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THE PROBLEM OF BLASPHEMY

THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND EARLY JEWISH UNDERSTANDINGS

JERRY DUANE TRUEX

PH.D. THESIS

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY

2001

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To my wife

Vangie Ruth Truex

who supported and encouraged me throughout the writing of this thesis, and

to our daughter

Karissa Ruth Truex

who provided joy and help in her own special way

To my parents

Joseph William Truex

(11 November 1926 — )

and

Margaret Gates Truex

(14 April 1927 — 13 June 2000)
ABSTRACT

THE PROBLEM OF BLASPHEMY

THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND EARLY JEWISH UNDERSTANDINGS

Jerry Truex

This thesis argues that the Johannine Jewish Christians—those who produced, preserved, and propagated the Fourth Gospel—were perceived to be blasphemers of God because of their exalted claims for Jesus and their disparaging remarks against the Ιουδαίοι. It was probably on this basis that Jewish Christians were excommunicated from the synagogue (cf. Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). We take three steps to establish this claim.

First, we review J. Louis Martyn’s hypothesis that the Johannine Christians were expelled from the synagogue as a result of the Birkat ha-Minim. We argue that the Birkat ha-Minim is problematic, suggest that an alternative hypothesis is necessary, and propose that accusations of blasphemy would provide an alternative explanation. Next, we survey recent research on blasphemy, offer an analysis of the historical, social, and literary context of the Fourth Gospel, and present a semantic analysis of ἀλασφημέω and related terms.

Second, we probe seven Jewish traditions pertaining to blasphemy. We examine the prohibitions against cursing God (Exod 22:27[28]), “naming the name” (Lev 24:10-24), and sinning with a high hand (Num 15:30-31). Then, we track some of the most notorious blasphemers, including Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:1—19:37), Antiochus (1 Macc 1:20—2:14), Nicanor (2 Macc 14:16—15:37), and an unnamed Egyptian ruler (Somn 2.123-132).

Third, we examine three Johannine claims—that Jesus is equal with God, that Jesus is the New Temple, and that the Ιουδαίοι are of the Devil—and argue that non-believing Jews would have regarded these claims as blasphemous and would have expelled anyone from the synagogue who proclaimed them.
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Most of all, I am indebted to my family who have sacrificed much for my sake. Love and thanks goes to my daughter, Karissa, for the exuberant way she approaches life, which daily put the ‘importance’ of my thesis in proper perspective. And, most of all, my deepest love and gratitude goes to my wife, Vangie, without whose support this thesis would not have been possible.
The charge of blasphemy reveals "what a society will not and cannot tolerate. Blasphemy is a litmus test of the standards a society believes it must enforce to preserve its unity, its peace, its morality, its feelings, and the road to salvation."\footnote{Levy (1993) xi.} This thesis addresses the issue of blasphemy in early Judaism, particularly as it pertains to the Fourth Gospel. It bears witness to a bitter struggle between two rival groups within the ancient Jewish world. One faction embraced Jesus as the Messiah and the other, a larger parent-group, became part of emergent Judaism. If the findings in this thesis are correct, their struggle for self-identity and religious truth led to the accusation of blasphemy, which became a tool to label and expel Jewish members who claimed that Jesus had divine authority and honor. With great sympathy and respect for both groups, I undertook the research and writing of this thesis in hopes of understanding the theological and social factors that were at stake for them. Understanding that rift long ago may provide healing for Jews and Christians today.

Throughout the thesis, certain conventions have been adopted. First, I have followed the abbreviations recommended by The SBL Handbook of Style.\footnote{The SBL Handbook of Style (1999).} Second, with the exception of the Acknowledgements and Preface, I have used the first person plural pronoun "we" or "our" to express my position. This convention seemed less pretentious than using "I" or "my" and less cumbersome than using the passive tense. Third, I have attempted to use inclusive language throughout the thesis. However, to avoid ambiguity and redundancy, I have occasionally used the third person masculine pronoun for deity. Fourth, the term the Jews (in italics) will refer to the literary construct depicted within the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, whereas the term without italics will have historical reference.

Jerry D. Truex
1 May 2001
PART I

BLASPHEMY AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

In Part I, we propose the need to examine whether non-believing Jews during the late first-century would have regarded the theology of the Fourth Gospel (hereafter FG) as blasphemous. If demonstrated, it would suggest that the Johannine Jewish Christians—those who produced, preserved, and propagated the FG—would have been considered blasphemous and would account for their expulsion from the synagogue (chapter 1).

Next, we summarize and evaluate significant and representative research on blasphemy during the twentieth century, beginning with Strack-Billerbeck (1922-28) and ending with Darrell Bock (1998 and 2000) (chapter 2).

Then, we describe the probable historical, social, and literary contexts of FG. All three contexts point to conflict, a conflict that in all likelihood concerned who were the rightful heirs to Israel’s inherence where the charge of blasphemy became a weapon of the disputing parties (chapter 3).

Lastly, we analyze the semantic relationships of five key terms—βλασφημέω, δυσφημέω, κοκκολογέω, καταλαλέω, and λοιδορέω—in order to provide a basic semantic map or orientation to our study of blasphemy (chapter 4).
CHAPTER 1
THE QUESTION OF BLASPHEMY

1.1 Introduction

The Fourth Gospel (FG) witnesses to a bitter intra-Jewish struggle during the late first century that eventually led to a painful separation between the Johannine Jewish Christians and non-believing Jews. Something about the Johannine group, either their beliefs or behavior, precipitated a conflict that eventually led to their expulsion from the synagogue. This rupture corresponds with certain Johannine claims within FG about Jesus, how God is revealed through him, how sacred space is relocated in him, and how sacred time—eternal life, Sabbath, Passover, Tabernacles, Dedication—is reconfigured by him. Although Johannine claims about Jesus are expressed throughout the FG, the claims and the corresponding conflict become particularly intense in Jn 5:1 - 11:54, which has been viewed as an extended trial or conflict between Jesus and the Jews. From the beginning to the end of this conflict

1 FG will refer to the final form of the Fourth Gospel. We focus on the final form, not because analysis and speculation regarding the pre-history of FG (its sources, redactive layers, and stages of development) are not important, but because the final form, and how it functioned (theologically and sociologically) for the earliest readers, is worthy in itself. It is reasonable to assume that the final form of FG emerged between 85-100 C.E., as supported by most contemporary scholarship.

2 The terms Johannine community, Johannine group, and Johannine Jewish Christians will be used as overlapping synonyms, although the later term stresses the Jewish composition of the group as a reminder that the controversies of FG are family disputes among different Jewish factions. On the family dispute nature of FG, see Ashton (1991) 137ff. Furthermore, these terms will refer to Christians in the later first century who produced, preserved, and propagated FG, whose experiences either shaped the content of FG or were shaped by it, irrespective of whether they lived in the same local village or region. The exact Jewish-Gentile composition of the Johannine community is debated, though most scholars accept that it was predominantly Jewish in the beginning and became more Gentile as time passed. Still, it is remarkable that the controversies of FG are Jewish and opposition to Jesus (and the Johannine group) never concern the issue of Gentile inclusion.

3 The term the Jews (in italics) will refer to the literary construct depicted within the FG, whereas the term without italics will have historical reference.

4 Jn 9:22, 34; 12:42; 16:2; Martyn (1979) passim.


7 Jn 5:17, 24; 6:4, 35; 7:2, 37-38; 8:12; 10:22.

8 See Brown (1970 and 1979), Dodd (1963), Harvey (1976), Lincoln (1994 and 2000), and Robinson (1985). The observation seems to have originated with Dodd (1963) 88-92, who noted similarities between Mark’s trial and Johannine parallels, which are spread throughout the FG. These similarities include: (1) the charge of threatening to destroy the temple (Mk 14:58; Jn 2:14-22), (2) the high priest’s question, “Are you the Christ?” (Mk 14:61; Jn 10:24), (3) Jesus’ prediction of the coming
section, amid claims and counter-claims, challenges and counter-challenges, Jesus is repeatedly charged with the most abhorrent of offensives—blasphemy against God.9

What is surprising is that little attention is paid to the emphasis FG places on blasphemy. Scholars who have addressed the issue of blasphemy have usually done so in conjunction with examining the historicity of Jesus’ trial and so have focused on the Synoptic tradition rather than FG. Why the Johannine tradition is usually not consulted for historical reconstructions are multiple, not least of which is the assumption that FG reflects a time much later than the historical Jesus.10

However, this does not account for the lack of discussion among scholars about the significance of blasphemy for understanding FG itself. Perhaps the reason for this neglect is that the Johannine Jesus is explicitly accused of blasphemy in only Jn 10:34-36 where the terms βλασφημία and βλασφημέω each occur once. However, as will be argued in Chapter 4, the concept of blasphemy should not be reduced to or confused with a particular term. Blasphemy is a much broader concept than one or two terms can bear and, once this is recognized and a plausible concept has been articulated, then we maintain that the issue of blasphemy emerges at critical junctures of the Johannine narrative and plays a key factor in Jesus’ conflicts with the Jews.

The emergence of blasphemy throughout the series of conflicts between Jesus and the Jews is all the more significant because, as it is widely held, John’s story of Jesus is simultaneously the story of the Johannine community.11 This suggests that the conflicts that beset Jesus and the accusations that he endured also beset the Johannine Jewish believers, including the stigma of being labeled blasphemers. Surprisingly, only a few scholars have ever suggested that the Johannine Jewish Christians were

Son of Man (Mk 14:52; Jn 5:27, 8:28), and (4) the charge of blasphemy against Jesus (Mk 14:64; Jn 10:33).

Brown (1970) 834 offers three basic explanations: (1) The Synoptics gathered charges against Jesus made during his ministry and used them to fill in the substance of the Sanhedrin session. (2) John “dispersed the contents of the Sanhedrin session so that Christians would understand that these charges against Jesus did not suddenly arise at the end of his ministry.” (3) Charges made against Jesus throughout his ministry were repeated at the Sanhedrin session.

9 Within the extended trial narrative, Jn 5:18, 7:28-30; 8:19; 8:59, and 10:33 (cf. 19:7) focus on the issue of blasphemy. In addition, the issue of blasphemy is raised during the high priest’s questioning of Jesus in Jn 18:23 and it is probably alluded to in Jn 7:52. See Harvey (1976) 51-3, 58-9.


11 E.g., Martyn (1979) passim; Brown (1979) passim; Stibbe (1992) 50-66; however, see our qualifications of the two-storied reading of FG in the introduction to chapter 13.
accused of blasphemy, but it has never been explored and never established. In fact, Jack Sanders argues that the christology of FG was not blasphemous. Nevertheless, if it could be established, even circumstantially, that the Johannine community harbored beliefs that were considered blasphemous by non-believing Jews, it would help explain the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians as well as have significant repercussions for future readings of FG.

The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to establish that there is good evidence that the Johannine Jewish-Christians were considered blasphemous by non-believing Jews and this is sufficient to account for the expulsion of Jewish-Christians from the synagogue (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). If this thesis can be established, it would provide an alternative to the well-known, but controversial and problematic, proposal by J. Louis Martyn that the expulsion resulted from the use of the Birkat ha-Minim (“the blessing of the heretics”).

The remainder of this chapter will: (a) review Martyn’s hypothesis, (b) interact with challenges to the Birkat ha-Minim hypothesis, (c) urge that the weakness of the Birkat ha-Minim explanation for the expulsion from the synagogue calls for an alternative, and (d) suggest that accusations of blasphemy against the Johannine group would provide such an alternative and therefore an investigation of blasphemy is warranted.

1.2 Martyn’s Hypothesis

With good reason, Ashton has described Martyn’s History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel as “probably the most important single work on the Gospel since

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12 Brown (1979) 47 and Brown (1993) 544. Meeks (1990) 319; Minear (1993) 41-45, esp. 44, holds “Jews who took the name of Jesus shared the blasphemy of the false prophet whose execution had disproved any messianic pretension.” E. P. Sanders (1990) 64 says that it is reasonable to assume that Christians were accused of blasphemy for their christological confessions.

13 J. T. Sanders (1993) 93 writes, “Unreasonable as it may seem to us moderns, the ‘high christology’ of the Gospel of John may have been outlandish but probably was not blasphemous or heretical within Roman-period Judaism, since similar notions [i.e., about the divine status attributed to Jesus] could exist elsewhere within the Judaism of that time.”

14 Martyn (1979) 54-62. In contrast, Brown (1979) 43-47 argues that the development of a higher Christology by certain Jewish-Christians caused their expulsion from the synagogue. It is difficult to establish whether Christological developments provoked the expulsion or vice versa. The factors were probably multiple.
Bultmann’s commentary.” Similarly, Rensberger writes that Martyn’s hypothesis “furnishes us with a definite social framework and polemic context within which John’s highly developed theology could have taken shape, and it permits us to ask further questions about the social, as well as the theological, implications of Johannine thought.”

Martyn believes that the socio-historical setting of FG corresponds to the post 70 CE period in which the rabbis at Yavneh were “closing the ranks” by becoming increasingly intolerant of certain elements that diverged from their vision of Judaism. FG was not only produced in that environment, but it was written in reaction to policies that were emerging from Yavneh which, it appears, precipitated a major crisis for the Johannine community—their expulsion from the synagogue. Of the texts that mention the expulsion (ἀποσυνάγωγος; Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), Jn 9:22 is representative:

His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue (Jn 9:22; NRSV).

Martyn argues that the expulsion mentioned in Jn 9:22 indicates that a formal agreement had been made to excommunicate Christ-confessors from the synagogue. This was not an ad hoc decision, but a carefully considered action with four elements: “(1) a formal decision, (2) made by Jewish authorities, (3) to bring against Christian Jews, [and] (4) the drastic measure of excommunication from the synagogue.” He reasons that a formal expulsion from the synagogue could not have happened during the life of Jesus and so John’s references (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) are anachronistic or retrojected back into the life of Jesus. Based on a careful redactional analysis of Jn 9:1-41, Martyn proposes that the text of FG witnesses to

---

15 Ashton (1991) 107. Brown’s work (1979) is certainly of equal stature, but for our purposes, Martyn’s work focuses the problem that this thesis addresses.
17 See Barrett (1975) 47, 70; Brown (1966) lxiii; Lindars (1972) 35ff; Martyn (1979) passim.
two levels simultaneously. One level witnesses to an einmalig\textsuperscript{20} event from Jesus’ life and another witnesses to the contemporary crisis of the Johannine community.\textsuperscript{21} Many contemporary Johannine scholars accept this two-level reading, though not in every detail.\textsuperscript{22}

What is important for this thesis is the move Martyn makes when he asks what historical reference outside of FG corresponds to the expulsion of the Johannine group.\textsuperscript{23} What mechanism led to the excommunication? He looks at and then rules out both the Jewish ban\textsuperscript{24} and the disciplinary action taken against Christians in Acts.\textsuperscript{25} What is more probable, according to Martyn, is the synagogue use of the \textit{Birkat ha-Minim}.\textsuperscript{26} This refers to the Twelfth Benediction of the \textit{Shemoneh Esreh} (Eighteen Benedictions) that was read in the synagogue and also repeated three times a day.\textsuperscript{27} The Twelfth Benediction was probably added to the \textit{Shemoneh Esreh} between 85 and 115 CE\textsuperscript{28} and may be translated as follows:\textsuperscript{29}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Martyn (1979) 29, n. 22 uses the German term, which he translates as \textit{back there} as opposed to \textit{now and here}, because he could not find a suitable English equivalent.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Martyn (1979) 30. Several passages in the FG suggest that Christians were in serious conflict with a synagogue that expelled them (9:22; 12:42; 16:2a) and then were further persecuted (15:18-21; 16:2b; 19:38; 20:19).
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Martyn (1979) 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} There are two types of discipline or bans used in synagogues: (a) \textit{herem}, the more severe, and (b) \textit{nubbui}, the less severe. In both cases, there is no evidence that the ban meant excommunication prior to the third century; rather, the two types of ban were designed for inner-synagogue discipline. See Martyn (1979) 43-4.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Martyn (1979) 45-50 argues that Acts does not provide proper parallels for understanding the \textit{dpousenvyugv} texts in FG. According to Martyn, Acts paints a picture of Jewish-Christians who are subject to Jewish authorities and not as people who have been excommunicated (e.g., Acts 9:1-2; 22:5). Even Paul sees himself as subject to Jewish authorities—and not as one who has been excommunicated—when he appears before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:6ff; cf. 2 Cor 11:24). The events recounted in Acts 18 and 19 are closer to the \textit{dpousenvyugv} mentioned in FG, but the comparison is problematic, because Acts 18 and 19 do not refer to a formal decision to expel Jewish-Christians and Paul’s “expulsion” appears to be voluntary. Acts 18:5-8 depicts Paul voluntarily leaving the synagogue in Macedonia and then preaching in another synagogue at Ephesus (18:19). Acts 19:8-10 describes Paul volunteering to leave after three months.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Martyn (1979) 38-42, 50-62.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} For a brief introduction to the Eighteen Benedictions (also called the \textit{Shemoneh Esreh} or \textit{Amidah}) and different versions of it, see Schürer (1979) 455-63.
  \item \textsuperscript{28} So Martyn 1979, 57 n. 75. Pritz (1988) 103 dates the \textit{Birkat ha-Minim} to soon after 80 CE and adds that almost no one dates it after 95. According to b. \textit{Bar} 28a-29b, R. Gamaliel II (the leading
For the apostates let there be no hope
And let the arrogant government
be speedily uprooted in our days.
Let the Nazarenes [Christians]
and the Minim [heretics] be destroyed in a moment
And let them be blotted out of the Book of Life
and not be inscribed together with the righteous.
Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the proud!

This translation is based on the Palestinian recension of the Eighteen Benedictions that was discovered in the Cairo Geniza and published by Schechter in 1898. This Geniza version is unique because it contained a condemnation of both Nazarenes (nošerim) and heretics (minim), whereas other extant versions only mention the minim. Following the description of the Birkat ha-Minim in b. Ber 28b-29b, Martyn suggests that when a person was asked to read the Benedictions in the synagogue, if he stumbled over the Twelfth Benediction or if he refused to read it, he would be exposed as a Christ-confessor and subject to exclusion from the synagogue. When considering the Johannine context, Martyn goes on to argue that in addition to the first trauma of expulsion from the synagogue, a second trauma of intense persecution seems to have followed in which the death penalty was imposed on certain members of the Johannine group for “leading people astray” to worship Jesus as a second God.

One reason for the acceptance of Martyn’s hypothesis, as Ashton observes, is “because of the wealth of illumination it sheds upon the Gospel itself and the satisfactory way it accounts for the one of its most puzzling features: why is the Gospel at once so Jewish and yet so anti-Jewish?” Nevertheless, Martyn’s proposal has been questioned, particularly regarding his use of the Birkat ha-Minim.

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29 Martyn (1979) 58.
31 Martyn (1979) 54. In dating of the Birkat ha-Minim to the late first century, Martyn relies on connecting the tradition that Samuel the Small wrote the Benediction under Gamaliel (b. Ber. 28a-29b) and that the Birkat ha-Minim was linked to Yavneh (y. Ber. 4.3 [8a]).
33 Jn 16:2; cf. 10:28, 15:18.
34 Martyn (1979) 72, 74-81, esp. 75; cf. Jn 7:47, m. Sanh 7:10, and b. Sanh 107b.
1.3 The *Birkat Ha-Minim*

The strongest challenge comes from Kimelman and Katz who, in separate articles, arrive at similar conclusions: There is no clear evidence that the *Birkat ha-Minim* was used to curse Christians or expel them from the synagogue during the first or early second century. Since Kimelman and Katz’s critiques overlap and complement each other, their concerns will be treated together.

1.3.1 Critiques by Kimelman and Katz

First, Kimelman addresses the issue of the *noṣerim*. Although the Geniza version, which Martyn cites, includes the term *noṣerim* and is an early witness to the Benedictions, Kimelman rejects it as original. Based on rabbinic evidence, Kimelman argues that *noṣerim* was a late addition to the benedictions, so late that *b. Ber.* 28b-29a only mentions *minim*. He does not indicate when *noṣerim* was added, though Katz speculates that it was between 175 and 325 CE. Even when *noṣerim* became part of the *Birkat ha-Minim* at some later point, Kimelman argues that it did not refer to Christians. Rather, he believes that the *noṣerim* referred to a Jewish sect, the Nazoraeans, which Jerome (d. 420) said were “neither Jews nor Christians” and Epiphanius (d. 403) identified as “Jews and nothing else.” So, then, who were the *minim*? After reviewing the tannaitic and amoraic literature of Palestine, Kimelman responds that “*minim* had a Jewish sectarian denotation and was not used to refer to Gentiles,” though he concedes that the denotation of *minim* could have included Jewish Christians.

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37 The article by Katz (1984) 43-76 is broader in scope than Kimelman’s and investigates official anti-Christian activity stemming from Yavneh, such as the circulation of anti-Christian letters, the use of *bans* (whether *niddui* or *herem*), the prohibition against heretical books, and the *Birkat ha-Minim*.
38 Fourth century; so J. T. Sanders (1993) 59. In addition, Pritz (1988) 104 lists three other manuscripts containing both *noṣerim* and *minim*: (1) a text of the Siddur of R. Amram Gaon published by Marx in 1907, (2) another Geniza fragment published in 1925, and (3) Rashi’s comment at Brachot 30a in the first Venice printing of the Talmud. In addition, the Old Yemenite version has *minim* and *mosarim*.
41 See *t. Hul* 2.22; 2.24; Kimelman (1981) 230 and 232. Horbury (1998) 93 argues that, even at the origin of the Tefillah, the imprecation against the *minim* included “invoking judgment on the wicked, both inside and outside the congregation of Israel.”
Next, Kimelman tries to expose the illogic of Martyn’s explanation that the Twelfth Benediction was used to expose minim and subject them to expulsion. If Martyn is correct, reasons Kimelman, it would require someone to identify himself voluntarily as a min, which seems unlikely. Who would voluntarily identify himself as a min? “As long as a person did not consider himself a min the benediction would be irrelevant and his participation in synagogue life would continue.”

Kimelman and Katz also look at the evidence within FG itself. They dismiss the Johannine references to expulsions as either a local phenomenon or an invented account (Lk 6:22 is dismissed as irrelevant). Kimelman suggests that the accounts of expulsion may have been "concocted to persuade Christians to stay away from the synagogue," whereas Katz views the Johannine evidence as "idiosyncratic in the Christian literature of this earliest period." In either case, both agree that FG cannot be directly linked to the Birkat ha-Minim, because the FG does not mention synagogue prayers or curses against Christians. Appeals to the writings of Justin Martyr and Origen (d. 253) also fail to persuade Kimelman and Katz that synagogue prayers were used to curse Christians. Even if certain statements from Justin and Origen indicated that synagogue prayers cursed Christians in the second and third centuries, juxtaposing their statements alongside the FG is deemed anachronistic.

Kimelman assumes that there is a sharp dichotomy between Jews (including Jewish Christians) and Gentiles (Christian or otherwise), and argues that the Birkat ha-Minim was entirely internal to Judaism. Katz seems to agree when he writes, “The Jewish leadership directed its malediction against all heretics, while the Jewish Christians, who knew of the animosity against them and of the feeling that they were heretics, ‘heard’ the Birkath ha-Minim as particularly aimed at them.... Thus John

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48 It does not allow for development between the time the FG was written and that of Justin (or Origen) and overlooks the impact of the Bar Kochba revolt, which interposed these two times; Katz (1984) 72, n. 11.
and other later second-century Christian sources could well speak of Jews cursing [Jewish] Christians in the synagogue, when in fact the malediction was against minim in general. So, while there was some internal intolerance toward minim, both Kimelman and Katz believe there was no official anti-Christian policy at Yavneh and no total separation between Jews and Christians prior to the Bar Kochba revolt.

The bottom line for both Kimelman and Katz is that the correlation of the Birkat ha-Minim with the expulsion of Christians from the synagogue mentioned in FG is without foundation, though Katz is somewhat more flexible than Kimelman.

1.3.2 Critique of Kimelman and Katz

With Kimelman and Katz, we cannot date the use of nośerim to the first century with any confidence. However, in contrast to Kimelman and Katz, there are reasons for supposing that the Birkat ha-Minim was directed at Jewish Christians among others.

First, the use of minim in the Benediction can be traced back to the shadowy area that the second century casts back on the first, particularly to the time of Trajan (98-117 CE) and of Rabban Gamaliel (85-115 CE). Moreover, as Alexander observes, from the viewpoint of the Rabbis, “a min was basically a Jew who did not accept the authority of the Rabbis and who rejected Rabbinic halakhah.” Thus, Jewish Christians in the Johannine community could have been targeted by the Benediction’s use of minim. It is plausible that once any Christian, Jewish or otherwise, was cursed by a prayer like the Birkat ha-Minim, the whole Christian body would have been implicated, though Kimelman and Katz fail to see this type of solidarity. Second, Kimelman’s argument that the Birkat ha-Minim worked by self-

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49 Katz (1984) 74; I have added the term, ‘Jewish,’ in brackets.
51 J. T. Sanders (1993) 62 argues that t. Hul. 2.24, which links the minim with Jeshu ben Pantiri, can be dated to the reign of Trajan. Barrett (1975) 48 refers to b. Ber.28b, which links Rabban Gamaliel and the origin of the Birkat ha-Minim, and says: “Anything that occurred in the period of Gamaliel occurred in the period of the Fourth Gospel.” Katz (1984) 68 also believes that the maledictions against the minim in t. Sanh. 13:4-6 and t. Ber. 3:25 can be dated after 70 CE.
exclusion, rather than by expulsion, underestimates the power of social ostracism. Even if a suspected min did not identify himself as such, surely being suspected of minuth (heresy) would have been enough to initiate the forces (physical or otherwise) of ostracism. Third, Casey rightly criticizes Kimelman’s sharp distinction between Jewish sectarians and Gentile Christians as compartmentalized, oversimplifying “doubtful or shifting identities.” Boundaries between different Jewish groups were fluid and overlapping. Failing to perceive such complexity, Kimelman seems to deny Jewish Christian sectarians the status of being counted among the Christians. Only if Jewish Christians are not counted can Kimelman say there is “a lack of evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish prayer in late antiquity.” Fourth, Kimelman and Katz underplay the Johannine evidence. Kimelman treats the FG as an isolated account and suggests that John might have “concocted” the reports of excommunication to prevent Christians from “being tempted” to attend synagogues. This is plainly contrary to the Sitz im Leben of the FG, which depicts Christians so thoroughly Jewish that they had to be removed from the synagogue. Similarly, Katz dismisses the Johannine evidence as “idiosyncratic.” Admittedly, the formal element that Martyn observes in Jn 9:22 appears to be unique to FG, but otherwise FG reflects similar accounts of Jewish hostility toward Jewish Christians. Lastly, Kimelman and Katz’s laconic remarks that FG neither mentions the cursing of Christians nor even synagogue prayers are not entirely correct. FG does provide evidence that some Jews were cursed because of their sympathies with Christ. In FG, the chief priests

54 In a related vein, Setzer (1994) 90 notes that the Birkat ha-Minim does not express anything about expelling people from the synagogue. Although this is true, it hard to imagine that, once identified and cursed as minim, people would have wanted, or been allowed, to stay in the synagogue.

55 As Barclay (1995) 116 reminds us that issues like defection or apostasy is “ascribed as much as it is an achieved status.” One needs only recall Macarthism, which involved the persecution of suspected communists during the 1950s in America, to realize that one’s self-perception is not decisive in matters of social exclusion and even official sanction.


57 My emphasis. Kimelman (1981) 226 uses this phrase in the title of his article.


59 Jn 9:34 states that the Jews “threw the man out,” ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἐκ εὐς; see Meeks (1975) passim; Casey (1996) 106; Culpepper (1998) 11.

