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THE PRE-TRIAL LITERARY MOTIF OF JOHN

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Introduction

Several books and articles over the last half century or so have proposed that a pre-trial (lawsuit) literary motif permeates the narrative structure of John.¹ While this legal setting is admittedly present in other New Testament writings (especially Acts and Revelation),² it is featured most prominently in John 1-12. It is expressed through the book's vocabulary, structure, and content (rhetorical features such as idioms, discourses, etc.). Lincoln contends that in John "this major metaphor is arguably the most distinctive, pervasive, and comprehensive motif."³

The pre-trial motif parallels and serves as the plot for the book's center theme of belief in Jesus' messiahship and divine sonship as highlighted in the author's purpose (John 20:31). It reflects the forensic ideas of witness, truth, and judgment as found in a Greco-Roman and primarily a Jewish setting. On one level, this motif is cosmic in nature depicting a lawsuit between God and his Christ (Jesus) on one side and prince of this world (Satan) and the world on the other (cf. John 14:30, 16:11). On another, it entails a judici-drama of Jesus offering testimony about his messianic claims to the "Jews," who literally represent the Jewish nation and metaphorically also the world. It is seen in the role of the Holy Spirit and the preparation of the

¹ For a survey of the major works from 1946-1994, see Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: the Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2000), 4-6. The most systematic of these works has been a monograph by Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977) (hereafter *New Testament Concept*). Lincoln is the first major work to appear on this subject in the last decade or so. For two recent attempts, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Cosmic Trial Motif: The World, the Jews, and the Witness to Jesus," in *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009), 436-454; and George L. Parsenios, *Rhetoric and Drama in the Johannine Lawsuit Motif* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) for a review of the legal character of John through ancient rhetoric and drama.

² Trites, 128 and 175, noted the theme of witness used to describe a trial motif is "most fully developed" in the Johannine writings (gospel and epistles) and "received great prominence" in Acts. He, 154-174, labels this phenomenon in Revelation as a "live metaphor." For a review of the judicial character of the Synoptics, see Allison A. Trites, "The Idea of the Witness in the Synoptic Gospels: Some Judicial Considerations," *Themelios* 5, no. 2 (1968): 18-26; and Trites, "Witness," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 877-879.

³ Lincoln, 12.

messianic community to testify to the world in the post-resurrection period. The Jewish leaders and Pilate (crowd to a lesser extent) serve as supporting actors in the historical Roman trial in which they ironically are judged for their rejection of the truth (Jesus). Lincoln summarizes the theme's function, "... second only to the narrative's unique Christology, this metaphor of a lawsuit on a cosmic scale is the most distinctive characteristic holding many of the elements of its plot and discourse together."⁴

This paper will explore the subject of the pre-trial motif in the John primarily through the concepts of witness, truth, and judgment, and briefly through its structure/content.

Linguistic Evidence: Terminology

John uses distinct forensic language (words, terms) to describe a cosmic pre-trial or judici-drama that progresses throughout the book. Bandy, De Diétrich, Hindley, Köstenberger, Lincoln, and Trites have observed the presence of three main cognate word groups that convey "strong judicial or legal connotations."⁵ The *martur-* (witness, testimony), *alēth-* (truth, true, truly), and *krin-* (judge, judgment) stem words form part of the Johannine rhetorical lexicon and constitute strong evidence for a trial motif. These words normally occur more frequently in John than in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts (see Appendix A for listing of the key words).⁶

A cursory review of the Johannine passages containing words from these three cognate groups reveals most appear in the first twelve chapters where there is no formal legal court scene. Two of the seven common themes in John that emerge from an analysis of the semantic

⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁵ Ibid., 12. See Alan S. Bandy, "Word and Witness: An Analysis of the Lawsuit Motif in Revelation Based on the Witness Terminology," *Global Journal of Classical Theology* 6, no. 1 (2005): 1, 10, 13-15. <http://www.galaxie.com/article/8608> (accessed November 22, 2011); Suzanne De Diétrich, "You Are My Witnesses," *Interpretation* 8, no. 3 (1954): 273; J. C. Hindley, "Witness in the Fourth Gospel." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 18 (1965): 320-321; Köstenberger, 439; Lincoln, 12-13; and Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 80-81.

⁶ For a comparison of the judicial language in Revelation and John, see Bandy, 27.

domains from an inventory of the book's vocabulary include "witness" and "truth."⁷ According to Köstenberger, John's wording "reflects [his] linguistic choice from a finite set of possible modes of expression in a given language."⁸ The linguistic data strongly suggest the author (presumably John) was attempting to apply a judicial standard of witness and truth to convince his readers to believe in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God.

Trites has provided a list of additional Johannine words that convey legal or judicial connotations in a context of hostility and debate:

The use of such Greek words as ... κατηγορία (18:29), κατηγορεῖν (5:45 twice), ἀποκρίνεσθαι (5:17; 19), ἀπόκρισις (1:22; 19:9), βῆμα (19:13), ζήτησις (3:25), ἐλέγχειν (3:20; 8:46; 16:8), ὁμολογεῖν (1:20, twice; 9:22; 12:42), ἀρνεῖσθαι (1:20; 13:8; 18:25, 27), αἰτία (18:38; 19:4, 6), εὐρίσκειν (18:38; 19:4, 6), and σχίσμα (7:43; 9:16; 10:19) suggests the idea that the work of Christ is set against a background of opposition in which it would be natural to try to prove Christ's case when it was being questioned and challenged.⁹

Concept of Witness in John

The *martur*- word group is the most important of the three for our exploration of the pre-trial motif in John. The most prominent words in this group include μάρτυς (Eng., *mártus*, witness), μαρτυρέω (*marturéō*, to witness, testify), μαρτυρία (*marturía*, act or content of witness), and μαρτύριον (*martúrion*, objective testimony, proof). In John only the words μαρτυρέω (33 times) and μαρτυρία (14 times) appear and are open to two possible understandings. Parnenios has noted rhetorically "testimony frames the Fourth Gospel from start

⁷ Köstenberger, "Linguistic and Literary Dimensions of John's Gospel and Letters," in *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (see footnote one), 129.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹ Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 80-81. A general gloss of these terms in order would include "accusation," "to accuse," "to answer," "an answer," "judgment-seat," "question," "to convince," "to confess," "to deny," "fault," "to find," and "division."

to finish,” beginning with the μαρτυρία of John the Baptist and ending with the μαρτυρία of the beloved disciple (John 1:6-8, 21:24).¹⁰

The Greek word for “gospel” (Gk., εὐαγγέλιον) appears nowhere in the book. Rather the book is described as a testimony (Gk., *marturía*), which places the entire book uniquely within the legal setting according to Classical oratory usage. Lincoln clarifies the relationship between this description and its traditional designation as a genre about the life of Jesus (i.e., gospel):

Given the extent to which the lawsuit motif shapes this Gospel, one might be tempted to suggest that the genre ... is that of a testimony or defense speech in a trial. This would, however, be to jump to a wrong conclusion. ... Testimony is the mode or function of this Gospel’s narrative, the perlocutionary effect that the narrative itself makes explicit. But when genre is defined in terms of both form and content, then the actual genre of this narrative about Jesus is ancient biography. All the canonical Gospels belong to a subgenre of the *bios*. The form that the Fourth Evangelist’s witness takes and the content of this witness are a life of Jesus. It is simply that the emplotment of this ancient biography is dominated by the motif of the trial. The signals that this biography has, like other ancient biographies, an apologetic and polemic function.¹¹

Such a description of the marked legal character of John raises the question as to whether his presentation is of a testimony is legal or historical. Parsenius has clarified that “the notion of eyewitness testimony ... does not exclude the legal character of testimony in John.”¹²

Judicial Witness: Establishment of Facts

Trites has produced the most systematic work on the concept of witness, tracing it from its pre-Christian to its New Testament usage. The usual Classical meaning of these words, except μαρτύριον, was associated with a legal setting.¹³ Individuals served as witnesses, testified, and gave evidence to establish facts in a law court or before the gods (cf. Homer, *Iliad*, l. 338ff).

¹⁰ Parsenius, 2.

¹¹ Lincoln, 170-172.

¹² Parsenius, 36.

¹³ Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 2-15. Cf. De Diétrich, 273; and H. Strathmann, “μάρτυς, et al.,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:476-481.

Witnesses also confirmed official records and agreements. Hearsay was less credible and women were usually not allowed to testify in court. The number of witnesses was generally unspecified. The connection of persecution and suffering for one's testimony ending in martyrdom is largely missing from the Hellenistic and Jewish usages of these words until the second century CE.¹⁴

Despite some differences in application of the *martur*- word group between Classical writers and their Hebraic counterparts, such as the number of witnesses required, Trites has aptly demonstrated its judicial or legal meaning has largely been retained in the Septuagint (LXX) and Jewish writers (especially Philo).¹⁵ These writings serve as the background and terminology for the New Testament authors' concept of witness. According to Trites, "the idea of witness in John's Gospel is both very prominent and thoroughly judicial and is to be understood in terms of Old Testament legal language."¹⁶

Barr, De Diétrich, and Trites believe the principle of collaborative (multiple) honest eye-witnesses was the standard throughout the biblical period. Barr in particular contends it was one by which early Christians verified the facts given to them.¹⁷ It is one of the noticeable differences between Hellenistic and Jewish legal applications of evidence. This principle is best seen in the Mosaic regulation of establishing a matter by several witnesses especially in cases involving idolatry, which were punishable by death (cf. Deut. 17:6-7, 19:15-19). As Barr explains, witnesses were "not called in to substantiate any charge, but by their presence to assist in bringing about confession and reconciliation."¹⁸ The largely apologetic function of witnesses is

¹⁴ Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 14; Bandy, 2; and Strathmann, 4:487-488, 495, 504-508. A possible early metaphor can be glimpsed in Revelation 12:11.

¹⁵ Trites, 4-65. Cf. Strathmann, 4:476-488.

¹⁶ Trites, 80.

¹⁷ Allan Barr, "The Factor of Testimony in the Gospels," *The Expository Times* 49 (1937-38), 401.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 402. Cf. Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1997), 212. From a slightly different view, *Pre-Trial Literary Motif of John* -6-

apparent in John chap. 1:19-6:71. The Mosaic code considered a witness' responsibility so serious that it required him or her to initiate the penalty, usually death in criminal cases (Deut. 17:7). Witnesses, especially elders at the city gate, were called upon to testify in legal transactions (Ruth 4:2-9). In Israel, false witnesses were to receive the same penalty intended for the accused (cf. Deut. 19:16-20; cf. Acts 6:11, 58-59, a case in which false witnesses prevailed). Later Jewish rabbis as recorded in the Mishnah minutely regulated the administration of the witness process (cf. *m. Sanhedrin* and *Makkot*).

This judicial concept of corroboration is carried over to apostolic teaching and applied literally or figuratively (Matt. 18:15ff, 2 Cor. 13:1, 1 Tim. 5:19). The most noticeable Johannine example includes Jesus' presentation of five witnesses in his defense against charges that he broke the Sabbath and committed blasphemy (John 5:31-47). The concept of reliable testimony is also present. In John 21:24a, the author (beloved disciple) claims to present a reliable and trustworthy eyewitness to what he saw and heard concerning Jesus from the beginning of his ministry (cf. John 15:27). The "we" statement of John 21:24b serves to validate his testimony. John used the Jewish literary practice of *inclusio* to highlight the historiographic nature of his writings from beginning to end (John 1:14, 16, 21-24b).¹⁹ He and his fellow witnesses observed Jesus' glory as the only son of God and the grace and truth he revealed (see section "Concept of Truth"). According to Köstenberger, these literary features place John within the accepted legal and historiographic practices of Hellenistic and Jewish writers who used firsthand sources and/or

Reiser explains the Jewish judicial process allowed anyone present at the trial to "speak and exercise influence for or against the accused."

