



The Gospel of John - Chapter Eleven

II. John 1:19-12:50 - The Signs of the Messiah (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eleven

When Jesus receives word that Lazarus has died, which he described to his disciples as him being asleep, he resolves to return to Judæa despite the fact that the Jews were seeking to kill him. His disciples object because they had taken Jesus' reference to sleep literally, but when he tells them that Lazarus has died and that this is for God's glory to be revealed, they decide to go with Jesus to Bethany.

As Jesus approached, some four days after Lazarus had been laid to rest in his tomb, Lazarus' sister Martha came to meet Jesus, stating that if Jesus had been there then Lazarus would not have died. Jesus announces himself as the resurrection and the life, and that all who believed in him would have eternal life. Martha took this as a reference to the final resurrection but Jesus would go on to show that Lazarus would indeed be raised during this age.

Mary, the second sister of Lazarus, also came to Jesus, accompanied by many friends and other mourners. When Jesus saw their sadness he had compassion on them and wept with them. They then led Jesus to the tomb.

Jesus instructed them to roll the stone away from the tomb, something Martha advised against because of the smell of decay that would be emitted, but they did as he said. After giving thanks to his Father, Jesus called for Lazarus to come out of the tomb, which he did, still wrapped in his grave cloths. Jesus instructed his sisters to unbind him.

This miracle had a mixed reaction. Many believed in Jesus because of what they had witnessed while others went to the Pharisees in Jerusalem to report what had occurred. The High Priest Caiaphas announced that it was necessary for Jesus to die so that the Romans would not destroy their nation because of the perceived revolt Jesus was leading. He was actually prophesying that Jesus would indeed be the saviour of the nation through his impending death.

Jesus again left the area and went back into the wilderness with his disciples, while those in Jerusalem pondered as to whether Jesus would indeed show himself at the forthcoming Passover Festival.

II.d John 11:1-12:19 -
The final Passover: the ultimate sign and the aftermath

The raising of Lazarus constitutes the final and ultimate messianic sign of Jesus in this Gospel. This spectacular miracle, recorded only by John, anticipates Jesus' own resurrection and reveals Jesus as 'the resurrection and the life' (v.25). The raising of Lazarus also serves as a final event triggering the Jewish leaders' resolve to have Jesus arrested and tried for blasphemy (vv.45-57).

This dramatic conclusion of the signs that Jesus does is followed by the signs of what others do for him. First, Mary anoints Jesus at Bethany in a private setting (12:1-8). Second, there is the public outpouring at the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as a great crowd receives him as the king of Israel (12:12-19).

II.d.i John 11:1-44 - The Miracle of Lazarus

The raising of Lazarus is the last of a series of Jesus' signs that began in Chapter 2; both the first and last of the signs in this series are explicitly linked with the revelation of God's glory. All of the signs were revelations of who Jesus is and what he offers. The final sign, the raising of Lazarus, points most clearly to what has been at the heart of the revelation all the way through and what was emphasised in Jesus' keynote address (5:19-30) – that Jesus is the one who gives life.

The irony, of course, is that he gives life by giving up his own life on the Cross. A further irony is that by giving life to Lazarus, Jesus sets in motion his own death. The raising of Lazarus, then, is the final sign before the event that actually accomplishes what all the signs have pointed toward – the provision of life through the death of the Son of God.

II.d.i.1 John 11:1-16 - The Death of Lazarus

John does not say exactly when this event took place, only that it was sometime during the four months between the Feast of Dedication and Passover. John is, however, careful to describe the place. This Bethany is a little less than two miles southeast of Jerusalem on the road to Jericho. It is to be distinguished from the Bethany where John had been baptising (1:28), and to which Jesus had just returned (10:40), which is either in Peræa at the Jordan a few miles north of the Dead Sea, about a day's journey from Jerusalem, or up north in Batanæa, several days journey away.

Jesus receives word that Lazarus has died but reports it to his disciples that he has simply fallen asleep, which they take literally at first. Jesus states that his death occurred in Jesus' absence for the sake of the disciples so that they may see God's glory revealed when Lazarus is raised. Jesus and the disciples then start their journey back to Bethany.

