Blinded Eyes and Hardened Hearts: Intra-Jewish Critique in the Gospel of John

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BLINDED EYES AND HARDENED HEARTS: INTRA-JEWSH CRITIQUE IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by

Nathan Thiel, B.A., M.A.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT
BLINDED EYES AND HARDENED HEARTS: INTRA-JEWISH CRITIQUE IN
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Nathan Thiel, B.A., M.A.
Marquette University, 2016

According to the dictum of C. K. Barrett, the Gospel of John is both Jewish and anti-Jewish. That is, alongside the Gospel’s pervasive appeal to Israel’s Scriptures and traditions stands trenchant criticism of those whom the evangelist refers to as “the Jews” (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι). That the censure is so often directed toward them with a seeming lack of inner differentiation has suggested to many that the Gospel witnesses to a religious schism. Ethnically Jewish believers in Jesus, having been banned from the synagogue for their faith, renounced their own identity as Jews. What began as an intra-Jewish dispute now bore the character of an external assault.

In this study, I undertake a reexamination of the Fourth Evangelist’s social location, the aim being to determine whether the author writes about the Jews as an insider, that is, as a Jew, or as someone who is conscious of standing outside membership in the Jewish people. It is my contention that the obstacles to an intra-Jewish reading of the Gospel are not insuperable. The evangelist, at the crossroads of experience and tradition, portrays the relationship between Jesus and his own in mostly oppositional terms, but he does not essentialize Jewish unreceptivity or stereotype all Jews as unbelievers.

The Gospel’s simultaneous indebtedness to Jewish tradition and persistent criticism of the Jews arguably stem from a Jewish author who portrays Jesus’s contemporaries as recapitulating the failings of their Israelite forbears. Jesus manifests the glory of God, but just as the Israelites rebelled against God in the wilderness, so too Jesus’s contemporaries refused to believe in spite of the signs which he performed. This does not in itself establish that John thought of himself as a member of the Jewish people, but it discloses a vantage point from which that inference becomes more reasonable. As a Jewish author, John drew upon the stories that he knew best in order to frame Jesus’s ministry and the opposition it aroused.
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Nathan Thiel, B.A., M.A.

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INTRODUCTION

TO BUILD UP OR TO DESTROY (OR SOMETHING IN BETWEEN)?: JOHANNINE “ANTI-JUDAISM” IN PERSPECTIVE

The Gospel of John has many biting things to say about those named “the Jews” (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι), who appear some seventy times through the course of the narrative. From ch. 5 onward, they seek to take Jesus’s life. On two occasions they unsuccessfully attempt to stone him (8:59; 10:31). Jesus rebukes them for failing to hear his word (8:43); they love praise from people more than praise from God (5:44; 12:43). And, most startling of all, the devil himself is reputed to be their father (8:44). The stridency of the Gospel’s criticism and its general depiction of the Jews as Jesus’s opponents have laid it bare to charges of anti-Jewish bias. It has been branded as “trenchantly anti-Jewish,” containing an “anti-Jewish polemic of extreme ferocity” that is inherent to the text itself and “not attributable solely to the interpretive tradition.”

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In at least one respect, the allegation that the Fourth Gospel is anti-Jewish cannot be deflected. By all appearances its author is a religious exclusivist. John 3:16 famously declares that God so loved the world that he sent his Son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Not as famous is the corollary in 3:18 that those who do not believe stand condemned already, the objects of God’s wrath (3:36). If Jesus is the source of true life, the alternatives, whatever shape they take, necessarily result in death. For the evangelist, then, Judaism, insofar as it excludes the confession that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, must be rejected as a path to salvation. By that measure the Gospel is also anti-Islamic, anti-Buddhist, anti-atheistic, anti-agnostic, in short, anti-anything that does not share its christological profession. For some this very fact will prove a stumbling block. It violates the spirit of inclusiveness and religious pluralism that is so valued today. John, I think, would not have minded. The Jesus he proclaims has no equal. To put matters this way, however, is essentially tautological and therefore not very enlightening. It amounts to saying that the evangelist took a stand on the exclusivity of the Christ of whom he wrote. The

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opposition is on the level of ideas and convictions. The Gospel is anti-Jewish in
the same sense that Judaism is anti-Christian.³

Then again, convictions are embodied and sustained in practice and group
interaction, and so our attention immediately shifts to the social implications of
the Johannine insistence on Jesus’s unique role as revealer and mediator of
salvation. It has been argued, in fact, that those behind the production of this
enigmatic text formed a closed conventicle, a sect in sharp tension with the Jews
and with the world, that the incomprehension Jesus meets in the Gospel is a
mirror of the Johannine community’s sense of alienation from the surrounding
society.⁴

And yet there is a peculiar ambivalence about the Jews in the Fourth
Gospel, so much so that C. K. Barrett could pointedly describe it as “both Jewish
and anti-Jewish.”⁵ Alongside the more infamous utterances, Jesus tells the
Samaritan woman in John 4:22 that “salvation is from the Jews” (NRSV), an odd
admission from someone who despised the Jewish people.⁶ Nowhere does the

³ So also John Ashton, The Gospel of John and Christian Origins (Minneapolis: Fortress,
2014), 3, n. 2.
44-72.
1975), 72.
of the Period,” in Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways AD 70 to 135, ed. James D. G. Dunn,
WUNT 66 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 197.
evangelist hide the tradition that Jesus himself is a Jew who dies as king of the Jews, nor are all Jewish figures in the narrative painted with the same broad, dark brush. Barrett’s paradox draws out the difficulty of making sense of the Gospel’s seemingly disparate statements about the Jews. At the same time, it pushes us to think more precisely about what we are asking. In what sense is the Fourth Gospel Jewish or anti-Jewish? Did the evangelist level his critique of the Jews from the inside as one who was born and died a self-professed Jew, as one who thought of faith in Jesus as faithfulness to Israel’s God and traditions? Or did he fire arrows from the outside, to harm and not to build up? Was he a Paul lamenting the fate of his own people, or was he a Martin Luther, outrageously clamoring for the burning of synagogues and Torah scrolls?7

And then there are relations on the ground. We might imagine that Jesus’s strong words to the Jews would manifest themselves as (or reflect) disdain of and separation from contemporary Jews on the part of the evangelist or his intended audience, a straight line running from here to the nightmarish mistreatment of Jews at Christian hands that was to plague later ages.8 Yet if God

7 As Luther advises in the notorious On the Jews and Their Lies (1543).
8 Among the most ardent critics of the Fourth Gospel as irredeemably anti-Jewish, and not just the victim of misinterpretation, are Rosemary Radford Ruether (Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism [New York: Seabury, 1974], 111-16) and the Jewish social scientist Micha Brumlik (“Johannes: Das judenfeindliche Evangelium,” in Teufelskinder oder Heilsbringer: Die Juden im Johannes-Evangelium, ed. Dietrich Neuhaus, 2nd ed., Arnoldshainer Texte 64 [Frankfurt am Main: Haag & Herchen, 1993], 6-21).
so loved the world to send his own Son, then did he not love the Jewish people to whom the Word made flesh was first sent? And if in the Gospel, Jesus himself continues to minister among the Jews up to his final days, even dying on their behalf, should it be assumed that the evangelist encourages a sharp break with the Jews of his own place and time? Both the past and present know all too well of Christian agitators against Jews. On the other hand, even today many Christians who cherish this Gospel and for whom its vision of a world in darkness is very real harbor no animosity toward the Jewish people. They co-exist with them peacefully. They are co-workers, colleagues, and friends.

There are two cautions embedded in this catena of queries, the first against mirror reading, a point to which I shall return later, the second against too hastily eliding a group’s beliefs and their relationship with those of the larger society or some part of it. To borrow from the field of sociology, we may say that the Fourth Gospel implies the existence of an individual or community that is in high tension with its surrounding social environment, a subculture whose beliefs, practices, and values deviate from the dominant society. But as Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge recognize in their work on the formation of sects and cults, social tension is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. In their
model, it is charted along three axes: difference, separation, and antagonism. The category of difference signifies tension in behavioral norms between the subculture and the dominant culture. That of separation concerns the removal of the subculture from its social environment and the manifestation of such distance in patterns of social relations. The index of antagonism measures the attitudes and feelings of a group towards outsiders, including an assessment of their particularism, that is, the conviction that they alone are in possession of the truth. The three dimensions are related but not inherently codependent, such that a group that exhibits marked particularism, and thus would tend to the higher end of the spectrum of antagonism, could conceivably maintain cordial relations with those not belonging to their association. What Stark and Bainbridge capture through their model and what I have expressed above on the basis of observation is the complex interaction between belief, practice, and social interaction. If we hope to avoid caricature and distortion, we cannot collapse the dimensions, inferring from one to the other without control.

To take one example in greater detail, over a century ago, the Jewish scholar Kaufmann Kohler described the Gospel of John as a “gospel of Christian love and Jew hatred.” With its piercing concision, Kohler’s epigram typifies a

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line of interpretation that situates the Jews at the negative pole of the evangelist’s dualistic mindset.\textsuperscript{11} Or as John Ashton has memorably put it in response to Hartwig Thyen’s statement that the Gospel is stamped with a deeply ambivalent love-hate relationship toward Judaism: “Even if we ignore the easy substitution of the ambiguous word \textit{Judentum} (‘Judaism’/’Jewry’) for John’s specific \textit{οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι}, there remains the clear implication that the evangelist was somehow torn between love and hatred (\textit{Haß}/\textit{Liebe}) in his feelings towards those he thus names; whereas in fact there is no love and little sympathy, only hostility tinged with fear.”\textsuperscript{12} As already observed, it cannot be reasonably disputed that the Gospel often speaks against those called “the Jews.” Yet how far is it right to label this hostility or hatred? In the first place, we ought to note that many of the so-called negative references do not directly impugn the Jews or their character but rather narrate their opposition to Jesus (5:16; 6:41; 7:1, 13; 8:59; 9:18, among many others). In the second place, although Jesus’s words are often critical, even confrontational, we must still determine where criticism ends and hatred begins. As a matter of general experience, the two sometimes overlap, or what begins as


an attempt at correction shades into outright anger or personal attack, but the ends of the spectrum remain conceptually distinct.

There is in fact plenty of hate speech in the Gospel, but it is all one-directional. The world hates and persecutes Jesus and the disciples. They are never exhorted to hate the world in return. The Gospel gives no counsel to violence or revenge, no glorying in the prospect of others’ destruction (as in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, or even in the Psalms), no hope for enemies’ demise. And Jesus does not come to condemn the world but to save it, the sentence of death being the logical consequence of refusing life. In the wider scope of Johannine theology, there is a fundamental incongruity between God’s self-offer to humanity and humanity’s response. Jesus’s command to love one’s enemies is not recorded in the Gospel of John; some have thought it alien to its ethics. Yet although never commanded, this is precisely what God does. He loves the people he has created, all the while they reject him out of a love for human glory and fear that their sin will be exposed.

13 So also Martinus C. de Boer, “The Depiction of ‘the Jews’ in John’s Gospel: Matters of Behavior and Identity,” in Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel, 143-44.
14 A position well summed up by Ernst Käsemann (The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in Light of Chapter 17, trans. Gerhard Krodel [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968], 59-60) who states forthrightly that Jesus in the Fourth Gospel does not love the world. Love for the brothers does not even encompass love for one’s neighbor but is restricted to the community of believers.
15 Along these lines are the recent studies of Enno Edzard Popkes, Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes in den johanneischen Schriften: Zur Semantik der Liebe und zum Motivkreis des Dualismus,
But is it possible to charge people with having the devil for their father (John 8:44) and not hate them? A full exegesis of this notorious passage must be delayed until ch. 2. Surely the first readers were to judge the murderous intentions of Jesus’s interlocutors as reprehensible. Nevertheless, even here, where the verbal fire blazes hottest, at least two possibilities immediately confront us. To the statement, “You are of your father the devil,” the intended readers could have subjoined something like the grim petition of Ps 69: “Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them.” Or they could have echoed the sentiment of Ezek 18:32: “For I [God] take no pleasure in the death of anyone … Repent and live!” It is hard to describe the first hypothetical response as anything but hatred. The second will strike some as patronizing or misguided, but its tenor comes closer to pained lament than to fervent loathing. My intent at this point is not to mount an apologia for the Gospel but to stress the need for circumspection. If it is sometimes no small feat to ascertain the standpoint from which our contemporaries speak and write, how much more so for an author whom we cannot engage in conversation and a work that does not divulge the exact circumstances of its origin and composition. A caveat lector, though not a


16 This is not to say that the intended readers of the Gospel necessarily knew these passages, only that there is a range of possible emotional and intellectual responses to Jesus’s words in John 8.
counsel of despair, must therefore accompany our examination of the Gospel’s attitude toward Judaism and the Jewish people.

The Evangelist’s Social Location: A Family Affair

Out of the many angles of approach, the present study will concentrate on the author’s social location, the aim being to determine whether the author writes about the Jews as an insider, that is, as a Jew, or as someone who is conscious of standing outside membership in the Jewish people. The argument has long been that the Gospel of John bears the character of an external assault, written in the heat of battle against the synagogue. Against this, I shall argue that an intra-Jewish reading of the Gospel becomes increasingly intelligible when we observe how the evangelist appropriates Israel’s Scriptures, even if the nature of our evidence prevents a definitive judgment about the author’s ethnic affiliation. In that respect, the study builds upon the work of James D. G. Dunn, Stephen Motyer, and Craig S. Keener, among others, according to whom an antithesis of Jew-versus-Christian is not yet appropriate for the Fourth Gospel. In other

words, I shall argue that the Gospel’s invective does not compel us to read the work as the story of a religious divorce between Jews and Christians, the two now seen as incompatible ways of life and faith demanding a choice for one or the other.¹⁸

I have put the thesis in this way and not in stronger terms because the process of inferring the author’s identity from the Gospel puts us in the realm of informed speculation. If we were to transport ourselves back a half-century or so, the hesitation would probably owe itself to the influence of source criticism: the detection of pre-existing documents and written traditions which the biblical authors appropriated and transformed in their own works. Some of the source-critical proposals are relatively reserved. Others are quite complex.

¹⁸ By focusing upon the Gospel in its relation to Jews and Judaism I do not mean to isolate it from other religious and social currents in the Greco-Roman world nor to deny the mutual influence of Greek and Jewish cultures in the Hellenistic era. Indeed, the religious outlook of the Fourth Gospel has much in common with developments that Jonathan Z. Smith has discerned in the diasporic expression of native religions in the Hellenistic era. In particular, the Fourth Gospel appears to detach proper worship of God from land and cultic site (4:23-24) and has a decided emphasis on the salvation of the individual from a world under the power of sin. See Smith, “Birth Upside Down or Right Side Up?” HR 9 (1970): 281-303; idem, “Native Cults in the Hellenistic Period,” HR 11 (1971): 236-49. Helmut Koester (History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age, vol. 1 of Introduction to the New Testament, 2nd ed. [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995], 148-96) chronicles this persistence and change in Hellenistic-era religion with an eye specifically to the historical context of the NT.

Nevertheless, as these concerns do not directly impinge upon the nature of the Gospel’s polemic or the Fourth Evangelist’s ethnic self-identification, they fall outside the scope of the present study. To the extent that the Gospel participates in these wider religious phenomena, it does so always with reference to Israel’s Scriptures and Jewish tradition.
hypothesizing multiple layers of editorial activity and textual rearrangement.\textsuperscript{19}

As the hypothetical hands which went into the Gospel’s composition multiplied, it became progressively appealing to speak of an anonymous collective responsible for its growth, or at least harder to discern the marks of an author or evangelist in a meaningful sense.\textsuperscript{20}

The popularity of source criticism of the Fourth Gospel has waned considerably in recent years, in part because of the advent of narrative criticism in Johannine studies, in part because of a string of rigorous demonstrations of the Gospel’s stylistic unity.\textsuperscript{21} The most meticulous of these, and still unsurpassed, is the monograph of Eugen Ruckstuhl and Peter Dschulnigg.\textsuperscript{22} Having identified

\textsuperscript{19} Although Rudolf Bultmann only proposed three main written sources for the Gospel of John, his commentary is a prime example of the tendency to divide and rearrange the text as it has been received. D. Moody Smith devoted a book to sorting out Bultmann’s method and textual decisions: \textit{The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel: Bultmann’s Literary Theory}, Yale Publications in Religion 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965). Another fine example from English scholarship is F. R. Hoare, \textit{The Original Order and Chapters of St. John’s Gospel} (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1944), whose theories of displacement are ingenious but implausible. A more recent work within this tradition is M.-E. Boismard and A. Lamouille, \textit{Un évangile pré-johannique}, EBib 17, 3 vols. (Paris: Gabalda, 1993).


\textsuperscript{21} The emergence of narrative-critical approaches to the Fourth Gospel is most often associated with R. Alan Culpepper’s \textit{Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design}, FF (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). That is not to say that earlier scholars showed no interest in the Gospel as a work of literature. See Mark Stibbe, ed., \textit{The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives}, NTTS 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

153 characteristics of the Gospel’s style, Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg group them according to their distinctiveness against other NT and Greco-Roman literature and track their distribution and interrelation from John 1 to 21. The result is a dense network of linguistic features suggestive of a unifying hand. Whatever sources, oral or written, were at the evangelist’s disposal, they were reworked and stamped with his own voice.

The efforts of Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg, and before them Eduard Schweizer, Joachim Jeremias, and Philippe-H. Menoud, confirm in some measure what D. F. Strauss felt to be true intuitively, that the Gospel is like that seamless garment of which it speaks. Or rather, they show that it is necessary to speak of an evangelist who, if he received into his hands various pieces of cloth, has nonetheless sewed them together carefully enough that it is now exceedingly difficult to rip them apart and analyze them in their pre-Johannine form. There are of course literary trouble spots in the Gospel, above all, awkward transitions,

23 As D. A. Carson has argued in his review of Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg’s book (JBL 113 [1994]: 151-52), the stylistic arguments do not in themselves invalidate source- and redaction-critical theories. However, whoever intends to substantiate their theories of literary development via differences in style between compositional layers faces a momentous challenge. It is interesting to note, in this respect, that Tom Felton and Tom Thatcher (“Stylometry and the Signs Gospel,” in Jesus in Johannine Tradition, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 209-18) largely pass over Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg’s work when trying to prove that the hypothesized Signs Source has a distinct style of its own.

aporiae as they have come to be known in the field. But whatever we make of these disjunctures, they no longer present a compelling argument against a strong individual hand in the Gospel’s production. It is not unreasonable to think that an otherwise great storyteller had occasional trouble crafting seamless transitions. Nor is there any inherent improbability that the author came back to his magnum opus over a protracted period of time, as Martin Hengel and John Ashton maintain.

The problem, then, is not that too many hands went into the writing of the Gospel so that it is impossible to say something about a single author. It is rather, that even granted this author, we still have to determine what stems from memory, what from tradition, and what from invention. I am schematizing, of course, but it is important for the moment that I keep these categories separate. Let us suppose, for example, that the evangelist invented Jesus’s speeches, so

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distinctive to the Fourth Gospel, out of whole cloth. Since many of these discourses presume a good knowledge of contemporary Jewish practice and exegetical technique, it would seem likely that the author was a Jew or had lived in Judea long enough to know the lay of the social land. But if the evangelist received these as already formed traditions, though not necessarily from a written source as Rudolf Bultmann had thought, and put them into his own words, no such inference is necessary.\(^{28}\)

There are some potential ways out of this impasse. We could scour the Gospel’s summary statements, narrative asides, and transitional sequences (the most probable candidates for composition de novo), but these are sparse and hard to secure. We might also consider whether the evangelist’s linguistic peculiarities reflect Aramaic influence, either as a first language or as the native tongue of his progenitors.\(^{29}\) It is no guarantee of a Jewish voice, but accents, so to speak, are often clues to geographic or ethnic origin. But to pursue these leads now would get us too far afield. At the present it must suffice to show that a self-identified Jew could reasonably speak about other Jews in the manner that the evangelist does.

\(^{28}\) Bultmann hypothesized a written “Revelation Discourse Source” (Offenbarungsredenquelle) which lay behind Jesus’s extended speeches in the Fourth Gospel. This was one aspect of Bultmann’s source-critical theory that never gained much traction.

\(^{29}\) As, for example, C. F. Burney (The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel [Oxford: Clarendon, 1922]), who argued for an Aramaic original. Burney’s thesis has not won wide support, but a certain Semitic coloring to Johannine style is nevertheless unmistakable.
Methodology and Plan of the Work

Those attempting to place what Adolf Schlatter once called a “homeless” Gospel in its historical setting have often looked toward a burgeoning conflict between church and synagogue.\(^3\) From the 1970s onward, under the influence of J. Louis Martyn’s slim but monumental *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, the model of a conflict between the Johannine community and the synagogue in which they had once been members has become a standard feature of accounts of the Gospel’s distinctive ideas, community history, and sometimes combative tone.\(^3\) I will explore the synagogue-expulsion theory and Martyn’s two-level reading strategy in the next chapter. For reasons that will become clear shortly, I will not take it as a starting point, nor do I assume any specific communal situation in which the Gospel was written or to which it speaks except in general terms. That does not mean this Gospel is left to “timeless, placeless interpretation,” only that the time and place to which it belongs fall within a


range whose breadth may not satisfy the intellectual curiosity of detail-minded biblical scholars.\textsuperscript{32} The story, of course, is set in the late 20s and early 30s in Palestine, even as the prologue stretches back into eternity. The Gospel’s destination, on the other hand, is open to speculation: written sometime in the first century in the Greek-speaking world, probably in the first place for the benefit of persons who were already believers in Jesus. The argument of this study neither depends upon nor directly refutes the many competing theories that would try to determine the evangelist’s and readers’ situations more specifically, even as it questions one aspect of the synagogue-expulsion hypothesis.

The method I will pursue is consciously eclectic. It is in part philological, since the appellation \textit{οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι} in the Fourth Gospel cannot be isolated from its history and usage, despite the occasional insistence that the identity of the Jews in the Gospel of John is best determined by the Gospel alone.\textsuperscript{33} It is in part narrative-critical, to the extent that a proper evaluation of the Johannine attitude toward the Jews must begin with a close reading of the Gospel as we have

\textsuperscript{32} I have taken the quoted phrase from J. Louis Martyn, “The Johannine Community among Jewish and Other Early Christian Communities,” in \textit{What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies}, ed. Tom Thatcher (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 184. I do not intend here to criticize Martyn, for in context he is reflecting upon the tendency among some earlier exegetes to downplay the historical and social context of the Gospel, but it is worth noting at the outset the problem of historical specificity.

\textsuperscript{33} So Gérald Caron, \textit{Qui sont les Juifs de l’Évangile de Jean?} Recherches 35 (Saint-Laurent, QC: Bellarmin, 1997).
received it. Above all, however, I am interested in social history and identity formation. From what we know of other Jewish Christian groups and from the evidence of the Gospel itself, what would be the likely response of a Jewish Christian community or individual author to persecution or imagined threat from fellow Jews? And what resources were available to them to make sense of the fact that most Jews of Jesus’s time and their own were not as the same mind as they?

I will begin, therefore, not with a wholesale rejection of the synagogue-expulsion theory but by scrutinizing the corollary that this event triggered the birth of a new religious body, that onetime Jewish believers in Jesus had relinquished their own identity as Jews. Chapters 2 and 3 will undertake a reevaluation of the identity of the Johannine Jews and of their overall image within the Gospel’s narrative framework. I will argue that while John is none too sanguine about the Jewish response to Jesus, or, for that matter, the general human response to him, it is misleading to conceive of this portrayal as stereotyped. The evangelist is not engaged in a process of alienating Jesus and indeed Christian faith from “the Jews,” such that the author looks on them from the outside. The fourth chapter constitutes something of a digression, insofar as the central thesis would be bolstered by it if correct but not harmed were the opposite proven to be the case. Here I will entertain the possibility that the
evangelist regards Palestine of Jesus’s time as multi-ethnic in character and that this understanding affects his remarks about the Jews.

I will return in the final chapter to my central question, namely whether it is intelligible for an author who self-identified as a Jew to write about the Jews as the evangelist does, and if so, how. The first component to the problem is the Gospel’s intended audience, as authors typically adapt their speech to accommodate their readers. The second is the evangelist’s approach to Israel’s scriptures; John, I suggest, appropriates the desert wandering traditions to frame Jesus’s ministry and the controversy it occasioned, imitating the accounts of the Israelites’ rebelliousness in order to weave the story of Jesus and his own into the scriptural drama of faith and unbelief. The Fourth Gospel’s criticism of the Jews, potent as it is at times, does not compel us to attribute it to an embattled and embittered author (or community) that had disowned his Jewish family.

**A Note on the Translation of Ἰουδαίος**

Before proceeding to the first chapter, I must take up one more preliminary matter. Any sustained investigation into the Johannine Jews must sooner or later tackle the question of translation, as this is part and parcel of the set of problems that lies before us. For the time being, I will leave the Fourth Gospel to the side, both because its usage is often seen as distinct, and therefore an outlier, and
because translation of the Greek Ἰουδαῖος has become precarious enough even apart from it.34 The principal question, as the debate has developed, is whether to translate Ἰουδαῖος in ancient texts “Jew” or “Judean,” or perhaps transliterate it ioudaios and so (ostensibly) evade any prejudicial rendering.35

The tussle might seem arcane outside of the academy, but it is driven by issues of some substance. It is probably no coincidence that the question of translation has come to the fore at this stage in history, as Christians have become more aware of and more sensitive to the dangers of anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism.36 Indeed, much of the impetus for “Judean” has come on ethical

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35 Another option proposed for the Gospel of John is to place “Jews” in quotation marks, signaling to the reader that what the Fourth Gospel means by it is not typical.

grounds. So, for example, the latest edition of the Bauer-Danker Greek lexicon prefers “Judean” on the rationale that “Jew” is ethically suspect:

In calculable harm has been caused by simply glossing I. with “Jew,” for many readers or auditors of the Bible translations do not practice the historical judgment necessary to distinguish between circumstances and events of an ancient time and contemporary ethnic-religious-social realities, with the result that anti-Judaism in the modern sense of the term is needlessly fostered through biblical texts.37

Because of its gravity the claim cannot be lightly dismissed. The Bauer-Danker lexicon, however, goes no way toward substantiating it. That the damage caused is said to be incalculable detours the reader around the specifics of the translation’s Wirkungsgeschichte (“history of effect”). Having read the NT many times before becoming acquainted with the mass of secondary literature, I never thought that it authorized animosity toward the Jews. Nor, in speaking with many acquaintances who know Scripture well have I witnessed any such transfer. This is anecdotal, of course, but the personal experience raises a question of methodology. To say that the translation “Jews” encourages hostility toward modern Jews, however unintentionally, begs for a standard of measurement, one with the power to confirm or refute the hypothesis that the translation itself is at fault.

37 BDAG, 478; similarly Malcolm Lowe, “Who Were the Ἰουδαῖοι?” NovT 18 (1976): 130; Esler (Conflict and Identity, 68) questions the morality of the translation “Jews” but on the grounds that it does not honor the memory of ancient Ἰουδαῖοι in a way that accords with their own sense of self.
I am inclined to think that the translation is a surface issue and that eliminating any mention of Jews in the NT would not have any appreciable effects in diminishing hatred of Jews today. Anti-Semitism has not been eradicated in the English-speaking world. But were we to compare the treatment of Jews before the Bible translations of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that gloss Ἰουδαῖοι with “Jews” with their misfortunes in England in the Middle Ages before a vernacular translation was available, relations have improved considerably. The cause of this state of affairs is surely to be found in a conglomeration of social and political factors unrelated to practices in Bible translation. Correlation in this case, as so often, is not causation, nor should it be so presumed in the opposite direction. The choice of translation is not to be credited or blamed without good cause.38

The reverse side of the ethical argument is that “Judean” runs the risk of severing the ancient from the modern people. Jesus and his disciples are no longer Jews but Judeans and/or Galileans. We are left with a “Jew-free” NT.39 Of course, this is not the intention of its advocates in the academic realm, who are typically concerned with historical accuracy or fidelity to ancient groups’ own

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sense of self-identity. But an internet search will show its potential for misunderstanding and misuse. In short, against the best intentions of translators, anti-Semites are likely to find their fodder whatever the translation.\textsuperscript{40}

The other impetus for “Judean” is more properly historical, though sometimes tethered to concerns about the effect of the text at the popular level. There are several inflections of this common theme. Shaye J. D. Cohen, to take a prominent example, locates a shift in the meaning of Ιουδαῖος from an ethno-geographic signifier to a more markedly religious or cultural term sometime in the second century BCE, the Maccabean revolt and Hasmonean conversion of the neighboring Idumeans and Itureans being watershed moments in that process. The possibility of Gentile conversion meant a re-conceptualization of Jewish identity as a religion.\textsuperscript{41} After this point, “Jew” becomes the best translation. Cohen’s separation of ethnicity and religion has been criticized as anachronistic or overly compartmentalized.\textsuperscript{42} But the notion of a historical and cultural transition in the life of the Jewish people which calls for a shift in English translation informs several other arguments for “Judeans” in a first-century

\textsuperscript{40} So also Klawans, “Invented Revolution.”

\textsuperscript{41} Cohen (Beginnings of Jewishness, 340) argues that “religion overcame ethnicity,” though an ethnic component to the term did not fade out entirely.

context. “Jews,” it has been said, reflects an identity that has been so shaped by the destruction of the temple, failure of the revolts against Rome, the emergence of rabbinic culture and piety, and subsequent historical developments that it is no longer appropriate for first-century Ἰουδαίοι. Their identity was tied to homeland and temple in a way that of their descendants was not. “Judeans” therefore better captures their sense of collective identity.

One of the most cogent critiques of a caesura of this sort, incidentally, comes from another advocate of the translation “Judean,” Steve Mason. Mason’s influential essay on the subject is in the first place a justification of the translation “Judean” adopted for some volumes of the Brill Josephus translation and commentary series. Given the article’s length, it is almost inevitable that one will find particulars with which to cavil, but I take its central point to be beyond reasonable doubt: Jews of antiquity thought of themselves and were thought by others to constitute an ἔθνος—a people, a nation. Their counterparts were Egyptians, Syrians, Greeks, Phoenicians, and so forth. Even as Christian heresiologists went some way in attempting to reify Judaism as an outmoded

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and ossified religious system, many ancient writers, from Origen to the emperor Julian, still knew the Jews as a people, comparable to the other peoples of the world with their customs, patron deities, and ways of life.\textsuperscript{45} The Maccabean revolt, the disastrous wars against Rome, and the loss of the Jerusalem cult, momentous as they were, do not mark any radical change in that respect. The Jewish people, like any other with so long a history, experienced the tides of fortune, the fell clutch of chance, the rise and fall of empires.

In some ways, continuity and discontinuity are matters of perspective, but if we were able to survey Jews of, say, the seventh century CE, I imagine that they would have felt no yawning gap, no decisive break between themselves and their ancestors.\textsuperscript{46} True, patterns of worship had evolved. The Jewish people had to accommodate themselves to new political arrangements, but this had already been happening long before, and much continued as it had, particularly for those who had already been living in the diaspora for some time. For those cultural indicia which underwent change or faded out over time, there were others (circumcision of male children, dietary practices, synagogue services, and celebration of holidays, for example) that persisted and persist to this day. And,

\textsuperscript{45} Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing,” 489-510.

\textsuperscript{46} Similarly, Klawans, “Invented Revolution.” By analogy, English society today might be said to be shaped more by the events of the twentieth century than those, say, of the sixteenth, but, as far as I can tell, no one is arguing for a change in nomenclature.
above all, the Jewish people have looked and continue to look upon the ancient Ἰουδαίοι as their forebears, despite the changes that inevitably accompany several millennia of human history. Why we should privilege our sense of discontinuity over the Jewish perception of continuity through change is unclear to me. At the risk of overstatement, it would be as if someone decided that we needed new names as we matured into adults, since our childhood selves were so unlike what we had become, even though as individuals we have an unbroken sense of self from very early on in our development. If “Judean” is to be preferred, I suggest this ought to be done on Mason’s grounds, that is, as a way to engage the categories of the ancients, to enter into their world of thought and discourse, not as a way to accentuate the historical distance between ancient and modern Jews. Mason, as he has recently clarified, in no way intends to drive a wedge between them.47

I am not ready to follow suit, however, not because of any fault in Mason’s historical analysis but because of the resonances of “Judean” in English. Scanning any number of dictionaries, we find that “Judean” means a native or inhabitant of the land of Judea.48 So if a non-Jew living outside of Judea were to


48 So, for instance, OED, s.v. “Judaean/Judean,” 8:291.
resettle and raise children in Jerusalem, they would be Judeans. But if, say, a first-century Thracian couple had made the long trek to Judea and had children there, neither they nor their offspring would be Ἰουδαῖοι unless they underwent circumcision and adopted the Jewish way of life. As far as I know, nowhere in ancient literature is a non-Jewish resident in Judea named a Ἰουδαῖος.⁴⁹ In that sense, it is not coterminous with our “Judean.”⁵⁰ In English, to be a Judean is not to be a member of a certain people but to live in a certain place; to be a Ἰουδαῖος in the ancient world was to be a member of a people with a homeland in a certain place. Mason, of course, is well aware that Ἰουδαῖος is not strictly geographical and of the fact that many Ἰουδαῖοι lived far afield from the province of Judea and had done so for generations. The reader of his commentaries will quickly realize this when he or she comes across Judeans in Antioch, or Alexandria, or Rome. In context, there is little risk of confusion, but it requires some stretching of English usage.

Now it must be conceded that “Egyptians” (Αἰγύπτιοι), “Syrians” (Σύροι), and other ethnonyms often fall prey to the same misunderstanding, as we tend to employ them loosely for any inhabitant of those lands, whereas ancient authors differentiated between Αἰγύπτιοι, for example, and the other

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⁴⁹ See also Schwartz, “’Judaean’ or ‘Jew’? 14-15.
⁵⁰ Likewise, idem, Judeans and Jews, 6.
ethnic communities living in Egypt. A similar imprecision happens often enough in contemporary discourse. While we might speak of Turkish Kurds without much thought, the expression would probably irritate a good number of Turks and Kurds themselves, who in their respective languages speak rather of Kurds in Turkey. If we tolerate the ambiguity in other cases, perhaps the same may be allowed for “Judean.”

Nonetheless, it seems to me that “Jew” captures the complexities of ancient Jewish identity just as well without having to massage English usage. Although many may think predominantly in terms of religious categories, today “Jew” remains both a religious marker and more than that. It is membership in a people, a culture, and a belief system all intermingled and configured in different ways by Jewish communities and individuals. It would be absurd to speak of Christian atheists, but there are Jewish atheists. “Christian Buddhist” sounds like a contradiction in terms, but there are self-professed Jewish Buddhists. And though their claims are often challenged, there are people who profess a Jewish identity but also believe that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. One can convert to Judaism. They did so also in antiquity, conceptualized then as a move to a new people. In practice, this all gets incredibly complicated because Jews

51 So ibid., 91-92; Reinhartz, “Vanishing Jews.”
(and non-Jews) differ in the stress placed on each aspect of identity. Yet for its overlap with the modern category of religion, Jewish identity is not reducible to that category. In that respect, the first century is not far from the twenty-first.

In objection, it might be argued that “Jew” obscures the relationship between people and ancestral homeland that is inherent in the Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew. Philip F. Esler holds that since territory and people were so commonly associated in the ancient Mediterranean world, “to translate Ἰουδαῖοι with a word such as ‘Jews’ in this context therefore represents a particularly blatant type of exceptionalist argument that is probably reason enough to reject it.” It is likely fair to say that to the native English speaker, “Judean” will more readily evoke the territory of Judea than does “Jew,” but it is easy to press the point too strongly. It is not as if “Jew” has lost all aural resonance with “Judea.” We have lost a “d” in the process of transmission from Latin through Old French.

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52 This is borne out by two recent surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center, one of American Jews (2013), the other of Israeli Jews (2016). Among other questions, respondents were asked whether for them Jewish identity was mainly a matter of ancestry/culture, religion, or all three and what elements they deemed essential to being Jewish. In both surveys, the majority characterized Jewish identity as a matter of ancestry/culture, but there was significant variation among different groups of Jews. American and Israeli Jews also diverged on several of the elements regarded as essential to Jewish identity. See Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/10/jewish-american-full-report-for-web.pdf and “Israel’s Religiously Divided Society,” http://pewforum.org/files/2016/03/Israel-Survey-Full-Report.pdf.

53 Esler, Conflict and Identity, 63.
to English, one that survives in other European languages. Surely such a small elision cannot be of so great a consequence.

“Jew” is the organic progression of the ancient term into English, attested several centuries before “Judean.” No one had to argue for it. No conscious differentiation was made in the course of the history of the English language to set it off from other ethnonyms. And if the link between the people and the land of their ancestors has been occluded, it seems to me that this is more a result of the antiquity of the Jewish diaspora than of translation. That is, when Jews had been living away from Judea for many centuries, the immediate association with the land was probably attenuated, though we must always ask in whose eyes. Many Jews still lived in Judea after the wars with Rome, even if they were banned from Jerusalem for over two centuries, and those in the diaspora continued to commemorate their people’s past, which of course meant memories of Jerusalem and Judea as the ancestral homeland. For the person who has a rudimentary grasp of Jewish history, the relationship between “Jew” and “Judea” will not be lost. I am not entirely averse to “Judean,” then, if adopted for the sake of historical consciousness, but on the whole I see no reason to jettison the more traditional “Jew.”
CHAPTER 1

THE JOHANNINE CHRISTIANS AND THEIR JEWISH NEIGHBORS: A TALE OF TWO RELIGIONS?

Writing over three quarters of a century ago, the great English commentator Sir Edwyn Hoskyns remarked upon the near anonymity of the author and intended readers of the Fourth Gospel, eclipsed as they are by the evangelist’s single-minded concentration on the Word become flesh:

But where did the original readers of the Fourth Gospel once stand? What was in their minds? In what direction or directions were they moving? These are urgent, pressing questions. Yet the precise character and standing, not of the author only, but even of his readers, are obscure ... It is therefore extremely difficult to gain from the gospel any direct information concerning its original readers, and for this reason it is hard to come by the key to its historical understanding.¹

This was not an admission of total ignorance, for Hoskyns presses on to give some account of the life setting of the Gospel despite the difficulties of the task.

But what is remarkable about the baronet’s resigned comments is how far removed from them we are today. In the opinion of many, experts in the Johannine literature and NT generalists alike, the historical key for which Hoskyns was searching has been discovered: the book and its peculiar ideas belong to a community of ethnically Jewish believers in Jesus who, because of

their devotion to Jesus, had come into conflict with the Jewish religious
establishment in the closing decades of the first century CE.²

I have already had occasion to mention J. Louis Martyn’s seminal History
and Theology in the Fourth Gospel. Martyn was not the first to explain the
Johannine attitude toward the Jews as the residual effect of conflict with the
synagogue, but in the words of D. Moody Smith, his reconstruction was the first
to achieve “sustained flight.”³ The methodological starting point of the book, and
what time and usage have shown to be Martyn’s most enduring contribution, is
that the Fourth Gospel is at once a story about Jesus (what Martyn calls the
einmalig level) and a story about the birth and maturation of the Johannine
community, above all its growing pains as it found itself harassed and its
existence threatened by the synagogue.⁴ The showcase in History and Theology for
the two-level reading is the dramatic healing of the man born blind in John 9.
Jesus is said to stand in for a preacher in the Johannine community, the man born

² So Ashton, Understanding, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 109: “It is largely because of his [Martyn’s] work that one can say that this area of Johannine research (that is, the one concerned with audience and situation) has been roughly mapped out. What remains is a matter of adjusting a few details and filling some gaps.” The second edition of Understanding drops the entire first part of the original (“Questions and Answers”) and so also omits this particular statement. D. Moody Smith (“The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John,” in J. Louis Martyn, History and Theology, 14, n. 30) refers to Martyn’s thesis as a paradigm, “part of what students imbibe in standard works … as knowledge generally received and held to be valid.”