¹⁹ Köstenberger, 124.

were participants in the actual events (cf. Plutarch, *Malice of Herodotus* 20; Josephus, *Jewish Wars* Preface).²⁰

The following section offers examples comparing this first connotation of witness in pursuit of historical fact to the secondary notion of witness in John.

Apologetic Witness: Expression of Truth

Barr, De Diétrich, Trites, and Strathmann have observed a secondary meaning for the *martur-* cognate group (μαρτυρέω, μαρτυρία). The Johannine usage may reflect what De Diétrich describes as the “wider sense” of the word already in Plato’s day, which conveyed “an expression of personal convictions without ... being necessarily based on factual evidence. The witness testifies to a truth in which he believes.”²¹ Barth argued “John’s neglect of μάρτυς and μαρτύριον in preference for the verb and μαρτυρία indicates a concentration on the actual witness-giving as opposed to the subject matter offered as evidence.”²²

Barr offers several examples to distinguish John’s application of witness. In cases where **historical fact** was under consideration, John followed the Mosaic regulation concerning evidence.²³ Instances are often found in the episodes where the beloved disciple (John) appears (John 18:23, 19:26ff, 20:1-10, 21:7-20). For example, the beloved disciple and Peter both witness the sign to Judas’ identification as Jesus’ betrayer (John 13:18-26). Later in John 20:1-10, both again independently confirm the empty tomb as indicated by the temporal progression of the narrative and condition of the grave clothes (John 20:4-8). The case of beloved disciple’s sole testimony to Jesus’ death does not necessarily invalidate this understanding (John 19:35). Barr explained the Greek demonstrative pronoun ἐκεῖνος (see bold) in this passage “**that one**

²⁰ Ibid., 123-124.

²¹ De Diétrich, 273.

²² Marcus Barth, *Die Augenzeuge* (Zurich, 1946), 272, quoted in Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 80.

²³ Barr, 406-407.

knows that [what] he says is true” may parallel Paul’s solemn appeal to God as his witness in a legal sense (Rom. 1:9, 2 Cor. 1:23, 1 Thess. 2:5).²⁴

In other parts of the John, especially the discourses, lawsuit scenes, and post-resurrection narrative, there is a noticeable difference in the type of testimony offered. It exhibits a similarity to Hellenistic literature where the sense of witness involves **a moral/ethical statement of truth about someone or something** based on a person’s experience and conviction (cf. Plato, *Laws* 2:664c). Barr defined the importance of this second connotation of witness to John’s usage:

But there is another kind of testimony which involves value-testimony—a testimony not to the fact but to the truth. ... it is very clear to us that where aesthetic or moral values are involved the standard [of multiple honest witnesses] is inappropriate. ... we find in the Fourth Gospel the simple principle of corroboration transferred to testimony of this kind. Such testimony is indeed impressive and convincing if we get enough of it, and from the right people²⁵

According to Tenney, this second type often involves the “presentation of the message about Christ” in John’s narrative and exhibits **an apologetic tone**:

Its general meaning denotes attestation of some person or event which might naturally be the object of antagonism or skepticism. Because of the stupendous miracle of the incarnation ... some sort of confirmation was necessary if Jesus were to be regarded as anything more than a wandering prophet who made fantastic claims. The support for His claims became the witness which is Christian testimony. This term thus became the summary of the apologetic teaching that the Gospel advanced in defense of Jesus’ life and work. ... The witness is mainly to the character and significance of His person. The attestation of the factual history is only the first step toward the witness of His significance in the divine revelation and in the reality of the experience.²⁶

Trites notes the parallel to non-legal usage among Classical Greek writers: “In this latter case one is dealing with contents whose very nature excludes empirical verification. The

²⁴ Ibid., 406.

²⁵ Ibid., 407.

²⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, “The Meaning of ‘Witness’ in John,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132, no. 527 (July-September 1975): 229-230.

trustworthiness of the witness now rests on his unique convictions.”²⁷ De Diétrich and Strathmann contend this type of witness presupposes factual events but is based mainly upon the subjective experience of faith and its accompanying gift of revealed truth.²⁸

The most vivid Johannine example of this type of witness follows Jesus’ claim in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world.” Immediately the Pharisees challenged his statement, “Because you are bearing witness [μαρτυρέω] concerning yourself; your witness [μαρτυρία: evidence] is not true.” The sense of the word “true” is “judicially valid.”²⁹

The Jewish leaders’ dispute with Jesus has meaning because their accepted norm for such evidence was multiple witnesses. Jesus’ initial solemn response to them was based on a personal self-awareness and conviction of his divine origins, commission, and destination (John 8:14).³⁰ It was not rooted in the Mosaic concept of evidence, but aligned with the Hellenistic concept of witness of truth. Sensing the Pharisees unbelief and unwillingness to accept his self-witness to the truth, Jesus later appealed to the Mosaic regulation to satisfy the Pharisees’ human demands (John 8:15-18).³¹ Hindley explains Jesus’ appeal to the Father’s witness does not fulfill the rules of independent evidence: “Testimony must be given and accepted: the witness of the Father is (humanly speaking) nothing more than the receiving end of this one transaction.”³²

The basis for Jesus’ witness was his relationship (union) with the Father from whom his teaching originated (John 8:16, 18, 26, 29).³³ This episode, like an earlier one during the Feast of

²⁷ Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 11. Cf. Hindley, 321.

²⁸ De Diétrich, 273; and Strathmann, 498.

²⁹ Maximilian Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 5th rev. ed., trans. Mary Grosvenor (Reprint, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1996), 311.

³⁰ Note John’s use of ἀποκρίνασθαι (“answered”), which is a Hellenistic response used in solemn proceedings. Cf. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated By Examples* (Reprint, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2005), 74.

³¹ Hindley, 327.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 320, 327-328.

Tabernacles (John 7:16-17), highlights the notion of self-authenticating testimony (cf. John 3:33). Unlike Nicodemus, the Jews failed to receive and accept the evidence that God had placed his seal on Jesus (ministry) and his revelation of truth.³⁴ Due to their unbelief, the Jews (Pharisees, Judeans, etc.) could not hear God's words through Jesus' witness, be drawn, and learn truth from him (John 8:43, 45-47; cf. John 6:37, 44-45, 10:26-29). According to Hindley, the real issue was the Jews did not know God and could not comprehend Jesus' self-witness to the truth, which ultimately meant they could not accept the witness of God himself.³⁵

Several instances are presented where this standard is applied to theological truth, especially in the self-witness of Jesus to his divine position and relationship with the Father: (1) John's testimony to Jesus as the lamb of God (John 1:29, 36), (2) Andrew's confession to Peter that Jesus was the Messiah (1:41), (3) Nathaniel's admission that Jesus is the Son of God and Israel's king (1:49), (4) Nicodemus' confirmation that Jesus was a teacher from God (3:2), (5) Samaritan woman's rhetorical question, "Could this be the Christ?" (4:29), (6) Jesus' pronouncement to be the bread of life, living bread (6:35, 51), (7) Jesus' own testimony as the light of the world (8:12, 9:5), (8) Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (6:69), (9) his description to be the door of the sheepfold and messianic good shepherd (10:7, 9, 11, 14), (10) his declaration to Martha as the resurrection and life (11:25), (11) her confession that Jesus was the "Christ, the Son of God who has come into the world" (11:27), (12) his assertion to his disciple to be the way, truth, and life (14:16), (13) Jesus' description as the true vine (15:1, 5), and (14) doubting Thomas' profession that Jesus truly was his Lord and God (20:28).³⁶

³⁴ Hindley, 326.

³⁵ Ibid., 323. See John 8:55.

³⁶ Several of the examples have been adapted from Barr, 407.

Despite John's seeming artificial use of judicial terms of witness to validate spiritual truth in his book, Barr concluded that such an expression serves as "a remarkable tribute both to the Evangelist's respect for historical truth and to the historical standards of his original readers."³⁷

Excursus: Rib Pattern and John

The prophets and biblical writers often drew upon Israel's judicial terminology and process to depict God as both judge and witness in a cosmic trial where he pleads with Israel who has broken his covenant (e.g., Micah 6:1-5, Mal. 3:5). The prophets acted as God's messenger announcing his complaint against his people. Job also explicitly conveys the drama of the divine court scene. Lincoln explains the patriarch as plaintiff had a controversy with and brought accusations against God (Job 13:3, 18, 16:21, 23:1-7, 31:35).³⁸ Job's friends act as witnesses and judges. God ultimately judges Job (40:1-9). Isaiah 40-55 is one of the longest sustained judicial sections in the Bible and contains a divine trial scene where God disputes with the nations in form of a trial speech (Isa. 41:1-5, 21-29, 43:8-13, 44:6-8, 45:18-25) and then a formal lawsuit with Israel (Isa. 42:18-25, 43:22-28, 50:1-3). Terminology and imagery reflective of a Hebraic courtroom are displayed.³⁹ For example, the faithful remnant of Israel was summoned to be witnesses and advocates in God's controversy with the heathen nations (Isa. 43:9-12, 44:8ff).

These Old Testament passages serve as examples of what form critics call a βῦρις (Eng., *rib*) pattern. The word appears in the Mosaic judicial section in Deuteronomy 17:8, which features instructions on matters (Heb. pl., *ribōt*) of controversy. In Hosea 4:1, it is used in the singular of God's legal indictment against Israel's sin and unfaithfulness to his covenant.

³⁷ Ibid., 408.

³⁸ Lincoln, 38.

³⁹ For a complete analysis of the speech controversy in Isaiah 40-55, see Trites, 35-47.

Essentially it involves one member of a covenant bringing a complaint against an offending party, and is often called a prophetic or covenant lawsuit. Soulen explains that such cases involved four elements (1) a summons to the offending party, (2) rehearsal of the benefits formerly afforded to the offender, (3) presentation of formal accusations, and (4) gathering of witnesses to testify.⁴⁰ Soulen's definition indicates this pattern could include both connotations of witness discussed earlier.

Soulen's criteria of a *rib* pattern could be broadly applied to John: (1) a summons is offered by John the Baptist to the offending party, the Jewish nation (John 1:23), (2) covenantal benefits of belief in Jesus include a new birth (John 3:3-8, cf. Ezek. 36:24ff), (3) John recites Isaiah as a witness to fulfilled prophecy to explain widespread unbelief in the Jewish nation (John 12:37-43, cf. Isa. 6:9-10, 53:1), and (4) Jesus as the judge in a pre-judicial setting appoints his word (teaching) as the standard by which those who reject him would be judged on the last day (John 12:44-50).

De Diétrich, Lincoln, and Trites, to a lesser extent, contend the *rib* pattern of Isaiah 40-55 serves as a rhetorical framework for John.⁴¹ Matson has specifically criticized Lincoln's argument for not taking into account the complexity of John's narrative and stated purpose (John 20:31). He has questioned whether Lincoln's hypothesis of a trial motif in John is actually "blunted" by his inability to recognize the book's true rhetorical nature as deliberative or epideitic rather than judicial.⁴² Matson unfortunately commits the fallacy of false dilemma by

⁴⁰ Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, "Rib Pattern," in *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, Ky.; Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 165.

⁴¹ De Diétrich, 275-276; Trites, 78-79; and Lincoln, 38-51.

⁴² Mark A. Matson, Review of *Truth on Trial*, by Andrew T. Lincoln, *Restoration Quarterly* 45 (2003): 127. Aristotle defined three branches of ancient oratory: deliberative, judicial, and epideitic. Brigham Young University offers a useful website for understanding the nature of each branch: <http://rhetoric.byu.edu>.

failing to realize that more than one oratory style could be combined, a fact that Lincoln attempts to address in his discussion of the Johannine plot and discourse.⁴³

Complicating any discussion of the ancient *rîb* pattern is the fact that it can be used theologically to refer to any of the three stages that follow and language of the dispute, except the actual conclusion of the judicial procedure (verdict): (1) extra-judicial (Exod. 21:18), (2) pre-judicial (Neh. 13:11ff), and (3) judicial conflict (Deut. 19:17).⁴⁴ Since the *rîb* pattern is Semitic rather than Hellenistic in nature, its dynamics should rightly be analyzed from this perspective.