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

John 11:1

Bethany. Identified in v.18 as being 2 miles or 3.2km from Jerusalem, this village is the Bethany most commonly mentioned in the Gospels: <<*When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives*>> (Mark 11:1a), and: <<*Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them*>> (Luke 24:50), but it is different from the Bethany mentioned in John 1:28. This is almost certainly the modern village of El-Azariyeh, an Arabic place-name which likely recalls the name of Lazarus, on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. A 4th Century chapel was built over a rock-cut tomb traditionally thought to have been the tomb of Lazarus. Other 1st Century tombs are found in the hillside around this chapel.



Bethany on the Mount of Olives

Lazarus is mentioned only in this current section and is not the same person in the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus recorded in Luke 16:19-31. However, **Mary** and **Martha** are recorded by Luke as being hosts to Jesus probably on another occasion to the one described here: <<*Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying*>> (Luke 10:38-39).

² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'

John 11:2-4

Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. This account is told in the next Chapter but it was clearly a well known story, as Jesus had said it would be: <<*She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her*>> (Mark 14:8-9), so John makes reference to it here to clarify which Mary he is referring to.

So the sisters sent a message to Jesus. Despite Jesus being out of the region, his friends clearly still knew how to locate him and were still able to communicate important events such as the illness of Lazarus.

Lord, he whom you love is ill. As already noted, Lazarus is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture and yet it is clear from this statement that Jesus had a relationship with this family. It further highlights just how little is known of the intimate relationships Jesus had with those he encountered during his ministry. Their message does not make any demands on Jesus to respond. They simply have faith in him to do what he believes to be right. This story indicates that having faith in God's love for his people is well grounded, irrespective of the outcome of a given situation.

Jesus could say that Lazarus' illness does not lead to death in the sense that it did not lead ultimately to his death, but it did lead him through death to being raised from the dead a few days later. Jesus made a similar statement: <<*When he had entered, he said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping'*>> (Mark 5:39). Jesus knew what was going to happen, and in vv.11-14 he tells his disciples clearly that Lazarus has already died.

It is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Just as the man's blindness in Chapter 9 was an opportunity for the work of God to be manifested (9:3), so the purpose here is the glorification of God and his Son through this sickness and death. In both cases there is a revelation of the divine activities of life-giving and judgment, although here they are more intense for the Cross and resurrection are fast approaching, the ultimate glorification of both Father and Son. God's glory is revealed in its fullest in his victory over death itself, this is at the heart of the Gospel.

⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

John 11:5-6

Accordingly, Greek *oun*, also means therefore or yet, and shows the reason why Jesus stayed two days longer. He allowed his friends to go through the sorrow and hardship of the death and mourning of Lazarus because he loved them and wanted them to witness an amazing demonstration of Jesus' power over death, thus seeing: <<*his glory, the glory as of a father's only son*>> (1:14b). The Lord does not always answer prayers as expected and he only ever acts in accordance with his Father's will.

There are two possible ways to understand the sequence of events that follow, depending on whether one believes the Bethany where Jesus is staying is in the south or the north. If Bethany is in the south, as most scholars believe, then it would take the messengers one day to reach Jesus and one day for Jesus to reach Lazarus. Since Jesus stayed put for two days and Lazarus has been dead for four days when Jesus does arrive, that means Lazarus must have died on the same day as the messengers set out.

If Bethany is a reference to Batanæa in the north the timing would be different. It takes four days to travel from Batanæa to where Lazarus is. Since Jesus arrives when Lazarus has been dead for four days, Jesus had waited until Lazarus died before he set out.

In either case the two-day delay does not cause the death of Lazarus, since Jesus could not have gotten to him before he died, either because he was dead before the messengers arrived with their message (southern view) or because Jesus would only be halfway there (northern view). Whichever it was, the two-day delay does, however, insure that Lazarus will have been dead for four days when Jesus arrives.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judæa again.'

⁸ The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' ⁹ Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.'

John 11:7-10

Let us go to Judæa again. When Jesus announces that they are to return to Judæa, his disciples remind him that the Jewish opponents had just been trying to stone him there. The disciples are taking their cues from their circumstances rather than from the Father. They are very aware of the danger their opponents present, but they are not in tune with the voice of the Father. Jesus responds with a cryptic saying: 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight?' which, as usual, directly addresses the issue at hand but is not able to be understood.

If Jesus is the light of the world (8:12), then to walk during the day means to walk in the light that Jesus gives; that is, to walk in fellowship with him, believing and obeying his words. Those who do so need fear no one: <<*The Lord is my light*

and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?>> (Psalm 27:1).

