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"Son of God" or "God's Chosen One" (John 1:34)? A Narrative-Critical Solution to a Text-Critical Problem

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A reasoned-eclectic approach to NT textual criticism examines both external and internal evidence when evaluating textual problems. This study explores the value of narrative criticism as another internal criterion when discussing intrinsic probabilities; specific attention is given to resolving the textual problem in John 1:34 ("Son of God" versus "God's chosen one"). After examining the external evidence, the discussion turns to the motif of incomplete understanding that emerges over the first four days of the narrative proper (1:19–51). Against the backdrop of the Johannine prologue (1:1–18), which provides the literary audience with a complete description of Jesus' identity, this pattern of misunderstanding suggests that "God's chosen one"—an otherwise unattested term in the Fourth Gospel—is to be preferred over the "Son of God" reading.

Key Words: John, textual criticism, narrative criticism, son, chosen, misunderstanding

INTRODUCTION

A difficult textual problem arises at John 1:34, where the standard critical editions of the Greek NT read ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ("the Son of God").[1] Though the external evidence for this reading is impressive, the internal

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1. The standard Greek texts retain the phrase ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, while ὁ ἐκλεκτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ is listed in the apparatus as a variant reading. See, e.g., *The Greek New Testament* (5th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014); *Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th ed.; Münster: Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, 2012); *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform* (ed. Maurice Robinson and William G. Pierpont; Southborough, MA: Chilton, 2005); *The Greek New Testament* (ed. B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007). It should be noted that *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (ed. Michael W. Holmes; Atlanta: SBL, 2010) is an exception to this general trend in the critical editions.

evidence strongly favors the variant reading, ὁ ἐκλεκτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ("God's chosen one"). Translation committees and commentators are divided over this difficult verse.[2] This essay aims to examine the textual evidence using a reasoned-eclectic approach, while also introducing narrative-critical concerns that are generally ignored by textual critics. This two-pronged approach is employed with the belief that a narrative hermeneutic can inform text-critical methodology and in the process offer a plausible solution to the textual problem in John 1:34.[3]

Analyzing the Textual Problem

The standard eclectic texts list three readings for the verse under consideration; the manuscript evidence for these readings is as follows:

2 The NRSV, NASB, ESV, NIV (1984), and HCSB all retain the reading "Son of God." English translations that read "the Chosen One of God" include NAB, NLT, NEB, JB, NIV (2011), and NET. A survey of major commentaries written since 1900 reveals significant disagreement on this textual issue. Commentators who favor ὁ υἱος τοῦ θεοῦ include George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36, Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 21, 25; J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* (ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 52; F.-M. Braun, *Jean le Théologien*, vol. 2, *Les grandes traditions d'Israel, L'accord des Ecritures d'après le Quatrieme Evangile* (Études Bibliques, Paris: Gabalda, 1964), 71–73; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 92–93 n. 6; Ernst Haenchen, *Johannesevangelium: Ein Kommentar* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 169–70; Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (ed. F. N. Davey; Faber & Faber, 1954), 177–78; Robert Kysar, *John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 38–39; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St. John* (BNTC 4, London: Continuum, 2005), 114; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 59; Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 51–53; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 77–78; Ludger Schenke, *Johannes: Kommentar* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1998), 45; Adolf Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Johannes* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1960), 52; Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THKNT 4, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), 51; D. Moody Smith, *John* (ANTC, Nashville: Abmgdon, 1999), 70–71; Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John* (Readmgs; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 36; Henri van den Bussche, *Jean: Commentaire De L'Evangile Spirituel* (Paris-Bruges: Desclee de Brower, 1967), 116–17; B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel of St. John* (London: James Clarke, 1958), 22–23. See also, B. M. F. van Iersel, "Tradition und Redaktion in Joh. 1:19–36," *NovT* 6 (1962): 254–57, and Dom John Howton, "'Son of God' in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 10 (1964): 227–37.

Those commentators who favor ὁ ἐκλεκτος τοῦ θεοῦ include C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 178; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (AB 29, New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1:57; M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile Selon St. Jean* (Paris: Gabalda, 1925), 43; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 152; Alfred Loisy, *Le quatrième évangile* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1921), 236; John Marsh, *Saint John* (Pelican Gospel Commentaries; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 125; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 134–35; and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 1:305, and Tze-Ming Quek, 'A Text-Critical Study of John 1:34," *NTS* 55 (2009): 22–34.

3 In a previous essay, I attempted to use narrative-critical evidence as another type of internal consideration. See Christopher W. Skinner, "'Whom He Also Named Apostles': A Textual Problem in Mark 3:14," *BSac* 161 (2004): 322–29. In this essay, I seek to develop further the embryonic model employed in that article.

ὁ υἱος $P^{66\ 75}$ A B C L Θ Ψ 0233^{vid} $f^{1\ 13}$ 33 1241 aur c f l g bo 𝔐

ὁ ἐκλεκτος P^{106vid} ℵ* b e ff^{2*} sy$^{s\ c}$

electus filius (ἐκλεκτος υἱος) (a) ff^{2c} sa

Though the first two readings are of greatest concern for our purposes here, the interests of fairness dictate a consideration of the third reading, *electus filius*, even if there is little evidence, external or internal, to justify a serious examination. The phrase ἐκλεκτὸς υἱός is unattested in extant Greek manuscripts, but is assumed by scholars on the basis of the Latin phrase *electus filius*, which appears in a handful of late versional witnesses. The manuscript support for this reading is meager at best, and internal considerations suggest that the reading is both late and derivative. Because it is neither the shortest reading nor the most difficult grammatically or theologically, it seems implausible that the Latin reading reflects an early Greek original. [4] It is far more likely that *electus filius* is a later Latin conflation of the other two Greek readings. Taken together, the external and internal evidence strongly suggest that "the Chosen Son" is not a good candidate for the earliest wording of the text.[5]

