

Reading John to Understand the Ascension and Exaltation of Jesus

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θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα μεγαλωσύνη
κράτος καὶ ἐξουσία πρὸ παντὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς
αἰῶνας

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Noli me tangere

Antonio Correggio (c.1489–1534). “Touch me not” — oil on wood panel from Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

Image: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-14/antonio-corregio-noli-me-tangere/5453226> accessed 17th Mar 2015.

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Abbreviations

BDAG	<i>A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature</i> , 2nd ed.
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> .
ESV	<i>The Holy Bible: English Standard Version</i> .
HCSB	<i>The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version</i> .
KJV	<i>King James Version</i> .
NA28	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , Nestle-Aland, 28th ed.
NIV	<i>The New International Version</i> . Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
NIV87	<i>The New International Version</i> . Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987.
RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version</i> .

Synopsis

Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ” (20:17 ESV)

λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς· μή μου ἅπτου, οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς· ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεὸν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν. (20:17 NA28)

What does Jesus mean when he speaks of his ascension in John 20:17? When and where does this ascension occur? How does the Johannine ascension relate to the way the ascension is depicted in Luke-Acts?

Many commentators approach John with the assumption that where there are tensions in harmonizing John with Luke-Acts, the chronology of Luke-Acts is to be preferred. This has a significant impact on how they read the text. Readings of John 20, preoccupied with harmonization questions, tend to misread elements in John’s narrative and read into the text elements of the Luke-Acts account that are not present in John’s narrative. This is particularly evident when the presentations of the ascension in John and Luke-Acts narratives are compared.

This paper conducts a reader-response experiment that postpones questions of Gospel harmonization and seeks to understand the Johannine ascension announcement in John 20:17, firstly within the immediate context of the John 20 narrative, then within the wider narrative context of the entire Fourth Gospel, and finally seeking to understand how the Johannine ascension relates to the ascension account in Luke-Acts. Reading John and Luke-Acts as texts in their own right that challenge and complement the perspective of the other, yields a rich and well-rounded theology of the resurrection, the ascension, the exaltation and the role of the Spirit. Counterintuitively, reading John first, before asking questions about harmonization, opens up intriguing and satisfying possibilities for harmonizing John 20 with Luke-Acts.

This paper demonstrates that the Johannine ascension is a *relational reunion* with the Father, as distinct from the *spatial translation* to heaven in Luke’s account. The Johannine ascension is more akin to what Systematic Theologians call the *exaltation* of Jesus.

Chapter 1. Setting the Scene

1.1 Introduction

The ascension is a significant focus of John's Gospel. Unlike Luke who provides an explicit farewell ascension scene in Luke 24 and then again in Acts 1 that terminates the earthly ministry of Jesus, in John, Jesus continues to come and go without any decisive closure to his earthly appearances. Yet despite this apparent lack of closure, a coming ascension event is repeatedly prefigured throughout John, including the dramatic ascension announcement in 20:17, but the Gospel ends without this event being explicitly narrated.

This thesis will examine the unique contribution of the Fourth Gospel to an understanding of the ascension and exaltation of Jesus. What did Jesus mean when he spoke of his ascension in John 20:17? When and where does this ascension occur? What is the nature of this ascension? How does it relate to the ascension of Jesus in Luke-Acts?¹

1.2 Thesis

This paper will argue for 6 related propositions regarding the Johannine ascension.

- a) John's ascension event and the Luke-Acts ascension event are describing two historically distinct events.
- b) The Johannine ascension is a *relational reunion* with the Father, as distinct from the *spatial translation* away from earth to heaven in Luke's account. The Johannine ascension is more akin to what Systematic Theologians call the *exaltation* of Jesus.²
- c) This relational *going to the Father* via the cross that Jesus refers to repeatedly in John 13-17 has begun but has not come to completion when Jesus appears to Mary in 20:17. It culminates in the Spirit bestowal of 20:22 which inaugurates

¹ *Luke-Acts* refers to the two volume work *The Gospel of Luke* and *The Acts of the Apostles*. Context will make clear whether *Luke* refers to the Gospel of Luke or to the implied author of Luke-Acts. Likewise, *John* refers to either the Fourth Gospel or the implied author of the Fourth Gospel.

² The term *exaltation* is defined and discussed in detail in section 5.1.

the perichoretic union of the disciples with the Father and the Son. The Johannine ascension announcement (20:17) emphasises, not the physical remoteness of Jesus (as in the Luke-Acts ascension) but rather the ongoing relational connectedness of the disciples with both the risen Son and his Father via the indwelling of the Spirit. In effect, the announcement of Jesus to Mary in 20:17 is, *There is no need to keep holding me physically because a new and better way of relating to me is dawning as I and the Father, united together, come to dwell with you – this is the important news you are to announce to the brethren.*

- d) In contrast to Luke's account, John 20 avoids an emphasis on a *corporeal* resurrection life, instead emphasising a *relationally rich* resurrection life.
- e) In Luke-Acts, the spatial relocation of Jesus to heaven appears to bring to a close the possibility of the implied reader meeting Jesus in the flesh. In John, Jesus continues to come and go without any obvious indication that these appearances will cease so that nothing in the action of John's narrative precludes the possibility of the implied reader meeting Jesus in the flesh. Yet the ascension announcement in 20:17, in the context of John 20, persuades the reader that apostolic testimony and the indwelling of the Spirit is a better way to know Jesus and dwell with him than an encounter with Jesus in the flesh.
- f) Understanding the Johannine ascension as a different event to the spatial translation narrated in Luke 24 and Acts 1 means that John 20 can be readily harmonized with the Luke-Acts ascension and provides new possibilities for reconciling the considerable and often underappreciated difficulties in harmonizing Luke 24 and Acts 1 with each other.

1.3 A Case Study in Inter-Gospel Reading

In arguing for these 6 propositions, this paper will provide a case study in reading which demonstrates that real readers (and preachers) will gain richer insights into Gospel narratives by consciously postponing questions of Gospel harmonization. This paper will demonstrate that approaching John preoccupied with the need to harmonize John 20 with Luke-Acts can lead the reader to miss important aspects of the way John's narrative has been crafted.

This paper will demonstrate that John's Gospel reads as a coherent narrative. The reader does not need to know the Jesus story from one of the other Gospels in order to read John and make sense of it. In particular, this paper will demonstrate that John 20 is a coherent narrative unit that does not require a prior knowledge of the post-resurrection story from somewhere else.

For a reader familiar with Luke-Acts, John 20 has the potential to be a destabilizing and challenging text. The Fourth Gospel presents Jesus in John 20 in a way that will

challenge the impression of Jesus this reader has formed from the post resurrection appearances in Luke-Acts. Rather than emphasize that the resurrection life is corporeal, John emphasizes a resurrection life that is relationally rich. Rather than a physical departure from the earth, John's ascension describes a relational reunion between the Father and Son, with implications for deep relational connections between believers and the Father and Son. Rather than the depiction of the ascended Jesus in Luke-Acts as remote, John presents Jesus as powerfully and proximately involved in the apostolic mission. For the reader already familiar with Luke-Acts, the depiction of Jesus in John 20 complements and stretches their understanding of Jesus. The Johannine ascension is central to this challenge.

However, not all readers familiar with Luke-Acts are challenged by John 20. It will be demonstrated (chiefly by citation in the footnotes throughout the paper) that some commentators miss the nuances in John's narrative regarding the Johannine ascension because they read John 20 pre-occupied with the task of harmonizing John 20 with the other Gospels. These readings frequently assume, or read into John's narrative, elements from Luke-Acts that are not present in John's narrative. They treat John 20 as a text that only makes sense when Luke-Acts is imposed upon the reading of John 20. Consequently, these readers misread or underappreciate the unique features of John's ascension account. Unsurprisingly, this kind of reader emerges from the experience of reading John 20 with an intact Lukan view of Jesus not substantially reshaped by the text of John 20.

This paper is an appeal to read John 20 firstly on its own terms, without prioritizing the text of Luke-Acts, in order that the reader might more fully appreciate John's perspective on the ascension.

1.4 The Structure of the Paper

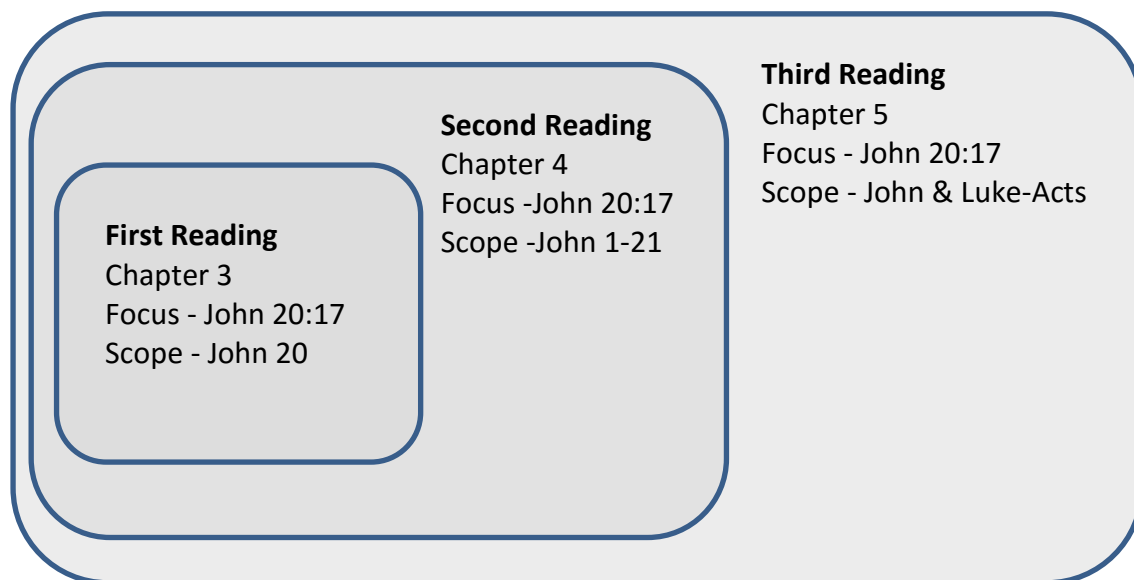
Chapter 2 begins by outlining the problems with reading approaches to John 20, which read John pre-occupied with harmonizing. Chapter 2 then proposes a method of reading John 20 that will involve three readings successively broader in scope (see diagram on following page). The particular kind of reader-response approach adopted in these three readings is defined and a rationale for adopting this approach is presented. The final section of the chapter clarifies methodological assumptions about the relationship between plot and history.

In Chapters 3-5, the three readings will be conducted.

The first reading (Chapter 3) approaches John 20 as a coherent narrative unit without consideration of the wider context in John, in order to evaluate what the narrator of John 20 tells the reader about the Johannine ascension which is announced in 20:17.

The second reading (Chapter 4) reads the whole of John's Gospel without regard for the other Gospels or Acts, in order to evaluate what the narrator tells the reader about the Johannine ascension. The second reading demonstrates that the key themes in John 20 of location and testimony are key themes throughout the Gospel. The associated imagery in John 20 of seeking, finding, eluding and grasping are also prominent throughout the Gospel. The Johannine ascension announced in John 20 as a relational reunion with the Father closely corresponds with the coming and going imagery of the entire Gospel. The way Jesus in John 13-17 describes his going to the Father, his return to the disciples in order that he and his Father might dwell with them, and the Spirit bestowal, all correspond with reading the Johannine ascension as a relational reunion with the Father that culminates in the Spirit bestowal of 20:22. Chapter 4 ends with a consideration and rebuttal of four internal objections to the findings of the second reading.

In Chapter 5, our reader, having carefully appreciated John's text in the first two readings, considers the presentation of the ascension in Luke-Acts and seeks to understand both the Johannine and Lukan ascensions with the benefit of having first appreciated both texts individually. The chapter outlines how a reader familiar with Luke-Acts would have their understanding of Jesus complemented and challenged by a right understanding of the Johannine ascension. Chapter 5 ends with a consideration and rebuttal of four external objections to the proposed reconstruction.



Chapter 6 reflects upon issues of reading method and Gospel harmonization. Counter-intuitively, postponing questions of inter-Gospel harmonization does not lead to irreconcilable texts but provides satisfying possibilities for how to harmonize John 20 with both Luke 24 and Acts 1-2. It will be demonstrated that the view of the ascension argued in this thesis provides solutions to some of the problems of harmonization between Luke 24 and Acts 1.

Chapter 2. Issues of Method

2.1 Reading for Inter-Gospel Harmonization

A survey of the way New Testament commentators understand John 20:17 and 20:22 highlights obvious issues of method. Certain commentators appear preoccupied with the need to harmonize John with the Synoptics and continually focus on how the "interlocking traditions" of the Gospels need to be dovetailed together.³ These commentators often rule out, at an early stage of the reading process, any understanding of John 20 that appears difficult to harmonize with Luke 24 and Acts 1-2. For example, Don Carson in the Introduction of his John commentary, in the context of discussing the challenges of harmonizing John with the Synoptics, advocates for an approach where:

one must constantly ask whether there is some larger historical reality that supports both the witness of John and the witness of one or more of the Synoptics.⁴

Sometimes these commentators not only demonstrate a preoccupation with Gospel harmonization, but also *prioritize* Luke's chronology over John's chronology.⁵ That is, they resolve apparent tensions in harmonizing John with Luke-Acts, by assuming that the chronology of Luke-Acts is the historical chronology. This strongly shapes their reading of the text.⁶

³ The term *harmonising*, unless explicitly qualified otherwise, is concerned with *narrative chronology* not *historical chronology*. It refers to the activity of understanding how the plot-order in the different Gospels correspond to one another, rather than seeking to relate the plot events of a Gospel to the actual timeline in which events occurred in history.

⁴ Carson, *John*, 55. While conceding it is possible that John has re-ordered the historical order of events he narrates, Carson continually resists this interpretation in favor of an approach that seeks to dovetail into a single time-line, the events of John, in the order John presents the events, and the events of the Synoptics, in the order the Synoptic authors present their events.

⁵ *Chronological priority* is concerned with which Gospel plot line aligns more closely to the actual order of historical events and is not to be confused with the *literary priority* which Gospel was written first.

⁶ An example of a strong commitment to harmonise that does not prioritize the Synoptics ahead of John appears in Carson's argument for two temple cleansings — one early in Jesus' ministry (John 2) and one late in his ministry (Mark 11:15-18, Matt 21:12-16 & Luke 19:45-47) — *John*, 175–178. Carson argues against the view that there is one historical temple cleansing on the grounds that there is no scholarly

2.2 The Problems with Reading for Inter-Gospel Harmonization

There are two problems with a reading approach to John 20 pre-occupied with Gospel harmonization.

2.2.1 Problem 1: Why Assume That Luke-Acts Is More Historical?

The first challenge to the approach that resolves harmonization issues between John and Luke-Acts by imposing Luke's chronology is recent scholarship that suggests that John's plot is closer to the historical chronology than the basic plot of the Synoptics.⁷ This scholarship proposes that John's plot of three annual visits to Jerusalem is smoothed out by the Synoptics in order to provide a simpler plot that moves once from North to South — from popular Galilee ministry, through a gradual growing tension with the religious leaders, to a single, final showdown in Jerusalem.⁸ This challenges the basic

consensus on why John would relocate this episode — *John*, 177. His approach resists relocation until (1) a persuasive reason is offered as to why the author wishes to relocate an event and (2) that this persuasive reason is recognized by a consensus of scholars. In a Gospel as symbolic and cryptic as John this is a demanding set of criteria — to demand not just a scholarly consensus on the relocation of a narrated event but also a consensus on the reason for the relocation. The imposition of such strong criteria before events narrated in one Gospel in one order might be matched with events narrated in a different order in another Gospel is evidence of an extremely strong desire to harmonise.

An example of a strong commitment to harmonise that does prioritize Luke-Acts ahead of John appears in Carson's argument for a symbolic Spirit bestowal in John 20:20. One of Carson's leading arguments is that a substantive Spirit bestowal cannot be harmonised with the Spirit bestowal in Acts 1-2 — *John*, 651.

For a detailed description of Carson's "interlocking approach" — see Naselli, "D. A. Carson's Theological Method," 265–266; Dvorak, "The Relationship between John and the Synoptic Gospels," 212–213. The desire of readers to harmonize the Gospels reaches back at least to Tatian's *Diatessaron* in the 2nd century — see Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 28.

This paper will cite in the footnotes instances where Carson, Köstenberger, Brown, Ladd, Fuller and Keener not only read John 20 preoccupied with a desire to harmonise John with Luke-Acts but with a strong presumption that the Luke-Acts chronology more closely aligns with the historical chronology. This is not to suggest that these commentators do not have other arguments to support their views on the ascension in John 20. These will be considered at appropriate points in this paper. See Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:1015; Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 298; Fuller, "John 20," 180; Köstenberger, *John*, 574 n.16 & 17; Keener, *John*, 1195.

⁷ Obviously, the Synoptics do not have identical plot lines but do have a basic plot line more similar to the other Synoptics than to John.

⁸ Blomberg observes that "a strong case can be made for the view that John describes the ministry of Jesus almost entirely in [historical] chronological order" — *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 215. See also Dvorak, "The Relationship between John and the Synoptic Gospels," 207, 212; Culpepper,

assumption of those who impose the Luke-Acts plotline onto John because they understand Luke's "orderly account" (Luke 1:3) to be one that more closely follows the historical chronology. It is far from certain that *καθεξῆς* should be understood as a claim that Luke's account follows a strict historical chronology.⁹ In any case, Luke's explicit claim to write orderly history (if that is what Luke 1:3 is claiming) does not imply that a Gospel without such an explicit statement of historical purpose is less interested in history.¹⁰

A comparison of the plot lines of the Synoptic Gospels with each other also challenges the assumption that the Synoptic plot-line reflects the historical chronology more faithfully than John's plot-line. The difference in the ordering of events between the Synoptic Gospels suggests a regard by the Synoptic evangelists for a theological narrative over a strict adherence to the historical chronology. For example Luke 11:1-4 and Matt 6:9-13 appear to record the same discourse by Jesus on prayer. The account in Matthew is set in Galilee prior to the journey to Jerusalem (see Matt 16:13-28). The account in Luke is set on the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (see Luke 9:18-20).¹¹ This observation alone strongly suggests that it is unwise when reading John to assume that the narrative chronology of the Synoptics is the historical chronology.¹²

Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 72; Ashton, *Fourth Gospel*, 68; Smith, "Johannine Studies since Bultmann," 347.

⁹ *καθεξῆς* – "in order, one after the other of sequence in time, space, or logic" – *BDAG*, 388.

¹⁰ Eusebius attributes to Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215) a view that could be understood as suggesting that John is less concerned with history than the Synoptics: "John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospel [of Mark...] composed a spiritual Gospel". If Clement, a very early witness, is understood to mean that John is less concerned with historical accuracy, how might this assumption shape how one reads John's Gospel? – Book 6, Chap. 14, Paragraph 7, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, 234.

¹¹ It is possible that Jesus repeated teaching on prayer at various times in different locations. What appears to be a relocated saying could be a case of one Gospel narrating a particular instance of Jesus' teaching on prayer while another Gospel narrates a different teaching session that occurred at a different point in his ministry. However, it still remains that each narrator in the selecting of some material and not others, has chosen to associate this teaching on prayer with particular point in the overall plot-line of their Gospel and to disassociate this teaching from another point in the plot where such teaching could have been narrated. Clear choices are made to present the material in a particular order that is not solely governed by historical chronology.

¹² It is important to distinguish between episodic historicity and historical order. It might be possible for a Gospel writer to take great care with historical accuracy in the recording of the details of each episode in their Gospel but not arrange the episodes in the historical order in which events occurred. For example, it is possible that Jesus performed one temple cleansing, which John narrates at the commencement of

2.2.2 Problem 2: Harmonization and Narrative Analysis

The second challenge to an approach that resolves harmonization issues between John and Luke-Acts by imposing Luke's chronology upon John is the distinctly different perspective of narrative analysis. The emphasis in narrative analysis is upon what lies in front of our eyes as we look at the text, not on what lies beyond or outside of the text.¹³ This approach is a reaction to source and redaction criticism that Culpepper rightly describes as "hypothetical and inconclusive", an approach that will "impoverish and rigidify the gospel narratives".¹⁴ However, narrative analysis also challenges those who read John preoccupied with or even imposing a Synoptic chronology. Readers who begin with questions of history and harmonization inevitably impose a strong agenda on the text.¹⁵ While practitioners of narrative analysis are sometimes aware of harmonization questions, they regard them as secondary or even as a danger to a true reading. At the very least, in narrative analysis, questions of harmonization are postponed to the very end of the process of reading:

We have first to understand what the gospels and other biblical narratives are and what they say, what they do and what we do in order to read them, before we can ask about their relationship to history.¹⁶

Jesus' ministry (John 2) and Luke narrates just prior to the arrest and crucifixion (Luke 19) but which occurred in history neither at the commencement nor closure of Jesus' ministry but somewhere in the middle, and which the Gospel writers have located at different points in their narrative for their own rhetorical purposes. See Kysar, *John the Maverick Gospel*, 8–9; Matson, "Current Approaches to the Priority of John," 4.

Modern readers need to be wary of bringing assumptions about the conventions of a certain type of modern historical writing to the reading of the Gospels. For example, if all four Gospels place a set of events in the same order, it does not even then necessarily follow that this common ordering of events must reflect the historical order of events in Jesus' life.

¹³ Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 9.

¹⁴ "Story and History," 473. Mark Sell adds that traditional exegesis can engages in "a 'scientific' surface reading of atomized clauses and phrases" — "Let the Reader Understand," 304. With respect to source and redaction criticism Culpepper notes: "[a]ll too often the assumption has been made that we have understood the text when we see how logically it can be taken apart." — "Story and History," 469. See also Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 143.

¹⁵ "How we study Acts is important for what we discover [...] Past concern with sources and historical events has sometimes led to hypotheses that stretch beyond the available evidence" — Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:4.

¹⁶ Culpepper, "Story and History," 473.

However, a pure narrative analysis of John 20 must still grapple with questions of inter-Gospel comparison. In John, the implied reader, a construct introduced by narrative analysis itself, appears to turn on its own creator and challenge the idea of reading without being mindful of inter-Gospel harmonization.¹⁷ References to later events in John, such as the aside in John 2:22 to the resurrection, suggest that the implied reader already possesses a basic knowledge of the Jesus story.¹⁸ Richard Bauckham has taken this observation a step further. He points out that Mary is introduced in John 11:2 with the narratorial aside: “This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair”. However, John is referencing an event (Mary wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair Mark 14:3 & John 12:3) not narrated so far in John’s Gospel. Bauckham argues persuasively that John addresses an implied reader already familiar with Mark’s Gospel, or at least a source, written or verbal, similar to Mark.¹⁹ In the same way, John 3:24 refers to the imprisonment of John the Baptist, an event not otherwise narrated in John’s Gospel: “(This was before John was put in prison.)”.²⁰ However, this reference to the imprisonment of John the Baptist is only necessary because the implied author has assumed that the implied reader is already aware of his imprisonment and needs assistance to understand where the events about John the Baptist being narrated here in 3:22-30 fit with the known event of John’s imprisonment.²¹ By narrating the story in this way, an implied reader is created with a prior awareness of a Mark-like story line.

¹⁷ This paper will regard the implied reader as a construct in the text. This definition of the implied reader should be distinguished from an approach where the implied reader is chiefly something constructed by a real reader — Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 138; Moloney, “Who Is ‘the Reader’ In/of the Fourth Gospel,” 21; Fowler, “Who Is ‘the Reader’ in Reader Response Criticism,” 10–11; Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 10; Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 46. The implied author is the author suggested by the choice and arrangement of the material. The implied reader is the reader to whom the implied author writes. See also Morgan, “Emplotment, Plot and Explotment,” 68.

¹⁸ See 2:22, 7:39 & 12:16. “The implied reader [of John] has some knowledge of Jesus’ death and resurrection (see 2:21-22; 21:30-31[sic]), but not of the Johannine version of it.” — Moloney, “Who Is ‘the Reader’ In/of the Fourth Gospel,” 33. Moloney probably means to refer to 20:30-31, not “21:30-31”. See also, Marguerat and Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories*, 106–108.

¹⁹ Bauckham, “John for Readers of Mark.”. See also Shellard, “The Relationship of Luke and John,” 71–72; Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 203; Spencer, “Narrative Echoes in John 21,” 58. Contra to Bauckham, Stibbe suggests the analepsis in 11:1-2 is for the benefit of the reader re-reading this account — Stibbe, “A Tomb with a View,” 52.

²⁰ NIV text. Brackets original.

²¹ Wendy North, while taking issue with Bauckham’s argument that rejects a specific target audience for John, concedes that there “is much to be said for his [Bauckham’s] claim that the evangelist’s remark on

Bauckham's insight raises important issues for implied and real readers of John's Gospel. The narrator, by creating an inter-textually aware implied reader, makes it difficult for real readers to postpone questions of inter-Gospel harmonization.²² Real readers attuned to the implied reader will become mindful, as they read, of issues that lie outside the text itself. It seems inevitable that real readers of John's Gospel, ancient and modern, would be asking questions as they read John, as to how the Johannine plot relates to the basic plot of the Synoptics.²³

While there is no evidence in John that suggest the implied reader is aware of the events narrated in Acts 1-2, the notion of an inter-textually aware implied reader raises some specific questions for our study of John 20.²⁴ Does John's implied author write his ascension narrative, if that is what John 20 is, knowing that his readers are familiar with an Acts 1 chronology for these events?²⁵ Will his references to a Spirit bestowal in John 20:22, while Jesus is still on the earth, surprise, intrigue or even destabilise this reader? Does he deliberately do so for particular theological, pastoral or rhetorical purposes?²⁶ Does it raise important issues as to how the narrator intends the reader to understand the ascension?

the timing of the Baptist's imprisonment was directed to readers who knew Mark's Gospel" — "John for Readers of Mark? A Response to Richard Bauckham's Proposal," 452.

²² Real readers unaware of these events before reading John will become aware as they read that John's narrator addresses an implied reader different to themselves — a reader who already knows things about the Jesus story. "The [*implied*] reader [*in John's Gospel*] emerges as a forward-looking textual effect who also knows and recalls what has happened and has been revealed in the story so far." — Moloney, "Who Is 'the Reader' In/of the Fourth Gospel," 21.

²³ Robert Lemmer highlights the way John's author uses narrative to draw the reader into a set of convictions — "A Possible Understanding By The Implied Reader," 291.

²⁴ Intra-textuality refers to textual connections within the work itself, inter-textuality refers to the phenomenon as developed between separate literary works — Zumstein, "Intratextuality and Intertextuality in the Gospel of John," 122.

²⁵ It is possible that a reader might be aware of the historical events of Acts 1-2 (for example the Lukan ascension and the Pentecost events) independently of the Acts account. As Luke acknowledges many accounts were circulating about the events surrounding Jesus' ministry (Luke 1:1). In either case, whether through the text of Acts or otherwise, there is no explicit evidence that John's implied reader is aware of these events.

²⁶ This paper will adopt the gender specific "he" and "his" when referring to the real and implied authors of Luke-Acts and John simply as a convention.

2.3 A Three Reading Approach Using a Reader-response Method

In the light of these considerations, our examination will undertake three readings of John 20. The difference between these readings and the rationale for these three readings will now be outlined.

The first reading will conduct a literary analysis of John 20 in itself, approaching the text of John 20 as a coherent literary unit. During this reading, contrasts will be made with parallel passages in the Synoptics, but only in order to illustrate the uniqueness of John's material and explicitly highlight what is not in the text of John 20 but can easily be presumed to be there by readers familiar with the other Gospels.²⁷

A second reading will then seek to understand John 20 in the context of John's Gospel as a whole.²⁸ Questions of harmonization with the other Gospels will be postponed until the third reading. The second reading is an attempt to read John on its own terms assuming it to be a coherent narrative in itself. At the end of the second reading it will be possible to describe John's unique take on the ascension. The first and second readings will seek to demonstrate that John 20 and John's Gospel respectively can be read as coherent narratives without the imposition of information from the other Gospels.

The third reading will consider how a reader, aware from the first two readings of John's contribution to the ascension, would then harmonize John's presentation with the Luke-Acts account. Up to this point (the first two readings) questions of harmonization will be postponed in order to appreciate clearly John's unique contribution. In other words, while our reader is aware of the Luke-Acts narrative all along, the reader will set aside their knowledge of the Luke-Acts narrative during the first two readings. This third

²⁷ During the first and second readings, lexical, syntactic and grammatical considerations will draw upon usage in the New Testament and beyond. Even readers focused exclusively on the text in front of them always draw on their wider knowledge of vocabulary, syntax and grammar. Allan Culpepper notes: "[s]tudy of the languages, culture, and history of Judaism and early Christianity will remain an essential part of the work of biblical scholars if interpretation is not to become only a picnic at which the text brings the words and we bring the meanings." — "Story and History," 471–472. In other words our three readings are conducted by what Stanley Fish would call an "informed reader" who has a knowledge of language, culture and history in a general sense — *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 48–49.

²⁸ For the reasonableness of assuming that the final text of the Fourth Gospel is a single narrative unit see Lemmer, "A Possible Understanding By The Implied Reader," 291–292.

reading considers how to harmonize the two accounts both historically and theologically. The contrast between the second and third readings will highlight the way John's contribution complements and challenges the reader familiar with Luke-Acts.²⁹

It is not being suggested that this three reading method is the way that any particular real reader actually reads.³⁰ It is true that reading is not typically a simple "single pass" linear activity but that readers often pause, reconsider, review and even re-read earlier material as part of the reading experience — a pattern that the three steps in our reading model reflects. However, the first reading of John 20 without regard for the text of John 1-19 is not a typical way for a reader to read narrative.³¹ It is acknowledged that this is an artificial reading experiment designed to draw out how questions about harmonization influence readers of the Gospels. Real reading will usually be much more of a dynamic and organic whole. However, this experiment in reading will explore whether, as much as is humanly possible, real readers aware of harmonization questions in the Gospels, should set these questions aside until as late as possible in the process of reading in order to appreciate more richly the text before them.

2.4 The Methodology of a Reader-Response Approach

2.4.1 Reader-Response Defined

In this paper all three readings adopt a reader-response approach. The term *reader-response* describes an approach to the text more focussed upon how the text impacts the reader, than an approach that seeks a fixed meaning already present in the text, or seeks to discover what lies beyond the text (authorial intention, history of composition, or the context of the first readers).³² The reader creates meaning in the act of reading.

²⁹ "We cannot impose one author on another; we must let John speak for himself. Though we will still have to face the task of relating the text of John to that of Acts we must first read John according to John" — Lyon, "John 20," 76.

³⁰ In the words of Fowler, these three readers are "not simply a hypothetical enhancement of the implied reader" but rather "a pose adopted by the critic for rhetorical purposes", *Let the Reader Understand*, 38.

³¹ Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 78–79.

³² Fowler lists a wide spectrum of approaches that fall under the umbrella of *reader-response* but identifies three characteristics that they all have in common: "(1) a preeminent concern for the reader and the reading experience and (2) a critical model of the reading experience, which itself has two major aspects (a) an understanding of reading as a dynamic, concrete, temporal experience, instead of the

The reader-response approach of this paper will derive conclusions regarding the implied reader, the implied author and the way the text impacts upon the implied reader from a detailed study of the text employing the tools of narrative analysis and traditional exegesis.³³ Particular narrative analysis concepts for example *character confusion*, will be defined, as they are required throughout the study.

2.4.2 A Rationale for Adopting a Reader-Response Approach

A reader-response approach is the appropriate form of analysis to adopt for the thesis of this paper. It will be demonstrated that readings of John 20 imposing Luke-Acts onto John tend to squash John's unique perspective or read into John Lukan material that is not part of John's narrative. A method is required that can differentiate between, on the one hand, a reading of John uninfluenced by Luke-Acts, and on the other hand, a reading of John that imposes Luke-Acts onto the reading of John. Therefore, reader-response, because it acknowledges that different readers respond differently to the same text and that each reading experience constructs a different meaning, provides a form of analysis that is able to highlight effectively John's unique contribution to the ascension in John 20.³⁴

It is important to acknowledge, as a reader-response approach does, that all readers begin the task of reading with assumptions. There are things the reader believes about the text, about themselves, about the world (their world-view) and about the relations between those things. Reflective readers strive to be as aware as possible of these assumptions as they begin reading. The process of reading can challenge and reshape these assumptions/beliefs. Even resistant readers can be reflective readers and be changed by the act of reading. However, readers unaware of their initial assumptions can easily read these assumptions unconsciously into the text. In the worst case, the only thing they read is what they already believe, because they so strongly impose their belief upon the text. Nothing is discovered, challenged, or changed. The reader-

abstract perception of a spatial form; and (b) an emphasis on meaning as event instead of meaning as content." — Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 25.

³³ As an example of traditional exegesis serving literary analysis in the study of John see Porter, "Can Traditional Exegesis Enlighten Literary Analysis of the Fourth Gospel?," 396–428.

³⁴ Fowler helpfully highlights the value of a reader-response approach in Gospel comparisons: "Concentration on the experience of reading not only leads to a greater awareness of what is transpiring on both the story and discourse levels but also helps us to be aware of the ways in which acquaintance with one Gospel influences the reading of another Gospel" — *Let the Reader Understand*, 16.

response analysis of this paper will be able to demonstrate that there is a real danger in biblical scholars approaching John 20 with inadequately examined assumptions about inter-Gospel harmonization.

2.4.3 The Validity and Limitations of Reader-Response Criticism

The merit of applying reader-response criticism to biblical texts has been an area of significant debate. It is beyond the scope of this paper to survey this debate comprehensively.³⁵ However, in order to clarify the approach adopted in this paper two specific issues need to be briefly addressed: (1) the criticism that reader-response is an inappropriate tool for historical texts, and (2) the relationship between narrative plot and actual history.

2.4.4 Is Reader-Response Disinterested in History?

Some reader-response approaches to the Gospels are rightly accused of a disinterest in how the narrated events of the Gospels relate to the real events of history.³⁶ While this criticism is sometimes overstated,³⁷ it is an important concern to address for the

³⁵ A few key contributions are as follows:

John Poirie is highly critical of reader-response — “Some Detracting Considerations for Reader-Response Theory,” 250–263. Don Carson expresses caution, 96-104 and 107-116, but also acknowledges some strengths in a reader-response approach, 120-129 — *The Gaggling of God*. With a focus on Johannine Studies, Martinus de Boer, while both defending narrative analysis and taking umbrage with the criticisms that narrative critics (Culpepper in particular) level at historical criticism, argues that narrative analysis is a helpful preparatory step serving the task of historical criticism — “Narrative Criticism, Historical Criticism, and the Gospel of John,” 35–38. Ashton makes similar criticisms — *Studying John*, 145–146.

Positive evaluations of reader-response include: Minear, “Audience of the Fourth Evangelist,” 339–340; Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 6–10; Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 55; Spencer, “Acts and Modern Literary Approaches,” 381–414; Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 140–179; Porter, “Can Traditional Exegesis Enlighten Literary Analysis of the Fourth Gospel?”; Adam, *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*, 18–24; Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament*, 39–40, 49–59; Peterson, *Acts*, 39–42; Bauckham, “Historiographical Characteristics,” 17–36; Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 21; Thiselton, “Narrative,” “Iser, Wolfgang” 489 and “Narrative” 609–613; Morgan, “Emplotment, Plot and Exploiment,” 64–98; Merenlahti, *Poetics for the Gospels?*, 99–100.

³⁶ See Carson, *John*, 33, 63–68. However later he is more conciliatory — *John*, 39–40. See also John Poirie is highly critical of reader-response — “Some Detracting Considerations for Reader-Response Theory,” 250–263.

³⁷ Marguerat rightly observes, “all historical work is driven by a choice of plot, a narrative setting and the effects of re-composition. Once the necessary subjectivity of the historian in the construction of the plot of the narrative is recognised, we must abandon the factual/fictional duality as the product of an unhealthy dualism. [...] The work of the historian and the work of the story teller are not as far apart as

particular thesis of this paper. If the Gospels are simply stories with no relationship to history then the question of how to harmonize the Gospels historically or theologically to one another is moot.

To outline this objection: As a school of criticism originating in the visual arts and then put to use in the analysis of literary fiction, there has been suspicion in some quarters that reader-response is an inappropriate method for the study of Gospel texts.³⁸ For example, in Johannine studies, Mark Stibbe criticizes the “anti-historical bias of text immanent literary analysis of biblical text”.³⁹ While Stibbe affirms the important contribution of approaches that appreciate the narrative artistry of John’s composition, he criticizes some narrative critics for approaching the Gospels as though they were simply stories where the events and characters have no connection to real events and real people in history. Stibbe singles out Culpepper as a key exponent of this kind of approach. Stibbe describes Culpepper’s method as “fundamentally flawed” because it approaches the Gospel narratives as though they were modern fictional novels.⁴⁰ According to Stibbe, the Gospel writers were not constructing stories simply for the

positivism [...] would have us believe.” — *The First Christian Historian*, 12. Similarly, Bock warns: “one should not deny that a historian can and does create relationships and can be creative (insightful?) in connecting events, this does not mean that such constructs misrepresent history” — *Acts*, 5. Bock goes on to critique the view that regarding Luke as about either theology or history is a false dichotomy — *Acts*, 9. He cautions that just because a writer has a clearly observable apologetic purpose does not, in itself, suggest a loss of historical accuracy — Bock, *Acts*, 10. Peterson notes that what he calls “narrative criticism” (which embraces what is here described as *narrative analysis* and *reader-response*) has shifted the focus from *author* and *historical event* to *reader* and *text* “however narrative criticism is not essentially ahistorical or antihistorical” — *Acts*, 41. Spencer argues that both theological enquiry and historical enquiry require literary analysis (in which he includes reader-response analysis). He outlines five recent approaches to the book of Acts in which these three areas of analysis (literary, historical and theological) interact in different ways — “Acts and Modern Literary Approaches,” 393–406. Spencer notes that good historical enquiry must make use of literary analysis. For example, if one is to make a conclusion about the real Herod of history from Jesus’ description of him as a “fox” (Luke 13:32, note Luke 9:58 where Jesus compares himself to a fox), the reader must first understand, using literary analysis, what such an expression means — “Acts and Modern Literary Approaches,” 405. In short, “a symbiotic relationship exists between narrative and historical approaches to texts” — Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 98.

³⁸ Barton helpfully traces the origins of narrative analysis (which includes what is described in this paper as reader-response) in *Reading the Old Testament*, 145, 151–166.

³⁹ *John as Storyteller*, 1.

⁴⁰ “whilst Culpepper is not guilty of calling gospel narratives primitive literature, it needs to be stated that the sophistications of the gospel narrative are quite different to the subtleties of modern novels.” — Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 11.

purpose of creating artful narratives but were writing about historical realities and seeking to persuade real readers to believe certain things about the person and work of Jesus Christ.⁴¹ Stibbe concludes, "[o]ne cannot ignore the question of the historical audience or the historical Jesus of John's story without reducing and restricting the functions of the narrative".⁴²

It is crucial when utilizing the tools of narrative analysis to identify text-type accurately. Stibbe effectively accuses Culpepper of an error in genre classification.⁴³ Stibbe demonstrates, using the tools of narrative analysis, that the text of John itself suggests it is "narrative Christology". This is a very different kind of text-type from the text-type of the modern fictional novel. Stibbe identifies a series of narrative techniques used throughout John, which the implied author deploys in order to persuade the implied reader of the truthfulness of certain Christological claims.⁴⁴ According to Stibbe, this illuminates the purpose of the real author, which is to persuade real readers of these same Christological claims.⁴⁵ By a similar line of argument, Tannehill proposes that the

⁴¹ "One of the things that has been omitted by narrative critics is a careful consideration of the relationship between theological purpose and the narrative form" — Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 12.

⁴² Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 12.

⁴³ Henaut makes an identical criticism of Culpepper as Stibbe — "John 4," 293.

⁴⁴ Stibbe summarises these narrative techniques here: *John as Storyteller*, 17–21. In this approach Stibbe acknowledges the work of Tannehill in "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology."

⁴⁵ "The author is writing narrative Christology, and it is his Christology which unites the concepts, images and episodes of the gospel into a coherent whole" — Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 12. It is not always clear when Stibbe refers to reader and author whether he means a real or implied reader or author. However, when he says "these narrative qualities are used by the author to persuade the reader of the truthfulness of his Christological credo" it is clear from the context that he is referring to the *flesh-and-blood* kind — *John as Storyteller*, 12. (Underline added.)

Stibbe draws upon Tannehill's approach in "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology." Tannehill's method has two purposes: to (1) evaluate the narrative composition of the text using a narrative analysis approach and (2) show that these narrative qualities are used by the author to persuade the reader to believe certain Christological claims. The first aim highlights Tannehill and Stibbe's indebtedness to narrative analysis and willingness to use its methods despite Stibbe's reservations. The second purpose sets the method of Stibbe and Tannehill apart from classic narrative analysis because it is an attempt to say something about the real author and their purposes in writing. Regardless of whether Stibbe's integrative approach in *John as Storyteller* which draws on structuralism and historical criticism as well as narrative analysis is ultimately persuasive, his contribution helpfully highlights both the strengths and dangers of a narrative criticism approach. See Culpepper's review of Stibbe in which he questions Stibbe's free use of the very methods he critiques — Culpepper, "John as Storyteller." See also Koester, "John as Storyteller."

study of how a text and its historical claims impacts upon an implied reader can provide insights into real readers:

The original readers [of Mark's Gospel] (or hearers, if we think in terms of a public reading) were, of course, people of the first century. Their problems and possible responses must be understood in terms of the first century world. Therefore, the approach taken here is not opposed to historical research. Its newness consists in the use of certain literary perspectives to sharpen our understanding of what is central to the story and of the way in which the story has been shaped in order to challenge the readers. This can give us a clearer view of the interaction between the author and his first readers. It can also deepen our understanding of what it would mean for a modern reader to read this Gospel well, with full appreciation of its power to challenge.⁴⁶

Following Tannehill and Stibbe, this paper will adopt a nuanced reader-response approach to the Gospels. This approach draws on the tools of narrative analysis while always being mindful that the narrative purports to do more than tell an elegant story. It speaks to the implied reader about historical realities and makes Christological claims. It suggests a real author who seeks to persuade real readers of these historical realities and Christological claims.⁴⁷ It is true that all texts, factual or fictional, historically reliable

⁴⁶ Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," 60.