60 E.g., Ant. 10.200; Acts 5:5; 13:50; 18:6-7; 17:10, 14; 19:9; 22:19; 1 Thess 2:14-16; cf. Casey (1996) 108-9 and Horbury (1998) 100. Also, it is noteworthy that Matt 5:11 and Lk 6:22 are Christian blessings that are in response to some sort of expulsion or action similar to those raised by the Birkat ha-Minim. However, as Rowland (1985) 300 points out, there is no evidence from Acts that a curse was used against Christians.
and Pharisees confront certain temple guards about why they did not arrest Jesus.

They say to the guards:

Has anyone of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed (Jn 7:48-49; NRSV).

This confrontation occurs on the temple grounds just after a Jewish crowd had declared that Jesus was the prophet, while other Jews exclaimed that he was the Messiah (Jn 7:40-41). This prompts the priests and Pharisees to accuse this crowd of not knowing the law (concerning the Messiah) and to declare that they are accursed, (ἐπάρατοι εἰσίν). The term, ἐπάρατος, like ἐπικατάρατος (Gal 3:13), implies that one has already been condemned by God. The way FG presents it, certain Jews have been cursed for confessing Christ. However, Kimelman is correct to say that FG does not mention a specific prayer of malediction, but perhaps wrong to assume that it should, since the main complaint of the Christian Jews was exclusion and persecution, not a specific form of cursing.

On the whole, correlating the Birkat ha-Minim with FG has raised a debate that is hardly resolved. If Martyn’s hypothesis is not entirely persuasive, then neither are Kimelman and Katz’s criticisms. If the term nošerim was not part of the original Birkat ha-Minim, then the use of minim in the Benediction could have targeted, among others, Jewish Christians. But this does not resolve the issue either, because the precise dating of the Benediction remains hidden in the shadows that the second century casts back on the first. Again, on the testimony of FG, Jewish sympathizers with Christ were cursed, but it is unclear what that entailed or whether it referred to the Birkat ha-Minim or something else like it. Additional arguments against correlating the Benediction with FG could be added to the debate, as can arguments

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61 So Louw and Nida (1988) § 33.475. Cf. Jn 7:51, which corroborates that the issue is condemnation.
63 The issue of dating the Birkat ha-Minim to the late first century relies on the debated date and reliability of Tannaitic traditions that link the Benediction to Samuel the Small (b. Ber.28a-29b) and Yavneh (y. Ber. 4.3 [8a]).
64 Setzer (1994) 90-91 offers six such arguments.
for such a correlation. Some scholars continue to argue that the Benediction is the best possible or probable explanation. Others mention it, but view it as unnecessary and still others else reject it altogether. Clearly, we are at an impasse.

1.4 Is the Birkat Ha-Minim Necessary?

The very reason why Martyn reached for the Birkat ha-Minim was to help link FG to a plausible historical context. And yet that seems to be the very thing our current knowledge of the Benediction is unable to supply. Is there another way forward? Could another mechanism beside the Birkat ha-Minim supply the type of explanation necessary to make sense of Jewish Christian expulsions from the synagogue? And could it, at the same time, satisfy the two-level reading of FG and the four elements identified by Martyn in Jn 9:22?

Some scholars have hinted that the way forward would be to search for an alternative explanation that is, at the same time, in continuity with the use of the Birkat ha-Minim in the second century. For example, Culpepper writes, “The action in view in John may not have been the enforcement of the Birkath ha-Minim as argued by J. Louis Martyn, but it probably reflects the kind of situation that led to the adoption of this blessing.” In a private letter to Martyn, Wayne Meeks stated his belief that what was depicted as punctiliar events in Gamaliel’s time by b. Ber 28 was actually “a linear development stretching over a lengthy period and culminating in the pertinent formulation of the Birkath ha-Minim, perhaps quite a bit later than Gamaliel.” Similarly, Hengel concludes that “the Birkat ha-Minim, the exact date of which we

70 Culpepper (1998) 57, cf.44.
71 The words are Martyn’s paraphrase of Meeks; see Martyn (1979) 55, n. 69. D. Moody Smith (1990a) 86 is also in agreement with the trajectory approach of Meeks and Culpepper.
do not know, is simply the ultimate consequence of a development full of combat and suffering."\(^{72}\)

Comments like these suggest that the *Birkat ha-Minim* may not be necessary for understanding FG’s enigmatic use of ἀποσυνάγωγος. In fact, one need not appeal to the *Birkat ha-Minim* to explain FG’s use of ἀποσυνάγωγος, as Ashton seems to have done, and yet affirm much of Martyn’s proposal regarding his two-reading of FG!\(^{73}\) Indeed, Meeks asserts straightforwardly that the *Birkat ha-Minim* is “a red herring in Johannine research,”\(^{74}\) while Wilson states categorically “it is not essential to connect the expulsion from the synagogue with the *Birkat ha-minim.*”\(^{75}\) If the Benediction is left aside, there is still a need to explain the historical context to which Jn 9:22 points and, to date, no carefully documented or convincing alternative has been proposed.

1.5 Is there an Alternative Explanation?

The search for a convincing alternative begins with a basic question: If the *Birkat ha-Minim* is set-aside for the moment, what other Jewish decision or action could have resulted in the expulsion of Jewish Christians from the synagogue? And, more fundamentally, what could have provoked a direct expulsion from the synagogue? From the outset, it should be stated that, as with other complex socio-historical realities, the factors were probably multiple. Nevertheless, the following options may be identified and assessed.

(1) Bans and *ad hoc* decisions. As we have seen, Martyn believes that the use of synagogue bans and the *ad hoc* decisions referred to in Acts are inadequate to explain the expulsion of Jewish Christians depicted in FG. Regarding the issue of bans, Martyn finds support from Katz who argues that the *niddui* form of ban was “never aimed at separating a Jew from Judaism … [and] … someone under the ban (*niddui*)

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\(^{72}\) Hengel (1989) 115.

\(^{73}\) Ashton (1991) 124-59 discusses the religious dispute between the Johannine group and other Jews, and yet, in this discussion, never mentions the *Birkat ha-Minim*, even though he cites Martyn’s hypothesis approvingly (e.g., 107).


\(^{75}\) Wilson (1995) 73.
was not excluded from participation in the life of the synagogue."\textsuperscript{76} Furthermore, that the \textit{herem} was the mechanism for expelling Jewish Christians referred to in Jn 9:22 is unlikely, since all uses of \textit{herem}, meaning full excommunication from Judaism, have a post-mishnaic provenance.\textsuperscript{77} When we turn to expulsions mentioned in Acts,\textsuperscript{78} where Jewish Christians are forced to exit the synagogues on certain occasions, there is a noticeable lack of formal deliberation or the setting of policy to exclude Jewish Christians on the basis of certain beliefs, like Christ-confession. Thus, the expulsions mentioned in Acts do not fully illuminate Jn 9:22.

(2) \textbf{An Anti-Temple group}. Some have argued that the introduction of another group of Jewish believers, like an anti-Temple faction from Samaria, who held views of Jesus that were intolerable for non-believing Jews, led to conflict and eventual separation.\textsuperscript{79} Although this is possible, it is hypothetical and it would be imprudent to build one uncertain hypothesis on another. Furthermore, it would have to be shown that their particular beliefs or behavior could have provoked formal proceedings to expel and even execute their members, as indicated by Jn 9:22 and 16:2.

(3) \textbf{Non-Jewish converts}. Another explanation is that the Johannine Jewish Christians accepted certain non-Jewish converts, which offended other Jews.\textsuperscript{80} Again, this may have happened, but it does not appear to have been the central concern for the Johannine community, because Gentile or non-Jewish inclusion never becomes a point of controversy in FG.

(4) \textbf{Jewish-Christian pacifism during the Jewish revolt}. The Jewish-Christian stance toward the Jewish revolt of 66-70 C.E. tended to be pacifistic and could have engendered hatred from Jews who took a militant stance against the Romans.\textsuperscript{81} Again, this issue does not seem to arise in FG.

\textsuperscript{76} Katz (1984) 49.
\textsuperscript{77} Katz (1984) 49.
\textsuperscript{79} Brown (1979) 37; Kysar (1992) 3.918.
\textsuperscript{80} Kysar (1992) 3.918.
(5) The charge of leading people astray. Martyn argues that the Johannine Jewish Christians were accused of leading other Jews astray. This arises in one instance in FG. Through the voice of the Pharisees, the Temple guards are questioned regarding ambivalence toward Jesus:

... Surely you have not been deceived too, have you?” (Jn 7:47; NRSV).

... Μὴ καὶ ὑμεῖς πεπλάνησθε; (Jn 7:47; UBS 4).

Martyn argues that behind the use of πλανάω in 7:47 stands the technical, rabbinic use of πλάνα, πλάνα, “to lead astray to do something.” In the context of the Johannine community, the deception involved leading Jews astray to worship Jesus as a second god (Jn 5:18). As it is widely understood, persons found guilty of such deception should receive the death sentence (Deut 13:6ff; b. Sanh. 107b). It is important to note that, in Martyn’s scheme, the accusation of “leading people astray” explains why the Johannine group was persecuted and refers to the second trauma of the community (Jn 16:2), whereas the use of the Birkat ha-Minim against Christ-confessors explains why they were expelled from the synagogue and refers to the first trauma. The charge of “leading people astray” is ruled out as the primary factor in the expulsion from the synagogue, because it explains the issue of execution (Jn 16:2), but not excommunication (Jn 9:22).

(6) Points of sensitivity. Another way to proceed is to look within FG itself for points of sensitivity, which Dunn describes as points “at which an effort is evidently being made to clarify some confusion or to counter opposing views.” If certain points of sensitivity could be identified as contributing to the apparent hostility between the Johannine Jewish Christians and other non-believing Jews, it might suggest an alternative explanation for the expulsion from the synagogue. Dunn notes several points of sensitivity related to Johannine Christology, including the repeated contrast between Jesus and John the Baptist, the christologically centered battles over the law and Sabbath, the mounting krisis depicted in Jn 5-12, and the way in which the Evangelist depicts the disciples’ stages of faith in Christ. Picking up Dunn’s

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81 Kysar (1992) 3.918.
82 Martyn (1979) 159.
83 Martyn (1979) 74-81, 158-160.
84 Dunn (1998a) 354.
insight, Motyer identifies seven points of sensitivity, including conflict over the Temple and its festivals, the legitimacy of the law, religious authority (revelation and open heaven), the Ιουσώτιτ, confession of Christ (Jn 20:31), the role of signs, and the polemical style of FG. Each of these points of sensitivity raised by Dunn and Motyer could provide a point of departure for discovering an alternative explanation. However, such an alternative would have to show why or on what grounds expulsion was justified, which is not readily apparent from the points of sensitivity that have been mentioned. For example, it is not altogether clear why confessing Jesus as Messiah would have led to expulsion, since, for instance, Rabbi Akiba was not expelled from the synagogue when he believed Bar Kochba was the Messiah.

(7) Blasphemy. There are a number of considerations that suggest that the Johannine Jewish Christians were regarded as blasphemous. This would account for their expulsion from the synagogue.

First, the emphasis the narrative of FG places on blasphemy suggests that it might hold the key to an alternative explanation. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the charge of blasphemy is repeatedly, either explicitly or implicitly, brought against Jesus in FG. FG’s emphasis on blasphemy (at least relative to the Synoptics) suggests that the issue of blasphemy was a concern to the Johannine group in ways that were not to the authors and earliest readers of the Synoptic Gospels.

Second, the prosecution of blasphemy seems to match the four elements observed in Jn 9:22—(a) a formal or legal decision (b) by Jewish authorities (c) to expel (d) people who make offensive statements. Although Jn 9:22 mentions expulsion and not blasphemy, there may be a connection, formal or informal, between different forms of social distancing (excommunication and execution) and verbal distancing (labeling someone a blasphemer), as the following considerations indicate. First, FG mentions both ἀποκρύφωμενος and killing Christians in the same verse (Jn 16:2), indicating

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that expulsion and execution are related.\(^{88}\) Second, Luke 6:22-23 links exclusion (ἄφορίζειν), which refers to a breaking off of community relations, with speaking disparagingly of a person (διηγήσεται) and casting out a person's name as evil (ἐκβολέω τὸ ὄνομα ὡς πονηρόν). Third, there are indications in some Jewish legal texts that people accused of blasphemy were both expelled and executed (Lev 24:13-16), whereas other texts indicate that only excommunication is required for blasphemy (IQS 7.1) or excommunication (kărêt) for certain types of blasphemy (v. Sanh. 7.25a-b; b. Ker. 7a-b).\(^{89}\)

Third, Martyn's two-level reading reinforces the possibility that the issue of blasphemy accounts for the expulsion. The two-level reading is, without apology, an allegorical interpretation, where the story of Jesus is simultaneously the story of the Johannine community.\(^{90}\) As it becomes clear in reading Martyn's History & Theology, persons and events at the einmalig level represent persons and experiences of the Johannine community. Jesus represents the leader of the Johannine group; the Pharisees are the Yavnean rabbis; the Jews are Jews in the synagogue who persecute Johannine Christians; Nicodemus stands for secret believers; the blind man's expulsion from the synagogue corresponds to the experience of Jewish Christians; and the persecution of Jesus corresponds to the persecution of his followers (15:18-20). As previously mentioned, this type of reading is widely accepted. It suggests that the charge of blasphemy against Jesus corresponds to charges of blasphemy against members of the Johannine community.

\(^{88}\) As Setzer (1994) 93, 96 and Brown (1979) 93-4, 106-7 have argued, it is possible that the reference to killing Christians in Jn 16:2 concerned the indirect death of Christians; that is, once Christians were deprived of the umbrella of Judaism, they were no longer exempt from imperial worship and did not have the right of assembly, thereby becoming vulnerable to the Romans. The problem with this view is that FG indicates that Jewish Christians were in fear of other Jews, not the Romans.


\(^{90}\) An allegorical interpretation is suggested by Martyn (1979) 24-36 and Martyn (1977) 171-5. Indeed, the FG itself seems to encourage such an approach (cf. 15:18-21). Ashton (1991) 412-20 defends the two-level reading of FG on the basis of his analysis of Jn 2:19-22. For an incisive critique of reading the FG allegorically, see Motyer (1997) 13-16. A major pitfall in reconstructing the history of the Johannine communities through allegorical correlation is the lack of historical control or criteria. This lack is underscored by the variety of proposals for the Sitz im Leben for the Johannine communities. See the survey by Brodie (1993) 15-21.
Fourth, history shows that certain social dynamics can be observed across time and culture regarding the connection between excommunication and allegations of blasphemy.91 One recent situation in particular exhibits this connection and is analogous to FG. Over the past sixteen years in Pakistan, a considerable number of blasphemy charges have been brought against both Christians and Ahmadiyya Muslims (Ahmadis). The account of the Christians begins in 1986 when new Pakistani blasphemy laws, known as 295-B and 295-C, stipulated life in prison for desecration of the Qur'an and the death penalty for blasphemy.92 Under these laws, more than a dozen Christians have been charged with blasphemy, which is not surprising since the Qur'an identifies common Christian confessions as blasphemous.93 Although Christians have not been executed, three have been sentenced to death, two have died in police custody and, in one instance, fourteen Christian families were forcibly banished from their village after two men were accused of blasphemy.94 The account of the Ahmadis begins much further back. Their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908)95 was accused of blasphemy when he proclaimed, among other things, that he was the Messiah. However, it was not until 1974 that the Pakistani government and the Muslim World League declared that the Ahmadis were "non-Muslim."96 As a result, they were excommunicated from Mosques and boycotted socially, economically, and culturally. This was followed by a further measure in 1984 by the Pakistani government, which made it a criminal offence for Ahmadis to call themselves Muslim, practice Muslim forms of worship, or use Muslim terms of greeting. Any public claim that Ahmad is the Messiah is

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91 See the unsurpassed history of blasphemy by Levy (1993).
93 In the authoritative English-Arabic version of the Qur'an, Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes, "The doctrines of Trinity, equality with Allah, and (Jesus') sonship, are repudiated as blasphemies." See note 676 for Surah 4.171 (cf. 5.72-73) in The Holy Qur'an: English translation of the meanings and Commentary (Saudi Arabia: The Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance, n.d.).
95 Ghulam Ahmad (1996 [Urdu 1898]) 10 indicates that his birth was 1839 or 1840 CE; however, the historian, Muhammad Ali (1937) 1, n. 1, argues that it was probably 13 February 1835.
96 The official reports of the Federal Shariat Court, Islamabad, Pakistan, are published by the Dar-Al-Hadyan in Quadianis are not Muslim (1996), see esp. 189-90.
blasphemous. Any use of the common confession—"There is no God except Allah and Mohammed is his prophet"—is prohibited. In the last decade, 152 Ahmadis have been arrested for blasphemy. Although none have been officially executed to date, 34 have been murdered, some in the presence of police. For our purposes, there are two items to highlight regarding the use or abuse of Pakistani blasphemy laws: (a) Expulsion from the community and allegations of blasphemy went hand-in-hand. (b) The founder of the Ahmadiyya movement was accused of blasphemy and, eventually, his followers were also so regarded. Although this is only suggestive, it reinforces the possibility that, like Jesus, the Johannine Jewish Christians were accused of blasphemy and this explains the references to ἐποστολήγογος in FG (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

1.6 Proposal

These four reasons—(1) the emphasis FG places on blasphemy, (2) the correspondence between the four elements mentioned in Jn 9:22 and prosecuting blasphemy, (3) the two-level reading of FG, and (4) the observation that blasphemy and excommunication often go hand-in-hand—intimate that the Johannine Jewish Christians were regarded as blasphemous or directly accused of blasphemy. However, this is merely suggested by what we have seen so far. What is needed is convincing evidence. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to determine whether non-believing Jews could have regarded the Johannine Jewish Christians as blasphemous and, secondarily, whether this would have been sufficient to account for their expulsion from the synagogue.

97 The 1993 Supreme Court of Pakistan stated that Islamic phrases were copyrighted trademarks of the Islamic faith and therefore could not be used by Ahmadis; see "Religious Intolerance in Pakistan," by the Center for Religious Tolerance; available from http://www.religious_tolerance.org/rt_pakis.htm.

98 Over the centuries, expelling people from community life and enforcing blasphemy laws have worked in tandem to purify groups from the perceived contamination of certain individuals and their actions. The social historian, Leonard Levy (1993) xi argues that the charge of blasphemy reveals "what a society will not and cannot tolerate. Blasphemy is a litmus test of the standards a society believes it must enforce to preserve its unity, its peace, its morality, its feelings, and the road to salvation."

99 We are primarily looking for theological reasons for the expulsion or separation, but at the same time we recognize that sociological and cultural factors contributed to the process. We agree with the concern of J. T. Sanders (1993) 82-151 that all too often scholars have provided theological-cultural reasons (e.g., high christology, a gentilizing of Christianity) to explain Jewish-Christian conflict and separation, but have neglected sociological factors (e.g., theories of social conflict and deviance).
If it can be shown that the Johannine Jewish Christians were probably expelled from the synagogue for blasphemous beliefs and behavior, it could provide an alternative to the problematic *Birkat ha-Minim* explanation for the expulsion mentioned in FG. Before examining key texts concerning blasphemy in early Jewish tradition (Chapters 5-12), it will be helpful to survey recent research on blasphemy in early Judaism and Christianity (Chapter 2), discuss particular considerations regarding the probable contexts of FG and the significance of *mirror-reading* FG (Chapter 3), and provide a basis semantic analysis of βλασφημείω and related terms (Chapter 4).
CHAPTER 2
RECENT RESEARCH ON BLASPHEMY

This chapter surveys a selected number of works that contribute to the discussion on blasphemy in significant ways. The survey provides a basic orientation to the relevant issues, the way the subject has been approached in the past and, most importantly, how scholars have addressed the issue in FG. Although other works could have been included here, the following scholars have been selected because they either provide seminal works (Strack-Billerbeck and Bock), unique perspectives (Sanders and Brown), representative opinions (Dunn and others), or direct engagement with FG (Harvey and O’Neill) regarding blasphemy.

2.1 Strack and Billerbeck (1922-28)

Strack and Billerbeck (hereafter Strack-Billerbeck) have, to a large degree, influenced much of the twentieth-century discussion on blasphemy. They provided one of the first comparisons between the Rabbinic and the Gospels’ depiction of blasphemy. The incongruities between the Gospels and the Rabbinic literature were noted by Strack-Billerbeck and have, subsequently, played a major role in scholarship on blasphemy in the NT, particularly as it relates to Jesus’ trial. In their Kommentar, Strack-Billerbeck treat the issue of blasphemy in a section on Matt 26:65 and, to a lesser extent, in a section on Jn 10:33-34.

2.1.1 “Then the high priest tore his clothes”

Without commenting on the historical or literary contexts, Strack-Billerbeck offer y. Sanh 7:25a, 65 as a rabbinic parallel to Matt 26:65a regarding the high priest tearing his clothes. The passage from the Yerushalmi tells a story about R. Simeon b. Laqisch (ca. 250) who repeatedly tears his clothes each time a certain Samaritan blasphemes (actal) God. Finally, R. Simeon sarcastically asks the Samaritan if his mother is able to make enough clothes for him to tear. As this halakah makes clear, clothes must be

100 See Bock (1998) 5-29.
101 Strack-Billerbeck (1922-28) 1.1007-19 and 2.542-3.
torn upon hearing blasphemy. If there is a question about whether blasphemy has been heard within a specific text or context, the renting of garments (or lack of it) ought to provide an immediate answer.102

2.1.2 “He has blasphemed!”

While providing pages of (presumed) rabbinic parallels to Matt 26:65b regarding the charge of blasphemy, Strack-Billerbeck make several significant claims. First, they cite Ex 22:27 as a key text for the entire discussion and argue that, prior to R. Aqiba (d. ca. 135), the warning against blaspheming בַּלְטֵי מְנַקֵּס in Ex 22:27 pertained to heathen gods.103 Only with R. Aqiba did Ex 22:27 come to be understood as a reference to blasphemy against God. Although the rabbis debated whether בַּלְטֵי מְנַקֵּס referred to gods, judges, or God,104 with the completion of the Bavli, Ex 22:27 came to be understood as a reference to blasphemy against both God and judges.105 Second, after quoting Num 15:30f, Strack-Billerbeck provide a three-fold typology for organizing the rabbinic use of the term רָעָלן which, it appears, has been recently adopted by Bock:107

(a) רָעָלן, in the broad sense, refers to a blasphemer who speaks against the Torah and, by association, against God;

(b) רָעָלן, more narrowly, denotes an idolater, which derives from Num 15:30f and concerns a רָעָלן being “cut off”(כִּבֵּשׁ) from his people. This was the view of R. Ishmael (ca. 135) and most of the rabbis during Ishmael’s time; and

(c) רָעָלן, in the narrowest sense (cf. R. Aqiba), is one who curses the Name.

Third, on the basis of some traditions, Strack-Billerbeck argue that the blasphemer and the idolater are similar in that they reject the entire law and, furthermore, what is demonstrated of one may be applied to the other.108 So, for example, the blasphemer and the idolater are both hanged after they are stoned to death, whereas others who

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102 Cf. y. Mo‘ed Qat. 3.83b, 28; cf. m. Sanh. 7:5; Sifra on Lev. 24:10-23.
103 As in LXX Ex 22:28; Josephus Ant 4.8.10; Philo Quest Ex 2.5.
104 R. Ishamel argued that בַּלְטֵי מְנַקֵּס referred to judges; cf. Mek. on Ex 22:27 (102b); b. Sanh. 66a.
105 B. Sanh. 7.66a; cf. Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1010.
106 Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1010f. The word רָעָלן is the piel participle of רָעָל, “to revile or blaspheme” (see BDB 154).
108 Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1011; cf. Sifrè Deut 21.22; Sifrè Num 15.31; y. Sanh. 7.25b, 9.
are stoned are not hanged.\textsuperscript{109} Despite similarities, blasphemy was considered more severe than idolatry. Whereas an idolater despises the commandment without denying God, a blasphemer not only sets himself over God’s commandment, “he deliberately takes on God himself”\textsuperscript{110} or, as Strack-Billerbeck put it elsewhere, “he presumptuously approaches God himself, taking his recognition and honor away from him.”\textsuperscript{111} Fourth, some rabbinic sources indicate that blasphemy was primarily a verbal offense\textsuperscript{112} involving a clear and fully articulated vocalization of the divine name יְהֹוָּה.\textsuperscript{113} Fifth, after the commencement of the Christian period, the halakah reveals an increasing tendency to link the death penalty to blasphemy, which also became associated with cursing God by invoking another deity.\textsuperscript{114} Strack-Billerbeck conclude by saying that they are uncertain if this halakah was in operation during the trial of Jesus; however, if it was, Jesus’ execution was unlawful because he neither spoke the sacred name nor used the name of another deity.\textsuperscript{115} Here, Strack-Billerbeck identify a tension between the description of blasphemy in rabbinic literature and the charge of blasphemy against Jesus in the Gospels, and it is a tension that almost every subsequent scholar has felt obligated to address.

2.1.3 “You, being a man, make yourself God.”

Since Strack-Billerbeck treat blasphemy thoroughly in their section on Matt 26:64, their comments are more brief for Jn 10:33 regarding Jesus making himself to be God.\textsuperscript{116} Here they identify two ‘parallel’ comments by R. Abbahu (ca. 300). The first is a warning that anyone who says he is God is a liar which, according to Strack-Billerbeck, was a reference to Jesus.\textsuperscript{117} The second comment appears to be directed

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{109} M. Sanh 6:4; cf. y. Sanh 6. 23c, 19 for R. Eliezer’s different opinion.
\textsuperscript{110} “Er greift in bewusster Weise Gott selbst an.” Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1012; cf. b. Ker.79b; y. Sanh. 7.25b.
\textsuperscript{111} “Er tastet in Vermessenheit Gott selbst an, entzieht ihm Anerkennung u. Ehre.” Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1017.
\textsuperscript{112} Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1011; cf. b. Ker. 79b; b. Pesah 93b.
\textsuperscript{113} Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1013-4; cf. Sifra Lev. 24:10-23; m. Šebu. 4.13
\textsuperscript{114} “Durch einen Göttennamen erfolgen.” Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1018.
\textsuperscript{115} Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1018.
\textsuperscript{116} Strack-Billerbeck (1924) 2.542. The noun βλασφημία (10:33) and the verb βλασφημέω (10:36 once) each occur only once in FG.
\textsuperscript{117} Y. Ta ‘an. 2.65b, 59: R. Abba (c. 300) has said: “If a person says, ‘I am God,’ he is lying; [if he says] ‘I am the Son of Man (the Messiah),’ he will ultimately live to regret having said that; if he says, ‘I am going up to heaven,’ he will not necessarily regret that.”
\end{flushright}
against some form of trinitarian thought. Here R. Abbahu contrasts an earthly king with God; the king can be a father, son, and brother at the same time, but God, who is absolute, has no such counterparts. Lastly, Stack-Billerbeck cite *Ex. Rab.* 8 (73a), which identifies four “wicked people” (*Frevler*) who made themselves to be God—Hiram (*Ezek* 28:2), Nebuchadnezzar (*Isa* 14:13), Pharaoh (*Ezek* 29:3), and Joash (*2 Chron* 24:17).

### 2.1.4 Evaluation

Although it has broad influence on NT scholarship, it is now generally regarded that Strack and Billerbeck’s *Kommentar* is methodologically flawed in several areas. A major question concerns dating: Is the rabbinic material, whose final compilations occurred long after NT documents were written, suitable for comparison to FG?

