

HEARING AND BELIEVING

CONTRASTING THE FAITH RESPONSES OF THE
ROYAL OFFICIAL AND THOMAS IN THE GOSPEL OF
JOHN AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

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Abstract

John pens his Gospel in such a way that, like his included characters who encounter Jesus, his readers are being confronted with the person of Jesus and the totality of his revelation. Also like the characters, John's readers must make decisions regarding the divine truth being revealed through the gospel as they read the text and experience Jesus for themselves. This study examines the two characters of the royal official and Thomas in the Gospel of John, examining how each character responds to the testimony of Jesus and how their differing faith-responses provide instruction for modern discipleship.

Introduction

In a recent monograph, *The Making of a Disciple*, Martin M. Culy and I examined how the Fourth Gospel records interactions between Jesus and various characters he encounters, providing them with revelation about his identity, mission, and message.¹ As these dialogue partners are confronted by “the Living Word,” they must make decisions regarding the divine truth being revealed to them. These characters and their diverse faith-responses create a learning opportunity for John's audience as they are presented with identifiable traits and readers are invited to deduce that what is true for the character in the story is also true for the reader.² This enables John to provide instruction to his audience on what appropriate faith and discipleship looks like as people encounter Jesus and respond to him. As the Johannine characters

struggle to understand what is being revealed by Jesus, some are able to move successfully into a deeper faith by recognizing his identity, receiving the revelation he offers, and growing in characteristics of discipleship.

John pens the interactions between Jesus and the diverse characters throughout his gospel as a way to reveal Jesus' identity. Each character functions "to draw out various aspects of Jesus' character by supplying personalities and situations with which he can interact, and to illustrate a spectrum of alternative responses to him."³ As John's readers identify with his characters, they are invited to evaluate both their strengths and weaknesses and use their identification with these features to foster positive growth in their own lives as they determine which attributes should be imitated and which should be rejected.

The following short study builds upon our larger analysis by examining the two specific characters of the royal official and Thomas and their responses to Jesus in the gospel of John to understand what the writer wants to communicate regarding authentic faith and effective discipleship. Thomas is a very interesting character in John's Gospel whose name appears seven times in four different episodes within the narrative (11:16; 14:5; 20:24–28; 21:2). The response of Thomas at the end of the Gospel can be clearly contrasted with the response of the royal official whom Jesus encounters after he returns from his successful ministry in Samaria at the end of John 4. Moreover, the responses of both of these characters to Jesus have implications for the future church (i.e., those who would later come to faith based on the testimony about the resurrected Christ). We will begin with the account of the royal official before moving on to Thomas and the implications for the future Spirit-empowered community.

The Royal Official

After the story of Jesus' successful ministry in Samaria, involving both the woman he met at the well and her village (4:1–42), John provides his readers with a short interlude that sets up the episode of Jesus' encounter with a royal official. In this interlude, Jesus travels from Samaria where he was well-received because of the woman's testimony about him and because of his own word rather than the need for miraculous signs (4:39–42). When Jesus enters Galilee (4:43), John mentions that the people there welcomed him because they had "seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival" (4:45; emphasis added).⁴ The reference to seeing what Jesus had done in Jerusalem must refer

either to the temple cleansing event, or more likely, to other signs Jesus had performed there that are not mentioned in John's Gospel (cf. 2:23). John will later write that his Gospel does not detail every sign that Jesus performed (20:30; 21:25). Yet, the allusion here to welcoming Jesus because of signs he has done continues a major Johannine motif where "sign-seeking-faith" is considered lacking compared to faith based on testimony. This theme will also come into play in the later post-resurrection scene with Thomas found below.

