

# EXPLORATIONS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

## Week Four: “Interlude: Other Feasts”

### JN 7–10 IN THE ROMAN LITURGY

4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent (A)	Jn 9:1–41
[[5 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent (C)	Jn 8:1–11]]
4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (A)	Jn 10:1–10
4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (B)	Jn 10:11–18
4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (C)	Jn 10:27–30
Solemnity of Pentecost: Vigil (ABC)	Jn 7:37–39

In the weekday Lectionary, significant portions of Jn 7–10 are read during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> weeks of Lent. Additionally, readings about the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:1–30) are read on Monday and Tuesday of the 4<sup>th</sup> week of Easter.

### OVERVIEW OF JN 7–10

After controversies on the Sabbath (Jn 5) and around the time of Passover (Jn 6), Jesus travels again to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Tabernacles (Booths), an autumn festival that celebrated the harvest and commemorated Israel’s time of wandering in the wilderness. He soon finds himself embroiled in controversy with the Jewish leaders, who now actively seek his death (see Jn 7:1). After a clash over who bears the true heritage of Abraham (see Jn 8:31–59), Jesus encounters a man born blind.

Jn 7:1–10	To Elude Arrest, Jesus Travels to Jerusalem in Secret
Jn 7:11–36	TABERNACLES: Controversy over Jesus’ Identity
Jn 7:37–52	Controversy: Jesus Promises “Living Water”= Spirit
Jn 7:53–8:11	[[Jesus and the Woman Caught in Adultery]]
Jn 8:12–30	Controversy: Jesus Speaks about his Father
Jn 8:31–59	Controversy: Jesus Speaks about the Pharisees’ Father
Jn 9:1–7	The Sixth Sign: The Man Born Blind (Narrative)
Jn 9:8–39	Controversy: The Man Born Blind Testifies to Jesus
Jn 9:40–10:21	Controversy: Jesus, the “Good Shepherd”
Jn 10:22–38	DEDICATION: “I and the Father Are One”
Jn 10:39–42	To Elude Arrest, Jesus Travels across the Jordan

## **THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT (NABRE)**

7 <sup>37</sup> On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, “Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: ‘Rivers of living water will flow from within him.’”

<sup>39</sup> He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

## **SLAVERY AND FREEDOM: THE TRUE HEIRS OF ABRAHAM (NABRE)**

8 <sup>31</sup> Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

<sup>33</sup> They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will become free’?”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. <sup>35</sup> A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. <sup>36</sup> So if a son frees you, then you will truly be free. <sup>37</sup> I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill me, because my word has no room among you. <sup>38</sup> I tell you what I have seen in the Father's presence; then do what you have heard from the Father.”

<sup>39</sup> They answered and said to him, “Our father is Abraham.”

Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham. <sup>40</sup> But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God; Abraham did not do this. <sup>41</sup> You are doing the works of your father!”

[So] they said to him, “We are not illegitimate. We have one Father, God.”

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am here; I did not come on my own, but he sent me. <sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because you cannot bear to hear my word. <sup>44</sup> You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies. <sup>45</sup> But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me. <sup>46</sup> Can any of you charge me with sin? If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me? <sup>47</sup> Whoever belongs to God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not listen, because you do not belong to God.”

<sup>48</sup> The Jews answered and said to him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed?”

<sup>49</sup> Jesus answered, “I am not possessed; I honor my Father, but you dishonor me.  
<sup>50</sup> I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the one who judges.  
<sup>51</sup> Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.”

<sup>52</sup> (So) the Jews said to him, “Now we are sure that you are possessed. Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’ <sup>53</sup> Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? Or the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be?”

<sup>54</sup> Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ <sup>55</sup> You do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know him and I keep his word. <sup>56</sup> Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad.”

<sup>57</sup> So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?”

<sup>58</sup> Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM.”