⁴ Martyn leaves the German einmalig untranslated but points out in a note (History and Theology, 40, n. 22) that it means something like the “back there” level of the story.
blind for a Christian convert, and the Pharisees for the Jewish council in John’s own city who had aligned themselves against the nascent Christian movement.⁵

As an important clue to this second level of meaning, though by no means its sole support, Martyn famously points to John 9:22 (cf. 12:42 and 16:2): “For the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue (ἀποσυνάγωγος γένηται).”⁶ Such punitive measures against Jewish believers, states Martyn, are scarcely imaginable in Jesus’s own lifetime and are to be correlated rather with the “blessing of the heretics” (the Birkat Haminim) thought to have been added to the Twelfth Benediction of the Jewish Amidah prayer under the direction of Rabban Gamaliel II at the Judean city of Yavneh sometime between 80 and 115 CE.⁷ For Martyn these events form part of the history of Jewish Christianity. That is to say, the members of the Johannine community were Jews who had come to believe that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah and who were ultimately barred from the synagogue as their estimation of Jesus swelled. The inference often drawn is

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⁵ Ibid., 40-45.
⁷ Martyn, History and Theology, 51-66. “Blessing” is a euphemism for a curse, as in Job 2:9 (“Bless God and die.”), directed in this case against minim (heretics) presumably including, but not limited to, Jewish Christians.
that these Jewish Christians, having suffered so traumatically at the hands of their compatriots, now relinquishe

8 Or if the separation was not yet final, it was nevertheless in process. As Martyn states: “To express it theologically, they cease even to be ‘Jews’ and become instead—like Nathanael—‘truly Israelites’ who now constitute the new ‘his own’ because the stranger has come from above and has chosen them out of the world/synagogue.”

Although some of the more adventurous aspects of Martyn’s community reconstruction have fallen by the wayside, in its essential contours it has been more than warmly received, endorsed in some form by such luminaries as Raymond E. Brown, John Ashton, and R. Alan Culpepper. The theory’s most vulnerable component (Wayne A. Meeks has called it a “red herring”) has proven to be the identification of being made ἀποσυνάγωγος with the Birkat Haminim, though, as Ashton observes, this in itself does not damage the overall

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8 I recognize that the term “Jewish Christians” is ideologically freighted and its precise referent sometimes unclear, as scholars have defined and redefined it. When I use it here, I mean those who are ethnically Jewish and who profess some form of faith in Jesus. I thereby leave out the question of Torah observance and allow space for a spectrum of christological views. If one objects to the term, he or she may substitute Oskar Skarsaune’s phrase “Jewish believers in Jesus” which bears essentially the same meaning as I intend. See Skarsaune, “Jewish Believers in Jesus in Antiquity—Problems of Definition, Method, and Sources,” in Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 3-21.

integrity of the proposal. Others, writing in what Jonathan Bernier has recently described as the neo-Martynian tradition, take the Gospel’s notices of Jewish opposition and persecution of the Christian community as projections intended to create and reinforce the community’s identity over against the Jews.

For all the adjustments and adaptations that have been made to Martyn’s two-level reading, the scenario of a Jewish Christian subsociety that had come to sever ties with its Jewish roots has on the whole remained intact. Brown writes of the community’s post-expulsion identity: “The Johannine Christians were expelled from the synagogues ... and told that they could no longer worship with other Jews; and so they no longer considered themselves Jews despite the

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Ashton (Understanding, 2nd ed., 33) states that Martyn’s thesis is at most buttressed by the identification of being made ἄποσυνάγωγος with the synagogue curse. That Ashton is essentially correct is seen in the fact that in Martyn’s unpublished dissertation (“The Salvation-History Perspective in the Fourth Gospel,” [PhD diss., Yale, 1957]), which contains the germ of many of the ideas in History and Theology, he had not yet proposed the identification.

fact that many were of Jewish ancestry.”

Similarly, for Ashton what was initially a family row had escalated beyond that: “To speak of the Johannine group as Ἰουδαίοι is to fail to take seriously the deliberate alienation-effect of the use of this term in the Gospel.”

“The decisive break between Judaism and Christianity,” concludes Culpepper, “had already occurred, at least in the Johannine setting.” And for those who consider the violence suffered to be more imagined than real, it is still part of a process of religious separation between Jews and Jewish Christians who became increasingly alienated from their brethren. Thus despite her measured skepticism about the historicity of Jewish persecution of Johannine believers, Adele Reinhartz is in agreement that the Fourth Gospel witnesses to a definitive rift between Judaism and Christianity on the local level. “In following Jesus,” she continues, “Jews relinquish the ethnic and national categories that hitherto marked their lives.”

Along similar lines, Finnish scholar Raimo Hakola argues that the Johannine quest for self-

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16 Ibid., 224; similarly eadem, “Forging a New Identity: Johannine Rhetoric and the Audience of the Fourth Gospel,” in *Paul, John, and Apocalyptic Eschatology: Studies in Honour of Martinus C. de Boer*, ed. Jan Krans et al., NovTSup 149 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 123-34. Reinhartz now holds that Samaritans, gentiles, and ethnic Jews were among the Gospel’s intended audience, so that the process of identity formation entails the separation of Johannine Christians not only from Jews but from any other ethno-religious entity.
definition led the evangelist “to create an autonomous symbolic universe”
detached from fundamental aspects of traditional Jewish practice and belief.\textsuperscript{17}
Although Hakola stresses the ambiguity of the Gospel’s relationship with the
Jews and Judaism, the trajectory is one from the inside out. Through this process
of self-definition, the Johannine community “no longer understood themselves in
terms of Jewish identity.”\textsuperscript{18}

The Holdouts: The Fourth Gospel and Intra-Jewish Polemic

Though relatively few, there are a number of interpreters who still see it fit to
classify the polemic in the Gospel as a family quarrel or as neuralgic
admonishments designed to goad contemporary Israel to repentance. Among the
better known advocates of such a reading is James D. G. Dunn. Dunn situates the
Fourth Gospel and its criticism of the Ἰουδαῖοι within the factionalism of late
first-century Judaism confronted with the loss of the temple and sacrificial cult.\textsuperscript{19}
Bereft of a central symbol of their corporate identity and grappling with the
theological ramifications of the disaster, the Jewish community took a renewed
interest in the question of revelation, of who had the authority “to speak in God’s

\textsuperscript{17} Hakola, \textit{Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness}, NovTSup 118 (Leiden: Brill, 2005),
235-36.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 231.
\textsuperscript{19} Dunn, “Embarrassment of History,” 43-46.
name with God’s voice.” Against this background, says Dunn, it is hard not to hear the Gospel of John as an attempt to fill that void. The answer to the political and spiritual turmoil, the privileged locus of revelation which addresses the hopes and fears of God’s people, is the man Jesus of Nazareth. The debate is still one between Jewish factions, or rather between the Johannine Christians and mainstream Jewish society with which it remained in dialogue. The Fourth Gospel “does not presuppose two monoliths, Judaism and Christianity, clearly distinct and clearly separate in identity, denouncing each other in anathemas and open hostility.” So for Dunn, John’s acerbic statements about the Jews more nearly resemble intra-Jewish polemic, more like the Dead Sea Scrolls or Psalms of Solomon than the anti-Jewish prejudices of Tacitus and the Latin satirists or the tirades of the patristic-era Adversus Judaeos literature.

The view that the Gospel of John speaks to the concerns of the Jewish people in the period between the two revolts against Rome is taken to its furthest end by Stephen Motyer. Following the lead of Dunn, Motyer identifies seven “points of sensitivity” in the text: the temple and festivals, the law of Moses, revelation, Judea and the Jews, the formation of faith, signs, and the

20 Ibid., 49.
argumentative style of many of the Gospel’s dialogues.\textsuperscript{22} Heard by Jews, especially those of Judea, still wrestling with the loss of the temple but on the path toward a reconstituted religious life, the Gospel functioned as a direct appeal “to persuade them that Jesus is the Christ who can meet the particular needs of Israel.”\textsuperscript{23} The Gospel’s purpose, as Karl Bornhäuser, W. C. van Unnik, and J. A. T. Robinson had maintained before the entrenchment of the two-level reading, was evangelistic, so that it must be read as an appeal coming from within Israel to co-religionists: “Jew speaking to Jew, in just the same way as the authors of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch tried to minister to the needs of their fellow-Jews by publishing their own solutions in written form.”\textsuperscript{24} In the Gospel’s pages is announced a renewal program for a troubled Israel, a project whose goal was to restore what had fallen, not to strike down its battered remnants as they tried to raise themselves up once more from the rubble.

While it has sometimes been maintained that the earliest stages of the Gospel’s development have their \textit{Sitz im Leben} in the context of a Jewish mission (one thinks above all of Robert T. Fortna’s setting for the hypothesized Signs Source) Motyer is likely to face an uphill battle convincing interpreters that the

\textsuperscript{22} Motyer, \textit{Your Father the Devil?} 35-73.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 73.
Gospel in something like its present form will have functioned effectively as a missionary tract directed toward non-believing Jews.\textsuperscript{25} We might nonetheless settle for something in between the Fourth Gospel as “letter of repudiation” against Judaism and evangelistic manifesto meant to convince hardened Israel.\textsuperscript{26} The mediating position is well represented in Craig S. Keener’s commentary. Keener identifies the Gospel’s intended audience as believing Jews who reside in Asia Minor, the traditional resting place of the apostle John. They had indeed faced some resistance from the synagogue authorities but the rupture with the Jewish community was by no means complete. Nor had the Johannine Christians consciously placed themselves outside of Judaism: “John was not, of course, claiming that the church had ‘replaced’ Jewish Israel; he was claiming that it was Jewish and that it continued the faithful remnant of Israel that had always existed. The Jewish Christians still saw themselves as part of Judaism.”\textsuperscript{27}

All such intra-Jewish interpretations, however, eventually run headlong into John’s presentation of the Jews. “John’s statements about οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι,” acknowledges Keener, “are too strong to dismiss as internal polemic without


\textsuperscript{26} “Letter of repudiation” (\textit{Absagebrief}) is how von Aberle (“Über die Zweck,” 94) had phrased it.

\textsuperscript{27} Keener. \textit{Gospel of John}, 1:200.
further explanation.” Dunn submits that the Johannine Jewish Christians ceded the name “Jews” to their opponents in the synagogue, preferring in its stead the name “Israel.” The easy rejoinder is that if this was the case, it is hardly meaningful to hang on to the tag line “intra-Jewish,” since these believers no longer numbered themselves among the Jews or reckoned them as their own. And if so, it seems to me that the “breakdown of ecumenical relations,” which Dunn sees as on the horizon, ought to be regarded as a fait accompli in the sense that the Johannine community now regarded the Jews as outsiders.

Motyer, for his part, pursues a more philologically oriented approach, drawing upon suggestions put forward by Wilhelm Lütgert and Bornhäuser in the early twentieth century. Whereas the “hub sense” of Ιουδαίος is all those who so identify and who adhere to the religion of Judea (whether or not they live

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28 Ibid., 1:216.
29 Dunn, Partings, 191-92, 209. This is based in part on Dunn’s understanding of “Israel” as a title that expressed identity in relation to God, while “Jew” emphasized distinction in relation to others. Any neat division of “Israel” and “Jew” into insider and outsider names respectively, however, is questionable. See my “Israel’ and ‘Jew’ as Markers of Jewish Identity in Antiquity: The Problems of Insider/Outsider Classification,” JSJ 45 (2014): 80-99.
30 Mark Goodwin (“Response to David Rensberger: Questions about a Jewish Johannine Community,” in Anti-Judaism and the Gospels, 168-71) raises a similar objection against Rensberger, asking whether as far as it relates to the Gospel of John the transitional period between an inner-Jewish struggle and that between two religions had not already ended.
there), an important derived reference is “the particularly strict, Torah- and Temple-centered religion found especially (but not exclusively) in Judea and Jerusalem,” or in Bornhäuser’s more succinct but less diplomatic formulation, “the Torah fanatics.” In context, the Ἰουδαῖοι of the Fourth Gospel are often religious authorities centered in Jerusalem and zealous for the traditions of their forefathers, as I will argue in the next chapter. On the other hand, one would be hard pressed to show that any ancient Jewish sources, from the early postexilic era to the age of the Amoraim and beyond, use the appellation Ἰουδαῖος to isolate a specific party within Judaism. And if this was not established usage, the question naturally follows why John would craft a persuasive appeal to Jews while criticizing their leaders in those very terms.

If the answer to this most perplexing of Johannine riddles is not to be found at the philological level, perhaps it resides on the literary plane in the Johannine love of irony. The evangelist and the community on whose behalf he speaks had not given up the name “Jews,” proposes Keener, but put the epithet to service as a subtle way of undermining the authority of the community’s detractors, a sort of subaltern strategy of resistance to a more powerful class

33 Motyer, Your Father the Devil? 56; similarly Cornelis Bennema (“The Identity and Composition of Oi Ιουδαίοι in the Gospel of John,” TynBul [2009]: 239-63) who identifies the Johannine Jews as “a particular religious group of Torah- and temple-loyalists found especially, but not exclusively, in Judaea” (242).

34 The evangelist’s fondness for the literary device of irony is well detailed in Paul D. Duke, Irony in the Fourth Gospel (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985).
which was arrogating to itself the authentic embodiment of Jewish identity.\textsuperscript{35}

With its firm basis in Johannine literary technique, the solution is far from perfunctory, but one wonders if it is overly subtle even for the “spiritual Gospel,” as Clement of Alexandria famously (or infamously, depending on one’s perspective) pronounced it.\textsuperscript{36} We shall see shortly that on most other fronts in the war over Israel’s heritage, the evangelist is on the offensive. Jesus’s enemies claim to cherish the Scriptures, but their inability to hear his word exposes their assertion as bluster. They rest themselves on a proud lineage, but their murderous intentions demonstrate that they are not truly Abraham’s children, and so on. Then, too, it must be asked whether the transformation of Ἰουδαῖοι into a kind of passive-aggressive swipe at non-believing Jews will not have resulted in its eventual renunciation by the Johannine Christians themselves, moving us once more from an intra-Jewish quarrel to an all-out fight between two distinct religious communities.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{35} Keener, Gospel of John, 1:218-28; similarly but independently, de Boer, “Description of ‘the Jews,’” 141-57.

\textsuperscript{36} Clement so describes the Fourth Gospel in the now lost Hypotyposes. The information comes to us through Eusebius of Caesarea, Hist. eccl. 6.14.5-7.

\textsuperscript{37} De Boer (“Description of ‘the Jews,’” 156-57) states explicitly that the Johannine Christians eventually renounced the name “Jews” for themselves, the irony contributing to the creation of a new social reality. Keener does not press this idea as far as de Boer, but some of his arguments begin to carry him in that direction. He compares the situation of the Johannine community to a hypothetical group of Christians who consider themselves heirs to the faith but are rejected by the wider Christian community: “The minority might respond by calling themselves ‘true Christians’ to distinguish themselves from the ‘false’ ones … or more to the point here, they might relinquish the title altogether to their opponents … The second solution appears to be the one chosen by the author of the Fourth Gospel” (Gospel of John, 1:219).
While a consistent reading of the Gospel of John as an internal affair cannot simply be shrugged off, its weakness in explaining John’s language about “the Jews” leaves it looking anemic against the prevailing paradigm. That is not to say that the two-level reading is unassailable. I have just noted a tendency to disassociate the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages from the Birkat Haminim, or to deny their historicity altogether. Another set of critiques is more radical (in the etymological sense of that word) and thus represents a more serious challenge to the two-level reading strategy. Some have abandoned the whole enterprise of retrieving communal histories from what purport to be stories about Jesus as methodologically unsound, since it proceeds as if the Gospels were occasional letters rather than a form of Greco-Roman biography. Thus even if directed toward a local church or circle of disciples, there is no warrant in the Gospel

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genre for reading it as a cipher for the experiences of second- and third-generation Christians. The story of Jesus will have been relevant to its first readers and hearers for its own sake, as those who professed faith in Jesus will have wanted to know about the one they revered as Lord and Savior of the world. The Gospels, it has been further argued, were written for many or all Christians, meant to circulate widely among believers in the Mediterranean basin.\(^\text{40}\) Still others have eschewed attempts to extrapolate the life, loves, and hates of the Johannine community as inconsistent or unduly selective in which passages are allowed a place in the process of reconstruction.\(^\text{41}\)

Although I cannot examine each critique in detail, their cumulative force has begun to erode the methodological foundations for reading the Gospel as simultaneous *vita Christi* and encoded community annals.\(^\text{42}\) The chief methodological crux, in any event, is the extent to which the Gospel of John correlates with its social setting. The Fourth Gospel and its symbolic structures must reflect something of the world in which it originated and in which it was

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\(^{40}\) This is the central thesis of Richard Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?” in *Gospels for All Christians*, 9-48. Klink’s *Sheep of the Fold* is an extension of Bauckham’s work to the Gospel of John.


\(^{42}\) Similarly, Cirafesi, “‘Johannine Community’ in (More) Current Research,” 361.
first received, as all texts do. But between the acknowledgement of that fact and Martyn’s historical allegory there is much room to maneuver.43 What sustains the two-level reading is the sense that it seems to make of the Gospel, the placement of its Jewish and allegedly anti-Jewish elements into a single, evolving social matrix. To the extent that it does not perform this task, the methodological objections against the theory loom larger.

In what follows I examine the consensus position on its own terms. Does it yield a consistent reading of the Gospel’s attitude toward the Jews? I shall argue that it does not, precisely in its assumption that a religious schism between Jews and Christians already had taken place. It is both questionable on socio-historical grounds that a group of first-century Jewish believers in Jesus will have renounced their identity as Jews, leaving it to their enemies as a name of opprobrium, and discordant with John’s self-understanding as the legitimate heir to the faith of Israel.

The Religious Schism Revisited

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43 The methodological difficulties in correlating ideas or systems of symbols, and the texts which carry them, with particular social structures and patterns of interaction are adumbrated in Bengt Holmberg, Sociology and the New Testament: An Appraisal (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 118-44, 125-28 on the Gospel of John. According to Holmberg (ibid., 142), the quest for correlations between texts and social situations is not “invalid or hopeless” but it must start from “good factual knowledge about social data” and “the realization of how complex and subtle such relationships typically are.”
Veteran Johannine scholar John Ashton opens his latest book with an anecdote about the philosopher Edith Stein, a Jewish convert to Roman Catholicism and Carmelite nun. Stein and her sister Rosa were deported to Auschwitz in early August of 1942 and executed in the gas chambers not long after their arrival. Beatified in May 1987 and canonized just over a decade later in October of 1998 as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Stein is a recognized saint of the Catholic Church. Ashton recounts a tense conversation between Edith and her mother, a devout Jew, during the synagogue service on Yom Kippur sometime after her conversion in the early 1920s. Upon the recitation of the Shema, the central confession of the Jewish liturgy, Stein’s mother leaned over and whispered to her daughter, “Do you hear? Your God is One, and only One.” For Ashton, the exchange serves as a vivid encapsulation of the dividing line between Judaism and Christianity, a thread that he traces all the way back to the Fourth Gospel. The doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity to which historically the Fourth Evangelist contributed so much mark Christianity as distinct from the other Abrahamic faiths and make it irreconcilable with Judaism.

As an entrée to the problem of the emergence of the Christian religion from Judaism, the example of Edith Stein is in one sense deeply ironic. Even after

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her conversion she never ceased to consider herself a Jew.\textsuperscript{46} They were still her own people. She had a foreboding of sharing in their collective fate.\textsuperscript{47} It is nearly impossible to make sense of this if we think of Jews and Christians as members of incompatible religions. Stein, of course, is many centuries removed from the writing of the Fourth Gospel, but her lasting conviction that she belonged to the Jewish people rattles our air-tight categories. That the Gospel witnesses to a religious dispute, to competing claims about revelation, salvation, and access to God is undoubtedly true. Is it also a dispute between two religious communities? Would the evangelist have thought in those terms?

The fact that religious conversion is common to our experience and native to our mode of social description lends a kind of self-validation to a narrative in which Jews shed their former identity to reemerge with a distinctively Christian one. So interpreted, the Gospel of John witnesses to the embryonic stages of the disambiguation of Christianity from Judaism into the discreet socio-religious

\textsuperscript{46} I say in one sense because if we think in terms of Judaism and Christianity as religious systems, then someone like Edith Stein did not adhere to both, but this just shows that being a Jew and practicing Judaism are not entirely symmetrical. So also Jacob Neusner, “Defining Judaism,” in The Blackwell Companion to Judaism, ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan Avery-Peck (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 4-5. That Stein still thought of the Jews as her own people is documented by Waltraud Herbstreith, Edith Stein: A Biography (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 62-67; Sarah Borden, Edith Stein, Outstanding Christian Thinkers (London: Continuum, 2003), 139-40: “It is, ironically, after her conversion to Catholicism that Stein identifies herself most strongly with the Jewish people, taking pride in her heritage and regularly insisting on her own Jewishness.”

\textsuperscript{47} Herbstreith, Edith Stein, 62-67. In a letter dated 31 October 1938, Stein compares herself to Esther, “taken from among her people precisely so that she might represent them before the king,” as Borden (Stein, 139) reports.
entities with which we are familiar. Or if we prefer the more antagonistic imagery, it is the story of an ugly divorce between the two.⁴⁸ The members of the Johannine community had converted from one religion to another and were therefore Jews no longer. Although we might corroborate this story by pointing to examples of Jews, past or present, who have willingly placed themselves outside of the Jewish fellowship, there is a confounding phenomenon that flows directly counter to this, namely, ethnic Jews who believe in Jesus but hold fast to their Jewish identity and heritage, men and women like Edith Stein.

These individuals and congregations, frequently maligned on both Jewish and Christian sides, are worth study in their own right.⁴⁹ But what is to be observed here is the holding together of identities that many judge to be incompatible. Being a Christian and being a Jew in this conceptualization are not mutually exclusive. A person is a Jew by birth and ancestry, a member of the Jewish people. A similar rationale seems to underlie the traditional halakic


⁴⁹ Scholarship on ancient Jewish Christian groups is voluminous. Much less has been written about modern movements—whether their history of development, theology, or religious practice—though that appears to be changing. See from a wide variety of perspectives, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Messianic Judaism (London: Cassell, 2000); Michael R. Darby, The Emergence of the Hebrew Christian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain, SHR 128 (Leiden: Brill, 2010); David Rudolph and Joel Willitts, eds., Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).
opinion that children born to an apostate (or apostates) still contract valid Jewish marriages.\(^{50}\) That is, as far as marital relations are concerned, they are treated as Jews even if their parents have defected from Judaism.\(^{51}\)

The conceptualization of Jewish identity as something dependent upon lineage is revealing both because it illustrates the complexities of Jewish self-understanding and because it is likely the understanding that prevailed in antiquity. As we have already seen, the Jews of the ancient world were accorded status as an ἐθνος. Jewish authors assumed as much, both those writing in Greek and those writing in Hebrew or Aramaic with corresponding terms.\(^{52}\) What distinguished the inhabited world’s diverse ἐθνη from other types of associations and institutions and what made them species of the same social genus is the myth of common ancestry. We might liken an ἐθνος to an imagined family, believed to have at its hoary beginnings an ancestor from whom the current members of the group are descended. This social formation was typically

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\(^{50}\) Thus, for instance, *Shulchan Aruch*, Even HaEzer 44:9. Joseph Karo also states in Even HaEzer 44:9 that the betrothal of an apostate to a Jewish woman is valid and thus the wife of the convert must still receive a bill of divorce in order for the marriage to be dissolved. The halakhic standing of the apostate him- or herself is fraught with tension, but according to Jacob Katz (*Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times*, Scripta Judaica 3 [London: Oxford University Press, 1961], 71) the Talmudic dictum that “although Israel has sinned, he is Israel” (b. Sanh. 44a) has become since the time of Rashi “a standard ruling in connexion with the definition of the status of the apostate.”


\(^{52}\) Terms such as עם, גוי, and אמה.
attended by a number of other characteristic marks: a group name, the myth of a common homeland, a shared history and customs, and national deities, to name some of the most salient.\(^{53}\)

For the Jews, all of these were memorialized in their sacred writings, the patrimony of the people since the exilic period.\(^{54}\) They believed that they had common ancestors Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, a common homeland in Judea with its capital city and holy place, a shared national story about the people’s origins, movements, misfortunes, and restoration, the common customs of circumcision, Sabbath observance, and dietary laws, among others, and a God who was Lord of all peoples but who had elected them as his special possession. According to their founding documents, Israel was a privileged nation, set apart from the others, but a nation all the same.\(^{55}\) The Jews were more than a cult, or a form of piety, or a philosophy despite all the overlap with these.

\(^{53}\) John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (“Introduction,” in Ethnicity, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, Oxford Readers [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], 6-7) settle on six marks that ἐθνὴς habitually exhibit: a common proper name for the group, a myth of common ancestry, a shared history or memories of a common past, a common culture, a historical homeland, and a sense of communal solidarity.

\(^{54}\) I speak here of memorialization, but it has also been argued that the direction of influence went the other way. According to David Goodblatt (Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], 28-48), it was Scripture that “provided the foundation and the building blocks for constructing the beliefs in shared descent and common culture” (29). In either case, Scripture was a vital component of Jewish self-understanding by the first century CE.

\(^{55}\) This is classically articulated when Israel is at Mount Sinai preparing for God’s appearance in glory. The Israelites are to be God’s treasured possession, a holy nation (יהי נִדָּגָע Exod 19:6). This understanding of Israel is everywhere in evidence in ancient Jewish literature,
In fact, against the tendency of some to emphasize multiple, shifting meanings of the term Ἰουδαῖος, it might be argued that in a general sense it was much less ambiguous than today. No Jewish author or work that has survived antiquity repudiates the myth of common ancestry even if a few try to graft foreign cultural heroes into the family tree. No known Jewish author denies the shared corporate historical experiences even if some are more interested in their spiritual meaning. None of them disputes that their ancestors’ homeland was in the province that the Romans knew as Iudaea. For all the local coloring of customs and practice, the diversity in native languages, and the multiplicity of what we would call religious beliefs, the myth of common ancestry and thus of a physical bond with all other Jews seems to have been close to invariable. To

including the rabbinic corpus, where Israel is the nation par excellence, as Sacha Stern observes (Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings, AGJU 23 [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 8).

The Hellenistic Jewish author Artapanus, for example, identifies Moses with the mythical Greek singer Musaeus, and Cleodemus Malchus makes the descendants of Abraham through Keturah the founders of Assyria and Africa.

For which Philo of Alexandria is famous. David T. Runia (Philo and the Church Fathers: A Collection of Papers, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 32 [Leiden: Brill, 1995], 213) writes: “It cannot, in the first place, be said that Philo totally dehistoricizes God’s revelation to Moses and his relation to the Patriarchs. There is no doubt in his mind that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and later Moses were real, if clearly exceptional men.” See also Martha Himmelfarb, A Kingdom of Priests: Ancestry and Merit in Ancient Judaism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 143-59. According to Himmelfarb, Philo sometimes restrains himself from allegorizing the cult and priesthood because he did not want to undermine these institutions.

That is not to say that all ancient Jews saw the value of kinship and ancestry equally. See again Himmelfarb, Kingdom of Priests, 3-4. Nevertheless, the assumption of common ancestry may be seen as one aspect of what E. P. Sanders has called “Common Judaism.” That is, there were beliefs and behaviors like monotheism, the practice of circumcision, Sabbath observance, and so forth that were shared by most Jews of the time. See Sanders, Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE (Philadelphia: Trinity International, 1992); Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz, eds., Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008). The
borrow the apostle Paul’s metaphor, they were a single tree, made up of many branches, but in their mind all sharing the same roots (Rom 11:16-24).

Within this conceptual framework, the binary opposition of Jew and Christian looks incongruent, even a touch absurd. “Being a Judaean,” as Mason concludes, “and being a follower of Jesus were incommensurable categories, rather like being a Russian or a Rotarian, a Brazilian or a Bridge player. Scholars know this well, but our continued use of ‘religion,’ as if this were the genus of which ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’ were two species tends to de-historicize and obfuscate the matter.”

In principle, someone born a Jew who had come to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah had no decision to make whether to remain a Jew. And had he or she renounced his or her Jewish identity, most logically it would have been to don an alternative mode of ethnic self-identification. The plausibility of a transition in Johannine Christian self-understanding from Jews to Christians, then, rises and falls in proportion to its satisfaction of two conditions: 1) that some at this period thought that one could not believe in Jesus and remain a Jew, and 2) that this community of ethnically belief in common ancestry is, of course, closely associated with the conviction that God chose Israel as his special possession among the nations, a belief that Dunn (Partings, 29-32) identifies as one of the “four pillars of Second Temple Judaism.”

Jewish believers accepted and internalized that premise. Neither of these should be assumed in light of the preceding considerations.

The Pincer Movement: Developments among Gentile Christians

If a reasonable case is to be made for the fulfillment of either condition, it is for the first. Although in theory Jewish identity and belief in Jesus initially belonged to different epistemological planes, two developments pushing in from opposite ends make matters more complicated. It has been argued that gentile Christian authors come to remake Jewish identity in their own generic image, twisting it into Christianity’s heretical counterpart. Mason traces the beginnings of this development to Ignatius of Antioch and Tertullian in the second century. To some extent a discursive transformation of this sort cannot be doubted. Christian authors begin to treat Judaism as a form of piety, or a system of philosophy abstracted from the common life of the Jewish people whose principles could not be reconciled with the Christian faith. It is by such a transformation that the fourth-century church father Epiphanius of Salamis, the indefatigable watchdog

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against heresy, could arrange Judaism alongside Barbarism, Hellenism, and Scythianism as overarching categories of theological error dissolved with the coming of Christ (Pan. 1-4).

Yet we should not overlook the fact that many of these same Christian authors never redefine Jewish identity in its entirety. Eusebius of Caesarea might reduce Judaism to an abstract theological system for the sake of facile contrast with the true divine philosophy Christianity (Dem. ev. 1.2.1-2), but it is not because he has forgotten that the Jews are a living, if humbled, ἔθνος. 61 And for all the reified systemization with which Epiphanius overlays his heresiological project, he still recognizes that the Jews are the physical descendants of Abraham, and so does not cleanly dissect the Jewish faith from the Jewish people. 62 Earlier authors such as Tertullian and Origen tend to think of the Jews not as adherents of a religion per se but as a homeless and rejected people whose covenant with God has been annulled, the vacancy having been quickly filled by the mass incoming of the gentiles into God’s new covenant. 63 For someone like

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61 So in bks. 1 and 2 of Ecclesiastical History Eusebius speaks occasionally of the Jews’ history and misfortunes as a nation (1.6.6; 2.6.1; 2.26.1) as it relates to the history of the church. He does so, of course, rather condescendingly; the disasters that befell the Jewish people were predicted by Christ and just deserts for their rejection of him and his apostles.

62 In Pan. 8.4.1 he states that Jews are “Abraham’s lineal descendants and the heirs of his true religion.” In 8.3.5 he connects the name “Jews” with the tribe of Judah to which David belonged, the people of Israel from David’s time taking on the additional title of “Jews.”

Tertullian, it was not so much that Judaism was a “system of postulates” as it was the reduction of Jewish identity to Torah observance, the now outmoded way of life of a God-forsaken nation. Part of the reason that Christian authors begin to regard Jewish and Christian identity as mutually exclusive is because adherence to the law of Moses, for many of them the *sine qua non* of being a Jew, indeed, the virtual definition of Judaism, becomes increasingly seen as inimical to faith in Christ. In that respect, the Christian inclination to define themselves over against the Jewish people was not an artificial project of self-definition. It grew out of their exegetical engagement with the Gospels and Pauline epistles, fostered by a kind of dispensationalist theology that made the Mosaic law and the sacrificial system into a temporary provision.

Hardening as time progressed, this attitude is on full display by the fourth and fifth centuries. Epiphanius decries all attempts at compromise between obedience to Torah and Christian faith as inherently heretical and gross

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64 According to Mason (ibid., 474), Christian authors from Tertullian on treat Judaism as a “system of postulates.” One can see what he means, but it should not be forgotten that Tertullian’s construct of *Judaismus* includes practices such as circumcision, the dietary laws, and other regulations from the law of Moses. That is, it is not a purely intellectual endeavor.

65 The intensification in the rhetoric of Christian authors intent to disassociate the Christian faith from the Jewish people and their traditions is amply documented by Andrew S. Jacobs in *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 21-55. According to Jacobs, Christian authors of the fourth century defame the Jews in the service of a totalizing imperial discourse that aimed to relegate perceived deviants and dissenters to an inferior status within a grand narrative of Christian triumph.
distortions of the orthodox truth (Pan. 29.8-9). A Jew who comes to believe in Jesus and enters the communion of the church through baptism surrenders the former name along with the practice of Jewish rites. Jerome assumes the same, ridiculing the Jewish Christian Nazoraeans for mixing belief in Jesus with observance of the Torah. Trying to be both Christians and Jews, they are for that very reason neither (Epist. 112.4.13).

But this development among gentile Christians is rather remote from the circumstances of the Fourth Gospel, nor was it the universal opinion of the churches in the first or second century. Our evidence is riddled with holes, but we are able to see all the same that not all Christian authors of this period, to say nothing of the mass of anonymous faithful, shared the sensibilities of Epiphanius and Jerome. Ignatius of Antioch, it is true, tries to erect a wall between his constructs of Christianity (Χριστιανισμός) and Judaism (Ἰουδαϊσμός) and thus ostensibly between being a Jew and being a Christian: “It is absurd to profess

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66 This is implied in his discussion of the Jewish convert Joseph of Tiberias from whom he has received information about gospels written in Hebrew (Pan. 30.5-12). In general, it is obvious from Epiphanius’s treatment of the Ebionites and Nazoraeans that he thinks of being a Jew and Christian as mutually exclusive.

67 The occasion of the statement is a disagreement between Augustine and Jerome on Paul’s rebuke of Peter in Gal 2. Jerome had argued that the whole encounter was a pious ruse, since Peter was no longer observing Jewish customs. Augustine caviled at the notion of righteous deception, maintaining that the apostles kept to the Jewish law, though such was not permitted to believers after them. Jerome subsequently argues (112.4.14) that all those who adhere to the ancestral customs of the Jews, whether from among the Jews or the gentiles, and profess to follow Christ will be cast into the pit of perdition. See Jacobs, Remains, 56-102.
Christ Jesus, and to Judaize. For Christianity did not embrace Judaism, but Judaism Christianity, so that every tongue which believes might be gathered together to God” (*Magn.* 10). The very fact that he feels it necessary to combat such Judaization suggests that not all were as worried about their intermingling as he.69

By comparison with Ignatius, the mid-second century convert and apologist Justin Martyr comes across as the more lenient. He too believes that the time for the law of Moses has passed, its ordinances put into permanent abeyance with the coming of Christ. He nonetheless permits Jewish believers to adhere to the Torah, provided that they do not compel gentile believers to do the same (*Dial.* 47). If these brothers from the circumcision are a bit stubborn in holding on to antiquated traditions, they are not for that reason heretics to be excluded from the communion of the saints. From Justin’s statements we may surmise that the growing church was divided over the status of Torah-observant Christ believers. Justin believes that they will be saved and encourages

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association with them as kinsmen and brethren, but he knows of others who
refuse to extend them this hospitality.\footnote{So also Lieu, \textit{Image and Reality}, 138-89. Lieu suggests that by taking a moderate position on Torah observance by Jewish converts, Justin may also be seeking to bring gentile Christians who had adopted some Jewish practices back into the mainstream church.}

But above this, the guiding element in most models of Johannine
community history is a setting of conflict with fellow Jews. It was the guardians
of Jewish orthodoxy, so to speak, who exerted pressure on the Johannine
Christians in their midst. Or at least this is what these believers thought in their
moments of existential angst. Relations between Jewish Christians and gentiles
are perhaps on the horizon in the Fourth Gospel, as well as persecution from “the
world,” but resistance from non-Jewish brethren is surely not one of the Gospel’s
“points of sensitivity.” If we are to make any headway in assessing the first
condition, we must therefore turn to the Jewish side of the pincer movement.

The Pincer Movement: Possible Developments among Non-Christian Jews

There is, as Mason says, a certain incongruence in the categories “Jew” and
“Christian” as it pertains to ancient modes of social organization. At the same
time, belonging to an ἑθνος was often so closely associated with the observance
of ancestral customs and laws that perceived aberration from them or adoption
of foreign practices was tantamount to betrayal of one’s own people.\textsuperscript{71} We might illustrate the interconnection between belief, praxis, and ethnic identity by returning to Mason’s lighthearted (or perhaps slightly satirical) comment about Brazilians and Bridge players. The two quite obviously belong to very different spheres of social identity, neither inherently coterminous nor inherently incompatible. But let us suppose that Bridge is the national pastime of Brazil, played by most everyone from childhood on, and thus part and parcel of Brazilian national identity. Nonconformist behavior is likely to elicit some form of disapproval from one’s peers. The situation is exacerbated if the preferred card game is associated with another nation, if, say, all Colombians play Canasta but not Bridge. The Brazilian who enjoys the former over the latter begins to look unpatriotic, perhaps even a threat to Brazilian society, especially if relations between the two nations have soured. It is because of such a tight association of behavior and ethnic belonging that Roman authors sometimes express dismay at the proliferation of foreign cults and customs, including those of the Jews, among the Roman populace.\textsuperscript{72} Those who attached themselves to these strange, even

\textsuperscript{71} As Mason observes, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing,” 462, 505-10. This is certainly not restricted to the ancient world. Maykel Verkuyten (\textit{The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity}, European Monographs in Social Psychology [Hove, UK: Psychology Press, 2005], 77) states almost axiomatically that “departures of cultural practices are typically defined as a loss or abandonment of one’s own culture and a betrayal of one’s own people or group.”

\textsuperscript{72} Many of the pertinent sources are laid out by Benjamin Isaac, \textit{The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 225-47, 440-91 for prejudices
odious, practices were forsaking the way of life of their ancestors, despising their fathers’ gods, and imperiling the welfare of the state.\textsuperscript{73} It is this same sort of crisis that arguably sparked the Maccabean revolt. To the more conservative segments of Jewish society, embracing the Greek way of life or ceasing to observe Torah struck at the very heart of what it meant to be a Jew. Failure to share in the ancestral customs amounted to a proverbial stab in the back.\textsuperscript{74}

Central to the Jewish religious tradition, of course, is the worship of Yahweh alone and the refusal to participate in the cults of foreign gods, even if not all Jews were equally scrupulous. So to some Jewish onlookers, a group of ethnic Jews who venerated Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God must have aroused suspicion. If in Johannine self-understanding, they were the faithful remnant of God’s people, to other Jews they were in danger of apostasy, or had already left the fold. The charge, in fact, is recorded in the Fourth Gospel. In the eyes of Jesus’s enemies, the man is a deceiver (7:12) and a blasphemer (10:33) who, by divine decree, must be put to death because he had the audacity to declare himself the Son of God (19:7). No one who follows him can claim to be a

\textsuperscript{73} Tacitus’s remarks in \textit{Hist.} 5.4.1 about Jewish proselytes are telling: “Those who are converted to their way of life accept the same practice, and the earliest habit they adopt is to despise the gods, to renounce their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little consequence.” Similarly, Juvenal \textit{Sat.} 14.100-104. From the other side, there is Philo (\textit{Virtues} 102-3), who lauds incomers to the Jewish community.

\textsuperscript{74} This is implied, for instance, in 1 Macc 1:41-64; 2 Macc 4:11-17.
disciple of Moses, as the Jewish authorities are made to imply in 9:28. The author of the Gospel in no way accepts the charges, as we shall see.

When we transpose the accusations against Jesus in the Gospel to accusations against the Johannine community at the time of the evangelist, as the two-level reading instructs us to do, we are able to see how also in antiquity being Jewish and believing in Jesus could be construed as mutually exclusive. The Johannine Christians, it was thought, had transgressed the bounds of proper Jewish belief and were leading the people wildly astray.75 Expressed syllogistically, the logic of the local Jewish authorities responsible for putting the Johannine Christians out of their company could have run as follows: 1) Jews believe in one God and worship none other beside him; 2) These people who say they are Jews make Jesus out to be God’s equal; 3) Therefore they are not Jews but have betrayed their God and their people.