Attempts to date rabbinic material generally rely on the names of rabbis cited in specific texts as points of reference. Stemberger believes that the Tannaitic attributions are generally reliable and he is fairly confident that a chronology of the rabbis is possible on a generation-by-generation basis. Similarly, Goldberg is not only confident that the Mishnah reflects four generations of rabbis, but also argues

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118 *Ex. Rab.* 29 (88b).

119 Rather sarcastically, Neill and N.T. Wright (1988) 292 write, “In the dark days before Strack-Billerbeck we referred to rabbinic matters cautiously, if at all; in this bright post-Strack-Billerbeck epoch, we are all rabbinic experts, though at second hand.”

120 Strack-Billerbeck received a devastating critique by Sandmel (1962) 1-13, esp. 8-11. According to Sandmel, Strack-Billerbeck committed four basic errors: (a) They create the impression that the NT was influenced by rabbinic literature, some of which dates to the fifth century. (b) They confuse the citation of selected passages with a thorough understanding of the intent, tone, and import of the literature. (c) They confuse quantity with quality by piling up alleged rabbinic parallels that lends a tone of authority but may actually obscure what should be seen. (d) They fail to exhibit scholarly impartiality and thereby “manage to demonstrate that what Jesus said was finer and better” than rabbis who seem to say the same thing. In a similar vein, E. P. Sanders (1977) 42 is critical of how Billerbeck has “more than any other passed on Weber’s soteriological scheme [that salvation in Judaism was a matter of gaining merit through good works and keeping the law] to the present generation” and thereby “distorted the clear meaning of a text or has prejudiced a question by his selections.”


122 Stemberger (1996) claims that we can discern five generations of Tannaim and seven of Amoraim, but gives specific dates only for the second generation (c. 90-130 CE) and the third generation (c. 130-160 CE) of Tannaites. Similarly, Danby (1933) 799-800 lists six generations of the Tannaim from c. 10 to 240 CE.
"the Mishnah can be properly understood and interpreted only when the relationship between each layer remains clearly recognizable." The optimism of Stemberger and Goldberg is contrasted with the pessimism of Neusner, who has given up trying to date rabbinic sayings. The decisive problem, as Neusner puts it, "is that we cannot demonstrate, and therefore cannot take as fact, that what is attributed to a given sage really was said by him." Hence, Neusner has decided that the only course of action is to set forth the sequence document by document and the only firm and factual date that can be assigned to material in a document is the time of its final redaction. Admirably, Neusner tries to avoid overstating facts and offering misleading dates. However, his recent emphasis on the final compilations without distinguishing the multi-layered traditions that have contributed to the final documents can itself be misleading; his positivistic approach leads him to unwarranted skepticism about some rabbinic traditions that can be traced to a time roughly contemporaneous with late first-century and early-second century Christianity. Therefore, I will follow the approach of Stemberger and Goldberg and accept an attribution of a particular Tanna as reliable, unless there is reason to reject it.

Some of the citations by Strack-Billerbeck, therefore, deserve further investigation. Sayings regarding blasphemy attributed to early Tannaim can be compared to what is presented in FG, since the Tannaim flourished between the time of the fall of

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125 Neusner (1994) 13 presents two sequences. He lists (a) the Mishnah as the earliest, (b) then the Tosefta, (c) the Yerushalmi, and (d) finally the Bavli. For the midrashim, he lists (a) the Sifra and the two Sifres, (b) then Leviticus Rabbah, Pesiqta deRab Kahana, and Pesiqta Rabbati, and (c) finally Ruth Rabbah, Esther Rabbah Part One, Lamentations Rabbah, and Song of Songs Rabbah. He assigns the Sifra and the two Sifres as post-Mishnah.
126 Neusner (1994) 17.
127 Neusner maintains that there are "no tests of validation or falsification of attributions" (1994, 15) and "what we cannot show we do not know" (1994, 16). This insistence on "strong verification" seems to echo the tenets of logical positivism, which asserts that "a knows the meaning of p if-and-only-if a knows how to verify p," see Dancy (1985) 87. To insist that a claim is meaningful if-and-only-if it is conclusively verifiable imposes unrealistic limitations. Many statements cannot be conclusively verified, including most historical testimony (e.g., "R. Akiba said: It is sacred"), most of our everyday statements (e.g., "Yesterday I had tea"), and even Neusner's own assertion ("What we cannot show we do not know"). Thus, Neusner's claim is ultimately self-defeating and his skepticism cannot be sustained.
128 Neusner (1994) 15 gives several helpful criteria for rejecting an attribution, such as when the rabbinic literature inconsistently assigns the same saying to different rabbis and when contradictory statements are assigned to the same rabbi.
Jerusalem (70 C.E.) and the compilation of the Mishnah (ca. 200 C.E.)\textsuperscript{129} and this overlaps with, or at least comes close to, a late first-century dating of FG. The Tannaitic literature to consider would be the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Tannaitic midrashim (Mek. R. Ishmael, Sifra on Leviticus, Sifré on Numbers and Sifré on Deuteronomy).\textsuperscript{130} This would rule out, however, all the material cited by Strack-Billerbeck in their treatment of Jn 10:33 and a large portion of the sayings cited in connection to Matt 26:65.

2.2 A. E. Harvey (1976)

2.2.1 The trials of Jesus

Harvey is the only scholar who has written a monograph that directly addresses the issue of blasphemy in FG.\textsuperscript{131} His sustained argument is that “it is possible to understand the Fourth Gospel as a presentation of the claims of Jesus in the form of an extended trial.”\textsuperscript{132} FG appears to be cast in the form of a trial reflecting a ribh-pattern, a literary genre that presents issues in the form of a lawsuit, which can be observed in certain OT passages.\textsuperscript{133} Under OT law, formal courts were not always necessary to bring an accused person to justice. Whenever three competent persons were available to hear and judge a case, an impromptu trial could convene.\textsuperscript{134} Similarly, FG portrays Jesus engaged in a number of conflicts or, as it were, impromptu trials where he defends himself against the charges of either Sabbath breaking or blasphemy.\textsuperscript{135} Harvey finds five instances where Jesus is on trial for blasphemy, with four of the five reflecting the same three-fold pattern: blasphemous

\textsuperscript{129}We are persuaded by E. P. Sanders (1977) 60 who accepts the Tannaitic literature as an accurate account of the rabbinic discussions from 70-200 C.E.

\textsuperscript{130}Cf. E. P. Sanders (1977) 59-60.

\textsuperscript{131}In addition to Harvey’s monograph, the only work specifically on blasphemy in FG is O’Neill (1995a) 50-61; cf. § 2.5. There are a number of works that are seemingly concerned with blasphemy in FG, but are generally less focused on blasphemy itself and more concerned with, for example, the exegetical puzzle that presents itself with the citation of Psa 82 in Jn 10:34; e.g., Menken (1996) 367-93, Schuchard (1992) 59-70, VanderKam (1990) 203-214, W. G. Phillips (1989) 405-19.


\textsuperscript{133}Harvey (1976) 16-17, esp. n. 30; cf. Deut 32, Isa 1, Jer 2, Mic 6, Psa 50, and Job.


\textsuperscript{135}Harvey (1976) 51 highlights the trial-like nature of Johannine conflicts by arguing that Jesus was, in fact, "prosecuted" (\textsuperscript{8}\textit{προσκαλε\textsuperscript{5}το\textsuperscript{6}ν}) in Jn 5:16.
words by Jesus, an attempt to seize or punish him, an escape by Jesus.\textsuperscript{136} Jesus not only defends himself, he also comes to make a claim as God’s Agent (= God’s Son), which is also challenged as blasphemous.\textsuperscript{137}

However, Harvey, like others, notes that there is an inconsistency between what FG understands as blasphemy—Jesus’ claim to be God’s Agent or Son—and “the only definition known to us of the offence of blasphemy (M. Sanh. 7.5) [which] makes it clear that ... it was necessary for the blasphemer to have pronounced the Divine Name.”\textsuperscript{138} This rabbinic definition is based on a specific interpretation of Lev 24:15-16:

\begin{quote}
15b Whoever cursed God, shall bear his sin.
16 He who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death.\textsuperscript{139}
\end{quote}

The two verses may have originally referred to the same offense.\textsuperscript{140} However, the rabbis distinguished the two. The first clause referred to using abusive language against God, which God himself would punish.\textsuperscript{141} The second referred to a different offense—vocalizing the Name or “naming the Name” (LXX Lev 24:16)—that of blasphemy itself, which required people to execute the offender by stoning.\textsuperscript{142} The rabbinic interpretation, however, was by no means the only one. The writings of Josephus and Philo show that blasphemy against God could be more broadly understood and that blasphemy need not entail vocalization of the Name.\textsuperscript{143} Thus, Harvey believes that FG’s understanding of blasphemy is historically plausible.

\subsection*{2.2.2 The trials of early Christians}

Harvey, like Martyn, recognizes that “the Gospel is written on two levels at once.”\textsuperscript{144} Harvey argues that the disciples (at the second level) continue to experience the trial of Jesus (at the first level) whenever “Jesus’ claim to be Son of God and Messiah is

\textsuperscript{136} Jn 5:16-18; 7:28-30; 8:19 (seems to be an exception); 8:59; 10:30-38; Harvey (1976) 51-3 and 58-9.
\textsuperscript{138} Harvey (1976) 77.
\textsuperscript{139} Harvey’s translation (1976) 77.
\textsuperscript{140} Harvey (1976) 77.
\textsuperscript{141} B. Ker 7b.
\textsuperscript{142} b. Sanh. 7.5
\textsuperscript{143} Harvey (1976) 78-80.
\textsuperscript{144} Harvey (1976) 82; cf. Martyn (1979).
denied by the enemies of the Christian community."\(^{145}\) The advocacy of the *paraclete* on behalf of the community (14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15) as well as the commission of the disciples as *agents* of the Son (13:16, 20; 20:23) is evidence that *Jesus' trial continues in the life of his disciples*. It follows that "any particular occasion on which a disciple is actually brought to trial is only an instance and continuation of that eternal 'trial' in which, first Jesus, and then his followers, are inevitably involved before the judgment of the world."\(^{146}\)

### 2.2.3 Evaluation

Rightly, Harvey places the issue of blasphemy at the center of the Johannine agenda. Set within the ebb and flow of the extended trial narrative, the charge of blasphemy is the counter claim, or flip side, to Jesus' claim to be God's Agent, the Son and the Messiah. The christological claim and the counter claim of blasphemy are inseparably fused in FG. One illuminates the other. No one has provided a clearer vision of this than Harvey. What he fails to provide, however, is an adequate definition or description of blasphemy based on early Jewish literature. Several times he simply assumes that a false claim to speak or act for God is blasphemous.\(^{147}\) Why it is blasphemous is not explained. In his treatment of Philo and Josephus, he never answers his own question of "what did this capital offence of blaspheming consist of?"\(^{148}\) except for a brief footnote to Derrett where the Greek *blasphēmia* is said to represent the Hebrew *yēkahel*—"any utterance diminishing the honour of God."\(^{149}\)

While Harvey takes pains to show that FG's conception of blasphemy need not entail vocalizing the Name, he neglects to demonstrate what precisely was blasphemous in FG. Part II of this thesis seeks to address that neglected factor.

In addition, Harvey persuasively argues that at one level the long, drawn-out trial of Jesus, in which the FG was cast, illuminates the life of early Christians at a second level. The extended trial of Jesus functions analogically: Just as Jesus is God's Agent and is put on trial for claiming to be God's Son, so also Jesus' disciples are Jesus'

\(^{145}\) Harvey (1976) 112-21, esp. 113.

\(^{146}\) Harvey (1976) 115.

\(^{147}\) Harvey (1976) 83.

\(^{148}\) Harvey (1976) 79.

agents and must endure prosecution for their christological confessions. Although Harvey states that early Christians expected to appear on trial for their faith, he never develops what charges they might have faced nor how that might have influenced early Christian self-understanding and the inevitable parting of the ways between Jews and Christians. Nevertheless, and crucially, Harvey’s analogy suggests that early Christians faced the charge of blasphemy. On what grounds early Christians could have been charged with blasphemy will be discussed in Part III of this thesis.

2.3 E. P. Sanders (1985, 1990, and 1993)

Although E. P. Sanders does not provide a monograph on blasphemy, three of his works should be considered here. Not only does he argue that a correct view of blasphemy is essential for an accurate portrait of the historical Jesus, significant in itself, but he also raises critical issues about what constitutes blasphemy and whose experiences of blasphemy—Jesus’ or early Christians’—are reflected in the Gospel accounts.

2.3.1 The cause of Jesus’ death

In Jesus and Judaism (1985), Sanders presents an analysis of Jesus’ intention, his relationship to Judaism, and the causes of his death. The Historical Figure of Jesus (1993) offers a similar, but broader portrait of Jesus, whereas Jewish Law From Jesus to the Mishnah (1990) buttresses his earlier position on Jesus’ relation to the law, which includes a section on blasphemy.

When dealing with Jesus’ death, Sanders argues that there are two firm facts: “Jesus was executed by Romans as a would-be ‘king of the Jews’ and his disciples subsequently formed a messianic community which was not based on the hope of military victory.” The difficulty lies in explaining, on the one hand, why the Romans thought Jesus was enough of a threat to execute and, on the other, why his followers were not rounded up and executed also. According to Sanders, Jesus believed that God was on the verge of bringing about the long awaited restoration of

Israel and, as part of that restoration, the old Temple would be replaced with a new one. Jesus saw his own work as part of that drama and so spoke against the Temple and enacted its symbolic destruction (cf. Mk 11:12-19 and para.). This led almost immediately to Jesus' arrest and execution because it alarmed the priests who were concerned about potential rioting and other political and moral consequences. The chief priests, therefore, persuaded Pilate to execute Jesus as a troublemaker. His talk of a kingdom and the gathering he attracted was enough to convince the Romans. As far as the priests were concerned, Jesus' claim to speak for God, his healings, and his announcement that sinners would be in the kingdom\textsuperscript{152} annoyed them and cocked the gun, "but it was the temple demonstration which pulled the trigger."\textsuperscript{153} Hence, the primary conflict was between Jesus and the priests and so Jesus' followers were not summarily arrested and executed by the Romans.\textsuperscript{154}

Thus, Sanders is convinced that Jesus' demonstration in the Temple is sufficient to account for Jesus' execution but, more than that, it is also a more satisfying explanation when compared to the charge of blasphemy.\textsuperscript{155} One of Sanders' main contentions is that Jesus' disputes over the law were not substantial, including the dispute surrounding the charge of blasphemy, and so they do not provide an adequate explanation or legal basis for his death.\textsuperscript{156} This line of reasoning becomes clear in his examination of the following key accounts of blasphemy.

First, Sanders does not find the evidence for blasphemy in Mk 2:5-7 compelling.\textsuperscript{157} In this account, it is usually thought that Jesus is accused of blasphemy for forgiving sins but, according to Sanders, it is not what it seems. Since Jesus speaks in the passive voice, he is not claiming to forgive sins himself; rather, Jesus is announcing God's forgiveness. There is nothing blasphemous about such an announcement by any known Jewish law or interpretation. Nevertheless, Sanders grants that someone

\textsuperscript{152} E. P. Sanders (1985) 174-221 argues that the 'sinners' (Heb. resha'ım; Gk. hamartōloi) are not to be equated with the 'amme ha 'arets, but with "professional sinners" or "the wicked" who do not repent.

\textsuperscript{153} E. P. Sanders (1985) 305.

\textsuperscript{154} E. P. Sanders (1985) 318.

\textsuperscript{155} Sufficient and satisfying are my terms; see Sanders (1985) 296-306 and (1993) 269-73.

\textsuperscript{156} E. P. Sanders (1990) 1-96 discusses the disputes concerning Sabbath, food, purity offerings, tithes, temple tax, oaths and vows, blasphemy, worship, and fasting.
making such a pronouncement could seem arrogant, and "arrogance and great presumption before God can be considered blasphemy." Still, Sanders dismisses the charge in Mk 2:5-7 as "extremely weak" since Jesus is not portrayed as displaying the type of taunting presumption that denigrates God (e.g., LXX Ezek 35:13). Sanders suggests that the account is a retrojection of a later Christian dispute back into the early ministry of Jesus.

Second, Sanders argues that the basis for blasphemy—the use of the titles 'Messiah,' 'Son of God' or 'Son of Man' (Mk 14:61-64; Matt 26:63-66)—in the so-called 'trial narratives' is less than convincing. Even if the trial narratives did not conflict with each other, there is no evidence that using such titles, in and of themselves, constituted blasphemy. Nothing in Judaism indicates that a claim to be the 'Christ' or 'Messiah' was blasphemous. Nothing in the passage suggests that when Jesus said, "I am," it was understood to mean ani hu, God's self-identification in the Hebrew Bible, which would have been blasphemous. Nor is there anything particularly blasphemous about the use of the term 'son of God,' which any Jew could claim. On this point, however, Sanders concedes that it could have been blasphemous "if Jesus claimed to be God's special son, and if Jesus was regarded as a false spokesman, God would be implicitly denigrated."

Although Sanders rejects the idea that Jesus used filial-language in this way, he states that Christians may have used the term Son in an exalted way and, in turn, this may have provoked the charge of blasphemy against Christians.

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159 E. P. Sanders (1990) 63.
162 E. P. Sanders (1993) 269 thinks that the trial narratives are accurate in general, but conflict in detail and therefore do not allow for an accurate reconstruction of specifics.
163 E. P. Sanders (1985) 298. In his later work, Sanders (1993) 270 argues that it looks like the product of Christian creativity and that "some early Christians wanted to attribute his death to confessing the christology of the church."
164 E. P. Sanders (1990) 64.
166 E. P. Sanders (1990) 64, his emphasis.
Jesus was thought to be the Messiah and the Son of God in some very special way. Thus Christians might have been accused by Jews of blasphemy. The accusation 'blasphemy' is a reasonable Jewish response to Christian thought about Jesus.167

Finally, Sanders states that "blasphemy is a conceivable response to the Son of man saying" (Mk 14:62), though it would require that the high priest interpret it in a way that denigrated God.168 However, he insists that blasphemy is not obvious from simply reading the passage and so even the 'Son of Man' text must be ruled as "not probable."169

In three of his monographs, Sanders consistently argues that it was Jesus' demonstration in the Temple led to his execution and not the charge of blasphemy as depicted by the Gospels. In the trial narratives, the evangelists tend to minimize the witnesses' testimony that Jesus threatened the Temple (Mk 14:57-59; Mt 59-61)170 because they wanted Jesus to be condemned for making a christological confession.171

2.3.2 Evaluation

When Sanders argues that Jesus' demonstration in the Temple pulled the 'trigger' that resulted in his execution—since it was the last public event before his life was terminated—he employs the fallacy argument known as post hoc, ergo propter hoc, "after this, therefore because this."172 As such, his argument is possible, but not compelling. Nevertheless, once Sanders deems that the Temple demonstration is a sufficient cause for the death of Jesus, he takes pains to show the improbability of the charge of blasphemy. However, at almost every turn, Sanders comments that if certain circumstances had been present, if a certain attitude had been displayed, if the high priest had interpreted Jesus in this way, then blasphemy would be "conceivable." Thus, Sanders is inconsistent. He acknowledges that blasphemy

167 E. P. Sanders (1990) 64.
170 E. P. Sanders (1985) 301 states Jesus' threat to the Temple was "swept under the rug by Matthew and Mark, and omitted by Luke." Even though Mark indicates that it was the decisive action in the plot to kill Jesus (Mk 11:18), it resulted in confused testimony (Matt 26:59-61; Mk 14:57-59), misunderstanding (Jn 2:19-21) or was reinterpreted as a prediction (Mk 13:2).
172 E. P. Sanders (1985) 302 recognizes this difficulty, but ignores it.
involves certain attitudes (such as arrogance, great presumption, or taunting God) or certain interpretations (such as the high priest's), yet he will only acknowledge the existence of blasphemy on the basis of certain textual artifacts (such as titles) which, in and of themselves, do not disclose attitudes or interpretations. Furthermore, it is ironic that after some effort to brush blasphemy out of the picture as a cause of Jesus' death, he paints it back in when he says that "attacking the temple, even by a minor symbolic gesture, might have been seen as denigrating and thus blaspheming God."\textsuperscript{173}

Sanders' treatment raises the question of where is blasphemy to be found? Is it found in the utterance of certain words, phrases, or titles? Or is it found in the unique configuration of certain verbal expressions, discourse circumstances, intentionality, and nuances of speech and gesture as Sanders recognizes, but seems to ignore? The question of where blasphemy is found will be addressed in Part II.

Sanders also raises the question of whether Christians themselves, in the late first-century, were being accused of blasphemy. He assumes that they probably were, if they were using the christological confessions expressed by the evangelists. However, he provides no evidence or argumentation and leaves his insightful observation undeveloped. The question of whether Christians—specifically those who read, embraced, and propagated the theology of FG—were accused of blasphemy will be addressed in Part III.

2.4 Raymond Brown (1994)

As part of his treatise on The Death of the Messiah, Brown presents a four-part examination of the historicity of the Sanhedrin proceedings against Jesus and follows that with an analysis of the main charge against Jesus, the charge of blasphemy.\textsuperscript{174} We will review and comment on his discussions dealing with the nature of blasphemy, the Sanhedrin judgment, and the charge of blasphemy.

\textsuperscript{173} E. P. Sanders (1990) 67 and also see (1985) 298.

\textsuperscript{174} Brown (1993) 1.520-47.
2.4.1 The nature of blasphemy

Brown asks what constituted blasphemy in the first century and, in particular, whether blasphemy entailed saying the divine name. He argues that key OT texts (like Lev. 24:16 and Num 15:30) are ambiguous and that later rabbinic sources, while attempting to clarify what constituted blasphemy, were not in agreement. Some rabbinic sources required an inappropriate vocalization of the divine name (m. Sanh. 7.5), while others argue that no vocalization was necessary (t. Sanh. 1.2, Sifra Deut 21:22 [#221], b. Sanh. 56a). In contrast, texts written in Greek by Jews are much clearer. On the basis of the LXX, Philo, and Josephus, Brown observes that "naming the Name" is distinguished from instances when blasphēm-root words are used. When blasphēm-root words are used of God, it involved insulting or demeaning God in word or deed. Hence, Brown argues that there is no reason to assume that first-century readers of the Gospels would have thought that the charge of blasphemy would have meant that Jesus “named the Name.” However, Brown may be premature in insisting that we can now drop the question of whether Jesus mentioned YHWH. While he has demonstrated that in the Greek pre-Gospel traditions blasphēmein did not refer to naming the Name, he has not dealt with Hebrew or Aramaic traditions.

Next, Brown argues that, from the perspective of the evangelists, Jesus was accused of blasphemy on the basis of three types of claims: (a) claims to be the Son of God or an exalted Son of Man, (b) claims to destroy the Temple or the holy place, and (c) claims to change the Mosaic Law. Each of these provoke an accusation of blasphemy against Jesus and the early Christians (at least this is the perception of the evangelists). For each of these, there are corresponding counter-charges of blasphemy against non-believing Jews. What we see is "two separate communities, each

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175 The clearest example is Philo’s insistence that blasphemy is worse than uttering God’s name unseasonably; see De vita Moses 2:38 (#206); cf. De decalogo 19 (#93).
180 Brown (1993) 524-7 identifies the blasphemous mocking of Jesus (Lk 22:64), the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Mk 3:29), the blasphemous ridicule of Jesus for his claim about the Temple (Mk 15:29), and the Christian judgment that the destruction of the Temple was God’s judgment on unbelieving Jews.
passionate for the honor of the God of Israel and each seeing the other as blaspheming because of the way they understood Jesus.”\footnote{Brown (1993) 527.} Despite minor differences among the Gospel accounts, Brown thinks that they “give almost the same picture of the charge of blasphemy against Jesus.”\footnote{Brown (1993) 526.} They tell their readers that non-believing Jews thought what Christians proclaimed about Jesus was blasphemous—Christians insulted God—because they elevated Jesus and claimed for him what belonged to God alone.

2.4.2 The Sanhedrin judgment

There is some dispute regarding whether the “Jewish trial narratives” in the Gospels portray a condemnation of Jesus. Some argue that, at most, the Sanhedrin is shown rendering a legal opinion, but not a condemnation of Jesus. For example, Luke’s account fails to mention the charge of blasphemy and Matthew’s does not use the verb katakrinein. Rightly, Brown is not convinced. There is convincing evidence that what the evangelists intended to depict (which he distinguishes from what happened historically\footnote{Brown (1993) 529 makes this distinction without elaboration.}) was the Jewish authorities’ passing of the death sentence on Jesus, not merely rendering an opinion. The evangelists’ description of the summoning of the Sanhedrin, the calling of witnesses, getting an admission from Jesus, tearing garments, and using the phrase enochos thanatou in Mt 26:66 and Mk 14:64,\footnote{Brown (1993) 529 translates enochos thanatou as “guilty, to be punished by death.”} indicate that more was at stake than rendering an opinion. “Thus, in the last third of the century the evangelists, who knew perfectly well that the Romans sentenced and crucified Jesus, were sharing with their readers the view that the Jewish Sanhedrin also decided on Jesus’ death.”\footnote{Brown (1993) 530.}

2.4.3 The charge of blasphemy

Brown deals with three main objections to or problems with the historicity of the charge of blasphemy. The first alleged problem stems from Lev 24:16, which specifies stoning for blasphemers, not crucifixion. Because Jesus was crucified or “hung,” he could not have been convicted of blasphemy, or so the argument goes. In
response, Brown shows that the “no stoning, no blasphemy” argument is very weak. A major factor to consider is that Jesus, unlike Stephen (Acts 6:11, 14), was turned over to the Romans who determined the type of execution. Beyond that, Brown demonstrates that even among Jews there was a range of death penalties, including hanging, that could be invoked for blasphemy and similar crimes (e.g., 11 Q Temple 64:7-13; cf. Deut. 21:22-23).