Stephen Moore concurs with Tannehill,

To see how the text moulds its own reader involves seeking out those features of the text that shape the reading experience of *every* perceptive reader, ancient or modern [...] the perspective of the implied reader allows us to focus on the text as an encounter and thus uncover its innate potential, whether realized or not, for leading *any* reader to the desired response — Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 100 [italics original].

⁴⁷ While it is important to distinguish between real and implied authors and real and implied readers, the distance between the *real* and the *implied* can sometimes be overstated by some proponents and opponents of reader-response. Fowler makes a helpful distinction between critics and readers. Readers engage or *lose themselves* in the experience of reading. Critics sit above the reading process and in a detached way observe the way the narrative is constructed and how the text might impact upon readers — Fowler, "Who Is 'the Reader' in Reader Response Criticism," 10–11. In the light of this distinction, Fowler proposes that real readers "tend to take the reading experience to be an encounter with the discourse of a real author directed to him/herself as a real reader" — Fowler, "Who Is 'the Reader' in Reader Response Criticism," 12. The reader assumes they can learn something of the real author and what the real author wishes to convey to them. This may not be a wise assumption for the reader to adopt for all text types. However, it is reasonable to assume in the case of Luke-Acts and John that the implied author accurately represents the real author. In both works the implied author is explicitly

or unreliable, are written to communicate with readers and that reader-response is simply trying to analyze how this is done.⁴⁸ However, if a reader assumes a text has a real author who seeks to speak to them about historical and theological realities it will inevitably change the way that reader approaches the text.

The assumption that John and Luke-Acts speak of historical realities and theological truths makes the task of theological and historical harmonization between these texts vitally important. If they are simply artful narratives with no connection to history then there is no imperative upon the reader to harmonize. However the texts themselves, by presenting themselves as narrative Christology, demand to be read in a way that requires the reader to consider harmonization questions carefully. Readers of the Gospels who do not consider inter-Gospel harmonization at some stage are poor readers.⁴⁹ This observation confirms the importance of the third reading in our three reading model. Once John's text has been appreciated in itself (via the first two readings) it is a crucial part of the reading process that the Johannine ascension is considered in the light of Luke-Acts (via the third reading).⁵⁰

identified as a reliable character in the narrative (Luke 1:1-4, John 20:30-31). At the very least, the implied authors in both these Gospels seek to present themselves to the reader as reliable witnesses to the truth about Jesus.

It is acknowledged that even when writing history, real authors can unwittingly deceive. An author might choose not to dwell on painful aspects of a story that cast them in a bad light. The author might write in such a way that they appear to possess values and ideals more pure or noble than in reality. Authors can also deliberately deceive and produce texts that appear to be history when they are fiction. In 1995 the Miles Franklin Literary Prize was awarded to Helen Demidenko for her autobiographical tale of life in Australia as a Ukrainian migrant. When it came to light that the author was a British lawyer with no Ukrainian heritage there was heated debate about whether the Franklin Prize should be stripped from the author. While the author argued this was an appropriate use of pseudonym, ultimately it was a debate about genre. Was this a work of fiction or history? The debate illustrated that for some readers at least this genre distinction had a significant impact upon their reading experience — Robinson, "Hoaxer Who Lost Control of Her Hoax."

⁴⁸ Reader-response recognizes that even factual narratives require imagination and are strongly shaped by reader assumptions. Thiselton, "Narrative," 489.

⁴⁹ Scholars against attempting any kind of historical harmonisation of the ascension and Spirit bestowal events in John and Luke-Acts include Raymond Brown, who argues there is little evidence of the authors of John or Luke-Acts being "aware or making allowance for the other's approach". On this basis Brown concludes that any attempt to harmonise John and Luke-Acts at this point is "bad methodology" — *John*, 1970, 2:1038. See also Keener, *John*, 1199–2000; Barrett, *John*, 570; Fitzmyer, "The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost," 409–440; Lyon, "John 20," 75–76; Ashton, *Fourth Gospel*, 424.

⁵⁰ This paper takes the view that neither Matthew nor Mark narrates an ascension event although it may be alluded to in places such as Mark 13:26. This paper assumes that Mark ends at 16:8. While there would

2.4.5 Reader-response, Plot and History

Given that the implied author of John's Gospel seeks to persuade the implied reader about historical realities – real people and real events, it is important to note that in a reader-response approach different readers construct different plot lines.⁵¹

For example, the narrator alludes to the resurrection as a future event in John 2:22 and alludes to the coming of the Spirit as a future event in John 7:39. At this point in the narrative, at John 7:39, a first-time reader of John with no knowledge of any Synoptic plot-line will place these two events vaguely in the future but in no particular order. This reader will continue to read John's text mindful of the need to clarify the order of these two events on the plot line they are constructing. However, at the same point in the narrative (John 7:39), a first-time reader of John who has read Luke-Acts will be able to place these two events (resurrection and Spirit bestowal) in a specific order. Both events will be placed after the crucifixion with the resurrection occurring prior to the arrival of the Spirit. What will happen when this reader encounters the Spirit bestowal in John 20:22 with Jesus un-ascended (in the Lukan sense of ascended)? Chapter 5 outlines the possible responses of this reader.

The way a reader constructs plot lines is in part determined by their assumptions about the kind of narrative being read. These assumptions are reassessed during the reading experience. For example, a reader of John's Gospel unaware of the chronology of the Synoptics might come to the cleansing of the Temple in John 2 and conclude that this was an event in the historic chronology that occurred early in the ministry of Jesus. However, a reader familiar with a Synoptic Gospel might conclude, as many readers

be merit in considering the contribution of these two Gospels to the ascension this is beyond the scope of this paper. It will be assumed that their contributions substantially align with Luke-Acts.

⁵¹ Note that *plot* is defined in a variety of ways by different narrative critics. See Morgan, "Emplotment, Plot and Exploiment," 65–66; Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 16–30; Merenlahti, *Poetics for the Gospels?*, 99–111. In this paper *plot order* is the ordering of events in the story the narrator is telling. *Text order* is the order in which events are revealed by the narrator to the reader. Text order and plot order are not necessarily the same. Instances of events where the text order and the plot order are not the same include prolepsis (for example the absence of Thomas in John 20:19 explained after the fact in 20:24) and analepsis (for example the foreshadowing of a coming resurrection in John 2:22). The concept of plot involves not only the raw ordering of events but also includes the way that events inter-connect including the causal connections between events. *Narrative chronology* is the order of events on the plot line constructed by the reader from the information provided by the narrative. *Historical chronology* is the order of events as they actually occurred on the timeline of history. *Plot-order*, the order in which events are ordered on the *plot-line*, is something unfolded by the narrator but which the reader must construct during the process of reading.

have, that John has relocated this episode from its historical order in the final events of Jesus' life prior to the crucifixion. Such a reader might pay less attention to John's chronology or might follow John's plot-order closely, not in the hope that it provides an historical chronology, but assuming that the narrator has sequenced events in a particular order for significant theological purposes.⁵² The reader might expect to gain significant Christological insights by pondering why certain episodes are sequenced beside each other.

Of particular relevance to John 20 is the observation by Bauckham of significant stylistic differences between John 1-12 and 13-21. Bauckham notes that John 1-12 has far less information about dates and less instances where places or people are named compared to John 13-21. The temporal connections between scenes in John 13-21 is often much more specific than in John 1-12.⁵³ The historical detail in John 13-21, in stark contrast to the lack of detail in John 1-12, might create a strong impression that in John 13-21 the narrator is telling carefully ordered and detailed history, and that understanding the historical details is important for the reader in understanding this section of the Gospel narrative. This again raises questions for how a reader of John familiar with Luke-Acts will understand the death, resurrection and post resurrection narratives in John given that the very narratives where the plot-order of John and Luke-Acts seems most at variance, are the narratives where John's change in style suggests he is carefully narrating historical detail.

The assumption of this paper is that the basic chronology of major events (birth, baptism, public ministry, trial, crucifixion, resurrection) included in the same order in all four Gospels corresponds to the historical chronology of the major events in the life of Jesus.⁵⁴ There is a logical order that puts these major narrative events into a particular probable historical sequence (birth before death, death before resurrection, etc.). However, within this basic skeleton it is possible that all four Gospel narrators have

⁵² For example, have the walking on water miracle and the feeding miracle been put together to evoke connections between Jesus and Moses (John 6:1-21)? Note that Mark also places these episodes adjacent to one another while Matthew and Luke do not record the walking on water episode. The bare fact that a Synoptic Gospel and John both narrate these events in the same order does not imply that this is the historical chronology. It is possible that a sequence of events recorded in the same order in all the Gospels might reflect a theological ordering rather than a strict historical order.

⁵³ "Historiographical Characteristics," 25–26.

⁵⁴ What Culpepper calls "a bare file of historical data" — "Story and History," 477.

reordered minor episodes for rhetorical/theological purposes without compromising, in the eyes of their reader, the historical credibility of their narrative.⁵⁵

2.5 Summary of Chapter 2 — Issues of Method

Some readers approach John 20 as though it was not a coherent narrative but one that only makes sense when the reader reads material from the Synoptics, particularly Luke-Acts, into John's narrative. The result of imposing Luke-Acts upon John 20 is that John's unique contribution to the ascension is not clearly heard.

This paper proposes to read John 20 in a way that will highlight John's unique contribution. The first two readings will focus on John in order to appreciate the Johannine ascension on its own terms. In the third reading, because John is a text making claims about history and Christology, it is necessary in order to read John 20 well, to consider how John's contribution on the ascension relates to Luke-Acts.

Some reader-response approaches to the Gospels are rightly accused of a disinterest in history. This paper will adopt a nuanced reader-response approach that draws on the tools of narrative analysis and regards John 20 and John's Gospel as coherent narrative units, while always being mindful that the narrative purports to do more than just tell a story, it speaks of historical realities and makes Christological claims.

⁵⁵ As already noted Bauckham argues that from internal literary evidence that John's reader would regard John as telling them about history - "Historiographical Characteristics," 27-36. Blomberg cites a four-fold criteria for evaluating whether an event in the Gospels might be regarded as historically reliable (1) makes sense in the first third of the first century in Israel, (2) depicts Jesus challenging conventional Jewish thinking, (3) shows signs of having been followed by early Christians inside and outside the NT, (4) seems to have changed in some significant way that later context — *Contagious Holiness*, 28 n.13. However, these criteria shed little light upon the ordering of historical events. These criteria are only concerned with narrative events as isolated episodes. See Bauckham, "Historiographical Characteristics," 24-27.

Chapter 3. FIRST READING: The Ascension in John 20

The first reading will seek to evaluate what John 20 tells us about the Johannine ascension. This reading will approach John 20 as a literary unit in itself without considering the wider context in John's Gospel or its relationship to the other Gospels or Acts. In this reading, observations will be organised under three headings: (a) 3.1 *Location* (page 31), (b) 3.2 *Testimony* (page 46) and (c) 3.3 *The Ascension Announcement* (page 54). The first reading will demonstrate that these three categories are not arbitrary impositions upon the text but emerge from the narrative of John 20 itself.

3.1 Location – Where Has Jesus Gone? Where Is He Going?

It will be demonstrated in this examination of the *Location* theme in John 20 that a number of narrative techniques foreground the issue of Jesus' location.⁵⁶ In the first scene the absence of Jesus is a pressing and significant problem for his followers. In the second and third scenes, as Jesus continues to appear and disappear with no apparent final departure, similar narrative techniques as in scene 1 continue to focus the reader's attention on the issue of Jesus' location. The overall effect of this theme is to raise questions for the reader as to how Jesus relates to his disciples if he is no longer physically present. These questions draw the reader's attention to the ascension announcement (20:17b) and the solution suggested in the narrative that follows the ascension announcement (20:18-31), that there is something better than knowing Jesus in the flesh — to know Jesus spiritually is better than knowing him physically.

⁵⁶ These techniques will be identified in the course of the first reading and include: direct speech (3.1.1, 3.1.9 and), reader-character distance (3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.4, 3.1.5, 0, 3.2.2, 3.2.3 and 3.2.4), reader-narrator distance (3.1.4, 3.1.6, 3.1.7, 3.1.13 and 3.1.14), inter-character distance (3.1.4, 3.1.6 and 3.2.4), character emotion (3.1.3), character movement (3.1.7, 3.1.13 and 3.1.14), plot delay (3.1.4) and narrative uncertainty/confusion (3.1.4, 3.1.7). For a discussion of various kinds of dramatic irony including reader-character distance, reader-narrator distance and inter-character distance see Booth, "Distance and Point-of-View: An Essay in Classification," 181–182.

3.1.1 Direct Speech and the Issue of Location in Scene 1⁵⁷

In the first scene, the issue of location is raised most prominently by Mary's direct speech. Her vivid and emotional dialogue, highlighting that she does not know the location of Jesus, punctuates the narrative on three occasions:⁵⁸

20:2b They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.⁵⁹

ἤραν τὸν κύριον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου καὶ οὐκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν.

20:13b They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.

ἤραν τὸν κύριον μου, καὶ οὐκ οἶδα ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν.

20:18b Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

κύριε, εἰ σὺ ἐβάστασας αὐτόν, εἰπέ μοι ποῦ ἔθηκας αὐτόν, καγὼ αὐτόν ἄρῶ.

3.1.2 Dramatic Irony and the Question of Location in Scene 1

The question of *where* is also highlighted in the first scene by a particular kind of dramatic irony that can be described as *reader-character distance*. The reader becomes increasingly aware of the location of Jesus but is repeatedly made aware, by Mary's own statements, that she does not know the location of Jesus. A distance gradually grows between the reader and Mary. Firstly, in 20:2, the reader might ponder the various

⁵⁷ For simplicity, *first*, *second* and *third* scenes refer to John 20:1-18, 20:19-23 and 20:26-29 respectively. 20:2-3 and 18 are not separate scenes but are action that occurs *off-stage* as the narrator does not relocate our focus from the empty tomb to a new location. While all the action of 20:19-29 occurs in the one location (although this is not certain for 20:24-25), the passage of time indicated in 20:26 introduces a new scene in the same location. The imperfect ἦν (20:24) and ἔλεγον (20:25) suggest 20:24-25 is best read, not as a separate scene, but as *off-stage* back-story information prior to the commencement of the third scene. The aside in 20:30-31 does not take place in the third scene but stands apart and looks back over the entire Gospel. For a discussion of *off-stage* narrative gaps see Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 64.

Lee points out that these three scenes are all introduced with a time and place marker — “Partnership in Easter Faith,” 38–39.

20:1 – On the first day of the week at the empty tomb.

20:19 – On the evening of the same day in a room with locked doors.

20:26 – One week later in a room with locked doors.

⁵⁸ Minear, “We Don’t Know Where,” 125; Schneider, “Touching the Risen Jesus,” 165.

⁵⁹ NIV translation. Underline added.

possible explanations for the empty tomb, but for Mary there is only one explanation. Seeing the empty tomb does not lead her to belief in the resurrection but the firm false conclusion that someone has taken the body. Mary's second "where" statement is in response to her encounter with the angels. The appearance of supernatural figures might suggest to the reader that some miraculous event is the possible cause of Jesus' absence from inside the tomb. This will cause the reader to question more firmly Mary's second "where" assertion. In the final "where" statement the reader knows explicitly that Jesus is alive. He is right in front of her! On this question of location, the distance between the reader and Mary becomes most obvious as the scene reaches its dramatic climax and Jesus reveals himself to Mary.⁶⁰

The distance between Mary and the reader in this first scene is further emphasised by the certainty of Mary's statements. The reader's conviction that Jesus has risen grows as the scene unfolds. Mary, until the end, remains convinced that the corpse of Jesus has been relocated by someone. Her recurring assertion of this belief (20:2, 13, 18) appears to become more emphatic by this repetition. There is no confusion in Mary's mind on this question. There is no deliberation about other possible explanations for an empty tomb.

Mary's appealing characterisation at first removes distance between the reader and Mary, but ultimately adds to the distance between the reader and Mary. In scene 1, Mary is characterised in this scene as a woman of initiative, devotion and conviction. While other disciples are characterised as fearful — cowering in a locked room — she takes it upon herself to go to the tomb. Other disciples only come to the tomb in response to her actions. She is presented as arriving quickly at clear convictions from what she sees and then acting decisively upon those convictions.⁶¹ It is an attractive characterisation. However, for the reader who admires these traits in Mary, the character-reader distance will be felt even more keenly as the reader gradually realises that Mary's conviction and action flow from a wrong understanding as to the location of Jesus.

⁶⁰ "Although she sees how he dies, discovers the tomb empty, sees the angels, and even sees the risen Lord himself, these experiences do not enlighten her. Witnessing each of the key moments of the passion story gives her no advantage or insight [...] When she recognizes Jesus it is not through seeing the risen Lord, but through hearing his words." — Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 144. See also Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 127.

⁶¹ Lee, "Partnership in Easter Faith," 43.

3.1.3 Mary's Emotions and the Question of Location in Scene 1

Mary's emotions emphasise the question of location. As the first scene progresses, her distress escalates over the issue of location. In 20:2, she "runs" to the disciples suggesting concern or distress over the empty tomb and a sense of urgency about locating Jesus.⁶² In 20:11, she weeps. Her reply to the angels makes it clear that the reason for her weeping is her lack of knowledge as to the location of Jesus. In 20:16, her intimate exclamation *πάββουι* highlights her surprise and joy.

3.1.4 Narrative Delay in The Reveal of Jesus' Location in Scene 1

The scene reaches its climax in the interchange between Jesus and Mary (20:14-17). However, even here, the reveal is delayed. Several narrative devices intensify this last moment of delay and thereby increase the focus for the reader on the question of *where* and emphasise the problem of Jesus being absent.

(1) *Unexpected dramatic delay.* Jesus being mistaken for the gardener prolongs the narration and intensifies the tension. The reader might expect Jesus to immediately identify himself but unexpectedly this does not occur. The reader might expect Mary to recognise Jesus when she turns in 20:14. Unexpectedly, this does not happen. The reader might expect Mary to recognise his voice when he questions her in 20:15. Again, the reader's desire for Mary to "find" Jesus is frustrated. This delay intensifies the moment of the reveal.

(2) *Inter-character distance.* "Who is it you are looking for?" is a question more about identity than location. The reader might expect a character who is asked this question to answer by giving a name.⁶³ However, Mary answers in a way that focuses on location. This disconnect between question and answer highlights that Mary's problem is about *where* not *who*. In this instance, the distance is not between the character (Mary) and the reader, but between characters (Jesus and Mary).

(3) There is also *reader-character distance* in the way Jesus delays revealing himself. Why would Jesus ask the question "who is it you are looking for?" when he clearly knows the answer? The empathetic presentation of Mary leads the reader to be

⁶² The verb *τρέχω* appears only twice in John, here in John 20:2 & 4.

⁶³ Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 129. There is perhaps even some irony, given the failure of Mary to use the name of Jesus here, that it is by using her name that Jesus triggers the reveal and resolves the narrative tension.

sensitive to the way this question delays the resolution of her distress. The reader will wonder why Jesus chooses to do this. Again, the overall effect is to intensify the delay in resolving the problem of location. It draws the reader's attention to the strong desire of a disciple to find Jesus.

(4) Note that there is also *reader-narrator distance* in this interchange in 20:14-15 because the narrator leaves so many elements of the narrative unexplained. Mary's failure to recognise Jesus by sight or voice until the moment he speaks her name is left unexplained.⁶⁴ In addition, the narrator offers no insight into the motivation of Jesus in delaying his reveal. A narrator who did not know the reason for these delays might still create a connection with the reader by acknowledging this fact. For the reader, empathising with Mary's problem and looking forward to the moment when she finds Jesus, that these delays are left unexplained and unacknowledged creates a reader-narrator distance that further intensifies the problem of location.

3.1.5 The Response of the "Other Disciple" Highlights the Issue of Location

The response of the other disciple also highlights the unresolved problem of Jesus' location in scene 1.⁶⁵ When the narrator tells us that this disciple sees the empty tomb and believes, it is not a belief in the resurrection, but a belief in Mary's report that the body is not in the tomb. Minear gives three reasons for this reading.⁶⁶

(i) The narrative aside in 20:9 explains that the other disciple only comes to believe in the resurrection, not from seeing the empty tomb, but from the testimony of Scripture. This is part of the theme in John 20, which will be examined shortly,⁶⁷ that believing comes not through seeing but by testimony.

(ii) There is a contrast between the response of the other disciple in 20:7-10 and the response of the disciples in 20:19ff. When the disciples see Jesus, like Mary, they are

⁶⁴ In the second reading an allusion to John 10:14-16 is explored. However, in the immediate narrative there is no explanation. If there is a link to John 10 the reader is left to work this out unassisted.

⁶⁵ ἄλλος μαθητής 20:2, 3, 4, 8.

⁶⁶ Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 127–128. *Contra* Keener, who states without argumentation that the beloved disciples believes at this point on the basis of Scripture — *John*, 1184.

⁶⁷ Section 3.2.3, page 45.

filled with joy (20:16).⁶⁸ However, the other disciple is not described in this way. His lack of joy suggests to the reader that he does not come to belief in the resurrection here at the tomb.

(iii) The realization that Jesus has risen leads other characters to give testimony (20:18 & 25). However, in 20:10, the other disciple simply heads home.⁶⁹ This implies that he has not come to understand that Jesus is risen. He is merely aware that the body of Jesus is not in a known location.

As well as these three reasons in favour of the view that the other disciple does not believe at this point in the narrative, it should also be noted that no particular Scripture is cited.⁷⁰ The lack of Scriptural citation adds to the impression that at this point in time the other disciple makes no connection between the empty tomb and any particular text of Scripture.

3.1.6 The Angelic Dialogue Highlights the Issue of Location

Note also the reader-narrator and inter-character distance in Mary's interaction with the angels which also highlights the issue of location. The Johannine angels do not announce the resurrection (compare Luke 24:6 "He is not here, but has risen"). They do not give the location where Jesus can be found (compare Mark 16:7 "in Galilee"). They simply ask a question "why are you crying?". This question highlights for the reader Mary's grief and bewilderment that the place of Jesus' location is not known to her. The reader is likely to regard the angels as characters with knowledge regarding the location of Jesus. However, they are given no opportunity to explain the absence of Jesus and so relieve Mary's distress. They mysteriously recede from the narration of the story with Mary still grieving.⁷¹ The question of Jesus' location is left hanging.

⁶⁸ It is not explicitly stated that Mary is joyful, however it seems a reasonable inference to draw from the context and her exclamation *ῥαββουνι*.

⁶⁹ Lee correctly notes that the response of this disciple "has no narrative impact" — "Partnership in Easter Faith," 39. The character's response is a non-response.

⁷⁰ On every other occasion in John when Scripture (*γραφῆ*) is mentioned, a specific OT text is cited (2:22; 5:39 see 5:46 and 6:31; 7:38, 42; 10:35; 13:18; 17:12; 19:24, 28, 36, 37).

⁷¹ Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:999.

3.1.7 Character Movement in Scene 1 Emphasizes the Issue of Jesus' Absence

The problem of Jesus being absent and the desire of the characters to find Jesus is foregrounded in 20:1-17 not just by the dialogue but also by the movement of characters. Mary's running in 20:2 has already been noted.⁷² The detailed description of the two disciples running to the tomb, which is discussed at length by commentators and about which many theories abound, seems primarily to emphasise the way the characters are urgently seeking.⁷³ The way the disciples "stoop", "look in" and "enter" the tomb, evokes a strong sense of searching intently for something.⁷⁴ These two disciples then return home with the question of the location of Jesus still unresolved. The movements of all three disciples (Mary, Peter and the other disciple) emphasise that they seek but fail to find.⁷⁵ This is also emphasised by the way that it is Jesus who "finds" Mary, not the other way around.

3.1.8 Ambiguity over Other Character Movements in Scene 1

Confusion concerning other character movements also highlights the issue of location in scene 1. The reader must keep asking "where?" not just in relation to Jesus but also other characters.

The narrator at some points emphasises the movement of characters and takes great care in describing their specific location. This makes the lack of explanation about other character movements all the more obvious. The reader is drawn in to making assumptions about the location of certain characters in order to keep reading and make sense of the scene.⁷⁶ For example, Mary runs to inform the disciples (20:2), the disciples run to the tomb (20:3-4) and then return home (20:10). The narrator is quite specific about these movements including details about the order in which the disciples arrived at the tomb. However Mary's reappearance at the tomb (20:11) is left unexplained. Does she run back with the two disciples? Does she return much later? Have the disciples left by the time she arrives? The reader must constantly ask "where?".

⁷² Section 3.1.3.

⁷³ Schnackenburg, *John*, 3:310.

⁷⁴ 20:5, 11 — παρακύπτω. 20:5 — βλέπω and 20:8, 11 — θεωρέω. 20:6, 8 — εισέρχομαι.

⁷⁵ Stibbe, "The Elusive Christ," 21, 24; Nicholson, *Death as Departure*, 165.

⁷⁶ For a general discussion of this narrative technique see Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 66–67.

Another example of reader-narrator confusion over character movement involves Mary's companions. Given that Mary is the only person mentioned in the opening of the first scene (20:1), the unspecified "we do not know where" (20:2) is part of the reader-narrator distance over the question of location. The reader, having assumed that Mary is alone, is then surprised by the (initially withheld) information that Mary has travelled here with companions. The reader must review and reassess what has been read. However, even though the existence of these companions is revealed by Mary's dialogue, there is no explanation about who they are and what role they play in the events.⁷⁷ What happens to these unspecified companions? Did they run with Mary to the disciples in 20:2? Have they returned with Mary in 20:11 when she encounters the angels and the 'gardener'? Have they, like the two male disciples, gone home, perhaps in despair? Are they witnesses to the resurrection? Do they go with Mary to report to the disciples in 20:18?⁷⁸ A reader familiar with the Synoptics might assume that Mary's "we" reference is to the women described in the other Gospels as accompanying her to the tomb (Luke 24:1, Mark 16:1, Matt 28:1). However, it should be noted how little information the narrator gives his readers regarding these characters and how much their identity and movements are left unresolved.⁷⁹ The withholding of information

⁷⁷ This narrative technique of *unreliable narration*, does not suggest that the narrator tells a fictional tale, or lacks knowledge, but that in telling the story information that could help the reader is withheld until later for effect. See Booth, "Distance and Point-of-View: An Essay in Classification," 183–185; Lemmer, "A Possible Understanding By The Implied Reader," 290.

⁷⁸ The proposal that Mary uses the plural οἶδαμεν because she speaks for a Johannine community rests upon a series of assumptions beyond the scope of this paper to address. See Carson, *John*, 198 for a convincing refutation. Whatever one concludes regarding the validity of reading the "we" in 21:24 as referring to a Johannine community, it is more difficult to make this case for 20:2. The "we" of 20:2 is on the lips of a character not a narrator addressing the reader directly.

Alternatively, Bultmann suggests that οἶδαμεν is not a genuine plural but an "[o]riental mode of speech" where the plural is used for the singular much like the royal "we" in English. By analogy with the royal "we" it is a device that emphasizes the importance of the announcement — *The Gospel of John*, 684 n.1. Beasley-Murray cites John 3:2, 11; 9:31; 14:5 & 21:24 as other possible examples of this technique — *John*, 371. While Bultmann's proposal would not undermine the thesis of this paper, each of these examples, including 20:2, are better understood as genuine plurals.

Both arguments would be stronger if Mary did not slip into the first person singular as the scene progresses (John 20:15 — καὶ ἡ, 20:18 — ἐώρακα, and 20:13 — οἶδα where the shift from plural to singular even occurs when using the same verb) — Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:984. The shift in pronoun suggests that in 20:2 Mary is in the company of others but by 20:13 she is either alone or the narration has zoomed in to focus on her alone.

⁷⁹ To even assume that the "we" refers to her companions is an assumption without any real evidence in the text.

regarding the movement and location of Mary's companions adds to the overall sense of uncertainty for the reader regarding location in this scene.⁸⁰

A further example of confusion over character movement involves the angels. The angels *fade out* of the narration but it is never said that they leave. Are the angels present during the interchange between Jesus and Mary? Does the conversation between Mary and the angels occur with Mary outside the tomb and the angels inside? Does Mary enter the tomb? The reader might assume that she enters the tomb because the point of view of the narration zooms in on the location of the two angels describing them in some detail. Do the angels then emerge from the tomb and interact with Mary outside the tomb?

In contrast to these character movement ambiguities, note how specifically the narrator positions Mary in 20:11 prior to her interaction with the angels. The narrator uses the conjunction δέ and the two prepositions πρὸς and ἔξω to pinpoint her location and orientation — Μαρία δὲ εἰσῆκει πρὸς τῷ μνημείῳ ἔξω κλαίουσα. The weak adversative δέ probably contrasts Mary's movements with those of the disciples (20:10) who returned home.⁸¹ The combination of the prepositions suggests that Mary stands outside the tomb, facing the entrance of the tomb. Even more prescriptive is the positioning of the angels inside the tomb as ἓνα πρὸς τῇ κεφαλῇ καὶ ἓνα πρὸς τοῖς ποσί (20:12).⁸² The narrator is also specific about the body position of the characters: Mary stands (ἵστημι), angels sit (καθέζομαι) and the gardener stands (ἵστημι). In her interactions with the gardener, Mary's orientation is again narrated (στρέφω – 20:14 & 16). To summarize, the reader is provided with Mary's precise position (in front of the tomb entrance), her orientation (toward the tomb entrance), her body position (standing), and her relative position with respect to the two angels, the two (now absent) disciples and her orientation (turning toward) with respect to the gardener. The precision in narrating the location of the characters at these points throws into stark relief the ambiguity about the location of characters at other points in the scene.

⁸⁰ Keener notes that it is typical of John's style to draw a scene by means of a few main characters that are named and foregrounded even when it is obvious that others are present. — Keener, *John*, 1183. The strong characterization of Mary in this scene is achieved in part by the way she alone is the focus, with much of the scene being told from her point of view.

⁸¹ Carson, *John*, 639.

⁸² There is clear tabernacle imagery here, see Stibbe, *The Resurrection Code*, 91–93. The presence of tabernacle imagery in the placement of the angels in this scene does not detract from the contrast between specific and unspecific character positioning.

Confusion over the location of various characters in scene 1 sets the reader up for final character movement ambiguity in the climactic reveal of 20:16. The appearance and location of the ‘gardener’ is unnarrated. Does he appear inside the tomb or outside? Is Mary still outside the tomb in 20:14 when she turns and sees the gardener? If she has moved inside the tomb to speak to the angels, does she now turn to look through the entrance at a gardener who is outside the tomb, or is he also in the tomb?⁸³ Has he been in the tomb, or outside the tomb, observing the interchange between Mary and the angels (20:11-13)? Has he suddenly materialised out of nowhere?

3.1.9 Mary’s Two Testimonies Highlight the Theme of Location in Scene 1

The problem of Jesus being absent and the desire to find him are highlighted by the contrast between the two testimonies Mary carries to the disciples in this one scene. Her two announcements bookend the scene. Her first message emphasises her lack of knowledge as to the location of Jesus (20:2 “We do not know where”), her second message emphasises that his location is now clear (20:18 “I have seen the Lord”). The problem is reported in her first message at the beginning of the scene (the unknown location of Jesus). The second message reports that this problem is now resolved. When compared, the content of the two testimonies emphasise that the location of Jesus is the key issue for Mary.

3.1.10 Summary of the Theme of Location in Scene 1 (20:1-18)

A variety of sophisticated narrative techniques highlight that the physical absence of Jesus is the pressing problem of the first scene. The empathetic presentation of Mary draws the reader into identifying with her distress and sympathising with her search for Jesus. Accordingly, the dramatic reveal of 20:16-17, that includes the ascension announcement, is the climactic centre of the chapter. Finally, the question of Jesus’ location is resolved. In scene 1, the ambiguity of character locations and movements intensify this focus on the question of Jesus’ location. At some points, the narrator leaves no room for reader assumptions about location and firmly directs the reader regarding the movement of characters. At other points, there is significant ambiguity about character location. The reader must keep asking “where?”.

⁸³ The variant ἐν (attested in 8) instead of πρὸς in John 20:11 may be an example of an ancient reader seeking to interpolate into the gaps created by the narrator with respect to Mary’s location at various points.

3.1.11 Location in Scenes 2 (20:19-23) and 3 (20:26-29)

The urgent problem of the first scene, “where is Jesus?”, is resolved in his appearance to Mary. However, his ascension announcement, that is part of this reveal, immediately raises new questions regarding Jesus’ location. What does Jesus mean in 20:17 by saying that he is ascending? Where is he going to? When is this to happen? How do his disciples now relate to him? The question of location continues to be highlighted in scene 2 and 3 as the reader encounters many of the same narrative devices as in scene 1.

3.1.12 Jesus’ Ongoing Appearances Are Unexpected

In the second scene, the sudden appearance of Jesus in 20:19 surprises the reader. The content of Mary’s message in 20:18 (see 20:17) does not create any expectation that Jesus will appear to the disciples. It is simply announced by Mary that Jesus goes to the Father.⁸⁴ Without an awareness of the Synoptics, it is quite unlikely that the content of Mary’s message would lead the reader to expect the appearance of Jesus in 20:19.

The appearance of Jesus in scene 2 is not only surprising for the reader, but also for the characters. The reassuring greeting εἰρήνη ὑμῖν implies that the disciples are unsettled and need to be reassured. Further highlighting this narrative device of dramatic surprise is the escalation in the level of surprise between scene 2 and 3. In the second scene, Jesus’ appearance is surprising for the characters simply because of an absence, in the lead up to the scene, of any suggestion that Jesus will appear. However, this escalating character surprise comes to a climax in the third scene when Jesus appears to Thomas emphatically against this character’s expectations.

In scene 1, the characters expect to find Jesus in the tomb and are destabilised by his absence. In scene 2 and 3 they are destabilised by his presence – his sudden and unexpected appearances right in their midst.⁸⁵ These ongoing and surprising appearances intensify reader questions as to what the ascension announcement “I am going to the Father” could possibly mean.

⁸⁴ Compare with ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ὄψεσθε (Mark 16:7), and the emphatically repeated ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ὄψεσθε (Matt 28:7) and κακεῖ με ὄψονται (Matt 28:10).

⁸⁵ 20:19 and 26 — ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον.

3.1.13 Character Movement – The Arrival and Departure of Jesus in Scenes 2-3

As in scene 1, confusion concerning character movements highlights the issue of location in scene 2 and 3. The reader must keep asking “where?”, firstly in relation to Jesus and secondly, in relation to other characters.

In both the second and third scenes, Jesus enters into a room with locked doors. He is specifically positioned in the midst of the disciples. However, the question of where he has come from and his means of entry into the room are unexplained. Does he materialise in the centre of the room? Does he pass through the locked doors? The phrase ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον does not state that he has come through the doors. The reference to the locked doors may merely serve to emphasis the fear of the disciples and underscore the motif of hiding.⁸⁶ It leaves open the question as to whether he just appeared, has come through the doors, or rises through the floor to stand in their midst.⁸⁷

While there is vagueness about Jesus’ arrivals into the second and third scenes, his departures from both these scenes are not narrated at all. Does he pass (again) through the locked door? Does he simply vanish?⁸⁸ Does he go upward or downward? Did he remain with the disciples for some time beyond the dialogue narrated? Does he hide in a cupboard overhearing the dialogue with Thomas?⁸⁹

⁸⁶ See footnote 92.

⁸⁷ Schneider argues that “[b]ehind the Greek ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον [...] stands the Aramaic word for ‘rise up’” suggesting that Jesus rose through the floor to stand in their midst — “Touching the Risen Jesus,” 165. For Schneider this fulfils the imagery of a new temple being raised (ἐγείρω) in 3 days (2:19). This creative suggestion underscores the way the narratorial gap has created a vacuum into which the reader’s imagination is drawn and into which the reader must insert something in order to keep reading.

Calvin, while insisting that Christ’s appearance in the room must imply some kind of miracle, admits that his exact form of entry into the room is not clear, “[l]et it suffice for us that Christ wanted to confirm the authority of His resurrection for the disciples by a striking miracle” — *John*, 202.

⁸⁸ As is the natural reading of Luke 24:31 — καὶ αὐτὸς ἄφαντος ἐγένετο ἀπ’ αὐτῶν.

⁸⁹ While there might be a smidge of jest in this last suggestion it also draws attention to the way the narrator never informs his readers regarding Jesus’ knowledge of the conversation between the apostles and Thomas which Jesus is obviously aware of in the third scene given the his dialogue in confronting Thomas. Again, the reader must assume something. Perhaps the reader will assume that Jesus possesses this knowledge by supernatural means. However, it is also possible that Thomas’ demand is relayed to Jesus by a disciple in another (unnarrated) resurrection appearance. Examples abound in the Gospels of Jesus receiving information by means of a normal conversation (see for example the highly significant 12:22) but in other situations he appears to have supernatural insight (4:16-18, 6:15).

This lack of narration regarding his departure draws the reader's attention to the question of his physical location between appearances. When it becomes clear in 20:24 that Jesus is no longer with the disciples, the reader must make assumptions about the current location of Jesus and the nature of his exit in order to continue reading.⁹⁰ It creates questions for the reader about how the disciples will now relate to Jesus and whether these surprising in-the-flesh appearances and disappearances will continue indefinitely.

3.1.14 The Departure of Jesus in Scene 1 Reconsidered

Given that Jesus' departure from the second and third scenes, if indeed he does depart, is not narrated, it is intriguing to reconsider the end of the first scene. Does Jesus dematerialise in front of Mary? Does he remain on the scene while she departs with the ascension message for the disciples? The reader might note that in response to Mary's first announcement (20:2), the disciples come with urgency to the tomb to investigate her claim; however, the report that Mary has seen Jesus alive does not appear to result in the disciples rushing to the scene a second time. If Mary leaves Jesus outside the tomb in order to go and convey the message that she had just seen the Lord there, why then do the disciples not return to the location of this reveal? The absence of any record of Mary or the disciples returning to the tomb must raise questions for the reader as to what they understood the ascension announcement to mean. Does the absence of any narration of a return to the tomb after the ascension announcement suggest a sudden lack of urgency to find Jesus in the flesh? For the reader, this must raise questions regarding how the disciples will continue to find and relate to Jesus.⁹¹

3.1.15 The Location and Movement of Other Characters in Scenes 2 and 3

The first scene began with the motif of searching emphasising the issue of location. In the first scene, everyone is looking for Jesus. The second scene begins with the related motif of hiding that emphasises the issue of location in a similar way. The disciples are behind locked doors so that they cannot be found. On each occasion Jesus finds his

⁹⁰ "Any narrative always has holes, places where something is missing. Reading is not only a matter of making sense of what is there in the narrative, but also what is not there." Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 61.

⁹¹ These questions will be explored in the detailed examination of the ascension announcement that follows in section 3.3 (page 49).

followers not the other way round (Mary in 20:15-16, the disciples in 20:19 and Thomas in 20:26). In each of these scenes, secured entrances (the stone and the locked door) are obstacles that Jesus appears to overcome in finding his followers.⁹²

Narratorial obfuscation regarding other characters adds to questions of location. In scene 3, the reader will assume from the unqualified reference ὅπου ἦσαν οἱ μαθηταὶ in 20:19 that all the disciples are present in the second scene.⁹³ Even the detail of the locked doors, suggesting that to be elsewhere would be dangerous, adds to the impression that all the disciples are gathered in this safe place. The narration of the commissioning in 20:21 strengthens the assumption that the entire inner circle are present. The reader only has this assumption overturned at the end of the episode when it is revealed that Thomas was absent (20:24).⁹⁴

3.1.16 The Location of the Disciples in Scene 1 Reconsidered

Given the way the narrator springs this surprise regarding the location of Thomas in 20:24, the reader may need to reassess the depiction of Mary's report to Peter and the other disciple back in 20:2. In the first scene, only Peter and the other disciple are explicitly narrated as hearing and responding to Mary's news that Jesus cannot be found. Where are the other disciples? The characterization of the disciples as fearfully hiding together in a locked room in 20:19 may cause the reader to re-read scene 1 posing new questions regarding location. It is possible that Mary spoke only to Peter and the other disciple. However, Mary may have spoken to all the disciples but only two disciples chose to leave the locked room and run to the tomb.⁹⁵ The background noise

⁹² Keener is technically correct to say that κλείω (20:19 – κεκλεισμένων) can mean “shut” rather than “locked” — *John*, 1201. In Acts 5:23 κεκλεισμένον means locked because of the prepositional phrase ἐν πάσῃ ἀσφαλείᾳ. This implies the disciples are *hiding* rather than *barricading*. That is, they are concealing themselves, rather than creating a barrier that prevents those who wish to apprehend them from entering. This might suggest that Jesus' entrance to the room is less miraculous; and instead underscores the theme of hiding, seeking and finding in the scene.

⁹³ Schnackenburg, *John*, 3:328. Who exactly is present in the locked room is not clear. 20:24 does not necessarily mean that only apostles are in the room during the second scene. The apostolic commission, if that is what occurs, might be witnessed by other disciples.

⁹⁴ The narrative technique at this point strongly parallels the “we” of 20:2.

⁹⁵ If they are present, when Mary makes her initial report in 20:2, the reason they do not also come out to the tomb is unexplained. If they are not with Peter and the other disciple when Mary reports in 20:2, this is left unexplained. It is possible that other disciples came to the tomb with Peter and John however the focus is just on the two disciples. As already noted in footnote 78, it is typical of John to focus on only a few named characters even though others are present.

of these continual reader questions of “where?” involving a variety of characters serves to intensify the reader’s questions about the location of Jesus.

