

THE IDENTITY AND OUTCOME OF THE BRANCHES IN JOHN 15:1–6

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Abstract

Historically, scholars have interpreted John 15:1–6 by translating the term ἀῖψω in verse 2 as ‘cut off’ or “removed” and viewing the harvest and fire imagery in verse 6 as a reference to eternal judgement. This paper challenges that reading by applying Conceptual Blending Metaphor and Allusion Theory to engage the text from a literary and historical perspective. It argues that ἀῖψω should be translated as ‘lifted up,’ identifying Peter and the disciples as the narrative referent of the unfruitful branches and that eternal judgement is not in view in verse 6. This argument is developed by situating the text within its OT allusions, examining the characterization of the disciples and Judas Iscariot, analyzing how “in me” functions in the text, and comparing the fire imagery in verse 6 with the synoptic judgement imagery with how judgement functions in John.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

While the “I am” statements in John are known to reveal the identity of Jesus, the final statement in John 15:1–6 focuses more on the identity, character, and outcome of his disciples. Jesus says, “I am the true vine, my father is the vinedresser... you are the branches.” There is consensus that the imagery surrounding the vine and the vinedresser refers to an OT symbolic network found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Psalm 80 among others. However, the identity, character, and outcome of the branches is still up for contention. There are two main points of view.¹

The first perspective maintains that there are two kinds of branches. The ones that do not bear fruit and the ones that do. They assume the branches being referred to in verse 2 are the same branches referred to in verse 6. They interpret the word “abide” as key to salvation.² The language in verse 6 is viewed as eternal judgment. The other point of view sees three kinds of branches and separates the outcome of the non-fruit bearing branches in verse 2 with the ones in verse 6. Rather than interpreting αἶπει as “taken away,” or “cut off,” this perspective translates it as “lifted up.” It also views the judgement motif in verse 6 as referring to the branches that, after having been given the opportunity to bear fruit (a second chance), refuse to abide, and therefore experience a form of judgement. This viewpoint either holds to the same interpretation of “abide” as the first or interprets the word “abide” as fellowship which views the judgment in verse 6 as a non-salvation issue. This will be addressed in the literature review.

The answer to this disagreement seems to lie in how the narrative within the Gospel of John uses common motifs of the time (i.e. the vine, branches, and judgment metaphors). These work together within John 15:1–6 to create a change of perspective from God’s people

¹ Joseph C. Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1–6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990): 50. While this is an older article, it gives a concise description of the different perspectives on the identity and outcome of the fruitless branches.

² Laney uses the word “believing” and Keener uses the word “persevering,” but both assume that salvation is in view with abiding and not abiding. See J. Carl Laney, “Abiding is Believing: the Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1–6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (January-March 1989): 55–66. and Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2003), 1001.

being passive participants in God's redemption story to active ones through their special "abiding" relationship with Jesus.

Literature Review: Scholarly Consensus and Disagreement

There is a significant amount of consensus among scholars concerning the primary metaphor found of John 15:1–6: “I am the true vine.” The disagreement occurs in the subordinate metaphors regarding the role of Father, and the identity and outcome of the branches.³ As representatives of the accepted scholarly stance surrounding Jesus’ I am statement, Craig Keener’s commentary on John, and David Mark’s monograph *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications*,⁴ meticulously engage with historical sources or with the background and function of “I am” in the Gospel of John.

Brief Overview of “I am” and “Vine”

The consensus is that the vine imagery references both the OT and 1st century viticulture.⁵ Keener points to both. He suggests Ps 80:8–16; Isa 27:2–6; Jer 2:21; Ezek 15:2–6; 17:5–10; 19:10–14; and Isa 5:1–7 as potential texts being alluded to in John 15, and the golden vine that is in the Herodian temple. These references indicate that the nation of Israel was referred to as a vine both in the OT and in the first century. Keener contrasts some scholars that suggest an allusion to the Lord’s Supper,⁶ Wisdom (The Law),⁷ or a Hellenistic background.⁸ That said, he encourages his reader to not depend solely on an OT allusion for interpretation. He states:

³ I have limited my range to representative works written or translated into English which also engage with the background and interpretation of key terms associated with the vine, vinedresser, or branch imagery in John 15:1–6.

⁴ David Mark Ball, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

⁵ See Keener, *John*, 991.; Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 491; and Gary W. Derickson, “Viticulture and John 15:1–6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996): 34–52.

⁶ See Keener, *John*, 990. “Bernard, *John*, 2:477–78; Brown, *Essays*, 102–3; Richardson, *Theology*, 377; Brodie, *Gospel*, 482; cf. Hoskyns, *Gospel*, 474, and Barrett, *John*, 472, who combine the Last Supper tradition with the biblical image of Israel as a vine. This tradition is likely early; *Did.* 9.2 uses Jesus as the vine as part of the eucharistic thanksgiving.”

⁷ From Sirach 24:17.

⁸ Keener, *John*, 990–91.

[The] vine imagery was common enough without necessary specific allusions to standard symbolism... Many scholars, nevertheless, suspect that this passage alludes to more than merely the standard function implied in the image of vine and branches.⁹

While Keener is hesitant to fully commit to the vine as being solely an OT allusion, his balanced engagement with past scholarship, and historical context point to a strong link between the metaphorical network of Israel as a vine.¹⁰ David Mark Ball takes a stronger stance in his study of ἐγώ εἰμι with a predicate, and states that ἐγώ εἰμι “functions as an integral part of the unfolding narrative” and “because the ‘I am’ sayings also focus attention on the person of Jesus, each time the words occur they further reveal something of Jesus’ role or identity so that the narrator’s point of view first disclosed in the Prologue is reinforced.”¹¹

He concludes:

The words ἐγώ εἰμι thus act as a formula which applies Old Testament and Jewish concepts to the person of Jesus who embodies and fulfills them... The Gospel itself provides clues which point to the Old Testament and Judaism as the correct conceptual background for the use of ἐγώ εἰμι.¹²

He arrives at this conclusion after engaging with each relevant pericope considering its setting, structure, character/characterization, irony, point of view, implied reader, and other themes and titles.¹³

Background of “Vinedresser” and “Branches”

The scholarship on the vinedresser focuses primarily on the Father’s actions, (i.e. pruning, taking away, etc.), rather than his character. Because of this, it is closely related to the outcome of the branches and so I have included the discussion on the vinedresser along with the discussion on the branches. In this section we will examine Gary Derickson’s article

⁹ Keener, *John*, 990.

¹⁰ He also cautions: “If the vine alludes to Israel, the designation “true” (15:1) may forcefully contrast Jesus with Israel. One should not overstate the contrast; whereas “true” can exclude any others (17:3), it can also simply contrast with “mere”... [F]or John, “becoming a true Jew and becoming a Christian are one and the same thing.” See Keener, *John*, 993.

¹¹ Ball, “*I Am*” in *John’s Gospel*, 149.

¹² Ball, “*I Am*” in *John’s Gospel*, 259.

¹³ In contrast to older scholarship, Ball argues against 1) seeing a direct connection between sign, discourse, and the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings, (29-32), 2) a Mandaean background (164-165), and 3) a sharp distinction between role and identity dependent on whether the “I am” saying has a predicate or not (260).

“Viticulture and John 15:1–6,”¹⁴ Keener’s commentary, and Joseph C. Dillow’s article “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1–6.”¹⁵

Keener details how vinedressers in the Mediterranean pruned their stock in both method and timing. He references examples of pruning in the OT¹⁶ and examples of how pruning analogies were used in the broader Greco-Roman culture in reference to morality, or the lack thereof. He builds a case for a moral understanding of pruning and fruit because of a play on words between John’s use of καθαίρω (John 15:2) and καθαρός (John 13:10). The first, while it should be properly translated as “prune,” points backwards to the previous Johannine use of καθαρός which refers to “being clean” or “cleansed.”¹⁷

Derickson’s article primarily engages with the identity of the branches in John 15:1–6.¹⁸ He uses historical and cultural data and argues two things: 1) that αἶρει should be translated as “lifted up”¹⁹ and, 2) that the cutting off of non-abiding branches to be burned refers to the wintertime pruning and specifically does not mention unfruitfulness, therefore the branches in verses 2 and 6 are different. He concludes:

When Jesus gave the analogy of the vine and the branches, He based it on the cultural practice of His day, which was to clean up only the fruit-bearing branches and tidy up the rows during the early spring growth following blooming. Severe pruning and removal of branches did not occur until the grapes were harvested and dormancy was being induced. Since Jesus was speaking in the spring, it is more natural to see His words in John 15:2 as referring to the spring practice. The viticultural use of καθαίρει, which describes the removal of sprouts from fruiting branches, should inform the meaning of αἶρει. Both actions occurring simultaneously.²⁰

Keener disagrees with Derickson giving four reasons why αἶρει cannot be translated as “lifted up:”

[Firstly,] it is not the vine but the branch which is lifted... [Secondly,] ‘lifting’ can refer to removal no less than ‘taking away’ does... [Thirdly,] Palestinian farmers may

¹⁴ Derickson, “Viticulture and John 15:1–6,” 34–52.

¹⁵ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship,” 44–53.

¹⁶ Lev 25:3–4; Song 2:12; Isa 2:4; 5:6; 18:5; Joel 3:10; Mic 4:3. See Keener, *John*, 995.

¹⁷ Keener, *John*, 996. See also, George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., vol. 36 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 272.

¹⁸ He summarizes two Calvinistic views on the passage. The first is that both kinds of branches refer to nonbelievers who are professing Christians and who will experience judgement in hell. The second is “that unfruitful branches represent believers who are cared for by God and later disciplined.” (36–37)

¹⁹ Derickson, “Viticulture and John 15:1–6,” 48.

²⁰ Derickson, “Viticulture and John 15:1–6,” 52.

have often done without supports, marring the image of ‘lifting’ the vine back into place.²¹

These first three reasons seem negligible. Vine and branches are semantically connected and therefore, it would not be a stretch to see “lift” in connection with branch. The semantic range of αἶπει is not conclusive to determine one way or the other, and that Palestinian farmers *may have* done without supports has the same weight that *they may have used* supports. His final point has more weight. He states:

[T]he branch is lifted away because it bears no fruit, the result in this context of failing to “abide” (15:4–6), a condition that 15:5 explicitly claims results in being cast away and eventually burned. Thus it is probable that the image of 15:2, like the image of 15:6, addresses apostate branches who fail to persevere.²²

But with Keener’s last point, it is based on his interpretation of “abide” which has some contention. Joseph Dillow in his article interprets “abide” as “remaining in fellowship.”²³ He argues that “when Jesus used this phrase [in Me], He referred to a life of fellowship, a unity of purpose, rather than organic connection.”²⁴ He uses John 16:33 as an example:

The experience of peace in the midst of persecution comes only to believers who are obediently walking in His commandments and aligned with His purposes. “These things I have spoken to you, that *in Me* you may have peace.”²⁵

He suggests the Johannine sense of “in Me” is separate from the forensic use of Paul’s term “in Christ.”²⁶ He states, “To be ‘in Me’ is to be in fellowship with Christ, living obediently.”²⁷ Therefore, it is possible for a Christian not to be ‘in Me’ in the Johannine sense. Thus, Dillow argues against viewing “remaining” (abiding) as the same as “believing” in the Johannine sense.

While I agree with Dillow’s argument, Keener interprets “abide” as “persevere.” He looks to the synoptics for support and argues “that only some who initially embrace Jesus’ message would persevere in fruitfulness to salvation.”²⁸ I believe “persevere”

²¹ Keener, *John*, 1001.

²² Keener, *John*, 1001.

²³ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship,” 46.

²⁴ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship,” 46.

²⁵ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship,” 47. Emphasis added.

²⁶ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship,” 46.

²⁷ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship,” 47.

²⁸ Keener, *John*, 1000.

could be an adequate interpretation of “abide” but Keener fails to account for how John uses the term “in Me.”

Derickson and Dillow view the judgement in verse 6 from a sanctification perspective. Dillow’s view of verse 6 connects it to Paul’s explanation of believers being judged in 1 Corinthians 3:15.²⁹ He states, “To what does the fire refer? Fire is a common symbol in the Bible for God’s judgment on His people in time (e.g., Isa 5:24; 9:19). Less frequently it is associated with the fires of hell.”³⁰ Derickson views verse 6 as the removal of useless branches rather than specific judgement but goes on to state:

That verse 6 looks at the Fall, postharvest pruning is seen in the practice of burning all the wood not attached to the vine. Thus even if verse 6 is seen as teaching a judgment on those who do not abide in Christ, it cannot be used to inform the meaning of verse 2.³¹

This is sharply contrasted with Keener who views the judgement in verse 2 and 6 as the removal from the people of God.³²

Conclusion

As can be seen from above, there is a division in the scholarship regarding the outcome and identity of the branches in John 15:1–6. Each scholar approaches the problem with a different method. Derickson primarily focuses on viticultural practices and concludes a separation between the outcomes of the non-fruit bearing branches in verse 2 and 6. Keener considers the non-fruit bearing branches in verse 2 and 6 as parallel as both have failed to abide, and therefore the outcome of both is separation from the faith community. According to Keener, “abiding” is the same as persevering in one’s faith so that to fail to abide is a salvation issue. Dillow focuses on the Johannine use of “in Me” to argue that the vine-branch imagery reveals, not an organic connection (believing and therefore salvation), but a connection by fellowship, which means that the judgement motif is not eternal judgement but only the removal of life on earth. Considering this disagreement, engaging with the identity and outcome of the branches from a new perspective will be helpful.

²⁹ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship,” 53.

³⁰ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship,” 53.

³¹ Derickson, “Viticulture and John 15:1–6,” 52.

³² Keener, *John*, 1000.

Thesis statement

This thesis will reengage John 15:1–6 with a renewed focus on the literary and historical background of the metaphors connected to and surrounding the imagery of the branches. This includes not only the source material (how branches are used in the OT) but also the target material (the disciples). I believe this focus has the potential to answer the following question: What is the identity and outcome of the branches that do not bear fruit in verses 2 and 6?

To answer this question a few others must also be addressed including: 1) Who is the narrative referent of the “branches that do not bear fruit” in verse 2, and how does that inform the translation of ἀῖπει? 2) How should the term “abide” be understood? 3) Does judgement function within the text and how does that inform our understanding of verse 6?

If we hold that the outcome of the non-bearing fruit in verse 2 is that it is “taken away” or “cut off”, the narrative referent could be Judas Iscariot.³³ In that case, the outcome of the judgement in verse 6 would mirror the judgement of Judas found in John 17:12 who Jesus calls “the one destined to be lost.” In essence, the text would be speaking about the removal of unfruitful people from the faith community. “Abiding,” therefore, would refer to salvation, not fellowship.

The alternative would be that Peter and the other disciples are the narrative referent as the “unfruitful branch” with ἀῖπει translated as “lifted up” which would point forward in the narrative to Peter’s reinstatement after his betrayal of Jesus. The narrative would be understood as follows: Peter fails to “abide” (John 18:15–18, 25–27) is then “lifted up” to a place where he is able to “abide” once more (John 21:15–19). This would potentially separate the outcome of the non–fruit bearing branches in verse 2 with the outcome of the non-fruit bearing branches of verse 6. “Abiding” would, therefore, be understood to mean fellowship.

In this thesis I will argue that Peter (and by extension the disciples) are the narrative referent of the branch that does not bear fruit in verse 2, and therefore the proper translation

³³ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 4, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 312.

of αἶπει would be “lifted up.” I will also argue that the judgement motif found in verse 6 does not refer to final, eternal judgement but only to the removal of life here on earth.