There is little doubt that υἱός enjoys the weightier attestation of the remaining two readings. A wide spectrum of diverse and early witnesses tips a preliminary decision in favor of this reading. However, ἐκλεκτός is clearly the more difficult of the two readings. If we take seriously the maxim, *lectio difficilior potior*, we are compelled to give this reading strong consideration despite its scanty external attestation. The sonship of Jesus is a prominent theme in the Fourth Gospel; the term υἱός appears 54 times in John, 42 of which are references to Jesus. The identification of Jesus as the "Son of God" is central to the entire Johannine story of Jesus. At the end of John 20, the narrator comments that Jesus is the "Messiah, the Son of God," and believing this truth enables one to have life in his name (20:31). The recognition that Jesus is the "Son of God" is clearly one of the

4 Long regarded as axiomatic in text-critical research on the NT, the rule that the "shorter reading is to be preferred," has met significant challenge in the substantive and detailed work of James R Royse (*Scribal Habits in the Early Greek New Testament Papyri* [New Testament Tools, Studies, and Documents 36, Leiden Brill, 2008]) In particular, Royse argues that "in general the *longer reading* is to be preferred, except where a) the longer reading appears, on external grounds, to be late, or b) the longer readmg may have arisen from harmonization to the immediate context, to parallels, or to general usage, or c) the longer readmg may have arisen from an attempt at grammatical improvement The frequency of omissions by scribal leaps and of omissions of certain inessential words such as pronouns must be kept in mind, and when such omissions may have occurred the longer readmg should be viewed as even more likely" (p 735, emphasis added) For an articulation of the consensus view that the shorter readmg is the more probable reading (*lectio brevior lectio potior*), see Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (3rd ed , Oxford Oxford University Press, 1992), 209–10, and Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament An Introduction* (trans Erroll F Rhodes, Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1995), 276

5 However, see the unlikely conclusion set forth by Peter R Rogers, "The Text of John 1 34," in *Theological Exegesis Essays in Honor of Brevard Childs* (ed Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Green-McCreight, Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1999), 299–305

most important elements of John's Christological outlook. On the other hand, ἐκλεκτός is otherwise absent in the Fourth Gospel.[6] Thus, in answer to the overarching question, "which reading most likely gave rise to the other(s)?" we have arrived at the proverbial stalemate. If we assume the antiquity of υἱός, how do we account for the rise of a reading that is more problematic for the Fourth Gospel's overall literary and theological arguments? On the other hand, if we opt for ἐκλεκτός as the better reading we are on far shakier ground in terms of manuscript support. Is the solution then, simply to privilege the external evidence over the internal, or vice versa? Or is there another way forward?

A relatively unexplored area of potential benefit to NT textual criticism is the application of narrative critical considerations.[7] It is my contention that a narrative hermeneutic can shed light on difficult historical-critical questions, not the least of which are text-critical problems such as the one under examination here. At the very heart of narrative criticism is a concern to focus on the final form of the text. Narrative criticism begins with the assumption that each gospel is an autonomous text with its own unique story about Jesus; thus, these narratives should be read in isolation from one another before their presentations of Jesus are compared or conflated in any way. Narrative critics seek to examine the story as a complete utterance containing a unified and coherent story. Issues of plot, character development, themes, motifs, and other literary concerns are central to the work of the narrative critic.

One of the most basic assumptions of any narrative approach is that the final form of the text possesses an overall unity. Despite form- and redaction-critical proclivities that motivate some scholars to find numerous literary seams, especially in the Fourth Gospel, it behooves the textual critic to assume the unity of the text under consideration. To be sure,

6 There may be a subtle connection between the use of ἐκλεκτος here and the later uses of the verbal cognate ἐκλεγομαι An important theme in the Fourth Gospel is the connection between the Father and Son and their connection to all who believe and follow Jesus The three passages in which Jesus speaks of those he has chosen (ἐγω οἶδα τινας ἐξελεξαμην, 13 18, οὐχ ὑμεῖς με ἐξελεξασθε, ἀλλ' ἐγω ἐξελεξαμην ὑμᾶς, 15 16, ἀλλ' ἐγω ἐξελεξαμην ὑμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ κοσμου, 15 19) may provide a subtle link between God's "Chosen One" (Jesus) and Jesus' "chosen ones" (future believers)

7 Narrative criticism arose within NT studies in the early 1980s, largely in reaction to some of fhe inherent weaknesses of redaction criticism The earliest contributions were David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia Fortress, 1982), and R Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia Fortress, 1983) *Mark as Story* was subsequently revised in a second edition, with contributions from a third author—Joanna Dewey—in 1999, the book is now available in a third edition (2012) Works employing a narrative critical approach have proliferated since the late 1980s For a valuable primer, see James Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament An Introduction* (Grand Rapids Baker Academic, 2005) For more on the different expressions of narrative criticism that have developed within NT scholarship since the early 1980s, see *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed Tom Thatcher and Stephen Moore, SBLRBS 55, Atlanta Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), and *Mark as Story Retrospect and Prospect* (ed Kelly R Iverson and Christopher W Skinner, SBLRBS 65, Atlanta Society of Biblical Literature, 2011)

this assumption is often reflected in routine text-critical questions about intrinsic and transcriptional probabilities. But in general, there is not an emphasis on the unity of the final form of the text as it emerges through a *diachronic* reading. To approach the text in this way is to introduce into the discussion another type of internal evidence in a way that takes into account specific themes *as they develop during the reading process*. This approach helps unshackle textual discussions from synchronic readings and forces the textual critic to engage the narrative with a more careful consideration of the unfolding story.

Against the backdrop of these concerns, the remainder of this study will focus on (1) the role of the Johannine prologue as an audience-elevating device, (2) the motif of misunderstanding (or incomplete comprehension)[8] as it relates to Johannine characterization, and (3) the implications these discussions have for the textual problem in John 1:34. Specifically, I will argue that the Christological confessions that appear over the first four days of the narrative (1:19–51) reflect a series of incomplete understandings of Jesus' identity as set forth in the prologue. These five confessions (vv. 29, 34, 36, 41, 45, 49) are tied to a wider pattern of misunderstanding that appears throughout the Gospel. Assuming a reasoned-eclectic approach to examining the data, this article will employ a narrative hermeneutic as another type of internal evidence when examining intrinsic probabilities. This approach will serve to demonstrate that the pattern of misunderstanding alongside the information provided in the prologue points to ἐκλεκτός rather than υἱός as the better reading.

