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John Dennis

### **Conflict and Resolution: John 11.47-53 as the Ironic Fulfillment of the Main Plot-Line of The Gospel (John 1.11-12)**

This article will argue that John 11-12, and particularly 11.47-53 as the center piece of these chapters, bring to an ironic resolution the main plot-line of the Gospel as crystallized in 1.11-12. Although some scholars have seen the crucial place that chapters 11-12 play in the unfolding of the Gospel's story, scholars have not adequately recognized the role these chapters play in the fulfillment and resolution of the stated purpose of Jesus' mission and the conflict this mission will endure as referred to in 1.11-12. My procedure will be as follows: I will first access the role that 11.47-53 plays within the structure and plot of chapters 11-12 (I) and then I will relate the function 11.47-53, as the crucial center of 11-12, to the main plot-line of the Gospel in 1.11-12 (II).

A comprehensive analysis of the plot of John's Gospel will not be attempted here, nor is it necessary for our purposes. Nevertheless, I make use of the term and thus a few comments about what I mean by the term is in order. In full agreement with A. Culpepper, Gospels, as narratives, do indeed have plots.<sup>1</sup> The complexity of the term is seen in the various descriptions given to it by literary critics. Two of the most widely quoted definitions are as follows: "the plot in a dramatic or narrative work is the structure of its actions, as these are ordered and rendered toward achieving particular emotional and artistic effects"<sup>2</sup> and "the dynamic shaping force of the narrative discourse".<sup>3</sup> On the basis of these attempts at a definition, both A. Lincoln and Culpepper have proposed their understanding of the term. Lincoln has observed that there at least appears to be an aspect of *movement* and *persuasion* in any plot. He concluded that the basic aspects of a plot are the three-stage movement of setting or commission, complication or conflict, and then resolution.<sup>4</sup> Culpepper concluded that "the plot of a narrative is that which explains its sequence, causality, unity, and affective power".<sup>5</sup> Central to Culpepper's under-

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<sup>1</sup> A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, Philadelphia 1983, 7-98.

<sup>2</sup> M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, New York 1981, 127.

<sup>3</sup> P. Brooks, *Reading for Plot*, Oxford 1984, 13.

<sup>4</sup> A. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel*, Peabody 2000, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 80.

standing of the plot of the Fourth Gospel, and similar in this regard with Lincoln, is the role that "conflict" plays in the development of the story line. Culpepper states that "the plot of the gospel is propelled by conflict between belief and unbelief as responses to Jesus ...".<sup>6</sup> Similarly, M. Stibbe has shown that John's plot is made up of a (1) main plot: Jesus' quest to do the work of the Father; (2) a counter plot: the quest of the Jews to destroy Jesus and his mission; and (3) a resolution: Jesus does in fact accomplish his mission of bringing eternal life.<sup>7</sup> "Conflict" or, in Stibbe's terminology, "counter plot", is the aspect of the plot of John's Gospel that all three scholars here recognize. While building upon all the above attempts to describe the term "plot" as it relates to John, we shall largely make use of the three aspects of Stibbe's description of plot, namely, the main plot line (as the mission of Jesus), the counter plot or conflict, and the resolution to this drama.

### I. The Function of 11.47-53 in Chapters 11-12

11.47-53 forms a crucial part of the fourth and final section of the Book of Signs (11.1-12.50).<sup>8</sup> This section (11.1-12.50) is both the climax to the Book of Signs and the lead-in to the Book of Glory where the "hour" of Jesus' glorification in death and resurrection speedily moves to fruition (13.1f.). The uniqueness of this section (11.1-12.50) is that it functions as the "link" which holds together Jesus' public ministry in word and sign in Palestine (1.19-10.42),<sup>9</sup> characterized by his Jewish rejection, and his approaching death (11.47-50, 53, 57; 12.7, 23-24), the "hour" of his return to the Father (13.1).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A. Culpepper, The Plot of John's Story of Jesus, in: *Interpretation* 49 (1995) 347-358, here: 348 and *Anatomy*, 97-98.

<sup>7</sup> M.W.G. Stibbe, *John's Gospel* (New Testament Readings), London 1994, 47.

<sup>8</sup> See R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, I* (AnBib), New York 1966, cxxxviii, cxli.

<sup>9</sup> Similarly, S.M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, New York 1999, 150. However, with *Lincoln*, Truth, 21-22, the "public ministry of Jesus" in Palestine appears to formally come to a close not at 10.39-40, but rather at 12.44-50 where the narrative highlights again Jewish rejection of Jesus, though now, in a seemingly final and definitive way (note the OT allusions and quotations in 12.37-40).

<sup>10</sup> M. Appolt, *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT, 2/1), Tübingen 1976, 107 states: "Both chapters [11-12] form a kind of unit setting the tone and direction for what is to follow as well as marking the end to Jesus' public ministry". Culpepper, *Plot*, 355 states that "John 11 and 12 are pivotal chapters that bring to a climax the mighty works of Jesus and set the stage for his death". J. Zumstein, L'interprétation johannique de la mort du

11.47-53, as the center piece of the Lazarus narrative,<sup>11</sup> has particular theological significance. Though many see the Lazarus story ending at the close of the miracle proper in 11.44,<sup>12</sup> there are literary as well as theological reasons to extend the Lazarus narrative all the way to 12.11. (1) The mention of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary and the place indicator "Bethany" appear at 11.1 and 12.1-3.<sup>13</sup> (2) The continued references to Lazarus in chapter 12 (12.1, 9, 10) serve to link chapter 12 with the narrative of Lazarus' resurrection (11.1-44).<sup>14</sup> (3) There appears to be a deliberate inclusion between the transitional verses 10.40-42 and 12.11 with the notice that "many believed in him/Jesus": πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκεῖ (10.42); πολλοὶ ... ἐπίστευον εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν (12.11).<sup>15</sup> This inclusion or literary frame marks 11.1-12.11 as a continuous narrative. The placement and function of the frames (10.42 and 12.11), along with other structural elements unifying this section (11.1-12.11), indicate the theological significance of this section and particularly the significance of 11.47-53 within it.<sup>16</sup> Consistent with the definitions of

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Christ, in: *F. van Segbroeck - C.M. Tuckett - G. van Belle - J. Verheyden*, *The Four Gospels (=Fs. F. Neirynck)* (BETL, 100), Leuven 1992, 2126 also points to the crucial place that chapters 11-12 play in the plot of John's Gospel.