Methodology

In this study, the above questions will be approached using Conceptual Blending Metaphor Theory (CBMT) and Allusion Theory (AT).³⁴ Before outlining my procedure and parameters for the application of this methodology, I will give a brief description of CBMT and AT, and the benefits of using them as a methodological framework.

Metaphors create new meaning by taking two different subjects and naming one in light of the other. CBMT describes these subjects (or inputs/components) of metaphors as conceptual domains.³⁵ Zoltán Kövecses defines a *domain* as “a coherent organization of human experience”³⁶ and states, “*A conceptual metaphor is a systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience.*”³⁷ The source domain (second input) is used to name, define, or characterize the target domain (first input). For example, in John 15, “branches” is the source domain, which is used to define “You (the disciples)” who are the target domain. The cultural and literary backgrounds for these terms are the *organization of human experience* that Kövecses references.

Zoltán Kövecses describes key concepts in conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) but he does not engage with the blending component of my chosen methodology. I chose CBMT rather than CMT as I believe it captures the reality of how the first metaphoric component (target domain) influences the overall meaning of the metaphor. Specifically, CBMT expands on CMT by showing how elements from each input space interact to produce meaning not found in either domain.³⁸ This makes CBMT useful for biblical interpretation, where

³⁴ This idea came about from reading Susan Hylen, *Allusion and Meaning in John 6* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005) and Beth M. Stovell, *Mapping Metaphorical Discourse in the Fourth Gospel: John’s Eternal King* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), but is primarily founded on the following: Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). See also Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

³⁵ Hylen, *Allusion and Meaning in John 6*, 65.

³⁶ Zoltán Kövecses, “Conceptual Metaphor Theory” in *Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language*, edited by Elena Semino and Zsófia Demjén, (Milton Park: Routledge 2017), 12.

³⁷ Kövecses, “Conceptual Metaphor Theory,” 2.

³⁸ The idea of using metaphor theory to engage with John 15 is not new. See Ruben van de Belt, ““Refiguring Christ, the True Vine: An Exploration of an Ἐγώ Εἰμι Saying Using Ricoeur’s Concept of

metaphors often combine theological, cultural, and narrative elements to generate new meaning. To understand how the two domains are interacting, CBMT creates a conceptual map. This map creates equivalences between the two inputs. A common and simple example is the metaphor THE SURGEON IS A BUTCHER.

Surgeon = Butcher

Tools of Surgery = Tools of Butchery

Purpose of Surgery = Purpose of Butchery

Conceptual mapping looks at the text in hand, or target domain (the disciples), and the text out of hand, or source domain (the branches) to determine what concept connects the two inputs. This is achieved by determining the cultural and literary source of the inputs and then comparing the source and target domains to find the shared conceptual connection. This shared concept is called “generic space.”³⁹ From there, the source domain is mapped and interpreted in light of the generic space which then is used to interpret the target domain.

Practically, the metaphorical inputs must be understood within their culture and literary background which make Allusion Theory a helpful tool. Simply, AT compares how the current text (in our case John 15) references previous texts (OT and Hellenistic writings) and interprets the meaning of these references by considering both contexts. The vine, branch and judgment imagery in John 15 are allusions and therefore, must be understood within the source domains’ literary backgrounds. In *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, Richard Hays has seven criteria for what constitutes an allusion. The first is *availability*, which asks whether the proposed alluded passage could have been known to the author. The second is *volume*, which looks at the degree of explicit repetition of words and syntactic patterns between the text and the supposed text being referenced. *Re-occurrence* asks whether the supposed alluded text is alluded to elsewhere in the author’s work and *thematic coherence* asks whether the reference fits with the tenor or overall message of the text. *Historical plausibility* asks whether the author could have intended the allusion and whether the

‘Metaphor,’” *Scriptura* 116, no. 1 (December 31, 2017): 1–11. He uses Ricoeur’s concept of metaphor which uses the structure: “Jesus” is, is not, and is like “the True Vine.” The difficulty with this view of metaphor is that as Belt describes, “All the possible meanings of the “true vine” are activated by this usage” which negates how the context of the text informs how the metaphor is to be understood. See Belt, “Reconfiguring Christ, the True Vine,” 8. This form of reading does reflect the mystery of Jesus, but divorces the metaphor from how it functions within the narrative.

³⁹ Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 41.

audience would have understood it. *History of interpretation* asks whether others throughout history have noticed an allusion within the text. The final criterion *satisfaction*⁴⁰ asks whether or not the supposed allusion makes sense within the new context after all the above criteria are met.⁴¹

Using CBMT and AT will help explain more fully Christ's relationship with the branches. Understanding the literary characterization of the disciples in John will inform who the referent of the non-fruit bearing branch is in verse 2, which will lead to the proper translation of ἀῖπει. Also, understanding the imagery surrounding judgement in verse 6 and how that relates to the rest of the Gospel of John will inform not only the outcome of the non-fruit bearing branches but also the proper understanding of "abide."

Procedure

The question that arises at this point is *how does one define the cultural and literary background of the metaphorical components in John 15:1–6?* Practically, this will involve engaging with the different allusions found within John 15:1–6 surrounding the imagery of the branches in the MT, LXX, and in the Gospel of John. For verse 2, I will track how Peter (and the disciples in general) and Judas Iscariot (specifically) are characterized within the Gospel to determine the likely referent. With the disciples, I will focus primarily on the immediate context of the Farewell Discourse. For the branches' imagery, I will use AT to engage with the necessary OT and LXX texts. I will also take into account how the branches are the subordinate metaphor to Jesus' statement "I am the true vine." This is important as Jesus reveals the nature of his relationship with his followers using "true vine," and "branches."

I will analyze the statements "I am the True Vine" and "You are the Branches" by tracking the metaphors of PEOPLE/IDEALS/OBJECTS AS PLANTS in the OT using AT focusing on key texts. This means I will focus on semantically connected metaphorical

⁴⁰ Stanley E. Porter finds Hays' criteria problematic but seems to conflate issues surrounding the language Hays uses rather than the criteria with regard to availability, and volume. Specifically, Porter finds Hays fails to engage with authorial intent, and would probably prefer the language of verbal coherence instead of "volume." I applied this criterion on well-known texts where other scholars have also seen allusions. See Stanley E. Porter, "Allusions and Echoes" in *As It Is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture*, edited by Stanley E. Porter, and Christopher D. Stanley (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 36-40.

⁴¹ Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29–32.

references of the target domain and terms that describe a person, people group or a personification of an ideal or object. With regard to “My Father is the vinedresser,” I will analyze texts that use the metaphorical input of GARDENING and FARMING. The judgement motif will be addressed by examining how the allusions of John 15:1–6 use these metaphors. HARVEST AS JUDGEMENT and FIRE AS JUDGEMENT.

After determining the source domain of the different metaphors found in John 15:1–6, I will determine how their use in John 15 is blended with the first metaphorical input (target domain) to create new meaning. As mentioned above, the target domain will be found from the context of the Gospel of John. I will engage with how Jesus, God and the disciples are characterized throughout the text with specific focus on the Prologue, on titles given to Jesus or God (The Father), and narrative examples of how the disciples⁴² and Judas Iscariot are characterized.

⁴² This would include Peter, the beloved disciple, and the other disciples with the exception of Judas Iscariot.

Chapter 2: Jesus and Major Allusions in John 15:1–6

John 15:1–6 contains three specific metaphors: Jesus and the True Vine, the Father and the Vinedresser, and “you” and the branches. The final metaphor (You are the branches) must be understood in light of the primary metaphor of Jesus as the True Vine. This chapter will engage with how Jesus is characterized in John by focusing on the Prologue and the “I Am” Statements, and unpack LXX Psalm 79:9–20 and LXX Isaiah 5:1–7 which are two major allusions in John 15 noting the implications for interpreting Jesus’ final “I am” statement.

Jesus in John

Prologue

The Prologue functions as an introduction not only to the Gospel of John, but to Jesus who is given the title ὁ λόγος. The background of this term is complex but it is connected with both Jewish and Greek philosophy and theology.¹ Craig Keener summarizes his discussion of Jesus as Logos:

John’s choice of the Logos (embracing also Wisdom and Torah) to articulate his Christology was brilliant: no concept better articulated an entity that was both divine yet distinct from the Father. By using this term John could present Jesus as the epitome of what his community’s opponents claimed to value: God’s word revealed through Moses. Jesus was thus the supreme revelation of God; the Torah had gone forth from Zion.²

J. Ramsey Michaels suggests not putting as much weight on the title Logos as other commentators. He notes that “Light... is a dominant image throughout at least the first half of the Gospel...”³ and that “The Gospel of John is about revelation; the text begins with audible revelation (‘Word’), moving on to visible revelation (‘light’), and thence back and forth between the two (embodied in Jesus’ signs and discourses) as the story unfolds.”⁴ The amount of weight one gives either the theme of Logos or Light does not change the fact that

¹ For a discussion on this see Keener, *John*, 339–363 and Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John’s Prologue*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 89, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

² Keener, *John*, 363. For a further discussion on this see Keener, *John*, 339–363.

³ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 46.

⁴ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 46.

we are supposed to understand the whole story of Jesus in light of what is revealed in this short text. Christopher Skinner in his contribution to *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel* notes:

The audience is given the tools needed to interpret the gospel in the prologue... [and] is expected to read the rest of John through the prologue's spectacles, seeing in every historical scene or moment not merely Jesus the Jew but Jesus the Word-became-flesh, who was with God in the beginning.⁵

Commentators note an allusion as the language Ἐν ἀρχῇ points back to LXX Genesis 1:1.⁶ What follows in John 1:1–3 is that this Logos, Jesus, is revealed as pre-existent, divine, and involved in the creation of all things. He is revealed as God but distinct in person. “ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.” Keener notes:

[The anarthrous construction] cannot note ‘a god,’ as in ‘one of many,’ given Jesus’ unique titles, role, and relationship with the Father later in the Gospel. Nor should it mean ‘divine’ in a weaker sense distinct from God’s own divine nature... [John] spends much of the rest of his Gospel clarifying the ambiguous distinction between God and the Logos promulgated in the lines of this first verse.⁷

Beasley-Murray goes on to state that for the Jews “the Word of God, was not so much an expression of thought as a powerful *action*, a concept not native to Greeks.”⁸ Craig Evans’ work *Word and Glory* states:

Even when the Prologue is divided into two parts, reflecting the λόγος ἄσαρκος (vv. 1–5), the ‘creation’ half, and the λόγος ἑνσαρκος (vv. 6–18), the ‘covenant’ half, we find that the biblical Wisdom materials parallel all of the principal components. With respect to the former we hear echoes of the attributes and activities of Sophia (and, in many instances, of God’s *logos* as well).⁹

As is seen in the scholarship, there is both consensus and disagreement on the nuances of the background of the Prologue but, I believe that the themes of light, and logos both function to reference Torah and Wisdom. The imagery serves to characterize Jesus as God and while separate from the Father, as the Word of God, acts in accordance to the Father’s will. Jesus is revealed as the creative, physical representation/revelation of God to the world.

⁵ Christopher Skinner, “Characterization,” in *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Douglas Estes and Ruth Sheridan (Mill Road: SBL Press, 2007), 250–51.

⁶ See Keener, *John*, 365. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 10. Michael, *John*, 46.

⁷ Keener, *John*, 372–73.

⁸ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 7.

⁹ Evans, *Word and Glory*, 92–93.

I Am Statements

As Jesus is revealed as the “Logos,” the creative action of God in the world, it seems fitting that Jesus’ declarations that He is “the bread of life” (6:35), “the Light of the World” (8:12), “the door” (10:9), “the Good Shepherd” (10:11–14), “the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “the way and the truth and the life” (14:6), and “the true vine” (15:1–5) function to reveal how Jesus relates to His people. David Mark Ball states:

As well as applying an Old Testament concept of a current Jewish expectation to Jesus, the ἐγώ εἰμι of John also takes some of the main themes of the Gospel and explicitly shows that Jesus is both the fulfillment and the embodiment of those themes.¹⁰

Jesus’ final “I am statement” functions this way as well, but focuses more on how His people are to relate to Him rather than the other way around.

Major LXX Allusions in John 15

In the primary metaphor of John 15:1–6, Jesus says: Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή... “I am the true vine...” This metaphor introduces the pericope with the conceptual metaphor of PEOPLE AS PLANTS and functions to draw the readers toward a particular metaphorical network. Current scholarship suggests that John’s Gospel and the original audience would have looked to the OT to interpret the imagery. So how is this metaphorical network expressed in the OT? We will initially look at the big picture allusions found in LXX Ps 79, LXX Isa 5:1–7, and then focus on the specific way κλήμα is used in those passages and in other important texts of the OT.

LXX Psalm 79:9–20 (80:1–19 MT)

Allusion Criteria

In his work in *Commentary on the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament*, Andreas J. Köstenberger counts fourteen direct quotations of the OT in the Gospel of John. Seven of those are from the Psalms.¹¹ He also notes seventeen potential allusions to the

¹⁰ Ball, *I Am*, 154.

¹¹ Köstenberger, “John,” 417.

Psalms throughout John in his introduction.¹² Even the direct quotations of the Psalms alone in John are good evidence of the text being available to the author.

There are also several repeated terms and themes from John 15:1–6 in LXX Psalm 79:9–20. 1) ἄμπελος is used metaphorically to refer to the nation of Israel. 2) The term κλῆμα is present in Ps 79:12, and 3) the NETS translates the phrase τρυγῶσιν αὐτὴν πάντες LXX Ps 79:13 (80:12 MT) as “pluck its fruit...” implying the term καρπὸν which is found in John 15. 4) The phrase Κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων is a parallel to ὁ πατήρ in John 15 as Jesus uses it to refer to God throughout that Gospel. In both cases, God is the one caring or tending to the vine. 5) Both passages also reference fire (see Ps 79:17, John 15:6). The frequency of repeated terms and themes in Ps 79 is significant and fulfills Hay’s allusion criterion of *volume*. On top of this, in John 10:11, Jesus says, Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός, “I am the good shepherd.” This corresponds to similar language in LXX Ps 79:1–3 which refers to God as Ὁ ποιμαίνων τὸν Ἰσραὴλ. “The shepherd of Israel.” This covers the re-occurrence criterion for allusions.

Breakdown

John Goldingay, in his commentary on Psalms, notes the intertextual connection between Ps 79 with the preceding two psalms (Ps 77–78).¹³ He notes the rejection of Joseph and Ephraim in LXX 77:67 corresponds to the cry of the psalmist in Ps 79:2:

*You who shepherd Israel,¹⁴ pay
attention,
you who guide Joseph like sheep!
You who sit upon the cheroubin,
appear!
Before Ephraim and Benjamin
and Manasse
arouse your dominance,
and come in order to save us!
(LXX Ps 79:2)¹⁵*

*And he rejected the covert of Joseph,
and the tribe of Ephraim he did not
choose,
and he chose the tribe of Judas,
Mount Sion, which he loved.
(LXX Ps 77:67–68)*

¹² Köstenberger, “John,” 419–20.

¹³ John Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89, Vol. 2*, in *Psalms: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 533.

¹⁴ Goldingay also notes the shepherding metaphor at the end of LXX Ps. 78, connects with the beginning of LXX Ps. 79. These connections suggest a larger context that we are to use to interpret LXX Ps. 79. See Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 533.

¹⁵ All English translations of the LXX will be the NETS unless otherwise stated.

