

The Fulfillment of Prophecy in the Gospel of John

JOHN, LIKE MATTHEW, HAS a significant interest in the fulfillment of scripture,¹ presenting ten scenes in which Jesus fulfills a scriptural prediction. Our study of John's gospel starts with an overview of its fulfillment scenes and discusses this gospel's explicit acknowledgment that only those who believe that Jesus is the resurrected son of God can see that he fulfilled scripture. The chapter then proceeds along the same lines as the chapter on Matthew. It first analyzes how the author we call John helps Jesus fulfill scripture. Then it discusses how John uses the fulfillment theme, situates that theme into its historical context, and assesses its role in the harsh accusations this gospel levels against Jews who do not believe in Jesus.

Overview

The first two things Jesus' disciples say about him in the Gospel of John are "We have found the Messiah" (1:41) and "We have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote" (1:45). The latter statement expresses the belief that Jesus fulfills scripture in an especially overt way, one that brings out into the open what other NT declarations about Jesus imply: not only that Jesus fulfills the scriptures, but that the scriptures were written *about* him. John reiterates the explicit form of this belief when he has Jesus proclaim that "the scriptures testify on my behalf" (5:39), and that "Moses wrote about me" (5:46). Similarly, John himself adds a comment after he

1. Of the ten passages John quotes in his fulfillment scenes, only four come from the prophets; five are from the Psalms and one from the Torah. Therefore, in discussing the Gospel of John it is more appropriate to speak of the fulfillment of *scripture* than of prophecy, unless a specific prophecy is in view.

quotes a passage from Isaiah: “Isaiah said this because he saw his [Jesus’] glory and spoke about him” (12:41).

The Gospel of John has eight scenes that quote OT texts and narrate their fulfillment.² Only two of those concern something Jesus does.

- Jesus drives out money changers and animal vendors from the temple (2:14–16).
- Jesus rides a donkey into Jerusalem to the cheers of a crowd (12:12–15).

In the other six scenes scripture is fulfilled when something is done to Jesus.

- God sends Jesus from heaven (6:31–33).
- The Jews do not believe in him (12:37–40).³
- Judas betrays Jesus (13:18).
- The “world” hates Jesus for no reason (15:25).
- Jesus’ executioners divide up his clothing (19:24).
- Jesus’ executioners spear his corpse rather than break his legs (19:33–34, 36–37).

In the pair of scenes in which Jesus himself fulfills scripture, John both times interrupts his narration to tell us that the disciples who witnessed the two events did not understand until after the resurrection that what Jesus had done had fulfilled scripture (2:17⁴ and 12:16). It is somewhat curious that the Johannine Jesus, who openly proclaims his divinity to those who seek to kill him,⁵ does not point out, even to his followers, which deeds of his fulfill scripture. Jesus tells his enemies that the scriptures were writ-

2. There are two more scenes in which an event fulfills scripture, but no text is quoted. In 17:12 Jesus tells his Father in prayer that Judas “was destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled,” and in 19:28 Jesus says, “(in order to fulfill the scriptures) I’m thirsty.”

3. John qualifies this blanket statement with the explanation that many Judeans did believe in him (12:42). We can infer—though John would not be pleased—that those who did believe in Jesus were thereby threatening to *frustrate* the fulfillment of scripture.

4. In 2:17 John says simply that the disciples remembered the scripture that Jesus had fulfilled; John does not explicitly mention the resurrection. However, in the other two passages that describe the disciples remembering the scriptural significance of something Jesus said or did (2:22 and 12:16), John indicates that this remembering occurred after the resurrection. Therefore, we should infer that he intends 2:17 in the same sense.

5. John 5:17–18; 8:58–59; 10:30–31.

ten about him but does not enlighten his disciples that anything he has done fulfills a specific scripture—although he points out one scripture that his enemies had fulfilled (15:25) and another one that Judas would fulfill (13:18–19). These are strong clues that John independently agrees with Luke’s analysis of why Jesus’ followers did not perceive during his lifetime that he had fulfilled prophecy. According to Luke, such insight required supernatural enlightenment that was available only after the resurrection. Luke describes that enlightenment quite concretely in Luke 24:27 and 24:44, scenes in which the risen Jesus interprets for his disciples numerous biblical passages that refer to him. (Unfortunately for us, however, Luke does not reveal which passages Jesus explained.) For John the ability to reflect on the life of Jesus and recognize when it had fulfilled scripture seems to be part of what the holy spirit imparts to the disciples after Jesus’ death. Jesus promised that this spirit “will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said” (John 14:26) and “will guide you to the complete truth” (16:13). The risen Jesus transmitted this holy spirit to his disciples on the evening of Easter Sunday (20:22). Earlier that same day, even after they had discovered Jesus’ empty tomb, “they did not yet understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead” (20:9).

John’s outlook on this topic is not entirely consistent. As noted above, John describes disciples, long before the resurrection, proclaiming Jesus as the one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote (1:45), and John has Jesus saying right out that “the scriptures testify on my behalf” (5:39), and that “Moses wrote about me” (5:46). Those three statements confirm the basic principle that belief in Jesus is the prerequisite, not the result, of the belief that he fulfills prophecy. John 1:45 is pronounced by a believer and is preceded by the proclamation that Jesus is the messiah (1:41). Jesus’ declarations in 5:39 and 5:46 neither lead nor invite his listeners to believe in him. On the contrary, those assertions are polemical ones, accompanied by accusations that “the Jews” have neither God’s word nor God’s love in them (5:38, 42), and that they do not believe Moses (5:46).

The only place in this gospel where Jesus explains how a scripture is fulfilled in him (rather than in what someone else does) further confirms my thesis. In the scene that sets up Jesus’ famous discourse on the bread of life, the crowd tells him,

“Our ancestors had manna to eat in the desert. As the scripture puts it, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Jesus responded to them: “Let me tell you this: it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven; rather, it is my Father who gives you real bread from heaven. That is to say, God’s

bread comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”
 (John 6:31–33)

The scripture the crowd quotes is a paraphrase of Ps 73:24, which in the Septuagint reads,

He rained down on them manna to eat,
 and gave them the bread of heaven.

Despite the obvious meaning of that verse, John’s Jesus contends that “bread from heaven” does not actually refer to the manna of Exodus, but to the “true” bread from heaven, which is Jesus himself (6:35, 51). Once again it is clear that one needs to believe in Jesus before one can perceive that he fulfills scripture.

Nonscriptural Scripture

One more passage in John merits attention in this overview. It is a curious passage, for it quotes a scripture not found in the OT.