Another objection to the historicity of the blasphemy charge is that nothing raised about Jesus during the trial was itself blasphemous. Brown, as it were, answers a series of questions to this objection. Would a claim to be the Messiah have been viewed as blasphemous? No. There is “no real evidence” that such a claim would have been seen as blasphemous. In fact, Brown does not believe that Jesus ever used the title for himself, publicly or privately. What about a claim to be the Son of God? No. It is unlikely that either Jesus or his followers applied the title to him during his lifetime. Would a claim to be the Son of Man have provoked a charge of blasphemy? Possibly. Brown writes, “Of the three Marcan titles mentioned at the trial, in my judgment only this one is favored by the evidence as having been used by Jesus himself in his lifetime.” If this title was understood in light of the exaltation passages in the OT (Ps 110; Dan 7:14; Isa 14:13-14; etc.), then Brown believes that it is possible that Jesus’ use of it could have been considered blasphemous. What about the allegation that Jesus threatened the Temple? Possibly. The Gospel tradition does associate Jesus with criticism of the Temple (Mt 12:6, 8; 26:65; Mk 15:29; 11:48; Acts 6:11, 13-14), exalting himself above the Temple (Mt 12:6, 8), and symbolically cleansing it and speaking prophetically about its destruction (Mk 11:2-19 and para.). Brown cites about ten instances outside the Gospels where criticism of the Temple or threats to it brought violent reactions, not only by the Jews but sometimes by the Romans. Cautiously, Brown comments that none of the instances he cites brought the charge of blasphemy. Is it possible that Jesus was accused of blasphemy for

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190 However, he overlooks a number of texts that link various threats to the Temple with blasphemy (see chapter 16).
being a false prophet? In a word, yes. Brown thinks that the evidence from the gospels is mixed; the evangelists show others acknowledging Jesus as a/the prophet, but it is less clear whether Jesus assigned himself that role. Nevertheless, in light of the warning against false prophets in Deut 13:2-6 and 18:20-22 and in conjunction with many examples of would-be prophets during Jesus’ century (but no would-be Messiahs, Sons of God, or Sons of Man), Brown believes that the main blasphemous charge against Jesus was that he was a false prophet, even though the evidence falls short of establishing it.191

A third issue regarding the historicity of the charge of blasphemy concerns Jesus’ ministry as a whole. In an insightful move, Brown goes beyond the trial narrative, where the official charge is heard. He comments that the trial “is phrased in light of later Christian experience,” couched in the confessional language of christological titles, so that in the trial “we are hearing how Christians in the last third of the 1st cent. understood Jewish adversaries who considered Christian claims about Jesus to be blasphemous.”192 In the eyes of the Christians, their Jewish opponents thought that the exaltation of Jesus as Messiah, Son of God, and Son of Man was blasphemous. Brown surmises that if we want to know whether Jesus was considered a blasphemer during his lifetime, we have to go beyond the trial narratives. He lists (with little comment) nine things that Jesus said or did that could have been considered religiously arrogant or presumptuous and therefore blasphemous.193 Jesus’ provocations included:

- teaching with an authoritative “Amen,”
- claiming to forgive sins,
- doing extraordinary deeds which he claimed manifested God’s Kingdom,
- telling people that they would be judged by how they reacted to him,
- claiming authority over the Law,
- demonstrating criticism of Temple customs,
- assuming his authority depended on who he was,
- addressing God with the familiar “Abba,”
- speaking of himself as the son of God

191 Brown (1993) 541-44. However, N.T. Wright (1996) 145-474 presents good evidence and argumentation that Jesus fits “the profile of a prophet.”
2.4.4 Evaluation

Brown’s study is significant for at least three reasons. First, he is sensitive to the possibility that the post-70s experience of Christians vividly colored their portrayal of Jesus’ pre-30s trial and the charge of blasphemy. Second, his understanding of blasphemy—an arrogant claim to have the status or privileges that belong to God alone and so insult God—is much broader than the definitions of blasphemy culled from OT and rabbinic juridical texts. This allows him to assert that late first century Christians themselves could have been accused of blasphemy for their arrogant and unabashed exaltation of Jesus. Third, Brown broadens the issue of blasphemy beyond the motifs usually associated with Jesus at the trial. Although he does not elaborate, Brown lists non-trial traditions that could have provoked a charge of blasphemy by unbelieving Jews. Part III of this thesis will investigate several motifs developed by FG that could have provoked the charge of blasphemy against Johannine Christians.

2.5 John O’Neill (1995)

2.5.1 Jesus’ claim to be Messiah

In an article examining the issue of blasphemy in Jn 5:17-18, O’Neill asks whether the Jews in this text thought Jesus was challenging monotheism. He concludes, “there is no good evidence in John’s Gospel itself that Jesus’ opponents thought that he was infringing [sic. on] Jewish monotheism.” O’Neill’s argument is unique and, on the surface, appears to have some force. First, he argues that Jesus claims to be the Messiah, a special Son of the Father, when he calls God, my Father in Jn 5:17. Second, he argues that, in accord with 2 Sam 7:14 and Psalm 2 (cf. 4Q 246 and 1Qsa 2.11), the Son of God was a contemporary title synonymous with Messiah. The use of these titles was not blasphemous in itself, rather it was Jesus’ self-acclaim to be God’s Messiah that brought the charge in Jn 5:18. According to O’Neill, “no human

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194 This is my paraphrase of Brown’s position (1993) 523, 531, and 547.
195 E.g., Ex. 22:28; m. Sanh 7:5.
196 This strengthens his case that Jesus was probably accused of blasphemy without relying on the trial narratives, which show later Christian influences.
197 By "Johannine Christians" I mean those who wrote, preserved, and promoted FG in the late first century.
being was allowed to say that he was himself the Messiah." To the identify the Messiah was God's prerogative alone, and anyone who made such a claim was "making himself equal with God" and thereby blaspheming (Jn 5:18). That Jesus was accused of blasphemy because of some sort of atrocious boast of self-assertion comes to the fore in Jn 19:7 and 19:21. Both verses depict the Jews accusing Jesus of claiming to be the Son of God (19:7) and the king of the Jews (19:21). Thus, according to O'Neill, Jesus is charged with blasphemy, not for making himself equal to God in all respects, but in only one respect, that of claiming to be the Messiah.

To further support this interpretation, O'Neill turns to Jn 10:34-36 and contends that it should be read in light of Psa 82 and 11QMelch. When all three texts are compared—and their redaction taken into consideration—two outcomes follow: (a) Jn 10:34 becomes a scriptural argument that the Messiah could be called God which, rather surprisingly, O'Neill says, "did not originally bear on the matter in hand, Jesus' defense against the charge of blasphemy."

(b) Jn 10:36 is "an accurate statement of what Jesus was tried for," that is, that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, the Messiah.

For O'Neill, the issue of blasphemy in FG does not concern an infringement on monotheism—speaking about the Messiah as God, as O'Neill argues that Jn 33:34 and 11QMelch do, assumes a living Jewish tradition that does not threaten the belief that God is one. Rather, the issue of blasphemy in FG concerns an infringement on God's prerogative to identify the Messiah, which was daringly and blasphemously usurped by Jesus when he identified himself as such.

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199 O'Neill (1995a) 54-5.
200 In another work, O'Neill (1995b) 48, 53 states that Jesus' self-acclaim was a capital crime, because it violated the warning against false prophecy in Deut 13:5 (cf. m Sanh 11:5).
201 O'Neill (1995a) 57 is less than convincing when he surgically removes Jn 10:35a because it is a "senseless gloss." Nor is he convincing when he follows late manuscript tradition (Tatian, Old Latin, a b ff1 l r and 472) and reads 10:36 as "he blasphemes" and "he said," rather than "you blaspheme" and "I said."
202 O'Neill (1995a) 57.
203 O'Neill (1995a) 58.
2.5.2 Evaluation

One of O’Neill’s main points should be accepted: Jesus was accused of blasphemy on the basis of what appeared to be some sort of self-acclaim. Although O’Neill only cites a few texts to support this (Jn 5:18; 19:7, 21) other texts may be added (Jn 5:19, 30; 8:28b-c, 53; 10:33; 19:7), pointing to a cluster of passages that form what may be called a self-assertion or self-exaltation theme in FG.

What Jesus was asserting or claiming for himself, however, is less clear. O’Neill falls short of supplying an answer, since he adduces no evidence for his crucial statement that “no human being was allowed to say that he was himself the Messiah.” O’Neill rather off-handedly refers to Matt 24:36 and Mk 13:32, but these verses concern the time of the coming of the Son of Man, not who has the right to identify the Messiah. To be fair, in another work, O’Neill cites examples from Josephus where messianic claimants do not directly say they are the Messiah. However, this does not help, since it is an argument from silence and since the claimants mentioned by Josephus actually take actions that indicate their messianic status, from putting on a crown to wearing royal robes to accepting the title of king.204 While O’Neill’s particular argument about Jesus’ messianic claim fails, the question of whether a messianic claim, under certain circumstances, could be seen as blasphemous is still open.

Lastly, O’Neill neglects to acknowledge the debate regarding the translation and interpretation of 4Q246 and 1QSa 2.11, and simply assumes that they indicate that the Son of God was synonymous with the Messiah.205 On the other hand, O’Neill’s citation of 11 QMelch regarding the identification of a Messiah-like figure as God, calls into question the modern notion that monotheism concerns numerical oneness. However, it is another thing to say, as O’Neill does, that Jn 10:34 must be read in the

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204 O’Neill (1995b) 42-54.
205 O’Neill (1995a) 53. First, which Hebrew word is represented in 1QSa 2.11 is debated. If it is yolid, then the phrase is “when God engenders (the Priest-) Messiah” (Vermes) or “when God begets the Messiah” (Garcia-Martinez). If the word is yitgalleh, then the phrase becomes “God reveals the Messiah” (Puech). See Vermes (1997) 159; Garcia-Martinez (1996) 127; Puech (1994) 361. Second, to whom the son of God refers in 4Q 246 is contended. Does it refer to a Seleucid ruler, Alexander Balas (Milik), to a Jewish, Hasmonaean, King (Fitzmyer) to an apocalyptic Antichrist figure (Flusser), to an angelic figure like Michael (Garcia-Martinez), or to historico-apocalyptic sovereign who proclaims himself and demands to be worshiped (Vermes)? See Vermes (1997) 576-7.
light of 11QMelch and that the Johannine Jesus did not threaten monotheism without further evidence from FG itself.

2.6 Darrell L. Bock (1998 and 2000)

2.6.1 The first major study of blasphemy

Bock provides the first major study on the meaning, scope, and significance of blasphemy in early Judaism and, along with a study on exalted figures, uses it to assess the historicity of the trial (Bock prefers examination) of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel. 206 Since the focus of his book overlaps significantly the interest of this thesis, we will interact with Bock throughout the thesis. Nevertheless, a brief overview of Bock’s work is warranted here.

Bock’s work is divided into four parts. In Part I, Bock reviews current scholarship that pertains to blasphemy and concludes by noting that Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13, which focus on exalted figures, have been repeatedly viewed as key texts for understanding the issue of blasphemy in the examination or trial of Jesus.

Part II provides the most thorough analysis on blasphemy in early Judaism to date. Bock selects more than 100 texts and organizes them into eleven categories: Hebrew Scriptures, Qumran, the Septuagint, the Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, Philo, the Mishnah and Tosefta, the Targums, the Midrashim, the Palestinian Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud and Aboth de Rabbi Nathan. Each section begins by identifying key terminology that belong to the semantic field of blasphemy for that particular category. So, for example, the terms בָּרְךָ, לִשְׁפָּט, קְלִלָה, קלָלָה, and קְלֵלָה are identified as key terms for the Hebrew Scriptures and קָלָלָה, קָלָלָה, and קָלָלָה are identified as key terms for Qumran literature. Each section also ends with a brief summary of his findings. Bock’s conclusion, for which he provides ample evidence, is that blasphemy may be verbal or non-verbal 207 and primarily involves insulting or

206 The content and pagination of Bock (1998), published with Mohr Siebeck, is identical with Bock (2000), published with Baker. Also see the earlier article by Bock (1994) 181-91.

207 Bock (1998) 35, 44-46, 49-50 argues that the verbal aspect is primary (e.g., Ex 22:27; 1QS4.11; 1QS7.1), but there is evidence for non-verbal blasphemy in the form of attitudes and actions (e.g., CD 5.12; 1 Mace 2:6; 2 Macc 8:4, 9:28, 15:24)
dishonoring God and, secondarily, insulting or dishonoring God's people, leaders, Temple, or law.

Part III investigates early Jewish perceptions regarding exaltation and heavenly access to God which, together with Part II, become a two-pronged approach for discussing the accusation of blasphemy in Mark's examination of Jesus. Bock argues that the charge of blasphemy is significant for both Mark's narrative as a whole and for his pastoral purposes. On the narrative level, the combination of Mk 2:7 and 3:29 sets up a "battle of blasphemies" that reaches a climax in the examination narrative with a charge of blasphemy against Jesus (14:64) and a counter-charge of blasphemy against onlookers insulting Jesus (15:29). The pastoral function was to encourage readers to have confidence in their own confessions of Jesus since Jesus is exonerated by the implied resurrection (Mk 16:6-7). Then, in concord with Otto Betz, Bock argues that the Markan examination scene should be viewed as a "preliminary hearing" and should not be judged by the standards of a formal trial. Third, in response to those who argue that it is hard to imagine that the disciples got information about the examination of Jesus, since they were not present, Bock contends that a chain of information about the examination could have reached the disciples and, what is more, it is hard to imagine that the Jewish position on Jesus was kept secret and never made public. Lastly, Bock argues that the charge of blasphemy against Jesus was not based on misusing the Name, but on his reply that alluded to Ps 110:1 ("sitting at God's right hand") and Dan 7:13 ("they will see the

208 Bock (1998) 188. Unfortunately, Bock does not elaborate on how the "battle of blasphemies" may have addressed pastoral needs of Mark's audience. However, Anderson (1986) 107-25 argues that the tit-for-tat allegations of blasphemy functioned in an environment where Christians were facing trials themselves. The accusation of blasphemy against Jesus (Mk 2:7, 14:64) was "Mark's characterization of Jewish anti-Christian polemic" (118) and the unpardonable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mk 3:29) was the Christian counter-charge against non-believing Jews (109).


210 Contra Lohse (1973) 97-7 and Reinbold (1994) 252, Bock (1998) 190-5 argues that Mk 14:53-65 should be viewed as a preliminary hearing for four reasons: (a) the statement ἐνεχειρεν ἢν θεοντου in Mk 14:64 functions as an opinion to pass on to Rome, not a formal legal verdict; (b) the weakness of the temple charge in Mk 14:55-59; (c) the lack of a defense; and (d) earlier efforts to trap Jesus (e.g., Mk 12:12-13) were attempts to gather evidence to convince Rome that Jesus was a political threat.

211 E.g., E. P. Sanders (1985) 298.


Son of Man coming on the clouds"). On the one hand, the allusions functioned as a self-claim to share in God's authority and to act as God's eschatological judge, both of which would have been viewed by the Jewish leadership as false and an arrogant affront to God. On the other hand, the allusions might have recalled martyrdom language that indicated that the unrighteous (the Jewish leadership accusing Jesus) will see the vindication of the righteous (Jesus). This would have been seen as an attack on the divinely appointed leadership of Israel, a violation of Ex 22:28, and thus blasphemous.

2.6.2 Evaluation

Bock provides a plausible historical reading of the Markan Jewish examination of Jesus by carefully and thoughtfully engaging both the evidence and alternative opinions at every step. Furthermore, Bock should be praised for providing the first major study on blasphemy that, on the whole, is both adept and thorough. Whereas others have largely assumed what was meant by blasphemy, Bock offers fairly comprehensive evidence and cogent rationale for his decisions. On the basis of the material that he examines, his general conclusions regarding the nature of blasphemy can hardly be disputed.

Still, some weaknesses can be detected regarding his analysis and, for our purposes, his approach fails to bring out the discourse concepts of blasphemy that are helpful for probing FG. First, Bock's survey of texts omits any analysis of NT texts that, one assumes, provide the closest comparative literature to Mark's Gospel. Surely, without analysis of some NT texts, Bock's conclusions are uncertain. In contrast, our semantic analysis of blasphemy in chapter 4 is based on a comprehensive analysis of blasphemy-related terms from the NT and other early Jewish literature. Second, when surveying Greek literature, Bock primarily focuses on texts that use βλασφημεῖν, 

215 Bock (1998) 200-6 reasons that this would have been blasphemous according to Philo's On Dreams 2.130-31 and Decalogue 61-64 as well as by midrashim, like ExodR 8.2, 15.6, 21.3
βλάσφημος, and βλασφημία, though he mentions καταλαλεῖν, παραλαλεῖν, παροδύνειν, and παροργίζειν.**218 This overlooks other Greek terminology within the same semantic domain as βλασφημέω, such as διαβάλλω, δυσφημέω, ἕκβάλλω τὸ δνομα, κακολογέω, λοιδορέω, ὀνειδίζω, and ὑβρίζω.**219 Of course, the necessity of setting boundaries for research will always invite the criticism that a piece of research is too limited, as even our own semantic analysis is limited to five groups of terms. Third, Bock has included a large analysis of texts that date well after the NT period. Analysis of texts prior to or concurrent with NT writings occupies 37 pages,**220 whereas that of post-NT texts occupies 45 pages.**221 Granted, some of the post-NT texts may contain earlier traditions, but this emphasis is hard to justify when the NT is neglected. It is possible that this apparent imbalance may have been prompted by previous scholarship (e.g., Strack-Billerbeck) that, rather anachronistically, used the broad spectrum of rabbinic literature to illuminate the trial of Jesus in the Gospels. Fourth, as we have noted, Bock provides a survey of over 100 ancient Jewish texts on blasphemy. This means that no one particular text receives more than a cursory analysis. In contrast, in chapter 4 we not only summarize our semantic analysis of blasphemy-related terminology based on nearly 300 texts, but in chapters 5-12 we also provide an in-depth analysis of seven key passages on blasphemy. Our approach provides greater depth and brings out the texture and color of early Jewish conceptuality of blasphemy suited for the examination of FG.

2.7 Dunn and Other Scholars

2.7.1 Blasphemy as the violation of monotheism

A number of scholars have argued that commitment to monotheism was a crucial element of the Jewish matrix within which to place and understand emerging Christianity.**222 This is true not only if we are to grasp the origins and significance of
early Christian belief and worship, but also if we are to understand the conflict and eventual parting of the ways between Christians and non-believing Jews. Furthermore, it is common for scholars to assert that FG’s emphasis on the divine status of the Son and the Father was perceived by some Jews to violate monotheism and thus it contributed to the parting of the ways.

In a statement that is now famous, Dunn urged, “we only let John be John if we recognize that the primary debate the fourth evangelist engaged in with the rabbis was actually a debate about monotheism.” In a more recent work, Dunn continues to argue that, from the perspective of emerging rabbinic Judaism, the claims made by Johannine Christians—that Jesus was equal with God—had gone a step too far and had abandoned the basic confession that God is one.

Dunn is not alone in holding this conviction. Others hold that the Jewish commitment to preserve monotheism was a decisive factor that separated Jews and Christians, and this schism is clearly reflected in FG. In fact, the Johannine claim for the Son’s equality and unity with the Father drew the charge of blasphemy and drew the line between Christianity and Judaism. For example, Anderson notes that the term βλασφημία occurs in relation to Jesus’ proclamation, “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30) and then states that “the Christian confession was perceived as a breach of the basic Jewish premise of monotheism.” Similarly, de Jonge writes, “It is not

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41; Harvey (1980) 154-73. In contrast, Barker (1992) and Hayman (1991) believe that early Judaism was ditheistic and not monotheistic.

223 This is the operating assumption of the collected essays by Newman, et al. (1999) x, 21-89; see also Hurtado (1998) passim; Stuckenbruck (1995) 47-204.


226 Dunn (1998a) 370.

227 Dunn (1991) 228-9. See Dunn (1998a) 420, who also writes, “It was precisely the language of preexistence and conception of incarnation in reference to Jesus which was seen by Jewish opposition as a threat to the unity of God and so as the first real breach (perceived as such) with the Jewish monotheistic axiom.”

228 de Jonge (1998) 120, 141;

229 Anderson (1986) 117; see also Sundberg (1970) 29.
surprising that outsiders interpreted as dangerous and even blasphemous the insistence of the Johannine community on the close unity between the exalted Son and the Father (as expressed in 1:18; 10:30, 38; 17:21-23).” Two of the foremost of Johannine scholars, C. K. Barrett and R. H. Lightfoot, argue that when the Jews first try to stone Jesus in 5:18, it is presumed that Jesus is being charged with blasphemy for violating monotheism and what follows in 5:19-47 is a defense of Christian monotheism. ²³⁰ Others like Segal, Martyn, and Scroggs argue that the Johannine claim for Jesus’ divinity looked like ditheism and therefore blasphemy to certain Jews, and this was the beginning or an early form of the two-power heresy vigorously condemned in later rabbinic sources. ²³¹ Lastly, scholars have noted that the repeated and extended efforts throughout FG to make clear the Son’s relationship to the Father indicates that FG was defending against the charge of violating monotheism, which was perceived as blasphemy. ²³²

2.7.2 Evaluation

Suffice to say, it is widely held that the charge of blasphemy in FG is a response to a breach of monotheism, but this claim has never been thoroughly examined. Is there any evidence that a “violation of monotheism” constituted blasphemy in early Judaism? This is a compound question because it not only involves the study of blasphemy, which is itself a complex undertaking, but also the highly debated issue of whether monotheism is itself an appropriate term for early Jewish beliefs. ²³³

2.8 Conclusions

As the preceding survey shows, contemporary scholarship has reached a general consensus that blasphemy in early Judaism entailed saying or doing something that was perceived to discredit or dishonor God. This basic understanding may be expanded to several more comments.

²³⁰ Barrett (1978) 257 approvingly quotes Lightfoot’s statement that 5:19-47 is “a defense of Christian monotheism.”
First, as the survey has indicated, scholars have argued that for an utterance or action to count as blasphemy it must be perceived to have been generated by a disdainful or contemptuous attitude toward God. Both Bock and Brown have argued that blasphemy can be expressed in both speech and action. However, as Sanders and O'Neill have observed, the use of certain terms, like christological titles, are not blasphemous in themselves, but only become such when they are uttered with arrogant or insolent intent toward God or perceived to be uttered in that manner. Even the utterance of the divine Name, which is often treated as the prototypical form of blasphemy, is not blasphemous in itself.\textsuperscript{234}

Second, as the review shows, blasphemy in early Jewish literature can be observed in a wide range of verbal and non-verbal activities, such as misusing the Name, attacking the Temple, denigrating God's leaders or people, disdainning the Torah, usurping God's prerogatives, and elevating oneself to a status equal to God. Many scholars would add breaching monotheism to this list. In addition, perhaps under the influence of Strack-Billerbeck, who put too much emphasis on Rabbinic jurisprudence, some scholars tend to limit their treatment of blasphemy by focusing on the utterance of the divine Name. However, as Bock has demonstrated, and Brown and others have intimated, blasphemy in early Judaism covered a much broader range than what is found in Rabbinic literature.\textsuperscript{235}

Third, early Jewish Christians were considered blasphemous by non-believing Jews, so comment Sanders and Brown, because their Christological confessions were perceived to insult God by elevating Jesus. This is echoed by Harvey who states that the Johannine group continued to experience the trial of Jesus whenever their claims about Jesus were denied. Apparently, these scholars come to this conclusion rather intuitively, since no evidence is offered in support.

\textsuperscript{234} In certain circumstances, vocalizing the Name was required, as when the high priest read the Aaronic blessing in the Temple.

\textsuperscript{235} Narrowing blasphemy to vocalizing the Name, as the Rabbis tended to do, may have been a more humanizing or merciful approach in that it surely would have reduced the number of blasphemous allegations.
Before proceeding to a close inspection of key Jewish texts concerned with blasphemy (chapters 5-12), this chapter addresses several issues that are assumed throughout the remainder of this thesis. First, this chapter discusses the probable historical, sociological, and literary contexts for the initial production and propagation of FG. Then, a brief discussion is provided on mirror-reading a polemical text, the legitimacy of which this thesis assumes, but not without due caution. Lastly, we present a semantic analysis of בולשפמלו and related terminology in order to provide a basic orientation to the study of blasphemy in ancient Jewish and Christian texts.

### 3.1 Historical Context: Emerging Rabbinic Judaism

#### 3.1.1 Destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.

Prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., Jewish religion was heterogeneous. There were Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, the Fourth Philosophy, Essenes, John the Baptist’s disciples, Samaritans, Thepapeutae, Zealots, Sicarii, Apocalypticists, various messianic groups, and Jews who were not in any identifiable group. Indeed, there is good evidence that late Second Temple Judaism was marked by factionalism; different groups claimed to be the sole heirs of Israel’s inheritance, often sharply criticizing and even condemning other Jews for some form of convenantal unfaithfulness.\(^{236}\) Jewish Christians were part of this factious and heterogeneous mixture and, like other Jews, participated in Temple and synagogue activities. For example, Paul saw himself as an *exemplary Hebrew* and *Israelite* (e.g., 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:4-6) even though he was a follower of the Way (Acts 24:14). Because Paul was Jewish, he was Torah observant (Acts 21:26), participated in Temple rituals (e.g., Acts 24:18), went to synagogues (e.g., Acts 18:4), and was also disciplined as a Jew by other Jews (e.g., 2 Cor 11:24). There are, of course, instances where Paul was
pressed to leaving certain synagogues because of disputes (usually over the law) but, as we have seen, prior to 70 CE there is no evidence of a *policy or formal agreement* to excommunicate Jewish Christians from synagogues.237

With the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (70 C.E.) and the victory of the Romans in their war against the Jews (66-74 C.E.), it is almost impossible to overstate the crisis and disorientation that faced Jews during the last quarter of the first century.238 The loss of the Temple was devastating, since it was the center of Jewish life and was regarded as the *axis mundi* of the universe. It was the place of God's presence among his covenant people and, through the daily sacrifices in the Temple, supported by the Temple tax, the Temple was the place where all Jews everywhere had access to God. With the destruction of the Temple, there followed the suspension of the Sanhedrin, the termination of sacrificial worship, the abolition of pilgrimages and feasts of the Temple, the destruction and confiscation of Judean land and property, and the humiliation of diverting the Jewish Temple tax to support the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome.239 In the aftermath of these tremendous losses, many Jewish sects either evaporated240 or merged into a rising stream of Rabbinic Judaism.241 Under the leadership of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai (70-85 C.E.) and Rabban Gamaliel (85-115 C.E.), a group of sages established the rabbinic school in the town of Yavneh (Jamnia) where they continued the traditions of the Pharisees242 and, in the absence of the Temple, instituted dramatic changes that

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236 Dunn (1990) 73-77 argues that early Jewish sources exhibit *factionalism*; e.g., I Macc., Jubilees, Enoch, CD, 1QS, Psalms of Solomon, and T. Mos. criticize other Jews, each for their own reasons, as *sinners, men of the lot of Belial, the wicked.*

237 Stegemann and Stegemann (1999) 339 states that prior to 70 CE, Jewish-Christian conflicts with other Jews primarily involved individuals, but after 70 CE conflicts tended to involve groups.


240 The Essene center at Qumran was destroyed in 68 C.E. and groups like the Sicarii, Zealots, followers of John of Gischala and Simon Giora were killed, captured, or forced to flee; so L. Levine (1993) 126. According to *y. Sanh.* 10:6 29c, there were 24 *groups of heretics* when the Temple was destroyed.

241 Cohen (1984) 28-31, 43-5 argues that the Temple and its priesthood was a focal point for sectarian disputes but, with the destruction of the Temple, that focal point disappeared and with it the impetus that fueled sectarianism. In addition, the tannaitic literature shows the Yavnean rabbis had a propensity to tolerate disputes, which also weakened the sectarian spirit.