After the interlude, John writes that Jesus "came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine" (4:46). Here, Jesus finds a royal official from Capernaum,⁵ who after also hearing about the signs that Jesus had performed, traveled all the way to Cana to implore Jesus to come down and heal his son who was at the point of death (4:47).⁶ At this point in the narrative, Jesus issues a sharp reproof: "unless you [plural] see signs and wonders you [plural] will not believe" (4:48).⁷ This perplexing rebuke, which is given in the plural form, indicates that the statement is meant not merely for the royal official but for a wider audience. Jesus' words are likely aimed at the entire Galilean crowd who had gathered expecting him to perform signs but who failed to trust in him. Jesus is rebuking them for their inadequate faith that requires miraculous signs while missing what Jesus was actually revealing about himself through his signs (4:44–45).⁸

After Jesus' reproof, the official's attitude changes from a purely resolute interest in Jesus' willingness to accompany him and heal his son to an authentic belief in Jesus' words as Jesus tells him to return home and his son will live. John states that "the man believed the word that Jesus spoke" and started on his way home (4:50). Thus, the royal official, like the Samaritans before him, believed based on Jesus' word (4:41).⁹ As the man travels back to Capernaum, his servants meet him and confirm that his son has indeed been healed (4:51). They determine that the son's fever broke at the very hour that Jesus had pronounced his healing (4:52). Consequently, the father's faith in Jesus' word is validated, and as a result, his entire household comes to believe in Jesus (4:53).

In the episode with the royal official, John reveals to his readers a man who finds genuine faith based on his trust in Jesus' word alone. He may have approached Jesus out of curiosity like the other Galileans who had heard about the signs Jesus was performing (4:45). Yet, after his encounter with Jesus, the man moves away from a faith that is reliant merely upon seeing signs to an authentic and genuine faith based on the life-giving witness of Jesus. The man trusts Jesus' word and obeys his

command. Then, upon hearing the confirmation about his son's healing, the royal official then becomes a witness to the One who had healed his son, and like the previous story of the Samaritan village, his whole household comes to faith as a result of his witness about Jesus (4:53).¹⁰

The Character of Thomas

The character of Thomas is best known for his refusal to believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead without physical proof of the resurrection. Thus, the phrase “doubting Thomas” has been coined to refer to a person who refuses to believe something until they are shown proof. Some scholars have recently questioned whether Thomas actually doubted Jesus' resurrection or whether he simply wanted the same consideration afforded the other disciples on Easter Sunday.¹¹ Nevertheless, the fact remains that his requirement for physical proof, although ultimately offered by Jesus, is admonished as a lesser type of belief than the belief based on testimony that Jesus deemed as more “blessed” (20:29).¹² Yet, before we deal with this famous encounter and the climactic confession that follows, we need to examine the other occurrences where the character of Thomas is highlighted in the Fourth Gospel.

The first episode where Thomas appears in the Gospel is found in the Lazarus narrative.¹³ Here, Jesus is told that Lazarus has fallen ill (11:3), and after waiting two days, Jesus tells his disciples that they will be returning to Judea so that he can minister to his friend (11:7). Their returning to Judea concerns the disciples since “the Jews” had just tried to kill Jesus there, so they begin to warn him that trouble surely awaits their return to that area (11:8).

The disciples then misunderstand Jesus' comment when he tells them that Lazarus has fallen asleep (11:11), thinking that he means that Lazarus was literally asleep and thus will recover from his illness (11:12). This misunderstanding necessitates Jesus' clarification that Lazarus had indeed died (11:14) and that he intends to go awaken him (11:11, 15). Yet, Thomas continues to misread the situation as he naively proclaims: “Let us also go, that we may die with him [Jesus]” (11:16). Thomas's words reveal his belief that the Jews would likely kill them all if they return to Judea. In characteristic Johannine irony, Jesus' proclamation to the disciples that “Lazarus will live” is countered by Thomas's proclamation that “we will all die.” As with other encounters in John's Gospel, Thomas hears Jesus' words from an earthly perspective, misunderstanding their spiritual significance (11:15). While Thomas can be commended for his

readiness to die with Jesus, in reality, John's readers will find later that it is only Jesus who will die, and Thomas, along with most of the other disciples, will abandon Jesus after his arrest (cf. 16:31–32).¹⁴

