the Twelve...”
8:47, “Whoever is of God ...”¹
10:26, “... you are not of my sheep.”
10:29, “My Father ... has given them to me”
15:16, “I choose you...”
15:19, “I choose you out of the world...”
17:2, “...all whom you have given him...”
17:6b, “...the people you gave me...”
17:6c, “They were yours ...”
17:6d, “...you gave them to me...”
17:9b, “...those you have given me...”
17:9c, “...for they are yours.”
17:24, “... those whom you have given me...”
18:9, “...those whom you gave me...”

Theme of false or incomplete faith:

2:2:23-25, “many believed in his name... Jesus would not entrust himself to them”
6:14, “This is indeed the Prophet...”
6:26, You seek “not because you saw the signs, but because you ate...”
6:60, “When many of his disciples heard It they said, ‘this is a hard saying...’”
6:64, “Some of you do not believe...”
6:64, “Jesus knew...who did not believe”
6:66, “many of his disciples turned back”
6:69, “We have believed...”
6:70, “one of you is a devil...”
8:30, “many believed in him.”
8:31, “if you remain in my word you are truly my disciples.”
10:26, “you do not believe because you are not of my flock”
10:42, “many believed in him there.”
12:11, “on account of him [Laz.] many were believing in Jesus.”
12:37, “Though he had done so many signs ...they still did not believe...”
12:39, “they could not believe.”
12:42, “many...believed in him, but for fear they did not confess it”
15:2, “Every branch of mine that does not”
15:6, “the branches are...thrown into the fire”

The right column assumes that there are many other places in the Gospel of John where frequent and unambiguous references to true faith occur (e.g. 1:12; 2:11; 3:16, 36; 4:39-42; 5:24; etc.). It is the view of this paper that the frequency of passages that reveal questionable faith on the part of false disciples demonstrates that there are not two separate themes, one of true faith and the other of inadequate faith, but that there is only one faith theme that exposes

¹ Note the contrasting source: “You are of your father ...” (8:44), “you are not of God” (8:47).

the difference between true and false faith in Christ. The exercise of true faith is a conversion which bestows on the believer eternal life, salvation and security which is often promised by Jesus in John's Gospel.

Let me first summarize the best of the recent literature, to my knowledge, and the major contributions they make to the meaning and presence of the doctrine of election in the fourth Gospel. First, in his chapter "Divine Election in the Gospel of John," Robert Yarbrough surveys most of the passages listed in the left column on the previous page and concludes that even though the Gospel of John emphasizes the responsibility of man in placing faith in Jesus for eternal life, that such true faith is the result of the prior action of God for a defined group described by the phrase "all the Father has given me" (6:37, 39), "all whom you have given ..." (17:2), or "the people you gave me" (17:6). This group comes to Jesus in faith because they are "of God" (1:13), "born of the Spirit" (3:8), drawn by the Father (6:44), and are "of my sheep" (10:26).² The essay is an irenic response to Grant Osborne's chapter "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," in which he holds to the ability of man as the determining action in those who receive Christ rather than the electing work of God (for the most part, a statement of the Arminian position).³ Yarbrough emphasizes that "John's Gospel makes it clear that one [divine sovereignty] is basic to the other [human responsibility], although both are quite real" (61).

Andreas Köstenberger has a more recent though shorter treatment of divine sovereignty in John and covers most of the same passages as Yarbrough.⁴ He concludes that "John makes [it] clear that humans require divine enablement to believe" (458). Though he views both "faith" and divine sovereignty as themes running "through the entire gospel" (458, 460), he does not treat their thematic intersection in chapters 6, 8 and 15 as I do in this paper.

² *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, & Grace*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 47-62.

³ *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 243-60.

⁴ Andreas Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 458-64.

In *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* Carson devotes nearly half of his book to the “Sovereignty-Responsibility Tension in the Gospel of John” (Part Three, 125-198).⁵ Half of this section on John is devoted to a survey of three themes that are presented in the Gospel, each of which has seemingly contradictory sides, yet nonetheless coexist in John side-by-side in nearly inexplicable harmony: (1) eschatology, as now and not-yet; (2) Christology, as human and divine; 3) theodicy, with its suffering amidst peace. It is his view that divine sovereignty and human responsibility also occur side by side in John and that in all four categories it is divine sovereignty that resolves the tension in each (e.g., eschatology, 145).⁶

But human responsibility is not presented throughout the Gospel of John as simply a black and white division between those who genuinely believe and those who completely reject Jesus and his word. To be sure, the Prologue presents the divide in clear enough terms: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God ...” (John 1:11-12).⁷ This prepares the reader for the repetition of these themes later on in the Gospel.⁸ When the thematic elements of belief and rejection of Christ occur, they sometimes present a third category: a seemingly inadequate, false, or incomplete faith.

Apparent false professions of faith occur in well-known passages like John 2:23-25 (“many believed in his name”), John 7:31 (“many of the people believed in him”), John 8:30-31 (“many believed in

⁵ D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981). Köstenberger refers to Carson several times (*Theology*, pp. 458-464, notes 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 16, 26.).

⁶ He demonstrates this conclusion forcefully by devoting more than two pages to the Bread of Life passage in John 6 (184-186), the prayer passage in John 17 (186-188) and the Good Shepherd passage in John 10.

⁷ In v. 13 the preposition ἐκ in each qualifying phrase indicates source (ἐξ αἰμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκός οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ θεοῦ) as in Murray J. Harris’ comment on John 1:13, “ἐκ θεοῦ may be paraphrased “as a result of God’s initiative and action” (*Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 105-106,

⁸ John’s Prologue establishes the background for themes and topics more broadly presented in the body of the Gospel. See Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist*, JSNTSup 107 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John’s Prologue*, JSNTSup 89 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Köstenberger, *Theology*, 176-178.

him”), and 12:42, (“many even of the authorities believed in him”). The same thing is implied of the crowd who ate the loaves in John 6 since “many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (6:66). The discussion below will advocate this view of these and other passages in the Gospel of John that refer to people whose faith is not adequate for eternal life or salvation. The frequency of these passages in John has an effect on the overall theme of “belief.”⁹ Thus, it will be shown that this theme does not make the Gospel of John just ‘The Gospel of faith,’ but really ‘The Gospel that distinguishes between true and false faith.’