In contrast, walk at night means to walk apart from Jesus, not believing him and not obeying him. This is an indication that the person has no spiritual life, for the light is not in him: <<*In the dark they dig through houses; by day they shut themselves up; they do not know the light*>> (Job 24:16). Most people at this time worked as long as there was daylight; once it was dark, it was time to stop working. Jesus is divinely called to go to Judæa; it is part of what constituted walking during the day for him, even though he is heading toward the Cross.

¹¹ After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’ ¹² The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’ ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.

John 11:11-13

Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him. Jesus actually means Lazarus has died, as the following conversation makes clear, although the disciples again misunderstand initially. The OT equivalent is: <<*Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David*>> (1 Kings 2:10), and throughout 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles. Occasionally, death is compared to a deep sleep from which people will one day be awakened: <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*>> (Daniel 12:2).

Sleep has become a common way of referring to death in Christian thought beginning with the post-apostolic fathers. Indeed, the word cemetery comes from the Greek word *koimeterion*, a place of sleep. Chrysostom writes ‘What is death at most? It is a journey for a season; a sleep longer than usual! So that if you fear death, you should also fear sleep!’ (Chrysostom, Concerning the Statues 5.11).

¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead.’ ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’

John 11:14-15

Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead’. This is blunt and to the point. This is not time for Jesus to use figures of speech (10:6).

For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. Both Martha and Mary will shortly state that if Jesus had been there then Lazarus would not have died but would have been cured from his illness. This, too, would have been a remarkable miracle. However, it seems that the disciples had become quite used to the works of Jesus and therefore something of greater significance was needed this close to the Cross to finally make them realise exactly who Jesus is.

So that you may believe indicates that Jesus knows raising Lazarus from the dead will lead to deeper faith on the part of the disciples who witness this miracle. Faith must be exercised in the face of each new revelation, and each new revelation is taking the disciples nearer to the ultimate revelation in the most extremely scandalous event, the Cross.

But let us go to him. Since Jesus has just announced that Lazarus was dead then it might have seemed more natural for him to say he was going to see the family of Lazarus. Jesus was already clear in his own mind what the outcome would be.

¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

John 11:16

The Aramaic name Thomas means the Twin, although Thomas may well have been a twin. When he says, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him' this is not a display of the character that would become known as 'doubting Thomas', but the actions of a true disciple, displaying the same loyalty as Peter did, even when he failed to understand the teaching on eating flesh and drinking blood (6:68). Jesus' decision may not have made sense to him or to the other disciples but they were committed to their Lord and were prepared to follow him into danger once again.

As Thomas follows Jesus into what he thinks is death he is answering the call, as expressed in the Synoptics: <<He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it>> (Mark 8:34-35).

II.d.i.2 John 11:17-27 - Jesus the Resurrection and the Life

The scene now shifts to Bethany, near Jerusalem, as Jesus arrives and finds that Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. Burials normally took place on the day of the death, so he has been dead for four days.

Martha goes out to meet Jesus as he approaches, claiming that he could have saved Lazarus had he been present before his death. Jesus announces that Lazarus, like all believers, will live because of Jesus, which Martha takes to be a reference to a future resurrection, but Jesus announces that he is the resurrection. Thus Martha believes in who Jesus is.

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

John 11:17

Four days. Although burial usually followed soon after death: <<Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him>> (Acts 5:5-6), some later Jewish sources indicate a belief that the soul hovered over the body for three days, hoping to re-enter it,

but then gave up and departed. Thus the period mentioned here would dispel any idea among his Jewish readers that the spirit had naturally re-entered Lazarus.

¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

John 11:18-19

Two miles away. John spells out that Bethany is quite near Jerusalem. This note heightens the drama. Jesus had said he was returning to Judæa, which the disciples recognised as the place of hostility. Now John makes sure it is understood that Jesus has come back to the region of Jerusalem itself, the very heart of the opposition. Jerusalem is also the key place for revelation, and the greatest of all revelations is now starting to unfold.

And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. The Jews here is intended ethnically and refers to those drawn from the whole community. It was normal for friends, neighbours and officials to gather to comfort those who are mourning the loss of a loved one: <<*Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him*>> (Job 2:11).