It seems plausible that John was predisposed to adapting the judicial settings of Isaiah 40-55 due to his use of three Isaian citations that pericope (Isa. 40:3 in John 1:23, 53:1 in John 12:28, and 54:13 in John 6:45). John shares major themes with Isaiah 40-55: light (Isa. 42:6, 49:6, 51:4-5; John 1:4-5, 7-9, 8:12, 9:5, 12:46), water (Isa. 43:19-20, 48:21; John 4:10ff, 7:37-39), God's glory (Isa. 40:5, 42:8, 48:11; John 1:14, 12:41), and shepherding (Isa. 40:11; John 10:11, 14-16). Lincoln observes the placement of the Isaian quotes at the beginning and end of the public ministry form an *inclusio*: "This scriptural depth enables the implied reader to discern clearly that, in the Fourth Gospel's narrative, the two lawsuits of Deutero-Isaiah have been brought together."⁴⁵

In light of these considerations, the trial motif in John appears to be a continuum, ranging from extra- to judicial conflict. John broadly adopts a *rîb* pattern, beginning with an pre-judicial situation with John the Baptist and progresses ultimately to judicial conflict at Jesus' trial before Pilate. Considering the amorphous nature of the debate, it would seem best to classify John's adoption of this rhetorical device as a modified *rîb* pattern. Aspects of this judicial framework

⁴³ Lincoln, 142.

⁴⁴ G. Liedke, "βῆρις *rîb* to quarrel," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann and tran. Mark E Biddle (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 3:1235.

⁴⁵ Lincoln, 46.

will be noted in passing. John uses it in more in a theological sense in conveying spiritual truths and consequences of unbelief. Trites' mediating characterization of John as "present[ing] a sustained legal metaphor" in a drama about the nature and identity of Jesus Christ seems wise.⁴⁶ He rightly observed "the respect paid to Old Testament law of evidence indicates that John has a case he is anxious to prove."⁴⁷ He bases his conclusion on three considerations: (1) Jesus' discourses convey judicial debate (John 6:26-66), (2) Jesus' conversations with the "Jews" appear like a lawsuit (John 2:13-22), and (3) the largely argumentative nature of John 2:13-12:48.⁴⁸

Concept of Truth in John

John interweaves the concept of truth with the concept of judicial and ethical witness. The goal of the second type of witness is revealed moral/ethical truth through personal testimony. The account of Jesus' trial before Pilate reveals the nature of the relationship.⁴⁹ In John 18:37, Jesus solemnly summarized his entire commission to Pilate: "For this purpose I have been born, and for this purpose I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."⁵⁰ In the next verse, Pilate reveals his skepticism of or indifference to the truth with his rhetorical question, "What is truth?" Pilate's question demands an answer as to the nature of the truth to which was Jesus testifying throughout his ministry.

Nature of Truth

The *alēth-* word group is frequently used by John (see Appendix A). Over the last fifty years, biblical scholarship has realized the Johannine concept of truth corresponds more to the

⁴⁶ Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 78.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁹ The book's last three occurrences of *alētheia* (truth) appear in John 18:37-38.

⁵⁰ See footnote 30.

Hebraic view than with Greek philosophy.⁵¹ Both concepts converge in John however. From a Hellenistic perspective, ἀλήθεια (*alētheia*, truth) refers to factual reality or the abstract quality of truthfulness, genuineness, or honesty.⁵² It conveys the sense of “hiding nothing.” The LXX often uses *alētheia* for the Hebrew *טֵמֶה* (*’ēmet*), which generally means reliability (firmness), faithfulness, and truth (in speech, testimony, or instruction).⁵³ It often refers to God’s faithfulness to his covenant and promises or his attribute of trustworthiness (e.g., Isa. 38:19, 61:8). In certain Johannine passages this nuance is apparent (see footnote).⁵⁴ Steadfast (covenant) love and faithfulness are two attributes that undergird God’s *rīb* with his people and the nations.

The Hebrew *’ēmet* is contracted from *’ēmenet* which is derived from the closely related Hebrew adverb *’āmēn*. The latter was used in solemn oaths of truthfulness (Num. 5:22) and to describe God’s faithfulness (cf. Isa. 65:15: lit., God of Amen). This adverb or its Aramaic counterpart was used by Jesus on twenty-five occasions to show tremendous self-awareness and offer a personal testimony. It seems the idea of truthfulness and faithfulness is retained in his proclamations and the connection to a judicial setting needs little elaboration. In statements that include the formulaic emphatic or double *’āmēn*, transliterated into Greek as ἀμήν (Eng., amen), McDonald and Porter note Jesus often revealed profound spiritual truths or offered clarifications

⁵¹ For a discussion of the contrasts, see David J. Hawkins, “The Johannine Concept of Truth and its Implications for a Technological Society,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1987): 5-11.

⁵² Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 42-44. Cf. Hawkins 6; and Dennis R. Lindsay, “What is Truth? Ἀλήθεια in the Gospel of John,” *Restoration Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1993): 130.

⁵³ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 54.

⁵⁴ See John 1:14, 17, where the Hebraic concept of *chesed ve’ēmet* in Exod. 34:6, meaning “steadfast love and faithfulness,” stands behind the “grace and truth.” Cf. Hawkins, 6, 8; Köstenberger, 439; and Lindsay, 131-133.

about his divine Sonship and messianic fulfillments (John 1:51, 3:5, 5, 11, 5:19, 24-25, 6:26-27, 32ff, 47, 53, 8:34, 51, 58, 10:7, 12:24, 13:20, 14:12, 16:23, 21:18).⁵⁵

Like Israel's prophets, Jesus in the Johannine narrative has become the witness and representative of God in his cosmic lawsuit or controversy with the nations. Jesus assumed this role since the Jewish nation at-large through its unbelief had abandoned its role as a national witness and light to his truth and glory (John 1:9-10, 12:37-40; cf. Isa. 42:6-9, 43:10-13, 49:5-6).⁵⁶ His purpose was to witness to the truth he had received of his Father, stirring the people to return to their God and be saved (John 3:11, 32, 7:7, 8:14; cf. Isa. 43:9, 44:21ff).

Unlike the secret declarations of pagan gods, God had revealed his truth openly through his prophets and now again in its fullness through Jesus (John 18:20, Isa. 45:19, Heb. 1:1-2). In contrast to the ancient prophets, Jesus was the full human expression of God's way for he was truth and life incarnate (John 1:14, 16; cf. 14:6).⁵⁷ Unlike the world and "Jews" who had rejected him and his testimony, the Johannine community received the fullest of his revelation (John 1:11, 16). Belief in Jesus' testimony and in him personally brought salvation and bestowed life (John 5:34, 6:63, 68). The remainder of John explains the truth of Jesus' identity as the fulfillment of the Isaian messiah and God incarnate (cf. Isa. 42:1-16, 43:10, 53:13-53:12). The trial motif allows the reader to follow the plot of this purpose as it plays out in the narrative.

Following the key Johannine passages where truth and the concept of witness are linked shows the author from the beginning with John the Baptist anticipated Jesus' testimony in John

⁵⁵ Lee Martin McDonald and Stanley E. Porter, *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2000), 302-304.

⁵⁶ Lincoln, 46.

⁵⁷ Hawkins, 10.

18:37 (cf. John 5:33).⁵⁸ Köstenberger argues the climatic passages about the truth of Jesus' testimony occur in John 8 where Jesus "identified himself as 'a man who has told you the truth' ... in contrast to the devil, who does not stand in the truth and in whom there is no truth."⁵⁹ The implication of Jesus' reply to the "Jews" was that they were more willing to believe a lie and act accordingly to preserve their present condition (murder) instead of accept the truth of God spoken by him (John 8:40ff).

Seven times the word truth appears in this pericope (John 8:32, 40, 44-46). Jesus' testimony to the truth or divine revelation is connected to his speaking (Gk., λαλεῖν).⁶⁰ As Lindsay has aptly discerned, truth in this section "is viewed in relationship to the word of Christ. ... particularly in verses 40, 45, 46, where Jesus makes the claim to have spoken or to be speaking the truth."⁶¹ It is the truth of freedom from sin through Jesus as God incarnate and what is associated with this claim against which the Jews rebelled (John 8:22-40, 42-43, 47).

Köstenberger has also observed a progression from Jew to Gentile occurs in the narrative.⁶² Throughout the quasi-lawsuits between the Jews and Jesus (John 1-12), culminating with his trial before Pilate (John 18:12-19:16), truth revealed and as embodied in Jesus was on trial. The truth was first revealed to the Jews and then to Pilate as representative of the Roman government, but all rejected its claim.⁶³ The core of these episodes focused on the book's central question (truth) of whether Jesus was the Christ and Son of God (John 20:30-31). "'Truth' is in

⁵⁸ For discussion on the other passages where *alētheia* (truth) appears, including John 3:21, 4:23-24, 14:6, 17, 15:26, 16:33, 17:17, 19, see Lindsay, 133-143.

⁵⁹ Köstenberger, 440. See John 8:40, 44-46.

⁶⁰ Lindsay, 138.

⁶¹ Ibid. Lindsay has shown that in the Hebrew Bible "speaking the truth" can be used in an ethical or revelatory sense (cf. Ps. 15:1 and 2 Chr. 18:13, 15). He believes the parallels to John 8 are significant, explaining "evil was plotted against Micaiah (2 Chr. 18:25f) and against Jesus (John 8:40, 44) precisely because they had spoken the truth."

⁶² Köstenberger, 441.

⁶³ Ibid.

essence an affirmative answer to these questions. The reason why John does not record a Jewish trial is because his entire ministry is a trial (John 1-12).”⁶⁴

It is no coincidence that the final occurrences of the *alēth-* group, the adjective “true,” appear in John 19:35, 21:24 to describe the implied author’s solemn affirmation that his testimony was in accordance with truth (facts).

Concept of Judgment

The *krin-* (judge, judgment) stem words form the last group with significance to the Johannine trial motif. Analysis of each occurrence as to its relationship to the three *rīb* stages is beyond the scope of this paper. A survey of the occurrences will establish the general judicial character of this concept in John. Most appear in John 1-12.

John stands as a record of God’s controversy with his people and the world (Gk., κόσμος) regarding salvation and life as mediated through Jesus, the incarnation of God’s grace and truth. The first set of judgment passages begins with the historical reference to Moses and the uplifted serpent in Numbers 21 as a type of Jesus’ crucifixion (John 3:14). John described God’s love for the world and its consequence, namely that God gave his unique Son that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life (John 3:15-16). God’s intention in sending his Son was not to condemn, but to save the world (John 3:17). According to Danker, the sense of condemnation in this passage refers to the punishment that follows the Divine Judge’s verdict of guilty.⁶⁵ The next verse establishes the criteria for judgment: continuous belief in Jesus removes condemnation; the unbeliever is already in a state of judgment (note the perfect tense of κρίνω). See John 3:36 where a similar dynamic is described. John 3:19 finally establishes the reason for judgment: People refused to accept the revelation (light) of Jesus, the true Light (cf. John 1:9-

⁶⁴ Ibid., 439.

⁶⁵ Danker, 568.

10). In these first passages, Jesus is depicted as the witness of truth and mediator of God's saving grace.