A. Thematic Development in John’s Gospel

Thematic development is a form of ‘motif’, and is a frequent literary device in the Gospel of John. Two essential elements identify a literary theme or motif: (1) its frequency in a literary work beyond only necessary mention and coincidence; (2) its appearance in a context where it is not expected.¹⁰ The frequency of words such as “believe,” “truth,” and “worship” marks them as thematic words. Their appearance in unique contexts is well illustrated, for example, by the use of πιστεύω (7xs in 3:12-18; 9xs in 6:29-69; 8xs in 11:15-45; 8xs in 12:36-46, etc.).

The relative importance of a given theme can be determined by three factors:

(1) its apparent ‘artificial’ or imposed insertion into a given pericope, like John’s explicit comment in John 2 that Jesus would not entrust himself to certain ‘believers’ (it seems out of place);

(2) the importance of the various contexts in which the theme reoccurs (the true/false faith theme extends from 2:23 into the Nicodemus dialogue and recurs in the Bread of Life discourse);

⁹ πιστεύω occurs nearly 100 times in John, about three times more than in the Synoptics combined, demonstrating the significance of this theme in John’s Gospel (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995] 296).

¹⁰ For example, see the unusual use of the imperfect ἐπίστευεν with its equally unusual reflexive use of 3rd pers. αὐτόν (the variant ἐαυτόν attesting to the difficulty!) which is noted in Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:531.

(3) a coherence of thematic recurrences into a “recognizable unit” (see ahead on the faith theme in the Cana Cycle and the relation of the faith theme with eating and drinking in John 6).¹¹

Hoskins defines this literary feature in terms of progressive clarification: “The nature of the Fourth Gospel provides the warrant for looking to the wider context for clarification [of themes]. John frequently introduces themes that require further clarification and then develops them over the course of the Gospel.”¹² In a few cases, individual passages in John are not well understood or interpreted apart from their dependence on thematic development throughout the Gospel. For example, in John 12:37 (“though he had done so many signs before them”) looks back on the prominent signs in the first half of the Gospel to show his readers that the signs alone, as dramatic as they were, were not sufficient to overcome human darkness and inability to believe in Jesus.¹³

But thematic development in John is not only explicitly mentioned (as the above examples), but it is also implicit, as in the following themes. The Passover theme in John begins with John’s proclamation in 1:29, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” It culminates in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (19:36) and in the missional preaching of forgiveness in John 20:23 (“If you forgive the sins of anyone ...”).¹⁴ The Trinitarian theme is well-recognized, beginning in 1:1 (“the Word was God”) and ending

¹¹ Jane S. Webster, *Ingesting Jesus: Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John* (Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica 6 (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 10-11.

¹² Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007) 141 n.169.

¹³ That the specially mentioned signs in the first half of the Gospel has thematic significance is emphasized in John 4:46 (“where he made the water wine”) and 4:54 (“This was now the second sign”).

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, “Adumbrations of Atonement Theology in the Fourth Gospel,” in *JETS* 57.3 (September, 2014), 518-20. Concerning Carson’s comments on αἴρω, cf. BDAG’s connection between John 1:29 and John 3:5 (ἵνα τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἄρῃ) with Isa 53:12. Atonement theology in 1 John relates τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἄρῃ (3:5) to forgiveness of sin (1:9; 2:12) and propitiation for sin (2:2; 4:10). “Though ‘Lamb,’ like ‘Logos,’ appears only at the head of the Gospel, its placement there is programmatic. The Evangelist wants us to read the entire book as the story of the Logos-become-flesh who laid down his life as God’s Lamb” (Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014] 183, 211n.67 (“by placing the image of the Lamb at the very front, John makes it the leading idea under which readers are to interpret the death of Jesus”).

in Thomas' "My Lord and my God" (1:1; 5:18; 10:33; 20:28).¹⁵ The same can be said of John's water symbolism and its relation to his theology of the Holy Spirit in 1:31-33 (John's baptism), 3:5 ("water and Spirit"), 4:10, 14 ("living water"), 4:23-24 ("Spirit and truth"), 7:37-39 ("rivers of living water"), and the *paraclete* references in John 14-16 which culminate and climax in the missional role of the Spirit in 20:21-23.¹⁶

Thematic development may also emphasize a culmination and expansion of meaning as words or symbols are repeated in a given narrative. Köstenberger observes that throughout the course of a narrative a symbol may "involve a pattern of escalation."¹⁷ This kind of theological climactic culmination is easily seen in John's Passover, Trinitarian and Spirit/water themes in the last two chapters of the Gospel.

It is the contention of this paper that such thematic progression also occurs with the theme of true and false (or incomplete) faith and that this theme reaches its climactic culmination in John's purpose statement in John 20:30-31, "...these [signs] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

B. Development of the True/False Faith theme in John

John forcefully presents examples of true faith in the first two chapters of the Gospel: "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? (1:50).¹⁸ After Jesus turns water into wine John comments: "his disciples believed in him" (2:11). The next episode is that of the cleansing of the Temple in which Jesus cryptically speaks about his resurrection. Again, John speaks about true belief: "When therefore he was raised from the dead, his

¹⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity in John's Gospel*, in *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 24, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008).

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 670.

¹⁷ Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 195; Köstenberger, *Theology of John's Gospel*, 158 n. 126 (where he extensively refers to Culpepper's *Anatomy*).

¹⁸ See a similar question posed by Jesus to Martha: "Do you believe this?" (11:26).

disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken” (2:22).

A new literary unit begins with the Cana sign (2:1ff), which results in the disciples believing in him, and then concludes with the “second sign” which highlights the true faith of the royal official “who believed the word that Jesus had spoken” (4:50-54).¹⁹ Thus the whole section is bounded on both ‘ends’ by true belief, the first by his disciples and the last, apparently, by a Gentile. Within this section, which is ‘roped off’ by true faith, John presents the confused response of one of Israel’s greatest teachers, Nicodemus, the ironic faith of the immoral Samaritan woman, and the greater faith of her fellow villagers who believe because of his own [Jesus’] word” (4:40), the remarkable forerunners of those who would worship “in Spirit and truth.”