242 Cohen (1984) 36-42 recognizes a close connection between the pre-70 Pharisees and the post-70 rabbinic sages, but argues that the Tannaim never called themselves *Pharisees,* perhaps to minimize their own sectarian identification and to create a more inclusivist ethic. Only with the Amoraim is an explicit connection made between the rabbis and the Pharisees (e.g., *t. Yoma* 1:8; *y. Yoma* 1:5 (39a); *b. Yoma* 18b; *b. Qidd.* 66a; *b. Nid.* 33b).
reconstructed Judaism.\textsuperscript{243} It is important to note that the term \textit{Yavneh} refers to both a city, whose exact location is uncertain,\textsuperscript{244} and to a complex process whereby the city of Yavneh functioned as a center for the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism between 70 and 135 CE.\textsuperscript{245}

\subsection*{3.1.2 Emerging Rabbinic Judaism}

Under Rabban Yohanan, due to the destruction of the Temple, the center of \textit{Jewish identity and practice shifted} in three ways.\textsuperscript{246} First, the place of animal sacrifice and atonement for sin disappeared. In response, Yohanan emphasized that acts of compassion had atoning significance, following Hos 6:6, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Second, the Yavnean rabbis emphasized the intensive study of both the written and oral Torah, which has come to symbolize Judaism itself. Third, as part of intensive study of the Torah, obedience to God’s commandments and statues took on renewed importance. Therefore, it is not surprising to read that, while interpreting a reference to white garments and anointing one’s head with oil in \textit{Midr Qoh.} 9.8 [42a], Yohanan is reported to have said, “They speak rather only of fulfilling the commandments and of good works and of the study of the Torah.”\textsuperscript{247}

Also under Rabban Yohanan, the center of \textit{Jewish religious and political authority shifted} from the priesthood of Jerusalem and the Temple to the Yavnean sages and the \textit{Beth Din} ("house of judgment" or court of law). The \textit{Bavli} refers to nine \textit{takkanot} (religious decrees) put forth by Yohanan that transferred certain practices associated with the Temple to the rabbinic courts and synagogues.\textsuperscript{248} In this way, Yohanan and the sages asserted authority over liturgical, calendrical, and priestly matters and forged links between the defunct Temple and actual synagogue practice.\textsuperscript{249} For

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{243} The reliability of the sources describing the emergence of the rabbinic school at Yavneh is difficult to assess because they were retracted at a later period (220-550 CE), show some variance in details, and are not transparent to separating fact from legend; Lewis (1992) 3.635.
\item \textsuperscript{244} Lewis (1993) 3.634-5.
\item \textsuperscript{245} The term \textit{Yavneh} should \textit{not} be understood to refer to a specific \textit{council}; so W. D. Davies (1999) 193 n.13.
\item \textsuperscript{246} Yee (1989) 19.
\item \textsuperscript{247} Cited by Barrett (1975) 46. Noteworthy is a statement attributed to R. Simeon the Just (ca. 200 CE) that there are three pillars on which the world rests: the Torah, the Temple, and acts of compassion (\textit{m. Abot.} 1.2).
\item \textsuperscript{248} \textit{B.Ros Haš.} 31b and \textit{b. Soṭa} 40.
\item \textsuperscript{249} Katz (1984) 46.
\end{itemize}
example, the sages were given authority to proclaim the New Year from rabbinical synagogues (formerly a right of the Temple priests) and to announce the New Moon, which determined Feast days like Passover (previously a prerogative of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin). Yohanan also regulated specific priestly activities when, for example, he required them to give the priestly blessing with their shoes off, just as they had in the Temple. Moreover, Yohanan assumed authority over an element of Sabbath practice, modified an aspect of the Feast of Tabernacles, provided new rules for gifts and offerings normally brought to the Temple, and was attributed with saying that acts of loving-kindness provided atonement as sacrifices once did. Although the changes instituted by Yohanan might appear to be minor, they had a major impact on establishing the authority of the Yavnean sages and in instituting the synagogue as a valid equivalent for the Temple, not because the synagogue replaced the Temple, but because the synagogue recalled it.

Under the leadership of Rabban Gamaliel, the authority of Yavneh achieved wider recognition and status and became a center for sages who either lived in Yavneh or traveled there periodically. The Tosepta indicates that 85 to 138 sages periodically gathered at Yavneh and halakhic questions were brought there from all parts of the region and even from Asia. Gamaliel’s authority and power is evident in that he was able to remove the mayor of the city of Gader from office and, when there were court cases, he sat in the middle, with elders sitting to his right and left. Various

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250 M. Roš Haš. 4.1 (cf. b. Roš Haš. 29b) indicates that Yohanan allowed the shofar to be blown wherever there was a court, if a Festival-day of the New Year fell on a Sabbath.
251 M. Roš Haš. 4.1-4
252 B. Roš Haš. 31b.
253 B. Roš Haš. 21b.
254 B. Roš. Haš. 31b allows for the use of the palm branch in the provinces during Tabernacles.
255 W. D. Davies (1964) 263; cf. m. Ma’as. S. 5.2; y. Seqal. 8.4; y. Haš. 1.1.
256 Abot R. Nat. A 4.
257 L. Levine (1993) 136 notes that the changes brought by Yohanan were relatively minor; in contrast, W. D. Davies (1964) 262 sees that Yohanan’s changes, however minor, brought prestige to Yavneh as the center of Jewish authority.
258 So W. D. Davies (1964) 261, 269-70 and Yee (1989) 20, who both note that Yohanan did not want to replace the Temple, since he expected it to be restored.
261 L. Levine (1993) 137; cf. t. Kelim—B. Bat. 5.6; t. Kil 1.3-4; t. Nid. 4.3-4; t. Kelim—B. Meš. 11.2
sages, including Gamaliel himself, traveled throughout the land of Israel, even to Alexandria and Rome, supervising practices and giving halakhic advice.\textsuperscript{263} Under Gamaliel, significant decisions were made regulating prayer, the canon, purification, family laws, vows, rules of testimony, the development of the Passover seder and much of the Passover haggadah, and other questions of practical importance.\textsuperscript{264} Although Cohen argues that the Yavnean rabbis helped eliminate Jewish sectarianism by tolerating disputes and allowing for pluralism within their ranks,\textsuperscript{265} the Rabbinic sages made no room for (a) those who refused to follow the majority rule and (b) those who maintained a sectarian spirit.\textsuperscript{266} The former category included R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, who was excommunicated for not accepting a majority ruling,\textsuperscript{267} and even Rabban Gamaliel, who was deposed from leadership for a period of time for imposing his will on the other sages.\textsuperscript{268} The latter category included persistent sectarians who, eventually, were cursed in the \textit{Birkat ha-Minim}.\textsuperscript{269} Hence, the Rabbinic influence on reshaping Jewish unity and identity moved in two directions simultaneously by either absorbing sectarianism or excluding it.

It should be emphasized that the Yavnean sages and the Johannine Christians shared the same post-70 C.E. milieu. Just as Yavnean sages coped with the loss of the Temple by reuniting Israel around a different center, so the Johannine Jewish Christians took similar measures. It is significant, therefore, that the issues addressed by the Yavnean rabbis are very similar, if not in detail, at least in general tenor, to the concerns that occupied the Fourth Evangelist. In addition to the question of religious authority, which is replete throughout FG (e.g., 7:17), the Fourth Evangelist was concerned with Torah study (5:39), the Temple and its loss (11:48), the Temple and a New Temple (2:13-22), where to worship without the Temple (4:20), synagogue participation (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), rules of testimony (8:17-18), purification (2:6; 3:25; 18:28), and the Jewish calendar—Sabbath (5:9-18; 9:14-16), Passover (2:13, 23; 6:4;

\textsuperscript{263} L. Levine (1993) 137 provides numerous references to the Tosepta and Mishna.
\textsuperscript{264} L. Levine (1993) 139-40; Lewis (1993) 3.636.
\textsuperscript{265} E.g., b. Ber. 11a concerns the posture of a person reciting the \textit{Shema} and allows the differing opinions expressed by the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai to stand side-by-side.
\textsuperscript{266} Cohen (1984) 49.
\textsuperscript{269} Cohen (1984) 49; see our discussion in chapter 1.
It is going beyond the available evidence to suggest that FG was a counter-response to specific decisions issued by a specific "council of Yavneh." However, it would not be a leap in the dark, but a step into the available light, to suggest that FG, which has its origins in Palestine, was addressing both the post-70 C.E. climate of disorientation and a climate warmed by the reforms initiated by nascent Rabbinic Judaism. Although there is no clear evidence that Yavnean Judaism and the Johannine community were in direct conversation, we can at least say that they were on a collision course, because each offered different solutions to the post-70 C.E. problems. For the Johannine community, the center was not the Torah, but Christ, to whom the Torah pointed to (5:39) and to whom Moses wrote about (5:46). For the Johannine community, acts of compassion did not make atonement, but the death of Jesus, who was the Lamb of God (1:29), offered on behalf of the nation (11:51), and killed at the very time Passover sacrifices were prepared (19:30-31). In addition, the Johannine community saw Jesus as the New Temple, so they did not need a restored Temple or a detailed record of laws pertaining to the Temple as we find in the Rabbinic literature. The stark discontinuities between the theology articulated by FG and the reforms and traditions of Rabbinic Judaism suggest that aspects of Johannine theology may have been offensive to Jews who had embraced the reforms at Yavneh. On the basis of our conclusions regarding blasphemy (see chapters 5-12), we will be able to explore just how offensive certain aspects of Johannine theology

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270 This seems to be the position of Mann (1988) 7, who argues FG was written in response to or "against the decisions of Jannia." Formerly, it was held that there was a specific "council of Yavneh," but this is largely rejected. Instead, the Rabbinic activities that centered at Yavneh must be seen as a complex process that occurred over many years; see Lewis (1993) 634-7.

271 So Brown (1966) lxix-lxii; Beasley-Murray (1987) lxx, Martyn (1977) 158-60; Brown (1979) argues more narrowly for a Judean setting, whereas Bassler (1981) 243-57 and Meeks (1985) 101 argues for a Galilean origin. It is, of course, conceivable that the final form of FG was published outside the land of Israel in places like Ephesus (so Irenaeus Adv. Haer. 3.1.2), Alexandria (so Kirsopp Lake), or Antioch (so Ephraem the Syrian).

272 See the argument in chapter 14.

273 E.g., the regulations concerning the offering of the first fruits at the Temple (m. Bik.), the half-shekel tax used for the Temple and the Temple ceremonies (m. Pesah), the festival of Sukkâh in the Temple (m. Sukk.), the three pilgrimage festivals of the Temple (m. Hag.), the sacrifices and offerings associated with the Temple (m. Zebah., m. Menah., m. Tamid, m. Qinnim), and the measures and furnishings of the Temple (m. Mid.)
could have been perceived by other Jews and to what degree this theology could have provoked the expulsion of Johannine Jewish Christians from the synagogue.

3.2 Social Context: Conflict

As we have seen, the resources for reconstructing the history of the Johannine community are, at best, only probable and suggestive. Nevertheless, our understanding of the Johannine community’s experience can be extended by using Lewis Coser’s analysis of social conflict. Of the sixteen propositions presented by Coser, two are particularly relevant for understanding how the Johannine conflict is related to group proximity and group boundaries.

3.2.1 Conflict and proximity

One of Coser’s basic propositions is that the closer the relationship, the more intense the conflict. For example, a person perceived to be a heretic will incite a more hostile reaction than an apostate or renegade who leaves the group. As opposed to an apostate or renegade, a heretic shares the goals and values of the parent group but offers alternative interpretations or proposes different means to achieve the group’s desired ends. As such, a heretic threatens the unity, even the existence, of a group by competing for the loyalty of its members. Because a heretic remains within or close to the group, a heretic will spark more fierce conflict than an apostate or renegade.

The sharp anti-Jewish polemic found in FG “is best explained as a phenomenon of proximity, that is, of a close relationship to Judaism.” Even a cursory reading of

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274 Coser (1956) presents a classic work on social conflict theory, which views society as the product of conflicting forces and competing interests regarding needs, desires, and goals. Coser’s work is based on Georg Simmel’s Conflict (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1955).
276 Coser (1956) 70-71, 169 n. 4.
277 Stegemann and Stegemann (1999) 227. This assumes a concrete historical situation in which Johannine Jewish Christians and certain other Jews were engaged in an actual social conflict. It is possible, of course, that FG is engaged in a type of symbolic anti-Judaism, a term used by Mariam Taylor (1994) passim. Although Taylor deals with patristic writings and not specifically with NT documents, she concludes that Christian expressions of anti-Judaism did not arise out of response to Jews in a context of conflict—the conflict theory made popular by Marcel Simon—but out of a need for Christians to resolve theological contradictions inherent in appropriating the Jewish tradition and at the same time rejecting other aspects of the Jewish heritage. See Taylor (1994) 127-9
FG reveals an intense conflict between the Jews and Jesus at the story level. On the one hand, this hostility can be seen in the attacks on Jesus and the Johannine community. Jesus is accused of breaking the Sabbath (5:18), blasphemy (5:18; 8:58; 10:33; 18:23), demon possession (7:20; 8:48; 10:20), being a Samaritan (8:48), deceiving the people (7:13, 47), and threatening both the Temple and the Jewish nation (2:20; 11:48). In addition, as a two-level reading of FG suggests (see chapter 1), just as Jesus encounters hostility at the story level, so there are indications that the Fourth Evangelist and his community experienced similar hostility (3:11; 9:22; 15:18-19; 16:2-4). On the other hand, FG witnesses to a counter-attack against the Jews, who are accused of seeking their own glory (5:44), failing to keep the Mosaic law (7:19), erroneous and harmful interpretation of the law (7:21-24), being children of the devil (8:44), and spiritual blindness (9:39-41; 12:40). Clearly, FG testifies to an acrimonious conflict that can be understood as an intense, intra-Jewish quarrel.279

However, Coser’s observation that closeness and conflict are functionally related also helps explain why FG uses the term the Jews (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) in both positive and negative ways. We will focus on this issue in depth in chapter 15. For the moment, let it suffice to note that the intense conflict depicted in FG suggests that the Johannine Jewish Christians and certain Jews had a close and even positive relationship in many ways. Not only were some of Jesus’ followers called Jews (4:9; 7:31; 12:11), but it appears that the Johannine group and certain other Jews shared common hopes, goals, and values. Both groups shared hopes regarding a coming prophet (1:21; 6:14) and a coming messiah (1:41; 7:31, 41). Both had common goals of eternal life (5:39; 10:10) and salvation (4:22, 42). Both groups valued the appropriate worship of God (4:20, 24) and were concerned about sacred days, including Sabbath (5:9), Passover (2:13; 6:4), Tabernacles (7:2), and Dedication (10:22). Both groups drew upon the same scriptures (5:39), especially the traditions of Abraham (8:31-59) and Moses (5:44-47; 6:31-51). It is assumed that, at one point in history, the Johannine Jewish Christians and their non-believing Jewish neighbors shared a close relationship in the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). We concur with von

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278 Margaret Davies (1992) 44-66 identifies four levels, including story-time, the disciples’ time, the narrator’s time, and the reader’s time.

279 Ashton (1991) 137 characterizes the conflict as a family quarrel.
Wahlde, who writes that "not only does the Gospel of John clearly have a positive estimation for the Jewish tradition, but also the Jewish tradition is the very soul and life of the Johannine tradition."\(^{280}\) The Jews probably represent a parent group\(^{281}\) for the Johannine Jewish Christians and, like the heretic described by Coser, the Johannine group claimed to uphold the same hopes, values, and goals as the parent group, but offered alternatives that were unacceptable for the parent group. Because the Johannine Christians both identified with and reacted against certain non-believing Jews, it is not surprising to find both positive and negative uses of the Jews. Starkly put, and with some risk of misunderstanding, the Johannine Christians hated the Jews just at the points where they loved them the most.\(^{282}\)

One more implication can be drawn from Coser's observation: *FG appears to have reached its final form when the process of separation between certain non-believing Jews and the Johannine Jewish Christians was not yet complete.*\(^{283}\) This becomes more evident when we distinguish between two levels of conflict: the time of the story (Jesus and his disciples) and the time of the narrator (when the Gospel was written).\(^{284}\) No one disputes the evidence of conflict at the story level, which has already been noted. But there is also evidence of ongoing conflict at the narrator's level in what can be called *distancing strategies* used by the author.\(^{285}\) That is, the author of FG, through the voice of the narrator prejudices readers away from non-believing Jews and what we assume is emerging Rabbinic Judaism.\(^{286}\) This

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\(^{280}\) Von Wahlde (1993) 69.

\(^{281}\) Von Wahlde (1993) 70-1 speaks of *parent Judaism*, but only for the first two periods of the Johannine history, which corresponds to what he believes were the first two editions of the Gospel.

\(^{282}\) This is an adaptation of a famous statement by Meeks (1975) 172 that "FG is most anti-Jewish just at the points it is most Jewish."

\(^{283}\) J. T. Sanders (1993) 41 believes that the conflict depicted by FG occurs when, or shortly after, Jewish Christians were still attending synagogues. Malina (1985) 11 and Stibbe (1992) 64 believe that FG’s language reveals a situation in which the Johannine Jewish Christians had recently broken away from the larger parent group. In contrast, Meeks (1975) 182 writes, “It seems clear that at the time of composition of the Gospel the Johannine community is separate from the Jews and no longer expects Jews to convert.” Similarly, Hengel (1989) 119-20 argues that the expulsion had long since past as witnessed by the way FG depicts Jesus talking to the Jews about your law and to the disciples about their law (Jn 7:51; 8:17; 10:34 [cf. 7:19]; 12:34; 15:25: 18:31)

\(^{284}\) Margaret Davies (1992) 44-66.


\(^{286}\) This corresponds to the *ideological point of view* of the narrator. See Culpepper (1983) 32.
ideological level of communication occurs between the implied author/narrator\textsuperscript{287} and the implied/intended reader.\textsuperscript{288} Very simply, this is how it works: The narrator describes the Jews in a negative light or, more subtly, in ways that distances them or distinguishes them from the heroes of the story—Jesus and his disciples. Then, as readers identify with Jesus and his disciples at the story level, they begin to distance themselves from non-believing Jews outside the story. An example of this distancing strategy can be seen when Jesus begins to describe his departure to his disciples by saying, “as I said to the Jews now I say to you” (13:33), as if the disciples were not Jews themselves. Another example is when the Jews are depicted as never having heard or seen the Father (5:37), which distances them from Jesus’ disciples who are said to have seen the Father (14:7-9).\textsuperscript{289} And, of course, there are the more explicit attacks on the Jews as when, for example, Jesus says that the father of the Jews is the devil (Jn 8:44). In this way, the narrator encourages the first-century readers—particularly the Johannine Jewish group—to separate from non-believing Jews in order to commit themselves more fully to the Johannine agenda. Such strategies suggest that there was continuing conflict at the time of the final writing of the Gospel and that members of the Johannine group were perceived to be too close to certain non-believing Jews.

3.2.2 Conflict and boundaries

Another one of Coser’s propositions is that group boundaries are established and maintained through conflict with an outside group.\textsuperscript{290} Conflict with an outside group increases the internal cohesion of a group by making members more conscious of their bonds and by increasing their participation.\textsuperscript{291} This dynamic is apparent with a sect, which by nature is exclusive and in conflict with an outside group. A sect is born in conflict, maintains its identity through conflict, and increases its internal

\textsuperscript{287} The implied author and the narrator are synonymous for FG; see Culpepper (1983) 16.

\textsuperscript{288} Regarding the terms implied author, implied reader, and narrator, see Culpepper (1983) 15-18. I am using the terms intended reader and implied reader synonymously; however see Moloney (1997) 219-33 for a more careful distinction between these terms.

\textsuperscript{289} Concerning other ways in which FG negatively characterizes the Jews, see Culpepper (1983) 128-30. For Culpepper, the characterization of the Jews is not concerned with historical Jews but, like other characters in FG, have representative value; for Culpepper, the Jews symbolize “the heart and soul of unbelief.”

\textsuperscript{290} Coser (1956) 87.

\textsuperscript{291} Coser (1956) 90.
cohesion by conflict. A sect is a conflict group.\(^{292}\) This is an apt characterization of the Johannine Christians, for not only did their conflict with the Jews lead to their expulsion from the synagogue but, as scholars argue, factious conflicts continued to plague their beleaguered communities from then on.\(^{293}\)

As Coser notes, in order to preserve group boundaries, conflict groups conduct periodic self-purification drives.\(^{294}\) To maintain purity and internal cohesion, conflict groups seek out and expunge dissenters and tend "to invent both inside and outside enemies in order to strengthen inner solidarity."\(^{295}\) Although it is difficult to ascertain whether the Johannine group invented enemies, it is clear that internal cohesion and unity was a priority for them as witnessed by several passages in the Johannine writings (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12-13; 17:1-26; 1 Jn 3:11-18). In addition, several other passages in FG either depict purges or anticipated them. For example, after Jesus’ discourse on the bread from heaven (Jn 6:25-59), we are told that a large number of his followers "were no longer walking with him," οὐκέτι μετ’ αὐτοῦ περιπέτειαν (Jn 6:66). In the farewell discourse, Jesus warns that whoever does not abide in him, the true vine, will wither and be thrown into the fire (Jn 15:5-6). In the Johannine letters, even more defections, self-purifications, and warnings are referred to (1 Jn 2:19; 2 Jn 9; 3 Jn 9-10). It is evident that throughout the Johannine material, the inner enemy is rejected as energetically as the outer enemy. Thus Coser’s comment that the "small, close, struggle group ... cannot deal with internal conflict and hence punishes expression of dissent with exclusion," seems applicable to the Johannine community.\(^{296}\)

Conflict theory provides a possible explanation for at least some aspects of the Johannine social milieu in which the prosecution of blasphemy, with its name-calling and rock-throwing, had been experienced. The Johannine community was in the process of distancing itself from a very close relationship with a parent group that

\(^{292}\) Coser (1956) 98-103.
\(^{293}\) The conflicts centered on christology, ethics, eschatology, and pneumatology, according to Brown (1979) 93-144.
\(^{294}\) Coser (1956) 101.
\(^{295}\) Coser (1956) 102 [his emphasis].
\(^{296}\) Coser (1956) 102.
held similar traditions, values, and goals. However, because the Johannine group articulated a different way to interpret their shared traditions and to achieve their common values and goals—summed up by the phrase confessing Jesus as the Christ (Jn 9:22; 20:31)—they experienced a bitter conflict and eventual separation from the parent group. The conflict and separation was probably not a singular event, but a process in which the development of Johannine ideology (e.g., high christology) and hostility fed off each other, each growing more intense over time. By the time the final form of FG was written, the spiral of hostility had produced two, separate and distinct groups that were, nevertheless, still struggling and still too close for comfort. If our analysis has been correct, then as the writing of FG neared completion, name-calling and rock throwing continued between the Johannine Jewish Christians and non-believing Jews.

3.3 Literary Context: Covenantal Lawsuit

The author of FG "appears to have cast much of his material in the form of a long-drawn-out trial, in which the underlying issues are exposed and by which the reader is challenged to form his own judgment and cast his own verdict." If this is so, then it may reinforce or support the argument that members of the Johannine community were being accused of blasphemy. If members were being charged with blasphemy, either formally or informally, certainly a trial motif would have been an apt way to cast the material of FG. Although the burden of proof for the contention that Jewish Christians were accused of blasphemy must rest with this thesis as a whole, we can at least establish that the literary context of FG is congruent with a Sitz im Leben in which people are experiencing social strife of a juridical nature.

3.3.1 Trial motif

In each of the major divisions of FG, a trial motif can be observed. There is a general consensus among scholars regarding the basic structure of FG. Brown's four-part outline is representative: Prologue (Jn 1:1-18), Book of Signs (Jn 1:19-12:50), Book of Glory (Jn 13:1 - 20:31), and Epilogue (Jn 21:1-25). In each section, juridical
language permeates the narrative and pushes the plot. In Jn 1:1-18, the trial motif is introduced by complementary references to John the Baptist who testifies on behalf of the Logos (Jn 1:6-8, 15). The second section, Jn 1:19—12:50, begins with the public testimony of John the Baptist (1:19-27, 32-34) and ends with a discussion about judgment and Jesus’ word of judgment (12:47-50), thus highlighting the trial motif by means of an inclusio. Throughout the second section, as Harvey has argued, Jesus is on trial before the Jews. From John 5:16 to 11:53, from episode to episode, Jesus is shown defending himself against accusations of breaking the Sabbath (5:16; 19:6, 24), blasphemy (5:18; 8:58-59; 10:33; cf. 19:7; 18:23), false teaching (7:12, 47; 9:24, 29), demon-possession (7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20), and being an enemy of “our temple and our nation” (11:48). In addition, Jesus is subject to hostile interrogations by the crowd (6:30; 7:20), the Pharisees (8:13, 19), and the Jews (8:25, 33, 48, 52-53), which is followed by equally sharp interrogations of his disciples (9:10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 25-26). In the face of these accusations and interrogations, numerous witnesses appear on behalf of the Johannine Jesus:

The Baptist (1.7f., 15, 32; 3:26; 5:33), the Samaritan woman (4.39), the works of Jesus (5.36; 10:25), the Old Testament (5.39), the multitude (12.17), the Holy Spirit and the apostles (15.26f.), God the Father himself (5:32, 37; 8:18), all bear witness to Jesus. Jesus himself... bears witness to the truth (18.27; cf. 3.11), in conjunction with the Father (8.13-18) whose consentient testimony validates his own.

In the third section, Jn 13:1—20:31, the trial motif surfaces in references to the παράκλητος, the advocate (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), the high priest’s questioning of Jesus regarding blasphemy, κακῶς λάθος (18:19-24; esp. 19:23; cf. LXX Ex 22:27), and the Roman interrogation of Jesus for sedition (18:28—19:16). During the Roman and Jewish examinations, Jesus challenges the authorities to bring witnesses against him, but no one comes forward. According to Trites, “The fact that no reference is made to anyone taking up the challenge is intended by John to suggest speculations about textual rearrangements by Bultmann (1971) and Bernard (1929), their outlines are comparable to Brown’s.

300 Harvey (1976) passim.
301 Unlike the Synoptics (cf. Mk 15:53-65), FG does not present an account of Jesus on trial before the Sanhedrin; however, Jn 11:45-53 depicts a rather official condemnation of Jesus in absentia by the Sanhedrin.
302 The chief priests and Pharisees are depicted as announcing that Jesus will provoke the Romans to come and take away “our place and our nation,” ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν τόπον καὶ τὸ ἔθνος (Jn 11:48); cf. Acts 6:13 and 2 Macc 5:19 where τόπος has the meaning of temple.
303 Barrett (1978) 159.
that Jesus won the lawsuit; even Pilate thrice declares that Jesus is innocent (18:38; 19:4, 6). In the end, by bringing Jesus to trial, the opponents of Jesus are unmasked as idolatrous and their condemnation is self-evident for those who can see (19:15c; cf. 9:39-41). Finally, the Epilogue closes with a twofold reference to the truth of the Beloved Disciple's testimony (21:24).

3.3.2 Covenantal lawsuit

Understanding FG from the perspective of the lawsuit, of claim and counter-claim, is strengthened when compared with other early Jewish literature regarding covenant lawsuits. For example, FG echoes the covenant lawsuit between Yahweh and the false gods in Isaiah 40-55. In Isaiah, the lawsuit concerns the claims of Yahweh as Creator, as the only true God, and as the Lord of history (Isa 40:25-31; 44:6-8; 45:8-11, 21). In FG, the lawsuit concerns the claim of messiahship and divine sonship (Jn 20:31). In Isaiah, there are two lawsuits: one lawsuit is between Yahweh, represented by Israel, and the gods, represented by the idolatrous nations (Isa 41:5, 21-29; 43:8-13; 44:6-8; 45:18-25); another lawsuit is between Yahweh and unfaithful Israel (Isa 42:18-25; 43:22-28; 50:1-3). In FG, the lawsuit is between Jesus and the world, and between Jesus and the Jews. In Isaiah, the gods are challenged to state their case, but they are silent (Isa 41:21-23; 43:9; 44:7); they cannot foretell or influence events; they have no real existence (Isa 41:24, 26-29). In FG, the witnesses against Jesus are also silent; they have no real claim.

