

God Came Down

(The Fourth Gospel)

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THE MESSIAH IS HERE: HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY (1:19-12:50)

The Messianic Expectation in Judea and Galilee (1:19-2:12)

The scenes of Act One are given to set the stage for the arrival of the Messiah. John the Baptist appears declaring to Israel that he was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord, whom he says is “in your midst.” Jesus appears and John identifies him to his disciples as the lamb of God. Two of John’s disciples follow him and become convinced that they have found the Messiah. Jesus leaves Judea for Galilee, meets and talks with Philip and Nathaniel, who both become convinced that he is the Messiah. In Galilee he attends a wedding feast and performs a miracle and these disciples “believed in him.”

What is going on here in these scenes? The **players** are John the Baptist, his disciples, the audience of John, a group of Jews sent from Jerusalem, Jesus, two disciples of John (one of whom is Andrew), Peter, Philip, Nathaniel, Jesus’ mother, the people at the wedding feast, and those who are called “Jesus’ disciples (perhaps those, mentioned in this block, who had believed him to be the Messiah).

The **setting** is in Judea (a location on the West bank of the Jordan River about 10 miles North of the Dead Sea) for three scenes, then Galilee for two scenes. More important than the location of the action is the time of the action. It is a time of great expectation, specifically, messianic expectation.

The **action** of each scene has to do with the arousal of interest related the messianic expectation, and in Jesus in particular. Various players show an interest in the messianic expectation, which leads to a quest or inquiry (investigation), which leads to a discovery relating to the identity of Jesus of Nazareth

The **dialogue** all has to do with various discussion associated with this messianic expectation; questions as to whether this person Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, and confessional statements of those who have become convinced that he is, indeed, the Messiah.

The **themes**, also, are essentially themes associated with the messianic expectation of Israel. Jesus' appearance on stage as this expectation is everywhere to be found in the air of Judea and Galilee. Themes associated with "who he is" run throughout this collection of scenes. Here also the major theme of "belief verses disbelief" begins to surface.

Scene One (1:19-28): John the Baptist and the Pharisees

Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah [Christ]. " ²¹They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord' " (Isaiah 40:3). ²⁴Now some Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶"I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The players in this scene, the action and dialogue all have to do with setting the stage for the entrance of Jesus of Nazareth. The **players** are John the Baptist and the priests, Levites, and Pharisees sent by the Jews from

Jerusalem. The **scene** is the site of John's preaching and baptismal activity; a location call Bethany on the West Bank of the Jordan River about 10 miles North of the Dead Sea). This is the location where Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind into heaven. John is identified with Elijah in terms of his appearance, his behavior, and his message. This is where Elijah disappeared and this is where he reappears to announce the coming of the Messiah. The **action, dialogue, and themes** all concern an exchange between John and the Jews from Jerusalem concerning John's identity and mission. Was he the Messiah, Elijah, the Prophet of Deut 18:18? (the theme of messianic expectation). John identifies himself as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," drawing from Isaiah 40:3. He has been sent to prepare the way for the Lord. He is preaching repentance and baptismal purification to make way for the Lord's arrival. John suggests that this one is already among them.

Scene Two (1:29-34): Jesus' Messianic Identity Revealed to John

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him."³³ I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

On the following day (scene change) Jesus himself appears on stage. John sees him and identifies him to his disciples as the one about whom he spoke yesterday (i.e. the one coming after him) and identifies him as the Lamb of God (1:29), the one on whom he has seen the Spirit of God descending like a dove (1:32-33), and confesses his belief that he is the Son of God. The players are Jesus, John, and John's disciples, the scene location is the same, the action, dialogue, and themes concern John's identification of Jesus as the one they have been waiting for.

Scene Three (1:35-42): Andrew and Peter Discover the Messiah

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹"Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴²And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

The following day the scene shifts to the action of two of John's disciples, Andrew and, most probably, John (the author of this Gospel), and Jesus. The interest of these two has been aroused by John's comments and they go to investigate for themselves. The action, dialogue, and themes here all concern the investigation pursued by these two men. Jesus invites them to come and spend time with him where he is staying. They accept his invitation and spend the rest of the day with him (until about 4:00 PM). The first thing the next morning (the Greek term *proi* would imply the first thing the next day) Andrew finds his brother and tells him, "We have found the Messiah." He takes Peter to Jesus, but the text does not tell us that Peter becomes a disciple.