The possible short circuit in the syllogism comes in the deduction. It is not certain that the Jewish leadership actually will have denied that Johannine Christians were Jews. Jewish sources that deal with apostates are not always explicit about the person’s post-defection status. Known defectors such as

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75 So Martyn, *History and Theology*, 69-83. According to Martyn, the Jewish authorities in John’s city had charged Johannine missionaries with being “beguilers” who were leading the people to the worship of another alongside God. The prohibition of this behavior and the dire consequences for engaging in it are set forth in Deut 13.
Dositheos son of Drimylos and Antiochus of Antioch are certainly scorned as traitors. The former, a Jew by birth according to 3 Macc 1:3, later “changed his religion and apostatized from the ancestral traditions.” The latter, Josephus tells us, left off observance of the Torah to ape the worship and customs of the Greeks, so zealous to demonstrate his hatred for the old way of life that he actively persecuted the Jewish community of Antioch in the aftermath of the war against Rome (J.W. 7.47-60). If his Jewish ancestry cannot be denied, he has for all intents and purposes made himself a gentile. But are such apostates thought of as former Jews or simply as bad Jews whose disloyalty to nation and kin has earned them the disdain of their Jewish compatriots?

In rabbinic literature, both apostates, those who no longer keep the commandments, and heretics, those whose interpretation of Torah diverges from that of the rabbis, continue to belong technically to Israel though in almost all other respects it is prescribed that they be treated like or worse than non-Jews.

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77 In favor of the first, at least in Josephus’s mind, is that the Samaritans are said to be apostates from the Jewish nation (Ant. 11.340) but are very plainly something other than Jews. But then he also regards them as foreign settlers from Mesopotamia.

We might say that as a matter of birth their Jewish status is granted, while in social interaction this counts for next to nothing.\(^7^9\)

The difference between non-Jewish status and ostracism despite retention of that status is not very pronounced, and the social consequences are effectively the same, but for the present task the shades of nuance are potentially significant. Granted the synagogue-expulsion hypothesis, will the Jewish leadership of John’s city have reproved the Johannine believers as non-Jews or rather as Jewish sinners and renegades? In the latter case, being a faithful Jew, but not a Jew per se, and following Jesus will have been seen as incompatible. The Johannine Christian avowal of Jewish identity will have been assaulted indirectly, rather than openly denied.\(^8^0\) The fulfillment of the first condition thus remains an open question. The Gospel itself does not supply the means to make so fine a distinction.

Former Jews? The Lack of Ancient Precedent

\(^7^9\) Stern, *Jewish Identity*, 105: “On the one hand, the apostate remains permanently and irreversibly ‘Israel’ … On the other hand … rabbinic sources ignore by and large the Jewish identity of the apostate, and emphasize as much as possible his affinity with the non-Jews.” Similarly, for *minim* (ibid., 112).

\(^8^0\) Keener (*Gospel of John*, 1:218-19) speaks of a “functional claim” on the part of the Jewish authorities that the Johannine Christians were no longer Jewish. The status of these believers as Jews was not denied, but they were made to feel unwelcome in the synagogue. For present purposes, it is best to keep any actual claims of the synagogue leaders and the implications of their actions conceptually distinct, though it must be allowed that the Johannine Christians could have perceived social ostracism as a denial of their standing as Jews.
It is the second condition that is the less probable and whose dearth of support jeopardizes the internal stability of Martyn’s reconstruction. The deficit is both external and internal to the Gospel. It is external insofar as we have no precedent for Jewish believers in Jesus in antiquity relinquishing the name Ἰουδαῖοι. Reliable information about these groups in the first few centuries of the Common Era is hard to come by. We know directly of the so-called sects of the Ebionites and Nazoraeans only from the church fathers who regard their faith as flawed or denounce them as outright heretics. The lack of sympathy and suspect inferences as the literary tradition grows make sifting fact from polemical fiction no small task. The common denominator in this tradition from Irenaeus to Jerome is the existence of sects who live like Jews but profess some manner of belief in Jesus, whether itself heretical or in harmony with the orthodox faith. According to Irenaeus the Ebionites deny the virgin birth (Haer. 3.21.1; 4.33.4; 5.1.3). Hippolytus accuses them of making Christ into a mere man like us in all respects (Haer. 7.22). Origen mentions two types of Ebionites who are split about the virgin birth but regulate their lives like the Jewish multitude (Cels. 5.61). Jerome equates the Ebionites with a sect he knows as Nazoraeans and judges their Christology to be sufficiently Christian but their practice damnably Jewish (Epist. 112.13). Epiphanius ascribes a bizarre mélange of beliefs about Christ to the
Ebionites (Pan 30.3) but professes ignorance about the Nazoraeans’ Christology (Pan. 29.7.6).

Of the relevant sources, Epiphanius alone claims that one of these sects, the Nazoraeans, has given up the name “Jews”: “But these same sectarian whom I am discussing here disregarded the name of Jesus, and neither called themselves Jessaeans, kept the name of the Jews, nor termed themselves Christians—but ‘Nazoraeans’ supposedly from the name of the place ‘Nazareth.’ But they are Jews in every way and nothing else” (Pan. 29.7.1). It has been argued that Epiphanius accurately reflects Nazoraean self-understanding since the bishop’s personal opinion is that the Nazoraeans are defective Jews. He does in fact appear to preserve some trustworthy information about this group in Pan. 29.7. The Nazoraeans use both the Old and New Testaments, observe the law of Moses, affirm the resurrection of the dead, God’s creation of the world, and Jesus’s Sonship, and they are versed in the Hebrew tongue. At the very least, this section has the semblance of historical plausibility. Nonetheless, it is

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unlikely that the bishop of Salamis was personally acquainted with the Nazoraeans, not enough in any case to know whether their Christology was acceptably orthodox.\textsuperscript{84}

If Epiphanius had a good source for current Nazoraean beliefs, he is much more in the dark about their origins. In tracing the alleged sect’s history, the \textit{doctor confusus} does nothing to allay the reputation that has long dogged him.\textsuperscript{85}

Part of the agenda in the \textit{Panarion} is to create a genealogical tree of heresy and heretics. The Nazoraeans according to Epiphanius were the successors to the Cerinthians and precursors to the Ebionites. But the bishop runs into several problems. He does not know their precise relationship to the former: “Next after these come the Nazoraeans, at the same time as they or even before them—either together with them or after them, in any case their contemporaries. I cannot say more precisely who succeeded whom” (\textit{Pan.} 29.1.1).\textsuperscript{86} Even so, he is confident that the two groups held similar ideas, although the only point of contact is that


\textsuperscript{85} This goes back at least as far as John Toland in the early eighteenth century, as F. Stanley Jones points out in “The Genre of the Book of Eclesai: A Primitive Church Order, Not an Apocalypse,” in \textit{Historische Wahrheit und theologische Wissenschaft: Gerd Lüdemann zum 50. Geburtstag}, ed. Alf Özen (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1996), 87; of Epiphanius’s handling of the Nazoraeans, Broadhead (\textit{Jewish Ways of Following}, 174-75) concludes that the portrayal is “particularly confused and unsubstantiated.”

\textsuperscript{86} Williams, \textit{Panarion of Epiphanius}, 123.
Cerinthus is said to have adhered to part of the Jewish law. Epiphanius must also confront the fact that all of Jesus’s earliest disciples were called Nazoraeans and therefore struggles to explain how the genuine followers of the apostles and these so-called followers bore the same name.\(^87\)

Slowed by several digressions, Epiphanius reports the sect’s beginnings as follows: they were Jews attached to the law, but, having heard Jesus’s name and the miracles wrought by the apostles, they came to faith in Christ, though without a true understanding of him. The Christians at the time, says Epiphanius, were called Jessaeans (an interesting case of confusion and conflation in its own right) after Jesse, the father of David, or after Jesus.\(^88\) These parvenus to the faith, however, did not keep that name, but adopted that of Nazoraean after the place of Jesus’s upbringing. The history is patently artificial and probably devoid of any historical value. The allegation that the Nazoraeans did not keep the name “Jews” comes as a summary of the sect’s origins before he

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\(^87\) The epithet Nazarenes is applied to the followers of Jesus in Acts 24:5. Epiphanius confuses for the name of a sect the general designation in Aramaic for followers of Jesus, nomenclature still current in Arabic and Hebrew. See Wolfram Kinzig, “The Nazoraeans,” in *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, 468-71.

\(^88\) Epiphanius seems to have taken his Jessaeans from Philo’s Essenes, mentioned in *Contempl. Life* 1 and *Good Person* 75-87, conflating them with the Theraputae by misreading or misremembering Philo’s opening remarks in *The Contemplative Life*. Since Eusebius of Caesarea had identified the Theraputae as Christian ascetics in *Hist. eccl.* 1.17, Epiphanius reasons that the Ἐσσαῖοι, or Ἰσσαῖοι as he remembers them, were none other than early Christians and concocts an etymology that links the name with Jesse or Jesus. It is also worth noting that one of his etymologies for the name Jesus is “healer,” perhaps derived in a roundabout way from the name “Theraputae.” Further discussion on the source of Epiphanius’s confusion in Aline Pourkier, *L’hérésiologie chez Épiphane de Salamine*, Christianisme antique 4 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1992), 439-47.
relates their present character and location in Pan. 29.7.2-29.7.7. That it tells us about their self-identification is doubtful. It seems, rather, that Epiphanius has inferred this from the fact that they are named “Nazoraeans” and that they believe in Jesus, thus setting them apart from the Jews. He refutes his own faulty deduction.

I have cautioned against taking Epiphanius at his word about Nazoraean self-identity in part because of his own biases, though that does not permit us a facile rejection of everything he says. But most crucial is the fact that he was not an insider to any of the Jewish Christian movements and therefore not in an advantageous position to speak on the matter. There is one other figure, much closer in time to John, of whom this cannot rightfully be said and whose self-understanding as a result is of utmost importance: the self-styled apostle to the gentiles.89 The view has sometimes been maintained, and has its able defenders

89 Ps.-Clem. Recognitions 1.27-71 presents one other possible first-hand source for Jewish Christian self-understanding, as it or parts of it are usually regarded as a distinct literary unit which originated in Jewish Christian circles. In Recognitions 1.50 and in the Latin version of 1.53, Peter does speak of “us” and “the Jews” as apparently separate groups, which might be taken as evidence of Jewish Christian renunciation of the name “Jews.” But the multiple layers of redaction of the Pseudo-Clementine literature means that this argument could only be sustained if it could be shown with confidence that these particular statements belong to the Jewish Christian source behind 1.27-71 and not to the author of the hypothesized Grundschrift or of the Recognitions itself. F. Stanley Jones, for example, assigns the middle of 1.44.1 to the middle of 1.53.4 to the author of the Grundschrift since its reintroduction of Clement and dialogical style are characteristic of the rest of the romance but strikingly different from the surrounding material. See idem, An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1.27-71, Texts and Translations 37, Christian Apocrypha 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 134-36. It should be noted, moreover, that in the Syriac text of Recognitions 1.32.1, Abraham is called a man of “our race, the Hebrews, who are also called the Jews.”
still today, that Paul consciously left his identity as a Jew behind when he put on Christ. His conversion, that momentous turn from persecutor to apostle, meant the end of his former religious and ethnic existence.\(^\text{90}\) How otherwise could he become a Jew to the Jews (1 Cor 9:19-23)?\(^\text{91}\) So perhaps he had already come to think of himself and other Christians as something like a third race, “neither Jew nor Gentile” in Christ, as he writes in Gal 3:28.\(^\text{92}\)

That Paul, along with the authors of Ephesians and 1 Peter, sowed the seeds for the notion of Christians as a third race is clear enough.\(^\text{93}\) That this meant

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\(^{92}\) Indeed, 1 Cor 9:19-23 in particular could be readily interpreted to mean that Paul occupies a third position, neither Jew nor Gentile. C. K. Barrett (\textit{A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians}, 2nd ed., BNTC [London: Black, 1971], 211) comments that Paul “could become a Jew only if, having been a Jew, he had ceased to be one and became something else.” If that is the correct inference, the problem becomes how to reconcile this passage with those that will be considered below in which Paul identifies himself as a member of the physical people of Israel. It should be noted, however, that Paul says that he became “like a Jew.” Although it is thereby implied that at other times he was somehow not “like a Jew,” this may not be transparent to the question of Paul’s ethnic self-identification. Since 1 Cor 9:19-23 deals with Paul’s behavior, I suggest that the passage may simply mean that among the Jews, Paul lived like a Jew (cf. Gal 2:14), not that he would have answered the question, “Are you a Jew,” with a “Yes” in some settings and a “No” in others.

\(^{93}\) “Third race” language and related metaphors for social belonging in early Christian literature are treated thoroughly in Denise Kimber Buell, \textit{Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in
the obliteration of Paul’s own ethnic identity is not. There has even been a small-scale revival of the Lukan portrayal of Paul as Torah-true to the end, a Jew’s Jew in all respects. Paul’s complicated stance on the law of Moses cannot detain us here. At the moment, it can be said that alongside passages like 1 Cor 9:19-23 and Gal 3:28, which might seem to imply that Paul had discarded his identity as a Jew (his chameleon-like missionary antics a symptom of the negation of any ethnic affiliation by the transcendent meta-identity of being in Christ), stand others in which he asserts membership in or solidarity with the Jewish people.

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*Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); see also Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 239-68. An early instantiation of this concept can be found in Aristides’s *Apology*, which in the Greek version speaks of three classes of worshipers: Jews, Christians, and polytheists (2.2); similarly Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.5.


Several distinctions are important to keep in mind in what follows. First, I am not concerned with how others viewed Paul but with his own self-understanding. For many of Paul’s Jewish peers the man was a sinner or apostate. See John M. G. Barclay, “Paul among Diaspora Jews: Anomaly or Apostate?” *JSNT* 60 (1995): 89-120; idem, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan* (323 BCE-117 CE) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 381-98. But this gives us no indication of what Paul thought about himself. Barclay, for instance, states that Paul never lost his sense of belonging to the Jewish people despite the skepticism and resistance with which he was often met (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 395); similarly, Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 125-26.

Second, the guiding question is not so much whether Paul abandoned his Jewish identity but whether he saw himself as a Jew. The first phrasing is more ambiguous, since there are many dimensions in which Paul’s Jewishness could be considered, as Lionel J. Windsor notes in *Paul
In Gal 2:15, Paul recounts having confronted Peter in Antioch over the latter’s withdrawal from communal meals with gentile converts in the following words: “We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the nations.” It is an appeal elicited by the exigencies of the moment, but there is little warrant from the text for supposing that Paul is dissembling, becoming like a Jew to win back the Jewish Christian brethren from the error of their ways, or that being Jewish “by nature” implies a present status as non-Jews. The essence of the rebuke to Peter is that not even those of Jewish stock, physical descendants of Abraham and heirs to the covenant, are justified by the works of the law. Thus demanding Torah observance of gentiles as if this were perquisite to their adoption as children of God and communion with Jewish believers constitutes a flagrant violation of the gospel message that we are justified by faith in Christ.

Paul, to be sure, writes earlier in Galatians of his former conduct in Ἰουδαϊσμός (often translated “Judaism”) (1:13). This behavior entailed

and the Vocation of Israel: How Paul’s Jewish Identity Informs his Apostolic Ministry, with Special Reference to Romans, BZNW 205 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 3-4.

96 Sechrest (Former Jew, 150-51) holds that the qualification “by birth/nature” means that Paul no longer considered them to be Jews. She supports this by observing that Gal 2:15 speaks of the ἐθνή whereas Paul elsewhere refers to his converts as former gentiles (1 Thess 4:3-5; 1 Cor 12:1-2). In Rom 11:13 on the other hand, the apostle addresses his audience as “you Gentiles,” mitigating the force of the argument. In any case, it seems hard to maintain Sechrest’s inference, since in Gal 2:14 Paul recounts having rebuked Peter for inconsistency. Peter is compelling non-Jews to adopt Jewish customs while he, a Jew (Ἰουδαῖος ὑπάρχων), does not even live Ἰουδαϊκῶς.

97 My understanding of this passage, and of Paul’s train of thought in Galatians more generally, agrees in the main with that of Stephen Westerholm, Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 366-84.
persecution of the church and zeal for the ancestral traditions. It is clear that Paul reckons his advancement in Ἰουδαϊσμός as something of the past. The pursuit of Ἰουδαϊσμός, however, is not necessarily the equivalent of being a Jew. That is, in Gal 1:13 Paul makes a statement not about his ethnic identity but about his once ardent concern to live according to the laws and traditions of the Jewish people, a concern which he has reevaluated in light of Christ. Paul, it might be said, is a Jew who lives like a gentile, as he recounts having said about Peter in Gal 2:14. In this vein, John M. G. Barclay remarks: “Paul took his life in Christ to be governed no longer by the traditions of (what he calls) ‘Judaism,’ even though he continues to call himself a ‘Jew’… his ethnicity has not been renounced but subsumed within an identity and an allegiance governed by the event of Christ.”

But the best barometer for whether Paul intended to initiate a program that dispensed with natural ethnic identities is Rom 9-11. When Paul refers to himself as an Israelite in 11:1, from the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin, he is speaking about his membership in the Jewish ἐθνος. They are his kinfolk according to the flesh (9:33; 11:14), whom he hopes to save through his calling as the apostle to the gentiles. Belonging to the people of Israel relative to Christ may count for loss (Phil 3:5-8), but it is not thereby engulfed or stripped of all...
salvation-historical significance.\textsuperscript{100} That Paul has physical Israel in mind through to the doxology that crowns ch. 11 receives confirmation from 11:28-31, for here the Israelites are said to be at present God’s enemies, handed over to disobedience, so that God may have mercy on them. Thus in Romans, a letter that is unarguably one of the most mature expressions of Paul’s thought, he presents himself as an ethnic Israelite in Christ.

What of the ethnonym “Jew” itself? Paul’s statements about Israel “according to the flesh” in Rom 9-11 are anticipated in Rom 3:1-8, but there he expounds on the advantages of being a Jew. Paradoxically, and what has at times been felt a misstep in the apostle’s reasoning, these advantages are said to be much in every way (3:2, πολὺ κατὰ πάντα τρόπον).\textsuperscript{101} But the list of Jewish privileges is immediately curtailed after the first in v. 2, cut off by a digression on God’s justice in judging sinners. The topic of Israel’s prerogatives is not reprised until Rom 9:4-5, which again plunges Paul into the labyrinths of theodicy. Paul’s charge in Rom 3:9-20 that Jew and gentile alike are under the power of sin also finds its counterpart in 11:30-32. God has handed all people over to disobedience,

\textsuperscript{100} So also David J. Rudolph, \textit{Jew to the Jews}, 32.
\textsuperscript{101} C. H. Dodd (\textit{The Epistle of Paul to the Romans}, MNTC 6 [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960], 68) states that the logical reply should be “None,” but that Paul’s engrained Pharisaism or patriotism have hindered him from following through on his own premises. I say that Paul’s statements in Rom 3:1-2 are paradoxical because in the preceding section (2:17-29) he seems to undercut Jewish privilege. If Paul is inconsistent, I see no grounds for supposing that he is being disingenuous, reasserting Jewish privilege to placate some in the Roman church.
even his covenant people Israel. And just as in Rom 3:21-31 God’s response to
human sinfulness is to extend his grace, received through faith in Jesus Christ, so
in 11:30-32 the solution to the plight of human disobedience is God’s mercy,
divine favor experienced as the pardoning of transgression and rescue from
God’s righteous anger. Because of the correspondences, any divorce between
Paul’s self-identification as an ethnic Israelite from that as a Jew is
unwarranted.\(^\text{102}\) The two passages share so many themes and Paul’s thought
swirls about in such similar ways that Rom 9-11 may be seen as an extension of
what Paul began but did not fully pursue in Rom 3.

It is probable, moreover, that Paul includes himself among the Jewish
people in Rom 3:9, even if this is not as straightforward as Gal 2:15. Because what
immediately precedes in Rom 3:5-8 concerns the glory which comes to God
through his righteous judgment and the pretext that this fact might give to
sinners to transgress deliberately, some have interpreted the question in v. 9 as
Paul’s restatement of human responsibility: “Are we making excuses? Not at
all!”\(^\text{103}\) In Greek the question is comprised of a single verb, προεχόμεθα. In the
middle voice, it can indeed bear the meaning of putting something forward as a

\(^{102}\) This is further supported by Paul’s bifurcation of humanity into Jews and gentiles
(Rom 9:24) and Israel and the gentiles (9:30-31; 11:11). Thus when Paul locates himself on the
Israelite side of the divide in 11:1, logic would dictate that he also places himself on the Jewish
side of the parallel formula.

\(^{103}\) So Sechrest, *Former Jew*, 152; with a slightly different inflection, James D. G. Dunn,
*Romans*, WBC 38 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 1:144-47.
pretext, though the absence of a direct object in Rom 3:9 makes this less tenable.\textsuperscript{104} On the other hand, the common rendering, “Are we any better off?” requires the verb to have a meaning that properly belongs to the active voice.\textsuperscript{105}

Despite the unexpected middle voice, the second interpretation commends itself as the superior.\textsuperscript{106} In v. 8 Paul has already headed off the pernicious reasoning that doing evil will redound to God’s glory, and the reply that Jews and Greeks are all under sin in v. 9 is out of place if the problem at hand is still the tension between the culpability of sinners and the display of God’s righteousness in judging sin. The fact that sin holds dominion over all people does not explain how wrongdoing merits judgment when it inadvertently enhances God’s truthfulness. Rather in v. 9, Paul returns to the question with which the section begins, anticipating a riposte to his claim that the Jews enjoy great advantages. Paul therefore asks, “Are we (Jews) any better off (than the gentiles)?” for that might seem to be the implication of v. 2. The response is either, “Not at all,” or “Not entirely,” depending on how one understands οὐ πάντως. “Not entirely,” in my opinion, respects the word order and falls

\textsuperscript{104} In agreement with C. E. B. Cranfield, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans}, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:188.

\textsuperscript{105} Though the middle is intelligible as a direct reflexive: “Are we holding ourselves in front?”

\textsuperscript{106} With Cranfield, \textit{Romans}, 187-90; Douglas Moo, \textit{The Epistle to the Romans}, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 199-200; Brendan Byrne, \textit{Romans}, SP 6 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 115-16, 119. That the “we” in 3:9 refers to the Jews was also the understanding of Origen and John Calvin in their respective commentaries on Romans.
precisely upon the line that Paul tries to straddle. The privileges that the Jewish people have received as gifts from God are not trivial. Paul does not at all want to deny their worth. Yet these advantages, great as they are, do not confer righteousness. In one vital respect, Jews and gentiles are on the same footing: they are under the power of sin and stand in need of the mercy of God which he poured out in Christ.

To the extent that Paul created a third race, it appears that it was, as E. P. Sanders puts it, “against his own conscious intention.” He thought of himself as a Ἰουδαῖος even after his experience of the risen Jesus. If that is so, and if Epiphanius’s report is historically unreliable as I have suggested, then the search for ancient analogues to the alleged Johannine renunciation of the name Ἰουδαίοι comes up empty. It would be precarious, if not fallacious, to build a positive argument on the basis of this silence. What this means, however, is that the fulfillment of the second condition rests entirely on whatever evidence we can extract from the Fourth Gospel.

Former Jews? The Johannine “Sectarian” Mentality

108 This, incidentally, is also the assessment of the author of Acts, who has Paul plainly affirm before the Sanhedrin that he is a Jew (Acts 22:3). Calvin J. Roetzel comments in Paul: A Jew on the Margins (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2003), 4 that the apparent discrepancies “reflect more the ambiguity of living on the margin than they reveal actual contradictions.”
In view of the foregoing considerations, the evangelist’s self-perception takes on paramount importance. Where does he position himself in relation to Israel’s heritage? We need not search long to see that it is in continuity with the seminal figures of Israel’s history and its Scriptures. The author portrays faith in Jesus not as an innovation but as the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. Because all the patriarchs and prophets testify to Jesus, unbelief entails not only rejection of him but rejection of them by proxy. The Johannine reflex is swift and uniform: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf” (5:39-40). “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?” (5:46-47). “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did (8:39).… Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad” (8:56).

I spoke above about a pincer movement against Jewish believers in Jesus that challenged the legitimacy of their faith and practice. The Johannine Jesus executes a pincer movement of his own, simultaneously denying Israel’s heritage to his opponents and appropriating that legacy to those who follow him. Whether or not properly a sect in sociological terms, the Johannine community, again assuming its existence, exhibits what according to Stark and Bainbridge is one of this social formation’s distinguishing marks: a self-understanding as
“something old,” as an “authentic, purged, refurbished version” of the parent faith.\textsuperscript{109} Against this, it might be objected that John subordinates Moses, Abraham, and the Scriptures so entirely to Jesus that he divests them of all importance, dispensing with the old wineskins in the process. In the sense that the Johannine Jesus overshadows all others, this is partially correct, but to put it in such terms is to confuse a theological judgment about Christianity’s proper relationship with Judaism with Johannine self-understanding. The evangelist’s stance is that those who believe in Jesus have been faithful to God and obedient to all of his servants and messengers.\textsuperscript{110} And we can almost hear voices in the Gospel retorting, “You are sorely mistaken. We are the rightful heirs to God’s covenant with Israel.”

So why in this shouting match would the Johannine community have suddenly lost its voice when it came to the ethnonym “Jews”? The tension is made all the more acute when we observe that the evangelist nowhere tries to conceal that Jesus himself is a Jew and that the names “Israel” and “Israelite” are

\textsuperscript{109} Stark and Bainbridge, \textit{Future of Religion}, 25.

\textsuperscript{110} From the outside the Johannine devotion to Jesus may look like an innovation, so that it would not be entirely wrong to describe the putative community as “cult-like” in the sense of Stark and Bainbridge’s model, as Fuglseth does in \textit{Johannine Sectarianism}. But these are not the terms in which the evangelist frames matters, and so an “etic” analysis of the community, as far as that would be possible for an ancient group whose existence is not known from sources outside the Gospel and Johannine Epistles, might come to a conclusion at variance with the community’s self-perception.
consistently positive in the Fourth Gospel.\textsuperscript{111} It is a basic tenet of Johannine Christology that the Jews are Jesus’s own people, even on the off chance that “his own” (οἱ ἱδιοί) of the prologue refers to humanity in general.\textsuperscript{112} Jesus, handed over to Pilate by his own people and his own chief priests (18:35), dies as the king of the Jews. And it is as a Jew that Jesus declares to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well that “salvation is from the Jews “(4:22).

Striking here is not only the asseveration itself, on its own a potent reminder of the complexity of the Johannine attitude toward the Jews, but the “we” (ἡμεῖς) of 4:22a.\textsuperscript{113} When Jesus states, “We worship what we know,” he speaks as a member of the Jewish people. The entire dialogue of 4:1-26 hinges upon this. The Samaritan woman expresses her bewilderment at Jesus’s request for a drink exactly in those terms: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria” (4:9)? If the evangelist does not try to disguise that the Son of God sent by the Father is in the flesh a Jew or excise it out of embarrassment over

\textsuperscript{111} The latter point is noted also by D. Moody Smith (\textit{The Theology of the Gospel of John} [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 172-73).

\textsuperscript{112} The importance that the flesh which the Word assumes is Jewish is brought to the fore by Thomas Söding, “’Was kann aus Nazareth schon Gutes kommen?’ (Joh 1.46): Die Bedeutung des Judeseins Jesu im Johannesevangelium,” \textit{NTS} 46 (2000): 21-41.

\textsuperscript{113} Of the declaration that “salvation is from the Jews,” Ashton (“The Identity and Function of The Ιουδαῖοι in the Fourth Gospel,” \textit{NovT} 27 [1985], 49) remarks: “In fact there can be few phrases in the Gospel more capable of laying bare an exegete’s basic presuppositions than this one: it sends the commentators flying in all directions.”
the community’s past, why would the ethnically Jewish members of the
Johannine community have renounced it for themselves?114

As for the name “Israel,” we must take into consideration not only that it
bears positive connotations but also that the evangelist does not transform it into
code language for the church.115 A case in point is the description of Nicodemus
in John 3. According to v. 1 he is a “leader of the Jews,” but in the course of the
winding conversation Jesus addresses him as the “teacher of Israel” (3:10).
Because at this point Nicodemus is only a curious sympathizer, “Israel” must
mean the natural people, the nation of Israel. Again, he who is hailed as “the
king of Israel” at the triumphal entry (12:13) is executed as “king of the Jews,”
the two expressions being nearly synonymous.116 So when Jesus penetrates into
Nathanael’s inner-being and announces, “Behold, truly an Israelite in whom
there is nothing false” (1:47), it is not the creation of a new identity, a
spiritualized Israel that floats free from ethnic bonds, or a tertium quid that
constitutes its own people or race, but the affirmation of an already existing one.
Because of the semantic overlap between Ἰσραήλιτης and Ἰουδαῖος in the Fourth

114 Likewise Ashton, Understanding, 65, though for him this only heightens the tension
with the less than favorable presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι.
115 With John Painter, “The Church and Israel in the Gospel of John: A Response,” NTS 25
114-29.
116 So also Painter, “Church and Israel,” 109-11.
Gospel, the distinction between being “truly Israelites” and being “Jews,” as Martyn frames it, seems artificial.\textsuperscript{117}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Proponents of the synagogue expulsion theory generally agree that the Johannine Christians repudiated identification as Jews as a result of excommunication. Culpepper likens this transition to a divorce. In the process of separation, these believers forged a new religious identity but took all the valuables of the house as their own.\textsuperscript{118} I would emend the imagery. What the Fourth Gospel asserts is that the house itself has belonged all along to those who hear Jesus’s voice. The evangelist had no intention of conceding it to another. Or to put it in more technical terms, the tradents of the Johannine tradition score high on Stark and Bainbridge’s index of antagonism, but they do so by presenting themselves more as the faithful remnant than as a new religion that invalidates the old.

The model of a local parting of the ways between Jews and Christians requires that John and the community for which he writes were pugilists through

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 111: “The distinction between Jew and Israelite does not seem to be significant for Johannine theology.”

\textsuperscript{118} Culpepper, “Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel,” 69.
and through but had on this one point lost their fighting spirit. They would in
effect be saying: “We are faithful to Moses. We are faithful to the prophets. We
are faithful to the Scriptures. We are the children of Abraham. We are truly
Israelites. But we are not Jews.” For a community of ethnically Jewish believers
in Jesus supposedly struggling to create social boundaries, a disjuncture in self-
identity of this kind would be at the very least idiosyncratic. Devoid of reliable
external evidence and pushed up against the evangelist’s “sectarian” mentality,
the premise that the Gospel of John reflects a religious schism between Jews and
Christians perceived as such by both sides loses some of its stability. At least, it
opens up the need for reassessment.
CHAPTER 2

REFERENTS AND ROLES: THE JOHANNINE JEWS AS MICROCOSM

In an influential article on the Jews in the Fourth Gospel, John Ashton disentangles three questions that he says previous scholars had bundled together to ill effect: Who are the Johannine Jews (the term’s reference)? What role or function do they fulfill within the narrative (the term’s sense), and why does the evangelist regard them with such hostility? The first two, he says, belong to exegesis, the third to history. But as his own procedure reflects, exegesis and history are mutually dependent, so that any explanation of the evangelist’s attitude toward the Jews can only proceed from a firm grasp of their characterization within the Gospel itself.¹

As I stated in the Introduction, the Gospel’s stylistic unity is suggestive of a strong individual hand at one of the terminal stages of its development. Therefore I think it is best to begin with a synchronic approach to the Gospel’s presentation of “the Jews,” seeing if sense can be made of their characterization within the text as we have received it.² The sundry source-critical attempts to

² Among others, C. J. A. Hickling (“Attitudes to Judaism in the Fourth Gospel,” in Évangile de Jean: Sources, rédaction, théologie, ed. Marinus de Jonge, BETL 44 [Gembloux: Ducolot, 1977], 347-54) argues that the evangelist let stand a milder stance toward the Jews which he inherited from the tradition, even as the attitude of the community hardened over time. But one then wonders why the evangelist would not have reworked that material more fully to align it
reconstruct the history of the Gospel as a living text, growing with and in the community that nurtured it, cannot be surveyed here. I would not deny in principle the legitimacy of the approach, but it is a daunting task to integrate all the pertinent data into any given redactional scheme. To assign the so-called hostile uses of “the Jews” to a late stage in the Gospel’s composition during or after the synagogue-expulsion crisis is not prima facie unreasonable, but then we would have to explain why an intelligent author would retain a statement like “salvation is from the Jews” if he had come to believe that hatred of Jesus was inherent to being a Jew. Or what are we to make of the Jews of John 11 who are surprisingly sympathetic, and some of whom even become believers? We would seem to be in need of another chapter in the community’s history when the feud with the Jews had abated and communication was again possible.

with his own views. In any case, I shall argue that we need not posit an inconsistent or unthorough editor to account for the Gospel’s diverse statements about the Jews.

3 The very term “the Jews,” in fact, has been taken as a clue to the Gospel’s literary development. At the extreme is the proposal of J. C. O’Neill that almost all occurrences of the term “the Jews” in the Gospel of John are scribal glosses; see idem, “The Jews in the Fourth Gospel,” IBS 18 (1996): 58-75. More moderate and better known is the hypothesis of Urban C. von Wahlde, “The Terms for Religious Authorities in the Fourth Gospel: A Key to Literary Strata?” JBL 98 (1979): 231-53. Von Wahlde distinguishes positive and neutral references to the Jews from those he deems hostile. The latter, he argues, always refer to the authorities (except possibly in 6:41 and 52) and belong to a later stage of the Gospel’s composition.

4 Ashton, “Identity and Function,” 49: “It is a priori unlikely (and certainly not to be assumed) that an intelligent author will incorporate into his own finished work a dictum with whose general tenor he is in radical disagreement.”

5 The problem that John 11 presents for the traditional two-level reading is exposed by Reinhartz, “The Johannine Community and Its Jewish Neighbors.”
Such loose ends and inconsistencies do not necessarily invalidate the process, but the taller the house of cards grows, the more likely the whole edifice is to crash. I am advocating for Occam’s razor. If a synchronic reading cuts more cleanly, so to speak, and is also the more economical, recourse to complex schemes of redaction to explain the evangelist’s portrayal of the Jews becomes less compelling. The first task then is to attempt a synthetic reading of the Johannine Jews that does justice both to their diversity of response to Jesus and to the pervasive motif of the people’s unbelief.

The Collapse of the Dialectic: The Johannine Jews as Representatives of Unbelief

Assessments of the role played by the Jews in the Fourth Gospel often resemble a game of tug of war, sometimes the same author, at odds with him- or herself, pulling at both ends of the rope. On the one hand, those named οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι respond to Jesus in many ways. They are not his monochrome enemies; hence the semi-obligatory nod in the secondary literature to positive, neutral, and negative connotations of the term.⁶ On the other, the Johannine characterization of the Jews has been described as crushingly negative, generalizing,

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⁶ Often this is briefly noted, but a full list of positive, neutral, and negative connotations of “the Jews” appears in Lars Kierspel, The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel: Parallelism, Function, and Context, WUNT 2/220 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 63-75.
stereotypical, and grossly undifferentiated. Whereas the Synoptic Gospels
preserve memories of Sadducees and scribes, teachers of the law and Pharisees,
tax-collectors, sinners, rich, and poor, John, so the reasoning goes, has jumbled
them all together and put a homogenous label on what was in reality a motley
crew.\textsuperscript{7} They are now submerged into “the Jews.” Long lost is the precision of an
earlier time.

The second strain of interpretation reaches at least as far back as the mid-
nineteenth century, but it is Rudolf Bultmann who perhaps gave it its most
incisive expression:

The term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, characteristic of the Evangelist, gives an overall
portrayal of the Jews, viewed from the standpoint of Christian faith, as the
representatives of unbelief (and thereby, as will appear, of the unbelieving
“world” in general) … Οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι does not relate to the empirical state of
the Jewish people, but to its very nature.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{7} So Bultmann, Gospel of John, 86; Erich Grässer, “Die antijüdische Polemik im
the Fourth Gospel,” AThR 3 [1974], 90) remarks that “the phrase hoi Ioudaioi obliterates virtually
all distinctions within first century Palestinian society by speaking of the Jews in an external,
monolithic way.”

\textsuperscript{8} Bultmann, Gospel of John, 86-87. Already in 1840, Diac. Fischer (“Ueber den Ausdruck οἱ
Ἰουδαίοι im Evangelium Johannis: Ein Beitrag zur Charakteristik desselben,” Tübinger Zeitschrift
für Theologie 2 [1840]: 96-133) had articulated something like the view Bultmann would later take. According to Fischer, the Jews in the Gospel are in their entirety incapable of believing. Their role in the story is to exemplify unbelief and unreceptivity to Jesus, in order to bring out the glory of the Word made flesh through sharp and persistent contrast.
The impression of total opposition that Bultmann captures so effectively has left its mark even on many scholars who recognize differences among the Ἰουδαίοι of the narrative.

R. Alan Culpepper’s remarks are reflective of the tension. Having critiqued a symbolic interpretation for turning a blind eye to the division among the Jews in the Gospel, he nevertheless inches back towards Bultmann’s side:

“The Fourth Gospel stereotypes the rejection of Jesus as the response of the Jews. Even if οἱ Ἰουδαίοι once denoted ‘the Judeans’ or the Jewish authorities, the Gospel of John generalized and stereotyped those who rejected Jesus by its use of this term.”

This designation, he writes, “carries the burden of unbelief and the world’s rejection of Jesus.”

So too Robert Kysar: “Although the term Ιουδαίοι is used to refer to many different groups in the Gospel and from varying perspectives, the negative characterization inherent in the term serves the dualistic scheme of the Gospel in which it opposes the Christian believers.”

Adele Reinhartz is just as forceful. Not only does the occurrence of “the Jews” in a variety of contexts tend to “blur the fine distinctions and nuances implied by these contexts,” but the evangelist, she claims, consigns all Jews of the narrative

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10 Ibid., 276.
to the negative pole of his dualistic mindset.\textsuperscript{12} And here Reinhartz goes one step past Bultmann: the Jews are not symbols of an existential stance against the Revealer. They are real flesh and blood Jews, of Jesus’s day and of the evangelist’s.\textsuperscript{13} For these scholars, diversity of response and shade of nuance have been drowned out by generalization and stereotyping.\textsuperscript{14} Whatever variety there may be, it has been consumed.

As a way of categorizing all responses of those named οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι this borders on the Procrustean. Although not properly speaking a return to Bultmann’s classic articulation because of its attention to the socio-historical circumstances of the Gospel’s composition, exegetically it comes quite close. The Jews’ collective role is still to represent unbelief, as Bultmann said, but now they are representatives who exist in the physical world. In the process, however, positive characterizations of the Jews must be dismissed as relics of the

\textsuperscript{12} Reinhartz, “‘Jews’ and Jews,” 220; eadem, “Forging a New Identity,” 132-33.
\textsuperscript{13} Eadem, “‘Jews’ and Jews,” 225.
Johannine community’s past or flattened into examples of human obduracy. If the evangelist stereotypes the Jews as unbelievers, little room is left for sympathizers like Nicodemus, who, if he is not a believer by John 19, nevertheless shows support for Jesus (7:50-52; 19:39-42) despite the opposition of his colleagues. The faith of the Jews in chs. 11 and 12, which arouses the Sanhedrin to take decisive action against Jesus, would have to be judged shallow or inadequate, though the text does not so qualify it. Gone would be the persistent note of schism (7:43-44; 10:19-21; 11:45-46), replaced by the monotony of inflexible opposition. The deficiency of the symbolic interpretation is not only that it sets aside historical concreteness for a timeless idea but that if the Jews in the Fourth Gospel are indeed symbolic of anything, if they have a single unified role to play in the Gospel, it cannot be to represent unbelief. This is altogether too stylized, laying down the lines of Johannine dualism where they do not belong.  

Mostly out of sight but nonetheless striking in this respect is Ashton’s change of mind between the first and second editions of Understanding the Fourth Gospel. In 1991 he responded to Bultmann’s evaluation of the Jews’ role in the Gospel with a hearty “Amen”: “That the role of the Jews is as Bultmann describes it is surely beyond serious dispute.”\(^{16}\) But by 2007 the imprimatur had been more or less rescinded. Bultmann’s interpretation, though perhaps reasonable from the standpoint of a later Christian faith, is ultimately an imposition on the text: “It is not exegesis but eisegesis.”\(^{17}\) What occasioned the more sober tone? In the interim, Daniel Boyarin, whose own solution to this Johannine riddle has a good deal in common with Ashton’s, had issued a rebuke tucked away in an otherwise appreciative footnote.\(^{18}\) Ashton’s approval of Bultmann, says Boyarin, “contradicts the whole thrust of his exegesis,” which finds in οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι a restricted contingent, an inner circle of the religious elite, who after the destruction of the temple were pivotal players in the reorganization of Jewish life. Martyn’s questionable two-level drama “is to be preferred to this typically Bultmannian attempt to enhance the anti-Judaism of the New Testament at every turn.”\(^{19}\) Behind the rhetorical thunder of Boyarin’s

\(^{16}\) Ashton, Understanding, 1st ed., 135. This is the position he first advanced in “Identity and Function,” 59-60.