Jesus cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Rivers of living water shall flow out of him.’” Now Jesus said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
 (John 7:37–39)

It is difficult to determine whether to classify this as a fulfillment of scripture or a somewhat vague promise that a scripture will come true. In any case, two features of the passage are important. The first is that there simply is no such quotation in the OT or in any extant ancient text. Even if John is paraphrasing rather than quoting some text, there is no scriptural verse on which “Rivers of living water shall flow out of him” is clearly based; about the best scholars can do is suggest a phrase in Zech 14:8 (“living waters shall flow out of Jerusalem”) as a possibility. The second important feature in this passage is the narrator’s commentary, which explains that the meaning of this scripture was not understood—and could not be understood—until after the death and glorification of Jesus.

*Excursus:**Other Unattributable Quotations*

As a fabricated scripture, John 7:38 is similar to Matt 2:23 (“He shall be called a Nazorean”). Those are not the only instances in which a New Testament author showcases an alleged scriptural quotation that cannot be found in any biblical book. For the record, here are three more examples, the first of which might be intended as a fulfilled prophecy.

Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The chosen obtained it, but the rest became obstinate, as it is written,

*God gave them a sluggish spirit,
eyes that would not see
and ears that would not hear,
until this very day.* (Rom 11:7–8)

Whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Do you think that it's for nothing that the scripture says, “*God jealously longs for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?*” (James 4:4–5)

Neither of those can be found in the Jewish scriptures or anywhere else. Another mysterious quotation is featured in 1 Corinthians.

As it is written,

*What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard,
and what has not entered the human heart,
what God has prepared for those who love him,
this has been revealed to us through the Spirit.*
(1 Cor 2:9–10)

Paul regularly uses the quotation formula (“as it is written”) to introduce quotations from the scriptures. Although the first line resembles phrases in Isa 64:3, the rest of the quotation is nowhere to be found in the OT. However, the saying is remarkably similar to one in the *Gospel of Thomas*:

Jesus said, “I will give you what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no hand has touched, what has not arisen in the human heart.” (*Thomas* 17)⁶

6. See Hedrick, *Unlocking the Secrets*, 47, for a tradition history of this saying.

Whether Paul is freely quoting from this gospel or whether both Paul and *Thomas* are quoting some undiscovered third writing is unknown.

How John Helps Jesus Fulfill Scripture

In this part of the chapter we do for John, though more briefly, what we did earlier for Matthew: analyze the creative ways in which the evangelist matches scriptures to their fulfillments.

Selective Quotation

Half the quotations in John's fulfillment scenes come from OT passages that are not amenable to his christological agenda. In these cases John quotes a single line or statement from a passage for which he otherwise has no use. The way John quotes scripture, therefore, reveals that he does not believe that Jesus fulfills, for example, this or that psalm, but only a single detail within it. Five of John's scriptural quotations allow us to see how judicious he was in selecting which bits of a passage to quote.

John 2:17 (Ps 69:9)

When Jesus disrupts the commerce in the temple, John reports that his disciples remembered a verse from the psalms: "Zeal for your house will consume me." The verses immediately following this one in Psalm 69 are antithetical to John's interpretation of Jesus because they describe the speaker of the psalm doing public penance for sin:

When I humbled my soul with fasting,
they insulted me for doing so.
When I made sackcloth for my clothing,
I became a byword to them. (Ps 69:10–11)

John 13:18 (Ps 41:9b)

After Jesus washes his disciples' feet at the Last Supper, he tells them that the example he has set is not intended for all of them because one of them (Judas) will fulfill the scripture, "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." John quotes only the second half of Ps 41:9 because the

first half does not fit John's description of the relationship between Jesus and Judas. The psalm describes "the one who ate my bread" as "my intimate friend in whom I trusted" (Ps 41:9a, NRSV [modified]). In the psalm that description makes the betrayal in v. 9b all the more treacherous, but John cannot apply v. 9a to Judas because it would contradict John's assertions that Jesus had never trusted Judas. The divine Jesus, who knows everything, always knew that Judas would turn traitor: "Jesus was aware from the start which ones were not believers, and he knew who would turn him in" (John 6:64 [SV]; see also 6:70–71 and 13:10–11).

The verse in the psalm immediately following the line John quotes is equally hostile to his purpose: "But you, O LORD, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may repay them" (Ps 41:10). Although the prayer to "raise me up" would be attractive to John, the next phrase ruins it for him because the psalmist asks to be raised up so that he can take revenge on his enemies.

Earlier in Psalm 41 the psalmist prays, "Heal me, for I have sinned against you" (Ps 41:4). John had to choose with care how to quote from this psalm.

John 15:25 (Ps 69:4)

As Jesus reflects on the hatred he has encountered among those to whom he was sent, he reveals that their animosity "was to fulfill the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me for no reason,'" a complaint found in two psalms (Ps 69:4 and Ps 35:19). Perhaps John knew this and studied both of them in search for scriptures that were fulfilled in Jesus. However, since John quotes Ps 69 earlier in his gospel (2:17) and clearly alludes to it later (19:29, see below), that psalm is the likely source for his quotation in John 15:25.

Psalm 69 is a prayer for deliverance and revenge (see Ps 69:22–28) but also an expression of confession and repentance. The very next verse after John's quotation of Ps 69:4 reads, "O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you" (Ps 69:5). John not only had to locate the right piece of the psalm; he also had to remove that piece from its context in order for it to find credible fulfillment in Jesus.

John 19:36 (Exod 12:46 / Num 9:11)

John's passion narrative relates that the soldiers hastened the deaths of the two victims crucified with Jesus by breaking their legs, but that they refrained from breaking Jesus' legs because they could see that he was already dead (19:31–33). John sees in this the fulfillment of the ritual prescription

not to break the bones of the slaughtered Passover lamb. John's symbolism of Jesus as the Passover lamb is theologically rich, but the analogy John implies between the treatment of the dead lamb and the dead Jesus is confined to a single point of comparison. The commandments in the Torah relating to Passover contain a number of regulations about the sacrificial lamb;⁷ none of them can be imagined to apply to Jesus except the one John quotes. Moreover, the prohibition against breaking the lamb's bones occurs twice, both times in conjunction with directives that cannot apply to Jesus.