²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' ²³ Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' ²⁴ Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'

John 11:20-24

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him. It is possible to find in Martha's first sentence a rebuke of Jesus, or it may simply have been a lament; and in her second there is a very defective view of Jesus for it is as if she regards Jesus as an intermediary who is heard by God, but she does not understand that he is life itself. In her belief that Jesus could have prevented the death of her brother it is clear that she believed he performed healing miracles but the idea that he could restore life was beyond her comprehension at that time. However, her trust in God's love for one that Christ clearly loved is not shaken by what seems like indifference or disregard: <<*Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights*>> (Habakkuk 3:17-19). In this way Martha is an example of stellar faith, which should encourage all believers who face situations

in which God seems to be absent or uncaring. The hard parts of life are occasions for learning about God and drawing closer to him.

I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Martha's affirmation of end-time resurrection was in keeping with the beliefs of the Pharisees: <<*The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge all three*>> (Acts 23:8), and the majority of 1st Century Jews, as well as the teaching of Jesus: <<*Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes*>> (John 5:21). Martha misunderstood the full import of Jesus' promise (v.23), thinking he was merely speaking of the final resurrection, while Jesus meant much more.

²⁵ Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' ²⁷ She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

John 11:25-27

Jesus does not merely say that he will bring about the resurrection or that he will be the cause of the resurrection, both of which are true, but something much stronger: I am the resurrection and the life. Resurrection from the dead and genuine eternal life in fellowship with God are so closely tied to Jesus that they are embodied in him and can be found only in a relationship to him. Therefore believes in me implies personal trust in Christ. The preposition translated in, Greek *eis*, is striking, for *eis* ordinarily means 'into', giving the sense that genuine faith in Christ in a sense brings people into Christ, so that they rest in and become united with Christ. John uses this same expression on eight other occasions in this Gospel, as well as in: <<*Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son*>> (1 John 5:10).

Jesus' statement addresses Martha directly in the situation she is experiencing with the death of her brother. Jesus' claim is mind-boggling. He says it is faith in him that brings one back to life at the resurrection at the last day. He is the ground of eschatological hope. But then he goes even further. 'I am the life and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'. The life that comes through believing in Jesus is not interrupted by physical death.

This is the fifth I am statement in this Gospel and again represents a claim to deity. There is a list of all seven I am statements on the website.

Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Lives refers to those who have spiritual life now. Those who believe shall never die, in that they will ultimately triumph over death. Jesus is the life giver and it is he who spans the gap between 'the now but not yet' of the Kingdom of God.

Do you believe this? Jesus wants Martha and all his disciples to truly believe in what he says and who he is, thus he reinforces what he is saying with this blunt yet penetrating question.

Martha's reference to the one who is coming into the world takes up the messianic expression derived from Psalm 118:26 <<***Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord***>>, which the crowd call out to Jesus during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (12:13).

While Martha's use of terms may suggest her lack of comprehension, the effect her statement has in the unfolding revelation in this Gospel is more positive. Here, Jesus' language of resurrection and life is combined with a common Jewish term Messiah and John's favourite title for Jesus, the Son of God. This combination brings together several strands of thought and makes them interpret one another. The most fundamental category in John is life. At this point, when Jesus most clearly speaks of himself as life, other major terms are brought in, thus suggesting that they should be interpreted in the light of this theme of life as well. Thus, Martha's confession and Jesus' claim provide a major point of revelation in this Gospel.

II.d.i.3 John 11:28-37 - Jesus Weeps

Martha returns home to tell her sister Mary that Jesus wants to speak to her. She leaves immediately but the fellow mourners in the house think she is going to visit the tomb and so they follow her.

Mary's first statement agrees with that of her sister in that Jesus could have prevented her brother's death had he been present. In seeing her sorrow and that of the others following her, Jesus had compassion for them and asked to be shown where Lazarus was buried. Jesus too wept. When the people saw this they knew it was because of his love for his friends and pondered the question that, since he could restore the sight of the blind, could he not have saved his friend from death?

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.'

²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

John 11:28-29

The Teacher was a natural way of referring to Jesus for any disciple prior to his resurrection, as Jesus confirms: <<***You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am***>> (John 13:13). At hearing the news that Jesus was nearby, Mary immediately left the house in order to be with him.

³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

John 11:30-31

Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. Jesus had met with Martha secretly and clearly intended to meet Mary that way too. This may have been to avoid detection by the authorities for some of those who followed Mary would be those who would go to the Pharisees with news of Jesus (v.46), or it could indicate that he simply wanted these meetings with his friends to be private affairs away from the onlookers.

However, the Jews who were with her followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb, thus their meeting was perhaps not as private as Jesus had wanted and if he wanted to remain away from the crowds it was too late.

