

# The “Nations,” the “World,” and the “Jews” in John\*

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## *Introduction*

Accepting the various testimonies internal and external that John wrote his gospel after the synoptics, most likely from Ephesus in Asia Minor, the significance carried by the terms “nations” (*ethnoi*), “world” (*kosmos*), and “Jews” (*Judeans*) may enlighten the progress of redemptive revelation from the synoptics to John. The synoptic gospels apparently were written while Jerusalem was still standing. That city continued to have a major role as the focal point of the ministry of the original apostles so long as it remained. But if the evidence is judged to be sufficient, John wrote his gospel in the 80’s or 90’s, well after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., after the banishment of the Jews from their ancient city, after the center of Christianity had shifted from Jerusalem in Judea, to Antioch in Syria, then to Ephesus in Asia (where according to tradition John completed his later ministry), and then to Rome in Europe. By the time of John’s composition of his gospel, the “nations,” the “world” and the “Jews” had taken on a totally different complexion than in the days in which the synoptics were written. What then is the significance of these three terms as they appear in the synoptics in comparison with John’s later presentation of the “gospel”?

### *a. “Nations” in the four gospels*

The term “nation” or “nations” (*ethnos, ethnoi*) occurs a total of 39 times in the four gospels. It appears 15 times in Matthew, 6 times in Mark, 13 times in Luke, and 5 times in John.

Matthew appears as the most “evangelistic” in his specific references to the “nations.” Six times he speaks of the gospel as it applies to the different nations of humanity. Twice he places the “nations” in the context of a fulfilled prophecy, indicating that all along the *nations* were the objects of God’s redemptive work. “Galilee of the *nations*” is the place for revelation of the light of redemption (Matt. 4:15; cf. Isa. 9:1, 2). The prophesied servant of the Lord will bring “justice to the *nations*,” and “in his name the *nations* will hope” (Matt. 12:17-21; Isa. 42:1-4). In addition, Jesus informs his disciples that as they suffer abuse they will witness to the *nations* on Jesus’ behalf (Matt. 10:18). Jesus warns the Jews that the kingdom will be taken from them and given to a *nation* bearing its proper fruit (Matt. 21:43). Before the *telos*, the end of the age, this gospel must be preached to *all nations* (Matt. 24:14). The risen Lord’s Great Commission embraces *all nations* as the objects of thorough discipling (Matt. 28:19).

Mark only twice refers to the nations as the objects of the evangelistic gospel. As Jesus cleanses the temple Mark places the incident in the context of the Old Testament as Jesus declares its function to be a “house of prayer for *all nations*” (Mark 11:17; Isa. 56:7). He affirms with Matthew that the gospel must first be preached to *all the nations* before the consummation will occur (Mark 13:10).

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Luke twice declares the saving gospel to be *for the nations* at the beginning and the end of his gospel. Aged Simeon prophetically declares the infant Jesus to be “a light of revelation for the *nations*” (Luke 2:32). The resurrected Christ unfolds the scriptures to declare that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to *all nations*, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47).

John, in striking contrast with all three synoptics, never speaks of the gospel as going to the “nations.” In the five times the term “nation” (*ethnos*) occurs in John, it always designates the nation of Israel, but never the nations of the world (John 11:48, 50, 51, 52; 18:35).

Is John so anti-evangelical that he never declares the gospel to be for the nations? Hardly can this be the case. Instead of the term “nations” as the word John uses to identify the object of the gospel of the Son of God, John chooses to use a different term, a more all-embracing word: **WORLD! KOSMOS!** That is John’s term for noting the evangelistic object of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. That is the word to be considered next in this examination of the four gospels to see if any progression may be noted between the synoptics and John in their respective uses of the terms “nations,” “world” and “Jews.”