1. John 2:23-4:54, The Emphasis of the Cana Cycle

The above passages confirm the expectation of the prologue that some will “believe on his name” (1:12), and after the testimonies of 1:35-51 and the disciples (2:11, 22), the next occurrence in 2:23 would seem to follow this pattern (“many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing”). This makes 2:24-25 surprising and unexpected: “But Jesus on his part *did not entrust himself* to them, because he knew all people ... for he himself knew what was in man.” John rivets the readers’ attention to this use of ἐπίστευεν αὐτὸν (“entrust himself”) on four counts:

- (1) the verb is active, not passive, and seems to be a word play that Jesus did not “believe” ‘the believers’ in this case;²⁰
- (2) the unusual use of αὐτὸν with a reflexive meaning;²¹

¹⁹ Carson, John, 104.

²⁰ Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 75; Keener, *John*, 1:531, 531n.367, called a *diaphora* wordplay (“he, himself [?] was not believing those who believed ...”). “The real point is that *Jesus did not believe their believing*” (Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996], 168).

²¹ Keener, *John*, 531n.367; John 2:24 as an example: Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 325.

(3) the unusual collocation of imperfect tenses: “...signs which *he was doing*” (2:23c), “... he himself *was not believing* them” (2:24a), “... *he was having* no need ...” (2:25a), and “...for he *was knowing* what was in man” (2:25b);

(4) the appeal to divine knowledge: “... because he knew all people (2:24b).²²

These linguistic phenomena highlight a significant and unexpected development in the text and in this context introduces the Nicodemus dialog.

Nicodemus is the first characterization of a man who believes “in his name” (2:23) but with an incomplete faith.²³ Despite his religious and social pedigree he is still in need of life from the Spirit and stands in direct contrast to the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4 who overcomes her misunderstanding of Jesus and arrives at true faith.²⁴ Not only is Nicodemus bested by the ‘lowly’ Samaritans in regard to true faith, but the Cana Cycle (2:1-4:54) ends with the second sign and true faith of a “royal official,” likely a Gentile, who believes Jesus’ word *even before the sign of healing happens* (“The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way,” 4:50).²⁵

This major literary unit of John’s Gospel stands at the head of John’s noteworthy “Book of Signs” and its *inclusio*, at its front and back, is marked by the first and second theological sign, the geographical repetition of both Cana and Galilee, and examples of true faith (2:11; 4:50). Yet within the unit there is a progression from a faith Jesus could not trust, to the exemplary faith of the Samaritan villagers who believe Jesus on the basis of his word alone, much like the official at the end of the passage. It is highly significant that this

²² Cf. Jesus’ divine knowledge: “...Jesus knowing in himself” (6:61), “... Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe” (6:64; cf. 5:42; 13:1, 11; 18:4).

²³ The repetition of ἀνθρώπος (2:25, 3:1) and the antecedent pronoun αὐτόν (to Jesus in 2:24-25) clarifies the relationship between 2:23-25 and the Nicodemus dialog (Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989], 279; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 117).

²⁴ Francis J. Moloney, “From Cana to Cana (John 2:1-4:54) and the Fourth Evangelist’s Concept of Correct (and Incorrect) Faith,” in *Studia Biblica 1978*, JSNTSupp 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 194, 198; Carson, *John*, 185.

²⁵ Köstenberger, *John*, 166-169.

literary unit also includes the first proleptic signal of Christ's resurrection ("... in three days I will raise it up," 2:19-22) which looks forward to the climactic signs of the resurrection in chapter 20 which conclude with the purpose statement of the Gospel (20:30-31).

It is the view of this paper that John begins his progress toward this purpose statement with the thematic introduction of true and false faith. Questions about how inadequate faith can persist in the face of the signs that Jesus does are answered, in part by the introduction of John's sovereignty theme in the Nicodemus dialog and in the bread of life discourse (John 6).

C. True and False Faith contrasted in the Sabbath Healings (5:1-10:42).

The next literary section in John is another *inclusio* which is used by John to frame everything from the beginning of John chapter 5 to the end of John chapter 9. It begins with the Sabbath healing of the cripple at the Pool of Bethesda and ends thematically with the Sabbath healing of the man born blind.²⁶ Jesus *finds* both men (5:14; 9:35), but the man in John 5 immediately betrays Jesus to the Pharisees ("the man ... told the Jews," 5:15) while the man in John 9 says, "I believe" and worships Jesus, thus highlighting the theme of true and false belief as the primary thrust of this section.

1. John 6 and the disciples who turned away

Within this section John places 'the sign of the loaves' and the Bread of Life discourse that compares the misplaced belief of "the people" ("the crowd," "the Jews," "disciples") with the true faith of "the Twelve" (excluding Judas, 6:67). The Twelve are called "his disciples" (6:16), yet by the end of the discourse "many of his disciples no longer walked with him" (6:66, an unexpected and seemingly contradiction of terms!). Though no form of πιστεύω is used of those who walked away, their inadequate faith is marked by

²⁶ Though the Sabbath healings form the thematic inclusion, John 10 provides a direct contrast between Jesus as the Good Shepherd who protects the sheep and the Pharisees who have cast the healed man out. Thus the structure goes from the beginning of John 5 to the end of John 10 (Thompson, *John*, 220). Köstenberger identifies 5:1 to 10:42 related to the festival cycle and sees chapter 10 as a comment on the healing of the blind man (*John*, 10, 173), however, he agrees with the emphasis John places on the comparison between the two healings, especially the contrasting responses between them, one not of faith, the other believing and worshipping (277).

the unexpected use of the word “disciple” (6:66) and their own words: “this is indeed the Prophet” (6:14), and “Sir, give us this bread” (6:34). But they are neither true believers nor true disciples and stand in direct contrast with the “Twelve.”

What distinguishes true belief in John 6? Externally, it is that the true disciples remain with Jesus and do not leave him (with the relative exception of Judas) because, in spite of Jesus’ hard sayings about his “flesh” and “blood,” they have **believed that what Jesus** said about eternal life is true and that he is “the Holy One of God” (6:68-69). This ‘remaining’ is brought out verbally by the word “abide” (μένω) in 6:56, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides [remains] in me and I [remain] in him.”²⁷ The important verbal connection between this passage and other occurrences of μένω/remain in John 8 and 15 will be discussed below, but the point here is that everyone present in John 6 saw the same sign of the loaves and heard the same discourse on the Bread of Life. What made the difference between the two groups?