The lamb shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. (Exod 12:46)

They shall eat the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it. (Num 9:11–12)

John 19:37 (Zech 12:10)

When, instead of breaking Jesus' legs, a soldier makes sure Jesus is dead by spearing his body as it hangs on the cross, John tells us that thus was fulfilled the scripture that says, "They will look at the one they have pierced." John has plucked this clause from the middle of a passage in which Zechariah prophesies that God "will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem," a spirit that moves them to mourn a prophet whom they have killed. All Jerusalem, indeed the whole nation, will regret this killing: "On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be great" (Zech 12:11); "the land shall mourn, each family by itself" (Zech 12:12). None of this can apply to Jesus, of course, whose death was mourned by only a few in Jerusalem. Moreover, in Zechariah it is those who pierce the prophet who mourn for him, which cannot work in the gospel because it is a Roman who pierces Jesus.

Retrofitted Prophecies(?)

In comparison with the retrofits in the Gospel of Matthew, those in John are quite modest. There are only two of them, and it's hard to say whether they actually meet the definition of retrofitting: the alteration of a prophecy by rewording or removing parts of it that are impossible or inappropriate for

7. See Exod 12:3–13, 43–46; and Num 9:11–12.

Jesus to fulfill. In John's two borderline cases, his modifications are slight and subtle. In each case his only touch is to tweak the form of a verb.

(1) *John 2:17* turns "Zeal for your house has consumed me" from Psalm 69:9 into "Zeal for your house will consume me." John has no problem declaring that prophecies with past-tense verbs were fulfilled in his story,⁸ so why does he take the small trouble to change this one to the future tense? Most likely it is because he sees this prophecy fulfilled only in Jesus' death.⁹ That makes this particular prophecy a unique case in this gospel because it is the only one that Jesus *will* fulfill much later in the story.

(2) *John 19:36* takes an instruction in the Torah about the Passover lamb ("You/They shall not break any of its bones")¹⁰ and changes the verb from active to passive ("None of his bones will be broken"). It is not apparent why John made this adjustment. Perhaps he thought that by changing the verb from active to passive he was converting a commandment ("You shall not break") into a prophetic prediction ("will not be broken").¹¹

Conclusion. The barely noticeable alterations in our two examples do not change the meaning of their prophecies. John could have quoted both of them as is and applied them to Jesus with no more awkwardness than in any of his other prophecy-fulfillment scenes. Perhaps John thought the minor modifications in these two scriptures made it more evident that Jesus had fulfilled them. Or perhaps those changes were not deliberate. If John was quoting from memory, changes like those could well be inadvertent. Even if John was working from written texts, it does not stretch the imagination that he could have unconsciously changed the tense or voice of a verb.

8. See the above analyses of *John 6:31, 12:38, 12:40, 13:18, 15:25, and 19:24.*

9. In its context in Psalm 69, "consume" expresses the "burning intensity of the zeal; John interprets the Psalm to mean that zeal for the Temple will destroy Jesus and bring his death" (Brown, *Gospel of John*, 124).

10. The "you" version is in *Exod 12:10 and 12:46 LXX*; the "they" version is *Num 9:12 LXX*.

11. Some scholars propose that the quotation in *John 19:36* comes not from the laws of Passover but from *Ps 34:20*, a guarantee of protection for the righteous: "He guards all their bones; not one of them will be broken." This verse uses the passive voice just as in John. Since, however, it seems clear that John associates the death of Jesus with the Passover sacrifice, it is much more likely that he draws his quotation from a passage about the Passover lamb in either Exodus or Numbers.

Zechariah 9:9 / John 12:15

This is the place to consider the quotation of Zech 9:9 in John 12:15, which differs considerably in length and wording from all known forms of the Zechariah passage.

Zechariah 9:9 LXX

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion;
 proclaim, daughter of Jerusalem.
 Look, the king is coming to you,
 righteous and saving.
 He is gentle and riding on a donkey
 and a young colt.

as quoted by John

Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.
 Look, your king is coming,
 sitting on a donkey's colt.

John has freely reworded the prophecy and condensed it to about half its original size. Those revisions, however, do not seem to alter any crucial element of the prophecy's meaning. John apparently made the changes to enable the prophecy to function more effectively in its literary and theological context of John 12.¹² John could have applied Zech 9:9 to Jesus without alteration, more or less as Matthew did in Matt 21:5 (though without the double donkey ride—see pp. 135–36). Therefore, John's rewriting of this particular prophecy here does not count as retrofitting.

Stories Created out of Scriptures

In John's unique passion narrative there are several scenes in which he has used the OT as a source for some details in his story. In these cases the interplay between the story and the ancient scriptures goes in both directions: the events in the story fulfill certain scriptures, but those scriptures are also part of the raw material from which John has shaped the story. (We saw this same dynamic in the Gospel of Matthew.) The scriptures John quotes can be fulfilled with unusual precision and literalness because John composed his

12. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, 71–84.

stories with those very passages in mind. There are three such scenes in the passion narrative.

John 19:23–24

The synoptic gospels report that the soldiers who crucified Jesus divided up his clothing by casting lots to see who got what (Matt 27:35 / Mark 15:24 / Luke 23:34). John, however, describes in detail a specific method by which the soldiers made this division. The four soldiers (only John tells their number) divide up Jesus' outer garments; perhaps John means that they cut them into pieces of cloth that could be put to other uses. However, Jesus' tunic, a long undergarment, would apparently be useless if it were to be cut up. So the men gamble for it by casting lots.

This happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled that says,
 “They divided my garments among them,
 and for my clothing¹³ they cast lots.” (John 19:24 [SV], quoting Ps 22:18)

John differs here from the synoptic gospels in two ways. First, while the synoptic scene (actually Mark's scene copied by Matthew and Luke) was created on the basis of Ps 22:18,¹⁴ John makes that scriptural basis explicit by quoting the verse.¹⁵ Second, what the synoptics narrate as one action (dividing garments by casting lots), John narrates as two (first dividing the outer garments and then casting lots for the tunic). John goes into this detail because he takes the two lines of Ps 22:18 to be descriptions of two distinct actions rather than synonymous descriptions of the same deed. Since, according to John's interpretation, the psalm foresees a two-step division of Jesus' clothing, then that is what must have happened. John's procedure here is similar to Matthew's when he describes Jesus mounted on two donkeys (Matt 21:1–7). In both cases the gospel writer decided that a poetic verse in

13. John evidently identifies Jesus' tunic with the “clothing” in the psalm, even though the psalm's Greek word (*himatismos*) is not the word for “tunic” (*chitōn*) used in John 19:23 (Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 955).