*b. The “world” (kosmos) in the four gospels*

(1) In the synoptic gospels

The term “world” (*kosmos*) occurs 2 times in Mark<sup>1</sup>, 9 times in Matthew<sup>2</sup>, and 3 times in Luke. But the same word occurs 78 times in 57 different verses in John. Matthew’s references come closest to anticipating some aspects of John’s usage. But the concept of the “world” obviously plays a much larger role in John’s gospel. “Nations” (*ethnoi*) in the synoptic gospels on some occasions represented the object of God’s redemptive purposes. This function of the term “nations” never occurs in John. Instead, John employs the term “world” (*kosmos*) to embrace peoples from all nations, including the Israelite nation as well, as the objects of God’s redemptive purposes. While the term “world” (*kosmos*) finds its place also in the synoptic gospels, this concept has a distinctive role to play in John’s gospel.

Matthew takes the lead among the synoptics in terms of passages in which the “world” stands as the object of God’s redemptive working in Jesus Christ. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus singles out his disciples as “the light of the *world*” (Matt. 5:14). In his parable of the tares, the field is the *world*, and the good seed are the sons of the kingdom (Matt. 13:38). As he judges the nations, the Son of Man will invite the righteous to take their inheritance prepared for them since the creation of the *world* (Matt. 25:34). As the gospel is preached in the whole *world*, the anointing of Jesus by the woman for his burial will be remembered (Matt. 26:13). These various references to the “world” as the object of evangelism in Matthew may be joined to his description of the “nations” as recipients of the gospel. This total of ten references in Matthew that anticipate the spreading of the gospel throughout the *nations* of the *world* is impressive. No room for doubt is left regarding the world-wide intentions of the gospel of Jesus Christ according to Matthew’s gospel.

Mark also refers to the preaching of the gospel “throughout the world” in connection with the rehearsing of Jesus’ extravagant anointment (Mark 14:9). But this one reference alone in Mark specifies the world as the object of the proclamation of the gospel, apart from the longer

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<sup>1</sup> Omitting the reference in the longer ending of Mark that refers to preaching the gospel to the whole world (16:15).

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, “world” does not appear in Matthew’s “Great Commission” (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus’ followers are to make disciples of all the “nations.”

ending of Mark and its commission by the resurrected Jesus: “Go into all the *world* and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

Luke’s gospel never designates the “world” as the object of gospel proclamation. As previously noted, his gospel opens and closes with references to the blessing of the gospel that reaches to the “nations.” But the concept of the *kosmos* as the place of proclamation for the gospel does not appear in Luke.

## (2) In John

The 78 references to the “world,” the *kosmos* in John’s gospel, tell a fuller story. Of these references, at least 28 speak of the redemptive purposes of God for the *kosmos*. Even the ten references in Matthew can hardly compare in number and scope to John’s presentation of the “world,” the *kosmos* as the object of the gospel’s embracement. A summary of John’s usage may be helpful in understanding his distinctive perspective on “the world”:

### (a) A summary of John’s usage

Jesus existed in glory and was loved by the Father before the world existed (John 17:5, 24). As the eternal *logos* (the “word”), he created the *kosmos* (John 1:10). He came into the *kosmos* (John 1:9; 11:27; 16:28). In fact, the Father sent him into the *kosmos* (John 6:33; 10:36). He eventually leaves this *kosmos* to return to the Father (John 13:1; 14:19; 16:28; 17:11).

The “world” for John is not in itself evil, since the world was made by him (John 1:10). Yet the *kosmos* did not recognize him and does not know the Father (John 1:10; 17:25).

Jesus is the savior of the *kosmos* and has come to take away the sin of the *kosmos* (John 1:29; 4:42). He gives life to the *kosmos* (John 6:51). He is the light of the *kosmos* (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). God gave up his one and only Son for the *kosmos* because he loved the *kosmos* (John 3:16). Jesus came, not to condemn the world but to save the world (John 3:17; 12:47). He spoke openly to the world (John 18:20). He came into the world to bear witness to the truth (John 18:37).

In response, the world hates him, because he testifies that its works are evil (John 7:7). The world also hates the disciples of Jesus, because they are not “of” this world (John 15:18, 19; 17:16). Jesus has a kingdom that is not of this world (John 18:36). His own were given to him out of the world by the Father, so he prays for them and not for the world (John 17:6, 9, 14).

