

I am the Light of the World:
The Origin and Christological Significance of Light Imagery in the Gospel of John

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The author of the Gospel of John, whom we will refer to hereafter as John, is influenced to a significant degree by the Jewish Scriptures,¹ with Marianne Thompson contending that Israel's Scriptures provide many of the key categories and framework for understanding the Fourth Gospel.² John quotes extensively from the Jewish texts.; he refers to the role of Moses and also the prophets having written about Jesus³ (Jn. 5.39; 1.17; 7.19; 5.45-47; 9.17). More specifically John alludes to the first words of the book to Genesis, 'Εν ἀρχῇ (Jn. 1.1 and Gen. 1.1 LXX), and repeatedly evokes the divine self-declaration "I am" from a number of scriptural texts (cf. Deut. 32.39, Isa. 41.4, and also Exod. 3.14). Of particular significance for this dissertation, titles and designations used to denote God in the Jewish Scriptures, such as light and living water found especially in Isaiah and the Psalms, are a common feature in the Johannine text. In addition to the Jewish Scriptures, John's language – including light imagery – has parallels to late Second Temple Jewish traditions such as those attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls, 2 Baruch, and 1 Enoch.⁴ Furthermore, traces of Greco-Roman styles of writing are observable in many places within the Fourth Gospel.⁵

The aim of this study is to examine the texts and traditions from the Jewish Scriptures and other Jewish and also Greco-Roman traditions that are likely to have influenced John's Gospel in its use of light imagery, that is, how John's metaphorical use of 'light' vocabulary relates to that found in a range of scriptural sources, in extra-biblical literature and also Greco-Roman literature. The underlying research question therefore can be summarised as follows: What is the origin and significance of the light imagery in the Gospel of John?

¹ Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), p. 11.

² Thompson, *John*, p. 11.

³ George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *John*, ed. by David A. Hubbard and others, Word Biblical Commentary, 36 (Dallas: TX: Word Books, 1987), p. lix.

⁴ Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, 'The Johannine Literature and Contemporary Jewish Literature', ed. by Judith M. Lieu and Marritinus C. De Boer, *Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, Religion, Liberty and Textual Studies, 2018, 155–66 (p. 155).

⁵ Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis: MN: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 147.

1.1 Background to the Study

The precise meaning and implications of light imagery in the Fourth Gospel is unclear and disputed.⁶ In particular, the contrast between light and darkness and their subordinate symbols - such as day and night, sight and blindness - have prompted New Testament scholars to examine the application of these categories to John's Gospel.⁷ This has, understandably, thrown wide open the discussion of John's sources.⁸ There are similar patterns of thought and, in some instances, exact verbal parallels between the language of light (and darkness) in John's text when compared to Jewish Scriptures.⁹ Scholars draw attention to relevant passages in the creation story, the exodus, the Psalms and prophetic writings.¹⁰ Scholars also focus attention on Second Temple traditions, especially the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Enochic literature, Baruch and Wisdom literature¹¹ to name but a few. Some commentators do, however, compare John's light imagery with Greco-Roman sources, especially Plato.¹² If this is the case, two issues become significant when attempting to determine how John appropriates light imagery in the gospel account. First, and foremost, understanding the precise reference and meaning of John's light imagery becomes a challenge considering the widespread traditions that are likely to have been at the author's disposal. Perhaps this is the reason why many have grappled with the issue of the Fourth Evangelist's audience and asked whether John is writing specifically for an audience steeped in Jewish literature or also for those of Gentile descent. David Rensberger, for example, sets out to investigate whether the author of John was concerned with

⁶ Ruth Edwards, *Discovering John: Content, Interpretation, Reception.*, 2nd edn (New York: NY: SPCK, 2014), p. 33

⁷ Clyde Muropa, 'The Johannine Writings: Symbolism and the Symbol of "Light" in the Gospel of John', *Asbury Theological Seminary*, 67.2 (2012), 106–13 (p. 107).

⁸ D. A. Carson, 'Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel: After Dodd, What?', ed. by Frances Wenham and David Wenham, *Sheffield Press*, 1981, 83–145 (p. 83).

⁹ Glen Balfour, 'The Jewishness of John's Use of the Scriptures in John 6:31-7:37-38', *Tyndale Bulletin*, 46.2 (1995), 356–80 (p. 356).

¹⁰ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 144.

¹¹ Leonhardt-Balzer, p. 156.

¹² Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 147.

politics¹³ or intended his work for his community¹⁴ facing existential problems considering the dynamic environment that may have been presented following the expulsion from the synagogue and other challenges. This would point to an audience drawn primarily from a Jewish group. Secondly, once John's precise meaning of his motifs are haze, applying the same motifs to John's theology becomes difficult.

With this in mind, the present work seeks to determine the origin of the Fourth Evangelist's light imagery and then to determine, on that basis, its possible significance for interpreting the Johannine presentation of the identity and role of Jesus (Christology).

1.2 Relevance for the Study of John's Gospel

The use of light imagery in the Gospel of John has received extensive coverage in Johannine scholarship. As far back as the early to mid-20th century, the works of renowned such scholars as Rudolf Bultmann and C. H. Dodd have received widespread attention, particularly the attention they gave to placing John within a Hellenistic context.¹⁵ This continued to be the trend until the impact of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls began to take effect in scholarship. From then on, greater focus placed on interpreting John in light of Jewish contemporaneous sources, such as those mentioned previously in the introduction. Scholars focus, for example, on John's style of writing with reference to light-darkness contrast, which, it is argued, to follows a dualistic pattern observable in a variety of Jewish traditions¹⁶ ranging from the Jewish Scriptures to later Jewish traditions. While there have been many wide-ranging studies on the Johannine use of the light motif, questions regarding its precise function within the text remains to be fully explored. The works that have sought to accord

¹³ Rensberger, *Overcoming the World*, pp. 87–100.

¹⁴ Rensberger, *Overcoming the World*, pp. 37–49. Rensberger writes extensively about certain narratives serving either as political tools or as narratives meant to encourage members to remain within the group in spite of the hostilities they faced, especially from the (Jewish) religious leaders.

¹⁵ John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 44–66.

¹⁶ Barnabas Lindars, *John*, New Testament Guides (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), p. 34. Like other scholars, Lindars suggests ancient Mandaean texts, Gnostic literature, writings from Nag Hammadi and non-canonical Odes of Solomon as possible sources of John's author.

attention to the function of light in John's Gospel are those of Jorg Frey, Craig R. Koester, Marianne Meye Thompson, and Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, and these will be regular conversation partners in this dissertation. There are two elements that appear distinct in scholars' discussion on John's use of light imagery. First, and quite significant is the issue of sources. Most of them seek to identify John's sources (as discussed in the previous section). The second issue has to do with John's theology. It may be a reasonable argument to propose that it is difficult to determine the precise meaning to passages in the Fourth Evangelist without understanding the origins of its light imagery before considering how they are applied to Jesus. As in our case, texts in question are those dealing with the light imagery which is a notable motif already from the very beginning of John's Gospel in its well-known prologue.¹⁷ While drawing on current debates regarding light in the Gospel of John, this thesis seeks to examine the origin of this language before considering its appropriation within John's narrative. It is hoped that once the origin of light vocabulary has been examined and clarified, it will be possible to explore the Christological significance of that language within the gospel narrative. By the end of our study, the theological implications for the light imagery will have been examined, particularly with reference to the key passages that deal with this motif, especially those found in the central section of John's Gospel (8.12).

While adding to the current debate regarding light in the Gospel of John, this dissertation seeks to examine the origin of this language, in particular that of the light imagery after which appropriating it to John's narrative will be done. It is hoped that once the origin of light is clarified, its Christological significance becomes easy to determine.

¹⁷ Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading*, ed. by Mark Goodacre, Library of New Testament Studies, 294 (New York: NY: T&T Clark, 2006). Especially 17-20. Phillips offers a comprehensive study on the prologue and makes insightful proposals about its function within John's Gospel.

Chapter 2: Origins of the Light Imagery

Introduction

We have noted in our introduction that scholars have a diversity of opinions on the sources that connect and are parallel to John's light imagery. The prominent issue in this regard has to do with John's sources. In this chapter, three aspects will be examined. First, we will survey the Jewish Scriptures to determine whether it is possible to establish possible links with John's light motif. There are so many biblical texts that deal with light such that it is not possible to adequately cover all of them in this study. As such, only those deemed central at this juncture will be given attention. To that effect, the creation story, which most scholars link with the prologue of the Gospel of John, will be included in our research. Thereafter, Isaiah and the Psalms will be explored. The reason for including especially these two books emanate from the vocabulary and language found in John regarding light motif. Such titles reserved for God as "I am" formulations, light and living water are to a large extent present in these two books. We will conclude this section with the Feast of Tabernacles, which is argued by many scholars to have a close contextual link with John 8.12. This particular text has drawn a lot of interest in current Johannine studies and may perhaps help us achieve two things. 1) If the origin of the light motif language can be established, it will follow then that appropriating its significance becomes probable. Owing to the festival backdrop at which John 8.12 was pronounced, it appears possible to use the text to apply John's meaning of light, first in this particular passage (8.12) and then to the rest of his Gospel. 2) Because it is believed that the Fourth Gospel is the most theological when compared with the other Gospels¹⁸ (Matthew, Mark and Luke), it would be paramount to understand this text theologically in relation to the light imagery.