<sup>11</sup> See the structure on page 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Brown*, John I, 422-437; *C.K. Barrett*, *The Gospel According to St John*, London 1965, 387; *E. Haenchen*, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John II (Hermeneia)*, Philadelphia 1984, 56; *J. Schneider*, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes (ThHK)*, Berlin 1976, 216. *K. Wengst*, *Das Johannesevangelium (TKNT, 4/2)*, Stuttgart 2001, 11 sees the Lazarus narrative ending at v.57. *R. Schnackenburg*, *The Gospel According to St John II*, New York 1987 (Germ. org. 1971), 317; *B. Lindars*, *The Gospel of John (New Century Bible)*, London 1972, 378. *G.R. Beasley-Murray*, *John (WBC, 36)*, Waco 1986, 187 and *R. Bultmann*, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Philadelphia 1971 (trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray et al.; Germ. org. 1964), 392 take the Lazarus narrative to 11.54.

<sup>13</sup> See *J.N. Suggit*, *The Raising of Lazarus*, in: *ExT* 95 (1984) 106-107 for more detailed links between chapters 11-12 which, according to him, provide evidence that the Lazarus narrative extends from 11.1-12.11.

<sup>14</sup> Thus, the responses to or effects of the Lazarus miracle, which clearly extend to 12.11, reveal that "as in other miracle stories, the response is an integral part of the account" (*Lincoln*, *Truth*, 149).

<sup>15</sup> *P.F. Ellis*, *The Genius of John: A Composition-Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, Collegeville 1984, 177, also sees an inclusion marked by the mention that "many believed" at 10.42 and 12.11.

<sup>16</sup> We agree with *B.N. Bachra*, *Structural Regularities in the Story of the Passage through the Sea: Exod 13.17-22 and Exod 14*, in: *SJOT* 16 (2002) 246, when he states that concentric and parallel structures "add to the functional impact of the text on the reader". Though the various techniques of structuration used by ancient authors play a role in the intended affect or meaning of the text, the exegete must be careful not to *over-*interpret his

plot surveyed above and especially with narrative critical methodology, the author guides the reader by means of such narrative strategies and devices like repetition, contrast, comparison, causation, pivot, summarization, inclusion,<sup>17</sup> but also by means of various narrative structuring methods. Thus, the structuring of a narrative is itself a rhetorical device used by the author to guide the reader to understand the text<sup>18</sup> and the reader's response is affected by the arrangement of the story's content.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the structure of chapters 11-12 and the place that 11.47-53 plays within this structure is crucial to determining the function of 11.47-53.

The parallel structuration of the section<sup>20</sup> can be set forth as follows:

- A Many [Jews] go to where Jesus is and many believe (10.40-42)
- B In Bethany, Mary, and Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (11.1-44)
- C Division among Jews over Jesus' signs, plot to kill Jesus, and retreat (11.45-57)
  - vv. 44-45: Division among Jews leads to death plot
  - vv. 47-53: Plot to kill Jesus and John's interpretation
  - vv. 54-57: Plot causes Jesus to retreat and the pursuit continues
- B' In Bethany, Mary anoints Jesus for burial and death (12.1-8)
- A' Many Jews go to where Jesus is and many Jews believe (12.9-11)

*A-A' (10.40-42; 12.9-11)*

or her perceived structural connections. In the end, it is the narrative argument - what the text actually says and the connections it makes more or less explicit - that has to be the arbiter of the text's meaning.

<sup>17</sup> See *M.A. Powell*, *What is Narrative Criticism*, Minneapolis 1990, 23.

<sup>18</sup> *H.J.B. Combrink*, *The Structure of the Gospel of Matthew as Narrative*, in: *TynBul* 34 (1983) 74.

<sup>19</sup> Narrative critics, taking their cue from *S. Chatman*, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca-London 1978, 15ff often speak of the two aspects of narrative: story and discourse. The *story* is the content of the narrative, *what* it is about. The *discourse* is the rhetoric of the narrative, *how* the story is told. Along these lines, I include the structuring of the narrative as part of the *how* or the pragmatics of the text.

<sup>20</sup> Ellis' structuring of this section is similar to ours. For him, 10.40 begins the Lazarus narrative and is not merely a "frame" (*Genius*, 177). He may well be correct, since our structuring has 12.11 ending the Lazarus narrative but also functioning as its frame, along with 10.40-42. In the end, whether 10.40-42 and 12.9-11 are verses that frame the Lazarus narrative and thus are not technically part of that narrative, or whether these verses function both as frames and as part of the Lazarus narrative proper do not affect the interpretation of this section.