He has come into the world that a distinction might be made between those who see and those who think they see (John 9:39). The person who hates his life in this world will keep it forever (John 12:25). The devil is the ruler of this world, and comes at a specific time intending to destroy Jesus (John 12:31; 14:30). The world will rejoice at the devil’s attack on the life of Jesus (John 16:20). But Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33). He is leaving the world, but his disciples will remain in the world (John 17:11). Jesus prays that the Father will keep his disciples from the evil one (John 17:15). He speaks his revelatory words while in the world (John 17:14).

The world cannot receive the Spirit that is coming (John 14:17). Jesus will not manifest himself to the world (John 14:22). Yet the Spirit shall convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8).

By doing the will of his Father, Jesus will manifest himself to the world (John 14:31). Just as the Father has sent him into the world, so he is sending his disciples into the world (John 17:18). By their oneness, the world may believe that the Father has sent him and loved them (John 17:21, 23).

## (b) Conclusions

What conclusions may be reached regarding John's gospel as it relates to the *kosmos*, the world, that represents an advancement beyond the perspective of the synoptics? It is not that John's perspective on the world contradicts the perspective of the synoptics. But John's analysis represents an enlarged vision of the world (the *kosmos*) in relation to God's redemptive purposes. The following summation may serve to underscore John's enlarged vision:

- (1) Jesus the *logos* of God existed in eternity before the *kosmos* existed. As the *logos*, he created the world, and is the one who makes sense out of the world.
- (2) The *kosmos* is not in itself evil, but currently is under the dominion of the evil one.
- (3) The *kosmos* includes the whole of humanity, Jews as well as all other peoples. This perspective on the "world" is most significant for John, and represents a "breakthrough" beyond the perspective of the synoptics. The synoptics distinguish between the Jews and the nations. But the first three gospels do not present the "world" as the unified source of both Jews and the nations. That perspective is unique to John.<sup>3</sup>

John's distinctive perspective on the "world" as the single source of both redeemed Jews and redeemed peoples from all nations becomes evident when it is noted that the famous "God so loved the *world*" of John 3:16 appears in the context of Jesus' speaking with Nicodemus, a leader of the *Jews*. This "man," this *anthropos* named Nicodemus (John 3:1) must be "born again" before being able to even see the kingdom of God. Though a leader of the Jews, he is a part of the "world" out of which Jesus saves his own people. Yet elsewhere John distinguishes between the Jews and the "other sheep" that belong to Jesus (John 10:16a). But from these two sources "one flock" shall be formed with "one shepherd" (John 10:16b)

- (4) God in his love sent his only beloved Son to save the *kosmos* by redeeming the ones he had chosen from among the Jews as well as from all the other peoples.
- (5) As the Son leaves the *kosmos* to return to his glory, the Father and the Son will send "another Supporter" (*ἄλλον παράκλητον* -John 14:16), even the Spirit of Truth, to preserve his own chosen people while they continue in the *kosmos*.
- (6) As the *kosmos* has hated the Son because his light exposes its depravity, so they will hate his disciples.
- (7) As the Father commissioned the Son into the *kosmos*, so the Son commissions his disciples to go into the *kosmos* as instruments of his purposes of redemption for the *kosmos*.

Because the tendency of the Church has been to read the gospels with a view toward the unified testimony of the four, it would be most natural to assume that these major perspectives

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<sup>3</sup> Note the discussion of William Hendriksen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 79, n. 26. Hendriksen refers to the following verses that present this all-embrasive concept of the "world" as including all people, both "Jews" and "Gentiles": John 1:29; 3:16, 17; 4:42; 6:33, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46. All these verses in John support this understanding of the "world" in John. Hendriksen notes that this all-embrasive meaning of "world" in John has been apparently missed in standard New Testament Greek lexicons as well as in the "excellent" article in Kittel's TWNT.

on the *kosmos* would be common to the synoptics as well as to John. But though in seed-form these concepts may appear in the synoptics, they are distinctly the product of an advancement in redemptive revelation found only in John.