Secondly, attention will be given to the later Second Temple traditions. There are some scholars who see a link between John's light imagery and the Second Temple traditions such as the Dead Sea

¹⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, The Johannine Monograph Series, 2nd edn (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014), p. 3.

Scrolls, Baruch, 1 Enoch and Wisdom literature. While we are unable to examine all Second Temple writings, it is the Dead Sea Scrolls, Baruch and 1 Enoch that this current work will focus upon.

Besides the vocabulary and language which, for some, form definite parallels with John, the dualism also appears to interest many Johannine students. These too need to be interrogated in order to ascertain whether such language has influenced the author of John's Gospel.

The third and final place from which John's sources will be sought are the Greco-Roman writings, especially those of Plato. Some scholars see patterns similar to the creation story in Plato. The fact that the Fourth Gospel and Genesis' creation story are believed to have a close association may be argued to indirectly link with Plato's writings, in particular his treatise on light.

2.1 Light in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint (Greek Bible)

We have noted in the introduction that scholars have diverse opinions on the sources of John's light language and vocabulary. The common links that Johannine commentators point to for possible associations with John's light are the Jewish Scriptures,¹⁹ later Second Temple traditions,²⁰ and Hellenistic writing especially those of Plato.²¹ In this section, these sources will be examined for possible links.

¹⁹ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 141.

²⁰ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 165.

²¹ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 144.

2.2 Creation: Light and Darkness and the Idea of Separation

According to Andrew Lincoln, “the first part of the prologue invites comparison with the beginning of Jewish Scriptures, the first verses of Genesis.”²² The phrase Ἐν ἀρχῇ (‘in the beginning’) is the same in Jn. 1.1 as in the LXX version of Gen. 1.1.²³ While in Genesis Ἐν ἀρχῇ introduces the beginning of creation, in the Gospel the phrase introduces the ὁ λόγος, as the agent through which creation occurred. This parallel between the two texts sets forth themes of “word, creation, light and darkness.”²⁴

Regarding the Word, Marianne Meye-Thompson’s comments are worthy of note. She claims that there are three characteristics that can be elucidated from the theme of the Word which are: “the Word was with God, became flesh and is now with God.”²⁵ It is with these three assertions that John would then identify the Word in relationship to God and the world. The world in this sense refers to humankind.

In Genesis, it is this Word that creates light where darkness has previously prevailed (vv. 2-3.)²⁶ God then separates the light from darkness, creating day and night respectively vv. 4, 5. From then on, the contrast between light and darkness becomes dominant and as the creation narrative continues as part of its modified dualism. This pattern goes beyond the creation account to encompass the entire Jewish Scriptures.

John therefore uses the Genesis parallel for his readers who would have been aware of the Jewish creation account for a number of reasons. First, and quite significant, to implore them that ὁ λόγος, existed with God before time. The term therefore is used here analogously or metaphorically in

²² Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, ed. by Morna D. Hooker, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: Hendrickson, 2005), p. 94.

²³ Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John*, p. 94.

²⁴ Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John*, p. 94.

²⁵ Thompson, *John*, p. 25.

²⁶ Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John*, p. 94.

relation to the divine.²⁷ Lincoln notes that, ὁ λόγος (the Word), carries a basic force of God's self-expression.²⁸

Secondly, to present to his audience ὁ λόγος, as one who was active in the Genesis account of creation. Scholars link this term λόγος with God's declaration: and God said, "let there be..."²⁹ (vv. 3, 6, 9,14,) culminating with the words, "Let us make humankind (v. 26). If this is the case, John's logos can be seen as, at the least, as a participant in the work of creation or for those of a high Christology as the creator of the world.

Thirdly, we can highlight the relationship that existed and continue to exist between God and ὁ λόγος. Commenting on ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν (the Word was with God), Daniel B. Wallace contends that ὁ λόγος "belongs to the larger category known as θεός"³⁰ (God). Seen this way, the idea that λόγος existed outside of time becomes credible. God and λόγος belong to the same category.

Having observed these parallels and how John linked his text with Genesis creation story, it becomes possible to envision the reason why scholars map these two books together. The dual pattern that both texts present becomes easy to expose. Key to this thinking is the role of light in both narratives. In both, light arrives in a place dominated by darkness and overcomes it (Gen. 1.2 and Jn. 1.5). Light causes a separation to occur in both texts. In Genesis, the separation is explicit Gen. 1 .3 while in the John it is implied. For instance, Jn. 1.12 can be seen as an example of a separation. It is those who receive and believe the personified λόγος who become children of God.

2.3 Light and the Law

²⁷ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 95.

²⁸ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 95.

²⁹ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 143.

³⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2001), p. 45.

A careful analysis of the giving of the law at Sinai opens the discussion of light in the Jewish Scripture to yet another level. At Sinai, the presence of God which is described in the context of light (Exod. 19.18), is connected with the law. It is this law that both the Scriptures and scholars refer to as “the Law of Moses” or simply Moses. Its inception at Sinai means that salvation had to be achieved through obedience. For most, this was the essence of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. With this idea in mind, Craig Koester maintains that:

“the Torah was understood to be the light that God had given to the benighted world, good and evil deeds could be measured according to its statutes, and those who adhered to it would receive life in the world to come.”³¹

The law therefore becomes the light that Israel would live by. It had two primary functions; first, adhering to it will aid Israelites to live in a covenantal relationship with God (Exod. 19.5-6). They would become a priestly nation to God. Secondly, as a result of their new role of “a kingdom of priests,” they are to be God’s vehicle to entreat surrounding nations to have a knowledge of God. This way, the law would be viewed in a universal context.

Commenting on Jn. 7.21-23, Koester clarifies the true role of the law and how it should have been realized in John’s era. For him, Jesus’ earlier healing and teaching were consistent with the law but was not derived from it (the law).³² In John, the light imagery is intended to convey the same message. “The closest biblical antecedent for the phrase “light of the world” in the Fourth Evangelist’s Gospel is “the light of the nations” Isa. 51.4, an expression that sometimes refers to the law. In addition to the law perceived as light, those who taught it were also seen as sages or could be called lights or lamps.³³ This of course was in a secondary sense, because their instructions only manifested the brightness of the law. The author of John’s Gospel therefore used the debate in Jn. 7 and 8 to underscore that, in the case of Jesus, both the teacher and the law come expressly from

³¹ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 150.

³² Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 152.

³³ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 146.

God and, as such, their authority is not derived from any lesser source.³⁴ Rightly understood, the law therefore does not contradict in any way with John's Jesus but rather, bears witness to him.³⁵ Ruth B. Edwards further clarifies this point by asserting that there is no opposition between Torah and Jesus in John's Gospel.³⁶ Instead, John sees the revelation offered by Jesus as greater.³⁷ If the law therefore is light and Jesus provides greater revelation of it, one begins to see why John refers to him (Jesus) as the light of the world 8.12.

2.4 I Am Sayings

The use of "I am" sayings will be further developed in chapter 3. However, in order to provide a comparison between the Jewish Scriptures and John's Gospel, these saying will now be briefly examined. Our aim is to demonstrate that John's sayings have connections with the Scriptures. The reason for a survey of these saying is given prominence by their use in relation to God but also the fact that in John, they are used in relation to the light motif (Jn. 8.12; 9.5).

The use of the metaphorical "I Am" sayings by the Fourth Evangelist with reference to Jesus recalls texts in the Jewish scriptures in which this particular title is reserved for God. The most explicit of these predicate is found in Exod. 3.24.³⁸ This claim, however, is less discussed in Johannine studies and may probably be contentious. Nevertheless, when this predicate is examined as whole (I am the bread of life), more impetus comes to the fore insofar as bread is concerned. Examples of texts that are linked to the idea of bread range from Deut. 8.3; Isa. 55.10-11 in which it is compared to the word of God, Prov. 9.5 which has a connotation of an invitation to partake of bread conferred by

³⁴ Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12* (Minneapolis: MN: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 77.

³⁵ Ruth Edwards, *Discovering John: Content, Interpretation, Reception.*, 2nd edn (New York: NY: SPCK, 2014), p. 142

³⁶ Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 144.

³⁷ Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 144.

³⁸ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King! :With Study Guide*, ed. by John Stott, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p. 111.

God.³⁹ On the whole, God is the giver of this bread. The same idea is notable in numerous Jewish Scriptures such as Exod. 16.4 (God rained manna from heaven, Deut. 8.16, Neh. 9.15, Pss. 78.24-25, and Pss. 105.40). John's use of "I Am" in 6.35 therefore is significant for two things. First, as much as "I Am" in Exod. 3.14 identifies God to Moses and subsequently to the rest of Israel, in the same manner, in John, "I am" identifies Jesus. The question of Jesus' identity is significant in John's Gospel especially in 7.27 where it is raised explicitly: "but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from."⁴⁰ John's I Am therefore serves to identify the origins of Jesus similar to the schemata expressed by the prologue in which Jesus is argued to belong to the essence of God. The slight difference is that, at 6.35, Jesus was given to the world by the Father.