The first frame (A 10.40-42) follows the shepherd discourse (10.1-18) and Jewish opposition to Jesus on the feast of dedication in Jerusalem (10.24-33). The response of the Jews to the shepherd of Israel, the one who mediates life to his people, is division (10.19-21), attempted stoning and attempted physical seizure (10.31, 39).<sup>21</sup> The reader is left with the clear impression that the Jews of Judea have rejected their shepherd (cf. 10.11). Jesus is thus forced to leave the area of Palestine and retreat "again beyond the Jordan" (10.40). The irony here is that Jesus finds faith not among his own in Palestine (note the place indicators in 10.22-23: Jerusalem and the temple,) but "beyond the Jordan" precisely where John had first baptized (10.40-42).<sup>22</sup> The reader notices the clear reference back to John the Baptist's inauguration of the Messiah's ministry by the direct mention that the place where Jesus retreats is "beyond the Jordan" and "the place where John was first baptizing" (10.40; cf. 1.28). Thus, the Jews, his own of 1.11, had for the most part rejected John's prophetic message that Jesus is the Messiah, Lamb of God, and Son of God, whose mission is that of bringing to Israel (1.31) the Isaianic restoration (1.23; cf. Isa 40.3), the eschatological Spirit (1.33; cf. Isa 11.2-4), and the removal of sin (1.29).<sup>23</sup> These two frames function to show that though some are believing (10.40-42; 12.11) as a result of Jesus' works (10.37-38) and signs (primarily here the greatest sign, the raising of Lazarus, 12.9-11), the Jews (represented by their leaders) are continuing to thwart the "sign" ministry of the Messiah by both their seeking to seize Jesus (10.39), their plot to kill him (11.47-53), and even their plot to kill Lazarus (12.9).

After Jesus is anointed for his own burial (12.1-8), many Jews seek him and believe on account of the sign of Lazarus (12.9, 11). Here again, the chief priests take counsel as to how they might keep Jesus' sign (raising of Lazarus) from producing

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<sup>21</sup> *J. Beutler*, *Two Ways of Gathering: The Plot to Kill Jesus in John 11.47-53*, in: *NTS* 40 (1994) 400: "Division caused by words of Jesus and his deeds is a common Johannine feature". See especially 7.12, 40-44; 10.19-21.

<sup>22</sup> Similarly, *Brown*, *John I*, 414.

<sup>23</sup> *Brown*, *John I*, 414 suggests an inclusion between the witness of John in 1.29 and the mention of John in 10.40-41. According to *Brown*, the inclusion serves to frame the public ministry of Jesus: from John the Baptist, beyond the Jordan (1.28) to John the Baptist, beyond the Jordan (10.40). This may well be the case. However, the inclusio here would not indicate the framing of Jesus' public ministry, as if his public ministry ends in 10.39-40 as *Brown* suggests. As we have indicated above, Jesus' public ministry in Palestine decisively ends in 12.37-40. This framing then, with its reference to John and the place where he was baptizing, serves, as we suggest above, to indicate to the reader that the Jews continue to reject John's witness about Jesus.



faith among the "Jews" (12.10-11; cf. 11.47-48). This leads to Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem where he is hailed "king of Israel" by the "great multitude" (ὁ ὄχλος πολὺς) who had come to the feast of Passover (12.12-13; cf. v.18). In 12.17, the multitude (ὄχλος) of the Jews, an apparently different multitude than that of 12.12,<sup>24</sup> "were bearing witness" (ἐμαρτύρει οὖν ὁ ὄχλος, 12.17).<sup>25</sup> In context, the content of their witness has to do with Jesus' sign of raising Lazarus from the dead. Their "witness" is the "reason" (διὰ τοῦτο) the pilgrims (the "great multitude" of 12.12,18) who come to the feast seek Jesus. Again, the "sign" of Lazarus is generating faith among Jews, evidenced by their "bearing witness" (12.17),<sup>26</sup> and producing more interest in Jesus (12.18). This causes frustration among the Pharisees who now have to admit that their plot to seize and kill Jesus (11.47-53, 57) is simply not working ("The Pharisees then said to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!'", 12.19).<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the statement "many Jews believed" (A-A' 10.42; 12.11) that frames the Lazarus narrative proper (11.1-12.11) suggests what will soon become clear: the Jewish leaders' (Pharisees and chief priests) primary anxiety is not that just any "people" are going after Jesus, but that "Jews", their own people, are going after him.<sup>28</sup>

*B-B' (11.1-44; 12.1-8)*

<sup>24</sup> So *Schnackenburg*, John II, 377; *Lindars*, John, 425.

<sup>25</sup> The multitude of 12.17 are those who were with Jesus at Lazarus' resurrection (12.17; cf. 11.19, 31, 33, 45-46).

<sup>26</sup> "Bearing witness" (μαρτυρέω) of Jesus in the FG is an act that is only done by "insiders", or trustworthy witnesses, who clearly "believe" in Jesus: John the Baptist (1.5, 34), the Father (5.37), the Holy Spirit (15.26), the Samaritan woman's witness of Jesus brings about faith in the Samaritans (4.39), the disciples (15.27), and the Beloved Disciple (19.35; 21.24). Even the Scriptures (5.39) and Jesus' works (10.25) "bear witness" of him.

<sup>27</sup> This hyperbolic statement "the world has gone after him" paints a vivid picture of Jesus' success on the one hand and the fact that many are turning away from the Jewish leaders and joining Jesus' new community (*Schnackenburg*, John II, 378).

<sup>28</sup> Notice that the Pharisees' frustration that their plan to stamp out Jesus and his signs in 12.19 is directly connected (οὖν, v.19a) to the mention of the two sets of multitudes (12.17-18), one of which bears witness of Jesus and his sign (12.17) and one of which seek him because of his sign (12.18). The notice that the "Greeks" among the multitude were seeking Jesus (12.20-21) comes after the Pharisees' statement and thus the impression is that it is not the Greeks' seeking of Jesus that upset the Pharisees, but rather it is the Jewish belief in him and seeking of him that cause them great concern.

The place Bethany, the characters Mary, Martha, Lazarus and the reference to "death/burial" provide the parallelism that hold these verses together. The notice that "many believed" in both 10.42 and 12.11 frame the two references to "death": Lazarus' (11.11-13, 17) and Jesus' (12.7-8).