From the chart on page one of this paper you can see that of all the references to sovereign salvation in John, the most occur in John chapters 6 and 17 and the most prominent in chapter 6 are 6:37 (“All that the Father gives me will come to me ...”) and 6:44 (“No one can come to me unless the Father ... draws him”).²⁸ To emphasize the importance of this theme in the discourse Jesus refers back to 6:37 in 6:65 (“This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is given him by the Father”). Such sovereign action is further clarified in 6:63-70): (1) “It is the Spirit who gives life” (6:63), referring back to the Nicodemus dialog (thus coloring that passage with the same sovereign context as 6:37, 44); (2) “For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe” (6:64), thus placing the context of sovereign choice in the divine decree prior to the

²⁷ “remains” NIV (1984, 2011), NLT (see “Μένειν ἐν in John,” Harris, *Prepositions*, 134-136; “Ideas of continuance permanency, and adherence regularly attach to the word” (135).

²⁸ The drawing of the father in v. 44 is explained by v. 45 and the OT reference to Isa 55:13 (“all your children shall be taught by the Lord”) which is the eschatological promise similar to the New Covenant promise of Jer. 31:35 that “I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts.” This is how the covenantal elect will be “taught by the Lord.”

creation (John 1:1-3).²⁹ (3) “Did I not choose you, the Twelve ...” may refer to Jesus’ earthly call of the disciples (though not recorded in this Gospel), but since this statement is closely tied to the sovereignty theme in this chapter, such a call is meant to be seen here in accord with the Father’s prior ‘giving’ of certain people to Jesus, though the choice is clearly to be understood differently in terms of Judas. Ironically, the choice of Judas without divine drawing demonstrates the absolute necessity of prior divine action since the text of John puts the responsibility for rejecting Jesus on both Judas and all who follow his betrayal (5:40; 12:4-6).

The chart on page 1 of this paper reveals that the greatest concentration of references to the true/false belief theme are also in John 6 and it is at this very point, when the false believers/disciples turn away, that Jesus explains why they have done so and the “12” have not (6:63-71): it is the sovereign work of God that makes the difference, even though the responsibility for turning away still rests on those who have done so. The adjoining emphasis in John 6 on both the sovereignty theme and the true/false faith theme is revealed in the reason Jesus gives for the persistence of the “12.” Twice it is affirmed: (1) “some of you ... do not believe ... This is why I told you that no one can come unless it is granted him by the Father (6:64-65); (2) “...we have believed ... Did I not choose you ...” (6:69-70).

The expansion of the true/false faith theme in connection with the sovereignty theme confirms the same combination of these two themes in the Nicodemus dialog in which Jesus explains that Nicodemus cannot understand the new birth apart from a sovereign work of the Spirit (3:5-8, “born of the Spirit”), which also recalls the Prologue (“born ... of God,” 1:13). This fundamentally explains the faith of the Samaritans and its lack in Nicodemus, at least in the context of John chapter 3.

²⁹ John’s use of “beginning” recalls 1:1 and “knew” 2:24, though the verbal connection is closer to 1:1 (ἤδεν/οἶδα in 6:64, γινώσκειν/γινώσκω in 2:24); Carson, *John*, 302; Contra Köstenberger, *John*, 220.

2. John 8:30-31 and “the Jews who believed in him”

As he was saying these things, many believed [ἐπίστευσαν] in him. So [οὖν] Jesus said to the Jews who had believed [πεπιστευκότας] him, “If you abide [μείνητε] in my word, you are truly my disciples”

John 8:30-31 is remarkable because only seven verses later Jesus reveals that those who “believed in him” intended to kill him (8:37, “yet you seek to kill me”). What kind of believers are these? In chapter 8 Jesus continues speaking to those who were gathered at the feast of Tabernacles in chapter 7, including Pharisees who opposed him, some people who believed that Jesus was the Christ (7:31), and others who believed that he was “the Prophet” (7:40).³⁰ In chapter 8 the Pharisees continue to oppose him (8:13) and in the process of the dialog Jesus calls them “the Jews” and tells them they will die in their sin (8:21). Yet, within a few verses “many believed in him” (8:30), so there appears to be a division among them. Motyer is probably right that the “many” who believe in 8:30 are some of the crowds in chapter 7 that believe Jesus to be either “the Christ” (7:31, “many of the people believed in him...”) or “the Prophet” (7:40).³¹

In the very next verse (8:31) Jesus speaks to the same people, once again calling them “the Jews” (“So [οὖν] Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, **‘If you abide [remain] in my word,** you are truly my disciples.’ ” Verses 30 and 31 are logically connected by οὖν which indicates that their belief, such as it is, is still unworthy of qualifying these Jews to be true or genuine disciples. They are not “truly” (ἀληθῶς) his disciples unless they remain in his word, that is, in his testimony that he is the Messiah of God and is thus greater than Moses (John 6) or Abraham (John 8).

Just like the disciples who turned away in John 6, it only takes one statement from Jesus, this time about their slavery to sin, to turn them against him (“I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave

³⁰ I defer discussion of the pericope of the adulterous woman (7:53-8:11) to Köstenberger (*John*, 245-249) and choose to read the text without it.

³¹ Stephen Motyer holds that “the Prophet” group is most likely and that the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD vindicated Jesus’ status as such in the eyes of many of John’s readers (*Your Father the Devil?* Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1997), 152-159).

to sin.”).³² Within the space of 13 verses Jesus calls them “children of the devil” (8:44). This is so surprising that a few commentators refuse to accept that “the Jews” in verse 31 are the same as the “many” who believed in verse 30!³³

But this ignores the significance of the connective οὖν at the beginning of verse 31.³⁴ It also ignores the similarity between opponents of John 6 and these in John 8.³⁵ In both cases the “disciples” turn away from Jesus within the same dialog. Köstenberger sums up the view of the majority of commentators: “the ‘many who believe’ in 8:30 and the ‘Jews’ in 8:31 are the same group of people.”³⁶

³² Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 210.