In the second occurrence where Thomas is found in the Gospel, he continues to misunderstand Jesus' words to the disciples. Here, in the farewell discourse before his imminent departure, Jesus is encouraging his disciples that he will go and prepare a place for them in his Father's house (14:1–4). After telling his disciples that they "know the way" to the place where he is going, Thomas proclaims, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (14:5). The plural "we" suggests either that Thomas is speaking not only for himself but also on behalf of the other disciples, indicating that they are all confused by Jesus' words, or that he is hiding his own individual confusion behind the disguise of the entire group.¹⁵ Yet, since John repeatedly depicts the disciples as constantly misunderstanding Jesus, it is likely here that Thomas is simply verbalizing the confusion of the whole group.

Two interesting things stand out about the character of Thomas as shown in his two appearances so far in the Gospel. First, he continually misunderstands the words of Jesus (although this trait is also consistent in the other disciples as well), and second, Thomas portrays a willing desire to follow Jesus, either in his death (11:16) or in the way to the Father (14:5). Additionally, Thomas's articulation of his confusion over Jesus' proclamation about the way to the Father prompts Jesus' final and most significant "I am" statement in John's Gospel: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). Thus, out of Thomas's misunderstanding arises one of Jesus' most profound Christological revelations in the whole of the Gospel.

Thomas's third and most noteworthy appearance is located in the incident following the story of Jesus' resurrection in John 20:24–29. Prior to Jesus' personal encounter with Thomas, the risen Lord had appeared to Mary Magdalene (20:11–18) and then to the disciples themselves (20:19–23). Yet, for some unrecorded reason, Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the other disciples. As Mary had earlier testified to the disciples of her individual experience with the risen Jesus (20:18), so now the other disciples testify to Thomas of their encounter with the risen Lord (20:25a). Yet, in spite of the disciples' eyewitness account of the resurrection, Thomas proclaims his need for physical proof: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe" (20:25b).¹⁶

There are both comparisons and contrasts between the other disciples' encounter with Jesus and Thomas's later encounter. Similarities include the following: the house where the two encounters take place is the same, both times the doors were shut and locked, both times the disciples were present in the house (with the exception of the absence of Thomas on the first occasion), both times Jesus comes and stands among them, both times Jesus shows them his hands and his side, and both times Jesus speaks the words "Peace be with you." Yet, despite the comparisons between the accounts, there are several important contrasts as well. On the first visitation with the disciples, Jesus does three things that are not repeated in the Thomas episode: he commissions the disciples for mission (20:21), he gifts them with the Holy Spirit (20:22), and he invests them with authority (20:23).¹⁷

When Jesus appears to the disciples, including Thomas, again eight days later, he does not follow this same protocol of commission, gifting, and investing. Instead, he commands Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side" (20:27). Jesus' imperative to Thomas differs from the previous visitation where Jesus simply showed them his hands and his side (20:20), and instead follows Thomas's own self-stated prerequisite for belief in the resurrection, namely touching the physical scars in Jesus' resurrected body (20:25). Jesus then delivers a reprimand to Thomas: "Do not doubt but believe" (20:28c).

Jesus' post-resurrection epiphany elicits from Thomas the greatest Christological confession found in the Gospel of John: "My Lord and my God!" (20:28). Thomas's words not only speak to the Lordship of Jesus, but also to his divinity, echoing the prologue, where John writes, "the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*" (1:1; emphasis added). So, the Gospel ends how it begins, with the revelation that Jesus is divinely God.¹⁸

After Thomas's climatic confession, which should be read as his profession of faith, Jesus makes one last proclamation, issuing the only beatitude in John's Gospel: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (20:29). It is noteworthy that we have no record of Jesus commending Thomas for his move away from skepticism to faith, nor does John record that Jesus issues upon Thomas the same elements that were previously given to the other disciples, although these were likely later provided.¹⁹ Instead, Jesus utters what can be understood as another gentle reprimand for Thomas's demand for a tangible sign before he would believe,²⁰ followed by a future blessing pronounced upon those

who, unlike Thomas, would come to their faith based solely upon testimony like that which Thomas had previously rejected (20:25).