One more important note needs to be made regarding the trial speeches of Yahweh against the nations in Isaiah. The purpose of the trial in Isaiah is to determine the identity of the true God. In the first speech, Yahweh states, "I am God, the first, and for the things coming, I am" (εγώ θεος πρώτος, και είς τὰ ἐπερχόμενα εγώ εἰμί) (LXX Isa 41:4). In the final speech, Yahweh is identified as the Creator who has spoken openly as "I am, I am (the) Lord, the one who speaks righteousness and

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304 Trites (1977) 83.
305 More internal evidence for the lawsuit motif comes from the Gospel's use of: (1) judgment-language, like κρίσις, κρίνειν, and κρίμα, (2) division-language, like σχίσμα, and (3) dualisms. See Ashton (1991) 220-32; J. Blank (1964) passim.
who declares the truth” (ἐγὼ εἰμι ἐγὼ εἰμι κύριος λαλῶν δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἀναγγέλλων ὀληθειαν) (LXX Isa 45:19b). Throughout the ordeal, it is clear that Yahweh is defending himself at the trial: “Accuse me, let us judge” (Isa 43:26). He is both a witness (LXX 43:10, 12) and a judge (Isa 43:26). What is particularly important to notice is that Yahweh defends himself by claiming that he is the true and only God: “I am the first and I am the last, and besides me there is no god” (Isa 44:6; cf 40:18, 23; 41:4; 43:10-11; 45:5-6; 46:9; 48:12). The glory and honor of Yahweh is at stake (Is 49:3; 44:23; 45:25) and his servant will be exalted and glorified (ὑψωθησαται καὶ δοξοσθησαται) (LXX Isa 52:13). Isaiah declares the oneness of God in unison with, and as a function of, the ἐγὼ εἰμι formula. Monotheism is asserted over against idolatry for God’s glory and the people of Israel, who understand the I am, are called to testify that Yahweh is the one true God (Isa 43:10).

When we turn to FG, the cosmic lawsuit of Isaiah reverberates throughout the narrative. Not only are there three direct quotes from Isaiah (Jn 1:23; 6:45; 12:38), but FG repeatedly uses the ἐγὼ εἰμι formula (e.g., Jn 8:24, 58; 13:19), appeals to the oneness of God (e.g., Jn 5:44; 10:30; 17:3, 22), emphasizes that Jesus will be exalted to the glory and honor of God (Jn 12:23-33; cf. 1:14; 17:5, 22, 24), and sets loyalty to God over against idolatry (Jn 4:21-24; 5:44; 19:15c). The point is that FG implicitly and explicitly echoes the juridical language of Second Isaiah. Such echoes suggest that the author FG was portraying the conflict between Jesus and his opponents as nothing less than a covenant lawsuit between Yahweh and an unfaithful world.308

The preceding considerations—the trial motif in FG and the correspondence between FG and the covenantal lawsuit in Isaiah—suggests that FG can be understood as a covenantal lawsuit or an extended trial with two claimants: God and his agents (Jesus and the Johannine community) on one side and the world and non-believing Jews on the other. In this way, the intertextual echoes of Isaiah’s covenant lawsuit

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308 Borgen (1986) 67-78 has observed six basic halakic principles of legal agency in FG. The fourth principle mentioned by Borgen concerns the mission of an agent is set within the context of a lawsuit. The Jewish principle, “Go forth and take legal action so that you may acquire title to it and secure the claim for yourself” (B. Qam. 70a), which sounds similar to “Yours they were and you have given them to me” (Jn 17:6). Borgen (1986) 70 writes that “According to the halakah the sender transferred his own rights and the property concerned to his agent.” In the words of FG, the Father has transferred his rights to Christ, who in turn functions as the Father’s agent in the lawsuit with the world. See our expanded treatment in § 13.3.4.
within FG (the oneness of God, the use of ἐγώ εἶμι, the exaltation and glory of God, and idolatry) is set over against the allegation that Jesus and his followers have committed blasphemy, broken the Sabbath, led the multitudes astray, and threatened the Temple and the nation of Israel. It is probably significant that FG was cast in the form of a trial narrative, particularly if the Johannine Jewish group was in the process of undergoing trials and persecutions themselves. If this was the case, FG could have functioned as counter-propaganda against accusations such as blasphemy.

3.4 Mirror-Reading FG

Since the aim of this thesis is to test whether members within the Johannine community would have been considered blasphemous by non-believing Jews during the late first century, an effort will be made to reconstruct the probable reaction of non-believing Jews toward certain claims made by FG regarding the exaltation of Jesus (chapter 13), the Temple (chapter 14), and the Τουδανοί (chapter 15). Because there are no extant literary or inscriptive testimony about the apparent dispute between the Johannine group and non-believing Jews independent of FG,309 we must use FG as a mirror to see indirectly the attitudes and beliefs of the non-believing Jews about the Johannine members.310 Reconstructing the non-believing Jewish reaction is, of course, assisted by an awareness of the probable historical environment (§3.2.1), the social dynamics displayed by conflict groups (§3.2.2), the literary genre (covenant law suit) with which FG depicts the conflict (§3.2.3), and the various Jewish beliefs and attitudes regarding blasphemy (chapters 5-12).

However, as Barclay311 and others312 have pointed out, there are numerous pitfalls associated with mirror-reading polemical texts. Although Barclay is primarily concerned with Galatians, he lists several dangers that are also relevant for critically reading FG. The first danger is undue selectivity. This involves putting too much emphasis on certain issues raised by FG, while minimizing or neglecting others. A

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309 Evidence external to FG for such conflict experiences, in principle, should not be expected. Even large scale conflicts, like the pogroms against Jews in Alexandria (Philo Flacc. 41-96) and Antioch (Josephus War 7.43-62), which included massive killings and horrific cruelties, are only known to us by those affected.


plausible reconstruction of the debate must account for the Gospel as a whole and not just part. For example, to argue that the charge of blasphemy resulted from a ditheistic Christology neglects other issues raised by FG. An accurate reconstruction must also account for FG’s considerable effort to develop Temple imagery and to stigmatize the Ιουδαίοι. A second danger is over-interpretation. In a polemical text like FG, it is easy to imagine that every narrative aside or every statement by Jesus is a rebuttal or criticism of Jewish opponents. While it is fair to assume that FG is countering certain viewpoints, not everything is directed at rebutting opponents. Just because we hear Jesus say, “I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (8:32; NRSV), does not mean that it was directed against certain people who denied it. A third danger is mishandling polemics. Barclay reminds us that “We should never underestimate the distorting effects of polemic.” Interpreters can mishandle polemics if they fail to recognize that inflated language can conceal, as well as misrepresent, points of dispute. In addition, interpreters can be seduced by such distortion if they take sides or if they dress up John’s opponents with the clothes of their own theological foes. A fourth danger is “latching onto particular words and phrases as direct echoes of the opponents’ vocabulary.” At first, this appears to be less a problem with FG than with a text like Galatians. For example, in Gal 6:1, Paul addresses “you who are spiritual,” the πνευματικοί. Numerous scholars assume that Paul latched onto this term because his opponents use the term; they called themselves “spiritual” or else they boasted about their spiritual gifts. With this assumption in mind, Galatians is read as a reproof against such spiritual arrogance. Surely, this is to make too much of a single word. Johannine scholarship exhibits a similar danger with the current trend to interpret Johannine

314 Barclay (1987) 75.
315 On the one hand, it is possible that John misunderstood the Jews and, on the other, that the Jews only have symbolic value. In either case, historical reconstruction is precluded. It is impossible to determine whether John misunderstood his opponents, since there are no sources other than John to settle the matter. At best, we can evaluate FG’s internal consistency and its coherence with other first-century Jewish literature. For a negative appraisal of FG’s truth-value, see Casey (1996) 111-39 and 218-29, who concludes that FG is both anti-Jewish and historically untrue. Regarding the literary use of the Jews, see chapter 15 on the Ιουδαίοι.
316 This is an adaptation of Barclay’s (1987) 81 wry comment: “There is the particular danger in the temptation to dress up Paul’s opponents with the clothes of one’s own theological foes.”
318 Barclay (1987) 82.
terms and phrases as *anti-language*. Borrowing from the field of socio-linguistics, Malina and Rohrbaugh argue that the Johannine Christians use "ordinary terms from ordinary language of the larger society but give them special in-group meanings that are only understood by insiders." Dualistic terminology—light/darkness, above/below, spirit/flesh, life/death, Israel/Judeans—is viewed as anti-language, as language that characterizes both the in-group (the Johannine Christians) and the out-group (*the Jews*). Since common terminology, and not just unique terminology, is used to reconstruct a mirror image of the Johannine opponents, this method may open larger pitfalls than those that have swallowed interpreters of Galatians. So, it is with caution that this thesis draws upon some of Malina and Rohrbaugh's analysis of "anti-language" in arguing, for example, that FG presents Jesus as the New Temple (see chapter 14).

To avoid the dangers associated with mirror-reading polemical texts, Barclay offers several guidelines, four of which have played a frequent role in our own reconstruction of the Johannine situation: (a) **Tone**: Particularly forceful statements may correspond to particular needs; for example, statements made in FG about Jesus' exalted authority and status could point toward the need for social stability and direction in a post-70 C.E. environment (chapter 13). (b) **Frequency**: Repeated statements or motifs may correspond to a specific situation; for example, the recurring Temple imagery and motifs could be responding to the loss of the Jerusalem Temple (see chapter 14). (c) **Unfamiliarity**: Unusual ideas or statements may be prompted by the situation; for example, the unique way in which FG uses the term 'IoouOioi might have been motivated by certain social tensions (chapter 15). (d) **Historical plausibility**: External evidence is brought in as a control; for example, the post-70 C.E. situation after the destruction of the Temple (§ 3.1) seems to provide evidence and possible motive for presenting Jesus as the New Temple (chapter 14).

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320 Barclay (1987) 84-5 mentions seven criteria.
3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have attempted to set forth our assumptions regarding the various contexts of FG.

First, we have argued that the probable historical context was a post-70 C.E. climate warmed by the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism. Non-believing Jews who had been influenced by Yavnean reforms could have viewed the theology presented by FG as offensive. Just how offensive Johannine theology was, whether Johannine claims could have been viewed as blasphemous, will be taken up in chapters 13-15.

Second, on sociological grounds, we have argued that FG reflects a Sitz im Leben in which there was intense conflict between non-believing Jews and Johannine Jews. The conflict stemmed from the fact that both groups were in a close relationship and yet the Johannine group made claims that were unacceptable to other Jews. Certain narratological distancing strategies employed by the author of FG underscores that a process of separation between the two groups was underway even at the time of the final writing of the Gospel. What mechanism was forcing the Johannine Jews out of the synagogue is debated. Of course, J. Louis Martyn has argued that certain Jews used the Birkat ha-minim to smoke out heretics, but this is problematic (see chapter 1). Instead, we contend that Johannine Jews, who were still in a very close relationship with other Jews, could have been identified as blasphemers (see chapter 13-15) and perhaps, on that basis, driven from the synagogue (see chapters 16).

Third, we have contended that the literary context of FG is replete with juridical motifs and language that echoes aspects of the ‘covenant lawsuit’ in Second Isaiah. This juridical tone of FG is congruent with a Sitz im Leben in which members of the Johannine group were undergoing harsh trials. As such, FG could have functioned as counter propaganda against whatever charges the Johannine group was encountering, perhaps the charge of blasphemy.

Fourth, we recognize that we will engage in mirror reading FG. There are pitfalls to this approach, but there are also safeguards, which we intend to take along the way.
CHAPTER 4
ΒΑΣΦΗΜΕΩ AND ITS SEMANTIC RELATIONS

One more preliminary task remains: to provide an analysis of selected Greek terms that can be translated with the English words blasphemy, blaspheme, or blasphemous, terms which comprise the semantic domain labeled “Insult, Slander” by Louw and Nida. The analysis of the terms’ range of meanings and relationships provides a semantic orientation to blasphemy before engaging selected early Jewish and Christian traditions that deal with blasphemy (chapters 5-12).

In this chapter, we will briefly review two approaches to semantic analysis and then, drawing on these two approaches, proceed to describe the semantic relationships between five verbs—βλασφημέω, δυσφημέω, κακολέγεω, κατολαλέω, and λοιδορέω—and their cognate forms.

4.1 Two Approaches to Semantic Analysis

Although there are a variety of types of semantic analyses, we will draw on two complementary approaches: a field-oriented approach and role-oriented approach.

First, we employ a field-oriented approach, which emphasizes sense-relationships or how the sense of one word relates to the senses of other words. As John Lyons has argued, “No word can be fully understood independently of other words that are related to it and delimit its sense.” An analogy that illuminates this approach is the color spectrum. We know what red is only in contrast to other hues on the color spectrum—red is not blue, not violet, etc. Similarly, most words belong to a field or spectrum of similar terminology. A ‘cup’ belongs to the same semantic field as

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322 Lyon (1996) 40-1 lists six basic approaches, including referential (or denotational) theory, ideational (or mentalistic) theory, behaviourist theory, meaning-is-use theory, verificationist theory, and truth-conditional theory. Lyons (1996) 41 states, “None of these [approaches], in my view, will serve alone as the basis for a comprehensive and empirically well-motivated theory of linguistic semantics.”
‘mug,’ ‘glass,’ ‘bowl,’ and ‘pitcher’ with each item having a slight distinction from the others. This is important because distinguishing one related word from another is part of gaining linguistic competence.

Sense-relationships in this approach are distinguished in two ways:³²⁴ (a) A *paradigmatic* (substitutional) sense-relationship refers to the ability of certain terms to be substituted for each other within a sentence; for example, “Pour the liquid out of the *bowl*” makes as much sense as “Pour the liquid out of the *cup*,” because both *bowl* and *cup* are in a paradigmatic sense-relationship. Words in this type of relationship can be described in terms of their synonymy, contiguity, hyponymy, and antonymy.³²⁵ (b) A *syntagmatic* (combinatorial or collocational) sense-relationship refers to the relationship between words within the same sentence. The sense linked to a word allows it to join in a sentence with some types of words but not others. For example, the syntagmatic relationship of the words, “Pour Sunday into the *cup*,” is meaningless even though the sentence is grammatically correct, because the different senses of the words prohibit their combination. In section 4.2, we describe the paradigmatic sense-relationships among the various terms that we selected for study.

Second, we will also use a *role-oriented approach*.³²⁶ This is a type of syntagmatic analysis that attempts to understand the sense that a word has by assessing its relationship with other words in a sentence.³²⁷ Consider, for example, the sentence, ‘The girl moved the stone on top of the hole with a shovel.’ The verb, *moved*, describes the action and determines how each of the referring expressions in the sentence relate to each other. The role taken by the *girl*, technically known as the *agent*, performs the action. The entity affected by the action is known as the *theme* or the *patient* which, in this example, is the *stone*. If an agent uses another entity to

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³²⁶ The term, “role-oriented approach,” is from Yule (1996) 116-17. This approach focuses more on sentence semantics (rather than simply lexical semantics). It is termed a “thematic role” or “theta-role” approach by Saeed (1997) 139-71, who notes that there are many other terms for this approach.
perform the action, in this case a shovel, that entity is known as the instrument.\footnote{Saeed (1997) 145-47 notes that these are semantic, not grammatical categories (such as object, subject, and indirect object). It is possible, for instance, for the agent to be distinct from the subject of a verb as in the sentence Jesus was raised from the dead. Although Jesus is the subject, God is the agent.}

Other role-relationships can be delineated,\footnote{Saeed (1997) 140-41 lists nine different roles: agent, patient, theme, experiencer, beneficiary, instrument, location, goal, and source.} but in section 4.3 we focus on the patient, agent, and instrument as a framework for our analysis.

These two approaches help structure our analysis and shape the type of questions we ask. For each text in which key terms occur, we ask: What is the patient, agent, instrument, and contextual associations? Does the patient or the agent of the verbal action distinguish the sense of one term from another? Can different sense-relationships be distinguished on the basis of instrumentality? Can attendant actions or other contextual features be used to distinguish the lexical senses of terms?

### 4.2 βλασφημέω and Related Terms

As a point of departure, we begin with the work of Louw and Nida, who have produced a lexicon arranged according to 93 semantic domains (paradigmatic fields), each with varying numbers of subdomains.\footnote{Louw and Nida (1989). For a critique of Louw and Nida’s approach and resultant lexicon, see J. Lee (1992) 167-89. For a response to Lee, see Louw (1993) 139-48.} Some of the major semantic domains include: Plants (Domain 3), Linear Movement (Domain 15), Memory and Recall (Domain 29), Military Activity (Domain 55), and Time (Domain 67). Within the domain for Communication (Domain 33), a subdomain labeled Insult, Slander (Subdomain P': 33.387-33.403) lists terms that share semantic features with βλασφημέω and its cognates. Thus, subdomain P' provides a basic list of terms that are in close semantic relationship with βλασφημέω. Although Subdomain P' lists seventeen entries, the following fourteen are relevant for our purposes.\footnote{We omitted the rare expression, ἐκβάλλω τὸ δόναμα, which occurs once in Lk 6:22, and the term διδάσκαλος, which only occurs in the noun form (‘the devil’) in the NT and LXX and once in a vice-list in Philo (Sacr. 32).}

1. καταλαλέω; καταλαλία, ας, ἡ
2. κατάλαλος, ο, ο
3. ὄνειδιζω; ὄνειδισμός, ου, ο
4. ὑβρίζω; ἐνυβρίζω

\footnote{Saeed (1997) 145-47 notes that these are semantic, not grammatical categories (such as object, subject, and indirect object). It is possible, for instance, for the agent to be distinct from the subject of a verb as in the sentence Jesus was raised from the dead. Although Jesus is the subject, God is the agent.}
According to Louw and Nida, the list is broadly hierarchical, moving from the most general (καταλαλέω) to the most specific (βλάσφημος) meanings. Moreover, certain terms have a superscript letter, indicating homonyms. Thus, βλασφημία has two distinct meanings (both within Subdomain P') and ὀβρίζω has two distinct meanings (one in Subdomain P' and the other in a completely different Domain and Subdomain [88.130]).

However, Louw and Nida's work is not sufficient for our purposes, since their lexicon focuses entirely on the NT. In order to provide a broader basis for a Jewish-Christian lexical meaning of blasphemy, we expanded the database to include the LXX, NT, Philo, and Josephus. However, after looking at hundreds of texts that used either the verbal or nominal forms of βλασφημέω, δυσφημέω, κακολογέω, κακός λαλεῖν, καταλαλέω, λοιδορέω, ὀνείδιζω, and ὀβρίζω and, attempting to draw limits or boundaries to this study, we have selected the following five terminological word-groups as representative of the semantic field:

1. βλασφημέω; βλασφημία, ας, ἡ; βλασφημός, ον
2. δυσφημέω; δυσφημία, ας, ἡ; δυσφημός, ον
3. κακολογέω; κακολογία, ας, ἡ; κακολόγος, ον
4. καταλαλέω; κακός λαλεῖν; καταλαλία, ας, ἡ; κατάλαλος, ου, ὁ
5. λοιδορέω; συνλοιδορέω; λοιδορία, ας, ἡ; λοίδορος, ον

We have carefully examined every occurrence—293 texts in all—of these terms in the LXX, NT, Philo, and Josephus. Our analysis treats verbs and their cognates together as a terminological-semantic group, since they share the same core or

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332 Louw and Nida (1989) vi-vii recognize that their hierarchical structures are rather general, since it is not possible to take into consideration all of the possible relationships and meanings involved.

essential meaning, though verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs have different grammatical functions. Therefore, for each terminological-semantic group, we (a) identify significant syntagmatic role-relationships (role-oriented approach), (b) describe essential and stereotypical senses or lexical concepts (concept-oriented approach), and (c) sketch their paradigmatic relationships (field-oriented approach).

4.2.1 \( \text{βλασφημέω} \)

\( \text{βλασφημέω} \) is often translated to blaspheme or to revile. There are a total of 169 occurrences of \( \text{βλασφημέω} \) and its cognates in the LXX, NT, Philo, and Josephus. The verb, \( \text{βλασφημέω} \), occurs 9 times in LXX, 34 times in NT, 10 times in Philo, and 40 times in Josephus. The noun, \( \text{βλασφημία} \), occurs 7 times in the LXX, 18 times in the NT, 11 times in Philo, and 24 times in Josephus. The adjective, \( \text{βλάσφημος} \), occurs 6 times in the LXX, 4 times in the NT, twice in Philo, and 4 times in Josephus.

As we hope to show, the lexical sense of \( \text{βλασφημέω} \) is much richer than a single gloss or a one-word translation can provide. We can tell something about the sense of \( \text{βλασφημι} \)-root words by the role-relationships they have with other words in various contexts.

We begin by identifying the patients of \( \text{βλασφημι} \)-root words. Of the 169 occurrences in our database, about 27% of the occurrences (45 of 169 times) the patient is God or the 'Name of God.' In about 12% of the occurrences (20 of 169 times), the

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334 Our data is based on the TLG; Rengstorf (1973-83); Borgen, Fuglseth, and Skarsten (2000); and the Concordance to the Novem Testamentum Graece (1987).
335 See the comments by Louw and Nida (1989) x, xii-xiii. For example, the verb \( \text{εὐχαριστέω} \) and its cognate noun \( \text{εὐχαρίστια} \) can both denote the same event of giving thanks; the part of speech employed by a writer depends largely on stylistic features. A good example of this is \( \text{θ’ Dan 3:96} \), which uses the verb \( \text{βλασφημέω} \), and \( \text{LXX Dan 3:96} \), which uses the noun \( \text{βλασφημία} \).
336 Regarding our database, see note 334.
337 We will use the lexical form for the Greek terms rather than what might be considered the appropriate inflected form. This is to reinforce the notion that we are discussing the sense of the lexeme, whatever forms it takes, and not the incidental meanings that various case endings contribute.
338 E.g., 2 Kgs 19:4, 6, 22; LXX Dan 3:96 and \( \text{θ’ Dan 3:96} \); Mk 2:7; Jn 10:33; Acts 6:11; Rev 16:11; Fug. 84; Mos. 2.206; Decal. 63; Legat. 368; A.J. 4.202; A.J. 6.183.
339 We have taken the expression \text{the name of God} as a figure of speech or metonymy for God himself. Instances of blaspheming the 'Name' include Isa 52.5; Rom 2:24; 1 Tim 6:1, 4; Jam 2:7; Rev 13:6; 10:1; 2 Mace 8:4. Since blasphemy came to be restricted to 'blaspheming the Name'—i.e.,
patient is not identified. In about 6.5% of the occurrences (11 of 169 times), certain gods, goddesses or glorious beings are the patient of βλασφημείω. Less frequently, other patients of βλασφημείω can be identified, including Moses, the Jewish people, Jews and their customs, the Temple, Josephus, Jesus, the word (teaching) of the Lord, Paul, the way, Christians, and certain kings and governors, and others. Lastly, we should note that the sense of βλασφημείω allows it to take both animate (e.g., Jesus) and inanimate (e.g., the Temple) patients.

With respect to the agents of βλασφημείω, only one pattern emerges: neither God nor his holy angels are ever accused of being, or described as, agents of βλασφημείω. In contrast, there is a whole range of alleged agents of βλασφημείω, including Sennacherib, Antiochus Epiphanes, the nations, Jesus, Temple guards, people witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus, certain Jews, Paul, Christians, and the Beast, to name a few.

When we turn to the instrument or means by which βλασφημείω is performed, some significant patterns can be detected. In about 65% of the occurrences (11 of 169 vocalizing the proper Name of God—in rabbinic tradition (e.g., m. Sanh. 7.5), it is important to note that early Jewish and Christians traditions preserved in Greek have a much broader range of application for βλασφημείω.

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340 E.g., TobS 1:18; Mk 7:22; Acts 26:11; Eph 4:31; 1 Tim 1:13, 20; Decal. 86, 93; 2 Macc 10:35; Sir 3:16; Wis 1:6.
341 E.g., 0' Bel 1:8; Acts 19:37; 2 Pet 2:10; Jude 1:8; Conf. 154; Mos. 2.205; Sornn. 2.131; A.J. 4.207; Cap. 2.237.
342 E.g., B.J. 2.145, 252; A.J. 3.207; Cap. 1.279; Acts 6:11.
344 E.g., 2 Macc 2:6, 10:4 (implied); Legal. 169.
346 E.g., Vita 232, 245, 158, 230; B.J. 2.637, 3.439, 5.375, 5.393; Cap. 1.2
348 E.g., Acts 13:45; 1 Tim 6:1; Tit 2.5.
349 E.g., Acts 18:6; 1 Cor 10:30.
350 E.g., 2 Pet 2.2.
351 E.g., Rom 3:8; 1 Pet 4:4 (implied).
353 Cf. 2 Pet 2:9-11 where the possibility that God or the glorious ones could be agents of slander is rejected by the writer of 2 Peter.
times), the context indicates that saying or writing something performs the offense.\textsuperscript{354} Thus, \textgreek{βλασφημεω} is primarily a verbal offense.\textsuperscript{355} However, in about 29% of the occurrences (49 of 169 times), the cause is not identified. In the remainder, about 6% of occurrences, \textgreek{βλασφημεω} can refer to non-verbal offenses as well.\textsuperscript{356} For example, \textgreek{βλασφημεω} against God can be performed by (a) a combination of words, gestures, and attitudes,\textsuperscript{357} (b) doubting God's power to save Israel,\textsuperscript{358} (c) killing Israelites,\textsuperscript{359} (d) failing to keep the law,\textsuperscript{360} (e) profaning the Temple and the Sabbaths, plundering Jerusalem, erecting a desolating sacrilege, destroying the books of the law,\textsuperscript{361} (f) suppressing Judaism and torturing Jews,\textsuperscript{362} and (g) drinking out of the sacred cups of the Temple.\textsuperscript{363}

When we look at the immediate context for attendant actions or events that coincide with the use of \textgreek{βλασφημεω}-root words, additional patterns appear. The most significant attendant action is the threat (or portent) of death against those accused of \textgreek{βλασφημεω} against God, including Sennacherib,\textsuperscript{364} the Edomites,\textsuperscript{365} Antiochus Epiphanes,\textsuperscript{366} Timothy's army,\textsuperscript{367} certain Gentiles,\textsuperscript{368} Nicanor and his army,\textsuperscript{369} Daniel,\textsuperscript{370} Naboth,\textsuperscript{371} Benhadad,\textsuperscript{372} Baltasar,\textsuperscript{373} anyone speaking evil about God,\textsuperscript{374} certain proselytes to Judaism,\textsuperscript{375} Jesus,\textsuperscript{376} and Stephen.\textsuperscript{377} Not surprisingly, another

\textsuperscript{354} There are several instances where \textgreek{βλασφημεω} is expressed in written form; e.g., Rev 13:1, 17:3; \textit{Vita} 245, 260; \textit{C.Ap.} 1.59, 1.221-123;
\textsuperscript{355} Our use of the term verbal includes both oral and written communication.
\textsuperscript{356} This is supported by Bock (1998) 30, 46, 50.
\textsuperscript{357} E.g., 2 Kgs 19:22, 28; Matt 27:39.
\textsuperscript{358} E.g., 2 Kgs 19:4; Isa 52:5, 7.
\textsuperscript{359} E.g., TobS 1:18.
\textsuperscript{360} E.g., Rom 2:23-25.
\textsuperscript{361} E.g., 1 Mace 2:6-9; cf 1 Mace 1:21-56.
\textsuperscript{362} E.g., 1 Mace 8:2-4.
\textsuperscript{363} E.g., \textit{A.J.} 10.233.
\textsuperscript{364} 2 Kgs 19:7.
\textsuperscript{365} Ezek 35:8-9, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{366} 2 Mace 9:28.
\textsuperscript{367} 2 Mace 10:37.
\textsuperscript{368} 2 Mace 12:16.
\textsuperscript{369} 2 Mace 15:24.
\textsuperscript{370} Bel 1:5.
\textsuperscript{371} \textit{A.J.} 8.358-359.
\textsuperscript{372} \textit{A.J.} 8.392.
\textsuperscript{373} \textit{A.J.} 10.233; cf. 10.241.
\textsuperscript{374} \textit{Fug.} 84; \textit{Mos.} 2.206-208.
\textsuperscript{375} \textit{Spec.} 1.53.
\textsuperscript{376} Mk 14:64; Jn 10:33.
attendant action that coincides with the use of βλασφημ- root words is stoning. In this regard, Josephus captures a crucial Jewish sentiment when he writes, “Let him that blasphemeth God be stoned, then hung for a day and buried ignominiously in obscurity.” In addition, on certain occasions, the attendant actions make it clear that βλασφημ- root words can have the connotation of cursing, speaking evil, shaming or dishonoring someone, displaying arrogance, despising authority, betrayal or treason, and misrepresenting the truth.

