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HORIZONS IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 40 (2018) 183-202

Horizons in Biblical Theology
brill.com/hbth

The Good Shepherd παροιμία (John 10:1-21) and John's Implied Audience: A Thought Experiment in Reading the Fourth Gospel

Christopher William Skinner
Loyola University, Chicago, IL, USA
cskinner1@luc.edu

Abstract

It is often said that the Johannine Jesus never utters a narrative parable like those that are so ubiquitous throughout the Synoptics. However, in John 10, we have the closest parallel in the so-called "Good Shepherd" discourse, where Jesus uses a "figure of speech" (παροιμία) to compare himself to a benevolent or noble shepherd. The present article will explore this παροιμία in light of the unfolding narrative Christology over the first nine chapters. Against that backdrop, we will examine the questions: "What historical information can reasonably be inferred as part of the literary construct known as the implied audience?", and "How has the implied audience been prepared by the narrator to receive this metaphorical speech?"

Keywords

Paroimia – implied audience – John – shepherd – narrative – reading strategy

1 Introduction

The interpreters of John 10 are immediately faced with a number of thorny historical and literary questions that complicate our attempts to decode the so-called "Good Shepherd" discourse. Chief among them are the following:

(1) Given the similarities of Jesus' "figure of speech" (παροιμία) to the Synoptic parables, how should we classify the metaphorical depiction at the heart this discourse, especially since most Johannine scholars

 | DOI:10.1163/18712207-12341376

consistently maintain that John has no narrative parables like those we find in the Synoptics?[1] This is the question of genre. Is it appropriate to approach this discourse with the same generic expectations and assumptions as when we approach the narrative parables of the Synoptics?

(2) What specific Old Testament passage(s) serve as the background to John's image of the "Good Shepherd" and is it even possible for us to discern these with any precision?[2] This is the question of intertextuality. The texts most commonly posed as background material are Ps 23, Ezek 34, and Zech 9-14, among others.

(3) Is the image of "good shepherd" derived from Jewish depictions of the shepherd-sheep relationship, or from other socio-cultural representations, including Greco-Roman rhetoric or Roman imperial rhetoric?[3]

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1 While the idea that John has no true narrative parables has been a longstanding consensus in Johannine scholarship, see the recent work of Ruben Zimmermann (*Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretation* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015], 333-60), who writes, "[A]re there actually any parables in John? In much of parable scholarship, John is ignored as a source for the parables of Jesus. This may have been due to the close relationship between parable-research and historical Jesus-research. If the goal was to reconstruct the original Jesus wording, the late Fourth Gospel seemed to be worthless with regard to the parables. Many of these presuppositions have been challenged in current New Testament scholarship" (p. 333). On the relationship between παραβολή and παροιμία see Uta Poplutz, "Paroimia und Parabole: Gleichniskonzepte bei Johannes und Markus," in Jörg Frey, Jan G. van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmerman, eds. *Imagery in the Gospel of John*, WUNT 200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 103-20.

2 On the relationship of these texts to John 10, see e.g., Mary Katharine Deely, "Ezekiel's Shepherd and John's Jesus: A Case Study in the Appropriation of Biblical Texts," in Craig A. Evans and James Sanders, eds., *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 252-64; Brian Neil Petersen, *John's Use of Ezekiel: Understanding the Unique Perspective of the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 133-50; Basilius Ebel, "Das Bild des Guten Hirten im 22 [sic] Psalm nach Erklärungen der Kirchenväter," in *Universitas; Dienst an Wahrheit und Leben: Festschrift für Albert Stohr* (Mainz: Matthias-Gruenewald-Verlag, 1960), 1:48-57. A great deal is made of the presence of material from Zech 9-14 across John 5-12; on this, see Siegfried Bergler, "Jesus, Bar Kochba und Das Messianische Laubhüttenfest," *JSJ* 29 (1998): 167-82; William Randolph Bynum, "Quotations of Zechariah in the Fourth Gospel," in Alicia D. Myers and Bruce G. Schuchard, eds., *Abiding Words: The Use of Scripture in the Gospel of John*, SBLRBS 81 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 47-74; Rafael Vicent Saera, "Tradiciones targúmicas de Zacarías 9-14 en Juan 12," *Simposio Biblico Español* (1984): 495-511.

3 Cf. e.g., Ruben Zimmerman, "Jesus im Bild Gottes: Anspielungen auf das Alte Testament im Johannesevangelium am Beispiel der Hirtenbildfelder in Joh 10," in Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle with Juliane Schlegel, eds. *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditionsgeschichtlicher Perspektive*, WUNT 2/175 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 81-116; Joachim Kugler, "Der andere König: Religionsgeschichtliche Anmerkungen

(4) What are we to make of the seemingly odd and potentially confusing mixing of metaphors in Jesus' two predicated ἐγώ εἰμι sayings, the first in v. 7 ("I am the door for the sheep") and the second in v. 11 ("I am the good shepherd")? This shift from one metaphor to another has been the subject of considerable attention among commentators.