14. While it might have been standard practice for soldiers to help themselves to the clothing of those they crucified, the detail that the soldiers *gamble* for Jesus' clothing reflects the influence of the psalm. If soldiers routinely gambled for the clothing of the crucified, that detail in the story would not have attracted enough attention for Christians to ponder it in light of the scriptures. If a scripture is fulfilled at every crucifixion, that fulfillment loses its ability to single out Jesus as anyone special.

15. The whole scene in John 19:23–24 might well be fictional, but that would not affect the analysis of how the author used the psalm verse in composing it.

synonymous parallelism described two distinct actions and then fashioned a gospel scene accordingly.

John 19:28–29

As Jesus is about to die,

he says (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I’m thirsty.” A bowl of sour wine was sitting there, so they filled a sponge with wine, stuck it on some hyssop, and held it to his mouth. (SV)

This short scene is unusual because it is the only one in this gospel that claims that a specific event fulfills the scriptures without quoting the scripture it fulfills. It is also the only scene in which Jesus says or does something that causes someone else to fulfill scripture. The scripture to which John alludes is from Psalm 69, a text he knows well, having quoted from it twice before (Ps 69:9 in John 2:17 and Ps 69:4 in John 15:25). This time Ps 69:21 is fulfilled: “for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” (The “sour wine” was a vinegary-tasting blend of water and cheap wine.)

The synoptic gospels also describe the crucified Jesus being offered sour wine, but only John (in John 19:23–25) points out that this was done in order to fulfill scripture. John’s scene differs from the synoptic one also in that the Johannine Jesus takes the initiative to fulfill scripture by saying “I’m thirsty.” In the synoptic scene the soldiers offer Jesus wine on their own initiative (Matt 27:48 / Mark 15:36 / Luke 23:36). In John’s gospel Jesus is in full control at all times, especially during his passion¹⁶ and even as he is dying. While the details in this short scene are different in John and the synoptics, both versions have been generated by the OT scripture: both Mark and John (or the Christian storytellers before them) invented the detail about the wine offered to Jesus on the basis of Ps 69:21.

John 19:33–37

In 19:31–32 John narrates the gruesome process in which soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus in order to hasten their deaths. Verses 33 and 34 indicate that since Jesus was already dead, the soldiers did not break his legs, but instead one soldier thrust a spear between his ribs. In 19:36–37 John reports that both what the soldiers did and did not do

16. For example, in John’s narrative—in contradiction to the synoptic gospels—Jesus does not need anyone’s help in carrying the cross; see the emphatic “by himself” in John 19:17 (in contrast to Matt 27:32 / Mark 15:21 / Luke 23:36).

fulfilled scripture: “None of his bones will be broken,” and “They will look at the one whom they have pierced.”

The entire scene (19:31–37) is unique to John. While the synoptics mention that two men were crucified with Jesus, those gospels show no interest in how the men died, nor do they mention the spear thrust into the corpse of Jesus. John narrates the breaking of the two men’s legs only in order to highlight what was *not* done to Jesus. The soldiers do not need to break Jesus’ legs because the soldiers “saw that he was already dead” (19:33). So far John’s story makes sense. What happens next does not. Why stab a dead man? Readers are tempted to fill in this blank by imagining that the soldier stabbed Jesus to make sure that Jesus was truly dead. But if so, then why did the soldiers refrain from breaking his legs? Perhaps John intended this detail in the story to be illogical, so as to underscore the power of prophecy: the soldier with the spear acted the way he did, not because it made sense to him, but because scripture must be fulfilled and he was the unwitting means to its fulfillment. Despite John’s insistence that this particular detail in the story is based on an eyewitness report (19:35), it is difficult to overcome the suspicion that the author’s more likely inspirations for this scene are the two scriptures he quotes. Jesus, proclaimed by John the Baptizer as the Lamb of God (1:29), dies on the eve of Passover while the Passover lambs are being slaughtered.¹⁷ So it makes perfect theological sense to John that the dead body of Jesus was treated with the same care as a lamb slaughtered for Passover: “None of his bones shall be broken” (Exod 12:46; Num 9:12). That Roman executioners unknowingly treat Jesus as a Passover lamb is further testimony to the power of the divine plan by which Jesus fulfills scripture.

The Role of Scripture outside the Fulfillment Scenes

It is self-evident that John has the OT in mind in those scenes where he announces that the scriptures were fulfilled. But the role of the scriptures in John’s passion narrative is more subtle than explicit quotation, and their influence reaches beyond those obvious examples. When a narrative element is unique to John, and especially when there is something incongruous about it, it is often a helpful hypothesis that John has shaped the story the way he has because he has based it on an OT passage. While some degree of

17. John notes that Jesus was condemned to death on “the day of preparation for Passover, about twelve noon” (19:14), which was the time the Passover lambs began to be slaughtered in the temple. See Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 847, and the Jewish sources cited there.

guesswork is unavoidable in such theorizing, in a few examples, the connection between the narrative detail and the OT text is fairly clear. In such cases it is easier to imagine that John constructed the story with the scriptural passage in mind than that the narrative detail just happens by coincidence to match up to a certain scripture. We can briefly consider three examples.

John 18:6

All the gospels tell of Jesus' being arrested by armed men, but John's version of this scene is epic in its scale: in addition to the Jewish temple police, an entire Roman military formation, a cohort, which consisted of six hundred troops, is sent to take Jesus into custody. Jesus confronts them and asks, "Who is it you're looking for?" When they say, "Jesus of Nazareth," he identifies himself by saying, in Greek, *Egō eimi* (literally, "I am"). In ordinary speech that means simply "I am he" but is also the name of God (see Exod 3:14), which is how John uses it here. What happens next is probably the most bizarre, yet theologically brilliant, scene in all the gospels: "As soon as he said, 'I am,' they all stepped back and fell to the ground" (John 18:6). Taken literally, the scene is absurd: a massive, combat-ready military unit cowering face down in the dust in front of Jesus. Taken metaphorically, however, the symbolism is perfect: both the armed Jewish officers and the full military might of Rome assume the posture of submission and worship when Jesus reveals his true identity by pronouncing the divine name.