LXX Ps 77 is also addressed to the congregation and is a retelling of the narrative from Exodus to 2 Samuel.¹⁶ Goldingay states:

The psalm itself introduces the narrative by an exhortation to listen and a reminder about the need to learn from the story of the ancestors a lesson about faithfulness... it makes one point explicit and inescapable: the vital importance of faithfulness and obedience rather than rebellion and defiance.¹⁷

These frame the understanding of LXX Ps 79 within the context of Israel's disobedience and subsequent rejection by God. Goldingay suggests that Ps 79 is a response or protest against Yahweh's rejection of Joseph found in LXX Ps 77:67–68.¹⁸

The refrain, “ἐπίστρεψον ἡμᾶς,”¹⁹ is repeated three times in Ps 79 (vv. 4, 8, 20) and the future passive indicative of σῶζω is used in verse 8 and 20, which reinforces that if God was to reveal his face, they “will be saved.” There is no question in the psalm whether God has the power to save, but the question lies in whether God *will* save and restore. In fact, Κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων²⁰ is repeated four times, the latter three connected with an appeal for God to act.

The Psalmist uses ἕως πότε (5b) to inquire of God:

how long (ἕως πότε)
will you be angry with the prayer of your slave
Will you feed them with bread of tears,
And you will give them tears to drink in measure.²¹

The reason for the tears is explained in verse 7:

<i>ἔθου ἡμᾶς εἰς ἀντιλογίαν τοῖς γείτοσιν ἡμῶν, καὶ οἱ ἐχθροὶ ἡμῶν ἐμυκτήρισαν ἡμᾶς.²²</i>	<i>You placed us as a controversy to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us</i>
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¹⁶ Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 479.

¹⁷ Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 479.

¹⁸ Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 533. It is likely that “Ioseph, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasse” is a synecdoche referring to all of Israel. See C. Hassell Bullock, *Psalms 73–150*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 60.

¹⁹ The imperative heightens the plea.

²⁰ NETS translates this as “O God of hosts...” while the LES translates it as “O Lord, the God of mighty powers.” See Rick Brannan et al., eds., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), Ps 79:5. And Albert Pietersma, ed., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: The Psalm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²¹ Pietersma, *NETS: Psalms*, Psalm 79: 5b–6.

²² Unless otherwise stated. I will be using Alfred Rahlfs *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).

This verse denotes the Northern Kingdom was either being ruled by another nation or being oppressed by one. The superscription in the LXX states: Εἰς τὸ τέλος, ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀλλοιωθησομένων· μαρτύριον τῷ Ἀσάφ, ψαλμὸς ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἀσσυρίου. (*To the completion, over the ones who will be changed. A testimony of Asaph, a psalm over the Assyrians.*) C. Hassell Bullock notes in his commentary that some scholars propose the historical occasion for LXX Ps 79 is the fall of the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians in 732–722 BCE., but goes on to state “while this psalm was not likely written in the context of the Babylonian exile, Book 3 certainly uses it in that context, which is the editorial backdrop of the collection.”²³ This suggests the readers/audience in the 1st century would have understood this psalm within this historical context.

LXX Ps 79:9–10 introduces the vine metaphor, and it is clear from the context that Israel is in view. The passage also references the Exodus and the seizing of the Promised Land as God’s work. There is a similar theme introduced here as is used in John 14 with ὁδοποίησας ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῆς (LXX Ps 79:10a) and πορεύομαι ἐτοιμάσαι τόπον ὑμῖν (John 14:2). In each case, a place or way has been or will be prepared for the people of God. Ps 79 also uses the term μεταίρω (v. 9) which is a compound of αἶρω. This term is translated a few different ways. The LES translates this term as “you lifted up” while the NETS translates it as “you transferred.” The equivalent term in the MT (Ps 80:8) is נָחַל which is translated as “uprooted” in the LEB. נָחַל is also used in Ps 78:52 MT to refer to God leading his people. In the LXX equivalent, LXX Ps 77:52 uses another compound of αἶρω: ἀφαιρέω. The way these terms function in the LXX Psalms is not as judgement, but as leading and moving the people of God from a place of slavery and destruction to a place of safety. This will become clearer below when we engage more thoroughly with the text. If John 15 is alluding to Ps 79 and the surrounding literary context, it brings into question the primary way that αἶρω has historically been understood in John 15:2. This will be addressed later.

The result of God planting the vine is described in Ps 79:10–12:

²³ Bullock, *Psalms: 73–150*, 60.

¹⁰ ὥδοποίησας ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῆς,
καὶ κατεφύτευσας τὰς ῥίζας αὐτῆς, καὶ
ἐπλήσθη ἡ γῆ.
¹¹ ἐκάλυπεν ὄρη ἡ σκιά αὐτῆς,
καὶ αἱ ἀναδενδράδες αὐτῆς ἅτας
κέδρους τοῦ θεοῦ.
¹² ἐξέτεινεν τὰ κλήματα αὐτῆς ἕως
θαλάσσης,
καὶ ἕως ποταμοῦ τὰς παραφύδας
αὐτῆς.

¹⁰ You cleared the way for it,
and you planted its roots and it filled
the land.
¹¹ Its shade covered mountains,
and its tendrils the cedars of God;
¹² it sent out its branches as far as the sea,
and as far as the river its shoots.

The picture here is of a flourishing nation. Goldingay notes this passage “sums up the narrative from Joshua to David, in whose day... Israel did occupy the whole land.”²⁴ The proceeding verse describes God removing his protection by introducing another question:²⁵

¹³ ἵνα τί **καθεῖλες** τὸν φραγμὸν αὐτῆς καὶ
τρυγῶσιν αὐτὴν πάντες οἱ
παραπορευόμενοι τὴν ὁδόν;
¹⁴ ἔλυμήνατο αὐτὴν σὺς ἐκ δρυμοῦ,† καὶ
μονιὸς ἄγριος κατενεμήσατο αὐτήν.

¹³ Why did you **bring down**²⁶ its fence,
and all who pass along the way pluck
its fruit?
¹⁴ A boar from the forest ravaged it,
and a lone wild beast fed on it.

Goldingay explains, “Literally what has happened is that enemies have invaded the land, and they have succeeded because YHWH has declined to protect it.”²⁷ The term *καθεῖλες*, is a conjugation of *καθαίρω*²⁸ which Louw-Nida puts in the semantic domain “to do away with, to remove, to eliminate”²⁹ LSJ translates this term as “take down.”³⁰ Ps 79:13b–14 describes the result of God removing the fence but does not move towards answering the question “why” that is introduced. Again, the imagery is one of oppression and destruction. In verses 15–16, the Psalmist expands on the refrain from verse 4.

²⁴ Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 539.

²⁵ The neutered interrogative pronoun τί introduces the question ‘why.’ See David L. Mathewson, *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax for Students of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 45.

²⁶ The LES translates *καθεῖλες* here as “destroy”

²⁷ Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 539–40.

²⁸ Not to be mistaken with *καθαίρω* found in John 15:2 or the prefixed preposition term found in LXX Ps 79. See Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1999), 140.

²⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 152.

³⁰ Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 849.

¹⁵ ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων, ἐπίστρεψον δὴ,
ἐπίβλεψον ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἴδε,
καὶ ἐπίσκεψαι τὴν ἄμπελον ταύτην·
¹⁶ καὶ **κατάρτισαι** αὐτὴν ἣν ἐφύτευσεν ἡ
δεξιὰ σου,
καὶ ἐπὶ υἱόν ἀνθρώπου ὃν ἐκραταίωσας
σεαυτῷ.

¹⁵ O God of hosts, do bring back;
look down from heaven and see,
and have regard for this vine,
¹⁶ and **restore** that which your right
hand planted—
and look upon a son of man, whom
you made strong for yourself.

The psalmist pleads with God to restore the vine, and the son of man. This term, υἱόν ἀνθρώπου is used in the Gospel of John twelve times to refer to Jesus.³¹ This, along with the continued vine metaphor, builds into the connection between John 15 and LXX Ps 79.

In verse 17 the psalmist circles back to imagery of destruction³² using the following perfect participles: ἐμπεπυρισμένη and ἀνεσκαμμέν. The judgement here is characterized as occurring in the past, with present consequences. But, as we will see, the tone of verses 18–19 shifts, and the repeated refrain of “restore us... and we will be saved,” (vv. 4, 8, 20) is one of hope, not further judgement.

Verse 18–19 shifts again to appeal to God:

¹⁸ γενηθήτω ἡ χεὶρ σου ἐπ’ ἄνδρα δεξιᾶς
σου,
καὶ ἐπὶ υἱόν ἀνθρώπου ὃν ἐκραταίωσας
σεαυτῷ·
¹⁹ καὶ οὐ μὴ ἀποστῶμεν ἀπὸ σοῦ·
ζώωσεις ἡμᾶς, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά σου
ἐπικαλεσόμεθα.

¹⁸ Let your hand be upon the man at your
right hand,
and upon a son of man, whom you made
strong for yourself.
¹⁹ And we will never turn away from you;
you will revive us, and we will call
on your name.

Verse 18 begins with the aorist imperative γενηθήτω (make) in which the psalmist implores God to strengthen the υἱόν ἀνθρώπου (the son of man). Likely within the original context of the psalm, υἱόν ἀνθρώπου was a reference to the king,³³ but scholars suggest that this term, and its MT equivalent, later took on a messianic interpretation.³⁴ Bullock notes:

³¹ See John 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 24; 13:31.

³² The rendering of verse 17 in the LXX is quite different from the MT. The use of the perfect participle ἐμπεπυρισμένη function to match the Qal absolute participle כָּסַח in the MT equivalent. The MT כָּסַח is an absolute noun which has the preposition ע. This could be better translated, “as something cut down.” The LXX renders that MT term as the perfect participle ἀνεσκαμμέν (dug up) which still connects with the viticultural metaphor. The LES does not capture 17b well. The NETS does it better: “at the rebuke of your face they will perish.”

³³ Goldingay, *Psalms* 42–89, 542. See also

³⁴ Goldingay, *Psalms* 42–89, 543. See also Bullock, *Psalms: 73–150*, 63.

Even though this psalm is not quoted in the New Testament, there are messianic overtones in the terms “the man at your right hand” and “the son of man you have raised up for yourself.” The Targum, though from the third or fourth century AD, likely preserves a much older messianic tradition by interpreting “son of man” as “king messiah.”³⁵

Verse 18 shifts from the aorist imperative γενηθήτω, to the aorist indicative κραταιώω. Why are both not in the imperative? The translator chose to view the action of God strengthening the son of man to himself as an already completed action.³⁶ This along, with the future tense found in verse 19b, “you will make us alive, and we will call upon your name...” leaves the readers with great hope that God will answer the psalmist’s petition. Now, verse 19a has the subjunctive ἀποστῶμεν which again, is the psalmist pleading with God that the community “never be removed from you...”³⁷

LXX Isaiah 5:1–7

Allusion Criteria

The Gospel of John quotes and alludes to the book of Isaiah a significant number of times. There is a table on the next page which catalogues each quote and allusion of Isaiah in John:

³⁵ Bullock, *Psalms: 73–150*, 63.

³⁶ Bullock and Goldingay note that the MT equivalent could just be an idiom used to refer to the king. See Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 542.; Bullock, *Psalms: 73–150*, 63.

³⁷ The NETS translates this term as “never turn away...”

Table 1: Allusions and Quotations in John to Isaiah⁴⁰

Kind	John Target	Isaiah Source
Quotation	1:23 marked by “it is written”	40:3
Allusion	1:29, 36	53:6–7
Allusion	3:14	52:13
Allusion	4:14	12:3
Allusion	4:22	2:3 ³⁸
Quotation	6:45 marked by “it is written”	54:13a
Allusion	7:38	58:11
Allusion	8:12	9:1–2
Allusion	8:28	52:13
Allusion	8:44	14:12
Allusion	9:5	9:1–2
Allusion	10:16	56:8
Allusion	12:32	52:13
Quotation	12:38 marked by “in order that Scripture might be fulfilled”	53:1
Quotation	12:40 marked by “in order that Scripture might be fulfilled”	6:10
Allusion	12:41	6:1
Allusion	15:1	5:1–7
Allusion	16:22	66:14
Allusion	19:18	22:16
Allusion	19:38	53:9
Allusion	20:23	22:22 ³⁹

As can be seen, John quotes Isaiah four times and alludes to Isaiah at least sixteen times. This is overwhelming evidence of Isaiah being available to the gospel writer and answers the question of Hays’ criterion, *reoccurrence*.

There are also several shared terms between Isa 5:1–7 and John 15.⁴¹ A declension of ἄμπελος is found in Isa 5:2. Κυρίου σαβαὼθ of Isaiah (5:7) and ὁ πατήρ in John (15:1) both function as the caretakers of the vineyard and the vine. Fruitfulness is also in view in each passage. Isaiah 5:4 uses the term σταφυλή (grapes) and Isaiah 5:4, 7 uses two conjugations of the term ποιέω: an aorist active infinitive (vv. 4, 7) and an aorist active (v. 7). The term ποιέω

³⁸ Köstenberger has a question mark beside this potential allusion. See Köstenberger, *John*, 420.

³⁹ Köstenberger has a question mark beside this potential allusion. See Köstenberger, *John*, 420.

⁴⁰ Data based on Köstenberger, *John*, 419–20.

⁴¹ There is also interesting overlap between the song of the vineyard and LXX Ps 79 as both refer to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

“to make” functions within the context of the passage to connote “to produce.” In fact, both the LES and the NETS translate this term as “produce.” These verses parallel each other in terms and in content. The first (v. 4) is found within the context of the metaphor and the owner sings out, “I waited for it to *produce* grapes, but it *produced* thorns.” In the second (v. 7), YHWH states: “I waited for it to *produce* fair judgement, but it *produced* lawlessness and not righteousness but screaming.” As can be seen, the second line expands and interprets verse 4. In John 15, the metaphor of fruitfulness is used differently. There is no mention of bad fruit, only whether a branch is being fruitful. Bad fruit implies a bad vine. This shift in the vine metaphor towards fruitfulness rather than good vs. bad fruit in John 15 makes sense as Jesus is revealed as the “true vine.” The true vine cannot make bad fruit!

Returning to Ps 79, there is also an aorist indicative μένω in verse 4 and 7. The context of this term is not a call for the branch to abide, (as in John 15) but a statement of how the owner of the vineyard, after doing all that he could to have a healthy vineyard, *waited* (ἔμεινα) for good fruit, but got bad fruit. The *volume* of shared terms and themes between Isa 5:1–7 and John 15:1–6 meets Hays’ criterion. In fact, Köstenberger suggests John 15 is directly alluding to Isaiah 5:1–7 in his work which indicates a *history of interpretation*.⁴²

Breakdown

The song in Isaiah 5⁴³ begins with the future indicative ἄσω” (I will sing”) and the substantival perfect participle τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ, (to the loved one). The language and context of the song suggests a bridegroom who sings a song of his bride (the vineyard).⁴⁴ In essence, the song is a form of judgement speech. Wildberger notes:

⁴² Köstenberger, *John*, 420, 491.

⁴³ There are some significant differences between the MT and the LXX. I used Watts as a base and filled in the gaps from a few smaller sources and my own work. In the MT the prophet is the first-person speaker introduced in v. 1 and he uses third person pronouns to refer to his “beloved” aka “the bridegroom” or owner of the vineyard. See, John D. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33: Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 2006, 86. The bridegroom is revealed as YHWH in v. 3 who calls for the men of Judah to judge who was at fault for the lack of good fruit. This is in contrast to the LXX which shifts the speaker to YHWH from vv. 1ff.