## BLINDNESS AND SIGHT

### *The Sixth Sign: Jesus Gives Sight to the Man Born Blind*

**8** <sup>59</sup> [The Jewish leaders] picked up stones to throw at [Jesus]. But Jesus hid and went out from the Temple.<sup>a</sup>

**9** <sup>1</sup> And while he was passing by, he saw a man who was blind from birth.<sup>b</sup> <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents,<sup>c</sup> that he became blind?”

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<sup>a</sup> “At the end of chapter 8, [Jesus] has left the temple area after a heated exchange that culminated in an attempt to kill him. John 9 builds upon these contrasts with the account of a blind man. Jesus has previously identified himself as the light of the world (8:12), and John 9 displays in narrative form what it means for Jesus to be the light. Two key aspects of Jesus’ identity as the light are on display in this account: first, he is the revealer, who gives spiritual light and life; second, his presence becomes the occasion of judgment.” (Martin and Wright, p. 171)

<sup>b</sup> “blind from birth”: This man is currently living in a hopeless situation. He sits at the Temple, presumably begging for alms because he has no alternative.

<sup>c</sup> See Ex 20:5, in which God, when revealing the First Commandment, identifies himself as one who punishes to “the third and fourth generation” for the wickedness of parents. The prophet Ezekiel contradicts this position in Ez 18:20. Theologically, the OT manifests a gradual development of Israel’s understanding of God, one that culminates in the person of Jesus in the NT: “Their question reflects the kind of theological thinking found in Deuteronomy, at an earlier stage of salvation history. According to this theology, God blesses people for their righteousness and punishes people for their sins in the present earthly life.” (Martin and Wright, p. 172)

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but rather it happened so that the works of God may be made visible in him.”<sup>a</sup> <sup>4</sup> It is necessary for us<sup>b</sup> to work the works of the one who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.<sup>c</sup> <sup>5</sup> Whenever I am in the world, I am the light of the world.<sup>d</sup>”

<sup>6</sup> Once he had said these things, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva<sup>e</sup> and smeared the clay on his eyes.<sup>f</sup> <sup>7</sup> And he said to him, “Go wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent).”<sup>g</sup>

So he went and washed and came back seeing.<sup>h</sup>

### *The Immediate Reaction from the Man’s Neighbors*

<sup>8</sup> Then the neighbors and those who had seen that he was a beggar earlier were saying, “Was this man not the one who was sitting and begging?”

<sup>9</sup> Some were saying that he was. Others were saying, “No, he is only similar to him.”

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<sup>a</sup> “made visible in him”: Gk *phaneroun*. Note the contrast between blindness and visibility. The Evangelist seizes on this contrary fully during this sequence.

<sup>b</sup> Note that Jesus uses the first-person plural pronoun “we” here. However, some manuscripts have “me” here. See Metzger, p. 194. If the text is genuine, the verse emphasizes that a true disciple is a true co-worker with Jesus and, by extension, the Father who sent him.

<sup>c</sup> “work”: The repetition of the noun and verb “work” three times in this sentence appears in the Gk. The Evangelist accentuates God’s ongoing work in the world, just as he worked in the six days of creation before resting on the seventh day (Gn 1:1–2:3), so now he continues to work in this re-creative act, in which he again separates light from darkness as he did on the first day of creation.

<sup>d</sup> “I am the light of the world.” Jesus already has said this earlier in this sequence (8:12).

<sup>e</sup> “Like people in other cultures, Palestinian Jews apparently believed that human excreta (including saliva) were forms of dirt rendering a person ceremonially unclean. Under certain conditions, however, it was believed that that very ‘dirt’ could become an instrument of blessing in the hands of authorized individuals. Thus, blood and saliva generally pollute, but in certain contexts blood cleanses and saliva cures. In the OT, saliva may convey ceremonial uncleanness (Lev 15:8). If the reversal of this taboo also applies, then by using saliva to cure a man, Jesus claims to possess unusual spiritual authority.” (Köstenberger, p. 283)

<sup>f</sup> “Jesus’ use of materials—spit, mud, water—underscores the materiality of this healing sign and subtly connects it with the incarnation. Just as Jesus’ flesh embodies and reveals his divinity, so also his perceptible signs disclose his divine identity and work.” (Martin and Wright, p. 173)

<sup>g</sup> The Evangelist quite possibly intends a baptismal significance to this sequence; in any event, the early Church understood the blind man’s healing as evocative of Baptism. Just as the man was born blind and needs to be washed to be healed, so also are we born sinners in need of a cleansing washing. See Brown, pp. 380–2.