(5) Considering the overall verisimilitude of the shepherding scene depicted in the discourse, how are we to understand Jesus' extraordinary threefold statement about the shepherd "laying down his life" for the sheep (see vv. 11, 15, 17)?[4] Are we thinking specifically of "risk," as some have argued or is this "laying down" explicitly about a real and imminent death?

Each of these issues complicates our attempts to interpret the Good Shepherd discourse, and the decisions we make about each largely determine the trajectories of our conclusions. While each has some relevance to the broader discussions in this article, we must, for the time being, bracket a few of them in order to focus more intently on issues related to the development of knowledge by the implied audience. This article is guided by the overarching question, "How has the audience of the Fourth Gospel been prepared to receive and respond to Jesus' unique "figure of speech" in John 10? Since there is nothing else quite like this παροιμία in the chapters leading up to the so-called "Good Shepherd discourse," it will prove important to examine the internal rhetoric and progressive development of the narrative. In what follows I want to pose three questions that are pertinent to a consideration of John 10 and the implied audience of the Fourth Gospel:

First, I want to begin by looking at the question of genre. How does this "figure of speech" in John 10 relate, if at all, to the parables that are so characteristic of Jesus' teaching in the Synoptic Gospels? Each Synoptic Gospel provides its audience with an initial parable accompanied by a detailed paradigmatic interpretation. There is nothing quite so detailed in the Fourth Gospel. Thus, the question of genre is a foundational one which leads to larger and much

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zum Jesusbild des Johannesevangeliums," *ZNW* 88 (1997): 223-41; J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Good Shepherd: St. John's Use of Jewish Halakah and Haggadah," *Studia Theologica* 27 (1973): 25-30; John Quasten, "The Parable of the Good Shepherd: Jn. 10:1-21," *CBQ* 10 (1948): 151-69; B.W. Bacon, "Pauline Elements in the Fourth Gospel: Parables of the Shepherd, John X.1-39," *Anglican Theological Review* 11 (1929): 305-20.

4 This has been discussed recently in an insightful article by Susan Hylen, "The Shepherd's Risk: Thinking Metaphorically with John's Gospel," *BibInt* 24 (2016): 382-99. I discuss this question in a recent article, taking an approach that largely disagrees with Hylen's conclusions; cf. Christopher W. Skinner, "The Good Shepherd Lays Down His Life for the Sheep" (John 10:11, 15, 17): Questioning the Limits of a Johannine Metaphor," *CBQ* 80 (2018): 97-113.

trickier questions, such as: "How is John's implied audience expected to encounter such a saying and is there any explicit foundation within the narrative for doing so?" or, to say it another way, "How does the Fourth Gospel prepare its audience to confront Jesus' enigmatic speech here?" In other words, when the Johannine Jesus speaks in a metaphorical fashion such as we have in John 10, how has the implied audience been prepared to understand and respond?

Second, after a discussion of genre, I want briefly to examine information *outside* the narrative to which the implied audience presumably has access. In other words, I will raise some *historical* questions about the *literary* construct known as the implied audience. Specifically, I want to raise the question: "What historical information is embedded in the text and how does this information shape and/or determine the implied audience's experience with or reception of the text?"

Third, and finally, I want to look at what the implied audience knows and what it learns as the story progresses: In other words, what propositional information is directly revealed to the implied audience, and what does the audience learn through witnessing Jesus' speech over the first nine chapters leading up to this discourse? Further, how do these contribute to the implied audience's ability to interpret the figuration within this discourse?

2 Παραβολή and Παροιμία: A Question of Genre

Essential to our examination of the "Good Shepherd discourse" is the question of whether this "figure of speech" (παροιμία) should be understood as a Johannine parable. It has often been noted by commentators that this discourse possesses a parabolic character.[5] Whether or not we decide to equate this figurative discourse with the Synoptic parables, we must begin with the fundamental recognition that elements of Jesus' discourse work at both literal and metaphorical levels and thus share some features in common with the parables. Throughout the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus' most common communication

5 David B. Gowler, in his recent, impressive work, *The Parables after Jesus: Their Imaginative Reception across Two Millennia* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), considers the reception of John 10 along with images that are derived from Jesus' parables. He notes, "That figurative language in John [viz., Jesus as 'Good Shepherd'] is usually not considered a parable, but the image of the ram bearer also came to represent the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:3-7, where the shepherd goes out to find and bring back one lost sheep out of the hundred in his flock" (p. 51).

comes in the form of narrative parables—though the Matthean Jesus, like the Johannine Jesus also engages in lengthy theological discourses.[6] While there is a great deal of debate within contemporary scholarship as to how the parables should be interpreted today, each of the Synoptic Gospels contains one parable with its own paradigmatic interpretation, which is presumably meant to guide the audience's attempts at interpreting the remaining parables (cf. the different *versions* and *explanations* of parable of the sower in Mark 4:1-20; Matt 13:1-23; Luke 8:1-15). There is no corresponding exposition in the Fourth Gospel and, as I have already indicated, many, if not most Johannine scholars deny that there are any true parables in John,[7] and this includes the παροιμία we are examining here. This begs the question: What exactly do we have here in this passage in terms of genre? It will help first to look at the standard definitions for each term.