\(^{17}\) Idem, Understanding, 2nd ed., 69.


\(^{19}\) Ibid.
demurral flashes a lightning bolt that strikes beyond Ashton’s exegesis: if we recognize in the Jews of the Gospel a subset of Jews or acknowledge that they are characterized from a variety of perspectives, it is then inconsistent, unless attempt is made toward a rigorous source-critical hypothesis, to make them out to be Jesus’s inveterate opponents *en masse*, to assign them a single, negative role as foils to Christian faith.

Of course, it cannot be ruled out in advance that the author or an editor somewhere down the line took up older traditions that featured a diverse cast of Jewish characters and replaced them with the amorphous “the Jews.” But before entertaining that possibility, it is necessary first to situate the Gospel of John in its ancient literary context, bringing its usage of “the Jews” into sharper focus by comparison with other Jewish authors of the period.20 The thrust of the following argument is not to disprove that the Jews in the Fourth Gospel are frequently Jesus’s opponents. That they are is too plain to contest. It is to show rather that

20 Although in what follows I do not adopt the specific terminology or methods of theoretical narratology, it is in one sense a “form of historical narrative criticism,” as Cornelis Bennema (“A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature,” *BibInt* 17 [2009]: 401) dubs it. That is, I am concerned with how the evangelist characterizes the Jews but not to the exclusion of outside sources of information, since as a class of people, the Jews are not figments of the evangelist’s imagination, even if their characterization should turn out to be unfair or distorted.

More generally, because the Gospel refers to people and places known through other means, to take a wholly text-immanent approach is to select the wrong tool for the job, as Petri Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola caution in “Reconceiving Narrative Criticism,” in *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni, JSNTSup 184 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 13-48.
the appellation οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, which seems to ring so general, does not subsume what might otherwise be regarded as positive and neutral references to “the Jews.”

“The Jews” and “These Jews as Determined by Narrative Context”

In the methodological prolegomenon to an unpublished dissertation on the application of linguistic theory to the Johannine Jews, Terry Schram, like Ashton after him, differentiates between sense and reference. For Ashton, as we have seen, “sense” means the role that the Jews play in the Gospel. As Schram employs it, “sense” is roughly equivalent to a word’s lexical meaning, a basic grasp of what a word means to the extent that intelligible communication about it is possible, even if we have difficulty precisely defining it. So, to take up Schram’s own example, we might struggle to define “chair” or have a different mental image of a chair than the person sitting next to us, but we have no trouble using the word “to refer to a variety of (somehow) recognizably similar things that constitute a class in the world of experience.” We have, on the whole, a good idea of what chairs are, the occasional oddity notwithstanding. A word’s

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21 Schram, “The Use of Ioudaioi in the Fourth Gospel: An Application of Some Linguistic Insights to a New Testament Problem” (ThD. diss., University of Utrecht, 1974), 28-33. Schram borrows his terminology from the field of linguistics, whereas Ashton takes his start from the German philosopher Gottlob Frege, who differentiated between Sinn as the object to which a term refers and Bedeutung as the manner in which the term refers to that object.

22 Ibid., 32.
referent, on the other hand, is a particular instance of the general concept that it picks out, the activation of its lexical content to specify members of a class of objects in the real world. If I remark to someone that the chair is comfortable, presumably I have a definite chair in mind. I am not making a statement about all chairs everywhere, nor does this particular chair’s luxurious quality adhere to the sense of the term.

Ancient authors acquainted with the Jewish nation and its customs had a good enough idea of what “Jews” meant to talk about them and be understood: a people like the other peoples of the world, having a common ancestral land, bound by a set of shared customs and traditions and by worship of the same God. The precise referents of “Jews” or “the Jews,” in contrast, frequently change without disrupting the word’s sense. This is well illustrated in the literary corpora of the Alexandrian philosopher Philo and of the Jewish aristocrat, general, and prisoner of war turned historian, Flavius Josephus. For here, a bare “the Jews” meets us time and again, in reference to the Jewish people at large, but just as commonly, if not more so, to very restricted subsets of Ἰουδαῖοι. As Dunn observes:

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23 As detailed in the Introduction. Similarly, Judith Lieu (“Parting of the Ways,” 109) remarks: “Whatever the fuzziness at the edges, the use of the term Ἰουδαῖος without apology in both pagan literature and Jewish inscriptions implies a sufficiently coherent perception from outside and from within.”
Philo speaks regularly of the “nation of the Jews” or of Moses as “the lawgiver of the Jews.” But in *In Flaccum* and *de Legatione ad Gaium* he can often use οἱ Ἰουδαίοι to denote Jews who are more specifically defined by their context, as Jews of a particular region or city. Josephus in *The Jewish War* speaks typically of “the Jews” in opposition to such as Antiochus, Pompey, Herod and Pilate … but he can also speak with equal meaningfulness of “the Jews” of specific cities such as Alexandria or Damascus, or switch from specific to general reference (as in *JW* 2.532) without confusion.24

While Dunn’s distinction between general and specific references does not map directly onto Schram’s “sense” and “reference,” as applied they cover much the same ground.25 In some passages, “the Jews” is more or less equivalent to the word’s lexical meaning, such that we could substitute “the Jewish people” for οἱ Ἰουδαίοι without doing any damage to the passage. When Philo or Josephus writes of the laws, customs, and feasts of the Jews they are not picking out individual members or subsets of the collective. But on many occasions the referent of “the Jews” contracts, so that we could gloss “the Jews” with “these Jews”: “the Jews who resided in their [the Caesareans’] city” (*J.W.* 2.457, LCL), “the remnant of the Jews at Antioch” (*J.W.* 7.41), and so on. Of course, this is rather cumbersome to continually repeat and redundant at that, since context

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25 Schram (”Use of Ioudaios,” 226-27) does indeed speak of generic and specific references. The primary difference is that “sense” for Schram is more abstract, the meaning of a word as it is available for making references to objects or classes of objects that exist in the real world.
makes it clear which Jews are now acting. Thus often in the place of these fuller constructions are just “Jews” or “the Jews.”

Because circumscription of a word’s reference by context is a normal part of both oral and written communication, we often pass it over unnoticed. So when Josephus refers to the Jewish populace of Caesarea Maritima in the lead up to the revolt, the defenders of Jotapata, Tiberias, Tarichaea, and Gamala during Vespasian’s Galilean campaign, the combatants of Jerusalem during the siege, or the Jews of Antioch and Macheraus in its aftermath all in their respective contexts as “the Jews,” we know quite intuitively that he has particular subsets of the people in mind, some Jews rather than all Jews or Jews in general.\(^\text{26}\) Philo exhibits the same tendency when recounting the fracas between Jews, Egyptians, and Greeks in Alexandria. “The Jews” of Flaccus 55 are consistently the Jews of Alexandria, those of Embassy 155-161 the Jews of Rome during the reign of Augustus.

Sometimes those named οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι exercise a representative function.\(^\text{27}\) But this is not inherent to the literary convention. In fact, in a number of passages


\(^{27}\) As, for instance, the fifty ambassadors from Judea sent to Rome to bring charges against Archelaus on behalf of their disgruntled compatriots (J.W. 2.80-92), referred to in J.W. 2.92 simply as Ἰουδαῖοι.
it is evident that what “the Jews” say and do is not reflective of the will or character of the ἔθνος at large, as the following examples will show.

1) *J.W.* 1.90-95: During the reign of Alexander Jannaeus, a growing number of malcontents, angered over his brutal treatment of political opponents, invite the Seleucid king Demetrius Eucaerus to help dislodge the king from his throne. Demetrius, all too happy about the instability in Judea, readily complies and ventures into Samaria. “The Jews,” Josephus now informs us, “joined with their allies around Shechem (συνέμισγον οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τοῖς συμμάχοις περὶ Σίκιμα)” (1.92). Josephus, we can be sure, has in sight only a sliver of the Jewish people. Not only are the combatants with Demetrius numbered in the low thousands, but Alexander, on his side, has “the part of the Jews that favored him to the number of 10,000” (παρῆν δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ εὐνοοῦν Ἰουδαϊκὸν εἰς μυρίους) (1.93). When the two parties confront each other, both kings, hoping to forestall the battle and gain a victory without the loss of any men, petition the soldiers on the other side, Alexander wanting to coax the Jews with Demetrius to return to him in peace, and Demetrius the Greek mercenaries whom Alexander had hired. Neither sovereign meets with success: “Neither would the Jews,” that is, the Jews allied with Demetrius, “abate their resentment nor the Greeks,” that is, the Greek mercenaries accompanying Alexander Jannaeus, “their fidelity” (1.94).
2) *J.W.* 1.141-51: The civil strife that plagues the Jews during Alexander’s reign rears its ugly head once more just a decade or so later, the feud between Alexander’s sons Hyrcanus and Aristobulus bringing Pompey into Judea and marking the end of Jewish independence. When the famed Roman general reaches the capital, those of Hyrcanus’s party are eager to open the gates, while the supporters of Aristobulus, determined to hold out, take refuge in the temple. Upon Pompey’s entrance into the city a battle ensues between the Roman army and those holed up in the sanctuary. At one point, Josephus refers to this latter party as “the Jews,” remarking in 1.45 that the Romans filled up the valley surrounding the temple while the Jews, that is, those Jews who were for Aristobulus, made an effort to repel them (τῶν Ἰουδαίων πάντα τρόπον εἰργόντων ἀνωθεν).

3) *J.W.* 6.113-114, 136-48: Josephus is doggedly insistent throughout *Jewish War* that it was internal discord and not Roman aggression that was to blame for Jerusalem’s downfall and, moreover, that brigands and tyrants—the Zealots, Simon bar Giora, and above all, John of Gischala—had overtaken all those in the city who were for peace, killing some and coercing others to do their will. It comes as no surprise, then, when Josephus reports in *War* 6.113-116 that many
chief priests and a good number of the aristocracy that were left in Jerusalem, emboldened by Josephus’s impassioned plea for surrender to the Romans, braved the fury of the rebels and jumped ship. Yet when Josephus returns in 136-48 to the battle at the gates of the temple, and in the ensuing scenes, the rebels are often engaged in combat against the Romans as “the Jews.” Not only so, but they are characterized as disorderly and disastrously confused, running to and fro at random and without unity, traits which Josephus elsewhere says are alien to a genuinely Jewish disposition (6.17).

If the examples presented here risk redundancy, that is by design, for they show to be mundane in Josephus what is often contested when it comes to the Fourth Gospel. First, we must not confuse what “the Jews” do in any given scene or report with what the word in itself means, to move from characterization at selected points to definition. If, as it happens often in Jewish War, the part of the Jews that oppose the Romans are called “the Jews,” this does not mean that “Jew” has become a cipher for someone hostile to Roman rule. This is false both to Josephus and to ordinary speech. Josephus knows that some Jews were for peace. In fact, as noted above, he is anxious to prove to his readers that the peaceable majority were put into an impossible situation by a small band of
extremists. Of course, we may very well have to pardon Josephus for exaggerating. Wanting to put his people in the best possible light, he hurls the blame at alleged knaves and instigators to deflect it from the nation as a whole. But none of this has to do with definition. The sense of the word “Jews” remains constant even as the behavior of those so named varies from episode to episode.

Second, the referents of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι change frequently. They expand and contract depending on the context. Sometimes the actions and attitudes of “the Jews” are reflective of the broader Jewish populace or carried out on their behalf. Often they are not. When οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in a given passage are equivalent to “these Jews as made known by context” we cannot justifiably predicate their actions of all Jews of all times and places. Josephus’s usage of “the Jews” for so many actors in the narrative, with their own agendas and character, can hardly be part of a

28 Indeed, according to Josephus, it was civil strife and not the Romans which brought upon the city and the temple such terrible disasters. The moderate priests and aristocracy were not able to steer the ship of the state to a more profitable course because of the violence of the insurrectionists, who themselves were broken into several competing factions.


Mason states elsewhere (“Josephus’s Judean War, in A Companion to Josephus, ed. Honora Howell Chapman and Zuleika Rodgers [Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016], 16-17), that many, having abandoned the older theory that Josephus wrote Jewish War as a piece of imperial propaganda, now hold that his chief motivation in writing was to absolve the Jewish people for their role in the war. Mason, for his part, is reluctant to elevate this theme to a purpose statement given Josephus’s multiple sets of concerns.
strategy of stereotyping or generalizing. An overall image of the Jewish people, to be sure, emerges out of the string of individual scenes, but the behavior of those named “the Jews” in any given passage need not and indeed does not always conform to it.  

**From Josephus to John**

There is a distinct challenge moving from here to the Fourth Gospel, for those literary conventions which I have shown to be unexceptionable in Philo and Josephus have appeared otherwise to many interpreters of the Gospel. How do we proceed without merely arguing in a circle? Admittedly, there is no way to prove that John’s language about the Jews has affinities with Josephus or Philo at those points just enumerated, but by working inductively and observing the resemblances between the Fourth Gospel and these texts, some progress may be made in that direction. To avoid begging the question, as much as that is

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30 As Paul Spilsbury has shown (The Image of the Jew in Flavius Josephus’ Paraphrase of the Bible, TSAJ 69 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998]), Josephus certainly does intend to project a positive image of the Jewish people. They are peaceable, noble, and virtuous. The portrayal that Spilsbury detects in Jewish Antiquities largely holds true for Josephus’s other works.

Similarly, Mason (“Josephus’s Judean War,” 26-27) notes that in Jewish War Josephus distinguishes between the poor political choices of some Jews and the Jewish national-ethnic character. As a people, they are courageous, daring, and contemptuous of death. The overarching point here is that Josephus’s narrative is not controlled by the overall image of his people, as if he had to make all those he names “Jews/the Jews” fit it perfectly. Some of those so designated are in his eyes bad Jews. So also Graham Harvey, The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew, and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature, AGJU 35 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 129.
possible, it will be best to move gradually from less controversial passages to the infamous statement in John 8:44 (“You are of your father the devil”). I will begin therefore not with the Jews but with the Samaritans.

On the Periphery of the Disturbance

In John 4, after an impromptu encounter with a Jewish man claiming to be the Messiah and revealing the secrets of her less-than-honorable past, a Samaritan woman departs from Jacob’s well to report the remarkable conversation to her fellow villagers. Their interest piqued, they go out to meet him. Verse 39 tells us that many of the Samaritans from this village believed in Jesus on account of the woman’s testimony, and so, having reached Jesus, they ask him to come and stay with them. Those who extend the invitation are referred to as “the Samaritans” (οἱ Σαμαριταῖς) without anything further added (v. 40).

Now there is some ambiguity in the passage, since v. 30 seems to imply that everyone in the village came out, while vv. 39-40 could be construed to mean that only those who were persuaded by what the woman had to say made the short trip. Either way, the Σαμαριταί of v. 40 are restricted to the people of Sychar, and perhaps to the many that believed the woman’s words. Having established the identity of this group by context, the evangelist drops any modifying adjectives or prepositional phrases; the Samaritans from this village
are now “the Samaritans.” Is this positive response to Jesus indicative of a widespread Samaritan acceptance of the stranger from heaven, intended to make the unbelief of the Jews stand out all the more starkly? It has been so read by a number of scholars, but the Gospel says nothing more about the Samaritans, either good or bad, the accusation that Jesus is a Samaritan (and demon-possessed) aside.31

If in John 4:40 οἱ Σαμαριται are narrowly the inhabitants, or some of the inhabitants, of Sychar, there is still perhaps some uncertainty whether the evangelist makes their reception of Jesus representative for all Samaritans, though on the basis of what I have said thus far, the inference is tenuous. No such thing can be said about the response of the Jews in ch. 11. John 11:33 holds the honor of being the shortest verse in the Bible, a mere two words, in English as in Greek: “Jesus wept.” The setting is the raising of Jesus’s friend Lazarus. Jesus, so unprecedentedly confident, so supremely self-assured of his identity and mission throughout the Gospel, is now overwhelmed at the sight of the tomb and of the accompanying mourners. The tears flow. The outpouring of emotion is met with a sympathetic response: “See how he loved him!” The sympathizers are simply “the Jews” (v. 36).

If we move back to v. 19, the context makes clear who these Jews are. Many Jews, we are told, had come to visit Mary and Martha to comfort them over the loss of their brother. Upon Jesus’s agonizingly delayed arrival, Mary rushes out to meet him, which prompts “the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her (οἱ οὖν Ἰουδαίοι οντες μετ’ αυτῆς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ καὶ παραμυθούμενοι αὐτῆν)” to follow (11:31). When Mary reaches Jesus, she is overtaken by grief and begins to weep. Jesus, seeing her weeping and “the Jews who came with her (τοὺς συνελθόντας αὐτῇ Ἰουδαίους)” also weeping, can no longer hold back his emotions (11:32-33). The Ἰουδαίοι of v. 36 are none other than this small contingent of Jewish mourners, in fact, only a part of them, since in short order there is a division among them, some openly cynical about a man who could open the eyes of the blind but would not arrive in time to heal a friend (v. 37).

The relationship between Jesus and these Jews is far from the rancorous debates of 5:10-47 or 8:31-59. The Jews in ch. 11 sympathize with him. Some even believe in him (v. 45). Those in chs. 5, 8, and 10 seek to murder him. Although all are referred to as οἱ Ἰουδαίοι, they do not comprise the same subset of the Jewish people. If the evangelist’s purpose in turning so frequently to “the Jews” was to obliterate distinction, to melt down all Jewish responses to Jesus and pour them into a block of solid opposition, here he has not carried the program through.
From John 11 we must venture one step closer to the fault line. If “the Jews” of John 11:36 are meant to signify only some of the Jews who had accompanied Mary to Lazarus’s tomb, it is natural to ask whether the actors are similarly restricted throughout the Gospel. One of the curious features of the synagogue-expulsion passages is that they assign the ban to the Jews in 9:22 and to the Pharisees in 12:42. John 9:16 and 10:19 reverse the interchange, the first reporting a division among the Pharisees, the second predicating this schism of the Jews. Within the story of the healing of the man born blind itself, the interrogators are the Pharisees from 9:13-17 and the Jews from v. 18 onward.

Whatever the pre-history of the passage, if it had any, the narrator has made a concerted effort to craft the episode into a dramatic whole.\(^{32}\) From the disciples’ query about the blind man in v. 1 to the man’s climactic confession and worship of Jesus as the Son of Man in v. 38, each scene builds the tension, centered, like so much of the Gospel, upon the question of Jesus’ identity. Verse 24 states, “Again (πάλιν) they summoned the man who had been blind.” This πάλιν joins the first phase of the investigation in vv. 13-17 with the second in vv. 24-34, just as the blind man’s sarcastic retort to the Jews, “I have already told

\(^{32}\) Chapter 9, in fact, has proven especially amenable to organization into dramatic form. See Hans Windisch, “John’s Narrative Style,” in *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, ed. Mark W. G. Stibbe, NTTS 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 25-64, first published in German in 1923; also famously Martyn in *History and Theology*. 
you, and you did not listen” (9:27), looks back to v. 15, where the Pharisees serve as the ringleaders of the investigation. If we couple these exegetical clues with the same type of literary device just observed in John 11, then the change in terminology is of little consequence.33 The referent of “the Jews” in 9:18-34 are the Pharisees of 9:13-17, as context demands. It is for this reason that the synagogue ban ascribed to the Jews in 9:22 is assigned to the Pharisees in 12:42.

The referent of “the Jews” in ch. 9 overlaps partially with those named οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Passion Narrative, where the designation at times refers to a coalition of the Pharisees and chief priests and at other times to the chief priests alone. The evangelist reminds the reader in 18:14 that Caiaphas was “the one who had advised the Jews” to arrest Jesus, alluding to the meeting of the Pharisees and chief priests in 11:45-63 which sprung these final events into motion. The “servants of the chief priests and Pharisees (ἐκ τῶν ἀρχιερέων καὶ ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων ὑπηρέται)” sent to arrest Jesus in 18:3 become “the servants of the Jews (οἱ ὑπηρέται τῶν Ἰουδαίων)” in 18:12. As the narrative progresses, the Pharisees disappear, and “the Jews” alternates with “the chief priests” during the trial scene before the conflicted Pilate (19:6, 15). “The Jews” of the Passion 33 Against the recent suggestion of Bernier (Aposynagōgos and the Historical Jesus, 71) that the evangelist switches from “Pharisees” to ‘Jews” at this point because v. 18 introduces a broader coalition of Jewish interrogators. Nor is the switch indicative of a secondary source for vv. 18-23. With Bultmann (Gospel of John, 335, n. 1), I attribute the alternation to the evangelist’s editorial activity, or rather his storytelling style, since the move to “the Jews” after context has been established is part of the author’s regular procedure.
Narrative, therefore, are the Jerusalem-based leaders among whom the chief priests are most prominent. And yet even here the referent quickly expands and contracts without formal notice from the evangelist, as the “many Jews” of 19:20 who read the titulus on the cross presumably refer to passers-by distinct from the chief priests, who in v. 21 are themselves named “chief priests of the Jews.” So if we are to ask about the referent of “the Jews” in chs. 9, 11, and 18-19, we must give at least five separate answers: those who had come to comfort Mary and Martha, the Pharisees, the Pharisees and chief priests, the chief priests alone, and the Jewish people in general.

At the Epicenter: “Your Father is the Devil” (John 8:44)

Now we come to the epicenter: John 8:44, according to some, the most anti-Jewish statement in the NT.34 Even were John 8:31-59 not fissured with exegetical problems, its aftershock alone in the sad history of anti-Semitism would compel the exegete to come with fear and trembling.35 But whom does Jesus charge with

34 The passage is described as a “text of terror” by Jeffrey S. Rogers (“Texts of Terror and the Essence of Scripture: Encountering the Jesus of John 8: A Sermon on John 8:31-59,” RevExp 103 [2006]: 205-12), borrowed from Phyllis Trible, Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives, OBT 13 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). Of the opinion that it is likely the most anti-Jewish statement in the NT is Jürgen Becker, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, ÖTK 4 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1979), 1:304.

35 Günter Reim ("Joh. 8.44—Gotteskinder/Teufelskinder: Wie antijudaistisch ist ‘die wohl antijudaistischste Äusserung des NT,’" NTS 30 [1984], 619) recalls having seen a photograph from the Nazi era of a sign at the entrance to a village with words drawn from John 8:44: “The father of
being offspring of the evil one? To begin with, it is ambiguous whether “the Jews who had believed in him (τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὕτῳ Ἰουδαίον)” in 8:31 are part of the many who believed in Jesus in 8:30. If so, this does indeed bode ill for the Jews of the rest of the narrative. The problem is exacerbated because the perfect participle πεπιστευκότας can bear the sense either of a perfect, a state persisting into the present, or a pluperfect, a past condition which no longer holds. Grammatically, neither is to be given priority. Context, therefore, must dictate which sense is most appropriate.

Any answer to these questions must account for the meteoric rise in hostility against Jesus. The narrative never builds up to their unbelief. Jesus knows from the outset that they have sinister designs (8:37). The expedient of an immature faith that Jesus now exposes is incommensurate with the severity of the Jews is the devil.” The photograph to which Reim refers has been reproduced in Martin Broszat and Elke Fröhlich, eds., Bayern in der NS-Zeit II: Herrschaft und Gesellschaft im Konflikt (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1979), 306. The phrase also appears as the title on the first page of an anti-Semitic children’s picture book published in 1936: Elvira Bauer, Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid und keinem Jud auf seinem Eid (Nuremberg: Stürmer, 1936). They are sober reminders of the terrifying history of interpretation of passages such as John 8:31-59 but also of the solemnity of the exegetical task.

36 Thus, for example, John 11:44 reports Lazarus’s exit from the tomb as follows: “The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth (ἐξῆλθεν ὁ τεθνηκὼς δεδεμένος τοὺς πόδας καὶ τὰς χεῖρας κειρίαις).” The first perfect participle τεθνηκὼς (which the NRSV translates as “the dead man”) denotes a former state while δεδεμένος (“bound”) has a proper perfect meaning. As for the verb πιστεύω, the perfect participle occurs in Acts (15:5; 18:27; 19:18; 21:20) with the sense of present belief, but in the Shepherd of Hermas (Vis. 3.7.1), the same form indicates apostasy—people who had formerly believed but do so no longer. So Terry Griffith, “‘The Jews Who Had Believed in Him’ (John 8:31) and the Motif of Apostasy in the Gospel of John,” in Gospel of John and Christian Theology, 184-85.
the conflict. It is not that their faith is shallow. Jesus does not accuse them of naively clinging to his signs at the expense of his words. He accuses them of nothing less than intent to murder. If the sudden burst of unexplained animosity is not just a deficiency in the evangelist’s story, then we must look for the spark which has set off this explosion. The intensity of the exchange right from the start pushes us toward identifying these “Jews who had believed” as former followers of Jesus, who at some point had fallen away.\(^{37}\)

But if that is so, how has the reader been prepared for it? Terry Griffith argues that at the heart of the invective of John 8:31-59 is apostasy, and the apostates are the defectors of 6:60-71 who, incensed at Jesus’s claim to be the bread of life, no longer follow him.\(^{38}\) To them Jesus holds out the possibility of return, but their lot has already been cast against their former rabbi.\(^{39}\) Griffith’s


\(^{39}\) Here we would have another example of the Gospel’s self-allusiveness, its quality of referring back to events and persons from earlier in the story. E.g., that the disciples are not arrested with Jesus (18:9) is said to fulfill Jesus’s words in 6:39. In 18:14 Caiaphas is identified by allusion to the events of 11:49-50. In 19:39 it is specified that Nicodemus is the one who came to Jesus by night (3:2). There are also proleptic statements. Judas’s betrayal is hinted at already in 6:64. Mary is described as the one who anointed Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair (11:2), even though this does not happen until 12:3. Even if “the Jews who had believed in him” of 8:31 are not the defectors of 6:60-71, the evangelist has hinted at things to come in 2:23-25. From very early on in his public ministry, Jesus knows that some of those who believe in him are not themselves worthy of trust.
suggestion brings the polemic in John 8:31-59 into contact with one of the Gospel’s ancillary themes, though in truth it is one aspect of the central theme of belief and unbelief, namely, the absolute necessity of holding fast to Jesus and the gravity of defection or betrayal.

This is first dramatized in John 6, where the report of disciples turning away from Jesus is closely connected with the betrayal of Judas, the archetypal apostate. Outside of John 8, in fact, Judas is the only figure in the narrative to be associated with the devil (6:70; 13:27), and it is precisely at the point of betrayal that the devil is said to enter into him. Unbelievers may stand under God’s judgment for their refusal to come to the light, but the Gospel’s most scathing denunciations are reserved for traitors.

Aligned with this is the prominence of the motif of “remaining” in John 8:31-59, a theme which resurfaces in the true vine discourse of ch. 15 as well as in 1 and 2 John where the secessionist crisis is at front and center. In John 8, Jesus defines true discipleship as an abiding relationship. The slave to sin does not remain in the household, but Jesus the Son remains there forever and is therefore able to free those who believe in him and make them children of God. “The Jews who had believed in him” bear the brunt of Jesus’s rebuke because they have failed to abide. Although it would be methodologically precarious to read John 8 as a literary artifice created in order to decry Jewish-Christian defectors from the
Johannine community and warn others tempted to leave the fold, it is fair to say that the pericope sets a pattern of opposition that applies in broad strokes to later Christians.\(^{40}\) No servant is greater than his or her master. If some disciples fell away and turned on Jesus, this is only to be expected to repeat itself in other settings where the same dynamic of faith and unbelief plays itself out.

All this is to say that the author does not indict the entire Jewish people, a charge which, as I have already suggested, would leave us with more problems than it solves. We cannot intelligibly read John 8:31-59 as if it cancels the more positive portrayal of the Jews in, say, chs. 11 and 12.\(^{41}\) Just as in 11:36 “the Jews” is shorthand for a narrow subset of the people, so throughout 8:31-59 “the Jews” are strictly the ones who according to v. 31 had (once) believed in him. Nor for that matter does the accusation of diabolical paternity in John 8:44 nullify the declaration that salvation is from the Jews, as if a fossil from a bygone age had been inexplicably left lying \textit{in situ}. Salvation does indeed come from the Jewish

\(^{40}\) Klaus Wengst, for example (Bedrängte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus: Ein Versuch über das Johannesevangelium, 3rd ed. [Munich: Kaiser, 1990], 126-27), reads John 8:31-59 as a two-level drama, in which a falling away of members of the Johannine community is read back into Jesus’s life. More common is the view that the Jews of 8:31-59 represent Jewish believers of the evangelist’s day whose faith is deficient, rather than those who have already apostatized. So Brown, \textit{Community}, 76-81; Henk Jan de Jonge, “‘The Jews’ in the Gospel of John,” in \textit{Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel}, 128-32; Matthias Rissi, “‘Die Juden’ im Johannesevangelium,” \textit{ANRW} 26.3:2099-141.

\(^{41}\) This is all the more so for those, such as Ashton, who assign ch. 11 to a late stage in the Gospel’s development. More generally, Tolmie (“Ἰουδαῖοι in the Fourth Gospel,” 397) remarks that although the negative characterization of the Jews receives the most emphasis, this does not nullify the response of those who believe.
people, as the Messiah is one of their own and as to them God’s will and word
have been revealed. For the evangelist it is not that all Jews, insofar as they are
Jews, are the progeny of the devil but that these Jews who intend to take Jesus’s
life are imitators of the primeval murderer.42

Referents in Retrospect

We could move back from the epicenter and walk through each passage in
search of the referents of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, but it would be superfluous. “The Jews” in
John are often various subsets of Jews. Those who persecute Jesus in ch. 5 are not
the same group as the Jews in ch. 6, who are at first more perplexed than hostile,
arguing amongst themselves. The Jews who attempt to stone Jesus in ch. 8 are
not the Jews who come to believe in him in chs. 11 and 12. And these are all of a
different nature than explanations of Jewish customs or a title such as “king of
the Jews.” Here the results of the present study join with those of Wendy E. S.
North: “The evidence suggests that John uses the expression ‘the Jews’ in a
general sense, that is to say, as a term which can accommodate within its scope

42 Similarly Reim, “Wie antijudaistisch?” 623: “Jesus does not speak generally of the Jews’
filiation from the devil but only in opposition to a determined group, who would like to stone
1994), 124-25: “Admittedly, the narrator does describe the antagonists as hoi Ioudaioi in 8.48, 52,
and 57. But this is shorthand for broader designation offered in 8.31, ‘the Jews who had believed
in him.’” So also Chatelion Counet, “No Anti-Judaism,” 207.
people with different responses towards Jesus as well as different social
groups.”  

Sometimes the phrase has all Jews without qualification in view, as in
the explanation of customs or identifications of the feasts. But it is also capable of
referring to “certain ‘Jews’ in particular” whose exact identity depends upon
context, a literary convention that is evident in Philo and Josephus. When the
evangelist has established the context, he often designates the various actors as
“the Jews,” but when possible ambiguity lurks, he is typically careful to identify
the group in question more explicitly as the rulers, Pharisees, chief priests, and so
forth. This does not mean the Jews in question are always different subsets of
the people. They are indeed very often those centered in Jerusalem, in positions
of authority, and devoted to the law, but this has to be determined on a passage-
by-passage basis. Thus to Ruth Sheridan’s assertion that “there is no subset of
Jews implied in the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι— the text reads not ‘some Jews’ but ‘the
Jews,’” I must reply with a rejoinder. The text may not read “some Jews” but in


44 Sjef van Tilborg (“Jezus temidden van de joden van het Loofhuttenfeest in Johannes 8,” in Jaarboek 2001 — Theologie in Exegese, ed. H. J. M. Schoot [Utrecht: Thomas Institut Utrecht, 2002], 66) contends that the “the Jews” in the Fourth Gospel are “the Jews, who according to this story, are present at this narrative place and in this narrative time.” Translation from the Dutch by Chatelion Counet, “No Anti-Judaism,” 198.


many passages it assuredly means “some Jews” just as it does in Josephus or Philo.

The Jews of the Fourth Gospel are almost always Judeans, as Malcolm Lowe and others before him had reasoned.\(^47\) They are frequently the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, as has long been recognized.\(^48\) They are often a scrupulously Torah-observant contingent among the larger populace, pace Motyer.\(^49\) These identifications are all correct in their own measure, in concert but not alone. If we have to select one answer, we should take a cue from the seasoned college student. When in doubt, the safest wager is on “all of the above.”\(^50\)

To return to Schram’s distinction, none of these referents constitutes the root sense of Ἰουδαῖος in the Gospel. For the evangelist, the Jews are a people, descended from Abraham, the recipients of God’s revelation through Moses and


\(^{48}\) Fischer (”Ueber den Ausdruck,” 98-99) identifies ”the Jews” in part with the Sanhedrin, a view he also ascribes to Wilhelm M. L. de Wette. In another early article, Johannes Belser (”Der Ausdruck oi Ἰουδαίοι im Johannesevangelium,” TQ 84 [1902]: 175-76) speaks of multiple meanings of “the Jews” standing side by side: the Jewish people, Judeans, and the Jewish authorities in particular.

\(^{49}\) Motyer, Your Father the Devil? 54-56.

\(^{50}\) This is in some respects an extension of what Belser had seen in 1902 and what Lowe had suggested in 1976 (“Who Were the Ἰουδαῖοι?” 107-8). Except whereas they speak of different meanings of the term “the Jews,” I would speak of multiple referents. It is worth noting that Belser (“Ausdruck,” 176) considered it a consensus position of the time that “the Jews” in the Fourth Gospel is a polyvalent term.
the prophets. They are in the same taxonomical order as Samaritans, Romans, and Greeks.\textsuperscript{51} Even if the Jews are the authorities in the majority of passages, “Jews” has not therefore become synonymous with “the Jewish authorities.” Or if most in the story are unreceptive or outright hostile to Jesus, we cannot therefore conclude that “Jews” now means those who are so disposed. An author or speaker, to be sure, may reorient the sense of a word through performance, but had the evangelist been attempting to redefine the term, we would expect the Jews of the Gospel to form a unified front. As it stands, their unreceptivity and antagonism is punctuated with exceptions: a sympathetic, if ambivalent, Nicodemus, the friends of Mary and Martha in ch. 11, and the many Jews who believe in Jesus in 11:45 and 12:11. Consequently, it seems to me most consistent to take the divergences in the characterization of the Jews as the result of changing referents, not as the evangelist’s failed attempt to foist a new meaning upon the term “Jew.”\textsuperscript{52} It is my contention that this is perfectly natural in terms of ancient literary convention.

\textsuperscript{51} So also Philip F. Esler, “From Ioudaios to Children of God: The Development of a Non-Ethnic Group Identity in the Gospel of John,” in \textit{In Other Words: Essays on Social Science Methods and the New Testament in Honor of Jerome H. Neyrey}, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn, Zeba A. Crook, and Eric Clark Stewart (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 118-24. The prophecy of Caiaphas about Jesus’s death for the people (11:50-52) and Pilate’s sarcastic reply to Jesus, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me” (18:35) make this clear. It is the ἔθνος of the Jews to which Jesus belongs and on whose behalf he dies.

\textsuperscript{52} As Schram states (“Use of Ioudais,” 20), although those named “the Jews” are often depicted in opposition to Jesus, “this is not yet to show any negative connotation in the term IOUIDAIOS, any emotional response to the term itself rather than to the referents of the term.”
Conclusion: Roles in Retrospect

I have spent some time on the identification of the Johannine Jews because the expansion and contraction of the referents of the term allows us to make a modification to Ashton’s question about the role of the Jews in the Gospel. If their identity changes depending on context, the characterization in one passage not necessarily carrying over to others, then we ought to ask not about their role, under the assumption that a univocal answer awaits, but about their roles. That is, despite the pronounced motif of opposition and unbelief, we do not have to erase the division among the Jews of the narrative to make room for a blanketing, undifferentiated massa damnata. The evangelist did not select the more capacious term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι for the purpose of stereotyping all Jews as unbelievers.

Yet if we cannot assign one role to the Johannine Jews, if we cannot make them out to be a single character, we can nevertheless place them within the Gospel’s total conception of the God-world relationship. Here we may take a cue

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53 In a similar way, it seems to me problematic to treat the Jews in the Fourth Gospel as a single character, as Culpepper does in Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 126. They are one group only in the sense that all so named are members of the Jewish people. I do not consider it a “limitation,” as Culpepper does, that we must always be asking precisely who the referents of “the Jews” are in each passage, any more than it would be a limitation in Philo or Josephus.

from Udo Schnelle. “Above all,” he writes, “they [the Jews] represent the two possible patterns of behavior with respect to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ: belief and unbelief.”

They, like the world that is in darkness but remains an object of God’s love, reside on both poles of the evangelist’s dualistic system. The crisis of belief and unbelief afflicts the Jews just as it does the world as a whole.

A cut straight through the middle, however, would be out of sync with the evangelist’s more pessimistic outlook. The division between those who believe and those who do not is not into symmetrical halves. The persistent feeling that the Jews in John are Jesus’s opponents is to that extent valid. What fraction belongs to the realm of belief in the author’s mind it is impossible to say. It is very small, no doubt. But there are believers, and if they are few among the Word’s own, it is not that they are more numerous anywhere else. The world did not recognize him, Jew or gentile.

The Jews come under the microscope because this is a story about Jesus, a Jew who ministered among his own people. If the evangelist had written his own Acts of the Apostles, non-Jews, I assume, would have fared no better. There is no hint of gentile triumphalism insofar as all humanity comes under indictment.

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56 Ibid., 228.
Human beings love darkness instead of light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). The world cannot accept the Spirit because it does not know him (14:17). The disciples will experience hatred from the world just as Jesus did from some of the Jews (15:18).57

The Johannine Jews reflect the twin possibilities of belief and unbelief which confront all people of all times but not in equal proportion. Their composite response to Jesus is a microcosm of the human response. This means unbelief on the part of most, but accompanying what might seem like categorical assertions of absolute rejection (“The world did not know him”; “His own did not receive him”) is John’s paradoxical qualification that some did receive him. The spectrum runs from unbelief, apostasy, curiosity, sympathy, and secret belief to true faith. As Jesus tells his disciples in the Farewell Discourse, “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also” (15:20). If we collapse the Johannine dialectic of division within the Jewish people in order to cast them as Jesus’ monochrome enemies, we destroy the Gospel’s deliberate tension.

57 As Kierspel (Jews and the World, 155-78) has shown, the concept of “the world” in the Gospel of John cannot be narrowed to the Jewish people but encompasses the whole stage of humanity. Kierspel concludes: “It is the author’s intention to say that the kind of opposition which Jesus faced from the Jews is not unique to his experience, but will always happen to all of his followers at any place. Creating this ‘universal outlook’ about Jesus’ mission and opposition is the main contribution of the term κόσμος” (178).
As Jesus’s public ministry reaches its completion in John 12, the narrative pace of the Gospel slows to a crawl. For the next five chapters, the master, knowing that the time of his glorification is at hand, comforts and prepares his closest followers for the events to follow and for life after his departure. Shortly after their final meal together and after Judas has made his exit, Jesus announces to the disciples, “Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’” (13:33). How is it that Jesus, a Jew, speaks to the Jewish apostles as if they were not themselves Ἰουδαῖοι? This becomes all the more peculiar when two chapters later he refers to a christologically interpreted passage in the Psalms as written in “their law” (15:25).