⁴⁴ See Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 86. And Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 178.

An accusation speech includes “establishing the fact that there is a mutual relation which binds the accuser and the accused, demonstration on the part of the accuser that his own obligations have been fulfilled, the accusation about the shortcomings in the one who is accused, who has failed to fulfill obligations, and the summons to those in the community responsible for justice to come together to pass judgement.” All these elements are found in vv. 1–4.⁴⁵

The song of the vineyard functions as an accusation with the “inhabitants of Jerusalem” and “the man of Judah” serving as witnesses to the crime. Its purpose is for the hearers of the song to state judgement even before knowing that they are in fact judging themselves.⁴⁶ The song continues with YHWH as the speaker who describes how he has cared for his vineyard (v. 2):

² καὶ φραγμὸν περιέθηκα καὶ ἐχαράκωσα καὶ ἐφύτευσα ἄμπελον σωρηχ καὶ ὠκοδόμησα πύργον ἐν μέσῳ αὐτοῦ καὶ προλήνιον ὥρυξα ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἔμεινα τοῦ ποιῆσαι σταφυλὴν, ἐποίησεν δὲ ἀκάνθας.	² And I put a hedge around it and fenced it in and planted a Sorech vine, and I built a tower in the midst of it and dug out a wine vat in it, and I waited for it to produce a cluster of grapes, but it produced thorns.
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The imagery here speaks of the bridegroom’s protection (καὶ φραγμὸν περιέθηκα καὶ ἐχαράκωσα), and care of the vineyard. The term “Sorech” is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew term סֹרֵךְ, a valued, bright red species of grape. The *DBD* Lexicon defines it as a “choice or valued vine.”⁴⁷ Verses 3–4 then rhetorically question the hearers (those inhabiting Jerusalem, and the person of Judah) to judge the fruit of the vineyard in comparison to the work and care given to the vineyard by the owner. Isa 5:5 describes the removal of the singer/owner’s protection and care specifically with the use of ἀφελῶ and καθελῶ. These terms are also found in LXX Ps 79:13; 19 referencing similar concepts:

⁵ νῦν δὲ ἀναγγελῶ ὑμῖν τί ποιήσω τῷ ἀμπελῶνί μου. ἀφελῶ τὸν φραγμὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔσται εἰς διαρπαγὴν, καὶ καθελῶ τὸν τοιχὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔσται εἰς καταπάτημα.	⁵ But now I will declare to you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be plundered, and I will tear down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.
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⁴⁵ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 178–79.

⁴⁶ See Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 178.

⁴⁷ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 977.

The compounds of αἰρέω: ἀφαιρέω; περιαιρέω; καθαιρέω; λύω (13.38) along with ἀφίημι (13.37) are organized within the semantic domain of “to cease, of a state...” or “to cause a state to cease.”⁴⁸ The result of the owner’s protection of the vineyard being removed leads to “plundering” and “being trampled.” Watts notes that the OT imagery of animals trampling the ground is sometimes used as a simile for when people are being trampled by an enemy.⁴⁹

Verse 6 continues the judgement of the vineyard. Motyer notes:

Failure to fulfil the owner’s intention brought the fourfold danger of divine antagonism (I will), dominant external foes (destroyed ... trampled), rampant alien growth (briers ... thorns) and deprivation of the means of life and fertility (no rain).⁵⁰

The final verse of this pericope interprets the song.

⁷ ὁ γὰρ ἀμπελὼν Κυρίου σαβαὼθ οἶκος
τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, καὶ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Ἰούδα
νεόφυτον ἡγαπημένον· ἔμεινα τοῦ
ποιῆσαι κρίσιν, ἐποίησεν δὲ ἀνομίαν καὶ
οὐ δικαιοσύνην ἀλλὰ κραυγὴν.

⁷ For the vineyard of the Lord Sabaoth is
the house of Israel, and the person of
Ioudas is the beloved young plant; I
waited *for him* to produce justice, but he
produced lawlessness— nor did *he*
produce righteousness, but a cry!

The vineyard is revealed as the house of Israel, and the owner as the Lord Sabaoth.⁵¹ The “person of Ioudas” is named “the beloved young plant.” The “thorns” that were produced by the vineyard are revealed as “lawlessness” and “a cry” and the desired grapes as “justice” and “righteousness.”

John 15: Jesus and the Father in light of LXX Allusions

How does this all relate to John 15? As was stated in the methodology, allusions function as metaphors, where the meaning of the source material is mixed with the target material to create new meaning. In other words, Jesus and the Father can be conceptually mapped onto the context of LXX Ps 79 and LXX Isa 5:1–7.

This would suggest that Jesus’ words, “I am the true vine...” may refer to the restoring of the vine (Israel) introduced in Ps 79. This would mean that “Jesus” is

⁴⁸ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 152.

⁴⁹ Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 183.

⁵⁰ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 20, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 70.

⁵¹ σαβαὼθ is a transliteration of the Hebrew term שָׁבָא “host.” See Hon-Lee Kwok, “Warfare,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

conceptually mapped onto the “the vine” in LXX Ps 79 and by extension mapped onto the phrases “man of God’s right hand,” and “the son of man who has been strengthen...” as those terms are also used to describe Jesus in John. More specifically, Jesus is called the “son of man” in John and the term “son of man” and “man of God’s right hand” are both synonymous in LXX Ps 79 (vv. 16, 18). In essence, Jesus is revealed as the answer to the psalmist’s plea for restoration. Restoration is found in the True Vine Jesus, who is revealed as the messiah king.

In the same sense, the Father’s role as the Vinedresser in John 15 is mapped onto the terms ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων in LXX Ps 79, the Father is responsible for restoring the vine and saving His people. By extension, the Father’s work as expressed by the terms αἰρῶ, and καθαίρῶ in John 15, must be understood in light of the role of the “God of mighty powers” specifically in light of restoration as Jesus has already been revealed as the resolution to the psalmist’s plea for restoration and salvation.

In LXX Ps 79, Jesus is mapped on a multi-faceted role using the terms “man of God’s right hand,” “the son of man who has been strengthened,” and “the vine.” Through these terms, the metaphor JESUS IS MESSIAH KING is revealed. If, as mentioned above, the terms are functioning as a synecdoche, the metaphor shifts to JESUS IS THE RESTORED PEOPLE OF GOD/ISRAEL. This changes the nuance of the John 15 passage, but not the overall meaning. The only way for the fruitfulness God desires is through an abiding relationship with Jesus.

The song of the Vineyard (Isa 5:1–7) functions to draw the hearers to proclaim judgement on themselves. Verse 2 introduces a vine.⁵² This vine (ἄμπελος), is modified by the term σωρήκ. It could be suggested that Jesus’ words in John 15:1, “Εγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή” is the fulfillment of the ἄμπελον σωρήκ, especially as we look to Isa 5:7 where “the beloved young plant” is revealed as ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Ἰούδα (the man of Judah). However, Wildberger notes in verse 3 the Hebrew יושב ירושלם and ואיש יהודה are both in the absolute singular and argues the terms should be understood as expansion. This is expressed in his translation of verse 3 as “and now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah.”⁵³ The LXX

⁵² Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 178.

⁵³ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 175.

matches the MT, with the singular term for “man” in verse 3 and 7. These terms could be functioning in this passage as a synecdoche to refer to Jerusalem or all of Judah, but when we look at the LXX Isa 5:3, it references the “inhabitants of Jerusalem” (οἱ ἐνοικοῦντες ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ), and the “man of Judah” (ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Ἰούδα).⁵⁴ The LXX shifted and rendered the first Hebrew terms as the plural substantival participle οἱ ἐνοικοῦντες, rather than a singular noun but followed the Hebrew for the second and rendered it as the singular noun ἄνθρωπος. This suggests that the Greek translators understood the term ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Ἰούδα not as expansion, but likely as the king. Verse 7 names the ἄμπελον σωρῆκ introduced in verse 2 as ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Ἰούδα though uses the term νεόφυτον ἡγαπημένον instead.

If this is the proper interpretation, this reinforces the connection between Isaiah 5 and John 15 as Isaiah confers messianic undertones to “vine.” If the vineyard refers to the nation, and the vine refers to the king, then Jesus, in John 15, is referring to himself as the true king of Israel. So, Jesus is not necessarily conceptually mapped onto “the people of God,” but is named the true leader of God’s people. The good fruit in Isaiah 5 is then conceptually mapped onto the fruitful branches. To be a fruit-bearing branch is to have “fair judgement” and “be righteous.” This fruitfulness is only found through the abiding relationship with the true king. Regardless, even if ἄμπελον σωρῆκ and νεόφυτον ἡγαπημένον is referencing the nation of Israel, it shifts the generic space (conceptual mapping) from “the messianic king” to “the people of Israel/God’s people.”

Jesus’ declaration, “I am the True Vine and my Father is the vinedresser” must be understood within the context of John and the OT allusions. The characterization of Jesus as *the Logos*, *light* and as the fulfillment of OT prophecy and messianic expectation as described through the “I am” statements, matches the context of LXX Ps 79 and Isa 5:1–7. As can be seen from these texts, the function of the vine metaphor is to refer to the messiah king or the nation of Israel. The context of John 15 could mean either and in a sense, both can function as a synecdoche, but both have the same application for the branches. Whether

⁵⁴ Another alternative is that “ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Ἰούδα” is an expansion of the term/idea of “οἱ ἐνοικοῦντες ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ” but I do not think its likely as ἄνθρωπος is singular rather than plural.

the branch is abiding in a relationship with Jesus the messiah king, or Jesus the restored people of God, the result is fruitfulness, participation, and connection with God's people.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ There are other references to the Vine metaphor in the OT (Ezekiel 15, 17, 19:10–14; Jeremiah 2:21, 6:8–9; and Hosea 10:1–2.) I will be addressing the judgement themes found in LXX Ps 79:9–20, and LXX Isa 5:1–7 and how they relate in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3: The Identity of the Branches

The Referent of “You”

In the previous chapter we contextualized the primary metaphor of Jesus as the True Vine within the Gospel of John and as an OT allusion. We found the metaphor functions to name Jesus as *the messiah king*, or as *the restored people of God*. This gives us the framework in which the secondary metaphor “You are the branches” finds itself and allows us to shift to the main focus of this work: the identity and outcome of the branches.

The first question we must ask is, “Who are the branches referenced to in John 15:1–6?” Jesus uses metaphoric language as is indicated with the εἰμί (“to be”) verb twice in verse 1. He names himself the True Vine and the Father the Vinedresser. Jesus utilizes εἰμί in verse 5, naming himself again as “the vine” and uses the second person plural ὑμεῖς with an implied ἐστὲ to name the disciples “the branches.”

Verse 2 is a description of the Father’s role as He is the implied subject of the verbs αἶρει and καθαίρει which are both in the third person singular. There are two examples of left dislocation which correspond to their counterpart αὐτὸ as it matches in case and number. Mathewson states, “In Greek, dislocation has the effect of announcing or shifting to a new topic. The dislocated information is foregrounded.”¹ This shifts the focus of the text from Jesus to emphasize the work of the Father²:

πᾶν κλῆμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μὴ φέρον καρπὸν αἶρει αὐτό,	Every branch that does not bear fruit in me, he removes it,
καὶ πᾶν τὸ καρπὸν φέρον καθαίρει αὐτὸ ἵνα καρπὸν πλείονα φέρῃ.	and every branch that bears fruit, he prunes it in order that it may bear more fruit.

The ἵνα along with the subjunctive φέρῃ informs us³ of the purpose of the Father’s work in pruning the fruitful branches: “that it may bear more fruit.” In verse 2, the branches have no specific narrative referent as the direct object κλῆμα is modified by πᾶν and ἐν ἐμοὶ in the first half of the verse. καὶ functions to make what follows a coordinate clause. πᾶν has an

¹ Mathewson, *Intermediate Greek Grammar*, 281.

² Steven E. Runge, *The Lexham Discourse Greek New Testament Glossary* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2008) “Left Dislocation.”

³ The subjunctive mood indicates “projection” or “probability. See Mathewson, *Intermediate Greek Grammar*, 165. For markers of dependent purpose clauses see Mathewson, *Intermediate Greek Grammar*, 251.

implied κλῆμα ἐν ἐμοὶ in verse 2b creating a parallel between the two kinds of branches, though there is no parallel dependent clause in connection with the unfruitful branches.⁴

In verse 3, a new participant is introduced with the use of ὑμεῖς and ὑμῖν. In the text Jesus states, ἤδη ὑμεῖς καθαροί ἐστε διὰ τὸν λόγον ὃν λελάληκα ὑμῖν. The adverb ἤδη is modifying ἐστε, and the use of the perfect tense λελάληκα indicates a previous episode where Jesus had interacted with the plural ὑμεῖς.⁵ This episode is likely John 13:1–18, as the play on words with the use of similar terms such as καθαίρω (43.12) and καθαρὸς (79.48), the perfect, passive participle of λούω, λελουμένος (v. 10), ὑμεῖς (vv. 10, 13, 14–15), as well as the proximity of being in the Farewell Discourse, signals the likelihood that this is the previous instance. John 13 informs us of the audience Jesus is talking to in John 15. The text doesn't explicitly state all the names of the attendees of the Last Supper but mentions “the disciples” (13:5, 22) and Peter (13:6), the disciple Jesus loved (13:23), Thomas (14:5), Philip (14:8), and Judas-not Iscariot (14:22).⁶ It is clear that Judas Iscariot is not a part of the audience of John 15 as he leaves the party in John 13:26–30.

Characterization of the Disciples in Farewell Discourse

One cannot talk about the characterization of the disciples without understanding how characterization works within the Gospel itself. John's Prologue is the key by which the reader is to interpret the gospel.⁷ It is the tool that the reader uses to “evaluate every character's response to [Jesus].”⁸ Characterization occurs within the framework of how characters relate to, and understand Jesus. This will become evident as we look at different pericopes concerning the disciples.

One of the main themes in the Gospel of John is misunderstanding. The implied reader is given privileged knowledge in the Prologue that they are to use to judge each

⁴ There is no stated purpose in v. 2a for the Father's action towards the unfruitful branches while there is a stated purpose for the pruning of the fruitful branches. This will be addressed later as the purpose of this section is to contextualize the passage and determine who the referent of the branches is.

⁵ Discourse analysis would also suggest that the perfect tense is foregrounding that Jesus is the one who told them.

⁶ Keener notes, “From John's own narrative... we can gather only that it was an intimate group of his closest disciples which included the beloved disciple, Peter, Philip, Thomas, and both disciples named Judas.” See Keener, *John*, 900.

⁷ Skinner, *How John Works*, 250.

⁸ Skinner, *How John Works*, 124.

character in their understanding of Jesus.⁹ The disciples are viewed as clean (13:10) and therefore as standing in fellowship with and believing in Jesus, but the pattern of misunderstanding continues through the Farewell Discourse. We will briefly look at the characterization of Peter, Thomas, Philip, and Judas in John 13–14 as, from a narrative-critical perspective, they set the tone for Jesus’ words to the group of disciples in John 15. Christopher Skinner describes characterization in John as follows:

By and large, the narrative was less concerned about the inner machinations of a character’s thought life and more focused on the character’s special and situational setting and ultimate purpose... their *raison d’être* is to confirm, deny, or question something about Jesus that will allow the literary audience to advance in its understanding of Jesus’[s] message, mission, and identity.¹⁰

While the disciples’ role in the Farewell Discourse follows this description, the narrative also reveals their character.