THE PROLOGUE AS AUDIENCE-ELEVATING DEVICE

One of the Fourth Gospel's important literary features is the use of misunderstandmg to develop the Gospel's complex Christology.[9] Misunderstanding also plays a central role in the Fourth Gospel's plot development.

8 "Misunderstanding" in the Fourth Gospel can refer to instances in which characters fail to comprehend a statement made by Jesus or to instances in which characters fail to perceive what is clear to the reader This second definition is a matter of particular concern for the present essay

9 Much has been written about the role of ironic speech, *double entendre*, and misunderstood statements in John Cf , e g , Oscar Cullman, "Der johanneische Gebrauch doppeldeutiger Ausdrucke als Schlussel zu, Verstaendnis des vierten Evangeliums," *TZ* 4 (1948) 360–62, Herbert Leroy, *Ratsel und Missverstandnis, ein Beitrag zur Formgeschichte des Johannesevangeliums* (BBB 30, Bonn Hanstem, 1968), Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (trans G R Beasley-Murray, R W N Hoare, and J K Riches, Philadelphia Westminster, 1971), 135 n 1, Paul D Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta John Knox, 1985), D A Carson, "Understanding Misunderstandings in the m the Fourth Gospel," *TynBul* 33 (1982) 59–91, Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT 120, Tubingen Mohr Siebeck, 2000), Christian Urban, *Das Menschenbild nach dem Johannesevangelium Grundlagen johanneischer Anthropologie* (WUNT 2/137, Tubmgen Mohr Siebeck, 2001), Earl Richard, "Expressions of Double Meaning and Their Function in the Gospel of John," *NTS* 31 (1985) 96–112 , and Sandra Schneiders, "History and Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel," in *L'Evangile de Jean Sources, Redaction, Theologie* (ed Martmus de Jonge, Leuven Leuven University Press, 1977), 371–76

Although much has been written about the role of misunderstanding in the Fourth Gospel, very little of it has focused on how misunderstanding is used to develop individual characters or how it contributes to an overall understanding of Johannine characterization.[10] I propose that an appreciation for the subtleties of misunderstanding (or incomplete comprehension) in the character interactions of John 1:19–51 can help to resolve the textual issue in John 1:34. In order to understand 1:19–51, we must reckon with the Johannine prologue (1:1–18).

It is widely recognized that John's prologue sets the theological and literary agendas for the remainder of the narrative. The implied audience of the Fourth Gospel is able to comprehend the meaning of Jesus' origins and mission in a way that the characters in the narrative cannot. The detailed presentation of Jesus in 1:1–18 allows the audience to interpret and evaluate the various responses to Jesus that appear throughout the rest of the gospel. Because nearly everything in the narrative revolves around Jesus and a given character's response to him, this means that the Fourth Gospel and its characters cannot be understood properly apart from the information provided in the prologue.

Though there is not space here for a full-scale exegesis, I will briefly sketch the major movements of the prologue. The Fourth Gospel begins its story of the *Logos* with a transparent allusion to the creation account in Genesis 1. The narrative that ensues is thus situated within the broader story of the God of Israel and how that God creates, sustains, and covenants with humanity. Just as the creation account takes place "in the beginning" (ἐν ἀρχῇ, Gen 1:1, LXX), where God speaks and creates both light and all living creatures, so the Fourth Gospel starts off "in the beginning" (ἐν ἀρχῇ, John 1:1) with the "word" (λόγος, John 1:1–2) who is the purveyor of life (ζωή, 1:4) and light (φῶς, 1:4, 5). The realities of the God of Israel are fully present in the *Logos*. The audience also learns that the *Logos* is the agent through whom God created the universe (1:3). The light of the *Logos* shines forth into a darkness that can neither comprehend nor overcome it (ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν, 1:5).[11]

The second section of the prologue begins with a reference to John the Baptist (though the Fourth Gospel never refers to John using the titles ὁ βαπτίζων or ὁ βαπτιστής[12]). The recent history of Fourth Gospel interpretation has yielded all sorts of speculation about the significance of John's presence at this point in the prologue. For our purposes, what is important

10. For more on the role of incomprehension in Johannine character development, see my essay "Misunderstanding, Christology, and Johannine Characterization: Reading John's Characters through the Lens of the Prologue," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (ed. Christopher W. Skinner; Library of New Testament Studies 461; London: T. & T. Clark, 2013), 111–28; several paragraphs in the above section have been borrowed from this essay and reworked.

11. As mentioned above in n. 10, double entendre is an important feature of Johannine discourse. Numerous commentators have pointed out that καταλαμβάνω can be rendered "overcome" or "comprehend." Both nuances are likely intended here. See BDAG 520, s.v. καταλαμβάνω.

12. βαπτίζων: Mark 1:4. βαπτιστής: Matt 3:1.

to note is John's designation as ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ (1:6b). According to the narrator, John has no *messianic* status vis-à-vis the *Logos* but is the one authorized by God to bear witness to Jesus (1:7–8). As such, John's subsequent witness to Jesus (1:29, 34, 36) will prove to be *reliable*, though *incomplete*. This recognition will factor heavily in our consideration of the textual problem in 1:34.

In v. 10, the audience is introduced to the Johannine understanding of κόσμος, as well as the relationship between the *Logos* and the world. The audience learns that the *Logos* was "in the world, and though the world was created through him, the world did not know him."[13] This statement further prepares the audience for humanity's rejection of Jesus throughout the story and confirms the double entendre in 1:5: the darkness has not understood/overcome the light. Throughout the story, the darkened "world" (humanity) consistently fails to comprehend Jesus' words and works, and as the narrative reaches its climax, the powers of darkness (symbolically represented by Roman and Jewish characters and by death itself) do not prevail against the risen Jesus.