<sup>h</sup> Notice the brevity of the miracle’s narration; the Evangelist evidently cares much more about the controversies and discourses that follow it. See Brown, pp. 376–7.

He said, “I am.”<sup>a</sup>

<sup>10</sup> So they were saying to him, “How [therefore]<sup>b</sup> were your eyes opened?”<sup>c</sup> <sup>11</sup> He answered, “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.’ So after I went and washed, I received my sight.”

<sup>12</sup> They said to him, “Where is this man?”

He said, “I do not know.”

*Controversy: The Man Born Blind and the Pharisees, Part One*

<sup>13</sup> They led the man who was once blind to the Pharisees.<sup>d</sup> <sup>14</sup> Now it was a Sabbath on the day that Jesus made clay and opened his eyes.<sup>e</sup> <sup>15</sup> So then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he began to see.<sup>f</sup> But he said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, I washed, and I see.”<sup>g</sup>

<sup>16</sup> So some of the Pharisees began to say, “This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath.”<sup>h</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> In this context, “I am” (Gk *egō eimi*) has the non-religious meaning of identifying the blind beggar instead of someone who only looked like him. It may also point to the cause of his miraculous sight.

<sup>b</sup> The brackets indicate a text-critical difficulty.

<sup>c</sup> “eyes...opened”: The form of this question hints at the double entendre that will dominate this passage. The blind man’s eyes are opened in the sense of his acquisition of the ability to see, but his metaphorical eyes are also opened to faith in Christ Jesus, while the Pharisees remain blind to Jesus’ true identity, which was the subject of the controversy that introduced this narrative (8:21–59).

<sup>d</sup> The narration implies that “the Pharisees” and “the Jews” are synonymous in this context.

<sup>e</sup> Note that the Evangelist narrates this detail in a manner that makes clear that Jesus has brazenly violated the letter of the Sabbath law. He “makes” and “opens”—two forbidden activities on the Sabbath.

<sup>f</sup> Notice that this scene resembles that of a courtroom in which the Pharisees question and the blind man testifies. See Martin and Wright, p. 175–6.

<sup>g</sup> “By delivering this man from the darkness of his blindness, Jesus reveals that he, as the light of the world, delivers all who are in the spiritual darkness of sin and alienation from God. Jesus also shows that the time of salvation announced by Isaiah is present in his ministry, for the Servant of the Lord was called ‘to open the eyes of the blind’ (Isa 42:7; see also 29:18; 35:5).” (Martin and Wright, p. 173)

<sup>h</sup> Jesus’ violation of the Sabbath arises from the fact that the man’s life was not in danger. Jesus thus, according to the predominant understanding of the Law at the time, should have waited for another day to heal the blind man. He also performed work when he mixed spittle with dirt. See Brown, p. 373.

Others were saying, “How can a sinful man do these kinds of signs?” And there was a schism among them.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>17</sup> So again they said to the blind man, “What would you say concerning him, because he opened your eyes?”

He said, “He is a prophet.”<sup>b</sup>

*Controversy: The Parents of the Man Born Blind and the Pharisees*

<sup>18</sup> The Jews thus did not believe about him that he was blind and gained his sight until they summoned the parents of the one who gained his sight,<sup>c</sup> <sup>19</sup> and they asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? So how does he see now?”

<sup>20</sup> His parents thus answered and said, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, but <sup>21</sup> we do not know how he now sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes; ask him, he is of age, he will speak for himself.”