Another implicit dimension is realised when Jesus asserts: "Before Abraham was, I Am" (8.58), a cause for which his opponents attempt to stone him for what Koester described as "arrogating God's name to himself."⁴¹ Considerable antecedents for the Johannine use of this phrase are found in Isaiah, where God calls upon Himself, His servant (Son), and His people to act the role of witnesses, in order for people everywhere to know "and believe me and understand that I Am" Isa. 43.10.⁴² There are other texts that are formulated in this way in Isaiah and Jeremiah.⁴³ In the same way, John presents Jesus as calling upon himself, his Father to act as witnesses and then in words similar to those of Isaiah, he told his opponents "you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." (8.24)⁴⁴

³⁹ Richard Schneek, *Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark I-VIII*, BIBAL Dissertation Series, 1 (Vallejo: CA: BIBAL Press, 1994), p. 196.

⁴⁰ NRSV

⁴¹ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 155.

⁴² Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 155.

⁴³ Isaiah 43. 25; 46. 4; 46. 4; 52. 6; 63. 1; Jer. 27. 5; 29. 23; Hos. 7. 13 and quite markedly, Deut. 32. 39

⁴⁴ NRSV

2.5 Light in the Feast of Tabernacles

Several scholars link John's light imagery with the Feast of Tabernacles. The reason for this connection arises from the history of Israel recorded in the Book of Exodus. Within this book, it is the pillar of fire (13.21-22 and 14.19-25) that is often referenced in connection with John's light. It would appear that, for most scholars, the pillar of fire resembles light. This light denotes God's power and presence.

The Tabernacles, which comprised of the water-drawing ceremony and the celebration of lighting lamps, would have reminded the Jewish nation of the Egyptian Exodus and invoked in them a hope for the second Exodus.⁴⁵ In the wilderness, God's presence was manifested in the Shekinah cloud, which protected the people from their opponents and provided them with guidance. Later biblical texts would draw heavily on this concept in teachings and songs that were sung at the temple. For example, in Ps. 27.1, God is depicted in the context of light and salvation. Moreover, the expectation of a coming kingdom of God in which light shone for the faithful became envisaged Isa. 60.19-22. This light was understood to shine continually from the Jerusalem temple Zech. 14.7. On the whole, the Jews connoted light not so much with the being of God but his saving activity.⁴⁶ Light was perceived to be Yahweh in action.⁴⁷

John's use of the Tabernacle background therefore helps in setting markers from which the light imagery should be understood. Furthermore, the Tabernacle background would have awakened familiar associations to John's audience, such as light being understood as the Torah, the Temple or even one of the great teachers.⁴⁸

Two issues become prominent in this regard. First, for John, the imagery takes a cosmic scope. From the beginning of his Gospel, John's introduction of the logos as light envisions the whole world φῶς

⁴⁵ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 127.

⁴⁶ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 128.

⁴⁷ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 128.

⁴⁸ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 151–52.

τῶν ἀνθρώπων not just for the Jews. The thought of God being light and his messengers seen as bringers of light to the entire world was familiar to John's readers.⁴⁹ John's presentation about light, first in the prologue and then at 8.12 and the rest of his Gospel is neither a new or a strange doctrine but one that could resonate with the Jewish teachings. John presents Jesus as the ultimate gift from God and the fulfilment of the Jews' taught truths.

Secondly, as in 8.12, the idea of following light is preferred rather than receiving it or walking in it because that is what Israel did in the wilderness.⁵⁰ The text therefore implores its readers to continue with what was started by their ancestors. John's Jesus therefore continues what was started by Moses. As the "light of the world," He enacts the role of the Isaianic Servant who was to be "light for the people" (Isa. 42.6; 49.6).⁵¹ In John however, Jesus transcends Moses in a number of ways. First, while Moses, the greatest of all prophets did not see God, Jesus is the only one who has ever seen God Jn. 1.18. Secondly, the scriptures testify about Jesus. In that regard, scholars can conclude that Jesus fulfils what had been predicted by Moses and the other prophets.⁵²

2.6 Light in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish Ancient Jewish Texts

The topic regarding light in John's Gospel and its possible connection with the Dead Sea Scrolls is gaining traction within Johannine studies. Of particular interest are the dichotomies between light and darkness, life and death, and the community and the world, which some interpreters apply to the Fourth Gospel, in some cases in connection with the Scrolls.⁵³ These dichotomies are fully expressed in 1QS iii.13-iv. 26 where Qumran's basic theological tenets are set out.⁵⁴ Within these writings, the covenanters are the sons of light 1QS i. 9, ii. 16 and 1QM i. 9,⁵⁵ who are guided by 'the

⁴⁹ Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 40–44.

⁵⁰ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 128.

⁵¹ Thompson, *John*, p. 183.

⁵² Thompson, *John*, p. 184.

⁵³ Jorg Frey, 'Dualism and the Word in the Gospel and Letters of John', ed. by Judith M. Lieu and Marritinus C. De Boer, *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, 2018, 274–88 (p. 274).

⁵⁴ Ashton, p. 213.

⁵⁵ Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, p. 213.

prince of lights 1QS iii. 20-21 in their struggle against the sons of darkness who in turn are supported by the angel of darkness.⁵⁶ What seems to interest scholars in relation to these opposites appears to emanate from the language in the Scrolls which for some parallels John.⁵⁷

There are others however who contend that the language of the Qumranic writings closely resembles that of John. Marie-Emile Boismard, for example, points out that 1QS iii-iv parallels I Jn. To an observer, her comprehensive analysis of the two texts (the Scrolls and I Jn) marginally falls short of discounting the Fourth Gospel outrightly. She admits however that the expression “sons of light” or “sons of truth” found in 1QS i. 9; ii. 16 and iii. 13 is in Jn. 12.36 and is absent from I Jn. On the whole, her work, just like that of other Johannine students, brings forth important pointers that may suggest that the authors of the Gospel and that of I John were familiar with the Qumran writings. This kind of thinking assumes that the authors were different individuals.

The phraseology of light and darkness is argued to designate the entire sphere of goodness, which is understood in the sense of the conformity of human behaviour to the divine will. For this reason, humanity is grouped into two distinct divisions. In this sense, it is light that causes this division just as has been noted in the creation story. These divisions are observable in both the Scrolls and John’s Gospel. This may justify why others regard both as respective communities.

Despite the differences between Johannine writings and Qumran’s in their concepts of angelology, eschatology, predestination and origin and conquest of evil, similarities in their dualism and their concept of life and light as a gift of God are notable.⁵⁸ All these resemblances seem to attest to a conceptual similarity that may be viewed as extending to such terms as ‘spirit of truth’, ‘Holy Spirit’ ‘sons of light’ which to some scholars suggest an apparent and direct link.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, ed. by Florentino García Martínez, trans. by Wilfred G. E. Watson, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), p. 6.

⁵⁷ Leonhardt-Balzer, *The Johannine literature*, p. 160.

⁵⁸ Leonhardt-Balzer, *The Johannine Literature*, p. 162.

⁵⁹ Leonhardt-Balzer, *The Johannine Literature*, p. 162.

Scholars appear unanimous in asserting that the dualism provided by the Dead Sea Scrolls is essentially of a moral nature. That may suggest therefore that the intention of these two sets of writings (the Scrolls and the Gospel) had diverse purposes considering that John is argued to be theological.⁶⁰ However, there are elements within both that are common. Primarily, both texts draw heavily from the Jewish Scriptures. From the Qumranic perspective for instance, there is mention of Moses and the prophets in 1QS i. 3⁶¹ which implies awareness with the law or Torah. Furthermore, in 1QS i. there is mention of the covenant and the decrees of God.⁶² The language of 'walking' in the light has a connection with the law. The same phenomenon is present in the Gospel. It is only the language in these two sets of texts that is in some cases different. The principles underlying them are similar. As in the case of the Gospel, the Idea of 'walking' in the light or darkness is found in two places (Jn 8.12; 12.35).

Furthermore, it is observable that each of these two communities has a leader to whom members look up to for guidance. In the Scrolls, it is the Prince of Lights who leads all the sons of Justice as they walk on the paths of light. It is interesting to note further that "the God of Israel and the angel of his truth assist all the sons of light"⁶³ (1QS iii. 24). Contrary to the Prince of Light is 'the Angel of Darkness' who, likewise, leads the sons of deceit in the paths of darkness⁶⁴ (1QS iii. 21).

In John's Gospel, both revelation and leadership are reserved for Jesus who is light and also appropriates it to those who believe in him (Jn. 1.12, 18; 8.12). Those who put faith in him become the children of God. Similarly, those who reject him would have rejected light and thereby condemning themselves.

⁶⁰ Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008), p. 1.

⁶¹ García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, p. 3.

⁶² García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, p. 3.

⁶³ García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ García Martínez, p. 6.

While it may not be possible to point out direct links between Qumran writings and the Johannine literature with regards to the light motif, the Dead Sea Scrolls provide possible background materials that are helpful in understanding Johannine texts,⁶⁵ in particular the light motif. There is no doubt that the author of John would have been aware of the Scrolls and how the light imagery was perceived at Qumran. The pattern of dualism that derive from a study of the Scrolls has in many way similarities with John's presentation of light motif. The Dead Sea Scrolls, however, do not appear to have been the origin of the light language or its imagery. The idea of light is widespread in various traditions including those prior and during the first century era. Sources that recur in scholarly studies that discuss this topic include the books of Enoch and Baruch.