Verse 11 reiterates the substance of v. 10 using a slightly different concept: "He came to *his own place* (τὰ ἴδια) and *his own people* (οἱ ἴδιοι) did not receive him." The neuter plural use of ἴδιον in the first half of the verse is a clear reference to the physical realm into which Jesus has entered, while the masculine plural use of ἴδιος in the second half of the verse is a reference to humanity. The *Logos* has come into a world he created (cf. 1:3), which is also shrouded in darkness. That darkness renders humans both unable to understand the *Logos* and hostile toward his intentions. However, despite this existential reality, there are some who will recognize the *Logos*, call on his name,[14] and become a part of God's newly constituted family (1:12–13). Within this new economy, the authority to grant one status as a "child of God" has also been granted to the *Logos*.

In 1:14, a strange new incarnation is described: ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν. The *Logos* existed prior to creation in the presence of God (1:2), but now has taken on a new form of existence by inhabiting human flesh. The contrast created by the use of εἰμί (cf. 1:1–2) and γίνομαι (1:14) underscores the significance of this incarnation. Never before has the *Logos* "become" something. The preincarnate *Logos* has always just "been." From this point forward, the narrator abandons *Logos* terminology. There is no longer a need for *Logos* language as the incarnate *Logos* will hereafter be called Jesus Christ (1:17). The grace and truth God unveils through him will be greater than *Torah*, which God unveiled through Moses. In a final

13. All translations in this article are mine unless otherwise specified.

14. While some contend that the phrase τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ is a reference to the name *Jesus*, I think something far greater is intended here. The connection between the Logos and God was explicitly spelled out in 1:1c and is a major theme throughout the Gospel. Therefore, I am persuaded that the use of ὄνομα is meant as a reference to השם—a common way of referring to the divine name among faithful Jews. As the revealer of the Father, the Logos shares the very name of God, YHWH.

affirmation of the intimate union between Father and Son, the narrator asserts that Jesus is both εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ("in closest relationship with the father"[15])—a phrase that will reappear during the meal sequence with the disciples (13:23)—and the one who reveals the Father to humanity.

We have seen that the prologue describes the *Logos* as existing with and as God before time (v. 1–2). He is further described as the agent of the entire creation (v. 3), the light of humanity that enlightens those in the world (vv. 4, 9), and the possessor of the authority both to appoint God's children (v. 12) and to display God's glory (v. 14). Most importantly, he dwells in intimate union with the Father (v. 18b) and reveals the Father to humanity (v. 18c). These propositions set the stage by providing the audience with information necessary to evaluate every character's response to Jesus, and thereby construct the interpretive grid through which the audience can understand the gospel's main purpose—to engender belief in those who hear the story (cf. 20:31). In addition to these aforementioned descriptors, important terms in the prologue that appear elsewhere in the gospel include: life (ζωή), light (φῶς), witness (μαρτυρία/μαρτυρέω, 1:7, 8, 15), the world (κόσμος, 1:9, 10), truth/true (ἀλήθεια/ἀληθινός, 1: 9, 14, 17), to believe (πιστεύω, 1:7, 12), one's own (ἴδιος, 1:11), glory (δόξα, 1:14), and "in the bosom" (εἰς τὸν κόλπον, 1:18).[16] Margaret Pamment perceptively notes that "characters use these concepts in slightly different ways, allowing the narrator to indicate their full range of meaning, and this is the purpose of the dialogues."[17] Characters thus misunderstand Jesus to the degree that they fail to grasp these terms and themes from the prologue.

It is not problematic for the implied audience that characters have not been exposed to the information revealed in the prologue. This is part of the narrator's rhetorical strategy. The narrator and reader of John's Gospel

15. Here I am relying on the translation of Andreas Köstenberger in *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God* (Biblical Theology of the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 237, 361, 382.

16. ζωή: see also 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 26, 29, 39, 40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 51, 53, 54, 63, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2, 3; 20:31. φῶς: see also 3:19–21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9–10; 12:35, 36, 46. μαρτυρία/μαρτυρέω: The nominal form appears in 1:19; 3:11, 32, 33; 5:31, 32, 34, 36; 8:13, 14, 17; 19:35; 21:24. The verbal form appears in 1:32, 34; 2:25; 3:11, 26, 28, 32; 4:39, 44; 5:31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 39, 7:7; 8:13, 14, 18; 10:25; 12:17; 13:21; 15:26, 27; 18:23, 37; 19:35; 21:24. κόσμος: see also 1:29; 3:16, 17, 19; 4:42; 6:14, 33, 51; 7:4, 7; 8:12, 23, 26; 9:5, 39; 10:36; 11:9, 27; 12:19, 25, 31, 46, 47; 13:1; 14:17, 19, 22, 27, 30, 31; 15:18, 19; 16:8, 11, 20, 21, 28, 33; 17:5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21, 23, 24, 25; 18:20, 36, 37; 21:25. ἀλήθεια/ἀληθινός: The word ἀλήθεια appears in 3:21; 4:23, 24; 5:33; 8:32, 40, 44, 45, 46; 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:7, 13; 17:17, 19; 18:37, 38.The word ἀληθινός appears in 4:23, 37; 6:32; 7:28; 8:16; 15:1; 17:3; 19:35. The word ἀληθής appears in 3:33; 4:18; 5:31, 32; 6:55; 7:18; 8:13, 14, 17, 26; 10:41; 19:35; 21:24. The word ἀληθῶς appears in 1:47, 4:42; 6:14; 7:26, 40; 8:31; 17:8. πιστεύω: see also 1:7, 12; 2:23; 3:12–18, 36; 4:50, 53; 5:24, 46–47; 6:29–47; 7:38–39, 48; 8:24, 45–46; 9:35–38; 10:37–38, 42; 11:26–27; 12:11; 13:19; 14:1–2, 11–12; 16:9; 17:21; 19:35; 20:31. ἴδιος: see also 1:41; 4:44; 5:18, 43; 7:18; 8:44; 10:3, 4, 12; 13:1; 15:19; 16:32; 19:27. δόξα: see also 2:11; 5:41, 44; 7:18; 8:50, 54; 9:24; 11:4, 40; 12:41, 43; 17:5, 22, 24. εἰς τὸν κόλπον: A variation of this phrase appears in John 13, where the Beloved Disciple is described as ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, thus drawing a connection between the intimacy shared by Jesus and the Beloved Disciple and that shared by the Father and Jesus.

