

**JESUS' SEA - CROSSING ACCOUNT AS AN INTERPRETATIVE
'BRIDGE' WITHIN JOHN 6**

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Introduction

Unlike the three Synoptic Gospels, John selects a particular cluster of traditions depicting Jesus' activities in order to point the reader to the Gospel's main purpose, that is, to reveal Jesus as the Word incarnate and 'the Messiah and Son of God' who offers eternal life to those who believe in him (see especially Jn 1; 3:1-17; 8:12; 10:10; 14:6; 20:31).

The account in John 6 is a significant example of how this motif functions in the author's presentation of Jesus' life and ministry. His account on the feeding miracle, which is one of Jesus' public miracles narrated in all four of the canonical Gospels, does appear to include more detailed elements in its presentation of the episode than the other Gospels (see Jn 6:1-15; cf. Matt. 14:13-21; Mk 6:31-44; Lk. 9:11-17). However, the sea-crossing account in John 6:16-21 is a typical example of how the Fourth Evangelist selects only those elements in his source material that are relevant to the presentation of his own christological agenda, thereby pointing readers to the message that Jesus is much more than the prophet perceived by the crowds (Jn 6:14). His divine identity is made manifest as he walks on the sea, which evokes various traditions recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures (see especially Ex. 14:21; Job 9:8; Ps. 77:20; Hab. 3:15). It is also reminiscent of numerous Greek and Roman traditions, where the act of walking on water signals divine authority and power over the sea/nature.¹

Notwithstanding, John's version of the sea-crossing miracle seems to have been overlooked by many New Testament scholars and regarded as largely irrelevant to the Johannine context of signposting Jesus as the embodiment of God's revelation. Many Johannine scholars conclude in this respect that the sea-crossing miracle is just a 'traditional requirement';² that is to say, the only reason for the insertion of this account in John 6 is that it was already attached to the feeding miracle in John's source material, and that he has not really made anything of it.³

This dissertation will investigate John's use of sources in his portrayal of Jesus crossing the sea and of its significance within John 6 by critically analysing both the intertextual resonances attested in John 6:16-21 and the multidimensional traces of Scripture within the chapter in its entirety. I will argue that Jesus' sea-crossing account is not just a 'traditional

¹ C.H. Williams, 'Intertextual Perspectives on John's Sea-Crossing Account (6:16-21)', in Jörg Frey and Craig R. Koester (eds), *Signs and Discourses in John 5 and 6: Historical, Literary and Theological Readings from the Colloquium Ioanneum 2019 in Eisenach*, WUNT 463; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, p.184.

² R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (I - XII)*, Anchor Bible 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 252.

³ A scholarly state of affairs noted by Williams, 'Intertextual Perspectives on John's Sea-Crossing Account (6:16-21)', p.176.

requirement' drawn from source material, but a case of John carefully including it to form a decisive christological bridge between the feeding miracle (6:1-15) and the 'bread of life' discourse (6:22-59). The purpose of this bridge-like function of John 6:16-21 is to establish the claim that Jesus is not only a prophet (6:14) or a political leader or king (6:15); rather, he is the son of God, the embodiment of God's revelation and giver of eternal life (6:67-68). Thereby, by clarifying or correcting the crowd's misconception of who Jesus is (6:14-15) and presenting him as the divine revealer, John's aim - unlike the other three Gospels - is to align this episode directly with the christological and soteriological aims of his gospel narrative.

Chapter 1: The Feeding Miracle (John 6:1-15)

1.1 The Gathering of the Multitude

Jesus, according to John's Gospel, performs many miracles, but the author carefully selects a few that he calls 'signs' that point to Jesus' identity as the Son of God and Logos incarnate who brings life to mankind and re-establishes the relationship between God the Father and humanity (see especially Jn 20:30-31; cf. 1:12; 3:16). Healing miracles are dominant in the Johannine selection of miraculous signs performed by Jesus. This could be due to a number of reasons. As noted by Craig Koester, 'while God in Jesus shows himself through the splendour of miracles, it is through healing that God is most clearly seen as truly incarnate', as healing re-establishes one's worth and relationships.⁴ Thus, the two healing miracles prior to John 6 (4:43-54; 5:1-47) are meant to represent a defining moment. Yet, the people do not recognise the essence of the signs. Consequently, the feeding miracle appears to have been set up to drive the agenda of revealing the true identity of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

John therefore begins the sixth chapter of his gospel narrative with the phrase, 'after these things' (6:1), linking it to the events described in the previous chapter, where Jesus is said to have healed an official's son (4:46-54) and then, the man by the pool of Bethesda (5:5-8). Impressed by these miraculous signs, the crowd follows Jesus in the hope that more miracles will be performed (6:2). This becomes the catalyst for the feeding miracle (6:1-15), whereby Jesus multiplies five loaves of bread and two fish to satisfy the hunger of the large crowd of people (five thousand at least). In 6:4, the author makes a special mention of the fact that 'the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near'. John may have highlighted the Passover for several reasons. Firstly, the Passover festival usually attracted many Jews from far afield and potentially could have contributed to the presence of the large crowd. Secondly, the Passover appears to offer the conceptual background of Jesus' teaching on the Bread of Life later in the chapter;⁵ and thirdly, it is a historic event in the lives of the ancient Israelites that has a

⁴ C.R. Koester, *Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of John: A Christological Spectrum* (London, UK; New York: T&T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2019), p. 9.; see especially C. H. Williams, 'Jesus the Prophet: Crossing the Boundaries of Prophetic Beliefs and Expectations in the Gospel of John', in C.R. Koester (ed.), *Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of John: a Christological Spectrum* (London/ New York: T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 2019), p.93.

⁵ Elmer Towns, *The Gospel of John: Believe and Live* (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series (Chattanooga, TN.: AMG Publishers, 2002), p.58.

spiritual connotation in the present. These elements will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

1.2 Feeding the Five Thousand: The Johannine Interpretation of the Miracle

As mentioned before, the feeding miracle is one of the seven miracles that John describes as ‘signs’; they have been carefully selected to point to Jesus’ true identity and significance (20:30-21). However, the likes of Alan Richardson believes that the feeding episode must be perceived as a ‘sacramental meal’.⁶ Although the sacramental element cannot be excluded, Richardson’s view appears to create the impression that no supernatural multiplication took place. Rather, as with the Lord’s Supper, small pieces of the bread were distributed out to the crowd. Leon Morris and others who view the feeding event as a miracle, argue that readers of the text should not ‘rely on presupposition and overlook what the writers actually say’.⁷ They establish that, embedded within the imagery of the feeding event, are symbols or ‘signifiers’ of the signs as ‘spiritual truth’,⁸ and this spiritual truth is the revelation that point to Jesus as the Son of God.

The distinctive message of the Johannine telling of the account, as compared with its Synoptic counterparts, is revealed by the way in which John portrays Jesus’ action over the bread. The use of the term εὐχαριστήσας (‘to give thanks’) provides an impression of Jesus’ foreknowledge of the event and of its outcome. The fact that Jesus gave thanks before distributing the bread connotes the idea that he knew the outcome even before he gave out the bread. This is a divine attribute that is also attested in Isaiah 46:10, where God is able to declare ‘the outcome from the beginning’ to fulfil his purpose and intentions. On the other hand, the other Gospels’ use of εὐλόγησεν (‘he blessed’; see Jn 6:11, 23, Lk. 9:16, Mk 6:41, Matt. 14:19) offers quite a different perspective in the sense that, here, the wording is reminiscent of the Last Supper setting, where Jesus ‘took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them’ (Mk 14:22).

Subsequently, readers are led directly into an arena that not only takes place at Passover (one of the greatest events in relation to Moses and the exodus tradition), but also into a scenario

⁶ A. Richardson, *The Miracle-Stories of Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1956), p. 56.

⁷ L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 33.

⁸ Ibid. p. 33.

that reverberates with the Passover event. The Passover setting (6:4) in John's account is a unique detail which recalls the time when God set free the Israelites from slavery (cf. Ex. 12:1-28; Deut. 16:1-8). The fact that the Johannine account specifically and exclusively includes Passover evocations is a likely indication to reveal some truth. It appears to set the scene to reveal Jesus, the Logos incarnate, as the one who can offer deliverance to his people. To unravel this truth further, there is a need to look at what the Passover Feast or tradition entails as celebrated in the first century CE, although, it worth mentioning that some aspects of the Passover rituals have changed over time, according to scholars.⁹ During the first Passover event, God instructs each Jewish household to kill a lamb and to mark the doorposts of their homes with lamb's blood so that the angel of death will recognize and 'pass over', and not kill their sons when he strikes the Egyptians (see Ex. 12:13, 23). The lamb and its blood become a symbol of deliverance for the Israelites. After setting them free from the Egyptians, God instructs the Israelites to remember this event as Passover (Pascha) in all generations. To do this the Hebrews are instructed to kill and eat an unblemished male lamb without breaking its bones (Ex. 12) together with unleavened bread (Deut. 16:3-4).¹⁰ Although there are other elements involved in the Feast (see Ex. 12-13; Lev. 23:4-8; Deut. 16:1-8; 2 Chr. 30; 2 Chr. 35:1-19), the element of the bread is significantly represented in the Johannine account of the feeding miracle and even more pronounced in the bread of life discourse later in the chapter (6:25-51).

The insertion of the reference to Passover in the feeding miracle (6:4) is again a distinctively Johannine motif designed to offer the reader a hint of the bread of life discourse and the fact that Jesus becomes the sacrificial or the Passover lamb (cf. Ex. 12:21) – signalling Jesus' death, an ultimate sacrifice for the redemption of humanity. By this John reveals his soteriological agenda to his readers (see Jn 2:13; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39; 19:4; cf. 1:29). The Passover reference also connotes the gift of manna during the first exodus and thus, commemorates both the provision and deliverance of God.

According to Mark's account, Jesus and his disciples intend to withdraw from the crowd for privacy and to take some rest following much activity (Mk 6:30-32). Therefore, Jesus did not

⁹ For the development of Passover tradition, see especially E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia, 1992), pp.132-138; T. Prosser, *The Development and Symbolism of Passover* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004); J.B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover: From the Earliest Times to A.D. 70* (London Etc.: Oxford University Press, 1963).

¹⁰ *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Englewood, New Jersey: St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, 2008), p. 78.

expect to receive the crowd. However, when he sees them and their state of need, he has ‘compassion’ on them and teaches them (Mk 6:33-34). John’s version, on the other hand, seems to suggest that Jesus is aware of the crowd and deliberately leads them to that spot to disclose his identity - the one about whom Moses wrote (see Deut. 18:15-19). This can be deduced from the end of John 5, where Jesus criticizes the crowd for not understanding or believing what Moses has written and the fact that he is the fulfilment of what Moses has written about (Jn 5:39-47). The feeding miracle (sign) has therefore been carefully and deliberately set up to create an opportunity for the people to understand and believe that Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophecy – the prophet in the order of Moses as written in the Jewish Scriptures. In this scene Jesus is linked to Moses as a prophet through the use of the symbol of the manna from heaven. Just as Moses provided the Israelites with manna from heaven during their journey through the wilderness (Ex. 16:15), Jesus is said to have provided the crowd with bread and fish to feed them. This miracle is seen as a fulfilment of the prophecy in the Old Testament that a prophet like Moses would come and provide for the needs of God’s people (Deut. 18:15). This will be unpacked further in the bread of life discourse later in the passage.