The section (B-B' 11.1-44; 12.1-8), immediately framed by A-A' (10.40-42; 12.9-11), serves to highlight the irony that the pursuit of the Jews to destroy Jesus' works and signs - his ministry to his own - actually brings about more faith among the Jews, but also ultimately Jesus' own death. Jesus' retreats away from death threats in this section (10.40; 11.54) actually result or at least provide the occasion for Jesus' greatest sign (that of the raising of Lazarus, 11.1-44) which in turn produces faith among "many Jews" (11.45; 12.11).

More specifically, Jesus' retreat in 10.40 from those who seek to seize him (10.39) leads him to the place "beyond the Jordan" where he finds "faith" and the place where he receives word that Lazarus is sick (11.3). This leads Jesus to move back to Bethany, in Judea, where Lazarus is (11.7). Jesus then raises Lazarus, which produces faith in some Jews (11.45) but also causes the council's plot to kill Jesus (11.47-53). Again Jesus has to retreat, but this time to Ephraim (11.54). With the Jewish leaders in hot pursuit, Jesus moves back to Bethany, in Judea, and is prepared for his burial (12.1-8). This journey (from Bethany to Bethany, 11.7, 12.1) leads directly to more belief among the Jews and renewed plotting of the council to stamp out Jesus' sign ministry - this time, the plot is not just to kill Jesus but also to kill Lazarus! (12.10-11). The chief priests' plot to kill Lazarus here is motivated<sup>29</sup> by the fact that the "sign" of Lazarus' resurrection is continuing to bring about faith in the "Jews" (11.45, 47; 12.9, 11). Thus, Jesus' retreats in this section, caused by Jewish attempts to destroy Jesus, ironically bring about that which they seek to thwart: the effecting of faith among his own by means of his signs.<sup>30</sup>

What is also suggested by the parallelism of B-B' (11.1-44; 12.1-8) is that Jesus' giving of life will ultimately cost him his own life - only hinted at in his anointing (12.1-8) and also in 11.4 ("This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God,

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<sup>29</sup> The chief priests plotted Lazarus' death (12.10) "because on account of him (ὅτι ... δι' αὐτόν) many of the Jews were going away and believing in him" (12.11).

<sup>30</sup> Brown's comment that the authorities' seeking to kill both Jesus (11.53) and Lazarus (12.10) is evidence of their determination to reject both the giver of life and the recipient of life is no doubt the case. But, more is going on here: our interpretation suggests that the Jewish authorities not only reject Jesus and his works and signs but they also are attempting to stamp out the effects of Jesus' ministry to Jews.

that the Son of God may be glorified by it"). This connection is made quite clear in the center part (11.45-53) of our section (10.40-12.11).

*C (11.45-53)*

The placement and the argument of these center verses confirm the motifs that seemed to dominate the entire section (10.40-12.11): the plot to kill Jesus is not simply a confirmation that the Jewish leaders reject Jesus' ministry, rather, this plot is the attempt on their part to thwart Jesus' ministry to his own, the Jews. As we have seen, the fact that Jews are believing as a result of Jesus' signs is explicitly said to be the *reason* that the leaders want to kill Jesus and his living sign Lazarus (11.47-48; 12.9-11). The Lazarus sign causes a division among the Jews:<sup>31</sup> some believe while others report to the leaders (11.45-46). This division (vv.45-46) is the cause that leads to the plot to kill Jesus (11.47ff).<sup>32</sup> The primary concern of the Sanhedrin is that Jesus' signs will soon result in "everyone"<sup>33</sup> believing in him (πάντες πιστεύουσιν εἰς αὐτόν, 11.48a) and that this will result in the Roman destruction of the temple and the nation (48b). It is interesting to note that the possible threat of Roman intervention as that which could justify putting Jesus to death is mentioned only here in the Gospel.<sup>34</sup> The motive for putting Jesus to death, as we have repeatedly seen, is not to protect the Jews from some outside force or harm, but rather a plot to keep Jesus' words, works, and signs from producing faith

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<sup>31</sup> The οὖν of 11.45 connects Lazarus' resurrection to the "division" of vv.45-46.

<sup>32</sup> The οὖν of 11.47a functions to link the "report" of some Jews with the official decision of the Sanhedrin in vv.47b-53.

<sup>33</sup> The πάντες in 11.48a must refer to "Jews" since the context concerns Jewish belief in Jesus (11.19, 31, 33, 36 and particularly 11.45). Chapter 12.11 makes it clear that it is Jewish belief in Jesus that angers the leaders. D. Lee's comment that v.48 refers to fears about the "coming of the Gentiles" is simply not supported by the context (The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning [JSNT SS, 95], Sheffield 1994, 217).

<sup>34</sup> The issue of "freedom", which relates to the widespread desire of Jews in the first century to be "free" from political oppression, is broached elsewhere in the Gospel (chapter 8). But this is not connected to a plot to kill Jesus.

in their fellow Jews.<sup>35</sup> Thus, protecting "their own" from allegiance to Jesus is the leaders' primary motive.<sup>36</sup> What accounts for this motive?