³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’

John 11:32

She knelt at his feet. Despite the fact that Jesus and this family appeared to have been firm friends, Mary still showed Jesus the appropriate respect for a Rabbi, refer again to Luke 10:39. She goes on to repeat the question that Martha had posed at her meeting with Jesus (v.21).

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’

John 11:33-34

The Greek word underlying greatly disturbed, *embrimaomai*, elsewhere in the NT only in v.38; Matthew 9:30 ‘sternly ordered’; Mark 1:43 ‘sternly warning’; and Mark 14:5 ‘scolded’, means to feel something deeply and strongly. Jesus was moved with profound sorrow at the death of his friend and at the grief that his other friends had suffered. In addition, this sorrow was intermixed with anger at the evil of death, the final enemy: <<**The last enemy to be destroyed is death**>> (1 Corinthians 15:26), and: <<**he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away**>> (Revelation 21:4); and also with a deep sense of awe at the power of God that was about to flow through him to triumph over death, in anticipation of his voice summoning the whole world to the resurrection on the last day.

In spirit does not refer to the Holy Spirit but to Jesus’ own human spirit.

Where have you laid him? Jesus is requesting to be shown the location of the tomb. A similar phrase will later be used for laying Jesus to rest: <<**When they had carried out everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb**>> (Acts 13:29).

³⁵ Jesus began to weep.

John 11:35

Jesus began to weep. Jesus joins his friends' sadness with heartfelt sorrow, yet underlying it is the knowledge that resurrection and joy will soon follow: <<***But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope***>> (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Jesus' example shows that heartfelt mourning in the face of death does not indicate lack of faith but honest sorrow at the reality of suffering and death.

Jesus would also weep over Jerusalem for he knew both its iniquity and its fate: <<***As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognised on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side***>> (Luke 19:41-43).

³⁶ So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' ³⁷ But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

John 11:36-37

See how he loved him! The Jewish mourners take note of how much Jesus loved Lazarus. They have interpreted his tears correctly. But then some of them go on to say, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' This is often taken as a statement of unbelief, but this is not so much unbelief as it is puzzlement. It looks like death is stronger than Jesus despite the implications of his healing the man born blind. Jesus will refute this in the most amazing way possible.

II.d.i.4 John 11:38-44 - Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

On arrival at the tomb Jesus requests that the entry stone be rolled away, to which Martha responds that the smell of decomposition would be too great. However, they comply with Jesus' request. Jesus then gives thanks to his Father before commanding Lazarus to come out of the tomb, thus Lazarus is raised to life.

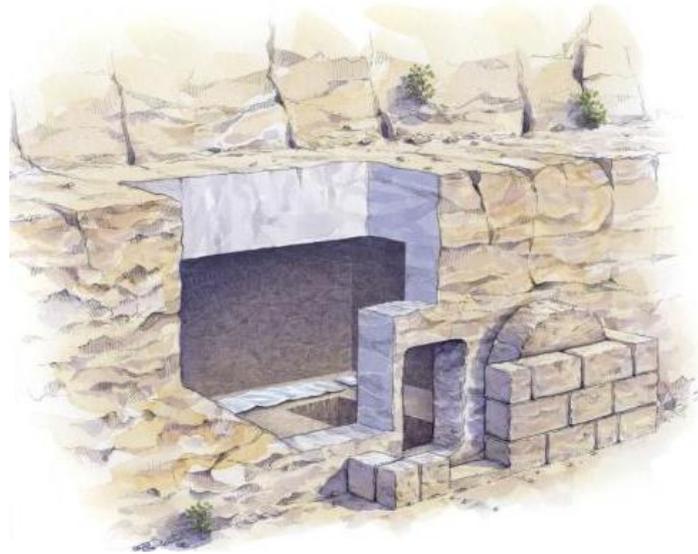
³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

John 11:38

Greatly disturbed was discussed in comments made on v.33. Jesus' anger is not at their lack of faith or puzzlement as such, but again at death and its challenge to him as life-giver.

It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Some tombs in that era were cut into the rocks but it appears that they used a natural cave. It was then common

practice to then protect the corpse from either grave robbers or wild animals by rolling a very heavy stone over the entrance.



A Rock-cut Tomb

The tomb in the image is more like that used for Jesus rather than the cave used for Lazarus: <<*So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away*>> (Matthew 27:59-60).

³⁹ Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, ‘Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.’ ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.’