³³ As, remarkably, Motyer advocates, though he views the ‘believers’ of v. 30 and a different group of ‘believers’ in v. 31, both of whom accept Jesus as “the Prophet” of John 7! (*Your Father*, 158, 163). Griffith states that several indications “serve to distinguish those in 8:31 from those in 8:30 [who believed in him].” (1) It is difficult to believe that within seven verses (from 8:30 to 8:37) such believers are intent on killing Jesus. (2) Jesus’ “friends” in 8:12-30 turn out to be his enemies in 8:31-59. (3) Verse 30 has “believed in him” (εἰς + acc. pronoun), but verse 31 has only “those who believed him” (ptc. + dat. pronoun). (4) Verse 31 specifies “the Jews” but verse 30 does not. (5) πιστεύω in verse 31 changes in both tense and mood (perf. ptc.) from its use in verse 30 (aor. ind.).

³³ (6) The antecedent of “the Jews who believed him” in 8:31-59 is really the false disciples who “turned back and no longer walked with him” in 6:66 (Terry Griffith, “The Jews Who Had Believed in Him” [John 8:31], in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 185-186). In answer to #3 above, πιστεύω with εἰς + acc. and πιστεύω with a dat. object both refer to true and false believers in John’s Gospel (cf. 2:23-24; 8:30, 31). In 8:31 the perfect tense (πεπιστευκότας) may or may not take the sense of pluperfect, but Edwin A. Abbott explains that πεπιστευκότας refers back to the believers in 8:30 and provides examples of John’s use of the perfect referring back to its immediate context (*Johannine Grammar* [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906], 365–366).

³⁴ Of the 12 other uses of οὖν in 8:12-59, all are based on the context of the previous verse (e.g. the three occurrences of οὖν in 8:24,25, 28 are especially clear and relate to its connective force in vv. 30-31).

³⁵ There are two other similarities between the dialogs of John 6 and 8: (1) the word “abide/remain/μένω refers to continual believing in Jesus, his word, and his truth (“whoever feeds ... has eternal life ... Whoever feeds ... remains in me and I in him,” 6:54-56; “If you remain in my word you are truly my disciples” (8:31); (2) The sovereignty of God is responsible for true faith in both John chapters 6 and 8 (for John 6 see above): “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God (8:47). To be “of God” recalls the sovereignty theme from 1:13 (“born ... of God”) and 3:5-8 (“born of the Spirit”).

³⁶ *John*, 260. He lists the major commentaries in 260n.47. Bob Wilkin holds that John 8:30-32 is strictly parenthetical and so “the Jews” who believe in these verses are *true believers* and are not “the Jews” of the preceding or following context (8:48)! The only reason he posits for this view is that every instance of πιστεύω in the Gospel of John must refer to true belief as in 3:16, or the assurance of eternal life is void (*Grace in Focus*, 28.3 [2013], 3-6), a view that D. A. Carson adequately refutes (“Reflections on Christian Assurance,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 54.1 [1992], 2–29).

John frequently and purposefully inserts this surprising and unexpected language into the narrative of his Gospel to alert his readers to the reality that much profession of faith in Jesus is inadequate for eternal life, just as it was for the Jews of Jesus' day.

But who are the readers of this Gospel that need such persuasion? Carson suggests that they are diaspora Jews.³⁷ In the view of this paper, the readers are professing Jews, many of whom may yet need to be fully convinced that Jesus is both the Messiah, the Son of God, and Savior of the world, in order to demonstrate that their profession is true. They are identified by the plural pronoun ὑμεῖς in 19:35 (“that *you* also may believe”) and by the 2nd plural subjunctives in 20:31 (“...that *you* may believe ... and that by believing *you* may have life”). This will be developed in a later section of this paper.

3. John 9 and 10, An Example of True Faith and Contrasting Unbelief

After four chapters of opposition and inadequate faith (except for that of the “12”), John 9 provides the other Sabbath healing ‘bookend’, but this time the sovereign drawing power of the Father is expressed in terms that precede the healing by years: the man was born blind “that the works of God might be displayed in him” (9:3). His true faith is confirmed in 9:38 by statements of faith (“Lord, I believe”) and worship (“he worshipped him”), thus confirming that the Father and sought and found a true worshipper (4:23-24).

Though chapter 9 completes the healing *inclusio* started in chapter 5, chapter 10 provides a fitting supplement to it: (1) The divine Good Shepherd of chapter 10 stands in contrast to the thieving Pharisees of chapter 9; (2) the healed man and all true sheep are drawn by the Father from the flock given to Jesus and thus both he and all of them are secure in their possession of eternal life.

Chapter 10 draws on the healing of the man in chapter 9 to move the theme of true and false faith ahead in the narrative. As in chapter 7, “there was again a division among the Jews,” showing that some were for Jesus and other against him (10:19-21), even though an

³⁷ *John*, 91–92, for a lengthy defense of this view in relation to the purpose statement of 20:30-31.

opposition group is determined to kill him by stoning (10:31ff). When Jesus leaves “many came to him” and “many believe in him there,” but the similarity of expression compared to 7:31 (“the people believed”) and 8:30 (“many believed in him”) leaves the reader in doubt whether these are genuine believers or not. Actually, by this point in the narrative, we know that unless they continue in Jesus’ word they are not genuine at all.

4. John 11-12, The Climactic Sign

The final sign of the “Book of Signs” (John chapters 2-12) is intentionally climactic and is introduced with sovereign intent as was the healing of chapter 9 (11:1-6).³⁸ With culminative intent Jesus asks the thematic question: “Do you believe this?” (11:26). Readers of the Synoptics may have been surprised to read that it is Martha (not her sister Mary) who gives the great confession of the Book of Signs: “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God ...” (11:27). Notice its similarity to the purpose statement in 20:31, “... so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ...”

Chapters 11 and 12 continue to move the narrative ahead to the Passover, so we read again, “many ... believed in him” (11:45) and because of Lazarus “many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus” (12:11).³⁹ The same people hailed Jesus at his entry into Jerusalem and even “continued to bear witness” at the raising of Lazarus (12:12-18), yet they still do not know who the Son of Man is (12:34). Jesus urges them to “believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (12:36a), and then he departs (12:36b). John’s comment immediately follows in 12:37, “Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him”). The believers of 12:11-18 are really not believers at all because they could

³⁸ The division of John’s Gospel into a Book of Signs (chapters 2-12) and a Book of Glory (chapters 13-20), with a Prologue and Epilogue is explained, with some differences from my own view, by Gary M. Burge (*Interpreting the Gospel of John*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013], 76-85) and Brown and Moloney (Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, Francis J. Moloney, ed. [New York: Doubleday, 2003], 298-315).