The term παραβολή refers to "a narrative or saying of varying length, designed to illustrate a truth especially through comparison or simile."[8] Other glosses provided for this term include "illustration," "proverb," and "maxim."[9] Παραβολή is the term most commonly used to translate the Hebrew term משל, which is often rendered, "similitude," "by-word," or "prophetic figurative discourse."[10] A משל considers two things side-by-side for the sake of comparison and we see this in the introductory formula to many of Jesus' parables (viz. "To what shall I compare the Kingdom?"). The term παροιμία, which is often translated as "proverb," is defined as "a brief communication containing truths designed for initiates."[11] Other glosses include "veiled saying" and "figure of speech in which lofty ideas are concealed."[12] Παραβολή and παροιμία are sometimes used interchangeably (e.g., Sir 47:17) and there are a few places where the term παροιμία is used to translate משל (e.g., Prov 1:1; 26:7; Sir 6:35; 8:8; 18:29; 39:3; 47:17). There is, of course, more to this discussion than simply a comparison of the semantic ranges of παραβολή and παροιμία. It is also important to note that the specific *form* of the kingdom parables is absent in John 10, and this is an even better

6 Matthean scholars typically divide the discourses under the titles, Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7); Missionary Discourse (Matt 10); Parables Discourse (Matt 13); Ecclesiological Discourse (Matt 18); and Eschatological Discourse (Matt 24-25).

7 An exception to this rule is Ruben Zimmermann, who treats Jesus' saying about the "dying and living grain" in John 12:24 as a parable. See Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables*, 339-58.

8 BDAG, s.v. παραβολή (p. 759).

9 Ibid.

10 BDB, s.v. משל (p. 605).

11 BDAG, s.v. παροιμία (p. 780).

12 Ibid.

reason to avoid characterizing it as a *parable*. We do not have here, a reference to the Kingdom, either direct or implied. Also missing are a figure that might represent God (or "the Father") and a specific moral or call to action—both of which are commonly present in the Synoptic parables.[13]

While I am personally persuaded that we should avoid equating the term παραβολή (as used in the Synoptics) with παροιμία here, and that it would be equally problematic to read John 10 through the lens of the Synoptic parables, we must remain aware of the metaphorical elements present in the imagery used in John 10. As Robert Kysar has noted, we must be mindful that the discourse is asking the audience "implicitly or explicitly to make a comparison in each of the figures of the passage. The reader is asked to compare Jesus with the entry to the sheepfold, with the shepherd who tends and cares for the sheep, and with the obedient child of a loving parent."[14] Thus, while we are not dealing with the identical generic form of Jesus' teaching in the Synoptics, this is perhaps the closest example we have in the Fourth Gospel. We should thus proceed with an awareness of the similarities between the Synoptic parables and the "figure of speech" presented here. We should also be mindful that there is occasionally a vicarious connection between the implied audience and characters in the narrative—and that seems to be the case here in John 10.

Thus, while this "figure of speech" is not to be regarded as a parable *in the exact same sense* as the Synoptic parables, it is the closest thing we have in John, though there is not (as in the examples of the Parable of the Sower) an explicit preparation in John 10 for *how to receive* Jesus' metaphorical speech here. This raises another difficult question: "How is John's implied audience expected to receive and interact with such a saying without a detailed explanation of how to do so?" In other words, if Jesus has not yet spoken in such a quasi-parabolic form (as he does in the Synoptics) and if no detailed explanation has been provided (as in the Synoptics), how should the implied audience be expected to understand and respond? To begin answering this question, we turn to a consideration of information that is *historically embedded* within John's implied audience.

13 It is also important to note that the term παροιμία is used three times in John 16:25-29 in reference to garden variety figurative speech.

14 Robert Kysar, "Johannine Metaphor—Meaning and Function: A Literary Case Study of John 10:1-8," *Sem* 53 (1991): 96.

3 Auditing John's Audience: What Does the Implied Audience Know?

Narrative theory describes the implied audience as a hypothetical intratextual construct that exists only within the idealized world of the text.[15] Each narrative runs its rhetorical course as the implied author communicates with the implied audience, while the real audience is, in a sense, "looking in" on that communication. Our historical and literary reconstructions are necessarily hypothetical—some to a greater degree than others—and when evaluated by scholars, some are collectively judged more plausible than others. So, as we begin our consideration of the implied audience's role in this text, it will be helpful to start with some *historical* observations about the implied audience that are, to my mind, incontrovertible.