How critical it continues to be for the Church to possess the *somatica*, the “body” of historical reality found in the synoptic gospels, as appropriately described by Clement of Alexandria in the second century AD. But as Clement continues his comparison between the synoptics and John, how appropriate as well are the particular insights of *pneumatikon...euangelion*, the “spiritual gospel” found in John’s record.<sup>4</sup> After the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews--Christian and otherwise from Jerusalem--John writes from Ephesus with a perspective on the “world” that was the need of the hour. As Westcott commented: “In the last quarter of the first century, the world relatively to the Christian Church was a *new world*...”<sup>5</sup>

Because in the processes of redemptive history this final stage of the apostolic age naturally blends into the present era, John’s perspective on the world should assist believers greatly in defining their perspective on the world today. John’s concept of the “world” includes Jews as well as peoples from all nations (“Gentiles”) from which the sheep of Christ are called.

In a most significant way, John’s view of the “world” may be regarded as a natural stepping-stone to the Apostle Paul’s perspective on the world. As the first great missionary of the gospel to the world, Paul underscores the fact that there is “no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same one is Lord of all, richly blessing all who call on him” (Rom. 10:12, opr).

### *c. The Jews in John’s gospel*

#### Introduction

To this point, the terms “nation, nations” (*ethnos, ethnoi*) and “world” (*kosmos*) as these terms appear in the four gospels have been considered. Special attention has been paid to a comparison between the use of these two terms as they are used in the synoptics and in John.

The third term that relates quite closely to the concept of “nations” and the “world” is the word “Jew.”<sup>6</sup> The extensive use of “Jew” by John in contrast with the synoptics has been generally recognized. *Mark* uses the term “Jew(s)” 6 times, with 5 of his references referring to the king of the “Jews,” the title given to Jesus by Pilate more as a mockery of the Jews than of Jesus (Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26; cf. 7:3). *Matthew* uses the term “Jew(s)” 5 times, with 4 of them referring to the king of the “Jews” (Matt. 2:2; 27:11, 29, 37; cf. 28:15). *Luke* uses the term “Jew(s)” 5 times, with 3 of them referring to the king of the “Jews” (Luke 23:3, 37, 38; cf. 7:3, 23:51).

In sharpest contrast, John uses the term “Jew(s)” 70 times, more than ten times more than any one of the synoptic gospels. John has been severely criticized for his usage of the term “Jew.” It has been proposed that John’s extensive usage of “Jew” provided a canonical Christian basis for strong negative perspectives toward Jews.<sup>7</sup> But a closer look at these 70 occurrences of

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Barnabas Lindars, *New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 26.

<sup>5</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1958), lxxxviii.

<sup>6</sup> As has been noted, the term “Jew” goes back to the earliest days of English bible translations. “Judean” would be a more precise transliteration of both *Yehudi* (יְהוּדִי) in Hebrew or *Ioudaios* (Ἰουδαῖος) in Greek. As previously indicated, from the perspective of redemptive history, a “Judean” (a “Jew” in English translations) is a “survivor of Israel’s exiles,” a “trophy of God’s grace.”

<sup>7</sup> Shakespeare’s Shylock in the *Merchant of Venice* with his dagger drawn to claim his pound of flesh from a debtor in default has for many decades served as a major illustration of popular attitude toward the “Jew.” A 1904 silent

“Jew(s)” in John may go a long way toward clarifying his actual intent in the employment of the designation.

For John, the basis for understanding humanity is not “Jews” in contrast with the “nations” (“Gentiles”), it is “Jews” in relation to the “world.” This perspective appropriately suits the circumstance of a worldwide situation in which the Jews have been expelled from Jerusalem and John writes from Ephesus, the gospel center for Asia. The term “nations” would not have served adequately for John’s purposes, since he is focusing on the “world” and the “world-wide” gospel. “Nations” (*ethnoi*) has the effect of dividing the various peoples of the world into segments. But the word “world” (*kosmos*) suited perfectly his perspective on the “cosmic” character of the Christ’s redemptive work, including both Jews and peoples from all other peoples of the world.

“Jew” as employed variously by John may be classified in three categories: a “neutral” use of the term, a “positive” use of the term, and an “adversarial” use of the term. These three categories may be examined more closely.