This motive may in fact be reflected in the verb *ὑπάγω* in 12.11 where the stated reason for attempting to kill Lazarus is *ὅτι πολλοὶ δι' αὐτὸν ὑπήγον τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ ἐπίστευον εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν*. The ground or motive (*ὅτι*) for stamping out Jesus' living sign Lazarus is that many Jews are not just believing in Jesus, but they are "going away" and believing in Jesus. A number of scholars see in the verb *ὑπάγω* here a decisive break away from an allegiance to the Jewish leaders to an allegiance to Jesus.<sup>37</sup> But, the picture painted by the verb *ὑπάγω* may intend to suggest not just a break from the leaders of Judaism but also a break from Judaism itself.<sup>38</sup> Read within the context of the entire Gospel, this "going away" reflects a break with Judaism as represented in its leaders, community, symbols and institutions (such as the Synagogue, temple and feasts). The center of gravity for those Jews who "went away" and believed in Jesus is no longer the Jerusalem temple or the Jewish feasts, but rather Jesus as the tabernacling presence of God (the *σκηνή*, 1.14), the true temple (2.19-22), the true passover lamb (1.29) and the heavenly manna who mediates eternal life to his people (6.50-51).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> A similar state of affairs seems to be at play in John 7.31-32 where the multitudes' "belief in him" appears to be generated by Jesus' signs. When the "chief priests and Pharisees heard these things" they sent officers to seize him. This "seizure" implies a death threat since it motivates Jesus' statement that "for a little while longer I am with you" (7.33). The parallels with 11.47-54 are clear.

<sup>36</sup> Culpepper's assessment that "the giving of life, paradoxically and poignantly, becomes the impetus for Jesus' death" (Plot, 355) is not precise enough. The precise impetus for Jesus' death is the fact that his signs (11.47), of which the raising of Lazarus is one such sign, are resulting in "many Jews" (11.45; cf. v.47) coming to faith.

<sup>37</sup> *Brown*, John I, 459; *Lindars*, John, 420; *L. Morris*, *The Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids 1995, 517-518; *Barrett*, St John, 346; *J.H. Bernard*, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John II*, Edinburgh <sup>1</sup>1928, <sup>2</sup>1942, 423.

<sup>38</sup> *Lindars*, John, 420 and *Brown*, John I, 459 make this point particularly clear. Brown states, "Verse 11 can be understood against the background of the struggle between the Synagogue and the Church in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century. It is a tacit invitation to those Jews who believe in Christ to follow the example of their compatriots who had already left Judaism to follow Jesus" (459).

<sup>39</sup> *S. Hamid-Khani*, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT, 2/120), Tübingen 2000 has recently argued that the theological relationship between Jesus and the Jewish religious institutions in the FG shows that "a new chapter in the history of salvation had opened, sealing closed the previous one, but all in the same book. A new era had begun in which the old tenets were fulfilled with their accomplishment in Jesus Christ. Judaism could no longer be viable as a

There appears to be more evidence of this motive of the Jewish leaders in the deliberate parallelism between 11.43-53 and 12.9-11. Notice the almost exact verbal parallels:<sup>40</sup>

11.43-53	12.9-11
11.43-44: Λάζαρε, δεῦρο ἕξω	12.9b: τὸν Λάζαρον ... ἐκ νεκρῶν
11.45a: Πολλοὶ ... ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων	12.9a: πολλὸς ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων
11.45b: ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν	12.11: πολλοὶ ... τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ ἐπίστευον εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν
11.53: ἐβουλεύσαντο ἵνα ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτόν	12.10: ἐβουλεύσαντο ... ἵνα καὶ τὸν Λάζαρον ἀποκτείνωσιν

As we have mentioned, the sign of Lazarus' resurrection (11.43-44) resulted in many Jews believing in Jesus (11.45) and this resulted in the plot to kill Jesus (11.47-53). Similarly, after Jesus' anointing for his own death and burial (12.1-8), the sign of Lazarus' resurrection continues to result in faith among many Jews (12.9, 11)<sup>41</sup> and this again results in a death plot from the Jewish leaders (12.10). This time, the plot to kill Jesus is expanded to include Lazarus as well.<sup>42</sup> The leaders deem it necessary not only to kill Jesus (11.53) but now, because of the continuing loss of Jews to Jesus, they want to kill the living sign, Lazarus. Since it is precisely the raising of Lazarus "that triggers the final reaction and initiates the prelude to the passion",<sup>43</sup> and since it is Jesus' death by which he is supremely glorified (11.3), mediates life to his people (6.51a) and gathers the dispersed chil-

cult ... While this did not mean that one ceased to be a Jew, neither did being a Jew in itself any longer carry any significance. For the Evangelist, the decisive factor was nothing less than a 'rebirth' from above in which the entire existing system of Judaism was challenged and transcended in Jesus Christ" (259).

<sup>40</sup> Some have noticed the parallelism between 11.53 and 12.10 (see *Brown*, John I, 459 and *Bultmann*, John, 416-417). But, the significance of the other parallels between 11.43-53 and 12.9-11 have not been noticed.

<sup>41</sup> *U. Wilckens*, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD, 4), Göttingen 1998, 187 argues that the interest of the Jewish crowd in 12.9-11 "hat mit wahren Glauben an Jesus nichts zu tun". Perhaps this may be the case with the ὄχλος πολλὸς ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων in 12.9. But, there is no reason to believe that the πολλοὶ ... τῶν Ἰουδαίων in 12.11, who were specifically believing in Jesus (ἐπίστευον εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν), did not have genuine faith.

<sup>42</sup> The death plot in 12.10 carries over the plan to kill Jesus decided upon in 11.53 by the καὶ of 12.10: "The chief priests planned to kill Lazarus *also*. Thus, now both Jesus and Lazarus are the objects of the death threat.

<sup>43</sup> *Appolt*, *Oneness*, 121.

dren of God (11.52), the FG's [Fourth Gospel] irony reaches a high point here: the leaders' plot to kill Jesus is that which will, in the end, serve Jesus' salvific purposes.