<sup>22</sup> His parents said these things because they were afraid of the Jews.<sup>d</sup> For the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Messiah, he would be out of the synagogue. <sup>23</sup> For this reason, his parents said, “He is of age, question him.”<sup>e</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> “schism”: A literal translation of the Gk *schisma*. This verse makes clear the function and limitations of the signs: those unwilling to believe what the signs reveal—that Jesus is divine and thus has power even over the Law—will find a way to negate the reality of the signs. In all likelihood, therefore, the Evangelist writes to a similarly polemical situation.

<sup>b</sup> The blind man’s answer reveals an incomplete faith, but a still courageous act of testimony given the hostility of the questioner.

<sup>c</sup> “gained his sight”: Note the twofold presence of this verb in this verse (Gk *anablepein*). The repetition serves two functions: (1) To accentuate the reality of the miracle. (2) To underscore of the unbelief of the Jewish leaders.

<sup>d</sup> “were afraid of the Jews”: Here and in Jn 7:23; 19:38; and 20:19, “fear of the Jews” forms an obstacle to giving testimony to who Jesus is. The Evangelist invites his readers to shun this sort of fear, as the man born blind will eventually do.

<sup>e</sup> “The man’s parents are afraid to say anything about Jesus because they do not want to lose their religious and social ties with their synagogue community. By explaining the parents’ motivation, John reveals a very unsettling dimension of their statement [...]. By shifting the focus back to their son, his parents put him in jeopardy in order to protect themselves. They act out of fear and self-interest. Throughout John 9, the formerly blind man is the only one who testifies in Jesus’ defense. By explaining the parents’ motivation, John sets up a contrast between the parents’ fearfulness and their son’s courage.” (Martin and Wright, p. 178)

*Controversy: The Man Born Blind and the Pharisees, Part Two*

<sup>24</sup> So they summoned the man who was blind a second time and they said, “Give glory to God;<sup>a</sup> we know that this man is a sinner.”

<sup>25</sup> He thus answered, “I do not know if he is a sinner; I know one thing, I see although I used to be blind.”

<sup>26</sup> Therefore, they said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

<sup>27</sup> He answered them, “I already told you and you did not listen.<sup>b</sup> Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”<sup>c</sup>

<sup>28</sup> And they reviled him and said, “Are you one of his disciples? We are disciples of Moses! <sup>29</sup> We know that God has spoken to Moses, but we do not know<sup>d</sup> where this man is from.”<sup>e</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The man answered and said to them,<sup>f</sup> “This is the miraculous thing, that you do not know where he is from, and he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if someone is devout and does the will of God, he does listen to

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<sup>a</sup> “The phrase ‘give glory to God’ constitutes a solemn exhortation to tell the truth and to make a confession, with the implication that the person so exhorted has done wrong. In the context of the Gospel, this may constitute yet another instance of Johannine irony. For the blind man will indeed ‘give glory to God’” (Köstenberger, p. 289)

<sup>b</sup> Here, the man born blind lays bare the Pharisees’ unwillingness to admit evidence contrary to their preconceived understanding of Moses and Jesus’ incompatibility with it. “In the Fourth Gospel, however, to be a follower of Jesus is to be a true follower of Moses (see 5:45–47).” (O’Day, p. 1928)

<sup>c</sup> The form of the Gk rhetorical question reveals that the man born blind expects a negative answer. He thus ridicules the Pharisees.

<sup>d</sup> Ironically, this is the precise problem; they do not know anything about Jesus’ origins: “Herein lie the roots of the failure of ‘the Jews’ to accept Jesus. They are locked into adherence to the former gift of God that came through Moses, and they reject the perfection of God’s gift that comes through Jesus Christ (cf. 1:17–18) because they will not accept that he is ‘from God.’” (Moloney, pp. 294–5)

<sup>e</sup> “When Jesus first identified himself as the light of the world, he said, ‘Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’ (8:12). This exchange between the Pharisees and the healed man displays this distinction in action. As the questioning unfolds, some Pharisees become increasingly opposed to Jesus: they see his actions as a sin, conclude that he cannot be from God, and affiliate themselves with Moses and against Jesus. The Pharisees show themselves to be blind to Jesus the light.” (Martin and Wright, p. 181)

<sup>f</sup> “Now the man born blind becomes the teacher, reasoning with the Jewish authorities on their own terms. His tenacity contrasts with the timidity of both his parents and even of Nicodemus.” (Köstenberger, p. 291)

him. <sup>32</sup> From eternity, it is unheard that anyone opened the eyes of someone born blind; <sup>33</sup> if this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything.”<sup>a</sup>

<sup>34</sup> They answered and said to him, “You were born entirely in sinfulness,<sup>b</sup> and you are teaching us?”