One detail doesn't fit, however. Before the soldiers fall on their knees, they all step back. Why? John depicts them prostrate before Jesus, not falling backwards, so there is no physical reason for them to step back before prostrating themselves. There is also a grammatical oddity in John's Greek here, which literally reads "they went out to the behind" or "they retreated backwards." The prepositional phrase "to the behind/backward" (*eis ta opisō*) is superfluous and clumsy. The incongruities in John's narration and in his grammar correspond exactly to a verse from the psalms: "my enemies shall turn back backwards" (*eis ta opisō*) (Ps 56:9 [55:10 LXX]). A coincidence? Perhaps. But it's much more likely that John inserts this awkward detail into his story because he took a cue from this psalm.¹⁸

18. Hanson, *Prophetic Gospel*, 203.

John 19:5

Another highly dramatic—and justifiably famous—scene in John’s passion narrative is the one in which Pilate presents Jesus, wearing a crown of thorns and a purple cloak, to the crowd and says, “Behold the man!” Since this very public spectacle is found only in John its historicity is dubious. Yet its symbolic meaning, unlike the meaning of the soldiers’ groveling before Jesus, is not obvious. What is “Behold the man” supposed to signify? If Pilate were to say “Behold your king” the scene would make good sense as realistic fiction because Jesus has been mockingly arrayed with a crown and royal robe. The Johannine irony of that would have been pitch perfect. It is precisely because Pilate’s proclamation is enigmatic that we should suspect a scriptural basis for it. The most appealing candidate is Zech 6:12, in which two people are told to go to a high priest named Joshua (which is “Jesus,” *Iēsous* in Greek), put a crown on his head and proclaim “Behold the man! His name is Branch . . . for he shall build the temple of the Lord.”¹⁹ How much of the context after “Behold the man” John has in mind is impossible to say. Perhaps John saw a connection between “he shall build a temple to the Lord” and Jesus’ disruption of the temple, during which he proclaimed, “Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days” (John 2:19). “His name is Branch” is obscure. Perhaps—and this is very speculative—John linked the Branch in Zech 6:12 to a messianic oracle in the book of Numbers: “A star shall rise from Jacob, and *the man* shall arise from Israel” (Num 24:17). The connection between the last verse and Branch is easier to see in Greek than in English, for “branch” (*anatolē*) is etymologically related to “rise” (*anatelō*).²⁰

John 19:29

When a soldier offers Jesus wine, he does so in a way that is physically impossible: he dips a sponge in wine, sticks the sponge on a stalk of hyssop, and raises it to the lips of the crucified Jesus. Hyssop is a short fernlike plant and is quite incapable of supporting the weight of a soaked sponge. Mark and Matthew give a realistic version of this event in which a soldier uses a stick to lift a sponge (Mark 15:36 / Matt 27:48). Since John’s description cannot be meant literally, we naturally suspect that he is interested in hyssop’s symbolism, which has to do with its role in the Passover ritual: “Slaughter the Passover lamb. Then take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood . . . and

19. *Ibid.*, 204.

20. Brown, *Gospel of John*, 2:876.

touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood” (Exod 12:21–22). The appearance of hyssop at the cross of Jesus has nothing to do with historical memory. John adds this botanically impossible detail in order to reinforce his interpretation of the crucified Jesus as a slaughtered Passover lamb (see above).

One medieval Greek gospel manuscript features an ingenious modification of John 19:29. The copyist substituted *hyssos* (javelin) for *hyssopos* (hyssop), probably in the belief that the text from which he was copying was in error.²¹

Summary

Our analysis of how John pairs prophecies and their fulfillments shows that it was no easy task. In five cases John quotes scripture selectively and precisely, lifting single verses out of contexts that cannot possibly be applied to Jesus. In two cases John’s quotations of scripture show very minor alterations from the wording of the originals; these cases might or might not be examples of retrofitting. In the passion narrative all three of the scenes in which John announces the fulfillment of scripture are literary fictions that he created out of the very scriptures that the scenes allegedly fulfilled. John enriched several other scenes in the passion narrative with symbolically significant details taken from scriptures that he believed pointed to Jesus.

As is the case with Matthew’s gospel, John’s shows that the author used the scriptures carefully and creatively in constructing his argument that Jesus fulfilled them. John’s work on the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled is less extensive than Matthew’s, and less varied in how he manipulated the texts he quotes, but it betrays the same conviction that belief in Jesus opens up new and unexpected meanings in the scriptures of Israel.

How John Uses the Fulfillment of Scripture

As in the Gospel of Matthew, so too in John’s gospel the demonstration that the scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus is a literary and theological achievement that required deliberation and ingenuity. Why did John go to all that effort? Why was it so important to him to try to prove that Jesus fulfilled scripture? In the next few pages I situate the fulfillment of scripture in John’s gospel within its anti-Jewish polemic. I argue that the way John presents the fulfillment of scripture is meant to strengthen his accusation that the Jews

21. *Ibid.*, 2:909.

willfully rejected their messiah. I then consider the fairness and plausibility of this accusation, examining the particulars of John's fulfillment scenes so as to assess whether it was reasonable to expect Jews either of Jesus' time or of John's day to be persuaded that Jesus was the one about whom the scriptures testify.

Anti-Jewish Polemic and the Fulfillment of Scripture

The Gospel of John is an acutely anti-Jewish narrative in which the fulfillment of scripture plays a supportive and explanatory role. The Jewish rejection of Jesus is a major theme in this gospel, and John robustly asserts that "the Jews" are culpable for rejecting Jesus (e.g., John 9:41 and 15:22), a sin for which they will be punished (see, e.g., 3:36). John puts forward several theories to explain Jewish disbelief, the most prominent being their unwillingness to be persuaded by the "signs" or "works" that Jesus performs. Those works were designed to testify to Jesus' divine origin (5:36). So persuasive are Jesus' signs supposed to be that simply hearing them narrated long after the fact should be sufficient grounds for belief in him. Indeed, that is the very reason why John wrote his gospel, as he emphatically explains in its closing words (20:30–31).²² Therefore, the disbelief of those who personally witnessed Jesus' signs must have been willful (12:37; 15:24). The rhetoric of the accusation is hard to miss: "the Jews" do not believe in Jesus, not because the evidence for his divinity is weak or ambiguous or hard to grasp, but because they knowingly reject the truth. "You do not believe me *because* I speak the truth" (8:45). "The Jews" revulsion for the truth is rooted in their satanic nature: they are like their father, the Devil, who has nothing to do with the truth because he is a liar by nature (8:44). That the Jews are "liars" (8:55) is therefore not something they do, but what they are by nature since "the father of lies" is their father.

There is one place in the gospel where a very different—and contradictory—assessment of Jewish intransigence peeks through. In the Last Supper discourse Jesus warns his followers of coming persecution. "The time is coming when those who kill you will think they are offering devotion to God" (John 16:2b). That unique acknowledgment of Jewish sincerity is surprising, coming as it does on the heels of the venomous accusation that those who oppose Jesus "hate God" (15:23–25). Indeed, the sudden (and

22. There is a strong scholarly consensus that John's gospel originally ended with 20:30–31. Chapter 21 is a later appendix. See Brown, *Gospel of John*, 2:1077–80, and the extensive scholarly literature cited there.

isolated) recognition of the sincere, though—from John’s perspective—misguided motivations of Jews makes the vituperation against them in the rest of the gospel all the more disturbing. John 16:2 proves that the author knows better.