## II. 11.47-53, Chapters 11-12, and the Main Plot-Line of the Gospel ( 1.11-12)

If we are correct about the role of the Jewish leaders in the plot of chapters 11-12, namely, that they attempt to quell Jesus' sign ministry to the Jews, then it appears that the fundamental plot line of the entire Gospel, encapsulated in 1.11-12,<sup>44</sup> is uniquely played out and comes to a decisive resolution in chapters 11-12. For our purposes, it is important to point out that 11.47-53 seems to connect the plot line of chapters 11-12 with the plot line of the Gospel (1.11-12) most directly. The designation τέκνα θεοῦ (or τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ) is used only in 1.12 and 11.52, and this fact alone is enough to suggest that the narrator intended the reader to relate the two passages in some way.

As the theme of the Gospel, John 1.11-12 appears to be unfolded, in various ways, throughout the Gospel.<sup>45</sup> The reader is prepared almost immediately for the coming opposition to the ministry of the Logos in the world (1.11). The Logos' earthly ministry, indeed the plot of the Gospel, has two basic moves:

(1) εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον (1.11)

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<sup>44</sup> *Culpepper*, *Anatomy*, 127-128; *Brown*, *John I*, 414; *I. de la Potterie*, *Jésus roi et juge d'après Jn 19,13*, in: *Biblica* 41 (1960) 246, who states "Le prologue avait indiqué le thème dominant du récit: 'il vint chez lui et les siens ne l'ont pas reçu' (1,11)". But, the plot or theme of the Gospel in crystallized form should include both 1.11 and 12. See *K. Scholtissek*, *Kinder Gottes und Freunde Jesu: Beobachtungen zur johanneischen Ekklesiologie*, in: *R. Kampling - Th. Söding*, *Ekklesiologie des Neuen Testaments* (Fs. K. Kertelge, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1996, 197: "In 1,11 und 1,12f ist in nuce das Geschick der Sendung des Gottessohnes, das Evangelium narrativ entfaltet wird, zusammengefasst und gedeutet". In terms of the importance of the Prologue as a whole for the rest of the Gospel, see *N.T. Wright*, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the People of God*, Minneapolis 1992, who concludes that "the story which the prologue thus tells is, most importantly, the story of the gospel as a whole in miniature" (416). Similarly, *M.D. Hooker*, *The Johannine Prologue and the Messianic Secret*, in: *NTS* 21 (1974) 40-58 and *S.R. Valentine*, *The Johannine Prologue: A Microcosm of the Gospel*, in: *EvQ* 68 (1996) 291-304.

<sup>45</sup> *Appolt*, *Oneness*, 110, n. 1, states that with these ominous words of the Prologue [1.11] the theme is announced that is to dominate the following scenes of dispute". *Lincoln*, *Truth*, 14, characterizes 1.11-12 as a preview of the outcome of the Logos' mission.

(2) ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (1.12)

(1) The Logos came to his own, but his own did not receive him; (2) nevertheless,<sup>46</sup> to those who did receive him, those who believe in his name, he gave authority to become the children of God. As the story unfolds and the opposition to Jesus, only hinted at in 1.11, increases in severity to include death threats, the question for the reader becomes "how will Jesus carry out his mission of creating children of God if he is killed?" This question appears to be resolved in chapters 11-12 and particularly in 11.52.

Against Bultmann and J. Jervell,<sup>47</sup> I take 1.11 not as a repetition of v.10 but rather as a further progression of the Logos' sojourn into the human realm: the Logos entered the κόσμος which was made through him although it did not know him (v.10) and furthermore the Logos came to τὰ ἴδια (v.11a) and the result was that οἱ ἴδιοι (v.11b) did not receive him. With Pryor, Carson, Brown, and M.-E. Boismard,<sup>48</sup> I understand τὰ ἴδια to refer to the Logos' own homeland, the promised land, the Jewish nation. This interpretation is consistent with the meaning of τὰ ἴδια as "his own home" in 16.32 and 19.27. I take "his own" (οἱ ἴδιοι) in v.11b to refer to the Jews, or perhaps Israel.<sup>49</sup> Thus, τὰ ἴδια and οἱ ἴδιοι in 1.11 refer to "Israel and her people".<sup>50</sup> The primary focus then of the Logos' mission is Israel, despite the universal offer and effects of his saving work (3.16; 4.42; 6.51; 12.46-47).<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> I take the δὲ in 1.12 as an adversative.

<sup>47</sup> Bultmann, John, 56; J. Jervell, 'Er kam in sein Eigentum'. Zu Joh 1,11, in: *Studia Theologica* 10 (1956) 14-27.

<sup>48</sup> J.W. Pryor, Jesus and Israel in the Fourth Gospel, in: NTS 32 (1990) 210-214; Carson, John, 124. Brown, John I, 10; M.-E. Boismard, *Le Prologue de Saint Jean* (LD, 11), Paris 1953, 53.

<sup>49</sup> Culpepper, Anatomy, 128; Brown, John I, 29-30; F. Godet, *Commentaire sur L'évangile de Saint Jean III*, Neuchatel 1903, 60-62; H.N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, Grand Rapids-Cambridge 1992, 44-46; Pryor, Jesus, 218; Wilckens, Johannes, 30-31. It is telling that "his own" (ἴδιος) elsewhere in the Gospel are believing Jews (10.3,4, cf. 10.14-15; 13.1).

<sup>50</sup> Pryor, Jesus, 214. Similarly, Wilckens, Johannes, 30-31 states: "V.11 grenzt den Aspekt auf 'sein Eigentum' ein, nämlich auf Israel als das erwählte Gottesvolk".

<sup>51</sup> Pryor, Jesus, 213-214 shows that the context of 1.11-12 has Israel in view: vv.6-7 and particularly vv.12-18 show that the Logos is related to traditional Jewish/OT concerns such as the wilderness tabernacled presence of God and his glory (v.14) and the Law and Moses (vv.17-18).