In the next set of passages, Jesus' mission expands to include the role of divine judge. John depicts Jesus as the Son of Man to whom the Father has given the power over life and judgment (John 5:22, 26-27). The expression "Son of Man" in this context is a direct reference to divine courtroom scene in Daniel 7:9-14.⁶⁶ Only those who continuously hear Jesus' teaching and believe God who sent Jesus have eternal life and escape judgment and death (John 5:24). The perfect tense of μεταβαίνω (has passed) in verse 24 reveals the resulting state for one who believes is life, not death. While the temporal setting of the speaker (Jesus) is present, the future passive verb of ἐκπορεύω (shall come forth) indicates his judgment is set in the *eschaton* where the final reward and punishment are given respectively to the good and evil (John 5:28-29).

John 5:30 indicates Jesus' judgment is just because it is based on the Father's instruction regarding judgment and Jesus' execution of that will (cf. John 8:50, 9:39). In contrast, the Jews were continuously judging him according to unrighteous and carnal criteria and illegal means (John 7:24, 51, 8:15). Jesus later declared that if he were to judge their actions his judgment would be true based on his and his Father's corroborated testimony (John 8:16-17).

The next major set of judicial passages occurs at the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry. In John 12:31, the cosmic dimensions are evident. Jesus stated that judgment of world had come and the ruler of this world (Satan) would be cast out. Later in John 16:11 in discussing the function of the Holy Spirit, Jesus pronounced the verdict: Satan had been judged and cast out of the divine courtroom (Cf. perfect tense).

⁶⁶ The Jewish people later exhibited confusion over the term "Christ" and "Son of Man" in John 12:34.

John 12:32-33 suggests Satan would be evicted by the uplifting or the verdict won by the death of the Son. While Jesus' initial mission did not entail a judicial role, it was now required due to persistent unbelief. As representative of the divine tribunal, Jesus offered an indictment of the Jewish nation because it refused to believe in him in spite of the many signs he had performed and his testimony (John 12:37). In contrast, John notes many Jewish authorities secretly believed in Jesus, but refused to publicly confess (i.e., testify) Jesus as Messiah. Unlike Jesus, their reasons were based on fear of expulsion from the community of faith and a desire for the approval of men (John 12:42-43; cf. John 5:41, 44).

Belief in Jesus amounted to belief in God who sent him. Jesus stated his message would serve as the witness against the "Jews" when their eschatological case was tried on the last day (John 12:48).⁶⁷ And that witness by inference would lead to their condemnation. His warning was similar to the one he made against the Pharisees and scribes found in the Synoptics: The Ninevites and Queen of the South would rise up (i.e., be resurrected) in the judgment to serve as their accusers (Matt. 12:41-42; cf. Luke 11:29-32). John 12:47 forms another *inclusio* with John 3:17-19, suggesting the extra- and pre-judicial *rîb* process was now complete.

The controversy between Jesus and the Jews serves as the backdrop to Jesus' conference with his disciples (apostles) in John 13:1-17:26 and the monumental trial and ultimate rejection of Jesus' witness before Pilate. In his discourse with the Twelve on the night before his trial, Jesus discussed Holy Spirit's role after his ascension to heaven (see Table 1 on page 22).

⁶⁷ Cf. Reiser, 211.

Table 1: Role of Holy Spirit in Future Judicial Process

<u>Role – Convict World</u> (probable judicial term)	<u>Explanation</u> (cf. hōti)
Sin	Unbelief in Jesus
Righteousness	Jesus departure to Father
Judgment	Satan has been judged

According to Priess, “When Jesus announces ἄλλον παράκλητον, another Defender, another Intercessor, we are always in solid judicial terminology” (cf. John 14:16).⁶⁸ The Holy Spirit would convict the world of its refusal to believe in Jesus, that in righteousness he returned to heaven until he comes again as the righteous judge, and Satan has been judged and condemned so he has been cast out and unable to accuse God’s elect in the divine courtroom (cf. John 12:31, 14:30, Rev. 12:10).⁶⁹ These separate functions are predicated on the notion of the Spirit’s witness (cf. John 15:26). While Jesus was in the world he bore witness to it as God’s chief advocate in the cosmic trial (John 18:37). Now the disciples also as an extension of the testimony of the Spirit would serve as witnesses to the world in the post-resurrection period (John 15:27).

The final occurrence of the concept of judgment appears at the beginning of Jesus’ trial; Pilate directs the Jewish leaders to judge him themselves (John 18:31). The conflict of this pericope is self-evident. The narrative offers little information about Jesus’ hearing before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest. The focus by implication is on the validity of Jesus’ witness to the truth (John 18:23). The Sanhedrin trial is absent from and implied in the narrative (John 18:19-24). Parsenius echoes Köstenberger’s earlier comment: “That trial [before the Sanhedrin] is not erased, but displaced and the entire life of Jesus becomes a legal contest

⁶⁸ Theo Priess, “The Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit,” *Interpretation* 7, no. 3 (1953): 270.

⁶⁹ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (Reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book, 1997), 395.

before the leaders of Israel.”⁷⁰ Pilate’s examination of Jesus is described in more detail in John than in the Synoptics (John 18:33-38a, 19:8-11). Köstenberger believes the change in focus by the author was intentional:

Thus, he focuses his trial narrative on Pilate’s complicity in the world’s rejection of the Messiah, which, as mentioned above, also includes Jesus’ rejection by his own people, the Jews. . . . Pilate displays considerable arrogance in the way he deals with one charged with wrongdoing who stands before him. In this Pilate serves as a representative character of all those who fail to recognize that they are called to render a verdict regarding Jesus and who deem themselves to be in the judgment seat regarding Jesus while in fact it is they who will be judged on the basis of their decision concerning Jesus.⁷¹

In contrast to Pilate, Jesus during his trial is displayed as humbly and calmly testifying to the truth about his origins, mission, and his kingdom that “transcends the political and material the sphere of this world.”⁷² Despite the fact that he could find no fault in Jesus, Pilate in the end rejected Jesus’ witness, listened to his accusers regarding their misguided charge of blasphemy against Jesus, and sentenced him to die (John 18:29, 19:7).

One additional passage is worth noting. Even with no explicit mention of judgment, Reiser argues Jesus’ reference to the ripening harvest and request for reapers in John 4:35-38 has connections to “the image of destroying eschatological judgment on Israel and the nations” (cf. Joel 3:11-13).⁷³ The context suggests Jesus immediate reference was to the approaching Samaritans of Sychar who believed because of the woman’s testimony (John 4:28-30, 39-40). While Jesus emphasized the salvific aspect of the harvest (John 4:36), the other of eschatological judgment needs to be remembered especially when one considers the persistent realized eschatology of John. For John, the eschatological harvest had begun with Jesus’ ministry. While

⁷⁰ Parsenius, 1.

⁷¹ Köstenberger, 442, 446.

⁷² Ibid., 448.

⁷³ Reiser, 256.

the last day of judgment in John is depicted as future (John 5:29, 11:24, 12:48), God's judgment has been proclaimed and his wrath remains for those who refuse to believe in Jesus (cf. John 3:18, 36; cf. John 5:24).

Excursus: The World and the "Jews" in John's Concept of Judgment

The Greek word κόσμος (world) is used 78 times in John, which is six times more frequently than in the Synoptics.⁷⁴ Cassem's grammatical and contextual analysis shows a connection between "world" and the concept of judgment. By analyzing the distinctions in John's attitude with regard to the positive, neutral, and negative connotations of the word, he was able to obtain a sense of the book's cosmic theology:

[I]t is clear that the author(s) use(s) κόσμος in a more favorable context during the first half of the gospel and in a more ambivalent or hostile context in the second half ... the concerns of the first part of the gospel appear to deal with God's attitude toward the world (which tends to be positive), while those of the second part deal with the response of the (men of) world to God (which is negative).⁷⁵

Cassem later explained the distribution of positive and negative uses of the word are clearly authorial in origin.⁷⁶ The present writer would suggest that this distribution reflects the narrative as it traces the progression of unbelief among the Jews and later Pilate who represents the inhabited Roman world. This conclusion was anticipated by John with a synonymous parallelism in the Prologue: "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own [creatures], and his own [people] did not receive him" (John 1:10-11).

This discussion raises the larger question of who precisely constitutes the "world" and the "Jews" in John. Marrow conducted a more extensive study of the word "world" in the extra-

⁷⁴ N. H. Cassem, "A Grammatical and Contextual Inventory of the Use of κόσμος in the Johannine Corpus with Some Implications for a Johannine Cosmic Theology," *New Testament Studies* 19 (1972-1973): 81.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

biblical and biblical literature.⁷⁷ While he observed similar positive, negative, and neutral uses of the word in John, Marrow found pluri-valent or multi-level meanings depending on how the “world” responded to the revelation of God through Christ:

[A]ll revelation comes both as grace and as judgment. This is its nature since there can be two, and only two, possible responses to it: acceptance, which inevitably means eternal life; and rejection, which necessarily means death.⁷⁸

In some instances such as John 1:10, the first two occurrences of κόσμος would be neutral while the third would obviously be negative and emblematic of those who did not receive (believe) in Jesus. The word “world” is contrasted a few passages later with a group of people who received (believed in) Jesus and to whom he gave power to become the children of God (John 1:12-13). In at least one early passage where a similar neutral-negative connotation occurs, there appears a substitute for κόσμος. John 3:19 features a neutral occurrence of κόσμος (the light has come into the world) followed by the general substitute ἄνθρωποι (men) used negatively (men loved the darkness) for those people who did not accept the revelation of the true Light. This distinction does not appear as the narrative progresses and the general level of unbelief rises. Under these circumstances, “world” is a figure for the earth’s unbelieving inhabitants whose ruler is Satan (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

Marrow proposes four reasons why the world “blinds itself” to the revelation of the true Light and receives a divine indictment: (1) it hates the revealer because it wants to be the judge of revelation (John 3:19-20), (2) its works are evil due to a separation from God and a desire for its own glory (John 5:44), (3) it cannot receive the Spirit of truth because it refuses to admit a need for salvation (John 5:39-40, 9:41, 14:17), and (4) a verdict of guilt has been established for the world due to its complicity with Satan in Christ’s condemnation and death (John 16:11).

⁷⁷ Stanley B. Marrow, “κόσμος in John,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 90-102.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

Like the word “world,” John uses the term “Jews” with a neutral (John 3:1, a ruler of the Jews), positive (John 4:24, salvation is of the Jews), and negative connotation (John 5:18, the Jews were seeking to kill him). This brief departure will only focus on the connection of the term “Jews” with judgment, not the exact identity of the term in every occurrence in John.⁷⁹ Marrow has rightly noted that the word “world” in John 13-17 “wholly replaces the role filled by ‘Jews’ and its cognates in the preceding chapters of the public ministry and subsequent chapters of the passion.”⁸⁰ Marrow does not discuss the reason for this replacement. It appears the author chose to use “world” in this pericope because the unbelief of the Jewish nation and its leaders *en masse* essentially placed them under same judgment with the unbelieving world that already opposed the revelation (gospel) of God in Jesus Christ (John 7:7, 8:23, 26, 12:31).

Structure/Content

One can trace the pre-trial motif by also examining the book’s structure and content. The narrative offers three general lines of testimony: signs, witnesses, and Jesus’ oral discourses.

Structure

Considerable debate has revolved around the topic of the book’s structure. It can be analyzed from various angles, depending on what one wishes to emphasize (e.g., Son of God Incarnate, Son of God Revealed in Israel, etc.). Table 2 on page 27 describes a natural structure based on obvious seams in the book’s content and its stated purpose to produce belief (John 20:30-31). It will provide the basis for examination of the author’s three lines of evidence. In our

⁷⁹ For a greater discussion of the identity of the term “Jews” throughout the New Testament, see Malcolm Lowe, “Who Were the IOYΔΑΙΟΙ?” *Novum Testamentum* 18 (April 1976): 101-130 (Cf. especially pages 115-126 for a review of the occurrences of the term in John). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1560764> (accessed November 24, 2011). Lowe’s general conclusion is that in the Johannine controversy scenes, “Judeans” would be an appropriate rendering.

