

JESUS IS LIGHT:  
THE MEANING OF LIGHT IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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## ABSTRACT

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The Meaning of Light in the Gospel of John  
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This study investigates the source and meaning of the metaphor JESUS IS LIGHT in the Gospel of John (GJohn) utilizing Conceptual Metaphor Theory. It argues that JESUS IS LIGHT in GJohn is a complex metaphor which is deeply rooted in the Old Testament metaphor THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT and its derivative metaphor THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. Many of the elements of these original metaphors are explicitly or implicitly mapped onto Jesus, showing him to be a personal revelation of God himself to mankind.

Chapter 2 presents a summary of significant scholarship on *light* in GJohn from early, history of religions, and Jewish background approaches. These scholars raise the question whether the metaphor has its background in reconstructed Gnostic myths, Hellenistic religions, or the Old Testament (OT). It is proposed that Hellenistic language and culture do influence GJohn but are secondary to the overriding OT influence and are explained by the author's evangelistic goals.

Chapter 3 analyzes divine light metaphors in the OT as a potential source for the metaphor in GJohn. These OT utterances can be categorized into four main conceptual metaphors: THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT, SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD, RIGHTEOUS LIFE IS LIGHT FROM GOD and THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT.

Chapter 4 demonstrates a close contextual analysis of the JESUS IS LIGHT metaphor in

GJohn chapters 1, 3, 8 and 9, finding that these metaphorical utterances do conform to the pattern and meaning of the OT metaphors. The metaphors are remapped from both God and his Agent of Salvation to Jesus.

Chapter 5 categorizes the meaning of JESUS IS LIGHT according to normative, situational, and existential perspectives. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the findings and implications of the study.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John (hereafter *GJohn* when referring to the book) contains vivid metaphors that depict Jesus and his impact: word, life, bread, water, and light, among others. Scholars have studied these metaphors, seeking for insight into the author (hereafter *John* or *the Evangelist*), the book's composition, and its purpose<sup>1</sup>. Much has been written about how the contemporary background of the book affected the author's use of these metaphors. Similar metaphors have been studied in Gnostic, Hellenistic, and Jewish literature for comparison to John. The metaphor JESUS IS LIGHT has received some attention, though perhaps not as much as the metaphor of word with its potential Gnostic overtones, or as the metaphors of bread and water with their eucharistic possibilities.

Scholars have seen the metaphor of light as speaking in some way about the kind of revelation Jesus brings. It has been described as borrowing from Hellenism the view of revelation as mystical secret knowledge available only to a select few. On this view John is describing the meaning of Jesus in terms of Hellenistic philosophy. Other interpretations see the metaphor as representing a revelation that allows man's reasoning capabilities to operate properly. Some scholars see clear links from GJohn to the use of light to represent the presence of divinity in the Old Testament (OT). They look for potential citations and

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<sup>1</sup> Other authors might refer to these as images, symbols or themes. I will treat these as metaphors for reasons that will become obvious.



intertexts to discover the meaning of each use of the metaphor. What can be made of these diverse opinions?<sup>2</sup>

This paper argues that JESUS IS LIGHT in GJohn is a complex metaphor which is deeply rooted in the Old Testament metaphor THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT and its derivative metaphor THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. Many of the elements of the original metaphors are explicitly or implicitly mapped onto Jesus, showing him to be a personal revelation of God himself to mankind.

### Plan of Study

Lanier's investigation of OT conceptual metaphors in Luke provides a helpful starting point for the current paper.<sup>3</sup> He demonstrates the application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to four separate metaphors (Horn, Dawn/Light, Mother Bird, Stone) used in the Gospel of Luke. For each, he evaluates the underlying conceptual metaphor and specific elements used in the Gospel of Luke. By comparing a conceptual metaphor and its elements in Luke to uses of that same metaphor in the OT, he can highlight similarities and differences between them. Since this methodology considers the complexity of metaphor usage, it can

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<sup>2</sup> See Rudolf Bultmann, C. H. Dodd and Ernst Haenchen for examples of the Hellenistic view. Thomas Aquinas provides an example of the pre-critical view that this light enables man to reason properly. George Beasley-Murray and D. A. Carson primarily make connections to metaphors of divine light in the OT. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. George Raymond Beasley-Murray, Rupert William Noel Hoare, and John Kenneth Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971). C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1958). Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6*, trans. Robert W. Funk, ed. Robert W. Funk and Ulrich Busse, *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, trans James A. Weisheipl (Albany: Magi Books, 1998). George Beasley-Murray, *John*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, John D.W. Watts, James W. Watts, Ralph P. Martin, and Lynn Allan Losie, vol. 36, 2d ed, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999). D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Gregory R. Lanier, *Old Testament Conceptual Metaphors and the Christology of Luke's Gospel*, Library of New Testament Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

lead to better results than a naive search for direct textual citations from OT or other ancient sources.

In Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphors are understood to be more than simply a substitution of one word for another. GOD IS LIGHT does more than simply provide a different word to name God. Metaphors are a way that the mind works to conceive one thing in terms of another (metaphors are thus *conceptual*). People actually think about a thing by making connections to something else they know. A metaphor can carry quite a lot of meaning, as multiple aspects of the *source domain* can be mapped onto the *target domain*. In CMT vernacular, the concrete experience being used to articulate a more abstract thing is called the *source*, while the thing being described is the *target*. An *element* is one aspect of the source—for instance “helps one to see” is an element of light. A *mapping* is the application of an element from the source to the target—for instance “God helps one to see” maps an element from light onto God. A metaphor is often written formally in small caps as either SOURCE→TARGET or TARGET IS SOURCE, such as LIGHT→GOD or GOD IS LIGHT. CMT will be further described below in sufficient detail for the reader to follow the argument.

The overall plan of study is to review the state of scholarship, analyze light metaphors in the OT to discover their elements, analyze the JESUS IS LIGHT metaphor in John, then draw conclusions based on the similarities and dissimilarities in usage between the OT and John. Since John self-consciously refers to the OT at many points, including within the passages under focus, it follows that the OT should be the first place to look for connections. For sake of length, this study is limited to only the OT as a source for this metaphor. The analysis demonstrates that this limitation is reasonable since John’s metaphor is so tightly connected to the OT metaphor.

Before analyzing the text in depth, Chapter 2 provides a brief review of the state of scholarship on the metaphor of light in the Gospel of John. Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin provide a flavor of three pre-critical theological views. Bultmann, Dodd and Haenchen represent the History of Religions approach to the text. In the main, they see the author adopting Hellenistic philosophies, which are laid over the story of Jesus. Beasley-Murray, Carson and Bauckham represent the Jewish Background approach. They primarily make connections from light to the word and life metaphors, and point back to Old Testament texts as the basis for these metaphors.

Following this survey of scholarship, Chapter 3 investigates Old Testament uses of light as a metaphor for the presence of God and his Agent. It uses CMT to analyze the conceptual metaphor (the actual mental model behind the literary use of the metaphor) and the mapping of individual elements from the source (LIGHT) to the target (GOD or THE AGENT OF GOD). The result is a set of concepts which the OT uses to describe the presence of God through the metaphor of light.

With the ground thus prepared, Chapter 4 analyzes four uses in GJohn of LIGHT to describe Jesus. For the purpose of this paper, the text is analyzed as a completed composition within the canon of scripture. Four main passages are investigated: the Prologue in chapter 1, the Discourse with Nicodemus in chapter 3, the Feast of Tabernacles in chapter 8, and the Man Born Blind in chapter 9. The analysis demonstrates that the light metaphor in GJohn carries the same fundamental meaning as in the OT. Its use in GJohn does carry one significant difference: the metaphor is remapped from both God and his Agent to Jesus. Where Hellenistic language or forms are used, they are used to express concepts of God present in the OT.

In Chapter 5, the earlier analysis is used to develop doctrine on the light of Jesus, particularly as it pertains to the identity of Christ and the lordship of Christ. John Frame's Normative, Situational and Existential perspectives provide a helpful lens for viewing the doctrinal contents of the metaphor JESUS IS LIGHT.

Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the conclusions and draws out several implications of the present research.

### Methodology of Biblical Analysis

The selection and analysis of each biblical text follows a consistent methodology. The chosen passages in GJohn use the metaphor of light to describe the presence of Jesus. Similarly, the selected OT texts each utilize a metaphor that describe God or his Agent as light. Since conceptual metaphors are in fact complex mental models rather than simple word replacements, the analysis includes concepts related to light such as darkness, sight and blindness. Greek lemmas such as φῶς, σκοτία, τυφλός, and βλέπω are common in these passages. However, the selection is made based on the presence of the metaphor without attempting to include every mention of φῶς, for instance.

We analyze the OT texts to discover the elements of the LIGHT domain which are mapped onto the GOD and AGENT OF GOD domains. This provides a list of mappings in the OT metaphor which were readily available to be used by the Evangelist. As metaphors work at the level of linguistics, analysis should be performed using the language of the author's

thought world. The Septuagint is the proper text to use for OT comparisons to GJohn since John likely read the OT primarily in Greek and wrote his gospel in Greek.<sup>4</sup>

The analysis of GJohn follows a consistent pattern for each passage under investigation. First, we address pertinent textual issues such as variant texts and difficulties in translation. Second, we review potential citations and allusions from the passage under study to OT texts. Third, we review the passage within its literary context to understand the narrative flow and author's intention. Fourth, we perform an exegetical analysis of the passage to determine the meaning of the metaphor. Finally, we summarize the findings which impact the thesis that JESUS IS LIGHT in GJohn is a remapping of OT divine light metaphors.

The result of this work across multiple texts in the OT and in GJohn is a rigorous exploration of the meaning conveyed by the metaphor JESUS IS LIGHT. John appropriates the OT metaphors THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT and THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT, which describe in several ways the presence of God with the people of Israel, to the coming of Jesus. His use of many aspects of the OT metaphor shows that he has in mind the same essential redemptive idea as the OT authors. However, the metaphor is applied in a new way—rather than applying the elements of the light domain to the presence of God, he applies them directly to Jesus. In this way, he indicates that Jesus is the concrete presence of God, equivalent to the manifest presence of God as described many times in the OT.

The remapping of LIGHT from THE PRESENCE OF GOD to JESUS is a seemingly novel way for John to indicate that Jesus is in fact the concrete presence of God. He transforms the metaphor as he realizes the identification of Jesus with God. However, this mapping is not

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<sup>4</sup> Carson, *John*, 75. Carson describes the somewhat peculiar Greek of GJohn as “with little exception, the language of the Septuagint.”

unique to GJohn. The Synoptic Gospels and Paul also draw on the OT light metaphor as a way to understand the divine presence in Jesus. This corroborates our finding that John is appropriating an OT metaphor and remapping it onto Jesus. GJohn and other NT books use the metaphor to describe Jesus as one who reveals God by being the very presence of God to the world.

## CHAPTER 2

### STATE OF THE SCHOLARSHIP

Scholars have a broad diversity of opinions on the meaning of GJohn in general and the light metaphor in particular. We will briefly survey the views of Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin in the early period. In the modern period, we will look at views within the History of Religions school, represented by Bultmann, Dodd and Haenchen, followed by the Jewish Background school, represented by Beasley-Murray, Carson and Bauckham.

#### Early

Pre-critical studies of the light in GJohn follow the expected pattern of general historical trends in biblical studies. The question of authorship is far in the background. Textual criticism is less of a pressing concern. One emphasis of leading scholars such as Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin is to analyze the text according to systematic doctrinal categories in light of other texts in the Bible. For these three, light is treated as a metaphor for a work of Christ which illuminates mankind's darkened reason and wisdom.

Augustine is concerned to argue against a literalistic idea that Jesus is being claimed in GJohn to be actual light or even the sun itself. He is not actually "that sun which by its rising and setting causes the day"<sup>1</sup> but instead is "the Light of wisdom." Augustine goes on to

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, "Tractates on the Gospel of John," 34.2 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. John Gibb (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1888.). Augustine mentions

draw out various elements of the metaphor. He compares how the sun can be used for determining direction to how Jesus shows the way that a man should live. He also connects Jesus's "I am the light of the world" saying to healing the eyes of the blind, making an analogy between physical healing of blindness and enlightenment. The light of Jesus is in some way a medicine for spiritual blindness: "For the Lord gives light to the blind. Therefore we, brethren, having the eye-salve of faith, are now enlightened."<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in expounding the meaning of Jesus's claim to be the light of the world, Thomas Aquinas argues against a literalistic view of Jesus as sensible light:

For this physical sun is a light which can be perceived by sense. Consequently, it is not the highest light, which intellect alone grasps, and which is the intelligible light characteristic of the rational creature. . . . Intellectual light makes the intellect to know, because whatever light is in the rational creature is all derived from that supreme light.<sup>3</sup>

Physical light from the sun which enables perception of the physical world is a lower order than intellectual light which enables knowledge of spiritual things. The light of rationality in mankind is derived from the supreme light which entered the world in Jesus. The primary metaphorical element he finds in 8:12 is that light makes spiritual/intellectual things intelligible. In some manner Jesus is the origin of man's rationality and also is the light by which reason can operate. Commenting on the Prologue, he finds that spiritual light can also

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"heretics who thought this" such as the Manichaeans. His concern to counter their teaching should be unsurprising since he spent years as an adherent before becoming a Christian.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Augustine goes on to extend the analogy with the spit-and-earth mixture being comparable to the Word-made-flesh. He also makes a connection to Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 13:12 "Now I know in part, now through a glass darkly; but then, face to face."

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, trans. James A. Weisheipl (Albany: Magi Books, 1998), 8.2.1142.



dispel the darkness of suffering and devils, in addition to ignorance.<sup>4</sup> This adds the element that light dispels various kinds of darkness.

Calvin develops this thought further, speaking of a spiritual blindness that afflicts the human race. Describing how light shines in the darkness, he explains that mankind's moral reason is ruined but not entirely destroyed: "this light [of reason] is so smothered by clouds of darkness that it cannot shine forth to any good effect."<sup>5</sup> Jesus is the source of knowledge and wisdom so he is able to restore these to man. He is called the *light of the world* for, "since we are all blind by nature, a remedy is offered, by which we may be freed and rescued from darkness and made partakers of the true light."<sup>6</sup> Calvin's main concern in the passages on light appears to be to demonstrate man's moral and intellectual blindness which places him in need of illumination from God.