First, it is often noted that the implied audience of the Fourth Gospel knows Greek, specifically a form of Hellenistic Greek with bilingual interference from Semitic ways of thinking and communicating. This knowledge of Greek includes, as we shall see, the ability to recognize and decode sophisticated *double entendre* and verbal irony.

Second, the implied audience of the Fourth Gospel has a degree of familiarity with some of the conventions and sacred writings of Second Temple Judaism, notably the feasts and various writings of the Hebrew Bible.[16]

Third, and perhaps most importantly for our considerations here, the implied audience already knows the story of Jesus—as evidenced by a number of proleptic statements that appear throughout the Gospel—but is being exposed to the *Johannine version* of this story for the first time.[17]

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15 Earliest work on narrative hermeneutics referred to this hypothetical construct as the "implied reader." However, in recognition of the oral/aural dynamics of life in the Roman world, the vast illiteracy of its people, and the performative nature of these early texts, scholars have more recently begun to speak of the implied *audience*. This shift in terminology has been facilitated by, among others, Joanna Dewey. See her most recent book, *The Oral Ethos of the Early Church: Speaking, Writing, and the Gospel of Mark*, Biblical Performance Criticism 8 (Eugene, Cascade, 2013).

16 On this subject, see Johannes Beutler, S.J., "The Use of 'Scripture' in the Gospel of John," in R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black, eds., *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 147-62; see also the very helpful essays in Alicia D. Myers and Bruce Schuchard, eds., *Abiding Words: The Use of Scripture in the Gospel of John* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

17 "The implied reader has some knowledge of Jesus' death and resurrection (see 2:21-22; 21:30-31), but not of the Johannine version of it. The implied reader is hearing this for the first time in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel" (Francis J. Moloney, "Who is the 'Reader' In/Of the Fourth Gospel?," *AusBR* 40 [1992]: 33).

All three of these observations about the implied audience are *historical in nature*. This is important, because even though we are dealing with a hypothetical *literary* construct, there is nevertheless, real and identifiable *historical* information embedded here. We must then, pay careful attention to this *extratextual* or *historical* information as a way of drawing conclusions about the rhetorical communication between implied author and implied audience. Of the three historical observations noted here, I am most interested in exploring the third, that is, "the implied audience already knows the story of Jesus but is being exposed to the Johannine version for the first time." If this assertion is true, we must then question what version(s) of "the story of Jesus" the implied audience would have brought into its experience with *this* story of Jesus?

I am proceeding here under the assumption that those responsible for the composition of the Fourth Gospel were, at the very least, familiar with and possibly dependent upon the Gospel of Mark. While this view is still up for discussion in Gospels research, it is neither an odd nor novel assumption.[18] In his recent monograph, *John's Use of Matthew*, James Barker has provided an abbreviated *Forschungsbericht* on the question of John's knowledge of the Synoptics, beginning with the first seventeen hundred years of interpretation and ending with the various shifts that have occurred in the past two hundred years.[19] The shifts in scholarly opinion that Barker traces in the last two

18 See the range of opinion expressed by scholars: Leon Morris (*The Gospel according to John*, revised edition [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995]) denies John's use of each of the Synoptics; Ulrich Wilckens (*Das Evangelium nach Johannes* [NTD 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000] argues that John knew and used all three Synoptics; Udo Schnelle (*Das Evangelium nach Johannes* [3d ed.; THKNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004]) argues that John knew Mark and perhaps Luke but not Matthew; Hartwig Thyen (*Das Johannesevangelium* [HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005]) argues for John's intertextual play with all three Synoptics; Andrew Lincoln (*The Gospel according to Saint John* [BNTC; London: Continuum, 2005; repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006]) claims John's literary dependence on all three Synoptics; Urban C. von Wahlde (*The Gospel and Letters of John* (3 vols.; Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) claims John's use of all three; Richard Bauckham ("The Gospel of John and the Synoptic Problem," in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem: Oxford Conference, April 2008; Essays in Honour of Christopher M. Tuckett* [Paul Foster et al., eds.; BETL 239; Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 657-88)] claims John's familiarity with Mark, but not with Matthew or Luke. Marianne Meye Thompson (*John: A Commentary* [NTL; Louisville: Westminster, 2015]) highlights how John's differences with the Synoptics outweigh its similarities; overall, her commentary does not try to account for John's sources.

19 James W. Barker, *John's Use of Matthew* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 1-14. In my opinion, John was familiar with all three Synoptic Gospels but I have chosen to focus only on John's knowledge of Mark in this article. At the end of the day, the argument I am making here does not necessarily depend upon John's knowledge of the Synoptics, only an awareness

centuries alone include the "consensus" position that John knew Mark and Luke but not Matthew, followed by the "consensus" position of Johannine independence, followed by the present state in which various "consensus" positions seem to hold sway among different groups of scholars operating in different locales. In my estimation, it strains credulity to suggest that by the late first or early second century, those responsible for the composition of the Fourth Gospel were unaware of Synoptic (or Synoptic-like) presentations of Jesus, and a major part of these presentations is *his speaking in narrative parables*. However, since I do not have space here to defend or develop my case for John's familiarity with Mark in any great detail, I ask the reader to indulge me for the sake of argument.