Interestingly, Jesus' blessing in this passage is declared upon future disciples (i.e., John's readers) who would be called to believe on the basis of the apostles' testimony to the risen Jesus rather than upon personal sight or physical signs.²¹ As such, Jesus' future disciples (as a group), along with the royal official, can be seen as an additional character in our study to be set in contrast with the character of Thomas. These future disciples to whom Jesus refers would be unlike the disciples found in John's post-resurrection narrative who experienced firsthand the risen Jesus and the signs he performed (i.e., Mary Magdalene, the other disciples, and Thomas). Jesus' beatitude in the presence of Thomas where he elevates believing without seeing over believing on the basis of seeing also prepares John's readers for the statement that follows where John declares the purpose for which his Gospel was written: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written *so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name*" (20:30–31; emphasis added). With his concluding statement,²² John indicates that his gospel provides the very testimony to his readers (the future church) that Jesus had commissioned the apostles to provide (20:21, 29), which brings us to our next section regarding the future church and how the Fourth Gospel bears witness to it.

The Future Church

The character of Thomas represents the challenge awaiting the disciples after Jesus commissioned them to be sent forth into the world (20:21). Moreover, Thomas is the first person who was asked to believe based solely on apostolic testimony without seeing the physically risen Lord. The other disciples saw the resurrected Jesus and rejoiced, but Thomas was asked to believe without seeing, and he came up short. The future church would also be asked to believe based on the testimony provided by the apostles, rather than on the physical presence of Jesus. So, Thomas then becomes a representative of those to whom the newly commissioned and Spirit-filled disciples are called to witness.

Jesus, in his High Priestly Prayer, had already prayed for the future church who would later be asked to rely on apostolic witness to come to faith. Jesus' prayer in John 17 can be divided into three sections: Jesus prays for himself (17:1–8), Jesus prays for his disciples (17:9–19), and

then Jesus prays for the future church (17:20–26). In this last section of the prayer, Jesus states: “I ask not only on behalf of these [the disciples], but also on behalf of *those who will believe in me through their word . . .*” (17:20; emphasis added). Not only is it amazing that just prior to his death on the cross that Jesus prays for the future church, but he also establishes that the transmission of faith that builds the future church will be based on the witness of the apostolic testimony to Jesus. Thus, when John issues his purpose statement in 20:30–31, he is offering the entirety of his Gospel as a reliable and trustworthy witness penned to bring about a saving faith in Jesus, the Messiah (cf. 19:35; 21:24–25). In the same way that the disciples experienced the risen Lord after his resurrection, so the future church is called upon to experience the same risen Lord through the witness of the Fourth Gospel.²³

The basis for this apostolic eyewitness testimony is also found in the First Epistle of John.²⁴ In 1 John 1:1–5, the apostle details both the origin and the content of the eyewitness revelation of Jesus that is found in his gospel:

We²⁵ declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands,²⁶ concerning the word of life—this life was revealed,²⁷ and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.²⁸

Thus, the Fourth Gospel contains Jesus’ revelation that he gave to his disciples and that was later written about in the epistle. It is this same apostolic witness that John is providing to the churches to which he is writing. This witness is about the Light that has come into the darkness (John 1:5; 8:12; 1 John 1:5), and it is provided so that readers will believe and have life in the name of Jesus (John 20:31; 1 John 5:11–13). This is the challenge that the Gospel of John issues to its readers and this remains the challenge of post-resurrection discipleship: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (20:29).

