

John as storyteller

Narrative criticism and the fourth gospel

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INTRODUCTION

We now come to the application of the method of narrative criticism to the text of the Johannine passion narrative (chapters 18–19). In what follows, the chapters correspond to their equivalents in part I. So in chapter 5 I expose John 18–19 to practical criticism, with particular emphasis upon structure, characterization, themes, symbolism and narrative echo effects. In chapter 6, I shall look at the genre of John 18–19 using categories drawn from the functional analysis of narrative (structuralism). In chapter 7, I look at the social function of these chapters for John's original addressees. In chapter 8, I look at the narrativity of the history of Jesus' passion, the narrativity of John's source for that history, and the artistic contribution of the storyteller in the final major stage of the composition of these chapters. In choosing chapters 18–19 of John's story, I have been particularly conscious of the lack of literary and narrative criticism of this carefully constructed and well-rounded narrative text. Apart from two somewhat disappointing articles by C. H. Giblin (1984; 1986), an interesting essay on the dramatic qualities of John 18–19 by Ehrman (1983), and some literary insights in the commentaries of Brown, Ellis and Sloyan, the main trends for the analysis of these chapters have emphasized sources (Goguel, 1910; Buse, 1957; Borgen, 1959; Dauer, 1972; von Wahlde, 1989; Fortna, 1989), historical tradition (Haenchen, 1970; Bruce, 1980; Robinson, 1985), theology (Pfitzner, 1976; Lindars, 1977; Thompson, 1988) and symbolism (Schwank, 1964; Dauer, 1967; de la Potterie, 1969). *John as Storyteller* is a first on two accounts: it is the first scholarly, book-length study of John 18–19 in English (Fenton, 1961, and Bligh, 1975, wrote popular studies), and the first comprehensive narrative-critical study of these chapters.

A PRACTICAL CRITICISM OF JOHN 18-19

The arrest of the shepherd. John 18.1-27

Narrative structure and summary

After the lengthy discourses of chapters 14-17, we come to the climactic moment in the gospel, namely, the moment of Christ's passion, death and burial (John 18-19). I have elected to examine 18.1-27 as the first of three sections because it represents the first division of John's passion account. Some scholars have divided 18.1-27 into two separate units, the first dealing with the arrest of Jesus and the second with the denials of Peter (and the concomitant initial interrogation of Jesus by Annas). Most notable amongst these has been Peter Ellis, who, in an experimental, composition-critical commentary, divides 18.1-27 into two separate acts (1-12, 13-27), both containing a chiasmic structure involving five scenes (p.247). However, it is quite plain that 18.1-27 is meant to be regarded as a single structural unit, with 1-11 emphasizing Jesus against Peter, 12-14 as a transitional pericope, and 15-27 (of equal length with 1-11) emphasizing Peter against Jesus. Three arguments support these structural divisions: (i) both scenes are rounded off with a reference to the high priest's servant Malchus; (ii) the preservation of 18.1-27 as a single unit results in a narrative triptych of three equal parts (A = 18.1-27, B = 18.28-19.16a, C = 19.16b-42, each part approximately twenty-seven verses long); (iii) the evangelist presents a consistent character contrast between Jesus and Peter which runs through the whole of 18.1-27 and which clearly ends at verse 27. These three lines of evidence support my contention that John the storyteller intended 18.1-27 to be regarded as a single act of the passion drama.

The kernel events of 18.1-27 are as follows:

(a) In vv. 1-11, Jesus crosses a valley to a garden with his disciples. It is night-time. Judas arrives at the garden with a detachment of Roman soldiers with the purpose of arresting Jesus. Jesus, outside the garden walls, identifies himself as the one whom they are seeking,

and asks that the disciples should be left to go in safety. Peter cuts the ear of the high priest's servant with his sword. Jesus, finally, rebukes Peter.

(b) Verses 12-14 form a narrative bridge in which the narrator provides three important pieces of information: first, that Jesus is bound and taken to Annas; secondly, that Annas was high priest and father-in-law to Caiaphas; thirdly, that Caiaphas was the man who claimed that it was expedient for one man to die for all the people.

(c) In vv. 15-27, Peter and another disciple follow Jesus. The anonymous disciple goes with Jesus into Annas' courtyard because he is known here. Peter remains outside and has to have the help of this disciple in order to get past the portress. The portress suggests that Peter is a disciple of Jesus. Peter denies it, and goes over to a fire to warm himself. Inside Annas' house, Jesus is questioned about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus tells Annas to ask one of his disciples. Jesus is slapped by an official, whom he rebukes, and sent bound to Caiaphas. Peter, outside the house, denies Jesus two more times and a cock crows.