These approaches suggest several elements of the metaphor as used in GJohn and in the Bible generally. These three early scholars make many connections from GJohn to the way light is used as a metaphor in Psalms and the Synoptic Gospels. The metaphorical elements they discover and map onto Jesus include:

- Light shows which way to go.
- Light is needed for eyes to see.
- Light enables reason.

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<sup>4</sup> Aquinas, *Comm. John*, 1.3.105-107. In Jesus coming into the world, light takes on the darkness of suffering in the flesh, so the Lord is a light for those who suffer. Jesus descended into the darkness of a world held in the sway of devils, but they could not overcome his light. Jesus came to men blinded by error and ignorance, offering them light.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), II.ii.12. The light of Christ continues shining, but mankind's moral reason and will are so badly damaged that they are unable to receive it.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 8.12. This is similar to a passage from his *Institutes*, speaking of the effect of Scripture on the spiritually blind: "as the aged . . . when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly, so Scripture, gathering together the impressions of Deity, which, till then, lay confused in our minds, dissipates the darkness, and shows us the true God clearly" (John Calvin, *Institutes*, I.vi.1).

- Light dispels darkness.
- Light can be hidden by clouds but not destroyed.

### Modern

In the modern period, it is helpful to make a broad distinction between studies of GJohn which take a History of Religions approach versus those which take a Jewish Background approach. We will look at each one in turn.

#### History of Religions Approach

Throughout the twentieth century until the 1960s, the history-of-religions movement dominated scholarship in GJohn, seeking a background for the book in Hellenistic culture. Scholars identified parallels in Philo (especially the *λόγος* ideas), Hermetic writings, Gnosticism and Mandaism.<sup>7</sup> The Hellenizing theory holds importance for the current study since words such as *light*, *word*, *knowledge* and *revelation* are common in potential Hellenistic parallels.<sup>8</sup> If John is importing Hellenism into the story of Jesus, the LIGHT metaphor will play an important role in conveying this philosophy.

C. H. Dodd takes a history-of-religions approach, looking for a source of the divine light idea first in Hellenistic religions.<sup>9</sup> He shows that Plato uses *φῶς* to identify the

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<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 255. They state that as Christianity spread out “it was progressively transformed both in vocabulary and in substance.” The authors provide a brief introduction to these Hellenistic influences. Ultimately the attempt to find a source for GJohn in the Hellenic world failed due to the proposed sources being dated far later than the gospel and due to large conceptual differences.

<sup>8</sup> Note that other important words in Hellenistic philosophy are (purposefully?) excluded by John. A notable exclusion is *σοφία*, found only four times in Revelation among all the Johannine text. This could be a hint that John is adapting Greek language to his purpose while carefully avoiding importing heavy overtones from Hellenistic philosophy.

<sup>9</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 201-212. Dodd considers sources in this general order: sun worshipping religion, Plato, Philo, general

“supreme god”<sup>10</sup> which causes life on earth and enables mankind to gain knowledge of the world. He goes on to say that Philo describes light as an emanation from God. As one gains mystical knowledge, one becomes illuminated by these ideas, ultimately seeing “the Light itself (which is God).” Additionally, the coupling of light and life as in the Prologue is found in Hellenistic language: “In [Philo, *Hermetica*,] and similar writings, as we have noted, light is commonly associated with life as a description of the real, or the divine.”<sup>11</sup>

Following this review of Hellenistic philosophies, Dodd also looks to the OT for parallels to John’s description of divine light. He notes that in Ps. 36:9[35:10]<sup>12</sup> light and life are both used to “express that ultimate blessedness or salvation which is God’s gift to men.”<sup>13</sup> He then finds philosophical justification for this verse in Philo, explaining that God “is the archetype of light, or rather, as Creator, prior to this, as to all archetypes.”<sup>14</sup> He finds in GJohn a similar circumspection where light is somehow in the Logos rather than being directly identified with God himself: “This archetypal light, John says, was ‘in’ the Logos . . .

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Hellenistic mysticism, OT Hebrew thought. He finds John’s concept of light to be closely connected to the Hebrew concept of glory as it reveals the “manifestation of God’s being” (206). Light shines into dark places, which connects it to judgment. More on this below.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 202. Dodd sees Plato’s concept of light as the source of the similar symbolism common in Hellenistic philosophy.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Because light is the source of life, growing in knowledge might lead to immortal life. As one participates more in knowledge of the Light, one also participates more in Life.

<sup>12</sup> Septuagint verse numberings are given in square brackets where they differ.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. This statement comes after a disclaimer: “Among the sources from which this doctrine of life and light in unity was drawn, it seems that we must include the Hebrew Scriptures.” Does Dodd’s phrasing express a hesitation to consider the OT as a source? The hesitation is surprising, in that John is a Jew, within an offshoot of Jewish religion, who consciously points back to the OT text at many points in his Gospel. Nevertheless, if this phrasing does express hesitation, to his credit Dodd goes on to make an analysis of the OT use of *light* in relation to God.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 203.

the Father to whom the Logos is Son, is prior to all archetypes.”<sup>15</sup> Summarizing Dodd’s findings in this section, the elements of LIGHT are that it shines in the darkness of ignorance, is in the world like emanations from God, exists in each man to some extent, is self-evidencing, and causes those who receive it to become enlightened sons of God.

Putting metaphysics to the side, Dodd then explores the connection between light and glory in the Prologue. To Jews, δόξα does not mean the mere *reputation*<sup>16</sup> of secular Greek but carries the full meaning of the Hebrew נְבוֹדָה, “the manifestation of God’s being, nature and presence, in a manner accessible to human experience; and the manifestation was conceived in the form of radiance, splendor, or dazzling light.”<sup>17</sup> Frey shows how this special religious meaning of δόξα developed over the course of LXX development, to be taken up later in the NT especially by Paul and John.<sup>18</sup> He states that the notion of δόξα in the LXX which is brought over into the NT refers to “the divine splendor, glory (occasionally connected with the idea of brilliance and gleam of light), and its eschatological revelation.”<sup>19</sup> Dodd similarly notices the parallel usage of δόξα and φῶς in GJohn “referring to the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, ‘δόξα’ in *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Sir Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940). Primary meanings include “notion, opinion, judgment.”

<sup>17</sup> Dodd, 206.

<sup>18</sup> Frey demonstrates how δόξα is used to describe the glory of Jesus, linking through the LXX to the exalted magnificence of God himself. He shows that the idea of divine glory is mapped from God onto Jesus, just as in the present text we show that the idea of divine light is mapped from God onto Jesus. Interestingly, these ideas often appear in close proximity, in chapters 1, 8, and 12.

<sup>19</sup> Jörg Frey, "The Use of δόξα in Paul and John as Shaped by the Septuagint," in *The Reception of Septuagint Words in Jewish-Hellenistic and Christian Literature*, ed. Eberhard Bons, Ralph Brucker and Jan Joosten, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/367* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 94.

manifestation of the power of God for the salvation of His People.”<sup>20</sup> This kind of glory is a significant departure from Hellenistic thinking. The disclosure is made as a “concrete revelation of that which is truly divine in an historic life” resulting in judgment between those who receive the light and those who reject it, rather than a “vague and abstract νοῦς.”<sup>21</sup> With these differences, John expresses Hellenistic philosophy in typical language but greatly transforms certain aspects of it.

Rudolf Bultmann’s understanding of the light in GJohn is tied closely to the existential philosophy he applies to the book and seeks to discover within it. He finds the story of Jesus to be told in terms of a Gnostic Redeemer myth: Jesus is the Revealer who brings the light that enlightens men to understand themselves. When 1:5 states καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἣν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, it is not using φῶς as a metaphor for some other thing. Rather, it is naming the truest light, “the means whereby man understands himself in his world.”<sup>22</sup> Through an encounter with Jesus, a person can find himself with a brightness within, an illuminated existence:

But the more completely φῶς is regarded as something eschatological, the stronger grows the conviction that the definitive illumination of existence does not lie within human possibilities, but can only be divine gift. Thus φῶς comes to mean revelation.

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<sup>20</sup> Dodd, 206.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 212. Dodd’s discussion prior to this point shows how an encounter with light inevitably leads to judgment as it separates those who receive the light from those who reject it. This explains the paradox that Jesus did not come to bring judgment, and yet his coming results in judgment.

<sup>22</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. George Raymond Beasley-Murray, Rupert William Noel Hoare, and John Kenneth Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 40-41. Light is not primarily an external thing but a brightness internal to a person. It is a “quality of existence” marked by self-understanding. This revelation, a bringing of internal brightness, is the salvation that is truly needed.

And where one speaks of a Revealer, one can describe him as the “Light” or as the Giver of light.<sup>23</sup>

For Bultmann, the description of Jesus as light perfectly underlines his idea that Jesus is a Revealer who enables a person to understand himself and his place in the world. This illumination matches Bultmann’s concept of salvation. He finds Gnostic myths to be the background of the Revealer in GJohn, but does not look to those myths for the ultimate meaning of the text. Instead, he demythologizes<sup>24</sup> the text through an existential reading.

When interpreting the ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου declaration in 8:12, he connects it directly to the story of the man born blind in chapter 9. Here, the concepts of spiritual sight and blindness are used in a similar way to the concepts of light and darkness earlier in GJohn, referring to “the salvation given by God and man’s shutting himself off from God.”<sup>25</sup> When faced with the crisis of the presence of the Revealer, each person must choose whether to truly see reality or not. Those who “believe” the revelation no longer make “an attempt to find their way in the world, in the delusion they can see,” but instead seek illumination through the revelation.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, those who claim they can see apart from revelation are judged. Jesus is the light of the world in that he is the Revealer who illuminates existence for

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 43-44. Bultmann goes on to say that this light/Word is pre-existent from creation in that Creation itself is a revelation, so it was always possible for man to be illuminated through reflection on Creation, becoming aware of his creatureliness and thus knowing himself truly.

<sup>24</sup> The aim of this approach is to remove mythical elements which can no longer be believed by modern man. The attempt presupposes that the Biblical text includes elements that are truly mythical (not actually true) which should not or cannot be believed. It also assumes that something worthwhile remains to be discovered once these elements have been removed. These presuppositions are by no means self-evident.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 341.

those “who are concerned with themselves as a whole, with their own authenticity.”<sup>27</sup> Faced with Jesus, people either decide to admit their blindness and accept his illumination, or they reject him and remain in darkness.

Ernst Haenchen follows in the footsteps of Bultmann but with significant departures. He begins a strong movement in scholarship away from the focus on Qumran as a Johannine source toward the Gnostic Gospels of Nag Hammadi.<sup>28</sup> In place of Bultmann’s Gnostic Revealer source, he finds a primary author who reinterprets the synoptic sources to downplay the divinity of Jesus. Rather than being divine, he is one sent by the Father. He thinks and acts in such accord with the will of the Father that in representational standing he can be called one with the Father.<sup>29</sup> Through miraculous signs he points the way to the Father:

[T]his light does not remain the hidden possession of the Logos, but is accessible to every man, and could and would enlighten everyone who comes into the world. Whoever lives in harmony with God—and that alone is true life—whoever knows himself to be secure in God and is given his goal by God (expressed in gnostic terms: “whoever knows whence he comes and whither he goes,” vis., from and to God), for him the darkness can no longer obscure the way to life.<sup>30</sup>

Though expressed in different language, his interpretation of light in this section appears to hew rather closely to Bultmann’s existentialist understanding. Darkness is a lack of self-

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 343. Scholars after Bultmann have generally found his attempt to discover existential philosophy in GJohn to be masterful but not at all convincing. It appears that in “demythologizing” the Gospel he has simply inserted his own philosophy in place of the book’s original intention.

<sup>28</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6*, trans. Robert W. Funk, ed. Robert W. Funk and Ulrich Busse, *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), xi. Haenchen’s place in the history of GJohn interpretation is described by James Robinson in his Foreword to the book.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 94-96. Haenchen argues that the author of GJohn uses sources such as an older hymn behind the first verses of the Prologue which had taken Jesus’s miracles to indicate his divinity. But John rejects the source’s interpretation, instead showing that the miracles are only signs pointing to something else, “the way to the Father.”

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 114.

knowledge; light is what enables one to know oneself truly. However, he later dismisses Bultmann's reading a theme of "authenticity" into GJohn as "Heidegger speaking, not the Evangelist."<sup>31</sup> He says that rather than showing Jesus to be a brightness for authentic men, or a polemic against other mystery revealers, John is simply saying that Jesus is the one who will "lead men to the one true God. Those who follow this light will find their way to the Father."<sup>32</sup>

The History of Religions approach, as seen in these three scholars, brings a number of questions and insights to the study of LIGHT in GJohn. Each scholar finds potential sources or parallels in a variety of religious sources. Each finds a competing philosophy which has perhaps been imported from different sources such as generic Hellenistic philosophy, mystery religions, or Gnostic Gospels. Bultmann adds his own existentialist philosophy on top of GJohn in contradiction to what he perceives to have been the authors' intents. Haenchen finds a conflicted book where the author's Christology is directly at odds with his own sources. Where they treat LIGHT as a metaphor they find these elements:

- Light is identified with life.
- Light causes life on earth.
- Light causes those who receive it to gain knowledge of the world.
- Light is an emanation from God.
- Light is self-evidencing, requiring no further witness.
- Light brings understanding of the self and one's place in the world.
- Light is sent forth from its source.
- Light shows the way to go.

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<sup>31</sup> Haenchen, *John 2*, 26. Presumably Haenchen means that Bultmann tends to read his own philosophy into John. It is surprising then that he seems to read a similar philosophy into John in places.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



## Jewish Background Approach

The finding of the scrolls at Qumran opened a new season of research into GJohn.<sup>33</sup> It became obvious that apocalyptic literature and dualistic motifs were not just pagan ideas but were available in contemporary Jewish religion at the time the New Testament was written. In particular, its dualistic themes such as light/darkness can be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls—speculation on Gnostic sources is not needed to explain the book.<sup>34</sup> Scholars began seeking a school behind the book from within Judaism. The search expanded to include Jewish religious groups present at that time: the Essenes, rabbis, Samaritans and apocalyptic movements to name a few. Studies looked at various metaphors in the text to find a Johannine community behind them.<sup>35</sup> Still, the history-of-religions movement failed to find consensus. The Jewish religious groups proposed as Johannine schools each drew heavily on the Jewish scriptures, ironically leading researchers back to the Old Testament as a primary text behind GJohn.

Recently, authors such as Beasley-Murray, Carson and Bauckham have taken a Jewish Background approach, allowing the OT its place as an important source. These look broadly for OT metaphors behind the metaphors in GJohn. They take the OT as the key baseline which guides its philosophy and defines its metaphors.