⁸⁰ Marrow, 100.

discussion of the various witnesses, an expanded structure will be proposed in order to trace the progression of the judiciary character of the narrative.

Table 2: General Structure of John

Prologue: Exposition of Word Incarnated (1:1-18)

Book of the Signs of Messiah (1:19-12:50)

Book of Glory of the Son of God and Preparation of Messianic Community (13:1-20:31)

Epilogue: Restoration and Commission of Messianic Community (21:1-25)

Signs

The **Book of Signs**, as the second section is commonly called, is organized around seven selected σημεῖα (signs) or miracles: Water to wine (John 2:1-11), healing of noble's son (John 4:46-54), healing of lame/paralytic man (John 5:1-9a), feeding the 5,000 (John 6:1-13), walking on water (John 6:16-21), healing the blind man (John 9:1-7), and raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-45). This artificial designation obviously does not include the most important sign of Jesus' resurrection (John 20:1-10) and the miraculous catch of fish (John 20:1-14).

The signs selected had special theological importance to John and were recorded to engender initial belief, ultimately leading to continuous (habitual personal) belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (John 20:31). The true objective of the miracles was to serve as visible signs "authenticating the reality of the Word become flesh."⁸¹

John's association of signs and belief is unique among the canonical gospels.⁸² Parsenius has observed that this presentation has parallels to rhetoric and recognition scenes in ancient literature:

⁸¹ Donald Guthrie, "The Importance of Signs in the Fourth Gospel," *Vox Evangelica* 5 (1967): 73-74, 80. Cf. Merrill C. Tenney, "The Meaning of Signs," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132, no. 526 (April-June 1975): 159.

⁸² Parsenius, 87.

First, signs ... are explained and explored in ancient rhetoric as a type of πίστις, or proof. ... Second, signs also play a role in recognition scenes in ancient literature, ranging from epic poetry to tragic poetry and even prose novels. Recognition scenes occur when long lost intimates (typically family members) recognize one another after a period of separation. The process of recognition is often completed by means of some token or piece of evidence, and one term for this evidence is sign, σημεῖον.⁸³

The implication for the Johannine judicial motif is that Jesus performed signs as a means of restoring a long lost relationship and reacquainting the Jews with the God they had forsaken. It is notable that both the first and last miracles performed by Jesus are described as manifesting his glory (John 2:11, 11:4, 40). They form an *inclusio* of the beginning and ending of Jesus' public ministry and are clearly intended to direct the reader to the description of Jesus' glory as the manifestation of the Father in the Prologue (John 1:14). The ultimate display of God's glory was in the Jesus' crucifixion (John 17:2).

The miracles were also intended to *convince* the unbeliever of Jesus' unity with the Father and his genuine witness to the truth (cf. John 10:38, 14:10-11). The episode of Nicodemus (chap. 3) strongly emphasizes this secondary aspect. The witness of the signs at Passover evidently led him and other Sanhedrin leaders to acknowledge Jesus as a teacher sent from God (John 2:23, 3:2). In Nicodemus' case, he was receptive to the truth about Jesus conveyed by the signs and desired to learn more.

This example also highlights the difference between what Hindley labels as the "evidence-value" and the "sign-value" of Jesus' miracles.⁸⁴ The former essentially relates to the quality (inference) of a miracle to serve merely as a witness to divine power and the latter to its reference to the greater spiritual significance as an actual sign of the messiah.⁸⁵ In order to appreciate the miracle as a true σημεῖον (sign), one must be receptive to the miracle's testimony,

⁸³ Ibid., 87-88

⁸⁴ Hindley, 330.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

which might lead to personal belief.⁸⁶ Trites adds “this evidence fails to convince opponents, however, unless it is accompanied by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit (John 15:26, cf. 14:16-17, 26).”⁸⁷ A rejection of this testimony, as in the case of many of the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ time, reduced the value of the miracle to simply evidence which could be easily dispensed with for personal and political reasons (cf. John 11:47-48). In such circumstances, the miracles, like Jesus’ words, actually become a witness to the sin of unbelief as Jesus noted to his disciples on the night in which he was betrayed (John 15:22-24). Quite revealing are Jesus’ comments to the Pharisees following the healing of the blind man (John 3:39ff). As Hindley rightly observed: “They are blamed, I think, not for failing to ‘believe’ in the full sense, but for being stirred into opposition by evidence which should have led them at least to become ‘inquirers,’ like Nicodemus.”⁸⁸

From his review of the various miracles and the human responses, Hindley has observed four effects: (1) a neutral effect resulting only in conveyance of information (John 5:15), (2) an escalation of the political and spiritual opposition (John 11:46ff), (3) an inception of faith (John 4:53), and (4) a revelation of the glory of God in Christ (John 2:11, 11:4, 40).⁸⁹

Two additional implications regarding signs and their contribution to the trial motif arise from the first half of the book’s purpose statement (John 20:30): (1) the signs recorded were from Jesus’ public ministry since they were performed in the presence of his disciples (cf. John 2:23, 6:2), thus (2) they possess an evidential quality as witnesses to Jesus’ glory because they could be observed and corroborated (cf. John 5:36, 10:25). The general trend of the commentators surveyed was to treat the signs symbolically. Obviously there might be symbolic

⁸⁶ Guthrie, 75.

⁸⁷ Trite, “Witness,” 879.

⁸⁸ Hindley, 331.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 328-329.

significance to several of the signs (e.g., feeding of 5,000 and discourse of Jesus as heavenly bread in chap. six). In this extended citation, Guthrie warns the apologetic and evidential value of the signs for the ancient reader would have been reduced if they had no historical basis:

All these details [contained in John] do not give the impression that John is creating narratives for symbolic purposes. They give the impression on the contrary of historic happenings to which John has come to attach a special significance. As signs intended to lead to specific faith in Jesus, their basis must be historical since Jesus as Messiah is a historical concept. Messiahship involves a relationship with historical persons and any signs of attestation must take place in the actual world of men. Jesus as Son of God needs signs which testify to his power among men. The signs as mere symbols of spiritual truths would not convince men of the essential character of Jesus. Whatever assessment of John's historicity is made by scholars of varying schools of thought it seems difficult to deny that John's intention was to write what actually happened.⁹⁰

Judicial Value of Signs

Each episode containing a sign authenticates or offers evidence to another aspect of Jesus' messianic nature as the Son of God. Often connected with the various signs are interviews and pre-judicial scenes (controversy) featuring Jesus and various actors (e.g., Pharisees, people, blind man, etc.) who interact with him, testify to, and/or challenge his messianic credentials and testimony to the truth. Appendix B contains a summary of the seven signs from Jesus' ministry, possible special significance, effects on the people, and judicial value (testimony, controversy, witnesses, etc.).

Trites has observed a general pattern associated with miracles three, four, and six: (1) a miracle is performed, (2) a debate with opponents ensues where Jesus' claims are introduced, (3) objections or counter evidence is presented, and (4) final development of the argument occurs.⁹¹ The effect he states is "division of opinion, some coming to faith in Christ, and others taking

⁹⁰ Guthrie, 81.

⁹¹ Trites, "Witness," 879.

offense at his teaching.”⁹² Elements three and four in the case of the raising of Lazarus occur independent of but still remain connected to the miracle in the narrative.

Witnesses

The number of witnesses presumed to have testified in the cosmic judici-drama of John varies significantly with each writer. One commentator postulated seven witnesses and even seven discourses.⁹³ Such categorizations appear superficial when analyzed against the text. As was evident from the last section on signs (Appendix B), at least two of Jesus’ discourses (John 5:19-47 and 6:22-59) are directly connected with the miracles and should appropriately be interpreted in light of their accompanying signs in order to obtain their true spiritual significance.

The objective of this section is to survey the major witnesses and their claims in John 1-12. These episodes could be labeled “virtual witness scenes.” Some entail interrogative and controversial elements (e.g, John the Baptist and priest/Levites in John 1:19ff).

Tenney and Trites have developed a structure that more precisely traces the progress of the judici-drama as it unfolds throughout Jesus’ public ministry.⁹⁴ Their organization of the various periods has been adapted below with some modification, including the addition of one for the Prologue. Trites in essence follows the dramatic structure of an ancient play.⁹⁵ The following presentation also aligns these periods with the three stages of the *rīb* pattern of controversy fully realizing this is largely an artificial designation applied to the narrative. Tenney concludes with the intercessory prayer in John 17. Our survey will only cover John 1-12.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Lincoln, 15, 23.

⁹⁴ See Tenney, “The Meaning of ‘Witness’ in John,” 230ff; and Trites, “The Witness Theme in the Gospel of John,” *Present Truth* 42, no. 2:8ff. <http://www.presenttruthmag.com/archive/XLII/42-2.htm> (accessed November 23, 2011). Their organization and identification of witnesses has been compared against Lincoln, 58ff; Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 91ff; and Trites, “Witness,” 879-880.

⁹⁵ For analysis of the parallels between ancient rhetoric and drama with John, see Parsenios (footnote one).

Extra-judicial: Prologue—John 1:1-18

The Gospel of John begins with an assumed hymn to the cosmic origins of the Word who became incarnate. In contrast to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which begin either with a Davidic genealogy of Jesus or the Baptist's ministry, John describes in abstract terms the pre-existence of the Word, his relationship with the Father (cosmic God), his role in and relationship to creation, his entrance on the world scene in human flesh, and his full witness of grace and truth (John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18). Lincoln notes the parallels to the Isaian lawsuit, with "references to the created cosmos of heaven and earth, which provides the theater where the trial takes place and which is affected by its proceedings."⁹⁶

The theme of life and light that describe the Word (John 1:4-5), directs the reader to the first set of passages where light serves as a metaphor for the word (truth) of Christ who comes into the world for judgment (John 3:19-21).⁹⁷

The importance of the Prologue is to set the stage for a series of human witnesses in the cosmic trial motif in terms of the largely Hebraic dichotomy of heaven and earth (cf. Gen. 1:1):

It could not be clearer, then that when the Logos comes into the world, he comes to establish the sovereign rights of the Creator as well as those of Israel's covenant Lord. This is spelled out in vv. 10-11 The point is here is simply to establish the cosmic setting and its presuppositions, within which the lawsuit takes place. The spatial elements in the setting—heaven and earth, above and below—need to be seen in this light. They are two parts of the created universe, where the upper part also functions to point beyond itself to the abode of God. Thus, as the witness and the judge, Jesus comes from above, from heaven, and will return there.⁹⁸

Besides the important theological principles conveyed, the Prologue records that God in the form of the Word has a controversy with his creatures and his own people who did not know him (John 1:9-11).

⁹⁶ Lincoln, 256. He cites Isaiah 40:22-23, 44:23-24, 45:18, 48:13, 51:6, 55:9-11.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Lincoln, 256-257.

Pre-judicial: Period of Consideration—John 1:19-4:54

The next major period involves the consideration of the claims about the Word incarnate. Some initial conflict with the Jewish leaders is introduced into this drama.

John the Baptist: 1:6-8, 15, 19-36, 3:22-30

The first witness introduced is John the Baptist (John 1:6-8, 15). Noun and verbal forms of the *martur-* stem group appear four times to describe John's judicial role in the drama. Having been sent by God, he bore witness to the true Light (Jesus) as an intermediary in order that "all might believe through him" (John 1:7). John 1:15 forms the bridge between the exposition (introduction) and the rising act⁹⁹ of the drama (John 1:19-4:54). His main focus was to highlight the cosmic origins and earthly mission of the Word: "He is of higher rank than me because he was before me." This clause is used three times to draw attention to the key reason for ministry of baptism (John 1:15, 27, 39). As the Synoptics indicate, John's ministry was one of repentance, preparing a people to meet their Lord, the divine witness, advocate, and ultimately their judge.