The rejection of Jesus by "his own" referred to in v.11b is played out in the Gospel.<sup>52</sup> The "Jews" are the group<sup>53</sup> that is characterized by their opposition to and unbelief in Jesus as the Messiah who has come from God; they even want to put him to death (5.18; 7.1; 8.59; 10.31). But, it appears that the leaders of the Jews, the Pharisees and chief priests,<sup>54</sup> are the ones who have the ultimate authority to make the death plot come to pass; it is their death plot against Jesus (11.47-53) that in the end seals his fate. In fact, the characters in 11.47-50 are the very ones (chief priests, Pharisees, Caiaphas) who orchestrate Jesus' arrest, conviction and death penalty (18.3, 12, 19, 35; 19.15, 21<sup>55</sup>).

Thus, the first move of the plot (1.11), played out through the many controversies, rejections, and death threats from Jews (and/or their leaders), appears to peak in chapters 11-12.<sup>56</sup> Before chapter 11, the reader has encountered references to Jesus' death or his going to the Father, but the threat did not seem imminent. It is not until the concrete plan of 11.47-53, sealed by the authority of both the Sanhedrin and the high priest, that the narrative begins to move quickly toward the events of the passion. In fact, the "hour" of Jesus, which, up until chapter 12, "had not yet come",<sup>57</sup> has now "come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12.23) or "depart out

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<sup>52</sup> Culpepper's category of "primacy effect" is helpful here (Anatomy, 126). The first impressions of the reader is established by the narrator early on and concerns both the basic plot line of the story and the characters who carry that plot to its fruition. Thus, the plot of the Gospel, in crystallized form, appears to be found in 1.11-12.

<sup>53</sup> Culpepper, Anatomy, 126 argues that the "Jews" should be regarded as a single group in John's narrative, although he recognizes that this character - the "Jews" - receives, from time to time, differing characterizations.

<sup>54</sup> Culpepper, Anatomy, 125 concludes that the chief priests and the Pharisees, as the leaders of the "Jews," are closely connected to the "Jews" in John, hence the language: οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς τῶν Ἰουδαίων ("The chief priests of the Jews", 19.21). Thus, though the Jews cannot be simply equated with the chief priests and Pharisees, I would argue that the chief priests and Pharisees are representatives of the worst characterization of the "Jews" (seeing that "many Jews" do in fact believe in Jesus, 11.45; 12.11) and as such are the main opponents to Jesus and his ministry to the very end.

<sup>55</sup> It is telling that Pilate puts the blame for Jesus' arrest specifically on "your nation" and the chief priests: τὸ ἔθνος τὸ σὸν καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς παρέδωκάν σε ἐμοί (18.35). The connection to and irony with 11.47ff. are evident: not only do the chief priest who conspired to initiate the death plot show up here, but the nation, the very entity for whom Jesus dies to save from Rome, appears here in the trial narrative as a co-conspirator to Jesus' death!

<sup>56</sup> Both Culpepper, Anatomy, 128 and Brown, John I, 414 link the theme of the Gospel found in 1.11 with the events of chapters 11-12.

<sup>57</sup> 2.4; 7.6, 30; 8.20.



of this world" (13.1). Thus, the Jews, and more specifically the Jewish leaders, carry out the plot line of rejection hinted at in 1.11. What seems to become clear in chapters 11-12, as we have pointed out numerous times, is that the leaders not only reject Jesus along with most of the "Jews," but they plot to thwart the Logos' mission to "his own", namely, his mission to bring about faith in Israel - to create a new community, the children of God (1.12).<sup>58</sup>

In 1.12 we find the second move in the plot of the Gospel: the Logos will create a new community, he will gather the people of God,<sup>59</sup> constituted from those who believe. These are the ὄσοι (1.12) who were part of οἱ ἴδιοι (1.11) but are now distinguished from the ἴδιοι of v.11 by their reception (λαμβάνω) of the Logos and their faith (πιστεύω) in him (v.12).<sup>60</sup> They are therefore given ἐξουσία to become τέκνα θεοῦ (v.12), a status which is closely connected with their being begotten (γεννάω) by God (v.13). As such, they become the restored Israel.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Stibbe*, *John's Gospel*, argues for a similar assessment of the plot-line of John's Gospel. The basic plot according to Stibbe can be summed up as the mission of the sent one, Jesus, to bring life to those who believe. Throughout the story, there are various "opponents" who resist Jesus' desire to fulfill his mission. Although, in the end, Jesus is seen as having triumphed over his opponents (41-42). The figures who fulfill the role of "opponents of Jesus" are the Jews, Pharisees, chief priests, Judas, Annas, the world, and the devil (42-43).

<sup>59</sup> *B. Olsson*, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel: A Text-Linguistic Analysis of John 2:1-11 and 4:1-42* (CBNTS, 6), Lund 1974, 248 has characterized the mission of Jesus in John's Gospel "as the gathering of the people of God, who are dispersed throughout the world". In this regard, he links the following passages: 4.36; 6.12; 10.16; 11.52; 12.32. However, he does not specifically link Jesus' mission with 1.11-12.

<sup>60</sup> Similarly, *Boismard*, *Prologue*, 53.

<sup>61</sup> I therefore see no justification for interpreting the "children of God" in 1.12 as the Gentiles or referring to a Gentile mission. See for example, Brown, who states "in place of the Jewish people who had been his own (i 11), he now has formed around himself a new "own", the Christian believers (i 12)" (*John I*, 29). He later identifies the children of God with Gentiles and the Gentile mission (442-443). However, this "new his own" are those who originate from "his own" in v.11 and as such are Israelites who have now been united and restored to their Messiah. We have already pointed out (see note 49) that all the other instances of "his own" (ἴδιοι) in the Gospel clearly refer to Jewish believers. In addition, the imagery of being "begotten" (γεννάω, v.13) children of God (v.12) is consistent with OT imagery of Israel being restored from sin to a renewed covenant relationship with YHWH. The judgment of exile and dispersion is often associated with the death of God's people (Deut 4.26-28; 28.63-64; Tobit 3.4; *TestJud.* 23.3-4). Furthermore, Israel, who had been begotten by God (γεννάω) (Deut 32.18) forfeited their status as God's children (τέκνα) due to their sin (Deut 32.5). Thus, it is consistent that the restoration of God's people can be equated with a new birth. In Isa 49.21, Israel's restoration is their "begetting" from a state of exile and their return (Isa 49.22). The same imagery (with γεννάω) is used in Isa 66.9 (cf.