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<sup>33</sup> Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 255-275. This section includes a brief history of the development of John studies in the 20th Century.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 115. In particular, Bultmann's speculative reconstruction of a Gnostic myth of the Revealer is not necessary; far simpler explanations are at hand. As will be shown in the present paper, GJohn is better seen as derived from the OT and Jewish concepts typical of the period.

<sup>35</sup> Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 274.

George R. Beasley-Murray sees Christology as John's primary theological concern. GJohn applies many titles to Jesus, including the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings, with their basic OT meaning intact, but then amplified, "lifted to a new plane."<sup>36</sup> He presents Jesus as the mediator in creation, revelation and salvation, beginning with the Prologue.<sup>37</sup> LIGHT is one way he expresses these aspects of mediation. As in Matthew, GJohn refers to many OT Christological texts, but often in a typological manner. Typological fulfillment is the primary way the OT shows up in this Gospel.<sup>38</sup> Jesus is shown to be the ultimate Moses, the true bread, water and light from the desert, and the fulfillment of the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication. The Evangelist tells the story of Jesus in a way that consciously and consistently echoes these great OT themes. Parallels can be made to Hellenistic imagery and language, but this should be done while giving appropriate weight to the clear and overwhelming influence of the OT upon the book.<sup>39</sup>

The LIGHT metaphor contributes directly to the guiding paradigm of John's Christology, showing Jesus to be the mediator who fully represents the Father to mankind. In

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<sup>36</sup> George Beasley-Murray, *John*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, John D.W. Watts, James W. Watts, Ralph P. Martin, and Lynn Allan Losie, vol. 36, 2d ed, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), lxxxii. Beasley-Murray lists many of the titles of Jesus in GJohn and expounds several, showing how their OT meaning is intact yet expanded. John's Christology includes all these titles, which must be held together in perspective for an accurate view. "Son of God" is the key Christological concept in GJohn.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxxiii. These three aspects of Christ's mediation appear to be primary for him as they appear time and again throughout his commentary.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, lix.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, lix. Beasley-Murray explains, "the latter [OT] must be given due weight, without excluding consciousness of the former [Hellenistic parallels]." Also see discussion on liii, considering Hellenistic religious parallels: "The term 'relations' is preferable to 'background' since it is likely that the Evangelist may have wished to relate the Gospel to groups with religious concepts and traditions other than his own." In other words, contemporary Jewish and Hellenistic religious groups may have influenced John's language since he was trying to communicate his concept of God effectively to them. They are not background sources for GJohn, but relations the book is meant to communicate with, about or against.

the context of the Prologue with its clear references to creation (“In the beginning”), the LIGHT refers back to the light of creation while demonstrating that a new creation is occurring with the coming of the λόγος.<sup>40</sup> He goes on to say that since it comes from the preexistent λόγος, this light has been shining, and continues to shine (φαίνει), in the darkness. The darkness has not grasped/understood/overcome it, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν, meaning that the “truth of the revelation” has not been acknowledged and received. This light now shines even brighter through the incarnation, the resurrection, and into the era of the church through the presence of the Holy Spirit. By describing Jesus as the light, John shows him to be the source as well as the one who fulfills the work of God in creating, making himself known, and saving mankind:

The appearance of the incarnate One is set in relation to all previous revelatory and redemptive acts of God as their consummation and perfection. . . . The Logos is the source of all life and light in the world.<sup>41</sup>

In this way, the Prologue sets out a grand vision and explanation of the story which follows.

Beasley-Murray places the great declaration “I am the light of the world” in 8:12 within the context of the Feast of Tabernacles in 7:37-38.<sup>42</sup> Spoken during the festival, this claim was made in reference to the lamp-lighting ceremony which celebrated the pillar of fire which had guided the Israelites out of Egypt:

In the wilderness wanderings, the presence of the Lord with his people was manifested in the Shekinah cloud—the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 11. GJohn references the original creation in the mediation of Christ but is primarily focused on the current redemptive mediatorial activity.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 16. Jesus is the mediator of a new creation, beginning with his own resurrection.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 127. The same setting where he had just claimed to be the source of living water.

night—which saved them from would-be destroyers (Exod 14:19-25) and guided them through the wilderness to the promised land.<sup>43</sup>

Jesus’s claim to be this light, combined with the call to follow him as the ancient Hebrews had followed the pillar of light in the wilderness, has a strong effect on his hearers. The Pharisees understand his reference and object, demonstrating that “it belongs to the function of the Light to discriminate and to judge.”<sup>44</sup>

D. A. Carson takes positions similar to Beasley-Murray on GJohn’s theology, sources, and use of metaphors. Borrowing is more likely in the direction from Christianity to Gnosticism based on dating and other factors,<sup>45</sup> and the seemingly Hellenistic language can be best explained by John’s purposeful choices as a preacher to the Jewish diaspora. Much of his terminology, including his use of *light*, has a “universal religious appeal”<sup>46</sup> that helps him to reach his audience. For this reason, it is not sufficient to simply rehearse parallels with terms found in various religious sources.<sup>47</sup> Instead, the “conceptual affinities”<sup>48</sup> must be compared to discover what the terms mean for the author in the context of the work.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. This connection demonstrates Beasley-Murray’s point that light can have a saving function.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 129. Beasley-Murray continues on to say that the gnostic-redeemer myth appears very late in the first century and is “parasitic on Judaism and/or Christianity.” He speaks strongly against those who just assume the dependency of GJohn on Gnosticism without even considering that the dependency might go the other way.

<sup>45</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 33.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 46. Carson goes on to explain that John is a preacher trying to reach an audience with the gospel, so is “trying to use language that will present the fewest barriers” to his audience.

<sup>47</sup> Carson points out that Dodd and Bultmann each propose over 300 parallels to the Prologue alone, yet overlap only 7% in their proposals (Carson, *Introduction*, 256).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 33. Later, Carson expands on this subject (61): “The alignment of possible parallels in other literature is not enough, unless one can show that in concept (and not just in vocabulary) they are indistinguishable from what John says and the only explanation of it.”

Applying these starting points to the Prologue, Carson finds that the language is purposefully ambiguous at first. But as one reads the Gospel, the meaning becomes specific and clear.<sup>49</sup> The ambiguity of the language fits John's evangelistic purpose (see 20:31) as it is amenable to readers of many backgrounds, and particularly to diaspora Jews who are versed in both Hellenistic culture and in the Old Testament. But this is not to say that the WORD, LIFE and LIGHT metaphors, for instance, are ungrounded in any particularities. On the contrary, John unveils their meanings clearly over the course of the book.

In many of GJohn's allusions to OT people and themes, the metaphor is used to show that Jesus is their fulfillment or replacement:<sup>50</sup> temple, shepherd, word, life and light find their fulfillment in Jesus. In Jewish sources, light and life were associated with wisdom and Torah. This metaphor is transformed in GJohn, where light and life are instead associated with "Christ, the Word."<sup>51</sup> In Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) vernacular we might say that John transforms WISDOM IS LIGHT and TORAH IS LIGHT into CHRIST THE WORD IS LIGHT. In 1:4, light is connected to creation, seeming to mean that the Word has a self-existing life which was given out at some way in creation so as to be the light of men. But in

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 62. History-of-religion scholars such as Bultmann and Haenchen have taken the ambiguity of the Prologue to mean that it was written by a different source or even is in theological conflict with other parts of GJohn. Carson shows that taking the book as written, it demonstrates a remarkable coherence and purposeful intention from start to finish.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 98. "Although John's use of the Old Testament is not as frequent or as explicit as that of Matthew, it is not slight (despite charges to that effect), and it is enriched by an extraordinarily frequent and subtle number of allusions to the Old Testament." This is a hermeneutic that Jesus himself used when teaching from the OT.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 118. Thus in 1:4 light and life are ways of describing the Word.

the rest of the book, the emphasis of light is more on salvation: “the ‘light’ is revelation which people may receive in active faith and be saved.”<sup>52</sup>

Richard Bauckham’s study of dualism and duality<sup>53</sup> in GJohn is helpful for its discussion of the background and meaning of the light/darkness contrast in the book. Similar dualisms in the Dead Sea scrolls make Bultmann’s complex reconstruction of a Gnostic Revealer myth unnecessary.<sup>54</sup> But the dualisms in Qumran texts do not indicate dependence of GJohn upon these texts—rather they indicate a common source from which both draw:

The resemblances [between GJohn and Qumran literature] can be explained as independent developments from scriptural texts and traditional Jewish imagery. With reference to the light/darkness imagery, the terminological correspondences are negligible compared with the key terminology present in each text and missing in the other. The theological significance of the imagery also differs decisively in ways that can be better explained from other sources in Scripture and late Second Temple literature than as some kind of adaptation of the Qumran usage.<sup>55</sup>

The best sources to look for the background and meaning of the light/darkness imagery are thus the OT and Jewish literature derived from it. It is not necessary to postulate a copying of dualisms such as light/darkness from other sources.

Bauckham identifies the first chapter of Genesis and several Messianic prophecies in Isaiah as “the generative sources of the light and darkness imagery in the Gospel.”<sup>56</sup> By

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>53</sup> Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 123. Bauckham distinguishes dualism (polarity of good and evil) from duality (categories which are distinguished but not opposed such as Creature and Creator). He categorizes light/darkness as a dualism with good/evil opposition.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 115. This is one of the reasons why Bultmann’s theories have largely been rejected by later scholars.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 117. As a particular example of the contrast between GJohn and Qumranic texts, the whole category of “spatial contrasts” where John distinguishes God as Creator from the world as Creation, not as a dualism of opposition but a duality of difference, is missing from Qumran.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 126. Particularly Gen 1:3-5 and Isa 9:2; 42:6-7; 60:1-3.

connecting the Word coming into the world with creation, John claims that the light which shone upon creation at the beginning is “the same light that has come into the world with the incarnation of the Word.”<sup>57</sup> Similarly, pointing back to the Isaiah prophecies, the light/darkness dualism expresses a significant theme in GJohn: “a great light coming in the world, shining in the darkness of the world, giving light to all people, so that they may come out of the darkness into the light and be able to walk in the light instead of stumbling in the darkness.”<sup>58</sup> Bultmann’s insight into what he calls a “dualism of decision” is correct. When the light comes into a world filled with darkness, the change of situation “requires people either to live in it and walk by it, or to stay in the darkness.”<sup>59</sup> These decisions lead to an ongoing conflict between light and darkness.

Beasley-Murray, Carson and Bauckham find the following elements of LIGHT in GJohn:

- Light dispels darkness
- A person can walk in light or stay in darkness
- Light appears as the beginning of creation
- Light shines in the darkness
- Light is not overcome by darkness
- Light reveals things
- Light brings about discrimination between things
- Light guides through the wilderness
- Light saves one from enemies
- A person may be saved by following light
- Light comes into the world
- Light shines on all people
- A person will stumble if they do not walk in the light

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. The light/darkness dualism is seen in 1:5, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. Bauckham sees the identification of this “dualism of decision” as a major contribution by Bultmann, while rejecting his source theories. In the first twelve chapters, Jesus calls people to the light. After this point, he no longer makes this call - decisions have been made and the conflict moves toward its conclusion. Following his resurrection, the disciples and the Paraclete will carry on his mission of calling people to the light.

### Summary of Findings

Reviewing the history of critical scholarship, we find that it is not necessary or helpful to postulate sources behind GJohn in reconstructed Gnostic myths, Hellenistic religions, or Hellenized Jewish schools. On the contrary, the OT and contemporary Jewish thinking are sufficient explanations for the theology and metaphors used by the author. John's evangelistic purpose, Greek-speaking audience, and access to the OT through the Greek Septuagint account for the unique language and themes in GJohn. Hellenistic language and culture do influence GJohn but are secondary to the overriding OT influence and are explained by the author's evangelistic goals. If this theory is correct, we should be able to demonstrate through exegesis and contextual analysis that metaphors found in GJohn such as THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT are derived from similar metaphors found in the OT.



## CHAPTER 3

### LIGHT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Having reviewed the state of scholarship on GJohn, with a focus on potential sources and meanings for the JESUS IS LIGHT metaphor, we turn now to an analysis of the OT. This will enable us to determine if John is reusing existing OT metaphors to describe the coming and work of Jesus. To gain a comprehensive view of LIGHT as a source domain, a search was made of each use of four light-related lemmas in the Septuagint: φῶς, φαίνω, φωτίζω, and σκότος.<sup>1</sup> This yielded over 350 passages.<sup>2</sup> Excluding passages which speak of light in a concrete manner without reference to God reduces the list down to around 100 passages. Certainly, additional light-related lemmas and verses could be found, but this sample should be large enough to provide a sufficient representation of the main uses of light as a metaphor for God.

With this large sample, the next step is to evaluate the elements of the source domain LIGHT which are used in the metaphor. Metaphors work from a concrete source and common-sense understandings of that source. Light is common and critical to human experience—everyone understands certain things about the effect of light—making it a

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned previously, metaphors work at the level of language. Since GJohn was written in Greek and John likely read the OT mainly in the form of the Greek Septuagint, this is the appropriate referent for an analysis of metaphorical connections.

<sup>2</sup> This process is similar to that demonstrated by Lanier, with similar results as *Chapter 3: Interpretation of the Ανατολή Metaphor*. The present chapter is a fresh analysis of the OT data, with reference back to this earlier study of the LIGHT domain in the OT.

valuable metaphorical source for conceptualizing various things. Understanding the elements of LIGHT as used in the OT involves common-sense thinking about light in human experience and a categorization of biblical examples.

With the elements listed, we will be ready to discover the mappings made from the source domain LIGHT onto the target domain GOD. Within the high level conceptual metaphor GOD IS LIGHT we will find a hierarchy of derived metaphors and mapping of concepts. This is to be expected for such a rich source as LIGHT and complex target as GOD—much can be said about God using a metaphor of light, and it can be said in a variety of ways. We must clarify these connections in order to describe the broad concept in a comprehensive manner.

#### Elements of LIGHT

In common experience, light has many attributes and can be discussed from many perspectives. For our purposes these can be gathered into three main elements:

- Light comes from God and from natural sources created by God.
- Light illuminates things that are otherwise in darkness.
- Light causes plants to grow.

These constitute simple commonplace knowledge about light—the basis for a mental model which can be used to understand and describe other things. The OT text expands upon these basic elements in several consistent ways.