During an official inquiry by the priests and Levites from Jerusalem, John offered his initial public testimony (μαρτυρία). The judicial significance of the verbs "confessed" in John 1:20 cannot be overstated. He denied being the Christ, Elijah, and the Deuteronomic Prophet. He established his ministry clearly in the setting of the cosmic *rîb* by citing Isaiah 40:3. Puzzled by John's lack of messianic or prophetic credentials, the Pharisaic envoys confronted him, asking to know why he was baptizing. John again redirected their attention to look for the one who would fulfill those prophetic roles cited earlier and his divine authority as the Son of God to baptize with the Spirit (John 1:27, 32-34).

⁹⁹ The rising action are the events in a dramatic play that precede the climax.

John also testified twice to Jesus' atoning work as the "lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29, 35-36). The use of κόσμος in these passages highlights the universal nature of the salvation and pending cosmic controversy between God and the world.

In his final testimony to his disciples' query about why Jesus' ministry was more effectual (more baptisms; cf. John 3:26, 4:1-2), John replied that "He [Jesus] must increase, and I decrease." He redirected them to his previous testimony that he was only a forerunner and used the analogy of the friend of a bridegroom to indicate his prophetic mission was now complete (John 3:28-29).

Confession of First Disciples: 1:37-51

Andrew and another anonymous disciple of John the Baptist were persuaded by his testimony to follow Jesus early in his public ministry (John 1:37-38). The witness of the early disciples about Jesus is based upon their personal encounters with him and consistent with the book's purpose: He is "the Messiah" (Andrew), the fulfillment of the scriptures (Philip), "Son of God," and "King of Israel" (Nathanael) (John 1:41, 44, 49). The scene ends with Jesus' self-witness to his new revelatory role as depicted by the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, a reference to Daniel's eschatological messiah (Dan. 7).

The episode is apologetic in tone and indicates several of Jesus' early disciples were believers due to this experience. Trites notes the evidentiary value of the narrative:

"The stories of Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael are narrated for the sake of the confirmatory testimony which they afford to the Messiahship of Jesus, in accordance with Old Testament law of evidence. . . . as witnesses who corroborate the testimony of John the Baptist by appealing to scriptural expectation of a coming Messiah."¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 93.

Jesus' Self-Witness of His Glory: John 2:13-25

Some time after the first miracle, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover. During this scene, Jesus encountered his first controversy with the “Jews” who were probably the temple authorities. Jesus challenged the *status quo* of temple operation by cleansing its precincts. In response to his actions, the hostile Jews demanded Jesus show them a sign of his authority. Jesus defied them by offering only the cryptic prophecy of the temple as a sign of his resurrection, the greatest sign of his glory as the Son of God (John 2:19, 21-22). Trites clarifies the connections to the ancient *rîb* pattern in Isaiah 43:9-13, 44:7-8, 46:8-11: “Both John and the Old Testament writer want their readers to know, understand, and believe the arguments they are presenting. For this reason they are keen to bring forward ‘the evidence of fulfilled prophecy.’”¹⁰¹ John recorded fulfilled prophecy on several occasions as evidence for the veracity of his testimony (Ps. 69:9 in John 2:17, Ps. 22:18 in John 19:24, Ps. 69:21 in John 19:28-29, and Exod. 12:46 in John 19:36).

This scene concludes with an interesting observation by the narrator (author): Jesus had no need for a testimony concerning mankind (John 2:25). Jesus already knew that many people lacked genuine conversion even though they initially believed due to his signs (John 6:64).

Nicodemus and Jesus: John 3:1-12

The testimony of Nicodemus about the effectual nature of signs for producing initial faith has already been considered (see “Signs”). Jesus here again offered a self-testimony to Nicodemus of “that which we know” and “we have seen” (John 1:11, notice pair of perfect tenses). The first person plural pronouns likely reflect a greater witness, probably the Father whom he represents. The cosmic connection is evident in his challenge to Nicodemus: “If I spoke to you early things, and you do not believe, how if I speak heavenly things to you will you

¹⁰¹ Trites, “The Witness Theme in the Gospel of John,” 9.

believe?” From his supernatural knowledge, Jesus knew a genuine conversion must be accompanied by an actual change of heart, which was only possible through a spiritual rebirth (John 3:3-8). Whether Jesus’ criticism of Nicodemus as the representative teacher of Israel is based upon the latter’s ignorance of prophetic scripture pointing to this moment (cf. Ezek. 36:22-29) is difficult to determine. One thing is certain: “To Jesus the new birth was no mystery; it was the normal effect of God’s intervention in human life, and He testified to His firsthand knowledge of its power.”¹⁰²

It is difficult to determine the beginning and ending points of Jesus’ and John’s dialogue and narrator’s comments in John 3:11-21, 31-36. Despite this interpretative impasse, Lincoln argues the assertion of the text is obvious: “Jesus, as the protagonist [in the drama], is to be the chief witness in the lawsuit.”¹⁰³

Samaritan Woman: John 4:3-42

The setting of the drama now shifts from Judea to Samaria. The testimony of the woman at the well and her fellow Samaritans is remarkable for its corroboration of John’s presentation of Jesus’ messianic credentials. The aspect of judgment associated with this episode has already been discussed (See “Concept of Judgment”). This episode highlights the device of irony:

Here the Fourth Evangelist has presented us with a beautiful picture of the gradual growth and development of a vital witness to the Christian faith, and that on the part of a woman who by reason of race and nationality might be presumed to be quite prejudiced against the claims of a Jewish Messiah.¹⁰⁴

The woman’s personal testimony about Jesus moves in stages from the contemptuous epithet of “you being a Jew” (John 4:9) to “Sir ... are you greater than our father Jacob?” (4:11) to “I perceive you are a prophet” (4:19), and to her question to the residents of Sychar: “Could

¹⁰² Tenney, “The Meaning of Witness in John,” 231.

¹⁰³ Lincoln, 65.

¹⁰⁴ Trites, “The Witness Theme in the Gospel of John,” 9.

this be the Christ?” (4:26). Jesus’ own testimony and conversation led the woman deeper into a personal faith in him. By asking her for a drink, he bridged the vast religious and cultural divide between Jews and Samaritans. Then from offering the gift of living water to his admission to being the messiah, he drew her into an intense and dynamic faith in him.

Based largely on the woman’s personal testimony, her fellow Samaritans came to meet Jesus. Her witness would have been wholly admissible as evidence in Jewish and Samaritan circles in contrast to what appears to be Greco-Roman judicial standards of the time (see Appendix C). The episode reveals it was the woman’s personal testimony of her experience with Jesus that convinced many people to believe in him (John 4:39); however, many more believed because of their own experiences of hearing Jesus’ own testimony (John 4:41, 42).

After their two-day encounter with Jesus, the collective Samaritan conviction of faith was “this [referring to Jesus] is *truly* [ἀληθῶς] the Savior of the world [ὁ σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου], the Christ” (John 4:42). The title “Savior of the world” conveys the universality and cosmic nature of Jesus’ messiahship. According to Koester, the social and political importance of this testimony cannot be overstated for John’s presentation of the gospel (see Appendix D). He contends this title is polemic in nature because it “seemed to exclude the use of the title for other figures, including Caesar.”¹⁰⁵ He explained the title’s importance to John’s theme of kingship, which has connections to the judicial motif:

[T]he Samaritans’ use of the title “Savior of the world” for Jesus is an important element in the theme of Jesus’ kingship, which the Fourth Evangelist associated with the issue of Roman sovereignty. The kingship theme is introduced in chap. 1, when Nathanael speaks as a true Israelite and prototype of Christian believers by calling Jesus “King of Israel” (1:49), and it culminates at the trial scene, when “the Jews” who reject Jesus deny that is “the King of the Jews” (19:12, 15, 21).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Craig Koester, “The Savior of the World,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 4 (1990): 674.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 677. **SEE PAGE 679.**

John essentially moves Jesus' witness beyond the national boundaries of Judea and "affirms the sovereignty of God" over the world.¹⁰⁷

Pre-Judicial: Period of Controversy (Conflict to Crisis)—John 5:1-12:50

The next period constitutes the climax of the judici-drama because it marks the turning point for Jesus' ministry. Many followers misunderstand his claims in his bread of life discourse and reject him (John 6:66). Chapters five and six form a largely apologetic background to what Trites describes as the "Great Controversy" of chapters 7-12.¹⁰⁸ No doubt this expression reflects the general meaning of the Hebrew word *rîb*. This period is characterized by episodes of intense debate and vicious legal charges, which Parsenius observes generally mirror the model of the rhetorical exercise *chreia* of the *progymnasmata* (series of ancient rhetorical exercises):

The *chreia* works by having some hostile question asked of the sage or some criticism made of him and his practice, to which he necessarily responds with cleverness, so as to vanquish his questioners and critics. In the Fourth Gospel, the ubiquitous *chreia* is replaced by formal forensic proceedings against Jesus, which move beyond hostile questions and criticism to legal charges, which if sustained would end in Jesus' death.¹⁰⁹

Trites described the judicial value of these chapters to the continuing Johannine narrative and pre-trial motif:

The forensic element in these chapters becomes very sharp. A great controversy is underway between God and the world. In this lawsuit Christ is the representative of God, and the Jews are the representatives of the world. Belief is invited and unbelief made inexcusable To those who receive these witnesses [chap. 5] and accept their evidence, there is granted a divine self-authentication of the mission of Christ, namely the witness of God Himself. ... The lawsuit of the ministry implies that Jesus confronts men with a choice (9:39; cf. 3:29). What evidence is offered for the claims of Christ, men must decide for or against Him, and by their choice they judge themselves.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 675, 680.

¹⁰⁸ Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 100; and "The Witness Theme of the Gospel of John," 10.

¹⁰⁹ Jerome Neyrey, The Trials (Forensic) and Tribulations (Honor Challenge) of Jesus: John 7 in Social Science Perspective," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 26 (1996), 107, quoted in Parsenius, 9.

¹¹⁰ Allison A. Trites, "The Woman Taken in Adultery," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (April 1974), 140-141.

Chapters five, six, nine, and eleven have already been examined for their evidential and judicial value (see Appendix B). Most of the general concepts of witness, truth, and judgment examined earlier also apply to the following episodes. As a result, all that remains is to offer a brief description of the setting and an inventory of the major witnesses, their legal claims, and counter-claims in the lawsuit of chapters 7-8, ten, and twelve.

*Feast of Tabernacles: John 7:1-10:21 (excluding chap. 9)*¹¹¹

At the beginning of chapter seven, the Jews were already seeking to arrest and kill Jesus (John 7:1). He traveled to the Feast of Tabernacles after his family journeyed up to Jerusalem before him. This scene conveys the escalating debate and controversy over Jesus' teaching during the middle and ending of the festival and his identity as Messiah, which continued through the pre-trial lawsuit (cf. John 7:26-27, 31, 40-43; 9:22; 10:24; 12:34). This contentious atmosphere led to division, confusion, and further unbelief among the Jewish people and authorities. Despite the confusion, many people did believe in Jesus (John 7:31, 8:30). By the end of the festival, others concluded he was demon-possessed or mad (John 8:20). The Judeans and Jewish religious authorities attempted to arrest him, but were unsuccessful in their efforts (John 7:30, 32, 44).