Character contrasts

A number of antitheses are presented in 18.1-27 between the characters who appear on stage. The main character contrast is between Jesus and Peter. As I have already indicated, scene one (1-11) depicts Jesus in the foreground and Peter in the background, whilst scene three (15-27) depicts Peter in the foreground and Jesus in the background. That the evangelist intends this contrast to be the main focus is obvious from a number of factors. First, he sets up a deliberate opposition between the twofold response of Jesus to an interrogation (*ἐγὼ εἶμι*, in vv. 5 and 8) and the twofold response of Peter to an interrogation (*οὐκ εἶμι*, in vv. 17 and 25). Secondly, the evangelist depicts Peter assaulting a servant of the high priest in v. 10, whilst Jesus is presented as being assaulted by an official of the same high priest in v. 22. Thirdly, the evangelist designs his narrative of Peter's denials so that they are separated by Jesus' response to interrogation in the high priest's house. This creates a highly ironic scene in which Jesus calls forth his disciples as witnesses at the same time as Peter is denying any knowledge of him. Two trials consequently appear to be taking place: an informal trial of Jesus inside the house, and an informal trial of Peter outside the house.

At every opportunity it seems as if the evangelist has underlined the differences between Jesus and Peter. Whilst Peter is a somewhat spontaneous hostage to fortune, Jesus exhibits a sovereign control over events. Whilst Peter's conduct smacks of human timidity, Jesus speaks of divine composure. A number of significant narrative details highlight this sovereign domination of events by Jesus: first, Jesus goes to a place which Judas knew (v. 2), suggesting that Jesus made no attempt to escape arrest, but went as usual to the place where he rested with his disciples. Secondly, the narrator informs us that Jesus knew everything that was going to befall him (v. 4), and yet he still allowed it to take place. This stresses the voluntary nature of Jesus' acceptance of arrest. Thirdly, in John's arrest narrative, Jesus goes out to Judas instead of Judas coming to Jesus and kissing him, showing that the initiative belongs to Jesus, not to Judas (as in the Synoptics). Fourthly, Jesus' use of ἐγώ εἰμι in v. 5, the divine name, causes the arresting party to recoil in fear before the moral supremacy of Jesus. Fifthly, Jesus manipulates the situation so that he is taken, but not his disciples (vv. 8–9). Sixthly, Jesus' question, 'am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?' (v. 11) manifests confident resignation to suffering, rather than shrinking fear (as in Matthew 26.42). How vividly this sovereign control contrasts with Peter, who is everywhere a victim of circumstances!

Two further character contrasts are visible in the narrative of 18.1–27, the first between the anonymous disciple and Peter, the second between the anonymous disciple and Judas. The second of these is very minor, but there is some irony in the fact that both characters fulfil the narrative function of guide (Judas to the arresting party, the anonymous disciple to Peter), though with very different motives. Judas' incentive to be guide is treachery; the anonymous disciple's is loyalty.

By far the more significant contrast is between the anonymous disciple and Peter. The anonymous believer here is undoubtedly the BD of 13.23ff., since (i) he always appears in close proximity to Peter, (ii) he is consistently faithful as a disciple, as he is here (in following Jesus into the courtyard of Annas' house), (iii) he provides access to Jesus for Peter in 13.23ff. (as he does here), (iv) he is called ἄλλον μαθητήν in 20.2 (where it clearly refers to the BD), just as he is called ἄλλος μαθητής in 18.15. The reasons why the BD is not referred to explicitly as the disciple whom Jesus loved are not easy to understand, but two possibilities suggest themselves. First, the anonymity of the BD contrasts emphatically with the complete

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designation 'Simon Peter' (not just 'Peter') in 18.15. This creates the ironical suggestion that an apparently unknown disciple behaved more faithfully than Peter. Secondly, if it is correct that the fourth gospel was forged in the heat of an ardent hostility to Judaism, then the fact of the BD's intimacy with the high priest Annas may well have been a cause of embarrassment – especially, as seems likely, if the BD was the founding father of the Johannine community.