That *light comes from God* is evident from the first page of Genesis, where God spoke “Let light come into being” (Gen 1:3)<sup>3</sup> and there was light. But the initiation of

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<sup>3</sup> Biblical quotations in this section are from *New English Translation of the Septuagint* rather than from an English translation of the Hebrew. This translation from the Greek is used to get closer to the Biblical sources used by John.

creation is not the only time when light comes from God—rather, it is a common theme throughout the OT. Theophanies are often accompanied by light or fire, including the burning bush, the pillar in the wilderness, and the shining glory of the meeting place where God met with Moses.<sup>4</sup> Of course light is also described as coming from heavenly bodies such as the sun, moon, stars, and lamps; at other times light comes from a source which is close at hand, such as a lamp or a fire.

The fact that *light illuminates things which are otherwise in darkness* is used in many ways in the OT. Within this broad category, light is seen to shine into darkness (Gen 1:3-4; 2 Sam 22:29; Ps 18:28[17:29]; Job 12:22), enable people to see (Ps 36:9[35:10]; Job 12:25), reveal hidden things (Prov 20:27; Job 24:14-17; Is 29:15; Dan 2:22), and show the way to go (Ps 43:3[42:3]; 119:105[118:105]; Eccl 2:14; Job 29:3; Neh 9:12). But when light is withheld, people are unable to see (Deut 28:29), hidden things are not revealed (Job 24:14-16), and people do not know the way to go (Ps 82:5[81:5]; Jer 13:16). Sometimes God shines light on one place, while withholding it from another (e.g. he sends a plague of darkness on the Egyptians while there is light wherever the Hebrews lived, Exod 10:23). This demonstrates that things can be separated according to whether they are in light or in darkness.

*Light is needed for plants to grow*, leading to common knowledge that light is needed for life. Certainly, within the OT, light is understood to be necessary for life to continue, either in absolute terms or in quality of life. This is behind Job's confession that his eyes will

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<sup>4</sup> The burning bush is found in Exod 3:1-6. The pillar of fire is in Exod 13:21-22; Num 14:14; and Neh 9:12,19. The shining glory when God meets with Moses is in Exod 34:29-35.

look upon the light because of God's salvation (Job 33:28). However, the removal of light is connected to death in Job 18:5-6.

The elements of LIGHT in the OT can be outlined as follows:

- Light comes from God and from natural sources created by God.
  - Theophanies are often accompanied by light.
  - Light may come down from heavenly bodies.
  - Light may come from a local source on earth.
- Light illuminates things which are otherwise in darkness.
  - Light shines into darkness.
  - Light enables people to see.
  - Light reveals hidden things.
  - Light shows the way to go.
  - Things in the light are separated from those in darkness.
- Light causes plants to grow.
  - Light is needed for life.

#### GOD IS LIGHT and Related Metaphors

Given the rich core elements of LIGHT (coming from God and from natural sources, illuminating things which are otherwise in darkness, and causing plants to grow), it is no wonder that it is often used as a metaphor of divinity or a description of man experiencing the presence of God. These aspects seem tailor made for expressing how God condescends so that people can experience him. Light is concrete in the sense that we experience it with our senses. Yet it is seemingly immaterial, able to be seen yet never touched. Perhaps this speaks to our feeling that God is present, that our experiences of him are real and somehow concrete, yet at the same time immaterial.

The OT authors use this source domain LIGHT to describe numerous concepts about God in a variety of creative ways. The primary metaphor GOD IS LIGHT is expressed directly at times by describing God as bright or shining. Psalm 76:4[75:5] worships the Lord, proclaiming: "It is you who gives light marvelously." This is also powerfully expressed in

Isaiah 60:19-20 where the prophet declares the coming of a day when the sun will not be needed because “the Lord will be to you an everlasting light.”<sup>5</sup> This broad metaphor is also expressed in several other ways. We can follow the outline of elements discovered above to see how these elements are mapped onto a core metaphor GOD IS LIGHT as well as onto more specific metaphors derived from this core. The broad GOD IS LIGHT metaphor can be divided according to the three core elements of the source (see Table 1). This division yields the three metaphors THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT, SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD, and RIGHTEOUS LIFE IS LIGHT FROM GOD.

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<sup>5</sup> To avoid repetition, the majority of evidence for the GOD IS LIGHT metaphor will be presented below during evaluation of the derived metaphors.

Table 1. Metaphors derived from GOD IS LIGHT

<b>Core Element of LIGHT</b>	<b>Conceptual Metaphor</b>
Light comes from God and from natural sources created by God.	THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT
Light illuminates things which are otherwise in darkness.	SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD
Light causes plants to grow.	RIGHTEOUS LIFE IS LIGHT FROM GOD

These three derivative metaphors work together, in that the latter two explain several implications of the first. Combining them together, we find that the presence of God brings spiritual illumination and grants righteous life. Evaluating each derivative metaphor in detail will bring additional implications to our attention.

An additional set of metaphors is closely related to those discussed above. At times in the OT, God’s Agent is in focus as light rather than God himself. This metaphor can be expressed as THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. This relationship will be described further below.

### The Presence of God is Light

The movement from the core metaphor GOD IS LIGHT to a derivative metaphor THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT is related to the concrete experience of abiding with a light source which illuminates a dark place. In addition, in the lived experience of the Hebrew people, the manifest presence of God was often accompanied by visible light. It is natural they would extend this to metaphorical descriptions of God’s presence. The Psalmist gives poignant expression to this metaphor when he asks God to send light that will guide him into his presence: “O send out your light and your truth; these led me, and they brought me to

your holy mountain and to your coverts!”<sup>6</sup> (Ps 43:3[42:3]). Throughout the OT, the presence of God is often connected with light (e.g. see Gen 1:3-4; Exod 14:20; Deut 4:11; 2 Sam 22:29; 23:3; Ps 4:6[7]; 18:28[17:29]; 36:9[35:10]; 43:3[42:3]; 89:15[88:16]; 104:2[103:2]; Job 29:3; Isa 4:5; 60:1-3; 60:19-20).

The *Face of God* is a term commonly used in the OT to indicate God’s presence and character, “especially his favor towards his people.”<sup>7</sup> Turning his face towards someone indicates favor and blessing while turning away indicates judgment. This phrase is often combined with the idea of light shining from his face. When his face shines upon someone, this is synonymous with turning his face towards them, and brings blessings. Just as a person’s face may appear to shine when he looks on someone he loves (we might say “his face lights up when she enters the room”), the OT describes how the face of God shines on his people. An important blessing in Numbers 6:24-26 states: “May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face shine upon you and show mercy to you; may the Lord lift up his face upon you and give you peace.” The shining face of God is also apparent in Psalms 4:6[7]; 67:1[66:2]; 89:15[88:16]; Proverbs 16:15; and Job 29:2-3. This indicates that God is present with his people in such a way that his loving favor is evident, so that they experience the blessings of light such as illumination and life (as detailed in subsequent sections).

However, people can choose to either abide in the presence of God or to reject him. This is pictured in the OT using the metaphor ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD IS ABIDING IN HIS

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<sup>6</sup> “Coverts” in this translation is a noun form of the word “covert,” unusual in modern English, meaning “a hiding place.” The Hebrew and Greek can be translated directly as simply “dwelling place.”

<sup>7</sup> Martin H. Manser, ‘The Face of God’ in *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

LIGHT. Just as at daybreak people can choose whether to stay in a dark room or go outside into sunlight, people respond to God's light either by abiding in it or by rejecting and avoiding it. The choice to reject the light and act in darkness in order to hide wickedness is described by Job in a concrete example: "the eye of the adulterer watched for darkness" (Job 24:14). The wicked choose to avoid the light of God's presence since it allows them to hide. Sinners must choose to come into the light to receive grace. Frequently, the OT calls people to live according to the light of God or describes the upright as being in the light, such as in Isaiah 2:5, "And now, O house of Iakob, come, let us walk by the light of the Lord!"<sup>8</sup> In this broader passage, walking in God's light results in the blessings of illumination and life as God teaches them his ways and puts an end to war.

In contrast to this metaphor is its opposite corollary REJECTION OF GOD IS TURNING AWAY FROM HIS LIGHT. For instance, Jeremiah 37:16 warns: "Give glory to the Lord your God before he brings darkness and before your feet stumble on dark mountains, and you will wait for light, and a shadow of death is there, and they shall be placed in darkness." In numerous places, the OT describes those who reject God, and thus will live in darkness and suffer judgment.<sup>9</sup>

### Spiritual Illumination is Light from God

Perhaps the most obvious thing to say about light is that it illuminates darkness. What was hidden becomes visible. A dark path becomes easy to follow. Eyes which could see nothing but darkness, as if they were closed, suddenly can see what is there. It is no surprise

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<sup>8</sup> See also Prov 4:18; Isa 50:10; 58:10.

<sup>9</sup> Ps 37:6[36:6]; 82[81]:5; Prov 2:13; Job 12:25; 17:12; 24:14-16; Isa 5:20; 29:15; 50:11; Jer 13:16.



that from GOD IS LIGHT the OT also derives the metaphor SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD. God enables people to see not just concrete objects, but knowledge, moral principles and wisdom about how to live. His law and judgments are a “light to nations” (Is 51:4). God’s laws are a kind of light, as they reveal right from wrong: “the commandment of the Lord is radiant, enlightening the eyes” (Ps 19:8 [18:9]). His words also provide guidance so that the way to live can be understood and followed: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my paths” (Ps 119[118]:105).<sup>10</sup> But those who lack the light given by God walk about in a kind of darkness where they stumble and fall (Ps 82[81]:5).<sup>11</sup>

Light and sight are closely related—both illumination and properly functioning eyes are needed in order gain knowledge about an object or occurrence. For this reason, the metaphor can be used in concert with SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS CURING BLINDNESS. In both cases, the meaning is that God enables a person to gain spiritual knowledge and understanding. In Isaiah, God promises to one day cure the sight of those who are in spiritual darkness, needing the illumination of God’s light: “and as for those who are in the darkness and those who are in the fog, the eyes of the blind shall see” (Is 29:18).

### Righteous Life is Light from God

Besides illuminating, light also causes plants to grow. It is well known that light is needed for life; the absence of light over time leads to death. The OT writers use this element to describe how life cannot exist without God sustaining it. The pattern is set in the opening of Genesis, when light bursts forth before anything else is made—it is needed for the creation

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<sup>10</sup> See also Prov 6:23; Job 29:3; and Isa 42:16.

<sup>11</sup> See also Job 12:25.

to survive. Throughout the OT, LIGHT FROM GOD is used to talk about the ways that God sustains life. God's saving action toward those who place their hope in him is like setting them to stand again in the light of the sun which falls upon the earth: "you rescued my soul from death and my feet from slipperiness so that I may be pleasing before God in the light of the living (έν φωτι ζώντων)" (Ps 56:13[55:14]).<sup>12</sup> But if God removes his blessings, it is like the darkness and death that would occur if the sun disappeared forever.<sup>13</sup>

Since God is known throughout scripture to save from physical and spiritual death those who turn to him for help, a common derived metaphor is SALVATION BY GOD IS LIGHT. Similarly, the opposite is frequently used: JUDGMENT BY GOD IS DARKNESS. In this usage, salvation and judgment are types of life and death. Examples of salvation as light are numerous and take many forms including pleas for help, praises for past saving action, and prophecies of future salvation.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, judgment is commonly marked by darkness, especially the judgment of the great Day of the Lord.<sup>15</sup>

### The Agent of Salvation is Light

In several places, especially the prominent Servant prophecies in Isaiah, an Agent of salvation is said to bring light to men.<sup>16</sup> Through this Agent, the blessings of illumination and

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<sup>12</sup> See also Ps 36:9[35:10]; 48:20; Job 33:28-30; and Isa 30:26.

<sup>13</sup> See Ps 49:19[48:20]; Job 18:18; 38:15; Amos 5:18-20; and Ezek 32:7-8.

<sup>14</sup> Concrete examples: Exod 10:23; 14:20; Ps 105[104]:39. Metaphorical use: Ps 4:6[7]; 13:3[12:4]; 18:28[17:29]; 37[36]:6; 56:13[55:14]; 107[106]:14; 112[111]:4; Job 33:28-30; Mic 7:8-9; and Isa 9:1; 42:6-7,16; 49:6-9; 50:10; 60:1-2,19-20.

<sup>15</sup> Job 38:15; Amos 5:18-20; Joel 3:4; Zeph 1:15; Isa 8:22; 10:17; 13:10; 47:5; 59:9; Lam 3:2; and Ezek 32:7-8.

<sup>16</sup> This metaphor is prominent in Isaiah. See 9:1[2]; 10:17; 42:6-7; 49:6-9; and 50:10.

life, signified by light, are brought from God to mankind. This light appears to have a similar function as the light given by God—as GOD IS LIGHT, so also THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT.<sup>17</sup> Early in Isaiah the Agent of salvation is described as a great light: “O you people who walk in darkness, see a great light! O you who live in the country and in the shadow of death, light will shine on you!” (Isa 9:1[2]). The light and the salvation brought by the Agent appear to be closely related.

It was seen earlier that acceptance with God means abiding in his light. Similarly, SALVATION IS ABIDING IN THE AGENT’S LIGHT. In the same way, just as spiritual illumination can be described as light from God, Isaiah uses a metaphor that SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD’S AGENT. An example of these combined metaphors is found in Isaiah, speaking of the Servant: “I have given you as a covenant to a race, as a light to nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out from bonds those who are bound and from the prison house those who sit in darkness” (Isa 42:6-7). Through this Servant, God will give knowledge and understanding to the nations, that they will know that he is the true God and give him glory as their Lord.<sup>18</sup> This will be an act of salvation, as they will be freed from their “bondage” (in this case the bondage of worshipping false gods). His saving and illuminating work is not limited to the Israelites, as God says to his Servant: “I have made you a light of nations, that you may be for salvation to the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6).

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<sup>17</sup> Or alternately as Lanier states the metaphor, THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS A SHINING LIGHT. Gregory R. Lanier, *Old Testament Conceptual Metaphors and the Christology of Luke’s Gospel* (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> See full context of Is 42:5-9. God declares he is the one true Creator, calls upon his servant to be a light to the nations (to give knowledge and understanding of him), and to free them from darkness (of not knowing the true God). He then reiterates that he will not share his glory with idols—the nations must learn to worship him rather than false gods.