³⁹ Leon Morris may be right that “going away” may refer to departing from their allegiance to the priests, but he is mistaken that this refers to a “deep and genuine faith” as the previous, nearly identical, phrase shows (*The Gospel according to John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 582n.33, 583).

not conceive of Jesus for who he really was--the light of the word, the Messiah, and the Son of God.

Reminiscent of the Synoptics, in the middle of this context Jesus describes the reception of eternal life in 12:25 in a fashion rather uncharacteristic of John's Gospel as 'hating ones life' which is accompanied by serving and following Jesus. In the context of the faith theme in John, and this passage in particular, this seems to help define the nature of true faith: it remains and continues (6:56; 8:31) because it regards faith in Jesus as more important than "life in this world" and results in serving and following. This is John's commentary on the inadequate faith of the crowd which he 12:37-41.

Yet, "many even of the authorities believed" but did not confess because they loved man's glory (12:42-43). This seems to anticipate the secret faith of authorities like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (19:38-39). Apparently, inadequate faith does not have to go the way of the Pharisees who plotted to kill Jesus, and the crowds who turned away from him. The sovereign drawing power of the Father may work quickly as in the case of the Samaritans and the blind man who was healed, or it may work slowly as in the case of Nicodemus and Joseph.⁴⁰ Thematic development shows Judas' descent into darkness, but that Nicodemus and Joseph continue on to true faith.

5. John 15 and Faith that Continues

The thematic development of true/false faith and the repetition of the abide/remain/μένω relationship between believers and Christ is strengthened in the vine passage of John 15. The descriptive "every branch in me" (ἐν ἐμοί, ESV, NIV) has been controversial because the words "in me" seem to indicate the abiding/remaining relationship. But because they do not bear fruit God "takes [them] away" (αἶρει/αἶρω), which is compared in 15:6 with "he is thrown away/outside" (ἐβλήθη ἔξω/βάλλω), the consequence of not

⁴⁰ Commentators are split on whether Nicodemus and Joseph were true believers. Pryor (*John*, 20) sees Nicodemus as an example of the fulfillment of the Zechariah prophecy quoted in John 19:37 ("They shall look on him whom they pierced," Zech. 12:10). Keener (*John*, 1:536) and Carson (*John*, 628-29) see them as true believers (contra Köstenberger, *John*, 118-119).

abiding/remaining.⁴¹ The negative sense of not bearing fruit in connection with αἶρω favors the meaning of “take away” such as is found in John 11:48 (“the Romans will come and take away [ἀροῦσιν/ αἶρω] ... our place”). The severe nature of the judgment in 15:6 is in keeping with Matthew 13:40 (“...the weeds are gathered and burned with fire ...) and the fate of Judas.⁴²

This passage should be taken in thematic relation to other true/false faith passages in John because of the other remain/μένω passages that address the same issue, such as John 6 (“whoever feeds on my flesh ... remains in me, 6:56) and “if you remain in my word” (8:31). Thus, just as those passages dealt with true and false faith, so John 15 does as well. The phrase “branches in me” can refer to false believers in John 15 just as words like “believe” and “disciple” do in John 6 and 8. On the positive side, those who abide/remain bear “fruit” (15:4) and “much fruit” (15:8) and thus “prove to be my disciples” (καὶ γένησθε ἐμοὶ μαθηταί, “and become my disciples”). This accords with 8:31, “if you *remain* in my word you are truly my disciples.” So, those who believe also “continue” (John 6:56), but at the same time they also have the responsibility to continue believing, and in process they bear much fruit. The thematic relation between these concepts in John 6, 8, and 15 is central to the thesis of this paper.

6. “Believe” in John 14-17

With Judas’ departure from the “12,” the concept of “believe” focuses on the development of true faith rather than that of true/false faith. In 14:1 Jesus urges the disciples to “believe also in me” that he and the Father exist in a special unity (14:11, “Believe me that I am in

⁴¹ Those who abide bear fruit (vv.2b-5); those who do not are “taken away” (v. 2) and are “thrown out” (v.6).

⁴² Gary W. Derickson holds that those in v. 2 do not bear fruit are disciplined as Christians, not ‘taken away’ and burned as in verse 6. He supports this view with the “in me” phrase of v. 2 and the claim that 1st C. viticulture supports his view, yet he provides no support in ancient texts for such a use of αἶρω. He also says that since Jesus is speaking to the disciples that are all “clean,” that all he says here refers to true believers only. However, it is just as true that Jesus deals with the betrayal of Judas (“Viticulture and John 15:1–6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 [1996]: 34-52). Derickson’s major fault is that he does not see the key terms of 15:1-8 in relation to their thematic development in the Gospel. J. Carl Laney compares 15:2 to the true/false faith theme similarly to the view presented in this paper (J. Carl Laney, “Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1–6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 [1989]: 55–66). See also Köstenberger, *John*, 450-55 and Carson, *John*, 514-18.

the Father ...”) even though it will take the eventual indwelling ministry of the Spirit to fully comprehend it (John 16:13, “he will guide you...”).

In John 16:30-31 Jesus challenges the disciples’ presumptive faith: “Do you now believe?” This reminds us of John’s insight that some aspects of the disciples’ faith was not developed until Jesus was glorified (2:22, “When he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture,” also 12:16 and 13:7). This question also reminds the reader of two earlier questions: “Do you believe this?” (11:26) and “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (9:35). But more pointedly, Jesus’ question, “Do you now believe?” is asked in view of the coming trial of their growing faith.⁴³ In view of the true/false faith theme the readers of the Gospel might ask themselves the same question: “Do I believe well enough to continue in his word or bear fruit?” (i.e. “What is to keep me from Judas’ fate or that of the fickle crowds?”). Jesus’ prayer in John 17 answers these questions from the sovereignty point of view (recall the theme chart on page one of this paper).⁴⁴

In John 17 the Father preserves those who have been given to Jesus in several ways:

(1) They still belong to the Father, though they are his gift to the Son, and thus are secure in the unity of the Father and Son (17:6-10, 20-21; cf. 10:28-30, “no one will snatch them ... I and the Father are one”);

(2) The Father will keep them in the name that both Jesus and the Father equally share (17:11)⁴⁵;

(3) The Father will keep them from the evil one (17:15); (4) The Father will sanctify them in the truth to accomplish the divine mission (17:16-19).⁴⁶

⁴³ Carson, *John*, 548.