And they threw him outside.<sup>c</sup>

*Jesus Speaks to the Man Born Blind*

<sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they threw him out, found him, and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

<sup>36</sup> He answered and said, “And who is he, sir, so that I may believe him?”<sup>d</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, “You have indeed seen him,<sup>e</sup> and the one speaking with you is he.”

<sup>38</sup> He said, “I believe, Lord.”<sup>f</sup> And he worshipped him.

<sup>39</sup> And Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that the ones who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.”<sup>g</sup>

*Controversy: Jesus and the Pharisees*

<sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees heard these things and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”<sup>h</sup> <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin;

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<sup>a</sup> In this speech to the Jewish leaders, the man born blind sets forth the function of the signs. They reveal the true identity of Jesus and illustrates how a contrary conclusion would violate logic. Of course, to those committed to resisting the truth, the signs have no power.

<sup>b</sup> This Gk expression is emphatic. This translation interprets the plural “sins” (Gk *hamartiais*) as a Heb plural of excellence = “the very essence of sin”.

<sup>c</sup> The leaders expel the man born blind from the Temple. Given this verse and Jn 16:2, one can infer that the original readers of this Gospel were suffering expulsion from their synagogues.

<sup>d</sup> This question shows that the man born blind still has not yet come to full faith in Jesus, yet he still was willing to suffer expulsion from the Temple. Nonetheless, he shows an eagerness to receive revelation from God, unlike the Pharisees, who make themselves unwilling to learn from the sign.

<sup>e</sup> Remember, this man has only been able to see for a few minutes in his life! The question thus has tremendous rhetorical effect.

<sup>f</sup> “Lord”: Gk *kyrie*, the same noun as in v. 36, there translated “sir”. The man’s movement to faith demands this difference in translation.

<sup>g</sup> The courtroom language returns here (see Jn 1; 3:16–21; 5:22–30), applying it to the ironic dichotomy between blindness and sight. The believing man passes from blindness to sight while the unbelieving Pharisees pass from sight to blindness.

<sup>h</sup> The form of the Gk rhetorical question implies a negative answer.

but now you say, ‘We see’—your sin remains.<sup>a</sup> **10** <sup>1</sup> Amen, amen,<sup>b</sup> I say to you, the one who does not enter through the gate of the sheepfold but goes up elsewhere, that one is a thief and a robber.<sup>c</sup> <sup>2</sup> But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd<sup>d</sup> of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> For this one, the gatekeeper opens, the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> Whenever he takes them out, he walks in front of them, and his sheep follow, because they know his voice.<sup>e</sup> <sup>5</sup> But they absolutely will not follow a stranger; instead they will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”<sup>f</sup> <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this veiled saying with them,<sup>g</sup> and they did not understand what he was saying to them.<sup>h</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Here strikes again the patron saint of the double entendre! Blindness, in this verse, symbolizes utter dependence of God and willingness to accept the revelation that the signs reveal. Since the Pharisees have worldly sight, they are blind to the meaning of the signs.

<sup>b</sup> This “amen, amen” saying “never begins a discourse in this Gospel, which suggests that the present pericope represents a continuation of the events recounted in the previous chapter.” (Köstenberger, p. 299)

<sup>c</sup> This Gk noun (*lē[i]stēs*) implies not only a transgressor of property, but also a perpetrator of violence. (See BDAG entry for this word.)