In the book of 1 Enoch, it is the division of mankind into good and bad that is prominent in scholarly works concerned with the topic of light in John's Gospel. This arises from an understanding that John's Gospel has the same division. In Enoch, the designation 'righteous' is commonly reserved for members of the author's own sect. The wicked are either their enemies or the rest of the human family that is not part of the sect. In 1 Enoch 91.108, the righteous are said to "walk in eternal light." The same thoughts are observable in Jn. 8.12 "he that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." The variation is noteworthy. For Enoch, there is no mention of the phrase 'to walk in darkness' or walking in darkness but rather that "sins will be destroyed in darkness forever and from that day will never be seen." Furthermore, the text suggests that those who walk in light will see those who were born in darkness thrown into darkness.

However, Enoch's writings exhibit what could be seen as a form of dualism which is eschatological. On the whole, this dualism and its eschaton is detectable throughout the Enochic writings.

The other first-century source that is cited in relation to the study of John's light is the book of 2 Baruch. This particular source discuss light in the context of the law 2 Bar. 59.2. There are two ideas that can be elucidated from 2 Bar. 59.2. First, the description of the eternal Torah illuminating those

⁶⁵ Leonhardt-Balzer, *The Johannine Literature*, (155-166), p. 163.

sited in darkness reminds one of the creation story and John's prologue. In both Gen.1 and Jn. 1.1-5, light arrives at a place of darkness and overpowers it. Secondly, as in the creation account and John's prologue, light creates an ethical dualism in which two groups of people develop. Commenting on 2 Bar. 59.2, Koester conjectures that that the law though handed to Israel, in effect, "its radiance was intended for all nations."⁶⁶ Moreover, some scholars connect 2 Bar. 59.2 with the Isaianic servant text found in Isaiah 42 but to be precise, v. 7. In Isaiah, light comes to those who sit in darkness. But more importantly, it is the servant of God who brings the light. For Richard Beaton, the servant mentioned in Isa. 42.1-4 can be viewed as the messiah.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Beaton connects Isaiah's servant with the Anointed One mentioned in 2 Bar. 70.9. There is no doubt that Beaton sees the Isaianic Servant as Christ. 2 Bar. 72.2 further brings in an eschatological context in which the Anointed one would effect a universal judgement. The text has a concept of judgement that is somehow similar to what is found in Isaiah 42.4 "Until he has established justice in the earth"⁶⁸

2.7 Light in Greco-Roman Sources, with particular reference to Plato's Writings

The author of the Gospel of John's formulae coupling life and light is argued by some section of Johannine scholars to have been derived from Hellenistic religious writings. For example, C. H. Dodd boldly upheld that:

"without suggesting any kind of direct literary dependence, we may recognise that we have both in Ephesus and in the Fourth Gospel an adaption to Christians uses of the light mysticism current in Hellenistic circles."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Koester Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, p. 145.

⁶⁷ Richard Beaton, *Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 123 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 42. Beaton bases his argument on OT passages such as Zech. 3. 8 where themes of "My servant", or "The Branch" are discussed.

⁶⁸ NRSV

⁶⁹ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (New York: NY: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 210.

While discussing the life light theme in John and Hellenism, Dodd widened his search to include various writings within the Greco-Roman literature. However, when he suggests that God is the archetype of light as the Creator,⁷⁰ one may argue that, in this way, he connects Hellenistic thoughts to the creation account. Dodd is not alone in making the link between John's language and Hellenistic writings. Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted asserts that in Platonism as well as in Christianity, the world had a beginning.⁷¹ They maintain that those who read Plato's creation story in the Timaeus may be persuaded to think that he either read Moses or that he received his knowledge by divine revelation.⁷²

The Hellenistic notion of the beginning however transcends creation to incorporate an idea of a movement from ignorance to knowledge as a process of illumination corresponding to the movement from darkness to the true light which is reflected in the light perceived by the senses. As in the thinking of Plato, humans are generally ignorant of divine reality, just like the residents of a dark cave are unaware of the reality outside of it. The role of light therefore is to stimulate the minds of humans to the reality of which is described as "the true light that is in the absolute good."⁷³ In the Hellenistic thinking therefore, to live was to be able to conceive and comprehend reality. The real in the Platonic understanding had to do with direct light from the sun. That is why Homer would infer that to live was to see the light of the sun.⁷⁴

The author of the Gospel of John and his audience, whether Jews or non-Jews would have been aware of these ideas. The difference could be, for John and those aware of the OT texts, light symbolised a number of things. We have noted previously that light was believed to symbolise Yahweh in action (Both in salvation and deliverance). Moreover, the law was perceived to be light or

⁷⁰ Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 203.

⁷¹ Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 2nd edn (Louisville: KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 1.

⁷² Allen and Springsted, *Philosophy for understanding theology*, p. 1.

⁷³ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 147.

⁷⁴ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 145.

a guiding light that guided adherence into the ways of Yahweh. In Isaiah, the servant of God was understood to be the dispenser of light not only to Israel but to the rest of the world (Ethnoi LXX).

Conclusion

It has been observed above that the Jewish Scriptures are not only central to John's development of his light motif, but also has a significant influence on the Second Temple traditions such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, 2 Baruch and 1 Enoch in their respective teachings with regards to the topic of light. All either quote certain Jewish Scriptures or write about key Jewish figures such as Moses. Interestingly, there are some scholars who associate the writings of Plato, which is argued to have some resemblance with John's light motif, with the biblical creation story.⁷⁵ Allen and Springsted maintain that either Plato had read Moses or received divine revelation.⁷⁶ While the Greco-Roman sources especially those authored by Plato have a different worldview of the light symbolism, there still remains some common features with the Hebrew texts including Second Temple tradition that we have examined. To begin with, all of these sources are dualistic in nature, with light as the mover of their teachings. Light though opposed to darkness, is presented as superior. As for the creation story, light arrives in a space of darkness and put darkness into its proper place Gen. 1. Light causes a separation of day and night, above and below, children of light and those of darkness, truth and wickedness and so forth.

Moreover, it has been established that, for the Hebrews, light signified Yahweh in action particularly in the context of salvation and deliverance.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the law or Torah was perceived to be light. As in the case of Isaiah, the Psalms and various others biblical texts, some of the titles reserved for God were mentioned in the context of light. Examples includes "I am" found in Exodus 3.14, ...

⁷⁵ Allen and Springsted, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Allen and Springsted, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 128.

Some of these titles were given to the servant of Isaiah 42 and 49. For Beaton, light is dispensed by the servant of God as a blessing not only to Israel but to the rest of the world.

Seen this was, light allows for a knowledge of who God was. This becomes the means through which the world is divided into two groups. Those who believe, as in the Johannine context, becomes the children of God (1.12) while those who choose to disbelieve remain in darkness (Jn. 9.41).

Chapter 3: The Presentation of the Johannine Jesus as Light

3.1 Introduction

The imagery of light is more prominent in the first half of the Gospel of John (chapters 1-12). Scholars and commentators generally locate it in four clusters: 1) the prologue (1.4-9); 2) Jesus' nocturnal encounter with Nicodemus that has unsettling remarks about love for darkness rather than light (3.19-21);⁷⁸ 3) the Tabernacles disclosure (7.1-10.21) from which Jesus' saying "I am the light of the world was made (8.12; 9.5); and 4) two statements in which Jesus warns of the impending departure of the light (12.35-36, 46). Although the word 'light' does not occur in John 4, some include its narrative (4.1-42) possibly because of the positive response of the Samaritans to Jesus' teaching and subsequent self-revelation "I am he" (4.26). That can be justifiable considering that chapter 4 falls in the range of the first twelve chapter of John's Gospel.

In this chapter, we will examine how the imagery of light is treated in each of the clusters mentioned above. Our primary interest is to establish the theological and Christological significance of light in John's Gospel in general but particularly between chapters 1 and 12.

3.2 The Prologue

The prologue (1.1-18) is more than a preface, such as that provided by Luke for his Gospel. Rather, its function is to direct the reader on how the entire Gospel should be read and understood. Beasley-Murray aptly asserts the function of the prologue: "As the Gospel is wholly concerned with Jesus, so the prologue is wholly taken up with him."⁷⁹ The prologue does not only give its subject, Jesus, a cosmic significance but it also deals with the issue of his identity in relation to God. The scope derived from the prologue is universal in that, it relates God's Word to all humanity.⁸⁰ There is noticeable references to light and darkness in this introductory part of the Fourth Gospel. The concept of light and darkness would have been familiar for many different kinds of people. Another

⁷⁸ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 140.

⁷⁹ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 141.

significant thought is discernible in v. 4, “in him was life, that life was the light of all people”. The darkness implied in v. 5 can be viewed in universal sense.

However, from vv. 14-18, the focus of the text “shifts to the significance of the incarnate Word for those who believe.”⁸¹ The language changes from “all people” (1.4) to “us” (1.14) and “we beheld his glory,” expressing the confession of a particular community. According to Koester, the imagery changes to reflect a focus that alludes to Israel’s history.⁸² Mention of the word ‘glory’ recalls the glory that filled the Exodus Tabernacle, the appearance of God at Sinai and the law given through Moses. Presented this way, one begins to see how John intended his text to be understood. Earlier in Jn. 1.1-5, the prologue had asserted that “the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” For this text therefore, light reveals the power and presence of God. Light is viewed in John as the presence of God. Also, light manifests the “life” that God gives through his Word.