So, in what ways do the characters of Thomas and the royal official represent or provide a challenge for the future church? First, the character of Thomas can be compared to Mary Magdalene and to the other disciples, who in the post-resurrection narrative are provided physical and tangible proof of Jesus’ resurrection. Although Thomas was

asked to believe without seeing, he was later graciously provided the proof that his faith required. Yet, Thomas can be contrasted first with the Samaritan city who listened to the testimony of the woman and believed based on her testimony (4:39). He can also be contrasted with the royal official, who believed the word spoken by Jesus without seeing his son's tangible healing (4:50). He can also be contrasted with the Beloved Disciple who, without seeing the risen Jesus, believed (20:8). Finally, Thomas can be contrasted with future disciples of Jesus who are asked to come to a life-giving faith based on the testimony of those who have witnessed the risen Christ (17:20; 20:31). Today, the modern church is still built upon the foundation of the eyewitness testimony of the apostles who experienced the risen Christ, who saw the signs that he performed, who were invested with power, and who were sent out to proclaim the gospel message.

Practical Applications for Modern Discipleship

There are several practical applications that can be drawn from our study of the royal official and Thomas and their responses to Jesus in John's Gospel that relate to modern-day Spirit-empowered ministry and discipleship. First, it is important to recognize that the Spirit-empowered community acknowledges and celebrates that Jesus was and is still a worker of miracles. This is an undeniable fact. Yet, it is important to note that Jesus, in his earthly ministry, challenged people not to be dependent upon miracles as the footing for their faith development and spiritual growth. One often repeated theme emphasized in the Gospel of John is the insufficiency of a "sight-based faith" to sustain thriving discipleship. We see throughout the Gospel and particularly in the story of the royal official that Jesus encourages seekers to move beyond an infatuation with miracles upon which to center one's belief and to an authentic belief in him. We see this both in his reprimand directed at the crowd (4:48) and in his challenge to the royal official to take him at his word (4:50).

The royal official had approached Jesus after hearing about Jesus' ability to perform miracles. Yet, when Jesus challenged him to move beyond a sight-based faith, the man responded by trusting in Jesus' word alone. "The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way" (4:50). The royal official did not question Jesus' declaration. He simply accepted what Jesus said as true and acted accordingly.

So, although the royal official may represent a person who initially comes to Jesus on the basis of signs, he becomes one who is able to advance toward a more mature faith that is less dependent on sight and

more dependent on the miraculous life-giving words of Jesus.²⁹ It is noteworthy that it was after the royal official believed Jesus' word that he saw his miracle. His faith was thus "confirmed by a sign, not based upon a sign."³⁰ Yet, as the character of Thomas reveals, this kind of faith is often a difficult thing to achieve: "If I do not put my fingers in the nail holes, I will not believe." Those whose "faith" rests on miracles, rather than on the Word of God, can easily fall away when they do not experience the miracle that they require in life. John's challenge to his readers is to grow beyond an insistence on signs to prove God's goodness and he encourages them to walk in a faith that takes God at his word whether or not they experience a miracle. When signs are granted, the miraculous should lead seekers beyond a faith that is based merely on sight and toward the miraculous God behind the signs, for the greater miracle is the one that supernaturally changes hearts and transforms lives.

Second, knowing that God is working in our lives, even if we do not see it, is an important aspect of daily growth as a believer. Without such trust, it is very easy for people who have had an experience with God in the past to fall away since they do not continually experience a spiritual manifestation often enough. It is a "what have you done for me lately" mentality that reveals a lack of maturity. Too many churches teach their congregants to require that God operate in their lives in a certain way that causes them to miss what God is really doing in their lives. We can refuse to "see" God in our midst while we look for God. The character of Thomas may represent those who have trouble believing that God is actively engaged in their daily lives: they can see and not see at the same time. One could even say that "the character of Thomas may represent the 'unbelief of believers.'"³¹ Disciples can be disciples and at times still have immature and unbelieving hearts. Mature believers need to help younger believers realize that God is with them even if they do not always "see" him.