John 11:39-42

Take away the stone. Jesus orders the mourners to take the stone away from the entrance of the tomb. Martha’s subsequent objection that there would be a stench due to decomposition highlights the greatness of this sign. Jesus is raising someone who should already have begun to decay. However, there is no indication in the story that Lazarus comes out bearing marks of decay, which is a clear indication that God is able to restore physical bodies even after decomposition.

The analogy is not complete, since Lazarus is not raised as an imperishable, spiritual body, as will be the case at the resurrection of the dead: <<So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body>>

(1 Corinthians 15:42-44). But there is continuity between the spiritual body and the physical body: it is a bodily resurrection. The overcoming of corruption in the raising of Lazarus thus provides, in part, a sign of the future resurrection.

Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? Jesus repeats his earlier statement to Martha about having faith. Yet it is not the resurrection of Lazarus that is dependent upon her faith, it is the ability to see and comprehend the glory of God.

Jesus looked upwards. This is normal in prayer and gives rise to the notion that heaven sits above the earth: <<*To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!*>> (Psalm 123:1), <<*Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven*>> (Lamentations 3:41), and: <<*After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you'*>> (John 17:1). Yet the reality is most likely that heaven is in another dimension to that in which mortals live and thus surrounds everything rather than being above. The gesture is intended to be more of looking away from oneself and towards God.

Father, I thank you for having heard me. The actual petition is not recorded but rather Jesus' thanksgiving that the Father heard him. The communication between the Father and the Son regarding Lazarus had taken place much earlier, since he already announced what would take place when the messengers arrived with the news (v.4).

I knew that you always hear me. The clear teaching of the OT is that God listens to the righteous, not the unrighteous, except for prayers of repentance. Thus, Jesus is claiming to be righteous before God and in unbroken fellowship with him. He knows he is heard; he has utter confidence in this relationship.

I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me. Jesus vocalises his prayer for the sake of the crowd. In other words, it is not enough for people to be impressed with Jesus. They must believe in him as the one sent from God: <<*Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me*>> (John 17:25). It is precisely because Jesus is sent from God and does as God directs him that he is heard by God. The Father as the sender is primary. Jesus is not a wonderworker who is able to get God to do what he wants him to do. He is the obedient Son sent by the Father to do the Father's will. The Father's will and the Son's petition coincide exactly.

⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!'

John 11:43

Come out. The voice of the omnipotent Creator cries out, and even Lazarus' dead body obeys. Jesus raised another corpse in similar fashion: <<*Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, rise!' The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother*>> (Luke 7:14-15). So it will be at the sound of the last

trumpet: <<*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

There are some commentators who say that Jesus had to specify that it was only Lazarus that he wanted to come out of his tomb. Had he not been so specific then many more may have been raised from their own tombs: <<*Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live*>> (John 5:25).

⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

John 11:44

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. The terminology may give the impression of an Egyptian style mummy but this was not the normal practise of wrapping corpses in Palestine. It is anticipated that the corpse would have been placed on a strip of linen, wide and long enough to envelop it completely. The feet would be placed at one end, and the cloth would then be drawn over the head to the feet, the feet would be bound at the ankles, and the arms secured to the body with linen bandages, and the face bound round with another cloth to keep the jaw in place.

Symbolically, it should be noted that Lazarus came out with his grave cloths. He was still a mortal being and would die at some point, thus needing new grave cloths for his final burial. However, Jesus left his grave cloths behind: <<*Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself*>> (John 20:6-7). As the risen Lord, Jesus had conquered death and would never taste death again. Thus he has no further need for grave cloths.

Unbind him, and let him go. The call to release Lazarus and let him go picks up the biblical imagery of 'loosing' for victory over death and the powers of evil: <<*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*>> (Matthew 16:19). This is a cry of victory. The grave has been defeated and liberty achieved. It is only a partial sign of the coming victory of Jesus' resurrection, since Lazarus will need to die again and enter the grave until the final resurrection. But it is a great sign of the life that is stronger than death, which those who believe in Jesus share. And it is a graphic sign of Jesus' own power and authority.

Remarkably, John does not record Lazarus' reaction or any of the aftermath of his raising, yet he did so with Jairus' daughter: <<*Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astounded; but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened*>> (Luke 8:55-56), except for the fact that 'many of the Jews

believed in him', i.e. Jesus, as a result of seeing this miracle (v.45). The focus is on Jesus, not Lazarus.