The evangelist is eager to portray an opportunity that will help correct the misguided loyalty of the crowd (cf. 4:19). Hence, according to John, while the crowd followed Jesus, he and his disciples ‘went up the mountain’ (6:3). He is probably described as doing so in order to teach the crowds. This is another part of the account, which is unique to John’s episode, although John does not specifically mention the teaching aspect at this time in his account. While some New Testament scholars do not detect any symbolic importance in the reference to the mountain,¹¹ according to Brown the mountain represent ‘a Christian Sinai’.¹² In other words, the image of Jesus going up to the mountain is an evocation of Moses at Mount Sinai. It epitomizes the time when Moses went up the mountain to meet with God and to receive a revelation of his commandment for the teaching of his people (Ex. 24:12-18).¹³ Just as Moses received instruction (commandment) for the people from the mountain, so Jesus teaches the people from the mountain so that they may receive the truth, namely Jesus himself. It is to be noted, as previously mentioned, that although John does not explicitly state that Jesus teaches the people at this time, we read that on the mountain ‘he sat with his

¹¹ C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 333; C.K Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* 2nd edn, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 273.

¹² R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (I – XII, Anchor Bible 29*, New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 233.

¹³ G.A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John* (Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock, 2007), p. 64.

disciples' (6:3), which is a posture that is reminiscent of the custom of Jewish rabbis. Furthermore, in other gospel accounts, Jesus usually sits down to teach (see Matt. 5.1; 13.1; 15:29; Mk 4.1; 9.35; Lk. 4.20). Corroborating this assertion is the fact that, Jesus is later said to have been teaching (Jn 6:59: διδάσκων).

For John, revealing Jesus as the fulfilment and true representation of what the Israelite ancestors experienced during the exodus is crucial. This is true in the sense that it provides an aid for the people to witness the Jewish Scriptures being fulfilled. Thus, teaching the crowd is essential in bringing them to knowledge of the truth (cf. Jn 4:25-26) – namely, that Jesus is the truth required for eternal sustenance (Jn 8:32; 14:6). That is to say that the essence of detailing the miracle (sign) is to reveal that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, who gives eternal life (Jn 20:30-31). Nevertheless, we read from the onset of the account that the crowd has been following Jesus because of the signs (6:2) and do not appear to recognize the true identity of the miracle giver (Jesus). This is the perception that John is keen to correct. Consequently, to suggest that Jesus has been teaching the crowd is not far-fetched, as it is through teaching that people are brought to knowledge of the 'truth' (Jesus is the embodiment of God), that is, as the one who is able to set them free (4:25-26; 8:32).

1.3 The Test of Faith

In verse 5, Jesus shows concern for the crowd so that they can be fed. Although John, different from Mark (6:34), does not mention at this stage that the crowd has been listening to Jesus' teaching all day, this potentially explains his concern about feeding them. More so, and as aforementioned, it remains that the crowd follow Jesus only because of the signs they have seen (6:2), not because of any belief in his true identity. Yet, Jesus performs the miracle of feeding them with a few loaves of bread and the fish (6.26). In the Johannine account Jesus' inspiration for doing so does not come from a display of compassion for the crowd as in the other gospel accounts. For John, his motivation is that 'he is a teacher, and he can teach the crowd by means of this sign'.¹⁴ It worth mentioning that, in all these accounts, the feeding miracle is not prompted by compassion. Jesus' compassion causes him to teach the people according to Mark's account (6:32), perhaps evoking Deuteronomy 8:3, that one cannot live on natural bread alone, but by the word of God that never perishes (cf. Matt. 4:4; Lk. 4:4; Isa.

¹⁴ L.Th. Witkamp, 'Some Specific Johannine Features in John 6.1-21', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 13 (1990), p.47. doi:10.1177/0142064x9001304004.

40:8). Therefore, while Jesus cares about their natural hunger and exhaustion, he is more concerned about the food for their soul. As a result, he most likely begins to teach them and set up the feeding miracle in order to encapsulate the core of his teachings and to reveal his true identity.

Unlike the other gospel accounts, John's version of the narrative depicts Jesus as taking the initiative and leading the process that brings about the miracle. According to the other gospel accounts, the disciples come to ask Jesus to send the crowd away so that they may find something to eat (see Matt. 14:15, Mk 6: 35-36, Lk. 9:12), but John's account indicates that when 'Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd coming, he asked Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' (Jn 6:5). This is another typical Johannine device that reflects the concern and love that God has for humanity, and, as a result, Jesus takes the initiative to offer a solution to the predicament that the people are facing (cf. Jn 3:16-17).

In verse 6 we learn that Jesus knows what he is going to do, yet he asks Philip where they might buy bread for the people (6:5). As noted by Lagrange, the dialogue between Jesus and Philip (6:5-7) must be read as a test of faith.¹⁵ It is reasonable that he asks Philip since he comes from the Bethsaida (see 1:44),¹⁶ a city near the location of the miracle (Lk. 9:10). Thus, logically, Philip would have a local knowledge of the area. However, the author is careful to make clear to his readers that Jesus already knows what he will do. This is not an editorial insertion to clear potential assumptions of ignorance on Jesus' part (cf. Mk 6: 37). This is a test of the disciples' knowledge and faith in him.

Jesus' question to Philip is not only about the provision of 'bread', but more about the source of it: 'where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' (6:5b). This appears to mirror the experience of Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness in Numbers 11:13, where Moses asked God, 'where am I to get meat to give to all this people'. This is another aspect of the narrative that appears to link Jesus to Moses. Moreover, the dialogue seems to be an opportunity for Jesus to teach the disciples and the crowd about divine provision and eternal satisfaction, thus gradually unveiling the gospel's christological and soteriological agenda. Clearly, John seems to be directing the reader's attention to a source beyond human ability. We see this in Philip's response: 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little' (6:7; cf. Mk 8:4; Matt. 15:3). The dialogue continues to evoke the desert

¹⁵ Marie Joseph Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1927), p.162.

¹⁶ Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, p.343.

experience during the exodus, where Moses' response to God's promise to feed the people shows a lack of faith. Moses says, 'the people I am with number six hundred thousand on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month'! Are there enough flocks and herds to slaughter for them? Are there enough fish in the sea to catch for them?' (Num.11: 21-22). Just like the exodus event, Philip looks at the facts and the impossibilities that he and the others are facing. Jesus, however, is pointing towards a divine provision (cf. Mk 9:23). For with God, there is no limitation or impossibility (cf. Matt.19:26; Mk 10:27).

It must be noted, however that in the Markan account the dialogue between Jesus and the disciples regarding the supply of food appears different. While John records that Jesus ask Philip where they might buy bread for the people (6:7), according to Mark, Jesus asks the disciples to 'give them something to eat' (6:37). Notwithstanding the seeming differences in the dialogue about the food supply, it remains that the core of the dialogues is testing the disciples' faith in the source of divine supply, and this regarding the identity of Jesus. The word John uses for testing here (πειράζων) has to do with a view to recommend Philip or 'prove' his faith and or knowledge of Jesus and not an attempt to 'tempt' Philip.¹⁷ Why is this necessary? In John 1:45, Philip tells Nathanael, 'we have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth'. By this statement, Philip appears to have a good knowledge of who Jesus is, hence Jesus' question appears to help him reflect on the degree of his knowledge of Jesus and his identity.

Furthermore, by asking Philip where they might buy bread when there is not enough money to buy the needed quantity (6:7), John appears to be drawing on Isaiah 55:1, which contains an invitation for people to buy (קָנוּ) and eat without money, thus emphasizing a divine supply. The text highlights abundant provision at no cost to the beneficiary and it represents a prophecy that points towards Christ and shows God's provision of salvation to mankind. This provision costs nothing to the people but their faith in him (Jn 3:16; 4:14; 7:37-39). John's soteriology is further expounded.

The crowd's physical hunger for food prompts varied responses from the disciples according to the gospel accounts. Some want the people to go away (see Matt. 14:15; Lk. 9:12; Mk 6:35-36). John's account appears to omit this detail, perhaps indicating that Jesus does not drive away anyone who comes to him (cf. 6:37). While others are concerned with money

¹⁷ Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, p.343.

(6:7), there are some who simply bring whatever they can find – two fishes and five loaves (Jn 6:8-9, cf. Lk. 9:13; Mk. 6:38; Matt. 14:17). Andrew, who is presented elsewhere as introducing people to Jesus (Jn 1:40-42), brings ‘a boy who has five barley loaves and two small fish’ (6:8-9). Although doubtful as to how much impact this small quantity of food will make among so many people, he seems to exercise some degree of faith in Jesus’ ability to intervene and make a difference. This may evoke memory of the time when Elisha fed 100 people with 20 loaves of barley bread and still have some left over (2 Kgs 4:42-44). As a result, additional prophetic features are evoked. Other than John, the rest of the Gospels record the fact that the people perceive Jesus as Elisha who has come back to life (Mk 8:27-28; Lk. 9:19; Matt. 16:14). In Mark’s Gospel, this perception comes after the second feeding miracle (8:1-10),¹⁸ hence the similarities, especially in the miraculous ways the people are fed in both instances by Jesus and Elisha. Although Jesus is more than the prophet (Elisha), John seems to draw on such parallel events, including knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, to signpost Jesus as divine; he alone possesses the ability to perform such miracles even on a greater scale than Elisha.

John’s choice of words to describe the meal, when compared with the other Gospels, sheds further light on the disciples’ reaction to the impossible situation they face and, for some, a doubt about the adequacy of the food at hand (6:8-9). While the Synoptic accounts use the common word for fish (ἰχθύας), the Johannine version uses the term ὀψάρια (small fishes), thereby highlighting the insignificance of the provision available to feed the crowd (Jn 6:8; cf. Mk 6:38; Lk. 9:13; Matt. 14:17).¹⁹ Moreover, stressing the fact that two hundred denarii are not enough to feed the crowd (Jn 6:7; cf. Mk 6:37) confirms their doubt. More significantly, it exposes the helpless state of the disciples according to the Markan account. However, in the Johannine version it reveals the insufficiency of the disciples. John also makes reference to the money to enhance the miracle and to portray the helpless state of the people in providing for themselves at this particular moment: ‘but enough for the Lord’s purpose’.²⁰ John is using this element to point towards the fact that humankind is incapable of finding solutions to their inner hunger, which again provides a further hint of his soteriological agenda. Moreover, by drawing from the Jewish Scriptures (see Judges 7; Ex.

¹⁸ For the significance of the elements in the feeding miracle, see Whitney Hopler, ‘The Miracle of Jesus Feeding 4,000 People’, <https://www.learnreligions.com/miracles-of-jesus-feeding-the-hungry-124510>, 08 February 2022.

¹⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), p. 167.

²⁰ *ibid*, p.167.

4), John is pointing to the fact that God has never required much from human beings to perform great miracles or to achieve his agenda.

Another detail from the Johannine version that is noteworthy is the type of bread used in the miracle. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the Johannine account distinctively identifies the loaves as barley loaves (see 6:9); they are intended as a lunch for a small boy.²¹ As small as this detail is, its significance cannot be overlooked. Barley bread was considered a simple food of very low value (see Ezek. 13:9; 1 Kings 4:28). In many places in the Jewish Scriptures, God often uses people and things of low stature to perform great wonders and for great achievement so that his glory is not shared (see Judges 6; Jer. 1:7; II Sam. 7:8-9,18). This appears to reflect some aspect of Isaiah 53, in the sense that, talking about Jesus, Isaiah says he is held in 'low esteem' (53:3), but through him God brought deliverance to the world.

1.4 The Feeding Miracle

According to John 6:10 Jesus commands the crowds to sit down. Except for Luke, the rest of the Gospels mention the fact that the people sit on grass (see Matt.14:18; Mk 6:39; Lk. 14:39). The Johannine version goes further in mentioning that 'there was a great deal of grass in the place' (6:10b). To 'make the people sit down' on the grass evokes Psalms 23. The connection between John 6:10 and Psalm 23 is that both verses make reference to grass or green pastures. In John 6:10, there was plenty of grass for the crowd to sit on, and in Psalm 23, God is described as leading his people to lie down in green pastures. This imagery is often used to represent God's provision and care for his people. Here, Jesus fulfils the role of the good Shepherd who does not let his sheep go hungry or be dispersed (Psalm 23:1-2, cf. Num. 27:17). As spiritually scattered as the people are from God, Jesus is the one sent to gather them back to a place of rest and fulfilment, hence fulfilling various scriptural prophecies (2 Chr. 18:16; Isa.13:14; 1 Kgs 22:17; cf. Matt. 10:6;15:24), Jesus plays the role of the Lord of host who provides and care for his guest (see Ps. 23:5).