As with their response to God's light, people will either choose to abide in the Agent's light or to reject it. Those who walk in darkness are urged to hear the voice of his Servant and trust in God for light (Isa 50:10). Those who refuse to listen to the servant are described as instead kindling their own fires to light their way, but they "shall lie down in sorrow" (Isa 50:11). The implication is that refusing the voice of the servant is equivalent to rejecting God himself.

In Isaiah, this LIGHT metaphor is used with both God and the Servant. The Servant is sent to be a light to men as described above. Then chapter 60 tells of a future day when God himself will dwell with men and be their light to such an extent that the light of the sun is no longer needed. The precise relationship is unstated, but this could be seen as a progression from darkness, to a preliminary bringing of light by the Servant, to a final fulfillment of light-giving through the presence of God on the great Day of the Lord.

#### Summary of the Metaphor in OT Use

The GOD IS LIGHT metaphor is rich and multi-faceted. It reveals much about how God relates with mankind both in blessing and in judgment.

*The presence of God is light:* his light shines upon mankind, bringing illumination and life. His face shines with favor and kindness to his people. Acceptance with God is abiding in his light, leading to blessing. Rejection of God is turning away from his light, leading to judgment.

*Spiritual illumination is light from God:* he grants knowledge and understanding, provides moral discernment, guides people on their path through life, and cures spiritual blindness.

*Righteous life is light from God:* he sustains living things, brings blessings and growth, and saves those who turn to him. However, those who come under his judgment will have the light of life removed from them.

*The agent of salvation is light:* God's trusted Servant will bring God's light to all people on earth, saving and illuminating those who receive him, so that the nations will know him to be the true God and worship him as their Lord.

Reflecting on the state of scholarship as described in chapter 2, it can already be seen that a rigorous analysis of the metaphor in the OT does much to clarify several points of contention regarding GJohn. The underlying elements of LIGHT discovered by the History of Religions scholars match well with those found within the OT. However, in contrast with their approach, it is not necessary to look far outside the OT itself to other religions and philosophies to find the source of the metaphorical use of LIGHT. The Jewish Background approach matches well with the data found by paying close attention to the OT, which is presumed to be a primary religious and philosophical source for John. To confirm this finding, we must next perform a careful analysis of the metaphor in GJohn. This analysis must answer whether the contextual meanings of the metaphorical utterances in GJohn conform to the pattern and meaning of the OT utterances analyzed in the present chapter.

CHAPTER 4  
LIGHT IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Having completed a review of LIGHT metaphors in the OT, we turn our attention to the Gospel of John. There are three significant uses of light as a metaphor related to Jesus: the prologue, the discourses in chapter 3, and the “light of the world” pronouncement with its immediate connection to the healing of the man born blind. The process for each passage is to cover pertinent textual issues, examine specific citations and allusions, view it in literary context, then carefully exegete the passage for its meaning. During the exegesis, we will compare mappings of LIGHT in GJohn to mappings in the OT to determine the extent to which GJohn’s metaphors are built upon the existing GOD IS LIGHT and THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT metaphors.

The Prologue (John 1:4-9, 18)

The relevant text in the prologue includes the introduction of the Word who is light and life in verses 4-9 and the related verse 18 which speaks of him being the only one to ever see God, and who now makes him known.

Textual Concerns

- 4 ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων·  
5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.  
6 Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος, ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης·  
7 οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι’ αὐτοῦ.

- 8 οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός.  
 9 Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν  
 κόσμον.  
 18 Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς  
 ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.<sup>1</sup>

The prologue is evidently a carefully crafted work with literary movement, repeated themes, and a clear purpose (see discussion under Literary Context). Many suggest that verses 1-5 represent an existing hymn which the author incorporated to start his book.<sup>2</sup> Whether these sections were brought in from existing sources or are the author's own creation is unclear and perhaps unprovable. Regardless, it is evident that the book opens with a hymn-like quality, using poetic forms to express divine realities. Similarly, verses 14-18 might be derived from a pre-existing church confession of belief in Jesus. The passage operates within the prologue as a sort of confession of faith, detailing the core beliefs which the author desires readers to believe.<sup>3</sup> In both cases, the analysis of the use of LIGHT within GJohn as a completed work is unaffected by the author's possible use of sources. If the passages were indeed drawn from earlier Christian sources, this would simply be another indication that the metaphor was in use prior to GJohn.

The simple present tense of the verb φαίνει in verse 5 is surprising as it does not match the tense of the surrounding verses, which speak of what existed before creation (the

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<sup>1</sup> Eberhard Nestle *et al.*, *The Greek New Testament*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), John 1:4-9, 18. This text is used as the source for all NT passages in Greek.

<sup>2</sup> George Beasley-Murray, *John*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, John D.W. Watts, James W. Watts, *et al.*, vol. 36, 2d ed, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 3. Carson is not convinced, D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 112.

<sup>3</sup> See the purpose statement in John 20:31: "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Word who was with God) and of his past mediation of the act of creation. The tense indicates an action which is ongoing, without reference to when it began or when it may end.

According to Beasley-Murray, the shining of this light includes the scope of history:

The light of the Logos shone in the primal darkness at creation, and continued amidst the darkness of fallen mankind; it shone with greater brilliance in the glory of the Incarnate One; and it shines on in the era of the Resurrection, which is the time of the Paraclete.<sup>4</sup>

This line of the hymn therefore ties together the distant past, all the way to creation and perhaps before, with the time of Jesus's ministry, and into the present day of the author. The verb οὐ κατέλαβεν in the connected clauses is in the aorist tense, and similarly indicates that throughout all this time that the light has been shining, the darkness has not grasped the light. The verb can mean grasped, understood, or overcome. All three meanings can potentially fit the meaning of the passage—further analysis is required to select the most likely meaning in context.

#### Citations and Allusions

This passage is rich with allusions to OT texts. The primary allusion is to the creation account in Genesis. The opening words of the book, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, refer directly to the opening of Genesis, where Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός. Then the passage speaks about the Word's involvement with creation. The implication is that the divine Word was a mediator of the acts of creation described in Genesis 1. "In him was life," which may be describing the source of the life that was breathed into man when he was formed out of dust in Genesis 2. "This life was the light of men"—a curious combination of metaphors (more below under

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<sup>4</sup> Beasley-Murray, 11.



Exegesis). The mention of light in the context of an account of creation brings to mind the light that suddenly became present at the spoken word of God in Genesis 1:3. In both Genesis 1 and John 1, light shines into the darkness. But despite the close connections between John 1:1-5 and Genesis 1, the Genesis account in no way exhausts the meaning of LIGHT in John 1. Much more is happening here than a simple pointer back to creation.

John the Baptist is first mentioned in 1:6-8 as a man sent by God to witness about the light. In verse 23 he tells the priests and Levites that he is fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 40:1-9, “A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight the paths of our God.’” This prophecy declares a coming day when Jerusalem’s iniquity will be pardoned and God will draw near, revealing his glory and salvation to all people. The messenger is called in Isaiah 40:9 a “herald of good news” (εὐαγγελιζόμενος) who is to proclaim to the cities of Jerusalem the coming of God himself to them, “See, your God!” (Ἴδου ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν). Since John the Baptist is sent from God “to bear witness about the light” (1:7), the Evangelist is making a connection between this light and the presence, glory and salvation of God promised in Isaiah 40. This link is emphasized with John the Baptist’s introduction of Jesus in GJohn 1:29, “Behold (Ἴδε) the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” In context, this appears to be the fulfillment of the herald’s calling to proclaim the coming of God to Jerusalem.

Verse 9 speaks of “the true light, which gives light to everyone.” This could be a reference back to Isaiah 49:6, speaking of the Servant: “I have made you a light of nations, that you may be for salvation to the end of the earth.” The connection is not certain on its own simply from the prologue. But in context of the entirety of GJohn, it is quite likely that the author is making an identification of the light he describes here with the servant of Isaiah

49:1-7 who is sent to restore Israel and to bring salvation to all the earth. The analysis below will demonstrate the truth of this tentative hypothesis.

Verse 18 states that no one has ever seen God. This could be drawing on the experience of Moses when he asked to see God's face. God replied:

You shall not be able to see my face. For a person shall never see my face and live (Exod 33:20).

The point here is that the Word is greater than even Moses, able to reveal truth about the Father because he is the only one who has seen his face.

### Literary Context

The metaphorical use of light begins right at the opening of the Prologue to GJohn in conjunction with the description of an eternal Word who has life and light in himself. The metaphor's placement in the prologue is important to keep in mind for a proper analysis of its meaning. Within the context of the book as a whole, the prologue provides an introduction to the story of Jesus from a divine perspective with truly cosmic scope. This perspective starts even before creation with the pre-existent Word, who is described with lofty language and extensive use of metaphor. A sense of expectation builds throughout the first chapter as John the Baptist is introduced as a forerunner and witness of this Word/Life/Light who has become flesh. Finally, the focus narrows to an historical moment, as the Baptist introduces his own disciples, and the reader, to Jesus—"Behold, the Lamb of God!" The Evangelist's Jewish readers would have caught the reference in John the Baptist's proclamation to the herald proclaiming the coming of God to redeem Jerusalem in Isaiah 40. This literary movement suggests that the author's opening statement is meant to provide the theological interpretation of the story of Jesus that is about to follow. He engages his audience with broad claims that open many questions. Who is this man? What might it mean that he is

called “the light of men?” In what ways is he to be identified with God? What evidence backs up these statements? Readers will expect the story that follows to explain and demonstrate the lofty statements made about Jesus.

Indeed, the flow of narrative and later declarations about Jesus in GJohn do fill out the metaphorical proclamations made in the prologue. As we will see, the book works together as a whole to present Jesus as the light (and Word, life, shepherd, bread and water) of the world. This is done in service of the Evangelist’s stated purpose, “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31).

The implication of this literary flow for our investigation is that we must set our expectations according to the author’s stated intent and demonstrated pattern of thought. The metaphors set out in the prologue can be expected to be general at first, becoming more defined and specific as the book unfolds. Carson suggests that the author is *intentionally* vague at first, intending the book to be re-read for full understanding:

[T]he Prologue opens with language that could be taken in several different ways, largely depending on the religious background of the interpreter. But as the Prologue proceeds, what the Evangelist is truly saying becomes more and more constrained, until only a distinctively Christian voice is heard. Better still, if the Prologue is read again after the entire Gospel has been read in a reflective manner, new insights spring to light. The language that once seemed so diffuse now appears decisively Christian much earlier in the text. John has written a subtle book that he *expects* to be read more than once.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Carson, *John*, 62.

If Carson is correct, then we would expect the LIGHT metaphor in the prologue to open questions that will be answered later in the text. The metaphor should become more specific and perhaps more explicitly Christian.<sup>6</sup>

### Exegesis

With preliminary matters resolved, we can now embark on an analysis of the LIGHT metaphors in John chapter 1. Our purpose is to identify the particular conceptual metaphor, the “mental model,” which is behind this description. As with the OT analysis of GOD IS LIGHT, we will identify the metaphors at play and the elements of LIGHT which are in mind.

**Duality and dualism.** Bauckham’s categories of duality and ethical dualism will greatly aid analysis of the frequent light/darkness distinction. The first type of dualism he finds at play in GJohn is a Creator/creature *duality* where “God is radically distinguished from, but not opposed to, his creation.”<sup>7</sup> The second type is an *ethical dualism* where reality is separated into opposing forces of good and evil. In Gnosticism, creator/creation and spirit/matter are ethical dualisms—the latter of each pair are necessarily in evil opposition to God. But in GJohn, these are normally dualities which recognize the goodness of God’s creation. It is only in the corruption of the good creation due to sin that the world and flesh are in some sense opposed to God. Bauckham states that due to the corruption of creation, “there is also a correlation between dualism (God against evil) and the duality (God and

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<sup>6</sup> See also: Beasley-Murray, 5. Beasley-Murray compares the prologue to the overture of an opera which whets the appetite. Its profound terms like *word, life and light* “gain their significance” in the story which follows.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 119-120.

creation). However, this correlation is not identity.”<sup>8</sup> For example, *world* in GJohn refers to God’s beloved creation. There is a distinction between God and the world, a *duality*, but the world is not seen as *necessarily* evil and unredeemable—actually God intends to save and restore the world. On the other hand, light/darkness in GJohn is often an *ethical dualism* where people set themselves in direct opposition to God.

Bultmann describes a *dualism of decision* when truth is revealed and people choose whether to accept it or to turn away from it. Bauckham agrees with Bultmann that this dualism of decision is key in GJohn—the situation changes suddenly when the Light comes into the world, forcing people to decide whether to walk by it or to stay in darkness.<sup>9</sup> Carson similarly notes that in GJohn, when the light shines on all people, it creates a distinction or judgment between those who receive it and those who reject it.<sup>10</sup> In the following analysis, we must pay close attention to the text for each use of the light/darkness distinction, determining whether it is being used as a duality, an ethical dualism, or a dualism of decision.

**John 1:1-5.** The light is introduced in the opening hymn<sup>11</sup> and is identified with the life that is in the Word: ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων (1:4). As mentioned above (Citations and Allusions), this entire section alludes back to the Creation

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>10</sup> Carson, *John*, 122. That distinction will be seen in the present passage as well as the ones that follow.

<sup>11</sup> Leaving open the question of whether a pre-existing source was used for the first verses of GJohn, they are highly stylized and thus “hymn-like.”

account in chapter 1 of Genesis.<sup>12</sup> The Word is identified as *with* God in physical or relational proximity (πρὸς τὸν θεόν). Further, the Word is identified as *being* God in some way (καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος).<sup>13</sup> The Word is a mediator of creation as all things were made through him. This profound Word had life in himself which was the light of men. Since the subject is not yet named, we might declare the preliminary *light* metaphor in the hymn to be THE MEDIATOR'S LIFE IS LIGHT.

Several elements of LIGHT are mapped in the hymn. Recall that light is often connected metaphorically with life and blessing through the recognition that light is necessary for life. That could be in mind here, especially given the connection with creation. In the OT, light from God often signifies the granting of life and blessing. In the Genesis account, which must be kept in mind while evaluating this hymn, light is given twice—on the first day light shines, without mention of a source, to separate light from darkness; on the fourth day, the sun, moon and stars are created to give light on the earth.<sup>14</sup> The light is needed by all creatures, which require light to shine on earth to live. The idea in John 1:4 could be that part of the Word's mediation of the act of creation is to give resources from his own self ("in him was life") that cause life to flourish, just as light from the sun causes plants to flourish upon the earth. The hymn has in mind the flourishing of mankind particularly, as

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<sup>12</sup> Carson notes that in most of GJohn, *light* and *life* are related to salvation. The hymn, however, has them related to creation. John's interest at the start is primarily their source. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 119.