3.1.17 A Future Foreshadowed Absence

A future, physical absence of Jesus is gradually foreshadowed in scene 2 and 3. On the one hand, the action does not suggest a future absence. Jesus comes and goes without any suggestion that these appearances will cease. The lack of narration of Jesus’ departure in all three scenes helps to avoid any sense of farewell or climactic departure. However, while the action, the coming and going of Jesus, might lead the reader to assume that Jesus will continue appearing to his disciples indefinitely, the dialogue hints at something different. Following the ascension announcement, the narrator subtly creates an expectation that these in-the-flesh visits will end.⁹⁶ However, his impending physical absence is implied, firstly by his own statement: μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πιστεύσαντες (20:29) and even more obviously in 20:31 where the implied reader is addressed as one who comes to believe through testimony rather than by seeing Jesus themselves in the flesh.⁹⁷

3.1.18 Conclusion of Location Theme

In conclusion, the issue of the location of Jesus in scenes 1-3 is highlighted by sophisticated narrative techniques. However, by the end of John 20, the question of location has shifted in its focus. It began with the empty tomb and the problem of where the body of Jesus might be, because he is not in the tomb as expected. While this problem is resolved by the end of the first scene, a new question of location is introduced: What does it mean that Jesus is ascending to the Father? Why do the disciples, after hearing the ascension announcement, appear to lack any urgency to encounter Jesus for themselves in the flesh? How is that to be understood in a narrative where Jesus is mysteriously continuing to come and go?

⁹⁶ It will be argued in section 3.3 The Ascension Announcement, that Jesus’ words in 20:17 do not announce his departure but the very opposite.

⁹⁷ “Jesus here foresees a time when he will not provide the kind of tangible evidence afforded the beloved disciple and Thomas” — Carson, *John*, 657. See also Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:1048–1049.

3.2 Testimony — Seeing & Believing Versus Hearing & Believing

A distinction gradually develops in John 20 between the eyewitnesses, who have encountered Jesus in the flesh, and those who know Jesus through the testimony of these eyewitnesses.⁹⁸ Some characters, such as Mary and the other disciple, believe through testimony.⁹⁹ Other characters, such as the disciples in 20:19-23 and Thomas in 20:24-25, reject the opportunity to believe through testimony and insist upon seeing Jesus in the flesh. The overall effect is to create a persuasive narrative that urges the reader to believe that encountering Jesus through apostolic testimony is better than an encounter with Jesus in the flesh. To know Jesus spiritually is better than knowing him physically.

3.2.1 Mary – Hearing and Believing

Mary comes to understand that Jesus has risen, not by seeing, but by hearing. Indeed, her sight misleads her, as she interprets what she has seen (the empty tomb) incorrectly. A second time sight misleads her as she faces the ‘gardener’ but for some unexplained reason does not perceive that it is Jesus. Only when she hears Jesus speak her name (Μαριάμ) does she come to understanding.¹⁰⁰ Overall, the narrative suggests that seeing has been misleading for Mary. *Seeing* led to the false conclusion that the corpse of Jesus had been stolen rather than the conclusion that he had risen.

Testimony includes the explanation of events. Jesus does not leave it to Mary to simply report her own theological interpretation of what she has seen. He provides an explanation. Jesus not only reveals himself to Mary in words (by calling her name) but also, in the words of his ascension announcement, explains to her the implications of what she has seen. What she has heard enables her to understand correctly what she has seen. Accordingly, 20:18 describes Mary as reporting to the disciples, not only what she has seen (ἑώρακα τὸν κύριον), but also what she has heard (καὶ ταῦτα εἶπεν αὐτῇ).

⁹⁸ Nicholson, *Death as Departure*, 36.

⁹⁹ While Mary does encounter Jesus in the flesh, it will be demonstrated in this section that it is by hearing that she comes to belief. The testimony she believes is the self testimony of Jesus.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:1009; Barrett, *John*, 469.

That is, it includes what she has been taught by Jesus regarding the significance of the event not simply the event itself.

The characterisation of Mary in scene 1 emphasises that *seeing* can be over-rated, while *hearing*, from a reliable source, leads to full and clear understanding.

3.2.2 The Other Disciple – Hearing and Believing

Likewise, as already discussed,¹⁰¹ the other disciple does not believe when he sees the empty tomb. Like Mary, understanding only comes to him through the voice of the Lord, this time in the form of the testimony of Scripture. As already noted, the way this disciple goes home and does not testify to what he has seen, suggests that his understanding (through the Scriptures) comes at a later unspecified time. He leaves the empty tomb still not believing. However, what he will hear in Scripture (at some future time) will enable him to finally understand what he has seen (the empty tomb).

In contrast to the other disciple and Mary, the disciples in the next two scenes are depicted negatively as those who insist on believing through seeing.

3.2.3 The Disciples – Believing Only After Seeing

The narrative of 20:19-20 emphasises that the disciples believe only after seeing. To understand correctly the response of the disciples it is important to observe carefully the way this recognition scene unfolds. In 20:19, Jesus speaks (εἰρήνη ὑμῖν) and then shows (τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν πλευράν). Recognition follows not the speaking but the showing. It is not, as with Mary, a recognition based on hearing.

This ordering is highlighted further by the depiction of the disciples' emotions. The phrase "the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (20:20b) emphasises that recognition came for the disciples not audibly but visually, even though Jesus tells first and shows second. The οὖν combined with the aorist ἐχάρησαν (20:20) emphasises that seeing Jesus is the reason for their rejoicing.¹⁰² In other words, the *hearing* of 20:19

¹⁰¹ Section 3.1.5.

¹⁰² In the second reading it will be noted that the familiar words of initial greeting in 20:19 (see 14:27 and 16:33) seem not to trigger recognition. This underscores the failure of the disciples to grasp the truth of Jesus' resurrection without sight.

does not immediately produce joy or recognition. This also implies that they have not believed Mary's testimony in 20:18.¹⁰³

3.2.4 Thomas – Hearing Rejected, Insisting On Seeing Before Believing

The refusal of Thomas to believe eyewitness testimony is the explicit focus of scene 3. Five elements in the narrative contribute to this focus:

- (i) The disciples are commissioned to take the message about Jesus to others (20:21).¹⁰⁴ The identification of the disciples as “the twelve” (20:24) emphasises that their testimony to Thomas is authoritative.¹⁰⁵
- (ii) The bestowal of the Spirit further emphasises that Thomas refuses the testimony of Spirit-enabled, Jesus-commissioned, apostolic eyewitnesses to the resurrection, not merely fellow disciples.¹⁰⁶
- (iii) Thomas' colourful dialogue “unless I [...] thrust (βάλω) my finger into the mark of the nails, and thrust (βάλω) my hand into his side” explicitly and flamboyantly rejects the apostolic testimony that Jesus is alive — this is not the way you speak if you believe there is a possibility that Jesus will suddenly appear in the midst of the room. Thomas is not an earnest open-minded seeker hoping for corroborating evidence.

¹⁰³ The natural reading of 20:18-19 is that the disciples who hear from Mary that Jesus is ascending are the same disciples present in the upper room in 20:19.

¹⁰⁴ The commission to the apostles is assumed here to be the role of revealing the truth about Jesus to others. It will be demonstrated in the second reading that the role of Jesus in bearing testimony is a significant theme in the Fourth Gospel. He has come from heaven to earth to speak of the Father's glory. In turn the disciples are to testify to what they have seen and heard. Throughout John 20, the major role of Jesus in each scene is to reveal the truth (about himself). On each occasion, he reveals the truth that he is alive and explains the theological significance of this truth. In scene 1 he teaches about his ascension (20:17). In scene 2 he outlines the post-resurrection role of the disciples as his messengers (20:21, 23). In scene 3 he explains the blessing of belief through testimony (20:29b). This fits the pattern of the apostolic mission outlined in John 13-17 as will be demonstrated in the second reading. See Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples*.

¹⁰⁵ When the reader remembers that Judas is no longer part of the group, and factors in Thomas' absence, then the use of “twelve” is patently not a literal head count but rather functions as a symbol of apostolic authority — Keener, *John*, 1208; Carson, *John*, 656.

¹⁰⁶ An argument will be developed in the second and third readings for seeing 20:22 as a substantive Spirit bestowal empowering the apostles as witnesses, and not, for example, a symbolic pre-figuring of some future Spirit bestowal.

For the reader, given the foregrounded use of ἅπτω in 20:17, the use of βάλλω creates a contrast between the gentler and reverent action of Mary and the more aggressive demand of Thomas. While βάλλω and ἅπτω have some overlap in their semantic ranges, βάλλω centres on the idea of throw or thrust and ἅπτω centres on touch or grasp.¹⁰⁷ βάλλω suggests a more aggressive action — the insertion of the finger/hand into the wound rather than an embrace that touching the surface of Jesus body.

The distance between the reader and Thomas as he rejects the possibility of meeting Jesus in 20:14-15 is the most marked instance of reader-character distance in the chapter.

- (iv) Far from the words of Jesus in 20:29 vindicating Thomas' demand, they are a rebuke to him.¹⁰⁸ The narrative of scene 3 when Jesus appears focuses on the culpability of Thomas in refusing to accept a second hand testimony. Jesus does not appear in the third scene to rebuke the apostles for ineffective or unpersuasive testimony. Likewise, Jesus does not appear to commend Thomas for aspiring to the status of eyewitness. The content of Jesus' blessing μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πιστεύσαντες (20:29) makes it plain that the apostles' testimony should have been sufficient for Thomas.¹⁰⁹ Thomas' Christological confession in 20:28, astute and profound as it is, could have been made on the basis of belief in the testimony of the eyewitnesses. The high Christology of Thomas' confession at the end of the scene does not suggest he is a character who acted with wisdom at the start of the scene.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ BDAG, 130–131.

¹⁰⁸ Carson describes it as an “admonition” — *John*, 658.

¹⁰⁹ The final declaration by Thomas ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου is a clear expression of belief and arguably the strongest Christological statement of any human character in the Gospel- Lee, “Partnership in Easter Faith,” 48. However, it serves to highlight the kind of belief that is possible by those accepting apostolic testimony. It is exactly the kind of belief that the narrator claims is possible through testimony — ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ (20:31). For a contrary view see Brown who argues that the blessing covers both those who believe through seeing and those who believe through hearing, coming to this conclusion with an appeal to Luke 24:30-31, 35 — *John*, 1970, 2:1049.

¹¹⁰ Brown effectively argues that the astute confession of Thomas in 20:29 is an indication that Thomas should be viewed positively throughout John 20. Brown emphasises a dichotomy between seeing and not

- (v) Significant elements in scene 2 are not repeated in scene 3 in a way that foregrounds the refusal of Thomas to accept eyewitness testimony. The Spirit bestowal (20:22) and the words of commission (20:21) are both absent. The initial setting of the two scenes is very similar; doors locked, Jesus appears in their midst, and offers the same greeting of “Peace be with you”. This makes the omissions all the more obvious. Perhaps the reader will wonder if Thomas has forfeited his commission and Spirit bestowal. Perhaps the reader will assume that Thomas does receive a Spirit bestowal and commission but these elements are simply unnarrated. In either case, the absence of these elements puts the focus on the explicitly narrated refusal of Thomas to believe the apostles.

The reluctance to believe eyewitness testimony is presented subtly in scene 2 when the disciples reject Mary’s testimony. It is made explicit in scene 3 when Thomas rejects the apostolic testimony. The disciples’ response to Mary is backgrounded and the response of Thomas foregrounded. This foregrounding/backgrounding is created by a combination of familiar and discordant elements in the two scenes. The two testimonies, Mary to the disciples and the disciples to Thomas, are in some ways remarkably similar. On both occasions, an eyewitness of the risen Jesus speaks to a non-eyewitness. Note the almost identical wording of ἑώρακα τὸν κύριον (20:18) and ἑωράκαμεν τὸν κύριον (20:25). The way that the relaying of Jesus’ ascension announcement is backgrounded by being summarised rather than by direct report, the only instance of dialogue summarising in John 20, also contributes to the two testimonies appearing to be similar. However, while the testimonies are similar, the responses to these testimonies are narrated differently. The response of the apostles is passed over. Thomas’ response is dealt with in detail. The refusal to accept Mary’s testimony in 20:18 is only apparent to the reader in the subsequent narrative when Jesus reveals himself to the disciples and they rejoice. This has the effect of making the reluctance to believe testimony a building theme in John 20 reaching its climax in the Thomas narrative.

seeing, at the expense of the dichotomy argued here between believing through seeing and believing through testimony. — *John*, 1970, 2:1050.

3.2.5 The Implied Reader – It Is More Blessed To Believe By Hearing/Reading

In the concluding aside (20:30-31), the implied reader is directly addressed and urged by the narrator to believe in Jesus, not by seeking out or hoping for an encounter with Jesus in the flesh, but by believing in the testimony of the Fourth Gospel.¹¹¹ Just as Mary testifies to the disciples (20:18) and the apostles testify to Thomas (20:25), the implied author reveals in 20:30-31 that all along he has been engaged in the same kind of testimony to the implied reader. This exhortation is emphasised by repetition. It is first stated in the negative by Jesus (20:29 – those not seeing but believing) and then in the positive by the narrator (20:31 – those reading and then believing).¹¹² The exhortation has more impact by the zeroing in, or telescoping in, upon the implied reader. The reference by Jesus is general (the one who does not see — οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες), while the narrator particularises by explicitly addressing the implied reader and exhorting this reader to believe through reading (ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε).

By placing this narratorial aside immediately following the third scene, it functions as a commentary on the choices made in this third scene. Effectively, the insistence of Thomas on seeing for himself is directly and unfavourably contrasted with the idea of believing in eyewitness testimony. The implied reader must decide whether to act like Thomas or whether to accept the (written) testimony of the narrator. The reader may initially identify with Thomas and his desire to see for himself. This would cause the rebuke to Thomas to function as an indirect rebuke to the reader.

One of the differences between Thomas and the implied reader is that Thomas at least receives the testimony about Jesus from a flesh and blood eyewitness. In one sense, the implied reader who 'hears' through the written word is a step further removed. However, the juxtaposition of Jesus' benediction in 20:29 and the narrator's statement of purpose in 20:30-31 has the effect of closing this gap. Jesus' word of blessing applies

¹¹¹ This does not suggest that the implied reader is an unbeliever, it may be that the reader's belief is strengthened and better informed as a result of by John's testimony. At this point in the Fourth Gospel the implied author and reader become explicit characters in the narrative. The implied author identifies himself as an eye-witness who has recorded his testimony for the purpose of persuading his reader to believe in Christ. While the implied author is not always the narrator, in John's Gospel the implied author is the main narrator. The implied reader is not always explicitly identified however in John the implied reader is explicitly identified, most notably in John 20:30-31.

¹¹² The phrase ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε...might refer to solely the resurrection appearance in John 20 but the phrase Πολλὰ..σημεῖα ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς suggests that the entire public ministry of Jesus is on view. However, this distinction is not germane to the thesis of this paper.

equally to someone who hears verbally from an eyewitness or who hears through the written testimony of Scripture. Initially, in the Thomas scene, the reader will understand Jesus to be referring to someone hearing verbal testimony, however after the narrator's statement of purpose in 20:30-31 the reader will understand that the narrator intends for the reader to include themselves in Jesus' word of blessing. These two classes of 'hearers' are grouped together by this statement.

In contrast to the example of Thomas, the reader will now realise that "the other disciple" functions as some kind of ideal disciple. They too, like the implied reader, come to believe through reading Scripture. The anonymity of this disciple will assist the implied reader to identify with this character.

The curious remark that many things Jesus did have not been recorded in the Fourth Gospel (20:30) suggests that the reader of Scripture benefits from a crafted narrative in which events have been carefully selected from a larger corpus of available material. This description of the Fourth Gospel will accord with the reader's experience of a narrative where many details have been obviously excluded (evidenced by the narrative gaps already observed) and the events included are accompanied by rich theological interpretation (evidenced by the sophisticated narrative devices and narratorial asides already observed). The reader has the benefit of Spirit inspired theological reflection in the way the Gospel has been put together as an insightful Christological narrative. This again is part of the narrator's persuasive narrative urging the reader to regard Spirit inspired apostolic text as a better way of knowing Jesus than an in the flesh experience.

3.2.6 The Backgrounding/Absence of Angelic Testimony

Human eyewitness testimony is foregrounded in John 20 by the backgrounding of angelic testimony. As a comparison, in all three Synoptic Gospels, angelic figures feature strongly in proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. In each of the Synoptics the angels are the first to announce the news of the resurrection (Matt 28:5, Mark 16:6-7, Luke 24:5-7). This fits a wider pattern in the Synoptics where the angels are often the messengers of important divine news (for example, Luke 1:11-20, 26-37, 2:8-14). However, John's angels give no explicit testimony to the resurrection or to anything else. They simply ask

a question and then disappear.¹¹³ By avoiding any narration of angels giving testimony, John 20 focuses on the important role of human eyewitness testimony.

3.2.7 Summary of Testimony Theme in Scenes 1-3

The direct appeal to the implied reader is a fitting conclusion to John 20. While the physical absence of Jesus has been a problem for various characters, from the narrator's point of view, the physical absence of Jesus is not a problem. The reader is urged to regard apostolic testimony not as a second-best option for those unfortunate enough to have missed out on the real thing. In fact, the entire chapter has been shaped to persuade the reader to regard testimony as better than an in-the-flesh encounter with Jesus. At crucial points in John 20, sight encounters are characterised as leading to confusion and misunderstanding, while eyewitness testimony leads to right belief and clear understanding.¹¹⁴ Counter-intuitively, seeing is over-rated. Blessing comes through Spirit inspired testimony.

So far, the only work of the Spirit the reader has observed is upon the apostles. While the possibility of a wider Spirit bestowal in which the Spirit has a ministry in the life of every believer will be considered in the second reading, the emphasis in John 20 is upon the Spirit's ministry in providing reliable apostolic testimony.

In a narrative where Jesus continues to come and go, without any apparent closure to these appearances, there is nothing in the action of John 20 that rules out future flesh and blood encounters with Jesus. Are these dramatic physical appearances the way all believers will continue to experience Jesus? In John 20 the reader is being persuaded to believe that there is something better than the possibility of meeting Jesus in the flesh. Jesus can be encountered through Spirit empowered insightful and reliable apostolic testimony. This idea is most clearly expressed in the ascension announcement itself to which we now turn.

¹¹³ This is a consistent feature of John. Apart from 20:13, the only other references to angels are the passive and distinctly non-heraldic appearances in 1:51, the gloss in 5:4 and 12:29.

¹¹⁴ *Contra* Keener who argues that believing through testimony is the more difficult thing that will therefore be rewarded more handsomely in the end — *John*, 1212.

3.3 The Ascension Announcement

3.3.1 The Place of 20:16-17 in the Overall Narrative of John 20

The analysis so far suggests that 20:16-17 occupies a highly significant position in the unfolding narrative of John 20. The problem in scene 1 of Jesus' absence reaches its climax in the dramatic reveal in 20:16. However, in 20:17, which immediately follows this reveal, while the question of Jesus' absence up to this point has been resolved, new questions arise as to how Jesus will continue to relate to his disciples. The following analysis of 20:17 will demonstrate that in a narrative where Jesus continues to physically come and go, the Johannine ascension not only describes a relational reunion between the Father and Son, but promises the believer a new era of permanent and intimate relationship with the Father and Son. It promises something even better than an in-the-flesh encounter with Jesus.

The exchange between Jesus and Mary in 20:16-17 is not only foregrounded by its significant place in the unfolding drama, but also by the vivid dialogue *Μαριάμ* and *Ραββουνι*. Overall, the post-resurrection account in John 20 appears to be quite truncated. The action moves quickly. The dialogue is minimal. It suggests a highly condensed and stylised account in which only the most significant events and most important dialogue are included. However, the intense ipsissima verba *Μαριάμ* and then *Ραββουνι*, creates the impression that this dialogue is not a highly stylised summary but something close to the raw exchange between Jesus and Mary.¹¹⁵ The use of the actual Hebrew (*Μαριάμ*) and Aramaic (*Ραββουνι*), which then requires the narrator to pause and translate the Aramaic for the reader, serves to slow down the pace of the narration. For the reader, this slowing down and the use of the ipsissima

¹¹⁵ Prior to 20:16, Mary is described as *Μαρία* (20:1, 11) not *Μαριάμ*, adding to the impression that *Μαριάμ* and *Ραββουνι* are the actual Hebrew/Aramaic words used in this dialogue. Some manuscripts prefer the "Hellenized form" (BDF, §53[3].) *Μαρια* (Α Δ Κ Γ Δ Θ Ψ) and *ραββωνι* (Δ Θ latt pbo). The more difficult reading of *Μαριάμ* and *Ραββουνι* is more likely to represent the original text and carry a vivid sense of being the raw discourse between Jesus and Mary. (see NA28 textual apparatus for John 20:16).

Ραββουνι is the unusual Aramaic variant of the much more common *ραββί* (John 1:38,49; 3:2,26; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8) and is the only Aramaic word appearing in dialogue in John even though it is likely that the original dialogue between Jesus and most other characters was in Aramaic. For a discussion of why *Ἑβραϊστί* should be understood in John's Gospel as meaning "Aramaic" rather than "Hebrew" see Ellingworth, "Hebrew or Aramaic," 339. Following Barrett this paper assumes that John was written in Greek not a work originally in Aramaic and then translated into Greek — *John*, 72.

verba, creates an intimate scene and adds to the impression that the words of 20:17 are a portentous announcement.¹¹⁶

John 20:17 is a problematic text. Most commentators affirm the sentiment of Carson that “this verse belongs to a handful of the most difficult passages in the New Testament”.¹¹⁷ The prohibition, the explanation and the ascension announcement each have several possible meanings. In addition, the relationship between these parts of 20:17 is not straightforward. The analysis that follows will carefully examine the parts and then the whole: firstly, the prohibition (20:17a) in section 3.3.2, secondly, the explanation and ascension announcement (20:17b) in section 3.3.3, and finally, a way to combine these parts together that makes sense of this dialogue in the wider context of the chapter will be proposed in section 3.3.4.

The reveal:	λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς·Μαριάμ. στραφεῖσα ἐκείνη λέγει αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστί·ραββουνι, ὃ λέγεται διδάσκαλε	Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).
The prohibition:	λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς·μή μου ἅπτου,	Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me,
The explanation:	οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα	for I have not yet ascended to the Father;
The ascension announcement:	πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς·ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεόν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν.	but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ” ¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ It is unclear why the Aramaic is translated here since all other Aramaisms in John (5:2, 19:13, 19:17) are place names where the Greek name is given first and then the Aramaic name is offered in a narratorial aside. 20:16 is the only instance in the opposite form, where the Aramaic is given first and then a Greek translation provided in an explanatory aside. Given that these other references all flow in the opposite direction, it would seem that the chief purpose of the Aramaism in John 20:16 is not to provide assistance to a reader unfamiliar with Aramaic but to create a sense of immediacy to the narration and therefore heighten the depiction of Mary’s emotional response. For a reader familiar with Aramaic to suddenly have the dialogue revert to his *mother tongue* would add to the vividness of the reading experience.

¹¹⁷ Carson, *John*, 641–642. This has been so throughout the history of interpretation, Cyril of Alexandria (376–444) remarks “The meaning of the statement [20:17] is not easy for the many to see because there is a mystery hidden in it” — *Commentary on John*, 360.

¹¹⁸ ESV text. A different translation will be proposed at the end of this chapter.

3.3.2 Detailed Analysis of 20:17a

μή μου ἅπτου

In scene 1, the empathetic presentation of Mary's search for Jesus, culminating in the reveal of 20:16, depicts her embrace of Jesus as a natural and appropriate response. For the reader, led by this portrayal to be sympathetic toward Mary, Jesus' prohibition is surprising and blunt.¹¹⁹ It is a confronting intrusion into the flow of the John 20 narrative. It creates significant narrative tension. Jesus has been found but not found. Mary, having found him, must now withdraw from him. In the analysis of μή μου ἅπτου that follows, it will be demonstrated that the command 'do not touch' is part of a theme in John 20 of *absence of touch* following the ascension announcement. This prohibition is part of a narrative strategy persuading the reader to believe that knowing Jesus spiritually is better than encountering him in the flesh.

3.3.2.1 The Significance of the Present Imperative of ἅπτου

The present tense form of the imperative ἅπτου (20:17) suggests that Mary's current action of grasping Jesus must now cease. Some older translations read the negated present imperative as an action that has not yet commenced, for example "Touch me not" (KJV). This represents an older understanding of present tense prohibitions.¹²⁰ More recent translations render the command as an action that has already commenced but must now be brought to a conclusion.¹²¹ In other words, Jesus allows

¹¹⁹ Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 129.

Even the omission of "my" in the explanation οὕτω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα adds to the bluntness of this prohibition. In contrast with 20:17b where the proliferation of pronouns emphasizes a web of relationships, the omission of the pronoun (somewhat atypical of John's style) gives the prohibition a distinctly unrelational tone. The variant that inserts μου into the τὸν πατέρα expression in 20:17a (NA28 cites Ɑ⁶⁶ A K L N Γ Δ Θ Ψ, etc) is probably influenced by the appearance of μου in the subsequent clause but also probably attests to the way this expression confronts the reader as unnaturally blunt.

¹²⁰ Headlam, in the 1901 edition of the *Classical Review* argues that the present negative imperative indicates an action that has not commenced — "Greek Prohibitions," 30–36. For a contrary contemporaneous view see Naylor, "Prohibitions in Greek," 26–30. Of the modern commentators, Michaels and Fowler appear to favour the older approach — *The Gospel of John*, 1000; "Meaning of 'Touch Me Not' in John 20."

¹²¹ "Something already existing is to continue (in prohibitions: is to stop)" — BDF, §336.

Mary to embrace him for a time but then asks her not to continue to “cling to” (ESV) or to “hold on” to him (NIV).¹²²

Recent advances in verbal aspect theory confirm that the prohibition should be understood as an action already in progress. Firstly, verbal aspect theory suggests that the present tense form of the imperative indicates an *imperfective action* and therefore a present prohibition is a command to stop doing something that is currently happening.¹²³ Secondly, the present tense form *foregrounds*, that is, brings into close-up for the reader, the action of the verb.¹²⁴

The depiction of the action as imperfective and foregrounded creates two contrasting impressions upon the reader. Firstly, it creates the sense of an intimate embrace viewed

¹²² An analysis of the fourteen negated present imperatives in John supports this — 2:16, 5:14, 28, 45; 6:20, 27, 43; 7:24; 10:37; 12:15; 14:1, 27; 19:21; 20:17 and 20:27. All of these imperatives are best rendered as actions already commenced but which should not continue. All are in direct speech. The possible exception is 10:37 and 19:21. However, on balance, 10:37 is best read as requesting that an action that is currently occurring now ceases. In 19:21, the request μή γράφε, the only present imperative in John not on the lips of Jesus, makes little sense as an action that has not commenced as the placard is already on public view. It is best read as “do not continue to have written” and is therefore a command to cease an action that has commenced. This is emphasised by Pilate’s rejoinder in 19:22 using the double perfect ὃ γέγραφα, γέγραφα indicating that the placarding of these words is an ongoing state/action.

¹²³ Campbell notes that among the modern advocates of verbal aspect theory “[t]he imperfective aspectual value of the present tense-form [...] is uncontested in recent literature; it is one of the few areas in which there is complete agreement” — *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, 35. Huffman has exhaustively surveyed negated imperatives in the NT and provided evidence that in a significant number of cases, in context, present tense-form prohibitions are best read as imperfective and their “Core Aspect Meaning” is to report an action in its progression as a process — *Verbal Aspect Theory and the Prohibitions in the Greek New Testament*, 74.

As is often the case, verbal aspect theory confirms what older commentators sensitive to context have already observed. For a similar understanding of this prohibition in John 20:17 as indicating an action in progress that must cease see Schnackenburg, *John*, 3:31. Beasley-Murray notes that “[c]ommonly μή with the present imperative calls for the cessation of an act in progress” — *John*, 366. See also Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:992; Morris, *John*, 840; Bruner, *John*, 1153. Zerwick notes that while classical usage drew a distinction between οὐ as objective or factual and μή as subjective or conceptual this has disappeared by the time of the NT writers, μή is simply the negative used with all non-indicative moods — *Biblical Greek*, §440, 148.

¹²⁴ It is difficult to know how much weight to give the foregrounding of the present tense form here. The foregrounding of the action in the present tense form is relative — it is foregrounded in comparison to the aorist but less foregrounded than the perfect. The present imperative is relatively common in John and this dilutes its significance somewhat (of the 129 imperatives in John’s Gospel 74 are aorist, 57%, and 55 are present, 43%). The perfect imperative is rare in the NT with none of the 4 occurrences appearing in the Johannine corpus (John, 1-3 John or Revelation).

by the reader in close-up. Jesus is not shouting at Mary across a distance warning her to come no closer. The dialogue occurs while they are in physical contact. The reader is not remote from this action and fittingly the detailed dialogue is not summarised. The reader overhears an intimate conversation. Secondly, this foregrounding brings into stark relief the intrusive bluntness of the prohibition. From the reader's point of view, this satisfying conclusion to Mary's search, her joyful embrace of Jesus, which the reader observes in close up, is now interrupted. The building physical proximity of the two main characters as scene 1 progresses and the growing emotional tension culminating in the reveal contribute to this impact upon the reader. The foregrounding of this command ensures the reader appreciates the surprise of this dramatic turning point. The reader will want to understand why Mary must now withdraw from Jesus.

The foregrounded prohibition signals an important change in the way that the disciples will relate to Jesus. Mary's understandable response is gently corrected by Jesus. He is not returning in order to continue living among the disciples as he had done before.¹²⁵ This misunderstanding might also be reflected in Mary's use of "Rabboni" to greet him. Her choice of title, highlighted by its citation in Aramaic, suggests a hope that Jesus has returned to resume his former role as a peripatetic teacher of an intimate circle of disciples who eat, sleep and live together in close physical proximity.¹²⁶ This hope is dashed by the prohibition. It raises the question for the reader as to how Jesus will relate to his disciples from now on.

3.3.2.2 The Absence of Touch in Scene 2 (20:19-23)

Despite its prominent place in the narrative, the command μή μου ἅπτου in scene 1 is not repeated when Jesus reveals himself to the disciples in scene 2. In the first scene, this command seems quite important. However, its absence in the second scene does not necessarily suggest that it is now appropriate to touch Jesus. When the disciples encounter Jesus in close proximity, as he stands in their midst in the locked room,¹²⁷ perhaps even close enough that they feel his breath (20:22), there is no record of

¹²⁵ Morris, *John*, 841. See also Köstenberger, *John*, 569.

¹²⁶ "Mary's address of Jesus as 'rabbi' indicates that she has not yet come to terms with the reality of Jesus' resurrection" — Köstenberger, *John*, 568–569. Brown compares Mary's ῥαββουνί unfavourably with Thomas' Christological confession, however this misses the nuance argued here. It misses the point of scene 1 to note that Mary has a lower Christology. This appears to be part of Brown's strong commitment to present Thomas favourably — *John*, 1970, 2:110.

¹²⁷ 20:19 — ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον.

physical contact.¹²⁸ Even more significant for the reader who is still processing the prohibition to Mary, the disciples do not even seem inclined to touch Jesus. Given the way Mary's actions are depicted as a natural response by a disciple upon first meeting the risen Jesus and the way touching Jesus is forbidden in such a prominent way in this first scene, it is unlikely that the reader will simply assume that the disciples embraced Jesus.

3.3.2.3 The Absence of Touch in Scene 3 (20:26-29)

The absence of touch is an even more prominent theme in the third scene. Thomas makes a big deal of wanting to touch Jesus. However, when Jesus appears, despite Thomas' stated intention, the narrative does not record him going through with his plan. Several commentators assume that Thomas touches Jesus, but the absence of touch is emphasised by a number of aspects in the narrative:¹²⁹

(1) The blunt demand of Thomas 'to touch' is in direct contrast to the blunt prohibition 'not to touch'. The reader will naturally read Thomas' foreshadowed touching as a direct transgression of Jesus' command.

(2) As already argued in section 3.2.4, the graphic detail of Thomas' demand, suggests that he does not expect to meet the risen Jesus. This is confirmed by his when Jesus does appear. In contrast to his demand in 20:25, his attitude is far more contrite and reverent.¹³⁰ His response in 20:28 is not to touch but instead to offer a profound Christological confession of submission and allegiance. It confirms that his demand in 20:25 was a defiant rejection of the apostolic testimony, of which he now repents.

(3) Thomas' demand does not imply that the rest of the apostles have already touched Jesus and that he only wants the same experience as them. The wording of his demand, when compared to the wording in scene 2, suggests that Thomas is demanding something more than the other apostles experienced. The first component of Thomas'

¹²⁸ Not only is the verb ἅπτω not used for the disciples' examination of the risen Jesus, neither is any synonym for ἅπτω used in the second scene.

¹²⁹ Several commentators assume that the disciples touch/embrace Jesus here, for example Stibbe, *The Resurrection Code*, 64, 95; Keener, *John*, 1193; Carson, *John*, 642; Barrett, *John*, 565. All these commentators read this idea into the Johannine account explicitly citing the Synoptic parallels where the touching of the disciples by Jesus is a prominent feature of the narrative.

¹³⁰ "Thomas is invited in vehement language to touch the wounds [of Jesus], but seemingly chooses instead to confess faith in the risen Christ" — Lee, "The Gospel of John and the Five Senses," 124.

demand is to *see* (20:25 — ἴδω ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτοῦ τὸν τύπον τῶν ἡλῶν) which equates to what the other apostles experienced (20:20 — ἔδειξεν τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν πλευρὰν αὐτοῖς) and what they reported to him (20:25 — ἐωράκαμεν τὸν κύριον). However, the second step in his demand ‘to touch’ is a demand that exceeds what the other apostles experienced.

(5) As already noted in section 3.2.4, the dichotomy between on the one hand *seeing and believing* and on the other hand *believing through testimony* is emphasised by Jesus in 20:29 and the narrator in 20:31. Thomas’ demand is a rejection of the testimony of the eyewitnesses. His demand is the wrong response, a foil to the response that the narrator explicitly advocates of believing the testimony of the eyewitness account.

These observations strongly suggest that Jesus’ invitation for Thomas to touch him should not be read as a reversal of the command to Mary or an indication that there is some circumstantial change that makes it appropriate for Thomas to now touch Jesus. Jesus’ repeated imperative φέρε...φέρε (20:27) followed by the even more confronting βάλε is ironic and rhetorical. It mimics the words of Thomas’ demand in order to confront him with the inappropriateness of that demand. It is designed to elicit from Thomas the opposite response, one that repents of demanding sight and touch and trusts instead in testimony. It suggests that touching Jesus is still inappropriate. It confirms the observation that absence of touch is a pronounced theme in 20:18-31.

In summary, the lack of touch in John 20 is highlighted by the prominent place of the prohibition μή μου ἄπτου in the flow of the narrative and the marked absence of touch in the two subsequent scenes. The lack of touch in John 20, often misread by commentators who read the Synoptics into John at this point, is part of the persuasive impact of the text upon the reader, the challenge that there is something even better than the physical presence of Jesus.¹³¹

3.3.2.4 Objections to the Proposal That There Is an Absence of Touch In John 20

Three objections will now be considered that propose in different ways that the prohibition to Mary is particular to her situation and that touch is appropriate in scene 2 and 3. These objections need to be addressed as they challenge a number of the

¹³¹ These commentators are cited in the footnotes of the following section (section 3.3.2.4).

propositions of this thesis including the central proposal that the Johannine ascension heralds a new way of relating to Jesus spiritually rather than physically.¹³²

- (i) Firstly, ἅπτω has a semantic range that includes “to touch a woman” as a euphemism for sexual relations.¹³³ While it might be possible in this context to read ἅπτου as meaning sexualised contact, it is highly unlikely. Nothing else in the context suggests that the contact Mary makes with Jesus is of a sexualised kind. While this reading might explain the absence of the prohibition being repeated to the male disciples in the next two scenes, it does not explain the lack of touch in the next two scenes. Indeed, this explanation would lead the reader to expect the disciples to touch Jesus in the next two scenes.¹³⁴
- (ii) Secondly, it has been suggested that the command is no longer relevant because of some ontological change that occurs in Jesus between the appearance to Mary (20:16-17) and the appearance to the disciples (20:19-23).¹³⁵ The sense of Jesus’ prohibition would be *do not be clinging to me now, however after I have ascended such physical contact will be appropriate*. However, it is unclear why an ascension will make Jesus touchable in a way that is not the case in his resurrected but unascended state.¹³⁶ Little in the context appears to suggest

¹³² See proposition (c) of the Thesis (page 8).

¹³³ ἅπτω can mean *to start a fire* (Acts 28:2), *light a lamp* (Mk 4:21), *touch as an act of blessing* (Mk 7:33, 10:13), *grasp* (BDAG cites a number of extra-biblical references but offers John 20:17 as its only biblical example) or even *to harm* (1 John 5:18 & Job 5:19 LXX). BDAG also cites the deponent middle, the form used in John 20:17, as meaning “to touch a woman” as a euphemism for sexual relations (e.g. Prov 6:29 LXX) — BDAG, 102–103. Cyril of Alexandria, Brown and Keener outline this view but do not argue for it — Keener, *John*, 1193 n.248; Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:992,993; Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, 360.

¹³⁴ It will be noted in the second reading that Mary of Bethany has engaged in physical contact with Jesus (John 12:3 and probably 11:32 as well) without opprobrium from the narrator. See section 4.3.3, page 104.

¹³⁵ Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:992. See also Keener who outlines this view but does not advocate for it — *John*, 1193.

¹³⁶ In passing, the proposal of Bieringer is noted — “Resurrection and the Forgiveness of Sins,” 232–233. By means of a complex Composition-Critical analysis Bieringer argues that μή μου ἅπτου is a command to not worship Jesus. According to Bieringer this clarifies, for the reader aware of Matthew’s account, that the grasping of Jesus’ feet by the women in Matt 28:9 (κρατέω), which in itself is an acceptable act of affection and even devotion, was not an act of worship. Bieringer argues that it would be inappropriate to worship the pre-ascended Jesus, as it would be to worship the Son in isolation from the worship of the Father. One of the weaknesses with Bieringer’s proposal is that it requires the reader to be familiar with

such an ontological change in Jesus. The fact that Mary embraces Jesus and is gently asked to stop doing so suggests that the reason for not touching Jesus is not because of some physical characteristic of his risen but unascended body. It is true that he twice appears in a room through locked doors, which might imply some kind of change to his physical capabilities. However, if this is the case, it is unclear that this change in his capabilities occurs between this appearance to Mary and the first appearance to the disciples.¹³⁷ His escape from the tomb would suggest that he may possess special capabilities prior to his appearance to Mary. However, the strongest objection to this reading is that in John's account no-one even seeks to touch Jesus in these subsequent appearances. It is curious that if touching Jesus is suddenly permissible again, no-one upon meeting him seems to do this or even wants to do it — not even Thomas. Prior to meeting Jesus, Thomas expresses a desire to touch him, a desire that quickly evaporates when he actually encounters Jesus.

- (iii) Thirdly, it is argued that it is appropriate for Thomas to touch Jesus but inappropriate for Mary to touch him because the motivations of Mary and Thomas are different.¹³⁸ It is true that Mary and Thomas appear to desire to touch Jesus for different reasons. While it is difficult to be certain about the motivations of either character, Mary appears to be a believer who wishes to hold on to Jesus as an act of affection and devotion, while Thomas is an unbeliever who desires to come to belief.¹³⁹ However, as already noted, a number of features in the narrative stress the inappropriateness of Thomas' demand. If Mary's desire to touch Jesus, empathetically presented as an expression of affection and devotion is inappropriate, it would seem an even

Matthew's account in order to understand the point John is making. A reader without prior knowledge of Matthew's account would not be able to comprehend the text at this point.

¹³⁷ In the second reading we will note that the ability to appear in a locked room may not be incongruous with the kind of abilities Jesus demonstrated in his pre-resurrection ministry. At times in his earthly ministry Jesus exhibits the limitations of typical human existence (he thirsts, he needs to rest, he bleeds when pierced, etc.) yet on other occasions he appears to transcend these physical limitations (for example 6:18) in a way that might not be inconsistent with his appearing in a locked room. Carson is in agreement with this view — *John*, 643. To suggest that the capability to make 'locked room appearances' is an ability Jesus possesses only after his resurrection is somewhat speculative.

¹³⁸ Carson, *John*, 644–645.

¹³⁹ Mary is motivated by affection and devotion — Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:992. Carson describes Thomas as an unbeliever — *John*, 644–645, 659.

more inappropriate action in Thomas' case. The proposal that Thomas desires to come to belief is a charitable reading at best.

In conclusion, none of these objections is persuasive.¹⁴⁰ The prohibition μή μου ἅπτου is neither a specific command to a female disciple nor a temporary command. Instead, it signifies a permanent change in the manner in which the disciples will relate to Jesus.

3.3.2.5 Why Is There No Desire On The Part of The Disciples To Touch Jesus?

Given that Mary's response of grasping Jesus is portrayed as natural and appropriate, the reader who observes the lack of touch in scenes 2 and 3 will be drawn to consider why the disciples do not seek to touch Jesus.

It is possible that Mary relayed the prohibition μή μου ἅπτου as part of her recount to the disciples. It would therefore be redundant for Jesus to repeat this command to them. This might explain why the disciples refrain from touching Jesus.¹⁴¹ This scenario, if it is the correct reading, still emphasises that touching Jesus is no longer the appropriate way to relate to him. However, an explicit feature of the narrative suggests a different reason. The structure of the narrative in scene 2 suggests that the Spirit bestowal removes the desire of the disciples to touch Jesus. In the place where the reader might expect the disciples to reach out and grasp Jesus, and Jesus to respond with the command μή μου ἅπτεσθε, Jesus instead issues a different imperative λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον. It would appear that the bestowal of the Spirit somehow assuages the desire of the disciples to grasp Jesus. It suggests that the bestowal of the Spirit is something better than having Jesus in the flesh. It is as though the disciples exhibit no desire to have Jesus back as their peripatetic teacher in his physical form because he now offers them something that surpasses this.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ They appear to be objections motivated by a desire to harmonise John's account with the emphasis upon touch in Matthew and Luke's post-resurrection accounts. An attempt to harmonise these two perspectives on touch will be addressed in the third reading (Chapter 5).