Jesus then takes the bread (6:11) and gives thanks because he knows beforehand what he has planned (cf. 6:6), thus echoing Isaiah 46:10, which is understood to be a statement of God's sovereignty and omniscience. He is aware of the 'end situation from the beginning', thus, portraying a divine attribute. For Jesus to give thanks before distributing the bread indicate

²¹ L. Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1986), pp. 207-208.

his foreknowledge of the outcome. He is all-knowing; a sovereign God – he can do all things and whatever he intends to do cannot be thwarted by anyone (cf. Job 42:2). As Jesus distributes the bread to the crowd through the disciples, the miracle of multiplication happens. This is a Johannine device highlighting the fact that, in the hands of Jesus, there is always an increase (cf. 15:1-10). Thus, the miraculous multiplication of the bread reveals Jesus' divine identity – that is, his creative attribute reveals his divine nature as God in flesh. As noted by G.R. O'Day, one of the basic beliefs of Judaism is the fact that God is often perceived as a Creator and a Maker.²² The feeding miracle is compared to the process of creation, where God created the world from nothing (Gen. 1:1; 2), and in the Gospels, especially John's, which is perceived as the most 'christocentric Gospel',²³ the account appears to reveal God through the narratives of the character and deeds of Jesus (Jn 14:8-10).²⁴ That is to say that Jesus must be God to possess such attributes. As G.R. O'Day notes, 'Jesus' actions and words in the Gospels' help to reveal God: there is a fluid interchange between the work of Jesus and the work of God'.²⁵ Thus, by conceiving of the miracle of the multiplication of the bread as an act of 'creation', it can be deduced that Jesus' work is God at work in a demonstrative way. Therefore, the act of multiplying the bread can only be seen as an act of God. John uses this to highlight Jesus' divinity because it shows his power over nature and his ability to perform miraculous acts, thereby presenting Jesus as the incarnate Word of God, who shares the same nature and attributes as God the Father.

In verse 11, John's account highlights the point that the people receive as much as they needed of the loaves. This indicates abundance and limitless supply. In other words, they are filled and completely satisfied (cf. Matt. 14:20, Mk 6:42, Lk. 9:17). As Jesus later in the chapter reveals that he is the bread, the excess supply from the small quantity of bread indicates that small quantities of 'spiritual word', which is Jesus (see Jn 1) can satisfy a huge number of people.⁵ Moreover, the doubts expressed by the disciples, despite the many miracles they have seen Jesus perform, do not prevent Jesus from performing this great 'sign' intended as a revelation to the crowd. This again echoes the exodus tradition, when the people of Israel doubt God's ability to provide for them in the desert, despite having

²² G.R. O'Day, 'John 6:15-21: Jesus Walking on Water as Narrative Embodiment of Johannine Christology', in R.A. Culpepper (ed.), *Critical Readings of John 6*, Biblical Interpretation Series 22 (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997), 222-245, esp.233.

²³ Ibid, p.222.

²⁴ Paul Sevier Minear, *The God of the Gospels: a theological workbook* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p.12.

²⁵ G.R. O'Day, 'John 6:15-21: Jesus Walking on Water as Narrative Embodiment of Johannine Christology', p.224.

witnessed many miracles along the way to the promised land. Yet, God send them bread from heaven; he gives them food in abundance, and they eat to their fill (see Ps. 78:19-29). Here, John is portraying Jesus as God, which is another example to his readers of revealing Jesus as the embodiment of God,²⁶ a compassionate God who cares for his people.

Furthermore, the connection with the story of Elisha and the Widow's oil in 2 Kings 4:1-7 is striking. In that passage, Elisha helps to feed a poor widow by multiplying a small amount of oil she had, so that it filled many jars, providing for her and her sons' needs. Similarly, in the feeding miracle in John's Gospel, Jesus multiplies a small amount of food, five loaves and two fish, to feed a large crowd, providing for their physical needs in a miraculous way. Both narratives can be seen as a display of God's provision and care for his people, and the way in which Jesus is fulfilling the promise of God to care for his people as Elisha did in the past. Even more significantly, both accounts also share the theme of abundance, where a small quantity is multiplied to provide for many.

Verse 12 seems to amplify what has happened in verse 11: the crowd have not only been provided with as much as they needed, but there is also an overflow or abundance in the provision, that is, a surplus (περισσεύσαντα) in the supply. This astounding event is underscored by the fact that twelve baskets are gathered of what is left over. This is a typical Johannine theme, indicative of the fullness and abundant supply found in Jesus (cf. 1:16; 4:13-14; 6:35; 7:37-38; 10:10). As in the case of the other miracle stories, John is eager to reveal small details that enhance the miracles and to showcase the abundant life that flows from Jesus.

The pivot of the feeding miracle is in verses 12 and 13: 'When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost. So, they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets'. John highlights as many christological and soteriological elements in the *aftermath* of the feeding miracle as he does in the actual act of multiplication of the food. The Johannine account places so much emphasis on the gathering of the remaining pieces and the fact that none is to be 'lost'. This is significant in the sense that it encapsulates Jesus' mission, which is to gather humankind back to God and ensure that no one is lost (cf. 12:32, 17:12; 18:9). According to C.H. Dodd the fragments which are to be gathered indicate the

²⁶ Colin Kruse, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), p. 30.

bread that ‘abides’ and is not ‘lost’ (6.27).²⁷ Although the Synoptic accounts make reference to the remnants, the function of the reference appears to only highlight the scale of the miracle. On the other hand, the Johannine version not only uses this element to underscore the magnitude of the event, but more importantly emphasises the deeper function of this element in the miracle narrative. As noted by G. Wheaton; ‘the symbolic action mentioned in 6:12-13 must not be understood as tangential to the main idea of the miracle narrative’.²⁸ Rather, the entire narrative has been set up to highlight ‘not the miracle itself but the gathering of the excess fragment’.²⁹ Jesus’ concern for every person is revealed by his attention to the κλάσματα of the bread. He takes care of all those given to him; not even the least or the remnant can get lost (cf. 6.53-58; 8:12; 18:9). Hence, this highlights the soteriological dimension of the miracle in the Johannine account.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the twelve baskets full of the gathered remnant appears to draw attention to God’s promise to the twelve tribes of Israel, namely that he will not forget them. Just as the remnants of the bread were gathered, so is he going to gather and bring back the scattered ‘remnant of Jacob to the mighty God’ (Isa. 10:21; cf. 5:26; 11:12; 43:5-6; Jer. 23:3; 32:37; Ezek. 37:21-27; Zech. 10:8-12; Deut. 4:27-31). The twelve full baskets also bring the readers to the New Testament era, drawing attention to the twelve disciples.³⁰ As contained in Jesus tradition, the gathering of the remnant also connotes the idea that the disciples will be looking after the gathering of the believers when Jesus is glorified. This relates to Jesus’ instruction for them to gather all and cautions them to keep all safe (see 14.12; 12.24; 15.8; 20.21).³¹

Although there are areas of contrasting details among the various gospel accounts, the parallels here are striking: the need for money to buy sufficient food to feed the multitude (Mk 6:37; Jn 6:7), only five loaves of bread and two fish are available (Mt. 14:17; Mk 6:38; Lk. 9:13; Jn 6:9), five thousand men are fed (Mt. 12:21; Mk 6:44; Lk. 9:14; Jn 6:10) and twelve baskets full of leftover gathered after the crowd are fed (Mt. 12:20; Mk 6:43; Lk. 9:17; Jn 6:13). At this point, John reveals to his readers that scriptural prophecy is being fulfilled.

²⁷ C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), p. 207.

²⁸ G. Wheaton, *The Role of Jewish Feasts in John’s Gospel* (New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.104.

²⁹ W.A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), pp.93-94.

³⁰ A.E.J. Rawlinson, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: Methuen & Co., 1925), p. 89.

³¹ Witkamp, ‘Some Specific Johannine Features in John 6.1-21’, P.50.

He details and signposts every element in the account to attest to the fact that God has made the provision in order to bring salvation to humankind.

1.5 The Crowd's Response

The crowd's response to the miracle is astounding. While at the beginning of the account they follow Jesus because they see the 'signs' that he has performed by healing the sick (6:1-2), the feeding miracle brings them to a realisation of a fulfilment of scriptural prophecy (see Deut. 18:15-18). The people have certainly made a connection to the feeding miracle in the desert, which is God's promise to raise up for them a prophet like Moses from among them.³² Therefore, in John 6:14 -15 Jesus is hailed as 'the prophet' and 'king' after they have witnessed the feeding miracle. While this revelation and the declaration is not incorrect (4.19), they do not perceive Jesus as any greater than Moses, although the term, προφήτης (a divinely commissioned person) is never assigned to Moses in any of the New Testament text in the same way it was used for Jesus.³³ Hence, while the crowd are enthralled by the sign of the bread, they are not able to recognize Jesus' true identity. They fail to grasp the true significance of the sign. Instead of seeing in Jesus as the embodiment of God in all his nature and character, they see a king – a political figure, who might deliver them from their oppressors and give them what they want (bread, in this instance).³⁴ It is worth noting that the crowd's response to the miracle (Jesus as prophet and king) is only recorded in the Johannine version. This is another exclusive detail that shows John's seemingly keen attempt to highlight the episode and its subsequent impact, which is Jesus is the Word incarnate – God in the flesh.

Considering that the miracle is set during Passover, which commemorates liberation from foreign oppression, one would understand the relevance in hailing Jesus as the expected king for their own benefit – 'a military Messiah'³⁵ who might deliver them from Roman rule. Of course, as part of Jesus' mission on earth, he is to heal the sick, proclaim liberty to the captives, and release the prisoners through the teaching of the good news (see Isa. 61:1; Lk.

³² For the allusions to Moses' signs see S. Hylen, *Allusion and Meaning in John 6*, (Berlin; New York: W. De Gruyter, 2005), pp.119-156.

³³ C. H. Williams, 'Jesus the Prophet: Crossing the Boundaries of Prophetic Beliefs and Expectations in the Gospel of John', p.93.

³⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John, Christ and Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2004), pp. 453-5.

³⁵ Morris, *Reflection on the Gospel of John*, p.211.

4:18). However according to John, his main purpose is to bring life to the full (10:10) and to offer eternal life to the world (20:30-31). Hence, while liberation from the troubles of natural life is embedded in that mission, this is only a shadow of the spiritual gifts that he offers. Therefore, though a king, his kingship is not earthly but heavenly (cf. Jn 18:33-37).

Consequently, Jesus withdraws from crowds when he realises that they have a misconceived notion of the kind of king that he is (6:15). The people clearly anticipate an eschatological prophet, but they fail to see that the Messiah is the promised king who is also the prophet. According to John 1:20-21, 25, the people expect the arrival of the Messiah and the prophet, but for them they were distinguished from one another.³⁶ Hence, they miss the point of the ‘sign’. As Morris puts it, ‘The tragedy of these Galileans was that they tried to make Jesus into their kind of king. They did not get what they wanted, and, in the process, they lost the kind of king Jesus really is’.³⁷ So, Jesus goes up from them to the mountain perhaps to pray; that is, to a location that signifies a place above and the presence of God (see Matt. 17:1-2; Mk 9:1-5; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; cf. Ps. 121:1-2; Ex.19). The mountain appears to imply that he does not belong to the plains (earthly – below) but high above (heaven; see Jn 8:23). This withdrawal from the people because of their misconception of his identity is consistent with other parts of the narrative. The text makes it clear that Jesus knows what is in their heart; they have not fully grasped the true revelation of the fact that Jesus is not just a prophet or someone with divine power to do miracles, but the Word incarnate – the Son of God.