At this point, we can provide a description or definition of βλασφημέω. This follows the tradition of Louw and Nida, who not only structure their lexicon according to semantic fields, but also provide definitions based on distinctive semantic features. Louw and Nida define βλασφημέω, βλασφημία, ας as “to speak against someone in such a way as to harm or injure his or her reputation (occurring in relation to persons as well as to divine beings).” Based on our survey, which goes beyond the database of Louw and Nida’s, we propose a similar definition of βλασφημέω: to denigrate falsely, insult or abuse someone or something in an arrogant manner either verbally or non-verbally. We should also note that typical uses of βλασφημ- root words also include the sense of making slanderous or untrue accusations about someone with evil or malicious intent and, when God is the patient, βλασφημ- root words have the sense of being a grave offense deserving deadly punishment. As we introduce more
terms (sections 4.2.2—4.2.5), we will identify the sense relationships between 

\[ \text{βλασφημέω} \] and each of the other terms.

### 4.2.2 \( \Deltaνσφημέω \)

\( \Deltaνσφημέω \) can be translated to blaspheme or to threaten evil. There are a total of 10 occurrences of \( \deltaυσφημέω \) and its cognates in the LXX, NT, Philo, and Josephus.\(^{389}\) \( \Deltaνσφημ- \) root words are relatively rare in ancient Greek literature.\(^{390}\) The verb, \( \deltaυσφημέω \), occurs once in the LXX and once in the NT. The noun, \( \deltaυσφημία, \alphaς \), occurs twice in the LXX, once in the NT, once in Philo, and once in Josephus. The adjective, \( \deltaυσφημος, \sigmaν \), occurs twice in the LXX, once in Philo, and once in Josephus.

When we turn to an analysis of the patients of \( \deltaυσφημ- \) root word, our survey reveals that it can take both animate and inanimate patients. In 50% of the occurrences (5 of 10 times), the patient is the Temple.\(^{391}\) Considering how rarely the term is used, it is noteworthy that \( \deltaυσφημέω \) is used with high frequency to characterize threats toward the Temple. Likewise, of the two occurrences of \( \deltaυσφημέω \) in Josephus, once the patient is Jerusalem, which is, of course, the city of the Temple,\(^{392}\) and once it is the sons of Herod.\(^{393}\) The patients of \( \deltaυσφημέω \) also include the Jewish community (once),\(^{394}\) Jewish laws, Jerusalem, Judea, and the commonwealth of Jews (once),\(^{395}\) and Paul and the apostles (once).\(^{396}\) Significantly, God is never the patient of \( \deltaυσφημέω \) in the LXX, NT, Philo, Josephus, or even Epictetus.\(^{397}\)

When we turn to the agent of \( \deltaυσφημέω \), it is not surprising that God is never identified as the agent. However, a number of figures are numbered among the

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\(^{389}\) Regarding our database, see note 334.

\(^{390}\) The TLG reveals only 51 occurrences of \( \deltaυσφημέω \) in extant literature between the 2nd century B.C.E. and the 1st century C.E.

\(^{391}\) See 1 Macc 7:38, 41; 2 Macc 13:11; 15:32; possibly \( \text{B.J.} \) 2.650.

\(^{392}\) \( \text{B.J.} \) 2.650.

\(^{393}\) \( \text{A.J.} \) 16.90.

\(^{394}\) 3 Macc 2:26.


\(^{396}\) 1 Cor 4:13.

\(^{397}\) Epictetus uses \( \deltaυσφημ- \) root words eight times in total—all occurring in \( \text{Diatr.} \) 3.24.89-3.24.91—with people as the patients of insult.
agents of δυσφημέω, including Nicanor or his messenger (3 of 10 times), 398 Gaius (once), 399 Philopater (once), 400 Herod (once), 401 Gentiles affiliated with Antiochus Eupator (once), 402 Romans (once), 403 and certain unidentified individuals (twice). 404

When we look for the instrument of δυσφημέω, 70% of the occurrences (7 of 10 times) indicate that the written or spoken word is the primary way in which the offense is performed. 405 In one notable instance, δυσφημία is performed by Nicanor’s “outstretched arm” along with certain verbal threats against the Temple, 406 which is confirmed by the fact that not only was Nicanor’s tongue cut out, but also his offending arm was cut off. 407 And, in two instances, the instrument of δυσφημία is not identified. 408 Even more than βλασφημέω, δυσφημέω is primarily a verbal offense, but on certain occasions, δυσφημέω is performed by non-verbal actions.

Once we look for attendant actions and settings coinciding with δυσφημέω, two patterns emerge. First, δυσφημέω is frequently accompanied by expressions such as speaking evil (κακῶς λέησεν), 409 speaking arrogantly (ἐλεύθησεν περιπάτως), with such audacity (ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον θράσους), 411 barbarous arrogance (φρονήμασιν ... βεβορβαρωμένος), 412 and he boasted highly (ἐμεγαλαύξησεν). 413 Rather than contributing distinctive meanings, these expressions of arrogant and evil speech seem to, by means of redundancy, reinforce the sense of δυσφημέω.

Redundancy is a common way in which writers try to reduce errors of reception. 414 Second, δυσφημέω tends to carry a cultic connotation, which is supported by (a) the

398 1 Mace 7:38, 41; 2 Mace 15:32.
399 Legat. 101.
400 3 Mace 2:26.
401 A.J. 16:90.
402 2 Mace 13:11.
403 B.J. 2.650.
404 E.g., 1 Cor 4:13; 2 Cor 6:8.
405 1 Mace 7:38; 1 Mace 7:41; 2 Mace 15:32; 3 Mace 2:26; Legat. 101a; 1 Cor 4:13; 2 Cor 6:8.
407 2 Mace 15:30, 33.
408 A.J. 16:90; 2 Mace 13:11.
409 1 Mace 7:42; cf. 7:41.
410 1 Mace 7:34; cf. 7:41.
412 2 Mace 13:11.
413 2 Mace 15:32.
proportionate number of times the patient of δυσφημέω is the Temple, (b) Josephus, who links one who practices divination (θελασμοὶ) with δυσφημέω,⁴¹⁵ (c) lexicographers who regularly translate δυσφημία as words of ill omen,⁴¹⁶ and (d) the use of δυσφημέω in 3 Macc 2:26-29, which pertains to Philopater’s malicious institution of pagan sacrifices for Jews and an interruption of Jewish gatherings in their ἱερὰ or sanctuaries.

Taking these observations into consideration, we can now provide a description or definition of δυσφημέω. Our survey indicates that Louw and Nida’s definition of δυσφημέω, δυσφημία, as "to attribute ill repute or bad reputation to"⁴¹⁷ holds true not only for the NT, but also generally reflects the usage in LXX, Josephus, and Philo. However, to better reflect LXX, Josephus, and Philo, we would expand that definition only slightly; δυσφημέω is to attribute evil, ill-fate, ill-omen, or a bad reputation to someone or something.⁴¹⁸ In addition, typical uses of δυσφημία-root words include the sense of slandering or attributing evil in an arrogant or boastful manner, often with a cultic connotation.

Now we are in a position to sketch the paradigmatic relationship between δυσφημέω and βλασφημέω, which we characterize as partially synonymous (see Diagram A). On the one hand, both share some semantic features. Both have the sense of speaking against someone or something; both are primarily verbal offenses; and both attribute arrogance to the speaker. On the other hand, the two terms have semantic features that do not overlap. The offense of βλασφημέω is more severe than δυσφημέω, because the penalty of death is often an attendant consequence of βλασφημέω, but not of δυσφημέω. In addition, God can be the patient (but is never the agent) of βλασφημέω; in contrast, God is never directly a patient (or the agent) of δυσφημέω. Furthermore, βλασφημέω is more likely to be used to describe non-verbal offensives than δυσφημέω. Therefore, βλασφημέω and δυσφημέω are partially synonymous.

⁴¹⁵ B.J. 2.650.
⁴¹⁶ Liddell & Scott (1889) and W. A. Oldfather, the translator of Epictetus (Loeb).
⁴¹⁷ Louw and Nida (1989) 434, entry number 33.398.
4.2.3 Κακολογεῖω

Κακολογεῖω can be translated to speak evil against or to curse someone. There are a total of 18 occurrences of κακολογεῖω and its cognates in the LXX, NT, and Josephus. There are no occurrences in Philo. The verb, κακολογεῖω, occurs 6 times in the LXX, 4 times in the NT, and once in Josephus. The adverbial expression, κακῶς λαλεῖν, occurs once in LXX and once in NT. The adverbial expression, κακῶς λέγειν, occurs 5 times in the LXX. The adjective, κακολόγος, ς, and the noun, κακολογία, ας, η, do not occur in the LXX, NT, Philo, or Josephus.

When we examine the patients of κακολογεῖω, an immediate pattern emerges. Of the 18 instances, 16 times the patient of κακολογεῖω is animate and twice the patient is an inanimate object. Of the 16 animate patients, 15 are symbols or persons of authority (ca. 83% of the total occurrences), including God (twice), father or mother (7 times), the high priest (3 times), leaders of Israel (once), kings and gods (once), and Jesus (once). Only once—a reference to disabled people—is the animate patient not an authority figure; however, even here, it is out of fear of

418 E.g., 1 Macc 7:41 (cf. 7:42); 2 Cor 6:8. Epictetus, Diatr. 3.24.90 provides a definition: οὔ δὲ δύσφημα καλέσ άλλα ἢ τὰ κακῶ τινος στημαντικά; But do you call any things ill-omened except those which signify some evil for us?

419 Regarding our database, see note 334. In our database for κακολογεῖω, we have included five instances of κακης λαλεῖν and two instances of κακῆς λεγεῖν, both of which function as adverbial forms of κακολογεῖν, e.g., see the interchangeability of κακολογεῖν and κακῆς λεγεῖν in Exod 21:16 and Lev 20:9.

421 Exod 21:16; Lev 20:9 (twice); Prov 20:9; Ezek 22:7; Matt 15:4; Mk 7:10.
423 Exod 22:27.
424 Isa 8:21.
425 Mk 9:39.
God that one is not to speak evil of the disabled (Lev 19:14) and thus it is linked to authority. Of the two inanimate patients, one is “the way”\(^{427}\) and the other is “the Temple,” both of which could symbolize divine authority.\(^{428}\) It is also worth noting that the only occurrence of \(\kappa\alpha\kappa\omega\lambda\omega\gamma\epsilon\omega\) in Josephus happens in the context of two rival groups claiming the authority of the high priest (\(A.J.\ 20.180\)). Thus, an examination of the patients of \(\kappa\alpha\kappa\omega\lambda\omega\gamma\epsilon\omega\) reveals that it predominantly expresses contempt for authority.

Turning to the issue of agency, it is not surprising that God is never identified as the agent of \(\kappa\alpha\kappa\omega\lambda\omega\gamma\epsilon\omega\) given what we have discovered about the patients of \(\kappa\alpha\kappa\omega\lambda\omega\gamma\epsilon\omega\). This might be explained by the notion that God, as the highest authority, has no one to rebel against. Conversely, 66% of the occurrences (12 of 18 times) the people of Israel, or “anyone” from among Israel, are identified as the agent or potential agent of \(\kappa\alpha\kappa\omega\lambda\omega\gamma\epsilon\omega\).\(^{429}\) Other specific agents that are mentioned include the sons of Eli (1 Sam 3:13), certain Jews in the synagogue of Ephesus (Acts 19:9), the high priests (\(A.J.\ 20.180\)), people who consult mediums (Isa 8:21), and Nicanor (1 Macc 7:42). It is noteworthy that in the so-called Jewish trial in FG, Jesus defends himself against the same charge of “speaking wickedly” before the high priest in Jn 18:23.\(^{430}\)

When we look for dominant patterns regarding the instrument of \(\kappa\alpha\kappa\omega\lambda\omega\gamma\epsilon\omega\), it is apparent that in 94% of the occurrences (17 of 18 times) the offense is performed by speech itself. The one remaining instance concerns the sons of Eli, who are accused of \(\kappa\alpha\kappa\omega\lambda\omega\gamma\omega\nu\tau\varepsilon\zeta\ \theta\varepsilon\delta\omicron\) or “blaspheming God” (NRSV; 1 Sam 3:13). Nothing in the immediate text indicates how they blasphemed God. However, they gave false and self-serving \textit{instruction}—suggesting that the offense was verbal—about the laws of sacrifice (1 Sam 15-17), which is subsequently interpreted as “setting aside the

\(^{427}\) Acts 19:9.
\(^{428}\) 1 Macc 7:42.
\(^{429}\) E.g., Exod 2:16; 22:27 (twice); Lev 19:14; Lev 20:9; Prov 20:9; Isa 8:21; Ezek 22:7; Matt 15:4; Mk 7:10; Mk 9:39; \textit{Alleg. Interp.}, 2.78.
\(^{430}\) “Jesus answered him, ‘If I have \\textit{spoken wickedly} (\kappa\alpha\kappa\omega\zeta\ \iota\lambda\alpha\dot{\eta}\sigma\sigma\alpha), bear witness of that evil; but if I have spoken well, why do you strike me?’” (Jn 18:23); see §14.2.1(9).
sacrifices of the Lord,” ἡθέτουν τὴν θυσίαν κορίου (1 Sam 2:15-17) and “despising me [God],” ἐξουθενῶν με (1 Sam 2:30).

Regarding actions that coincide with the use of κακολογέω, there is one conspicuous set of associations. In about 61% of the occurrences (11 of 18 times), the death sentence is prescribed (e.g., Exod 21:16; 1 Sam 3:13), or death is the result (e.g., 1 Macc 7:42-43), or some other harsh punishment follows (Ezek 22:7, 15). In fact, it seems that it was taken for granted that κακολογοῦντες against one’s parents was a capital offense (e.g., Prov 20:9; Mk 7:10).

At this point, we can offer a definition of κακολογέω. We generally agree with Louw and Nida that κακολογέω can be defined as “to insult in a particularly strong and unjustified manner.” However, our data indicates that we can go further; κακολογέω refers to speaking evil against persons or symbols of authority and, because the performance of κακολογέω frequently results in the death for the offender, κακολογέω is a very severe offence.

Now we can sketch the paradigmatic relationship between κακολογέω and βλασφημέω as hyponymous (see Diagram B). On the one hand, both share certain semantic features. Both take animate and inanimate patients. Both share the feature of being verbally offensive by attributing evil to or insulting someone or something. Both can result in deadly penalties for the offender. On the other hand, there are differences in stress and emphasis. For instance, κακολογέω is more likely to appear in contexts where persons or symbols of authority are being scorned than βλασφημέω; hence, κακολογέω seems to have a more restricted sense. In addition, κακολογέω is limited to verbal offenses, but βλασφημέω can be performed verbally or non-verbally. Thus, the lexical sense of βλασφημέω is more general and inclusive than κακολογέω and, as such, κακολογέω is a hyponym or type of βλασφημέω:
4.2.4 Ἐνακαταλαλέω

Ἐνακαταλαλέω is often translated to *speak evil* or to *slander*. There are 14 occurrences of Ἐνακαταλαλέω and its cognates in the LXX, NT, and Philo. There are no occurrences in Josephus. The verb, Ἐνακαταλαλέω, occurs 5 times in the NT and 5 times in Philo. The noun, Ἐνακαταλαλία, ἄλλα, ἑτέρα, occurs once in the LXX and twice in the NT. The noun, Ἐνακαταλαλός, ὁ, ὁ, occurs once in the NT.

There are a wide variety of patients for Ἐνακαταλαλέω-root words. Of the 14 occurrences, patients include Christians (3 times), "anyone" (once), the law (once), Moses (twice), God and Moses (3 times), and unidentified individuals (4 times). As we can see, the patient of Ἐνακαταλαλέω can be either animate (e.g., Moses) or inanimate (e.g., the law), which follows the pattern of ἐθέλησαμενος, δυσφημέω, and κακολογέω.

The agents of Ἐνακαταλαλέω are widely distributed among various types and classes of people. Of the 14 occurrences, the agents of Ἐνακαταλαλέω includes "anyone" (twice), Christians (3 times), Gentiles (once), Miriam (twice), the people of Israel.

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431 Louw and Nida (1989) 434, entry number 33.399.
432 Regarding our database, see note 334.
434 Jas 4:11.
435 Jas 4:11.
436 Jas 4:11.
437 Jas 4:11.
438 Jas 4:11 (twice).
439 Jas 4:11 (twice).
440 Alleg Interp. 2.66 and 2.67.
441 Alleg Interp. 2.78 (thrice).
442 Alleg Interp. 2.66 and 2.67.
(three times), people who do not acknowledge God (once), and certain unidentified individuals (twice).

It appears that the instrument of καταλαλέω is the tongue. Although most texts do not explicitly identify the instrument of καταλαλέω, the sense of καταλαλέω seems to be restricted to a verbal offense for three reasons: (a) part of the root of καταλαλέω (-λα-) is associated with the sense of speaking, (b) when we assume that the instrument of καταλαλέω is speech, it is congruent with the texts in which the term occurs, and (c) in our data base there is no clear evidence to the contrary.

When we turn toward identifying attendant actions or circumstances coinciding with the use of καταλαλέω, no thoroughgoing trends emerge. Nevertheless, a few moderate tendencies can be observed. First, several times κακαλαλέω has the connotation of an unjustified accusation or attributing evil to someone who is good. In one instance, Philo writes that Miriam “dared to speak against [καταλαλαίην] Moses and to accuse him for the very actions for which he deserved to be praised.” Second, the issue of honor and shame forms the backdrop in a few instances. For example, as the author of 1 Peter wrote, “Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign [καταλαλοῦσιν] you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.” Third, although in most cases the consequences of καταλαλέω are not mentioned, in a couple of instances the act of καταλαλέω either leads to the destruction of the soul or is considered worthy of death. Fourth, καταλαλέω has

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443 Alleg. Interp. 2.78 (thrice).
444 Rom 1:28.
445 Wis 1:11 and 1 Pet 3:16.
446 Wis 1:11.
447 E.g., Jas 4:11.
448 1 Pet 2:12; 3:16.
449 Alleg. Interp. 2.78 (Loeb).
450 1 Pet 2:12; 3:16; Alleg. Interpr. 2.66, 2.67.
451 NRSV, 1 Pet 2:12.
452 Wis 1:11.
453 Rom 1:30; cf. 1:32.
the sense of falsely accusing.\textsuperscript{454} Fifth, καταλαλέω is listed among the vices in contrast with virtue.\textsuperscript{455}

Now we are in a position to offer a brief definition of καταλαλέω. For Louw and Nida, the definition of καταλαλέω is “to speak against, often involving speaking evil of.”\textsuperscript{456} We concur with Louw and Nida’s definition as far as it goes, but our data suggests that καταλαλέω can also includes the sense of attributing evil to someone unjustly and speaking in a dishonorable or shameful manner.

At this point, we can sketch the paradigmatic relationship between καταλαλέω and βλασφημέω as hyponymous (see Diagram C). On the one hand, καταλαλέω and βλασφημέω share certain semantic features in common. Both share the sense of speaking against someone. In certain circumstances, both καταλαλέω and βλασφημέω result in death or a threat of death for the offender. In addition, both terms can imply that the abuse of the patient entailed false accusation or misrepresentation of the truth. On the other hand, the sense of καταλαλέω seems to be slightly more restricted than the sense of βλασφημέω. Whereas the instrument of βλασφημέω can be both verbal and non-verbal, καταλαλέω appears to be restricted to verbal abuse alone. Hence, the lexical sense of βλασφημέω is more general and inclusive of καταλαλέω; that is, καταλαλέω is a hyponym of βλασφημέω:

\begin{center}
\textbf{Diagram C: Hyponymy}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{454} E.g., 1 Pet 2:12; \textit{Alleg. Interp.} 2.78.
\textsuperscript{455} E.g, \textit{Alleg. Interp.} 2.78; 1 Pet 2:1; Rom 1:30.
\textsuperscript{456} Louw and Nida (1989) 433, entry number 33.387.
4.2.5 λοιðορέω

λοιðορέω is frequently translated to reproach or to abuse. There are a total of 82 occurrences of λοιðορέω and its cognates in the LXX, NT, Philo, and Josephus.\(^{457}\) The verb, λοιðορέω, occurs 8 times in the LXX, 4 times in the NT, 4 times in Philo, and 25 times in Josephus. The verb, ἀντιλοιðορέω, occurs once in the NT and the verb, συνλοιðορέω, occurs once in the LXX. The noun, λοιðορία, ας, ἡ, occurs 7 times in the LXX, 3 times in the NT, 4 times in Philo, and 21 times in Josephus. The noun, λοιðορός, ὁ, ὁ, occurs 4 times in the LXX.

The patients of λοιðορέω included a broad range of animate entities (80 of 82 times) and one inanimate entity—the law (2 of 82 times).\(^{458}\) The animate patients of λοιðορέω are broadly distributed and include (in descending frequency):

- unidentified people (16 of 82 times),\(^ {459}\) the Jews (12 of 82 times),\(^ {460}\) Moses (9 of 82 times),\(^ {461}\) Herod the Great (5 of 82 times), God (twice), Pilate (twice),\(^ {462}\) Christ (twice),\(^ {463}\) Israelites quarrelling with each other (once),\(^ {464}\) the High Priest (once),\(^ {465}\) the man born blind (once),\(^ {466}\) Christians (once),\(^ {467}\) and others. It is noteworthy that God is the patient of λοιðορέω in only 2 of 82 occurrences.

The agents of λοιðορέω include (in descending frequency): the Israelites (20 of 82 times),\(^ {468}\) unidentified persons (11 of 82 times),\(^ {469}\) Apion, who reproaches the Jews (9 of 82 times),\(^ {470}\) Greek historians, who reproach the Jews (4 of 82 times),\(^ {471}\) Paul, who is accused of reproaching the High Priest (once),\(^ {472}\) women in the market place.

\(^{457}\) Regarding our database, see note 334.
\(^{459}\) E.g., Gen 49:23; Spec. 3.174.
\(^{460}\) E.g., C. Ap. 1.3, 2.114.
\(^{461}\) E.g., Exod 17:2; Hypoth. 6.2.
\(^{462}\) A. J. 18:61.
\(^{463}\) E.g., 1 Pet 2:23.
\(^{464}\) E.g., Exod 21:18.
\(^{465}\) E.g., Acts 21:4-5.
\(^{466}\) In 9:28.
\(^{467}\) E.g., 1 Tim 5:14.
\(^{468}\) E.g., Num 20:13; Deut 33:8; A. J. 18:61.
\(^{469}\) E.g., 1 Cor 4:12; 1 Pet 2:23; C. Ap. 2.161.
\(^{470}\) E.g., C. Ap. 2.142; 2.290.
\(^{471}\) E.g., C. Ap. 1.220; 1.3.
\(^{472}\) Acts 23:4-5.
When we look for the instrument of λοίδορέω, a clear pattern emerges. The instrument of λοίδορέω is the word. In about 17% of the occurrences (14 of 82 times), the instrument is the written word, and in about 55% of the occurrences (14 of 82 times), the instrument is the spoken word. However, about 28% percent of the time, the instrument of λοίδορέω is not identified or there is not enough contextual information to determine the instrument of λοίδορέω. This leaves some uncertainty; however, since we find explicit or implicit indications that λοίδορέω was performed by non-verbal means, we conclude that λοίδορέω is a verbal (written or oral) offense.

When we look at actions associated with λοίδορέω, a few patterns emerge. First, λοίδορέω is used in contexts of mutual violence, where two disputants or parties trade verbal or physical blows, garrisons are attacked, riots break out, bloodshed takes place, and military combat ensues. Philo even compares
λοιδοροθάντος with the blows and injuries inflicted by wrestlers and boxers\textsuperscript{489} and speaks about contests of abuse (λοιδορίας ἀμιλλον).\textsuperscript{490} Second, λοιδορέω occurs in close association with verbs indicating abusive language, such as blaspheming,\textsuperscript{491} uttering words that are not to be spoken,\textsuperscript{492} speaking evil,\textsuperscript{493} using evil language,\textsuperscript{494} speaking with contumelious words,\textsuperscript{495} quarrelling,\textsuperscript{496} and cursing.\textsuperscript{497} These associations confirm that the lexical sense of λοιδορέω entails the notion of verbal abuse.\textsuperscript{498} Third, λοιδορέω occurs in contexts where honor and shame are at stake.\textsuperscript{499} For example, if a borrower does not repay his debt, then the creditor will “repay him with curses and reproaches [λοιδορέω], and instead of glory will repay him with dishonor.”\textsuperscript{500} In this instance, the performance of λοιδορίας is an act of dishonor (ἀτιμία), rather than honor (δόξη).\textsuperscript{501}

In view of the sense relationships we have just described, we can provide a definition of λοιδορέω. For Louw and Nida, the definition of λοιδορέω is “to speak in a highly insulting manner.”\textsuperscript{502} As with previous terms we have looked at, we concur with Louw and Nida, but offer a slightly expanded definition; λοιδορέω entails speaking or writing against an opponent (a disputant) with evil or malicious intent.

The paradigmatic sense-relationships between λοιδορέω and βλασφημεῖω can now be articulated as partially synonymous (see Diagram D). On the one hand, βλασφημεῖω and λοιδορέω share some semantic features. For instance, both λοιδορέω and βλασφημεῖω can take inanimate and animate patients. Both can have a

\textsuperscript{489} Spec. 3.174; cf. Somn. 2.167-168
\textsuperscript{490} Agr. 110.
\textsuperscript{491} Βλασφημοῦντες (2 Macc 12:14); βλασφημίας (Flacc. 23-33).
\textsuperscript{492} Λαλοῦντες σὲ μὴ θέμις (2 Macc 12:14).
\textsuperscript{493} Ἐρεῖς κακῶς (Acts 21:4-5).
\textsuperscript{494} Κακηγοροῦντος (Spec. 3.174); κακηγορεῖν (Flacc. 32-33).
\textsuperscript{495} Προπηλακίζειν (Spec. 3.174).
\textsuperscript{496} Συμπλέκει (Prov 20:3).
\textsuperscript{497} Κατάρας (Sir 29:6); κατάρας (Decal. 75); καταραμένη (B.J. 6.203).
\textsuperscript{498} The associations tend to shade the lexical sense of λοιδορέω, if we trust the redundancy principle; that is, that authors attempt to reduce miscommunication by using closely related words and expressions in the same context; see Reed (1995) 226.
\textsuperscript{499} E.g., C.Ap. 1.220, 1.319, 2.30, 2.32-34, 2.49; A.J. 18.150, 18.180, Agr. 110; Sir 29:6
\textsuperscript{500} NRSV Sir 29:6.
\textsuperscript{501} Prov 20:3; Sir 29:6; Agr. 110.
\textsuperscript{502} Louw and Nida (1989) 433, entry number 33.393.
wide variety of agents, but never God. Both are used to express verbal attacks between quarrelling people or hostile armies. Moreover, both λοιδορέω and βλασφημέω are primarily verbal offenses—the written or spoken word is the instrument of offense for 65% of all the occurrences of βλασφημέω and 72% of all the occurrences of λοιδορέω. On the other hand, βλασφημέω has some distinctive semantic features that λοιδορέω does not have. For example, βλασφημέω can be performed by non-verbal actions but, as far as we can discern, this is not so for λοιδορέω. Again, βλασφημέω appears to be a more severe offense than λοιδορέω. That is, βλασφημέω is often (33.5% of the time) used to refer to an offense against God or other deities and, as a consequence, the death penalty is associated with it. In contrast, λοιδορέω is rarely (2% of the time) used to refer to an offense against God and, although death may be associated with it, 503 the death penalty is not. When we consider the similarities and differences, we see that βλασφημέω and λοιδορέω have continuous sense relations; however, βλασφημέω is used more in religious contexts and λοιδορέω in more non-religious contexts. Hence, we describe βλασφημέω and λοιδορέω as partially synonymous:

![Diagram D: Partial Synonymy](image)

4.3 Conclusions

Here, we will not summarize the foregoing material, since the entire chapter has been an exercise in summarizing the semantic relationships of βλασφημέω and related lexemes. Here, we merely point out the benefits of the preceding analysis.