<sup>13</sup> It's not necessary at this point to clarify the precise nature of this identification of being between God and the Word. The words are intentionally grand and open to interpretation. GJohn as a whole will provide an indication of what is meant.

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to consider whether John is imagining the Word as the source of the light that shone on the first day of creation, before any light source was created. Bauckham follows this line of thinking, calling it the "primordial light that inaugurated creation" (Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 126).

the life in the Word is said to be “the light of men.” Given the creation context, all human beings are in view. It is not speaking of a light given to a select few, but a gift freely given to all.

In the very next sentence, the metaphorical use shifts suddenly to present a different element of light<sup>15</sup>—it illuminates things that are in darkness: καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν. As noted earlier under Textual Concerns, the tense of φαίνει indicates that the light has been shining since creation (or before!) and continues to shine in the present day. We have seen that the metaphor SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD encompasses providing knowledge, moral principles and wisdom about how to live. In the OT, receiving the true God<sup>16</sup> results in an illumination which includes all three categories (one who comes to know the true God receives knowledge, moral principles, and wisdom).<sup>17</sup> The immediate context provides a hint about the kind of darkness being described. The light shines into the darkness, but the darkness has not grasped/understood/overcome it (οὐ κατέλαβεν). Given the parallel statement in verses 10-11 that his own did not know (ἔγνω) or receive (παρέλαβον) the light, κατέλαβεν in verse 5 means that the darkness did not know or receive him. This darkness probably refers

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<sup>15</sup> Exegetical approaches which fail to recognize the malleability of metaphors could get hung up at this point, trying to find a single element represented by the metaphor. Some source-critical scholars see each change in meaning as necessitating theories of multiple sources and redactors. However, Conceptual Metaphor Theory helps us to see that a broad conceptual space exists behind any particular metaphor. Just as one’s thoughts can quickly apply many perspectives from a metaphor source to a target life situation, a biblical author can reference multiple elements of a metaphor in close proximity.

<sup>16</sup> *Receiving* here includes the concepts of relational knowledge, obedience, and worship.

<sup>17</sup> See *Spiritual Illumination is Light from God* in Chapter 3 for a discussion and examples.

to mankind's sinful mindset that is set in opposition to God.<sup>18</sup> Using Bauckham's categories, this is an ethical dualism where mankind opposes God in sin. But at the same time, given the creation context, a Creator/creature duality is also present. Perhaps it is best to view this instance as ambiguous, with both duality and ethical dualism in mind. In summary, THE MEDIATOR'S LIFE IS LIGHT in the opening hymn indicates that ever since creation the mediator has been spreading knowledge of the true God so that mankind can abide with God and receive the blessings of life, knowledge and wisdom; however, mankind in opposition to God has often refused to receive this truth.

**John 1:6-8.** The next section introduces the witness of the light, describes rejection of the light by those who refused to receive him, and proclaims blessing on those who did receive him. The identification of John the Baptist with the voice crying in the wilderness of Isaiah 40:3 connects this light with the presence of God himself. In Isaiah, the wilderness herald proclaims that Yahweh himself is coming to Jerusalem to save his people and to reveal his glory for all people to see.<sup>19</sup> Though the citation in Isaiah does not mention light, John combines the prophecy of the voice in the wilderness with the metaphor of light—appropriate since Isaiah elsewhere makes heavy use of THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT. John the Baptist was sent to witness about the light “that all might believe through him” (1:7). The light is thus not only a mediator of creation but a savior and object of belief in whom all people ought to place their trust.

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<sup>18</sup> Carson notes the “planned ambiguity” of verse 5. On first reading, a Jew or Greek might not see the moral overtones. But on a second reading, this verse anticipates the theme that those who love darkness hate the light. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 119.

<sup>19</sup> Recall the discussion above under Citations and Allusions about the parallels between John 1 and Isaiah 40. Isaiah's herald cries out in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord, saying “Behold, your God!” John the Baptist identifies himself as this herald and upon seeing Jesus cries out “Behold, the Lamb of God!”



**John 1:9.** In verse 9, the light is said to be true, to give light to all people, and to be coming into the world: Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. That *light* can be said to be true follows from idea that light enables a person to see a thing the way it is truly. Knowledge about the world often increases when darkness is removed and a thing is more fully revealed. The usage here follows the OT metaphor SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD’S AGENT. True light shining to all people uses the element “light from the sun shines down on all the earth.” This echoes Isaiah’s use of the same metaphor to speak of how God will one day shine his light upon all the nations through his Servant (42:6, 49:6). The allusion is too subtle to suggest a direct citation, but the match between Isaiah’s light-bringing Servant and John’s light-bringing Word does indicate that the author has Isaiah’s prophecy in mind. Likely he is making an unstated identification of the Word with the prophesied Servant. This connection is made much more certain by John the Baptist’s reference to Isaiah, identifying himself as the witness who has come to prepare way of the Lord. Interestingly, the author appears to be conflating the coming of God himself in Isaiah 40:3 with the coming of the Servant in 42:6 and 49:6. Carson notes that “coming into the world” here distinguishes the incarnation from creation and explains the “sending of the Son” mentioned often in GJohn.<sup>20</sup> In this way, these verses indicate that the long-awaited Servant/Light who would bring the presence of God to mankind was now coming into the world. At this point in the prologue it is becoming clear that THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT is a key metaphor for the Evangelist.

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<sup>20</sup> Carson, *John*, 122.

**John 1:10-13.** As predicted earlier in the opening hymn, many refused to receive the light, even his own people. The hymn's prediction is explained here and then later demonstrated repeatedly throughout the narrative, culminating in the crucifixion. The dawning of light raises a dualism of decision: to walk in it or to remain in darkness. In the OT, those who love wickedness are said to hide from the light in order to keep their deeds in secret. Those who come to the light of God receive all his great promises and the blessings of covenant relationship.<sup>21</sup> In the same way here in GJohn, REJECTION OF GOD IS TURNING AWAY FROM THE LIGHT. Those who turn away will be shown in the narrative to remain in the darkness of foolishness and sin. This is the true ethical dualism of light/darkness where fallen mankind stands in opposition to God. In contrast, in verses 12-13 those who receive the light receive the covenant blessing, being adopted as children of God himself, by the will of God. This is an act of new creation, where those who receive him become born of God. Just as in the OT, SALVATION IS ABIDING IN THE AGENT'S LIGHT. This light is thus again identified with the OT light of God, offering the same covenant blessings that were given in the OT to those who received the light.

**John 1:18.** Verse 18 does not speak directly of light, but uses the related concepts of sight and revelation: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." The ultimate act of revelation is to reveal God himself to people in a way that they can know him truly. Mankind needs a mediator to fulfill the prophesied role THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. But how can any person reveal God, since no one has

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<sup>21</sup> See discussion under *The Presence of God is Light* in Chapter 3.

seen him? The Evangelist answers that the Word who was with God in the beginning is the only one who can speak with ultimate authority about God.

### Summary

John 1 starts with seemingly open-ended language about God as *word, life* and *light*, but quickly defines these in terms of the OT divine light metaphors of God and his Agent of Salvation. Jesus is revealed to be the fulfillment of both metaphors, preexisting as the divine Word who is then made flesh to bring spiritual life and light to mankind.

The opening of the prologue (1:1-5) assigns the OT metaphor GOD IS LIGHT to the divine Word. He existed before anything was made and all creation was made through him. He was with God and yet also *was* God. Given this divine description, it follows that GOD IS LIGHT could be assigned to him. The opening makes this connection by describing him as the source of the primal light of creation. The primary derived metaphors discovered in Chapter 3 are also present. THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT: The Word has light in himself which shines upon mankind. That light has been shining out into the darkness of ignorance and sin, but mankind has often refused to receive that light. RIGHTEOUS LIFE IS LIGHT FROM GOD: The life that is in the Word is called the light of men. He is the source of man's life as his creator.

This metaphor is expounded further with the introduction of John the Baptist as the herald of God who was prophesied in Isaiah 40. He prepares the people for the light of the Lord which is coming into the world. Behold, God is coming to dwell with his people!

Beginning with verse 9 and the Word's coming into the world, THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT is a better fit for the context. The light appears to be the Servant of

Isaiah whom God sends to give light to all the nations. Several derived metaphors are also present. SALVATION IS ABIDING IN THE AGENT'S LIGHT: In the dawning of his light, people face a dualism of decision to choose light or darkness. Those who receive him gain the covenant blessing of adoption to become children of God. SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD'S AGENT: He is the *true* light, the only one who has seen God. He reveals God because he can speak of him from direct knowledge.

The dual identification of Jesus as both God and the Agent of Salvation is tied up with the major questions of Christology. The Evangelist applies GOD IS LIGHT to him in his eternal divinity, as seen in the opening account of the Word's mediation of creation. As his account moves toward the incarnation of the Word as the man Jesus, the metaphor changes subtly to reflect the relationship of the Son to the Father. Going forward he will be described more in terms of the AGENT OF SALVATION who brings the light of God to the world.

### The Discourse with Nicodemus (John 3:16-21)

The next passage we will consider is John 3:16-21, which is a key explanation in GJohn of the content and meaning of the gospel. The Father sends his Son in the person of Jesus, bringing light into the world, to save those who will believe in him.

#### Textual Concerns

- 16 οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ' ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον.
- 17 οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἵνα κρίνη τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλ' ἵνα σωθῆ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ.
- 18 ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν οὐ κρίνεται· ὁ δὲ μὴ πιστεύων ἤδη κέκριται, ὅτι μὴ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ μονογενοῦς υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.
- 19 αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ κρίσις ὅτι τὸ φῶς ἐλήλυθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον καὶ ἠγάπησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι μᾶλλον τὸ σκότος ἢ τὸ φῶς· ἦν γὰρ αὐτῶν πονηρὰ τὰ ἔργα.

- 20 πᾶς γὰρ ὁ φαῦλα πράσων μισεῖ τὸ φῶς καὶ οὐκ ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸ φῶς, ἵνα μὴ ἐλεγχθῆ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ·
- 21 ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸ φῶς, ἵνα φανερωθῆ αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ἐν θεῷ ἐστὶν εἰργασμένα.

The structure of chapter 3 indicates how verses 16-21 should be related to the surrounding text. The nature of this relationship will be discussed below under Literary Context. It is structured with an introduction or bridge in 2:23-25<sup>22</sup>, a narrative discourse with Nicodemus in 3:1-15, a commentary on the narrative in 3:16-21, a narrative discourse with John the Baptist in 3:22-30, and a commentary on the second discourse in 3:31-36. A key textual question is whether the commentary in verses 16-21 are a continuation of the words of Jesus or a reflection by the Evangelist on the narrative. Murray ends the words of Jesus at verse 12 while Carson ends them at verse 15.<sup>23</sup> We will follow Carson's argument that the use of the title Son of Man, Jesus's unique title for himself, indicates that verses 13-15 continue his words. Verses 16-21, on the other hand, expand on several of the author's themes from 1:9-18, including the metaphor of Jesus as a light bearer. They read not as a continuation of the narrative but as a "look back on the completed work of Christ."<sup>24</sup> The main passage under investigation here is thus an explanation of the preceding discourse. The similar structure of narrative in 22-20 and commentary in 31-36 helps the reader to notice a continuity of themes in the two halves of the chapter. The entirety is focused on the witness to Jesus and the call to believe in him.

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<sup>22</sup> Beasley-Murray, 47. The passage wraps up chapter 2 while stating the main crisis to be addressed in chapter 3.

<sup>23</sup> See the discussion of various options in Beasley-Murray, 46 and Carson, *John*, 105 and 203.

<sup>24</sup> Beasley-Murray, 46.

A second textual topic is the meaning of μονογενής. John applies the Greek lemma μονογενής to Jesus several times (Jn 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 Jn 4:9). The common sense of the word as used of others in the NT and LXX is *only-begotten, the only child from a parent*. As a parent's only child is unique and special to them, "the word can also be used more generally without ref. to derivation in the sense of 'unique,' 'unparalleled,' 'incomparable.'"<sup>25</sup> Charles Lee Irons has recently made a case for restoring the older translation as only-begotten, based on the biological reference to begetting in the word root and parallel word forms.<sup>26</sup> Regardless, the sense in GJohn appears to be primarily the utter uniqueness of the Son, who alone comes from the right hand of God to make him known to mankind.

#### Citations and Allusions

The passage under investigation does not contain an obvious citation to another text, but clearly expresses the ethical opposition between light and darkness expressed in various passages in the OT. It continues the conversation begun in 1:6-18 about those who receive the light and those who reject it.

The lead in to this passage mentions the serpent which Moses lifted up in the desert (Num 21:4-9). At that time the Israelites had sinned against God and were suffering deadly snake bites as a result. When they repented, God directed Moses to lift up the figure of a

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<sup>25</sup> Büchsel, Friedrich, "Μονογενής," eds. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 737–738.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Lee Irons, "A Lexical Defense of the Johannine 'Only Begotten,'" in *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, eds. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017). Irons's argument is summarized in his article "Let's Go Back to 'Only Begotten'" available online at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/lets-go-back-to-only-begotten/>.

serpent on a pole, so that those who looked at it would be healed of the poisonous bite. In the same way, Jesus says, the Son of Man must be lifted up so that those who believe in him will live. He may have in mind the Servant song beginning at Isaiah 52:13, “Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.” This connection brings into view the prophecy of the suffering servant who will be pierced for the transgressions of the people. It foreshadows the crucifixion, the means by which Jesus will be lifted up to offer salvation to those who believe in him.

### Literary Context

The key statement of the gospel in 3:16-21 is placed at a point in GJohn where it can make sense of the story which has been told so far. In chapters 1-3, the Evangelist gradually unpacks the gospel through both narrative and commentary. There are periodic calls to believe in Jesus along with a growing crisis of decision as some believe while others reject him. Many come to “believe in his name” (2:23) due to the witness of John the Baptist, the sign at the wedding at Cana, and the cleansing of the temple. Yet others do not believe. In response to his cleansing of the temple, some demand a sign to prove his authority to do these things. Instead he offers only the veiled sign of his future death and resurrection. Jesus knows that the faith of even those who do believe is shallow, so he does not entrust himself to them.