In the first-century Jewish context, food was a sign of blessing (cf. Eccles. 8:15a; Ps. 132:15; Neh. 8:10; Ezek. 44:3; Ex. 24:11). Basically, at the core of the miracle, Jesus has miraculously provided food for the multitude to meet the needs of the people – a sign of divine power attributed to God as Lord of rain and yield.³⁸ Although, in Johannine account, Jesus did not perform the miracle ‘out of compassion for the need of the people, but in order to reveal Jesus’ glory’ (cf. 2:11; 9:3; 11:4),³⁹ one needs to exercise caution since the ‘glory of Jesus is ‘the theophany of God’s love’⁴⁰ – his love and compassion cannot be separated from the reasons for meeting the needs of humanity. Hence, his concern for the multitude leads

³⁶ Williams, ‘Jesus the Prophet: Crossing the Boundaries of Prophetic Beliefs and Expectations in the Gospel of John’, p.93.

³⁷ Ibid, p.212.

³⁸ For God being the Lord of rains and yield, see Ex. 9:33; Deut. 11:17, 28:12, 1 Kgs. 17:1; Jer. 5:24; Hos. 10:12; Zech. 10:1; Mt. 5:34.

³⁹ Witkamp, ‘Some Specific Johannine Features in John 6:1-21’, p.57.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.57.

him to provide for their need at the time. Therefore, while the crowd appears to have followed Jesus because of the miracles they have witnessed or experienced, the Johannine account seems to suggest that Jesus leads them there to reveal to them the truth – the identity of Jesus as the embodiment of God (cf. Jn 14:6, Ps. 103:7). In John 4:48, Jesus says, ‘Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe’. For John, the important element in relation to the miracle is not the ‘element of wonder’.⁴¹ The miracles are ‘signs’ designed to bring people to believe that Jesus is the Word incarnate and ‘the Messiah – Son of God’ who offers eternal life to those who believe in him’ (20:30-31).

However, as the people fail to grasp Jesus’ true identity, John takes his readers to the sea-crossing account (6:16-21) and the bread of life discourse (6:22-70) in order to clear any misconception and to leave no doubt in his readers mind of his christological agenda, which is to present Jesus as the Logos incarnate. Hence, in the next two chapters of the study we will examine how the sea-crossing account and the bread of life discourse shed significant light on the intended significance of the feeding episode to bring about an occasion of divine manifestation.

⁴¹ Morris, *Reflection on the Gospel of John*, p.205.

Chapter 2: The Sea Crossing Account (6:16-21)

When the scene moves in John 6 from the Feeding episode to the Sea Crossing, the resonances of Passover linger on. It also becomes even more apparent that John presents the two miracles as occasions for Jesus to be presented as the visible revelation of God in the flesh. While there is an explicit reference to the Passover setting of the feeding miracle in the Markan account, the Johannine sea-crossing episode seems less direct in echoing the (first) exodus tradition. As argued by Catrin Williams, ‘the evocations of exodus motifs which bind together Mark’s feeding and sea-walking miracles are much less pronounced in John’s sea-crossing account’.⁴² There is an absence of direct scriptural references that link John’s sea-crossing account to the exodus tradition, although traces of ‘possible evocations’ of the strong wind (cf. Ex. 14:21), the Israelites’ fear (14:10, 31) and the divine declaration ἐγώ εἰμι κύριος (14:4, 18 LXX) cannot be ignored.⁴³ On the other hand, Susan Hylen argues that the similarity between the order of events in the stories represents a contained allusion to the exodus motif.⁴⁴ In other words, while the Johannine account – like its Markan counterpart – does lack direct quotations from the Jewish Scriptures, the multi-layered evocation and application of Scriptures from Israel’s past is evident in many other ways (as is also the case in the Markan account). This chapter, therefore, seeks to explore those scriptural inferences within the Johannine text and earlier Jesus tradition used by the writer in order to achieve his aim – that is, presenting Jesus as the Word and presence of God. In what follows I will explore scriptural references that heighten Jesus’ act of walking on the sea as a divine act as well as his theophanic revelation, his I AM pronouncement, that allude to his divinity.

2.1 The Disciples’ Departure

In the Johannine version of the narrative, the story is told from the disciples’ point of view as they embark voluntarily on the sea-crossing journey to Capernaum (6:16). This seems to follow on from the end of the feeding episode, when Jesus realises the people’s intention to make him king by force and thus ‘he withdrew again to the mountain by himself’ (6:15). Left on their own with the crowd, the disciples embark on the journey to Capernaum for reasons which are not made clear. However, the Markan version portrays a different picture: Jesus orders (ἀναγκάζω) the disciples to embark on the sea-crossing journey ahead of him to

⁴² C.H. Williams, ‘Intertextual Perspectives on John’s Sea-Crossing Account (6:16-21)’, p.182.

⁴³ Ibid, p.183.

⁴⁴ S. Hylen, *Allusion and Meaning in John 6*, p.131.

Bethsaida while he dismisses the crowd (6:45 - 46; cf. Matt. 14:22).⁴⁵ Mark appears to suggest that when Jesus realises the state of mind of the crowd, 'he went up on the mountain to pray' (6:46). However, before doing so he compels his disciples to go to the other side of the lake in order to perhaps avoid being influenced by the crowd's misguided perception of his identity.⁴⁶

2.2 The Scene on the Sea

In verse 17-18, just like the other Gospel accounts, the Johannine version states that the disciples got into a boat in the evening and made their way on the sea to the other side but that they were met with a great wind (see Matt. 14:22-24; Mk 6:45-48). However, the Johannine account adds a small detail that is not mentioned in any of the other accounts: John highlights the fact that there was darkness and Jesus was not yet with them (6:17). As remarked by Witkamp, the emphasis on the presences of darkness (σκοτία) while Jesus was not with them in the Johannine account 'bears overtones with regard to Jesus' absence and return'.⁴⁷ This is highlighted by Jesus' own words in 8:12: 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'. John declares that Jesus is the φως (light) of the world and that, in the absence of the light, darkness takes its place. This appears to contain soteriological and eschatological elements: Jesus, who brings light to humankind (and salvation from darkness), will also be the light bringing life in the present time and at the end of time, when darkness (evil) is overcome.

Traces of Genesis 1:1-3 in connection with verses 17 and 18 can also be detected: 'darkness covered the face of the deep, while wind from God swept over the face of the waters'. Nevertheless, God calls forth light and overcomes the darkness (cf. Jn 1:4-5). The common elements - wind, darkness, and light - in the Genesis account are employed to fulfil a similar function in John's sea-crossing account. John appears to be hinting at his earlier message, which also happens to be one of his central claims in the writing of the Gospel: Jesus is the light of the world and being without him is comparable to being in darkness.

⁴⁵ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), p. 170.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p.170.

⁴⁷ L. Th. Witkamp, (1990). Some Specific Johannine Features in John 6.1-21. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 13, p.53 doi:10.1177/0142064x9001304004.

In verse 18, John's account tells the effect of the wind and the consequent reaction of the disciples differently from its Synoptic parallels (see Mk. 6:48; Matt. 14:24). The Markan version expresses the fact that, when Jesus 'saw that they [the disciples] were straining' on the sea 'against an adverse wind, he came toward them' (Mk. 6:48; cf. Matt. 14:24-25). This portrays more of a rescue mission. However, the Johannine counterpart appears to imply that the impact of the strong wind stirring up the sea only impedes the progress of the journey rather than posing a danger to the disciples' lives. The Johannine account draws attention to a different aspect that seems to line up with his christological agenda. For John, the pivotal moment of the narrative is certainly 'Jesus's epiphanic appearance to the disciples'.⁴⁸ We see this in the way that John omits the seemingly life-threatening situation of the stormy condition, as told by the other Gospels, and goes straight to highlight the fact that 'when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified' (6:19).

Interestingly, the Markan account mentions that Jesus walked towards the boat when he 'saw that they were straining' on the sea (6:48); he also mentions that Jesus 'intended to pass them by' (Mk 8:48b), which seems odd. The Markan notion that Jesus was about to pass by them portrays an image of Jesus walking in front of the disciples in the boat. Coupled with the Johannine portrayal of the disciples' arrival and the fact that Jesus did not climb into the boat (6:21) appears to be an enactment of God making 'a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters' (Isa. 43:16 LXX). This is seen as God's personal presence with his people and as assurance to them of his deliverance from every circumstance: 'And if you should pass through the water, I am with you' (Isa. 43:2 LXX). D. F. Hill suggests that the actual statement, καὶ ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς, should be interpreted as, 'he wanted to walk beside them' (Lk. 6:48b).⁴⁹ This would imply that Jesus walks parallel to the disciples and not in front of them. Therefore, the idea of leading his people is lost in this interpretation.

Notwithstanding, the common factor is Jesus' presence with his people. This fulfils God's promise to never forsake his people (see 1 Kgs 6:13; 1 Sam. 12:22; Lev. 26:11; Deut. 31:6b). The Johannine version seems to have omitted this aspect of Jesus' encounter with the disciples during the sea-walking event. If the source materials are the same, as some scholars suggest, then John might have done this in order to arrive at the most important point in the

⁴⁸ Williams, 'Intertextual Perspectives on John's Sea-Crossing Account' (6:16-21), p.189.

⁴⁹ D. F. Hill, 'The Walking on the Water: A Geographic or Linguistic Answer?' ExpTim 99 (1988), 268-69, 12th November 2022.

narrative from a Johannine perspective, namely, the sudden arrival of the disciple at the shore. John appears eager to establish the ‘spiritual truth’,⁵⁰ that is Jesus is able to deliver his people from the threat to life, which is death (cf. 3:17) and to reveal his true identity, namely the Logos incarnate.

This appears to suggest that, even in the Markan version, Jesus’ intention in walking towards the boat is not necessarily to rescue, but perhaps to reveal his divine identity. Therefore, the Johannine account seems to expound on Mark’s source material⁵¹ and reveals this hidden but most crucial element of the episode: Jesus walks on the sea and appears to his disciples. This also applies to Graeco-Roman traditions, where the act of walking on water, whether literally or figuratively, implies ‘divine authority and power over the sea’.⁵²

We also see this in Jewish scriptural texts, and John appears to evoke several scriptural traditions pointing to the presence of deity who walks on and controls the sea. According to Jewish tradition, God is able to walk on water, as his sovereignty and might as creator allows him power and authority over the forces of nature.⁵³ For instance, according to Job 9:8 LXX, God is described as the one who ‘stretched out the sky’ and walks on the sea as on dry ground (cf. Hab. 3:15; Ps. 29:3; 65:7; 89:9–10; 93:4; Job 38:16). Therefore, for Jesus to walk on the water connotes the presence of one who has authority over nature. The text in Job 9, as with Jesus walking on the water, is closely linked to the exodus tradition.⁵⁴ It reflects God’s ability to make ‘paths’ in the sea and lead his people through to a safe ground (see Ps 77:16, 19–20 [76:17, 20–21 LXX]). This echoes Exodus 14–15 where God’s authority over the sea is directly associated with his act of empowering the Israelites and securing for them a safe passage across the Red Sea. Thus, in relation to the exodus tradition, as we proceed to argue, ‘Jesus’ role in the sea crossing is parallel to God’s role in Exodus, not Moses,⁵⁵ thus, correcting the crowd’s remarks in the feeding episode (see 6:14b). In other words, Moses was just an ‘instrument’ whom God operates through. God’s invisible power operated through

⁵⁰ L. Witkamp, *Some Specific Johannine Features in John 6.1–21*, p.46.

⁵¹ Bernard, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the gospel according to St. John, xcvi – xcvi. Correct your formatting here*

⁵² Williams, ‘Intertextual Perspectives on John’s Sea-Crossing Account’ (6:16–21)’ p.184.

⁵³ J.P. Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Functions of Matt. 14:22–33, Mark 6:45–52, and John 6:15b–21* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), pp.38–59.