Thereafter, at 1.17, a contrast between the law that came through Moses and the grace and truth that comes through Jesus is made. In making this contrast, John does not negate the law since the law serves as a witness to Jesus (5.39). John’s text seeks to announce the arrival of the fullness of the divine blessings that has come through Jesus. Meye Thompson puts this same idea this way: “God grants such blessings through the Torah, but God pours them out fully through Jesus.”⁸³

Another way in which the significance of Jesus is explicated in the Fourth Gospel is in the closing verse of the prologue (1.18) where John argues that “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” This places Jesus in an unequalled and unique place even over those whom the Jewish Scriptures present as having seen

⁸¹ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 141.

⁸² Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 142.

⁸³ Thompson, *John*, p. 35.

God, such as Jacob (Gen. 32.30-31), Moses (Exod. 33.11) and the seventy elders of Israel (Exod. 24.9-11).

At this point of John's Gospel, there is no doubt that Jesus of Nazareth is the central figure of the prologue. No wonder he is presented through the image of 'light.' The unique position he has been accorded suggests that he is the only one who can dispense God's fullest blessings not only to Israel but to all people of the world. Jesus is therefore light that lightens the world. This has implications for those that comes into contact with him. Those who receive him become the children of God (1.12). By implication, those choose to disbelieve him remains in darkness.

The primary role of the prologue is to introduce Jesus while identifying him through the theme of life and light (1.4). In it, John employs a poetic language in which the concept of the logos is utilised. Once this introduction has been done, the idea of the logos ends. From then on, the logos is replaced by Jesus while the theme of life and light (1.4) is retained.⁸⁴

3.3 The Book of Signs (John 2-12)

In this section, we will examine the theme of life and light that is introduced by the prologue (1.4). We will consider how this theme is explored in the first half of John's Gospel that is commonly referred to as the Book of Signs in Johannine scholarship. The Book of Signs comprises of seven miracles. Only five⁸⁵ among the seven signs will be give attention at this point. The miracle of walking on the water has been omitted because most of its materials are included in the section dealing with the origins light in the Jewish Scriptures. Also, the miracles of the healing of the man

⁸⁴ Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 140.

⁸⁵ The five miracles that will form part of our research are: The miracle of changing water to wine in chapter 2, the healing of the official' child in chapter 4, the healing of the lame man at Bethzatha in chapter 5, the feeding of the five thousand in chapter 6 and the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11.

born blind will be discussed outside of the Book of signs. Scholars associated it with the declaration of 8.12. Furthermore, it is argued that chapter 7 to 10.21 is one unit.⁸⁶

The Book of Signs (John 2-12) is argued to be the central section of the Gospel of John which sets forth the theological and Christological significance of Jesus.⁸⁷ It comprises of miracles which are commonly referred to in Johannine scholarship as signs. Each sign is performed at the backdrop a Jewish tradition. Jorg Frey terms these traditions “Israelite-Jewish Messianic traditions.”⁸⁸ These traditions are widened to encompass a universal horizon as expressed for example in the declaration “I am the light of the world” (8.12).

One may ask how these signs are connected to the topic of light. In order to reveal their relevance to the light motif, we will first briefly consider two texts from the prologue. Thereafter we will examine each sign while paying attention to the theme of light.

In Jn. 1.14, the narrator hints his audience that Jesus, symbolised in the text as the logos, has already set his tent among them and that his glory can be seen. Furthermore, in 1.18, John tells his audience that the revelation of God is only possible through Jesus. When the signs (Jn. 2-12) are examined from this context, it becomes clear that John intended the glory of God to be revealed at each point of the Gospel narrative. In other words, in John’s Gospel, light is not restricted to one portion of the text but pervades the entire Gospel. However, in John’s signs, light appears veiled and only comes to the fore through investigation. We will commence this section with the miracle of Cana.

Beasley-Murray titled the sign of Cana “The Revelation of the New Order in Jesus.”⁸⁹ To him, the miracle at Cana exemplifies the deeds of the Redeemer-Revealer and signifies that a new start is being made.⁹⁰ Lincoln asserts that the miracle of turning water into wine associates Jesus with both

⁸⁶ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 241.

⁸⁷ Jorg Frey, ‘The Diaspora-Jewish Background of the Fourth Gospel’, *University of Zurich*, 2010, 169–84 (p. 179).

⁸⁸ Frey, ‘*The Diaspora-Jewish Background of the Fourth Gospel*’, 169-84, p. 180.

⁸⁹ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 31.

⁹⁰ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 31.

the messianic age and divine beneficence.⁹¹ Viewed on its own, this sign does not achieve what John intended to reveal. When combined with the cleansing of the temple (vv. 13-22), it forms a prelude to the ministry of Jesus. Seen this way, the Cana miracle has an ongoing purpose that develops as the narrative unfolds further. Understanding this introductory sign together with its temple cleansing backdrop is the key to the knowledge of the ministry of Jesus and also what his death and resurrection entails. As such, this is not an ordinary miracle. It is a sign that reveals Jesus' glory. The Greek word δόξα can be translated: reputation or honour. It also denotes divine splendour, majesty and transcendence.⁹² Not only the disciples experience a taste of being in the presence of divinity but the invited guests and the hosting family.

Wine has a connection with the OT. The miracle of a provision of wine recalls how wine in the Jewish Scriptures symbolises joy (Ps. 104.15).⁹³ More significantly, wine foretells of a messianic age in which the revelation of the Anointed One would be marked by the blessing of large quantities of grapes.⁹⁴ Regarding the immediate context of the text (2.1-11), the Cana wine is illustrative of the quality of God's generous gift in giving the world Jesus (3.16) as the agent of salvation who is bringing eschatological joy.

The next sign (4.46-54) is argued to form a pair with the Cana wine miracle. Perhaps it is mention of Jesus' return to Cana that helps connect these two signs. However, the manner in which the official's son is healed is striking. Jesus simply tells the official: "Go; your son will live"⁹⁵ and the severely ill child is healed. The choice of use the Greek word *zao* which is a cognate of *zoe* connects the healing with Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman whom Jesus offered living water "gushing up to eternal life." This miracle demonstrates that Jesus is acting out his life giving power by restoring life to a dying child.⁹⁶ Once again, the theme of light is veiled in the sign. Those who are aware of the

⁹¹ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 125.

⁹² Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 60.

⁹³ Edwards, p. 60.

⁹⁴ Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 61.

⁹⁵ NRSV

⁹⁶ Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 63.

prologue will recall “in him was life, and the life was the light of all people” (1.4). The gift of life given to the boy points forward to Jesus’ statement in the following chapter in which he asserts that he has life in himself (5.26), a prerogative share with God.⁹⁷ This sign associates Jesus with God. Both signs⁹⁸ deal with the issue of belief in Jesus. Believing in Jesus is a key element that allows for people to benefit from God’s gift of salvation through Jesus.

The third sign shifts focus to other questions. Because the healing of the man paralysed for thirty-eight years happened on the Sabbath, the debate that ensues focuses on the law. Milne compares the teaching of Matthew 5 and this healing incident and concludes that, “in John 5, Jesus does not challenge the rabbinic extension of the OT law as he did in the Sermon on the Mount.”⁹⁹ Instead, Jesus reaches beyond refuting the rabbinic writings so he can remind his audience that he is beyond the letter of the Sabbath law. God is not constrained by the Sabbath law. Jesus’s claim is a truth that is irrefutable. In this way, Jesus demonstrates that the work of mercy can be appropriated on the Sabbath. The claim of Jesus places him in a unique position that is believed to belong solely to God. The controversy that emanates from the healing serves to justify Jesus’ unique position. The primary purpose of this particular sign was to present a Christological discourse that emphasises Jesus’ dependence on God and also that he acts with God’s full approval.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Jesus is presented as one who is loved by the Father, and the judge who is also life-giver.

The fourth sign, generally referred to as the feeding of the five thousand, is the only miracle that occurs in all four gospels,¹⁰¹ probably to signify its importance. John’s account of this particular miracle (6.-15) is Christologically rich and laden with symbolism. Readers would have been aware of Israel’s past stories ranging from God’s giving of manna in the desert to prophets miraculously producing food in times of need.¹⁰² John’s precise mention of Moses’ giving of manna (6.31, 49)

⁹⁷ Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 63.

⁹⁸ The miracle of changing water to wine at the wedding in Cana (Jn. 2.1-2) and the healing of the official’s child (Jn. 4.46-53)

⁹⁹ Milne, *The Message of John*, p. 97.

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 65.

¹⁰¹ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 209.

¹⁰² Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 65.

makes the closest connection to this section. Additionally, the people identify Jesus as ‘the prophet who is to come into the world’ (6.14), invoking memories of God’s promise of Deut. 18.15-19. Soon after the sign, the crowd attempt to make Jesus king. Like the miracle of wine at Cana, this sign also symbolises a new era of the arrival of the messianic age.