It was the purpose of the last chapter to show that the frequency of the expression ὁ Ἰουδαῖος does not serve to stereotype all Jews as unbelievers. Rather the nomenclature is shorthand for whatever Jewish contingent is acting at that point in the narrative, whether the Jewish mourners in Bethany, the Pharisees, the chief priests, or some other subset of the people. And although the strongest note is that of widespread unbelief, this is not at the expense of more
favorable Jewish responses. But these passages from the Farewell Discourse, and the handful of others like them, would seem to pull once more in the other direction and show that the exegetical task is not yet complete.¹ Does not the evangelist “other” the Jews, so that the dialectic of faith and unbelief collapses in on itself? Or to put it in the Gospel’s own terms, if believers are in the world but not of the world (17:11-14), are Jewish followers of Jesus among the Jews but not of them?² Earlier I had occasion to quote Bultmann’s lapidary remarks about the Johannine Jews as symbols of unbelief. An attentive reader, especially one familiar with Bultmann’s iconic commentary, may have noticed the ellipsis in the middle of the quoted text. The omission was not meant to prejudice the results of that chapter, but I would be remiss to leave it unattended to altogether, for once again Bultmann gets to the heart of the matter:

The Jews are spoken of as an alien people, not merely from the point of view of the Greek readers, but also, and indeed only properly, from the standpoint of faith; for Jesus himself speaks to them as a stranger and correspondingly, those in whom the stirrings of faith or of the search for Jesus are to be found are distinguished from the “Jews,” even if they are

¹ Culpepper (Anatomy, 128-29), for instance, suggests that such phrases contribute to the creation of a stereotype of the Jews as unbelievers. Brown (Community, 41), taking these passages as a window into the situation of the Johannine community, concludes that “the Jesus who speaks of ‘the Jews’ (13:33) and of what is written in ‘their Law’ (15:25; see 10:34) is speaking the language of the Johannine Christian for whom the Law is no longer his own but is the hallmark of another religion.”

² Or as Meeks pointedly asks (“‘Am I a Jew?’” 163): “Could Pilate’s question [“Am I a Jew?”] have been put in the mouth of the author himself? Or, for that matter, of his central character, Jesus?” Similarly Reinhartz, “‘Jews’ and Jews,” 224.
themselves Jews. In this connection therefore even the Baptist does not appear to belong to the “Jews.”

There are indeed some strange turns of phrase that appear to put Jesus and the disciples at some remove from the Íουδαίοι: the crowds in Jerusalem not speaking “for fear of the Jews” (7:13) when all in the narrative are presumably Jewish, Jesus’s references to the Torah as “your law” (8:17; 10:34), and so forth. I made the case in ch. 1 that the model of a religious schism in which former Jews now donned an identity as Christians is ill at ease with the evangelist’s more assertive posture, but now those features of the Gospel which have fed the impression of detachment must be met head on exegetically.

“Many Left the Jews”?

The first thing to be observed is that nowhere is it explicitly said that an ethnically Jewish believer’s identity is erased in Christ. Neither the evangelist in his own voice nor the Johannine Jesus makes a pronouncement or articulates a general principle to that effect. Believers, it is true, experience an identity

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4 Although I shall argue that the distancing effect of such expressions can be exaggerated, Brown (Community, 41) hits upon their apparent strangeness: “But to have the Jewish parents of the blind man in Jerusalem described as being ‘afraid of the Jews’ (9:22) is just as awkward as having an American living in Washington, DC, described as being afraid of ‘the Americans.’”
transformation, an event that the Gospel envisions with a panoply of metaphors. They are given the right to become children of God (1:12). They are born from above (3:3), born of the Spirit (3:5), children of the light (12:36). They worship the Father in Spirit and in truth (4:23). They are sheep kept safe by the Good Shepherd (10:1-18). But never is it stated that this acquired standing supersedes the individual’s ethnic identity. When, in the high-priestly prayer of John 17, Jesus tells the Father (it would seem for the benefit of his followers rather than for his own sake) that the disciples are not of the world (v. 16), κόσμος stands in for a principle of ungodliness. Its meaning has transitioned from the stage of human activity into an abstracted life stance defined by opposition to the Creator. So although the disciples have been granted a transfer of origins from the earthly to the heavenly realm, it is not as though they have become ontologically non-human. The antithesis of “child of God” is not “human being” but rather the “offspring of the evil one.” Thus although the promised adoption as sons and daughters of God for those who believe, or the imagery of one flock under one shepherd, could be construed as creating an all-consuming meta-identity, it could also be reasonably interpreted as establishing a nested

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5 That is, “world” in this verse begins to slide toward the sense it bears in 1 John 2:15-17 where the anonymous author of the letter warns the congregation against love of the world and the things in the world, the world not referring to “humanity but to ‘the distasteful cosmic trinity’ of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (Kierspel, Jews and the World, 160). The transition is noted also by Stanley B. Marrow, “Κόσμος in John,” CBQ 64 (2002): 90-102.
hierarchy.⁶ There are Jewish children of God and gentile children of God. There is one flock which embraces both the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* and the *ecclesia ex gentibus*, at the same time unified and distinct.⁷

The closest the Gospel comes to a forthright denial of the ethnic state of Jewish believers in which they were called is perhaps John 12:11. For the evangelist, it is the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and not the cleansing of the temple as in the Synoptic Gospels, that triggers the official decision of the Sanhedrin to have Jesus arrested and killed. It also proves to be a major catalyst of Jewish belief, first among those present and then among the general population as the word spreads. By all appearances, 12:11 is one of the relatively few notices of Jewish reception of Jesus. On account of Lazarus, “many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus (πολλοὶ δὲ αὐτὸν ὑπήγον τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ ἐπίστευον εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν).” The syntax of the verse, however, leaves room for some ambiguity, since the genitive “of the Jews (τῶν Ἰουδαίων)” follows the verb (ὑπήγον) and not the subject “many (πολλοί).” According to

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⁶ That the evangelist was attempting to erase former identities and replace (rather than supplement) them with allegiance to Christ is the view of Reinhartz (“Forging a New Identity,” 128) and Esler (“From Ioudaioi to Children of God”), among others.

⁷ I have borrowed the language of the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* and *ecclesia ex gentibus* from the fifth-century mosaic of the Santa Sabina basilica in Rome. For present purposes, it need not be determined whether the artist(s) envisioned this as a meta-identity (the *ex* implying a former state) or as a differentiated unity. The point, rather, is that the metaphors with which the evangelist plays are open to a conceptualization of the Christian community which retains ethnic difference within the greater body.
Meeks, “this verse could be translated, ‘Many left the Jews and believed in Jesus.’”

The fact that English translations are virtually unanimous in taking τῶν Ἰουδαίων as a partitive genitive in relation to πολλοί steers us away from this rendering. A perusal of the LSJ shows that when transitive, ὑπάγω takes a direct object in the accusative. To express it rather woodenly, and with due awareness of the etymological fallacy, one brings someone or something under something else. It is as an intransitive verb that ὑπάγω accrues connotations of self-withdrawal or departure. If ὑπῆγον in John 12:11 bears the meaning of “were going out,” presumably Jerusalem is the point of departure, since according to 11:55-56 many pilgrims had congregated there from the countryside in anticipation of the festival. The NRSV’s “were deserting” suggests more a movement in the social sphere than relocation of place. It might even be that ὑπάγω serves as the active counterpart to being made ἀποσυναγωγός. Many of the Jews willingly cut themselves off from the public assembly. They withdrew, having resolved to pay the price for their faith.

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8 Meeks, “‘Am I a Jew?’” 183.
9 LSJ, s.v. “ὑπάγω,” 1850.
10 So Hoskyns, Fourth Gospel, 416-17: “It was because of Lazarus, the author notes, that many of the Jews withdrew (i.e. from their obedience to the Jewish authorities, cf. vi. 67) and began to believe on Jesus.”
11 Or to put it more colloquially, they quit before they could be fired.
As a highly inflected language, Greek more than English lends itself to the figure of speech known as hyperbaton, the separation of elements that belong together. Grammatically there is no impediment to the consensus translation. The syntax of 12:11, moreover, parallels the summary of Samaritan belief in 4:39: “From that city many of the Samaritans believed in him on account of the woman’s word (Ἐκ δὲ τῆς πόλεως ἐκείνης πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν τῶν Σαμαριτῶν διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς γυναικός).” Even though the main verb and its oblique object (ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν) intervene between πολλοὶ and τῶν Σαμαριτῶν, together they form the subject of the sentence: “many of the Samaritans.” The success with which Jesus meets among the Samaritans of Sychar in ch. 4 replays itself now among a portion of the Jewish populace in Judea. There are indeed some Jews, few as they may be, who come to believe in Jesus.

The Mirage of a Manufactured Xenophobia

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12 The first hand of Codex Sinaiticus omits εἰς αὐτόν, but this appears to have been a scribal error. NA only provides a negative apparatus, since the printed reading is secure.

13 Indeed, neither John 4:39 nor 12:11 intimates that the faith of these Samaritan and Jewish believers is inadequate or that their ethnic affiliation is thereby dissolved. The plain sense of John 12:11, therefore, is that the Jews who believe belong among the “all who received him” of the prologue (1:12).
Without any express statement in the Gospel itself, the conclusion that John intentionally sets Jesus, and by association Johannine Christians, apart from the Jewish people and their religious institutions and customs (and turns them into foreigners, so to speak) has been arrived at by a circuitous route. The process of inference typically runs along two interrelated tracks. First, the Gospel’s seeming ambivalence toward central Jewish institutions and its relative silence on matters of Jewish ritual observance that feature often enough in the Synoptic Gospels have often been felt to be the product of a supercessionist theology. The Gospel’s seeming ambivalence toward central Jewish institutions and its relative silence on matters of Jewish ritual observance that feature often enough in the Synoptic Gospels have often been felt to be the product of a supercessionist theology. Jesus fulfills in himself the meaning of Jewish festivals and religious customs, and indeed the law of Moses tout court, and thereby makes them obsolete. Thus Jesus does not say “our law” but “your law” and “their law.” The ancestors of the Jews of John 6 are not “our fathers” but “your fathers.” And practices like Sabbath observance and temple worship, though not denigrated, are nowhere affirmed as divine


ordinances with enduring validity. Second, as we have seen, are statements about οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in which other Jewish figures appear to be excluded from the collective to which they naturally belong.

The First Track of Inference: The Fourth Gospel and the Law

The relationship between Jesus and Moses (and the law given through him), if not as pervasive a theme as others, nevertheless exercised the thought of the evangelist, for he broaches the subject already in the prologue: “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:17). Unfortunately for exegetes, the statement is terse to the point of ambiguity. Is the comparison antithetic, such that the law is abolished with the coming of Christ? Or is it synthetic, the Torah still valued as a God-given grace, even if relativized by Jesus’s earthly advent? Despite its occasional reference to this greatest of Jewish heroes and the law given through him, the body of the Gospel does little

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16 As Ashton, for example, understands it and makes programmatic for Gospel of John and Christian Origins. According to Ashton, the evangelist consciously intended to supplant Moses with a new religion: “This statement, bleak, blunt, uncompromising, illustrates more clearly than any other in the whole of the New Testament the incompatibility of Christianity and Judaism. It announces a new religion” (3).

17 So Brown (Gospel of John, 1:17), who concludes that “there is no suggestion in John that when the Law was given through Moses, it was not a magnificent act of God’s love.” Similarly, Johannes Beutler, Judaism and the Jews in the Gospel of John, StudBib 30 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 40; Jörg Augenstein, “Jesus und das Gesetz im Johannesevangelium,” Kirche und Israel 14 (1999): 161-79.
to clarify matters.\textsuperscript{18} Jesus, no doubt, has pride of place far above all the other figures of Israel’s past, but what would this have meant for the daily life of the evangelist or those under his pastoral care?

One thing is certain: the evangelist was no Marcion. He was not ready to dispense with Israel’s Scriptures and God, as if these only served to shackle the church to the principles of this world.\textsuperscript{19} For John, the law of Moses and the sacred writings are, if nothing else, witnesses to the Word, and so their testimony goes unheeded to one’s own detriment. Although he has most assuredly reappraised their significance in some measure, he has not tossed them away entirely as the detritus of past revelation. Scripture cannot be broken (10:35).

And yet, if John has little in common theologically with the ship owner from “icy and inhospitable Pontus,” as Tertullian scorned Marcion’s native land \textit{(Marc. 1.1)}, that by no means ensures that he or the original recipients of the Gospel were Torah-observant. Maurice Casey has made the case that in practice, the Johannine Christians had given up many of “the identity factors of Second

\textsuperscript{18} Severino Pancaro \textit{(The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity according to John, NovTSup 42 [Leiden: Brill, 1975], 519) concludes that the law of Moses is “looked upon as associated in some special way with the Jews” but that at the same time the evangelist “attributes great importance to the Law.” Thus John’s attitude toward Torah “is hardly that of one who considers the Law no longer relevant.”}

\textsuperscript{19} The question of Marcion’s attitude toward Israel’s God and Scriptures has been taken up again in Sebastian Moll, \textit{The Arch-Heretic Marcion}, WUNT 250 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 47-106. See also Judith Lieu, \textit{Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
Temple Judaism” and had in the process taken on a gentile self-identification. The law is presented as the possession of an outside group, circumcision and purity regulations as alien customs. The Sabbath is explicitly abrogated (5:18), the festivals replaced. Scripture is accepted in its capacity as witness but its injunctions otherwise ignored. According to Casey’s reconstruction, the expulsion of Johannine Jewish Christians from the synagogue accelerated their assimilation to the customs of the ethnically non-Jewish members already part of the community. They had become gentiles.

The problem with this train of thought, however, is that it pushes us into a methodological cul-de-sac, or rather into several of them. First there is the possible disjunction between the evangelist’s ethnic self-identification and that of the Gospel’s intended recipients. That is, we may be dealing with a Jewish author who is writing for gentiles with varying degrees of familiarity with Jewish life and history, just as Josephus addresses himself to Greeks and Romans. If so, the

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20 Casey (Jewish Prophet to Gentile God, 12-20) settles on eight “identity factors” of Second Temple Judaism: ethnicity, Scripture, monotheism, circumcision, Sabbath observance, dietary laws, purity laws, and major festivals. Casey scores the purported Johannine community a 1.5 out of 7 or 8 on this scale. Dunn (review of From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God, by Maurice Casey, JTS NS 44 [1993]: 304) questions whether these categories imply too much fixity, the border between Jew and gentile being more nebulous than Casey allows. The larger problems, I will suggest below, are how well such a scale gauges self-identification and to what extent the Gospel is transparent to the religious practices of its intended recipients.

21 Hakola (Identity Matters), though not quite as direct about the gentile self-identification of the Johannine community, also moves in this direction, concurring with Casey that the Johannine Christians had abandoned traditional Jewish practices like circumcision and Sabbath observance.
explanations of Jewish customs, the identification of the festivals as “of the Jews,” and the Gospel’s lack of concern about Jewish ritual practice might say more about the ethnic makeup of the intended audience than about the evangelist.\textsuperscript{22}

The gap between practice and self-identification forces us into a second impasse. It cannot be assumed that divergence in behavior or practice from group norms, even dramatic departures, will entail a corresponding sense of having exited the social entity in question. Doubtless there were some Jews in antiquity who were lax with respect to Torah, who occasionally went to the market on a Saturday to sell their goods or who had a taste for non-kosher meat. As we have seen in ch. 1, there were some who went much further, reproached by other Jews as apostates. Although for the most part we do not have access to these individuals’ own testimonies, it might be suspected that some of them rejected the derisive tag and continued to think of themselves as Jews.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} I will consider this in greater detail in ch. 5. For the moment, it may be said that although with Martyn’s \textit{magnum opus} opinion began to turn toward an audience of Jewish Christians, there have been and remain many who subscribe to a more heterogeneous intended readership.

\textsuperscript{23} And that even if others concluded that they had sloughed off their Jewish identity. Casey (\textit{Jewish Prophet to Gentile God}, 12), too, recognizes that a group or individual’s self-identity and the perception of others need not coincide, but he does not follow that fact through with respect to the Fourth Gospel.

This is, of course, an argument from silence but so too is the position that all of those considered apostates by some segment of their peers would have conceded the charge. We must always be wary when what we hear about a group is only what its opponents have to say.
At the very least, we have the example of the apostle Paul, who, if he lived obediently to the Torah, did not think it obligatory even for Jewish believers.\textsuperscript{24} The day-to-day mechanics of Paul’s missionary practice elude us. It would seem that among all-gentile congregations, he had no trouble dropping many traditional Jewish customs, but how did he maneuver in settings where Jewish believers were present, so as not to cause them offense? But whatever this may have looked like on the ground, intellectually Paul had detached faithfulness to Israel’s God from life under the Sinaitic covenant.\textsuperscript{25} He felt free to adapt his lifestyle to particular mission fields. He became like a Jew to the Jews to win them for the Gospel. To those under the law, he became like one under the law; to those not having the law, he became like one not having the law (1 Cor 9:20). It is hard to imagine that one who was convinced that no food was unclean in itself (Rom 14:14) would have felt a compulsion to keep kosher provided that such activity would not distress a Christian brother or sister.\textsuperscript{26} And yet for all Paul’s

\textsuperscript{24} And indeed in Galatians even publicly objects to Peter’s withdrawal from meals with gentile believers (2:11-14).
\textsuperscript{25} John M. G. Barclay (\textit{Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora}, 385) speaks similarly of Paul’s sense of freedom with respect to the Torah’s injunctions, a liberty which other Jews would have seen as “deeply corrosive to the Jewish way of life.”
\textsuperscript{26} Likewise in the case of circumcision, as Paul writes in 1 Cor 7:19 that circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing. For Paul these are somehow separate from keeping God’s commands (v. 19b), a statement which could only strike Torah-observant Jewish Christians, let alone other Jews, as startling and probably pernicious. Thus I do not see Paul as consistently Torah-observant, against the suggestion of Rudolph (\textit{A Jew to the Jews}), Tomson, (\textit{Paul and the Jewish Law}), and others.
reservation about the Torah, particularly those of its injunctions that marked off Jews from gentiles, the apostle never set aside his own identity as a Jew.\textsuperscript{27} By the measure of many of his contemporaries Paul may have been a sinner or apostate. But in his own mind he remained a Ιουδαῖος, an Israelite according to both spirit and flesh. Thus even were it certain that John or Jewish Christians around him no longer kept the Sabbath, or purity regulations, or some other statutes of the Torah, these are not infallible indexes of their ethnic self-identification.

A third dead end arises from the very fact that the Gospel is a story about Jesus. He is the one who speaks about the Torah as “your law/their law,” who works on the Sabbath just as his Father is working, and who refers to Abraham as “your father.” Surely the evangelist believed what he wrote about Jesus. But by reading the narrative as if this stranger from heaven were a transparent mouthpiece for a preacher in the community or its corporate voice, we ignore the Gospel’s character as interpretation of past events.\textsuperscript{28} There is, no doubt, a sort of mimesis expected of the disciples. They are to love one another as Jesus has loved them (13:34). Jesus sends them into the world, just as the Father sent him (20:21). They will do even greater works than Jesus because, having ascended to

\textsuperscript{27} I assume here the arguments of ch. 1.

\textsuperscript{28} As Counet (“No Anti-Judaism,” 206-7) remarks with respect to John 8:17: “It is Jesus who speaks to the Ιουδαῖοι about ‘your law’; it is not the evangelist speaking to Jews in a synagogue in Ephesos.”
the Father, he will send another Paraclete, the promised Spirit of Truth (14:12).

Yet however we might conceive the operation of the Paraclete in a hypothetical community, presumably those so inspired did not make their utterances in persona Christi but with the prophetic, “Thus says the Lord.”29 Jesus, in other words, is not the spokesperson for the Johannine community in the sense that all of his words are their own.30 He stands both within and above the community, both Lord and friend, straddling the line between heaven and earth. As the Word made flesh, his voice is unique.

It is possible that “your law” or “your fathers” in the mouth of Jesus corresponds to the ad hominem rhetorical situation within the narrative, “your”

29 Some have in fact hypothesized that the Paraclete was modeled on prophets in the Johannine community. See M. Eugene Boring, “The Influence of Christian Prophecy on the Johannine Portrayal of the Paraclete and Jesus,” NTS 25 (1978): 113-23. Nevertheless, as the profile of the Holy Spirit/Paraclete in John matches that of Jesus in so many respects, it seems most apt to speak of a mutuality between believers and the Spirit that also respects the distance between them. So George Johnston, The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John, SNTSMS 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 147: “For it is true always for John that the spirit is power from above, from heaven, hence from God himself or from Jesus Christ who is no longer here on earth but is exalted far above all things.”

Something comparable to a Christian prophet speaking in persona Christi is suggested by Barnabas Lindars (Behind the Fourth Gospel, Studies in Creative Criticism 3 [London: SPCK, 1971], 43-60). Lindars proposes that much of the discourse material of the Fourth Gospel began life as separate homilies which were meant to deepen the faith of the Christian community.

30 That is, even if the Gospel reflects the historical situation of a Jewish Christian community painfully breaking away from the synagogue and its Jewish heritage, it does so only in a general way. Martyn’s version of the two-level drama is more decidedly allegorical. In John 9, for example, Jesus stands in for a preacher in the Johannine community, the blind man for a convert, and so forth. Martyn (History and Theology, 85) recognizes that he may be pressing the point too far. Few have maintained such a close correspondence between individual characters and groups in the Gospel and specific persons and events in a late first-century setting, though Brown’s doubling of characters in Community comes close.
putting the onus on the hearers to act according to a standard they themselves would recognize.\textsuperscript{31} The convention occurs relatively frequently in the book of Deuteronomy and again occasionally in Joshua.\textsuperscript{32} Addressing the assembled Israelites, Moses consistently speaks with second person plural pronouns: “Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven” (Deut 10:22). Here “your” is not exclusive, as if Moses had some other God or the people’s ancestors were not also his own, but intensifies the speech.\textsuperscript{33} The statements in the Fourth Gospel are likely tinged with more irony than those in Deuteronomy — “your law” having the force of “the law as you (mis)interpret it” — but even then, they could serve more as an admonishment for Jesus’s opponents to recognize the true meaning of that which they claim as their prized possession and the arbiter of truth than as a repudiation of the Torah.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} So Jörg Augenstein, “‘Euer Gesetz’: Ein Pronomen und die johanneische Haltung zum Gesetz,” ZNW 88 (1997): 311-13; also Beutler, Judaism and the Jews, 40. Similarly, Chatelion Counet (“No Anti-Judaism,” 206) compares Jesus’s reference to “your law” in John 8:17 to the prophet’s statement in Isa 59:2: “Your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God.”

\textsuperscript{32} Augenstein, “‘Euer Gesetz,’” 312-13.

\textsuperscript{33} Thus Moses also speaks of “the LORD my God” (Deut 4:5) and “the LORD our God” (5:2) despite the frequency of the second person pronoun in such expressions.

\textsuperscript{34} So already Marie-Joseph Lagrange, Évangile selon Saint Jean (Paris: Gabalda, 1925), 234; recently Keener, Gospel of John, 1:225. According to Pancaro (Law in the Fourth Gospel, 528) it is the misunderstanding of the law of Moses, not the law in itself, which is the object of the evangelist’s attack.
Nevertheless, it seems to me that when Jesus speaks of “your law” or “your fathers” he does so as the one sent by the Father from above, simultaneously a Jewish man and bread from heaven. Here the paradox of the eternal Word becoming flesh is at its sharpest. As Hugo Odeberg remarked in 1929:

It is indefensible to take into account only one of the following facts, vis. (1) that J[esus] doubtlessly speaks of the Tora as containing spiritual words, as belonging to the Spiritual World, hence cannot possibly reject it, (2) that he never says “our Tora,” but several times “your Tora.” The explanations seems to be: J[esus] declares himself expressly, in both contexts (5:30-47 and here, in both passages referring to the Holy Writ) to be a Celestial Being, the Son of his Father. God never says “our Law” but either “my Law” or “your Law.” J[esus] stands in the same relation to the Tora as his Father.35

As one who is over the people, the all-powerful suzerain in the covenant with Israel, God says “Abraham your father” (Isa 51:2), “your festivals” (Isa 1:14; Amos 5:21), and “your ancestors” (Jer 7:22; Zech 1:4-5), and although Jesus depends entirely on the Father and so does not speak on his own (5:19), he too is the one from above who is above all. The Jews are his own people, and yet he pre-existed them. John holds on to both propositions.

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Thus when Jesus breaks the Sabbath, he does so as one who makes himself equal with God (5:18), enjoying the divine prerogatives of giving life and executing judgment. It is a display of his divine status. There is nothing in John 5 and 9, where Jesus’s Sabbath healings raise the ire of the authorities, equivalent to Mark’s aside to readers that Jesus had declared all foods clean (7:19), no generalizations about Sabbath observance among the Christian community.

Hakola states that “it is not very likely that the Johannine Christians would have continued to keep the Sabbath themselves while accepting without further ado that their Lord habitually broke it or even abrogated it.” The deduction is more than a non-sequitur, but at the same time it minimizes the difference between Jesus and all others. Would Jewish Christian members of the Johannine community have thought these particular deeds of Jesus open for or even demanding imitation? Or would they see in them an authority that belonged exclusively to the Son of God, actions that were meant to inspire faith in Jesus more than guide their own behavior?

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36 There is of course a paradox here, as John 5:18 says that by claiming God as Father, Jesus is asserting equality with God while other passages imply the Son’s subordination to the Father. Thus Jesus tells the disciples during the Farewell Discourse that “the Father is greater than I” (14:28). The evangelist lets the tension stand; the Word is both God and with God (1:1).


38 Similarly Pancaro (*Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 530), commenting on the Sabbath healing in John 5. The evangelist, he says, is not primarily interested in the relationship between Jesus’s followers and Torah but rather “the authority and position of Jesus with respect to the Law.”
In the end, the path to reconstructing the evangelist’s or Johannine community’s religious practice is obstructed at too many points for us to say much about it with confidence. The mixture of appropriation and implicit critique of Jewish traditions and institutions does not resolve itself by the Gospel’s end, leaving us with what might be an ineradicable tension.

The Second Track of Inference: Jews over against “the Jews”

As is clear by now, the true weight of the controversy ultimately centers upon the term Ὕπατος itself. Does the evangelist place those who are Jews by birth outside of that ἕθνος in a sort of manufactured xenophobia? It should be noted that those who are seemingly contrasted with the Jews are not always believers. The lame man of ch. 5, the divided crowds of ch. 7, and the blind man’s parents of ch. 9 are all set over against “the Jews,” but none of them is said to have put his or her faith in Jesus. If an attempt at alienation is in progress, it is not a distancing from the vantage point of faith but a setting apart of the ordinary folk from the Jews as an authoritative body or elite religious group. As has long been recognized and as I argued in the last chapter with the necessary qualifications, the referent of “the Jews” is indeed often the religious authorities in Jerusalem, but it would be peculiar indeed, if not unprecedented, for an ethnonym like Ἱουδαῖοι to differentiate the authorities from the masses. To this neither Jewish
literature contemporary with the Fourth Gospel nor the OT furnishes convincing parallels.\(^{39}\)

Although we would be hard pressed to find examples of an inner-group within a collective taking the name of the whole in contrast to the rest of the group, the inverse is amply attested: individuals within a narrative who are set off from a body to which they belong without a distancing intent. This literary convention is once more evident in Josephus’s writings, in which Jewish figures, including the author himself, are from time to time juxtaposed with “the Jews.”\(^{40}\) Josephus reports having been knocked unconscious by a stone from the wall of Jerusalem while trying to persuade the rebels to surrender to the Romans. Upon this, he writes, “the Jews made a rush for the body” (\textit{J.W.} 5.541).\(^{41}\) It can be said with confidence that Josephus does not thereby put a wedge between himself and his Jewish identity, since shortly after this he appeals to the people of Jerusalem as a fellow Ἰουδαίος: “Remember, too, that I who exhort you am your countryman, that I who make this promise am a Jew … For never may I live to

\(^{39}\) Analogously, although it is not uncommon to refer to a nation’s government by the name of the whole (e.g., “The Americans and the Russians met in Moscow for negotiations”), this form of metonymy does not work in contexts in which the parties are a people’s leaders and the people themselves.

\(^{40}\) As for example Alexander Jannaeus and his queen in \textit{J.W.} 1.107. See Dunn, “Question of Anti-semitism,” 184.

\(^{41}\) Josephus and “the Jews” are also the actors in \textit{J.W.} 3.130, 136, 142-143; \textit{Life} 113, 416.
become so abject a captive as to abjure my race or to forget the traditions of my forefathers” (J.W. 6.96-110).

Josephus’s vehement affirmation of his Jewish credentials in the face of indictments of betrayal converges thematically with the portrayal of the apostle Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. If the most severe accusations of anti-Jewish bias have been leveled against the Fourth Gospel, the book of Acts stands in the courtroom as the second defendant, and to this point I have kept it at arm’s length. But whatever we make of Luke’s attitude toward Jews and Judaism, one of his tendencies is to characterize the protagonists of the narrative as devout Jews, scrupulously adhering to the law of their fathers. Twice (21:39; 22:3) he has Paul avow that he is a Jewish man, trained in and faithful to the Torah, despite malicious rumors to the contrary. Paul addresses the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem

and the Sanhedrin as brothers and fathers (22:1, 3; 23:1, also the Jews of Rome in 28:17). The Jewish people are his people, their ancestors his ancestors (24:17; 28:17). Thus, in those instances in which Paul acts over against those named “the Jews” or vice versa (14:45, 50; 17:5; 18:6, 19; 22:30; 23:12; 24:9; 26:2, 4), any impression of the Jews’ otherness is a mirage. He speaks to them as one of their own.43

The evangelist likely was familiar with this literary convention, since it abounds in the narrative portions of the Pentateuch and, to a lesser extent, in Joshua and Judges, where Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and other Israelite leaders are distinguished from the children of Israel. “Moses spoke to the Israelites” is a common refrain in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. During the desert wanderings, those designated as “the Israelites” repeatedly grumble against Moses and Aaron (Exod 16:2-3; Num 14:2), even attempting to stone them. Joshua likewise is said to speak to “the Israelites” (Josh 3:9; 4:21). They do as he commands (4:8). He circumcises them (5:3). According to Jdg 2:6, Joshua “dismissed the Israelites” to go and take possession of their assigned inheritance. Later in Judges, the Israelites send Ehud to Eglon, the king of Moab (3:15), come

43 So also Dunn (“Questions of Anti-semitism,” 184): “So too Paul’s apparent readiness to distinguish himself from ‘the Jews’ in the latter stages of Acts should not be given exaggerated significance as though he thereby distanced himself from and disowned his own Jewishness.” We find another example of this literary phenomenon in Acts 18, where Apollos, identified in v. 24 as a Jew from Alexandria, is said to have “powerfully refuted the Jews in public” (v. 28).
to Deborah to have their disputes adjudicated (4:5), request Gideon to rule over them (8:22), and ask the Levite whose concubine is abused and murdered to recount the sordid affair (20:3-4).

This characteristic of biblical storytelling produces scenes in which tribal subunits also serve as principal actors alongside “the Israelites.” The Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh of Josh 22 belong to Israel, brothers of those settled on the west side of the Jordan (1:14; 22:3), and yet it is “the Israelites” who send Phineas son of Eleazar to interrogate them about the altar which they have built at the river’s edge (vv. 9, 11, 13, and 32). And when the nation erupts in civil strife in Jdg 20, the warring parties are named “the Israelites” and “the Benjamites,” even as the narrator of the story knows that all involved in the conflict are kin (v. 14). The people, to be sure, are often portrayed as inconstant and unfaithful, and in that respect are set apart from their leaders. But this should not be interpreted as the conceit of an author trying to make of the Israelites an alien people.44

So in the Fourth Gospel when Jesus speaks to οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, or when they are said to undertake some action in relation to him, or when John the Baptist,

44 Similarly Ezra 5:1; 9:20, 23; Jer 40:12; 1 Macc 14:33-41. First Macc 14 records the decree of the Jewish people and their leaders commemorating all of Simon’s achievements for the Jewish people. According to v. 41, “the Jews and their priests decided that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise.”
the lame man, or the blind man’s parents are distinguished from “the Jews,” it is
in all probability an effect of literary convention, something much less pernicious
than an “othering” of the Jews. Indeed, even Caiaphas, for whom the evangelist
hardly has any sympathy, is said to be “the one who advised the Jews (ὁ
συμβολεύσας τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις)” to hand Jesus over to the procurator so that the
rest of the nation might be spared from Roman aggression (18:14). The
evangelist, we may reasonably surmise, did not try to put distance between
Caiaphas and the Jews, as if the man who engineered Jesus’s demise was a
crypto-Christian, or at any rate, something other than an ethnic Jew. Thus when
Jesus speaks with “the Jews” or they take some action in relation to him, this is
not at the expense of the Gospel’s presentation of Jesus’s own Jewishness. If John
intended to sweep that piece of tradition under the rug, he left much of the dirt
out in the open.

The Remaining Cruces

Having bracketed out such passages as immaterial to the question of Johannine
anti-Judaism, we are left with a much smaller pool of cruces interpretum. Two of
these belong to the dialogues between Jesus and the disciples. It has been
thoroughly reiterated that the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is and remains a
Ἰουδαίος. But what about his inner circle of disciples, whose ethnic identities are
nowhere made explicit? As the Twelve only figure as minor characters, Peter and
the unnamed beloved disciple being the most prominent of the group, it should
come as no surprise that the evangelist makes few direct statements about their
origins and biographical profile. Philip and the pair of brothers Andrew and
Peter hail from the town of Bethsaida in Galilee, Nathanael from Cana to the
southwest. A few others are named, but appear and disappear as if they had
hardly set foot on the stage.

It might be supposed that they too are assumed to be Jewish were it not
for John 11:8 and 13:33. For in these verses they speak and Jesus speaks to them
in contradistinction to the Jews. According to 11:8, the disciples try to dissuade
Jesus from returning to Judea: “A short while ago the Jews tried to stone you,
and yet you are going back there?” And 11:33, as already observed, contrasts the
“you” whom Jesus addresses with “the Jews.” Yet we must take care not to
exaggerate the idiosyncrasy of Johannine usage, since the convention observed
above seems to have extended into direct discourse. The author of Esther
narrates a message from Mordecai to his orphaned cousin, now ascended to
royalty, in the following words: “Do not think that because you are in the king’s
house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time,
relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and
your father’s family will perish” (4:13-14). Esther, in turn, petitions Mordecai to
“gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me” (v. 15).\(^\text{45}\) Josephus recounts in his autobiography that “the Jews” pressured gentile dignitaries from the court of Agrippa II to undergo circumcision, a measure which the general opposed as contrary to God’s will and the nation’s strategic interest (\textit{Life} 113).

Again, near the end of \textit{Life}, he boasts of the favors which Titus and Vespasian bestowed upon him, recalling their protection against continual threats: “I was often in danger of death, both from the Jews, who were keen to have me at their mercy, for the sake of revenge, and from the Romans who imagined that whenever they suffered defeat, this resulted from my betrayal” (\textit{Life} 416). It could be that for John, the Twelve do not in fact belong to the Jews, in which case, their ethnic status would still have to be determined, but in light of these examples, this seems quite unlikely.

The third crux is the statement in John 7:12-13 that no one among the crowds that were present in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles said anything publicly about Jesus “for fear of the Jews.” The subject of 7:13 is not a named individual or subset of the people as in the previous examples but an indefinite “no one” (οὐδείς). It sounds as if the Jews stand over the crowds as an authoritative body, and so it must be asked whether this stretches the convention

\(^{45}\) Nehemiah also speaks of “Jews” in first-person speech (Neh 1:2; 2:16; 4:12; 5:17; 13:23), though he is Jewish himself.
beyond what it reasonably can bear. The antithesis of Jew and Christian, or of
Jew and potential Christian, which breaks down in many of the examples
presented above, also breaks down in this case. For although some in the crowd
have determined that Jesus is a good man, others retort that he deceives the
people.

It would be expedient to identify the Jews in this passage with the upper
crust of Jerusalem society, the religious and political elite who have already cast
their vote against Jesus, as the case appears to be. The Jews before whom the
masses acquiesce in v. 13 appear in context to be the same as those in 7:1 who are
seeking to take Jesus’s life. John 7:1, in turn, alludes to 5:18, where the threat to
Jesus is stated in nearly identical terms. But then we are faced with the problem
of a subset of a group bearing the name of the whole in contrast to the larger
collective, a usage which, as far as I can tell, would be unique to the Fourth
Gospel among ancient texts.

The Jews of 7:12-13, of course, are also Judeans in the strict sense, and it
could be that the tension revolves around geography. The Jews of the adjacent
regions of Palestine and those of the diaspora, away from the seat of power in

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46 According to 5:18, because Jesus claimed God as his Father (besides healing on the
Sabbath), “the Jews tried all the more to kill him (μάλλον ἐξήτουν αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαίοι
ἀποκτείναι).” In 7:1 Jesus delays a trip to Judea because “the Jews were seeking to kill him
(ἐξήτουν αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαίοι ἀποκτείναι).”

47 Although it is potentially significant that the evangelist does not say that the crowds
feared the Jews but that no one individually dared to speak up.
Jerusalem, hesitate to make any public pronouncement for fear of the reaction of their more politically influential compatriots in Judea. On the other hand, as Ashton notes, “although there is plenty of evidence in contemporary writing (above all Josephus) for the use of the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι to refer to the people of Judaea, it is nowhere used to distinguish them from Jews of the diaspora or of other parts of Palestine.” Had the evangelist meant the inhabitants of Judea as opposed to other Jews, we would expect some qualification such as we find in the opening letter of 2 Maccabees (1:1-9) where “the Jews who live in Jerusalem and in the countryside of Judea (οἱ ἐν Ἰεροσολύμοις Ἰουδαίοι καὶ οἱ ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῆς Ἰουδαίας) send greetings to their compatriots in Egypt.

Perhaps here we are after all at the mercy of Johannine eccentricity, struggling to rein in usage which does not perfectly conform to what we know from elsewhere. Yet the present indecision should not overshadow the important question that John 7:12-13 prompts: Are all the characters of the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel in fact Jews? Certainly there are the Greeks in 12:20-21 whose request to see Jesus marks the advent of Jesus’s hour. Are there others, and if so, how does that affect our understanding of Johannine terminology? I will take up that question in the next chapter.

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48 Ashton, Understanding, 66-67.
Conclusion

At first glance, the Fourth Gospel might seem to inhabit a world of its own, its presentation of Jesus far removed from the earth-bound sage of the Synoptic Gospels. The distinctiveness of its Christology in comparison with the whole deposit of early Christian tradition remains an unsettled matter. On the other hand, I hope to have shown that the evangelist’s handling of the term Ἰουδαῖος has much in common with other ancient works. If the total presentation is uniquely Johannine, many of the turns of phrase involving “the Jews” are not. The evangelist does not write in an idiolect that must be deciphered on the basis of the Gospel alone. Those few passages that present genuine exegetical challenges, while not to be waved away, nonetheless lie at the periphery of the problem.

49 The problem is brought to a head by Ashton, Understanding, 141-42. The Johannine Christ, he writes, “does not belong to this world at all” but is a “pre-existent divine being, whose real home is in heaven.” In contrast to the very human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels, the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is “Master of his fate, captain of his soul,” supremely confident from beginning to end. Whether this exaggerates matters or not (and this depends on one’s understanding of the Christology of the Synoptic Gospels), Ashton masterfully encapsulates one of the central questions of Christian origins.

50 And that for two reasons: 1) At least a handful of scholars judge the Synoptic Gospels to have a high Christology. Richard Bauckham (Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 18-30), for example, finds a Christology of divine identity throughout the NT. See also Simon J. Gathercole, The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). And 2), a fair assessment of Johannine themes such as Jesus’s pre-existence must take the rest of the NT, and above all Paul’s letters, into consideration. The problem, important as it is, cannot be entered into here.
Although John has a decided critical edge, the juxtaposition of Jesus and the Jews, or John the Baptist and the Jews, or the lame man and the Jews bespeaks more literary convention than a process of separation. The Jews as a whole are not alienated from the standpoint of Christian faith. I would suggest, therefore, that these Johannine locutions do not unravel the dialectic of division, that motif of widespread unbelief relieved by small pockets of sympathizers and believers. John, at the crossroads of experience and tradition, portrays the relationship between Jesus and his own in mostly oppositional terms. But he does not essentialize Jewish unreceptivity. The line between belief and unbelief still cuts through the Jews of the narrative.

The focus of chs. 2 and 3 has been exegesis, informed as it must be by historical and literary context. How does the evangelist characterize the Jews? What role do they play in the Gospel? Now I must turn, as Ashton advises, to the order of explanation. Why does John portray them in this way? Why does he opt so often for “the Jews” when other terms were available?
CHAPTER 4

“FOR FEAR OF THE JEWS”: THE ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF FIRST-CENTURY PALESTINE AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

By John 5 the opposition to Jesus in Jerusalem has solidified. No longer able to minister in the city and its environs publicly, he often takes refuge in the lands north and east of Judea, making calculated appearances in the Jewish heartland at great personal risk. ¹ As part of this narrative pattern, John 7:1 reports that Jesus went about in Galilee, reluctant to enter Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him. The evangelist thereby gives the impression that by staying in Galilee, Jesus could avoid the Ἰουδαῖοι. ² But was not Galilee, too, a Jewish territory, and has not Jesus just wrangled with the Jews in the synagogue at Capernaum (6:25-59)? Or again, how is it that people in Jerusalem during Tabernacles are afraid of “the Jews” (7:13) when all there are ostensibly Jewish? I recused myself in the previous chapter from pronouncing on these aporiae in the Gospel’s usage of “the Jews,” but it is worth considering now whether these modes of expression fall under the rubric of the literary conventions surveyed in chs. 2 and 3 or whether some other explanation is in order.