Another reason for the Jews’ rejection of Jesus is their disbelief that he fulfills the scriptures, which John characterizes the same way he does their disbelief in Jesus’ signs: as a willful refusal of the truth. John analyzes this root cause of disbelief only once and quite briefly (5:39–40, 46–47), but his argument is clear, almost syllogistic. The scriptures “testify on my behalf, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (5:39b–40). Moses “wrote about me,” so “if you really believed Moses, you would believe me” (5:46). But since they do not believe Jesus, it follows that they must not believe Moses (5:47).

John’s self-sealing logic equates Jews’ not accepting that Jesus fulfills scripture with their rejection of Moses (i.e., of their own Judaism). John does not point to any behavior (e.g., violating Torah) that shows that Jews disbelieve Moses; he infers that solely from their disbelief in Jesus. That inference would be valid only if it were transparently evident that Moses wrote about Jesus. But John openly admits that that was not true. Although he reports that the disciple Philip mysteriously realized that Jesus was the one “about whom Moses wrote” (1:45), John goes out of his way to explain that the disciples failed to understand that Jesus had fulfilled scripture until after the resurrection (2:22; 12:16). Philip’s proclamation in 1:45 is but one of numerous examples of things in John’s gospel that make sense only in the light of faith in the risen Jesus. Therefore, for John to maintain that the Jews should have recognized that Jesus fulfills scripture is tantamount to holding that they should have known during Jesus’ lifetime what his followers failed to realize until after they came to believe in his resurrection.

Two final and closely related explanations for Jewish failure to believe in Jesus make appeal to prophecy. The first says simply that Jewish disbelief is itself a fulfillment of prophecy.

³⁷ Although he had performed so many signs before their eyes, they did not believe in him, ³⁸ in order that the word the prophet Isaiah spoke would be fulfilled:

“Lord, who has believed our message?
To whom is God’s might revealed?”
(John 12:37–38, quoting Isa 53:1)

John here hints at more than he says. The opening “although” in John 12:37 seems to imply that since the signs Jesus worked were fully sufficient to elicit belief, there must have been something impeding the Jews’ recognition of

what was so clearly evident. Verse 38 can thus seem to explain that their disbelief was inevitable, for how can prophecy fail to be fulfilled?

The second explanation, which follows immediately after the first one, makes that implication explicit. John bluntly declares,

³⁹And so they were *unable* to believe, because Isaiah also said,
⁴⁰“He has blinded their eyes,
 and closed their minds,
 to make sure they don’t see with their eyes
 and understand with their minds,
 or else they would turn their lives around
 and I would heal them.”

⁴¹Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about it. (John 12:39–41, freely quoting Isa 6:10)

Given this analysis of the divine will as the cause of Jewish disbelief, John’s next sentence is puzzling: “Nevertheless, many did believe in him, even many of the ruling class” (12:42a). The “nevertheless” reveals John’s awareness of how strange is the ground on which he now treads: *many* Jews believed in Jesus, (a) despite their God-sent blindness, and (b) in defiance of prophecy. However, the full statement introduced by this report shows that John’s purpose is to condemn those believers for not professing their faith publicly.

⁴²Nevertheless, many did believe in him, even many of the ruling class, but because of the Pharisees they did not admit it, so they wouldn’t be thrown out of their congregations. ⁴³You see, they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God. (12:42–43)

John 12:37–38 implies and 12:39–40 directly asserts that the Jews were *prevented* by God from believing. If the reader dwells on this, a theological conundrum about divine justice seems inevitable: how can they be held guilty for not doing what God prevented them from doing? But John does not linger. He takes the reader straightaway to the condemnation in 12:42–43, which indicts, not the unbelievers, but the believers who lack the courage of martyrs. John thus quickly moves his audience from a facile condemnation of outsiders to anxious self-examination. (Do we—or would we—have the courage to profess faith in Jesus in the face of danger?) The rhetoric of v. 43 is especially effective, for it shifts the motivation for silence away from fear to a craven desire for transient glory. To hide one’s faith out of fear of persecution is understandable, perhaps even excusable; to do so

out of a preference for “human glory” over “the glory that comes from God” is devastatingly reprehensible.

I have drawn attention to how John draws attention *away* from the theological problem that is just below the surface of his two appeals to Isaiah. That John holds Jews morally culpable for not believing in Jesus is abundantly evident. And yet in 12:39–40, and in at least one other place (6:44: “No one can come to me unless the Father calls him”), John asserts that God himself prevented them from believing. John does not attempt to resolve this issue, nor does he even raise it. Perhaps he did not recognize it as a problem.

Who Knew?

How were those who encountered Jesus supposed to realize that the scriptures testify to him (John 5:39)? At the point in the story when Jesus makes that declaration, the only thing that had happened so far that John claims fulfilled scripture was Jesus’ disruption of the temple, which John admits that the disciples did not connect to scripture until later (2:17, 22), and which no other gospel presents as a fulfillment of scripture. As for the other fulfillment scenes in John, we can ask about them what we asked about those in the Gospel of Matthew: which of them deal with publicly observable events or circumstances that neutral observers could plausibly have interpreted as fulfillments of prophecy?

- That God had sent Jesus, the bread of life, from heaven (John 6:31–33) in fulfillment of Ps 78:24 (“He gave them bread from heaven to eat”) is an obviously Christian interpretation and not something anyone can verify by observation.
- Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (12:12–15) was a public event, but John admits that even the disciples did not connect it to prophecy until after they came to believe in Jesus’ resurrection.
- That “the Jews” did not believe in Jesus (12:37–40) would be public knowledge; and perhaps it is plausible that the public would perceive the truth behind John’s hyperbolic characterization that “the world” hated Jesus (15:25). But there is no good reason to think that people would see those circumstances as fulfilling scripture (Isa 53:1; Isa 6:9–10; Ps 35:19 respectively) unless they already believed that the scriptures were written about Jesus.

- Few people outside those who were present at Jesus' arrest would know that Jesus had been betrayed by one of his followers (John 13:18). Perhaps a few of those few would associate that fact with Ps 41:9 ("The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me") and thereby make the connection that Jesus had disclosed privately to his disciples (John 15:25).
- The crucifixion was a public event, to be sure. However, the three details of Jesus' execution that, according to John, fulfill prophecy (the soldiers' gambling for Jesus' clothing [19:23–24], their refraining from breaking his legs [19:32–33, 36], and the spearing of his corpse [19:34, 37]) are almost certainly narrative fictions, created by John out of the very scriptures they fulfill (see above).