II.d.ii John 11:45-57 - The Plot to Kill Jesus

As a result of this miracle there is again a variety of responses. Many put their faith in Jesus (v.45), but others inform the authorities (v.46). John does not make clear whether their trip to the authorities is innocent or a betrayal of Jesus. At an earlier stage the crowd was well aware of the authorities' concerns over Jesus, and their animosity deepened significantly at the Festival of Dedication, leading Jesus to withdraw from the area. So it may well be that this is another betrayal of Jesus, as some see the actions of the man healed on the Sabbath in John 5:15.

For the first time in his Gospel, John introduces the High Priest Caiaphas, who clearly states that Jesus must die for the sake of the nation. His intention was to have Jesus killed so that the Romans would not intervene because of his following and subsequently take away the authority the Jewish leaders held. In fact, Caiaphas' words were a prophecy that Jesus would indeed die for the nation's sins to become the world's Saviour.

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

John 11:45

Here John uses the phrase the Jews in a positive way, to refer to those Jews who believed in him. It is most often used to refer to hostile Jewish opponents of Jesus among both the Jewish leadership and the ordinary people who followed them.

The reason they believed in him was because they had seen what Jesus did, he raised a man back to life. They were not the first to believe because they had witnessed a miracle: <<*Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses*>> (Exodus 14:31), and: <<*Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, 'When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?'*>> (John 7:31).

⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs.

John 11:46-47

Some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. It is not clear whether this was done with the intention of getting Jesus into more trouble with the leaders or simply that they thought it was the right thing to let their leaders know what was going on. This is what the friends and neighbours had done with the man whose sight was restored: <<*They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind*>> (John 9:13).

The chief priests were mostly Sadducees, refer to comments on v.49. They were members of high-priestly families, along with others from prominent priestly families, as confirmed by Luke: <<*The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family*>> (Acts 4:5-6). They may have included other temple officials like the treasurer and captain of police. Of the fifty-four references to the chief priests in the Gospels, all of them are associated with Jerusalem, and almost all of them concern Jesus' final conflict.

The council represents the Greek word *synedrion* or Sanhedrin, a body of seventy elders, priests and the Pharisees who were the religious rulers in Jerusalem.

What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. The religious leaders acknowledged that Jesus was indeed performing miracles, yet they were clearly too blinded by their own dogma and traditions to be able to understand what these signs meant and who it was that was with them: <<*John answered them, 'I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal'*>> (John 1:26-27).

⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.'

John 11:48

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. This is, of course, God's intention that all should come to recognise Jesus as the Christ: <<*Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*>> (Philippians 2:9-11).

Our holy place almost certainly refers to the temple: <<*They set up false witnesses who said, 'This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us'*>> (Acts 6:13-14).

Destroy our nation may refer to the feared removal of the Jews' semiautonomous status by the Romans. This would be the normal Roman response to a perceived popular uprising anywhere in the empire. Judæa and particularly Jerusalem had always had such a reputation: <<*So I made a decree, and someone searched and discovered that this city has risen against kings from long ago, and that rebellion and sedition have been made in it. Jerusalem has had mighty kings who ruled over the whole province Beyond the River, to whom tribute, custom, and toll were paid*>> (Ezra 4:19-20). Ironically, what the Sanhedrin sought to prevent by killing Jesus still came to pass when the Romans razed the temple and captured Jerusalem in AD70.

⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all!

John 11:49

High priest that year. In fact, Caiaphas was high priest for 18 years (AD18-36), longer than any other high priest in the 1st Century. John will again emphasise that Caiaphas was high priest at the time of Jesus' death: <<*First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people*>> (John 18:13-14).

You know nothing at all displays the rudeness allegedly characteristic of many Sadducees, as confirmed by Josephus. Caiaphas was a Sadducee.

The Sadducees were primarily of wealthy priestly families in Jerusalem. Josephus claims they were unfriendly, even to one another, and were unpopular (Jewish War 2.166, and Jewish Antiquities 13.298). They could be cruel judges (Jewish Antiquities 20.199, Mishnah Sanhedrin 7:2, and Makkot 1:6). When Jesus disrupted their financial interests in the temple during Passion Week, he was arrested and condemned. James, the half-brother of the Lord, was later killed by a Sadducean high priest (Jewish Antiquities 20.200).