The visit by Nicodemus provides a concrete example of the dynamic of belief, unbelief and misunderstanding that is at play. He recognizes that Jesus is a teacher sent by God because of the signs, but he has no conception that Jesus is someone to be believed in for salvation. Nor is he aware of his own need of salvation in order to enter the kingdom of

God. When Nicodemus comes at night, perhaps out of curiosity, Jesus creates an unexpected crisis of decision. He challenges Nicodemus's tentative expression of trust by telling him that he must be "born from above," cleansed by the Spirit, before he can enter the kingdom of God. Nicodemus is surprised, possibly misunderstanding his phrase as "born again," so is unable to receive his testimony.<sup>27</sup> Jesus replies that he should understand this as the teacher of Israel and should believe him. His witness should be trusted because he alone has come from heaven to speak of what he has seen. In contrast to what Nicodemus says he *knows* because of a sign, Jesus *knows* about God and the kingdom of God because he descended from heaven. Just like Moses's snake saved those who looked on it, those who see the lifted-up Son of Man and believe will have eternal life.

The gospel commentary in 3:16-21 provides a theological explanation of the Nicodemus discourse as well as the entire narrative flow of GJohn up to this point. It tells of God's saving purpose in sending the Son into the world and of the way of salvation. Whoever believes in him has eternal life; whoever does not obey him is condemned. A primary concern in this passage is to explain why some people reject Jesus and the consequences for them. The divine light metaphor is used to express this concern, tying it back to the prologue.

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<sup>27</sup> Beasley-Murray, 48-49. Perhaps Nicodemus truly misinterprets the statement, or perhaps he is so thrown off by Jesus that he responds in a non-serious manner, purposefully misunderstanding the word. As a teacher of Israel, he should have understood the words of Jesus, making a connection to the Jewish hope of new creation in a renewed kingdom.



## Exegesis

As shown above, the passage we are studying should be understood as a commentary or meditation on the discourse with Nicodemus which continues the author's gradual unfolding of the gospel. Likely the words of Jesus end at verse 15, but the interpretation is not affected greatly by the decision to view 16-21 as the continuing words of Jesus or as the comments of the author. This short passage is tightly written with close interconnections between its parts. For this reason, though LIGHT is not mentioned until verse 18, it is reasonable to consider it as in view already in verse 16.

**John 3:16.** The commentary starts by explaining the wonderful motivation and purpose of God in sending his Son into the world. In love, God intends for those who believe in his messenger to gain eternal life instead of suffering spiritual death. This echoes the Servant songs of Isaiah where God's Agent is sent to bring redemption to his people. He is called here God's only/unique Son (υἰὸν τὸν μονογενῆ), pointing back to 1:14 where the Word is described as becoming flesh with glory as the only/unique one from the Father (μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός). This Son who is given by the Father in verse 16 is the same LIGHT which has come into the world in verse 19. Putting these pieces together makes sense of the claim that those who believe in him have eternal life, for "in him was life, and that life was the light of men" (1:4). Eternal life exists in the eternal Word through whom all things were created, the unique Son of God sent by the Father. His coming into the world in the person of Jesus means that the light of salvation is now present with his people as promised in Isaiah chapters 9, 42 and 49. This fulfills the OT ideas that THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT and SALVATION IS ABIDING IN THE AGENT'S LIGHT. Those who believe in him also

receive eternal life through him. This life is the result of being born of God, the gift promised to those who believe (see the parallel statement in 1:12-13).

This terse gospel statement with its dense web of connections serves to explain Jesus's lesson to Nicodemus. As the teacher of Israel, he ought to have known that one must be born from above (aka. born of God) to enter the kingdom. God had promised many times throughout the OT that he would draw near to rescue his people from their sins. Now the Son of God, sent by the Father, was present. Nicodemus believed his signs but until now had not yet truly believed in him. Jesus made clear that to enter the kingdom and receive the gift of eternal life, Nicodemus must place his trust in Jesus as the savior sent by God.

**John 3:17-18.** The crisis created by the Son coming into the world is explained in verses 17-18. A dualism of decision is created as those who come in contact with Jesus must decide whether to believe in him or not. God's purpose in sending him was salvation, yet this ironically results in judgment of those who will not believe. The verb κρίνω (to judge, condemn or decide) appears several times in these verses. Carson argues that the meaning here is not condemnation but a decision that results in judgment.<sup>28</sup> The Evangelist is using the story of Nicodemus to warn readers that they too face a point of decision. Unless they come to believe in Jesus and look upon him for salvation, they will be excluded from the kingdom and eternal life.

**John 3:19-20.** The author uses the light/darkness dualism in verses 19-20 to explain why some might choose to reject the witness of Jesus. It is a strange thing to imagine that the eternal Son of God would become a man to save mankind, only to suffer the humiliation of

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<sup>28</sup> Carson, *John*, 206.

rejection by his own creations. Already the author is preparing the reader to understand the coming opposition towards Jesus and final scandal of the cross. As Beasley-Murray explains it:

The Redeemer has come into the world as Light in a dark place, clearly to bring the “light” of salvation. But before that Light men separate themselves; they either approach it or move away from it. The former move into the light of salvation, the latter depart from it into deeper darkness.<sup>29</sup>

This choice between light and darkness has been signaled since the very beginning of GJohn. That light which has been shining into darkness since creation (1:5) has now come into the world (1:9; 3:19) yet is not received by everyone (1:10-11; 3:18). Throughout all this time the darkness has not overcome, understood, or received the light (1:5; 3:19). Even Nicodemus, an esteemed teacher of Israel who knows the OT well (3:10), fails to recognize the light in its coming. Jesus chastises his unbelief, calling him to believe his witness because he is speaking of what he knows, bearing witness to what he has seen in heaven (3:11-13). The Evangelist describes his coming down from heaven as the light of God coming into the world. In Carson’s words, “As the light of the world, Jesus is the revelation of God and the objectification of divine holiness and purity.”<sup>30</sup> Jesus is truly the epitome of the OT metaphor that SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD’S AGENT.

Now the Evangelist provides a moral explanation why some people reject Jesus: “people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” (3:19). This repeats the OT metaphor of people hiding from the presence of God, attempting to prevent him from seeing their evil deeds (described in Chapter 3 under *The Presence of God is*

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<sup>29</sup> Beasley-Murray, 51.

<sup>30</sup> Carson, *John*, 207.

*Light*). He restates the judgment even more strongly in verse 20, saying that the wicked *hate* the light as it exposes their evil deeds. This strong statement prepares the reader for the shocking hatred shown by those who not only reject the witness of Jesus but subject him to shameful murder by crucifixion.

**John 3:21.** Happily, some people do come to the light. It is intriguing to consider how the author might be reflecting on the case of Nicodemus. He comes at night (out of darkness) to meet with the Light. He struggles to understand and does not yet fully believe, but continues in dialog with Jesus. Jesus engages with him, giving him the opportunity to believe. Nicodemus surfaces twice more in GJohn (7:50; 19:39), on both occasions showing respect for Jesus though not clear faith. Perhaps he is meant to serve as an example of a man on the path toward faith. John may be encouraging the skeptical reader to move out of darkness toward the light, considering carefully the claims of Jesus.

As opposed to those who hide from the light, whoever “does what is true” ποιῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν comes to the light. In that light, it will be seen that his works “have been carried out in God” ἐν θεῷ ἐστὶν εἰργασμένα. The unusual wording here makes plain that the author is not making a simplistic religious statement that good people who do works out of their own goodness are right with God. On the contrary, they do works not out of their own intrinsic goodness but through God.<sup>31</sup> This relates to the OT metaphor ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD IS ABIDING IN HIS LIGHT. Belief, obedience and abiding with God are seen together. From one perspective, the one who believes will obey and come to God (3:36). From another perspective, the one who obeys will believe in Jesus (3:21). The result of obedient faith is an

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 208. The one who comes to the light “is not an intrinsically superior person.”

abiding in the light of God which leads to eternal life. In this way, it is seen that SALVATION IS ABIDING IN THE AGENT'S LIGHT. Jesus is the Agent of God who has come into the world to bring salvation to those who put their trust in him.

### Summary

In this brief passage, the Evangelist summarizes the gospel and exposes the crisis of decision caused by the coming of the Son of God into the world. The crowds have seen his miracles and believed in the miraculous signs, but have not truly received him. Like Nicodemus, they don't realize they need saving from sin through belief in Jesus to enter the Kingdom of God. He is the eternal Son, sent by the Father, to give the light of spiritual illumination and eternal life. Those who receive him will gain eternal life; those who reject his light are already condemned. Some reject him to hide their evil works from exposure before the light of the truth he brings. Others come to the light, demonstrating that their works are done through God.

Several OT divine light metaphors are used in this passage. THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT: The Son of God's presence among men is the light of God coming into the world. SALVATION IS ABIDING IN THE AGENT'S LIGHT: Those who believe in him come to the light, where they receive eternal life from the Word in whom is life. SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD'S AGENT: As the only one who has come down from heaven, Jesus witnesses about heavenly things which he has seen. His light exposes good and evil. ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD IS ABIDING IN HIS LIGHT: Those whose works are done in God will come to the Son and abide in the light of his presence.

## The Light of the World (John 8:12)

John 8 contains the first instance of Jesus's claim to be the light of the world. His claim leads to an intense controversy with Pharisees and crowds in the temple courts.

### Textual Concerns

- 12 Πάλιν οὖν αὐτοῖς ἐλάλησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγων· ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου· ὁ ἀκολουθῶν ἐμοὶ οὐ μὴ περιπατήσει ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἔξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς.

Verse 12 begins “Again Jesus spoke to them,” referencing a previous conversation which does not fit with the context of 7:35-8:11. The connection of this discourse in 8:12-59 to what comes before is determined by the nature of 7:35-8:11. Based on manuscript, textual and external evidence, the story of the woman caught in adultery was most likely not original to GJohn.<sup>32</sup> Removing this insertion makes clear that 8:12 continues the words of Jesus from 7:37-38. His words then fit perfectly together:

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ . . . Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.<sup>33</sup>

### Citations and Allusions

The context for Jesus's sayings in 7:10-52 and 8:12-59 is the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. This feast celebrated God's provision for them in the wilderness with a water ceremony and a light ceremony. The immediate reference for Jesus's claim to provide living water was the water-drawing ceremony which pointed further back to God's multiple

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<sup>32</sup> See discussions in Beasley-Murray, 127 and Carson, *John*, 337.

<sup>33</sup> John 7:37-38 and 8:12.

provisions of water in the desert. In the same way, the immediate reference for Jesus's claim to be the light of the world was the lamp-lighting ceremony which pointed further back to the pillar of fire through which God rescued his people from Egyptian armies and led them through the wilderness.<sup>34</sup> Likely he spoke these words during the actual ceremonies, creating a dramatic situation where everyone would understand him to be identifying himself in some way with God's saving activity during the exodus. Richard Hays has demonstrated that GJohn repeatedly shows Jesus to be the fulfillment of the temple and of the religious feasts. By claiming to be the living water and the light of the world during the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus is claiming to fulfill those symbols from Zechariah 14:7-8: "The festival's burning torches that symbolize the 'continuous day' of God's glorious presence point in fact to Jesus, who is 'the true light . . . coming into the world.'"<sup>35</sup>

As we have seen, the repeated claim that JESUS IS LIGHT in GJohn does not merely cite a particular OT text but rather draws in a vast set of metaphorical utterances in the OT where GOD IS LIGHT or THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. The same is true of this passage.

### Literary Context

In chapters 7 and 8, the claims of Jesus become ever clearer with dramatic overtones. At one level his claim has not shifted, he is just what he has been claiming to be since the beginning (8:25). But at another level, his claims are more specific, that he is living water,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Beasley-Murray and Carson have similar discussion of the connection to the lamp-lighting ceremony.

<sup>35</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 314.

the promised light of the world, and divine (as recognized with wrath by the Jews in 8:58-59). His public claims during the festival disclose himself plainly to be the promised Messiah and the fulfillment of several OT rituals. These specific claims made in an intensely dramatic setting during the water and light ceremonies of the Feast of Tabernacles lead to hardening opposition.

Chapters 1, 3 and 8 demonstrate a strong pattern in GJohn where Jesus as Light is set alongside a number of key themes (in italics). *Jesus as the light and life of men* (1:4; 3:16; 8:12) expresses the idea that THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. One expression of this salvation are the statements repeated in 3:14-15 and 8:28 that the Son of Man must be lifted up to grant eternal life to those who believe. *Revelation and witness of the light* (1:6-8; 3:11-13; 8:13-18) expresses SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD'S AGENT. The Son was sent by the Father to give light to men; therefore, his truthfulness is witnessed by the truthfulness of the one who sent him. *Opposition to the light and the dualism of decision* (1:5,10-11; 3:19-20; 8:23-24) expresses ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD IS ABIDING IN HIS LIGHT and its corollary REJECTION OF GOD IS TURNING AWAY FROM HIS LIGHT. In these chapters there is a pattern of misunderstanding, rejection and opposition by those who do not accept his claims. The pattern is so strong that Beasley-Murray suggests: "The whole section chapt. 7-8 may be viewed as an extensive illustration of the teaching in 3:17-21."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, looking back on the Prologue, the opening passages which introduce him as LIGHT are anticipating Jesus's own claims about himself.

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<sup>36</sup> Beasley-Murray, 142.



Finally, it is worth noting that chapter 9 provides a vivid narrative illustration of the theological topics discussed in chapter 8. The healing of the man born blind demonstrates Jesus illuminating a man both physically and spiritually, drawing him to a faith that results in eternal life, while both Jesus and the man face opposition from those who reject the light.