⁵⁴ D.A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: the Interplay of Form and Meaning* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994), p.140; B. Gärtner, *John 6 and the Jewish Passover* (Lund: Gleerup, 1959), p.17.

⁵⁵ S. Hylan, *Allusion and meaning in John 6*, p. 133.

Moses to enable them to cross the sea, as he took instructions from God. We see this in many ways. For instance, in Ps 77:19–20 God is depicted as leading the Israelites through the sea, yet his footprints were hidden. This implies that God walked among them in the waters and led them across the sea, albeit with the use of Moses and Aaron as human leaders and guides.

Moreover, the initial part of Jesus' pronouncement, ἐγώ εἰμι (6:20), in response to the disciples' fear when they see him walking on the sea, is a possible evocation of Exodus 14:4, 18 - ἐγώ εἰμι κύριος (cf. 3:14) – which functions as a divine declaration that expresses his ability to save. More so, as a sign of one with absolute control and authority over every situation, Jesus assures his disciples not to be afraid (6:20). This reflects a remark made by God many times in the Jewish Scriptures to his people to assure them of his divine presence and authority (see Ex. 14:13, Deut. 3:22; Jos. 1:9; Isa. 35:4). Particularly in Isaiah 41:13-14, the emphasis on God's absolute authority is striking. He says, 'I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand (a symbol of leading to victory); it is I who say to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you'. The emphasis on the phrase, 'do not fear' indicates the notion of complete authority over the situation, but more importantly of having full knowledge of the expected outcome. There is hence a link between Jesus' response to the disciples' fear and his divine authority as one who has power to control the situation and save his people. Furthermore, Jesus' self-declaration by the I AM (ἐγώ εἰμι) statement is indicative of his continuous presence, irrespective of time or distance. This echoes some Jewish Scriptures, where God assures his people of his continuous presence with them (Deut. 31:6,8; Isa. 41:10. Even more significant is the fact that the expression ἐγώ εἰμι also means 'continuous being, irrespective of all times'.⁵⁶ This means that he is and has always been there.

It is also striking that the disciples see Jesus in the middle of darkness (6:19). This is a miracle in its own right. Was Jesus glowing in the darkness? Is this why they could see him? This appears to be an epiphanic illumination of Jesus for the disciples. John is perhaps drawing his readers attention back to Exodus 13:20-22, which describe how God went with the Israelites in a pillar of fire as a sign of divine guidance and a way of providing a light for his people in the night. This also appears to be John's way of reiterating the fact that Jesus is the light of the world (8:12) and, more crucially, that darkness cannot overcome (1:5).

⁵⁶ Robin Griffith-Jones, 'Apocalyptic Mystagogy: Rebirth-From-Above in the Reception of John's Gospel', in Catrin H. Williams and Christopher Rowland (eds), *John's Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing plc, 2013), p.286.

While the Johannine version reports that the disciples see Jesus straight away, albeit in the darkness, its Synoptic counterparts, particularly Mark, appear to indicate that when the disciples saw him walking on the water, ‘they thought it was a ghost’ (Mk 6:49), hence their fear. On the other hand, the Johannine parallel regarding the disciples’ expression of fear when they see Jesus walking on the water seems to suggest a fearful awe and amazement of what they see. They marvel or are awestruck by the presence of the divine. We see a similar scene in Exodus 3:6, when God appears to Moses in the burning bush, ‘he hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God’. This certainly suggests that the disciples at this time have come to the realisation that Jesus, who they recognise from a distance in the darkness, is divine. He is the embodiment of God’s revelation. The light around him is powerful enough to reveal his identity to the disciples.

The Johannine evocation of Isaianic texts is particularly compelling in this passage. For instance, the author’s portrayal of Jesus being with the disciples on the sea echoes Isaiah 43:1-2, where God assures his people, Israel, not to be afraid because he will be with them when they pass through the waters and that the ‘rivers shall not overwhelm’ them. The darkness and the epiphanic illumination, is reminiscent of Isaiah 9:2, in that “a great light” has appeared to them in the darkness (cf. Matt. 4:16). This is symbolic of salvation. The imagery of light and darkness in connection with blindness and salvation (God providing light) are prominent features in the prophecies of Isaiah (see Isa.42:6-7; 49:9; 58:10; 60:1-3).

Evocations of Isaiah in the Johannine sea-crossing account continues in a more profound way when possible echoes of Isaiah 43 are considered. According to this passage, God utters his divine name, ἐγώ εἰμι (I AM) on two occasions in the same passage (43:10, 13 LXX) and twice utters the expression μὴ φοβοῦ, ‘do not be afraid’ (43:1, 5), a statement that exhibits God’s absolute authority over every situation.⁵⁷ This is directly parallel to John 6:20, where exactly the same phrases (ἐγώ εἰμι and μὴ φοβοῦ) have been used to demonstrate Jesus’ supremacy and authority over nature and every circumstance.⁵⁸

2.3 The Arrival of the Disciples at their Intended Destination

The resonances of Isaiah in the Johannine sea-crossing narrative are even more pronounced in the final part of the episode. These resonances give deeper meaning to and encapsulate the

⁵⁷ P. J. Madden, *Jesus’ Walking on the Sea: An Investigation of the Origin of the Narrative Account*, p.8.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.8.

essence of the account. The dramatic landing of the boat reveals further aspects of Johannine christology and soteriology. John writes that, as Jesus approached the disciples, ‘they willingly received him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going’ (6:21 NKJV). However, many other translations propose that ‘they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going’ (6:21 NRSV). Notwithstanding the difference in various translations as to whether Jesus got into the boat or not, the main message conveyed by John to his readers is that both the willingness of the disciples to receive Jesus and his presence resulted in the sudden and immediate arrival of the boat from the middle of the sea, where they first encountered Jesus.

The sudden arrival of the boat again appears to allude to a prophecy by Isaiah, whereby the Lord assures his people of his presence with them, making their paths straight and smooth and leads the way to a safe ground (see Isa. 45:2; 41:10; cf. Deut. 31:8). Here, Jesus becomes ‘the way of the Lord’, as earlier emphasized by John the Baptist (see Jn 1:23; cf. Isa. 40:3). Jesus says, ‘I am the way’ (14:6) – the way to the Father – leading those who believe in him to their intended destination, and from the darkness and perils of the world.

Therefore, according to the Johannine version, it appears that the disciples’ eagerness to receive Jesus - as a result of their recognition of his identity - results in their immediate arrival at their intended destination. This reflects John’s christological and soteriological agenda, as noted by Williams: the immediate and safe arrival, as a result of the disciples’ willingness to receive Jesus, his presence and his self-revelation support the fact that the ‘sea-crossing narrative is designed by the evangelist to anticipate one of the primary functions of the “absolute” ἐγώ εἰμι in later parts of the narrative, namely as a succinct expression of Jesus’s identity as the one who offers the Father’s gift of eternal life to those who believe in him (cf. 8:24, 28; 18:8–9)’.⁵⁹ Unlike the Markan version, John does not mention a life-threatening danger. Notwithstanding, windy conditions in darkness have the potential to cause havoc. However, the presence of Jesus and their willingness to receive him prevent the likelihood of them perishing at sea. This is a typical Johannine element to highlight the fact that those who receive him do not perish (3:16) but are offered life in all its fullness (10:10).

Mark’s sea-crossing episode appears to evoke Psalm 107:28–30, which describes the life-threatening situation of sailors on the seas, whereby God ‘made the storm still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to

⁵⁹ Williams, ‘Intertextual Perspectives on John’s Sea-Crossing Account (6:16-21)’, p.194.

their desired haven'. Even though the Markan version mentions the eventual arrival of the boat at its destination (see 6:53; cf. Matt.14:34), its focus is on the calming of the wind after Jesus joins the disciples in the boat (6:51). Mark therefore highlights the amazement of the disciples as they witness the calming of the wind, which is the consequence of Jesus' walking on the water as well as his presence in the boat. According to Mark, the disciples are astonished by the response of the wind to Jesus' presence because they 'had not understood about the loaves' (6:52). In many ways Mark is implying that if the disciples had understood the essence of the feeding miracle, they would have realised that they were in the presence of a greater prophet than Elijah – one who has authority over nature; hence, the calming of the wind or their safe arrival with Jesus should have been expected. Mark appears to establish the fact that the sea-crossing is designed as an extension or elaboration of the feeding miracle, since they failed to understand what the feeding miracle was meant to achieve.

Although John does not include the comment regarding the disciples not understanding about the loaves, their astonishment can be seen in their willingness to receive Jesus. When he makes the self-declaration (ἐγώ εἰμι), their fears are now gone and they realise that they are with a deity, who is able to walk on the sea. Here the writer appears to elaborate on the fact that, Jesus, who performed the miracle of feeding five thousand people, is more than a prophet, as the people perceived. He is the visible embodiment of God's self-revelation.

Moreover, although Jesus' full self-revelation and knowledge of his true identity is conceivable only after his 'glorification' (Jn 14:18-20),⁶⁰ this motif of revealing himself to his disciples is already attested in John 6:16-21. That is to say that the divine expression, ἐγώ εἰμι, μη φοβεισθε, is intended only for the disciples, after Jesus removed himself 'from 'the unbelieving world' and come to his own in his own divine way'.⁶¹ That is, as the crowd fails to recognise his true identity as a result of the feeding episode, he separates himself and comes to those he has chosen (cf. 15:16) so that he may reveal to them what they failed to see earlier. The concept of coming to his own and empowering those who receive him to have a relationship with God, is seen much earlier in John's Gospel (1:11-12). In 6:67-69 (cf. Mk 8:26-29; Matt. 16:13-20), Jesus openly tests the disciples' recognition of his true identity. This is a sign of how important it is from a Johannine perspective that the disciples understand what it means to belief in Jesus as the Son of God, the Word incarnate. According to Leon Morris, Jesus refuses to meet the expectation of the crowd as earthly king, but he

⁶⁰ L. Witkamp, Some Specific Johannine Features in John 6.1-21, p.53.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.54.

demonstrates to disciples that he is the king over all creation – all creation is under his control and responds to his authority.⁶² This emphasises on how he able to walk on the water.

John's selection of those elements in his source materials, especially from the book of Isaiah, is profound. The striking similarity in the pattern of thought between Jesus' departure and his return to the disciples as described in 6:16-21, as well as the pronouncements in 14:18-21,⁶³ inform the christological, and symbolic, interpretation of the event. As noted by Witkamp, 'the majestic ἐγώ εἰμι, μη φοβεισθε is destined only for the disciples, after Jesus had separated himself from 'the unbelieving world' and come to his own in his own divine way.'⁶⁴ In other words, Jesus departs from those who do not recognise his divinity, and goes to the mountain – the locus of God's presence (see Micah 4:2) - but then returns not to the rest of the crowd, but to only his disciples (the community of believers).

It can be concluded that, although helping the disciples to reach the destination may not have been highlighted as having necessitated Jesus's self-revelation (6:20), the safe arrival implies that their ability to reach where they were meant to be is the consequence of that revelation (6:21). F. Albright and C. S. Mann put it this way, Jesus walking on the sea is a 'prophetic symbolism' in the sense that, though it is impossible to know exactly what transpired at the time regarding this event, its 'spiritual import is clear'⁶⁵ - Jesus is the Son of God who possesses the divine power to save'.⁶⁶ This explains the immediate and safe arrival of the disciples at their destination. That is to say, the sea-crossing episode appears to reveal the fact that Jesus is the 'way and the life'; he leads his people to their haven, away from danger and death, in this case the threat of stormy weather. He is the sovereign one and the light in the darkness; to receive him mean eternal life.

⁶² L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), p.348.

⁶³ 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them'.

⁶⁴ L. Th. Witkamp, *Some Specific Johannine Features in John 6.1-21*, p.54.

⁶⁵ W.F Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 26; New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 182.

⁶⁶ Madden, *Jesus' Walking on the Sea: an Investigation of the Origin of the Narrative of Jesus Walking on the Sea*, p.6.