17. Margaret Pamment, "Focus in the Fourth Gospel," *ExpTim* 97 (1985): 73.

form an "inside group" that has privileged knowledge about Jesus. The characters in the story are part of an "outside group" that is constantly struggling to come to terms with Jesus' identity and mission. The narrator is omniscient. He knows whom Jesus loves (11:5; 13:1–3, 23; 19:26; 20:2), what Jesus perceives (6:6, 15, 61, 64; 13:1; 19:28), and when Jesus is troubled (11:33, 38; 13:1). He provides information about the beliefs (2:11, 22; 20:8), suppositions (13:19; 20:15), and memories of the disciples (2:22; 12:16; 13:28; 19:35). The narrator guides the reader skillfully through a maze of reported activities, interactions, and conversations. Unlike the narrator, the reader is informed but not omniscient. The reader shares in much of this privileged information with the narrator but continues to learn throughout the story. By contrast, the characters of the gospel do not have access to this "inside view." This literary dynamic places readers in a position to evaluate every character's response to Jesus. As the story moves forward, characters appear to understand or misunderstand Jesus to the degree that they grasp ideas earlier unveiled in the prologue. Because no character (except the Beloved Disciple) fully grasps these truths, each expresses some degree of misunderstanding. The narrator then uses Jesus' words to clarify the fuller meaning of these themes. Readers soon discover that numerous character interactions in the gospel follow a predictable pattern:

1. Jesus speaks/acts in the presence of another character. This activity usually addresses some element of Jesus' mission.
2. The character in question misperceives some element of Jesus' words or actions. This misunderstanding requires either correction or further instruction.
3. Jesus speaks again, this time in a way that is intended to clarify what has been misunderstood.
4. In each instance, one or more themes from the prologue are raised, revealing the character's misunderstanding, exposing the reader's knowledge once again, and ultimately clarifying the truth about Jesus.

The misunderstandings that happen will serve to heighten the audience's awareness and understanding of Jesus' origins, mission, and identity. Later in the narrative, Jesus' theological discourses (3:1–21; 4:7–42; 5:19–47; 6:25–71; 8:12–59; 10:1–18; 13:1–17:26) shed light on the fuller meaning of the prologue's themes. This unfolding of Christological insights is accomplished in contexts where Jesus is instructing or correcting a given character or character group. This pattern differs, however, from the narrator's presentation of characters that appear over the first few days of Jesus' public ministry (1:19–51). The characters that arise in the sections immediately following the prologue, unleash a series of lofty Christological confessions that, in light of the prologue, are infused with some degree of incomprehension. Against the backdrop of 1:1–18, the audience witnesses a narrative pattern in which John the Baptist, Andrew, Nathanael, and Philip, each display a failure to grasp fully some element of Jesus' identity. Each figure ascribes to Jesus a title that finds a home under a broader

messianic category. Their individual professions consist of partial truths that serve to highlight for the audience Christological themes introduced in the prologue.

The exegesis that follows will attempt to demonstrate this pattern of misunderstanding over the first four days of narrated activity. In the context of this argument, we will also argue that John the Baptist displays a failure to grasp the full realities of Jesus' identity and mission, and as part of this literary pattern, ὁ ἐκλεκτός rather than ὁ υἱός emerges as the better reading in John 1:34.

The First Four Days (1:19–51): Messianic Incomprehension

Day One (1:19–28)

In 1:19 the narrator shifts from an atemporal précis of Jesus' identity and incarnation to the story's first day of narrated activity. In the events of that first day, a group of Jewish leaders is sent to question John. Unlike the next three days of narrated activity (1:29–34; 35–42; 43–51) this opening scene contains no Christological confession, though a sense of ambiguity is already emerging in the questions posed by the priests and Levites. When questioning John about his identity, the representatives of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι propose three possible options: (1) Messiah, (2) Elijah, or (3) the prophet (vv. 19–21). In each instance, John answers in the negative (οὐκ εἰμί in vv. 20, 21a; οὔ in v. 21b),[18] instead identifying himself as a forerunner who will prepare the way of the Lord (v. 23). Ironically, in the same way the κόσμος fails to recognize Jesus, representatives of the world's darkened perspective also have trouble reckoning with the identity of his predecessor. For his part, however, John consistently directs others in the story to Jesus even if, as we shall discover, he does not fully comprehend who Jesus is. In support of this interpretation is the fact that John twice indicates that he did not know Jesus prior to his public acknowledgements in 1:29, 34 (cf. 1:31, 33).

In the wake of John's denial of messianic identity, the Pharisees question the foundation for his ministry of baptism (vv. 24–25). In the Synoptic accounts of John's discussion of Jesus, he indicates that he engages in water baptism, whereas the coming one will baptize with the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt 4:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). Similarly here, John speaks of his baptism as in (or with) water (ἐγὼ βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι), but after that abandons the discussion of baptism altogether. The primary emphasis of this scene, unlike the Synoptic tradition, seems to be Christology rather than baptism. As the scene draws to a close, the audience learns that these events take place at Bethany beyond the Jordan (v. 28).

18. The use of οὐκ εἰμι stands in contrast to the continual use of ἐγώ εἰμί by the Johannine Jesus in both predicated (6:35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5) and unpredicated (e.g., 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8) Christological statements.

Day Two (1:29–34)

In v. 29, Jesus makes his first appearance in the story, at which point John proclaims that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Other than John and Jesus, only the literary audience is present for this crucial proclamation. Much has been written in an attempt to identify precisely the referent behind John's "lamb" pronouncement; no scholarly consensus has emerged.[19] The term "lamb" (ἀμνός) does not appear in the prologue nor does it appear explicitly elsewhere in the Gospel as a designation for Jesus, though John's pronouncement proleptically anticipates Jesus' condemnation before Pilate.