Proceeding under the assumption that John knew Mark, what we often see in the Fourth Gospel is a response to or correction of something that John is, for lack of a better term, unhappy about.[20] Examples of such things include: (1) In Mark, Jesus is widely, perhaps even primarily known as an exorcist, while there is not a single exorcism in in the Fourth Gospel. (2) In Mark, there is a distinctly apocalyptic cosmology, from which John seems intentionally to distance his presentation of Jesus.[21] (3) Touching directly upon our subject matter

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of the teaching style of Jesus that is present within the ethos of various expressions of early Christianity. I must admit, however, that my argument is bolstered by a view that I cannot reasonably make the case for here, which is John's knowledge of all three Synoptic Gospels.

20 On this point, Joel Marcus comments, "John is so different from the Synoptics that, if he did use them, he has transformed them radically in pursuance of his own theological and narrative interests" (*Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27 [New York; Doubleday, 2000], 53). Barker has made the argument that John's alteration of material inherited from the Synoptics should not be viewed as an attempt to supplant but rather supplement previous Gospel accounts. He writes, "A particularly important practice is known as *oppositio in imitando*, whereby a subsequent text imitates and reinterprets—but does not replace—a predecessor.... By way of analogy, John could imitate and reinterpret Matthew, but John's gospel could hardly replace Matthew" (*John's Use of Matthew*, 35).

21 This is my own reading of the different cosmological outlooks of Mark and John but there has been a more recent move by some to see John as possessing an apocalyptic cosmology. For one side of the debate that regards John as having little relation to apocalyptic, see my chapter, "Overcoming Satan, Overcoming the World: Exploring the Cosmologies of Mark and John," in Chris Keith and Loren Stuckenbruck, eds., *Evil in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, WUNT 2/147 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 101-21; for an approach that regards John as possessing significant apocalyptic elements, see Benjamin Reynolds, *The Apocalyptic Son of Man in the Gospel of John*, WUNT 2/249 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); and Catrin H. Williams and Christopher Rowland, eds., *John's Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (London: T&T Clark, 2014).

here: In Mark, Jesus most commonly teaches in narrative parables, where in John, Jesus most commonly teaches in lengthy theological discourses; further, there does not appear to be a true narrative parable in the Fourth Gospel. These are but a few examples of John's particular take on the story of Jesus' vis-à-vis Mark's version and I think it is important that we point out these critical differences while maintaining John's knowledge and appropriation of Mark's larger narrative about Jesus' life, vocation, and death.

Given what we have attempted to establish about the historical information embedded in John's implied audience, I contend that the implied audience's knowledge of the Markan Jesus points to a knowledge of (1) Jesus' parables and (2) how to interpret them along the lines of an interpretive model provided in Mark's first Kingdom parable, the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20). In vv. 1-9, Jesus utters an enigmatic parable to the crowds, followed by a comment that his teachings are intentionally meant to conceal from the masses (v. 12). He then poses the following question to the disciples: "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand the others?" Verses 14-20 then provide a detailed and paradigmatic interpretation of the parable, revealing its two-level, allegorical meaning. Presumably, this parable is meant to provide Mark's audience with the means to understand the other parables that will appear throughout the gospel narrative, none of which are accompanied by a formal explanation. If, as I argue, John's implied audience is already familiar with the Markan presentation of Jesus, this familiarity includes the preaching of parables with *both literal and metaphorical features*.

This *historical* assumption, along with the *literary* presentation of what the Fourth Gospel reveals about the nature of Jesus' speech, is the dual basis upon which the implied audience is able to interpret properly Jesus' παροιμία in John 10. We turn now to a consideration of that literary evidence.

4 The Implied Audience: What It Learns

In the Fourth Gospel we encounter a Jesus who has come from above (1:1-2) and taken on human flesh (1:14); his mission is to complete the tasks assigned to him by the Father and return to the place from which he came (e.g., 14:1-6); when Jesus speaks he utters enigmatic sayings that are often misunderstood by his audiences, who presume he is from Galilee rather than from above (e.g., 7:52), and find his words difficult to accept (e.g., 6:60-66; 10:31-33). This is not the earthy, Synoptic preacher from rural Galilee. Rather, he is a "stranger from

heaven," who speaks about the things above while mystifying his hearers down below.[22]

Within the context of the unfolding narrative rhetoric, the implied audience of the Fourth Gospel has two major sources of knowledge about Jesus: (1) information that is directly revealed by the implied author/narrator;[23] and (2) information that is gained through witnessing Jesus' interactions—and in particular his speech—across the narrative. Both of these are key components of the implied audience's preparation to receive the teaching of Jesus in John 10. Information that is directly revealed to the implied audience also represents privileged information to which other figures in the narrative have no access. The primary source of this privileged information is, of course, the Prologue (1:1-18) that provides the audience with much of what it needs to interpret properly the Gospel's presentation of Jesus going forward. We will briefly consider the Prologue before moving on to a more detailed consideration of Jesus' enigmatic speech in the first nine chapters of the Fourth Gospel.