Outline of John 13

Setting, Motivation, and Washing Feet, 13:1–17

Jesus Predicts Judas’ Action, 13:18–30¹¹

Jesus’ Glorification, Love Command and Prediction of Peter’s Betrayal, 13:31–38¹²

The chapter starts with an explanation from the narrator of the setting. He emphasizes Jesus’ knowledge that “*his hour had come*,” Jesus’ care and love for his disciples, (v. 1) and his knowledge that Judas Iscariot would betray him (v. 2). The language in verse 3, that “he had come forth from God and was going away to God” points to the privileged knowledge the implied reader has from the Prologue. The narrative frames Jesus washing his disciples’ feet as a great act of humility for he was aware of his identity and his inevitable betrayal by someone close to him. The focus of the narrative shifts in verse 6 to dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Peter misunderstands the meaning of Jesus’ action as he initially questions Jesus, then declares to Jesus, *Οὐ μὴ νίψῃς μου τοὺς πόδας εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*. (*You will never wash my feet for eternity*). The use of the double negative *Οὐ μὴ*¹³ and *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα* emphasizes Peter’s intense conflict over, and misunderstanding of, Jesus’ actions in this text. When Jesus

⁹ Skinner, *How John Works*, 127.

¹⁰ Skinner, *How John Works*, 117.

¹¹ I am planning on addressing this section when I discuss Judas’ characterization.

¹² Taken from Willard M. Swartley, *John: Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2013), 317. See also Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 455–486.

¹³ See also Swartley, *John*, 318.

declares that Peter will have no share in Him if he refuses, Peter shifts gears. His response *Κύριε, μὴ τοὺς πόδας μου μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν*. (“*Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!*”), again points to Peter’s lack of understanding. Susan Hylen in her book, *Imperfect Believers*, says this:

At the Last Supper, the disciples’ lack of comprehension is again striking. The only indication of their understanding of the footwashing is by comparison with Peter, who repeatedly rejects Jesus’ efforts (13:6–11).¹⁴

The disciples misunderstanding is addressed by Jesus in 13:12–17, 19. He states:

Do you understand what I have done for you? ¹³ You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you speak correctly, for I am. ¹⁴ If then I—*your* Lord and Teacher—wash your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that just as I have done for you, you also do. ¹⁶ Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you understand these *things*, you are blessed if you do them... ¹⁹ From now *on* I am telling you before *it* happens, in order that when *it* happens you may believe that I am *he*.

Hylen reflects on 13:19, “Jesus’ words presume the disciples’ future belief but imply a current lack of understanding or belief.”¹⁵ This idea repeats itself through the Farewell Discourse.

Peter becomes the focus again in 13:36–38. Jesus states ‘Where I am going you cannot come (v. 33) and commands the disciples to “love one another...” (v. 34). Peter then asks, “Κύριε, διὰ τί οὐ δύναμαί σοι ἀκολουθῆσαι ἄρτι; τὴν ψυχὴν μου ὑπὲρ σοῦ θήσω.” (Lord, why am I not able to follow you now? I will lay down my life for you). Jesus’ response points to the reality of Peter’s commitment to him and replies, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly I say to you, the rooster will not crow until you have denied me three times!” (v. 38).

Jesus’ words to Peter (vv. 36, 38) point to Peter’s imminent failure to follow through with “laying down his life...” but also points to restoration as Jesus tells Peter that he “will follow later...” (v. 36). Blaine Jr. in his monograph states, “Peter’s pledge to give his life for

¹⁴ Susan Hylen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 65.

¹⁵ Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 65.

Jesus is sincere, but the courage needed to carry out the act is not yet mature.”¹⁶ This has implications for our understanding of John 15.¹⁷

In John 13, the disciples are characterized as loved by Jesus. In verse 6, Peter, and by extension the rest of the disciples, are characterized as misunderstanding Jesus’ actions to the point where Jesus needs to clarify the meaning and purpose of the footwashing (v. 12–17).

John 14 Outline

Jesus Prepares a Place and Shows the Way, 14:1–11

Jesus and the Father Ensure the Future, 14:12–24

Jesus Consoles His Disciples in View of His Departure, 14:25–31¹⁸

Chapter 14 picks up the theme of Jesus’ imminent departure which is introduced clearly through Jesus’ words in 13:33, “Children, yet a little *time* I am with you. You will seek me and just as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going you cannot come,’ now I say also to you.” This chapter starts with Jesus giving three imperatives,¹⁹ the negated imperative, *ταρασσέσθω* and two instances of *πιστεύετε*. The first command “do not let your hearts be troubled” is resolved by the command to “believe in God, and also believe in me.” The ability to “not be troubled” is dependant on the disciples’ ability to “believe.” Jesus goes on to say that he is going to ‘prepare a place...’ (v. 2), and that the disciples “know the way where I am going...” (v. 4).

The first of the three questions asked by the disciples comes in verse 5 by Thomas, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How are we able to know the way?” This question sets the stage for Jesus’ sixth I am statement: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have known me, you have also known my Father. From now on you know him and have seen him” (vv. 6–7).²⁰ Philip then

¹⁶ Blaine B. Bradford Jr., *Peter in the Gospel of John: The Making of an Authentic Disciple* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 77.

¹⁷ I will bring the implications together when I get to engaging specifically with the text rather than the characterization of the disciples.

¹⁸ Swartley, *John*, 340.

¹⁹ *πιστεύετε* could be imperative or indicative. I believe that the imperative matches the context more clearly than the indicative. See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 488. See also Kruse, *John*, 291. and Swarthy, *John*, 340.

²⁰ This is my own translation. I believe this better captures the pluperfect *γινώσκω* and *οἶδα* especially with Philip’s misunderstanding in v. 8 and Jesus’ response in vv. 9–11. I understand that the negated perfect *γινώσκω* explains the stative nature of Philip’s lack of knowledge but when weighed against the theme on misunderstanding I believe this translation fits the Greek better.

uses the imperative *δειξον* as he misunderstands Jesus' words, "Lord, *show* us the Father, and it is enough for us" (v. 8).

Jesus' response (vv. 9–14) begins rather pointedly, then shifts to a command, and then a conditional promise. Philip's misunderstanding of Jesus' words in verse 9 comes to a front with Jesus' response, "Τοσούτῳ χρόνῳ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωκάς με, Φίλιππε; ὁ ἑώρακὼς ἐμὲ ἑώρακεν τὸν πατέρα· (Am I with you so long a time and you have *not known* me Philip?). The use of the negated perfect γινώσκω, points to the stative nature of Philip's (and by extension the disciples) knowledge of Jesus. Even over the time they have spent with Jesus, they still do not understand the nature of Jesus and the Father. Jesus commands the disciples to "believe... that I am in the Father and the Father is in me." He then points to his actions as proof that the Father is in him.

While verse 12 begins as a conditional promise concerning "the one who believes," it is clear from the context of verses 13–14 that the disciples are in view. Here is the text:

¹² ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ
τὰ ἔργα ἃ ἐγὼ ποιῶ κάκεῖνος ποιήσει, καὶ
μεῖζονα τούτων ποιήσει, ὅτι ἐγὼ πρὸς τὸν
πατέρα πορεύομαι. ¹³ καὶ ὃ τι ἂν αἰτήσητε ἐν
τῷ ὀνόματί μου τοῦτο ποιήσω, ἵνα δοξασθῇ
ὁ πατήρ ἐν τῷ υἱῷ. ¹⁴ ἐάν τι αἰτήσητέ με ἐν
τῷ ὀνόματί μου ἐγὼ ποιήσω

¹² *Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes
in me will also do the works that I do and,
in fact, will do greater works than these,
because I am going to the Father. ¹³ I will
do whatever you ask in my name, so that the
Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If in
my name you ask me for anything, I will do
it*

The substantive participle *ὁ πιστεύων* informs who the promise refers to, "the one who believes." The promise is that they will "do greater works than these..." (v. 12) because of Jesus' return to the Father. While the writer uses the second person plural subjunctive *αἰτήσητε*, (vv. 13, 14) which does not match the singular participle *ὁ πιστεύων* used in verse 12, the context of verse 13 implies that the disciples *will* believe as Jesus promises that he will do whatever they ask in his name. The purpose of this promise is clear from the use of *ἵνα*: "that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

This pattern of conditional promise being obviously connected to the disciples' future belief and obedience continues in verses 15–17 where Jesus states:

Ἐὰν ἀγαπᾷτέ με, τὰς ἐντολὰς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσετε· ¹⁶ καὶ ἐρωτήσω τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἄλλον παράκλητον δώσει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἦ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ¹⁷ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὃ ὁ κόσμος οὐ δύναται λαβεῖν, ὅτι οὐ θεωρεῖ αὐτὸ οὐδὲ γινώσκει· ὑμεῖς γινώσκετε αὐτό, ὅτι παρ' ὑμῖν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

The conditional clause is introduced with *Ἐὰν* and begins with the present subjunctive *ἀγαπᾷτέ* (v. 15), shifts to the future tense *τηρήσετε*, *ἐρωτήσω*, *δώσει* (v. 16), and ends with the present subjunctive *ἦ*. The use of the present subjunctive at the beginning and end confirms the conditional nature of the promise of the sending of the “Advocate” but the tense shifts in verse 17 to the present.²¹ This shift in tense points to the disciples meeting the condition as the text states that they “know” (present tense) “the Spirit of truth... because he abides” with them. The fact that the disciples meet the condition of the two statements (vv. 12, 15) is further clarified in verses 18–20 as Jesus comforts the disciples by promising them that he will not leave them as orphans, that they will see him, and that they will know Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Him.

Jesus then declares: “*They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them*” (v. 21). This leads to the final question the disciples ask in this section: “*Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?”*” This very question assumes that the disciples will keep Jesus’ commandments which proves their love for him and therefore that Jesus would reveal himself to them.

Jesus replies to Judas:

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. (vv. 23–24)

²¹ Aspect is also something to consider with this change in tense, but the context implies time as it has shifted from future tense to present.

Jesus describes why he will reveal himself to the disciples and not the world: the disciples love Jesus and keep his words. The world does not love Jesus and does not keep his words. Jesus continues to comfort his disciples in verses 25–30. This text uses a second person plural pronoun thirteen times in reference to the disciples and both the verb tense and mood shift. This confirms what was said above, that the disciples are viewed by Jesus as meeting the conditions of the promise as the disciples are told that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to teach and remind them (v. 25).

Conclusion

What we have found in chapters 13–14 is the disciples, even though they are confused and have inadequate belief at this part of the narrative, are characterized as being people who Jesus and the Father love. This love for them is expressed through washing their feet (13:1–5), correcting Peter (13:6–11), answering the disciples' questions (14:1–24), the promise of sending the Holy Spirit (14:25–26) and the general comforting of the disciples in their confusion. The mixture of imperatives along with the assumption that the disciples will/have satisfied the conditions function to show the ambiguity/messiness of discipleship. Susan Hylen describes it in this way:

The disciples are an eschatological character; God's redemption is not only future but also already present in them. They clearly misunderstand Jesus, yet they are understood to be believers already. The indications of the disciples' perfect belief are statements by Jesus or the narrator that attribute such belief to them without qualification.²²

In other words, while the narrative reveals the disciples as imperfect believers through their actions and questions, Jesus and the narrator speak of the disciples as having perfect belief. The characterization of the disciples in John 13–14 confirms a mixture of present and future belief and utter confusion. It reveals Jesus' acceptance of them in the present, and their future of having fulfilled the conditional promises found in these texts. We will come back to this when we get into analyzing the branch metaphor later in this chapter.

Characterization of Judas Iscariot in John

As was mentioned in Chapter 1, we need to determine whether Judas is the narrative referent of the "branch that does not bear fruit" in John 15:2. So we will look at how Judas is

²² Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 73–74.

characterized in the narrative. In contrast with the disciples who are viewed as accepted in the midst of their confusion in John 13–14, Judas is consistently referred to within the context of betraying Jesus. The first mention of Judas (6:71) is a narrator’s note explaining the words of Jesus, ““Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.” He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him” (vv. 70–71). Carson states, “As in the other three Gospels (Mt 4:10; Mk 3:19; Lk 6:16), Judas is no sooner named than he is labelled as the betrayer.”²³ Kruse notes, “Beginning with 6:71, Judas is repeatedly and explicitly identified as the betrayer (71; 12:4; 13:2; 18:2, 5; 21:20).”²⁴ William Wright in his 2009 article on Greco-Roman character-typing of Judas states:

John associates Judas with the devil in his role as the betrayer, who opposes Jesus and plays a role in his death... John develops this association of Judas and the devil on other occasions in the Gospel narrative. Thus, from his first appearance in the Gospel, Judas is associated with unbelievers and is characterized quite negatively as the betrayer, an unfaithful disciple from Jesus’ inner circle and an associate of the devil.²⁵

This negative characterization of Judas continues through the narrative where he takes on a more active role in 12:4–8, 13:26–29 and 18:2–5. In John 12:4–8, Jesus has a meal at Lazarus’ house (v. 2). This pericope occurs after Lazarus was raised from the dead. The context of Judas’ involvement is his response to Mary anointing and washing Jesus’ feet with an expensive ointment (v. 3). Verse 4–6 describes Judas’ response:

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said,
⁵ “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?”⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

The narrator’s note describes Judas’ motivation. He would have access to more funds if the ointment was sold. The Greek text uses the noun κλέπτης (thief) and the imperfect verb ἐβάσταζεν (steal) (v. 6). The use of the *imperfect* suggests that Judas consistently and

²³ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 304.

²⁴ Kruse, *John*, 106.

²⁵ William Wright, “Greco-Roman Character Typing and the Presentation of Judas in the Fourth Gospel,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2009): 553–4.

repeatedly stole.²⁶ Judas is pictured here, not only as the betrayer of Jesus, but also as someone more interested in dishonest gain than in caring for the poor or honouring Jesus.²⁷

Keener, in his analysis of this passage states:

Mary's anointing at Bethany contrasts starkly with the preceding scene of calculated plans to have Jesus killed: "a supreme act of ignorant unbelief and a supreme act of intelligent faith" ...the two longer units... contrast the high priests (11:47–53) and Mary (12:1–8), while linking Judas with the attitude of the Judean elite (12:4–6)." [He goes on to state,] "Judas is, however, worse than the Judean elite; the moral reasoning of the latter may be incorrect, but at least it involves moral reasoning, whereas Judas is portrayed as completely morally debased."²⁸

The next passage is in the context of the Last Supper. Jesus has told the disciples that one of them would betray him:

"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. ¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me...' After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." (13:17–18, 21)

This leads Peter and the 'disciple that Jesus loved' to investigate. The Beloved Disciple asks who, and Jesus answers, "*It is he to whom I dip the piece of bread and give it to him.*" Then after dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot" (v. 26). This, along with Jesus' quote of Ps 41:9 in John 13:18b, is important as there is significant evidence to show that in the Mediterranean at this time, the betrayal by one who was shown hospitality was an ultimate act of betrayal.²⁹ Keener summarizes it in this way:

Judas's discipleship and its longstanding implicit covenant of friendship make his betrayal a heinous act of treachery, but the meal context makes the betrayal even more heinous. For many, sharing food and drink represented the most important bond of kindness... Injuring or slaying those who had eaten at one's table was a terrible offense from which all but the most wicked would normally shrink; such behavior was held to incur divine wrath.³⁰

²⁶ The imperfect communicates remoteness (big picture) and an action that is durative or repeated. See Mathewson, *Intermediate Greek*, 132.