Protagonist: Jesus

- World's works are evil (7:7)
- My doctrine is of God ... I speak those things I heard from him (7:16-18, 8:26, 28b-29, 38a)
- You seek to kill me (7:19, 8:37, 39b-40)
- Judge righteous judgment (7:24)

¹¹¹ The *Pericope Adulterae* (John 7:53-8:11) has not been considered despite this writer's belief that it is original to the gospel. For a brief paper on the controversy language, imagery, and terminology of this section, see Allison A. Trites, "The Woman Taken in Adultery," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (April 1974), 137-146. This pericope offers a unique study of the legal words *κατηγορέω* (bring charges) and *κατακρίνω* (condemn) and how the scribes and Pharisees used the ploy of adultery to trick Jesus into saying or doing something so they could bring a legal charge against him (John 8:6).

- God has sent me ... he is true; I honor my Father (7:28-29, 8:26, 42, 49b)
- You (people) do not know God, the Father; if you are of God you would love me/hear me; however, I do know him and keep his word (7:28, 8:19, 42, 47, 56)
- Reveals eschatological living waters: Holy Spirit (7:37-39)
- I am the light of the world (8:12)
- My witness/judgment is true because I and Father are one, etc. (8:14, 16, 45-46)
- You (Pharisees) judge according to the flesh (8:15)
- You will die in your sins ... if you do not believe in me (8:21, 24)
- You are from beneath, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not (8:23)
- If you abide in my word, you are my disciples, then you will know the truth and it will make you free/will not see death; anyone who sins is a slave to sin, etc. (8:31, 34-36, 51)
- You speak/do what you have seen/heard of your father the devil (8:38, 41, 44)
- I do not have a demon (8:49a)
- You dishonor me; my Father honors me (8:49c)
- I do not seek my own glory (8:50)
- Before Abraham ... I AM (an identification with YHVH (8:58)
- I am the door of the sheepfold ... all who enter by me will be saved (10:7, 9)
- I have come so you may have life abundantly (10:10b)
- I am the good (messianic) shepherd who gives his life for the sheep and I know my sheep and am known by them (10:11, 14-15, 17-18)
- I have other sheep, which hear my voice (inference to Gentiles and universal nature of Jesus' ministry) (10:16)

Antagonist: Jews Leaders (chief priests, Pharisees, etc.) and officers

- No man spoke like this (temple guards) (7:46)
- No prophet is from Galilee (Pharisees) (7:52)
- He bears witness to himself (Pharisees) (8:13)

Antagonist: Jews (Judeans, etc.)

- Jesus is good (7:12)
- He deceives the people (7:12)
- He knows letters (a rabbinically educated man) (7:15)
- He has a demon ... can a demon open the eyes of the blind? (7:20, 8:20, 48, 52)
- He is ... is he the Christ? (7:26-27, 31, 41, 41b-42,)
- He is the Prophet (7:40)
- We are Abraham's descendants and free (8:33, 39)
- You were born of fornication (bastard ancestry) by implication (8:41)
- We have one Father—God (8:41)
- You are a Samaritan (8:48)

Feast of Dedication: John 10:22-42

A few months later, Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication (December). Opposition to him had hardened considerably and unbelief grew to the point that the Jews no longer were able to accept his personal testimony even after they had demanded an affirmation of his messiahship (John 10:24-25). On this occasion, they accused him of blasphemy and attempted to stone him (John 10:29-33, 39). Jesus “counters with *a fortiori* argument from Scripture, and appeals again to His works as evidence for His claims” (John 10:34-38).¹¹² While many did believe in him through the encounter in the temple, other persisted in their stubborn unbelief (John 10:25-26, 42).

Protagonist: Jesus

- I have told you plainly ... you do not believe ... you are not of my sheep (10:25-26)
- Works I do in my Father’s name testify to me ... believe them (10:25)
- I and my Father are one ... Father in me, and I in him (10:30, 38)
- The one the Father has sanctified and sent into the world (Jesus by implication) (10:37)

Antagonist: Jews (Judeans, etc.)

- Are you the Christ? (10:24)
- You a man make yourself God (10:33)

*Final Passover: Chapter 12:1-41*¹¹³

At this point in the drama, the chief priests and Pharisees had issued an official warrant for informants to betray Jesus’ location so they might arrest him (John 11:57). The cosmic lawsuit has tragically reached a crisis following the raising of Lazarus. At Passover, Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem after living in seclusion in a city called Ephraim following the raising of Lazarus. The witnesses to Lazarus’ resurrection were also in Jerusalem and testified to this sign

¹¹² Trites, “The Woman Taken in Adultery,” 141.

¹¹³ John 12:42-50 has largely been covered in the section on judgment.

and Jesus' messianic claims (John 12:17). So powerful was this witness that many Jews met with Jesus and believed in him (John 12:11, 17-19). As a result, the chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus as well to erase the testimony (John 12:10).

The major witnesses at this Passover are few, but significant. The crowd, upon hearing of Jesus' arrival, took palm branches and publicly greeted him, chanting Psalm 118:25-26: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!" John further notes two more instances of fulfilled prophecy, including a passage from Isaiah's cosmic lawsuit, as a witness of Jesus' Davidic messiahship (Isa. 40:9, Zech. 9:9).

The arrival of Gentile proselytes, a symbol of the universal appeal of Jesus' messiahship, prompted Jesus to speak of his death, his hour of glory, using the analogy of the fallen grain (John 12:23-26). Jesus' became extremely agitated by his pending death that he cried out to the Father to glorify his name. One of the last witnesses of Jesus' public ministry that John records is the Father's voice stating, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again" (John 12:28). This miraculous event was meant as a direct heavenly witness as confirmed by Jesus' solemn statement "This voice has not come because of me, but for your sake" (John 12:30). John 12:28 forms an *inclusio* with John 1:14. Jesus' ministry as the revealer of the Father's grace and truth had passed.

In response to their obstinate ignorance (maybe denial) of his identity as the Son of Man and the Christ, Jesus made one final urgent appeal for belief (John 12:34). Using the metaphors of walking, light, and darkness, he admonished his hearers to resolve the spiritual conflict by believing in him. The present tense command in the clause "believe in the light" conveys the need for "persistent faith, not solely a momentary decision" as was evident in many who had

believed in him.¹¹⁴ Tragically the lawsuit offers a portrayal of the people's continual unbelief, as indicated by the imperfect tense in the clause "they were not believing in him" (John 12:37).

John cites two prophecies from Isaiah, one from the cosmic lawsuit and another from the prophet's commission, to explain the widespread unbelief on the part of the Jewish nation.¹¹⁵ John intended for his readers to understand this unbelief as fulfilled prophecy for Jesus' ministry (John 12:41). For the author, fulfilled prophecy served as one line of evidence in his legal case. The original prophecy is set in the cosmic throne room of God before the pending judgment on Judah (Isa. 6:1ff). John wanted his readers to know that Isaiah identified Jesus with YHVH and as God's divine witness.¹¹⁶ Both Jesus and Isaiah were commissioned to preach the truth as a witness to an unreceptive people.

By repeatedly refusing to believe the numerous signs and witnesses to Jesus' messiahship, the people had unwittingly become hardened to the evidence that was designed to lead them to salvation. Tenney explains this dynamic from Isaiah 6:9-10 as applied by John:

John quotes from Isaiah 6 to show that unbelief is the result of the rejection of light, which act, by the sovereign law of God, gradually makes belief impossible. ... Isaiah was told to announce his message even though it merely hardened the hearts of those who heard him. God offered the opportunity of faith, but the very offer made the recipients of it more obstinate. John interprets the prophecy by its effect rather than by its intention. It was not God's desire to alienate his people; but without the offer of faith and repentance, they would never turn to him anyway. The cumulative effect of unbelief is a hardened attitude that becomes impenetrable as time progresses.¹¹⁷

The pre-trial lawsuit of John closes with an indictment of unbelief and stands as a historical witness of the controversy between belief and unbelief (see section on judgment for details).

¹¹⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, "John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981), 131.

¹¹⁵ Isaiah 53:1 in John 12:38; Isaiah 6:9-10 in John 12:40.

¹¹⁶ Tenney, "John," 133.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

This paper has surveyed the key judicial features found in John: terminology, structure, and content. Together they offer persuasive evidence that John followed some sort of pre-trial literary motif in chapters 1-12, with a continuation of the judicial theme in chapters 13-17 culminating with a judicial conflict in Jesus' trial in chapters 18-19. This study decidedly analyzed only the pre-trial literary motif. Trites offers a fitting conclusion to our study:

The lawsuit reaches its climax in the proceedings before Pontius Pilate in which Christ is sentenced to death. Paradoxically, however, Christ's death is the means whereby He is glorified and draws all men to Himself (12:28, 32). By His apparent defeat at Golgotha Christ wins His case and "overcomes the world" (cf. 16:33 where the perfect tense of $\nu\iota\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$ is used) Instead of the cross being His judgment, it is really the judgment of the world¹¹⁸

The parallels between the gospel and the writings of the prophet Isaiah (chap. 40-55) suggest to this writer that John adopted a modified *rib* pattern for his presentation (retrial) of the biography of Jesus and his gospel message. Chapters 1-12 broadly correspond to an extra- and pre-judicial *rib* stage of a cosmic lawsuit between God and the world with Jesus as the chief divine witness, mediator, and eventual judge. Chapters 18-19 would constitute an actual judicial conflict before the implied Sanhedrin and actual Roman trials.

In John's treatment of the pre-trial and trial motif we also grasp glimpses of the structure of an ancient drama.¹¹⁹ The *Eumenides* by Aeschylus offers an example of a play where legal questioning of Orestes is displayed in a trial officiated by the goddess Athena.¹²⁰ This reference is made not to suggest that John adopted this plot for his gospel, but such parallels to ancient literature offer clues to analyzing the Johannine rhetorical structure.

¹¹⁸ Trites, "The Woman Taken in Adultery," 143.

¹¹⁹ Parsenios, 49ff.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

In this paper a few of the principles were applied to aid our analysis. The Prologue serves as the exposition or background to the judici-drama. The rising action is apparent in chapters 1:19-4:54 and its climax appears in 5:1-12:50. Chapters 13-17 appear as an interlude where Jesus instructs his messianic followers about the role of the Holy Spirit as an enduring testimony and prepares them for their function as witnesses to the world (cf. Acts 1:8). Chapters 18-19 constitute the drama's falling action where Jesus seemingly loses his case before his Roman trial and is crucified. Chapters 20-21 form the resolution with an unexpected reversal of Jesus' condemnation (resurrection) and the commission of his disciples to care for their fellow believers.

No matter how one wishes to analyze the rhetorical structure of John, the logical conclusion is that the author used the tools at his disposal to convey a pre-trial lawsuit between God and the world. The implications of the pre-trial motif are cosmic in scope but personal in nature. Each reader of John's Gospel must weigh anew the claims and evidence offered by the various witnesses in this cosmic lawsuit brought by God through his Son Jesus Christ. People must resolve the conflict by making a personal decision for belief or unbelief. The gospel's author portrays the choices in stark terms so his readers will understand the essential choices are belief or condemnation, life or death. The question each must ask him- or herself is whether he or she will deny Jesus (like Peter) or confess him as messiah and Son of God (like Martha).