Scene Four: (1:43-51): Philip and Nathaniel Discover the Messiah

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." ⁴⁸"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before

Philip called you." ⁴⁹Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe[1] because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." ⁵¹He then added, "I tell you[2] the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

The next day (another scene change) Jesus leaves Judea and returns home to Galilee. A new player appears on stage, Philip who is from Bethsaida, a town located on the North coast of the Sea of Galilee. The text is not clear as to where this meeting took place, but Jesus encourages Philip to follow him (i.e., become his disciple). Philip appears to have come to faith in Jesus because he goes to find Nathaniel and tells him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathaniel's interest is aroused and he goes to see for himself. After he meets Jesus, he, himself, confesses to Jesus, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, the King of Israel (1:49). The players are Jesus, Philip and Nathaniel, both of whom come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

***Scene Five (2:1-12): Jesus Changes Water into Wine,
His Disciples Believe***

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." ⁴"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." ⁹They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." ¹¹This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus

revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. ²After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

After three days have past (scene shift) from the previous scene. The Greek here literally reads, “in the day, the third.” With the Jewish way of reckoning time, this is very likely two days after they returned to Galilee in that any part of the daylight of a day was considered as a whole day. William Barclay suggests that John is saying, “two days later” counting the day of the previous events: (1) the day of in which he met Philip and Nathaniel, (2) the next day is skipped, (3) the next day is the third day; (i.e., three daylight period).

The players in this scene are Jesus, his mother, and his disciples. The setting is a wedding in Cana of Galilee. The dialogue concerns a conversation Jesus has with his mother when the host runs out of wine. The Greek text of this conversation is somewhat ambiguous. Jesus’ mother tells Jesus that they have no wine. Jesus’ response in the Greek literally reads, “*Ti* (what) *emoi* (to me) *kai* (also) *soi* (to you) *gunai* (woman); *oupo* (not yet) *hekei* (it is coming) *he* (the) *hora* (hour) *mou* (of me).” The problem here is whether this is a declarative statement of Jesus, in which he sounds like he is being indifferent to the problem and rude to his mother, or whether he asking her a question. There is no punctuation in the Greek text; the only way to identify a question is by the presence of an interrogative pronoun. The first word of Jesus’ reply, *Ti* (what), is an interrogative pronoun. If this statement is taken as a question, then Jesus is saying to his mother, “What to me, also to you, woman (an endearing term), my hour is coming” or “is my hour here?” He is aware of who he is and what will happen when he enters his messianic ministry, but is she? “What to me also to you” seems to indicate that he is telling her, “What happens to me happens to you also.” In this he is asking her if she ready for what will happen once he begins to do such things as will identify him as the Messiah.

Mary’s reaction to Jesus’ words seem to indicate that she realized what he was saying, and she acquiesced to what was before her. She had to let him go. She turned to the servants as said, “Whatever he tells you to do, do it!” From here it all began and when it ended, Mary was holding here dead son in her arms. With Mary’s comments to the servants, Jesus performs his first miracle.

The theme here, again, concerns the messianic identity of Jesus. He turns six jars of water into 120 or 180 gallons of wine, and the quality of the wine was such that it startled the master of the banquet. This scene closes with an editorial comment by John that in this action Jesus manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him. Here is the critical theme, "belief," a theme that runs through every scene of this Gospel.

First Century Messianic Beliefs

To fully appreciate and properly interpret what is going on in collection of scenes, one must understand what is meant by such expressions as, "We have found the Messiah," and "“We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote.“ Within each of these statements one detects an expectation, or more specifically, a messianic expectation (i.e., an expected appearing of someone called "the Messiah"). The significance of all this is that the origins of Christianity are rooted in this Messianic expectation that was a part of the Judaism of the first century Mediterranean world.