The contrast between the BD and Peter centres principally on the idea of discipleship. In 18.15, the narrator makes the apparently innocuous remark that both Simon Peter and another disciple 'followed' Jesus. The verb ἀκολουθέω is, at one level, nothing more than a verb of motion explaining how the two disciples managed to be present in the vicinity of Annas' house. At a deeper level, however, the verb – especially when it has Jesus as its direct object – connotes discipleship, as the noun follower indicates. The difference between the anonymous disciple and Peter is visible in the fact that the former has easy access in and out of the courtyard, whilst Peter is stuck at the gate, refused entry by a woman gatekeeper. Paul Duke, who has written a seminal study of the irony in John's story, makes the important point that Peter's timid behaviour is in striking opposition to his rather irrational bravado with the high priest's servant. As Duke puts it, 'the sword-slashing defender melts before the word of a servant girl' (1985, p. 97). What we have in the two major subsections of John 18.1–27 is therefore an antithesis between Jesus and Peter at a primary level, and an antithesis between the BD and Peter at a secondary level. In both instances, the conduct of Jesus and the BD is paradigmatic and exemplary, whilst that of Peter is clearly misguided and coloured by pathos.

Implicit commentary

In chapter 1, we adopted Tannehill's 'narrative Christology' as an apt description of John's gospel, on the grounds that the different parts of the gospel appear to be unified by Christological themes. By 'themes' here we mean the main, recurrent ideas which give internal coherence to the narrative, and the sorts of unifying Christological ideas which we highlighted there were, for example, the notion of Jesus as Judge, the notion of Jesus' divinity (the 'I am' sayings), and so on. In chapter 4 I showed how the theme of the elusive Christ dominated the whole of John's presentation. In all these examples, we see how Christological themes recur, appearing

and disappearing with enough regularity for us to discern a coherent narrative Christology.

These themes are either explicitly or implicitly stated; there appears to be a kind of sliding scale from the overt to the allusive — as can be seen in the evangelist's subtle contrasts between light and darkness, and between warmth and coldness in 18.1-27. When, in v. 1, we are told that Jesus and his disciples crossed the Kidron valley, the two notions of darkness and coldness resonate from the etymological meanings of the phrase χειμάρρου του Κεδρών (Brown, 1966, Vol. II, p. 806). When the arresting party arrive with lanterns and torches to capture Jesus in v. 3, the reader may feel that some irony is intended here, with Jesus having already been described as the Light of the World in chapter 8. When Peter warms himself by the charcoal fire in 18.18, the reader may feel that, again, the evangelist is playing on the irony of Peter's dependence on a man-made ἀνθρώπιον rather than on the Light of the World. In other words, the details connotative of light and darkness, and of warmth and coldness, may lead the reader to see an implicit commentary in 18.1-27 deriving from the Christology of Jesus as light and as the true source of human vitality and warmth. Yet again we see how John's narrative details possess a symbolic resonance.

It is possible for the reader to understand 18.1-27 as an implicit commentary on the truth enunciated in 1.5 that 'the light shines on in the darkness, for the darkness did not overcome it'. But is this theme of Jesus-as-light the only Christological thought controlling the emplotment of the arrest? Whilst the commentaries are confident about the central Christological themes in the rest of the passion narrative (i.e. in 18.28f., and 19.16f.), they are less certain about the Christological emphasis in 18.1-27. This is largely because its delineations are allusive rather than explicit. However, two of the best-known Johannine commentators have made isolated and undeveloped remarks which indicate a direction which we could go in. First, C.K. Barrett has written of Jesus' desire for his disciples' safety in 18.7 that 'it seems to be John's primary intention to show, in an *acted parable*, that the "Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (10.11)' (1978, p. 435). Secondly, Barnabas Lindars, commenting on the text in 18.9 ('This was to fulfil what he had said, "I have not lost even one of those whom you have given me"'), suggests that its most logical background is 10.29, where Jesus says of his sheep, 'My Father, as to what He has given me, is greater than all, and from the Father's hand no one can snatch them away' (1972,