While people appear to prefer earthly bread (6.31), Jesus reminds them of the importance of bread that endures to eternal life (6.26). When the crowd asks Jesus to give them eternal bread, he identifies himself with the bread of life. This way, John reveals Jesus not only as a prophet like Moses but as superior to Moses. For some scholars, in this text Jesus identifies himself with personified Wisdom (Prov. 9.5) who feeds those who keep Torah with the bread of understanding.¹⁰³ Philo equates manna with Sophia.¹⁰⁴ In Deut. 8.2-3, an association between manna and the law is noticeable. In Judaism, manna is also referred to as bread.¹⁰⁵ If bread represents the Torah, it becomes easier to connect the law of Moses and the bread of God (Exod. 16). While the phrase ‘law of Moses’ can mean the Pentateuch, the possible context of bread in the Fourth Gospel appears closer to the Sinai event (Exod. 19-25). Both bread (Exod. 16) and the law are gifts from God. In this sense, the word ‘Torah’ is both the bread and the law. The implication of this thinking is that the Torah becomes a source of life and nourishment is critical for human existence. It is not only consuming it that becomes paramount but also its knowledge.

On the other hand, in Judaism, the Torah was called bread, water and light, and was considered to be the source of life.¹⁰⁶ In the Fourth Gospel, the evangelist consciously transfers these symbols from the Torah to Jesus.¹⁰⁷ His homily presupposes the giving of the Torah at Sinai as a model for his

¹⁰³ Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁴ Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity According to John*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum (Leiden: Brill, 1975), p. 457.

¹⁰⁵ Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 457.

¹⁰⁶ Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 457.

¹⁰⁷ Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 452.

audience.¹⁰⁸ It is notable that in John, the bread of God is meant for the world and not only the Jewish nation. The phrase to 'the world' has a connection with Sinai (Exod. 19.4-6). God's purpose for Israel was to radiate light to the world by exemplifying his law (Torah/bread) to the nations around them. In John's Gospel, this purposed meets its fulfilment. Jesus is the true bread that comes from heaven. The symbolism of bread and all its connotation is an invitation to yet another new era of life.

The final sign in the Book of Signs is the story of the raising of Lazarus from death (11.1-53). This particular miracle forms the climax of Jesus' miraculous signs.¹⁰⁹ It is notable again that, in the Lazarus narrative, the theme of life recurs as has been the case in the previous ones. However, at this point, a man who has been dead for four days is brought to life.

Christologically, Lazarus' raising from death is a practical demonstration of what had earlier been hinted (Jn. 1.4) that Jesus has power to give life.¹¹⁰ The narrator has suggested already that in Jesus, there is life and that his life is the light of human beings (Jn. 1.4). Further on at Bethzatha, Jesus made a statement about the dead hearing his voice and coming to life (Jn. 5.25, 28). Consequently, the raising of Lazarus provides a setting for teaching on the subject of the resurrection on two levels. First, the miracles foreshadow Jesus' own resurrection. Just like the previous signs, this miracle produces division among John's audience. Some believe in Jesus and others do not (Jn. 11.45-46). Secondly, Lazarus' raising envisions the future of the believers. Though they may die yet, like Lazarus, they will live again. This is possible through the Son who has power to give not only the bread of life but also life to the dead.

While the signs portray Jesus as a healer and a wonderworker, it is clear that John to explain more. He utilises them to present Jesus as a prophet sent from God (3.2; 4.19). In John's schemata, Jesus' actions recall more precisely, Moses. This way, the signs are viewed as fulfilling Jewish expectations

¹⁰⁸ Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 10, 1st edn (Leiden: Brill, 1981), p. 148.

¹⁰⁹ Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 69.

¹¹⁰ Edwards, p. 70.

of a Deuteronomic ‘prophet like Moses’. The wine miracle would have been understood to signify the entrance of a new era. The healing of the sick, restoration of the lame and the giving of the bread of life would have been understood from the context of God’s salvation in which grace and mercy are appropriated to people. the signs point to Jesus as the Messiah who is bringing a new era that provides for both physical and spiritual needs. They are the setting for all of Jesus’ “I am” saying but more importantly for our topic, for the “I am the light” saying (Jn. 8.12; 9.5). Of themselves, the signs do not explicitly mention light. However, a close study of them does reveal the theme of life and light are imbedded in them.

3.3.1 Use of Light Imagery with Reference to Jesus

The development of the concept of the light imagery within the Fourth Gospel begins at Jn. 1.4: “In him was life that life was the light of all people”.¹¹¹ Notable in this text is the association given to life and light, a point widely noted by Johannine scholars.¹¹² The idea of life and light recalls the creation account of Genesis 1. According to Beasley-Murray, the inclusion of life and light in John’s style of writing is intended to signify a new creation.¹¹³ This new creation is said to presuppose “the original creative action of the logos and its goal.”¹¹⁴ The very next text v. 5 continues this argument with use of a present active indicative verb φαίνει which can literally be translated ‘it is shining’. The idea is that the light is already present and active. For Beasley-Murray, this light of the logos is the same that shone at the primal darkness at creation. It is now shining “with greater brilliance in the glory of the Incarnate One.”¹¹⁵ For Lincoln, these two terms (life and light) will be characteristic of John’s entire discourse with both occurring 37 and 22 times respectively throughout the gospel.¹¹⁶ The context in which v. 4 should be understood derives from the parallel it draws from Gen. 1. 3-5 and

¹¹¹ NRSV

¹¹² Bultmann, *The Gospel according to John*, p. 39. See also

¹¹³ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 11.

¹¹⁴ Beasley-Murray, *John*, P. 11

¹¹⁵ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 11.

¹¹⁶ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 99.

other Jewish traditions outside of the Jewish Scriptures, such as Bar. 4. 1-2, 1 *Enoch* 89. 9, and Wis. 7. 26.¹¹⁷ The same idea is observable in the Qumran literature though in a more developed form, especially in 1QM where there is mention of war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness. This light and darkness motif came to represent the modified dualism in which God, who is represented by light will ultimately bring darkness to an end. As for the prologue, it is ὁ λόγος (the logos) incarnate v. 14 who embodies light (Jn. 1. 4-9), who comes into a world portrayed in the Gospel as darkness (Jn. 1. 5). The aorist active κατέλαβεν verb demonstrates that light had already arrived, but darkness could not comprehend it. Commenting of this verse, Koester tells us that, it is the people that meets Jesus and fail to grasp his teaching who are equated with the word darkness.¹¹⁸ The verb κατέλαβεν can also be translated to mean ‘to grasp’.

It is important to note that Jn. 1.18 expressly affirms that only ὁ λόγος is able to reveal God to the world. In that case, ὁ λόγος (the logos) incarnate should be understood in the context of revelation and salvation. He came to enlighten the world about who God is v. 18. This idea creates a dual pattern that John follows throughout his Gospel. For example, in Jn. 3. 19, a contrast is made between the world of darkness and “the true light that comes to is from above.”¹¹⁹ According to Jn. 8. 23, those who fail to comprehend the teaching of Jesus are classified as from below while the Johannine Jesus is from above. It would seem they fail to understand the truth that Jesus is revealing (Jn. 7. 25; 8. 15). In contrast, those who receive and believe on Jesus becomes the children of God. In other words, they are from above even though they are still in the world (Jn. 17. 15-16). They have been set free by believing the truth revealed by Jesus.

Knowledge therefore plays an important role in John’s representations of how salvation works in his Gospel. Knowing God and also knowing the identity of Jesus are pivotal (Jn. 17.3) and as such, this idea would be verified latter in Jesus’ prayer of Jn. 17.

¹¹⁷ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 99.

¹¹⁸ Koester, *The Word of Life*, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Koester, *The Word of Life*, p. 12.

3.3.2 Jesus' Encounter with the Samaritan Woman John (4.1-42)

For a number of Johannine scholars, the story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well belongs to the larger section focused on the motif of light in the Fourth Gospel. John 4.1-42 appears in the Book of Signs (Jn. 2-12), where the topic of light is largely treated.

To begin with, it is observable that this incident happens during daytime (v. 6). While there is a debate regarding the system used to calculate time in the first century, it is widely agreed that 'sixth hour' would have been in the afternoon.¹²⁰ The scene created by this story recalls the betrothal story between Jacob and Rachel which also happened during broad daylight (Gen. 29. 7). The name of Jacob is referenced further down the story (Jn. 4. 12). For Lincoln, making this connection between the Genesis betrothal story and that of Sychar provide cues for a new betrothal.¹²¹ This betrothal would happen in broad daylight as opposed to Jesus' nocturnal encounter with Nicodemus which has unsettling remarks about those who prefer darkness instead of light (Jn. 3.19-21).

The next section (vv. 7-9) invokes a memory of the encounter of Rebekah and Eliezer in Gen. 24 in which Eliezer similarly asks for a drink of water from Rebekah's jar.

Moody Smith is right to assert that this woman was not a Jew, neither did she understand Jewish views and traditions.¹²² It is clear that at the beginning of the discussion, she struggles to comprehend Jesus' teaching about living water. The concept of living water recalls Jer. 17. 13 where the giver of "living water" is none other than God. Claims similar to this one are contentious when spoken in the presence of Jewish religious leaders.

However, the woman not only believes that Jesus is the long-awaited Christ, but also becomes a witness. She understood what the noble and highly educated Rabbi Nicodemus could hardly

¹²⁰ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 172.