¹⁴¹ As already argued (section 3.2.3, page 44), the disciples do not appear to accept Mary's testimony. It is nonetheless possible that the disciples, perhaps at the moment Jesus appears to them, recall and believe Mary's account and hold back from grasping Jesus on the basis of the reported command.

¹⁴² Speaking of Mary's understanding of 20:17, Dorothy Lee writes: "[Jesus'] permanent abiding with her is to be not in the flesh as she supposes—not at least in the old way—but in the Spirit " — "Partnership in Easter Faith," 42. See also Köstenberger, *John*, 596; Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 130; Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:1015; Bruner, *John*, 1153; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 379. To illustrate by contrast, in Luke 24 the

This understanding of the Spirit bestowal strongly supports the understanding of the Johannine ascension proposed in this thesis. At this point, reading only the text of John 20, it is unclear exactly how the Spirit bestowal resolves the desire of the disciples to touch Jesus. In the second reading, it will become evident that in the Final Discourse (John 13-17) Jesus repeatedly explains that he and his Father will dwell with the disciples through the Spirit. Therefore, he effectively announces to Mary in 20:17 that the time has come for the completion of his relational reunion with the Father, and that the Father-Son relationship he enjoys with the Father, is now to be their relationship as well.

The connection between the ascension announcement, the Spirit bestowal and the lack of touching language in scene 3, highlights another possible aspect of Thomas' demand. If the disciples relayed to Thomas the account of Mary that included Jesus' command μή μου ἅπτου, his demand to touch Jesus is a defiant repudiation of that prohibition. However, he is also rejecting the promise of the ascension announcement that there is something better than a physical encounter with Jesus. Thomas is effectively saying *Your story is that touching Jesus is no longer the appropriate way to relate to him, but even if he has risen from the dead, I demand to continue to relate to him in this way.* His demand to touch Jesus fundamentally rejects the notion that having Jesus present *spiritually* is better than having Jesus present *physically*.¹⁴³

3.3.2.6 The Theme of Touch and the Structure of John 20

The observations so far regarding μή μου ἅπτου are confirmed by the structure of the scenes in John 20. The structure of the three scenes invites the reader to see the command to *receive the Spirit* as appearing in the narrative exactly where the command to *not touch* is expected. This confirms that the Spirit bestowal replaces in some way the need of the disciples to touch Jesus even though this was the natural response of Mary.

good news is that Jesus has risen physically (with a narrative emphasizing touch). In John the good news is that Jesus will now abide spiritually with the disciples (with a narrative absent of touch).

¹⁴³ *Contra* Carson, who argues that the natural reading of John 20:29, “with its contrast *between seeing-believing and not-seeing-believing*, presupposes that Jesus ascended *subsequently* to v. 28” [italics original] — *John*, 644. Carson appears to miss that the contrast between seeing-believing and not-seeing-believing is illustrated by Thomas who in John 20:24 is given the opportunity to believe without seeing. Carson also appears to miss this absence of touch in the rest of John 20. He appears to assume that Thomas either touches Jesus or at the very least Jesus is indicating that touching him is appropriate by the command to Thomas. Carson is strongly influenced by the emphasis on touch in the Synoptic accounts — *John*, 644.

The three scenes in John 20 all follow a similar structure. The dramatic and theological climax of each scene involves an announcement by Jesus, in each case in the form of an imperative. The structuring of the narrative in this way draws attention to these imperatives and invites the reader to compare and contrast them:

Scene 1: μή μου ἅπτου... πορεύου... εἰπέ

Scene 2: λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον

Scene 3: φέρε... ἴδε... φέρε... βάλε... μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός

Each of these imperatives is preceded by a *reveal* or *recognition dialogue*. In each recognition dialogue, Jesus reveals his identity to the main character(s) of the scene. In each case, the imperative that follows the reveal articulates the appropriate response by the character(s) to this disclosure.¹⁴⁴ Note also the way each of the imperatival announcements anticipates the scene that follows. In 20:17, Mary is commanded to tell the disciples, which shifts our focus to the disciples who are central to the second scene. In 20:22, the disciples are commanded to receive the Spirit, which anticipates a scene of Spirit empowered witness. In 20:27, the imperatives to Thomas are the foil for the narratorial address to the reader in 20:31 to not demand sight, as Thomas did, but rather believe on the basis of apostolic testimony.

Each of these imperatives will surprise the reader. The empathetic presentation of Mary searching for Jesus, jars against the “do not touch” command. In the second and third scene, Jesus issues an unexpected command given his imperative in the previous scene. In scene 2, the implied reader, as has already been argued, will expect the command μή μου ἅπτου to be repeated to the disciples, instead a very different imperative is given. Likewise, in scene 3, the reader will expect Jesus either to forbid Thomas to touch him (like scene 1) or bestow the Spirit on Thomas (like scene 2). Note the way he is introduced as “one of the twelve” suggesting that he ought to receive the apostolic commission and Spirit bestowal given to the others in the apostolic band. Even if the Spirit bestowal to the disciples is read as a symbolic prefiguring it will still be the case that the reader expects Thomas to receive the same as the others. In all three scenes, the unexpected nature of the imperatives, overturning the reader’s expectation, contributes to the foregrounding of the imperatives.

¹⁴⁴ As already argued, the imperative φέρε is a provocative rebuke to Thomas calling him to do the opposite, which is expressed as μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός.

While there is a pattern in the three scenes that suggests the command λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον occupies the place in the dialogue where the prohibition to touch appeared in scene 1 and where the reader expects it in the second scene, there is also a break in the pattern. The variations in the pattern suggest a step chiasm that puts the focus on the λάβετε imperative. As the only command in scene 2, λάβετε stands out from the more complex imperational constructions in the other scenes.¹⁴⁵ Even the way the commissioning of the apostles in scene 2 is narrated without imperatives serves to put the focus in scene 2 on the sole imperative λάβετε so that it stands out to the reader.¹⁴⁶ In addition, the two prohibitions μή...ἅπτου (scene 1) and μή γίνου (scene 3) are similar in form which also contributes to the imperative λάβετε (scene 2) standing out in contrast:

μή μου ἅπτου... πορεύου... εἶπέ	Scene 1
λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον	Scene 2
φέρε... ἴδε... φέρε... βάλε... μή γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός	Scene 3

In summary, in the overall structure of the three scenes, the command to receive the Spirit in scene 2 stands in the place where a command regarding touch is expected. This contributes to the overall theme of John 20 that relating to Jesus in the flesh is replaced in the Johannine ascension with the better way of relating to Jesus by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

3.3.2.7 Conclusion to the Analysis of 20:17a

To conclude the analysis of μή μου ἅπτου, this prohibition points to a significant change in the way the disciples will relate to Jesus. It is part of the overall message of John 20

¹⁴⁵ Compare with other commissioning scenes in the Gospels: Matt 28:19 (μαθητεύσατε), Mark 16:15 (κηρύξατε), Matt 10:6 (πορεύεσθε, and the 15 imperatives that follow in Matt 10:16-23), Mark 6:10-11 (μένετε... ἐκτινάξατε), Luke 9:1-9 (3 imperatives), Luke 10:3-10 (9 imperatives) and John 21:15-17 (βόσκε, ποιμαίνε, βόσκε) with the following imperative ἀκολούθει (John 21:19).

¹⁴⁶ The commission is expressed entirely in the indicative: καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς (20:21).

that abiding *physically* is no longer the way that Jesus' followers will relate to him. As explained in the Johannine ascension announcement, Jesus, united with the Father, comes to dwell with the believer by the Holy Spirit. This explains why there seems to be no desire by the disciples to touch Jesus even though this was the natural response of Mary.

3.3.3 Detailed Analysis of 20:17b

3.3.3.1 The Place of the Ascension Announcement in the Flow of the Narrative

In contrast to the post-resurrection witnesses in the other Gospels, the message Jesus commissions Mary to carry to the disciples is about ascension rather than resurrection.¹⁴⁷ The importance of this announcement is emphasised by the way Jesus prescribes the very words Mary is to report to them. Note what is not said by Jesus: There are no instructions to wait for anything or to meet him in a particular place. Nothing in the message Jesus dictates to Mary creates any expectation that the disciples will encounter Jesus in the flesh. The absence of other dialogue strongly foregrounds the message about ascension. It creates the sense that in the ascension announcement nothing more is required.

The analysis of 20:17b that follows will consider, firstly, the *destination* of the Johannine ascension (section 3.3.3.2). Secondly the significance of perfect tense οὕτω constructions (section 3.3.3.3) and what this means for the particular construction οὕτω..ἀναβέβηκα (section 3.3.3.4) will be considered. Finally a relationship between the prohibition μή μου ἄπτου in 20:17a and the explanation and ascension announcement in 20:17b (section 3.3.4) will be proposed.

¹⁴⁷ In Matt 28:17 the women are commanded to tell the disciples that Jesus has risen (with no mention of ascending). In Luke 24:7 the resurrection prediction is the focus of the proclamation by the angels with 24:9 implying that the resurrection was central to the message the women relayed to the disciples. Mark's witnesses say nothing (Mark 16:8). De Boer describes Mary's ascension-focused announcement to the disciples as "uniquely Johannine" – "Jesus' Departure to the Father in John," 4.

It could be argued that "I have seen the Lord" (20:18) assumes a message of resurrection, but this is not the point the narrative most keenly impresses upon the reader. The phrase ταῦτα εἶπεν αὐτῇ undoubtedly refers to the ascension message of 20:17. The phrase "I have seen the Lord" is not so much a testimony about resurrection but gives validity to her message about his ascension.

3.3.3.2 The destination of the ἀναβαίνω action.

The feature of the ἀναβαίνω verb that Jesus most strongly highlights in 20:17b is its destination. Jesus describes the location he is going to, not so much as a place, but a person. Πρὸς τὸν πατέρα describes a shift in relational status rather than physical position.¹⁴⁸

This relational relocation is emphasised by several factors.

(1) πρὸς is used primarily for relational or personal proximity not spatial relations.¹⁴⁹

(2) This relational destination is reinforced by elaborate repetition. The phrase πρὸς τὸν πατέρα is the destination in both the perfect instance ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα and the present tense instance ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. In the present tense instance, there is a highly unusual four-fold repetition of the relational destination — the phrases πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν and θεόν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν.¹⁵⁰

(3) The added familial term ἀδελφός further underscores a focus on relationships.

All this serves to emphasise that the change this Johannine ascension brings about is a relational movement. Where is Jesus going? The answer emphatically and repeatedly provided in 20:17 is that he will be *with the Father*.¹⁵¹

This reading is reinforced by the recent findings of verbal aspect theory, which suggests that the perfect and present tense forms of ἀναβαίνω are not conveying the time of the

¹⁴⁸ The metaphoric use of verbs of motion to describe relational shifts is part of the narrator's style. In the second reading, the prevalence of spatial verbs being used throughout the Fourth Gospel to indicate relational movements will be demonstrated (section 4.1.1 and 4.1.2.4). For example, John the Baptist is described as sent from God (ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ 1:6) yet clearly he has not travelled spatially from heaven.

¹⁴⁹ "As a rule πρὸς refers to personal relations" — Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 561.

Of the 82 occurrences of ἀναβαίνω in the NT 60 have an associated preposition. The most common is εἰς (37 times) which usually occurs in ἀναβαίνω constructions with a non-personal (spatial) destination. The only 2 occurrences of ἀναβαίνω associated with the preposition πρὸς are both here in John 20:17. In the second reading the use of πρὸς relationally, particularly in the Prologue and the Final Discourse, will be explored — sections 4.1.1-4.1.3

¹⁵⁰ The preposition πρὸς governs all four expressions.

¹⁵¹ "The ascent to the Father appears to have eliminated spatial or temporal distance, opening the way for reciprocal indwelling" — Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 134.

action but are rather foregrounding the action as proximate and imperfective.¹⁵² While ἀναβέβηκα is associated with a temporal deictic marker οὕτω, there is no temporal deictic marker associated with the present tense form ἀναβαίνω. However, both the present and perfect forms of ἀναβαίνω in John 20 are qualified by the same relational deictic marker πρὸς.¹⁵³ The thing that is being highlighted about this ascension is not so much its timing but its relational destination. This would render this clause (over-translated for emphasis): “whenever I ascend (or complete my ascending) the thing you can be certain of, is that it will definitely be to my Father and your Father, my God and your God”.¹⁵⁴

The ascension announcement not only emphasizes the relational connectedness of the Father and the Son, but just as strongly emphasizes the connectedness of the believer with the Father, and by implication the believer with the Son. The same terms are used in the same way. Some commentators suggest that the language of 20:17 is emphasising relational distance. Morris sees it as significant that in 20:17 Jesus does not say *our Father*, which would express a commonality between Jesus and his disciples.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² See the analysis by Pierce and Reynolds who argue that the perfect form of ἀναβαίνω in 3:13 does not describe the ascending action temporally (indicating a prior ascending by the Son of Man) — Pierce and Reynolds, “The Perfect Tense-Form and the Son of Man in John 3.13,” 153–154.

This approach is not unknown to older grammarians. See the discussion of the “timeless perfect” in *BDF* §344 note 11–12. *DF*, note 11–12, #344.

Regarding the present, Robertson notes “the durative sense does not monopolize the ‘present’ tense, though, it more frequently denotes linear action” — Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 881. The “verb and the context must decide”, and “Since the pres. ind. occurs for past, present and future time it is clear that ‘time’ is secondary even in the ind.” — Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 881–882.

¹⁵³ Campbell and Porter, from a verbal aspect theory perspective, read indicative presents as foregrounding the action of the verb rather than indicating time — Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 84; Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, 35–36.

Commenting on the present tense form instance of ἀναβαίνω Morris argues for the futuristic present, emphasising either certainty or imminence, on the grounds as it is obvious that as Jesus speaks to Mary his feet are still on the ground. — Morris, *John*, 841. See also Carson, *John*, 644. Unless a Lukan style levitation is being read into the narrative, there seems little warrant for this reading. Note how strongly this view is conditioned by a presupposed Lukan account.

¹⁵⁴ I am indebted to Peter Bolt for this suggestion in a private conversation.

¹⁵⁵ Morris, *John*, 842. Morris follows Calvin — *John*, 201. Daniel Wallace appears to agree: “[t]he construction here [John 20:17] is unusual in that it involves four nouns. The possessive pronouns are used to show the differences in how Jesus and his disciples relate to God...” — *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 274. Carson concurs: “the expressions *my Father and your Father* and *my God and your God* assume distance between Jesus and his followers, even as it establishes links” — *John*, 645 [italics original].

Morris sees “my Father” and “your Father” as indicating a distinction between the relationship that Jesus has with the Father and the relationship the disciples have with the Father. Morris interprets this as stressing that Jesus is the natural son, while the disciples are the adopted sons. However, Brown notes that Ruth 1:16 LXX uses a similar construction to καὶ θεὸν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν (20:17) to create an emphasis of “identification and not of disjunction”.¹⁵⁶ Brown helpfully notes that different facets of the relationship are being emphasised by these different expressions in that πατήρ is familial and θεός is covenantal.¹⁵⁷

This relational emphasis will stand out for the reader who has noticed the emphasis on the physical location of Jesus in the first scene with Mary. It suggests that the focus on physical location in scene 1 has been a foil for the emphasis in the ascension announcement on relational location. Like the unexpected and jarring prohibition, the relational emphasis of the ascension announcement will stand out to the reader all the more because the reader has been led by the unfolding narrative of scene 1 to think in the categories of physical location, physical absence and physical proximity.

3.3.3.3 The Meaning of Perfect οὔπω Constructions

The meaning of the οὔπω construction in 20:17 requires some sustained comment as its meaning is crucial to any reading of 20:17. The temporal, emphatic and durative senses of perfect tense-form οὔπω constructions in the NT and LXX will be considered in the following sections in order to then evaluate the nuance created by the particular οὔπω construction, οὔπω..ἀναβέβηκα, in 20:17.

¹⁵⁶ Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:1016. Cyril indicates that there was a debate in his own day as to whether the 20:17 reference to sonship implies a disjunction or identification, “When it comes to us, however, he is not our Father by nature, but rather our God, since he is creator and Lord. But since the Son has mixed himself with us, in a manner of speaking, he grants to our nature the honour that properly and strictly speaking belongs to him when he refers to his own Father as our common Father” — Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, 363.

¹⁵⁷ Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:1016–1017. See also Lee, “Partnership in Easter Faith,” 45.

It may be that Jesus in 20:17 is both carefully preserving a distinction between himself as the incarnate Son and the believers as adopted sons. However, the point remains that whatever the exact nuances, Jesus is saying something relational, more than spatial. These terms stress, not a spatial distance between Jesus and his disciples following his resurrection, but a relational closeness between them following his (Johannine) ascension.

(i) The temporal sense of perfect οὐπω constructions

The traditional approach to the perfect tense-form is that it has temporal significance conveying “the *continuance of a completed action*”.¹⁵⁸ However the deictic marker οὐπω (“not yet”)¹⁵⁹ already provides a temporal sense, indicating an action that has not occurred (at the time of the narrative) but which may occur at a future time. In the NT and LXX, οὐπω occurs with the aorist (10 times), the present (10 times) and the perfect (8 times).¹⁶⁰ On all occasions context suggests that the temporal meaning is the same, indicating an action or state that has not currently occurred (or not come to completion), but may occur (or come to completion) at some future time.¹⁶¹ In the NT and LXX, the appearance of an aorist, present or perfect tense-form in an οὐπω construction does not change the temporal sense.¹⁶²

(ii) The emphatic sense of perfect οὐπω constructions

Given that the perfect tense form verb in an οὐπω construction conveys the same temporal meaning as the aorist or present, what is the significance of a perfect tense

¹⁵⁸ BDF, §340 (italics are original). See also Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 892–895.

¹⁵⁹ BDAG, 593.

¹⁶⁰ Aorist: Mark 11:2; John 7:39b; Rom 9:11; 1 Cor 8:2; Heb 12:4; 1 John 3:2; Rev 17:10, 12; Gen 29:7 and Eccles 4:3. Present: Matt 16:9, 24:6, Mark 4:40, 8:17, 21; John 2:4, 7:6, 8:57; Heb 2:8, 11:7. Perfect: John 7:8, 20:17; Heb 9:8; Gen 15:16, 18:12; Ex 9:30; Isa 7:17; 2 Macc 7:35.

In this survey οὐπω, οὐδέπω, μήπω, and μήδέπω will be assumed to have sufficient semantic overlap that they can be regarded here as synonyms. BDAG 593 treats οὐδέπω as a synonym of οὐπω. While it would appear to be formed from δέ and οὐπω, the construction δέ οὐπω in Heb 2:8 demonstrates that οὐδέπω is not used uniformly by the NT writers whenever they wish to combine δέ with οὐπω (see also Jewish Wars 1.327 and 4.490). Moulton and Milligan cite a usage in the papyri οὐ γάρ πω εἰργασμένοι εἰσὶν where οὐ and πω are separated — *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, 466. The prominent positioning of οὐ in this papyri and the relative lack of prominence in the placement of πω suggests that the various components of οὐπω/οὐδέπω might be combined in different ways to create subtle nuances of emphasis. On the other hand, the parallel between John 19:41 (οὐδέπω οὐδεὶς ἦν τεθειμένος) and Luke 23:53 (οὐκ ἦν οὐδεὶς οὐπω κείμενος) suggests a significant semantic overlap between οὐδέπω and οὐπω. This parallel (John 20:9 and Luke 23:53) strongly suggests that for the purposes of this survey it is reasonable to treat οὐπω and οὐδέπω as synonyms.

¹⁶¹ The difference between an action not commencing (‘not yet’ focus on start), not coming to completion (‘not yet’ focus on end), or not having occurred (in the case of an action viewed as a whole) is a durative characteristic and should be distinguished from a temporal characteristic. Durative characteristic will be considered in section (iii).

¹⁶² While οὐπω also occurs with Pluperfect and Imperfect tense form verbs these are not germane to our investigation. It is sufficient to compare and contrast the perfect with the present and aorist.

form verb combining with οὔπω? Recent developments in verbal aspect theory suggest that the perfect tense-form provides *prominence* or *emphasis* of some kind rather than conveying a particular temporal meaning.¹⁶³ In the NT and LXX perfect οὔπω constructions, when considered in their context and compared to present and aorist οὔπω constructions, provide one of two distinct kinds of emphasis.¹⁶⁴ While the emphasis of perfect οὔπω constructions is always focused on the future possibility of

¹⁶³ Fanning, Porter and Campbell disagree to some extent on how to understand the Perfect tense-form but agree that the Perfect provides some kind of prominence or emphasis. Porter and Campbell hold that the Perfect has no temporal meaning and simply indicates *prominence* (Porter) or *heightened proximity* (Campbell) — Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 84; Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, 200–201. Both Campbell & Porter reject Fanning’s approach that secondary Aktionsart and temporal characteristics are associated with particular tense-forms — Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 133. However, Campbell recognises that certain pragmatic characteristics are associated with certain verb forms. For the impact of verbal aspect on prohibitions in the NT see Huffman, *Verbal Aspect Theory and the Prohibitions in the Greek New Testament*. See Pierce and Reynolds who bring an approach that is sympathetic to Campbell to bear upon the use of ἀναβαίνω in 3:13 — Pierce and Reynolds, “The Perfect Tense-Form and the Son of Man in John 3.13,” 149–155.

The traditional grammars observe that the perfect can create emphasis — BDF, §340. Peter O’Brien’s comment on Campbell’s contribution to verbal aspect is pertinent here: “his paradigm has led to exegetical conclusions similar to those of earlier scholarship, but he has now put forth stronger reasons for reaching these decisions” — Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, back cover. For examples of traditional grammatical approaches being applied to the οὔπω construction of 20:17 and arriving at similar conclusions to the advocates of verbal aspect theory already cited here see Schnackenburg, *John*, 3:319; Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:994; Fitzmyer, “The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost,” 415.

For discussion of verbal aspect and deictic markers providing tense see Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 98–99. The survey of οὔπω construction in this paper is an extrapolation from the general work done on the perfect and perfect imperatives in particular. No significant published work has yet been done on the contribution of recent developments in verbal aspect to the understanding of οὔπω constructions, however unpublished analysis can be viewed at — Tucker, “The Usage of οὔπω in the New Testament.”

¹⁶⁴ Consider for example the use of οὔπω in John 7 where it is used with the present in John 7:6 (ὁ καιρὸς ὃ ἐμὸς οὔπω πάρεστιν) and then the perfect in John 7:8 (ὁ ἐμὸς καιρὸς οὔπω πεπλήρωται). The context makes clear that the perfect tense-form (John 7:8) does not change the temporal sense at all, in both cases the temporal sense is that “the time has not yet come”. However, context suggests a step up in emphasis between the present (John 7:6) and perfect (John 7:8) in three ways. (1) There is increased dramatic intensity created by repetition. Jesus insists a second time that his time is not yet arrived. (2) The time is described in much more significant terms. The use of πεπλήρωται in the second occurrence contains the new idea that the particular time being spoken of is one of divine appointment. (3) The first instance ὁ καιρὸς ὃ ἐμὸς is not identified but merely contrasted with the time of the brothers in a weak negative comparison. In the second instance by the use of πεπλήρωται, the time is defined by an identity with the time set (by the Father). The expression ὁ ἐμὸς καιρὸς has moved from being quite vaguely defined to being much more sharply defined. The ESV helpfully renders this progression as “not yet come” (John 7:6) and “not yet fully come” (John 7:8).

the action,¹⁶⁵ this emphasis usually highlights the *likelihood* of the foreshadowed action occurring at some time in the future¹⁶⁶ but occasionally emphasises the *unlikelihood* of the foreshadowed action occurring.¹⁶⁷ Unlike the present tense form where the emphasis of the οὔπω construction sometimes falls upon the current action having definitely not occurred (or come to completion) at the present point in time, there is no instance in the NT or LXX of a perfect οὔπω construction where the focus of the emphasis falls in the present.¹⁶⁸ To state it the other way around, perfect οὔπω constructions never emphasise the fact that the action has definitely not yet begun.

(iii) The durative sense of perfect οὔπω constructions

Perfect οὔπω constructions in the NT and LXX occur in situations where the context indicates one of two durative possibilities. Occasionally, the foreshadowed action in a perfect οὔπω construction describes a “not yet” action that has not commenced,¹⁶⁹ but in the majority of cases it appears to describe an action that has commenced and is in progress but has not yet come to completion.¹⁷⁰ Where the action has not commenced this is always clearly indicated by the context.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ An οὔπω construction makes two statements about the action of the verb –a strong statement that the action has not occurred at the present time (in the narrative) and a less certain statement implying that the action may occur in the future (with respect to narrative time).

¹⁶⁶ For example John 7:8, Heb 9:8, Gen 15:16 LXX, Ex 9:30 LXX and Isa 7:17 LXX.

¹⁶⁷ For example Gen 18:12 LXX and 2 Macc 7:35 LXX. In Gen 18:12 LXX Sarah expresses her scepticism that she will ever bear a child.

¹⁶⁸ Present tense forms with *emphatic assurance* about a future action occurring include Matt 16:9, 4:40, 8:17, 8:21 and John 8:57. Present tense forms with *emphatic denial* that the action has occurred in the present include Matt 24:6, John 2:4, 7:6, Heb 2:8 and 11:7.

In contrast to both perfect and present οὔπω constructions, aorist constructions do not appear to create emphasis on either the present state (an emphasis that the action has certainly not yet occurred or been completed) or the future state (an emphasis, for example, on the action definitely occurring at some future time).

¹⁶⁹ For example Heb 9:8 (μήπω with the infinitive πεφανερωσθαι) where the heavenly city is described as something *not yet seen*. See also Isa 7:17.

¹⁷⁰ For example Gen 15:16, Ex 9:30, 2 Macc 7:35 & John 7:8. In John 7:8 the lexeme πληρώω (“to cause something to be full” Louw & Nida 59.37) creates the sense of an event that is already in train but not yet fully come. The ESV reflects this in its translation “my time has not yet fully come” (my underline) which gives it a sense of being a process that has begun but has not yet been completed and where the accent falls on strongly emphasising that the completion is certain to occur. Note the similar use of πληρώω in Gen 15:16 as discussed by Bieringer, “Resurrection and the Forgiveness of Sins,” 232–233.

(iv) Summary of οὔπω construction survey

To summarize these observations of οὔπω constructions:

(1) Temporal: aorist, present and perfect verbs all combine with the deictic marker οὔπω to produce the same temporal value.

(2) Emphatic: perfect οὔπω constructions occur in contexts that suggest an emphasis on the future of the foreshadowed action – usually to emphasise *certainty* that the foreshadowed action will occur but occasionally to emphasise *uncertainty*. Context is the guide.

(3) Durative: perfect οὔπω constructions sometimes describe an action or state that has not started to occur, but more frequently describe an action or state that has commenced, is in progress, but has not come to completion. Context is the guide.

3.3.3.4 The Meaning of οὔπω..ἀναβέβηκα

Having surveyed οὔπω constructions in the NT and LXX it is now time to draw some conclusions regarding the particular οὔπω construction in 20:17.

Firstly, given that the focus of emphasis in perfect οὔπω constructions in the NT and LXX is upon the fulfilment of the foreshadowed action with context determining whether it is a strong expression of certainty or uncertainty, the expression οὔπω..ἀναβέβηκα is best understood as creating an emphasis on the future certainty of the Johannine ascension. Context strongly indicates this is the most likely reading. In the dialogue that immediately follows ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα is an explicit promise. This statement, on the lips of Jesus, a reliable character of knowledge and understanding while other characters in the chapter continually demonstrate misunderstanding, confirms this reading of the foreshadowed action as certain.

While there are no such examples in the NT or LXX, one example exists in the Apostolic Fathers of a Perfect οὔπω construction with a focus on an emphatic denial of the present action in *1 Eph 3.1*. However it is an emphatic denial that the action (of becoming mature in Christ οὔπω ἀπλήρτισμαι ἐν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ) has reached completion. In the context, it is clearly a process already in progress. Οὔπω takes the emphatic first position in the first of three co-ordinate clauses that all emphasise that a state of spiritual maturity has not yet been fully attained. There are no examples in the NT, LXX or the Apostolic Fathers of a Perfect οὔπω construction where the emphasis is on the action or process having not begun.

¹⁷¹ Aorist, present and perfect tense-forms are all capable of expressing a ‘not yet completed’ durative characteristic for example 1 Cor 8:2 (aorist) and Mark 4:40 (present).

Secondly, given that perfect οὔπω constructions in the NT and LXX usually, unless context suggests otherwise, indicate a process in progress, it is best to read οὔπω..ἀναβέβηκα as an action that has already begun before Jesus speaks with Mary.¹⁷² The other possibility would be to understand from the context that the action has definitely not commenced. If ἀναβαίνω is understood as a Lukan-style spatial departure to heaven, then the ascension action has clearly not commenced as Jesus still has his feet on the ground as he speaks to Mary.¹⁷³ However, nothing in the text of John 20 supports this understanding of ἀναβαίνω, in fact, the strong emphasis on a relational shift to the Father tells against this spatial reading. Only the imposition of a Lukan style ascension would lead the reader down this path.

Therefore, bringing these observations together, the phrase οὔπω...ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα should be rendered (over-translating for emphasis) as: *My relational return to the Father, that has begun, will definitely come to completion at some point in the future.*

3.3.4 Putting the Pieces of 20:17 Together

The observation that the ascension announcement heralds a new era of intimate relationship between Jesus and believers, creates a new possibility for how to understand the causal relationship between the prohibition and its explanation. The

¹⁷² “All attempts to make this refer to an ascension occurring much later so that the appearance in xx 19 ff. can be pre-ascensional go against the obvious meaning of the text.” — Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:994.

Porter describes οὔπω...ἀναβέβηκα as indicating a process still in progress as Jesus speaks to Mary — *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 356. However Porter’s argument relies upon the view that the action described in the first (Perfect tense-form) instance of ἀναβαίνω has commenced because Jesus states as much in the second (Present tense-form) instance. However, the Present tense-form of ἀναβαίνω in John 20:17 does not describe an event that is occurring as Jesus addressed Mary but an action that will be occurring subsequently when Mary relays the message of Jesus to the disciples. It may be that Jesus is ascending (in some sense) as he speaks to Mary, but this is not what Jesus is addressing here. His words only refer to the state of affairs at that later time when Mary will meet with the disciples. Porter’s apparent misunderstanding regarding the timing of this action somewhat undercuts his observations regarding the first instance of ἀναβαίνω. In any case he seems to rely too strongly on the Present-tense not being able to have a future meaning. A number of recent commentators follow Porter and see the perfect as a kind of stative and therefore a process in progress. See Köstenberger (*John*, 570.) who follows Carson (*John*, 644.) who follows Porter (*Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 356.) and Beasley-Murray (*John*, 377.).

¹⁷³ The possibility that Jesus is spatially rising away from Mary as he speaks these words should be acknowledged as a possibility. However, there is no indication to suggest this in the narrative and this option will be excluded from consideration.

prohibition in isolation suggests a movement of some kind away from Mary. This is confronting for the reader who identifies with Mary in her emotional search and strong desire to find Jesus. However, this suggestion of a distance between Mary and Jesus is overturned by the ascension announcement. The narrator springs a surprise upon his reader. Jesus foreshadows what will be realized in the Spirit bestowal in the next scene. Rather than a distance, there will be a new rich relational closeness between the believer and the reunited Son and Father by means of the Spirit bestowal.

The conclusions already drawn about the emphatic and durative nuances of οὐπω...ἀναβέβηκα make some readings of γάρ unlikely. Jesus is not saying: *stop holding me because my ascension has definitely not commenced* (emphasis on the present action).¹⁷⁴ Jesus is not saying: *stop holding me because my ascension has definitely not yet completed* (emphasis on the present action as a process that has commenced). Instead, given our observations so far in the entire reading, it is best to understand Jesus as saying: *stop holding me physically because there is a new and better way of relating to me that is definitely now dawning*.¹⁷⁵ Taking the prohibition as a persuasive exhortation, the dialogue might even be rendered: *there is no need to keep holding me physically because there is now dawning a new and better way of relating to me*. In Luke's account, the ascension is a departure that creates distance between Jesus and the believer. Something quite different is being emphasised in the Johannine ascension.

While other possibilities have been advanced by commentators for how γάρ connects the prohibition with the dialogue that follows, the vast majority of commentators understand the phrase οὐπω γάρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα to be some kind of explanation for why Mary touching Jesus is not an appropriate action.¹⁷⁶ On the plain reading of the text, this is the most straightforward understanding of γάρ. Even commentators who understand ἀναβαίνω as a Lukan spatial departure and for whom reading οὐπω γάρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα as an explanation creates significant

¹⁷⁴ This option would be the natural way to read ἀναβέβηκα and ἀναβαίνω if it were a Lukan style ascension.

¹⁷⁵ Underline to signify the emphasis of the perfect.

¹⁷⁶ "a marker of cause or reason between events, though in some contexts the relation is often remote or tenuous—"for, because." — Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1:§ 89.23.

exegetical difficulties, nevertheless, frequently agree that this is the best reading.¹⁷⁷ However, the reading of the Johannine ascension proposed in this thesis resolves the problem that the explanation for the prohibition does not seem to function like an explanation. Mary is to cease relating to Jesus physically because the Johannine ascension is all about a better way to relate to Jesus. The entire verse might be rendered (with over translation for emphasis): *There is no need to keep holding me physically because a new and better way of relating to me is dawning as I and the Father, united together, come to dwell with you – this is the important news you are to announce to the brethren.*

This reading is consistent with the function of the imperatives ἄπτου and πορεύου, in the flow of the overall narrative of John 20.¹⁷⁸ These two imperatives, both foregrounded by the present tense, highlight the way the ascension announcement is a watershed in the overall action of the narrative of John 20. Mary is to cease doing one thing (searching for the physical Jesus and embracing him) and start doing another thing (going to the disciples with the news of the Johannine ascension with all its rich relational indwelling).¹⁷⁹ The focus up until the ascension announcement is upon searching for the physical Jesus culminating in the surprising prohibition to withdraw

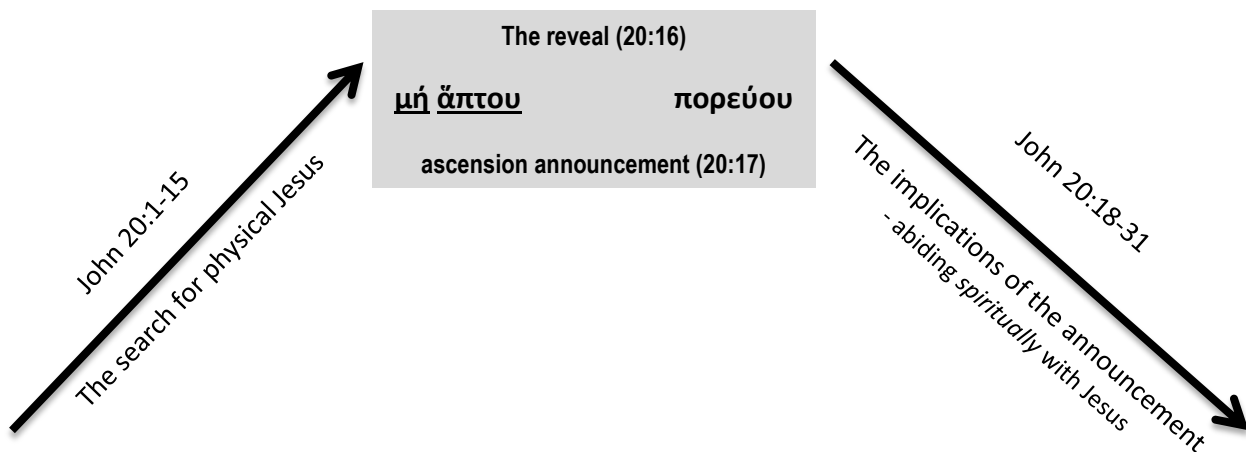
¹⁷⁷ Carson appears sympathetic to a reading similar to the one proposed here when he says: “The idea is that the resurrection has opened up the door to a new, intimate, spiritual relationship between Jesus and the disciples” — *John*, 643. However, he ultimately dismisses this view because he understands ἀναβέβηκα as a Lukan style levitation, which means that οὐπω...ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα makes little sense as an explanation for the prohibition.

Carson ultimately opts for a reading that might be paraphrased as: *Do not touch me now because my ascension is not occurring anytime soon, there will be plenty of time for that sort of thing in the forty more days until I ascend at Pentecost* — *John*, 644. His reading has a number of weaknesses. (i) It heavily imposes a Luke-Acts understanding upon John’s ἀναβαίνω event and the chronology of events in John 20. (ii) Contrary to NT usage, it understands the οὐπω...ἀναβέβηκα construction not as a process in progress at the time Jesus speaks but an event in the future, and the emphasis of the perfect οὐπω construction is in the form of an emphatic denial of the present action in the perfect οὐπω construction. (iii) It assumes that touching Jesus is appropriate in the later resurrection appearances, assuming that Thomas does touch Jesus, when everything in the narrative points in a different direction. His reading would be more persuasive if there was touch in the following narrative. (iv) It does not really make sense of οὐπω...ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα as a rationale for the prohibition. On Carson’s logic, the rationale should be more like “because I am remaining”. To render οὐπω...ἀναβέβηκα as “because I am not ascending until much later” is a difficult reading of the phrase οὐπω...ἀναβέβηκα and is a strange way to word the explanation in any case.

¹⁷⁸ The other imperative, the aorist εἰπὲ, is subordinate to the main verb πορεύου which is foregrounded by the present tense and prominent first position in the clause.

¹⁷⁹ Stibbe, *The Resurrection Code*, 41.

from him. The focus of all that follows 20:17 (the Spirit bestowal, the apostolic commission, and the challenge to believe the apostolic witness) is the outworking of the implications of this announcement. The structure of the John 20 narrative, with these two foregrounded imperatives forming a hinge, confirms the reading of 20:17 proposed here, and reflects the challenge to the reader that knowing Jesus spiritually is better than seeking to find him physically.



3.4 Conclusion to First Reading

John 20, as a literary unit, has a significant focus on the problem of Jesus being absent from his disciples. The question *Where is Jesus and how do we now relate to him?* is raised by a series of sophisticated narrative techniques in all three scenes. The 'problem' of Jesus being absent from his disciples culminates in Jesus' strongly foregrounded announcement about his ascension. This announcement is positioned as the climax of the first scene. All that follows the ascension announcement (the Spirit bestowal, the apostolic commission, the challenge to believe the apostolic witness) is the outworking of the implications this announcement. The structure of the narrative, with the dialogue of 20:17 at its centre, reflects the challenge to the reader that knowing Jesus spiritually is better than seeking to find him physically.

The destination of the Johannine ascension is a person rather than a physical location. This is the thing that is most clear from the ascension announcement with its repeated relational markers. Jesus is not spatially departing from the disciples in order to enter (or re-enter) into a relationship with the Father. Instead, the Johannine ascension describes a new relational closeness in which the Father and Son abide with the believer. His ascension announcement is about something better than his physical presence.

While the question of when the Johannine ascension occurs will be dealt with in the second reading, some significant preliminary observations have been made. Firstly, the Johannine ascension is in progress as Jesus speaks to Mary but has not come to

completion. Secondly, some kind of change occurs within the John 20 narrative. The Spirit bestowal appears to replace in some way the need of the disciples to touch Jesus even though this was the natural response of Mary. It suggests that in the Spirit bestowal some kind of significant change occurs in the way the disciples relate to Jesus.

In John 20, Jesus continues to come and go without any obvious indication that these appearances will cease so that nothing in John's narrative precludes the possibility of the implied reader meeting Jesus in the flesh. Yet the ascension announcement in 20:17, in the context of John 20, persuades the reader that that apostolic testimony and the indwelling of Spirit is a more reliable way to know Jesus and dwell with him than an encounter with Jesus in the flesh.

Chapter 4. SECOND READING: The Ascension in John

This chapter will consider how the reader of the entire Fourth Gospel would understand the Johannine ascension that is announced in 20:17. Observations are grouped under three similar headings to the first reading. Firstly, section 4.1 *Location* will outline the use of spatial and relational imagery in John's Gospel, as it is relevant to the ascension announcement. Secondly, section 4.2 *Testimony* will outline the way the motif of testimony develops through the Gospel and the significance of this motif for the reader's understanding of the ascension announcement. Thirdly, section 4.3 *The Ascension Announcement* will identify scenes and motifs in John's Gospel that will particularly shape the reader's understanding of the ascension announcement in 20:17. Finally, four objections to this thesis will be considered in section 4.4.

It will be demonstrated that the overall effect of the John 1-19 narrative is to prepare the reader to understand the Johannine ascension as a relational movement rather than a spatial movement, which culminates in the Spirit bestowal in which the Son, with the Father, abides with the disciples spiritually rather than physically, by means of the Spirit.

4.1 Location — Relational/Spatial Imagery in John

This section examines the sophisticated interplay between spatial and relational imagery throughout John's Gospel and the way this prepares the reader to understand the ascension announcement in 20:17. It will be demonstrated that while the Prologue describes the coming of Jesus from the Father as a relational movement, the Book of Signs describes his coming and going in spatial terms.¹⁸⁰ In contrast, the Final Discourse focuses almost exclusively on the departure of Jesus from the disciples and does so in language that is exclusively relational.¹⁸¹ In this Final Discourse, Jesus not only speaks of

¹⁸⁰ For the sake of convenient notation the *Prologue* is defined as John 1:1-18, the *Final Discourse* refers to John 13-17, the *Book of Signs* refers to John 1:19-12:50.