4.1 *What the Implied Audience is Told* (*1:1-18*)

Johannine scholars have long noted the Prologue's importance to an interpretation of the Gospel. Once controversial in a world obsessed with sources and layers of composition, the claim that the Prologue is the lens through which the entire narrative should be read is now banal.[24] In approaching the Gospel as a complete utterance with emphasis upon the unfolding narrative Christological presentation, we must begin with the Prologue, which is a font of necessary information about Jesus.

The following Christological ideas emerge in the Prologue, all of which are essential for "getting Jesus right" in the Fourth Gospel:

(1) Jesus has eternal origins (1:1ab)
(2) Jesus possesses all that the Father possesses (1:1c)

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22 In an influential article, Wayne Meeks famously referred to the Johannine Jesus as the "man from heaven" (Meeks, "Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 [1972]: 44-72). A few years later, Marinus de Jonge published a monograph in which he referred to John's Jesus as the "stranger from heaven" (*Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God* [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977). Since the publication of these two important works, Johannine scholars have commonly used one of these two phrases when discussing the Johannine Jesus.

23 Traditional narrative critical formulations distinguish between the implied author and the narrator. Since the two are indistinguishable in the Fourth Gospel, I will use them interchangeably here.

24 For more on this, see my chapter, "John's Prologue: The Interpretive Key for Reading the Gospel of John," in *Reading John*, Cascade Companions (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 8-31.

(3) Jesus is from above (1:2)
(4) Jesus is the agent of all creation (1:3)
(5) Jesus is the giver of life (1:4)
(6) Jesus is the true light which enlightens all people (1:4-5, 9)
(7) Jesus has entered a world he helped to create and was rejected by his people (1:10-11)
(8) Jesus has the authority to grant eternal life and new birth (1:12-13)
(9) Jesus took on human flesh and became like humans (1:14)
(10) Jesus is the purveyor of grace (1:17)
(11) Jesus is the Christ/Messiah (1:17)
(12) Jesus reveals the Father to humanity (1:18)[25]

These themes are critical to the audience's appraisal of all that happens in the story going forward. As I have noted elsewhere:

> [T]here is little dispute that the Johannine Prologue sets the literary and theological agendas for the entire gospel narrative. Like an overture that rehearses the major symphonic movements in the forthcoming story, the Prologue serves as an audience-elevating device by providing privileged information to which characters in the story have no access. The Prologue introduces the themes that are needed to interpret properly John's story of Jesus, and provides the audience with comprehensive inside information regarding the gospel's developed Christology.[26]

Noteworthy among these themes are that Jesus is "from above" and that he has come to "reveal the Father." As such his language throughout the narrative is commensurate with these two assertions. Jesus is "from above" and he often speaks in what we might call a "heavenly," "other-worldly," or "figurative" way, which is then misinterpreted by his audiences by means of a misplaced literalism and results in misunderstanding. This observation is not terribly novel; Johannine scholars have long been aware of this feature of Johannine discourse. Jesus' language is also revelatory, pointing the audience to the nature of the Father. Both of these themes are foundational to the enterprise of interpreting Jesus' speech throughout the Gospel.

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25 I develop these specific points in greater detail in my book, *Reading John*, 8-31, (esp. 30).

26 Christopher W. Skinner, "Misunderstanding, Characterization, and Johannine Christology: Reading John's Characters through the Lens of the Prologue," in Christopher W. Skinner, ed., *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, LNTS 461 (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2012), 109-25 (110).

This critical information from the Prologue is the primary guide to the audience's appreciation of Jesus going forward. Having been directly told about these important elements of Jesus' identity and mission, the audience must now observe and learn. We will now look at what the audience observes in the first nine chapters of the Gospel and see how this prepares the audience to receive the παροιμία in ch. 10.

4.2 *What the Implied Audience Observes*

Throughout the Fourth Gospel, Jesus speaks in a manner that reflects a "two-level" schema and this often leads to misunderstanding. An initial instance of this schema (John 2) provides both an example of this type of speech accompanied by a brief explanation of how to understand it:

> 16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken (NRSV).