⁴⁴ Notice that this prayer excludes “the world” and is directed only to the elect who have been given to Jesus.

⁴⁵ In some sense this must include the sending of the Spirit as the name that the Father and Son share is also shared by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). The Father and Son both send the Spirit to empower the disciples for witness, which is only possible if the Father keeps them in his (their) Trinitarian name.

⁴⁶ This sanctification seems to be a wholly sovereign and preparatory work of God, much the same as Jesus’ bestowal of the Spirit on the disciples to enable them for the Gospel mission (20:21-23). The common element between the two (17:17 and 20:22) is not only the divine mission, but the [Footnote continued on next page ...]

This is also true “for those who will believe in me through their word” (17:20). This forward look to future believers prepares the first readers of the Gospel for John’s purpose for them in the historical setting of his authorship of the Gospel (19:35, “that **you** also may believe”; 20:31, “that **you** may believe”). The answer to the question of whether the believer will “remain in me” (John 15) or “continue in my word” (8:31) is found in the keeping power of the Father and the Son (see n.46).

True believers will “remain” in Jesus’ word and in the love of the truth (14:23, “If anyone loves me he will keep my word and my Father will love him”). Does this mean that believers never doubt or suffer lapses of faith? No, since John’s Gospel itself provides examples to the contrary: (1) Peter and the disciples fled from Jesus on the night he was arrested (John 18)⁴⁷; (2) Peter denied the Lord Jesus (John 19); (3) Thomas denied the testimony of the other disciples about the resurrection of Christ (John 20). True believers, after episodes of failure, may question their relationship to Jesus, just as it seems Peter did after his denials, though he still went to Galilee as Jesus had commanded (Matt. 28). Jesus did not demand that he “believe” again because Peter was still “clean” and in some true sense, was still ‘remaining’ in Jesus’ word. Nor did Jesus demand a lengthy penance or restitution to show how sincere his repentance was. The main issue was simply, “Do you love me?” which is something every true believer is quick to affirm, and which every false believer, characterized by Judas, cares nothing about.

D. “Believe” in the Purpose Statement of John 20:30-31

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John forces the reader to wonder whether the signs he refers to in 20:31 (“these are written”) are those of the Book of Signs, concluding

repetition of ‘making holy’ (“sanctify,” ἁγιάσων/ἁγιάζω) in terms of the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth” (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The preserving of the Spirit is also a Pauline emphasis (Eph. 1:13-14; 2 Cor. 1:22; Rom. 8:11).

⁴⁷ John includes only that Jesus said the disciples would be scattered (16:32), but not the actual event itself in the Garden.

with John chapter 12, or the more recent signs of Jesus' resurrection in chapter 20 to Mary and the disciples, concluding with the climactic confession of Thomas and the blessing to all future believers (20:29, "My Lord and my God ... Blessed are those who have not seen ..."). Since John does not restrict himself to only a technical use of the word "sign," referring only to the major miracles he records in the first half of his book, there is no need to think that John requires the reader to recall only the signs of the first half of the book when he reads "these have been written" (20:31a).⁴⁸ Notice the frequency and surprising uses of "believe" in John 20:

20:8, "the other disciple ... saw and believed."

20:25, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails ... I will never believe."

20:27, "Do not disbelieve, but believe."⁴⁹

20:29, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

20:30, "...so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life ..." the evangelist talks about Jesus' blessings for those who believe without seeing and resumes in 20:31 the main theological motifs of chapter 20, viz., believing in Jesus (20:8), confessing one's faith (20:18, 25, 28), and receiving new life (20:17-18, 20). ... verses 30-31 are a conclusion to the Thomas episode (vv. 24-29) ...⁵⁰

No doubt John also has in mind the function of the signs throughout the Gospel, and recalls 12:37, "though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe." But this almost seems like a contradiction. Do signs help or not? Without the cumulative force of thematic development, this would be a seeming contradiction, but by chapter 20 the readers have gathered that the

⁴⁸ "... when they saw the signs that he was doing (2:23), cf. "This was now the second sign that Jesus did ..." (4:54!).

⁴⁹ μή γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός. Remarkably, in contrast to 98 uses of πιστεύω in the Gospel, this is the only time John uses a related noun form, perhaps for literary impact in this climactic scene where the entire faith theme reaches its intended significance in relation to the purpose for the Gospel.

⁵⁰ Rekha M. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 156-157; Thompson, *John*, 428-429.

ultimate cause of faith is the sovereign work of the Spirit (3:5-8) and the Father (6:37, 44) through the words of the Son (6:63, “the words I have spoken to you are Spirit ...”). Without the prior work of God, the purpose of the Gospel, “that you may believe,” would go unfulfilled. This also requires that those who “remain in my word” (8:31) and “remain in me” (15:4-5) do so by the encouraging work of the Spirit of truth (chapters 14-16) and the keeping power of God (chapter 17) because they are true believers.

The purpose statement is variously interpreted as either directed to unbelievers as an evangelistic strategy or with the purpose of encouraging believers to be more faithful in the Christian life (loving one another, abiding in Christ, fruitful in witnessing, etc.). The first half of the Gospel seems to accord with the evangelistic purpose with its emphasis on signs, challenges to first time faith, and conversion episodes. The second half of the Gospel, especially chapters 13-17 with its emphasis on loving one another, the ministry of the Spirit, and fruitful discipleship, seems to emphasize an intent to encourage believers in faithful living. The textual problem in 20:31 is often interpreted in terms of one purpose or the other.⁵¹ In the phrase “these are written so that you may believe” the aorist active subjunctive, πιστεύσητε, is often taken to support the evangelistic purpose with the sense of “that you may come to believe.” The other reading, πιστεύητε, a present active subjunctive, is taken, even in view of the current discussion in aspect theory, to support a purpose for believers, “that you may continue to believe.”⁵²

In the substantive debate on the textual evidence of the two readings, D. A. Carson has changed his position to Gordon Fee’s view that the present subjunctive is the most likely reading, but in doing so he has nuanced his view that John’s Gospel was written primarily with an evangelistic purpose.⁵³

⁵¹ Most of the commentaries that mention this make no mention of the thematic influence on the problem and conclude that the textual evidence inconclusive (contra Carson, below) regarding either option (Köstenberger, *John*, 582 (“this is not essential for ... the purpose statement”).