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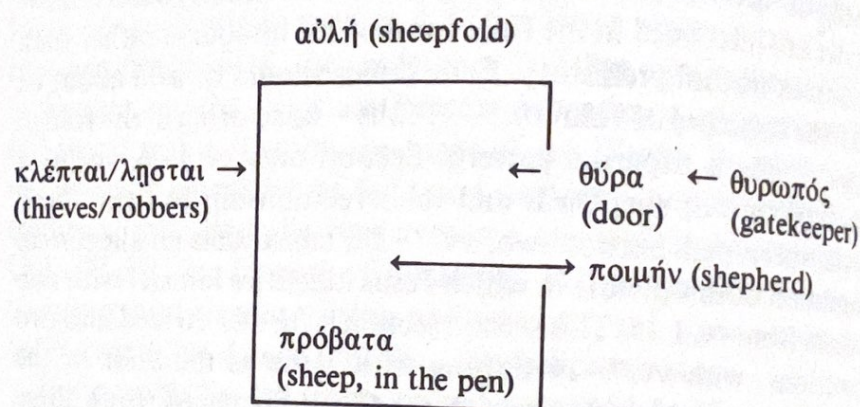
p. 542). He makes much of the fact that there is no flight of the disciples in John 18, arguing that such a desertion, understood via Zechariah 13.7 as a scattering of the sheep, would have undermined Jesus' status as a 'good shepherd' (p. 542).

Barrett and Lindars have started on an avenue of investigation which is promising, for there is no doubt in my mind that the evangelist intended a number of narrative echo effects with the pastoral discourse in John 10.1–21. However, John 10.1–21 is by no means unproblematic, since there are a number of difficulties with its form. For instance, it is not easy to say what literary background lies behind this pastoral imagery, or what sources have been used, or what relationship the text has to its enveloping narratives. In this context, however, we are interested in the final form of the discourse rather than its complex textual prehistory. Four things should be said about it:

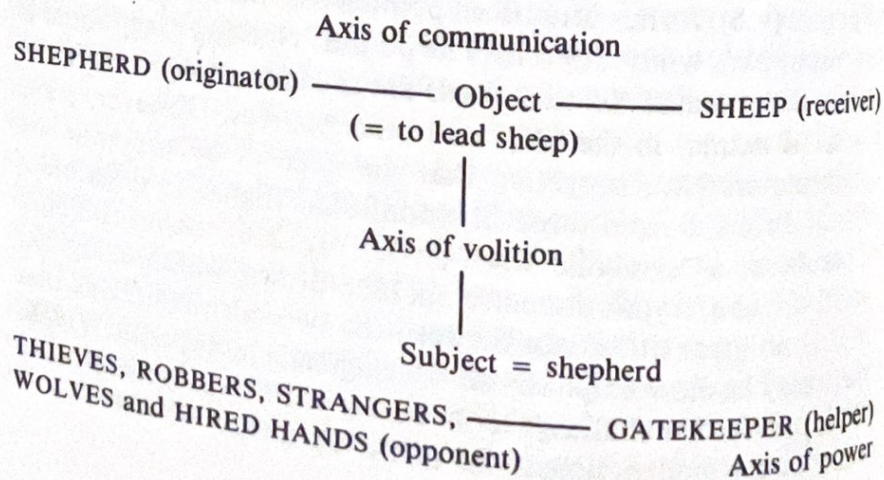
(1) The structure of John 10.1–21 falls – as so often in the fourth gospel – into a tripartite pattern. Section one, vv. 1–6, forms a general picture of shepherds and their relationship to their sheep and the sheep-pen. Section two, vv. 7–18, constitutes an allegorical elaboration of this picture in which Jesus identifies himself with two elements from vv. 1–5. This second section is further divided into two subsections, with vv. 7–10 dealing with Jesus as the door of the fold, and vv. 11–18 with Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Both these subsections contain two ἐγώ εἶμι sayings, at verses 7 and 9, and 11 and 14 respectively. A recurrent theme in the second subsection is 'laying down his life for the sheep', at vv. 11, 15, 17, 18. The third subsection, vv. 19–21, describes the division amongst the people which this teaching caused, verse 20 depicting the negative response, and verse 21 the positive response.

(2) the genre of vv. 1–5 is explicitly described by the narrator as παροιμία (v. 6). As has often been pointed out, the Synoptic gospels use παραβολή, whilst John uses παροιμία. Nothing exceptional is seen in this, because the two words are used as synonymous translations of *mashal* in the LXX and other sources. However, some commentators have suggested that the nuances of παροιμία are slightly different from those of παραβολή. Lightfoot describes a παροιμία as a 'symbolic word-picture' (p. 210); Schnackenburg describes it as a 'cryptic discourse' (p. 283). Brown, whilst stating that there is no great difference between the two, also maintains that 'there may be more emphasis on the enigmatic in παροιμία' (1966, Vol. I, p. 385). The challenge to the reader of 10.1–21 is therefore to penetrate the hidden dimensions of the discourse.