Scholars have long noted John's changing of the passion-week chronology presented in the Synoptic tradition. Whereas the Synoptics have Jesus celebrating a Passover meal with the disciples (Matt 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–38), the Fourth Gospel situates the final meal on the night prior to Passover. This change allows Jesus to be condemned to death at the very moment paschal lambs are being slaughtered in preparation for Passover (cf. John 19:14), thus reintroducing the lamb image at a critical juncture in the passion narrative. Brown has observed:

> The time when this fatal renunciation of the Messiah takes place is noon on Passover Eve, the very hour when the priests have begun to slaughter the paschal lambs in the temple precincts. . . . At the beginning of the Gospel John the Baptist had pointed Jesus out as the Lamb of God who takes away the world's sin (i 29). By way of inclusion this prophecy is now fulfilled; for at the moment when the Passover lambs are being slaughtered, Jesus' trial comes to an end, and he sets out for Golgotha to pour forth the blood that will cleanse men from sin.[20]

While the connection between John's pronouncement and later Passover imagery demonstrates John's reliability as a witness to Jesus, we should not assume that John has unfettered access to all the insights possessed by the omniscient narrator. In fact, there is much to commend the interpretation that John's "Lamb of God" affirmation is informed by Second Temple ideas of an apocalyptic, conquering messiah who removes unrighteousness from the land—ideas that have faint connections to the type of figure the

19. See the various solutions offered in the following studies (in chronological order of publication): C. J. Ball, "Had the Fourth Gospel an Aramaic Archetype?" *ExpTim* 21 (1909): 92–93; E. May, *Ecce Agnus Dei: A Philological and Exegetical Approach to John 1:29, 36* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1947); C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 230–32; C. K. Barrett, "The Lamb of God," *NTS* 1 (1954): 210–18; Walther Zimmerli and Joachim Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (London: SCM, 1957), 82; Raymond E. Brown, "Three Quotations from John the Baptist in the Gospel of John," *CBQ* 22 (1960): 292–98; Stephen Virgulin, "Recent Discussion of the Title 'Lamb of God,'" *Scripture* 13 (1961): 74–80; E. W. Burrows, "Did John the Baptist Call Jesus the 'Lamb of God'?" *ExpTim* 85 (1974): 245–49; George L. Carey, "The Lamb of God and Atonement Theories," *TynBul* 32 (1981): 98–121; D. Brent Sandy, "John the Baptist's 'Lamb of God' Affirmation in Its Canonical and Apocalyptic Milieu," *JETS* 34 (1991): 447–59.

20. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 2:895–96.

prologue envisions. First, the Baptist—both here and elsewhere—is depicted as an apocalyptic prophet (outside of the Fourth Gospel, see Matt 3:4–12; Luke 3:7–9). Thus, his preaching about Jesus needs to be understood against the backdrop of apocalyptic Jewish expectations, rather than Christian understandings of a "suffering" messiah.[21]

Second, within the writings of Second Temple Judaism prior to the time of Jesus, there was not a prominent tradition of a *suffering* messianic lamb. However, the image of a *conquering* lamb is found in numerous places in the noncanonical literature of the period (cf. *1 En.* 90:6–19; *T. Jos.* 19:8–12; *T. Benj.* 3:8).[22] There are also explicit references to that figure removing or "taking away"[23] unrighteousness from the land (e.g., *2 Bar.* 73:14; *1 En.* 38:1; 46:4; *T. Levi* 18:9; *Pss. Sol.* 17:30). On these numerous texts, Sandy rightly observes:

> The literary context for lamb motifs in second temple Judaism must take into account, then, a wide range of symbolism. . . . two passages from the Pseudepigrapha demonstrate an imagery rooted in Daniel and Ezekiel's prophecies but developed in the second temple period: A lamb prevails over other animals; the victor of the lamb deserves a large celebration; the lamb is predictive of a future event in the last days; and the lamb represents the deliverer of the Jews.[24]

Given the Baptist's overall presentation, it seems likely that, as an apocalyptically oriented preacher, these ideas served as the seedbed for his thinking about Jesus as the "Lamb of God."

Third, though the idea of a suffering lamb is part of the fabric of Christian thinking, we should not be completely caught off guard by the idea of a conquering messianic lamb. Even within the NT—in the book of Revelation—the most prominent figure is a *conquering lamb* that ushers in God's judgment, removes evil from the land, and establishes a new heavens and a new earth.[25]

Again, John's testimony is reliable despite its failure to align fully with the evaluative point of view of the narrator. Even if the apocalyptic lamb

21. On this, see J. C. O'Neill ("The Lamb of God in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *JSNT* 2 [1979]: 2–30), who makes a strong case that the idea of a conquering messianic lamb predates the Christian era.

22. Notably, the latter two references in this list use the phrase "Lamb of God," which, aside from John 1:29, 36, is otherwise unattested in the NT or in the OT pseudepigrapha. Kee, however, argues that both texts have been corrupted by later Christian interpolation (see Howard Clark Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [ed. James H. Charlesworth; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1983] 1:824, 826).

23. Against this backdrop, it is possible to argue that the phrase, ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου ("the one who takes away the sin of the world") could be understood in the sense of "the one who removes evil from the land."

24. Sandy, "John the Baptist's 'Lamb of God' Affirmation in Its Canonical and Apocalyptic Milieu," 455.

25. It should be pointed out, however, that the term ἀμνός is used in John 1:29, 36, while Revelation consistently uses the term ἀρνίον.

interpretation is rejected, there is little dispute that the "Lamb of God" title is explicitly messianic. Each of most commonly posed referents is deeply rooted in a messianic understanding of "lamb." [26] This fact makes it difficult to move beyond the conclusion that John's pronouncement, while reliable, is ultimately incomplete. We will see that the same judgment can be applied to his confession in 1:34.

In v. 30, John references his earlier comment about the coming one (cf. 1:27) and identifies Jesus as that expected figure. Accompanying this comment is John's admission that prior to Jesus' appearance, he was unaware that Jesus was ὁ ἐρχόμενος (cf. v. 31), something he will reiterate in v. 33. This revelation has taken place in a scene that is not narrated in the Fourth Gospel. John recounts an instance at which he saw the Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus and recalls the Father's promise that this individual will be the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (vv. 32–33). The revealing of Jesus' identity leads John to the proclamation that is the subject of this article: Jesus is either ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ or ὁ ἐκλεκτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

In our earlier discussion, I argued that on internal grounds it is much more difficult to account for the rise of ἐκλεκτός if we assume υἱός as the original reading rather than vice versa. Transcriptional probabilities clearly favor the ἐκλεκτός reading. It is easy to envision a scribe familiar with the Johannine emphasis on the "sonship" of Jesus altering the unfamiliar ἐκλεκτός to the seemingly more appropriate υἱός. The reverse scenario seems quite implausible.