⁵² Stanley Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 327-28; Keener, *John*, 2:1215-16; Brown, *Introduction*, 152, 152n.4.

⁵³ Carson, “The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:30-31 Reconsidered,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106.4 (1987), 639-51; Fee, “On the Text and Meaning of John 20,30-31,” in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. van Segbroeck et al.; BETL 100; Leuven: University Press, [Footnote continued on next page ...]

Finally, one must recall, with Craig Keener (n.16 above) how often John insists on persevering faith. Keener is quite right that this is a major Johannine theme. But in Johannine theology, short-lived faith, that is, non-persevering faith, is not genuine faith that is sadly truncated; rather, it is not genuine faith at all... By not persevering, this faith proves itself to be false.⁵⁴

Carson takes this as a support for his view on the evangelistic purpose of the Gospel, but he must also confront the problem that John 13-17 seems to deal with issues primarily related to confirmed and true believers such as the remaining disciples. His commentary answers the problem this way: “the best evangelistic literature not only explains *why* one should become a Christian, and *how* to become a Christian, but *what it means* to be a Christian. John 14–17 addresses those concerns rather pointedly...”⁵⁵

However, the true/false faith theme runs equally through both halves of the Gospel of John and is, therefore, a unifying theme that best qualifies the purpose statement in 20:31. Thematic development that views the interrelationship of God’s sovereignty and the true/false faith theme offers a better solution. In this sense, the signs, both in chapters 2-11 and in chapter 20, were written so that “you” might continue to believe.” The present tense in “might continue to believe,” then, urges a continuance of belief in much the same way as John used remain/μένω in John 6, 8, and 15.⁵⁶ The point is also repeatedly made that all the Gospels were written first of all, for the use of the churches.⁵⁷

The second part of 20:31, “that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,” is the recollection of Marth’s climactic confession, “I believe

1992), 2193-2205; Carson, “Syntactical and Text-Critical Observations on John 20:30-31: One more Round on the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124.4 (2005), 693-714.

⁵⁴ “Observations” (2005), 713.

⁵⁵ *John*, 92; “Purpose” (1987), 650.

⁵⁶ An exchange aorist and present tenses in John 10:38 accomplishes a similar comparison to this use of remain/μένω: “believe the works, that you may know [γνῶτε/ γινώσκω] and understand [γινώσκητε/ γινώσκω] that the Father is in me ...” Jesus urges “the Jews” to have true faith in him so that they “may know” (aorist tense) and “continue to know/understand” (present tense) the true relationship between him and the Father (Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 328: “...the aspectual contrast is between the act of knowing [γνῶτε, aor. subj.] and continuing progress of understanding [γινώσκητε, pres. subj.]”)

⁵⁷ Keener, *John*, 1:214 (see 175-222); 2:1214-15 (professing Jewish diaspora); Köstenberger, *John*, 8.

that you are the Christ, the Son of God ...” (11:27).⁵⁸ It also recapitulates for the purpose statement the confession and worship of the healed blind man (9:35-38), but it thematically expands into Thomas’ worshipful confession: “My Lord and my God” (20:29). The witness of the whole Gospel is called on to answer the repeated question, “Do you believe?” (16:31; 11:26; 9:35). This repeated question, then, is presented in the Gospel as preparatory for its purpose.

The last part of 20:31, “and that by believing you may have life in his name,” also casts true belief in the sense of a continuing practice on behalf of true believers. Since the present ptc. “believing” (πιστεύοντες/πιστεύω) takes its temporal nuance from the main verb of the clause, “that you may continue to have” (ἔχητε/ἔχω), the two parallel clauses “that you may believe” and “that you may have” occur in a parallel structure that presents the continuing action of both verbs as simultaneous: those who continue to believe also continue to have eternal life. As a thematic summary, 20:31 is saying that those who have placed their faith “in his name” in the way as Jesus and John have taught in this Gospel are true believers and were such from their first exercise of such faith in Christ, just as Nathaniel in chapter one, the disciples in chapter 2, the Samaritans in chapter 4, and the healed man in chapter 9.

A secondary purpose is that this faith and possession of life be realized in all future believers, Jews or not, because they have considered the themes and emphases of John’s Gospel and have become convinced that they have true, saving faith in Christ. Even in spite of lapses of faith, such a secure conviction in true believers will be used by God to draw them back to the core conviction that they love Jesus Christ enough to persevere in their faith and serve him. Though Peter is on the cusp of such convictions in John 21, he is paradigmatic contrast to Judas in terms of true and false faith and of all true disciples who are restored to fellowship after significant lapses of faith.

⁵⁸ This constitutes the major argument against Carson’s thesis that the purpose statement should read the articular noun as the subject in the purpose statement: “that the Messiah, the son of God, is Jesus” (“Observations” [2005], 695, 709-713). The confession is “climactic” because it is central to the climactic sign in John 11.

Conclusion

Thematic development highlights the value of following clearly established authorial themes through a work like the Gospel of John. In doing so, special care should be given to passages where the theme is repeated and emphasized in relation to other themes in the same book. This paper has emphasized the relation of “believe” statements throughout the Gospel of John to both the sovereignty and abide/remain themes. These emphases combine with the striking occurrences of inadequate faith in key passages of John where these themes converge, such as in the Bread of Life discourse, the disputation passage of John 8, the Vine analogy, and Jesus’ lengthy prayer (the longest of the Gospels). These emphatic comparisons serve to indicate more about the purpose of the Gospel of John than is evident in 20:30-31 alone.

Tentatively, the result is that the Gospel of John is not just the Gospel of faith in Jesus, but the Gospel that distinguishes between true and false faith in Jesus, with a view to confirming that a profession of faith in Christ must become the true faith of a true disciple. Such disciples can have the confidence that they are secure in the sovereign work of God in bringing them to saving faith in Christ, and that the evidence of fruitful works reveal the continuing work of God in them so that “it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out by God (John 3:21).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ I have translated “carried out in God” with an instrumental view of the ἐν (ἐν θεῷ), cf. ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος (3:6, 8) and ἐν πνεύματι (4:23).