### Exegesis

***I am the light of the world.*** Jesus's claim to be the light of the world reminds the reader of his identification in 1:5 as the pre-existent Word who is the light of men. This is the light which has been shining since creation and which now has come down from heaven to earth. The connection is made clearer by his further claims to have come from God and to have existed before Abraham was born (πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί) in 8:58. He is the one who fulfills the Isaianic prophecies that THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT, coming from God to bring his light to mankind. This chapter gradually escalates his use of the "I am" revelation formula (see Isa 43:10).<sup>37</sup> He uses the formula with the direct object "light of the world" in verse 12. He drops the object in verse 24, saying "unless you believe that I am" which elicits the exasperated question, "Who are you?" Finally, in verse 58 he proclaims his unity with the Father clearly, stating of himself that "I am" before Abraham (the one to whom God revealed his name as "I am"). The Jews rightly understand him to be equating himself with God and pick up stones to execute him for blasphemy. This statement of divinity alters the metaphor to suggest that GOD IS LIGHT may be directly in mind in addition to THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. As in the rest of GJohn, Jesus is distinguished as Son

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 139. Beasley-Murray states, "The intention of the saying, however, is primarily what Jesus means for salvation, rather than of his being . . . his steadfastness and faithfulness and his promise to help his people." See also the discussion of the "I and He" formula on page 131.

from the Father, yet also identified so closely as to have divine origin. He has a unique relationship and unity with God the Father that enables him to bring the light and life of salvation to mankind.<sup>38</sup>

As mentioned under Citations and Allusions, his claim to be the light of the world is likely made during the lamp-lighting ceremony of the Festival of Tabernacles. He first refers to himself as the fulfillment of the water-drawing ceremony (7:37b) and then as the fulfillment of the lamp-lighting ceremony (8:12). These bold statements made during the ceremony must have been dramatic indeed! No wonder the Pharisees and crowds struggled to understand and accept his claims. What man could claim to be the fulfillment of these ancient rituals which celebrate God's salvation of their ancestors? Since the feast also carried eschatological overtones with hopes of God's promised future saving action, he would be heard as proclaiming that eschatological day to be present with his coming.

Somehow, in himself, the coming age promised in Isaiah 60:19-22 and Zechariah 14:5b-7 was dawning. Isaiah 60:19b describes the coming day when "the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and God will be your glory." Zechariah 14:5-7 similarly proclaims the coming day when the Lord himself will come to Jerusalem to become king over all the earth. As a sign of his coming, living water will flow forth from Jerusalem and his light will shine at evening, ending a day of darkness. His coming as the light *of the world* also brings to mind Isaiah 49:6 where the Servant is called a light to Gentiles. Jesus's claim brings all these OT divine metaphors into action due to the special time and place when he makes it.

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<sup>38</sup> Beasley-Murray, 139. Beasley-Murray explains, "The statement implies a real pre-existence, and is possible because the 'I' of Jesus is one with the 'I' of the divine Logos."

***Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.*** The call to follow his light alludes to the pillar of fire which guided the Israelites through the wilderness. God's light-giving presence in the wilderness was precisely the light which the worshippers celebrated during the Feast of Tabernacles. As their ancestors followed God's pillar of fire through the desert, now they should follow Jesus. In this Jesus is at least using the metaphor SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD'S AGENT. However, given the presence of God in the pillar of fire and Jesus's claims to divinity in verse 58, he may be referring to himself as divine here as well.

***But will have the light of life.*** As in 1:5, the light which Jesus brings relates to the life which is found in the eternal Word. Carson notes that the Light of the Lord in the OT often represents his saving activity.<sup>39</sup> We have stated this metaphor as THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. The pillar of fire which came between the Israelites and the Egyptians before the Red Sea is an example which would have been present in minds of the worshippers during the Feast of Tabernacles.

### Summary

Set in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus's claim to be the light of the world carries dramatic connotations. He is the Servant spoken of in Isaiah as well as the presence of God with his people spoken of in Zechariah. His coming into the world is like a dawning of divine light which inaugurates the kingdom of God. As in the other passages we have studied, the Evangelist uses the metaphor of divine light to show Jesus to be the

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<sup>39</sup> Carson, *John*, 338. Carson lists many examples similar to those listed in chapter 3 of the present text.

ultimate Revelation of the Father, the Son who is in union with the Father, the mediator of salvation, and the cause of judgment.<sup>40</sup>

Many of the OT divine light metaphors we have identified can be seen in chapter 8. THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT: Jesus offers the light of life to mankind. SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD'S AGENT: those who follow him will not walk in darkness. ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD IS ABIDING IN HIS LIGHT and REJECTION OF GOD IS TURNING AWAY FROM HIS LIGHT: he is the light of the world to those who accept him, but those who reject him will die in their sins.

#### The Man Born Blind (John 9:5)

The narrative of the healing of the man born blind in chapter 9 may be covered in brief.<sup>41</sup> It illustrates through a concrete story the Light of the World discourse of chapter 8. As Bultmann shows, the concepts of spiritual sight and blindness in chapter 9 are used in a similar way to the concepts of light and darkness earlier in GJohn. Both light/darkness and sight/blindness indicate “the salvation given by God and man’s shutting himself off from God.”<sup>42</sup>

By way of explaining why the man was born blind, Jesus uses the divine light metaphor to tell his disciples that they must do the works of the Father as long as he is in the

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<sup>40</sup> Beasley-Murray explains well how GJohn reveals these roles of Jesus: “From beginning to end, the Fourth Gospel is concerned to set forth Jesus as the Revelation of the Father and one with the Father, but always with a view to making plain his role as Mediator of salvation—and of judgment, where man so insists” (Beasley-Murray, 140).

<sup>41</sup> As discussed below, chapter 9 builds on the “Light of the World” metaphor from chapter 8. The narrative reflects in story form the propositions and discourse from the previous chapter. For this reason, we can cover it in brief as an extension of the previous section.

<sup>42</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. George Raymond Beasley-Murray, Rupert William Noel Hoare, and John Kenneth Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 340.

world. While he is with them, he is the “light of the world” (making an explicit literary connection to the identical language in 8:12). His saving works, which are done in the light of his presence, fulfill the OT metaphor THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. Ominously, a night is presumably coming when he will not be with them—he warns his disciples of this coming time in 12:35-36.

Throughout this chapter, physical blindness is used as an analogy of spiritual darkness. Opening the eyes of the blind man is thus an analogy of spiritual illumination. By bringing healing to the blind man he provides a sign demonstrating the reality of the OT metaphor SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD’S AGENT. His act recalls God’s promise in Isaiah 29:18 of a coming day when “as for those who are in the darkness and those who are in the fog, the eyes of the blind shall see.” Having received physical sight from Jesus, this man also receives spiritual illumination when Jesus discloses himself as the Son of Man. He responds to this revelation with belief and worship.

The passage drips with irony as the blind man receives physical sight and spiritual illumination, while those with physical sight expose their spiritual darkness:

Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.” (9:40-41)

As in each passage we have studied, the presence of the Light creates a crisis for the people present. Some believe and are saved, while others reject the light and remain in darkness.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DOCTRINE OF JESUS AS LIGHT

Now that we have investigated the meaning of JESUS IS LIGHT in terms of biblical categories, it will be helpful to lay out systematically the biblical doctrine which is expressed by the underlying conceptual metaphors. John Frame's tri-perspectivalism provides a useful methodology for discovering and grouping various perspectives on doctrinal subjects. His approach is to view each topic from three perspectives in turn: situational, normative and existential. Applying these perspectives to Christology, the area of theology most pertinent to our topic, he finds three "lordship attributes" which match the perspectives: control (situational), authority (normative) and presence (existential).<sup>1</sup> He helpfully summarizes these attributes:

[T]he Lord is (a) the one who controls all things by his mighty power; (b) the one who speaks with absolute authority, rightly requiring all to obey, and (c) the one who gives himself to his people in covenant intimacy: "I will be your God, and you will be my people."<sup>2</sup>

We will use Frame's three perspectives to evaluate the doctrine that can be derived from the meaning of JESUS IS LIGHT.

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<sup>1</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 17.

<sup>2</sup> John M. Frame, "A Primer on Perspectivalism," *Frame-Poythress.org*, June 4, 2012, <https://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism/> (Accessed March 8, 2018).

### The Normative Perspective

Starting with the Normative perspective and the lordship attribute of Authority, what does this metaphor say about the authority of Jesus? What laws or standards does it reveal to which man must comply? Jesus is shown to speak with great authority as the “true light” (1:9) who brings to mankind what he knows having come down from heaven (3:11,19). He speaks not as a mere prophet or teacher, but as the divine agent of the Father who was with God from the beginning, even shining forth since the day of creation. In him is the life and light of men (1:4) and through him everything was created. He is given authority by the Father as the unique Son of God to fulfill the promised role of THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. His word is to be trusted because the Father who sent him witnesses to the truth of what he says (8:14-18).

Because of his identity and truthfulness, it is required by God that people must accept Jesus’s authoritative witness. He calls people to *follow* his light to find life (8:12). As with God in the OT, now in Jesus ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD IS ABIDING IN HIS LIGHT. Since the beginning, the darkness has not known and received the light (1:5, 3:19-21). Even many of God’s own people to whom Jesus came refused to accept him. But to those who did receive his light, he gave the right to become children of God (1:11-12) who receive eternal life (3:16). Those who refuse to accept his testimony will ultimately die in their sins unless they repent and receive him (8:24), for with him they have rejected God. As Carson points out, John does not mention explicitly a doctrine of justification by faith, yet this is implied by the call to receive the light of Jesus for salvation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 207.

## The Situational Perspective

The Situational perspective speaks to what we can know about the world around us, “the way things are.” This relates to the lordship attribute of Control, as God exercises control over the universe he has created. The fact that JESUS IS LIGHT implies much about the situation of the world and his control over it.

The world is lost in the darkness of error, idolatry and sin. Mankind is unable to find its own way out of this darkness.<sup>4</sup> In fact, people often prefer to stay in darkness even when light is available. They hate the light because it exposes their evil deeds (3:19-20). But because he loved the world, God has acted to save mankind, sending his unique Son to become flesh and replace darkness with light (1:9; 3:16). Because Jesus has come, the true knowledge of God is not locked away in heaven. Rather, in him, SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD. Jesus is the Revealer of the Father, in whom true knowledge of God may be found (1:18). Jesus’s control over all things extends to his role as mediator in creation (the light who was create all things), mediator in revelation (the light who reveals the Father), and mediator in salvation (the light who gives life to those who believe).

In Jesus, the light of revelation and salvation has dawned on the world. This light continues in the church through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (who came like a flame upon the disciples). The fulfillment of the Kingdom of God will bring that Light to dwell eternally with his people on the great Day of the Lord. In that day, as promised in Isaiah

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), II, ii, 12. Calvin helpfully describes mankind’s position, saying, “In this sense it is said (John 1:5), that ‘the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not;’ these words clearly expressing both points, viz., that in the perverted and degenerate nature of man there are still some sparks which show that he is a rational animal . . . and yet, that this light is so smothered by clouds of darkness that it cannot shine forth to any good effect.”



(60:19) and again in Revelation, there will no longer be a need for a sun to shine on the city, because “its lamp is the Lamb” and the nations will walk in his light (Rev 21:23).

### The Existential Perspective

The Existential perspective is about the internal dimension of ourselves and relates to the lordship attribute of Presence. This perspective is greatly informed by the metaphor that JESUS IS LIGHT because Jesus is described as the light that came from God to be present with us. God promised in Isaiah and elsewhere that one day he would come, personally and through his Servant, to be an abiding light to his people (Isa 42:7; 49:9). Now that Jesus has come, THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT can be a lived reality where we experience salvation, life, and healing in him (Jn 3:16-17; 8:12). The idea that RIGHTEOUS LIFE IS LIGHT FROM GOD means that our lives can be transformed if we receive the light.

The Evangelist makes clear in his own words and in those of Jesus that a choice stands before his readers. It is not enough merely to *hear* the truth; a crisis of decision faces everyone who hears the claims of Jesus. Each passage we studied taught that we must each choose whether to follow the light of Jesus or to remain in darkness (1:11-12; 3:18; 8:12,24; 9:35-41). Jesus promises that God will continually be present with those who receive him. Even though Jesus returned to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to be a helper, guide and revealer to continue the work he began in believers’ hearts. In this way, the light of Jesus continues to be present to all who are willing to receive him.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Our thesis states that JESUS IS LIGHT in GJohn is a complex metaphor which is deeply rooted in the Old Testament metaphor THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT and its derivative metaphor THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT. Many of the elements of the original metaphors are explicitly or implicitly mapped onto Jesus, showing him to be a personal revelation of God himself to mankind.

The summary of scholarship in Chapter 2 found that it is not necessary or helpful to postulate sources behind GJohn in reconstructed Gnostic myths, Hellenistic religions, or Hellenized Jewish schools. On the contrary, the OT and contemporary Jewish thinking are sufficient explanations for the theology and metaphors used by the author. John's evangelistic purpose, Greek-speaking audience, and access to the OT through the Greek Septuagint account for the unique language and themes in GJohn. Hellenistic language and culture do influence GJohn but are secondary to the overriding OT influence and are explained by the author's evangelistic goals.

Analysis of the OT divine light metaphors in Chapter 3 found examples across books as varied as the Pentateuch, histories, Psalms, wisdom literature and the prophets. These can be categorized into four main conceptual metaphors: THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT, SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD, RIGHTEOUS LIFE IS LIGHT FROM GOD and THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT.

In Chapter 4, a close contextual analysis of the JESUS IS LIGHT metaphor in GJohn chapters 1, 3, 8 and 9 found that these metaphorical utterances do conform to the pattern and meaning of the OT metaphors. The metaphors are remapped from both God and his Agent to Jesus. The Evangelist's use of many aspects of the OT metaphors shows that he has in mind the same essential redemptive idea as the OT authors. However, the metaphor is applied in a new way—rather than applying the elements of the light domain to the presence of God, he applies them directly to Jesus.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS LIGHT: Jesus is the pre-incarnate Word, the Son of God, who is with the Father and is in unity with him. His light has been shining since creation; he became flesh to be the light of the world. Like the pillar of fire in the desert, he is a light-giving presence of God with his people. This fulfills the OT promises that God will one day dwell with his people and be a light to them.

SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION IS LIGHT FROM GOD: As the one who came down from heaven, Jesus proclaims what is true about the Father. Those who trust in him will no longer walk in the darkness of unbelief or misunderstanding about God. He came to cure blindness both physical and spiritual.

RIGHTEOUS LIFE IS LIGHT FROM GOD: Jesus is the pre-existent Word who has life in himself. He grants eternal life to those who place their trust in him. Those whose works are done in God will come to him. Conversely, those who refuse to come to him will continue to walk in the darkness of sin and error.

THE AGENT OF SALVATION IS LIGHT: Jesus is the Servant of Isaiah whom God promised to send for the salvation of mankind. He came as a Jew to the people of Israel, but

also as a light to the nations. He saves those who trust in him from slavery to sin and ultimately from spiritual death.

The ultimate implication of the JESUS IS LIGHT metaphor is that each person must choose whether or not to receive Jesus. If he is the eternal Word who is the unique Son of God, if he is the only one who came down from heaven to reveal truth about God, if abiding in him is the way of salvation, then all should choose to walk in his light.

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