Third, as previously mentioned, the character of Thomas represents the challenge of post-resurrection discipleship. The future church was asked to "see" without "seeing" (i.e., to experience Christ in and through the inspired written Gospel), instead of face to face. Yet, this is not to say that the apostolic testimony negates the future church from experiencing the risen Jesus for themselves. Indeed, Thomas was granted the experience of having a physical encounter with the risen Jesus, which transformed him from doubt to faith, and as a result, he ultimately confessed the Lordship and divinity of Christ. And although John's readers are asked to "see" the risen Jesus through the inspired witness of the written gospel, Jesus promised that his presence would continue

with his disciples through the Holy Spirit whom he would send to them (14:16–23). By receiving the testimony of the gospel and by experiencing the indwelling presence of the risen Christ in our lives through the person of the Spirit, modern disciples continue to develop in their faith, grow in their discipleship, and by their lives, confess the Lordship and divinity of Christ.

Summary

As the Johannine characters show a diversity of faith-responses to the revelation that Jesus offers, so the gospel message elicits a broad spectrum of diverse responses today. Ultimately, John's sense of dualism allows only two possible reactions when confronted by the revelation of Jesus: belief or unbelief. But, even for those who have put their faith in Jesus, John's characters reveal differing levels of success as they individually progress in their discipleship. These diverse paradigms offer modern disciples challenges as well as hope as they also traverse their own journeys of faith and discipleship.

Each type of character depicted in the Gospel can also be found in the modern church. Consequently, contemporary readers likely will find that they can identify with the Johannine characters' positive or negative faith-responses, as they too struggle to understand Jesus' revelatory words. Moreover, modern readers may also find that they identify with both the successes and the failures of discipleship found in the characters at different times in their own journeys. As Bennema rightly notes:

Since characters resemble people, the array of Johannine characters and their responses to Jesus correspond to people and their choices in real life in any generation and culture. The Johannine author thus seeks to challenge the Gospel's readers, past and present, about where they stand in relation to Jesus. So, even today, the reader of John's Gospel, like the characters in the story, will encounter Jesus—and must respond.³²

Like the characters he presents, John expects his readers to decide how they will react to the message of Jesus and whether they will ultimately turn to him in faith and receive the life that he offers and become his disciples, or reject the revelation he brings and perish. Yet, the intricacies of the Johannine characters, along with their relative success and relatable struggles, offer modern disciples hope that even when they fail to believe and respond adequately, the Good Shepherd

awaits them with his loving and forgiving arms to embrace them and set them afresh again on their individual journeys toward discipleship.



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Notes:

¹ For a far more detailed examination of these and many other characters in the Gospel of John, see Edward W. Watson and Martin M. Culy, *The Making of a Disciple: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021).

² Often, the relative growth found in John's characters is presented through comparisons and contrasts made between the diverse characters being portrayed. For more, see Watson and Culy, *The Making of a Disciple*, 8–12.

³ Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 49.

⁴ All Scripture quotations are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

⁵ Craig Keener posits that the royal official was likely a Gentile aristocrat who served in the court of Herod Antipas, *The Gospel of John*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 630–31. Yet, it is likely that John's use of the term "royal" indicates that he was a relative of the royal Herodian family, Watson and Culy, *The Making of a Disciple*, 53–54.

⁶ Note the similarities and differences between this story in John's Gospel and a story involving a Gentile official in the synoptic tradition (cf. Matt 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10). Interestingly, in the synoptic account, the man's servant is sick; in John's account, it is the man's son who is sick. In the synoptic account, Jesus tells the man that he will come; in John's account, it is the man who asks Jesus to come. In the synoptic account, Jesus is impressed with the man's faith, which leads to the healing; in John's account, Jesus rejects sign-seeking faith and tells the man to go and his son will be healed. So, although similarities exist between the two healing stories, it appears that they represent two diverse healings.

⁷ This statement echoes John's earlier declaration in ch. 2: "When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them,

because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone” (2:23–25). In this passage, John is once again referring to a deficient type of belief that first requires a sign.