In summary, the examination of each of the specific scriptures that John claims were fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus turns up virtually nothing to sustain the case that Jews who saw and heard Jesus should have realized that those scriptures were being fulfilled. And there is no basis at all for them to have concluded that Moses wrote about Jesus.

When John wraps up his narration of Jesus' public ministry, he reflects on Jewish disbelief in Jesus (12:37–40), interpreting it as a double fulfillment of prophecy. First, Jews' disbelief was itself a fulfillment of prophecy (12:38). Second, they were unable to believe because it was prophesied that God would prevent them (12:39–40). Here again John has to distort the quoted prophecy's original meaning in order to apply it to his story. Both quotations are from Isaiah and reflect on the failure of that prophet's own message to elicit a favorable response from Israel. John's recontextualization of both quotations forces them to refer to Jesus' preaching about himself.

John's Audience

All the gospels, and John especially, are stories about the past (the career of Jesus) that have meaning for the author's own present. "The Jews" in John's gospel, although they appear in the story as figures from the time of Jesus, represent for John's audience the Jews of their own day, with whom John's people are in hostile and futile debate. When Jesus tells Nicodemus, "We tell what we know, and we give evidence about what we've seen, but none of you accepts our evidence" (John 3:11), the plural pronouns are transparent indicators that John is using the character of Jesus to speak on behalf of his community to the Jews of his day.

A traumatic situation that seems to have catalyzed the writing of this gospel was a move by Jewish authorities to ban followers of Jesus from the synagogue (see 9:22). John wrote his gospel, not to persuade Jews that Jesus is the messiah—it was too late for that—but to reassure his audience that they were right and the Jews who “persecute” them (15:20) were wrong. Situating John’s theme of the fulfillment of scripture in that context helps us understand its function. At a time when Jewish authorities were telling those who believed in Jesus that they had no place in Israel’s religion, the argument that the scriptures of Israel were written about Jesus was a powerful means for his followers to reassert their claim to their religious heritage. If the specific arguments that particular details in the story of Jesus fulfilled particular scriptures were ever presented to real-life Jews—as opposed to the fictive Jews in stories told by followers of Jesus—in the hopes of persuading them, by the time John wrote his gospel those arguments were strictly for the benefit of John’s Christian audience. In seeking to understand the gospel’s impact on its audience, it is beside the point to ask whether those arguments refer to publicly observable events, or whether those events have some evident connection to the scriptures they supposedly fulfill. Those questions are aimed at assessing whether reasonable persons would accept the claim that Jesus fulfilled prophecy. But in the polemical situation in which John writes, opponents are not treated as reasonable people. If John’s audience is willing to believe that “the Jews” are children of Satan—and they have to be willing to do so because that is what Jesus himself calls his/their enemies—then we are long past the point where rational arguments can find a forum. From John’s perspective, the Jewish rejection of Jesus is both willful and culpable.

If I hadn’t come and spoken to them, they wouldn’t be guilty of sin. But as it is, they have no excuse for their sin. Those who hate me also hate my Father. If I hadn’t performed feats among them such as no one else has ever performed, they wouldn’t be guilty of sin. But as it is, they have witnessed these feats and come to hate both me and my Father. (John 15:22–24)

It should not surprise us that John then asserts that this hatred for Jesus fulfills scripture (15:25).

In light of the historical context of John’s gospel, we can adjust our questions about the plausibility of his argument from prophecy. Instead of asking whether the alleged fulfillments of scripture that John points out would have been evident to the Jews in the story at the time of Jesus, we can ask how those fulfillment scenes might be evaluated by Jews of John’s time, sixty or so years after the death of Jesus. In that context we don’t have

to wonder how or if people might realize which specific scriptures were supposedly fulfilled, because John quotes the scriptures he wants readers to consider. Similarly, we don't have to evaluate whether people knew about the events or circumstances that fulfill those scriptures, because John narrates them and coordinates them with the scriptures he quotes. Nor do we have to factor in John's acknowledgement that the disciples connected specific scriptures to certain events only after the resurrection, because John transmits their retrospective insights.

In assessing how Jews of John's day might respond to his message that they should believe that Jesus is the messiah because he fulfilled scripture, we can ask two questions. First, are the scriptures John quotes actually prophecies about the messiah? Second, how persuasive would the claim that Jesus fulfilled the scriptures be to those who were not already his followers?

Messianic Prophecies?

John quotes ten scriptures²³ that he claims were fulfilled in his narrative. It is constructive to canvass the Gospel of John, as we have done for the Gospel of Matthew, to see how many of the quoted texts that it asserts were fulfilled are prophetic predictions, and how many are about the messiah or some messianic figure.

1. *John 2:17 (Ps 69:9)*. "Zeal for your house will consume me." In the psalm, the verb refers to a past event ("has consumed"), which John has moved into the future ("will consume") so that it can point ahead to Jesus' death (see below). The psalm itself makes no prediction and is not about a messianic figure; the "me" in the quote is someone praying for deliverance from persecutors.
2. *John 6:31 (Ps 78:24)*. "He gave them bread from heaven to eat" is a transparent reference to the manna of the exodus. It is not a prophecy.
3. *John 12:15 (Zech 9:9)*. "Your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt" is a prediction about the future Davidic ruler, a messianic figure.
- 4–5. *John 12:38 and 40 (Isa 53:1 and 6:10)*. Both of these pronouncements refer to past actions that affected the prophet's own experience. Neither is a prediction, and neither is about a messianic figure.

23. Two of John's eight fulfillment scenes (12:37–40 and 19:33–37) each quote two passages.

6. *John 13:18 (Ps 41:9)*. “The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me” is not a prediction. In the psalm it describes a past event. The speaker (“me”) is not a messiah.
7. *John 15:25 (Ps 69:4)*. “They hated me for no reason” is not a prediction, nor is the speaker a messiah.
8. *John 19:24 (Ps 22:18)*. “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothes they cast lots” is not a prediction, nor is the speaker a messiah.
9. *John 19:36 (Exod 12:46 / Num 9:12)*. “None of his bones shall be broken” is not a prophecy; it is a ritual commandment about how the slaughtered Passover lamb is to be handled.
10. *John 19:37 (Zech 12:10)*. “They will look at the one they have pierced.” This cryptic oracle is a prediction, but to whom it refers is unclear. Perhaps the pierced one is a prophet who will be killed by the Israelites to whom he was sent. If so, this verse is very unlikely to be a messianic prophecy, since Jewish messianic conceptions, as diverse as they were in the first century, did not include a messiah who would be killed.²⁴

Results

Of the ten quoted scriptures allegedly fulfilled in John’s gospel, only one (the prediction from Zechariah in John 12:15) can safely be considered a messianic prophecy.