Chapter 3: The Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:22–69)

Unaware of the sea crossing episode, the crowd makes their way to the other side in search of Jesus (6:24). Hence, ‘when they find him on the other side of the sea, they question him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’ (6:25). Some scholars remark that the people had the opportunity to know about the sea crossing if they had asked the right question, such as ‘how did you get here?’⁶⁷ Verses 24-25 appears to evoke Isaiah 55, especially verse 6: ‘seek the Lord while he may be found’. However, for what reason do they seek Jesus – the Lord? The motive of the people is embedded in their question. They seek Jesus not because they want to know him, but because they seek to receive from him, whether it is food or healing (cf. 6:2). Hence, ‘Jesus rebukes them (6:26) and urges them to be ‘more concerned with eternal life than mere food to keep them alive physically’.⁶⁸ While Jesus gives attention to their natural needs and physical sustenance (6:5), he cares more about his gift of eternal need.

3.1 Regathering of the Crowd

Unaware of the sea crossing episode, the crowd makes their way to the other side in search of Jesus (6:24). Hence, ‘when they find him on the other side of the sea, they question him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’ (6:25). Some scholars remark that the people had the opportunity to know about the sea crossing if they had asked the right question, such as ‘how did you get here?’⁶⁹ Verses 24-25 appears to evoke Isaiah 55, especially verse 6: ‘seek the Lord while he may be found’. However, for what reason do they seek Jesus – the Lord? The motive of the people is embedded in their question. They seek Jesus not because they want to know him, but because they seek to receive from him, whether it is food or healing (cf. 6:2). Hence, ‘Jesus rebukes them (6:26) and urges them to be ‘more concerned with eternal life than mere food to keep them alive physically’.⁷⁰ While Jesus gives attention to their natural needs and physical sustenance (6:5), he cares more about his gift of eternal need.

⁶⁷ L. Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 220.

⁶⁸ Elmer Towns, *The Gospel of John: Believe and Live* (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series. Chattanooga, TN.: AMG Publishers, 2002), P. 62.

⁶⁹ L. Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 220.

⁷⁰ Elmer Towns, *The Gospel of John: Believe and Live* (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series. Chattanooga, TN.: AMG Publishers, 2002), P. 62.

3.2 The Bread of Life

As a metaphor for life and sustenance, bread has been used to represent God's abundant provision for his people in the Hebrew Scripture (see Isa. 25:6; Deut. 8:9-10; Pro. 9:5; Eccl. 3:13),⁷¹ hence, the author of John's Gospel uses bread to signify that Jesus is God's provision given to the world to bring life. John does not refer to Jesus as a 'bread of life' only but also as a 'living bread' (6:51), implying Jesus' ability to give new life but also as continuously sustaining life.⁷² Therefore, verse 27 encapsulates this soteriological concept as well as the overall purpose of John 6. John highlights Jesus' reply to the audience, 'do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal' (6:27). What food gives eternal life? Jesus' comment appears to evoke Deuteronomy 8:3, in the sense that anyone who lives by bread (physical food) alone will only benefit physically for a while, but eternal sustenance is to live by 'every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord' (cf. also Matt. 4:4). Furthermore, according to Jeremiah 15:16, the word of the Lord is symbolically described as food that brings joy (life) to the heart (cf. Ps. 119:103). John 1 also mentions that Jesus is the Word of God that became flesh and gives life. Therefore, the food that gives eternal life is Jesus. It is only by receiving Jesus that one can truly be satisfied spiritually and be filled with life to the full (cf. 10:10b).

This is a clear exposition of John's theology of soteriology. In other words, Jesus is the only one who has been authenticated by God (set his seal on him) to supply this 'life-saving' food (salvation), and the people have to receive him to enjoy this satisfying life. Notwithstanding, the people do not appear to comprehend the spiritual dimension of what Jesus is communicating. Consequently, they ask, 'what must we do to perform the works of God?' (6:28). Jesus replies to them, 'this is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent' (6:29). John highlights the 'tension between the faith and works'.⁷³ He attempts to steer the people's attention away from their practice of physical human effort and practices in attaining God's provision to believing and receiving Jesus as God's provision for eternal life (cf. 1:12,18).

The meaning of the phrase 'the work of God' is still debated among scholars, particularly as to whether the phrase is about 'the work God does' to bring about salvation or 'the work that God requires'. For some scholars, the meaning of the phrase is unsettled in this context; it could denote the human commitment to place their trust in Jesus or the theological truth that it is God who bestows

⁷¹ Duane A. Garrett, *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), s.v. 'Bread, Bread of Presence,' accessed December 06, 2022, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/bread-bread-of-presence.html>. What about the standard literature on John's Gospel?

⁷² Jeremiah K. Garrett, *Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), s.v. 'Bread.'

⁷³ G.A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John* (Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock, 2007), p.65.

faith to those who would believe.⁷⁴ However, Jesus' response explicitly highlights the fact that God has done the 'work' of making provision; humanity only needs to believe in the works of God through Jesus and receive him in faith in order to receive eternal life.

The people's response, 'what must we do to perform the works of God?' (6:28), appears to connote an understanding of what Jesus is trying to communicate to them (v. 29). However, they demand a greater sign to validate Jesus' claim to be the one from God (6:30). The desire for a sign appears to be typical of crowds encountering Jesus, including in the Synoptic Gospels. For instance, in Mark 8:12, Jesus rebukes the crowd: 'Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it' (cf. Matt 16:4; Lk. 11:29). The crowd's quest for a sign authenticating Jesus' messianic and prophetic identity is significant - it goes back to Israel's past history, when God had to perform many works and signs to demonstrate his presence and power among them (Deut. 29:3; Num. 14:11; Ps. 77:14-15). The Greek word σημεῖον ('sign') takes the meaning of a mark by which a person or situation is known to be distinguished from others in ways that cannot be replicated by mere humans.⁷⁵ It is God's way of authenticating what he wants to relay or communicate to people. In John's Gospel, signs are used to highlight miracles that reveal deeper truths and which can only be conceived through faith.⁷⁶ However, in this instance the people do not seek just any sign, but they ask Jesus to replicate a sign done by Moses during their ancestors' wilderness experience (6:31).

At this point Jesus corrects them: 'it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world' (6:32-33). Jesus, in this regard, is referring to himself (cf. 3:16). He highlights the fact that the manna given in the wilderness only foreshadowed the true spiritual bread that he offers and also represents- the true bread that is able to sustain life eternally.

The connection between food (bread) and believing in Jesus, as highlighted in John 6, requires particular attention. In the first-century Palestinian Jewish context, bread was the main food and played a fundamental role in sustaining human life.⁷⁷ The people's survival was simply to work for bread (food), which was crucial for their sustenance. Thus, perhaps to curb the seemingly non-ending cycle of labouring for bread, they ask, 'Lord give us this bread always' (6:34), so that they might not have to work again for their daily bread. Their perception is earthly but 'Jesus seeks to raise them to

⁷⁴ S. Grindheim, 'The Work of God or of Human Beings: A Note on John 6:29', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59 (2016), pp. 63-4.

⁷⁵ *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Coded with Strong's Concordance Numbers*, new ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), s.v. 'Semeion.'

⁷⁶ D.A. Carson and Andrew D. Naselli, 'John' in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), p.2164.

⁷⁷ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p.127.

the spiritual realm and show them the fact that eternal life is inextricably linked with himself'.⁷⁸ Therefore, Jesus answers them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty' (6:35). Theologically, this exchange appears to mirror the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4. Jesus refers to himself as the gift of God and the giver of living water, that is, the Holy Spirit (see 3:3-6; 7:37-39), which he alone can provide to satisfy humans' true and eternal need (4: 10). In John 4 Jesus declares that those who drink from him will never be thirsty again (4:13); what he gives become an everlasting life in those who receive it (4:14). A similar phrase is used in the 'bread of life discourse' (6:35). As in the bread of life discourse (6:34), the Samaritan woman perceives things in a literal sense, hence she asks, 'sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water' (4:15), but Jesus establishes that he is the one who saves – the Messiah (4:25-26).

Jesus is not only the 'living bread', but he is also the living water. Jesus says, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty' (6:35). The word thirsty connotes the need for water, which was an essential part of the Exodus wilderness narrative. God did not only provide manna from heaven, but he also gave the Israelites water from the rock (Ps. 77:15–16; Exod. 17:3; Neh. 9:15, 20). Jesus becomes the bread and water - providing a complete and eternal satisfaction to those who receive him.

The connectivity between Jesus as the bread of life and the sea-walking episode is striking in that they both reveal Jesus as the incarnate Word of God, the Son of God, and the source of eternal life. In the Bread of Life discourse, Jesus claims to be the bread that has come down from heaven, which is a clear reference to his divine origin and nature. In the Sea-Walking episode, Jesus demonstrates his power over nature, which is a clear indication of his divinity. According to Raymond E. Brown, the Sea-Walking episode is a manifestation of Jesus' divine nature, while the Bread of Life discourse is a revelation of Jesus' role as the incarnate Word of God. He notes that, 'The sea-walking episode reveals Jesus as the incarnate Word, whose word can control the sea, while the bread-of-life discourse reveals him as the incarnate Word, whose flesh can give life'.⁷⁹

The claims of the Johannine Jesus position it apart from the other three Synoptic Gospels in terms of its exposition of the humanity and divinity of Jesus.⁸⁰ Direct claims such as, 'I am the bread of life' (6:35), 'I am the light of the world' (8:12; 9:5), 'I am the good shepherd' (10:11, 14), 'I am the resurrection and the life' (11:25), 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (14:6), 'I am the true vine

⁷⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p.362.

⁷⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII), Anchor Bible 29* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 361-362.

⁸⁰ Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Robert Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), p.1.

(15:1, 5), showcase Jesus as the source of eternal life and the one who can give salvation to humanity, which is a clear indication of his divinity. In John 8:58, when Jesus says ‘before Abraham was, I am’ he is also making a claim of his pre-existence, which is a claim of deity. Hence Jesus’ declaration (6:35) reveals his divine nature - messianic identity and his identity as the incarnate Word of God.⁸¹

Clearly, the evocation of Exodus 16, where God provides ‘manna’ or ‘bread of heaven’ to sustain Israelites on their journey through the wilderness (Ex. 16:1-7; Deut. 8:2-3) is apparent in this passage. To the Ancient Israelites, Manna was regarded as a divine gift, a sign of God’s compassion, and it foreshadows ‘God’s eschatological provision’ for his people. It was perceived by the Israelites as ‘bread from heaven’, symbol of ‘God’s word’, which nourishes and provides life to those who believe in him. The rabbinic tradition also promises an end-time manna which God would provide in the messianic age.⁸² Therefore, the crowds expectation of a ‘prophet-like-Moses’ (see Deut.18:15), who can provide them with bread of heaven is to be expected.⁸³ Since bread was theologically seen as imagery for life and sustenance in scriptural settings,⁸⁴ the author uses this metaphor, ‘bread of life’, to point to the fact that Jesus is the new spiritual bread sent by God to give eternal life to the world.⁸⁵ The way to partake of this bread is to believe in him (cf. 6:40,47), which is John’s central message (20:31).

Jesus claims to be the only lasting satisfaction for the human need for life. Nevertheless, to attain this eternal satisfaction, one must believe in him. However, just like the Samaritan woman, the people appear to have a different understanding of the concept of belief. To the crowd, ‘belief’ meant receiving Jesus on the basis of his power or unique ability as demonstrated through miracles (cf. 6:30). On the other hand, to Jesus it meant devotion to him and belief in his identity as life-giver and visible manifestation of God’s presence, independent of his miracles or what he might give them, but rather trust in his person (6:35). The miracles were signs that were meant to point people to Jesus as the Messiah and his saving power (cf. 20:31). Nonetheless, despite the many miracles and signs performed by Jesus, the people do not believe in him or his true identity (6:36; cf. 3:11, 18; 7:5; 8:45-46; 10:25; 12:37,48).⁸⁶

⁸¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, pp. 354-357.