(1) A “neutral” use of “Jew” in John

On several occasions, John alludes to ritual practices of the Jews, including purification of water in jugs (John 2:6), a dispute over washings (John 3:25), the removal of Jesus’ body from the cross before the Sabbath (John 19:31), and the manner in which his body is wrapped for burial (John 19:40). In other places, reference is made to various feasts of the Jews, including Passover (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55; 13:1), tabernacles (John 7:2), the feast of Dedication (John 10:22, 24) and an unidentified feast (John 5:1).

In all these cases, no value judgment is made about Jews and their practices. Nothing negative or combative is implied in these uses.

(2) “Positive” inferences associated with the term “Jew” in John

Many instances of the use of Jew in John clearly express a positive attitude. This aspect of the term must not be overlooked when an evaluation of John’s perspective on Jews is being made. All the earliest disciples of Jesus were Jews, even though the term may not be directly applied to them. Nicodemus was a member of the ruling council of the Jews (John 3:1). Jesus himself being of the tribe of Judah affirms that salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22). Several specific passages indicate that many who must have included Jews believed in him (John 7:31; 8:30, 31; 10:42; 11:45; 12:11, 42). Jesus urged them to hold to his teaching (John 8:31). They manifest natural human kindness and sympathy to Mary and Martha at the death of their brother Lazarus (John 11:19, 31, 33). They take note of Jesus’ tears (John 11:36). Joseph of Arimathea provided for Jesus’ burial, though a secret believer (John 19:38).

All these positive elements in John’s gospel with reference to the Jews must be given their full weight. Clearly the writer of the fourth gospel was not blinded by prejudice against Jews. Yet it must be acknowledged that the far greater percentage of John’s references to the Jews falls into what may be described as “adversarial” observations. It is not that Jesus takes on a role of adversary toward the Jews. Repeatedly he offers himself and all the blessings he can bring to the Jewish peoples. But although many Jews favorably receive him and his ministry, their leadership in particular repeatedly and with increasing determination set themselves against him.

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movie entitled “The Wandering Jew” still is available on the internet, with its depiction of the “Jew” who cursed Jesus on the way to the cross.

### (3) Adversarial observations regarding the “Jews” in John

Quarrelings and disputings about the ministry of Jesus characterize John’s picture of the Jews. Numerous times they persecute Jesus, often determining to kill him:

- they dispute his claim to restore the temple in 3 days (John 2:20)
- they dispute with the healed man for carrying his mat on the Sabbath (John 5:10)
- learning that it was Jesus who healed the man on the sabbath, they become all the more determined to kill him (John 5:18)
- they grumble because Jesus claims to be bread from heaven (John 6:41)
- they quarrel among themselves about eating Jesus’ flesh (John 6:52)
- Jesus will not go into Judea because they are trying to kill him (John 7:1)
- the “Jerusalemites” seek to seize him, even as many of the crowd believe in him (John 7:25, 30, 31)
- the high priests and Pharisees send [armed] guards to seize Jesus because many in the crowd were believing in him (John 7:32)
- even some of the crowd wanted to seize him (John 7:44)
- they seek to kill him even though they are the physical seed of Abraham (John 8:37)
- even those who profess belief in him insult him by saying he is a Samaritan and has a demon (John 8:48)
- they conclude he must have a demon because he says if anyone keeps his word they will never die (John 8:52)
- they dispute Jesus’ claim to have seen Abraham, since he is not yet 50 years old (John 8:57)
- they take up stones to stone him, because he said, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:59)
- they refuse to believe the blind man’s testimony that he was born blind (John 9:18)
- they determine to excommunicate anyone that confesses Jesus as the Christ (John 9:22)
- they dispute among themselves about Jesus, with some concluding he is raving mad (John 10:19)
- they pick up stones to stone him because he claims to be one with the Father (John 10:31, 32)
- they try to seize him once more because he said, “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me” (John 10:39)
- the disciples remind him that the Jews were planning on stoning him (John 11:8)
- from the day of Lazarus’ resurrection they plot to kill him. So he could not walk openly among them (John 11:53, 54)
- the high priests and the Pharisees had given commandment that if anyone knew where he was, he should make it known in order that they could seize him (John 11:57)
- the high priests resolve that they must kill Lazarus (John 12:10)
- the officers of the Jews were among those who arrested Jesus (John 18:12)
- the Jews press Pilate to put Jesus to death (John 19:7)
- they strongly resist Pilate’s desire to release Jesus (John 19:12)