Intrinsic probabilities also strongly favor ἐκλεκτός for at least two reasons. First, like the apocalyptic lamb imagery present in extracanonical texts cited above, the "chosen one" also appears in important Second Temple texts in which an apocalyptic messiah figure is present. Specifically, the title "chosen one" is found throughout book 2 of *1 Enoch* (chs. 37–71) with specific reference to the messianic figure who conquers evil (e.g., *1 En.* 39:6; 40:5; 45:3–5; 49:2–4; 51:4; 52:6; 53:6; 55:4; 61:5, 8, 10; 62:1). Thus, the titles, "Lamb of God" and "God's chosen one" together fit within messianic categories that existed in the literature prior to the NT era.[27] While this is solid evidence for the ἐκλεκτός reading, it is ultimately secondary to the argument we have been advancing here. The second, and more pertinent reason intrinsic probabilities favor ἐκλεκτός is its place in the pattern of explicitly messianic, and therefore partially correct confessions, that appear in the events of 1:19–51. In the exegetical sections that follow, this judgment will find further support from an examination of the similar messianic confessions of Andrew (1:41), Philip (1:44), and Nathanael (1:49). According to

26. For an overview of these views along with an attempt to merge historical and theological understandings of the "lamb," see Christopher W. Skinner, "Another Look at the 'Lamb of God'," *BSac* 161 (2004): 89–104.

27. There seems to be a theological and possibly even a historical connection between the apocalyptic preaching of John in the Synoptic tradition (cf. Matt 3:7–12; Luke 3:7–18), and the apocalyptically oriented messianic confessions in John (1:29, 34, 36).

John the Baptist, Jesus is both the "Lamb of God" and "God's chosen one." Having read the prologue, the audience knows that Jesus is much more.

Day Three (1:35–42)

As the third day begins, John appears once again, this time in the presence of two unnamed disciples (v. 35). In v. 36 John proclaims for a second time that Jesus is the "Lamb of God." Hearing John's confession, the two anonymous disciples begin to follow Jesus (v. 37). This gives way to an initial conversation in which they ask Jesus where he is staying (v. 38) followed by his invitation for them to come and see (ἔρχεσθε καί ὄψεσθε, v. 39).

Andrew, the only one of the two disciples to be named,[28] seeks his brother (1:40) to inform him that he and the other disciple have "found the Messiah" (εὑρήκαμεν τὸν Μεσσίαν, 1:41b). Throughout the NT, χριστός is generally used to translate the term "messiah" (Hebrew, משיח; Aramaic, משיחא), though here the uncommon Μεσσίας is used. In fact, Andrew's confession (1:40) and the Samaritan woman's confidence regarding the expected *Ta'eb* (οἶδα ὅτι Μεσσίας ἔρχεται, 4:25) are the only instances in the NT where the term *messiah* appears in transliterated Greek.[29] In both cases, the term is used by a character expressing a messianic expectation different from the prologue's depiction of Jesus as the incarnate *Logos*. In this way, both Andrew and the Samaritan woman seem to represent stock characters that possess garden-variety messianic views consistent with "Jewish" and "Samaritan" theology, respectively.

Andrew's confession contrasts with the identity of Jesus revealed in the prologue, though it is consistent with the more limited confessions of John the Baptist (1:29, 34, 36). Much like John's "Lamb" and "chosen one," Andrew's "messiah" designation does not align fully with the evaluative point of view of the narrator. Nowhere in the prologue is the title, "messiah," explicitly used of Jesus, and even if the messiah concept is implied it falls far short of the comprehensive and detailed depiction of Jesus' identity provided by the narrator. Therefore it appears that Andrew's understanding of Jesus is limited, as was John's, the source of his information about Jesus. According to Andrew, Jesus is the "messiah." Having read the prologue, the audience knows that Jesus is much more.

28. The identity of the other unnamed disciple has long been a topic of debate in Johannine studies. Some have argued that there is a connection between this unnamed disciple and the Beloved Disciple that appears later in the narrative. Others have argued that this is a question on which the narrative intends to remain silent. For comment on both sides, see Frans Neirynck, "The Anonymous Disciple in John 1," *ETL* 66 (1990): 5–37.

29. Historical questions abound over the Samaritan conception of Messiah. The fifth article in the Samaritan creed was the belief in a messianic prophet like Moses (*Ta'eb*, "one who returns"). This figure was supposed to be a successor in the mold of Moses and restore proper worship. Brown (*The Gospel according to John*, 1:172) comments that the scene fits the Samaritan concept of *Ta'eb* as teacher of Torah, "even though the more familiar Jewish designation of Messiah is placed on the woman's lips." For a fuller discussion of the Samaritan concept of Messiah, see Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 3 vols. (trans. C. Hastings; HTKNT 4; New York: Crossroad, 1968–82), 1:441.

Day Four (1:43–51)

On the fourth day, Jesus enters Galilee, finds a fifth disciple named Philip and calls him to follow (v. 43). Philip, who is from the same town as Andrew and Peter (v. 44), in turn finds Nathanael and proclaims, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets" (ὃν ἔγραψεν Μωϋσῆς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ καὶ οἱ προφῆται εὑρήκαμεν). Like Andrew in 1:41, Philip uses εὑρήκαμεν to describe his epiphany. It is difficult to know if the first-person plural is intended as an editorial "we" or if Philip is including Andrew and Peter, both of whom are mentioned in the preceding verse.