¹²¹ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 172.

¹²² D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 28.

comprehend.¹²³ The narrative therefore is intended to underscore that Jesus' message has no geographical boundaries. It is a message for the cosmos. To this effect, a number of things can be elucidated from this particular narrative. First, the division created by human antagonism between communities are here replaced by a new way of worship. From then on, worship would not be confined to Mt Gerizim or Mt Zion but would now transcend to where God's Spirit led (Jn. 4. 21-22). The hour to inaugurate a new way of worshipping God had already arrive. For Lincoln, at this point, Jesus signalled an eschatological change that would transcend present traditions between Jews and Samaritans.¹²⁴ However, another division becomes visible. This division is observable at the outset of chapter (4 vv. 1-3). While the content of the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees is not explicit, there is no doubt that his departure from Judea suggests that a controversy existed. Judea in general was not welcoming to Jesus and his message. On the other hand, Samaria demonstrates a more receptive attitude toward Jesus' revelation of God vv. 23-24 while also quite significantly acknowledging Jesus as the Christ (vv. 25-26). This way, John's narrative paints a dualistic picture similar to what is found in the OT, Second Temple traditions and Greco-Roman literature. The Jews are portrayed in the negative while the Samaritans' receptive attitude to the identity of Jesus places them in a positive standing in relation to Jesus. The Samaritans are the children of light.

Because of the Samaritan woman's role as a witness, one could classify her as a lesser light similar to OT prophets, teachers, something absent of Jewry orthodoxy leaders. The woman exemplifies how light is perceived and imparted to others. Although there is no mention of the word 'light' in this encounter, a dualistic picture is discernible.

3.3.3 Jesus' Discourses in the Temple (John 8)

The manner in which John 8 is composed continues to draw intense debate among Johannine scholars. For most commentators, John 8 belongs to a larger section that commences at 7.1 and

¹²³ Smith, *The theology of the Gospel of John*, p. 28.

¹²⁴ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 177.

ends at 10.21.¹²⁵ The backdrop of this entire section is the Feast of Tabernacles. Over and above the backdrop of this feast, the declaration in 8.12 has also drawn significant interest. It is at this point that the second of the seven “I Am” statements of Jesus in John’s Gospel are made. Viewed as a single textual unit, thus 7.1 to 10.21, many connections with the Jewish scriptures are discernible. However, most of these connections are not directly relevant to this research. As such, only two will be discussed at this point. First, in order to examine the theme of light in John, 8.12 will now be further explored while paying particular attention to the declaration “I am the light of the world” and also the phrase “whoever follows me will never walk in darkness.”

The second issue that need to be considered is the Feast of the Tabernacles that is contended to be the background to this “I am” predicate.

3.3.3.1 I Am the Light of the World

The declaration Ἐγώ εἰμι (I am) (Jn. 8.12) has several links with the Jewish Scriptures. Ἐγώ εἰμι (I am) is argued to recall numerous Old Testament texts that present God as the light of Israel.¹²⁶ Marianne Meye Thompson asserts that: “In the Old Testament, light is an image for God as salvation, as well as for various divine attributes, such as God’s guidance, salvation, truth, Word, or Torah.”¹²⁷ These sayings are used especially where God identifies himself. Examples of such instances includes Exod. 3.14, Deut. 32.39, Isa. 43.10, 11 and 45.3. For others, ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν can be translated “I am the one who is.” This way, the saying would characterise God and his identity in terms of infinite existence. Additionally, the same saying infers self-existences. It is believed that John used this particular saying (I am) in order to portray Jesus and ascribe to him these very same qualities. Jesus’ audience as a result becomes hostile towards him when he uses ἐγώ εἰμι at Jn. 8.58 with reference to himself.

¹²⁵ Thompson, *John*, p. 164. See also Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 241

¹²⁶ Thompson, *John*, p. 182.

¹²⁷ Thompson, *John*, p. 182.

Commenting on Jn. 8.58, Meye Thompson argues that John's use of the same formulation was intended to emphasise that Jesus is what God is.¹²⁸

Furthermore, there are instances in the Jewish Scriptures where God identifies himself to Israel in a slightly modified way such as "I am the Lord" (Gen. 15.7), "I am the Lord your God" (Exod. 6.7). For Meye Thompson, this pattern is commonly used in the Old Testament as a characteristic of divine speech that describes and presents God to his people¹²⁹ She makes a significant observation that, when the saying is used without the predicate, it becomes neither revelatory nor a particularly divine speech.¹³⁰ She is of the view that the predicates are significant and that they are needed in order to complete the thought expressed in the text. Whichever way the "I am" saying is used, one cannot dispute that the Jewish scriptures tend to give them a special place. To a large extent, they are also reserved for God.

The other places where "I am" sayings are common include Isaiah where a further variation is notable. In Isaiah, it is the people who are to know, believe and understand that God is "I AM" (Isa. 43.10). The same pattern is discernible in John, where "I am" sayings are used for the purpose of underscoring Jesus' unique status in relationship to his role of bestowing God's gift of life to humanity. When the declaration of Jn. 8.12 is taken as a whole, three things become visible to the reader of the Fourth Gospel. First, we have noted in the previous chapter that light was significantly associated with Israel's God. Beasley-Murray maintains that Light was Yahweh in action.¹³¹ Light, especially in the context of the exodus, was ever before Israel, in the representations of theophany, for revelation as well as for salvation. Scholars cite Exod. 13.21-22 as one of the OT examples not only of God's leadership but also his protection and sustenance of his people during the wilderness experience.

¹²⁸ Thompson, *John*, p. 158.

¹²⁹ Thompson, *John*, p. 158.

¹³⁰ Thompson, *John*, pp. 158–59.

¹³¹ Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 128.

Secondly, just as light was followed during the exodus, according to Jn. 8.12 following light is employed instead of receiving it or even walking in it.¹³² It therefore may be argued that John deliberately chose the language that would remind his readers of the exodus. Perhaps he intended to depict Jesus as one leading not only Israel but the entire world or κόσμος in the anticipated second Exodus.

Third, this particular declaration is made during the Feast of the Tabernacles in which water and light rituals were carried out at the temple. Many scholars argue that the Feast provides John's text with the context from which it should be understood.¹³³ For example, Francis Moloney notes that the declaration of Jn. 8.12 is made on the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles and the chronological marker is significant.¹³⁴ If this be the case, there are suggestions that can be made in relation to this particular saying. Chief among what scholars have pointed out is the issue of Jesus' identity that is raised at Jn. 7.25-31. Because Jesus' credentials are questioned in 7.25-31 and also in 7. 40-44, the pronouncements which depicts Jesus as the bestower of rivers of living water (7.37-39) and as the light of the world (8.12) are both intended to answer the question regarding his identity. Living water was associated with the eschatological appearance of the Messiah who would teach the law.¹³⁵ However, within Jn. 7 and 8, it is evident that the religious leaders refuse to accept Jesus as the Messiah. They also do not accept that there was any other way of interpreting and understanding Moses. The second declaration, "I am the light of the world" (8.12), is not unconnected to chapter 7 where the question of the origins of the Messiah or the prophet are raised. In fact, the use of the word 'light' recalls Isa. 9.1-2 where Galilee is mentioned as one of the places of darkness where light would visit in the future. John therefore appears to suggest that the long-awaited fulfilment of that particular promise had materialised in the person of Jesus. The fact that he came from that region would have provoked the audience to make the association and

¹³² Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 128.

¹³³ Gale A Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John* (Eugene: OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), p. 27.

¹³⁴ Moloney, *Signs and Shadows*, p. 93.

¹³⁵ Moloney, *Sings and Shadows*, p. 93.

connection between Isa. 9.1-2 and Jn. 8.12. Furthermore, the light ritual at the temple (during the Feast) had a substantial eschatological expectation for John's audience.

Light is also associated with judgment.¹³⁶ As such, the text can be viewed from a dualistic perspective. To Lincoln, judgment that is provoked by the presence of light condemns all that belongs to darkness.¹³⁷ As can be seen, the text pitches people into two groups particularly in Jn. 7.25-31. This justifies why Johannine studies associate light in the Fourth Gospel in general but at 8.12 in particular with other Jewish traditions such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, 1 Enoch and 2 Baruch in which people are divided into two groups. One group belongs to light and are generally referred to as children of light while the other belongs to darkness. The common idea in all these writings appears to be the concept of judgment.

The debate between John 7-8 therefore forms the framework that discloses numerous facets of the meaning of light. According to Koester, the first issue concerned the identity of Jesus as the teacher in regard to the Law of Moses.¹³⁸ To the Jewish leaders, the fact that Jesus did not study with a recognized sage meant his teaching lacked credibility. This was worsened by what they perceived to be Jesus' disregard for the Mosaic Law. On the contrary, Jesus maintained that his teaching was from God. As such, he was transmitting God's Word.

Arguments and counterarguments are observable between Jn. 7 and 8. In order to resolve the misunderstanding ensuing in these two chapters and prior ones, the author of John employs a different approach in chapter 9.

¹³⁶ Moloney, *Sings and Shadows*, p. 130.

¹³⁷ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 265.

¹³⁸ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 151.