As many as 28 references in John’s gospel provide an adversarial attitude on the part of the Jews in their relation to Jesus. Almost every chapter in John makes some reference to the Jews, most

of them adversarial in character, with the major exception in John 13-17, where Jesus teaches in the privacy of the upper room, alone with his eleven disciples after Judas has left.<sup>8</sup>

At least five times, John reports “fear of the Jews” by various people. Widespread whisperings about Jesus circulate at the feast, but no one spoke openly for fear of the Jews (John 7:12, 13). The parents of the man born blind manifest the same fear (John 9:22). Many of their own leaders believe in Jesus but do not confess him for fear of the Jews (John 12:42). Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple “for fear of the Jews (John 19:38). The disciples locked themselves in the upper room for the same reason (John 20:19).

These adversarial reportings in John consistently depict the zeal among the Jewish leadership for purity in faith, lifestyle and worship. Their zeal brought them to the point of readiness to excommunicate and even to kill anyone who poses a threat to their establishment. They are publicly recognized as a life-threatening social factor.

But why? Why would John in his gospel present such a strong adversarial perspective in his depiction of the Jews? Could he not have been a bit gentler in his descriptions? Might not human history subsequent to Jesus have been less brutal in its treatment of the Jews? What led John to present this adversarial perspective in the attitude of the Judeans toward Jesus?

On a most basic level, John simply presents things as they actually developed. Something must explain the drastic mistreatment of the historical Jesus, a man who went about only doing good. John’s explanation is that a significant number of the Jews living in Jesus’ day rejected him and his teaching and viewed him as a threat to their faith and their ongoing traditions.

From one perspective, their adversarial relation to Jesus is fully understandable. This man Jesus claims to be God, and one with God. He has the audacity to say “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.” He even identifies himself as the Son of God. These statements represent blasphemy, a blatant violation of the Torah worthy of death.

The only problem with their conclusion was the outward confirmation of Jesus’ claims by his miraculous works, which they themselves had to acknowledge. As a single example, when has it ever been reported across the whole of redemptive history that someone caused a person born blind to see? In the end, even Pilate the secular Roman judge could see that it was “out of jealousy” that they delivered him (Matt. 27:18). They were concerned that if Jesus’ popularity continued to swell, the Romans would take away “the position and the nationhood that belongs to us” (John 12:48 opr).

But should not the Romans equally bear the blame for the abusive treatment of Jesus? After all, Roman law prescribed crucifixion as the death-penalty, not Jewish law. As their leaders argue before Pilate, they did not have authority to put anyone to death (John 18:31). Did the Romans actively receive Jesus rather than reject him? Pilate as their governor obviously did not. Clearly the Romans must share the blame for the abusive treatment of Jesus, despite all Pilate’s protestations of innocence. According to John, it was not only the Jews that rejected Jesus. The whole “world” of that day, consisting of “Jews” and “Romans,” joined together in their opposition to Jesus. As John’s gospel repeatedly underscores, the *world* hates Jesus, because he testifies that its works are evil (John 7:7). The devil is the ruler of this world, and comes to destroy Jesus (John 12:31; 14:30). The world, consisting of both Jews and all other peoples, rejoices at the destruction of Jesus (John 16:20).

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<sup>8</sup> John 13:33 contains the only mention of Jews in John 13-17. In that single verse, reference is made by Jesus to the fact that he had previously told the Jews that where he was going they could not come.



But out of this same “world” God gathers to his son Jesus the people he has chosen. The Father draws them, and they come to Jesus. Believing in Jesus they come. As they come, they form a new flock, the new people of God.

This principle holds even today. The “world” rejects Jesus. But the Father sovereignly summons people from the world, and they come to the Son. John, writing after the dispersion of the Jews at the fall of Jerusalem, depicts the situation as it actually was in Jesus’ day as well as in his day. This same situation prevails even today.