²⁷ Wright argues that the text links Judas with the devil as Judas is portrayed as a liar. He states, "Jesus calls the devil 'a liar and the father of lies' and states that 'there is no truth in him' (8:44)" see Wright, "Judas in the Fourth Gospel," 555.

²⁸ Keener, *John*, 859.

²⁹ Keener, *John*, 913. For examples see Homer *Il.* 21.76; *Od.* 4.534–535

³⁰ Keener, *John*, 913.

The betrayal of Judas, within the context of the footwashing and meal, heightens the moral depravity of his actions. The narrative continues:

After he received the piece of bread, *Satan entered into him*. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival”; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. (13:27–30)

Satan entering Judas and the setting note that “*it was night*” both work together to reveal the nature of Judas. Carson suggests that the first “expression probably signifies thorough possession.”³¹ This idea of spirits possessing people was not a new idea at this time.³² With regard to Judas, the rest of the disciples, and Jesus, Keener states:

Satan’s entrance into Judas contrasts starkly with the promise of God’s Spirit entering the other disciples (14:20, 23). Yet, as in the OT and general early Jewish perspective, in which God is sovereign over the devil, Jesus here remains in control, so that the devil, like Judas essentially (even if perhaps unwittingly) executes Jesus’ will concerning the passion (13:26–27).³³

This is clear from the text as 13:1–4 and Jesus’ dismissal of Judas to betray (v. 28) inform the audience that Jesus knows exactly what Judas was about.

The phrase “it was night” (v. 30), speaks to both a spiritual and a physical reality. Within the narrative, it was night, but Johannine literature often gives the imagery of light and dark spiritual meaning.³⁴

The final scene with Judas is John 18:2–5 where he betrays Jesus by leading a mob from the chief priest to the garden where Jesus would often go with his disciples. While this occurs after Jesus’ words in John 15, it reveals the character of Judas concretely. He is not just named the betrayer, or characterized as dishonest. His story climaxes and ends on his decision to bring a military unit from the political leaders to arrest Jesus.

³¹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 475.

³² See Keener, *John*, 919. “The entrance of spirits into individuals to empower them for a task, good or evil, was already familiar in the Mediterranean world... The image of Satan’s inspiration or filling an agent’s heart appears in Acts 5:3; *T. Job* 41:5/7; cf. the late *Apoc. Sedr.* 5:4–5; Boring et al., *Commentary*, 296, cite *T. Sim.* 2:7, where the prince error moves Satan against Josph.”

³³ Keener, *John*, 919.

³⁴ See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 476. See also Keener, *John*, 920. Keener also mentions that this symbolic understanding was emphasized as “least as early as Origen.”

If we quickly compare how Judas is characterized in the Synoptics, the characterization of Judas becomes even more clear.

Table 2: Comparison of Judas Iscariot's Characterization in the Synoptics & the Gospel of John

Book	#	References	Includes
Matthew	5	10:4; 26:14, 25, 47; 27:3	Plan to betray with Chief Priests Betrayal in the garden Death
Mark	3	3:19; 14:10; 43	Plan to betray with Chief Priests Betrayal in the garden
Luke	4	6:16; 22:3, 47, 48	Plan to betray with Chief Priests Betrayal in the garden
John	8	6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26, 29; 18:2, 3, 5	Jesus rebuking Judas (12:4) Informing audience Judas dealt with finances of the group. Jesus handing Judas bread Jesus telling Judas to go Betrayal in the garden

As can be seen from the table above, John gives Judas more time in the narrative with added conversations in the pericope of the woman washing Jesus' feet, and the Last Supper. Matthew and Mark have no mention of Judas in their respective accounts of Jesus' anointing at Bethany (see Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9) and the information that Judas oversaw the money is not present in the Synoptics at all; neither is Jesus' interaction with Judas at the Last Supper. Judas in John has a larger narrative presence than in the other gospels but in John, in contrast to the synoptics, there is no reference to Judas meeting with the chief priests to betray Jesus (John 11:45–54). That is replaced with the narrator's comment in John 13:2, "the devil had already put into the heart of Judas *son* of Simon Iscariot that he should betray him."

Judas is motivated by greed, characterized specifically as the devil, and in contrast to Matthew (27:3–10), there is no reference to Judas' death by suicide. This could be John determining that Judas' role in the narrative was finished or an indication of John's eschatology. This will be unpacked later.

OT References of "Branches"/Referent of the "branches"

Now that we've dealt with the characterization of the referent of "you" in John 15 we can look at the second half of the metaphor: Branches. Branches and semantically linked

terms are used in the OT metaphorically fairly often.³⁵ κλήμα is used to translate six different Hebrew terms and is used a total of ten times in the LXX.

Table 3: Hebrew Terms Used to Translate κλήμα

Uses	Hebrew Term	LES Translation	Reference	Alternative Greek terms used to translate Hebrew term
5	קציר	Branches, shoot, sprout	Isa 27:11, Ps 80:12, Job 14:9; 18:16; 29:19	θερισμός, χλωρός,
3	שריג	Tendrils	Gen 40:10, 12; Joel 1:7	πυθμήν
7	ענף	Twig, branch	Lev 23:40, Ezek 17:8, 23, 31:3, 36:8; Mal 3:19, Ps 80:11	παραφυάς, σταφυλή, κλάδος , ἀναδενδράς, βλαστός, παραφυάς
3	נטישה	Tendrils	Isa 18:5, Jer 5:10, 48:32	ὑποστήριγμα
8	דלית	Foliage	Jer 11:16; Ezek 17:6, 7, 23; 19:11; 31:7, 9, 12	κλάδος
5	זמורה	Shoot	Num 13:23; Isa 17:10; Ezek 8:17, 15:2; Nam 2:3	

The primary way the term functions metaphorically in the LXX is as a reference to a person, or nation. Some key examples of this usage can be found in Joel 1:6–7, Ezekiel 17, and Ezekiel 19:10–11. These passages also reference the larger metaphorical network using key terms such as ἄμπελος and καρπός.

The context of Joel 1 is a lament over the destruction of the land because of a swarm of locusts. The imagery found in verse 7 references the desolation (ἀφανισμός) of a vine, the breaking (συγκλασμός) of a fig-tree, and the whitening (λευκαίνω) of branches (κλήμα). The LXX frames this passage as the work of God as verse 7 starts with the verb τίθημι which the LES translates as “I appointed.

ἔθετο τὴν ἄμπελόν μου εἰς ἀφανισμόν καὶ
τὰς συκᾶς μου εἰς συγκλασμόν, ἐρευνῶν
ἐξηρεύνησεν αὐτὴν καὶ ἔρριπεν, ἐλεύκανεν
κλήματα αὐτῆς

It has set my vine for annihilation
and my fig trees for breaking;
searching it has searched it out and thrown
it down;
its branches have turned white.

³⁵ The ten uses of κλήμα in the OT are Joel 1:7, Ps 79:12, Mal 4:1, Je 31:32, Nu 13:24, Na 2:3, Ezek 1:6, 7, 23; 19:11.

As the imagery is shaped within the context of God's work, and God being the referent of μου, it shifts from just being a literal picture of the locust's destruction towards the metaphoric destruction of the land. The branches becoming white pictures the bark being pulled off to reveal the white wood underneath. The branch, κλημα, functions within the text as an expansion of the destruction of the land/nation.

There are two significant allusions to Ezekiel in John 15 which use the term κλημα: Ezekiel 17 and Ezekiel 19:10–14. Each fulfills Hays' criteria for an allusion in John 15:1–6. The first is divided into three sections: a parable (17:1–10), its meaning (17:11–21) and a promise of restoration and strength (17:22–24).³⁶ The parable uses key terms. Within the text κλημα is a synecdoche of vine (or expansion) which references the king of Israel. Ezekiel 19:10–14 functions similarly. The prophet introduces the nation of Israel as a mother and a vine. John Taylor explains the context:

In this allegory, the vine, planted in a well-watered land, flourishes and sends out sturdy shoots like so many royal scepters, and these represented the nation's succession of rulers. When the vine was pulled up by its roots, however, its strong stem withered away and was burnt. The vine was transplanted to a desert land and at the same time fire came out of its chief branch and destroyed all its fruit and the rest of its foliage. This is clearly a reference to Zedekiah, the last ruler of Israel, who was regarded as the cause of the nation's ultimate collapse.³⁷

We see in verse 11 the terms ράβδος, στέλεχος and κλημα representing kings: καὶ ἐγένετο αὐτῇ ράβδος ισχύος ἐπὶ φυλὴν ἡγουμένων, καὶ ὑψώθη τῷ μεγέθει αὐτῆς ἐν μέσῳ στελεχῶν καὶ εἶδεν τὸ μέγεθος αὐτῆς ἐν πλήθει κλημάτων αὐτῆς. This has implications for how we are to understand how the term κλημα is used in John 15:1–6.

“You” and κλημα in John 15

When we look to map the context of the OT allusions onto our target text, the question arises surrounding the destruction of the branches and whether we are to map this into the new context, but when we consider the primary metaphor of “I am the True Vine” and the context of restoration, and how the disciples are characterized in the chapters leading

³⁶ John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 22, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1969), 142.

³⁷ Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 153–154.

up to John 15, we find the source context of the branch's destruction does not necessarily map onto the target source without other contextual markers. This will be discussed more fully in chapter 4.

As we have looked at how the disciples are characterized and the term κλημα is used in the LXX, the disciples are viewed as active participants in the fulfillment of the messianic promises realized through Jesus. In the midst of their confusion shown in John 13–14, Jesus views them as fulfilling the conditional clauses which proves their acceptance as God's people. They are viewed as "in him." The point of John 15 is not about whether the "disciples" are "in him" but whether the branches abide and are fruitful.

Judas and the Metaphor "in me"

The text is clear that Judas was physically and socially a part of the twelve and was in a position of trust, but throughout the Gospel of John, Judas is consistently named as the betrayer (John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2; 18:2, 5; 21:20) even as he is revealed as a man in Jesus' "inner circle" (as a part of the twelve). The fact that Judas carried the group's shared finances (12:6) implies that he was trusted, even as the narrator points to the fact that trust was misplaced. Again, in John 13, Judas having his feet washed, sitting on the left side of Jesus³⁸ (v. 26) and receiving bread from Jesus' hand all point to Judas being "in" Jesus' circle. The quote of Ps 41:9 in John 13:18 highlights the depth of Judas' betrayal as being worse as he is a friend and as someone who has received Jesus' hospitality. This, paired with the three pericopes which make up Judas' role in the gospel points to a man whose very closeness with Jesus permits him not only to steal but, to betray significant cultural norms surrounding hospitality by leading a mob to arrest Jesus.

The question that is left regarding Judas, is whether he is referenced in John 15.³⁹ Jesus says, "every branch *in me*..." While this branch is indefinite, the question whether Judas was ever considered "in me" needs to be addressed. If we look at John 13:5–11, the term used to wash the disciples' feet is νίπτω. This is used in contrast to καθαρὸς (clean). Even though Judas had his feet washed, the text states:

³⁸ See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 474. He suggests because of the ease by which Jesus was able to pass the bread he would have been close at hand. The Beloved disciple was on Jesus' right side so he suggests that Judas could have been on his left. The left-hand is a place of honor. Keener also notes that the beloved disciple and Judas "apparently share Jesus' highest couch..." See Keener, *John*, 916.

³⁹ References to "in me" in John: 6:56; 10:38; 14:10 [twice], 11, 20, 30; 15:2, 4 [twice], 5–7; 16:33; 17:21, 23.

Ὁ λελουμένος οὐκ ἔχει χρείαν εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι, ἀλλ' ἔστιν καθαρὸς ὅλος· καὶ ὑμεῖς καθαροὶ ἐστε, ἀλλ' οὐχὶ πάντες. ¹¹ ἦδαι γὰρ τὸν παραδιδόντα αὐτόν· διὰ τοῦτο εἶπεν ὅτι Οὐχὶ πάντες καθαροὶ ἐστε. (John 13:10–11)

This term, καθαρὸς (clean), is the same term used in John 15:3 and is a play on words with καθαίρω (prune) in John 15:2. This could suggest that as Judas was not καθαρὸς in John 13, that he would not be pruned (καθαίρω) in John 15:2. This argument is assuming that Judas was considered “in me.”

In the previous section on the characterization of Judas, we see evidence that could be interpreted both ways. As an example, in John 6:70–71 when Jesus says, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.” The narrator then goes on to name Judas as the betrayer a.k.a., “the devil.” This specifically states that Judas was a part of Jesus’ inner circle, a part of the twelve. Keener notes in his commentary on John 13:27:

The mention of Satan (13:27) is significant. In contrast to the Synoptics, John, who also omits Jesus’ exorcisms, speaks only once of “Satan” (13:27) and three times of the “devil” (6:70; 8:44; 13:2). The devil’s role in this Gospel particularly surrounds the betrayal; Judas the betrayer was a “devil” (6:70), replacing Peter’s function in the Markan tradition (Mark 8:33)...The devil had already put it into Judas’s heart to betray Jesus (13:2), and once Judas prepares to execute his mission, Satan enters him to enable him to carry it out (13:27).⁴⁰

In other words, the principal focus of John’s language surrounding the devil and Satan is Judas. John does not include the pericope where Jesus tells Peter, “Get behind me Satan”⁴¹ (Matt 16:23 and Mark 8:33). This means the only time Jesus uses the term “devil” not in reference to Judas, is in John 8:44 where Jesus says to “the Jews believing in him” (v. 31), “ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστὲ”⁴² (you are from your father the devil [v. 44]).

There are a couple of important things to note as to why the instance in John 8 is not the same as how John characterizes Judas. Firstly, Judas is consistently referenced and connected with the devil by the narrator’s voice. There is no context where Judas is seen in a good light. This is contrasted with how “the Jews” are characterized within John. Hylen states:

⁴⁰ Keener, *John*, 919.

⁴¹ John also uses the term “ὁ τοῦ κόσμου ἄρχων” or “ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου” 3 times: John 12:31, 14:30; 16:11.

⁴² More in this pericope will be explored later with reference to the use of μένω in John 8:31–38.

At the opening of this conversation [vv. 30–31]... the Jews are characterized as believing in Jesus, although the rest of the conversation between the Jews and Jesus highlights an inconsistency in the Jews' character: their behavior contradicts their belief. This does not necessarily render their belief invalid, but it does suggest a complex character: they believe in Jesus and they seek to kill him.⁴³

This parallels the misunderstanding and questioning of the disciples.⁴⁴

Secondly, the polemical nature of this passage impacts the weight of Jesus' charge against the Jews as being of the devil as the connection with the devil is linked to their current actions and behavior rather than as with Judas who is consistently viewed as such.⁴⁵ Keener explains the central theme of this discourse as the question of origins and goes on to state, "Jesus is from above, God; his opponents are from below, from the devil. Jesus speaks here in spiritual terms concerning the world..."⁴⁶ The polemic used in this passage is drastically different in style and purpose than the narrator's notes surrounding the character of Judas.⁴⁷

Finally, in John 14:30, we have an interesting statement of Jesus:

οὐκέτι πολλὰ λαλήσω μεθ' ὑμῶν, ἔρχεται γὰρ ὁ τοῦ κόσμου ἄρχων· καὶ ἐν ἐμοὶ οὐκ ἔχει οὐδέν,	I will no longer speak much with you , for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has no power over me.
--	--

In his commentary on John, Kruse connects the title, 'the ruler of the world' with Satan "whose coming was to occur through the actions of Judas Iscariot (13:2, 27) and the Jewish leaders to whom Judas betrayed Jesus."⁴⁸ This is intriguing as John 14:30 states; "καὶ ἐν ἐμοὶ οὐκ ἔχει οὐδέν" which translated literally would say, "and he (Satan) has no claim *in me*." There are only three verses between John 14:30 and John 15:2. 14:30 seems pretty clear that the devil has nothing "in" Christ. The evidence against Judas as the narrative referent is weightier than the evidence for. Judas can not be considered the narrative referent of the unfruitful branch in John 15:2.