<sup>d</sup> The shepherd motif begins with God’s choice of the shepherd boy David to become the great king of Israel. After God promises that his dynasty will never fail but Judah nonetheless goes into exile, the prophets liken God’s work with his people to that of a shepherd with his sheep. Jesus thus fulfills this role announced by the prophets (see especially Ez 34). For more, see Moloney, p. 301.

<sup>e</sup> “This creates a contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees as religious leaders. Whereas the Pharisees angrily *ejected* the healed man, Jesus *leads* his sheep out to good pasture, to eternal life (10:9, 28).” (Martin and Wright, p. 188)

<sup>f</sup> “In ancient times as well as today, sheep, while helpless and in need of guidance, are able to discern between their shepherd’s voice and the call of a stranger [...]. This intimacy of a shepherd and his flock provides a beautiful illustration of the trust, familiarity, and bond existing between Jesus and his followers.” (Köstenberger, p. 301–2)

<sup>g</sup> “veiled saying”: Gk *paroimia*. Although John never uses the term “parable” (Gk *parabolē*), this “veiled saying” serves a similar function to the great Synoptic parables and conceals a profound meaning from people who approach Jesus with unbelieving hostility. (See BDAG entry for this word.)

<sup>h</sup> “In this figure of speech, Jesus draws on OT traditions. In Ezek 34, the kings of Israel are depicted as the bad shepherds who endanger the flock (34:1–10) and God has to intervene and tend for God’s own sheep until they can be put in David’s care (34:11–31). To Jesus, the Pharisees, as demonstrated in their behavior to the blind man, endanger the flock, but they do not see this. They think of themselves as shepherds, not as a thief or a stranger.” (O’Day, pp. 1928–9)

<sup>7</sup> So Jesus said to them again, “Amen, amen, I say to you that I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All those who came [before me] are thieves and robbers,<sup>a</sup> but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate:<sup>b</sup> if anyone enters through me, he shall be saved and come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief enters only to steal and kill<sup>c</sup> and destroy; I came so that they may have life and have it abundantly. <sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life on behalf of the sheep. <sup>12</sup> A hired hand, who is not the shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees—and the wolf snatches and scatters them—<sup>13</sup> because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd and I know my own<sup>d</sup> and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life on behalf of the sheep.<sup>e</sup> <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep who are not from this sheepfold.<sup>f</sup> It is also necessary for me to lead them and they will listen to my voice, and they will become<sup>g</sup> one flock, one shepherd.

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<sup>a</sup> “Most likely, Jesus is criticizing any religious authority who rivals or challenges him as leader of the sheep, and in the Gospel’s immediate context, it would apply to the Pharisees of John 9.” (Martin and Wright, p. 191)

<sup>b</sup> “The image of v. 7 returns in v. 9 as Jesus explains what it means to be the door of the sheep: Jesus is the mediator who will provide what the sheep need for life. [...] Jesus is the ‘door’ *through whom* access to good pasture is made available and by means of which a sheepfold is protected.” (Moloney, p. 303)

<sup>c</sup> “*Thyein* is not the usual verb ‘to kill’ (*apokteinein*) used elsewhere in John; it has the connotation of sacrifice and could well be a sly reference to the priestly authorities.” (Brown, p. 386)

<sup>d</sup> “my own”: This substantive use of the possessive adjective echoes its use in the Prologue in 1:11 and will reappear in Jn 13:1.

<sup>e</sup> “The unique feature in the Johannine picture of the shepherd is his willingness to die for the sheep. [...] Elsewhere in Johannine literature we find death associated with the image of the lamb [...]. This has much in common with the image of the shepherd who lays down his life so that others may have life to the full. The similarity suggests that we need not go outside the OT for the background of this particular aspect of the Johannine picture of the shepherd: it is a combination of elements from the OT descriptions of the shepherd and of the Suffering Servant.” (Brown, p. 398)