¹⁸¹ There is one reference in John 13-17 that might be regarded as spatial. The narrator refers to "the world" twice in 13:1. He describes Jesus departing from the world (μεταβῆ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου) and the disciples as being in the world (ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ) in the opening verse of the Final Discourse. This verse may function as a hinge between the spatially focussed Book of Signs and the relationally focussed Final Discourse. However, it will be argued in section 4.1.1 that "the world" is an ambiguous term with spatial and relational connotations. It is best read here as a spatial term being juxtaposed with the relational expression πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. The language of being "in the world" will recur throughout the Final Discourse where it is relational.

his departure from the disciples (into death) but also introduces the idea of a subsequent return to abide with them. The entire journey, from the disciples, to the cross, and back to the disciples, is described as his going to the Father.¹⁸²

Prologue (1:1-18)	Coming from the Father	relational terminology
Book of Signs (1:19-12:50)	Coming and Going	spatial terminology
Final Discourse (13:1-17:26)	Going to the Father	relational terminology

4.1.1 Relational Terminology in the Prologue (1:1-18)

The Prologue uses relational terminology to describe the coming of Jesus. The Word is “with God” (πρὸς τὸν θεόν 1:1) and comes “from the Father” (παρὰ πατρός 1:14). In 1:9 the Word comes into the world (εἰς τὸν κόσμον 1:9). Even this is a relational term more than a spatial one because the world are those who owe Jesus loyalty (τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν 1:11) but choose not to receive him (οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον 1:12).¹⁸³

That this *coming* language in the Prologue is relational rather than spatial is clear from the way the Prologue describes John the Baptist as sent *from God* (παρὰ θεοῦ 1:6). Clearly, this is not describing a spatial movement from heaven into the creation. This understanding of παρὰ will inform the reader’s understanding of the Word being παρὰ πατρός in 1:14. This is not to deny that the λόγος was spatially with the Father prior to

¹⁸² Commenting on 3:14, Brown describes it as, “one continuous action of ascent: Jesus begins his return to the Father as he approaches death [...] The first step in the ascent is when Jesus is lifted up on the cross; the second step is when he is raised up from death; the final step is when he is lifted up to heaven” — *John*, 1966, 1:416. Despite the spatial understanding of the ascension in Brown’s statement, the notion of a single journey through death to the Father is correct. Note that Brown’s final phrase “when he is lifted up to heaven” highlights what 20:17 does not say. Jesus says *to the Father*, not *to heaven*.

¹⁸³ That ὁ κόσμος is a relational term will surprise the reader. It shifts in meaning, overturning the reader’s initial understanding that it is a spatial term. Morris points out that the notion of the “world” is developed in three successive clauses in 1:10. “Notice the subtle shift of the meaning of the word ‘world’. On the first two occasions it refers to the earth together with all that is in it, including man. But on this third occasion it signifies men at large, more particularly those men who have come into contact with Jesus of Nazareth” — *John*, 95–96. Morris suggests that κόσμος begins as a spatial term and then becomes a relational term in a kind of double meaning. The relational element is the surprise, and therefore the element of the meaning that stands out most for the reader.

the incarnation,¹⁸⁴ but the narrator is clearly making a relational point here rather than a spatial one. All this prepares the reader for the re-emergence of these terms in the ascension announcement. Note the twin occurrences of πρὸς τὸν θεόν in 1:1-2 that echo the twin occurrences in 20:17. In 1:1-2, πρὸς clearly bears the sense of “being with” more than “travelling to”. This suggests that the reader will understand the Johannine ascension announced in 20:17, in the light of the Prologue, as emphasizing a reunited relationship rather than a spatial proximity.

4.1.2 Spatial imagery in the Book of Signs (1:19-12:50)

The Book of Signs uses spatial imagery for the coming and going of Jesus. Three terms feature: οὐρανός (section 4.1.2.1), ὑψώω (section 4.1.2.2) and ἀναβαίνω (section 4.1.2.3).

4.1.2.1 References to οὐρανός in the Book of Signs

Οὐρανός occurs seventeen times in the Book of Signs. On each occasion, οὐρανός is used spatially. It occurs 8 times in connection with Jesus coming from heaven.¹⁸⁵ On two occasions it refers to someone going to heaven.¹⁸⁶ Οὐρανός is also the place from which the Spirit descends (1:32), the manna falls (6:31-33) and, in the climactic event that closes the Book of Signs, the place from whence the voice of God is heard (12:28). In contrast, when the relational schema of the Prologue re-emerges in the Final Discourse, οὐρανός occurs only once where it is used in an idiom for prayer (17:1). Οὐρανός does not occur in the Prologue. Note also the spatial idiom that Jesus uses to refer to himself ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος (3:31, see also 3:3, 7) as well as the contrast Jesus draws in 8:23

¹⁸⁴ That is, the Word was spatially not in the creation space – the term *spatial* begins to break down as a description of where the pre-incarnate Word resided and can only properly describe where he was not because heaven is in some sense not a spatial location. It is another reminder that while the narrator uses spatial terminology for the pre-incarnate Word in the Book of Signs this must be to some extent metaphorical.

¹⁸⁵ 3:13a, 31; 6:38, 41-42, 50-51, 58.

¹⁸⁶ 1:51 and 3:13b. Both these references are discussed in section 4.1.2.3 and quite probably are not referring to Jesus.

between his opponents as ὑμεῖς ἐκ τῶν κάτω ἐστε and himself as ἐγὼ ἐκ τῶν ἄνω εἰμί.¹⁸⁷

4.1.2.2 References to ὑψώω in the Book of Signs

In the Book of Signs, ὑψώω, “lifted up”, occurs five times in three separate passages.¹⁸⁸ In all three passages, Jesus describes his death on a cross, using the passive form of ὑψώω, as a kind of raising up.¹⁸⁹ In John 3 and 12 “the lifter” is not specified, but in 8:22 “the Jews” are described as those who will act upon the Son of Man by lifting him up. In 12:32, the narratorial aside explicitly connects this lifting up with his death. On each occasion, Jesus alludes to his coming crucifixion using the imagery of a spatial movement, in a way that confuses his interlocutors. The impact of this character confusion upon the reader is explored in section 4.1.2.4.

4.1.2.3 References to ἀναβαίνω in the Book of Signs

Setting aside 20:17 and the non-significant usages (10:1 and 21:11), all eleven references to ἀναβαίνω in the Fourth Gospel occur in the Book of Signs.¹⁹⁰ As with ὑψώω, there are no references to ἀναβαίνω in the Final Discourse despite the departure of Jesus being the central theme. These ἀναβαίνω references in the Book of Signs can be categorised into: (i) *Son of Man* references and (ii) *Temple Typology* references.

(i) The Son of Man ἀναβαίνω References

The instances of ἀναβαίνω in 1:51, 3:13 and 6:62 all appear on the lips of Jesus in contexts where he refers to himself as the Son of Man. None of these references explicitly state that Jesus will ascend but all convey some kind of spatial usage of ἀναβαίνω.

¹⁸⁷ These are the only two uses of ἄνω/ἄνωθεν in reference to Jesus. It occurs twice in relation to the Father (11:41) and twice in reference to the Spirit (3:3 and 7). In 19:11, Jesus is most probably using ἄνωθεν to describe relative earthly authorities. Outside of the references cited here the term κάτω (the compliment to ἄνω) occurs in 8:6 (a non-significant use). It appears in 8:23 in opposition to ἄνω.

¹⁸⁸ 3:14 (twice), 8:28, 12:32, 34. In contrast to ἀναβαίνω and the coming and going terms of the Final Discourse which are all in the active, all of the references to ὑψώω are in the passive.

¹⁸⁹ de Boer, “Jesus’ Departure to the Father in John,” 19 n.52; Carson, *John*, 201. All references are self-designations although strictly speaking in 12:34 “the Jews” quote Jesus’ self-designation back to him.

¹⁹⁰ The insignificant uses are 10:1 (the one who climbs over a fence) and 21:11 (Peter climbing into the boat).

- a) 1:51 describes the ascent and descent of the angels. Jesus is neither descending nor ascending.¹⁹¹
- b) In 3:13, Jesus is not referring to his own spatial ascension into heaven. It is best understood as describing a hypothetical human who ascends to heaven and then returns in order to speak with authority about heavenly things because Jesus refers to the activity of ascending prior to the activity of descending. If it is a reference to himself, Jesus would be expected to refer to descending first.¹⁹² While the one who descends is the Son of Man, the one who has ascended, ἀναβέβηκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, has no subject. A spatial image is being used to discuss the abstract notion of spiritual authority.
- c) 6:62 describes the hypothetical scenario of Jesus' opponents observing him ascend spatially to heaven.¹⁹³ Jesus is suggesting that not even this would persuade them to believe. It is not a promise or prediction of some future ascension event.¹⁹⁴ That Jesus is described as ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ or ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ on ten occasions in 6:31-58 reinforces the spatial sense of ἀναβαίνω.

¹⁹¹ The exact nature of the imagery is unclear. It may be that Jesus occupies the place of Jacob (in the Gen 28 dream) and is on the earth while the angels ascend and descend upon him. Alternatively, Jesus might be the 'ladder' bridging heaven and earth, or be situated at the top of the ladder (in the position of Yahweh in Jacob's dream). For the strength of these various positions see Carson, who favours the first view, and Morris who favours the second — Carson, *John*, 161–162; Morris, *John*, 170–171.

¹⁹² "The Evangelist's extension and exposition of the preceding dialogue begins with an ambiguous saying. Most commonly it is considered to be directed against all claims made by or on behalf of individuals who are supposed to have ascended to heaven and received revelations to make known to the world below " — Beasley-Murray, *John*, 50. For a similar view see Carson, *John*, 200.

The view that 3:13 refers to an ascension by Jesus is a position held by a number of commentators, for example Nicholson, *Death as Departure*, 91–98. The recent contribution of Pierce and Reynolds has strengthened this position — "The Perfect Tense-Form and the Son of Man in John 3.13," 149–155. It would not be problematic in arguing this thesis to hold that 3:13 narrates an ascension by Jesus. Setting aside the question of whether this would be a spatial or relational ascension, this understanding of the text would strengthen the observation that the Book of Signs uses spatial imagery in contrast to the Prologue and Final Discourse. Pierce and Reynolds, informed by the verbal aspect models of Campbell and Porter, understand the perfect ἀναβέβηκεν as a foregrounded action rather than a kind of past tense. While this proposal has merit it still makes little sense in the context to understand this as a reference to Jesus' own ascension.

The passage also uses spatial imagery for the coming and going of the Spirit (3:8) which also contributes to the disconnect between Jesus and Nicodemus.

¹⁹³ Morris, *John*, 383.

¹⁹⁴ In the way that, for example, Mark 14:62 functions as a promise/prediction of a spatial ascension. *Contra* Bernard who argues that ἀναβαίνω in 20:17 must be a spatial term on the basis of this usage in 6:62 — *John*, 671.

In all three passages, ἀναβαίνω has a strong spatial flavour. Each usage describes an observable physical ascent. However, none of these references describes an actual future spatial ascent of Jesus.

(ii) The Temple Typology ἀναβαίνω References

The more frequent usage of ἀναβαίνω in the Book of Signs is as a *temple typology*. Each of these instances describes a going up to Jerusalem or up to the temple in Jerusalem. Some references are to Jesus (2:13, 5:1, 7:8b, 7:10b & 7:14) but other characters are also described in the same way (7:8a, 7:10a, 11:55, 12:20).¹⁹⁵ While it is a geographical reality that Jerusalem is on a hill and a journey from most points in Israel would involve an ascent, the spatial imagery is making a theological point.¹⁹⁶ Like the ὑψόω references to the crucifixion, these references refer to Jesus being offered up to the Father as an acceptable sacrifice. Unlike the Synoptics, in John's Gospel, there is no sense of estrangement of the Son from the Father in his death.¹⁹⁷ John never suggests a separation between the Father and Son in his crucifixion. Jesus is most obviously in his Father's will, bringing joy to his Father by his faithful obedience, and united in purpose with his Father, at the moment of death. See for example 16:32. It is a sacrifice offered up to God in his presence. Like ὑψόω, these ἀναβαίνω references use a spatial image in a non-spatial way.

4.1.2.4 What is the Impact of this Spatial Imagery Upon the Reader?

In the Book of Signs there is both coming and going language. Almost all of this language is on the lips of Jesus. He uses spatial imagery for his coming into the world, in a way that strongly contrasts and therefore highlights the relational terminology of the Prologue. However, the going language of the Book of Signs functions quite differently. All the references to Jesus' departure in the Book of Signs use spatial imagery in a metaphorical way. None of the going references in the Book of Signs describes a spatial departure from the earth to heaven by Jesus.

¹⁹⁵ In the LXX ἀναβαίνω is used for going up to Jerusalem (for example 2 Sam 19:35 LXX, 2 Edras 1:3), or going to the temple once in Jerusalem (for example Ps 23:3, Is 37:1, 38:22) This usage also appears widely in the NT (for example Luke 18:10, Acts 3:1) — Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 107–111; Nicholson, *Death as Departure*, 75; Stibbe, *The Resurrection Code*, 97–99.

¹⁹⁶ Morris comments on 6:61, "the ascension stands for all that series of events that was inaugurated by the crucifixion." — *John*, 383.

¹⁹⁷ For example, the cry of forsakenness in Matt 27:46 and Mark 15:34.

Prologue (1:1-18)	Coming from the Father	relational terminology
Book of Signs (1:19-12:50)	Coming and Going	spatial terminology Coming: literal Going: metaphoric
Final Discourse (13:1-17:26)	Going to the Father	relational terminology

All of the references to Jesus' departure in the Book of Signs are about his departure into death.¹⁹⁸ While the reader gradually becomes aware that Jesus is referring to his death, his interlocutors misunderstand his metaphoric use of departure/raising up language. This creates significant dramatic irony. In relation to the departure of Jesus, the reader gradually associates spatial thinking with misunderstanding. Those who think in spatial terms are those who misunderstand, refuse to believe and oppose the mission of Jesus. This will significantly shape the reader's understanding of the spatial thinking in John 20 that is overturned in the ascension announcement and Spirit bestowal.

Note the dramatic irony associated with Jesus' departure in the following dialogues:

- (i) In 3:12-15 Jesus speaks about his death and the Spirit bestowal using pointedly spatial imagery. Jesus describes the difference in understanding between himself and Nicodemus as a spatial chasm where one understands heavenly matters while the other can only comprehend earthly things (3:12). The phrase rendered "born again" in the NIV is literally *born from above*.¹⁹⁹ Jesus speaks enigmatically about someone ascending and descending to/from heaven (3:13) and then in a parallel image depicts the Son of Man being lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness (3:14-15). Nicodemus, at this point in the Gospel, is characterised as lacking insight.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ While similar misunderstandings about spatial imagery will arise between Jesus and his disciples in the Final Discourse, in the Book of Signs all these spatial misunderstandings occur in dialogues between Jesus and his opponents. In the Final Discourse, a return to the disciples will be discussed but this is never mentioned in the Book of Signs where all the 'going dialogues' are with his enemies.

¹⁹⁹ 3:3 — γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν.

²⁰⁰ Note the reference to "night" (3:2) and the rhetorical question οὐ εἶ ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ταῦτα οὐκ οἶσκε;

- (ii) In 7:33-35 Jesus again creates misunderstanding about his departure. His opponents speculate that his leaving has some kind of benefit for the Gentiles.²⁰¹ In John 12, when the Greeks arrive, the reader who understands from 12:20-36 that the departure of Jesus in death has great significance for the Greeks will reflect back on 7:33-35 and appreciate the dramatic irony — they speak far better than they know.²⁰²
- (iii) In 8:14, 21 and 22 Jesus speaks of his departure into death in a way that confuses the Pharisees.²⁰³ In 8:28, as in 3:14, Jesus combines the spatial language of departure (ὑπάγω) with the spatial language of lifting up at the cross (ὑψόω). Again, his enigmatic departure/rising language is associated with the enigmatic title “Son of Man”.
- (iv) In 12:32-34, as the Greeks arrive, Jesus announces that he will be lifted up (ὑψόω) and “draw all men to himself” echoing 3:15. Note the strong reference to death in the saying: “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies” (12:24). Again, there is confusion, as the crowd cannot understand how he can depart (with their spatial understanding of ὑψόω) and at the same time abide with them forever (12:34). It is clear for the reader that the titles “the Christ” and “the Son of Man” refer to the same person, but for the crowd these titles just add to the fog of confusion.

Dramatic irony grows with each interchange. In 3:13-15, with the image of the Son of Man being lifted up like the snake in Numbers 21, the narrator gives the reader no assistance in decoding this spatial image. However, in the final scene of the Book of Signs where the same spatial verbs create the same character confusion, the narrator in an explicit aside ensures that the reader understands what the characters fail to grasp:

²⁰¹ John appears to use “the Greeks” as a kind of synecdoche for the Gentiles more generally.

²⁰² Carson, positing a reader aware of the Gentile mission, notes, “Once again the ‘Johannine irony’ is very thickly laid on. Not only will serious readers of the Gospel remember that within six months the question of visiting proselytes will signal for Jesus the onset of the last ‘hour’ (12:20ff.), but that after the cross, resurrection and ascension the truth of the gospel Jesus proclaimed would in fact spread in Jewish and Gentile circles throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.” — Carson, *John*, 320. Carson helpfully reflects on the experience of reading as involving review and reflection upon earlier passages in that his use of “remember” here refers to something that happens to the reader in John 12.

The reader may have already made a connection between the Gentile mission and the lifting up language of 3:15-17 on the basis of the width of the language: πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων... ἡγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον... πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων.

²⁰³ Minear, “We Don’t Know Where,” 131.

“Jesus said this to show what kind of death he was going to die” (12:33). The contrast between Jesus and the narrator at this point, in that the narrator speaks plainly, while Jesus speaks in enigmatic terms, will strongly suggest to the reader that Jesus is deliberately creating this confusion for his interlocutors.

This dramatic irony prepares the reader to understand the ascension announcement in 20:17 in a particular way. Many of the specific confusions about location in the Book of Signs find parallels in John 20.

- (i) Jesus' reply to his opponents "you will search for me but not find me" (7:34) appears to echo Mary's search in 20:1-15. This will suggest to the reader that Mary labours under a similar confusion, thinking spatially rather than theologically.
- (ii) Likewise, note the way the crowd make a dichotomy between his *lifting up* and his *remaining forever*, apparently believing that these are mutually exclusive propositions (12:34). However, this contradiction is resolved in the ascension announcement because Jesus completes his mission by his departure in death and thereby comes to abide with his disciples forever.
- (iii) Finally, the reference to Jesus journeying to the Greeks (7:35) is fulfilled in the apostolic commission. Jesus by his Spirit-filled apostolic messengers will teach the Gentiles.

4.1.3 Relational Terminology in the Final Discourse (John 13-17)

In contrast to the heavy use of spatial imagery in the Book of Signs, the language of the Final Discourse describes Jesus, not so much going to a new place, as to a person, being either πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, πρὸς τὸν θεόν or πρὸς τὸν πέμψαντα με.²⁰⁴

Jesus' departure is the key theme of this Final Discourse.²⁰⁵ The announcement of his departure in 13:1 is the turning point between the first and second halves of the Gospel. This departure is foregrounded by the two temporal references: ἦλθεν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα

²⁰⁴ The phrase πρὸς τὸν πατέρα appears frequently in the Final Discourse (13:1; 14:12, 28; 16:10, 17, 28) but does not recur until 20:17 when it appears twice. The phrase πρὸς τὸν πέμψαντα με appears in 16:5 where the phrase ὑπάγω πρὸς τὸν πέμψαντά με has a focus is on the going not the coming, with τὸν πέμψαντα serving to identify the destination of Jesus' departure rather than his origin. The phrase πρὸς τὸν θεόν occurs in 13:3 — de Boer, “Jesus' Departure to the Father in John,” 2–4.

²⁰⁵ Going Away / Departing language: ὑπάγω — 13:3, 33, 36; 14:4, 5, 28; 16:5, 10, 17; ἔρχομαι — 13:1; 16:7; 17:11, 13; ἐξέρχομαι — 13:3; 16:28; πορεύομαι — 14:2, 3, 12; 16:7, 28. While this coming/going is progressed by a number of verbs ὑψόω and ἀναβαίνω do not appear in John 13-17.

and [π]ρὸ δὲ τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ πάσχα.²⁰⁶ The phrase τέλος ἡγάπησεν αὐτούς implies that this departure is the goal or end point (τέλος) of his coming into the world. This gives the whole dialogue of the Final Discourse a sense of urgency and foreboding. The shadow of Jesus' imminent departure falls over this scene. Following the explicit narratorial asides (12:33, 13:1-3) the reader now knows that this journey, in the first instance, is into death. The entire dialogue is bookended by two similar statements about Jesus leaving ὁ κόσμος (13:3, 17:10), which, as already noted in the Prologue, is also a relational descriptor indicating those opposed to Jesus.

4.1.3.1 Character Confusion in the Final Discourse Concerning Jesus' Departure

The misunderstanding of the main characters in the Final Discourse regarding the relational nature of Jesus' departure, not unlike Mary in 20:1-17, is highlighted by the way the question of *where* punctuates the narrative three times:²⁰⁷

John 13:36	Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?"	Λέγει αὐτῷ Σίμων Πέτρος· κύριε, ποῦ ὑπάγεις;
John 14:5	Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"	Λέγει αὐτῷ Θωμᾶς· κύριε, οὐκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ὑπάγεις· πῶς δυνάμεθα τὴν ὁδὸν εἰδέναι;
John 16:5	But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'	Νῦν δὲ ὑπάγω πρὸς τὸν πέμψαντά με, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐρωτᾷ με· ποῦ ὑπάγεις;

All three questions highlight the issue of location. In the Final Discourse, from the viewpoint of the disciples, the departure of Jesus is an unresolved problem despite his insistence that his departure is for their good (16:17).

4.1.3.2 Dramatic Irony in the Final Discourse Concerning Jesus' Departure

These three questions contribute to the characterisation of the disciples as both anxious and confused in regard to Jesus' looming departure. In the Book of Signs, Jesus' opponents misunderstand his statements about his departure, however in the Final

²⁰⁶ Note the first word position of [π]ρὸ and the choice of this preposition over ἐγγύς (see 6:4 & 7:2) which suggests that his departure is imminent. The NIV appropriately renders this as "It was *just before* the Passover Festival" [italics added].

²⁰⁷ Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 132.

Discourse it is his disciples who repeatedly misunderstand.²⁰⁸ The dramatic irony is even more intense in these exchanges for four reasons:

- i. In moving from a focus on the opponents of Jesus in the Book of Signs to the disciples in the Final Discourse, the reader will expect these insiders to be more insightful. Jesus' affection for the disciples expressed in his words and in the intimate foot washing ritual suggests a closeness between them that will lead the reader to assume that the disciples understand more about Jesus than his opponents understand of him.
- ii. In contrast to his enigmatic remarks in the Book of Signs, Jesus appears to make straightforward statements. His disciples show complete misapprehension despite Jesus speaking plainly.²⁰⁹ The reader knows that even their claim to understand (16:29) shows how much they do not understand. Even if Jesus' remarks are not as straightforward as they could be, the reader will have the impression they are straightforward because no more narratorial asides appear to be required (after 13:11) in order to explain what Jesus means by his departure.
- iii. The cycle of dialogue in the Final Discourse is more repetitious creating the impression that the disciples repeatedly make the same errors in understanding.²¹⁰
- iv. Most of all, the reader understands, by means of the initial narratorial asides (12:33 and 13:1-2), that his departure involves his betrayal and death. The disciples fail to grasp this and seem to think only of the cost to themselves of Jesus being absent. Their self-centred misunderstanding is highlighted by the

²⁰⁸ Lemmer argues that the central theme of John is the way various characters respond to the one who comes from the Father. The theme is introduced in the Prologue where "the world" and "those who believe" are categories differentiated by their response (John 1:10-11) — "A Possible Understanding By The Implied Reader," 292. Lemmer argues that the Book of Signs is concerned with the response of the world and the Final Discourse concerns the response of those who believe — "A Possible Understanding By The Implied Reader," 292–294. Torrey demonstrates that this narrative device appears extensively in John — "'When I Am Lifted up from the Earth', John 12," 320. See also Moloney, "Who Is 'the Reader' In/of the Fourth Gospel," 23.

²⁰⁹ See "The Fourth Gospel and its Misunderstandings" in Marguerat and Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories*, 112–113.

13:1-3 is a narratorial aside setting the scene but not explaining enigmatic dialogue. 13:28 is an explanatory aside but again is not about a departure saying.

²¹⁰ Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 132.

way Jesus lovingly comforts them and patiently teaches them even though the hour of his trial is upon him (13:2).

4.1.3.3 The Disciples' Emotions Tied to the Absence of Jesus

Just as Mary's emotions in 20:1-15 are tied to the absence of Jesus, the question of *where* Jesus is going, and the problem of his impending absence, is tied to the emotional responses of the disciples. They are filled with grief (16:6). Their distress is implied in the way Jesus repeatedly comforts them.²¹¹ Unlike the Book of Signs where the idea of Jesus' departure simply creates confusion in his opponents, in his disciples it creates sadness and fear (14:1, 27). They desire to be with him and resist the notion of separation. It highlights that this is a relational departure — Jesus is leaving his friends.

This emotional depiction of the disciples sets the reader up for John 20. Mary's emotional response to the absence of Jesus will appear natural and understandable, drawing the reader strongly to empathise with her. In addition, the emotion of the disciples at the prospect of Jesus' absence ensures that the reader focuses on the solution Jesus provides in the Final Discourse that he will return to the disciples to abide with them spiritually. It is to this aspect of Jesus' teaching in the Final Discourse that we now turn.

4.1.3.4 Jesus Promises to Return to the Disciples and Bestow the Spirit

Highly significant for our understanding of John 20 is the way Jesus speaks in the Final Discourse not just of his departure but also his subsequent return to the disciples.²¹² His absence will be a time when the world rejoices but the disciples mourn. Then comes a great reversal. His subsequent return will fill the disciples with joy (16:20, 22). His absence will be for a "little while" (16:16).²¹³ That μικρός is used by Jesus in 16:16 to

²¹¹ See 13:33 τέκνία and 14:18 οὐκ ἀφήσω ὑμᾶς ὀρφανούς. See Lemmer, "A Possible Understanding By The Implied Reader," 297.

²¹² ἔρχομαι — John 13:1, 14:3, 14:18, 14:23, 16:28; πορεύομαι 14:28.

²¹³ In commenting on 20:20 Cyril of Alexandria writes, "[w]e recall that he wove together an enigmatic statement for them concerning the precious cross and his resurrection from the dead. 'A little while,' he said, 'and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.' " — *Commentary on John*, 366.

indicate both the time until his departure, and the time between his departure and return suggests a short period of time and tells against his return being his Parousia.²¹⁴ That the Parousia is not on view is also suggested in Jesus' statement that his return will be observed by this generation of disciples but not the world (14:19-20, 16:16, 22). This fits well with the private nature of his post resurrection appearances in John 20 where he appears to Mary alone at the tomb and to the disciples inside a locked room.²¹⁵ Likewise, Jesus promises that at his return the disciples will finally understand the significance of his mission (14:7-11). This fits well with John's portrayal of the disciples as full of joy and understanding when Jesus appears in the locked room (20:19-29).²¹⁶ Note the dramatic reversal in Thomas. Before seeing this return he fails to believe; upon witnessing the return of Jesus he gives a remarkably profound confession (20:28).

The coming Spirit bestowal is strongly connected to Jesus' return. Jesus sometimes comforts the disciples regarding his departure by speaking of his own return and sometimes by speaking of the coming of the Spirit (15:26; 16:7, 8, 13). The phrase ἄλλον παράκλητον (14:16) suggests there has already been one παράκλητος who has had a ministry with the disciples. It suggests a strong continuity between the ministry Jesus exercises and the ministry the Spirit will come to exercise.²¹⁷ Indeed, in the Final Discourse, Jesus can speak of the Spirit's ministry to the disciples as though he was returning himself.²¹⁸ In other words, Jesus will return to dwell with the disciples, but in a way that the world will not see him. This unseen ministry will be in the person of the Spirit (14:17). Jesus will dwell with them, not as before, in fleshly form, but by the Spirit.²¹⁹ No other coming/going, for example the Parousia, is on view in John 13-17.²²⁰

²¹⁴ 21:19, 23 suggest the narrator is not committed to a Parousia in the lifetime of the apostles. See Beasley-Murray, *John*, 410–412; Beutler, "Resurrection and the Forgiveness of Sins," 239–240.

²¹⁵ Carson, *John*, 502.

²¹⁶ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 344–345.

²¹⁷ Carson, *John*, 500.

²¹⁸ "At times this indwelling is visualized as a coming of the father and the son to abide with the disciples (14:23); at other times the text visualizes Christ as taking the disciples to himself (14:3)." — Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 133.

²¹⁹ "In 14:1-3 Jesus' remarks about preparing a lodgement for his disciples by going away seem to refer to Christ's spiritual cleansing [*his death*] and his incorporation of the believers after the resurrection [...] Elsewhere in the narrative Jesus tells his disciples that he will come to them and they will see him again [...] Jesus will return by the coming of the Spirit and will make his home with the disciples (14:18-24)." — Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 254. See also Morrison, "The Ascension of Jesus and the Gift of the Holy Spirit," 38.

The disciples need not cling to Jesus physically for he will return, in a better way (16:7), to abide permanently with them by his Spirit.²²¹

4.1.3.5 The Hour of his Glory and the Johannine ascension

The departure of Jesus and the bestowal of the Spirit are tied to the highly anticipated hour (ἡ ὥρα) of his glorification (δοξάζω).

In 1:14, the Prologue leads the reader to anticipate the narration of a scene in which the disciples behold the glory of Jesus. While the narrator informs us that his glory is seen by the disciples in his miracles (2:11; 11:4, 40), the narratorial prolepsis in 7:39 suggests that there still awaits a particular time when it can be conclusively said that Jesus has been glorified. This aside makes clear that this coming definitive glorification precedes the bestowal of the Spirit.²²² The moment seems to arrive with the appearance of the Greeks where the motif of a coming *hour* and the theme of Jesus being *glorified* are brought together (12:23). However, it is a false climax as Jesus continues to speak of ἡ ὥρα as a coming time when the disciples will be tested (16:2, 4) and indeed will abandon him (16:32).

That Jesus has his death in mind as he speaks of his glorification is seen in the request for the Father to save him (12:27), his resolve to face his destiny (12:27), his prayer that he might glorify the Father in the ordeal he is about to face (12:28) and the Father's response (12:28, 33). In 17:1 the hour of glorification is again said to have arrived, but the prayer of Jesus suggests that his glorification, which will include his reunion with the

²²⁰ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 254; Schnackenburg, *John*, 3:62. The Parousia is probably referred to in 21:22.

²²¹ Bennema, "The Giving of the Spirit in John's Gospel--a New Proposal?," 210.

²²² It is possible that the giving of the Spirit in John 7 refers to a different Spirit bestowal other than the exclusively apostolic Spirit bestowal narrated in 20:22. The existence of two kinds of Spirit bestowal (one apostolic and one more general) will be argued in the third reading (section 5.1.5, page 122). In any case, the argument here is that the Spirit is not given in any form until the glorification of Jesus at the cross.

Father (παρὰ σοί 17:5), is still yet to come.²²³ These observations all point toward the hour of Jesus' glorification centring upon his death and resurrection.²²⁴

4.1.3.6 The Relational Terminology of the Final Discourse and the Ascension Announcement

The reader will recognise in the ascension announcement the same relational language emphasised in the Prologue and Final Discourse. The strong perichoretic language of 17:21 means the reader will continue to follow the narrative anticipating a union between the believers with the Father and the Son, like the oneness they have with each other. The reader will recognise in the "my Father" and "your Father" language of 20:17 the oneness with the Father and Son that Jesus prayed for back in 17:21. Coupled with the way the language of Jesus returning to the disciples is co-terminus with the language of Spirit bestowal (14:1-2, 16:16-22), it strongly suggests that the Johannine ascension finds its culmination in the Spirit-bestowal. Jesus' comforting word εἰρήνη underlines the connection between his teaching on the Spirit in the Final Discourse and its fulfilment in his appearance in the locked room (14:27, 16:33, 20:19, 21).

While some of the relational language of the ascension announcement is anticipated in the Final Discourse, other terms represent a new development. Nowhere prior to 20:17 does Jesus refer to the Father as "your Father", but only as "the Father" or "my Father".²²⁵ Likewise, nowhere prior to 20:17 does Jesus call the disciples his brothers. In 15:14, he announces that he now regards them as φίλοι. This is not necessarily a symmetric designation. While Jesus calls them friends, he does not invite them to

²²³ The ἡ ὥρα is also connected to Jesus' going to the Father in 13:1.

²²⁴ "Up to this point the narrative has left room for the reader to interpret [the hour] in a positive sense, its use in this passage [*John 12*] clearly emphasises the relationship of glorification to Jesus' death." – Quinn, "Expectation and Fulfilment of the Gift of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John," 123.

Köstenberger argues that the six signs in John 1-12 all reveal his glory and anticipate the cross-resurrection-ascension event, which is the hour of glorification — *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples*, 61–62. The Lazarus event anticipates the resurrection of Jesus and is said to reveal his glory (11:4). The ὥρα is associated with the dead being raised in 5:25 and 28. The language of glory (δόξα) and the hour (ἡ ὥρα) do not appear in the passion or post-resurrection narratives.

²²⁵ To illustrate by contrast, the term "your Father" and "our Father" appear in the earthly ministry of Jesus in the Synoptics (Matt 6:9, Mark 11:25, Luke 6:36, 12:30, 32, see also the assumed "our" in Luke 11:2). John alone holds back this term until the climactic ascension announcement.

consider him their friend.²²⁶ In contrast, the familial ἀδελφός (20:17) is not only more intimate than φίλος but also undeniably symmetric.²²⁷ The relational terms of the ascension announcement bring to a climax Jesus' use of relational terms in the Gospel. All this confirms the observation in the first reading that 20:17 is a portentous and highly relational announcement signifying a dramatic new development.²²⁸

In the first reading it was observed that the ascension announcement expresses a oneness between Jesus and his disciples yet still maintains relational distinctions. This balance is anticipated in John 17.²²⁹ While the believers will be drawn into a oneness with the Father and the Son, like the oneness the Father and Son have with each other, distinctions are preserved (17:11-13). The eternal Son is not indistinguishable or interchangeable with the adopted sons. However, the point remains that whatever the exact nuances, Jesus is saying something relational, more than positional. These terms stress, not a distance between Jesus and his disciples following the resurrection, but a closeness between them following the Johannine ascension. In our first reading, the question posed by John 20 *Where is Jesus?* was answered: *with the Father*. The overall context of the Gospel suggests a more comprehensive answer is: *with the Father, and by the Spirit, both he and the Father now dwell with the believers*.

4.1.4 Conclusion of Relational/Spatial Imagery in John

The *coming* language of the Prologue uses imagery that is clearly relational rather than spatial.²³⁰ In contrast, the strong spatial imagery in the Book of Signs throws into relief the relational schema of the Prologue.²³¹ Jesus' statements about his departure create confusion for his opponents in the Book of Signs.²³² For the reader, this creates a link between *spatial thinking* about Jesus' movements and misunderstanding of his mission.

²²⁶ Carson, *John*, 522–523.

²²⁷ Note also the way this term ἀδελφός is extended beyond the apostles to a wider group of believers in John 21:23.

²²⁸ Minear, “We Don’t Know Where,” 137.

²²⁹ This was observed in the ascension announcement in section 3.3.3.2, page 64.

²³⁰ Section 4.1.1.

²³¹ Section 4.1.2.

²³² Section 4.1.2.4.

In the Final Discourse the relational language Jesus uses for his departure is foregrounded by the sadness and distress of his disciples.²³³ In the Final Discourse Jesus describes his departure, not so much as going to a new place, but to a person.²³⁴ It is a shift in relationships. The most frequent description of this destination is πρὸς τὸν πατέρα which is a key phrase in the ascension announcement.

In death, Jesus departs from the disciples, but his death is not described as a departure or distancing (relationally or spatially) from the Father. The Son offers himself up to the Father as an acceptable sacrifice.²³⁵

However, even though Jesus has died and risen, the ascension announcement of 20:17 emphasises that his journey to the Father is not yet complete. As anticipated in the Final Discourse, his movement to the Father culminates in the Spirit bestowal. Jesus, returning as promised, and united with the Father, abides in his disciples by the Spirit in a rich perichoretic oneness.²³⁶ In a narrative where Jesus continues to spatially come and go, the Johannine ascension is a single relational journey toward the Father because it is the journey of the Son's obedience to the Father at every stage, bringing glory to the Father and the Son.

4.2 Testimony — Seeing and Believing

The pattern of an eyewitness giving testimony to a non-eyewitness is a significant theme throughout John's Gospel.

4.2.1 Testimony in the Prologue

The motif of eyewitness testifying to non-eyewitness can be observed in the Prologue. The narrator announces: "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (1:18). The Father has made himself known, not by appearing himself, but by sending an

²³³ Section 4.1.3.1.

²³⁴ Section 4.1.3.

²³⁵ Sections 4.1.2.2, 4.1.2.3, 4.1.2.4 and 4.1.3.

²³⁶ Sections 4.1.3.4 and 4.1.3.6.

eyewitness on his behalf into the world. As the narrative progresses, this role of eyewitness to the Father becomes a key claim that Jesus makes about himself (3:11-13, 6:46, 8:38). This motif reaches its climax in 20:21. As the Father sent Jesus as an eyewitness on his behalf, so now Jesus likewise sends the apostles. When his opponents and disciples ask to see the Father, Jesus insists that his testimony about the Father is not a second best experience but is as good as a direct encounter with the Father in person (14:8-11, 5:19). Those who ask to see the Father are characterised as those who lack understanding and do not appreciate the significance of the testimony Jesus offers them. This sets the reader up for the challenge of John 20 that eyewitness testimony is to be preferred over a direct encounter with Jesus.

4.2.2 Testimony in John 1-12

The motif of eyewitness testifying to non-eyewitness is repeatedly acted out in the Book of Signs. The disciples initially hear about Jesus, in almost every case, through the testimony of a witness rather than by direct encounter with Jesus. Andrew and an unnamed disciple accept the testimony of John the Baptist (1:35-37). Simon Peter accepts the eyewitness testimony of Andrew (1:41-42) and Nathanael accepts the testimony of Philip (1:45).²³⁷ In John 5 and 9 the unexpected absence of Jesus necessitates the men he has healed (the lame man and the blind man) testifying about him to those who did not themselves see the sign that Jesus performed (5:11-13, 9:8-33).²³⁸

4.2.3 Testimony in the Final Discourse

Much of the Final Discourse involves Jesus preparing the apostles for their role as eyewitnesses for which he commissions them in the Spirit bestowal scene (20:21).²³⁹ The distinction between eyewitness and non-eyewitness is made clear in 13:10 when

²³⁷ The exception is Philip (1:43).

²³⁸ While it could be argued that the blind man is hardly an eyewitness, note the way *seeing* is used a play on words in his testimony when he says οἶδα ὅτι τυφλὸς ὦν ἄρτι βλέπω (9:25). The verb εἶδον, prominent in John 20, appears frequently in discourses in the Book of Signs related to the themes of eyewitness and testimony (1:39, 46, 48, 50; 3:3; 4:29, 48; 6:26, 30; 8:56; 12:21, 41).

²³⁹ *Seeing* verbs, prominent in John 20, appear more sparingly in the Final Discourse but are prominent in two significant passages that address the future ministry of the apostles. Jesus emphasises that they have been eye-witnesses to his earthly ministry (ὁράω in the perfect tense 14:7, 9) and that they will be eye-witnesses to his future return, which in the context refers to his post resurrection appearances (ὁράω in the future tense 16:16, 17, 19, 22).

Jesus says, “whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.” The same pattern is emphasised when Jesus prays firstly for “those whom you gave me” in (17:6) and then for “those who will believe in me through their message” (17:20).²⁴⁰ Thus, the Final Discourse is opened and closed by explicit references to the sending of the apostles. On both occasions the words of Jesus closely anticipate the words used in the commissioning of the disciples in 20:21.

The vine image (15:1-17) also articulates this distinction between the eyewitness and non-eyewitness believer. Note the strong identifications in 15:5. Jesus is the vine. The apostles are the branches. The language of choosing (ἐκλέγομαι 15:19) and of branches being removed (15:2) is reminiscent of 13:18 where all the apostles are described as “chosen” (ἐκλέγομαι) except Judas.²⁴¹ It is emphasised that the branches (apostles) must be directly connected to the vine (Jesus) in order to bear fruit (15:4, 5).²⁴² Note again the commissioning language in 15:16 “but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit”. It is reasonable to assume, given this commissioning language, that the fruit are those who will hear through the apostles. The implied reader, as one of those who hears through apostolic testimony, is urged in this motif to attend to the apostolic testimony as the only way to be truly connected to Jesus but is also assured that by this apostolic testimony they have a living and genuine connection to Jesus. In this way the vine metaphor in John 15 sets the reader up for the challenge in John 20 to not despise the apostolic testimony in favour of a first-hand experience of Jesus. There can be no life for the non-eyewitness, except through the apostolic

²⁴⁰ While ἀπόστολος only appears in 13:16, the concept of a special role for the first disciples as witnesses is prominent in the Final Discourse and 20:21.

²⁴¹ Bolt, “What Fruit Does the Vine Bear?,” 12.

²⁴² Note the assurance that this second generation of believers have a real connection to Jesus. Blessing, joy and connection to Jesus comes via a connection through the branches — Bolt, “What Fruit Does the Vine Bear?,” 19, 19; Minear, “We Don’t Know Where,” 348. Likewise, Minear detects the theme in John 10 where the “other sheep” (John 10:16) will be included into the sheepfold already present. They will hear the voice of Jesus, the only way to belong to him, through the testimony of the eyewitnesses — “We Don’t Know Where,” 348. Bolt points out that this reading is confirmed in the following passage (15:9) — “What Fruit Does the Vine Bear?,” 17.

testimony (20:31).²⁴³ In this way, the vine metaphor sets the reader up for the challenge in John 20 of preferring apostolic testimony to a direct connection with Jesus.

4.2.4 Testimony in John 21

The theme of testimony is also played out in John 21. It has already been observed that in John 20, the disciples fail to believe on the basis of the eyewitness testimony of Mary, and Thomas refuses to believe on the basis of the eyewitness testimony of the other apostles. This motif recurs, in a positive way, in John 21. From the boat, the beloved disciple can see Jesus. In turn, he reliably testifies to Peter that he has seen the risen Jesus. Notice the verbal similarities between his testimony (21:7) and the testimony of Mary (20:18) and the apostles (20:25). In 20:17 Peter has not visually perceived the risen Jesus for himself but enthusiastically trusts the verbal testimony of an eyewitness – he does not insist upon seeing before believing (21:7).