When we look at John 17:12, Jesus is praying for his disciples:

⁴³ Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 122.

⁴⁴ Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 123.

⁴⁵ For a brief discussion on the polemic of this passage see Keener, *John*, 758–760.

⁴⁶ Keener, *John*, 743.

⁴⁷ For a brief discussion on the use of "in me" in John see Dillow, "Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship," 45. He argues that "in me" refers to fellowship.

⁴⁸ Kruse, *John*, 308.

ὅτε ἤμην μετ’ αὐτῶν ἐγὼ ἐτήρουν αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου ᾧ δέδωκάς μοι, καὶ ἐφύλαξα, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀπώλετο εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, ἵνα ἡ γραφὴ πληρωθῇ	While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.
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What the NRSV translates as “the one destined to be lost” is ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας: “the son of destruction...” in this text, Judas is the son of destruction, the one who will be lost. If Judas is understood as the unfruitful branch in John 15, it radically impacts the interpretation of the whole passage. If *he is the son of destruction* and the unfruitful branch of John 15, then the unfruitful branches must also be those who would be destroyed. But as we’ve looked at how Judas is characterized, that interpretation or reading of the text does not connect with the evidence. Judas cannot be considered “in Christ” because of his consistent association with the devil.

Conclusion

Jesus’ final “I am” statement focuses on how he, as the fulfillment of OT imagery in LXX Psalm 79, and LXX Isaiah 5:1–7 relates to his closest disciples. We saw this as we worked backwards through the Farewell Discourse to determine the referent of Jesus’ words in John 15:1–6. We noted how the characterization of the disciples in the text revealed them as having a confused and partial faith but still within the framework of being considered *in him*. This was made clear with Jesus’ words in John 14 which inform the reader that the disciples are considered having completed the conditional promises which are dependant on “belief.” As was stated above, the use of κλημα in John 15 and how that relates to OT allusions, reveals that the disciples are viewed as active participants in the fulfillment of the messianic promises realized through Jesus.

I have also argued in this chapter that Judas cannot be the referent of the unfruitful branches as the narrative does not characterize Judas as “in Christ” but associates him with the devil. This association is more apparent in John than in the synoptics and this association disqualifies Judas from being considered “in Christ” as John 14:30 states clearly, “the prince of this world has nothing *in me*...”

Now that we’ve determined the identity of the “branches in Christ” as being the disciples with the exception of Judas, we can focus on their outcome. In the following

chapter, we will discuss how judgement functions within John, and the context of John 15:1–6.

Chapter 4: The Outcomes of the Branches

Now that the identity of the branches has been discussed in Chapter 3, we need to determine their outcome. This will be done by analyzing how judgement functions in the Gospel of John, comparing how John uses the motifs of “harvest” and “fire” with their use in the synoptics, evaluating how $\alpha\dot{\rho}\omega$ is used in John and the LXX allusions, and by situating it all within the context of the Farewell Discourse.

Judgement in John

John 15:1–6 contains two motifs that have historically been interpreted as forms of eternal judgement: fire and harvest. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I believe this is a misinterpretation of this imagery. Judgement in John functions very differently than in the synoptics, which have many references to weeping and gnashing, eternal fire, or intense images of destruction. Judgement in John functions on two levels: the first occurs informally by the reader of the text. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Skinner notes that characters exist in the text “to confirm, deny, or question something about Jesus that will allow the literary audience to advance in its understanding of Jesus’s message, mission, and identity.”¹

Readers of the text, by extension, judge characters as either being “in the light” or “loving the darkness” as introduced in the Prologue. Keener notes: “Judgement occurs in the context of Jesus’ ministry as people’s hearts are exposed by how they respond to him and his message (9:39; cf. 12:31).”² The narrative and characterization in John function to invite and teach the reader to judge every character by whether they understand Jesus as he is revealed in the Prologue. The beloved disciple and the voice of God throughout the text, remind the reader of Jesus’ identity as revealed through the Prologue and set the bar for how people are to relate to Jesus.

The second level of judgement comes directly through the text by both Jesus and the narrator’s words. This section will focus on this second level as found in John: 3:16–21, 5:19–30, and 12:44–50 where the terms $\kappa\rho\acute{\iota}\nu\omega$, and $\kappa\rho\acute{\iota}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ are present and at how key

¹ Skinner, *How John Works*, 117.

² Keener, *John*, 571.

“judgment” terms found in John 15 are used elsewhere. We will first address how judgement functions in these passages, then see how it relates to John 15:1–6.

John: 3:16–21 (14–15)

As mentioned, characterization functions to reveal the identity of Jesus, his purpose, and his mission. This text is Jesus’ (or the narrator’s) response to Nicodemus’ questions.³ Verse 16 starts with the adverb Οὕτως with the conjunction γὰρ. Kruse notes that the adverb Οὕτως “always refers back to something previously mentioned, not something about to be explained.”⁴ This previously mentioned situation is found in John 3:14–15 with Jesus alluding to Moses. Kruse shows the beginning of the two main clauses in italics:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert,
in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up,
 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life,
 for in this way God loved the world;
And so [as a consequence of this love] he gave his one and only Son,
 that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have
 eternal life, for God did not send his Son into the world
 to condemn the world,
 but to save the world through him.⁵

On top of the Οὕτως found in verse 16, the repetition found in verses 15 and 16, give further weight to the connection between these verses. Rather than the focus being on perishing and condemnation (eternal judgement), which are only mentioned with the negatives μὴ and οὐ, the focus is on the one believing in the Son of Man having eternal life. See the repetition in verses 15–18:

Table 4: Comparison & Breakdown of John 3:15, 16, and 18a

v. 15	ὁ πιστεύων	ἐν αὐτῷ	/	/	ἔχῃ	ζωὴν αἰώνιον
v. 16	ὁ πιστεύων	εἰς αὐτὸν	μὴ ἀπόληται	ἀλλὰ	ἔχῃ	ζωὴν αἰώνιον
v. 18a	ὁ πιστεύων	εἰς αὐτὸν	οὐ κρίνεται	δὲ	...	...

In the first two, a present substantival participle is paired with the subjunctive present ἔχῃ creating a conditional clause, which verse 18a summarizes and then builds upon in verse 18b

³ It seems unclear on whether a section of this shifts from Jesus’ words to the narrator’s comments. See Kruse, *John*, 105.

⁴ Kruse, *John*, 115–116.

⁵ Kruse, *John*, 116.

with the conjunction δὲ. This also marks a shift from the present tense to the perfect tense implying the stative nature of disbelief. The one believing in him *is not judged*, but (δὲ) the one not believing, is already judged because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. The shift to the perfect tense in this verse, that the past action of disbelief continues to have implication in the present, leads into verses 19–20 where judgement is defined not as a future destination or a consequence of judgement, but as a statement of “right standing” or the “lack of right standing.” Verses 19–20 state:

And this is the judgment: that the **light** has come into the world, and people loved **darkness** rather than **light** because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the **light** and do not come to the **light**, so that their deeds may not be exposed.⁶

The narrative uses belief in Jesus as the marker of right standing (being in the light) and by extension, rejection of Jesus as continuing in darkness— they did not “come into the light.” This suggests that the judgement as revealed in John 3 is not condemnation in a consequential sense, but as a statement regarding their “right standing-ness” before God: those that reject Jesus do not want their evil deeds exposed. Rather than judgement as a place of condemnation, it is descriptive of the disbelievers’ present reality that they love darkness because “their deeds were evil.” The text does not describe where they will end up (outside with weeping and gnashing of teeth/fire etc.) because of their disbelief and verse 20 shifts back to the present tense from the perfect with the use *μισοῦν*, and *ἔρχεται*. This suggests the text is not referencing eternal judgement or condemnation but instead is inviting the reader to view those in the narrative who believe in Jesus in line with the Prologue. Verse 21 uses the developmental marker δὲ to further build on the idea that the reader is to judge not only those who disbelieve but also those who believe in Jesus as “practicing the truth.” The text is not just inviting the reader to judge who is in wrong-standing with God, but also who is in right-standing.

Judgment in this pericope deals with viewing the characters in the narrative in light of the Prologue rather than as eternal condemnation. Judgement from a negative connotation is a secondary theme, with the main theme focusing on eternal life given to those who believe. This eternal life is experienced within the narrative in the present as shown through the

⁶ Emphasis added. The imagery in these verses points back to John 1:4–13 with the repeated use of *φῶς* and *σκότος*.

present subjunctive verb ἔχῃ found in verse 15 and 16. Disbelief is characterized as a state that has narrative consequences of current wrong-standing with God because of one's evil deeds, but is invitational in the sense that their situation is changeable if they believe.

This is supported in the narrative as Nicodemus' disbelief in John 3 (meeting Jesus at night) shifts in John 7:50–52 to openly questioning the religious leaders on their approach to Jesus, to 19:39–42 where he prepares Jesus' body for burial. There is a shift from Nicodemus visiting Jesus at *night* to openly and actively serving. There is a move from confused disbelief into active (though incomplete) belief.

John 5:19–30

The context of “the Jews’” displeasure over Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath and calling God his Father, “making himself equal to God” (5:18),⁷ is the occasion for Jesus' words in John 5:19–30. Jesus addresses the charge by explaining that the Father has given him authority like “a son who imitates and obeys his father (5:19–20).”⁸ This authority includes “all judgement” (5:22, 27), and the ability to give life (5:22–26). This life-giving has present implications as Jesus states: “the one who hears my word and who believes the one who sent me has eternal life, and does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life” (24).⁹

The main verses I would like to address are 25–30 as they contain more direct reference to coming judgement. Verse 25 begins with Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν, and continues with the declaration that “an hour is coming– and now is here...” Keener notes the implications:

[T]he “now is” in 5:25 is significant (cf. 4:23): the believer enters new life (3:3, 5) and has in the present the life of the future age (3:15–16). Those who believe “hear” or “heed” Jesus' voice (cf. 18:37)...¹⁰

This, as stated above, focuses on this present-day nature of the new life found through Jesus. This suggests the term “οἱ νεκροὶ” in verse 25 is referencing the spiritually dead. The new life is present and available to the spiritually dead. Verse 28 starts similarly but with some key differences. Here is a quick comparison of the two verses:

⁷ Keener notes that “equality” in this context refers to rank not “an ontological question of nature.” See Keener, *John*, 648.

⁸ Keener, *John*, 648.

⁹ See Keener, *John*, 652–53. See also Kruse, *John*, 114.

¹⁰ Keener, *John*, 653.

Table 5: Comparison of John 5:25 and 28

25	Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν	ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα	καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν	ὅτε οἱ νεκροὶ ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀκούσαντες ζήσουσιν.
28	μὴ θαυμάζετε τοῦτο	ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα	/	οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ

Both start with a call to pay attention and a repeated ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα. The first references the dead coming to life in the present with the use of καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν while the second references life within the context of the future using the phrase πάντες οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις to reference the actual dead.¹¹ Verse 29 references a future resurrection– the good to a “resurrection of life” and those “who have practiced evil things to a resurrection of judgement.” This follows the same theme of verse 26, primarily being the authority of Christ to bring life. Carson notes: “The voice of the Son is powerful enough to generate spiritual life now; it will be powerful enough to call forth the dead then.”¹² In verse 30, Jesus reaffirms the primary context that he is able to do all these things as God’s divine representative. If we continue to the end of chapter 5, after a discussion on trustworthy testimony, Jesus ends with this:

Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me (vv. 45–46).

The focus in this passage primarily has to do with the authority given to Jesus to give life and judge in the present and in the future. The resurrection to judgement referenced in verse 28 is not qualified by any particular expression or imagery which indicates firstly, it is not the focus of the text, and secondly, as will be shown when looking at the synoptic tradition, does not follow the formula used to refer to eternal judgement.

¹¹ See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 258.

¹² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 258.

John 12:44–50

Keener notes that John 12:37–50 is a closing of sorts for the book of signs, and functions as a summary of the people’s response to his teachings (12:37–43)¹³ and his *actual* teachings (12:44–50).¹⁴

A simplified breakdown of Jesus’ appeal is as follows:

- 44–45: Jesus is God’s representative
- 46: He is a light, Believers will not remain in darkness (Prologue)
- 47–48: He does not Judge but His words will on the last day
- 49–50: Jesus is God’s representative

Jesus’ final appeal does not necessarily add new teaching but is a repetition of themes from John 3:16–21 and 5:19–30 (among other places...) and sandwiches a reference to light and darkness from the Prologue and discussion on judgement between statements surrounding Jesus’ declaration to be God’s representative. The teaching on judgement (vv. 47–48) within this passage recaps John 3:17 and John 5:28–29 with Jesus declaring: “I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world” and “The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge.” There is a present reality within the text of judgement where the reader determines, by the character’s responses to Jesus, who has come into the light and who remains in darkness. Carson notes:

As the Father’s agent, the Father’s Son, Jesus is the revealer of God (1:18). That is why he earlier claimed, ‘I am the light of the world’ (8:12). Here the thought is similar, the language less bold: Jesus has come into the world *as a light*. The Evangelist thus continues the theme of vv. 35, 36, using the light/darkness antithesis not only to invite the belief by making darkness repulsive, but also to stress, in preparation for vv. 47–48, that the purpose of his coming was not to bring condemnation but transformation.¹⁵

As can be seen, Carson notes that Jesus’ coming was to bring transformation rather than condemnation, but the text does mention a future final judgement where Jesus’ words (rather than Moses’ words as in John 5:45–46) will function as the judge but again, lacking in the text is any form of destructive imagery.

¹³ Keener, *John*, 882.

¹⁴ Keener, *John*, 886.

¹⁵ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 452.

As we have looked at these three texts, final judgement is a secondary theme with the primary one focusing on believing in Jesus as being “in the light.” In other words, being in the light is to be *in him*. In John 15, the passage makes it clear that all the branches are “in him” and what we know from our texts on judgement, that to be “in him” is connected with the theme of light. To be “in him” is to be “in the light.” When we look at how Judas is characterized, it is clear that he is not “in the light,” especially as when he leaves the last supper, it mentions that “it was night.”

Harvest and Fire Imagery in the Synoptics

The argument for eternal judgement in John 15 often uses the harvest and fire imagery to support its claim. However, those who interpret John 15:2 and 6 in this way seem to imbue its imagery with a synoptic understanding, rather than allowing the context of John to inform their interpretation. In the following section, I will briefly address synoptic imagery by engaging with Matt 3:7–12 and give an overview of how these metaphors function in the LXX.

The imagery of fire and burning is used in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The term $\pi\tilde{\upsilon}\rho$ is used within the context of eternal judgment. In each instance the terms “thrown into the fire,” “fiery hell”, “fiery furnace,” or “eternal fire” are used to further characterize the term. Fire is only used one time in the Gospel of John in 15:6 and there is no pattern in the text apart from the context of the Farewell Discourse for how it is to be understood.