(3) There is an overall setting implied in the narrative world of this discourse takes place in and around an αὐλή (translated 'sheepfold' in most versions). Αὐλή denotes two possible scenarios: a sheepfold erected at pasture time out in the open and outside a village, or a yard pertaining to and adjoining a house (Schnackenburg, 1969, p.279). The sheep are enclosed within this fold during the night, protected from wolves, robbers and other predators by a gatekeeper and by the shepherd. In the dark hours of the early morning, the shepherd goes in and out of the fold to lead his flock to pasture. The setting within the narrative world of John 10 is therefore as follows:



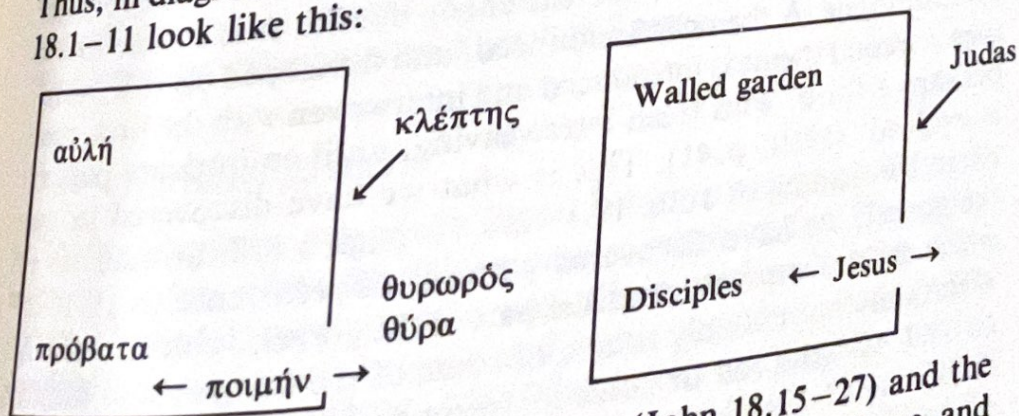
(4) The pastoral picture as a whole is constructed upon a number of significant character contrasts. These narrative oppositions are best expressed using Greimas's model for the study of all narrative performances, though I acknowledge the limitations of this model, as well as the fact that John 10.1-21 does not constitute a single narrative with a discernible plot:



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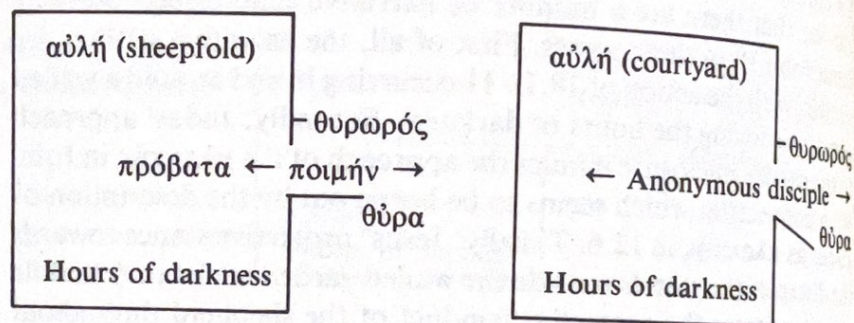
The top horizontal axis is what Greimas calls the 'axis of communication', which in this case is constituted by the shepherd (the originator) calling his sheep out of the fold to pasture. The middle vertical axis is the axis of volition, and the quest implied in this instance is the shepherd's (subject) desire to lead his sheep safely to and from their pen (object). The bottom line is the axis of power, and the struggle which the shepherd experiences in the attainment of his goal is caused by marauding thieves, robbers and wolves, and by incompetent hired hands and strangers (opponents). He is, however, assisted by the θυρωρός or gatekeeper (helper), who ensures that no one enters the fold by the gate except the shepherd.