Therefore, despite the fact that the Logos' sojourn in the world and among his own will be characterized by rejection and result in his own death, nevertheless, there will be those who believe - those who are made children of God (1.12). When the reader reaches 11.52, he or she cannot miss the ironic fulfillment of 1.12: it will be by means of the death of Jesus that 1.12 will be fulfilled! Thus, the leaders and the high priest think that if they kill Jesus they will both thwart Jesus' faith producing sign ministry among "many Jews" (11.45; 12.11) and Roman destruction and domination of their Temple and nation. But, it is precisely *by means of* Jesus' death that he will create the new community of the children of God (11.52). Caiaphas thus not only unwittingly prophesies the soteriological significance of Jesus' death, but, by means of his (and the other leaders') death plan, he actually unwittingly becomes the agent of the soteriological mission of the Logos, a mission first alluded to in 1.11-12.<sup>62</sup> At the encountering of 11.47-53, the reader now knows that it is the death of Jesus that somehow effects the stated mission of the Logos in 1.12.<sup>63</sup>

M. Stibbe's use of the actantial structural analysis of A.J. Greimas to study the plot structure of John's Gospel has revealed a very interesting *omission* that supports our arguments above. At many points, John's plot "seems to obey what Greimas conceives to be the universal rules for storytelling".<sup>64</sup> Stories usually have four character-types or *actants* associated with them: a sender, receiver, opponent, and helper. "Throughout all of this, the receiver is involved in a quest. This receiver is the subject and the quest itself is the object".<sup>65</sup> What Stibbe notices is that John's

65.9). Ezek 37 is the *locus classicus* of Israel's exile being equated with death and their restoration being equated with new life.

<sup>62</sup> As such, the leaders' reveal their paternity; they are on the side of their father the devil "who was a murderer from the beginning" (8.44).

<sup>63</sup> Of course, the reader has already encountered statements about the soteriological effects of Jesus' death: Jesus' "lifting up" (3.15) and his giving of his flesh (6.51) effects life in others. But, the concrete connection between Jesus' death and the gathering of the children of God is made only in 11.52. In 10.15-16, there is a close connection between Jesus' laying down his life *for* his sheep and the bringing in of "other sheep". This comes close to 11.52 in this regard. But, whereas the propositions "I lay down my life for the sheep" and "I have other sheep not of this fold; I must bring them in also" are connected with a *καί* in 10.15-16, the relationship between Jesus' death and the gathering of the dispersed children of God in 11.52 is made explicitly clear by means of *ὅτι* + the subjunctive: Jesus will die *in order to* gather the dispersed children of God in 11.52.

<sup>64</sup> *Stibbe*, John's Gospel, 45.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

story subverts this universal structure in that "Jesus is the hero without any *obvious* Helpers. None of the characters who are seen to stand *with* Jesus are portrayed as ones who assist him in going to the cross to die for the world. But can this be said about the Jewish hierarchy? Is there not a strange and paradoxical sense in which the Jews *help* Jesus fulfill his mission? It is they who seek to arrest and kill him from Chapter 5 onwards. It is they who formally decide to have Jesus put to death in the council meeting at the end of Chapter 11. It is they who acquire the services of Judas and Pilate in the arrest and execution of Jesus. Is there not a sense in which Jesus depends upon the actions of his antagonists in order for his salvific death to occur"?<sup>66</sup>

Stibbe's answer to these questions is in the affirmative. By means of various techniques, such as the language of scripture fulfillment (John 17.12: "the one destined for destruction that the scripture would be fulfilled") and other uses of OT *testimonia* (19.24,36-37), John makes it clear that opposition to Jesus is part of the divine plan. Thus, "the antagonists contribute to the predetermined will of God ... the antagonists of Jesus are both Opponent and Helper!"<sup>67</sup> This leads Stibbe to conclude that irony is a crucial part of John's plot in this regard: "What is ironic about their hostility [the opponents of Jesus] is this: that in putting Jesus to death they are doing the very thing which will enable Jesus to cry out, 'It is finished'!"<sup>68</sup> Stibbe labels this plot technique as John's "creative theodicy in which the evil forces at work in the Gospel are seen to overreach their purposes and to contribute towards God's eternal plan".<sup>69</sup> For the careful reader, this "creative theodicy" of John's plot comes to a decisive peak and resolution at 11.47-53, for now the reader knows that the oppositional forces against the mission of God's Son will, on the one hand, succeed: Jesus will be put to death by them. But, on the other hand, this very act of killing Jesus will bring about the goal of the Son's mission, the creation and unification of the new messianic community, the children of God (1.12; 11.52).

This would have been a powerful message to John's community who had been separated from their Jewish origins by means of some kind of rift with the synagogue because of their belief in Jesus as the unique Son of God. Furthermore, along with most post-70 Jews, the Roman destruction of the Temple and the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 45.

theodicy and identity issues this event raised apparently also affected John's community. The Gospel's assurance that Jesus' death by the hands of both Jews and Romans was not his disgraceful defeat, as if God had forsaken him - quite the contrary; his death in fact was the event that brought to fruition his plan from the beginning, namely, to beget and gather together the children of God. His enemies, as well as the enemies of the community, can never thwart the plans of God but can only serve them.