John 21 also reinforces this lack of decisive departure in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus surprisingly appears again in John 21 even though 20:30-31 reads like a conclusion to the entire Gospel. The Gospel closes, with nothing in John 21 suggesting it is a climactic, final appearance. The departure of Jesus from the John 21 scene on the beach is not narrated, which, as observed earlier in the scenes of John 20, reduces further any sense of a final and decisive departure. All of this creates a sense that there is nothing to stop Jesus continuing to appear again and again.

4.2.5 Testimony and the Failure of the Chosen Witnesses to Understand

Running beside the theme of eyewitness, is the problem of the disciples being slow to understand.²⁴⁴ In the Book of Signs, the narratorial asides assure the reader that the

²⁴³ The same imagery is present in 4:35-38. Again Jesus speaks of his own mission, as the one sent by the Father into the world (4:34), he uses commissioning language of the sending the apostles (4:38), and equates the fruit (καρπός 4:36, 15:2, 4, 5, 8, 16) with those who receive eternal life through the ministry of the apostles.

²⁴⁴ In the Final Discourse and John 20, Peter, the beloved disciple and Thomas, feature prominently. Peter – 13:6-9, 24, 36-37. The other disciple – 13:23-24. Thomas – 14:5. It is assumed here that ὁν ἡγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς (13:21) and ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής (20:4) are the same character. As part of the parallel note that in both scenes (Final Discourse and Empty Tomb) Peter and the unnamed disciples both appear together, Thomas stands apart. In 20:19-29 the room where Jesus meets the disciples is similar, if not identical, to the room in John 13-17. Whether or not it is the same location, the similarities in the setting remind the reader that these same disciples who are still so slow to understand were present at the Final Discourse when Jesus explained his departure and return in detail.

disciples who are currently full of confusion will gain understanding. The point at which this understanding occurs is either described as after the resurrection (2:22) or after Jesus is glorified (12:16). This glorification is connected with the bestowal of the Spirit in the narratorial aside in 7:39. Likewise in the Final Discourse, the disciples appear slow to understand, but the reader is constantly assured that the ministry of the Spirit will bring understanding. As the theme of eyewitness is developed in the Final Discourse, the implied reader (a non-eyewitness) will become increasingly aware that their own access to Jesus will be through these apostles who appear to lack understanding. The reader is therefore primed to expect a transformation in the disciples at the point when the risen Jesus bestows the Spirit. In this way, the problem of Jesus being absent is being implicitly addressed. The unreliability of the eyewitnesses to grasp and explain the truth about Jesus is constantly foregrounded, yet the reader is repeatedly promised that the Spirit will enable the apostles to both recall and understand (14:25).

The emphasis, particularly in the Final Discourse, is upon the apostles receiving the Spirit. It foregrounds both their unique role as eyewitnesses, and the super-naturally empowered reliability of their testimony. However, throughout the Gospel a Spirit bestowal upon all who believe (including the non-eyewitnesses) is repeatedly promised.²⁴⁵ They will come to believe in Jesus through Spirit inspired testimony, and by believing, will enter the rich perichoretic life of knowing the Father and Son by the indwelling of the Spirit.

4.2.6 Summary of Testimony and Location in John's Gospel

Having considered the themes of location and testimony in the entire Gospel, how do these themes inform our understanding of the ascension in John 20? This second reading has confirmed that a significant pastoral concern in John's Gospel is the absence of Jesus and the implications this has for the implied (non-eyewitness) reader. The absence of Jesus is constantly presented as a problem in the action of the Gospel, particularly the responses of various characters. In this way, the narrator repeatedly acknowledges that this is a genuine concern for his reader. However, in contrast to the characters in his Gospel, the narrator has a different attitude. He does not see the

²⁴⁵ 3:5-8, 34, 7:37-39. The idea of a wider Spirit bestowal will be taken up in the third reading (section 5.1.5 *An Apostolic Bestowal* in John and a General Bestowal in Acts, page 122).

absence of Jesus as a problem. The disconnect between the characters and the narrator creates the sense that the absence of Jesus being for the good of his people is counter-intuitive. This is a point of empathy between the narrator and the non-eyewitness reader. Yet the reader must keep reading to see how this tension is resolved. John 20 provides a fitting resolution. In the Spirit bestowal to the apostles there is a strong tone of assurance that the non-eyewitness believer can genuinely know and be connected, via the eyewitnesses, to Jesus and the Father.

4.3 The Ascension Announcement – Narrative Echoes of Earlier Scenes

John 20 contains narrative echoes of several earlier scenes in the Gospel.²⁴⁶ These scenes from John 1-19 significantly shape how the reader understands John 20. The imagery of seeking and grasping, prominent in a number of scenes and culminating in Mary's seeking and grasping of Jesus in 20:17, will be surveyed (sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2). Three particular scenes in which one main female character interacts with Jesus create narrative echoes in John 20 — Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus in 12:1-8 (section 4.3.3), the empty tomb scene in John 11 (section 4.3.7) and Jesus foreshadowing a Spirit bestowal to a Samaritan woman in John 4 (section 4.3.8).

4.3.1 The Motif of Seeking and Grasping – the Opponents

The motif of seeking for Jesus, who mysteriously evades the attempts of his enemies to capture him, is repeatedly acted out in John 1-12.²⁴⁷ The motif often uses the ζητέω verb in conjunction with *where* questions.²⁴⁸

The opening words of the Fourth Gospel introduce the reader to the image of Jesus' opponents seeking to grasp him (1:5). As soon as the reader is told of the Word entering the World, the relationship is characterised in combative terms. Καταλαμβάνω is

²⁴⁶ Among others, Stibbe uses the term "narrative echo effects" to refer to the experience of a reader being reminded of an earlier scene by the particular way a scene is narrated — *John as Storyteller*, 103.

²⁴⁷ Stibbe, "The Elusive Christ," 20–21; Lee, "The Gospel of John and the Five Senses," 123–124; Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 129.

²⁴⁸ The verb ἄπτω (20:17) occurs nowhere else in John. However it is common for John to progress a theme with synonyms.

ambiguous, meaning either *grasp hold* or *understand*.²⁴⁹ The reader will wrestle with the meaning of καταλαμβάνω in 1:5 as the unfolding narrative of the Fourth Gospel repeatedly depicts the opponents of Jesus as those who both misunderstand him and seek to grasp hold of him.

- i. The first explicit reference to seeking by his opponents is in 5:1-17.²⁵⁰ Jesus heals the crippled man and then apparently departs before his opponents arrive on the scene. The reader does not discover that Jesus is absent until 5:13. Jesus' reappearance in 5:14 is just as unexplained and unexpected as his departure.²⁵¹ The reader is then told in another analepsis in 5:16-17 that the Jews have been pursuing Jesus.²⁵² The way the scene ends in 5:17 means the reader must assume that somehow, in some unnarrated way, Jesus has evaded the attempt to capture him following the exchange in 5:17.²⁵³ Then, after what appears to be the close of the scene, the reader is told that the Pharisees seek Jesus (ζητέω) in order to kill him (5:18). The way this narrative is complicated by events being told out of sequence, requires the reader at several points to pause, review, and assume something about the movements of Jesus. All this highlights for the reader the elusiveness of Jesus and the intent of his opponents to grasp him.

²⁴⁹ Morris, *John*, 86. Note in the context, the antithesis between light and darkness which is a major theme in the gospel between good/evil and belief/rejection. BDAG offers for the active and passive “*win, attain, make one’s own*” and “*seize with hostile intent*”, while the middle can mean “*grasp, find, understand*” — BDAG, 412–413 [italics original].

²⁵⁰ While his opponents fail to understand Jesus' statements on several occasions (2:18-22, 3:10) and it is implied by his departure in 4:1-3 that they seek him, the first explicit reference to seeking is in John 5.

²⁵¹ “Another characteristic of John's story which highlights the elusive presence of Jesus is the occasional uncertainty about where Jesus is geographically. John portrays Jesus as slipping out of geographical focus, both the focus of characters within the narrative world, and the focus of the reader interpreting that world” — Stibbe, “The Elusive Christ,” 24.

²⁵² 5:16 — διώκω, *hasten, run, press on [...]* persecute [...] *drive away, drive out [...]* run after, pursue — BDAG, 201 [italics original].

²⁵³ As has already been observed in John 20, the departure of Jesus being left unnarrated requires the reader to assume something in order to keep reading. The end result is to focus the reader's attention on the departure of Jesus.

- ii. In John 6, the crowds intend to grasp Jesus (ἄρπάζω 6:15) in order to make him king but he foresees this and withdraws.²⁵⁴ They search (ζητέω 6:24) for him, something underscored by Jesus who points out they are seeking for him (ζητέω 6:26) with inappropriate motives.²⁵⁵ The use of the same verb that was used in 5:18 to describe the Pharisees seeking Jesus in order to kill him, gives the searching of the crowd a more sinister connotation. Without an explanation as to why it is problematic, the reader gains the impression that it is somehow incompatible with the mission of Jesus for him to accept the role of king at this time and in this way. It characterises those who wish to make him king as opponents rather than misguided supporters.
- iii. In John 7, Jesus is unexpectedly absent from the feast. Various characters/groups are involved in the seeking and grasping imagery in a way that gives the scene the feel of a chaotic chase. The "Jews" ask "Where is he?" (7:11). They seek him (ζητέω) in 7:11. This is confirmed in 7:19 when Jesus claims that they seek him (ζητέω) in order to kill him (ἀποκτείνω, see also 7:25). In 7:30, they seek him (ζητέω) in order to grasp him (πιάζω 7:30), with the imagery of grasping underscored by the tactile phrase ἐπέβαλεν ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὴν χεῖρα. In 7:32, this time the Pharisees and the chief priests attempt to arrest him (πιάζω, note the references to their seeking, ζητέω, in 7:32 and 34, and to not finding εὐρίσκω in 7:34).²⁵⁶ Finally, in 7:44, this time it is "some of the crowd" who attempt to grasp him (πιάζω again, and again complemented by the tactile expression ἐπέβαλεν ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὰς χεῖρας). The verb ζητέω occurs 11 times in 7:1-44.
- iv. In the next conflict scene in John 8, "the Jews" pick up stones to kill Jesus (8:59), however, he again mysteriously departs.

²⁵⁴ The surrounding narrative clearly depicts his interlocutors in John 6 as seeking Jesus with an agenda he rejects (see for example 6:26). They seek for bread that spoils, not the bread of eternal life he offers. The same verb appears in John 10 in the description of the wolf attacking the flock (10:12). Jesus uses ἄρπάζω twice in the following explanatory discourse to highlight that his sheep/disciples will not be snatched away for they are in his hand (10:28) and in his Father's hand (10:29).

²⁵⁵ Carson, *John*, 283.

²⁵⁶ Ashton's observation that a majority of commentators hold that the "Pharisees" in John, particularly here in John 9, is "virtually a synonym for 'Jews'" does not diminish this observation regarding multiple pursuers. It suggests a narrator using synonyms to create an impression upon a reader of a scene where everyone is chasing Jesus — Ashton, *Studying John*, 56.

- v. In John 9 when the Pharisees confront the blind man and ask “Where is this man?” (9:12), again, unexplained, Jesus has departed. The blind man does not know where Jesus can be found.
- vi. In 10:39, again (πάλιν), in tactile grasping imagery (note the χεῖρ), the Jews seek (ζητέω) to arrest him but he escapes.²⁵⁷
- vii. In John 11:56 the crowds at the Passover seek (ζητέω) him.

Subverting this pattern of seeking but failing to grasp, the motif appears to come to a climax in the arrest scene (18:1-8) when Jesus' opponents finally succeed in their seeking and grasping. Note the emphasis on ζητέω. Twice Jesus asks the mob who have come to arrest him “Who are you seeking (ζητέω)?” and then says “If you are seeking (ζητέω) for me, then let these men go” (18:4, 7 and 8). Finally, the soldiers succeed in seizing him (18:12 — συλλαμβάνω).

Even in this climactic seeking scene (18:1-14), where his opponents appear to have finally succeeded, there is significant dramatic irony. The reader, by means of the narrator's explanations throughout the Gospel, already knows that Jesus is voluntarily giving himself up as part of his Father's plan.²⁵⁸ Even this final, seemingly successful attempt to grasp Jesus will be foiled. In John 20, in the resurrection account, the reader will recognise Jesus' final and ultimate surprising escape from his opponents' attempts to physically grasp him and thwart his mission.

The dramatic irony is reinforced by the way Jesus is depicted as being in control even as his enemies successfully grasp him.²⁵⁹ With a word from Jesus, the crowd coming to arrest him fall to the ground (18:6). He has the presence of mind to secure the escape of his followers (18:8). It is all part of his plan (18:11). Up until the arrest scene, Jesus evades all attempts to lay hold of him, with what appears to be a minimum of effort. The narrator repeatedly reveals that Jesus knows the motivation behind the seeking of his enemies.²⁶⁰ This depicts him as never taken by surprise by these intentions to grasp

²⁵⁷ This scene, set in the temple (10:23) involves several word plays on χεῖρ. Those that Jesus grasps with his hands he never loses (10:38) however, Jesus slips through the hands of the Pharisees.

²⁵⁸ For example 11:11 and 12:32-33.

²⁵⁹ Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:818.

²⁶⁰ To make him king (6:15), simply see a sign (6:26), and to kill (5:18, 7:19). In 18:4, Jesus clearly knows the answer to his question already, again making clear that he is one step ahead of his pursuers.

him. In the previous scenes, this characterisation is achieved in part by avoiding any narration of Jesus' withdrawals. His running away is never described in any detail. However, in the arrest scene, counter-intuitively, the detailed narration of his failure to evade his pursuers also carries this same sense that Jesus is still in charge.

4.3.2 The Motif of Seeking but not Grasping – the Disciples

Two variant motifs emerge in the John 1-19 narrative involving touch. The first motif has just been examined. The opponents misunderstand and seek to grasp Jesus. This grasping always fails, until the motif reaches a surprising climax in John 18 when they succeed in their grasping of Jesus. This climax represents the nadir of their failure to understand Jesus and his mission. A second motif that involves the disciples will now be examined. The disciples also misunderstand but this misunderstanding never results in a seeking to grasp.²⁶¹ They seek, they find, but never grasp; until this motif reaches its own surprising climax in a disciple grasping. However, this climax represents a high point of clarity in profoundly understanding Jesus and his mission. Just as the opponents grasping has a pattern that is overturned in its climax, so the disciples seeking and not grasping has a pattern that is overturned in its climax.

The first interactions between Jesus and his disciples are progressed by means of *seeking* and *finding* language. In John 1:37 Jesus asks “Whom do you seek?” (τί ζητεῖτε;). This question expects them to identify *who* but their answer ποῦ μένεις; focuses on *where*.²⁶² The reader will recognise the parallel with the question Jesus asks Mary in 20:15 (τίνα ζητεῖς;) and her reply that also focuses on *where* rather than *who*. Note the *finding* language (εὕρισκω) in their testimonies: “we have found the Messiah” (John 1:41) and “we have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law” (John 1:45). All this sets the reader up for the surprise in the Final Discourse when Jesus prepares the disciples for a time (his departure to the cross) when they will seek for him but not find him (ζητέω — John 13:33 and 16:19).

²⁶¹ It is a generalisation, albeit a valid one, to say that the disciples and opponents misunderstand. It is not being argued here that there are no moments of (at least partial) insight by these groups in the Fourth Gospel. However, the moments of insight, particularly with the disciples, are normally a foil for a subsequent failure to understand.

²⁶² The abiding language is another important theme in John. It complements the seeking motif and the issue of Jesus being elusive and absent. From the very beginning, the quest or problem for the disciples has been their desire to be where Jesus is abiding (for example 15:4).

To summarise the theme of touch so far, two variant motifs emerge in the Gospel narrative — the motif of seeking and attempting to grasp (opponents) and the motif of seeking and finding but not grasping (disciples). The first motif highlights the elusiveness of Jesus. This first motif is subverted in the climax when he (apparently) fails to elude his pursuers. The second motif highlights the distinct lack of touch by the disciples.²⁶³ This second motif is subverted in John 12 when Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus, which will now be examined.

4.3.3 Mary of Bethany – Understanding and Grasping

In John 12:1-8, Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus in a scene full of sensual and tactile imagery.²⁶⁴ The way touch is consistently presented negatively in John 1-19 ensures that the reader will notice this one positive instance and carefully consider its significance.²⁶⁵ The attempts by his opponents to touch Jesus are consistently characterised as a

²⁶³ By contrast, in the Synoptics, followers are frequently depicted as holding onto Jesus. For example, ἄπτω is used on a number of occasions and is always positive (Matt 9:20-21, 14:36; Mark 5:27-31, 6:56; Luke 6:19 and 7:39). While the Synoptic touch references are overwhelming positive, they do occur in the arrest and passion scenes in a negative context (for example κρατέω in Mark 14:44, 46, 49).

²⁶⁴ Mary is not said to "seek" or "grasp" Jesus here. The verbs that characterise the grasping of his opponents (καταλαμβάνω, ἄρπάζω, etc.) are not used. However, touch is clearly implied by ἐκμάσσω. See Lee, "The Gospel of John and the Five Senses," 124.

The anointing scene is emphasised by repeated reference: once in passing (11:2) and then in detailed narration (12:1-8). Whatever the exact function of the analepsis in 11:2, already discussed in section 2.2.2, the forward referencing of this event, creates a sense of anticipation, and when the scene arrives, a sense of recognition. It suggests to the reader that this is a significant event in the unfolding drama.

²⁶⁵ In the Fourth Gospel, the lack of touch by Jesus complements the observations about touch made here. Jesus is frequently depicted as compassionately touching/holding others in the Synoptics, for example: Matt 8:3, 15; 9:29; 14:36 his garment; 17:7; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:56; 8:23; 10:16; Luke 5:13, 7:14 σορός; 22:15.

The lack of touch by Jesus is also subverted in a climactic scene. In John 13, again narrated in detail, Jesus washes his disciples' feet. The washing of their feet has parallels to the anointing of Jesus' feet and evokes similar tactile imagery. Physical contact is also implied in the beloved disciple leaning against Jesus (13:25) adding to tactile imagery of this scene. If the setting in the John 20 room reminds the reader of the room in John 13 when Jesus washes their feet, then the lack of touch on this second meeting will be even more obvious.

In John 9 Jesus heals the man born blind with a gesture that implies touch. However, this is not the emphasis of the narrative. At the risk of being pedantic, the narrative does not mention touch. The unusual imagery involving saliva and mud suggests other connections, see Carson, *John*, 363–364. For an alternate view that sees the touching of the blind man as significant see Lee, "The Gospel of John and the Five Senses," 124.

misunderstanding of his mission. In contrast, the John 12 narrative emphasises that Mary's touching of Jesus demonstrates her deep insight into his mission (12:7).²⁶⁶ Jesus' response to his enemies is to withdraw because they are attempting to thwart his mission. However, Jesus' response to Mary of Bethany is to commend (not evade or rebuke). This scene characterises Mary of Bethany, not only as a disciple of understanding regarding Jesus and his coming death (12:7), but one who acts rightly on this understanding.

4.3.4 John 20 as a Narrative Echo of John 12

There are strong echoes of the John 12 scene in John 20. In both scenes, Jesus and a female follower are the central figures. In both cases, an intimate scene is depicted. In both episodes, the initiative of the female disciple to touch Jesus and his strong verbal response is central to the narrative. Both female characters express emotions that convey a strong devotion to Jesus. The reader is disposed to see Mary of Magdala in John 20, as was the case with Mary of Bethany in John 12, as a woman of insight because she is introduced to the reader in 19:25, her only appearance in John outside John 20, as a faithful witness to the crucifixion.²⁶⁷

That the characters have the same name, Μαριάμ, creates an obvious literary connection between the scenes.²⁶⁸ The other Marys in John are never called Μαριάμ.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ The connection between Mary's understanding and her action of touch is the point emphasised in the dialogue. This is highlighted by the contrast made between Judas and Mary. Judas is negatively characterised (12:6). The reader will understand that a normally commendable concern for the poor has been eclipsed by something of greater significance.

²⁶⁷ Like the other women present and the idealised beloved disciple, she is depicted at the crucifixion, as a follower of courage and insight; in contrast to the other disciples who are absent, most prominently Peter who's denial has been foregrounded in the preceding narrative. When these male disciples are next encountered as a group they are characterised as hiding and fearful (20:19) in contrast to Mary Magdalene (20:1). John omits the potentially negative characterisation of Mary Magdalene in Luke 8:2 and Mark 16:2.

²⁶⁸ It is not being argued here that Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala are the same character, but simply that that these two female characters contribute to the creation of two scenes with many literary correspondences. However, identifying these two Marys as the same person has been a prominent position in the history of interpretation reaching back to Tertullian — Fallon, "Mary Magdalene, St.," 388; Collins, "Mary," 580; Kent, "Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the Sinful Woman of Luke 7: The Same Person?," 13. Nothing in John, or the other Gospels, precludes this possibility, but nothing proves it. This identification, if it could be proved would only strengthen the argument here.

Attention is drawn to their common naming by a dramatic disclosure. Mary of Magdala is initially referred to as Μαρία (19:25; 20:1, 11) but then referred to as Μαριάμ (20:16, 18). At the climax of the narrative in 20:16, at the point where she touches Jesus, it is revealed to the reader for the first time that she possesses the same name as the character in John 12. After this reveal, the narrator, who has previously referred to her as Μαρία (19:25; 20:1, 11), now refers to her as Μαριάμ (20:18). At the very point where there is an inter-character reveal (Mary discovers the true identity of the gardener), there is also a narrator-reader reveal. This further adds to the impact of 29:16-17 upon the reader as a climactic and surprising text. The device of changing a character's name, without explicit explanation, in the midst of the narration of a scene in which they are a central figure, strongly draws attention to the new name and the reader is therefore drawn to consider its significance. The literary connection between the Μαριάμ of John 11-12 and the Μαριάμ of John 20 is all the clearer, because Μαριάμ alone is foregrounded in 20:1-17 even though others come to the tomb with her.²⁷⁰ A strong link is being forged between the narrative of touch in John 12 and the narrative of touch in John 20.

The positive attitude of Jesus when Mary of Bethany touches him, and the strong echoes of John 12 in John 20, further predispose the reader to regard Mary of Magdala's embrace of Jesus in John 20 as a natural response and therefore the reader will be surprised and confused by Jesus' prohibition.²⁷¹ This reinforces the conclusion in the first reading that the reader will want to know why such an action, so appropriate on an earlier occasion, is now inappropriate.

The characterisation of Mary of Bethany in 12:1-8 suggests that physical contact with Jesus (for the right reasons) is a privilege reserved for those who are closest to him and who most deeply understand his mission. The similar characterisation of Mary of Magdala at the cross as an insider possessing insight into his death, sets the reader up to be surprised, not only by the prohibition in 20:17, but even more so by the promise

²⁶⁹ Mary the mother of Jesus is referenced in 2:1-5 and 19:25-27 but is never named. Mary the wife of Clopas (19:25) is referred to as Μαρία not Μαριάμ. There is uncertainty over how many Marys appear in the Gospel accounts and whether certain historical figures appear by different names in different Gospels or even within the one Gospel — see Collins, "Mary," 580–581.

²⁷⁰ As already noted, the "we" in "we don't know where they have put him" (20:2) suggests Mary has companions. See section 3.1.8.

²⁷¹ Jesus' escape/departure is often unnarrated or backgrounded, but in 20:17 the prohibition that effects his 'release' is strongly foregrounded. All this highlights the command to "not touch" and makes it all the more surprising.

of the ascension announcement. His followers will experience rich relationship with Jesus through the Spirit bestowal rather than by physical proximity/contact.

There are also parallels in the way the characterisation of the two Marys is developed in a way that reinforces the literary connections between John 11-12 and John 20. In John 11, Mary of Bethany stands with other characters (Martha in particular but also the disciples in 11:1-8-16 and the crowd in 11:37²⁷²) as those who lack insight in some crucial way into Jesus' mission. If anything, the narrative foregrounds her as the prominent example of misunderstanding. However, in the narrative that immediately follows in 12:1-8, Mary of Bethany stands apart from the other disciples (Judas in particular) as the one who possesses insight. A similar pattern occurs in John 20. In 20:1-15, Mary of Magdala stands with the other disciples (Peter and the other disciple) as those lacking understanding. If anything, again, the narrative foregrounds her as the prominent example of misunderstanding. However, she then becomes the character possessing knowledge with insight into the resurrection and the Johannine ascension. She is set apart from the other disciples because Jesus reveals himself to her alone after the others have apparently left the scene, and by her appointment as the messenger to them. This patterning, reinforcing the literary connections between the Marys, makes the prohibition of Jesus in 20:17 all the more striking given the appropriateness of touch in John 12.

4.3.5 The Prohibition in 20:17 in the Light of the Seeking and Grasping Motif

To summarise, *touch* is a rich motif in the Fourth Gospel. The reader gradually becomes aware that grasping Jesus is typically presented in a negative light. It is the action of those who do not understand Jesus and are opposed to his mission. The disciples, who are typically presented as characters loyal to Jesus but lacking understanding, seek but do not touch. The obvious exception is Mary of Bethany. Mary is presented as a character close to Jesus and possessing insight into his mission. Her touch is an appropriate action commended by Jesus. The overall development of this theme of touch and the specific literary connections between the Μαριάμ of John 12 and the Μαριάμ of John 20, set the reader up to expect Mary of Magdala's touching of Jesus to be an appropriate response by one possessing insight into his mission. The development

²⁷² The phrase τινὲς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν is vague. The δὲ suggests they are being contrasted with "the Jews" in 11:36. However, beyond this it is hard to be specific. It might refer to the disciples or could be the bystanders who happen to be around Jesus in this scene.

of these motifs ensures that the moment when Mary of Magdala grasps the risen Jesus and then must withdraw, is a twist in the tale that requires reflection.²⁷³ While her depiction in John 20 is certainly not as an opponent of Jesus, the prohibition μή μου ἄπτου must highlight that there is something about the mission of Jesus and the way he will relate to his disciples from now on, that Mary is yet to fully understand. Mary's desire for the physical presence of Jesus is at odds with his agenda to dwell with his followers by his Spirit.²⁷⁴ As already noted, this understanding is confirmed by the absence of the disciples touching Jesus in the subsequent post-resurrection appearances.

4.3.6 The Garden Setting

Both the climactic grasping scene with his opponents (John 18) and the grasping scene with Mary (John 20) occur in garden settings, in a way that connects these scenes with Genesis 2-3 and serves to underscore the Johannine motifs of touch. Both locations are described as a κήπος (18:1, 19:41).²⁷⁵ In each case, the reader is reminded that the scene occurs in a garden setting by a subsequent comment — firstly, the servant girl questions Peter οὐκ ἐγώ σε εἶδον ἐν τῷ κήπῳ μετ' αὐτοῦ; (18:26)²⁷⁶ and secondly, the reference to Jesus as a κηπουρός (20:15). In the LXX, κήπος is used synonymously with

²⁷³ Lee, who argues for a positive characterisation of Mary, describes the touching language in 20:17 as “ambiguous” — “The Gospel of John and the Five Senses,” 124.

²⁷⁴ While Stibbe's emphasis is upon access to the Father through the High Priestly ministry of Jesus and his atoning sacrifice, his sentiment is correct when he emphasises a relational shift for the followers that reflects the relationship shift between Jesus in his Father when he says of 20:17 “Mary must let go of this kind of relationship. From now on, Mary will not cling to Jesus but cling to the Father” — Stibbe, *The Resurrection Code*. Stibbe's understanding of this relational shift is that it occurs earlier than the Spirit bestowal.

²⁷⁵ Zimmermann, “Stylistic Communication Between John and His Reader: The Garden Symbolism in John 19-20,” 228–229. Despite the title of Zimmermann's essay as “John 19-20” it addresses the imagery in John 18 as well as 19-20.

²⁷⁶ The references in 18:1, 26 and 19:41 are the only instances of κήπος in the Fourth Gospel.

παράδεισος, a loan word for a walled Persian garden used repeatedly in Genesis 2-3 (Gen 2:8, 9, 10, 15, 16; 3:1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 23, 24).²⁷⁷

The connection between Genesis 3 and the garden setting of John 18, casts the arrest scene as a climactic act of rebellion. In Genesis 3, grasping and taking the fruit from the tree, is not merely a single act of disobedience to a specific command, but an archetypal expression of autonomy by humanity against its creator.²⁷⁸ This aligns with other symbolism in the arrest scene. Carson notes, the "combination of Jewish and Roman authorities in this arrest indicts the whole world".²⁷⁹ As already observed, the way the arrest party fall to the ground at the sound of Jesus' voice (18:6) reinforces the audacity of this attempt to grasp and overcome the one who identifies himself with the name of Yahweh.²⁸⁰ The imagery of lights coming into the darkness (18:3) is a parody of the description in the Prologue of the great and glorious light of God coming into a dark world (1:4-5, 14).

The connections between Genesis 3 and John 18 suggest similar connections between Genesis 3 and 20:1-15. A woman with a lack of knowledge and a desire for knowledge is central to both narratives.²⁸¹ In both narratives, a woman grasps something that it is

²⁷⁷ BDAG, 614; Zimmermann, "Stylistic Communication Between John and His Reader: The Garden Symbolism in John 19-20," 228. Carson notes that the description: "Jesus and the disciples *went into it*" (18:1 εἰσῆλθεν) and later "Jesus *went out*" (18:4 ἐξῆλθεν) suggests a walled garden — *John*, 576 [emphasis original]. This is reminiscent of the sheepfold imagery in 10:1-6, 11-12 — Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 103–104. However, κῆπος is not used in John 10 suggesting that κῆπος in John 18 evokes more than merely a specific allusion to the sheepfold image. Brown discusses a possible allusion to Eden here but concludes "the symbolic exegesis is difficult to justify" on the basis that κῆπος is used not παράδεισος — *John*, 1970, 2:806. However, Eccl 2:5 LXX appears to use them as synonyms: ἐποίησά μοι κήπους καὶ παραδείσους καὶ ἐφύτευσα ἐν αὐτοῖς ξύλον πᾶν καρποῦ. The reference to the Garden of Eden in Ezk 36:35 (גִּן-עֵדֶן) is rendered as κῆπος τρυφῆς in the LXX.

²⁷⁸ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 27; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 38; Reid, *Salvation Begins*, 32–33. Wenham rightly describes the grasping of the forbidden thing in Genesis 3 as the "paradigmatic and protohistorical" sin. — *Genesis 1-15*, 91.

²⁷⁹ Carson, *John*, 577. See Beasley-Murray for similar comments — *John*, 322.

²⁸⁰ It evokes the powerful voice that speaks at creation (Gen 1:1, which is reprised in John 1:1) and the fear of Adam and Eve when they hear the sound of God approaching in the Garden (Gen 3:8 and reinforced in Gen 3:10). While Brown describes Jesus' utterance as "a Johannine theological construction rather than a historical reminiscence", he is correct in understanding this scene as depicting that "Jesus has God's power over the forces of darkness because he has the divine name. It reinforces the impression that Jesus could not have been arrested unless he permitted it." — *John*, 1970, 2:811,818.

²⁸¹ Zimmermann notes that a lack of knowledge is common to both scenes — "Stylistic Communication Between John and His Reader: The Garden Symbolism in John 19-20," 231.

forbidden to grasp. However, Mary's grasping does not have the same negative connotations as in John 18 or Genesis 3. Unlike the opponents of Jesus in John 18, in John 20 the reader has great empathy for the character who grasps that which should not be touched. Her obedience to the twin commands μή μου ἅπτου and πορεύου...εἰπὲ depict her as succeeding at the very point where Eve fails to obey. The scene closes with Mary not rejecting the agenda of Jesus to dwell with his people by his Spirit, but rather she is depicted as embracing the good news of the Johannine ascension announcement. She takes this good news to others. A restoration of the Eden garden is repeatedly anticipated in the OT as a key image in God's plan of redemption.²⁸² Placing the Johannine ascension announcement in a setting reminiscent of Eden depicts the eschatological future as breaking into the present. The reader who makes this connection will see in the John 20 garden imagery the eschatological garden where God will again dwell intimately with humanity.

4.3.7 John 20 as a Narrative Echo of John 11

John 11 depicts the physical absence of Jesus as a significant problem. The narrative begins with a petition from the sisters of Lazarus for Jesus to be present (11:3). The decision by Jesus to delay for two days, juxtaposed with the proposition that Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, seems intended to destabilise the reader (11:5-6). The disciples appear disorientated by this decision to delay (11:8-16).²⁸³ The reader will ask

While there are rich NT connections between Jesus and Adam (see for example Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:20-28), the grasping motif suggests that in this scene Jesus is identified with the tree rather than Adam. Touch between Adam and Eve is not only appropriate it is explicitly commanded (Gen 1:28, 2:24). If an analogue to Adam is to be drawn in 20:1-17, it might be with the two male disciples. Adam is depicted negatively in the Genesis 3 scene as silent and passive. By means of an analepsis the reader is made aware that he was present through the entire dialogue between the serpent and the woman (Gen 2:6). Even though the initial command is given to Adam (Gen 2:15-16), he remains silent through the entire confrontation. His passivity, underscored in the simple narration that he took the fruit and ate it (Gen 2:6), suggests a lack of insight.

²⁸² See Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning*, 166, 184; Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 24–25. See for example Ex 15:7, Joel 3:18, Ezk 47, Is 65:17-25.

The prohibition to not touch the tree in Genesis 2, is a motif that recurs with the ark of the covenant which is situated in the centre of the Israelite camp and is not to be touched (Num 4:15). Note that tabernacle imagery in John 20 (see footnote 82) reinforces the connections made here. In the OT, the tabernacle imagery is a continuation of the forbidden tree imagery.

²⁸³ Note the statement of Jesus in 16:7 that appears counter-intuitive to the disciples at the time — that by choosing to be absent Jesus will love his disciples and do what is best for them.

themselves *How can the absence of Jesus be a good thing for his followers?* Each sister greets Jesus with a sharp expression of disappointment about his physical absence at her time of need. It is strongly emphasised by verbal repetition: “If you had been here my brother would not have died” (identical in 11:21 and 28). The problem is emphasised again by the crowd, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” (11:37). All the characters express the explicit belief that if Jesus had been physically present then he could have saved the one he loves. This issue is all the more acute for the reader, who knows what these characters (Mary, Martha, crowd) do not know, that the absence of Jesus at the time Lazarus was dying was deliberate. The narrator avoids any suggestion that with a word Jesus might heal from a distance – the necessity of his physical presence is being stressed.²⁸⁴ This episode sets up the reader for the problem of Jesus’ absence as John 20 begins.

Many aspects of John 20 will remind the reader of John 11 — Jesus and a female disciple in dialogue, the stone rolled away, the empty tomb, the raising of a corpse, the discarded grave clothes, Mary’s emotional response to the absence of Jesus and her perception that his physical absence is a problem. As has already been noted with regard to John 12, there is a strong connection between the Μαριάμ of John 11-12 and the Μαριάμ of John 20. In 20:1-15, the reader has already witnessed an empty tomb and has observed Jesus not only demonstrate his power over death but provide clear interpretation regarding the significance of the event. This reader will therefore feel the distance between themselves and Mary of Magdala even more keenly when Mary searches for Jesus, seemingly oblivious to even the possibility of resurrection.²⁸⁵

4.3.8 John 20 as a Narrative Echo of John 4

The scene featuring Jesus and Mary in John 20 bears several parallels with another scene in which Jesus and a female character are the focus. In 4:1-45 there is a lengthy

Like the misunderstandings about Jesus’ departure in the Final Discourse, even his plain speech (11:14 παρηγοία) about the departure of Lazarus is met with confusion. As in the Final Discourse, Thomas is named as the disciple wishing to go with Jesus on his departure in a way that highlights his misunderstanding (compare 11:16 and 14:5).

²⁸⁴ The reader will again appreciate the dramatic irony over a spatial issue. The emphasis on the necessity of Jesus being present will cause the reader to recall the healing of the official’s son in 4:46-54 where the focus of the miracle is on the lack of necessity for Jesus to be present. Note the positive characterisation of the official who believes without requiring the physical presence of Jesus (at the bedside of his son).

²⁸⁵ Jesus provides interpretation in 11:25 40-42.

dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Like John 20, the identity of Jesus is slowly unfolded in the narrative. Once his identity is revealed, the woman hurriedly leaves her surprising encounter with Jesus to bear witness regarding Jesus and return with others. Like Mary who came to the tomb expecting a corpse and found a living Saviour, the woman comes to the well expecting to find ordinary water but finds living water. In both scenes, the climactic dialogue is about location (4:20-24). The discussion revolves around whether God might be found here (Gerazim) or there (Jerusalem). Jesus resolves the issue by speaking of a time when God, the Father, will do the seeking (ζητέω 4:23, see also 27). The promise of Jesus at the end of the dialogue is that a time is coming when the place where God may be found will be detached from a physical location (the temple) and spiritualized (4:21 and 23). What exactly this means is unclear at this point in the narrative. In some way, the question of where to seek God will be resolved not by means of a physical place, but by means of the Spirit. This enigmatic reference sets the reader up for the Spirit bestowal in 20:22 and the promise of the Johannine ascension of rich familial and covenantal relationship through the indwelling of the Spirit. Given the renewal motifs involving the Spirit and water in 3:5-8 and 7:37-38 it is reasonable to understand the offer of living water here as a promise regarding the Spirit (4:10-15).²⁸⁶

4.4 An Excursus — A Genuine Spirit Bestowal

One possible objection to the thesis of this paper is that 20:22 does not narrate the coming of the Spirit but is merely a symbolic prefiguring of a later substantive Spirit bestowal.²⁸⁷ While this objection usually involves an appeal to the Luke-Acts chronology in which Jesus appears to depart permanently prior to the coming of the Spirit, three internal criteria, outlined in earlier passages in the Fourth Gospel, must be satisfied if 20:22 is to be regarded as a substantive Spirit bestowal. Other arguments, which appeal to the Luke-Acts chronology, will be considered in the third reading (see section 5.1.5 *An Apostolic Bestowal* in John and a General Bestowal in Acts).

²⁸⁶ Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 160.

²⁸⁷ Carson describes it as “a kind of acted out parable pointing forward to the full endowment still to come [at Pentecost]” — *John*, 655. For Carson, a leading argument for a symbolic bestowal here is the difficulties of harmonizing a substantive Spirit bestowal in 20:22 with the Pentecost Spirit bestowal in Acts 2. This issue will be addressed in section 5.1.5, page 109.

A key argument supporting the thesis of this paper is that the lack of touch in John 20 is explained by a genuine Spirit bestowal occurring in 20:22. Likewise, the function of Thomas in the narrative relies upon the disciples' testimony being understood as a genuinely Spirit empowered apostolic witness rather than a pre-Pentecost failure that puts the focus on the inability of the apostles to testify effectively until they receive the Spirit. The way the narrative seeks to persuade the reader to see relating to Jesus spiritually as better than an encounter with Jesus in the flesh, depends upon understanding 20:22 as a genuine Spirit bestowal. Therefore, it is essential to address these three objections.

4.4.1.1 Objection 1: the Criterion that Jesus must go to the Father is not Satisfied

In the Final Discourse Jesus stipulates that the Spirit comes only after Jesus himself departs. Carson argues "the Fourth Gospel has repeatedly insisted that the Spirit will come only *after* Jesus has returned to the Father".²⁸⁸ Carson goes on to argue that the Spirit bestowal in 20:22 must be symbolic as Jesus cannot have returned to the Father given that his feet are still firmly upon the ground. Note the spatial schema in this position. Although Carson states that this criterion is "repeatedly" stipulated, it is unclear what other texts Carson has in mind apart from 16:7. However, the departure Jesus speaks of in 16:5-7 is principally his departure from the disciples into death. It is the cross that is essential before the Spirit bestowal.²⁸⁹

Even still, it is true that Jesus has not *completed* his journey to the Father by his departure into death. The "not yet" of the ascension announcement makes this clear. However, the thesis of this paper is that Jesus completes his relational movement to the Father in the act of the Spirit bestowal. It is the culmination of his reunion with the Father. Therefore, when Jesus bestows the Spirit in 20:22, the criterion required in 16:7 has been met.

4.4.1.2 Objection 2: the Criterion that Jesus must be Absent when the Spirit Comes is not Satisfied

The second criterion is that Jesus must be absent when the Spirit is bestowed. The logic is that because Jesus speaks of his going away (16:7) and then describes the Spirit's

²⁸⁸ Carson, *John*, 644 (italics original). See also Holwerda, *Holy Spirit and Eschatology in the Gospel of John*, 24.

²⁸⁹ Hatina, "John 20,22 in Its Eschatological Context," 201–202.

ministry as replacing his own ministry (16:17, 12-14), Jesus must permanently depart before the Spirit can arrive.²⁹⁰ However, a closer reading of the Final Discourse makes it clear that Jesus never insists on being absent when the Spirit arrives. From the view point of the disciples he has departed (satisfying the going away of 16:7) but then returns in his resurrection, even though his journey to the Father that has commenced is not completed (20:17). There is nothing precluding a short overlap in the ministries of Jesus and the Spirit.

Consider the language used to describe the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. John's ministry heralding the arrival of the Christ logically precedes the ministry of the Christ himself. John's ministry recedes once Jesus is publically identified as the Christ (3:30). However, John the Baptist can describe Jesus as ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος (1:15, see also 1:27) even though their ministries temporally overlap. Indeed, John the Baptist can even use this language when the two are physically present in the same scene (1:29 — note again the non-spatial use of spatial language). This *handover* scene, when both are present, reinforces that the ministry of one is coming to a natural conclusion, as the ministry of the other commences. In that scene, John the Baptist introduces Jesus in a way that emphasises the *passing of the baton* from one to the other. Their appearance together in the handover scene diminishes any sense of rivalry or competition and emphasises continuity in their ministries. In the same way, John 20 is a handover scene. Jesus imparting the Spirit as he commissions the disciples functions to highlight the closure of his physical earthly ministry and at the same time the commencement of his ministry through the Spirit. This objection, often proposed by commentators who prioritise the Luke-Acts chronology, misses the significance of this handover imagery.

