

God Came Down

(The Fourth Gospel)

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Jesus in Judea (3:22-36)

This text consists of two scenes: (1) the exit of John the Baptist (3:22-30), and (2) an editorial comment by John (3:31-36). John the Baptist has fulfilled his mission as the voice in the wilderness who came to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. He is now to decrease and Jesus is to increase. John, the writer of this Gospel, follows this scene with an editorial comment giving the reader a glimpse of the identity of the one who has appeared in response to the preparation of John the Baptist. In both scenes the belief/disbelief theme continues to appear.

Scene One (3:22-30): Exit the Baptist

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.²³ Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.²⁴ (This was before John was put in prison.)²⁵ An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.²⁶ They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan--the one you testified about--well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."²⁷ To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.²⁸ You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah [Christ] but am sent ahead of him.'²⁹ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.

The **players** in this scene are Jesus (v 22), his disciples (v 22), John the Baptist (v 23), people coming to be baptized by John (v 23), some of John's disciples (v 25), and a Jew who questions John's disciples about the relation between John and Jesus (v 23).

The **setting** has changed from the meeting of Jesus and Nicodemus to the Judean countryside, where Jesus and his disciples are baptizing (v 22), to a parallel scene in Aenon near Salim in Samaria where John the Baptist is questioned by his disciples about what Jesus is doing (v 23-30). The dating is, most likely, shortly after the Passover feast of April, 28 AD.

The **action** is that of Jesus and his disciples going into the Judean countryside where he spent some time with his disciples and baptized those coming to him as did John (v 22). We also see John continuing to baptize and a discussion between him and some of his disciples concerning the activity of Jesus (v 23-30).

The **dialogue** begins at 3:26, when John's disciples ask him about Jesus. John's reply to them makes up the content of the script or dialogue of this scene. John's answer to them identifies Jesus as the one for whom he has been preparing the way, and informs them of the growth of the following of Jesus and the decrease of his own following. Most of the themes of this text develop out of this speech.

The **themes** present in this text are as follows: Jesus (the teacher) takes some time to be with his disciples which was, most likely, to begin teaching them, in keep with the role of a master to his disciples (v 22). We also have the theme of baptism (v 22), which is called "ceremonial washing" in verse 25. The question of the identity of Jesus is present throughout, specifically, in vv 26-30. The popularity of Jesus is seen in verse 26.

John's reply to his disciples is, essentially, a christological confession given by the Baptist (vv 27-30). John informed them that he had done what he came to do, he was here to accomplish what the will of heaven had revealed to him (v 27); he had told them earlier that he was not the Messiah but was sent ahead of him (v 28). John's mysterious statement concerning the brides recognition of the bridegrooms voice is a subtle indication of his recognition of the voice of the one for whom he came to prepare the way (v 29), and now that the Messiah was here, John's ministry must cease and Jesus' ministry must now begin (v 30).

As for an **interpretation** of what John is doing with this block of material, it appears that John is developing Jesus messianic role and increasing his activity. Those hearing him are beginning to recognize that there is something very powerful and very special about him, and all of this points to the possibility that the promised Messiah of God has finally come and he is Jesus of Nazareth. Following these two scenes, John tells of Jesus movement toward Galilee and his interaction with the people of a Samaritan town, who, after encountering him, came to believe that he was indeed the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Scene Two (3:31-36): Editorial Comment by John

"The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³²He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. ³³The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. ³⁴For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. ³⁵The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

John uses this literary device to summarize previous material and/or introduce new material; here it is to summarize. These “narrative comments” usually contain a good number of **themes** and, because they are comments, the literary features such as players, setting, action, etc. are not present “on stage;” the content of the text takes the form of comments addressed to the audience from an off-stage voice. In this editorial comment the voice presents the audience with **images, themes, or motifs** he wishes the reader or audience to visualize. The language of these editorial narratives is often foreboding or esoteric, as though what is being said is an insightful piece of revelation coming from a voice somewhere other than the stage. The language presented here draws up images of **players**: the one who comes from above (v 31), the one who comes from the earth (v 31), the one who comes from heaven (v 31), he who testifies to what he has seen and heard (John himself?), (v 32), the one who accepts the testimony (the believer), (v 33), the one sent by God (v 34), the Father (v 35), the Son (v 35), the one who believes (v 36) and the one who disbelieves or rejects the Son (v 36).

There is **no setting**, but there is implied **action** in the imagery, such as: someone coming from above (v 31), someone coming from heaven (i.e., a visitation of God), (v 31), someone testifying of what he has seen and heard (v 32), the rejection of the testimony (v 32), an affirmation that the one bearing the testimony is speaking as moved by God (the author is claiming inspiration?), (v 34), a divine affirmation of the claims of the Son (v 35), and a comment that the ability to attain eternal life is directly related to one's willingness to believe (v 36).

The whole text is **dialogue** (or a **monologue**), which is filled with themes. The **themes** here are: the one about whom he is speaking has been sent from God, thus, it is a visitation of God (v 31), eye witness testimony (v 32), rejection of the testimony (v 32), to accept the testimony is to know that God is truthful (v 33), the one speaking from God has the Spirit of God without measure (v 34), the love of the Father for the Son (v 35), the giving of authority to the Son (v 35), belief in the Son (v 36), disbelief or rejection of the Son (v 36), eternal life (v 36), and the wrath of God (v 36). We have a "heaven and earth" motif, an "ascent and descent" motif, a "thisworldly and otherworldly" motif (vv 31), a "representative of God motif" (v 31, 35), and a "belief/disbelief" motif; all running throughout this narrative.

As for **interpretation**, John is summarizing his presentation thus far. Someone has been expected, someone has said that the expected one is soon to arrive, someone appeared, someone has said that he was the one expected, they said this someone was from God, some believe that he is the expected one, others disbelieve. Those who believe that he is the coming one will see life. Those who do not believe will not see life, they will only see the abiding wrath of God which comes upon all those refusing to believe (or believe in) God's word. With this editorial comment serving as a transition point, John moves to Jesus' journey into Samaria (4:1-42).