What, then, has this rather terse set of images got to do with the narrative of Jesus' arrest and Peter's denials in John 18.1-27? If we take the narrative of Jesus' arrest first (scene one, 18.1-11), we can see that there are a number of narrative echo effects deriving from John 10 in these verses. First of all, the narrative settings are similar, with the action of 18.1-11 occurring in and around a walled enclosure during the hours of darkness. Secondly, Judas' approach to the garden enclosure mimics the approach of the κλεπτής in John 10, a connection which seems to be borne out by the description of Judas as κλεπτής in 12.6. Thirdly, Jesus' protective stance towards the disciples (he stands outside the walled garden whilst they huddle inside) imitates the protective conduct of the shepherd throughout John 10, as is indicated by the reference to 10.27ff. in 18.9. Fourthly, John 10 itself anticipates this first step towards the passion, with its recurrent stress on the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep. Thus, in diagrammatic form, the connections between John 10 and 18.1-11 look like this:



The connections between scene three (John 18.15-27) and the pastoral discourse in John 10 are more allusive than the above, and they centre on three details: (a) the courtyard of the high priest's house, which is described in John 18.15 with the same word which is

used for the sheepfold in John 10.1, αὐλή; (b) the θυρωρός at the entrance of Annas' courtyard, which recalls the θυρωρός at the entrance of the sheepfold in 10.3 (which may explain why John 10 has this otherwise unnecessary detail); (c) the anonymous disciple goes in and out of the αὐλή in 18.15–16, just as the shepherd in 10.2–3 goes in and then out of the fold. The implication of these narrative echo effects is that the anonymous disciple functions as the shepherd of the symbolic word-picture in 10.1–5, whilst Peter functions as the hired hand who flees in the hour of danger (though Peter's flight is a metaphorical flight from confession, not a literal desertion). Peter is not yet a shepherd like his Master, willing to lay down his life for the sheep. That honour will be given to him later (John 21.15–19). Diagrammatically, these connections or narrative echo effects can be drawn up as follows:



Conclusion

C. H. Dodd once wrote of John's story that 'the links which connect one episode with another are extremely subtle. It is rather like a musical fugue. A theme is announced, and developed up to a point; then a second theme is introduced and interwoven with the first, then perhaps a third, with fresh interweaving, until an intricate pattern is evolved' (1950, p.41). This is what we have discovered in our narrative reading of John 18.1–27. Through a holistic analysis of the gospel, we have discovered patterns of recurrence in 18.1–27 which derive from a much earlier part of the gospel, John 10. John 10 is certainly not the only source of some of the imagery and diction of 18.1–27 (the end of John 13 forms an obvious background to the theme of discipleship, betrayal and denial in John 18), but it is perhaps the most interesting quarry for an understanding of John 18.1–27 as narrative Christology. Looking at John 18.1–27 as *narrative* has led us to penetrate some of the rich poignancy of the

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Jesus-as-shepherd image, and some of the severe irony of the Peter-as-hireling image – qualities which are overlooked in methods exclusively concerned with diachronic matters. Narrative criticism encourages the reader to provide those missing links which bring schemata together into an intelligible whole.

The trial of the king. John 18.28–19.16a

Narrative summary

Act two of the Johannine passion narrative comprises the story of Jesus' trial before Pilate. After the third denial of Peter, Jesus is led from Caiaphas' house to the palace of the Roman governor. Because the Jews want to eat the passover, they remain outside Pilate's residence. This forces Pilate into a situation where he has to come outside to the Jews if he wishes to question them, and to go inside to Jesus if he wishes to question him. Pilate begins his hearing by trying to ascertain the charges brought against Jesus. The Jews will not specify a charge, nor will they back down. So Pilate has to ask Jesus whether he is the King of the Jews. Jesus replies that he is a king, but not the sort of king either Pilate or the Jews have understood. Pilate, frustrated, goes back to the Jews and asks whether they want Jesus released. The Jews cry for Barabbas instead. Pilate then has Jesus flogged. His soldiers humiliate Jesus. Pilate brings Jesus out to the Jews again, but the chief priests and officials demand crucifixion. Pilate again pleads Jesus' innocence. The Jews, however, claim that Jesus has called himself God as well as king, thereby setting himself up against Caesar. The Jews eventually get their way with the statement, 'We have no King but Caesar.'

Narrative structure

R. H. Strachan was one of the first scholars to recognize the architectural subtlety of the narrative structure in this section. He pointed out that 'the trial is presented dramatically in a series of scenes, which are laid out alternately outside and inside the praetorium' (1941, p. 315). In scene one (18.28–32), Pilate meets the prisoner and his accusers outside the praetorium. In scene two (18.33–38a), Pilate conducts his first interview with Jesus inside the palace. He asks Jesus whether he is the King of the Jews. In scene three (18.38b–40), Pilate goes outside again to the Jews, who demand Barabbas instead