In the first century AD, the whole of Judaism was alive with what historians call a "messianic expectation" (i.e., the belief that a special anointed one or Messiah was soon to appear). References to the coming of the Messiah are found throughout the literature of the Jews (biblical and non-biblical writings): the apocalyptic writings (1 & 2 Enoch, Baruch, 4 Ezra), the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Rabbinic writings. Some believed he would be a human deliverer like David (Son of David), some believed he would be God's last and greatest prophet (Matt 16:13ff), others even believed he would be a supernatural or otherworldly being (Dan. 7). This messianic expectation is reflected in much of the Jewish literature of the first century period as well as the New Testament writings

In a Jewish document, dated in the late part of the first century BC, we find a classic example of this Jewish expectation. This document is called, *The Psalms of Solomon*. The writer claims that the corruption of Israel's leaders is what has caused their subjection to the Romans. He follows this accusation with a plea for God to send them a deliverer. In chapter 17:20-25 we read:

From their leader to the commonest of the people they were in every kind of sin: the king was a criminal and the judge disobedient; and the

people sinners. See Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time known to you, O God. Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar; to shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth; at his warning the nations will flee from his presence; and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts (*Psalms of Solomon* 15:20-25).

This passage is lengthy but in verse 32 he identifies the longed for Messiah: "And he will be a righteous king over them, taught by God. There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days, for all shall be holy, and their king shall be the Lord Messiah." (*Psalms of Solomon* 15:32)

This expectation can be seen in such New Testament references as John 1:40-41, 4:25 and 40-42, listed above, as well as such texts as John 3:38 and 7:26-27; 10:24; 11:27; 12:34, and many similar text in the other New Testament Gospels. This messianic figure was usually associated with one of the representatives or agents of God mentioned above; i.e., a king, a priest, or a prophet.

Conclusion

It would appear that what John is doing, compositionally, is setting the stage for the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth. As the appearance of John the Baptist raised the question of, "Who is he?" much more was this the case with Jesus. He appears and is baptized by John. With his second appearance in this collection of scenes, John identifies him as the lamb of God, tells his disciples of the revelations God had given him concerning his recognition of the Messiah, and identifies Jesus as the one of whom he spoke, "there comes one after me." By use of this structure, John has created a major theme which will run throughout the Gospel; i.e., **the arousal of interest**. In each scene this theme or motif is present. John arouses interest by his role as the voice crying in the wilderness. He arouses his disciples' interest by identifying and confessing Jesus to be the Son of God. A couple of the disciples of John go to **investigate for themselves** and **discover** there is good reason to believe that he is who John said he was. Two others enter on stage and **their interest was aroused** by Jesus, Philip

investigates for himself then finds Nathaniel and arouses his **interest**. Nathaniel comes **and investigates for himself** and comes to faith in Jesus (**discovery**).

The scene shifts from Judea to a wedding feast in Cana in Galilee, where Jesus becomes involved in a conversation with his mother, the outcome of which marks a point of demarcation for Jesus. Following his conversation with Mary, Jesus performs the miracle of turning water into wine, which is identified as a manifestation of his glory, and his disciples **believe in him**. The themes of messianic expectation, interest aroused in Jesus' identity as the Messiah, investigation by several who come to the discovery that he is the long awaited Messiah, continue to grow. In each scene this, interest-investigation-discovery scenario is followed by belief on the part of the ones doing the investigating.

In the following act, the scene shifts as Jesus goes down to Jerusalem and enters into conflict with the Jewish hierarchy. Their reaction to Jesus is that of disbelief. One of their number, however, Nicodemus by name, comes to Jesus by night to **investigate for himself**, having had his **interest aroused** by the activity of Jesus. The conversation between them results in Jesus going after Nicodemus' inner thoughts, reads his questions about the legitimacy of the religious of his life, and addresses the true questions at the heart of Nicodemus' visit. The text does not tell us that Nicodemus believed what Jesus said to him, but at the end of Jesus life, Nicodemus reappears at the removal of Jesus' body from the cross. What this tells us about the belief/disbelief system of Nicodemus is curious but not conclusive with reference to whom Nicodemus believed Jesus to be. The first two acts here introduce the reader to the different reactions of the two different communities of faith in John's Gospel – the *anawim* (the poor and oppressed common people) verses the Jewish hierarchy.

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