Philip's confession carries the generic resonances of the various messianic expectations operative in the first century A.D., though presumably passages such as Deut 18:15–18 are also in view. By this period, it was assumed that the Hebrew Scriptures as a whole bore witness to a coming messianic figure. Philip here equates Jesus with that long-awaited figure. In this regard, Francis Moloney comments: "The infant church looked constantly to the OT for its witness to Jesus, but that is not enough for the Fourth Evangelist. It is not denied, but it is not enough. The [early] witness of the disciples is the Johannine way of telling a story of the fragility of the disciples."[30] Lending further support to our argument that Philip misunderstands Jesus' identity is his twofold description of Jesus as υἱόν τοῦ Ἰωσήφ and τὸν ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ (v. 46c). The audience has read the prologue and knows that Jesus is not the son of Joseph but rather the *son of God*. The audience also knows that Jesus' origins are not from Nazareth, but *from above*. Like John and Andrew before him, Philip has fallen short of the mark. According to Philip, Jesus is the "one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote." Having read the prologue, the audience knows that Jesus is much more.

The scene now shifts to Nathanael, whose initial words reveal strong prejudices against the place they have (incorrectly) supposed to be Jesus' hometown. Nathanael wonders aloud if anything good can come from Nazareth (v. 46). In reply, Philip summons him using an invitation similar to the one Jesus gave his first two followers: ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε (cf. v. 39: ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε). While Nathanael is en route to meet him, Jesus exclaims: "Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no guile" (v. 47a). When Nathanael asks Jesus, "How do you know me?" (v. 48a), Jesus responds that he saw Nathanael before their meeting while he was still sitting "under the fig tree" (v. 48b). This comment is consonant with the idea that, as the creator and sustainer of the κόσμος, the Johannine Jesus has access to undisclosed knowledge. While not an example of a "sign" miracle, Jesus' knowledge in this situation is rightly understood as miraculous.

Two elements in this initial interaction set Nathanael apart as one who will be expected to hold distinctly Jewish views. First, Jesus identifies him as a "true Israelite." This identification indicates to the audience that this

30 Francis J Moloney, *Belief in the Word Reading John 1–4* (Minneapolis Fortress, 1993), 71

character will typify what it means to think, act, and speak like one of God's people.[31] Second, there is the explicit reference to Nathanael sitting under the "fig tree." There has been much debate over the significance of certain OT passages that picture those under the protection of vines and fig trees (1 Kgs 4:25; Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10). Andrew Lincoln points out that whether or not these traditions have any connection to this text, "the most obvious symbolic force of the fig tree itself is that it stands for Israel. To associate Nathanael with this symbol would therefore reinforce his identification as 'truly an Israelite.'"[32] It is difficult to overcome the cumulative force of these two descriptors. Nathanael is the Israelite *par excellence* and as such holds views in keeping with his status.

Nathanael's response is telling: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, the King of Israel!" Like the confessions that have preceded it, this one is rooted in a messianic expectation. Moloney writes:

> Here we find a confession of Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish messianic hopes. . . . Whatever may have been the prehistory of 1:19–51, it is clear that Nathanael has confessed his faith *only* in terms of Jewish messianic expectation. Addressing Jesus as "Rabbi," recalling the limited understanding of the first disciples in v. 38, he then uses two messianic titles: Son of God and King of Israel. Exalted as these confessions may be, they are still bound by Nathanael's own culture, history, and religion.[33]

As a "true Israelite" under the shade of Israel's "fig tree," Nathanael represents yet one more example of an early follower with only partial understanding of who Jesus is. The narrator does not deny the veracity of Nathanael's confession, but neither is his speech celebrated for its correctness.

I argued above that "son of God" is not only fully correct from the evaluative point of view of the narrator, but also one of the most important Christological titles for the Johannine Jesus. So why, in this instance, would we consider Nathanael's confession only partially correct? By itself, the designation, "son of God" would be fitting and the pattern of partial understanding over these first four days would seem to fall apart. However, here the confession "son of God" is coupled with "king of Israel." This combination indicates that Nathanael's understanding of Jesus is rooted in a messianic expectation that goes beyond what the prologue unveils. Like the other characters before him, Nathanael is only partially correct insofar as his comprehension of Jesus limits him to categories arising from within

31. "It was Jacob, whose name meant supplanter or deceiver (cf. Gen 2:26; 27:35–6) who was first given the name Israel after wrestling with God. . . . Nathanael surpasses the original Israel in being without guile or deceit. . . . This is the only time the term 'Israelite' is employed in the Gospel of John and it has none of the more dubious connotations that will be attached to the term 'Jew'" (Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 120).

32. Ibid., 121.

33. Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 72 (emphasis original).

his Jewish heritage. According to Nathanael, Jesus is the "son of God, the king of Israel." Having read the prologue, the audience knows that Jesus is much more.

CONCLUSION

The characters that appear over the first four days of the story betray an explicit messianic expectation and thereby project upon the Johannine Jesus characteristics, roles, and responsibilities that fail to align with the evaluative point of view of the narrator. The prologue has decisively answered the question of Jesus' identity, so the ignorance displayed by these four characters reinforces what the audience has learned in those initial, very crucial verses. From a literary perspective, this pattern indicates that each of these characters, though sincerely embracing Jesus, is also in partial error about his identity and purpose. He is not merely a messianic deliverer. He is something much greater. The failure of these early characters to comprehend Jesus' identity constitutes a literary pattern that figures prominently in the remainder of the story.

Taking this evidence into consideration, we are now in a better position to draw a conclusion. On internal grounds, and specifically with respect to intrinsic probability, I have argued above that ὁ ἐκλεκτός (a term unattested elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel and in the rest of the Johannine corpus) better explains the rise of ὁ υἱός, the evangelist's preferred designation for Jesus. The exegetical argument presented above bolsters this conclusion by demonstrating a consistent pattern of characterization in the first four days of narrated activity. John the Baptist, like Andrew ("messiah," 1:41), Philip ("the one about whom Moses and prophets wrote," 1:44), and Nathanael ("the son of God, the king of Israel," 1:49), understands Jesus as a messianic figure ("Lamb of God," 1:29, 36; "God's chosen one," 1:34) and thus only partially comprehends his identity. As such, John's pronouncements are the first in a string of confessions that identify Jesus in limited messianic terms. All of this evidence suggests that ὁ ἐκλεκτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ rather than ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ is the better reading for the text of John 1:34.