The Sadducees rejected the extra-biblical traditions of the Pharisees, perhaps embracing only the Pentateuch as being canonical (Jewish Antiquities 13.297 and 18.16). This narrow canon may explain why they did not believe in the general resurrection of the dead, since it is not explicitly mentioned in the Pentateuch. Perhaps, for the same reason, they embraced human responsibility, which is emphasised in the Law of Moses in contrast to the determinism of another key group at the time called the Essenes (Jewish War 2.164 and Jewish Antiquities 13.173). Jesus, when arguing for the resurrection in Luke 20:37-38, meets the Sadducees on their own ground by showing the implications of Exodus 3:6 <<*He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God*>>, instead of appealing to a more straightforward passage, e.g. <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*>> (Daniel 12:2).

⁵⁰ You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' ⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. ⁵³ So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

John 11:50-53

It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed. Caiaphas refers to the people using Greek *laos*, and the nation using *ethnos*, but in the next verse John only uses nation. The word *laos* was not used frequently in classical Greek, but it occurs more than two thousand times in the Septuagint, having become a specific term for a specific people, namely, Israel, and it serves to emphasise the special and privileged religious position of

this people as the people of God. Thus, John's refusal to use *laos* may be significant in the light of the theme of Jesus' departure from the temple and the formation of the core of the new community around him.

Die for the nation invokes the memory of the Maccabean martyrs. With a typical Johannine double meaning, Caiaphas' pronouncement anticipates Jesus' substitutionary atonement - he would die for the nation's sins. Caiaphas did not realise that he was prophesying the real reason for Jesus' death.

The dispersed children of God, as referred to here, refers to the Gentiles as well as Diaspora Jews, which John emphasises by stating and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God: *<<he says, 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth'>>* (Isaiah 49:6). John is not suggesting that Gentiles are already God's children but anticipates their future inclusion into God's people: *<<I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd>>* (John 10:16).

So from that day on they planned to put him to death. Up until now the authorities had only tried to arrest Jesus although the mobs had tried to stone him to death. Now they make an agreement that Jesus must be put to death and their intention is to ensure that he is: *<<But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him>>* (Matthew 12:14).

⁵⁴ Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.

John 11:54

Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews. Jesus clearly knew of the edict to kill him and thus he withdrew once again from public life, if only for a short time as his hour was approaching. This is not the first time that Jesus left the region because of death threats: *<<After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judæa because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him>>* (John 7:1). He does not do so from fear but to fulfil the will of the one who has sent him.

It is not certain where Ephraim was located, although it was probably four miles to the northeast of Bethel, which places it some fifteen miles north-northeast of Jerusalem. His movement in and out of seclusion shows him working around the intentions of his enemies as he works out the intentions of his Father.

He remained there with the disciples. It is not clear whether Jesus withdrew in order to pass on some further teaching to his disciples, although there would still be time for that during his final evening with them and the 40 days between his resurrection and ascension. It may simply have been a time of quiet reflection and a time for them to be rested for the dramatic time that was soon to follow. Jesus

attempted to do this with them following their first mission: <<*On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida*>> (Luke 9:10), but he ended up feeding a multitude instead!

⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.

John 11:55

This is the third and final Passover mentioned by John. People went up early to purify themselves from any ceremonial uncleanness that would otherwise have prevented them from celebrating the Passover, e.g. Numbers 9:4-14 and Numbers 19:11-12. People always go up to Jerusalem because of its higher elevation over the surrounding areas.

Jews were not normally permitted to participate in the Passover if they were ceremonially unclean but the law made exceptions for those who were unclean during the first month to be able to celebrate Passover a month later: <<*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites, saying: Anyone of you or your descendants who is unclean through touching a corpse, or is away on a journey, shall still keep the passover to the Lord. In the second month on the fourteenth day, at twilight, they shall keep it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs*>> (Numbers 9:9-11). There was at least one occasions where it seems that prayer was sufficient to cover those who were not cleansed but celebrated anyway: <<*For a multitude of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the passover otherwise than as prescribed. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'The good Lord pardon all who set their hearts to seek God, the Lord the God of their ancestors, even though not in accordance with the sanctuary's rules of cleanness'*>> (2 Chronicles 30:18-19).

⁵⁶ They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?' ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

John 11:56-57

What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he? Again John depicts the interested crowd and the antagonistic authorities: <<*The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, 'Where is he?'*>> (John 7:11). They are standing in the temple, speculating whether or not Jesus will come to the festival, aware that the chief priests and Pharisees were seeking his arrest. But Jesus has already departed from the temple (8:59), and will not be standing where they are standing as they ask such questions. He will come up to this festival, but he will not be coming to the temple. Rather, the one true sacrifice is about to take place in the temple of his body.