¹ Jesus is said to have spent some time baptizing in the Judean countryside early in his ministry (3:22) but departs for Galilee when he learns that the Pharisees have received word of his activities. From that point on, it is not safe for him to remain in Judea for an extended period of time. Also observed by Meeks, “Galilee and Judea,” 167-68.

² Perhaps sensing this, some English Bible translations insert a qualifier such as “the Jews there” (e.g. NIV 1984) or append an explanation in a footnote (e.g. ESV).
Given that the Gospel of John is set in first-century Palestine and revolves structurally around Jesus’ pilgrimages to Jerusalem, it is natural that most of the characters who appear in its pages are Jews. It would be wrong, however, to say that the evangelist’s Palestine is monolithically Jewish. There are, above all, the Samaritans of ch. 4 but also the Greeks who come to worship in Jerusalem for the Passover (12:20) and the Roman authorities who carry out Jesus’s execution. In this chapter, I will entertain the possibility that greater Judea as John envisions it was more diverse than this, that he can speak of the crowds in Jerusalem for Tabernacles fearing the Jews, for example, because not all of the pilgrims are thought to be Jewish.\(^3\)

The model presented here thus requires us to distinguish between the Ἰουδαῖοι and other non-Jewish actors in the story and is in that respect conceptually akin to the thesis put forward by Daniel Boyarin. Boyarin frames the differentiation in terms of Jewish sectarianism, arguing that the יהודים (Aramaic: יודינו) were an elite religious body that traced its origins to the returnees from the Babylonian exile. The “people of the land,” those who had not

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\(^3\) By greater Judea, I mean the province as Greek and Roman authors often spoke of it, inclusive of Judea proper, Samaria, and Galilee. See, for example, Strabo, Geogr. 16.2.2 and 16.2.21. In Jesus’s time, the Roman province of Judea included Samaria, while the administration of Galilee was in the hands of Herod Antipas. After the death of Agrippa I in 44 CE, all three regions were under the authority of the Roman procurator until the time of the Jewish revolt against Rome (though Agrippa II was gifted the cities of Tiberias and Tarichea). When the Fourth Evangelist refers to Judea (3:22; 4:3, 54; 7:1; 11:7), he means Judea proper.
gone into exile, were excluded from the company of the יהודים, who regarded them as second-class citizens despite their Israelite lineage. The author of the Fourth Gospel and his community, concludes Boyarin, belonged to this outgroup. They were not and never had been יהודים. I have argued, in contrast, that the Fourth Evangelist reasonably numbers himself among the Jewish people.

To suggest that an awareness of greater Judea’s ethnic diversity partially conditioned John’s statements about the Jews is not to claim that he belonged to the Samaritans, Idumeans, or any of Palestine’s other non-Jewish Εθνη.

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5 Boyarin, “Ioudaioi in John,” 234-39. Against this Ashton (Understanding, 74) questions how, if Boyarin is correct, the Johannine believers could have been expelled from the synagogue as 9:22 seems to imply. I would add that Boyarin does not address the Gospel’s presentation of Jesus as a Ιουδαῖος and the Jews as his own people. Thus it seems to me strained to identify Jesus and his disciples, who according to Boyarin function as representatives of the Johannine community, as non-Ιουδαῖοι Israelites.

Since these non-Jewish figures are on the periphery of the evangelist’s field of vision, the arguments presented below must be tentative and exploratory, directed more toward those *cruces interpretum* just delineated than to the Gospel’s total presentation of the Ἰουδαίοι. Consequently, the thesis that the Fourth Gospel is intelligible as a piece of intra-Jewish critique does not hinge upon their validity. However, were it to be shown that the evangelist was conscious of the ethnic diversity of first-century Palestine, this may supply one rationale for the author’s preference for the expression “the Jews” over more restrictive terms.

**Judea’s Neighbors**

A rich store of ancient texts written by and about Jews has passed down to us. By an odd turn of history, much of it was preserved by Christians, reworked or reinterpreted to meet their own theological and apologetic needs. If “odd” is too strong, given the emergence of the Christian faith from a Jewish matrix, it is nonetheless noteworthy that these texts were preserved in a non-Jewish context.

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7 Samuel Sandmel (*OTP* 1:xi) describes this state of affairs as “the strangest quirk of fate respecting literature that I know of.” If “odd” is too strong, given the emergence of the Christian faith from a Jewish matrix, it is nonetheless noteworthy that these texts were preserved in a non-Jewish context.
who had encroached as far north as Hebron, comes from Josephus.\footnote{8} The remains of Petra testify to the flourishing of Nabatean culture in this period, but the Nabateans have left us only inscriptions, coinage, and a few documents. The Samaritans have preserved their religious traditions to the present, but what we know of their practice in the first century is filtered through Josephus and the NT. Other peoples in the vicinity of Judea have already disappeared from the historical record by the first century CE.\footnote{9}

The imbalance in written sources could easily distort the reality of a culturally vibrant region. In addition to the Idumeans, Nabateans, and Samaritans who abutted the territory of Judea, strings of Greek-style \( \pi \omega \lambda e \iota \varsigma \) dotted the Mediterranean coast and the Decapolis. Sebaste in Samaria and Scythopolis in the Jezreel valley (reckoned as part of the Decapolis) also had non-Jewish majorities.\footnote{10} The Phoenicians lived to the north and west of Galilee and

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\footnote{8} There is also evidence of an Idumean presence in Egypt. See Uriel Rappaport, "Les Iduméens en Égypte," RevPhil 43 (1969): 73-82.

\footnote{9} The most thorough study of Judea’s southern and eastern neighbors is Aryeh Kasher, Jews Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Nations of the Frontier and the Desert during the Hellenistic and Roman Era (322 BCE – 70 CE), TSAJ 18 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988). Of necessity, Kasher relies heavily on Josephus for the events and movements of the centuries under consideration. The Samaritans have generated more scholarly interest. See the recent works of Reinhard Pummer, The Samaritans: A Profile (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Gary N. Knoppers, Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); as well as the collection of essays in Menachem Mor and Friedrich V. Reiterer, eds., Samaritans: Past and Present: Current Studies, SJ 53 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010).

the Itureans to the north, centered in the Beqaa Valley. Without the requisite written sources, not much can be said about the self-identities of these peoples, but the archaeological and written materials that have survived are suggestive of cultural spheres which overlapped in some ways but had not coalesced.

That some of these ethnic identities were eventually lost or supplanted does not mean that they were nugatory in the first century. The Idumeans, for example, had been incorporated into the Judean state during the Hasmonean period but some appear to have held on to their ancestral traditions for some time. Although Josephus reports in *Jewish Antiquities* that John Hyrcanus forcibly converted the Idumeans, making them undergo circumcision and submit to the customs of the Jews so that they became Ἰουδαῖοι (*Ant.* 13.257-258), the assimilation must have been only partial. Strains of nationalist sentiment

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11 In addition to Kasher’s remarks on the Itureans, see E. A. Myers, *The Ituraeans and the Roman Near East: Reassessing the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

12 So, for example, while remains of many Greek and Roman temples have been unearthed around the periphery of Galilee, there is no evidence that any stood within its borders in the first century CE. The remains of a temple in Sepphoris have been dated to the second century CE. The numismatic data that suggest the presence of a Roman sanctuary in Tiberias also date to that period. These archaeological findings cohere with Josephus’s delineation of the borders of Galilee in *J.W.* 3.35-40. See Mordechai Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee: 25 Years of Archaeological Excavations and Surveys Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 9-21.

persisted long after the Hasmonean period. And at least a segment of the Jewish populace resented Herod the Great as an interloper, a foreign oppressor rather than a native dynast.\textsuperscript{14} Costobar, one of Herod’s closest associates, was a priest of the god Qos, who, like an Idumean Maccabee, wanted to return the country to its native traditions (\textit{Ant.} 15.252-258). This attitude among the aristocracy, I suspect, had broader support at the grassroots level.\textsuperscript{15}

Indeed, the narrative of \textit{Jewish War} does not give the impression that the Idumeans had become Jews at all.\textsuperscript{16} There Josephus paints them as a violent and unstable ἔθνος, delighting in revolutionary change. Hyrcanus’ annexation of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{14} See Matthew Thiessen, \textit{Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 96-103. Cohen (\textit{Beginnings of Jewishness}, 18) remarks that for some Jews, Idumeans like Herod would always be outsiders. Josephus provides a glimpse of this in an exchange between Antigonus son of Aristobulus and Herod before the walls of Jerusalem (\textit{Ant.} 14.403). In the hearing of the Roman authorities, Antigonus impugns Herod’s credentials as king of Judea because of his Idumean ancestry The gloss “half-Jew” for “Idumean,” I suggest, is supplied by Josephus for the aid of his readers. Idumeans were “half-Jews” because they had adopted some Jewish customs but were not Jewish by descent. This is not, of course, to say that all Jews, much less Herod himself, saw matters in this way. See again, Cohen, \textit{Beginnings of Jewishness}, 13-24.


\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, Joshua D. Garroway, \textit{Paul’s Gentile-Jews: Neither Jew nor Gentile, but Both} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 28, though Garroway wishes to emphasize Josephus’s ambiguity. See also Alan Appelbaum, “‘The Idumeans’ in Josephus’ \textit{The Jewish War},” \textit{JSJ} 40 (2009): 1-22. Appelbaum makes a sustained case that the Idumeans of \textit{Jewish War} are not Jews from the territory of Idumea but a people of their own and that Josephus stereotypes them as aggressive and turbulent.
\end{footnotesize}
Idumean territory is scarcely mentioned, nor is anything said of compulsory conversion to the Jewish way of life. Politically, the Idumeans are presented as allies of the Jewish state during the revolt against Rome, coming to the defense of Jerusalem during the siege, but even then their presence in the capital is more hindrance than help.\(^\text{17}\) Josephus’s statement a few decades later that they became Jews thus comes across as accommodation to an audience less familiar with pre-revolt Judea, for whom the difference between Jews and Idumeans may have been of minor importance.

Then, too, some of the Jews’ ancient neighbors have preserved their ethnic bonds through the intervening centuries, as Jewish-Samaritan relations illustrate. The feud between the two, so deeply entrenched in Christian consciousness through the Gospel narratives, is far from the sum of Samaritan history. A small community, in fact, still worships on Mount Gerizim, self-identifying as non-Jewish Israelites.\(^\text{18}\) The ancient Samaritans, it is probably safe to say, did not participate in the festivals of their political enemies in a city they viewed as an illegitimate cultic site.\(^\text{19}\) Yet in light of the ethnic diversity of the region and the economic and religious importance of Jerusalem, it is not unreasonable to

\(^{17}\) Since according to Josephus, they aligned themselves with the Zealots and wrought havoc in Jerusalem before coming to their senses (\textit{J.W.} 4.305-333).

\(^{18}\) See Pummer, \textit{Samaritans}, 289-304. An insider’s perspective may be gleaned from http://www.israelite-samaritans.com, a website maintained by members of the Samaritan community.

\(^{19}\) Certainly not \textit{en masse}, even if some happened to find themselves in the Jewish capital.
suppose that the Jewish capital hosted some non-Jewish residents as well as foreign visitors when swollen with crowds during the annual festivals.\textsuperscript{20} In that context, distinguishing between the Jewish majority and others of non-Jewish extraction might prove necessary.

The Fourth Evangelist and the Ἐθνη of Palestine

Whereas the Idumeans, Nabateans, and related groups are absent from any of the Gospel accounts, the Fourth Evangelist knows at least something of Palestine’s ethnic diversity, as the Samaritans are key actors in the movement of John 4. Among the NT writings, the Gospel of John alone notes the Samaritans’ worship on Mount Gerizim and their self-understanding as descendants of the patriarch Jacob.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Similarly Lester L. Grabbe, “Ethnic Groups in Jerusalem,” in Jerusalem in Ancient History and Tradition, ed. Thomas L. Thompson, JSOTS 381 (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 160-63. Certainly there were gentile visitors to Herod’s temple. Otherwise the Greek inscriptions warning gentiles not to enter the inner precincts of the temple would be superfluous. The inscriptions are recorded in CIJ 2:1400. In an estimation of the population of Jerusalem during Passover, Josephus also remarks that a great number of foreigners gathered from abroad for the occasion (J.W. 6.427-428).

\textsuperscript{21} Or more precisely, that the Samaritans worship on a mountain in the vicinity of Sychar. John does not name it Mount Gerizim, though this is surely intended. The Samaritans’ high regard for Mount Gerizim is corroborated by Josephus (J.W. 3.307) and by two inscriptions discovered on the island of Delos in 1979 dedicated by “the Israelites who bring first-fruit offerings to Holy Argarizein.” Inscriptions published by Philippe Bruneau, “Les Israélites de Délos’ et la juiverie délienne,” BCH 106 (1982): 465-504. The Samaritans also feature in the Gospel of Luke (9:51-56; 10:25-37) and the book of Acts (8:4-25), but quite briefly and without much attention to their beliefs and practices.
Jesus’s stay with the people of Sychar is followed by another cordial reception, this time by the Galileans. According to John 4:45, the Γαλιλαίοι welcome Jesus when he arrives in the region, having seen all the signs he had performed in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, for they too had been there. If for some time the construct of a first-century “Galilee of the gentiles” had wide currency, today the model of a predominantly Jewish Galilee is nearly axiomatic, enjoying strong support from both the archaeological and the written record. It might therefore be assumed that the Galileans of John 4 are the Jewish inhabitants of Galilee, to be distinguished from their countrymen to the south.

For several reasons, however, this is not entirely certain. First, the syntax of John 4:45c implies that the Galileans had attended the festival with some other group. As 2:13 explicitly describes the Passover as “of the Jews,” the nearest antecedents are the Ἰουδαίοι. If that is indeed the intended pairing, Γαλιλαίοι in this context must bear a strictly geographical meaning (Galilean Jews in contrast to Judean Jews), but as we have seen, this usage would be without parallel, like referring to expatriate Americans in Paris as “the French” in contrast with “the

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23 “For they also (καὶ αὐτοί) had been there.” καὶ in this passage functions adverbially: “also,” “even.”
Americans” back home. In this vein, it bears noting that Jesus is a Ἰουδαῖος despite his Galilean origins and that the Jews of ch. 6 are not only with Jesus in Capernaum, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, but also know his father and mother and so are implicitly portrayed as natives or long-term residents of the region.

Second, I shall argue that our best source for the demographics of Palestine during this period differentiates between οἱ Γαλιλαῖοι (the Galileans) and the Jewish inhabitants of Galilee. That is, when Josephus refers to the Γαλιλαῖοι he has in mind an independent ἔθνος related to but distinct from the Jews. I am thus suggesting that the Galileans occupy a place in Josephus’s mind

24 As noted in the previous chapter (“The Remaining Cruces”). The point is well made by Ashton (“Identity and Function,” 55-56).

25 I am thus arguing that Γαλιλαῖοι in Josephus’s writings does not function as a general term for a native or resident of Galilee. It is not coterminous with our word “Galilean” just as the designation Ἰουδαῖος is not coterminous with “Judean.” To put it sharply, not all geographic Galileans were Γαλιλαῖοι in the same way that not all inhabitants of, say, modern China are ethnically Chinese or all the inhabitants of Turkey ethnically Turkish.

26 Josephus is not the only ancient author to mention Γαλιλαῖοι. The name appears in the Gospels (Mark 14:70; Luke 13:1-3; 22:59; 23:6) and Acts (1:11; 2:7; 5:37), where it denotes an inhabitant of the region of Galilee. In his De prosodia catholica, the second-century CE grammarian Aelius Herodianus glosses Γαλιλαῖος as an ἔθνος of Judea; text in August Lentz, ed., Grammatici Graeci (Leipzig: Teubner, 1867), 3:1:130. Other references to the Galileans in Greek are later and/or derivative from the NT accounts. Among other sources, Tacitus reports a fracas between the natio Galilaeorum and the Samaritans (Ann. 12.54). Tacitus, it seems, understands both the Galileans and Samaritans as subdivisions of the Jewish gens. Josephus gives an alternative version of these events in J.W. 2.232-244. There is also a cryptic reference to הגללאים in a letter of Simon bar Kosiba to one of his subordinates; Hebrew text in J. T. Milik, “Textes hébreux et araméens,” in Les grottes de Murabba‘āt, ed. P. Benoit, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux, DJD 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 1:159-61.

I have elected to focus on Josephus over these other sources because of their brevity. He alone furnishes enough material to develop a profile of the Γαλιλαῖοι. Further, as a native of Palestine, he is positioned to speak knowledgably about its people and places.
close to the Idumeans, somewhere in between full-fledged Jews and ἀλλόφυλοι like Greeks and Syrians. The pursuit of this claim will take us afield from the Fourth Gospel, but its potential ramifications will, I hope, justify the detour. For if Josephus treats the Γαλιλαῖοι as relatives of the Jews and not as Ἰουδαῖοι proper, it might be that the evangelist, who of all the Gospel writers has preserved the most detailed information about the people and places of greater Judea, does the same. Jesus’s movement back and forth between Judea and Galilee in the Gospel of John would then take on a new significance. Jesus’s Heimat, the place where he ought to have been received, is in a strict sense Judea.

To be clear, it is by no means my intention to revive the outdated model of a gentile-dominated first-century Galilee, nor, of course, to lend credence to a racially motivated cleavage of Jesus from his Jewish context. As noted, both literary and archaeological evidence attest to a substantial Jewish population in the region at least since the Hasmonean territorial expansion in the second century BCE. Josephus, for his part, depicts Galilee as surrounded by foreign

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27 For the remainder of the chapter, when I refer to “the Galileans” I mean specifically those denominated by Josephus and the Fourth Evangelist as οἱ Γαλαται.
29 Reconstructions of first-century Galilee have often become vehicles for more expansive claims about the relationship between Jesus and his social environment and thus also between Christianity and Judaism, as Roland Deines shows in “Galilee and the Historical Jesus in Recent Research,” in Life, Culture, and Society, ed. David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange, vol. 1 of Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 11-50.
nations (*J.W.* 3.41-42), but routinely designates the inhabitants of its cities as Jews. And even if the Γαλιλαίοι form a separate ἔθνος, as I contend, they are for Josephus a kindred people, for in *Life* 377 he reports having softened the Galileans’ rage against the people of Sepphoris by appealing to their common stock (ὁμοφυλία). What is at question is not the strong presence of Jews in Galilee or the influence of Jewish culture in the region. It is, rather, whether Josephus thinks of the Γαλιλαίοι as an indigenous population that lives alongside its Jewish neighbors and therefore belongs to the ἔθνος of the Jews in only a derivative sense or not at all.

**Josephus and the Γαλιλαίοι: The Problem**

Among the central figures in Josephus’*s autobiography are those he refers to as the Galileans, a contingent which the Jewish general turned Roman supporter largely leaves to the margins in his more famous volumes. But when he turns his pen to give an account of his own illustrious ancestry and public career, Josephus’*s relationship with the Galileans, or rather, his skill at manipulating their fickle masses, is front and center. Patronized by their one-time general as a restive and emotional mob ready to erupt at the slightest indignation, the Galileans are of vital importance to Josephus’*s imagined success as general of the Jewish forces in Galilee. It is their undying support and even affection, as
Josephus will boast, that fortifies the Jerusalem aristocrat’s position in Galilee against the unceasing threat of rival factions.

Josephus’s condescension toward the Galileans, strange as it is, is compounded by the fact that he never identifies the inhabitants of Galilee’s major cities (principally Sepphoris, Tiberias, and Gabara) as Galileans. Indeed, the denizens of the major civic centers, under continual threat from the resentful Galilean populace, are frequently contrasted with οἱ Γαλιλαίοι. The motif of tension between city and countryside runs unabated throughout Life, a predicable scenario of internecine conflict playing out time and again. The Galileans are country-dwellers, pliable village folk who are none too keen to rub shoulders with the Tiberians or Sephoreans.


Confronted with this oddity, some have thought to identify the Galileans with a revolutionary party rather than with the inhabitants of the region at large. But for one problem laid to rest this proposal spawns several others and has justifiably fallen out of favor. Why, for example, would Josephus own up to being a commander of the Galileans in *Ag. Ap.* 1.48 if they had some affiliation with the despised Zealots or Sicarii? Or why would Herod Antipas settle these revolutionaries in his newly-founded capital of Tiberias (*Ant.* 18.37)? The sum of Josephus’s references to the Galileans will simply not bear out this hypothesis with any consistency.

If the Galileans are not to be equated with some revolutionary party, there is still something to be said for the impression that feeds the theory. How are we to account for the Galileans’ apparent “otherness”? One suggestion is that the inhabitants of Sepphoris and Tiberias were suspect because of recent political events. Around 4 BCE Varus, then Roman governor of Syria, had put down a revolt in Sepphoris and sold many of its inhabitants into slavery (*J.W.* 2.68; *Ant.* 17.289). As for Tiberias, Josephus reports that at its founding Herod Antipas

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34 As Freyne convincingly shows in “Galileans in the Light of Josephus’ *Life*.”
settled a mixed rabble, Jews avoiding the place because it was built on top of a
cemetery (Ant. 18.36-38). We might surmise from this information that many of
the citizens of these environs were not natives of Galilee. A second suggestion is
that the differentiation corresponds to levels of political organization. Oi
Γαλιλαίοι is Josephus’s blanket term for those Galilean Jews who were not
integrated into the more developed political apparatuses of the region’s cities.35
That the Galileans are distinguished from the urban population is a by-product
of this naming convention.36

Of these proposals, the first falters for its restricted scope, as the contrast
in Life is not only between the Galileans and the people of Sepphoris and Tiberias
but also with the Gabarenes (125) and Taricheans (143). Josephus gives us no
reason to suppose that the people of all these cities are newcomers to the region
or of questionable stock.37 And even in the case of the two ornaments of Galilee,
Sepphoris and Tiberias, the narrative of Life assumes mainly Jewish inhabitants,
the political circumstances mentioned above notwithstanding.38 The second is

35 Similarly Armenti, “‘Galileans.”
36 Cohen lays out both possibilities in idem, Josephus in Galilee and Rome, 209-10, n. 53.
37 In the case of Tarichea, Josephus distinguishes its citizens from the foreigners who live
among them (Life 143, 162). Likewise, the people of Gischala who come over to Josephus’ side
(372) are the citizens as opposed to the Tyrian mercenaries who remain aligned with John. The
Taricheans’ allegiance to the law of Moses is presumed in Life 132-136, where Iesous the son of
Sapphias appeals to the ancestral laws against Josephus, who has been accused of betraying the
country to the Romans. The “mob,” respecting this source of authority, responds with applause.
38 Josephus recounts a ruse against him manufactured by the delegation from Jerusalem
(Life 285-289). The Tiberians, having received fabricated letters informing of a Roman threat on
the more defensible and should probably be regarded as the default position. It is in effect a variant on what I observed in ch. 3, that subsets of a group are sometimes set off from the group to which they belong without a distancing intent.

A Galilean Ἐθνος?

For now, this second proposal ought to be left on the table, but it leaves several features of Josephus’s presentation of the Galileans unaccounted for. Most conspicuously, when Josephus introduces the Galileans in J.W. 3.41-43, he attributes to them an inborn nature that runs counter to the Jewish disposition. They are, he says, warlike from infancy. Also noteworthy is the distribution of ethnonyms in Jewish War’s account of the Galilean campaign (bks. 3 and 4). In these scenes, Josephus regularly describes the people of Galilee’s cities as Jews. Only occasionally are the combatants named Galileans, and then the tone of the narrative takes a more critical turn. Adding to these peculiarities is Josephus’s general disparagement of the Galileans, particularly in the Life, since no such bias is evident toward Jews in other parts of Palestine or the diaspora.

\[\textit{the frontier of Galilee, urge Josephus to go out to aid their fellow-nationals (τοῖς ὀμοεθνεσίν αὐτῶν). In general, Josephus’s understanding of Galilee’s population is in line with what he says in J.W. 3.41. Galilee is said to be surrounded by foreign peoples. It is therefore implied that the region itself has a limited gentile presence.}\]
The alternative, that the Γαλιλαίοι of the Josephan corpus comprise an ἔθνος related to but not identical with the Jews, has its impetus from Josephus’s own terminology. Three times he explicitly refers to the Galileans (or their land) as an ἔθνος (J.W. 2.510, 570; 4.105).39 This in itself is of some weight as Josephus arranges the Jewish ἔθνος, whether in Palestine or in the diaspora, alongside others of the same social genus: Arabs, Parthians, Greeks, Idumeans, Samaritans, and so forth.40 Nowhere does he suggest that the ἔθνος of the Jews is made up of sub-ἔθνη. By taking the term as it applies to the Γαλιλαίοι in its most usual sense, Josephus’s uneven presentation of them becomes more explicable.

Galileans in *Jewish War*

Josephus supplies little direct information about the Galileans’ identity and character, either in *Jewish War* or in the *Life*, where they appear most frequently.


An important exception to this is the geographical digression that fronts the account of the Roman campaign in Galilee. The survey of greater Judea in J.W. 3.35-58 is for that reason a natural place to start, even though the Galileans make their first appearance in J.W. 2.232-246 embroiled in a dispute with the Samaritans. Having set out the boundaries of the two Galilees in 3.35-40, Josephus proceeds with a paean to the region’s fertility and resistance of foreign invasion: “For the Galileans are from infancy inured to war (μάχιμοι τε γὰρ ἐκ νηπίων), and have at all times been numerous” (3.42).

“Inured to war,” as Thackeray interprets μάχιμοι, is neither the expected translation (given his handling of the same lexeme in the rest of Jewish War) nor the most natural, as μάχιμος typically has a more active sense. When a substantive, μάχιμος is typically rendered “combatant,” and in all cases denotes a party of fighters or that part of the population that is fit for battle. Habituation to war does not in itself explain how the Galileans have succeeded in fending off hostile neighbors. Rather they have resisted invasion because they are fighters

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41 As noted, this conflict is mentioned by Tacitus in Ann. 12.54 with some variation from Josephus’s account. Whereas the Jewish historian names only Cumanus as procurator of greater Judea, according to Tacitus, Cumanus was governor of Galilee and Felix of Samaria. And unlike Josephus, who assigns the initial act of violence to the Samaritan side, Tacitus reports a reciprocal plundering. Josephus himself modifies the account in the parallel in Ant. 20.118-136, from the killing of one Galilean to the slaughter of many.

42 Translations of μάχιμος and its cognates in the LCL edition of Jewish War include the following: “military” (1.348), “finest troops” (2.58), “capable of bearing arms” (3.62), “bravest warriors” (3.205), “militants” (5.335), “war party” (5.342), and most frequently “combatants” or some variation thereof (3.9, 69, 111, 132, 298, 304, 478; 4.10, 63, 137, 516; 5.248, 370, 447).
from infancy, warlike as Josephus will describe the Amalekites in *Ant.* 3.40.\(^{43}\)

That this is closer to Josephus’s meaning is supported by the second half of the sentence, which mirrors the adjectives μάχιμος and πολύς by denial of approximate antonyms: “Never did cowardice seize the men nor lack of men the country (καὶ οὐτέ δειλία ποτὲ τοὺς ἄνδρας οὐτε λιπανδρία τὴν χώραν κατέσχεν).”

It is, of course, a very curious statement for Josephus to make if the Γαλιλαίοι of whom he speaks are the Jews of Galilee. Writing under the auspices of the imperial court, he is anxious throughout *Jewish War* to show that his countrymen were driven into war with Rome by a few scoundrels, an otherwise tame horse hijacked by hotheads and demagogues and spurred into battle against its will.\(^{44}\) It is hardly congenial to Josephus’s ends to present all the Jews

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As it relates to the Amalekites, Josephus, retelling the story of Exod 17, describes them as the most warlike people of the wilderness region which the Israelites entered after their departure from Egypt. See Johann Maier, “Amael in the Writings of Josephus,” in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period*, 118-19.

\(^{44}\) As Josephus announces already in *J.W.* 1.10.
of Galilee as bellicose, while striving so strenuously to demonstrate that political restlessness is not an inherent Jewish disposition. The addition of ἐκ νηπίων ("from infancy") only heightens the incongruity. Belligerence is an innate quality of the Galileans, one which has been pressed upon them by their geographical location in the midst of enemies.

Josephus, I suggest, is participating in a mode of discourse common to the ancient Mediterranean world. It was often held that each ἔθνος had its own character shaped by its history and the environmental conditions of its homeland and reflected in its ancestral traditions, political constitution, and relationship towards other nations, a belief that naturally lent itself to ethnic stereotypes, both positive and negative. Josephus was not immune to the darker side of such prejudices and readily indulges in them to enhance the status of the Jewish people. If Jewish worship and customs are solemn and philosophically minded, as Josephus asserts in Against Apion, the Egyptians, those slanderers of the Jewish nation, embody the very opposite qualities; they are “empty-headed and utterly

45 Had Josephus selected an adjective like ἀνδρείος ("courageous," “manly”), J.W. 3.42 would resonate much more with the theme announced in the prologue that the Jews were worthy opponents of the Romans (J.W. 1.7-8). If this is what Josephus meant to convey, his choice of terminology is infelicitous. Moreover, as we shall see shortly, the one episode of the Galilean campaign that refers consistently to the Γαλιλαῖοι (J.W. 3.289-306) portrays the Romans as far the superior, effectively gifted the victory by the Galileans' lack of fortitude and disloyalty to one another.

46 As, for example, Benjamin Isaac amply shows in idem, The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) in relation to Greek and Roman ethnic prejudices.
foolish people, inured from the beginning to depraved opinions about Gods” 
(Ag. Ap. 1.225). And if the Egyptians cling to inane religious ideas, the vice of the Idumeans is instability and ferocity: a “turbulent and disorderly people, ever on the alert for commotion and delighting in revolutionary change” (J.W. 4.231), “naturally of a most savage and murderous disposition” (4.310).

The Galileans too have their corporate personality, determined by the history, topography, and climate of the region. J.W. 3.35-44, in other words, is Josephus’s formal introduction of the Galileans as a separate people, a very succinct ethnographic report to go alongside the geographical inventory, not unlike the beginning of Julius Caesar’s Gallic War. Here in nuce are the defining features of the land and its native inhabitants, their character as a people, wholly in accord with their fiery demeanor in Life. We may observe how Josephus assigns to the Galileans a predetermined nature, just as he does to the Egyptians and Idumeans. Whether or not the Egyptians’ religious madness was once

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47 Josephus’s negative rhetoric about the Egyptians is especially potent in his defense of the Jewish people and way of life in Against Apion. See John M. G. Barclay, “The Politics of Contempt: Judaeans and Egyptians in Josephus’s Against Apion,” in Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire, ed. idem, LSTS 45 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 109-27. Barclay summarizes: “Like any skilled orator, Josephus has selected and manipulated ethnic stereotypes to suit his argumentation, allowing as little interference as possible between positive and negative images” (112).

48 See also Appelbaum, “Idumaeans,” 6-10, 22.

49 The comparison between this section of Jewish War and Caesar’s Gallic War is made by Smith (“Troublemakers,” 532). It is perhaps not accidental that the Galileans appear so sparsely before this point, even though a good part of J.W. 2 is set in Galilee.
voluntary, it has become so ingrained with time and use that it is now
constitutive of their temperament “from the beginning.” The Idumeans are most
savage by nature (φυσεί).\textsuperscript{50} The Galileans are bellicose from the cradle.\textsuperscript{51}

The Galileans’ combativeness will play a significant part in their last
appearance in \textit{J.W.} 4.556-565. The image which develops in between is more
subtle, but interesting nonetheless for its negative associations. The next major
episode to feature the Γαλιλαίοι is the Roman attack on Japha, a large village a
few kilometers southwest of Nazareth (\textit{J.W.} 3.289-306). Encouraged by Jotapata’s
resistance, the residents of the nearby town take to the offensive. In response,
Vespasian commissions Trajan, the commander of the tenth legion, to put down
the insurgency. The scene, which cuts through the much more elaborate story of
the siege of Jotapata, is remarkable on several accounts. Three times Josephus
refers to the city’s soldiers and residents as Γαλιλαίοι (3.293, 301, 306), not once

\textsuperscript{50} Josephus likewise describes the Samaritans as duplicitous by nature (\textit{Ant.} 11.341;
12.257) and the Germans as naturally prone to unsound judgment and eagerness to rush into
danger (\textit{Ant.} 7.77).
\textsuperscript{51} What differentiates Josephus from the Fourth Evangelist in this respect is that even if
we take the Gospel’s more deterministic statements to their farthest end, concluding that some
indeed have been consigned by the Father to judgment and others destined for eternal life, all
people share that condition. It is not the effect of climate, geography, or past experience exerting
itself on nations and producing something like collective personality. The Jews, in short, are no
better or worse than the rest of humankind. As I argued in ch. 2, they are a microcosm insofar as
the unbelief of the many and the belief of the few is recapitulated among the whole human
family. Whatever the prejudice, if one wishes to call it that, it is not against a particular ἐθνός. It
is an indictment of all humanity.
as Jews.\textsuperscript{52} The defenders of Jotapata, on the other hand, are nearly always denominated Jews as are those of Tiberias, Tarichea, and Gamala later in bks. 3 and 4.\textsuperscript{53} Why Josephus inverts his typical pattern of nomenclature like this is not immediately apparent. An appeal to variety will not take us very far, since in other episodes of the Galilean campaign Josephus is happy to speak consistently of “Jews.” And although in \textit{Life} Josephus terms Japha a village (\textit{Life} 230), in \textit{J.W.} 3 both Japha and Jotapata, are described as cities, rendering any city-country dichotomy irrelevant.

Accompanying this change in names is a marked shift in characterization.\textsuperscript{54} The soldiers at Jotapata hold out against all odds. Led by their consummate general, they are brave, unified, and clever (e.g., \textit{J.W.} 3.152-157, 171-175, 213-228). Not so the people of Japha. Eager for combat, they rush out to engage Trajan’s forces but are quickly repulsed and take to flight (3.290). Reaching the first wall of the city, they are closed out of the second by their own people, who are afraid that the Romans will burst in along with them (3.292-298). The fighters, trapped

\textsuperscript{52} As also observed by James S. McLaren, “Constructing Judaean History in the Diaspora: Josephus’s Account of Judas,” in \textit{Negotiating Diaspora}, 97.

\textsuperscript{53} Jotapata: 3.113, 114, 130, 142, 149, 150, 151, 157, 161, 165, 167, 170, 189, 191, 207, 211, 218, 239, 270, 276, 277, 279, 320, 355; Tiberias: 3.452; Tarichea: 3.471, 475, 479, 480, 488, 495, 530, 530; Gamala 4.36, 43, 75. The lone exception is a pair of Galilean brothers who are singled out for their bravery in combat in 3.233.

between the walls, perish to a man at their enemies’ hands. These Galileans lack the qualities that make Josephus and Jotapata formidable.

Josephus pairs this narrative about the pitiful Galileans of Japha with a story about the slaughter of the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim. The pejorative overtone of both vignettes and the complementary summaries that bookend the respective calamities suggest that we are to view them together. The chronological proximity of the two events surely contributes to their arrangement, but that will not explain the transition from “Jews” to “Galileans” nor the palpable change in mood from what precedes. In Josephus’s eyes, the Samaritans are decidedly not Jews, even if from time to time they claim kinship with them when it is politically expedient (Ant. 9.288-291; 11.341). If the Galileans share a status as non-Ἰουδαῖοι, albeit thought of as possessing some common stock with the Jews, Josephus’s literary plan emerges more clearly. He breaks off from the siege of Jotapata to amplify the Jews’ military prowess and vigor of spirit by comparison with the foibles of the disorganized Galileans and

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55 J.W. 3.306 concludes the fall of Japha as follows: “This disaster befell the Galileans on the twenty-fifth of the month Daesius (τούτῳ συνέβη τὸ πάθος Γαλιλαίως πεῖπτη καὶ εἰκάδι Δαυσίου μηνός).” The account of the Samaritans’ misfortunes in J.W. 3.315 reads: “This was on the twenty-seventh of the month Daesius. Such was the catastrophe which overtook the Samaritans (ἐβδόμη καὶ εἰκάδι Δαυσίου μηνός ἐπράξθη καὶ τοιαύτας μὲν συμφορὰς Σαμαρεῖται ἐχρόσισαντο).” That the Samaritan episode is meant as a sequel of sorts to J.W. 3.289-306 is further indicated by Josephus’s transition in 3.307: “The Samaritans too, did not escape their share of calamity.”

56 See Reinhard Pummer, The Samaritans in Flavius Josephus, TSAJ 129 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 67-80, 123-25; Feldman, “Josephus’ Attitude toward the Samaritans.”
Samaritans. It is a fine specimen of digression for the sake of comparison (σύγκρωσις), making Josephus and the Jews of Jotapata shine all the more brightly.  

The Galileans take the stage for a final time in 4.556-565. It is also their most infamous moment. As one of the last holdouts in Galilee, John of Gischala, the arch-villain of Josephus’s story, manages to sneak out of his hometown with a band of Galilean supporters and take refuge in Jerusalem. He subsequently positions himself for power at the head of the Zealots and sends the city into a tailspin of violence. To make matters worse, the people’s appeal to Simon bar Giora backfires when he surrounds the city, cutting off the hope of would-be deserters to the Romans. Simon and his men are a greater terror than the Romans, the Zealots inside the city more oppressive than Simon, and of the Zealots, the most odious are the contingent of Galileans (τὸ σύνταγμα τῶν Γαλιλαίων). These Galileans are veritable anarchists, engaging in all manner of sordid vice: theft, murder, rape, and sexual depravity, even dressing up as women with swords ready at the side under their dyed mantles.

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58 The decidedly negative portrayal of the Galileans in this episode is again briefly noted by McLaren (“Constructing Judaean History,” 96-97).
In one sense, this is Josephus at his rhetorical best, magnifying the worst in his adversaries by making them look as debauched as imaginable. He has prepared the reader for these otherwise unexplained acts of depravity in 3.42, just as the reader, having already learned of their turbulent character, is not surprised when the Idumeans, angry at not receiving immediate entry into Jerusalem, vent their fury against its citizens. Whereas the depravities of John or the Zealots or Simon are not in keeping with the dignity of the Jewish nation, the Galileans simply act in accord with their belligerent nature.

The Galileans in Life

Aside from Ant. 20.118-120, the Galileans are rarely mentioned in Jewish Antiquities. This is in stark contrast to Josephus’s Life, where they appear in the narrative some forty-five times. I have argued that when Josephus describes the

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59 I assume a general continuity in Josephus’s religious and political outlook between Jewish War and Antiquities-Life, though, of course, each work has its characteristic emphases and concerns. It has sometimes been hypothesized that whereas Josephus wrote Jewish War as pro-Roman propaganda, by the time he came to Antiquities-Life he had adopted a more nationalistic stance. Thus Richard Laqueur, Der jüdische Historiker Flavius Josephus: Ein biographischer Versuch auf neuer quellenkritischer Grundlage (Giessen: Münchow, 1920). Cohen (Josephus in Galilee and Rome, 148) attributes to Antiquities-Life a “religious-Pharisaic viewpoint” that is largely absent from Jewish War. For reasons that are unknown to us, Josephus “was becoming more ‘nationalistic,’ more conscious of religious considerations, less concerned about flattering Rome” (236).

The case for any radical change in perspective, however, is overstated. While conciliatory to the Romans, and in particular to Josephus’s Flavian benefactors, Jewish War has Josephus engaged in the same-double game as in Life. As one entrusted with the preparations of Galilee for a looming war with Rome, he cannot neglect his duties. And yet, he can foresee that a war against
Galileans as μάχιμοι ἐκ νηπίων in J.W. 3.42, he has in mind an ethnic stereotype.

The portrayal of the Galileans in *Life* reads like an amplification of this very trait.