Appendix A: Key Forensic Vocabulary and Frequency in John, Synoptics, Acts

	John	Synoptics	Acts
μαρτυρέω, marturéō (to witness, testify)	33	3	12
καταμαρτυρέω, katamarturéō (to witness/testify against)	0	4	0
μάρτυς, mártus (witness)	0	4	13
ἀμάρτυρος, amárturos (without witness)	0	0	1
μαρτυρία, marturia (act, content of witness)	14	4	1
μαρτύριον, martúriōn (testimony, proof)	0	9	2
μαρτύρομαι, martúromai (to record, testify)	0	0	1
διαμαρτύρομαι, diamartúromai (to testify)	0	1	9
ψευδομαρτυρέω, pseudomarturéō (to witness falsely)	0	5	0
ψευδομάρτυς, pseudomárturos (false witness)	0	2	0
ψευδομαρτυρία, pseudomarturia (false testimony)	0	2	0
κρίμα, kríma (judgment, condemnation)	1	6	1
κρίνω, krínō (to judge, condemn)	19	12	22
κρίσις, krísis (judgment)	11	18	1
κριτής, kritēs (to judge, condemn)	0	8	4
κατακρίνω, katakrínō (to condemn)	2	9	0
ἀλήθεια, alētheia (truth)	25	7	3
ἀληθής, alēthēs (true, truthful)	13	2	1
ἀληθινός, alēthinos (true)	8	1	0
ἀληθῶς, alēthōs (truly)	10	8	1

Appendix B: Signs from Jesus' Public Ministry ¹²¹

<u>Sign</u>	<u>Significance</u>	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Judicial Value</u> ¹²²
Water to wine (John 2:1-11)	Power over nature	Disciples belief confirmed (John 2:11)	Minor: Jesus shows reluctance to perform miracle because his true hour of glory (death) had not yet come (John 2:4)
Healing of noble's son (John 4:46-54)	Power over distance	Noble and household believed (John 4:53)	Minor: Abrupt rebuke of noble by Jesus regarding necessity of signs for belief (John 4:48), possibly predicated on recent events in Jerusalem (2:23-25)
Healing of lame/paralytic man (John 5:1-47)	Power over time	No reference to faith; Jews incited to kill Jesus (John 5:16, 18)	Major: Jesus warns the man not to sin again (John 5:14); dispute ensues over an assumed breaking of Jewish reading of Sabbath law and Jesus' claims of equality with God (5:16-18); Jesus defends his claim against accusers with five witnesses: Self, John the Baptist, works, Father, Scriptures/ Moses (5:19-44); he indicts accusers by citing Moses as witness against their unbelief in day of judgment (5:45-47)
Feeding of ¹²³ the 5,000 (John 6:1-15, 6:22-71)	Power to address human needs	No real faith, people perceived Jesus was the Prophet; wanted to forcefully make him king (John 6:14-15); many disciples stop following him (6:66)	Major: Jesus withdraws after sensing crowd's material desires (John 6:15, 26); day later offered discourse on bread of life in synagogue that challenges followers to seek spiritual meaning of his identity; many quarrel, complain, and reject his testimony and ministry; Peter confessed him as Son of God (6:22-71)

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¹²¹ This table has been developed by analyzing and evaluating the articles of Tenney and Guthrie (see footnote 81) and Trites, "The Woman Taken in Adultery," 139-142.

¹²² Each pericope is rated by the artificial standard "none," "minor," and "major" to indicate judicial value.

¹²³ The discourse and subsequent dispute of the people in John 6:22ff is often treated separately from its sign in 6:1-15. Despite the day delay, it appropriately needs to be considered with its sign.

Appendix B: Signs from Jesus' Public Ministry

<u>Sign</u>	<u>Significance</u>	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Possible Judicial Value</u>
Walking on water (John 6:16-21)	Power over nature	Initial fear, then reassurance (John 6:19-20)	None
Healing the congenitally blind man (John 9:1-41; part of larger festival narrative from 7:2ff)	Sin not only cause for illness; power over illness and true light to world	Progressive faith on part of man: Jesus first viewed as a man, prophet, then Son of God (John 9:11, 17, 38); Jews call Jesus a sinner (9:24)	Major: Second Sabbath healing causes official inquiry: division ensues over healing, man testifies Jesus is a prophet of God, and Jews expel man from synagogue ¹²⁴ (John 9:13-34); Jesus encourages man's growing belief, but made judicial pronouncement against the Pharisees blindness of unbelief (9:35-41); (Trites, 141): "The debate continues back and forth, and reminds one of the speech and counter-speech characteristic of the Old Testament legal assembly, so amply illustrated in the speeches of the Book of Job."
Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-57)	Power over death; direct sign to messiahship and divine sonship	Many believed (John 11:45); Jewish leaders plot to arrest and kill Jesus (11:46-57)	Major: Lazarus' resurrection after four days in the grave offered absolute proof of Jesus' messiahship (John 11:17); Jesus challenges Martha to make a declaration of belief in him after he testifies to his divine identity (11:23-27, 40); Mary, Martha, and many Jews are eye-witnesses to Lazarus' resurrection (11:45); some witnesses show hostility by reporting miracle to the Pharisees, which led to official Jewish admission of evidence-value of signs and inquiry to resolve perceived threat to personal and national security (11:46-53, 57)

¹²⁴ Tenney, "The Meaning of the Signs," 152, explains "excommunication from the synagogue was a serious matter, for expulsion from the covenant people meant the loss of salvation to a Jew and consequent despair."
Pre-Trial Literary Motif of John -48-

Appendix C: The Admissibility of the Samaritan Woman's Testimony

This essay addresses the criteria of "witness" as used in relation to the Samaritan woman in John 4. In the abstract of his article (see footnote), Maccini lamented the "inattention to differences" between Samaritan and Jewish beliefs, customs, and laws, and the "misapplication of rabbinic laws to Samaritans" as a means of denying the Samaritan woman's and by extension other women's testimony in John (e.g., Mary Magdalene).¹²⁵

Relying heavily on Harvey's *Jesus on Trial* (London: SPCK, 1976), Maccini began his article by describing the general literary features in John (words, scenes, witnesses, etc.) that indicate the author is conducting a retrial of Jesus for the reader. Harvey's contention was the confession of Martha during the raising of Lazarus episode would be inadmissible in a Jewish court of law due to his belief that women were not generally qualified to be witnesses in Jewish culture. In footnote three, Maccini briefly reviewed the evidence from the Pentateuch and Mishnah regarding woman as witnesses. In short, he found from his own and Daube's review¹²⁶ that the Pentateuch does not "record any explicit prohibition" against women witnesses and in the Mishnah "the rabbis found it difficult to adduce any scriptural support for excluding women from giving testimony."¹²⁷ Despite this evidence, the rabbis still formulated a "comprehensive, but not absolute" exclusion of women as witnesses except for in situations where their knowledge would allow them to be competent witnesses.¹²⁸

As a result of this primary evidence, Maccini proposed to use John 4 (Samaritan Woman) as a test case to assess the roles of women as witnesses in John. After reviewing various proposals regarding authorship due to the presence of this story in John, Maccini surveyed the Jewish and Samaritan *halakah* regarding interaction between women and men and Jews and Samaritans.¹²⁹ What Maccini found was somewhat surprising. In summary, the rulings of interaction between the two religious/ethnic groups may vary from "locale, class, education, and so forth."¹³⁰ In particular, he contrasted actions of the disciples who go to a nearby Samaritan village of Sychar to buy food and the interaction of the woman and Jesus at the well with supposed Jewish prohibitions (cf. John 4:8, 49b).

Maccini emphasized the real barrier based on John 4:9 appears to be religious and ethnic, not gender (male versus female). He contended that John 4:27 must also be read in this context (i.e., a Jewish man is talking with a Samaritan woman, not a man talking with a woman).¹³¹ Based on this analysis, it is clear that Jesus violated a normal custom of interaction between Jews and Samaritans.

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¹²⁵ Robert Gordon Maccini, "A Reassessment of the Woman at the Well in John 4 in Light of the Samaritan Context," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 16 (1994): 46.

¹²⁶ See D. Daube, *Witnesses in the Bible and Talmud* (Oxford: Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1986), 15, quoted in Maccini, 36.

¹²⁷ Maccini, 36.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37-39.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

In the remainder of the article, Maccini also reviewed the issue of the exclusion of women generally from Jewish public spheres and how this phenomenon affects the issue of witness.¹³² Two major rabbinic reasons for this general prohibition were presented: (1) avoidance of ritual uncleanness (menstruation), and (2) the universal ban on teaching women theology or engaging in such discussions with them. Maccini then offered numerous literary examples to show it was generally inappropriate to apply later rabbinic teachings to Samaritan woman as in John 4.¹³³ These include three folk stories from the *Chronicle of Abu'l Fath*.¹³⁴ After reviewing these stories, Maccini concluded, "Since the Samaritans adhered strictly to the Pentateuch alone, which contains no *de jure* exclusion of women as witnesses, it is quite possible that they were competent witnesses in that group in many circumstances, whereas Jewish women were excluded as witnesses by rabbinic codes in most (but not all) cases."¹³⁵ He persuasively made the case that Samaritan women could be messengers and witnesses with credibility. As further evidence, one could look to the text itself where the Samaritans initially accepted her testimony with no difficulty (John 4:42).

Returning full circle to the initial question of a woman's testimony in Jewish context, Maccini devoted the remainder of the article to answering whether a Jewish audience would accept a Samaritan woman (or by extension any woman) as a credible witness. He reviewed the actual reading of John 4:9, which when properly understood should not be taken as a categorical denial of Jewish-Samaritan interaction, per several rabbinic decrees (e.g., Rabbi Eliezer). It should also not be understood as a prohibition for Samaritan interaction and testimony unless there was a legal reason for doing so.¹³⁶

Maccini concluded, "it may be argued with some confidence that a Samaritan woman, however ignoble she may have been in the eyes of some Jews, was not an intrinsically incompetent witness. ... Samaritan, Jewish or otherwise, it is not difficult to imagine John's readers, like the villagers of Sychar, accepting her testimony and coming out to meet Jesus for themselves."¹³⁷

¹³² Ibid., 39-41.

¹³³ Ibid., 41ff.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 42.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 44-45.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 45-46.

Appendix D: The Universal Nature of the Title “Savior of the World”

The title “the Savior of the World” (ὁ σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου) appears only in John 4:42 and again in 1 John 4:14 as a complement of the words “the son” in “the Father has sent the son as/to be savior of the world.” Koester has documented the universality of this title in Jewish and Greco-Roman culture and its social and political implications for John’s gospel.¹³⁸

This messianic title appears in Jewish thought and also in the Hebrew Bible with connections to the cosmic trial motif of Isaiah:

- (1) LXX: used for God (Isa. 45:15, 21; verbal form in Isa. 43:3, 11).
- (2) Judges: used of Othniel, Ehud (Judg. 3:9, 15).
- (3) Philo calls God “savior, the God who rules the world” (*On the Special Laws*, 2:298) and “savior of the universe” (*On the Unchangeableness of God*, 156).¹³⁹

The title “savior” was used widely in Greco-Roman world:

- (1) Imperial connotations: Examples of welcoming visiting rulers/emperor: Tiberius (*Jewish War*, 3.9.8); Vespasian (*Jewish War*, 7.4.1).¹⁴⁰
- (2) Worship of gods: Zeus, Isis, Serápis.
- (3) Used for Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Hadrian:¹⁴¹
 - σωτὴρ τῆς οἰκουμένης (savior of mankind): Julius Caesar, Claudius, Hadrian
 - σωτὴρ τῶν Ἑλλήνων τε καὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης πάσης (savior of the Greeks and also of all of the inhabited world): Augustus
 - εὐεργέτης καὶ σωτὴρ τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου (benefactor and savior of the whole world): Augustus, Tiberius

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¹³⁸ Material adapted from Craig R. Koester, “The Savior of the World,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 4 (1990): 666-667.

¹³⁹ Philo, *The Works of Philo*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 393, 1337.

¹⁴⁰ Josephus, *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987), 660, 754.

¹⁴¹ Greek for titles was translated by present writer.

- σωτὴρ καὶ εὐεργέτης τῆς οἰκουμένης (savior and benefactor of the inhabited world): Nero, Titus
- σωτὴρ καὶ εὐεργέτης τοῦ κόσμου (savior and benefactor of the world): Vespasian
- σωτὴρ τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου (savior of the whole world): Trajan
- ὁ παντὸς κόσμου σωτὴρ καὶ εὐεργέτης (the savior of the whole world and benefactor): Trajan
- σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου (savior of the world): Hadrian

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