The closest imagery to the fire and harvest imagery in John 15:6 in the synoptics is found in Matthew 3:7–10 and 3:12 and the speaker is John the Baptist. His purpose was to call the religious leaders to produce the fruit of repentance. “Therefore produce fruit worthy of repentance...” (v. 8) “Already now the ax is positioned at the root of the trees; therefore every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and *thrown into the fire*” (v. 10).

Here we see repeated terms and themes surrounding fruitfulness and a call to produce along with the terms $\pi\tilde{\upsilon}\rho$ and $\beta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\omega$ which are also present in John 15:6. However, while the imagery is similar, the metaphor functions differently in Matthew as the audience of the text is the religious leaders before Jesus begins his ministry¹⁶ and the desired fruit is a life

¹⁶ Leon Morris suggests that these religious leaders “had no real repentance but only a desire to escape divine retribution.” See Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 58.

changed because of repentance.¹⁷ In John 15, the narrative audience is Jesus' closest disciples, and the fruit is implied as doing the same kinds of works as Jesus.¹⁸ The language surrounding the removal of the tree is also clearer than is found in John 15:2, using the term ἐκκόπτω “cut down” in Matt 3:10. Morris notes:

John is not referring only to the remote future; for those who have eyes to see things were already happening. This is reinforced by the present tense in the three verbs of this verse... It is not easy to understand why the axe is pictured as lying at “the root” of the trees; if one is using an axe a tree is generally cut down some little distance up from the ground. But the root is that from which the tree draws its sustenance; therefore, the picture suggests that not only will the tree be overthrown, but its source of nourishment will be taken away.¹⁹

We also see a difference with the idea that in Matthew 3, judgement was the removal of the tree's root (sustenance/connection) while in John 15:6, not being connected to the vine is the reason “he is thrown out as a branch...” and is burned.

If we continue to Matt 3:12 we see a harvest metaphor:

οὗ τὸ πτύον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ, καὶ διακαθαριεῖ τὴν ἄλωνα αὐτοῦ καὶ συνάξει τὸν σῖτον αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν ἀποθήκην, τὸ δὲ ἄχυρον κατακαύσει πυρὶ ἀσβέστῳ.	His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.
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Morris notes that the imagery here is of the final stage of winnowing²⁰ but unlike Matt 3:10's focus on judgement as a present reality for the religious leaders, the three future tense verbs in verse 12 indicate this winnowing will occur in the future. Jesus is in view. He is the one who will “clean out,” “gather,” and “burn up the chaff.” The judgement in verse 12, is characterized as done in the future and accomplished by Jesus. The modifier ἄσβεστος denotes the eternal consequence of this judgement.

Matthew 3:7–10, 12 function as an illustration of how the synoptics use the motifs of fire and harvest to reference judgement. When looking at John 15 and Matt 3:10, we find similar imagery and tenses but drastically different audiences. The first instance in Matt 3 which uses themes of cutting and fire, looks at a narrative present judgement while the

¹⁷ Luke 3:10–14 expands on what fruit worthy of repentance looks like.

¹⁸ This idea of fruitfulness is based off of Jesus' words in John 14:12–14.

¹⁹ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 60.

²⁰ See Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 62.

second which uses the harvest motif focuses on the final judgement. Only in the case of the final judgement is a modifier used.

Using synoptic imagery as a basis to understand the fire and pruning metaphors in John 15:1–6 as eternal judgement does not work. Not only does judgment function differently in the gospel of John but as was shown in Matt 3, the synoptic writers often used a modifier to “up the ante” to mark judgement as eternal.

Evaluating the use of αἶρω in John 15 and the LXX Allusions

According to Functional Linguistics, choice implies meaning.²¹ An author’s use of one term over another creates the meaning. So why does John 15:2 use the term αἶρω to mean “taken away” or “cut off” if another word like καθαιρέω (LXX Ps 79:13), ἀναιρέω, or ἀφίστημι²² (LXX Ps 79:19a) could have been used and been clearer especially when considering how αἶρω is used in the LXX? The use of αἶρω and καθαίρω in John 15:2 forces interpreters to choose a term which contrasts with καθαίρω according to the context. The term καθαίρω has more contextual clues because of the play on words with καθαρός and its use in viticultural texts in the first century.²³ The translators seem to look at verse 6 and read in a kind of judgement²⁴ relating back into verse 2.

Now, one could argue that John not using καθαιρέω or ἀφίστημι could mean that he was not using the LXX as a text, was using a different manuscript tradition, or was not alluding to LXX Ps 79. Even if all of that is true, αἶρω is not the best term to use if the author of John 15 wants to indicate “removal.” αἶρω is used in the LXX to translate thirty-three Hebrew terms. The primary Hebrew term translated with αἶρω is נָשָׂא which is primarily used to refer to lifting or carrying.²⁵ If the writer of John 15 was primarily concerned with a play on words, the term καθαιρέω would have been a clearer choice as the connotations of the term are negative.

²¹ For examples of this see Mathewson, *Intermediate Greek Grammar*, 112-115, 140-143, 160-163. See also Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 165, 178.

²² This term is not connected with the viticultural image but it is a clearer term.

²³ Keener, *John*, 996.

²⁴ I do not believe that John 15:6 is judgement in the traditional sense. In John 15, Jesus is speaking to believers, not non-believers. Even in verse 6 the terms ἐν ἐμοί are used.

²⁵ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

As was stated above the compounds of αἰρέω (13.38) are organized within the semantic domain of “to cease, of a state...” or “to cause a state to cease.”²⁶ Louw Nida puts αἶρω (15.203) is within the lexical domain of “to carry or bear.”²⁷ The term καθαίρω is found in two different lexical domains, regarding: 1) agriculture (43.12) where it means “to cut away or cut back,”²⁸ and 2) being clean or dirty (79.49), as in, “to make clean, to cleanse, to clean.”²⁹ LN specifically mentions the play on words with this term and with regard to John 15 states: “This play on two meanings of καθαίρω serves to highlight the meaning of καθαρός as ‘clean’ (79.48) or ‘pure’ (53.29) in John 15:3.”³⁰

Again, as John 15 alludes to Isaiah 5:1–7, one would expect the target domain (John 15) to use similar terms as the source domain (Isa 5:1–7; Ps 79) to reference similar referents. John’s use of αἶρω instead of a compound of αἰ αἰρέω suggests that he is referring to something different than the source domain.

Context: The Farewell Discourse, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Reinstatement

In Chapter 3 we looked at how Peter and the rest of the disciples were characterized in John 13–14. The first as one who was going to betray Jesus and the whole group as confused with a partial faith, but viewed by Jesus as fulfilling the conditional promises. In John 18, after Jesus was arrested, we see Peter and another disciple follow the mob to Caiaphas’ house, only for Peter to deny Jesus three times (18:16–17; 25–27). We see, leading up to the crucifixion, all of the disciples, with the exception of the beloved disciple, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene, abandoning Jesus (19:25). They did not remain or abide with Jesus in this part of the narrative. In fact the next time the group of disciples is referenced after Jesus’ arrest they are behind locked doors because they are afraid even after Mary Magdalene brings news that Jesus is alive (20:18–19).

Interestingly, what we find as the narrative continues is not “a cutting off and a removing” of all those that betrayed and denied Jesus leading up to the crucifixion (a

²⁶ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 152.

²⁷ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 206.

²⁸ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 516.

²⁹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 698.

³⁰ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 516.

legitimate lack of abiding), but a reinstatement. When Jesus suddenly appears in John 20:19b he does not condemn them but declares:

Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν· καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ ἐγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐνεφύσησεν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· Λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον· ἃν τινῶν ἀφῆτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἀφεῶνται αὐτοῖς· ἃν τινῶν κρατῆτε κεκράτηνται.

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:21–23)

In verse 21 Jesus declares that he is commissioning the disciples in the same manner that the Father sent him. This is a continuation of Jesus’ ministry through his disciples. This is reinforced in verse 22 when Jesus uses the aorist imperative Λάβετε as he calls his disciples to receive the Holy Spirit. This reflects the beginning of Jesus’ own ministry in John 2:32 when John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus. On top of this, Jesus gives authority to his disciples to forgive sins and while this is the first mention of “forgiveness of sins” in the gospel, it is linked with the larger commission that the disciples are to do the works of Jesus. Kruse notes the disciples being “sent to continue the words and works of Jesus” was foreshadowed throughout the text.³¹

This commissioning and reinstatement by Jesus more easily describe how the branches of John 15:2 are treated. Rather than αἵρω being understood as “cut off,” which we do not see as happening to the unfruitful disciples, it is much more natural for it to be translated as “lifted up” as it reflects the narrative of the gospel. This is further supported in John 21:15–17 when Jesus specifically reinstates Peter.

Conclusion

When we look at how judgement functions in John in comparison to the synoptics, the use of αἵρω in both John and the LXX allusions, and situate the text within the larger narrative we must seriously reconsider how eternal judgement could be the outcome of the branches in John 15:1–6. As was shown in this chapter, we found that eternal judgement was not the main point of John 3, 5 or 12. The judgement rhetoric in John 3 is used invitationally to help the reader believe in the privileged knowledge of Jesus that was revealed in the

³¹ See Kruse, *John*, 375.

Prologue. In John 5, Jesus is revealed as God's divine representative who has the authority to judge in the present and the future. While judgement is mentioned, the primary focus is on Jesus' authority to judge, not the judgement itself. John 12 is a recap of Jesus' teachings in John 3 and 5. Within these texts, final judgement is a secondary theme which supports the gospel's invitation towards believing in Jesus. As was said earlier, believing in Jesus is revealed as being "in the light" and by extension, as being "in him." Judgement in John lacks the metaphoric and figurative language used in the synoptics to refer to final judgment.

After engaging with how judgement functioned in the Gospel of John, we looked at how $\alpha\dot{\iota}\omega$ was used in the source materials and situated the narrative context of John 15:1–6. We saw that the context of the text does not share the necessary generic space to map the judgement themes from the OT allusions into the outcome of the branches. We noted how the outcome of the branches should be understood in light of the resurrection and the disciples' reinstatement. Specifically, the outcome of the unfruitful branches in John 15:2 is better described by the disciples' experience with Jesus after the resurrection— a lifting up, rather than a cutting off. With the language of "in me" referencing believers, the fire language in John 15:6 cannot be viewed as eternal judgement. Instead the language in verse 6 should probably be understood in light of 1 Corinthians 3:15: "If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire."

In the next chapter we will summarize the overall argument being made in this thesis and discuss the implications.

Chapter 5: Putting it All Together and Implications

Summary of Argument

I have argued in this thesis that the identity of the branches in John 15:1–6 is Peter and the disciples apart from Judas Iscariot, with the outcome of those unfruitful branches in verse 2 as being lifted up into a place of fruitfulness and that the fire theme in verse 6 does not refer to final eternal judgement. Below is a quick synopsis of my argumentation.

In Chapter 1, we looked at the disagreement concerning the identity and outcome of the branches in John 15:1–6 along with a brief evaluation of the methodologies used. I contended that the use of Conceptual Blending Metaphor Theory, with a focus on both sides of the metaphorical inputs, and Allusion Theory would lead to a clearer outcome of the issues surrounding the term αἶψα, the “in me” language in the text, and the harvest and fire imagery in verses 2 and 6.

In Chapter 2, we contextualized the “I am the True Vine” metaphor within the context of John by briefly engaging with the Prologue and the purpose of the “I am” statements. We found in the first that Jesus is revealed with the themes of logos and light which point to Torah and Wisdom. This imagery serves to reveal Jesus as God but separate from the Father. Concerning the “I am statements” we discussed how they function to reveal how Jesus relates and fulfills the OT expectations of the Messiah.

We then looked at two OT allusions: LXX Psalm 79 and Isaiah 5:1–7. In the first, we noted one of the major themes of LXX Psalm 79 is God’s restoration and how the psalmist used different compounds of αἶψα. The implications of this, along with the context of John 15 being in the Farewell Discourse is that we are to read the text in light of God’s restoration rather than judgement.

In Chapter 3, we discussed the identity of the branches by initially determining the narrative audience of Jesus’ words in John 15, by analyzing how the disciples are characterized in John 13–14, by discussing whether Judas Iscariot could be considered “in me,” and by assessing how the term κληῖμα is used metaphorically in the LXX. What we found was that Judas Iscariot, in contrast to the rest of the disciples, could not be considered “in me.” Where the disciples are revealed as having fulfilled the conditional promises Jesus makes even in the midst of their confusion, Judas is consistently associated with betrayal and

the devil. The implication of Judas' characterization is that he could not be the unfruitful branch of John 15:2.

In Chapter 4, we focused on the outcome of the branches in John 15:1–6 initially noting how judgement in John functions starting with the Prologue and working through key texts, then contrasted Johannine judgement with synoptic imagery. The implications of the differences were that judgement in John functions differently with a focus on the present right-standing before God rather than a final judgement. The marked difference in the use of harvest and fire imagery in the synoptics means that we cannot use it to determine the meaning of the imagery in John 15:2, 6. This is made clearer when evaluating how αἶψα is used in John 15 and the LXX allusions, as well as analyzing the wider context of the narrative including the crucifixion and resurrection. The reinstatement in John 20:21–23 and John 21:15–17 are the narrative examples of Jesus “lifting” his disciples into a place of fruitfulness.

Implications

The implications of this are rather significant. If I am correct about the identity of the branches in verses 2 and 6, this has implications for the outcomes of the branches as it impacts the potential readings of the text. If Judas is the identity of the “unfruitful branch” the text would have to be referencing eternal judgement as he is also called “the son of destruction.” If he is not considered “in Christ,” then the default understanding of eternal judgement of being “cut off” (v. 2) and “burned” (v. 6) is not necessary and in fact not possible as the disciples do not experience eternal judgement. If that is the case, αἶψα (v. 2) should be translated as “lifted up.” This is a radical change from how the text has historically been understood and translated. This has consequences for biblical scholarship and Christian discipleship.

In John 15:6, the fire motif should be understood in light of 1 Corinthians 3:15. This reflects more clearly how judgement functions in John with the focus on God's invitation to belief. I am not arguing against eternal judgement as a Christian doctrine, but only against judgement being in view in John 15:1–6.

Future Considerations

There were many things that were beyond the scope of my thesis but which are important considerations. One of those is how the Early Church and Jewish sources interpreted the allusions and key texts engaged with in this work. I briefly discussed “fruitfulness” in chapter 4, but I believe a fuller discussion on how it functions within John 15:1–6 and the following narrative would be beneficial. I also primarily discussed the term αἶρω and examples of how “lifting up” occurred in the narrative. I believe further work could be done on how the term καθαίρω is understood after Jesus’ betrayal. In other words, what are narrative examples of how “pruning” occurs within the text? There are also other metaphorical texts that could be better understood by applying the methodology utilized in this work.

Conclusion

A final restatement of my thesis is that the narrative referent of the branches in John 15:1–6 is the disciples of Jesus with the exception of Judas Iscariot. As a result, along with the characterization of those disciples, the proper translation of αἶρω (v. 2) is “lifted up” and the judgement motif in verse 6 is not referring to eternal judgement. When it all comes together, we find that in John 15:1–6, Jesus uses metaphoric language to prepare his closest disciples not only for his betrayal, but also for his resurrection by situating their identity, purpose and authority as being “in him.” The phrase “every branch in me” and the use of the verb αἶρω work together along with the context of the Farewell Discourse, to bridge the gap of unfruitfulness reflected in the disciples’ own betrayal and rejection of Jesus after his arrest. Understanding the text in this way takes seriously all the metaphorical components and the narrative. I believe this is a more accurate reading.

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