3.3.4 The Healing of the Man born Blind (John 9. 1-41)

The dispute that arose at 8.12 and continues to the end of chapter 8 is followed by an account of the healing of the man blind from birth (Jn. 9.1-41). Chapter 8 records a controversy regarding Jesus' identity and his claim to be the light of the world which is also repeated in Jn. 9.5.¹³⁹ I am the light of the world also recalls the prologue (1.4). 8.12 has a section that reads "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." This claim will now be confirmed by Jesus' giving sight to the blind man (9. 6-7). The healing changes the dynamics of the debate from interrogation of Jesus earlier in chapters 7 and 8 to the interrogation of the healed man in 9. 13-34. What the narrative is intended to portray is clear. The fact that the one who is light is rejected and opposed implies that those who become his followers will similarly be subjected to the same treatment. While analysing chapter 9, Lincoln proposes a chiastic structure whose mid-section is at vv. 18-23.¹⁴⁰ He further maintains that readers are exposed to the idea of the cost of becoming followers of Jesus.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the narrative is also clear on what it means to receive sight. The man not only receives sight but also insight with regards to Jesus' identity.¹⁴² While his understanding of who Jesus is develops gradually, there is no doubt that it is also progressive. At first, he refers to Jesus as 'The man' (v.11) and then "He is a prophet" (v. 11); then he believes that Jesus is the Son of man v. 38 and finally he worships Jesus v. 38.

The man not only tactfully employs sarcasm and irony in his answers to the Pharisees but also demonstrates significant theological understanding of the Jewish Scriptures.¹⁴³ Lincoln tells us that this man undergoes a character development that is unequalled in the entire Fourth Gospel.¹⁴⁴ The flipside of the narrative is that those with physical sight become blind (v. 41). This demonstrates the importance of following Jesus the light of the world. The narrative concludes with the idea of

¹³⁹ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 279.

¹⁴⁰ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 280.

¹⁴¹ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 280.

¹⁴² Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 159.

¹⁴³ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to ST John*, p. 280.

¹⁴⁴ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to ST John*, p. 280.

judgement mentioned in vv. 34-41. The NRSV subtitled this last section of Jn. 9 “Spiritual Blindness” perhaps to underscore what the prologue had earlier hinted. It is light that comes into a space of darkness (1.5). However, darkness does not comprehend light.

3.4 Conclusion

The way in which John’s materials are arranged in the first half of his Gospel (1-12) is impressive.¹⁴⁵ His presentation of the theme of life and light can be equated to a relay in which the baton is passed from one competitor to the other towards the finish line. Each section in this block is assigned a role which once developed advances to the next.

The prologue creatively introduces Jesus as the logos in whom life that confers light is resident (1.4). He then tells his readers that the life-giving light’s mission is to reveal God to the world (1.18). The prologue hands over the discussion to the section commonly referred to as the Book of Signs in which the theme of life and light is acted out.¹⁴⁶ This theme begins at the wedding at Cana (2.1-11) and climaxes with the raising of Lazarus from death (11.1-53). What is common in all the signs in this block are the concepts of water and life. The idea of water is also discernible in chapter 4 where it is described as “water gushing up to eternal life.”¹⁴⁷ Chapters 8 and 9 deal directly with the theme of light. In these two chapters, the Johannine Jesus asserts that he is the light of the world (8.12; 9.5). It is notable that it is from these two chapters that a dualistic theme of light and darkness is most developed within John’s text. That does not in any way discount Jesus’ night interview with Nicodemus (3.1-21) in which the opposites (heaven and earth, Spirit and flesh) are mentioned among other things.

¹⁴⁵ Johnson Thomaskutty, ‘Dialogue as a Literary Genre in the Book of Signs (John 1:19-12.50)’, *Biblical Study Journal*, 1 (2019), 01–16 (p. 1).

¹⁴⁶ Edwards, *Discovering John*, p. 59.

¹⁴⁷ NRSV

There are clear indications that the Fourth Gospel is a carefully designed narrative. Certainly, “it remains the magic pool in which an infant can paddle, and an elephant can swim.”¹⁴⁸ Beyond the impressive introduction of the Johannine Jesus in this manner, this section also is designed to reveal Jesus’ special relationship with God.¹⁴⁹ The reader is informed at the outset of the Gospel that Jesus existed before the beginning, presumably, the beginning of time (1.1-3). The prologue of this Gospel further asserts that Jesus was with God.¹⁵⁰ The idea that he dwelt among us invokes God’s glorious visit at Sinai (Exod. 19-25).¹⁵¹ Similarly, in Jn. 1.14, the Johannine Jesus is described the same way with use of the adjective ‘glory’. This glory is said to be visible (1.18) and would be the objective of Jesus’ ministry in the subsequent chapters (2-12).

In all the signs recorded in this block, Jesus is doing the works of God.¹⁵² As such, the first half of John’s Gospel can be viewed in the context of judgment. Because Jesus’ works are evidence of his relationship with God, believing him in both his works and teaching becomes crucially important for one to access of eternal life. On the contrary, disbelief results in self condemnation which John describes as walking in darkness. According to Karl Barth, “Christianity is not teaching, but life; its teaching is only teaching for living.”¹⁵³ However, teaching demands a response. Each response groups its audience into two division. This is how John communicates his theology in this section of his Gospel while utilising significant actions of Jesus. In some instances, Jesus acts out his life and light teaching while in other instances he makes statements about himself.

¹⁴⁸ Moloney, *Signs and Shadows*, p. 209.

¹⁴⁹ Edwards, p. 72.

¹⁵⁰ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 97.

¹⁵¹ Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The Prophetic Gospel: Study of John and the Old Testament* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), p. 21.

¹⁵² Marianne Meye Thompson, ‘Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel’, *Bulletin For Biblical Research*, 1 (1991), 89–108 (p. 98).

¹⁵³ Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 93.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

While examining the origin and Christological significance of John's light imagery, the aim of this dissertation has been to investigate the evangelist's possible sources and to propose that they include Jewish Scriptures, Second Temple writings and some elements from Greco-Roman literature. After surveying all these materials, it is necessary to seek to determine which among them most closely relate to the Fourth Gospel in general but to the theme of light in particular. The impression gained from the survey, which also is noted by several Johannine scholars, is that John is more profoundly influenced by the Jewish Scriptures than any other ancient texts and traditions that would have been available in the first century CE.¹⁵⁴ However, there is no doubt, as the Johannine evidence suggests that John was aware of other ancient traditions that were in circulation during this period. What is also clear is that John has creatively transformed these various sources, including the scriptural material to make the light imagery conform to his intended purpose in the Johannine presentation of Jesus.

There are three reasons why it is most likely that John's light imagery is primarily drawn from the Jewish Scriptures. The manner in which John's text is arranged, particularly in relation to the application of the light motif, displays significant links with the Jewish creation account. In particular, the theme of light is dominant in the creation narrative and recurs in various scriptural sources, particularly in the Psalms and prophetic traditions of Isaiah. Light preceded and put everything else into its proper place, including darkness.¹⁵⁵ Light causes separation from which a dual picture of light and darkness emerges. The same can be contended for John's presentation of Jesus. Jesus is first presented as God's agent in creation (Jn. 1.1-3), while as light (1.4-5), he enters a space of darkness which cannot overcome him. From that point onwards in the Johannine prologue, dualistic elements in the theme of light and darkness become visible. Furthermore, and as demonstrated in earlier

¹⁵⁴ Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, p. 72.

¹⁵⁵ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 143.

chapters of this study, John's subordinate symbols of day and night, heaven and earth, truth and evil are also discernible in the Jewish Scriptures.

Secondly, there is much emphasis in the Jewish Scriptures on the importance of following light, epitomised in the biblical account of the exodus events. Understandably, some scholars have associated the light motif in Scripture to the Shekinah cloud that led the people of Israel from Egypt to the promised land.¹⁵⁶ The rest of the declaration of Jn. 8.12, "whoever follows me will never walk in darkness", recalls the Exodus historical event in a number of ways. As is envisioned from the Jewish Scriptures, following God encompasses faith and obedience. This is where the law of Moses becomes prominent in the lives of the Israelites. As this dissertation has sought to demonstrate, the prominence of the idea of following light in both the Jewish Scriptures and the Fourth Gospel has strong redemptive and revelatory connotations. As things are set out and prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures, so they are fulfilled in John's schema.

Thirdly and finally, the concept of light is rehearsed in the Jewish Scriptures and later Jewish traditions by way of ceremonies that evoke memories of God's leadership, protection and the sustenance of his people during the Exodus. In a general sense, all of Israel's feasts promote this theological message. This is why John utilises the Feast of Tabernacles as the backdrop to Jesus' declaration "I am the light of the world" (8.12). As such, John is announcing the fulfilment a long-expected eschatology.¹⁵⁷ Instead of continuing past traditions the Johannine Jesus, as the only revealer of the true God (1.18) is portrayed as the embodiment of the long-awaited light.¹⁵⁸ What had been foretold and promised has according to John, now met its zenith. In John, Jesus is fulfilment of both Israel's history and traditions.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Beasley-Murray, *John*, pp. 127–28.

¹⁵⁷ Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John*, p. 265.

¹⁵⁸ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 158.

¹⁵⁹ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2007), p. 317.

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