John in his preface anticipates the rejection of Jesus by the Jews: “He [the promised Messiah] came to his own (place), and his own (people) did not receive him” (John 1:11 opr). But inherent in this rejection, this adversarial relation to the designated savior of God’s people, is a principle that permeates the history of redemption. Cain the elder brother murders Abel his younger brother (Gen. 4:5, 8). Why did he kill him? Because he was “of the Evil One,” as the Apostle John writes in his letter (1 John 3:12). Israel in the wilderness quarrels with Moses their God-ordained leader (Exod. 17:2, 3). David’s son Absalom foments rebellion against his father, seeking to kill him (2 Sam. 15:1-12; Psa. 3 title). In the structure of the Psalter, no less than three of the five books feature psalms that display trusted individuals who become the traitorous archenemy. (Psa. 41:9 [Book I]; Psa. 69:8, 9 [Book II]; Psa. 109:4, 5, 8 [Book V]). All three of these passages are quoted in John’s gospel:

*Even my close friend, whom I trusted,  
he who shared my bread,  
has lifted up his heel against me (Psa. 41:9 [Book I]; John 13:18).*

*I am a stranger to my brothers,  
an alien to my own mother’s sons;  
for zeal for your house consumes me (Psa. 69:8, 9 [Book II]; John 2:17).*

*With words of hatred they surround me;  
they attack me without cause (Psa. 109:3 [Book V]; John 15:25).<sup>9</sup>*

The depravity of the world comes to its fullest expression when the whole world, including both Jews and all nations, repeatedly reject him. Their adversarial relation to their God-sent Messiah originates with Satan himself, even as noted in John’s gospel (John 13:2, 27). From Satan the betrayal must originate, and from within the twelve the betraying agent must come. Only then could the depth of human depravity be displayed in all its ugliness. Satan himself must put it in the heart of one of the twelve, chosen by Jesus himself from among the favored people of God. This “betrayed” of Jesus is the most trusted of the twelve, for he was “keeper of the money bag” (John 12:6). He may not be among the favored three of the twelve, but he was the trusted treasurer of the twelve. In this context the “mystery of iniquity” may be measured for all its depravity.

At the same time, nothing could better display the heights of divine grace than the salvation that comes to these same Jews. Jesus knew it would happen this way from the prophetic scriptures. “Who has believed our report?” was the cry of the prophet Isaiah as he anticipated the rejection of the Savior by God’s own people (Isa. 53:1). This is the precise passage quoted by John to explain the unbelief of the Jews (John 12:38). Despite all the signs worked by Jesus, they still did not believe in him. Yet in his coming, a great multitude of Jews

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. O. Palmer Robertson, “The Intimate Friend Who Becomes the Archenemy” in *The Flow of the Psalms* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 250, 251.

along with peoples from all other nations have experienced redemption and restoration in him.  
For:

*Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the nations to glorify God for his mercy; as it is written,  
Therefore I will give praise to you among the nations (Rom. 15:8,9).*

### *Conclusion*

It is true. His own people rejected him. But it is also true. Never in any age since Jesus (or even since Abraham) has there ever failed to be Israelites who have been believers in Jesus as the Christ. Never will there fail to be Jews among the true people of God. It is guaranteed by the LORD's oath-bound covenant made with Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus Christ. In his magisterial analysis of the wondrous ways of God's grace with a rebellious and lost humanity, Paul repeatedly stresses God's ongoing, ever-going faithfulness to his covenant promises (Rom. 9:3-5; 11:1-6; 15:8, 9).

John's gospel represents both the rejection and the acceptance of Jesus by the Jews. No rancor toward the Jews characterizes John's gospel. Rancor indeed manifests itself in Peter as he attempts to decapitate the High Priest's servant. With his sword's sweeping blow he manages to reap only the servant's right ear. But Jesus commanded his hot-tempered disciple to put away his sword, and restored the severed ear (John 18:10, 11; Luke 23:51).

In John's gospel the Jews stand in tandem with the "world." Yet for John Jews are also perceived as being included in his definition of the "world." And God so loved the "world" that he gave up his one and only son. Whosoever believes in him, whether he be from the Jews or from any other peoples of the world, has the right to be called a son of God.