4.4.1.3 Objection 3: the Criterion that Jesus must be Glorified is not Satisfied

The third criterion is stipulated in 7:39. The third objection is that 20:22 cannot be the Spirit bestowal as John 20 does not depict Jesus as a heavenly or exalted figure. However, the prominent theme of Jesus being glorified is most strongly connected in the Fourth Gospel with the death of Jesus. While his glory is prefigured in the signs, all these signs point to his death. Either this objection reads into John an expectation Jesus'

²⁹⁰ Carson argues "if Jesus finally returned to the Father only once (upon which the gift of the Spirit depends), what warrant is there for thinking the Spirit was bestowed twice?" — *John*, 650. Carson's objection here, as well as prioritizing the Lukan chronology and insisting that because Luke narrates only one Spirit bestowal there can only be one Spirit bestowal, also seems to insist upon a *final* return to the Father. Keener agrees with Carson — *John*, 1194.

glorification requires a manifestation like the Synoptic transfiguration,²⁹¹ or it imposes a Lukan style ascension upon John's account that equates glorification with physical presence at the right hand of the Father.²⁹² This objection suggests a misunderstanding, as far as the Fourth Gospel is concerned, with what it means for Jesus to be exalted or glorified.

4.4.1.4 Summary of Internal Arguments Against a Substantive Spirit Bestowal

While all three criteria are indeed stipulated in the Fourth Gospel, it turns out that all three are satisfied by the time the narrative reaches 20:22. (i) Jesus must leave the disciples and go to the Father. This criterion is arguably satisfied by Jesus' departure into death, but is undeniably satisfied by the Spirit bestowal itself. (ii) The ministry of Jesus is handed over to the Paraclete. This criterion is satisfied in the handover scene in 20:19-23. (iii) The Spirit comes only after Jesus is glorified. This criterion is satisfied in that this glorification is most clearly associated with his death. These three criteria are all satisfied as the narrative reaches 20:22.

4.5 Conclusion to Second Reading

The Gospel as a whole confirms the conclusion of the first reading that the ἀναβαίνω event announced in 20:17 is a completely different kind of event to the spatial translation depicted in Luke 24 and Acts 1. The sophisticated interplay between spatial and relational imagery throughout John's Gospel prepares the reader to understand the ascension announcement in 20:17 as a relational reunion with the Father. The motif of searching and grasping sets the reader up to be surprised by Jesus' prohibition to Mary and challenged by the ascension announcement to set aside spatial thinking and think instead in relational categories.

²⁹¹ Mark 9:2b-3, Luke 9:29 and Matt 17:2. However, the word δόξα is not associated with any of the Transfiguration accounts in the Synoptics. The request of James and John, δὸς ἡμῖν ἵνα εἴς σου ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ εἴς ἐξ ἀριστερῶν καθίσωμεν ἐν τῇ δόξῃ σου (Mark 10:37) which Jesus reinterprets as a request to join him in crucifixion (see Mark 15:27), suggests that even in the Synoptics the glory of Jesus is associated more with his death than any other moment in the Jesus story – Hurtado, *Mark*, 171.

²⁹² This objection also misreads Luke-Acts. The word δόξα is not associated with the Ascension accounts in Luke 24 or Acts 1. Stephen sees the glory (δόξα) of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55) but even here the emphasis is not upon Jesus being glorified but the Father. The glory of Jesus might be referenced obliquely in Paul's recount of his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road in Acts 22:11.

The reader is prepared by the Final Discourse to understand the departure of Jesus to the cross and then back to the disciples as a single journey that can be described as Jesus' *going to the Father*. The looming problem of Jesus' physical departure, which the disciples keenly feel, is resolved by his bestowal of the Spirit. John's Gospel stresses that the final destination of Jesus is not somewhere that is distant from the disciples. What is stressed is his relationally rich abiding with the disciples, together with the Father, by the Spirit. The Spirit bestowal is both the culmination of his going to the Father and the culmination of his return to the disciples. They will dwell together in a rich perichoretic union. The Johannine ascension announcement (20:17) emphasises, not the remoteness of Jesus (as in the Luke-Acts ascension) but rather the ongoing relational connectedness of the disciples with both the risen Son and his Father.

While the physical absence of Jesus at some point after his resurrection is assumed in the Fourth Gospel, his physical departure is not the focus. The reader will focus instead upon the better thing of his remaining spiritually with his followers. The reader is being persuaded to not seek a flesh-and-blood encounter with Jesus, but to understand that knowing Jesus through Spirit-inspired testimony, and the permanent abiding of the Father and Son spiritually with the believer, is a better way to know and abide with Jesus.

Chapter 5. THIRD READING: The Johannine Ascension for Readers of Luke-Acts

It is now time to consider how a reader familiar with Luke-Acts would be impacted by the Johannine ascension.²⁹³ This third reading assumes a reader, hereafter referred to as the *assumed reader*, who has read John and Luke-Acts setting aside questions of historical or theological harmonization in order to appreciate both texts in themselves. However, as outlined in Chapter 2, this assumed reader, recognising the Gospels as purporting to speak about real people and real events, and in many cases the same real people and the same real events, will reflect on how to harmonize these accounts.

Drawing on the observations regarding the Johannine ascension in the first and second readings, section 5.1 will propose a particular harmonization of the relevant passages of

²⁹³ For the sake of focusing the enquiry, and in order to highlight John's unique contribution to the ascension, this paper will assume a reader familiar with the Old Testament and with Luke-Acts but not necessarily any other inter-testamental or New Testament text.

There is broad consensus among commentators that John's implied reader is familiar with the OT — Köstenberger, *John*, 13–14; Porter, "Can Traditional Exegesis Enlighten Literary Analysis of the Fourth Gospel?," 401–407; Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, lix–lxii.

Detailed questions regarding the reader's familiarity with the inter-testamental literature, where the ascensions of various OT figures are prominent, are not easily resolved and beyond the scope of this paper. See Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts*, 51–58. The most relevant inter-testamental texts are Sir 50:20–22 and Tobit 14:3–12. On the Rabbinic interpretations of Deut 33–34 see Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts*, 56. Note also the extra canonical Mark 16:14–20 and *The Testimony of the Twelve Patriarchs* in which all 12 narratives contain a blessing and departure scene with narrative connections to the Luke 24 and Acts 1 departure scenes of Jesus — Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts*, 57, footnote a.

The material in Paul's epistles on the ascension arguably predates the Gospels (for example, Eph 4:7–13) — Fitzmyer, "The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost," 439–440; Beutler, "Resurrection and the Forgiveness of Sins," 244–245; Zumstein, "Intratextuality and Intertextuality in the Gospel of John," 130–133. Carson at some points posits a reader aware of the Gentile Mission (although not necessarily the Luke-Acts version) — see footnote 202, page 84. The question of literary priority between John and the Epistles is not easily resolved. Robinson rightly observes

one cannot redate John without raising the whole question of its place in the development of New Testament Christianity. If this is early, what about the other gospels? Is it necessarily the last in time? Indeed does it actually become the first? — or are they earlier too? And, if so, how then do the gospels stand in relation to the epistles? Were all the Pauline letters penned, as has been supposed, before any of the gospels? — *Redating the New Testament*, 16.

John and Luke-Acts. Section 5.2 argues that the Johannine ascension brings a complementary perspective to Luke-Acts regarding the nature of the new creation. The Johannine ascension corrects a potential misreading of Luke-Acts that overemphasises the corporeal nature of the resurrection life. Section 5.3 addresses four objections to the proposal advanced in section 5.1 that the Spirit bestowals in John 20 and Acts 2 are separate events.

5.1 Harmonizing John 20 and Luke 24/Acts 1

In harmonizing the sections of John and Luke-Acts relevant to the Johannine and Lukan ascensions, the assumed reader must construct a plot line that dovetails the appropriate events. While other constructions are possible, it will be demonstrated in the following argument that the Johannine ascension, as articulated in this thesis, suggests a particular reconstruction that deals well with the harmonization difficulties that beset other reconstructions.²⁹⁴ The proposal advanced here allows for a single exaltation event and multiple translations by Jesus between earth and heaven. Moreover, it will be proposed that the Luke 24 and Acts 1 ascensions are discrete events, and that Jesus comes and goes after the Luke 24 ascension and even after the Acts 1 ascension and Acts 2 Pentecost event.

5.1.1 The John and Luke-Acts Ascensions Describe Different Kinds of Events

The Johannine ascension, as articulated in the second reading, is more akin to what systematic theologians refer to as *exaltation* rather than *ascension*.²⁹⁵ In 20:17, ἀναβαίνω is completely metaphoric, in the way that in English, a monarch might be said to ascend to the throne even when the physical act involves descending from a standing position to a seated position.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ The weaknesses of these alternative reconstructions will be noted at appropriate points in the following argument, particularly in section 5.3 that deals with objections to the proposed reconstruction.

²⁹⁵ See Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:1013. Morris appears to be aware of this approach when he says “Some point out, whereas we use ‘the Ascension’ as a technical term, this was not so in the New Testament days” — *John*, 840.

²⁹⁶ Note again the references already cited in the LXX to the ascent of kings to the temple and a sacrifice in the temple being described, purely metaphorically, as an ascent. This enthronement usage may be what is meant by ἀναβαίνω in Psalm 23:3 LXX [English Ps 24:3].

Peter Toon helpfully defines and distinguishes *exaltation* and *ascension* as follows:

The Ascension is the removal of the resurrected body of Jesus from space and time into the immediate presence of God. The exaltation is the Father's placing His incarnate Son in the position of His Vice-regent. Exaltation presupposes both resurrection and ascension; but it is not the sum of them. Rather, exaltation emphasises what actually happened to the Word made flesh as He entered heaven: He sat at God's right hand.²⁹⁷

The way Toon defines *ascension* fits the kind of event narrated in Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:9. The way he defines *exaltation* fits with the way Jesus uses ἀναβαίνω in 20:17 because it is a change of status more than a change of location.²⁹⁸ Toon is correct to distinguish the exaltation from the resurrection and the (spatial) ascension, however it is unhelpful to say "[e]xaltation presupposes both resurrection and [spatial] ascension" if by this Toon means that ascension must occur chronologically prior to exaltation. In John, the exaltation occurs before a final spatial ascension.²⁹⁹

Likewise, in the OT ὑψώω describes the exaltation of Jerusalem or God's appointed king in Jerusalem. For example, in Isaiah, the mountain of the Lord itself will be raised up (ὑψώω – 2:2) an apocalyptic and metaphorical image. Zion is central to God's plan for the gathering of the nations. While Zion (Jerusalem) is a geographical location, it functions as a metaphor for the rule of God. God will exalt himself or be seen to be exalted (ὑψώω – 12:6, 28:29, 33:10). In later passages, Isaiah describes the Servant as being raised up (ὑψώω – Is 52:13, see also 4:2). The Servant is an enigmatic figure whose suffering is somehow part of his passage to being glorified and exalted. All these metaphoric elements of this spatial term connect with the Johannine ascension as an exaltation of Jesus through the cross and to the Father. Subverting the centripetal imagery of Isaiah in which the nations stream to Zion, through the Spirit empowered apostles the Gospel will go out to the nations and Zion's king will reign in the hearts of all who believe and who in believing receive the Spirit. Frequently in Isaiah, ὑψώω is used metaphorically for the proud person who exalts themselves in an expression of independence from God (Is 2:11, 17; 3:17, 10:15).

²⁹⁷ Toon, "Historical Perspectives on the Doctrine of Christ's Ascension, Pt 1," 198. See also Fitzmyer, "The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost," 410–412, 414.

²⁹⁸ Toon clearly employs "God's right hand" as a spatial image used metaphorically. Fitzmyer notes that the NT often refers to the exaltation at the right hand of God "without specifying the mode of such a taking up" citing Phil 2:8-11 and noting the absence of any reference to the resurrection or ascension, "one passes from his death upon the cross to his exaltation to glory"- "The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost," 411.

²⁹⁹ While the exaltation of Jesus is not explicitly narrated in Luke-Acts, it is assumed to have occurred by the time the reader gets to Acts 2:33. The physical manifestations of the Spirit at Pentecost are presented by Peter as evidence for the exaltation of Jesus which appears to be connected to his resurrection rather than his ascension. See footnote 303. The exaltation is predicted, among other places, in Luke 22:69.

There is no overlap in the Greek terms used to describe the Johannine ascension and the Lukan ascension.³⁰⁰ What John means by ἀναβαίνω in 20:17 is not the physical translation/levitation event that Luke describes by ἀναφέρω (Luke 24:50), ἀναλαμβάνω (Acts 1:2, 11, 22)³⁰¹ and ἐπαίρω (Acts 1:9). John never uses ἀναφέρω, ἀναλαμβάνω, ἐπαίρω or ἀνάλημψις. Luke-Acts never uses ἀναβαίνω in ascension narratives. In Luke-Acts, 27 of the 28 uses of ἀναβαίνω are ordinary spatial usages, for example Zacchaeus climbing a tree (Luke 19:4).³⁰² The one exception is Acts 2:34 where ἀναβαίνω refers to the exaltation of Jesus, rather than a spatial ascension, and therefore is identical to John's usage of ἀναβαίνω in 20:17.³⁰³

5.1.2 Jesus Comes and Goes Repeatedly Prior to the Ascension in Luke 24

Understanding the Lukan and Johannine ascensions as narrating different kinds of events provides a new possibility for addressing the question of Jesus' physical whereabouts between his post-resurrection appearances.

The Johannine ascension suggests a reconstruction in which Jesus continues to come and go spatially between heaven and earth prior to his departure in Luke 24:51. Even without considering the material in the Fourth Gospel, the reader of Luke must ask: *If*

³⁰⁰ Our English Bibles unhelpfully translate ἀναβαίνω as "ascended" in John 20:17 but typically use other verbs in Luke 24 and Acts 1. John 20:17 has "ascended" in ESV, RSV, HCSB, NIV but NIV87 has the marginally better "returned". Acts 1:9 has "lifted up" in ESV and RSV, but "taken up" in the HCSB, NIV and NIV87. The ESV and HCSB insert the editorial title "The Ascension" in Acts 1.

Whether Luke 24 and Acts 1 describe exactly the same event or describe two distinct events of the same kind will be discussed in section 5.1.3.

³⁰¹ The noun ἀνάλημψις is not used in Luke 24 or Acts 1. Its use in Luke 9:51 has no object so it could arguably be a reference to the cross, exaltation, or Lukan ascension of Jesus.

³⁰² Luke 2:4, 42; 5:19; 9:28; 18:10, 31; 19:4, 28; 24:38; Acts 1:13; 2:34; 3:1; 7:23; 8:31, 39; 10:4, 9; 11:2; 15:2; 18:22; 20:11; 21:6, 12, 15, 31; 24:11; 25:1; 25:9. Many of these usages are to the ascent to Jerusalem as in John.

³⁰³ It is a reference to David not reigning forever. It has more the sense of exaltation/enthronement with a strong emphasis on a relational ascent (to be with the Father) rather than spatial connotations — Fitzmyer, "The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost," 412.

The οὓν of Acts 2:33 suggests that the exaltation (ὕψω in 2:33, ἀναβαίνω in 2:34) is a result of the resurrection from death (ἀνέστησεν in 2:32). The verb ὑψόω occurs three times in Acts. The NIV rightly translates it as "exalted" in 2:33 and 5:31 as it is associated with Jesus being at the right hand of the Father (τῇ δεξιᾷ οὓν τοῦ θεοῦ ὑψωθεὶς in 2:32 and ὑψωσεν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ in 5:31) as distinct from ascending to heaven. In 13:17, with an undeniably non-spatial sense, ὑψόω describes the people of Israel as being exalted (made numerous) in the wilderness.

Jesus is taken up to heaven in Luke 24:51, where is he located between the post-resurrection appearances in Luke 24:1-49? However, this is not a problem for the reader of the Fourth Gospel. A non-spatial understanding of ἀναβαίνω in 20:17 gives the assumed reader the option of imagining Jesus as spatially with the Father between his appearances to the disciples. If the bestowal of the Spirit in 20:22 definitively demonstrates that Jesus' going to the Father (in the Johannine sense) is completed, then it will be natural for the reader to assume that Jesus is physically with the Father in the week between his appearance to the disciples (20:19-23) and his appearance to Thomas (20:24-29).

The distinction between exaltation and spatial ascension invites the reader to reconsider the location of Jesus between his appearance to Mary (20:16-17) and his first appearance to the disciples (20:19-23). The Johannine ascension, being a relational concept rather than a spatial concept, allows Jesus to be in heaven physically even though his relational return to the Father is not yet complete. In other words, even though his mission is not accomplished until the Spirit bestowal and he has therefore not returned to the Father in that sense, he could be physically in heaven in this time period.³⁰⁴ Without John, the reader of Luke is unlikely to come to this conclusion. Luke holds back any notion of Jesus being physically with the Father until the ascension in Luke 24:51. The singular event of his "being taken up" in Acts 1:2 separates his earthly ministry from a subsequent heavenly ministry, and makes no allowance for any additional comings and goings. The angelic announcement (Acts 1:11) suggests a decisive and final physical departure of Jesus until his Parousia. However, the assumed reader will need to reassess this material in the light of John's account. It is never stated that the ascension in Luke 24:51 or Acts 1:9 is the first time that Jesus has physically departed to be with the Father. Indeed, nothing in the Luke-Acts account rules out multiple movements between heaven and earth before the ascension in Luke 24:51.

In both Luke and John it is the resurrection event, not the Lukan or Johannine ascension, which concludes the continuous earthly ministry of Jesus. This is one of the few common points between the two resurrection accounts. Jesus' dramatic appearances

³⁰⁴ While in 20:1-13, it is possible Jesus is *lurking around the set* a reader who understands 20:17 as describing a non-spatial relational reunion with the Father as the glorified Son will feel free to locate Jesus materially in heaven while he is off-stage in 20:1-13. Further discussion of the location of Jesus between his death and his resurrection appearances would need to draw significantly from systematics. See Toon, "Historical Perspectives on the Doctrine of Christ's Ascension, Pt 1," 197–205; Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 123–135.

and disappearances in the post-resurrection narratives of Luke and John suggest a movement that transcends time and space.³⁰⁵ Carson, who argues against any kind of ascension occurring prior to the close of the Fourth Gospel, concedes in commenting on 20:17, “[i]t is a commonplace of the New Testament writers that in the wake of his resurrection Jesus was exalted to the right hand of the majesty on high”.³⁰⁶

5.1.3 Jesus Comes and Goes After the Luke 24 Ascension

The assumed reader, holding John and Luke-Acts in tension, will need to also consider the possibility that Jesus comes and goes between earth and heaven even after the Luke 24 ascension. Two factors support this reconstruction:

Firstly, there is the need to reconcile the Luke 24 and Acts 1 accounts. In Luke 24, the natural reading is that all the events from the discovery of the empty tomb through to the ascension in Luke 24:51 occur on the one day.³⁰⁷ Given that Luke 24:1 introduces the narrative with τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων, it would appear that all these events occur on the day after the Jewish Sabbath, which aligns these events with the chronology of 20:1-23.

Secondly, the appearance of Jesus in John 21, as an episode that occurs prior to the Lukan ascension, is difficult to reconcile with the command to remain in the city until the bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost (Luke 24:49).³⁰⁸ It strongly suggests that the appearance of Jesus in John 21 occurs after the Luke 24 ascension.

³⁰⁵ For example, his appearance in Emmaus and then Jerusalem (Luke 24:33-36).

³⁰⁶ Carson, *John*, 645.

³⁰⁷ See Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1882–1884, 1944; Toon, “Historical Perspectives on the Doctrine of Christ’s Ascension, Pt 1,” 196; Dawson, *Jesus Ascended*, 36; Fitzmyer, “The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost,” 417; Stibbe, *The Resurrection Code*, 100. A tradition based on John’s account is reflected in the Epistle of Barnabas “And we too rejoice in celebrating the eighth day; because that was when Jesus rose from the dead, and showed Himself again, and ascended into heaven” (*Barnabas* 15).

³⁰⁸ Matt 28:7 suggests an encounter between Jesus and the disciples in Galilee prior to any Jerusalem appearances. This might explain how to reconcile John 21 with the command to remain in the city (Luke 24) but at the cost of postponing some of the John 20 material. It would also require that Luke 24:36 onwards occurs after the episode recorded in John 21:1-23.

Given that the plain reading of the Acts 1 ascension is that it occurred about 40 days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3), one path to reconciling Luke 24 and Acts 1 is to regard the Luke 24:51 ascension as a non-final spatial ascension and therefore not the same event as the ascension described in Acts 1:9.³⁰⁹

Green and Shin place John 21 between Luke 24:49 and 50, however their reconstruction puts the farewell scene in Matt 28:16-20 before Luke 24:44-49 — *Common English Bible Gospel Parallels*, 240–248. The phrase Ἐξήγαγεν δὲ αὐτοὺς [ἐξω] ἕως πρὸς Βηθανίαν (Luke 24:50) implies a close connection with the events that immediately proceed them, not a period of 40 and a relocation to Galilee — Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1944.

The Acts 1 reference to a forty-day period might be symbolic. It resonates with a number of biblical events (Gen 7:12, Ex 24:18, Num 13:34, 1 Kings 19:8, Jonah 3:4, or even Luke 4:2). The Exodus 24 passage where Moses meets God on the mountain to receive instructions for the implementation of the Old Covenant finds an obvious parallel in the instructions of the risen Jesus to his disciples (Acts 1:2) on a mountain (Acts 1:12) — Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:1039; Bock, *Acts*, 55. It is possible that Luke is styling his account with symbolic time periods in order to make important thematic connections between the ministry of Moses and the ministry of Jesus. However, this proposal raises significant challenges. It is difficult, but not impossible, to insert the second Sabbath appearance in John 20:26-29 between Luke 24:49 and Luke 24:50. It is more difficult to credit that the extended period of 40 days in which Jesus taught the disciples (Acts 1:3) occurs between Luke 24:49 and Luke 24:50 — Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:10.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss comprehensively the problems of harmonising the resurrection and ascension accounts in the NT in a general way, the proposal argued here offers one way to harmonise Matthew, Luke and John.

³⁰⁹ Bock concedes that arguments for Luke 24 and Acts 1 narrating the same ascension are difficult to harmonise when he says "the chronology is a tension for this option" — Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1944 footnote 23. He adds, "[s]eeing the ascension as an event that is telescoped here allows one to see how the different Galilean appearances suggested by Matthew and Mark and John fit into the timing of events more easily" — Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1944 footnote 23. Bock's observation that an argument in favour of Luke 24 being a telescoped account also support the reconstruction here.

Fitzmyer's argument that all the events of Luke 24 occur on one day but this period is stretched out in Acts so that Jesus appears for a period of forty days for symbolic theological reasons, effectively jettisons any attempt to chronologically harmonise Luke with Acts — "The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost," 417.

Luke 24:1-53, John 20:11-17, 19-23	Appearance at the tomb to Mary, first appearance to disciples in the locked room, and first Lukan ascension (Easter Sunday)
John 20:24-29	The appearance to Thomas (eight days after Easter Sunday) ³¹⁰
Acts 1:6-11	Second Lukan ascension (roughly 40 days after Easter Sunday)
John 21:4-23	An appearance on the beach (some unspecified time after Pentecost)

The proposal that Luke 24:51 narrates a non-final ascension of Jesus suggests that Luke uses ascension imagery in Luke 24 to create a sense of final and decisive departure even when this is not the case. It invites a reassessment of how Jesus is depicted after the ascension in Luke 24 and prior to the ascension in Acts 1:9. Two passages are particularly significant. Firstly, if Luke 24:51 narrates a non-final ascension, it means that the very earthly depiction of Jesus in Acts 1:6-8, occurs after the Luke 24 ascension. Secondly, the decidedly non-heavenly appearing of Jesus at Galilee in John 21 also occurs after the ascension in Luke 24 and the Pentecost event in Acts 2.³¹¹

5.1.4 Jesus Comes and Goes Even After Pentecost

The observation that John 21 depicts a post-Pentecost appearance invites the reader to reassess the post-Pentecost appearances in Acts. Luke depicts the post-Pentecost appearances in Acts 7:55 and 9:3-6 in the style of a heavenly theophany.³¹² The angels who interpret the theophany in Acts 1:11 seem to imply that this is the last appearance of Jesus until his Parousia.³¹³ However, it is difficult to know what is meant by

³¹⁰ Μεθ' ἡμέρας ὀκτώ (20:26).

³¹¹ The depiction of Jesus building a fire and cooking breakfast 21:9 is an earthly scene that echoes the humble practical service of the foot washing in John 13. In contrast to the miraculous feeding of his followers with fish and bread in John 6, the narration of John 21 suggests that Jesus has prepared this meals by ordinary means.

³¹² It is quite possible that Luke was aware of several post-Pentecost appearances by Jesus to his apostles but has omitted these events for his own rhetorical purposes. It is difficult to imagine that Luke would be unaware of the occasion when Jesus appeared to more than 500 people that is cited by Paul (1 Cor 15:6) yet none of the Luke 24 post resurrection appearances seem to match this event.

³¹³ Such angelic guides/interpreters are a typical feature of heavenly visions, see for example Dan 8:17 and Rev 17:1.

ἐλεύσεται...τρόπον in the angelic announcement "he will return to you *in the same way*" (Acts 1:11).³¹⁴ It may be nothing more than a reassurance that he will eventually return, however the phrase ἐλεύσεται...τρόπον refers to the manner of his appearance, rather than simply the fact that he will return. The reference to the cloud gives the manner of his going the sense of a Sinai-like theophany (νεφέλη Acts 1:9; see Ex 19:9, 13, 16 LXX).³¹⁵ This suggests that the angels are saying that when the disciples next encounter Jesus it will not be in the earthly form to which they are accustomed, but as a glorious and triumphant heavenly figure in a style redolent of the Sinai theophany.

The proposal that the angelic announcement is not specifically about the Parousia, but describes the manner of Jesus' subsequent appearances in Acts, accords with the way that Jesus is depicted in Acts 7 and 9. When Jesus appears to Stephen (Acts 7:55) it is at the right hand of God and God's glory is emphasised. The way his followers look up at him from below is reminiscent of Acts 1:9. The emphasis upon Jesus being located in heaven is less obvious in Acts 9:3-6. Jesus is not described as in heaven, however the light coming from heaven (φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), which is again redolent of Sinai, may imply that Jesus is in heaven. The Sinai-like blinding heavenly light is one of the few consistent features in the three Damascus road accounts (Acts 9:3-6, 22:6, 11, 26:13, see Ex 19:16).³¹⁶

The reader of John who understands 16:7 to mean that Jesus must permanently depart before the Spirit appears, will resist the proposal that Jesus appears again after Acts 2. Even his appearance in the style of a heavenly vision (Acts 7:55, 9:3-6) is problematic for this reading of 16:7. However, as already argued, if the departure Jesus refers to in 16:7 is understood as his leaving the disciples in death, and the 20:22 Spirit bestowal is seen as a substantive giving of the Spirit in a handover scene upon his return, then it strongly suggests that the Acts 7 and 9 appearances are styled in a particular way for a rhetorical

³¹⁴ "manner, way, kind, guise" for τρόπος in BDAG, 827.

³¹⁵ Translating ἡν in Ex 19:9 and 16, but the occurrence in Exodus 19:13 is an LXX interpolation not found in the BHS text.

³¹⁶ Paul intriguingly describes the Damascus road encounter as τῇ οὐρανίῳ ὀπτασίᾳ in 26:19. Fitzmyer comments,

"we may ask what difference there was between the appearance of Christ 'to Cephas, to the Twelve,' etc. (1 Cor 15:5-6) and his appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus [...]. As far as I can see, the only difference is temporal; in Paul's case it is postpentecostal, whereas for the others it is prepentecostal" — "The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost," 422.

effect.³¹⁷ Luke depicts Jesus in a heavenly setting to make the theological point that he is exalted. Luke draws Jesus as high up above the earth and far away. While the assumed reader will appreciate the theological point of his imagery, the assumed reader will also be aware that the Fourth Gospel creates a sense of exaltation by a different set of narrative devices. By means of the Johannine ascension, Jesus is presented in John as both proximate and exalted.

5.1.5 An Apostolic Bestowal in John and a General Bestowal in Acts

Just as the assumed reader will recognise the Johannine and Lukan ascensions as two different kinds of event, so too John 20 and Acts 2 narrate separate Spirit bestowals given to different groups for different purposes.

5.1.5.1 The Two Spirit Bestowals are Narrated Differently

The two Spirit bestowals are narrated differently.³¹⁸ Many of the elements of the Pentecost narrative in Acts are absent from John's account — flames, sound like rushing wind, tongues, the presence of a large collection of bewildered onlookers, preaching to a large crowd, mass responses and baptisms.³¹⁹ Most significantly, the absence of Jesus in Acts 2 is emphatically at odds with his presence in the John 20 account.

The Luke-Acts Spirit bestowal imagery is very spatial. The emphasis is on something that comes down from above. In Luke 24:49 Jesus promises the coming of the Spirit as ἐνδύσησθε ἐξ ὕψους δύναμιν. Likewise, the wind imagery in Acts 2:2 is described as ἐγένετο ἄφνω ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. The Spirit-giving is depicted as a pouring out (ἐκχέω) suggestive of the Spirit coming down from above (Acts 2:17, see also 2:33).

In contrast to the downward spatial imagery of Acts, the Spirit bestowal is narrated in John 20 by an absence of distance and an absence of vertical (downward) imagery. Jesus is not physically in heaven and sending down the Spirit, but present in the room.

³¹⁷ "Luke has here [Acts 1] employed apocalyptic stage-props to recount the ascension of Christ" — Fitzmyer, "The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost," 419.

³¹⁸ It will be observed in section 5.3 that some commentators who object to the two Spirit bestowal view under appreciate the differences in the two Spirit bestowal narratives.

³¹⁹ F. F. Bruce contrasts the Acts 2:1-4 and John 20:22 Spirit bestowals by noting that "Luke appears generally to think of the Spirit as coming with external manifestations of power, whereas the incident recorded by John is marked by none of the visible and audible phenomena experienced on the day of Pentecost" — *The Book of Acts*, 31 footnote 13. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 296–297.

The breathing imagery implies close proximity and suggests a horizontal, face-to-face imparting of breath. This lack of downward imagery is consistent with the way John 13-17 depicts the ascension as relational rather than spatial. The language of παράκλητος evokes an image of one who walks along beside or sits beside the accused in court, rather than being poured out from above.³²⁰

The lack of vertical imagery in the narration of the Spirit bestowal in John 20 is all the more obvious in contrast to the highly spatial and vertical language about the Spirit in John 1-12. The Spirit descends upon Jesus (καταβαῖνον ὡς περιστερὰν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ 1:32). The Spirit bestowal upon all believers is associated with the new birth *from above* (3:3 γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν, 3:7 γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν). This serves to contrast the way the Spirit bestowal in John 13-21 is depicted as horizontal rather than vertical.

5.1.5.2 Two Spirit Bestowals to Different Groups for Different Purposes

The two Spirit bestowals in John 20 and Acts 2 are not simply stylistic variations in recounting the same historical event. It will be argued that they describe two different historical events because they recount two different kinds of Spirit bestowals – given to different groups for different purposes.

On the one hand, Acts 2 describes a large group in an upper room (Acts 2:1, see 1:12-15). The Pentecost event is not interpreted by Peter as a dispensation on a select few (see Acts 2:17-18). It does not seem to be restricted to eyewitnesses. Peter appears to promise a similar Spirit bestowal to all who hear and respond to the apostolic message (Acts 2:38-39).³²¹

³²⁰ Παράκλητος (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) is rendered as "one who is called to someone's aid" in *BDAG*, 618. In contrast, note the impersonal imagery in Luke-Acts of a fluid poured out (ἐκχέω – Acts 2:2) and flames (γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ πυρὸς – Acts 2:3). The language of baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) is also impersonal and spatial (Luke 3:16 and Acts 1:5). Similar impersonal imagery occurs in the spatial Spirit descriptions in John 1-12, see especially 3:8 and 7:38-39.

³²¹ The Spirit bestowals that follow in Acts (8:14-17, 10:44, 19:6) are part of the fulfilment of this promises are bestowals of the same kind as the one at Pentecost – a bestowal upon believers not an apostolic commission. Peter regards the Acts 11 bestowal as of the same kind as the Acts 2 bestowal when he says: οἵτινες τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔλαβον ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς (Acts 10:47).

On the other hand, John 20 is part of a commission to “the twelve” eyewitnesses chosen by Jesus.³²² This bestowal is anticipated in the Final Discourse where the unique role of the Spirit in the apostles is emphasised. Even if 20:22 prefigures a future Spirit bestowal, it is not the Pentecost event (upon all believers) that it prefigures.³²³ The only event the Johannine Spirit bestowal could prefigure is a Spirit bestowal exclusively upon the apostles equipping them for their unique ministry as the eyewitnesses chosen by Jesus.³²⁴ The strong distinction in John 20 between eyewitnesses and those who believe

Peter O’Brien regards Peter’s reference to “witnesses” in Luke 2:32 as referring to the apostles alone and is noted used in Acts for those who respond to the apostolic message — “Mission, Witness, and the Coming of the Spirit,” 210, 213–214. However, he affirms that the Spirit “comes upon the whole group of 120” and that the Pentecost bestowal is not simply an empowering for witness but is “for salvation [...], for transformed lives in the community [...] that are given to worship, prayer, praise, adherence to the apostle’s teaching, and the sharing of one’s possessions” — “Mission, Witness, and the Coming of the Spirit,” 210.

³²² As already noted, given the absence of Judas and Thomas, οἱ δώδεκα is a symbolic expression rather than an arithmetically accurate one, signifying the apostolic band.

³²³ See footnote 351 (ii) for a list of commentators who advocate for 20:22 being a merely symbolic gesture.

³²⁴ It might be argued that at the Pentecost event, although a wider group receive the Spirit, there is a distinction between the way the Spirit comes upon the apostles, and the way the Spirit is given to other believers, that would allow the distinctly apostolic John 20:22 to be read as a prefiguring of the first part of the Pentecost event. It is true that only the group in the upper room (Acts 2:1) speak in foreign languages and receive the flame phenomenon, while the vast numbers who repent and believe in response to their preaching (Acts 2:41) are not described as exhibiting these phenomena. Even though on other occasions in Acts there are physical manifestations accompanying Spirit bestowal, the appearance of the flames is unique to the initial group in Acts 2:1. This might suggest that if the group in Acts 2:1 consists of only the apostles, or the apostles and those who accompany them is some kind of apostolic team, then a distinction is being made in Acts 2 in the way the Spirit is given uniquely to the apostles which is analogous to the Johannine Spirit-bestowal. However, if Luke wished us to understand that only a subset of the hundred and twenty are present in Acts 2:1, the phrase ἦσαν πάντες ὁμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό seems to suggest the opposite. In Acts 10 when the Spirit falls upon the Gentiles at Cornelius’ house, it is true that flames are not mentioned, However Peter’s words οἵτινες τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔλαβον ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς; (Acts 10:47) seem to suggest Luke is not intending us to understand the narrative of Acts 2 as delineating two different Spirit bestowals that set the apostles apart from all other believers. See O’Brien, “Mission, Witness, and the Coming of the Spirit,” 210–211. Likewise, in the conversion of Paul, whom Luke is keen for the reader to accept as a genuine apostle, the Spirit bestowal is narrated without any reference to tongues or flame. If such phenomena occurred as Paul received the Spirit, and if Luke wanted to argue that the apostles received a distinctive kind of Spirit bestowal, it is difficult to accept that he would have deliberately omitted it.

by hearing the eyewitness testimony highlights this difference between the Johannine Spirit bestowal and the Lukan Spirit bestowal.³²⁵

5.1.5.3 Theological Harmonization of the Two Spirit Bestowals

Nothing in the theology of Luke-Acts would prevent a specific apostolic dispensation of the Spirit prior to Pentecost.³²⁶ In fact, it may be that Luke makes a similar point by a different means, when he describes the post-resurrection teaching of Jesus as empowered by the Spirit ἐντειλάμενος τοῖς ἀποστόλοις διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου οὓς ἐξελέξατο ἀνελήμφθῃ (Acts 1:2). While the verse could be read in different ways, it depicts the Spirit as exercising some kind of ministry to the apostles prior to the Pentecost event. It could be understood as the Spirit working within Jesus alone, as the teacher, however the emphasis on the Spirit in Luke-Acts suggests that the Spirit is exercising a ministry within the disciples as well. Luke has been clear that the Spirit has been empowering the teaching ministry of Jesus since his baptism (see Luke 3:22 and 4:18). Therefore, it would be unremarkable to describe the post-resurrection ministry of Jesus in this way if that is all that Luke means to say. The expression in Acts 1:2 seems to distinguish the post-resurrection teaching of Jesus from the pre-resurrection teaching of Jesus even though both were empowered by the Spirit. The way the disciples have their minds opened as they receive the teaching of Jesus in Luke 24:45 may well be evidence of the Spirit being at work within believers prior to the outpouring at Pentecost.³²⁷

³²⁵ It might be argued that the larger gathering in Acts 2:1 fits Luke's more relaxed attitude as to who are counted as apostles. It is true that Acts will carry more the sense of an *apostolic team* that travel with Paul and share in his ministry (for example 14:14). The co-opting of Matthias suggests that the membership of the apostolic circle is open to modification as circumstances change. A personal calling by Jesus is apparently unnecessary. However, Luke clearly identifies the apostles as having a unique ministry and commission from Jesus — Peterson, *Acts*, 80; Bolt, "Mission and Witness," 214. The selection of Matthias highlights a high view of the apostolic ministry and a stringent criteria for who might qualify even for nomination as an apostle (Acts 1:15-25). The text suggests that not all in the group of one hundred and twenty, upon whom the Pentecost Spirit comes, meet the apostolic criteria of being an eye-witnesses to the entire public ministry of Jesus (Acts 1:15, 1:21). That only one is added to restore the apostles to a complement of twelve, even though two satisfactory candidates can be found, strongly suggests a clear demarcation between the apostles and other believers. That the process for adding an apostle is narrated in detail including Scriptural justification and the practice of casting lots, an OT practice seen as a form of divine guidance (1 Sam 10:20-22, Luke 1:9), all highlight the importance of the apostolic ministry. The identification of the apostles in Acts 1:13 by name and the constant references distinguishing them from the other believers (Acts 2:42, 4:33, 6:2 οἱ δώδεκα, 6:6, 11:1) suggests that Acts and John both take great care to delineate a unique role for the apostles.

³²⁶ Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 214.

³²⁷ Quinn, "Expectation and Fulfilment of the Gift of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John," 188–190.

There is ample evidence in Luke of the Spirit at work within individual believers prior to Pentecost (Luke 1:15, 35, 67, 2:25-27).

Acts 1 does not read as a narrative depicting the apostles as timid men waiting in hiding for the empowerment of the Spirit. Assuming two distinct Spirit bestowals, one upon the twelve (only recorded in John) and the other upon a wider group (only recorded in Acts), it becomes quite natural to read the Acts 1 account as a description of Jesus instructing an inner circle who now have their minds opened by the Spirit. Jesus does not forbid them to teach and preach until the Pentecost event occurs; he simply asks them to remain in Jerusalem. The command to remain in the city (Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4) may have more to do with Jerusalem being the theological epicentre from which the mission to the Gentiles will radiate outward, than the inability of the apostles to effectively preach prior to Pentecost. The activity of the apostles in Acts 1:12-26 involves testimony to the resurrection and exposition of the OT Scriptures that proclaim Jesus as the fulfilment of the OT Messianic texts. While they base themselves in an upper room in Jerusalem, perhaps the same upper room as described in Luke 24 and John 20 (Acts 1:12-13), there is no mention of locked doors or fear of "the Jews". On at least one occasion, Peter preaches outdoors. The large gathering in Acts 1:15 is unlikely to have been accommodated indoors. The use of ἀνίστημι (Acts 1:15) adds to the depiction of Peter as an initiative taking leader making an important speech to a sizeable group. It strongly connects this speech in Acts 1 with his speech in Acts 2 (Acts 2:14 ἵστημι). A depiction of the apostles as hiding, frightened, silent and lacking understanding until the events of Acts 2:1 simply does not do justice to the way Luke has crafted the Acts 1 narrative.³²⁸

In John 20, a separate Spirit-giving prior to Pentecost reinforces the unique role of the apostles as eyewitnesses. It strongly sets them apart from other believers. In John 13-17, the reader is never directly promised a Spirit bestowal.³²⁹ In John 13-21, and especially John 20, the reader, and all non-eyewitnesses, are not depicted as receiving the Spirit themselves, but as receiving Spirit enabled testimony.

³²⁸ Admittedly, they lack insight in the exchange with Jesus in Acts 1:6 but this is also true after Pentecost, in contrast Peter's speech in Acts 1:16-22 depicts him as insightful.

³²⁹ Some references in John 1-12 anticipate a more general Spirit bestowal on all who believe (see 3:8, 3:34 & 7:39). The implication of the Johannine ascension is that the non-eyewitness through believing in the apostolic testimony can also receive the Spirit.

5.1.6 Closure Effects and Different Perspectives on the Apostolic Mission

The presence and absence of a spatial departure in Luke-Acts and John respectively create different closure effects.³³⁰ This sets up the assumed reader to observe different perspectives on the apostolic mission and in particular the role of the ascended and exalted Jesus in that mission.