<sup>f</sup> This allusion to the salvation of the Gentiles would have struck the Jews of John’s era as offensive. They viewed their exclusive connection to Moses as essential to their identity. “But the Johannine Christians respond that God has perfected the former gift given through Moses. God is made known to them through Jesus Christ. Gone are national boundaries, and gone is the centrality of the former gift of the Law. The signs and shadows of the celebration of Tabernacles in the Temple, and only for the Jews, have become flesh in the person of Jesus, the Sent One of the Father. Water, light, and shepherd are available to all who believe in Jesus, of whatever race or nation.” (Moloney, pp. 307–8)

<sup>g</sup> “they will become”: Most published translations render this expression “there will be” but the subject of the sentence in Gk is plural. The sense is that all the disparate groups of sheep will be

<sup>17</sup> For this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life, so that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This is the command that I received from the Father.”<sup>a</sup>

*The Schism among the Jews: Can a Demon Open the Eyes of the Blind?*

<sup>19</sup> Again, a schism formed among the Jews because of these words. <sup>20</sup> Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why do you listen to him?”<sup>b</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Others were saying, “These words are not those of a man possessed by a demon.<sup>c</sup> Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”<sup>d</sup>

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of this story, who is blind and who can see? Pay particular attention to Jn 9:3–5. What about at the end of the story? How does this narrative fit with what Jesus has said in the controversies of Jn 7–8?
2. Why does the Evangelist choose to focus on the parents of the man born blind (9:18–23)? What persuasive effect might he be trying to achieve with his audience?
3. According to the man born blind (9:30), what is the real miracle in this story? How does this relate to the role of the signs in John?
4. In 9:35–39, the man born blind comes to faith as a result of his encounter with Jesus. Who else has a similar experience in John’s Gospel? Why does Jesus not encounter the man born blind until after he is thrown out by the

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united with one shepherd, Jesus. Some manuscripts, however, do have a singular verb. See Metzger, p. 196.

<sup>a</sup> In 10:17–18, Jesus tells the Pharisees that the life they seek to take from him is in fact something he lays down on his own, in obedience to the Father’s command. He also announces his Resurrection by saying that he has “authority to take it up again”. The word “again” (Gk *palin*) emphasizes that Jesus speaks about his own life after death. In saying this to those who seek his death, he undercuts any success that they might hope to achieve and provides inspiration to countless martyrs who will follow his path of death.

<sup>b</sup> “Both literarily and historically, the healing in chapter 9 forms the backdrop for Jesus’ good shepherd discourse in chapter 10. The Jewish leaders are shown to be blind guides and illegitimate usurpers, while Jesus is presented as the true, self-sacrificing shepherd of the sheep.” (Köstenberger, p 276)

<sup>c</sup> Gk participle *daimonizomenou* = “of a demonized man.”

<sup>d</sup> The form of this Gk rhetorical question implies a negative answer, thus accentuating the ridiculousness of the position of those persecuting Jesus.

- Jewish leaders (9:34)? What point might the Evangelist be making about how his audience should live as followers of Christ?
5. What purpose does the Good Shepherd metaphor serve (10:1–18)? To whom does Jesus address it? Whom do the various characters—shepherd, sheep, gate, gatekeeper, thieves/robbers, wolf—represent?
  6. Why does Jesus use the image of a “shepherd”? Does this metaphor have a heritage in the Old Testament? Where and with what significance?
  7. (For prayer): Following the blindness/sight and light/darkness motif in this story, how is my spiritual “eyesight”?
  8. (For prayer): Are you comfortable with being a sheep following a shepherd? Does this image bother you? What does the image evoke about the way God touches my daily life?

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

### Abbreviations:

All biblical abbreviations are those proposed as standard in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

A number followed by “x” reflects the number of times a given word occurs in a given context. Therefore, the shorthand “4x in Jn” means that the word occurs four times in the Gospel of John.

BDAG = W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Electronic edition in *BibleWorks 10*.

*bis* = twice

cf. = confer

ff. = following verses

Gk = Greek

Heb = Hebrew

LXX = Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament)

NT = New Testament

OT = Old Testament

p. (pp.) = page(s)

*pace* = Latin “with peace to”, indicates that the opinion expressed differs from that of the author(s) cited.

v. (vv.) = verse(s)

vs (vss.) = verse(s)

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