I contend that these two instances of obscured speech (vv. 16, 20), both of which are followed by an explicit narratorial explanation (vv. 17, 21-22), are John's version of a "parable-of-the-sower" type moment in the narrative. Here the audience is first told that Jesus' interlocutors are guilty of an overly literal interpretation of his words followed by instructions on the more appropriate way to understand him. Richard Hays helpfully articulates this need for the audience to read for figuration:

> The hermeneutical key to the passage is given explicitly in an authorial voice-over directed to the reader in John 2:21-22: 'But he was speaking of the temple of his body.... The force of John's *oun* (not translated by the NRSV) is elusive, but it seems to mean something like this: 'Jesus spoke figuratively about the resurrection of his own body; therefore the meaning of his prophecy could be understood only after the resurrection, only after he had embodied its figural sense.' It is not too much to suggest that

> John, early in his narrative, is teaching his readers how to read. Look beyond the literal sense, he whispers, and read for figuration.[27]

After this example in chapter 2, we can find three similar examples leading up to chapter 10. In each case, the implied audience is now equipped to decode the "otherworldly" or "heavenly" nature of Jesus' words *without narratorial interruption*, while those to whom Jesus is speaking are guilty of misunderstanding through a misplaced literalism. These three examples are: (1) Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in ch. 3, (2) Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman in ch. 4, and (3) the confusion expressed by the Pharisees over Jesus' discussion of his "departure" in ch. 7. We will briefly look at each text below.

In John 3, we witness the first example of verbal and situational irony in the narrative since Jesus' first two misunderstood statements, "Zeal for your house will consume me," (2:16) and "Destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days" (2:19). The example in John 3 is perhaps the most well-known example of verbal irony in the Fourth Gospel as it appears in one of the most popular stories in the New Testament. Nicodemus, a man of impeccable social and religious credentials, approaches Jesus by night and offers him (feigned?) praise (vv. 1-2). In v. 3, Jesus' responds: Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μή τις γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν, οὐ δύναται ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ. There is, of course, confusion on the part of Nicodemus over what it means to be γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν.[28] By this phrase, Nicodemus—applying an overly literal interpretation to Jesus' words—hears "born again" while Jesus intends "born (or possibly re-born) *from above*."[29] This leads to another question which displays both Nicodemus's misunderstanding as well as his overly literal hermeneutic: "Surely a man cannot enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born, can he? (v. 4). Jesus responds once again, this time replacing born from above (γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν) with born of water and spirit (γεννηθῇ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος), and continuing with an exposition about how the wind blows/spirit moves (vv. 5-8). Again, Nicodemus misunderstands and responds with utter confusion:

27 Richard B. Hays, "Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection," in Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 221.

28 According to BDAG (s.v. ἄνωθεν, p. 92), the primary sense of this adverb is "in extension fr. a source that is above, *from above*"; the fourth option listed there is "at a subsequent point of time involving repetition, *again, anew*." Much has been written on this subject in the recent commentary tradition.

29 Francis J. Moloney (*The Gospel of John*, SP 4 [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998], 98), suggests the conflated translation, "born again, from above."

"How can these things be?" (v. 9). Here there is no clarification of Jesus' words similar to "Jesus was speaking of the temple of his body," (as in John 2) or "Jesus was speaking of being born from above," because the audience has already been given a paradigmatic explanation of how Jesus' speech works in the Fourth Gospel. The implied audience simply understands because it has been prepared by the initial example of irony and misunderstanding in John 2:16-22.[30]

Similarly, in John 4, after a brief exchange that is presumably about drinking *literal water* (vv. 7-9), Jesus informs the Samaritan woman that he is capable of dispensing ὕδωρ ζῶν ("living water"). There is, of course, confusion on the part of the Samaritan woman over Jesus' statement about "living water," because she understands the phrase as a reference to "running water" (a common Greek euphemism). She has come to the well for the very purpose of drawing literal water and she first responds to Jesus by saying, "You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where then do you get this living water?" (v. 11). After a bit more conversation she exclaims, "Give me this water so that I will neither thirst not come here to draw" (v. 15). The irony is that Jesus is not speaking of literal water but rather intends the phrase to denote something like "water which imparts life." For a good part of the discussion, the Samaritan woman is in the dark, but the implied audience is in the know. Again, as in chapter 3, no explicit clarification is added or necessary because the implied audience has been given the initial example in John 2 and recognizes that this is another example of such obscured speech.[31]

Finally, in John 7, after lengthy deliberations from the crowd and the Jewish leaders about Jesus' origins and identity, there is confusion on the part of Pharisees over Jesus' teaching about his departure. In vv. 33-34 he announces, "I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to the one who sent me. You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you

30 The exegetical details raised here regarding the Johannine use of double entendre have been discussed at length in the commentary tradition. For the classic exposition of how verbal and situational irony functions in John, see Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985). On how the narrative characterization of Nicodemus contributes to the rhetoric of this pericope, see the recent treatment by Michael Whitenton, "The Dissembler of John 3: A Cognitive and Rhetorical Approach to the Characterization of Nicodemus," *JBL* 135 (2016): 141-58.