As already observed, the Galileans of *Life* live in the region’s villages and in the countryside and are sharply distinguished from the urban population. Their hatred of the cities is a persistent motif in Josephus’s autobiography. Their behavior is almost comically predictable. The Galilean mobs are always looking for a fight, thronging whenever an opportunity for retaliation is at hand. We first encounter them in *Life* 30, ready to sack Sepphoris for its pro-Roman leaning.

They participate in the destruction of the Herodian palace in Tiberias (66), appeal to Josephus to lead them against John and Gischala (102), had reportedly cut off the hands of Iustus of Tiberas’s brother (177), rush against Jonathan and the delegation sent from Jerusalem to recall Josephus (262), and so on seemingly *ad infinitum*. In the terms of classical narrative criticism, they are flat characters, their lust for revenge a pretext for Josephus to put his clemency, ingenuity, and

the Romans will be disastrous and so moves to pursue a more salutary course. Nor is it true, as Cohen (ibid., 155) argues, that according to *Jewish War* only the tyrants fought while *Antiquities-Life* expands participation to the nation as a whole. According to Mason (*Life of Josephus*, 36, n. 171), “it is true that the rhetorical twists placed on particular episodes in the *Life* tend to be different from parallels in the *War*. ... But we look in vain for a new political agenda here.” It is interesting to note in this respect that many of the differences between Josephus’s overlapping accounts in *J.W.* 2 and *Life* do not have any clear motivation. See Rajak, *Josephus*, 147-48. I find most persuasive Mason’s (*Life of Josephus*, xlvii-l) argument that Josephus wrote *Life* in the first place as a celebratory display of his own character and thus also of the nobility of the Jewish priestly-aristocratic constitution, whatever other factors (like Justus’s provocation) may have motivated him.
conflict-resolution skills on display. It is little wonder that they have been thought to comprise a party of revolutionaries.

The other prominent aspect of the Galileans’ character is their unswerving loyalty to Josephus. Having paid off the bandits who were harassing the people and having ingratiated himself with the Galilean leaders, the general wins the heart of the people. According to Josephus’s telling, they would sooner suffer anything than their beloved general to leave them. Indeed, it is the Galileans’ refusal to betray Josephus that saves him from deposition by the delegation from Jerusalem. He achieves what he sets out in *J.W.* 2.569-570 as his first priority, to earn the affection of the natives, “knowing that this would be of the greatest advantage to him, however he might otherwise fail.” Invested with *potestas* by the highest authorities of the Jewish people, it is his *auctoritas* among the rural Galileans that preserves his generalship.

Whatever Josephus’s actual relationship with the Γαλιλαῖοι, in *Life* they serve to heighten his own virtue, and, by association, the virtues of the Jewish people.\(^{60}\) If for Josephus the Γαλιλαῖοι constitute their own ἔθνος, this only serves to augment further the priest-aristocrat’s political accomplishments. He

\(^{60}\) Mason (*Life of Josephus*, xlix) remarks that “almost every single paragraph in the *Life* ... confirms with no hint of subtlety either his virtues or his opponents’ vices.” The Galileans, of course, are not Josephus’s opponents, but they too are put to the same ends. This does not mean we must doubt everything that Josephus says about them, even as our image of them is refracted through his eyes. Their distrust for Galilee’s urban centers, for example, is plausible enough, even if it happens that Josephus exaggerates the rural populace’s zeal.
comes into Galilee commissioned to get the region and its cities under Jerusalem’s control by disarming other factions. Finding the cities unresponsive to this project, he leverages the manpower of the indigenous Γαλιλαῖοι. These, by nature an excitable rabble, are tamed (temporarily) by Josephus’s political skill. When word makes it to Jerusalem that Josephus is aiming for autocratic rule, a delegation is sent to persuade the Galileans to transfer their allegiance. But Josephus has so attached the Galileans to himself that the attempted ousting fails, and he retains command of Galilee until his capture by the Romans. Josephus’s statesmanship is therefore doubly impressive. Not only does he hold the mob in check time and again, fend off enemies, and maintain civil order, he does so by mastering another people through persuasion and political craft, a feat his opponents could not equal. He has subdued a warlike people without the least threat of force.

Potential Counter-passages

If the preceding argument is valid, then Josephus marks off the Γαλιλαῖοι from the Jews of Galilee much as he marks off the Σύροι or Αἰγύπτιοι from the Jews who live among them. But for this interpretation to prove consistent, I must tackle several passages that appear to conflate the two. The first is J.W. 2.232-246 which recounts a skirmish between the Galileans and Samaritans that spills over
into Judea when the procurator Ventidius Cumanus turns a blind eye to the matter. According to Henry St. John Thackeray’s translation, at a village called Gema “a Galilaean, one of a large company of Jews on their way up to the festival, was murdered (πολλῶν ἀναβαίνοντων Ἰουδαίων ἐπὶ τὴν ἐορτήν ἀναφέρειται τις Γαλιλαίος).” Thackeray, it seems, took πολλῶν ἀναβαίνοντων Ἰουδαίων ἐπὶ τὴν ἐορτήν as standing in a partitive genitive relationship with the indefinite pronoun τις, the resulting noun phrase in apposition to Γαλιλαίος. But it is also grammatically acceptable to take the string of genitives as a genitive absolute.

While this subtle change is likely to prove inconsequential in most contexts, the difference in meaning is potentially as great as between the following hypothetical statements: 61) A New Yorker, one of the many Americans who went to Washington D.C. to protest, was arrested; 2) When many Americans were going to Washington D.C. to protest, a certain Canadian was arrested. On Thackeray’s interpretation, the man who was murdered is both a Γαλιλαίος and a Ἰουδαίος. On the alternative, this inference is possible but not necessary. The Galilean of whom Josephus writes may be like the Canadian in the previous example, tagging along with another national or ethnic group. The

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61 Here I diverge from Steve Mason, who considers this point of grammar to be of little consequence. See Mason, Judean War 2, vol. 1b of Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, ed. Steve Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 189, n. 1449.
whole fiasco would thus be a three-way affair, as Josephus brings out more plainly in the parallel at *Ant.* 20.122-129. The ethnic Galileans, finding no redress for the wrong perpetrated by the Samaritans, turn to the Jews, some of whom perceive this as an opening to take action against their long-standing rivals.

The second passage that seems to equate the Γαλιλαῖοι with the Jews of Galilee comes in *J.W.* 3.229-233. Among the defenders of Jotapata, Josephus praises three men as worthy of memorial. The first is a Jewish man by the name of Eleazar, a native of Saba in Galilee. The others are a pair of brothers, Netiras and Philip, and according to Thackeray, “also Galileans, from the village of Ruma (ἀπὸ Ῥοῦμας κώμης, Γαλιλαῖοι καὶ αὐτοί).”

In this case, the proper interpretation of the statement depends in part on a text-critical judgment. Thackeray’s translation and the underlying Greek text, based on the *editio maior* of Benedict Niese, read as follows:

Next to him [Eleazar] those who most distinguished themselves were two brothers, Netiras and Philip, also Galileans, from the village of Ruma: dashing out against the lines of the tenth legion, they charged the Romans with such impetuosity and force that they broke their ranks and put to flight all whom they encountered (ἀριστοὶ μετ’ αὐτὸν ἐφάνησαν ἀδελφοὶ δύο Νετείρας καὶ Φίλιππος, ἀπὸ Ῥοῦμας κώμης, Γαλιλαῖοι καὶ αὐτοί, [οἱ] προσήδωσι μὲν εἰς τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ δεκάτου τάγματος, τοσοῦτον δὲ χρόις καὶ βίᾳ τῶν Ῥωμαίων συνέπεσον, ὡς διαφημῆσαι τε τὰς τάξεις καὶ τρέψασθαι καθ’ οὺς ἐφομήσειαν ἄπαντας) (*J.W.* 3.233).

Niese, following Codex Marcianus, retains the relative pronoun οἱ after Γαλιλαῖοι καὶ αὐτοί. This would mean that the aforementioned Eleazar is a
Γαλιλαίος as well. As the square brackets indicate, however, oĩ may not be original. The sentence in Niese and LCL runs all the way from ἄριστοι to ἀπαντας, but with oĩ removed, the period could be placed after Γαλιλαίοι and a new sentence begun with καὶ αὐτοί. καὶ in that case would be best understood as an adverb with intensive force. We might then translate J.W. 3.233: “Next to him those who most distinguished themselves were two brothers, Netiras and Philip, Galileans from the village of Ruma. They, for their part, leapt forth toward those of the tenth legion and charged with such impetuosity and force that they broke their ranks and put to flight all whom they encountered.”

Eleazar and the brothers, on this reading, belong to separate ἐθνη, the former Ἰουδαῖος the latter two Γαλιλαίοι.

The Galileans in the Gospel of John

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62 As it often does in Josephus, particularly in conjunction with the particle μὲν. καὶ αὐτοί, in other words, can reasonably bear the meaning of “they,” where the emphasis is conveyed in the vocal inflection, or “they, on their part.” The grammatical stress on αὐτοί will thus spotlight the brothers and balance this brief report with that of Eleazar just preceding it. It is not always easy to convey in English the precise nuance of καὶ. What is nonetheless clear is that adverbial καὶ is not always equivalent to the English “too” but may simply add emphasis to the word or clause that follows.

63 Alternatively, καὶ αὐτοί may mean “they too” but serve as the subject of προπηδῶσι: “They too leapt forward.”

64 Elsewhere in the story of the siege and capture of Jotapata, Josephus shows concern to identify combatants by their ethnicity. Thus, for example, he mentions the Arab archers (3.168, 211) and slingers from Syria (3.211) as auxiliary units in the Roman forces. Similarly in J.W. 5.549-557, where the Arabs and Syrians in the Roman camp rip open Jewish refugees in hopes of procuring the gold they had ingested to hide from the insurgents inside Jerusalem.
Although Josephus’s writings are far from impartial and must be sifted critically, it would be disingenuous to deny their immense historical value. The stereotypes that Josephus has of the Galileans might cloud our view of them, but he hardly invented them any more than he invented John of Gischala or Iustus of Tiberias. Josephus’s tenure as general of Galilee was fleeting, heavily contested, and likely blown out of proportion to what actually transpired.⁶５ But as one who spent several months in Galilee during the revolt and as a native of Palestine, his first-hand knowledge of the region’s geography and demographics is indispensable.

The greater Judea of Josephus’s day could be fittingly compared to the United Kingdom. Despite historical and cultural ties, the province’s ethnic groups retained their own identities. The trio of Idumeans, Jews, and Galileans, as I have suggested we read Josephus, would be not unlike Britain’s Welsh, English, and Scottish constituencies. To most outsiders, all the people of greater

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⁶５ For all of Josephus’s boasting about his abilities as general and administrator of Galilee, he does not conceal the many challenges to his authority, though, unsurprisingly, he faults not any personal shortcomings but the devious motives of political opponents. Especially prominent in Life is the attempt of the embassy from Jerusalem to remove Josephus from his post. Josephus tries to mitigate the damages to his reputation by pinning the blame on the mounting envy of John of Gischala. See Rajak, Josephus, 151-52. According to Rajak (ibid., 165), the attempt to oust Josephus is likely an indication that he was not as successful in gaining control of the region as he would like us to have it. Cohen (Josephus in Galilee and Rome, 230-31) expresses similar skepticism about Josephus’s self-presentation.
Judea were Jews, just as to many foreigners, all the people of Britain are English. But internally, traditional ethnic identities persisted.

The paucity of statements about the Galileans in the Fourth Gospel makes a character sketch comparable to that which I drew from Josephus next to impossible. The appellation Ἐλληνες, after all, is a *hapax* in the Gospel. All that is said about them is that they welcomed Jesus. Consequently, the only test of the hypothesis, that in the evangelist’s eyes they are something other than Ιουδαῖοι, is its compatibility with the Gospel’s narrative trajectory. Under this assumption, Jesus is welcomed in ch. 4 not by the Jews of Galilee but by an autochthonous population of which he is not a member. This would pair with the missionary success among the Samaritans of Sychar to form an important development in the Gospel’s plot. As Jesus begins to encounter opposition from his own people, the Jews, he finds refuge with others. That is not to say that Judea symbolizes the realm of unbelief and Samaria and Galilee the converse. There is both belief in

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66 Perhaps this is why, in *Ag. Ap.* 1.48, Josephus states that he was the commander of those who “among us” (παρ᾿ ἡμῖν) are called Galileans. That is, outsiders would have made no distinction between them and the Jews, just as Tacitus appears to conflate Jews and Samaritans.

67 Of the Galileans’ origins, however, Josephus is tantalizingly muted. That he thought of them as descendants of the northern Israelites is quite doubtful, since the ten tribes are said to reside somewhere beyond the Euphrates to his own day (*Ant.* 11.133). If Josephus anywhere fills the lacuna, it must be found in the conversion of part of the Itureans, mentioned only in *Ant.* 13.318-319, but he does not say enough to push us beyond speculation.

Judea (11:45; 12:11) and lack of faith in Galilee (6:60-66).\textsuperscript{69} Jesus’s movement from Judea to Galilee better corresponds to a polarity of threat and safety at the Gospel’s story level than to one of unbelief and faith at the level of theological allegory.

The Galileans’ amiability, moreover, is not tantamount to a profession of faith.\textsuperscript{70} The only people of Galilee explicitly said to believe are the disciples (2:11) and the royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum (4:53). The Galileans, on the other hand, “welcome” (δέχομαι) Jesus rather than “receive” (λαμβάνω) him or “believe” (πιστεύω) in him, and so John 4:45 does not conform to the Prologue’s terminology for faith in Jesus: “to all who received him, who believed in his name” (1:12). What the stories of ch. 4 convey, however, is that the threat to Jesus is concentrated in the Jewish heartland among “his own.” From then on, the narrative oscillates between Jesus’s short-term and conflict-ridden visits to Judea, which for their temporal brevity occupy most of chs. 5-12, and his more extended stays in the outlying areas, where he enjoys relatively security. Galilee,

\textsuperscript{69} With Brown, Community, 39-40: “The fact that in Galilee the royal official and his whole household come to faith (4:53) is not really more significant than the fact that in Jerusalem the blind man comes to faith (9:35-39).”

\textsuperscript{70} I thus side against Meeks (“Galilee and Judea,” 165) and Jouette M. Bassler (“The Galileans: A Neglected Factor in Johannine Community Research,” CBQ 43 [1981]: 243-57) who attaches the symbolism to people (Judeans vs. Galileans) rather than to territory (Judea vs. Galilee). If the Γαλιλαῖοι are indeed symbols of belief, it is surprising that they do not have a more prominent role in the Gospel. As Fortna (“Theological Use of Locale,” 88-89) observes, Galilean faith “is never shown as a widespread thing,” though he too insists on a geographic symbolism that contrasts Judea with Galilee.
while not necessarily the place of belief and discipleship in contrast to the hard
spiritual soil of Judea, is indeed a place of refuge for Jesus.

On the analogy of the United Kingdom, the Johannine Jesus plays the role
of an Englishman, raised and resident in Scotland. Observant of the traditions of
his people, he makes regular journeys from Scotland to a city in England to
celebrate English holidays. The Γαλιλαίοι of 4:45 on this analogy are Scots, a
people of their own despite all the political and cultural ties with their neighbors
to the south, rather than English expatriates. In this framework, the impression
given by John 7:1 that Galilee is a safe-haven from the Ἰουδαίοι becomes less
anomalous. There are, to be sure, Jewish inhabitants of Galilee, among them
Jesus and his family, but these would be in addition to enclaves of native
Galileans who, having seen Jesus’s signs, are on friendly terms with the itinerant
preacher. Galilee is neither a land of foreigners, with customs alien to the Jewish
people, nor the exclusive domain of transplants from the south.

The expression “for fear of the Jews” in 7:13 now receives a potential
object of contrast. Among the festival crowds there are some non-Jews,
Γαλιλαίοι or others, over whom stand the Ἰουδαίοι, and the Jewish authorities in
particular.71 In a multi-ethnic context, the ethnonym Ἰουδαίοι would help

71 Josephus also speaks of a custom of the Galileans to travel through Samaria on their
way up to Jerusalem for the festival (Ant. 20.118). The reading of John 7:13 put forward here
differentiate the actors, just as someone might refer without confusion to “the English” when recounting events that also involved people of Welsh and Scottish heritage. The intended readers might have appreciated this from the aside in 4:45 that the Γαλιλαῖοι had gone up to Jerusalem for Passover, or perhaps they had received some prior instruction about the geography and demographics of Palestine. But what is of immediate concern is the knowledge and especially the assumptions of the evangelist about Jesus’s time and place, not all of which need have been shared by the first readers for the Gospel to achieve its intended result of inspiring or sustaining faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

The arguments of this chapter are necessarily tentative. I present them as one possible influence on the evangelist’s language about the Jews. If they hold, they introduce one more element to the Gospel’s tale of the Word among “his own.” Jesus ministers primarily among the Jews, but they are not the only people on the evangelist’s horizon. The territories around Judea had non-Jewish elements but Jerusalem too hosted many foreigners during seasons of pilgrimage. John agrees in part with Boyarin, “Ioudaioi in John,” 237-38, inasmuch as I concur that some group of non-Ἰουδαῖοι is implied.
explicitly mentions the Galileans and some Greeks as among the attendants, but he may assume the presence of others.

Nevertheless, the Samaritans, Greeks, and even the \( \Gamma \alpha \lambda \lambda \alpha \iota \iota \) with whom Jesus stays are not the \( \iota \delta \iota \iota \) of the prologue precisely because they are not \( \Iota \upsilon \delta \alpha \iota \iota \). Jesus’s trips to Jerusalem are in that sense genuine homecomings. So it is upon Judea that John is fastened, not for the sake of allegory or geographical symbolism but because it is most properly there that the drama between Jesus and his own plays out. And if this proves to be insufficient or too speculative for some, I repeat that it speaks in the first place more to a handful of difficult passages than to the Gospel’s overall presentation of the Jews. I propose a more comprehensive account of their characterization in the next (and final) chapter.
LIKE (FORE)FATHERS LIKE SONS: THE WANDERING ISRAELITES AND THE JOHANNINE JEWS

Alongside John 8:44, Rev 2:9 is perhaps the most troubling statement about Jews in the NT. According to Jesus’ word of comfort to the harassed Christian community in Smyrna, the Jews of that city are no Jews at all but a synagogue of Satan (συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατάνα; also Rev 3:9). By general consensus, the seer who put these words to page was a Jewish Christian. In fact, although at first glance the attack may seem directed from the outside, its logic operates on the assumption that the name “Jew” is a mark of honor. Those who follow Jesus are the true Jews. The pattern, like that in the Fourth Gospel with respect to Abraham, Moses, and the Scriptures, is appropriation or retention on the part of

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the author and denial to the author’s opponents: “We are the real Jews; those who slander and persecute us have lost all right to that title.”

Internecine verbal swordsmanship such as we see in the book of Revelation is plentiful in the Israelite/Jewish literary tradition. Associated most of all with the prophets’ lashings of Israel and Judah for their chronic infidelity to the LORD and abuse of the poor and socially vulnerable, it is found throughout the books that would come to make up the Jewish canon and in many others that would not enjoy such good fortune. No epithet of opprobrium, it seems, is spared: the people are a sinful nation, the offspring of iniquity, rebels, murderers, thieves, and whores—and this in the first chapter of Isaiah alone! In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the enemies of the community are lambasted as the sons of Belial, sons of the pit, sons of darkness, greedy, wicked, haughty, deceitful, stiff-necked, and hard-hearted. This type of rhetoric, so shrill to modern ears, verged on

3 Paul does something similar in Rom 2:28-29 and 9:6-9 with “Jew” and “Israel” respectively. In context, the point is that being a faithful Jew/Israelite requires more than birth status.


5 The Rule of the Community (1QS) supplies many of these, but derisive names and ill-wishes toward opponents, both Jewish and non-Jewish, are attested throughout the sectarian scrolls—those texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls which reflect the distinctive beliefs and practices of the Qumran community. The vocabulary, linguistic forms, and thought patterns of the sectarian texts are thoroughly probed by Devorah Dimant in “The Vocabulary of Qumran Sectarian Texts,” in Qumran und die Archäologie: Texte und Kontexte, ed. Jörg Frey, Carsten Claussen, and Nadine Kessler, WUNT 278 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 347-95.
While we might rue the inclination toward objectification and demonization of opponents, it becomes immediately apparent that the ancients could and often did reserve their most damning criticism for compatriots and confreres.

It is not the intensity of John’s polemic, then, that prevents us from reading it as intra-Jewish, for it is not any more acerbic, and arguably less so, than some of the sectarian scrolls, or even than some of the canonical prophets. Nor is it the frequency of the phrase οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι that makes the Fourth Gospel exceptional. For although in many Jewish writings the endonym “Israel” predominates, some Jews did indeed write to other Jews about “the Jews”—the authors of Ezra-Nehemiah, 2 Maccabees, and Esther, among other texts. A writer’s preference for one term or the other is not a sure guide to his or her social location. To gauge from the extant papyri, numismatic evidence, and other windows into popular practice, many Jews were happy to be known as such in communication both with their kinsmen and with gentiles.⁷

⁷ On these texts and artefacts, see Thiel, “‘Israel’ and ‘Jew,’” 86-90. The letter preserved in 2 Macc 1:1-9 shows very clearly that Jews did not necessarily avoid that title in internal communication. The authors of the festal letter refer to themselves as the Jews of Jerusalem and address the correspondence to the Jews who live in Egypt. In fact, it might be argued that the numerical prominence of “Israel” in many of these texts is deceptive and that in practice “Jew” was the much more common self-designation both in Palestine and the Diaspora. In that vein, it is interesting to observe that whereas 1 Maccabees features “Israel” very frequently and mostly
What is unique to the Gospel of John is that here intensity of polemic and frequency of phrase coincide. It is specifically “the Jews” who so often bear the brunt of the criticism. In chs. 2-4, I attempted to show that John neither stereotypes the Jews nor instantiates a dichotomy in which being Jewish and believing in Jesus are mutually exclusive, even as he makes clear that very few of Jesus’s own embraced his message. But still we are faced with a kind of reductio ad absurdum. Why would someone who thought of himself as a Jew and who was equipped with a handful of narrower terms for the Jewish parties involved not content himself with these, as the Synoptic Gospels mostly do, instead of preferring the more nebulous οἱ Ἰουδαίοι?

The Gospel’s Audience

Although as a methodological principle I have not assumed a specific communal situation in which the Gospel of John originated or to which it addressed itself, it must be acknowledged that any explanation of this confluence of literary features, the frequency of οἱ Ἰουδαίοι and the critical tone, will depend in part on how we envision the Gospel’s intended audience. That the Gospel was composed

reserves “Jews” for communication involving gentiles, in 1 Macc 13:41-42, the people are reported to have begun signing their contracts to the year of Simon, “high priest, commander, and leader of the Jews.”
with a gentile or mixed Jewish-gentile readership in mind cannot be rejected out of hand. The Fourth Gospel certainly contains a great deal of material that would be most fully appreciated by those acquainted not only with the Scriptures but also with first-century Judean society and religion. Jesus’s invitation at the Feast of Tabernacles to all those who are spiritually thirsty to come and drink (7:37-38) and the self-declaration of 8:12 (“I am the light of the world”), for example, take on greatest significance when interpreted against the background of contemporary festal practice unknown from the biblical account alone. The lighting of candles in the temple precincts and the drawing of water from the Pool of Siloam—or some liturgical or exegetical precursor to these rites—become the themes of Jesus’s public teaching.\(^8\)

On the other hand, the explanation of some Jewish customs and the labeling of many of the feasts as “of the Jews” seem to serve as an orientation for readers not intimately familiar with Jewish life and worship.\(^9\) A community of

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\(^8\) On the relation between Jesus’s speeches and first-century temple ritual, see Gale A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John*, Zacchaeus Studies: New Testament (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1989), 70-82, and Dorit Felsch, *Die Feste im Johannesevangelium*, WUNT 2/308 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 171-218. It must be acknowledged that the sources for the lighting of the candles and water-drawing ceremony post-date the composition of the Fourth Gospel, since they are first recorded in tractate Sukkah of the Mishnah (ca. 200 CE). Nevertheless, the convergence between the Mishnah and the Gospel of John on this point suggests that these rabbinic traditions about Tabernacles reach back into the first century. For a slightly more cautious approach, see Brian D. Johnson, “The Jewish Feasts and Questions of Historicity in John 5-12,” in *Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*, 122-23.

diaspora Jews might have needed some help with Aramaic terms like Messiah and Rabbi or with customs unique to their compatriots in Judea, but no Jewish Christians would have to be told that Passover or Tabernacles was a feast of the Jews, just as it would be superfluous for an American to write to fellow citizens about the Thanksgiving feast of the Americans.¹⁰

There are several layers to this problem that forestall its definitive resolution. First, were we to pursue a consistent two-level reading of the Fourth Gospel, we would have to follow Brown and make room for the presence of Samaritans and gentiles in the Johannine community.¹¹ For if the healing of the blind man in ch. 9 reflects the activities of a preacher in the Johannine community at the end of the first century, why methodologically should we ignore the Samaritan believers in 4:39-42, the “other sheep not of this fold” of

¹⁰ “Rabbi” is not unknown from the late antique Greek inscriptions that Shaye J. D. Cohen (“Epigraphical Rabbis,” JQR 72 [1981]: 1-17) has catalogued, but it is hard to determine the extent of its popular usage among Greek-speaking Jews.

10:16, or the Greeks of 12:20-21? Then, too, we must explain why, in the Farewell Discourse and the Johannine epistles, “the Jews” mostly fade into the background, replaced by “the world.” Did the Johannine community now face opposition from the gentile powers?¹²

There is, however, an even more fundamental problem. Even if it is valid to read the Gospel on two historical levels and the expulsion refers to events toward the end of the first century, it cannot be safely assumed that John writes for those who have endured the trauma.¹³ For the sake of argument, let us presume that Jewish Christians were in fact expelled from a local synagogue around 85 CE and that the conflict between Jesus and the Jews in the Gospel is patently anachronistic, reflecting the evangelist’s own situation more than what Martyn called the story’s einmalig level.¹⁴ The Gospel would necessarily post-date this event, but by how long?¹⁵

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¹² So François Vouga, Le cadre historique et l’intention théologique de Jean (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 97-111; Frey, “Bild ‘der Juden,’” 49. Kierspel (Jews and World, 177-213) develops this line of argumentation more fully. Frey (“Bild ‘der Juden,’” 41-42), though, cautions against a straight chronological reading from a situation of Jewish opposition to gentile opposition because, in his judgment, the various historical levels in John are so intertwined as to make a precise separation impossible (53).

¹³ Bauckham (“For Whom Were the Gospels Written?” in Gospels for All Christians, 15-16) makes the more general distinction between the communities in which the Gospels were written and those for which they were written; the two, as Bauckham observes, have often been conflated.

¹⁴ As Ashton (Understanding, 33; John and Christian Origins, 75-79) takes as a cue to the essential correctness of Martyn’s hypothesis whatever other assaults may be leveled against it; also D. Moody Smith, “Contribution of J. Louis Martyn.”

¹⁵ Similarly, Frey, “Bild ‘der Juden,’” 40: “How long ago the definitive split occurred and whether later there was still contact and dispute is difficult to say” (translation mine).
expulsion to the completion and circulation of the Gospel a few years or more had passed. Let us imagine that in the meantime the evangelist had moved on, as some preachers are wont to do, and was now active in the life of another congregation. Thus the Gospel might reflect experiences projected onto the life of Jesus yet not mirror those of the reading community. In brief, it cannot be taken for granted that the home in which the evangelist grew up, so to speak, was the home in which the Gospel came to reside.  

Second, although a thorough knowledge of first-century Jewish life and thought will deepen the reader’s understanding, this fact is not determinative for the ethnic makeup of the intended audience. Nuances will be lost to the less perceptive reader, but anyone conversant with the rudiments of the OT and the basic contours of Jesus’s life and ministry should be able to track the Gospel’s important themes and message. To put it negatively, the evangelist has

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16 In other words, the perspective that “a Gospel is the creation of the community in which it is celebrated,” as Tomson (“’Jews’ in the Gospel of John,” 176) puts it, must not be assumed uncritically. An author, as Richard A. Burridge (“About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences,” in Gospels for All Christians, 126) says, may “move around, collecting ideas and developing their understanding. Their ideas get refined by wider experience and by the collection of source material.” The point is well made by Bauckham, “Is There Patristic Counter-Evidence? A Response to Margaret Mitchell,” in The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity, ed. Edward W. Klink III, LNTS 353 (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 105-6.

17 Bauckham has argued that John, far from being a sectarian Gospel hermetically sealed to outsiders, is, in fact, the one most accessible to the Christian novice and non-Christian alike. See idem, “The Audience of the Fourth Gospel,” in Jesus in Johannine Tradition, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 101-11; slightly modified in idem, Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 113-26; on this, see also North, “‘Jews;’” 207-8, who colorfully describes John as a “born
provided enough guidance to the reader by means of the prologue and the frequent narrative asides, and has enunciated the central theme of Jesus’s revelation so clearly and so persistently, that one will not be lost even if he or she is not in a position to appreciate the minutiae of the story. A reader ignorant of rabbinic exegesis of Ps 82, or even of the sheep and shepherd imagery of the OT, for instance, will still grasp the thrust of what Jesus is saying in John 10:1-39, since the metaphor, as so many in the Fourth Gospel, is drawn from everyday life.

Third, because the evangelist had access to traditions, eyewitness or otherwise, we must not approach all the details of the narrative as if they were free inventions. So when one of Jesus’s sayings presupposes some subtle allusion to Jewish belief, custom, or line of biblical interpretation, it may be because it reaches back into the Jesus tradition, even as it is recast in the distinctive voice of the evangelist. The author, not wanting to write a hefty commentary, will have

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18 Gilbert Van Belle (Les parenthèses dans l’Évangile de Jean, SNTA 11 [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985], 206) comes to a similar conclusion about the Fourth Gospel’s parenthetical remarks. The evangelist deliberately aids the reader as exegetes of the Gospel have long noticed, a claim which Van Belle backs up with an impressive list of some 35 scholars.

19 That the evangelist was constrained in part by the tradition he received is plain enough from the overlap between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics, both in terms of the general contours of the narratives and with respect to particular events and sayings. Among the most thorough attempts to isolate traditional material in the Gospel of John is C. H. Dodd’s classic, Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel.
limited himself to explanations of more elemental matters, just as the Gospel of
Mark occasionally explains Jewish customs but fails to comment on terms like
“Son of Man” or to elucidate the Jewish context of the Sabbath controversies. Or
perhaps the evangelist foresaw a readership beyond the immediate circle of
readers and hearers and therefore made some concessions for those who did not
have the opportunity to hear his teaching personally.\(^{20}\)

We need not multiply hypotheses to see that a touch of disciplined
historical imagination can quickly escort us from a Jewish Christian audience to
one that is ethnically mixed or predominantly gentile in character. We can
reasonably infer that the intended readers of the Gospel knew Greek and were
acquainted with the basic outline of Jesus’s life, as they are presumed to know of
Peter, Mary of Bethany, and a few others.\(^{21}\) The physical realities of ancient book
production, moreover, require a sympathetic audience if the text is to be
preserved and copied for posterity. Otherwise, one runs the risk of consigning all
of his or her efforts to oblivion, as by and large happened to the myriad writings
of those adjudged heretics when they fell into the hands of men like Irenaeus and
Tertullian. The Gospel’s stated purpose of inspiring or sustaining faith in Jesus

\(^{20}\) Edward W. Klink III (The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John, SNTSMS 141 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 172-77) has recently argued that the evangelist’s perplexing handling of \textit{Judaica}, simultaneously known and unknown to the readers, is suggestive of multiple sets of implied readers.

(John 20:31) points to an author who was not just writing for personal consumption but for the sake of others. That he would have willingly handed over the finished Gospel to the unreceptive seems improbable. Taken together these facts strongly favor an intended Christian readership. But beyond this little is known with confidence about those to whom the Gospel was first delivered.

An audience that included gentiles, therefore, is far from unreasonable and would help account for what has come off as a lack of nuance in the Gospel’s presentation of the Jews. The evangelist does not incriminate all Jews of Jesus’s time or stereotype them, but he may move to the designation of Ἰουδαίοι as quickly as he does to accommodate readers and auditors who were at some remove culturally and temporally from the Pharisees, chief priests, and other religious and political factions of Palestine in the late 20s and early 30s. At the very least, the possibility ought to remain open given the lack of consensus and the absence of any external confirmation of the Gospel’s destination.

22 And that even if Barrett’s (Gospel according to St. John, 135) sense that the evangelist wrote primarily to satisfy himself is true. That is, there was still an intended audience whom the author wanted to persuade or edify, even if his principal motivation in writing was personal.

23 Indeed, even if the Gospel was designed as a missionary tract, its purpose could hardly have been achieved without the mediation of those who were already believers.

24 J. A. T. Robinson’s remarks in 1960 (“Destination and Purpose,” 117) are as salient now as they were when he wrote over fifty years ago: “After all this time the question of the destination and purpose of the Gospel is as wide open as it ever was. Was it addressed to a Jewish or gentile audience, or indeed to the inquiring individual whatever his background?” As Brodie (Quest for Origins, 146) observes: “In dealing with John, and in asking what social world he reflects, the difficulty is to find balance between the universal and the specific.”

25 Notable scholars who incline toward a gentile element in the intended audience include Brown, Culpepper, and Hengel.
In the end, an adequate reconstruction of the original audience’s ethnic composition, important as it is, is of only partial explanatory value, for it concerns the frequency of “the Jews” in John more than the intensity of the criticism. It does not explain the evangelist’s total theological framework in which Jewish unbelief, though not universal, is indeed pervasive. We must still supply a compelling account of the role(s) that the Jews play in the narrative, precisely the feature that has imbued Martyn’s two-level reading with such vitality.\(^{26}\)

Naturally, most investigations of John’s relationship with Judaism have fastened upon the appellation οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι itself, as I have done thus far. But if we cast our net wider than the expression “the Jews,” possible influences on the evangelist’s presentation begin to emerge. Whereas many of the putative sources and influences to which scholars have turned to illuminate the Gospel’s thought-world are now stashed deep in the archives (few commentators today are quick to reach for the Hermetica or the Mandean Ginza Rabbah, for example) one

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\(^{26}\) I am, accordingly, taking up Ashton’s challenge in *Identity and Function.*
influence is beyond any reasonable dispute.\textsuperscript{27} The evangelist knew Israel’s Scriptures (some of them at least), and he knew about many of the formative events of Israel’s history: the exodus from Egypt, the desert wanderings, and the giving of the law at Sinai at the barest minimum. Jesus’s discourses in particular evince intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures, the allusions occasionally bordering on the obscure: Moses’s lifting up of the bronze serpent in the wilderness as a type of the crucifixion (John 3:14) and Jesus’s appeal to Ps 82 (“I have said you are gods”) as part of an \textit{a fortiori} argument in defense of his right to be called the Son of God (John 10:34-36), to take two of the more abstruse examples.\textsuperscript{28} The Jesus of Johannine tradition, little interested in messianic proof-texting, draws deep from the scriptural well.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{27} Modern readers might be surprised how heavily Bultmann leans upon the so-called Gnostic Redeemer myth in his commentary, or C. H. Dodd’s frequent recourse to the Hermetica in \textit{The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953). As Barrett (\textit{Gospel according to St. John}, 3) states: “For many years the prevailing critical opinion was that John was ‘the gospel of the Hellenists’; it was written by a Greek thinker for Greeks.” On the turning of the scholarly tide toward Jewish sources and backgrounds, see Meeks, “‘Am I a Jew?’” 163-71.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{28} The rabbinic tradition and the church fathers, to be sure, know of these passages, but unlike Ps 110 or Isa 6, they do not seem to have significantly influenced early Christian thinking about Jesus’s messianic identity or served widely as apologetic arguments. On ancient Jewish interpretation of Num 21, see Jörg Frey, “‘Wie Mose die Schlange in der Wüste erhöht hat . . .’: Zur frühjüdischen Deutung der ‘ehernen Schlange’ und ihrer christologischen Rezeption in Johannes 3,14f,” in \textit{Schriftauslegung im antiken Judentum und im Urchristentum}, ed. Martin Hengel and Hermut Löhr, WUNT 73 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 153-205. On interpretation of Ps 82 in antiquity, both Jewish and Christian, see Carl Mosser, “The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification,” \textit{JTS NS} 56 (2005): 30-74.}
Though its appropriation of Scripture is arguably less intricate, the narrative material shares the same theological sensibility, abounding in quotations and allusions to Israel’s sacred writings and the seminal figures of her past.29 One would be hard pressed to come up with a more appropriate title for John than Andreas Obermann’s Schrifttheologie.30 John, as C. K. Barrett says, may have fewer direct quotations than the Synoptic Gospels, but he has a wide and comprehensive knowledge of the OT.31 From the prologue’s climactic statement that “the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us,” as God dwelt amidst the Israelites in a portable sanctuary, to the people’s grumblings in chs. 6-7, surely meant to recall the incessant murmuring of the Israelites in the desert, through the summary statement closing the Book of Signs that Isaiah had foreseen the people’s hardness and predicted their unbelief (12:37-50), to the


scriptural fulfillment formulas that dot the Book of Glory (13:18; 15:25; 19:24-25, 28), Jesus’s life and the response to him are interpreted through a christological reading of Scripture. It is the natural outgrowth of the Johannine conviction, shared with all the NT authors, that the Scriptures, rightly read, testify to Jesus (John 5:39).

Searching the Scriptures, we discover that relatively little is said about “the Jews” under that name except in Esther, parts of Ezra-Nehemiah, and Jeremiah 40-44, though even then, they do not go entirely without censure.32 The prophetic denunciation in Jer 44 (Jer 51 LXX) is said to concern “all the Jews living in the land of Egypt” (MT: אלה כל־היהודים הישׁבים בארץ מצרים; LXX: ἅπασιν τοῖς Ιουδαίοις τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ).33 Because they have obstinately persisted in their worship of false gods, God has determined to wipe them out, leaving them no remnant in the land to which they have fled for refuge. Never again will the Jews living in Egypt invoke the LORD’s name. In an inversion of the promises of restoration in Jer 29:11-14, God swears, “I am going to watch over them for harm and not for good; all the people of Judah who are in

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33 I give the reading of both the MT and the LXX because the textual forms underlying John’s quotations are not always clear, and he may have quoted at times from memory. Maarten J. J. Menken (Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form, CBET 15 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 205-6) concludes that the LXX is the Bible of the Fourth Evangelist but that he also had occasional recourse to the Hebrew, a view he notes has been propounded by many others (206, n. 1).
the land of Egypt shall perish by the sword and by famine, until not one is left” (44:27). That the divine threats are directed toward “the Jews” is not insignificant insofar as it is an extension of the prophetic critique of Israel and Judah. Nonetheless, this is an isolated example in a vast sea of literature. Despite the evangelist’s scriptural expertise, it cannot safely be assumed that he knew the passage, much less that it shaped his discourse about the Jews.

In contrast to the paucity of material about “the Jews” in the OT, a great deal is said about Israel and Judah, much of it less than flattering. Starting with the prophets, we find not only scathing oracles against kings, priests, and nobility, but also sweeping indictments of Israel and Judah as national entities. Israel, according to the marital metaphor of Hosea (Hos 1-3) and Jeremiah (Jer 2-3), is an unfaithful bride, having run after deceptive courtesans who are impotent to deliver on their promises. She is a “stubborn heifer” (Hos 3:16), a “hard-hearted” people (Ezek 2:4; 3:7), who together have gone astray. The nation of Israel and the people of Judah are the LORD’s vineyard, but when he looked for justice there was only bloodshed, and when he sought righteousness, he heard only cries of distress from the oppressed (Isa 5:1-7). The Israelites, like their ancestors, have rebelled against the LORD, defiling themselves with detestable idols (Ezek 20:1-31).
The sectarians who produced the Damascus Document and the Rule of the Community (1QS) must have imbibed some of this prophetic spirit, for they too fault Israel for national apostasy. The Damascus Document speaks of a time when God “hid his face from Israel and from his sanctuary” because the people had forsaken him (CD I, 3-4). Contemporary Israel apparently had not learned her lesson, for according to CD III, 13-14 they are like Hosea’s stubborn heifer, misled by the “scoffer” and ignorant about the hidden matters “in which all Israel had gone astray.” They have been caught in the demon Belial’s snares, corrupted by wealth, fornication, and ritual defilement (CD IV, 13-18). The Rule of the Community is not much more optimistic about Israel’s spiritual state. As part of the rite of initiation into the community, the Levites are instructed to “rehearse the wicked acts of the children of Israel, all their guilty transgressions and sins committed during the dominion of Belial” (1QS I, 22-24), as a sort of antiphon to the priestly recitation of God’s mercies which precede.