⁸² G.A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John*, p.57; J.G. van der Watt, ‘I am the Bread of Life. Imagery in John 6:32-51,’ *Acta Theologica* 2 (2007), p.197.

⁸³ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), pp. 440-681.

⁸⁴ Duane A. Garrett, *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), s.v. ‘Bread, Bread of Presence,’ accessed October 28, 2022, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/bread-bread-of-presence.html>.

⁸⁵ Jeremiah K. Garrett, *Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), s.v. ‘Bread.’

⁸⁶ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1982), p.328.

Again, reminiscences of the Israelites' past is seen in the unbelief of the people, such as Psalm 78:32: 'in spite of his wonders, they did not believe'. They grumbled and sinned against God (Deut. 1:27). However, the unbelief of the ancient Israelites did not prevent God from making the provision for their deliverance. Psalm 106:6-8 makes the point that the ancestors sinned against God – they did not believe in the miracles of God; 'yet he saved them for his name's sake, so that he might make known his mighty power'. John appears to draw on this knowledge to expound on his soteriological and eschatological message. He postulates that God's divine purpose to save humanity is independent of mankind's reaction or contribution. He establishes that, although the people do not believe, the mystery of his divine sovereignty and God's mighty power allows him to draw people to see and believe in his Son, Jesus, in order to be saved (6:37–40, 44). John maintains that God will complete his salvation process by empowering people to come to him, and as they believe in him, they will experience eternal life now and resurrection on the last day (cf. Jn 3:16-17; 11:24-26). Again, the crowd fails see beyond their earthly knowledge of him. Thus, they could not respond with faith as apparent in their murmuring (6:41-43); another depiction of their ancestors' response towards God in their wilderness experience (see Ex. 11–17; Num. 14–17; 21:4–5; Deut. 1:27; Ps. 106:25). Just like the manna experience, the relationship of the ancient Israelites with God and their responses on the wilderness was a shadow of what was to come, the real picture, that is the relationship between humanity and Jesus.

Jesus responds to their grumbling by elaborating on the certainty and sovereignty of God in salvation in a more precise manner.⁸⁷ In 6:45 he quotes Isaiah 54:13, 'they shall all be taught by God'. According to George R. Beasley-Murray, 'the reference to Isaiah 54:13, which speaks of God's promise to teach his people, is used to support Jesus' claim to be the one through whom God teaches and guides humanity'.⁸⁸ In a way Jesus is emphasizing the sovereignty of God to teach and direct his children. In many respects, the writer alludes to the fulfilment of a prophetic text which indicates that a time is coming when God will soften the heart of the people – 'heart of flesh' - and make their heart receptive to his Word so that they will know and follow his ways (Ezek. 36:25-27; Jer. 31:33). This suggest that anyone who comes to Jesus, God's Word incarnate, would have already had a spiritual encounter with God, and have had their heart prepared to receive and abide in him. As a result, Jesus rebukes them regarding their complaints and tells them that it is only those who have 'heard and learned from the Father' that can come to him' (6:45b). In other words, it is God who initiates the process to save humanity. Nevertheless, those who come to him must believe in him to receive eternal life.

⁸⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John, Christ and Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2004), p.513.

⁸⁸ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John, Word Biblical Commentary 36*, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), p. 213.

In verses 46, Jesus claims an exclusive and authoritative knowledge and relationship with the Father (cf. 1:18). What is the essence of this claim at this point in the discourse? Firstly, Jesus' response to the crowd in verses 43-45 suggesting that they are hesitant to come to him because they have not known God nor heard his voice in the same way Jesus has (cf. 8:42-43). This is because, if they knew the voice of God, they would recognise the voice of Jesus as that of God, since Jesus and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). This appears to follow Jesus' tradition: 'my sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me' (10:27). Thus, the people could not see Jesus as the God incarnate, because they could not hear God in Jesus' voice. Secondly, Jesus is the physical reflection of the Father – the begotten Son of the Father (see 3:16); hence, one can only learn from the Father through revelation from the Son. In view of that, one cannot see the Father except in union with the Son (see 14:9-11).

In verses 48–59, John builds on the 'bread of life' metaphor, and though he appears to be repetitive, he focuses this section to clarify what Jesus means when he says he is the true bread that comes down from heaven – the 'bread of life'. He highlights the fact that, unlike the manna their ancestors ate in the wilderness after which they all died, the bread that Jesus gives 'for the life of the world' is his 'flesh' and whoever eats of this bread (Jesus) will live forever (6:49-51). The writer appears to be pointing to Jesus' sacrificial death. This is embedded in the 'flesh' and 'blood' language, highlighting that the eternal life that Jesus offers to the world is achieved through the sacrifice of his life,⁸⁹ so that people may experience its life-giving power. Again, Jesus emphasises the fact that all those who eat the bread that he gives (that is receive him as the One from heaven) will never be lost; they will enjoy eternal life in the present age and be sure to be resurrected in the end, hence explicitly laying out his soteriological and eschatological agenda intended for humanity (vss. 39, 40, 44, 47, 51). In many respects, while the first section of the discourse highlights the will of the Father in the salvation process (vs. 44-45), the second section expresses the sovereignty and the will of Jesus in executing the salvation process (cf. 10:17-18).

Jesus does not stop at the eating of his flesh in order to receive life, even after the Jewish crowd has become agitated at his words (6:52). He goes further to state they must also drink his blood in order to have life (6:53). The direct references to the language used in the Exodus wilderness experience (bread of heaven, manna, hunger, thirsty, grumbling) and citations of the Hebrew Scriptures (see Ex. 16:4-15; 16:2; 17:3; Neh. 9:19; Ps. 77:24; cf. Jn 6:31, 32, 35, 41, 43, 46) articulate the theological connection between the bread of life discourse and the Israelites wilderness experience. This is in the sense that Jesus becomes the type of the bread and the water that is able to satisfy, not only for a while

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.215.

but for eternity.⁹⁰ The verses 53-55 partly expands the verse 35, where the thirst mentioned in verse 35 is connected with the drinking of his blood in verses 53-55.

Some of Jesus' disciples, mainly Jewish had a real issue with these words (6:52,60). The Jewish crowd find the idea eating of human flesh and drinking of blood repugnant and a serious sin (see Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:14; 1 Sam. 14:32-34). However, the writer uses these words metaphorically. In Greek, the words interpreted as 'flesh' (σάρξ) and 'blood' (αἷμα) in 6:51-56 refer to the soft tissues of the living body and human or animal blood respectively. Effectively, it represents the whole human body in an idiomatic sense. Hence, Jesus is metaphorically referring to the whole person, when he says that one must take his flesh and blood in order to have eternal life.⁹¹ The expression, 'eating the flesh' and 'drinking the blood' of Jesus, is thus, more visual way of indicating that one must completely consume or be united with the whole person of Jesus in order to possess what he has – that is eternal life⁹² - using a figure of speech in which one aspect is used to represent the whole.⁹³

3.3 The Essence of the Flesh and Blood Language

The essence of the elements (flesh and blood) in verse 51-58 can be explored further because of their significance in relation to how new life is imparted to believers of Jesus. This language has generated debates among scholars as to whether the writer is hinting at the sacrificial death of Jesus or the institution of the Last Supper. The Gospel of John's account of the Last Supper is not as specific as in the other Synoptic Gospels in the sense that there are no direct words that establish the sacrament of the Eucharist (see Matt. 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20). Hence, some believe that the 'flesh' and 'blood' language is John's way of instituting the Last Supper.⁹⁴ Moreover, others believes that 6:51-58 was not part of the original passage,⁹⁵ but later added in order to line up with the other Gospel's account on the subject of the Last Supper. The scholars who view the passage as an institution of the Eucharist argue that the language of 'bread', 'eating flesh', and 'drinking blood' is

⁹⁰ Maarten J. J. Menken, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), pp. 52–54; Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (NovTSup 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965), pp. 40–41; Kostenberger, p.216.

⁹¹ Thomas L. Constable, 'Notes on John 2010 Edition,' *Sonic Light*. 2013. <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/john.pdf> (accessed October 2022), 111.

⁹² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John. The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), p.279

⁹³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John. The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p.378.

⁹⁴ Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translations* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), pp.381, 383, 385.

⁹⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John, 3 vols.* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1967), pp.2, 5–9; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K., Riches (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp. 209, 218–19,234.

not dissimilar to the Eucharist language used elsewhere in the other Synoptic Gospels' account. For instance, David Rensberger argues that it is inconceivable that anyone would view the obvious 'demand in 6:53–56 to eat the 'flesh' of the Son of Man and drink his 'blood' as anything other than the strongest sort of invitation to the Eucharistic meal'.⁹⁶

George R. Beasley-Murray agrees with Raymond Brown and puts forward that the language for Eucharist formula in the 'Bread of Life Discourse' indicate an institution of Johannine version of the Last Supper Meal. They compare the language and the elements in John 6:51, 53-58 and Luke 22 and establish similarity in the language used.⁹⁷ Moreover, as in the Synoptic Gospel's account of the Last Supper narrative (Matt. 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk. 22:17-19), Jesus is the one who gives out the bread in the Johannine feeding account (6:11). Finally, it is argued that the word τρώγω, which refers to munching or gnawing or chewing and swallowing⁹⁸ food is used by Jesus to order his disciples to eat his flesh. For Brown, there is a clear connection between the 'Bread of Life Discourse' and the Last Supper in the sense that the use of the word τρώγω in the narrative by the evangelist is needless if he only meant to convey a spiritual connotation of Jesus' words.⁹⁹

On the other hand, those who argue against the Eucharistic institution in the passage highlight the fact that Jesus is not necessarily talking about literal eating as in the Last Supper. They expound that, since the Johannine Gospel is noted for its prolific use of synonyms, the use of the word τρώγω in the passage is most likely to function as ἐσθίω, which is another verb used in the passage to mean eating but is not as an Active Present Participle as in the word τρώγω.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, it is posited that the act of breaking bread in the Eucharist is vital in highlighting its meaning. Additionally, the allusions to the Exodus wilderness experience¹⁰¹ and the traces of the sacrificial death of Jesus appear obvious in the passage.

Another angle to view the argument in favour of Jesus' sacrificial death is to examine the way that John the Baptist addresses Jesus: 'the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (1:29). According to John, Jesus is willing to give up himself (flesh and blood) as a sacrifice that provides life to those who believe in him. This is consistent with the Hebrew Scriptures. According to Leviticus 17:11, God says, 'the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement

⁹⁶ David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), pp. 71–72.

⁹⁷ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John, 2nd ed.*, p. 95; Raymond E. Brown, *New Testament Essays* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 108–31.

⁹⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains, Vol. 1; 2nd ed.* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), p. 23.

⁹⁹ Brown, pp. 108–31.

¹⁰⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, p. 159; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John, 2nd ed.* p. 299; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Gospel of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 398.

¹⁰¹ Susan Hylen, *Allusion and Meaning in John 6*, pp. 119–56.

for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement'. Therefore, as the sacrificial Lamb of God given to humanity, Jesus' life becomes a substitutionary one – that is Jesus' life, which is in his blood is poured out like water (cf. Deut. 12:25-26) on the cross as symbol of an offering to God for the remission of the sin of the world. Thus, in fulfilment of the Scripture, when Jesus is pierced on the cross (which becomes the altar), not only blood flows out from his side but water as well (see 19:34). The blood for the atonement of sin (Lev. 17:11b) and the water for purification (13:10). This appears to be the literal illustration, fulfilling prophecies regarding the fact that Jesus is not only the typology of the rock of Massah and Meribah, but also the well and spring of living water (cf. Isa. 12:3; Zech. 13:1) that sustains life eternally.