31 On some of the complexities associated with interpreting this passage, see Stephen D. Moore, "Are There Impurities in the Living Water that the Johannine Jesus Dispenses? Deconstruction, Feminism, and the Samaritan Woman," *BibInt* 1 (1993): 207-27; and Victor H. Matthews, "Conversation and Identity: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman," *BTB* 40 (2010): 215-26.

cannot come." By this language, the Pharisees wonder aloud if Jesus might be going to live in the Dispersion among the Greeks (v. 35). The implied audience however, recognizes that Jesus is the one who came down "from above," and that talk of his departure is related to his return to the Father. The Pharisees are mystified by his comments insofar as they have taken him literally. The audience suspects but has yet to discover directly that language of "returning to the Father" is Jesus' code for his death and resurrection. This will become clearer as the narrative progresses, especially in the Good Shepherd discourse where Jesus speaks of "laying down his life" (10:11, 15, 17). Again, as in the two previous examples in chs. 3 and 4, no narratorial explanation is provided; the audience understands what the Pharisees are unable to grasp.[32]

Against the backdrop of the narrator's "lesson" in reading the Gospel in ch. 2, these three textual examples have helped prepare the audience to receive the παροιμία in John 10. Thus, when Jesus proclaims, "I am the door for the sheep" (10:7), or "I am the good shepherd" (10:11),[33] or even more enigmatically, "the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep," (10:11, 15, 17), the implied audience recognizes this as metaphorical speech and has the tools to decipher the meaning of the entire παροιμία (10:1-21), while still learning what it means that a Shepherd-Messiah will willingly submit himself to death. Thus, even though the audience has been prepared to receive the teaching in John 10, the learning does not stop there.

It was established in 1:17 that Jesus is the Messiah. This is affirmed by the narrator in 9:22, but this "information," is obscured as the narrative unfolds from 1:19 down to ch. 10. First, John the Baptist refutes attempts to ascribe messianic status to him (1:20, 25; 3:28). Second, Jesus never simply accepts that he is "the Christ" as understood by others (1:41; 4:25, 29; 6:15). Third, there is great confusion about Jesus' being the Christ, articulated within the setting of Tabernacles, the annual time for messianic expectation (7:26, 27, 31,41, 42). The audience, who has been told that Jesus is the Christ, wonders how he is the Christ and waits for the narrative to progress in order to discover this. Jesus' intervention in ch. 10 picks up the image of "Shepherd," which was a well-known messiah-motif. For the first time in the narrative, the infallible word of Jesus self-identifies Jesus as a messianic figure. This finally gives

32 Noting another ironic twist in this passage, Lincoln (*Gospel according to Saint John*, 252) comments: "Irony may be intended here, since readers will know that in fact one result of Jesus' going away to the Father was the spread of his teaching beyond Israel to the Greeks."

33 An element that I have not considered here is the presence of two predicated ἐγώ εἰμι sayings in John 10:7, 11. An examination of previous ἐγώ εἰμι statements in the Gospel (cf. John 6:35, 41, 48; 8:12) would also assist our deliberations on the implied audience's reception of this discourse.

the audience, who has been prepared to receive this teaching, something concrete to connect to the previous announcement that Jesus is the Christ. However, the Shepherd-Messiah image is immediately shattered by the emphasis on the shepherd "laying down his life." Such a concept is unknown in the Jewish expectation of a Shepherd-Messiah. Jesus says that he is Messiah, but then strains the audience's "knowledge" with reference to death. Against that backdrop, the audience is now well-placed to follow what is being asked and affirmed about the Christ throughout the rest of the Gospel (e.g., 10:24; 11:27; 12:34; 17:3; 20:31). That fact that Jesus is the Messiah eclipses the audiences' messianic expectation and forces the audience to look forward and continue learning.[34]

5 Conclusion

This article has been guided by the larger question: "How has the implied audience of the Fourth Gospel been prepared to receive the παροιμία in John 10?" We have discovered that the implied audience has three sources of knowledge leading up to the Good Shepherd discourse. First, there is information that is necessarily—by virtue of the social, historical, and religious contexts of the author(s)—embedded within the text. Especially important here is the audience's awareness of Mark's story of Jesus, and this includes his use of parables to instruct the crowds. Second, there is information that is directly revealed to the audience in the form of the Prologue (1:1-18). Unveiled here are the most critical elements of the Johannine Jesus' identity and mission. Third, the narrator offers a "reading strategy" in ch. 2 which subtly instructs the audience (cf. 2:17, 21-22) as to how Jesus' enigmatic language is to be interpreted throughout the rest of the Gospel. These three sources of information uniquely prepare the audience of the Fourth Gospel to interpret properly, the metaphors at the heart of the Good Shepherd discourse and together function similarly to Jesus' explanation of how to interpret the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4, and thus the remaining Markan parables. Thus, even though there is nothing else in the Fourth Gospel quite like the παροιμία in John 10, the audience is not left scratching its head at this enigmatic discourse. Rather, the implied audience has been guided and nudged in its position of privilege to appreciate both *that* and *how* Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down his life.

34 I am indebted to Frank Moloney for this important insight.

Acknowledgements

A previous version of this paper was presented in the Johannine Literature Group at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Boston, MA (November 2017). I am grateful for those who offered comments and questions that helped improve this paper.

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