There is no doubt a distancing effect in these pronouncements, but to the extent that they create “others,” this is done from within. That is, the broad-based accusations against Israel and Judah are leveled by those who consciously

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34 Other closely associated texts include the War Scroll, Hodayot, and pesharim. Dimant (“Vocabulary,” 349) notes that this group of texts was very quickly recognized as distinct and has received the designation “sectarian literature” as opposed to that literature which the community at Qumran copied but did not itself create.

35 Israel is further charged with despising the words of the prophets in CD VII, 17-18.
belong to Israel and Judah. It is in that sense criticism of one’s own. Against the background of such texts, John’s language about the Jews becomes less peculiar, more at home within the Jewish tradition. The rancorous debate between Jesus and the Jews in John 8, in that respect, is not altogether different from the LORD’s manifold complaints against the people of Israel in an Isaiah or Hosea, as Stephen Motyer argues. Yet we cannot rest ourselves here, in the first place, because the frequency of “Israel” and “Judah” in these prophetic indictments does not quite compare with the proliferation of “Jews” in the Fourth Gospel, in the second, because I have yet to demonstrate the evangelist’s dependence upon any particular passage or set of themes, leaving us with the unsatisfactory proposition of a vague osmosis from the prophetic books to the Fourth Gospel.

Criticism of the Children of Israel in Exodus-2 Kings

The prophets and those who edited the books under their names were not alone in their disappointment with the people of Israel and Judah, past and present. If the author of Hebrews had it in mind to write a brief history of faith in the famous encomium of ch. 11, those responsible for the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History (Joshua-2 Kings) were deep in the project of writing a

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36 Motyer, *Your Father the Devil?* 146-50.
history of faithlessness. This is a rhetorical way to put it, of course, but the conscious hyperbole is not far from Scripture’s own assessment. The story of the Israelites as told in Exodus-2 Kings is a tale of rebellion: the repeated grumbling against Moses and Aaron, the worship of the golden calf, the wailing to return to Egypt where things were better, the refusal to enter the promised land upon first offer, the repeated lapses into idolatry in the tumultuous period of the judges, the disastrous split between Israel and Judah, and a slew of impious kings, all culminating in exile when the LORD could endure their sin no more. \(^{37}\) Were one to chart Israel’s moral progress, the peaks of covenantal fidelity would be dwarfed by the expansive valleys of disobedience. “It is a story,” as Mary C. Callaway says, “told in the voice of a relentless critic rather than a proud heir.” \(^{38}\)

If I am in danger of one-sidedly amplifying this aspect of ancient Hebrew historiography, it should be remembered that this is the very impression which a number of biblical authors, reflecting on their people’s past history and present spiritual condition, sought to convey. The Deuteronomist is perhaps the most consistently gloomy in this respect. Moses’s charge against the Israelites in Deut 31:27 epitomizes the book’s critical perspective: “For I know well how rebellious


and stubborn you are. If you already have been so rebellious towards the Lord while I am still alive among you, how much more after my death!” Surveying the nation’s history up to the exile of the Northern Kingdom, the author of 2 Kgs 17 concurred. The Israelites “were stubborn, as their ancestors had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God. They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their ancestors, and the warnings that he gave them” (2 Kgs 17:14-15). Rehearsal of the people’s sins, often in the *Sitz im Leben* of communal confession (Pss 78, 106; Neh 9:6-37; Dan 9:1-19), becomes something of a standard form in post-exilic works, recalling and reinforcing the characterization of earlier texts.

Not only so, but when the authors and editors of these narratives criticize their forebears, they often refer to them as the children of Israel. Although we might attribute the philippic in a passage like 2 Kgs 17 in part to a southern bias against the northern kingdom of Israel, most of these critical moral evaluations of the Israelites come from the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges, where they encompass all twelve tribes. We need only remember the chorus of Judges that “the children of Israel did evil in the eyes of the LORD” (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). What we encounter throughout Exodus-2 Kings are authors, editors, and compilers of tradition who will have undoubtedly numbered themselves among the descendants of the patriarch Israel, who are writing for fellow
Israelites, but who for the most part characterize their ancestors as a faithless brood, the mass of covenantal shortcomings relieved by the occasional individual or generational exception. Familiarity with these texts may inure us to their charge of disobedience, so that we miss the peculiarity of the rhetorical situation. It would be like an American writing for compatriots about the sins which “the Americans” have committed—or a Jew writing for other Jews about the stubbornness of “the Jews.” Here we begin to see how the evangelist’s criticism of the Jews might be reasonably interpreted as a family row. He presents his own people like the Scriptures so often present the children of Israel.

Desert Wandering Traditions in the Fourth Gospel

The evangelist knew the Scriptures, Scriptures in which Israel is consistently presented as a wayward people, all too prone to break their end of the solemn agreement with God, and in which criticism of the children of Israel by other Israelites is in no short supply. In theory, he had a template for what he says about the Jews in Scripture’s intramural criticism of the Israelites. But if we are to move beyond suggestion, it must be shown that John did indeed make use of these traditions with their motif of pandemic unbelief.

It can be said with confidence that the Fourth Gospel alludes to the time of Israel’s sojourn in the desert and, moreover, that the evangelist consciously
invokes these stories to characterize both the Gospel’s protagonist and its ancillary actors. Mention has already been made of the lifting up of the snake in the wilderness (Num 21) as a type of Jesus’s crucifixion. The purpose of the comparison is evident as part of the constellation of images associated with Jesus’s death and glorification, but here the context of the source passage seems peripheral to the discourse. The image has been extracted for its own sake.

Elsewhere the evocation of the wilderness stories contributes in central ways to the Gospel’s narrative arc, beginning as one would expect with the prologue, which serves as a sort of “reader’s guide,” as Adele Reinhartz puts it, and in whose light the rest of the Gospel is to be understood.39 Although the vividness of the expression is sometimes masked by nondescript English translations, it can hardly be a coincidence that the sequel to the climactic, “And the Word became flesh” (1:14) is that “he tabernacled among us” (καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν). The verb σκηνόω is cognate to σκηνή, the Greek word for “tent” and the same term used in the LXX for the edifice which the Israelites were instructed to build at Sinai and which accompanied them for the duration of their wanderings in the wilderness.40

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Securing the allusion is the pairing of ἐσκήνωσεν with the author’s claim in the second half of v. 14 to have beheld Jesus’s glory (δόξα). The tabernacle was to be God’s dwelling place in the midst of the people, sanctified by his glory (Exod 29:43). Immediately after Moses finishes setting up the tabernacle and putting all its accoutrements in order, the cloud covers it, and the glory of the LORD fills it, signaling God’s approval of the work (Exod 40:34-35). He has come to live among his people. At times of crisis, the glory of God descends upon the tabernacle to vindicate Aaron and Moses and quash the people’s uprisings (Num 14:10; 16:19, 42; 20:6). As God’s presence accompanies the Israelites in this temporal dwelling and as his glory manifests itself there, so too the Father’s presence is mediated through the Son and the divine glory revealed through Jesus’s signs and words.

It has been plausibly argued that vv. 14-18 play upon a related set of images drawn from Moses’s encounter with the LORD on Sinai in Exod 33-34.

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Jewish wisdom speculation, above all with Sir 24:8, most see in John 1:14 some allusion to the tabernacle and/or temple as the locus of God’s presence among the Israelites. A notable exception is Bultmann (Gospel of John, 66) who, as is his Tendenz, makes little of the OT connections.

41 Noted especially by Hoskyns, Fourth Gospel, 148: “The phrase [“and we beheld his glory”] develops what is implied in the word tabernacled and demanded by the phrase became flesh.” Also Brown, Gospel according to John, 1:34; J. Ramsey Michaels, The Gospel of John, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 79.

42 So in detail Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, “John 1:14-18 and Exodus 34,” NTS 23 (1976): 90-101; also Craig A. Evans, Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John’s Prologue, JSNTSup 89 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 79-82. Although it is likely that not all commentators would describe Exod 33-34 as the “guiding imagery” of John 1:14-18, as Keener (Gospel of John, 405) does, nearly all find some allusion to this scene or to exodus symbolism more
The latter, it will be recalled, recounts Moses’s request to see God’s glory. The LORD obliges his servant but on the condition that Moses will only catch a glimpse of the LORD’s back as he passes by. After proclaiming his name before Moses, the LORD relays another set of commandments that Moses, in turn, is to teach the people. The Law, presumably encompassing all of the Pentateuchal legislation, is the express subject of John 1:17. Expanding upon the statement in v. 16 that from Jesus we have received grace upon grace (καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος), the evangelist writes, “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” The “we” of the prologue situate themselves in a position like that of Moses before God. Just as in Exod 34 Moses beholds God’s glory, so too the anonymous bearers of the tradition have beheld the divine glory in Jesus, revealed, as we later learn, through the signs which he performs (2:11). Just as the LORD warns Moses in Exod 33:20 that no one may see his face and live, John 1:18 affirms that no one has ever seen God, even as the Son makes him known (similarly John 14:7-9). And just as God by his very nature responds to Israel with חסד ואמת (Exod 34:6), the divine loving-kindness

broadly; similarly Johannes Beutler, Das Johannesevangelium: Kommentar (Freiburg: Herder, 2013), 94.
and faithfulness which become so prominent in Jewish tradition, Jesus comes from the Father full of grace and truth (πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας, 1:14).43

The conjunction of motifs does not seem to be arbitrary. The evangelist, I would argue, has read the theophany to Moses at Sinai and God’s presence with the people of Israel in the tabernacle as Christophanies, just as Justin Martyr and many church fathers later would.44 The apophatic profession that no one has ever seen God presents a conundrum, since the OT records several divine apparitions, some of which the evangelist must have been aware of. Who was it, then, that appeared to the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets? That it was the Word who spoke face to face with Moses in the tent of meeting and who proclaimed his name on the mountain is wholly consistent with the Gospel’s Christology.45 Abraham saw Jesus’s day (8:56). Isaiah beheld his glory (12:41). Moses knew him as a man knows a friend. It is in this sense that Moses’s status is relativized. Jesus is greater than Moses in the same way that the God who appears to Moses in the

43 At Exod 34:6 the LXX reads πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινός. Nonetheless, that the evangelist alludes to the passage, perhaps directly to the Hebrew, is now close to a consensus position. So Wayne A. Meeks, The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology, NovTSup 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 288, n. 2; Reim, Studien zum altestamentlichen Hintergrund, 140; Hanson, “John 1:14-18”; idem, Prophetic Gospel, 25, in addition to many commentators. Bultmann (Gospel of John, 74) is again an exception. He rejects any allusion to Exod 34:6, since he judges that the Johannine concepts of grace and truth are more indebted to Greek thought.


45 So also Hanson, Prophetic Gospel, 21, 166.
burning bush and on Mt. Sinai is greater than his chosen servant, for it was the pre-incarnate Jesus who revealed himself and accompanied the people.

I believe that a compelling case can be made for reading the Gospel as an extended theophany of sorts, a balanced version of Ernst Käsemann’s “God striding over the Earth” that does due justice to the fact that the Word did indeed become flesh. Yet however fruitful that line of interpretation may (or may not) be, it is clear that from the very start the evangelist intends to relate the story of Jesus to the story of God’s past dealings with his chosen people.

The association of Jesus with God’s presence in the tabernacle and with the revelation of the divine name to Moses on Sinai anchors the evangelist’s soaring estimation of Jesus’s person and work in Scripture. The appropriation of wilderness traditions also serves the opposite purpose, namely, to ground the opposition to Jesus in those same Scriptures and to portray Jesus’s adversaries as reenacting the unbelief of their forebears, a mode of characterization that is most transparent in the “Bread of Life” discourse in John 6:25-59. Both the temporal setting of the events of John 6 (according to 6:4 the Passover was near) and the content of the speech itself (the raining down of manna from heaven) recall the liberation from Egypt and Israel’s hardships upon their exit. So when the.

\[46\] The German is “über die Erde schreitende Gott” from Käsemann’s, Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966), 22. Ashton (John and Christian Origins, 157, n. 1) notes possible antecedents to Käsemann’s famous phrase in the works of Wrede and Bultmann.
crowd’s innocent inquisitiveness turns to grumbling, now attributed to the Jews (6:41), one is undoubtedly intended to think of the complaints of the children of Israel to Moses in Exod 16 and of God’s subsequent intervention in spite of their lack of faith.47 Ruth Sheridan’s recent remarks are apropos: “For the ancestors of ‘the Jews’ at Sinai, God’s glory was seen prior to the manna miracle; in John 6, Jesus implicitly claims to embody God’s glory insofar as he reveals himself to be the life-giving bread from heaven. And as in the Exodus story, where the ancestors did not come into a deeper knowledge of God as a result of beholding his glory, so ‘the Jews’—despite claiming to ‘know’ Jesus (6:42)—do not know him, do not receive his life and do not know God.”48

This characterization applies first and foremost to those in the immediate context, the Jewish crowds who had been with Jesus on the other side of the lake and who partook of the miraculous meal. At the same time, their response is not isolated, as we have seen, and so it is natural to ask whether the evangelist carries this line of thought farther or adopts it more comprehensively. We know that he interpreted the cold reception that Jesus received from his own people theologically. That is to say, it was God himself who blinded the people’s eyes

47 This is almost universally noted by commentators. See also the recent studies of Susan Hylen, Allusion and Meaning in John 6, BZNW 137 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005) and Sheridan, Retelling Scripture: “The Jews” and the Scriptural Citations in John 1:19-12:15, BibInt 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 135-58. Bultmann (Gospel of John, 229) briefly considers the connection but does lend it much weight.

48 Sheridan, Retelling Scripture, 157.
and hardened their hearts, as Isaiah had prophesied according to John 12:39-40.

The summary of Jesus’s public ministry resonates with the lament of the prologue that “he was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (1:10-11). In the final verdict, they could not receive him.

Although John 12:37-50 draws most directly from Isaiah, it may also allude secondarily to a set of passages from Numbers and Deuteronomy. We have just seen that the grumbling of the Jews in John 6 is very likely meant to recall Exod 16. This, of course, is neither the first nor the only time that the children of Israel are said to murmur against God. The first report of popular discontent comes in Exod 15:22-24, right after the people cross the sea, and escalates in Exod 16:1-3 and 17:1-3. It is reprised once more in Num 11:1-3 and in 14:1-2, where the rebellion reaches murderous proportions. God himself is ready to wipe out the people and start over but relents at Moses’s behest. The exegetical technique of word association, known from the rules of Hillel as *gezera shawa* but practiced by many ancient Jewish interpreters, alongside the contextual similarities between the stories, make them prime candidates for a synoptic reading. Several psalmists (Pss 78 and 106) had already taken that step,
stringing these stories together in condensed form as a reminder of Israel’s history of rebellion.

Intriguing in this respect are the conceptual and verbal parallels between John 12:37 and Num 14:11.49 The evangelist, it is true, nowhere quotes from the story of the spies’ exploration of Canaan, their discouraging report to the people, and the Israelites’ subsequent mutiny against Moses and Aaron in Num 13-14, but the resemblances between this narrative and Exod 16 make John’s acquaintance with it likely. Besides the similarity in narrative form established at the outset through the *Leitwort* “murmur” (Hb: לון, Gk: γογγύζω/διαγογγύζω), both passages recount the people’s disingenuous wish to have died in Egypt.50 And in each pericope, God deems it necessary to act on his own behalf, manifesting his glory in the sight of all the people.51 We may further note that in Num 14:18 Moses appeals to the proclamation of the divine attributes from Exod 34:6–7 to persuade God to forgive the people. If John 1:1-18 alludes to the events

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50 Ex 16:3: וַיַּצֶּרֶנָה כְּבוֹד יְהוָה בְּעַנָּן/καὶ εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτούς οἱ νεοὶ Ισραήλ ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν ἠθέτανομεν πληγέντες υπὸ κυρίου ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ; Num 14:2: καὶ θεὸς αὐτοῖς καὶ εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτούς πάσα ἡ συναγωγή ἀπεθάνων ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν ἠθέτανομεν ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ, ἢ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ταύτῃ εἰ ἀπεθάνουμεν.

51 Ex 16:10: γνώστω καὶ ἐὰν κυρίον ἄφοθη ἐν νεφελήν; Num 14:10: γνώστω καὶ ἐὰν κυρίον ἄφοθη ἐν νεφελή ἐπὶ τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου. The two passages are more closely aligned in the LXX with its inclusion of the cloud in Num 14:10.
of Exod 33-34, as seems to be the case, this lends further support to the supposition that John knew the story in Num 13-14 as well.

As already mentioned, John 12:37-50 serves as a summary to the Book of Signs, capping it off with a sober acknowledgment of the people’s lack of faith: “Even after Jesus had done all these signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.” The exasperation echoes God’s impassioned reaction to the Israelites’ refusal to enter Canaan. Having received the disheartening report from ten of the spies, the people raise their voices in despair (14:1-4). While the Israelites contemplate stoning Moses and Aaron (v. 10), the glory of the LORD appears at the tent of meeting. The LORD is incensed: “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them” (v. 11)? Although the evangelist does not quote Num 14:11 verbatim, he matches each element except for the interrogative. Grouping the corresponding parts of the sentences together, we may compare them as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John 12:37</th>
<th>Num 14:11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>τοσαύτα σημεία</td>
<td>πάσιν τοῖς σημείοις βασιλείας</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>αὐτοῦ πεποιηκότος ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν</td>
<td>οἷς ἐποίησα ἐν αὐτοῖς</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When we allow for the conversion of a first-person question into a third-person statement within its own context, John 12:37 comes quite close to Num 14:11 in both language and tone.\textsuperscript{52}

One other passage is worth mentioning here. Brown has observed that John 12:37-50 is reminiscent of Moses’s farewell address to the Israelites in Deut 29:1-4.\textsuperscript{53} Conceptually, Deut 29:1-4 follows the same pattern as Num 14:11. Despite the LORD’s powerful work on behalf of his people, they have not responded with commensurate fidelity. They have seen everything that God did for them in Egypt, the signs and great wonders, but “to this day the LORD has not given you a heart that understands, eyes that see, or ears that hear.” The points of contact between John 12:37-41 and Deut 29:1-4 are threefold. First, of

\textsuperscript{52} It bears noting in this connection that Targum Onqelos replaces “me” in Num 14:11 with “my Word” (Targum Neofiti: “the name of my Word”). See John Ronning, \textit{The Jewish Targums and John’s Logos Theology} (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 29-30, 177-78. As suggestive as this may be, the extant targums post-date the Fourth Gospel, and so due caution must be exercised.

As Fletcher (\textit{Signs in the Wilderness}, 84, n. 74) observes, an allusion to Num 14:11 in John 12:37 fares well against the criteria which Richard B. Hays lays out in his influential \textit{Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-32. In effect, what I have just been doing is implicitly applying Hays’s criteria of availability, volume, and thematic coherence.

course, is the content of the summary itself. God has done miraculous works on behalf of his people, but to little effect on their attitudes toward him. Second, there are the shared verbal links with Isa 6:1-10, the trio of hearts, eyes, and ears (though John leaves out the last of these) that are not working as they should. Third, in Deut 29:1-4, as in Isa 6, the LORD is the agent—in some mysterious sense the cause of the people’s unbelief. He has not given them the ability to understand.

How far John 12:37 depends upon these passages, individually or together, need not be determined with absolute precision to see that the evangelist’s summary follows a recurrent theme from Exodus to Deuteronomy. God does signs and miracles, great deeds to rescue his people and to sustain them. With outstretched arm, he reveals himself to Israel. The signs are meant to elicit faith, but Israel disobeys and rebels time after time. The divine kindness and provision are repaid with complaint and provocation. The Fourth Gospel, I suggest, recapitulates this narrative in broad strokes. Jesus dwells among the people as God travels with the children of Israel in the tabernacle. He reveals his glory through signs which are invitations to belief just as the LORD displays his

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54 Evans, Word and Glory, 140: “It is apparent that the Fourth Evangelist’s understanding of faith, or the lack of it, is significantly informed by traditions relating to Moses, especially in reference to God’s mighty works and ‘signs.’” So also Marianne Maye Thompson, “Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel,” BBR 1 (1991): 89-108.
glory in great signs and wonders. Sometimes the people respond in faith, but more often than not the miracles do not achieve their intended result. The contemporaries of Jesus are like their ancestors in the wilderness. The characterization of the Jewish crowd in John 6 would seem to apply to the Johannine Jews in a more comprehensive way.

Children of Israel: Frequency of Expression and Intensity of Criticism

It is the more difficult task to show that the affinities between the Johannine presentation of the Jews and the scriptural presentation of Israel extend to patterns in nomenclature, but there are reasons to think that here too John owes some debt to the wilderness narratives. Although these stories refer to the people in a variety of ways, בנים של ישראל ("children of Israel" or "Israelites") is the designation of choice. Its use at times is extraordinarily dense, occurring in Exod 16, for instance, ten times in the span of thirty-six verses. This frequency of use in the context of a generally disparaging evaluation of the people’s behavior has a striking effect. That we typically reserve the name “Israelites” for the ancient people tends to dull the sting, but if for the sake of analogy we substitute “Jews” in these narratives for “children of Israel,” the sharp edge of the criticism is immediately felt. Thus modified, Exod 16:1-11 would read:
The whole congregation of the Jews set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the Jews complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Jews said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you ...” So Moses and Aaron said to all the Jews, “In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?”

Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Jews, ‘Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.’” And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Jews, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, “I have heard the complaining of the Jews; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”

It would be misleading, of course, to label this anti-Jewish just as it would be to describe the original stories as anti-Israelite. But had we not known or reasonably surmised the author’s ethnic self-identification in advance, we might very well come to that conclusion. There is a seeming air of hostility hovering over the story, a sense of distance and alienation from the Israelites. It may sound like an
outsider roundly censuring “the other.” It is in reality a group of insiders critical of their ancestors.

The criticism of the Israelites in Exod 16 is relatively mild when set next to a passage like Num 14. If we again substitute “Jews” for “Israelites,” the tone of the passage grows almost sinister. “All the Jews” grumble against Moses and Aaron (Num 14:2). The LORD himself, having heard “the complaints of the Jews” (v. 27), rebukes them as a wicked congregation and vows that their bodies will fall in the wilderness (vv. 27-35). The constant refrain of Judges too takes on an ominous quality: “The Jews did evil in the eyes of LORD.” And yet in their original context, these are all in-house, intergenerational jabs. Thus Israel’s Scriptures and especially the desert-wandering narratives, evince that same intersection of frequency of nomenclature with critical disapproval of the people’s behavior that otherwise seems so peculiar to the Fourth Gospel. John retells Scripture, or rather, he has interpreted the events of Jesus’s ministry

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55 Although ancient historians, playwrights, and poets were more than capable of finding fault with the civic or ethnic bodies to which they belonged, the Hebrew Scriptures do seem to be sui generis in the persistence and scope of their internal criticism.

56 This might be viewed against the background of in-group criticism more generally, a phenomenon which has received some attention in the field of social psychology. Of note is that intra- and inter-group criticisms are perceived differently and that in-group criticism itself is often received in a relatively generous way, at least in private. See Matthew J. Hornsey, Tina Oppes, and Alicia Svensson, ”It’s OK if We Say It, But You Can’t: Responses to Intergroup and Intragroup Criticism,” European Journal of Social Psychology 32 (2002): 293-307; Matthew J. Hornsey, ”Ingroup Critics and Their Influence on Groups,” in Individuality and the Group: Advances in Social Identity, ed. Tom Postmes and Jolanda Jetten (London: Sage, 2006), 74-91.
through Israel’s story as he knew them from those Scriptures. He, like the
tradents of Exodus-2 Kings, is a relentless critic, or nearly so. Such cutting
theological assessment had long been part of Israel’s counterintuitive way of
telling its history.

**Conclusion**

As I made clear at the beginning of this study, because of the Gospel’s
anonymity, any judgment about its author’s ethnic identity must be tentative.
What I have nonetheless tried to show is *how* an author who thought of himself
as Jewish could say the sorts of things that the evangelist says about the
Ἰούδαιοι. He writes in imitation of the Scriptures, troubled over what he
perceives as an inexplicable lack of faith on the part of most, though by no means
all, of Jesus’s compatriots. It is an internal critique like the sort we find in the
prophets but transposed into a historical narrative, the Pauline dilemma of
Israel’s unbelief as it was thought to have played out in Jesus’s own life. It could
only be fathomed as the inscrutable will of God. He had blinded their eyes and
stopped up their ears.

John, of course, is not Paul, though the two have often been yoked in
Christian theology. Whatever the affinities between the two—and these, I
believe, are more than superficial—we ought not to smuggle in ideas that are
possibly foreign to the Fourth Gospel.\footnote{A recent assessment of the relationship between Johannine and Pauline literature can be found in Jürgen Becker, “Das Verhältnis des johanneischen Kreises zum Paulinismus: Anregungen zur Belebung einer Diskussion,” in Paulus und Johannes: Exegetische Studien zur paulinischen und johanneischen Theologie und Literatur, ed. Dieter Sänger and Ulrich Mell, WUNT 198 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 473-95.} It must be reiterated, therefore, that in themselves the foregoing observations do not and indeed cannot prove that the evangelist thought of himself as a Jew or that he will have lamented Israel’s state of unbelief, as Paul does with such pathos in Rom 9-11. The marshaling of Israel’s holy writings against the Jewish people and religion by non-Jewish Christians in an attempt to show that God had rejected them in favor of the church is too pervasive among the church fathers to warrant the inference. “It has never been strange,” as Raimo Hakola remarks, “to Christian anti-Jewish tradition based on supersessionism to hold to the Jewish Scriptures, or to maintain that Jesus was really a Jew,” or, for that matter, to turn the Jewish people’s sacred writings against them in accusations of hypocrisy, obstinacy, or blindness.\footnote{Hakola, Identity Matters, 240.} Given that history, it is not surprising that the Johannine appropriation of Israel’s legacy has been and continues to be construed as the plundering of what the evangelist or his community thought valuable in the Jewish tradition and the concomitant rejection of the rest, the people themselves being tossed out with the supposed chaff.
What I regard as improbable is that a Jewish Christian author or community of the first or early-second century, one that in other respects claimed Israel’s heritage as its own rightful possession, would have conceded their identity as Jews, whatever external pressures confronted them, and that it is through the lens of this process of separation that the evangelist’s statements about the Jews are best understood. If the criticism of the Jews is indeed hatred, those responsible for the vitriol probably never numbered themselves among the Jewish people. The sides were never married; there could be no divorce.

But if we are not permitted to foreclose upon the possibility of a gentile author because of the inherent limits of our evidence, several generations of scholarship and our improved knowledge of first-century Judaism have put the onus squarely on any who would venture to advocate the position. Judith Lieu, among others, is right to question the logical consistency of bland appeals to John’s Jewishness, as if this could somehow diffuse any potential anti-Judaism. But if we are not permitted to foreclose upon the possibility of a gentile author because of the inherent limits of our evidence, several generations of scholarship and our improved knowledge of first-century Judaism have put the onus squarely on any who would venture to advocate the position. Judith Lieu, among others, is right to question the logical consistency of bland appeals to John’s Jewishness, as if this could somehow diffuse any potential anti-Judaism.59

The appropriation of Jewish exegesis, Scripture, and motifs does not tell us what the evangelist thought of the people themselves or of his relationship to them. But when we advert ourselves to how the evangelist makes use of Scripture and view this together with the Fourth Gospel’s familiarity with first-century

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Palestine and the Semitic flavoring of its style, the criticism of the Ἰουδαῖοι starts
to look more of one piece with the more benign aspects of the Gospel’s
Jewishness. The harsh statements to and about the Jews are at home within the
diverse Jewish fold. In the eyes of the evangelist, many, probably most, of Jesus’s
contemporaries in Palestine were blind to the manifestation of God’s glory
through Jesus. Though the lack of faith was not universal, true believers were in
the minority. The disregard for God’s revelation was not unique; Israel had
hardened their hearts before. The story of Jesus as John recounts it brings this
drama of faith and unbelief forward into his own day.
CONCLUSION

JOHANNINE “ANTI-JUDAISM” IN RETROSPECT

Among the many distortions of the Bible that infested Nazi-era Germany, one of the most absurd came from the hand of Johannes Hempel, then professor of OT at Göttingen. While others were anxious to discard the OT as a corrupting influence on a pure, völkisch Christianity, Hempel saw its lasting value as “the most strongly anti-Semitic book of world literature.”¹ The claim is absurd not because these Scriptures are rosy about Israel’s history as a people. As we have seen, sustained criticism of the Israelites is endemic to many of the OT writings. Hempel’s statement is so outlandish, rather, because it exteriorizes a critique that was meant for insiders and turns it into a weapon to assault the Jewish people.

I mention Hempel’s assertion not in the first place for the sake of analogy to the Fourth Gospel but to illustrate once more the part that an author’s social location plays in the assessment of harsh or seemingly polemical language.² The


² Though the results of this study do lean toward the view that those who have marshaled texts like John 8:44 to incite violence against or antipathy toward the Jewish people have done so against the evangelist’s intention. Nevertheless, it has not been my objective to
harangues of the Hebrew Scriptures against Israel and Judah and, say, the virulence masked as harsh mercy of Martin Luther’s *On the Jews and Their Lies* are as far apart in intention as in time. Yet without knowing in advance whether an author speaks from within the group that he or she criticizes or whether the barbs originate from outside its boundaries, the lines can begin to blur. Detached from their context, the silhouettes of internal critic and external foe are not always easily distinguishable. The question of the Gospel’s language about the Jews is therefore also a question about its author’s self-understanding.

**Summary of Chapters**

Whence does the Fourth Evangelist write, not in terms of geography but in terms of social and ethnic self-identification? That is the chief question I have attempted to answer in the course of this study. It is my contention that the arguments against an intra-Jewish reading of the Gospel of John are not insuperable. The Gospel’s simultaneous indebtedness to Jewish tradition and persistent criticism of the Jews arguably stems from a Jewish author who portrays Jesus’s contemporaries as recapitulating the failings of their Israelite forbears.

chronicle or assess the reception history of the Fourth Gospel with respect to its criticism of the Jews.
J. Louis Martyn, with many others in train, placed John and his community in a setting of social ferment and transition. Ethnic Jews who had come to believe in Jesus now found themselves cut off from the heart of Jewish communal life. As a threatened minority, they reciprocated the anger directed at them by renouncing their own Jewish identity and projecting this new state of relations back into the life of Jesus. I argued in ch. 1 that for all its explanatory power, this aspect of the synagogue-expulsion hypothesis stands in need of reassessment. The purported evidence for ethnically Jewish believers in Jesus relinquishing the name Ἰουδαῖοι is unreliable or ambiguous. The internal evidence of the Gospel also tells against a renunciation of Jewish identity on the part of the evangelist. John exhibits what I have called a sectarian mentality, claiming Israel’s heritage for Jesus and his followers and denying it to Jesus’s opponents. According to the consensus reading, we must envision a group of ethnically Jewish believers in Jesus who asserted their continuity with Israel’s past and their right to the name “Israel” but rejected the title “Jew” for themselves.

In chs. 2 through 5, I proposed an alternative reading of the Gospel as intra-Jewish critique, first reevaluating the evangelist’s characterization of the Jews (chs. 2-3) and then situating the Johannine polemic in the biblical tradition of intra-Jewish critique (ch. 5) with an eye in ch. 4 to particular cruces interpretum.
On the whole, the Johannine Jews are indeed portrayed as unreceptive of Jesus. They are very often Jesus’s staunch opponents. Nevertheless, to reduce all Jews in the narrative to this role does not do justice to their diversity of response. Some of the Gospel’s Jewish characters are sympathetic to Jesus. Among other groups of Jews, there is division. A few individuals put their faith in Jesus.

This dialectic of division, I endeavored to show in ch. 2, is not undone by the frequency of the phrase οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι nor its ostensible erasure of internal differentiation. When other Jewish authors of roughly this period (above all, Josephus) speak of “Jews” or “the Jews,” only context indicates which group of Jews is acting at that point in the narrative. Sometimes the reference is to the customs or beliefs of the Jewish people at large, but often it is much narrower: the Jews of a particular time and place whose actions may or may not be representative of their people. The Fourth Gospel exhibits a similar pattern. The Jews of 11:36, for example, are specifically those Jews (or more accurately, some of them) who have come to visit Mary and Martha to mourn for Lazarus. We must always be asking which particular subset of the Jews the evangelist has in mind, for the referent of the term expands and contracts throughout the Gospel. Thus a statement about the Jews in one part of the Gospel cannot necessarily be transferred to those in another section. The name “Jew” has not become synonymous with someone who opposes Jesus. In this way, positive Jewish
responses to Jesus can stand alongside the Gospel’s pronounced theme of the rejection of Jesus by “his own.”

Nor is this dialectic of faith and unbelief within the Jewish people collapsed through a process of alienation (ch. 3). That is, the Fourth Evangelist does not disassociate Jesus from the Jewish people or oppose Jewish identity and faith in Christ as mutually exclusive. Although John has assuredly reinterpreted Jewish custom and practice through a christological lens and subordinated them to faith in Jesus, it is hard to extrapolate much about the religious life of the evangelist or those for whom he writes. Moreover, when Jesus, the disciples, or John the Baptist are said to perform some action in relation to the Jews, it is likely of little import, since even Caiaphas is said to have advised the Jews (18:14). Given that it is not only Jesus and his disciples who are set over against the Jews and that Jesus’s status as a Jew is fundamental to the Gospel’s Christology, it is best to interpret the juxtaposition as a literary convention. John would have been familiar with this way of speaking from the OT, as the people of Israel and its leaders are often distinguished without implying that the latter do not belong to the former.

Chapters 2 and 3 are meant as a corrective to readings of the Gospel that universalize Jewish unbelief. Yet to say that John does not stereotype the Jews is not to neutralize the Gospel’s criticism of them. Some rationale must be given for
the evangelist’s preference for the designation οἱ Ἰουνᾶιοι over others that were available and why he presents them in so bleak a light. My principal contribution to this question (ch. 5) is that the criticism of the Jews in the Fourth Gospel is modeled after the intramural criticism of the Israelites in the OT. John 1:1-18 and 12:37-50 frame the typology. Jesus manifests the glory of God, but just as the Israelites rebelled against God in the wilderness, so too Jesus’s contemporaries refused to believe in spite of the signs which he performed. This does not in itself establish that John thought of himself as a member of the Jewish people, but it discloses a vantage point from which that inference becomes more reasonable. As a Jewish author, John draws upon the stories and traditions that he knew best in order to depict Jesus’s contemporaries.

To a lesser extent, other factors may have contributed to the frequency of the ethnonym “the Jews” in the Fourth Gospel. I argued in the first half of ch. 5 that despite the many unknowns about the Gospel’s recipients, the explanation of Jewish customs intimates that at least some were Gentiles unfamiliar with aspects of Jewish life, culture, and ritual. If so, the evangelist may have suited his terminology for those less attuned to the various parties in mid-first-century Judea. Moreover, in ch. 4, I entertained the possibility that John did not view greater Judea as monolithically Jewish. Jesus teaches and performs signs primarily among the Jews, but Samaritans, Γαλιλαῖοι, and foreign visitors to
Jerusalem also have minor roles to play in the Gospel. Consciousness of a multi-ethnic Palestine could help explain why the Gospel occasionally differentiates the Jews from some other group when this would otherwise seem superfluous. Nevertheless, these potential influences on John’s patterns in nomenclature stand in a secondary position, supplementing the main argument of ch. 5.

**Implications and Reflections**

In a play on (and sharpening of) C. K. Barrett’s dictum that the Gospel of John is both Jewish and anti-Jewish, Wayne A. Meeks remarks that it is most anti-Jewish at precisely those points that it is most Jewish.\(^3\) By that he means that the Gospel voices its criticism of the Jews through appeal to Jewish tradition and Scripture.\(^4\) It attacks a people in their native language, so to speak. The results of this study suggest that this Jewish/anti-Jewish dichotomy separates into two opposing mentalities what in reality belongs together. That is not to say that the evangelist was double minded, in turns pro- and anti-Jewish but rather that he occupied a

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\(^3\) Meeks, “‘Am I a Jew?’” 172.

\(^4\) Similarly, Ashton, *Understanding*, 64-65. To be more precise, according to Meeks (“‘Am I a Jew?’” 172-76), it is an appeal to those traditions and Scriptures as transformed by the Christian community that stands behind the Gospel. Aspects of that tradition, he says, have been so distorted in the Gospel that they become “virtually a parody” of actual Jewish beliefs, straw men set up for easy refutation by irony (172).
liminal position as a self-conscious member of the Jewish people who believed that most of “his own” had gone astray.

The immediate implication is that the Fourth Gospel serves as a witness to the separation of Christianity and Judaism in only a qualified sense. It could be said from the outside that two religions were forming or had already formed, but this is not how John casts it. And if we put it in terms of ethnic self-identification, John, by my account, would have denied that any separation had occurred.

On this score, it could be asked to what extent the author of Luke-Acts shares in that perspective, since the presentation of the Jews in the Gospel of John and the book of Acts run parallel in important respects. If Paul’s letters are now typically read against a Jewish background and the Gospel of Matthew still within the orbit of Judaism, Acts continues to divide commentators. Like the Gospel of John, it combines frequency of the expression “the Jews,” concentrated in Acts 13-28, with critical disapproval of their behavior. And arguably more so than the Fourth Gospel, allusions to and quotations of Scripture structure the grand sweep of both it and the Gospel of Luke. Yet in some ways, the book of Acts is more perplexing because of its extremes, a Torah-observant Paul, for example, contrasted with the pronounced motif of the turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-47; 18:8; 28:28, already Luke 4:14-30). By nuancing the scheme of Jewish
versus anti-Jewish proclivities and attending to the social and psychological
layers of self-identity, the problem might be amenable to reexamination.

The wider implication is that the process of separation between Jews and
Christians, this “parting of the ways” as it has come to be known, can and ought
to be viewed from many angles. Not only must we ask when and where a
separation occurred, eschewing the model of a one-time definitive split or simple
linear progression, but the very notion of separation must be considered in its
various facets: the self-perception of the groups and individuals in question, the
emergence of distinctive social structures and practices, and patterns of social
interaction, among others. Each yields part of the story. Pieced together they
create a much richer (and more complex) narrative.

Richer and more complex, however, does not mean that the resulting
account of the parting of the ways will be any less challenging to modern Jewish
and Christian sensibilities. In our case, even if the Fourth Evangelist felt an
abiding attachment to the Jewish people and even if he would look aghast at
what some have made of his words, as a Jewish believer in Jesus he occupies

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5 As is increasingly recognized. Judith Lieu (“‘Parting of the Ways,’” 119) aptly
summarizes thus: “In trying to make sense of the uncertainties of the early history of Christianity
it may prove to be theologica

[Text continues on the next page]
what in the development of Judaism and Christianity quickly became a no man’s
land, caught between church and synagogue. And if in the end it proves
misleading to categorize John’s polemic as anti-Jewish, this does not soften the
Gospel’s christological exclusivism. The equation of faith in Jesus with
faithfulness to Israel’s God is no less stark from whatever quarter it originates.

Conclusion

One of the appeals of Martyn’s two-level reading is its specificity. He invites the
reader to imagine life in John’s city, to consider the day-to-day experiences of a
small band of beleaguered Christians, to hear in the exalted cadences of Jesus the
voice of a preacher in this community. My own account of the Gospel’s historical
setting remains more impressionistic: a Jewish author writing from somewhere
in the Greek-speaking world for an audience about which we know relatively
little, an author who interprets Jesus’s earthly ministry and the hostility it
aroused on the analogy of God’s relationship with wayward Israel.

If according to my reconstruction the precise historical circumstances of
the Gospel’s composition fade partially from view, John’s theological
perspective, the asymmetry between God’s revelation and the human response
to it, becomes more prominent. The daily experience of the evangelist or the
community of Johannine Christians is probably beyond recovery, but perhaps in
the evangelist’s attitude toward Jesus’s Jewish contemporaries we are able to retrieve something of the internal tension of a marginal Jew.
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