5.1.6.1 A Mission of Danger and Difficulty

Tannehill makes the important observation that it is possible to announce a mission and then not narrate its execution and that this significantly changes the impact upon the reader. In Luke 24, a mission to the nations is announced but that mission is not narrated. This makes the mission seem “unproblematic. It is assumed to follow naturally, for there are no narratives of danger or difficulty”.³³¹ The ascension functions in Luke 24 as the guarantee of the mission. There is a strong sense that in Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension all has been accomplished to secure salvation. Luke ends on a note of optimism and triumph.³³² By contrast, the mission narrated in Acts does not progress smoothly. In Acts, the mission faces fierce external persecution (Acts 5:17-18, 7:54-8:3, 12:2, 17:5-9 & 20:23), internal division (Acts 6:1-6), hypocrisy (Acts 5:1-11) and confusion about the nature of the mission (Acts 15:5). The ascended Jesus appears at strategic points suggesting that he is overseeing the mission (Acts 7:56 & 9:4) but it is still a mission full of danger and difficulty. His position at the right hand of the Father does not guarantee that all will proceed smoothly.

³³⁰ Each Synoptic Gospel ends in a different place and creates closure to the earthly ministry of Jesus in a different way. A reader familiar with Mark might react quite differently to John's ascension and Spirit-bestowal account, compared to a reader familiar with the Luke-Acts account (Assuming a version of Mark that ends at 16:8).

³³¹ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:7.

³³² In Luke the resurrection, ascension and mission are tightly connected as though they were all one event. The ascension occurs on Easter Sunday giving the sense that it is inextricably linked to the resurrection. In contrast, the delay of 40 days in Acts 1 disconnects the resurrection from the ascension.

The mission is also tightly connected to the resurrection/ascension in Luke 24. It is almost as though the ascension begins in Acts 1:9 as Jesus is speaking the words of commission. The juxtaposing in Acts 1:9 of two participles εἰπὼν (aorist) and βλέπόντων (present) conveys a sense that the words of the commission are completed but the levitation then occurs immediately. The present arguably gives it a strong sense of immediacy and proximity — Bock, *Acts*, 67. Again, there is marked contrast in Acts where there is a hiatus between the ascension and commencement of the mission.

John 20 falls between Luke 24 and Acts 1 in that the mission is not simply announced (like Luke 24) nor is it fully narrated (like Acts 1-28). The mission announced by the ascended Jesus in the handover scene (20:19-23) commences with Thomas. John in his own way provides a narrative suggestive of danger and difficulty. The doors are still locked highlighting that the Spirit-empowered and Jesus-commissioned apostles will encounter Jewish persecution. The response of Thomas highlights that the mission will encounter unbelief, even from those who might be expected to most readily believe. The Thomas scene is therefore anticipatory and programmatic.³³³ It outlines the dangers and difficulties ahead without the need for lengthy and detailed narration. John's depiction of the ascended Jesus captures both a sense of completion (like Luke 24) and a sense of the ongoing challenges (like Acts 1-28) in a way that holds both of these ideas together.

5.1.6.2 The Role of the Ascended and Exalted Jesus in the Mission

The Lukan ascension creates a sense of distance between Jesus and the apostolic mission while there is no such distance in John's account.³³⁴ In Luke and Acts, there is a temporal gap between the apostolic commission and the commencement of that mission at Pentecost. The commencement is anticipated by the repeated promise of a Spirit bestowal (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 8), but the command to wait (Acts 1:4) creates a sense of delay. The sense of hiatus between commission and commencement is intensified by the insertion of the Matthias narrative (Acts 1:12-26). Significant events are allowed to occur between the commission and commencement. As well as this temporal distance, there is emphasis on the physical absence of Jesus. While the physical levitation of Jesus in Acts 1 above the earth conveys a sense of global mission and that all the resources of heaven are at the disposal of Jesus for that mission, a physical distance between Jesus and his followers is a necessary part of this imagery.³³⁵

³³³ Barnett has drawn attention to the way the regions of Jesus' mission in John anticipate the mission of the Johannine apostles (Peter and John, not Paul) in Acts and the kind of opposition they experience. – "Indications of Earliness in the Gospel of John," 73.

³³⁴ With respect to 20:22, Stauffer notes "Here, then, three processes which are separate in the other Evangelists, the giving of the keys, the missionary command and the outpouring of the Spirit, are combined in a single act of creation which denotes the beginning of a new reality of life — "ἐμφυσάω," 536–537.

³³⁵ As already noted, the pouring out (ἐκχέω) imaginary underlines the sense of distance. The depiction of Jesus' post ascension appearances as though he was permanently positioned at the right hand of the Father reinforce this sense of distance — Acts 7:56, 9:10-16 and 18:9-10.

However, exactly the opposite effect is achieved by John. While in Luke-Acts the Spirit is poured down upon them from a great height, in John, the Spirit is imparted in a close and intimate gesture. In John, Jesus is close at hand as the mission begins. While he is absent during the first step of the mission (20:24 to Thomas), he reappears immediately afterwards (20:26) to effectively debrief the apostles. He provides encouragement and theological commentary on the nature of the mission. As already noted, the apostles are not rebuked for their efforts with Thomas, rather Jesus affirms that there was nothing defective in their testimony and assures them of the efficacy of apostolic testimony despite this initial setback. Again, in John 21, Jesus provides guidance on the mission, in particular the role of Peter. It is a warm scene where Jesus cares for the physical needs of his disciples (the breakfast) and an intense and intimate scene (the searching dialogue with Peter). Jesus is presented as full of understanding and insight. He has not lost touch with the disciples. He is intimately aware and concerned with even the smallest of steps in the apostolic mission. In John, the proximate Spirit bestowal, and subsequent appearances by Jesus, emphasise that the exalted Jesus not only has the resources of heaven at his disposal for the mission, but is close at hand and intimately concerned for the progress of the mission.

5.1.7 Conclusion of Harmonizing John 20 and Luke 24/Acts 1

The reconstruction outlined above suggests a satisfying solution to the difficulties in harmonizing not only the John 20 and Luke-Acts ascension accounts, but also the even more challenging difficulties in harmonizing Luke 24 and Acts 1. This reconstruction allows for the Spirit bestowals in John 20 and Acts 2, which are clearly two distinct events, to be harmonized chronologically and theologically. The observation that Luke 24 and Acts 1 are separate ascensions, coupled with the observation that John 21 occurs after the Acts 1 ascension, not only provides a satisfying harmonization of the accounts, but also suggests that the spatial depictions of Jesus in Luke-Acts after Luke 24:51, have more to do with the styling of the narrative than is often appreciated. It emphasises that the Luke and John narratives convey the notion of exaltation by means of different narrative devices. In Luke, the exalted Jesus is *high above* and permanently located at the Father's right hand, working from a distance by the agency of the Spirit. In John, the exalted Jesus is *close at hand* and permanently located with the believers by means of the Spirit. He is deeply concerned for the mission and in touch with the details of its progress.

5.2 A Relationally Rich New Creation Life

The Johannine ascension, as argued in this paper, provides an important corrective to an over-reading of Luke's emphasis upon a corporeal resurrection and ascension. The Johannine ascension emphasises that the resurrection life is not simply a bodily existence, but is also and perhaps more importantly, a relationally rich life.

5.2.1 Two OT Spirit Bestowals

The distinct Spirit bestowals of John 20 and Acts 2 evoke different Old Testament Spirit imagery. Acts 2 evokes the *wind imagery* of Genesis 1 (רוח) while John 20 evokes the *breath imagery* of Genesis 2 (נְשָׁמָה).³³⁶ The Acts 2 imagery is reminiscent of Genesis 1 where the רוח blows across the primordial waters. Other elements of the Acts 2 narrative convey a sense of a world-wide Spirit outpouring. Note the hyperbolic description of the crowd as ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν (Acts 2:5). The promise of the Spirit encompasses πᾶς σὰρξ (Acts 2:17) and is offered to πᾶσιν τοῖς εἰς μακράν (Acts 2:39).³³⁷ Even the dramatic phenomenon of speaking in other languages (Acts 2:4) suggests a Spirit dispensation with implications for all the nations of the earth. In contrast, the John 20 imagery evokes the coming to life of Adam in Gen 2:7.³³⁸ The Genesis 2 image is more personal than global. In John 20, the intimate breath imagery reminiscent of Genesis 2, highlights a strong personal connection between Jesus and his apostles. Like the Genesis 2 account in which Adam is commissioned with vice-regal authority, the Spirit bestowal in 20:22 is part of a significant commissioning in which Jesus sends the apostles with his personal authority to be his witnesses. In Genesis 2, a commission with worldwide consequences is given in the close and intimate setting of the garden. Likewise, the close and intimate upper room is the setting for the Johannine apostolic commission.³³⁹

In Acts, when the Spirit is bestowed by a human agent, the symbolic gesture adopted is the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17, 9:17, 19:6).³⁴⁰ However in John, Jesus adopts the

³³⁶ While both רוח and נְשָׁמָה can mean Spirit they have distinctly different semantic ranges and evoke different images in the creation account. While נְשָׁמָה can be rendered literally as breath (see Ps 18:16) it has a semantic range throughout the OT centred on the concept of life (Gen 7:22, Deut 20:16, Is 57:16). On the other hand רוח has a semantic range throughout the OT centred on the concept of wind (Gen 3:8, Ex 10:13).

³³⁷ O'Brien, "Mission, Witness, and the Coming of the Spirit," 212.

³³⁸ Keener, *John*, 1204; Minear, "We Don't Know Where," 130.

³³⁹ In Acts 2 the public nature of the Spirit bestowal with accompanying signs is stressed in Peter's speech (Acts 2:33 c.f. 2:22). In John 20:22 the commissioning is private. If there are witnesses, other than the apostolic recipients, John certainly does not mention them.

³⁴⁰ Not all laying on of hands in Acts is associated with the coming of the Spirit (see Acts 6:6, 13:3 & 28:8) but all Spirit bestowals subsequent to Acts 2 include the narration of this distinctive physical gesture. When the narrated characteristics of these Spirit bestowals are compared, it is the only common feature: Acts 8:17 (apostolic bestower, laying on of hands, physical manifestation of the Spirit but details not specified), Acts 9:17 (non-apostle bestower, laying on of hands, healing), Acts 19:6 (apostolic bestower, laying on of hands, tongues and prophesy).

physical gesture of breathing the Spirit into the apostles (20:20). For the reader familiar with Luke-Acts, this gesture will be unexpected. The assumed reader, will need to understand what this surprising gesture signifies, and is therefore likely to connect this gesture with the similar gesture in Gen 2:7. Moreover, this gesture highlights again the way *lack of touch* is a feature of the John 20 account. For the reader familiar with Luke-Acts, at the point where Jesus might be expected to make physical contact with his followers, by laying on hands, he avoids this in a surprising way.

5.2.2 The New Creation Life Will Not Only Be Corporeal but Relationally Rich

The Johannine ascension highlights an important corrective to a potential misreading of the Luke 24 and Acts 1 ascension accounts. In Luke-Acts, the emphasis on the physical resurrection body of Jesus implies a corporeal new creation life for believers. In John, the emphasis is on a relationally rich, Spirit-filled existence. The risen and ascended Jesus is depicted, in the terms of 7:38, as the one from whom the Spirit flows.

In Luke's account, Jesus commands the disciples to grasp him (ψηλαφήσατε- Luke 24:39), emphasizing that Jesus has physically risen. His corporeality is of great importance in Luke's narrative. Jesus explicitly addresses the possibility that he is a non-corporeal spirit (Luke 24:39). Jesus eats before them to explicitly allay any concern that he might be a ghost (Luke 24:41-43). These details in the narrative accord with an apologetic against the allegation that the disciples have merely seen a vision or ghost. All of this is absent in John's account.³⁴¹

John's account avoids an emphasis on a corporeal resurrection. Even in John 21, when Jesus prepares a meal for the disciples, his eating is not narrated.³⁴² Nor does John, as

³⁴¹ Without this emphasis on the bodily resurrection in Luke, the heavenly visions of Jesus in Acts 7 and 9 might be misunderstood. The Acts *theophanies* alone might be understood as some kind of disembodied spiritual existence at the right hand of God. The emphasis on a bodily resurrection in Luke corrects a potential misreading in the subsequent Acts account. The depiction of Jesus as distant and permanently located in heaven in Acts necessitates this pre-emptive corrective in Luke. This potential misreading is not a concern in the Fourth Gospel because the exalted Jesus is not depicted as distant and heavenly.

³⁴² Commentators who read John 21 as providing an apologetic for the bodily resurrection because Jesus eats breakfast with the disciples impose a Lukan emphasis upon John. Köstenberger is correct in suggesting that the breakfast scene in John 21:9 is more about providing a déjà vu experience recalling Peter's betrayal before a charcoal fire (άνθρακιά) in John 18:18 –*John*, 592 footnote 26.

already noted, record Jesus being touched except in 20:17.³⁴³ Given the way touch is used in Luke 24 as part of the evidence for a corporeal resurrection, that Jesus is reluctant to be touched in 20:17 appears to be problematic. It may suggest that John's Gospel does not clearly proclaim a physical resurrection.³⁴⁴

However, for a reader familiar with the OT, the breathing into the apostles in 20:22 is a fitting way to depict him as a living corporeal being rather than simply a spirit. In Gen 2:7, the point at which Adam becomes a living being (וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגִפְשׁ חַיָּה) is not when he is given physicality (וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה). The narrative pauses momentarily, emphasising that the man is corporeal but not yet living. He comes to life only when he is given breath (וַיִּנְפֹּחַ בָּאָזְנוֹ נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים). The two acts of bestowing physicality and bestowing breath are clearly distinguished.³⁴⁵

This is an important OT theme. The link between life and the bestowal of breath, in the way Gen 2:7 uses נְשָׁמָה, is a connection frequently made in the OT (see Job 12:10; 32:8; 33:4; 34:14; Ps 104:29; Isa 57:16; Ezk 37:5, see also 1 Cor 15:45 where Paul's anthropology reflects the same OT background).³⁴⁶ The same two-stage distinction between corporeality and animation is drawn out in the Ezk 37:1-14 (see especially the momentary pause in the narrative in Ezk 37:8 — וְרָאִיתִי וְהִנֵּה-עֲלֵיהֶם גְּדִים וּבָשָׂר עָלֶיהֶם וַיִּקְרָם). The imagery of 20:22 draws attention to the way the Johannine Spirit bestowal is the culmination of an important biblical theme.

The distinction between the two OT Spirit images (Gen 1 and 2) reinforces the contrast already observed between the two NT Spirit bestowals (Acts 2 and John 20). John 20, particularly the Johannine ascension announcement fulfilled in the Johannine Spirit

³⁴³ It has already been argued that the Thomas scene in 20: 24-29 does not involve Thomas touching Jesus and that the observation of his scars is more a proof regarding the identity of Jesus than a proof of his *bodily* resurrection. Even in 20:17 there is no suggestion that Mary's touching of Jesus is for the purpose of verifying the bodily nature of his resurrection.

³⁴⁴ Cyril of Alexandria alludes to a contemporary debate in which Jesus' appearing in a locked room with no explanation as to his means of entry or exit is also taken as evidence that the Johannine Jesus is not corporeal — *Commentary on John*, 364.

³⁴⁵ "But man's nature is more than modelled clay: he owes his life to the inbreathing of breath from God" — Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 87.

³⁴⁶ "Where God causes His breath to go forth, life springs up; where He withholds it, life perishes (Ps. 104:29 f.)" — Stauffer, "ἐμφυσάω," 536, footnote 3. See also *BDAG*, 259. "The breath of God awakens life in all creation, and when it blows over the place of the dead the dead bones rise up to new life. Thus God will impart His Spirit into Israel that it may come to life again (Ez. 37:5, 14)" — Stauffer, "ἐμφυσάω," 536.

bestowal, emphasises that life is about more than mere physicality. Jesus defines the kind of life he offers by saying: “This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (17:3). John’s perichoretic imagery emphasises that the same relationally rich life enjoyed within the Trinity is central to the life that Jesus promises his followers (17:2-3, 20-23). Thus, the promise of life in 20:31, pledged immediately after John’s Spirit bestowal, has all these rich associations. Jesus, in his act of breathing into the apostles, is vividly portrayed as one who already has this Spirit-filled life, and is the one who bestows it upon others. John’s Gospel has already used the imagery of the Spirit flowing out from within the Spirit-filled person (7:39, see also 4:14), again evoking Genesis 2 imagery of the abundant life (Gen 2:5, 10-14).³⁴⁷ It confirms the frequent assertion in John that Jesus is the one who will bestow life upon his people (5:21, 26; 10:10, 28; 11:25). Unlike the Synoptics, in John eternal life is a state that begins at the point of belief, before the physical death and resurrection of the believer.³⁴⁸ For the reader familiar with Luke-Acts, John’s account adds a new perspective to the nature of the new creation life. Luke has emphasised that it is life involving a bodily resurrection and by implication will involve a physical, sensual new creation. John extends that picture by emphasizing that it will also be a Spirit-filled, relationally rich fellowship with God.

That life is ultimately about rich relationship with the Father is emphasised by the way the ascension is foregrounded in 20:17 by the surprising and abrupt prohibition to Mary. Jesus’ mission is not completed until he is relationally reunited with the Father once more. His physical resurrection and his exaltation are not collapsed together. They are held apart in a way that emphasises the necessity of his relational reconnection to the Father and their relational coming to the believers. Mary must not hold onto him until this event is completed. In John, the announcement Mary takes to the disciples is not ἐγείρει but ἀναβαίνει. Luke’s emphasis upon the corporeal new creation life comes to a fitting climax in the Lukan ascension, by which the corporeal and fully human Jesus

³⁴⁷ Note also the connection with Ezekiel’s Spirit imagery where the Spirit is depicted as both breath that brings new life (Ezk 37:4, 9) and the water of renewal flowing from the presence of God (Ezk 47:1-12). These images are strongly connected with the restoring of covenantal relationships (Ezk 37:27).

³⁴⁸ Guhrt contrasts the Synoptics with John’s Gospel noting that in the Johannine usage *eternal life* describes a qualitatively different kind of life that “does not ... just begin in the future, it is already the possession of those who have entered upon fellowship with Christ” — “Time,” 832. See for example 3:15-18, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39-40; 6:27-29, 40, 47, 54; 10:28; 17:3. For the contrasting use in the Synoptics see for example Luke 10:25; 16:9; 18:18, 30.

enters heaven. John's emphasis upon the relationally rich life, found in oneness with the Father, reaches a fitting culmination in John's ascension narrative.

A number of recent Systematic Theology contributions to the doctrine of the Ascension major on the significance of a bodily resurrection and bodily ascension.³⁴⁹ That Jesus stands in heaven in his "thoroughly embodied risen state"³⁵⁰ testifies to the importance of corporeal humanity and a physical creation in God's future plans. This is an important and accurate biblical emphasis. However, John's narrative, in particular his avoidance of an emphasis upon corporeality in his resurrection/ascension account, in order to emphasise other themes, suggests that there is more to be said on the doctrine of the Ascension than merely the notion that it is corporeal. In the bodily resurrection and the rich relationships announced in 20:17 and inaugurated in the Spirit bestowal, the future order of things is breaking into the present. Via the Johannine ascension announcement in 20:17, the new creation life is anticipated in a rich web of relationships that give definition and shape to the resurrection life of Jesus and his people. The implications of the familial, covenantal and perichoretic dimensions of the eschatological community should not go unexplored at the expense of a focus on the corporeality of the new creation.

³⁴⁹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 109–116; Dawson, *Jesus Ascended*, 42–44, 97–101; Chester and Woodrow, *The Ascension*, 77–79; Needham, "Christ Ascended for Us," 44–45.

O'Donovan is more balanced noting that "God has reinstated the descendants of Adam as 'living soul' by sending them the last Adam, the 'life giving spirit'". However, he immediately collapses this idea into a corporeal Lukan emphasis when he adds "[f]rom this aspect the emphasis of the resurrection narratives is upon the physical reality of the restored body: Jesus eats and drinks and is touched" — *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 56.

³⁵⁰ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 111.

5.3 Objections to a Two Spirit Bestowal View

Four objections to the view that John 20 and Acts 2 narrate separate Spirit bestowals will now be addressed.³⁵¹

5.3.1.1 Objection 1: The Breathing Into Imagery of 20:22 Suggests A Symbolic Gesture Not A Substantive Spirit Bestowal

The first objection is that the action of breathing in 20:22 is symbolic and not literally the transfer of the Spirit. The only thing narrated is Jesus breathing. It is not said that the Spirit is imparted.³⁵² This view has merit. The foot-washing in John 13 provides a precedent. Jesus anticipates what will happen at the cross in an acted out and symbolic

³⁵¹ Note that internal arguments against understanding 20:22 as a substantive Spirit were addressed in section 4.4. It is beyond the scope of this paper to interact with the huge volume of scholarly material regarding the Spirit in John's Gospel. Works listed here are the key contributors with whom the paper interacts or who are noted for their significance in the history of interpretation. See Quinn for a more comprehensive treatment — "Expectation and Fulfilment of the Gift of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John," 3–42. Works cited here are grouped into the three main positions held on the Johannine Spirit bestowal.

Those that hold that 20:22 and Acts 2:1–4 are genuine distinct Spirit bestowals include: Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.XIX.29, 1477; Calvin, *John*, 205; Holwerda, *Holy Spirit and Eschatology in the Gospel of John*, 21–24; Schnackenburg, *John*, 3:325–326; Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 346; Morris, *John*, 846; Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 213–214; Bennema, "The Giving of the Spirit in John's Gospel—a New Proposal?," 195–213; Thompson, "The Breath of Life," 69–70; Hatina, "John 20,22 in Its Eschatological Context," 196; Quinn, "Expectation and Fulfilment of the Gift of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John," 199.

Theodore of Mopsuestia was condemned in 553 by the Council of Constantinople for holding the view that 20:22 narrates a symbolic anticipatory act. Modern scholars holding this position include: Quinn, "Expectation and Fulfilment of the Gift of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John," 19; Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 298; Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 533–535; Carson, *John*, 650; Köstenberger, *John*, 574.

iii) Those advocating that 20:22 and Acts 2:1–4 narrate the same historical event include: Lyon, "John 20," 75–76; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 381; Burge, *The Anointed Community*, 114–149; Keener, *John*, 1999–2000; Brown, *John*, 1970, 2:1038. Dunn originally advocated for distinct Spirit bestowals — *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 177. However in his later work assumes that John's account is a recasting of the Pentecost narrative — *Christianity in the Making: Jesus Remembered*, 1:805, n105.

³⁵² Köstenberger prioritises Luke-Acts when he reasons, "a symbolic promise of the soon to be given gift of the Spirit...Otherwise, it is hard to see how John would not be found to stand in actual conflict with Luke's Pentecost narrative" — *John*, 574–575. See also Carson, *John*, 651.

fashion. So too, it might be argued, Jesus' *breathing into* (20:22) anticipates what will come at Pentecost.³⁵³

Against this objection, four points should be noted:

Firstly, this objection significantly changes the function of Thomas in John 20, in a way that jars with many elements in the narrative. If the Spirit is not given in 20:22 then the failure to persuade Thomas becomes a dramatic demonstration of how essential the Spirit will be to the apostolic witness. It puts the focus on the inability of the apostles to testify effectively until the Spirit is bestowed. Instead of testifying, they should be waiting. However, as already argued, everything else in the narrative puts the focus on the culpability of Thomas in refusing to accept a second hand testimony. There is no suggestion, as would be expected if 20:22 were a mime, that the apostles need to wait for anything else before testifying about Jesus. All this points to a genuine bestowal of the Spirit in 20:22. Thomas receives the testimony of Spirit-enabled, Jesus-commissioned apostles, yet refuses to believe.

Secondly, it does not follow that a symbolic act cannot appear at the same time as the reality towards which it points.³⁵⁴ While symbolic acts may refer to realities that lie in the future (13:4-5 is a good example) this is not to say that symbols must or even usually depict a reality still in the future. The Acts 2 bestowal is accompanied by sights (something like tongues of fire) and sounds (something like rushing wind). These are symbols and not the Spirit himself.³⁵⁵ The symbols and reality occur at the same moment.³⁵⁶ Likewise, the visible sign of the Spirit coming like a dove upon Jesus (attested in all four Gospels) is not a visible sign of a later reality; symbol and reality are coincident (Matt 3:10, 16; Luke 1:32, 3:22). Most telling of all is the Spirit bestowal in Genesis 2. In Gen 2:7, the symbolic act of breathing and the bestowal of the Spirit occur

³⁵³ There is perhaps also anticipatory imagery of a Spirit bestowal in the crucifixion account. The handing over of the Spirit (19:30 — παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα) can be read as the narrator describing the death of Jesus in a way that prefigures his bestowal of the Spirit — Bennema, "The Giving of the Spirit in John's Gospel—a New Proposal?," 200–201. Water flowing from his side (19:34) is reminiscent of the Spirit promise in 7:37-39 — Burge, *The Anointed Community*, 135; Hatina, "John 20,22 in Its Eschatological Context," 214.

³⁵⁴ Hatina, "John 20,22 in Its Eschatological Context," 200.

³⁵⁵ Jesus has stressed that the Spirit is not visible and his arrival is not directly observable in 3:8.

³⁵⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.XIX.29, page 1477.

at the same moment. Therefore, while the breathing into of 20:22 is a gesture with symbolic significance, it does not follow that the Spirit is not imparted coincidentally.³⁵⁷

Third, while the act of bestowal is not narrated, the imperative λάβετε (20:22) suggests a substantive act. "He would not have said 'receive' if he did not give."³⁵⁸

Finally, the comparison with John 13 is significant because the narrative in John 13 makes it clear that the foot-washing prefigures a future event. Note the words of Jesus to Peter "[i]f I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (13:8) and his concluding words to the group "I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he" (13:19). In contrast, nothing in the John 20 dialogue suggests that the action of breathing and the command to receive the Spirit prefigure a future event. In short, when the narrator wants the reader to understand that a future event is on view he makes this quite clear. Nothing like this occurs in 20:22.

5.3.1.2 Objection 2: The Breathing Action In 20:22 Has No Object

The second objection is that the breathing action in 20:22 has no object and therefore does not describe breathing into or upon each disciple in a way that would evoke the imagery of Gen 2:7.³⁵⁹ It is true that 20:22 simply states that Jesus breathed out (ἐνεφύσησεν) in a way that does not demand that he breathed into or upon anyone in particular, let alone went around the room and breathed upon each apostle in turn. The language of Gen 2:7 LXX ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ is much more specific.³⁶⁰

However, against this objection three points should be noted.

Firstly, the same verb ἐμφυσάω is used in both 20:22 and Gen 2:7. In most of its 9 uses in the LXX it carries the sense of breathing into or onto another person (note Ezk 37:9, Tobit 6:9 & 11:11). It is rendered by Stauffer not as "to breathe" but "to breathe upon

³⁵⁷ Cyril notes that even when a future event is being prefigured it is sometimes done with a substantive anticipatory act rather than a merely symbolic one. He cites the raising of Lazarus as a substantive prefiguring of the general resurrection — *Commentary on John*, 370.

³⁵⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, 370.

³⁵⁹ Thompson, "The Breath of Life," 71; Carson, *John*, 651–653; Köstenberger, *John*, 575.

³⁶⁰ It should be noted in passing that this second objection undermines the first objection which makes a strong identification between John 20 and John 13. In John 13 Jesus washes the disciples feet one by one.

or over”.³⁶¹ Even without an explicit target for the action (in a form like εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον) this is still the kind of action this verb suggests. In this case such a construction immediately after the verb may be unnecessary given the phrase ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον of 20:19 that positions Jesus standing in the midst of the disciples in a way that implies face-to-face proximity.

Secondly, this objection begs the question, what purpose does this *breathing into* serve in the narrative? Why is it included? In this context it does not seem to be a sigh of exasperation (see Mark 8:12 ἀναστενάξας) nor a *proof of life* (this would have been expected in 20:19-20 before the disciples rejoice having concluded their examination of his body and satisfied themselves that Jesus had indeed risen). The single breath is arguably the most appropriate symbolism for a group commission. It reflects a single bestowal given to the group, the collective apostles, not to individuals.³⁶²

Third, inserting the action of breathing in between the two pieces of dialogue that constitute the apostolic commission and Spirit bestowal, εἰρήνη ὑμῖν·καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς and λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον, strongly suggests that the *breathing into* is connected to both the Spirit giving and commissioning. As already noted, the blessing εἰρήνη ὑμῖν and the commission ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς both recall the teaching on the Spirit in the Final Discourse.

5.3.1.3 Objection 3: The Disciples Remain Timid and Ineffective After the Johannine Spirit Bestowal

The third objection is that after 20:22 the disciples remain timid and ineffective, unlike the bold apostolic ministry on the day of Pentecost.³⁶³ This suggests that 20:22 is a prefiguring and not a genuine Spirit bestowal.

Against this objection three points should be noted.

³⁶¹ Stauffer, “ἐμφυσάω,” 536–537. See also BDAG, 259; Hatina, “John 20,22 in Its Eschatological Context,” 198. 20:22 is the only time ἐμφυσάω is used in the NT, however the cognate adjective ἐμφυτος appears in the expression δέξασθε τὸν ἔμφυτον λόγον τὸν δυνάμενον in James 1:21. The ESV renders it as “implanted”. A similar expression occurs in *Barnabas* 1:2. Without the prefix, φῦσιώω (a later substitute for φυσάω) simply means to blow. In the NT it is limited to a metaphorical usage with negative connotations characterising someone *puffed up* with pride – BDAG, 869.

³⁶² Morris sees here a point of difference with the Pentecost Spirit bestowal which he regards as emphasizing the individual — *John*, 846.

³⁶³ Köstenberger, *John*, 575.

Firstly, this objection is in danger of overstating the contrast between pre and post-Pentecost apostles in Acts. The post-Pentecost disciples in Acts still get things wrong, meet in private on occasions, tactically withdraw from their enemies, fail to convert everyone with their preaching, experience division, rivalry and confusion over the mission.³⁶⁴ As has already been argued, Luke 24 presents the mission of the apostles in an unproblematic way, while Acts presents the mission as full of difficulties including internal division and weakness. To read the Pentecost event as a simple and dramatic transformation is to misunderstand the nature of both narratives.

Secondly, there is a danger of overstating the timidity of the disciples from 20:22 onwards. As already argued, the obstinacy of Thomas is not presented as being a result of defective or reluctant apostolic preaching that lacked boldness or Spirit empowerment. After the bestowal of the Spirit, the apostles do exactly what we would expect Spirit-filled Jesus-commissioned apostles to do, they testify to what they have seen and heard. A poor response, in this case from Thomas, does not necessarily imply ineffective preaching. Jesus taught them that Spirit-empowered ministry would be met with unbelief and even hostility (16:2). Further, that the disciples met in a locked room is consistent with the pattern of Jesus in John who strategically withdrew and proved elusive to the Jewish authorities on a number of occasions. To criticise the apostles here may go dangerously close to critiquing the strategy employed by Jesus.

Thirdly, the account in John 21 is often cited as strong evidence that the behaviour of the disciples is less than would be expected after Pentecost.³⁶⁵ Again, the problem is often overstated. It is far from clear that there is rivalry between disciples in John 20 (running to the tomb) and John 21 (getting from the boat to the shore). Even if it is evident, it is still the case that the Spirit-filled church of Acts subsequently has similar problems. It is also alleged that the apostles continuing to fish in order to provide for themselves suggests a pre-Pentecost timidity or confusion about the mission.³⁶⁶ Again, the contrast is not as strong as some have argued.³⁶⁷ Note Paul's tent-making in Acts 18:3 which appears in the narrative without any negative connotations. In any case, for those arguing that John 20 is a prefiguring, it has already been argued that the best

³⁶⁴ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:7.

³⁶⁵ Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 213.

³⁶⁶ Carson, *John*, 653.

³⁶⁷ Hatina, "John 20,22 in Its Eschatological Context," 198–199.

reconstruction places the events of John 21 after Pentecost. If John 21 is a post-Pentecost event then any observations that the disciples are less than they ought to be work against this objection and not for it.

5.3.1.4 Objection 4: There Is No Narration of Thomas Receiving the Spirit in John 20

The fourth objection is that there is no narration of Thomas receiving the Spirit in John 20.³⁶⁸ If it were a substantive Spirit bestowal, necessary for the ministry of apostleship, then Thomas would have been included.

Against this objection, three points should be noted.

Firstly as already argued, if the action of 20:22 was purely symbolic, then this same objection might still be raised. The symbolism is of an apostolic commission. It makes clear to the reader that these disciples now have a specific function as apostles. The same problem can be raised with the words of commission. To follow the logic of this objection would seem to lead to a view that Thomas was not commissioned as an apostolic witness at all.

Secondly, this is not the way narratives work. The reader is left to imagine what happened next for Thomas. The absence of a Spirit bestowal to Thomas (substantive or otherwise) cannot be argued from the silence here.

Thirdly, as already noted, the single breath suggests a single bestowal upon the group. An individual bestowal upon Thomas would work against this imagery.

5.3.1.5 Summary of Objections

To summarise these objections, the NT material taken together reads well as recording two distinct historical Spirit bestowals to two different groups for two different purposes. Objections to John and Acts narrating two different events are overstated. The Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 accounts provide an intriguing precedent for two spirit

³⁶⁸ Carson, *John*, 654.

bestowals, one with a universal focus, one with a focus on equipping the divine representative(s) for a specific task.³⁶⁹

5.4 Conclusion to Third Reading.

The ἀναβαίνω event announced in John 20 describes something quite different to the levitation narrated in Luke 24 and Acts 1. In John, the exalted Jesus, reunited with his Father, comes to dwell with believers. This is a fitting culmination to a narrative emphasising not so much the corporeal nature of the new order, but its rich familial, covenantal and perichoretic relationships. Once this is understood, the two accounts become complementary rather than contradictory. Jesus comes and goes repeatedly. The two ascension accounts in Luke-Acts (Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:9) are two separate ascendings. The Spirit bestowals in John 20 and Acts 2 are two distinct events commissioning two distinct groups for two distinct purposes.

Acts and John provide balancing theological perspectives on the exaltation of Jesus. Luke uses the image of distance to emphasise that Jesus is reigning at the Father's side, presiding over a world-wide mission. From his position high above the mission, he pours out the Spirit. Problems with the mission, which Acts narrates clearly, are addressed by depicting Jesus as completely in control.

In contrast, John's Gospel depicts the exalted Jesus as proximate. He is intimately concerned for, and connected to, his followers. Fittingly, he dispenses the Spirit in an

³⁶⁹ In passing another argument regarding John's Spirit bestowal should be noted for the way it illuminates the assumptions of commentators. Carson and Ladd both mount an argument against the Johannine Pentecost view on the basis that the Pentecost event was very well known. Ladd argues that any Christian living in Ephesus in the first century would know about the Pentecost Spirit bestowal and therefore would not write an account that could not be harmonised with the Luke 24 and Acts 2 account — *A Theology of the New Testament*, 298. Carson makes a similar point likening Pentecost to the Azusa Street revival in the USA — *John*, 654.

(1) Both these arguments assume that Luke's version of events is well known and the accepted historical account and also that John's Spirit bestowal is unknown. Note how privileged Luke's chronology has become.

(2) Both arguments stress that the Lukan event is well known to readers, however this is precisely the kind of event that can be told out of order or recast with different symbolism. The familiarity of the event assists the reader to recognise that the Johannine event is a complementary but distinct Spirit bestowal. Consider a modern recasting of a well-known Shakespearian work. The observer is not confused to find a Scottish king in 21st century dress and setting precisely because the original story is so well known to the observer that the rhetorical effect is immediately recognised and appreciated.

intimate gesture. Jesus, although glorified and exalted, is still close at hand. Appearing in their midst to speak with them face-to-face. In contrast to Acts 1-2 which emphasises the worldwide nature of the mission and describes great crowds responding, the first step in the mission in John is small, in testifying to Thomas. However, even this small step is of great interest to Jesus and worthy of his personal intervention. Like a shepherd who knows his sheep by name, he is aware of the smallest details in the mission.

Two Visual Texts: Two Approaches to Gospel Harmonization

Tatian is credited with producing the *Diatessaron* (c. AD 160–175) which combined the four Gospels into one narrative. It is the first known work to grapple with the question of harmonizing the Gospels. The picture on the right is from the introduction of a 13th century Persian translation. What



Codice Mediceo-Laurenziano XVII (81) f. 127^v

impact would this opening illustration have on the reader? Note how the four Gospel writers are depicted. They are slightly different in shading and slightly different in size, but similar figures, dressed in the same style and in almost identical postures. Does it suggest to the reader, at the commencement of the reading process, that the four Gospels are basically the same story told in similar ways with a similar style from a similar authorial outlook?



Consider the different impact the front plate (left) of the 9th century Gaelic New Testament known as *The Book of Kells* might have upon the reader. This depicts the evangelists as Lion, Ox, Eagle and Man (known as the *Tetramorph*). How might this illustration shape the presuppositions of a reader? It suggests four Gospels telling the same truth, in complementary ways, but with significantly individual style, perspective and arrangement.

This thesis has highlighted the importance of approaching the Gospels as texts with different styles, motifs, perspectives and emphases.

Image of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, <http://sepehr.mohamadi.name/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/persian-diatessaron-four-evangelists.jpg> accessed 10th March 2015. Image of *Tetramorph*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetramorph#/media/File:KellsFol027v4Evang.jpg> accessed 10th March 2015.

Chapter 6. Some Observations about Reading

The goal of the three step reading process followed in this paper has been to slow down and tease out, albeit artificially, the process of reading in order to delay questions of harmonization, and reflect on the place of harmonization in reading the Gospels. Counter-intuitively, postponing questions of inter-Gospel harmonization does not lead to irreconcilable texts but in fact provides satisfying possibilities for harmonizing John 20 with both Luke 24 and Acts 1-2.

Some exponents of narrative analysis and reader-response theory are rightly criticised for a disinterest in questions of history and inter-Gospel harmonization.³⁷⁰ However, there is also a danger in addressing such questions too early in the reading process and imposing historical and harmonization questions in a way that flattens the Gospel narratives. This paper has demonstrated that commentators focused on harmonizing John 20 with Luke-Acts tend to read into the text things that are not there, and tend to misread elements in the text, emerging from the experience of reading with an intact Lukan view of Jesus not substantially reshaped by the text of John 20. John's unique contribution is all but lost. For these commentators, the Gospels end up sounding a lot like each other. The characteristics of John 20 typically missed by these commentators include: the uniqueness of the apostolic testimony, the specific ministry of the Spirit to the apostles, the connection between John 20 and the Adamic imagery of Genesis 2, the lack of emphasis on a corporeal resurrection/ascension in favour of an emphasis upon rich relationships, and Jesus' intimate connection to the ongoing mission.

It might be assumed that failing to attend to questions of harmonization until the end of the process results in such divergent readings that no harmonization of John and Luke-Acts either chronologically or theologically is possible. However, counter-intuitively, reading John on its own terms first, before asking inter-textual questions, has in fact yielded satisfying possibilities for harmonizing John 20 and Luke-Acts. If the major harmonization questions had turned out to be between John on one side and Luke-Acts on the other, then questions regarding the historical sources available to the two authors would arise. In that case, harmonization issues might be regarded as the unintended consequence of the authors having contradictory theologies and sources. That harmonization questions exist between the two volumes of the one work

³⁷⁰ These criticisms are outlined in section 2.4.4.

challenges the assumptions that Luke's orderly account observes strict historical chronology and that where questions of harmonization arise, Luke's chronology and theological perspective are to be imposed upon John.

This experiment in reading suggests that readers and preachers of the Gospels should postpone questions of harmonization until as late as possible in the process of reading, in order to more fully appreciate the narrative before them. The reader who deeply appreciates the narrative is then better equipped to undertake the task of harmonizing.

Conclusion

The three step reading process undertaken in this paper has highlighted John's unique contribution to understanding the ascension of Jesus.

The first reading in Chapter 3 approached John 20 as a coherent literary unit. The problem of Jesus' absence is raised by sophisticated narrative techniques. This issue culminates in a vivid and climactic announcement by Jesus about his ascension that foregrounds the Johannine ascension as a relational return to the Father. The pressing problem of Jesus' absence is resolved in John 20 in two ways. It is explicitly resolved because eyewitness testimony is a greater blessing than the physical presence of Jesus. It is also implicitly resolved by the Spirit bestowal. Counter-intuitively, his 'ascending' is good news for his followers as it will involve not only a relational reunion with the Father, but the Father and Son dwelling with the followers of Jesus by means of the Spirit.

The second reading in Chapter 4 considered how the reader of the entire Fourth Gospel would understand the Johannine ascension. The interplay between spatial and relational imagery throughout John's Gospel prepares the reader to understand the ascension announcement in 20:17 as a relational reunion with the Father. The motif of searching and grasping sets the reader up to be surprised by Jesus' prohibition to Mary and challenged by the ascension announcement to set aside spatial thinking and think instead in relational categories. John 13-17 prepares the reader to understand Jesus' departure as a single journey culminating in his reunion with the Father and his return to the disciples by means of the Spirit, in order that the Father and the Son dwell permanently with them in a rich familial, covenantal and perichoretic union.

While the physical absence of Jesus at some point after his resurrection is assumed in the Fourth Gospel, his physical departure is not the focus. The reader will focus instead upon the better thing of his remaining spiritually with his followers. The reader is being persuaded to not seek a flesh-and-blood encounter with Jesus, but to understand that knowing Jesus through Spirit-inspired testimony, and the permanent indwelling of the Father and Son spiritually with the believer, is a better way to know and abide with Jesus.

The third reading in Chapter 5 demonstrated that the ἀναβαίνω event announced in 20:17 is a completely different kind of event to the spatial translation depicted in Luke 24 and Acts 1. The Johannine ascension provides a satisfying solution to the difficulties in harmonizing not only the John 20 and Luke-Acts ascension accounts, but also the even more challenging difficulties in harmonizing Luke 24 and Acts 1. The Johannine ascension allows for a reconstruction in which the Spirit bestowals in John 20 and Acts 2 depict two separate historical events commissioning different groups for different roles.

This reconstruction demonstrates that John and Luke-Acts provide complementary and mutually challenging theological perspectives on the exaltation of Jesus. In Luke-Acts, the exalted Jesus is high above and permanently located at the Father's right hand, working from a distance by the agency of the Spirit. In John, the exalted Jesus is close at hand and permanently located with the believers by means of the Spirit. He is deeply concerned for the mission and in touch with the details of its progress.

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