⁸ Speaking to individuals in the plural form, which indicates that Jesus is speaking about a wider audience, is also found in the Nicodemus episode in John 2:11–12.

⁹ Peter J. Judge asserts that “in parallel to the report that the Samaritans came to Jesus because they heard about him but then advanced to a fuller faith because they themselves heard Jesus’ word (4:39–42), in this story a Galilean approaches Jesus after hearing about him but advances to full faith on the same basis (4:43–54),” “The Royal Official: Not so Official,” in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), 309. Also see Alan Culpepper, who argues that the official “exemplifies those who believe because of the signs but show themselves ready to believe the words of Jesus,” *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 137.

¹⁰ The text seems to indicate a progression in the man’s faith as he initially believes Jesus’ word about his son’s healing (4:50), and then after the healing is confirmed, his faith advances to a knowing and saving faith, which is then followed by his whole household (4:53); see Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 179.

¹¹ See Thomas Popp, “Thomas: Question Marks and Exclamation Marks,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 516. See also Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 290, 292.

¹² Keener correctly notes that Thomas’s skepticism in the absence of a sign “reflects a thread that runs throughout the Gospel: many respond to signs with faith (1:50; 10:38; 11:15, 40; 14:11) and refuse faith without signs (4:48; 6:30), but unless this faith matures into discipleship, it must prove inadequate in the end (8:30–31),” *The Gospel of John*, 1208.

¹³ Note that Thomas is identified as “the one who is called the Twin” (11:16). This same description recurs in 11:24 and 21:2. It is unclear what is meant by the term since the Greek term *Didymus* is the translation of the Aramaic “Thomas,” which means twin. Thus, Thomas could be a twin of someone we are not told about or it simply could be a nickname based on the translation of his name.

¹⁴ See Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 842.

¹⁵ See Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 289.

¹⁶ See Culpepper, who sees Thomas as a model of a disciple “who understands Jesus’ flesh but not his glory,” and is the opposite of Peter, “who saw Jesus’ glory but could not accept his suffering,” *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 123.

¹⁷ On the question of how Jesus’ post-resurrection gifting of the Spirit in John, which has been called a “Johannine Pentecost,” compares with the Acts 2 episode, see Gary Burge’s helpful discussion of the various promoted theories (e.g., symbol, partial anointing, and genuine anointing), *John*, New International Version Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 558–61.

¹⁸ For more, see Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1211.

¹⁹ Tradition reveals Thomas's later powerful witness of Jesus in Syria and also places the future Thomas as a missionary to India where he would be instrumental in preaching the gospel and building the church throughout the continent (see the *Acts of Thomas*, 11:31, 39).

²⁰ Contra Popp, "Thomas: Question Marks and Exclamation Marks," 522.

²¹ See Popp, "Thomas: Question Marks and Exclamation Marks," 522; also, Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 293.

²² Note that if John 21 is an appendix added to the Gospel later, which many scholars believe, then John 20:30–31 would be the conclusion of the Fourth Gospel in its original form.

²³ See Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 294.

²⁴ For a brief discussion on the authorship of the various Johannine writings, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 864–69; and D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 446–50. For our purposes, we will assume, along with multiple church fathers (e.g. Papias, Eusebius, Irenaeus, Dionysius of Alexandria, Tertullian, Jerome, etc.) that the same author penned the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John.

²⁵ This is an "apostolic we," which means that what follows is based on apostolic eyewitness testimony.

²⁶ The four relative clauses, each beginning with "what," disclose that the contents of the apostolic eyewitness testimony that is being declared is the self-revelation of Jesus that has been given to the apostles.

²⁷ See John 1:14, 18.

²⁸ See also John 1:4–5, 9–13; 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5.

²⁹ Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 181.

³⁰ Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 52.

³¹ Popp, "Thomas: Question Marks and Exclamation Marks," 518.

³² Cornelis Bennema, "A Comprehensive Approach to Understanding Character in the Gospel of John," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 58.