Plausible Fulfillments?

Our second step in assessing John’s use of the fulfillment of scripture is to pose the question, what would Jews of John’s day make of his claims that the scriptures he quotes were fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus? Let’s consider each of John’s fulfillment scenes with that question in mind.

24. The traditional Hebrew text (the Masoretic Text) of Zech 12:10 is worded strangely: “They will look at *me* whom they have pierced.” In context the “me” can only be Yahweh himself. This extremely odd reading has led most editors of critical editions of the Bible to substitute “the one” for “me,” on the reasonable assumption that the Hebrew text is corrupt. A rabbinic interpretation solved the difficulty another way, interpreting the sentence to mean that “they” will pierce the messiah and look to God (Brown, *Gospel of John*, 2:955). However, there is no evidence that this interpretation was known in the first century.

(1) Would many agree that Jesus' "zeal" for the temple had "consumed" him (John 2:14–16)? Some might grant that Jesus' disturbance of the temple was motivated by zeal for God's house. However, in order to see Jesus fulfilling that scripture, one would have to interpret his disruption of the temple to be what motivated his enemies to seek his death. While that is a plausible—though not necessary—way to understand the narrative plot in the synoptic gospels (Mark 11:18),²⁵ John's gospel does not connect the dots in this way. While the synoptic gospels situate Jesus' demonstration in the temple during the last week of his life, John puts it in chapter 2 and draws no connection between it and the threat to Jesus' life. According to John, the death plot against Jesus was motivated by the authorities' alarm at the large numbers of people who believed in him because of his raising of Lazarus (11:45–53).

(2) None except Jesus' followers would believe that he had been sent from heaven, and so only they would acknowledge that he was the fulfillment of "He gave them bread from heaven to eat" (John 6:31–33).²⁶

(3) Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem (John 12:15). It's hard to see how that would impress people because it was such a commonplace event. Many people had ridden donkeys into that city, and surely they had not fulfilled prophecy by doing so. So although the prophecy from Zechariah is about a figure who might be considered a messiah, there is nothing particularly messianic about riding a donkey. Besides, unless one already regarded Jesus as a king, one would not agree that he fulfilled the prophecy about a *king* riding a donkey.

(4–5) One would have to already believe that Jesus' expansive claims about himself were true in order to realize that people's disbelief in him was a fulfillment of prophecy (John 12:38 and 40).

(6–7) Only those who already believed that Jesus was the messiah would see much significance in the scriptures that were fulfilled when Jesus was betrayed by a friend (John 13:18) and "hated without cause" (John 15:25), for those scriptures would be fulfilled in countless situations of betrayal and undeserved enmity.

(8) Similarly, some people might be impressed that scriptures were fulfilled when Jesus' executioners gambled for his clothing (John 19:24), but they might also object that such a thing had nothing to do with being the messiah.

25. Mark 11:18 does not report that Jesus' enemies sought to kill him because of his act in the temple. It says that they decided to kill him *after* his act there because of the crowd's reaction to his teaching.

26. There is no biblical verse with this wording. John seems to be paraphrasing Ps 78:24 or Ps 105:40 or Neh 9:15.

(9) People would have no reason to agree that the prohibition “You shall not break any of its bones” (Exod 12:46) refers to Jesus’ body (see John 19:36) unless they were already willing to see him as a slaughtered Passover lamb, which only his followers might do.

(10) A similar problem attends “They will look on him whom they have pierced” (John 19:37, quoting Zech 12:10). Being pierced by a spear was, unfortunately, not all that rare. Certainly thousands of Jews had died that way in the terrible war with Rome (66–70 CE). Moreover, anyone who knew the Zechariah passage quoted by John would realize that it could not refer to Jesus unless one agreed with John to ignore most of the actual prophecy (see p. 182) and to consider only the one sentence he extracts from it.

Results

The results of this analysis confirm those from Matthew’s gospel: unless one already believed in Jesus, the chances are very slim that one would be persuaded by John’s fulfillment scenes that Jesus had fulfilled scriptures in any way that made him special.

Conclusion

The Gospel of John is unique in its forthright admission that only those who believe that Jesus is the resurrected Son of God can recognize that he fulfilled scripture (John 2:7; 12:16). John, like Matthew, periodically interrupts the gospel narrative to explain how events in it fulfill specific quoted scriptures. Also like Matthew, John *helps* Jesus fulfill scripture, in three interesting ways. First, John is quite selective in quoting the scriptures that he claims were fulfilled, isolating just the right words to lift from a passage, while avoiding adjacent phrases that cannot apply to Jesus. Second, John reports Jesus’ fulfilling a prediction that he quotes as scripture, but that is not actually a biblical text (John 7:37–38). Third, John uses scriptures as raw material in composing certain scenes in which those same scriptures are fulfilled. Scenes composed in this fashion can demonstrate the fulfillment of scripture with unusual clarity.

John’s gospel is colored throughout by an undisguised anti-Jewish polemic that heaps moral condemnation on Jews for not believing in Jesus. John, speaking through Jesus, asserts that Jews have no excuse for not embracing Jesus as the Son of God because, among other kinds of “evidence,” they should have realized that he fulfilled scripture (John 5:39). This chapter

has scrutinized that claim in detail, in regard to Jews both of Jesus' day (the ones portrayed in the narrative) and of John's day (the ones in the imagined audience of his gospel). The analysis in this chapter has argued that for the former group, it is most obscure *how* they were supposed to come to believe in Jesus on the basis of scripture, because the fulfillment scenes that John narrates do not describe events in which neutral observers could reasonably be expected to recognize fulfillments of scripture. In fact, John acknowledges that even Jesus' disciples could not recognize them that way at the time. As for Jews in John's implied audience, I have argued that it is most unrealistic to think that his gospel would persuade them that Jesus was the messiah because he had fulfilled scripture, because only one of the ten quoted passages that John claims had been fulfilled is an actual messianic prediction. Furthermore, the connections John draws between the scenes he narrates and the scriptures he quotes in them are simply not plausible, unless one *already* believes in Jesus.

SAMPLE