In the midst of both side of the argument, whether Eucharist or not, is the 'eating of flesh' and 'drinking of blood', indicating union with the whole person of Christ¹⁰² in order to receive life. This appears to be the core of the whole discourse.¹⁰³ The writer uses the language of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood metaphorically to explain that, to experience the eternal life, which is in Jesus, one must believe in his word, since he and his word are the same (Jn 1). He reiterates this in John 15, when he talks about mutual indwelling. This is a clear exposition of salvation theology; using imagery for those who would come to Jesus to receive his word in faith and place their entire life in him by totally believing and walking in his word (cf. 15:4-7). F.F Bruce puts it this way, coming to Jesus is 'not only to give credence to what he says; it is to be united to him by faith, to participate in his life'.¹⁰⁴ In the same way, Diana M. Swancutt writes, 'Eating means believing, coming, and listening to God' ¹⁰⁵ Jesus is therefore the Word of God – the Logos incarnate that sustains life.

3.4 The Crowd's Reaction

Jesus' claim creates a controversy among the crowd and divides even his own disciples (6:60). Many of his followers 'turned back and no longer went about with him' (6:66). This proves the earlier assertion that the crowd's faith was not sincere;¹⁰⁶ they followed Jesus for their personal gains and not necessarily to receive him as the divine Son of God and Messiah. They found Jesus' word difficult and 'hard' to accept. As hinted earlier, this could be due to their Jewish law that forbid them to eat

¹⁰² Kostenberger, p.216.

¹⁰³ B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John, New Century Bible, ed. Marshal, Morgan, and Scott* (London: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 269.

¹⁰⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), p.21.

¹⁰⁵ Diana M. Swancutt, 'Hungers Assuaged by the Bread from Heaven 'Eating Jesus' as Isaian Call to Belief: The Confluence of Isaiah 55 and Psalm 78(77) in John 6.22–71,' in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (JSNTSup 148/SSEJC 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p.243. See also, Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p.103.

¹⁰⁶ D.A. Carson and Andrew D. Naselli, 'John' in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), p.2164.

flesh of a person or drink blood (see Deut. 12:16; Lev. 19:26); or perhaps the fact that they had their own perception of who the Messiah or salvation would look like.¹⁰⁷ To the people the Messiah could not be Jesus because they think they know where he has come from (cf. Matt. 13:52-57; Mk 6:2-4). Other scholars also posit that the crowd found Jesus' teaching in this passage 'hard' not because the saying was difficult to understand but that it was hard to accept.¹⁰⁸ The word 'hard' (σκληρός) as used in the passage implies 'to dry', 'hard to touch', 'rough'¹⁰⁹ in relation to their heart. That is to say, 'the hardness was in their heart and not in the saying'.¹¹⁰ The hardness of their heart has been known to Jesus right from the beginning of the discourse (6:36) and elsewhere (see Matt. 11:16-25; Mk 6:52).

The response of the followers, whether it is the division, or their walkaway did not surprise Jesus because he had foreknowledge about what was in their heart (6:61, 64); this is another demonstration of Jesus' divine attribute as it suggests that he has knowledge that is beyond that of a mere human. Some scholars argue that this passage and others like it in the Gospel of John are meant to communicate the idea that Jesus is not simply a human prophet, but rather, the incarnate Word of God who has come to reveal the Father to humanity.¹¹¹ The reference to Jesus as the 'Word' in the prologue of John's Gospel (John 1:1-14) is often seen as supporting this view. Emphasizing on the deity of Jesus, D.A. Carson highlights that the Son of God, Jesus not only knows the future but also the hearts of people.¹¹²

Knowing his followers are struggling to accept his message in their heart, he poses them a rhetorical question, 'Does this offend you?' (6:61b). The word σκανδαλίζω, interpreted as offence here and elsewhere in the Synoptic Gospels, is meant to imply 'trigger off the trap' or 'to cause to stumble'.¹¹³ These words of Jesus are meant to enlighten the people and set them free (cf. 8:32-36), instead, they are ensnared by them because of their hardened and preconceived mindsets. Notwithstanding, Jesus is not moved by their reaction; he goes further to pose another reflective question, that perhaps gives much closer revelation of his identity, when considered closely. He asks, 'what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?' (6:62). The Son of Man, referring to Jesus (see Matt. 8:17-20; 20:28; Mk 10:45; Lk. 9:44; 24:7), the author highlights this question to tease the minds of the followers to reflect on what their reaction would be if they saw Jesus ascending to heaven, where he comes from (see 6:33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58); will they believe then or cause them even more trouble? In other words, this appears to be a rhetorical question; Jesus was not expecting a response – it was meant for

¹⁰⁷ L. Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John*, p. 244

¹⁰⁸ L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p.382.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p.382.

¹¹⁰ L. Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John*, p. 244.

¹¹¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: a commentary* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014), pp.142-144.

¹¹² D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), pp. 431-433.

¹¹³ Ibid, p.245.

their reflection and a revelation of what was to come – his crucifixion (cf. 12:32-33) and ascension to heaven. Although John does not directly mention the ascension of Jesus, he alludes to it in a few places in his gospel (see John 7:33; 14:12, 28; 16:5, 10, 17, 28; 20:17). His ascension to heaven will further reveal his divinity – that Jesus is from above – his Kingdom is not earthly,¹¹⁴ as perceived by the crowd, rather, the Son of God who has come to the earth to save humanity.

3.5 The Word – the Spirit – the Life

The people have interpreted his words literally, but Jesus tells them that the ‘words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life’. It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless’ (6:63). The writer seems to reiterate the fact that physical food, as their ancestors ate, does not sustain, but only that which is provided by the Spirit of God has the ability to sustain life perpetually (cf. 6:58). It is clear that Jesus is referring to the work of the Holy Spirit as the life giver. In other words, in the absence of the spirit, all the natural elements (the manna, the water, the bread) have no power to sustain life. Hence, he says, it is the spirit that gives life, therefore, the words spoken by him (the bread, the blood) are to be understood spiritually as life from the spirit. This lines up with chapter 3, when he effectively says that unless one is born of the spirit there is no life in them because the flesh (physical), which has no eternal life in them can only give birth to its kind, but the Spirit of God which has the power to give eternal life will also give birth to its kind, that is life everlasting (see 3:5-6).

3.6 The Response and the Confession of the Twelve

In verses 64-65, Jesus again demonstrates this divine attribute by his foreknowledge of what is in the heart of the people; the writer mentions that ‘Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who did not believe and who was the one who would betray him’ (6:64). He grasps the opportunity to buttress the Father’s sovereign role and as the initiator of the salvation process. He tells them, ‘No one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father’ (6:65). Hence, he is neither perturbed by the unbelief of the crowd nor the reaction of many of his disciples to turn back from him (6:66). This appears to fulfil the words of the prophet Isaiah, understood by John with reference to Jesus and the reaction of the people. The Prophet speaks, ‘Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?’ (Isa. 53:1; cf. Jn 3:11). With this knowledge, he asks the twelve, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’ (6:67). The twelve have walked with Jesus more intimately and often ask Jesus in private for explanation to parables said to the crowd in public (see Mk 4:10, 33, 34). Hence, Jesus’ question appears to suggest that he expects them to know better, but more importantly, the question

¹¹⁴ Jesus said to them, ‘You are from below, I am from above; you are from this world, I am not from this world’ (Jn 8:23; cf. 18:33-38).

serves as a test of the disciples' loyalty and commitment to Jesus, where their faith is put to the test, and their true belief in Jesus is revealed, highlighting the importance of commitment and faith in Jesus.¹¹⁵ This is seen in Peter's responds, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God' (6:68-69). Peter's declaration appears to have been informed by the theophanic revelation of Jesus on the sea-walking episode. The intratextual connection between 6:16-20 and 6:60-69 is striking. Peter's ensuing declaration, σὺ εἶ ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (6:69), can be linked to his knowledge from Jesus' self-declaration, the ἐγὼ pronouncement on the sea crossing episode (6:20). Moreover, the echoes of Isaianic designation in Peter's confession is compelling. In relation to God's deliverance of his people 'through the waters' Isaiah declares God as 'the Holy One of Israel' (ὁ ἅγιος Ἰσραηλ, Isa 43:3, 14 LXX) and 'your Holy One' (ὁ ἅγιος ὑμῶν, 43:15 LXX). Also, the 'repetition of θέλω (6:21, 67) and ὑπάγω (6:21, 67) to juxtapose positive and negative responses to Jesus's word'.¹¹⁶

In many ways the feeding episode and the sea-walking accounts in John's Gospel uses different symbols in revealing Jesus as the revelation of God's presence. However, in the bread of life discourse, the text is explicit in revealing the true identity of Jesus as the One who came down from heaven (see 6:51,58) and gives eternal life to those who accepts it on his 'terms' – those who both come (6:35) and believe (6:36,47) in him.¹¹⁷ In other words, in the feeding miracle, John highlights Jesus' ability to provide the physical needs of the people in the most miraculous manner. However, in the 'bread of life' discourse that follows, the writer demonstrates that Jesus meets more than just physical hunger; he supplies the deep spiritual need of humanity¹¹⁸ - that is eternal life – salvation. William Barclay puts it this way, 'the hunger of the human situation is ended when we know Christ and through him known God - the restless soul is at rest; the hungry heart is satisfied'.¹¹⁹ The author of John's Gospel uses the passage to draw the attention of his readers to the spiritual connotation of the feeding episode – that is, the word of Jesus is likened to 'true bread' that has eternal life. As humanity receives his word in faith, they receive the eternal life empowered by the spirit of God (cf. 6:33, 63; 3:5-6; cf. 1:4, 9, 12).

¹¹⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel of John*, pp.431-433.

¹¹⁶ Catrin Williams., 'Intertextual Perspectives on John's Sea-Crossing Account (6:16-21)', p. 197.

¹¹⁷ Elmer Towns, *The Gospel of John: Believe and Live* (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series. Chattanooga, TN.: AMG Publishers, 2002), p. 64.

¹¹⁸ L. Morris, *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p.110.

¹¹⁹ William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John, vol.1* (Louisville KY: Saint Andrew Press 2001), p.253.

Conclusion

Following the feeding miracle, the author of the Gospel of John recounts Jesus' act of walking on water. At some level this account (6:16-21) appears detached from the previous event, particularly as the 'bread of life' discourse seems an obvious elaboration of the feeding miracle. However, the sea-crossing narrative, it is argued in this dissertation, has in fact been incorporated into the gospel narrative in order to correct misconceived opinions about Jesus' identity as expressed by the crowd at the end of the feeding miracle. The sea-crossing episode demonstrates that Jesus is more than a prophet as perceived by the people (6:14). 'His out-of-the-world ability and action show that he is divine'.¹²⁰

The sea-crossing epiphany, therefore, seeks to correct the view of the earthly kingship ensuing from the crowds during the feeding miracle, and it expounds on why the declaration of Jesus as a prophet (6:14) does not completely and accurately define his true identity according to John.¹²¹ This is in the sense that, although Jesus is King, his kingdom is not of the earthly realm (Jn 18:33-38). Similarly, in his capacity as a prophet, the designation selected by the crowds, he is of a greater authority (see Deut. 18:15-18; Mk 6:4-6).

The 'bread of life' discourse offers an explicit articulation of what the disciples have witnessed, through a theophanic encounter, on the sea, namely that Jesus is the Word made flesh and the true bread that brings eternal life (6:53-55). 'The walking on the sea gives a picture of Jesus transfigured, glorified, and spiritualized in his flesh'. Consequently, it is possible for believers to eat his flesh and drink his blood.¹²² Hence, the sea-crossing event thus ultimately forms a crucial link between the feeding miracle and the 'bread of life' discourse in the sense that it serves as an anticipation, even revelatory confirmation, of the true identity and authority of the one who is responsible for providing the loaves of bread in the feeding miracle, as explained in the 'bread of life' discourse (6:22-59).

¹²⁰ Rodney A. Whitacre, *John, IVP New Testament Commentary Series Vol. 4* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), p. 247.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.196.

¹²² P. J. Madden, *Jesus' Walking on the Sea An Investigation of the Origin of the Narrative Account* (De Gruyter, 1997), p.8.

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