First, the preceding analysis reminds us that words have meaning only in relation to other words. Even though our analysis was limited to five lexemes and their

503 E.g., Josephus believes that Apion died in great torment because of his reproaches (λοιδορία)
cognates, it provided a sample of words that share partially synonymous or hyponymous relations with βλασφημέω and, in this way, it rendered a type of semantic map or orientation for the remainder of our study on blasphemy.

Second, the preceding analysis demonstrates that the various senses of βλασφημέω are not limited to that term. Βλασφημέω shares semantic space with a broad range of other terms, even beyond the four other lexemes we discussed. As such, the preceding analysis frees us from the notion that only texts that use βλασφημέω are valid for the study of blasphemy.

Third, the preceding analysis alerts us to the fact that various partial synonyms and hyponyms of βλασφημέω can be used to express blasphemy with different emphases. So, for example, κακολογέω can be used to refer to blasphemy, while stressing the sense of speaking evil of authority, and λοιδορέω can refer to blasphemy, but do so by accentuating an element of contending with an opponent.

against the Jews and their laws; cf. C.Ap. 2.142.
PART II

BLASPHEMY IN SELECTED EARLY JEWISH TEXTS

In Part II we use the concept of blasphemy articulated in chapter 4 to identify and evaluate seven key texts from selected early Jewish literature—Exod 22:27; Lev 24:10-23; Num 15:30-31; 2 Kgs 18:1—20:21; 1 Macc 1:41—2:14; 2 Macc 14:26-15:37; and Philo's Dreams 1.123-132—where it appears as though God is directly or indirectly blasphemed. For each text, we address two main questions—What is the discourse concept of blasphemy that emerges from the text? What is the penalty for blasphemy?

In Part II, we shift our focus from analyzing the lexical meaning of blasphemy (chapter 4), to examining the discourse meanings of blasphemy of key texts (Chapters 5-12). At this point, we also narrow our discussion from speaking about blasphemy in general to the more specific and significant issue of blasphemy against God. We conclude Part II with a composite portrait of blasphemy comprised of four strokes.
CHAPTER 5
MOSAIC LAW ON BLASPHEMY
EXODUS 22:27 (28)

Three Mosaic texts undergird many of the legal assumptions and actions regarding blasphemy in early Judaism. In chapters 5-7, we will analyze this triumvirate of Mosaic texts—Exod 22:27 (28), Lev 24:10-23, and Num 15:30-31—beginning with Exod 22:27 (28):

Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people (NIV).

When it comes to the issue of blasphemy, Hebrew scripture, Christian scripture, Philo, Josephus, and the Talmud make reference to Exod 22:27. It is little wonder, therefore, that modern interpreters have identified Exod 22:27 as a primary text or even a legal foundation for understanding the Jewish conception of blasphemy. However, treating this verse as a cornerstone for blasphemy could be hasty. Not only are there difficult text-critical issues and questions of interpretation, but also some have even argued that Exod 22:27 has nothing to do with blasphemy. We will set out the issues and address them in turn.

5.1 Is This Blasphemy?

Of first importance, we must address the claim that Exod 22:27 does not deal with blasphemy. Brichto has argued that blasphemy (= cursing God) is not the issue.

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504 Following A, B, and A, whereas Sym has οὐκ ἀτιμάσεις, do not dishonor, and Aquila has οὐ καταράσῃς, you shall not curse; see Wevers (1991) 265 and Houtman (2000) 231.
506 2 Kgs 19:3; Isa 8:21.
507 Mos. 2.205, Spec. 1.53, and QD 2.5.
509 b. Sanh. 66a.
510 The versification varies. The Hebrew has v. 27 as does Rahlfs’ LXX. In contrast, the English versions, the Göttingen Septuaginta, and Brenton (1851) trans. of LXX has v. 28.
here.\footnote{Brichto (1963) 118-79 is followed by Durham (1987), Sprinkle (1994) 167-8, and Enns (2000) 445, 452-3; in contrast, see Noth (1962) 187; Cassuto (1967) 193-4; Hyatt (1971) 244.} Focusing on the Hebrew, Brichto argues that הלל in the piel stem (to revile; lit. to make light) does not necessarily involve speech and, in fact, usually does not.\footnote{Brichto (1963) 151.} Furthermore, רע ה (to curse) should not be limited to meaning a spoken curse but, more fundamentally, it means, “to bind with a spell or put under a ban.”\footnote{Brichto (1963) 114-5.} Thus, Brichto understands the first expression, בלא ה (22:27a), to mean do not show disrespect for Deity, which he further interprets as, do not disregard God’s moral standards.\footnote{Brichto (1963) 158.} In addition, Brichto believes that the second expression, לירוא נ (Exod 22:27b), should not be limited to do not curse a leader of our people, but should be taken figuratively as do not do anything that brings civil authority into the disfavor of God.\footnote{Brichto (1963) 158.}

On the whole, Brichto’s analysis is persuasive. However, because he labors under the conviction that the term blasphemy only refers to cursing God (verbal imprecation or casting a curse or spell on someone), by definition he rules out blasphemy in verse 27.\footnote{Brichto (1963) 177.} This is a mistake. As we have argued in section 4.6, blasphemy in early Jewish and Christian literature can include the notion of malediction or imprecation, but it is much broader concept. The fact that Brichto’s analysis focuses on Hebrew and ours focuses on Greek has no bearing, since any language can lexicalize the concept of blasphemy. Our analysis in section 4.6 indicated that the verbal expressions found in verse 27, κακολογεῖ (to blaspheme) and κακῶς λέγειν (to curse), are used to lexicalize the concept of blasphemy. Although we argued that the lexical senses of κακολογεῖ and κακῶς λέγειν are limited to verbal actions, the discourse concept or contextual use of the two terms in Exod 22:20-27 extends their meaning to embrace non-verbal connotations (see § 5.3 below).

As such, the disagreement between Brichto’s analysis and our own is largely terminological. We both agree that Exod 22:27 refers to non-verbal (moral) behavior...
as much as it does to verbal behavior. We disagree on whether *blasphemy* is the correct term to describe the phenomenon in verse 27. Our analysis indicates that it is the correct term.

### 5.2 Who Is Blasphemed?

There is some question about who is being *blasphemed* in Exod 22:27a. The MT has the plural, מִנְזֵירָא, which probably explains why we find the plural ὑεός in LXX. Although the plural form is used, it is possible that מִנְזֵירָא or ὑεός has singular intent. Disagreement over whether to translate the terms as singular or plural, as well as disagreement over their meaning has resulted in four possible translations—*judge*, *judges*, *God*, or *gods*.

#### 5.2.1 Judge(s)

A long-standing interpretation is that מִנְזֵירָא in verse 27a refers to *judges* or a *judge*. *Targums Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Neofiti* have מִנְזֵירָא (your judges), *Targum Onqelos* has מִנְזֵיר (judge), and *b. Sanh.* 66a has מִנְזֵיר, which in context, clearly refers to human judges. Some modern interpreters also follow this view. There are two reasons for translating ὑεός or מִנְזֵיר as *judges or judges*. On the one hand, interpreting it as *judges* eliminates an inconsistency that would otherwise appear if it were translated as *gods*. If it were translated as *gods*, Exod 22:27 would be saying do not disrespect the gods, and this seems inconsistent with the uncompromising anti-other-gods context of Exodus. On the other hand, translating ὑεός or מִנְזֵיר as *judge* seems to make better sense than translating it as *God*. After all, God is the speaker or the voice behind Exod 22:27 and we would not expect God to speak of Himself in the third person.
If we follow this long-standing tradition that θέους or מִלְחָמָה refers to not blasphemying judges in verse 27a, then it is more-or-less synonymous with verse 27b, which warns against cursing rulers (ἀρχοντας or שֵׁם). However, this is where the argument loses steam, according to Houtman.524 The parallel between the first and the second half of the verse does not hold; whereas θέους is not further defined, ἀρχοντας (rulers) is further qualified by the phrase τοῦ λαοῦ σου (of your people). This weighs against equating θέους and ἀρχοντας. As we shall see, there are other factors that count against this position too.

5.2.2 The one true God

Another interpretation, which is widely held by modern scholars, understands מִלְחָמָה as a collective singular in 22:27a and thus a reference to the one true God.525 This is not unreasonable, since the overwhelming use of מִלְחָמָה in Exodus refers to the one God of Israel (e.g., 19:3; 20:2).526 This strongly counts against the previous view that מִלְחָמָה refers to judges. That מִלְחָמָה in verse 27a refers to the one true God is reinforced by the context of the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:22—23:33), which pertains to giving the law by “the LORD your God” (מִלְחָמָה; 20:2) and “the LORD” (לֹא פָּרֳס; 20:22). Because God is the key figure and final authority throughout the discourse, when we encounter the warning not to undermine authority—“Do not blaspheme God (מִלְחָמָה), or curse a leader of your people (שֵׁם)” —it would seem natural to take מִלְחָמָה as a reference to God and שֵׁם as reference to administrative leaders. This preserves the balance between divine and human authority exhibited throughout the Book of the Covenant (see § 5.4), where God gives the ordinances (21:1), but human judges (מִלְחָמָה) interpret and apply them (21:22).527 This balance

526 The word מִלְחָמָה occurs 139 times in Exodus: (a) 131 refer to the one God of Israel; (b) four refer to other gods (18:11; 20:3; 23:13; 32:23); (c) once it is predicated of Moses (7:1); and (d) three times (21:6; 22:7-8). It could refer to judges, which is preferred by Enns (2000) 444, or to God, which is preferred by Durham (1987) 321.
527 With casuistic formulations, like we find in “the Book of the Covenant,” a criminal or civil suit is presented, a human authority under divine revelation makes a legal decision, and a general principle is formulated in casuistic terms (e.g., Lev 24:10-23). Although the decision comes through a human court, it has the authority and sanction of divine command. See Sarna (1996) 161. Cf. Sprinkle (1994) 167, who also notes the divine-human authority pattern.
can also be seen in other texts that differentiate between divine and human authority and warn against disparaging either one.528

5.2.3 Other gods

When we turn to LXX, however, some difficulties arise. Of the 23 occurrences of θεός used in Exodus, 22 occurrences refer to gods other than the one true God and the 23rd is the debated text of Exod 22:27a. It suggests, of course, that the author(s) of LXX Exodus did not intend θεός to refer to the one God of Israel. In fact, both Josephus and Philo, who were influenced by LXX, interpret θεός in 22:27a as a reference to other gods. Both Philo529 and Josephus530 argue that it is important not to blaspheme the so-called gods of other nations, because the name “god,” in general, is worthy of the highest honor and respect. Their motivation was apologetic, advocating Jewish monotheism to a readership that was influenced by a broadly Greco-Roman understanding of divine realities. As we will see in chapter eleven, Philo adds insight to our understanding of blasphemy, but his interpretation is not the only Jewish understanding available during the first century and it does not particularly fit the Johannine context. For our purposes, we need to look elsewhere for a more satisfying and relevant understanding of verse 27a.

5.2.4 Intermediary figures

Another possibility is that θεός in verse 27a refers to intermediary figures, whether human or superhuman. Already in Exod 7:1, Moses is given the title of god531 and now, in the immediate context of 22:27, another intermediary figure is introduced by the Lord:

I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him (NRSV; Exod 23:20-21, my emphasis).

528 1 Kgs 21:10; Isa 8:21; Prov 24:21; Philo Alleg. Interp. 2.78, Fug. 84; Josephus A.J. 8.358-9; Acts 6:11; cf. 1 Pet 2:17.
529 Philo Mos. 2.205-206; cf. Q.E. 2.5; Spec. 1.53.
530 Josephus C. Ap. 2.237; cf. Ant. 4.207.
531 Cf. Exod 4:16 and Philo, who writes that Moses “was named god and king of the whole nation” (Mos. 1.158). On the exalted Moses traditions, see Hurtado (1988) 56-9 and Meeks (1968) 354-71.
There are two Jewish traditions that allude to Exod 23:20-21 and both may shed light on who is blasphemed in Exod 22:27a. The first comes from the Apocrypha of Abraham, which can be dated between 70 and 150 C.E. In this text, God commands an angel named Yahweh to consecrate Abraham (Apoc. Ab. 10:3-4). The angel, whose name is thought to be a combination of Yahweh and El, is indwelt by God’s ineffable name (Apoc. Ab. 10:8) and is given powers of divine administration (Apoc. Ab. 10:8-14). In this way, the Apocrypha of Abraham seems to allude to Exod. 23:20-21, where God promises to send an angel to lead Israel and warns the Israelites not to disobey the angel, for my name is in him. The second tradition comes from Philo who, in his commentary on Exod 23:20-21, describes the angel that leads Israel as the Logos. The Logos is the μεσιτής or mediator of God’s gifts and benefactions, who is elsewhere given the title of God. What is striking is that the identification of certain figures as gods is not exceptional in first-century Jewish literature. This accords with Mach’s findings that, within second Temple Judaism,
different types of monotheism can be discerned.\textsuperscript{537} One type, \textit{inclusive monotheism}, vigorously affirms one God, but at the same time avows the existence of other exalted heavenly beings.\textsuperscript{538}

Inclusive monotheism, in our judgment, provides a plausible theological context for reading verse 27a during the first century. Just as Philo and Josephus read verse 27a as a reference to \textit{other gods}, so it is possible that other first-century Jews understood it as a reference to other gods, \textit{but in the more positive sense of divine mediator figures}. If so, then Johannine Jewish Christians and their non-believing Jewish counterparts could have read verse 27a as “Do not blaspheme divine mediators [of God].”

\textbf{5.2.5 Preliminary conclusion}

Although it is possible that all four interpretations could have surfaced during the first century, and we know at least one interpretation did (see Philo and Josephus), we believe that early Jewish readers would have found two readings most commendable. On the one hand, if LXX had been influential, which it was, and if we presuppose inclusive monotheism, which we should, then verse 27a could have been understood as a prohibition against slandering gods and/or divine intermediary figures. On the other hand, when we see that the overwhelming use of ρήμα in Exodus refers to God, once we grant that translating ρήμα into Greek would account for the plural use of Θεός, and after we consider the literary context of the Book of the Covenant,\textsuperscript{539} then it is reasonable to suppose that the prohibition of verse 27a is concerned with blasphemy against God and not against intermediary figures.

\textsuperscript{537} Mach (1999) 21-42 describes an \textit{exclusive-polemical monotheism}, an \textit{exclusive-assimilative monotheism}, and an \textit{inclusive monotheism} (our terms), each reflecting different political-cultural situations.

\textsuperscript{538} An example of \textit{inclusive monotheism} is found in Jub. 15:31-32a: “Because (there are) many nations and many people, and they all belong to him, but over all of them he caused spirits to rule so that they might lead them astray from following him. But over Israel he did not cause any angel or spirit to rule, because he alone is their ruler and he will protect them”; cf. \textit{OTP} (1985) 87.

\textsuperscript{539} The context on the Book of the Covenant presents a balance between divine and human authority.
Henceforth, we will suppose that the referent is God, knowing that it was not the only way the text could have been understood.

5.3 The Literary Context

How does the literary context or discourse of Exodus shape the meaning of the prohibition in Exod 22:27? The broader context or discourse is often identified as the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:22—23:33).\(^{540}\) It is considered the oldest collection of laws in the OT and represents a sample of laws drawn from a larger body of judgments.\(^{541}\) Whatever the origin, in their present form, the laws comprising the Book of the Covenant are too inexact, too concise, and not comprehensive enough to serve as a legal code for governing a society.\(^{542}\) The inclusion of the Book of the Covenant in the narrative of Exodus must have had another purpose besides providing genuine legal guidance. A clue to its purpose comes from the two forms of law found in the Book of the Covenant, casuistic and apodictic.\(^{543}\) The casuistic laws express conditions and corresponding penalties for civil and criminal cases.\(^{544}\) They are secular laws dealing with cases of slavery, injury, property, and restitution. Casuistic case laws were resolved in two ways. Occasionally, litigants would come and take oaths before God to establish guilt or innocence (22:8, 9, 11; cf. 21:6). However, scholars think it is more likely that that layman would be selected to function as judges to form impromptu courts to decide matters of dispute (cf. 21:22).\(^{545}\) This pattern is already pictured in Exod 18:13-26. In contrast, the apodictic laws are unconditional demands that deal more clearly with a person’s relationship


\(^{541}\) Based on comparisons with other law codes of the A.N.E., it is like that the code comes from the settlement and pre-monarchical periods of Israel’s history. They were probably drawn from Canaanite, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Hittite reservoirs; see Hyatt (1971) 218, 222-4, Noth (1962) 174, Durham (1987) 317.

\(^{542}\) Important details are missing (e.g., very little is said about marriage law) and other laws are too compact or obscure to provide more than minimal guidance.

\(^{543}\) For a discussion about these two forms of law, various critiques of them, and alternative classifications, see Noth (1962) 174-5, Hyatt (1971) 219-222, and Childs (1974) 452-3.


\(^{545}\) So Noth (1962) 174-5; Hyatt (1971) 219-220 following Albrecht Alt. Noth (1962) 187-88 also believes that הָעֲשָׂרִים (22:27) refers to a representative of the twelve tribes who functioned as a judge or leader during the premonarchy period. During the first-century, Jews might have taken this as a reference to judges appointed over certain cities (cf. Josephus A.J. 4.214ff.).
with God, including issues of morality and cultic regulations.\(^{546}\) In matters of apodictic law, no human court convenes; rather, judgment is the prerogative of God (cf. 22:23). It is noteworthy, therefore, that the apodictic and casuistic laws stand side by side in the Book of the Covenant\(^{547}\) and both are said to have been given by Yahweh himself (cf. 20:22; 24:7). One might expect to find casuistic laws credited to human courts and judges, but that is not so. The final editor of Exodus makes it clear that Yahweh is the source of law, both civil and religious. In this way, law becomes part of Yahweh’s continuing redemptive action on behalf of Israel.\(^{548}\) Even if covenant law comes though the mediation of human judges, Yahweh himself, as the Book of the Covenant presents it, ultimately authorizes such law.\(^{549}\) The point is this, rather than diminish human mediators of law, this elevates them to a status comparable to the Lawgiver.\(^{550}\) This is what we see in our target text of Exod 22:27—respect for God goes hand-in-hand with respect for the leaders of his people.\(^{551}\) Viewed from this perspective, Exod 22:27 expresses the foundational law of laws in that obedience to it would be a necessary precondition for obeying all of the other covenantal laws.

When we turn to the narrower context, we find Exod 22:27 is part of a series of paragraphs that alternate between issues of social justice and cultic matters.\(^{552}\)

\[\text{Cultic Matters I (22:17-21)}\]

\[\text{Social Justice I (22:20-27)}\]

\[\text{Cultic Matters II (22:28-30)}\]

\[\text{Social Justice II (23:1-9)}\]

\[\text{Cultic Matters III (23:10-19)}\]

\(^{546}\) Hyatt (1971) 219 identifies Exod 21:12-17; 22:18—23:19 as apodictic in form.\(^{547}\) So Noth (1962) 175.\(^{548}\) “Like the Ten Commandments, the Book of the Covenant has to be seen in its redemptive context, as a gift of God to a people already redeemed.” Enns (2000) 439.\(^{549}\) Hyatt (1971) 219.\(^{550}\) Sprinkle (1994) 167.\(^{551}\) Broadly speaking, this is one way to articulate the thrust of Exod 22:27. We will describe the meaning in greater detail below. Textually, B and \(\aleph\) have \(\varphi\chi\omicron\nu\rho\alpha\tau\varsigma\); in contrast, A, Sym, and Theod have the singular, \(\varphi\rho\omicron\nu\rho\alpha\tau\varsigma\); see Wevers (1990) 355. Heb. Exod 22:27b has \(\aleph\nu\varphi\delta\omicron\), which Speiser (1963) 111-17 describes as an elected leader of the people (not a king), who was thought to be chosen by Yahweh.\(^{552}\) The diagram is a modification of a chart by Sprinkle (1994) 160.
Sprinkle observes that "by such an organization the author indicates, whether consciously or unconsciously, that there is no dichotomy between the secular and sacred, between 'church' and 'state', between justice and religion in Israel, but that these are inextricably intertwined."\textsuperscript{553} This observation reinforces the point made previously regarding the correspondence between the sacred and the secular, the divine and the human, a correspondence that is recapitulated by the two-fold prohibition expressed in Exod 22:27.

Narrowing our focus still further to our target paragraph of 22:20-27, we see three cases concerning the mistreatment of disadvantaged individuals, which is concluded by what Sprinkle calls a \textit{generalizing summary} in verse 27.\textsuperscript{554} In the first case (v. 20), we find a warning not to \textit{mistreat} (κόκω) the sojourner\textsuperscript{555} because the Israelites themselves were sojourners in the land of Egypt. In the second case (vv. 21-23), we come across a warning not to \textit{mistreat} (κοκώ) widows and orphans. If any Israelite does so, God will hear their cry and kill the offender with the sword. On the one hand, God is the one who kills with the sword. On the other hand, the text suggests that the execution itself will be at the hands of the civil authorities. The word for \textit{sword} can refer to a short dagger, which symbolizes the power granted to civil authorities for punishing wrongdoers.\textsuperscript{556} In the third case (vv. 25-26), we find a warning not to \textit{press down} (κατεπείγων) the poor who could be further disadvantaged by surety practices. Finally, the paragraph concludes with our target text of Exod 22:27—\textit{do not blaspheme God or curse a leader of your people}—which punctuates the three moral exhortations with a call to respect heavenly and earthy authority.

The interpretation of verse 27, in the ordinary act of reading, whether during the time of the Johannine community or otherwise, is influenced by what readers hear in the

\textsuperscript{553} Sprinkle (1994) 161.
\textsuperscript{554} Sprinkle (1994) 166-72, who is followed by Enns (2000) 452.
\textsuperscript{555} The term \textit{sojourner} (προσήλυτος) becomes a technical term for a Gentile who has converted to Judaism but, in this context, it probably refers to a foreigner or sojourner who is without rights or property. See the article and bibliography on \textit{προσήλυτος} by H. Kuhli (1993) 3.170-71. The Hebrew has יָד, which refers to a sojourner, a term that is also applied to Israel in Egypt (cf. 23:9).
\textsuperscript{556} The term is μάχαιρα. Cf. Rom 13:4. However, the lexical evidence is mixed, since sword (μάχαιρα) can refer to different types of swords. See the article by Plümacher (1993) 2.397-8.
discourse leading up to that verse.\textsuperscript{557} Reading through each of the three cases builds up semantic momentum that impacts verse 27. The sense of momentum is partially achieved through alliteration. There are five sequential prohibitions that begin with Οὐ followed by a καπα-verb plus one conditional with a καπα-verb:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Οὐ κακώσετε—do not mistreat (v. 20),
  \item Οὐ κακώσετε—do not mistreat (v. 21),
  \item Εἀν ... κακώσητε—if you mistreat (v. 22),
  \item Οὐκ ἐπὶ ... κατηπείγον—you shall not oppress (v. 24),
  \item Οὐ κακολογήσεις—you shall not blaspheme (v. 27a), and
  \item Οὐ κακῶς ἐρεῖς—you shall not curse (v. 27b).
\end{itemize}

The sense of momentum is also built up by the cumulative effect of the three moral exhortations, each of which focuses on the proper physical treatment of disadvantaged members of society.\textsuperscript{559} The moral connotations of the three cases are, in effect, passed on to verse 27 with the result that Οὐ κακολογήσεις (v. 27a) and Οὐ κακῶς ἐρεῖς (v. 27b) take on broader and more figurative meanings. That is, it would be natural for a reader to conclude that disobedience of the laws of God is contempt for God and his leaders. If so, then the synonymous expressions, Οὐ κακολογήσεις (v. 27a) and Οὐ κακῶς ἐρεῖς (v. 27b),\textsuperscript{560} not only refer to bad mouthing God and his leaders, but also, figuratively, to disobeying the law by badly treating disadvantaged individuals. We should note that the lexical senses of κακολογεῖν and κακῶς λεγεῖν are limited to verbal offenses\textsuperscript{561} but, once placed within the Book of the Covenant, the terms acquire an expanded meaning so that the discourse concept of κακολογεῖν and κακῶς λεγεῖν comes to entail both verbal and non-verbal senses.\textsuperscript{562}

To summarize, in the context of Exod 22:27, blasphemy is not only the verbal abuse of God, but also the abuse of disadvantaged individuals. Similarly, cursing civil
authorities not only includes the *malediction* of such leaders, but also to the *maltreatment of the underprivileged*. In short, blasphemy is contempt for the God, his moral law, and his leaders.

5.4 Blaspheming God and His Leaders

Verse 27 links together the prohibitions against blaspheming God and the ruler in a type of *synonymous parallelism*. Traditionally, synonymous parallelism has been defined as the occurrence of two or more lines expressing the same sense in different but equivalent terms. More recently, linguists have refined the analysis of parallelism in terms of grammatical, lexical, semantic, and phonological aspects. In light of these refinements, we can see that verse 27 exhibits degrees of grammatical, semantic, and phonological synonymy.

The syntax or grammar of line A corresponds to line B, even though line B has an expanded predicate. There is semantic equivalence between the prohibitions, οὐ κακολογήσεις (you shall not blaspheme) and οὐ κακῶς ἔρεις (you shall not curse). Both of these expressions have a *paradigmatic sense relationship* and, as such, we could translate verse 27 as, “You shall not curse God and you shall not blaspheme the leader of your people.” In addition, there is phonological equivalence between the sounds οὐ κακ .... εἶς in line A and in line B.

Synonymous parallelism does not require that all aspects are the same, only enough to draw readers into seeing the dissimilar terms together. In this case, we are invited to see both God and the leaders of your people synoptically. To blaspheme one is to

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563 Influenced by Robert Lowth’s 1753 work on Isaiah; see Berlin, *ABD* (1992) 5.156.
565 See § 3.6.3.3. For example, the expressions are interchangeable in traditions that warn against cursing of parents. Compare Exod 21:16, ὁ κακολογῶν πατέρα αὐτοῦ ἡ μητέρα αὐτοῦ τελευτήσει θανάτῳ, “Whoever curses father or mother shall be put to death” (NRSV) with Lev 20:9a, δὲ δὲν κακῶς εἴπῃ τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ ἡ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ θανάτῳ θανατούσθω, All who curse father or mother shall be put to death (NRSV).
566 See § 4.2.
blaspheme the other. To have contempt for the law and judgments of the leaders of God’s people is nothing short of contempt for God. In this way, the prohibition of Exod 22:27 against cursing rulers extends to the king (3 Kgs 20:10) and the High Priest (Acts 23:4-5), since the authority of Israel’s leaders was seen as stemming from God. Certainly, the correspondence between heavenly and earthly authorities is attested to throughout Jewish and Christian scripture and nowhere is this more clear than in Prov 24:21:

My son, fear God and the king and do not disobey either of them.

Because an indissoluble union between heavenly and earthly authorities was assumed in early Judaism, giving respect and honor to earthly authorities was an unquestioned duty and, conversely, disrespecting or undermining such authorities met with grave consequences. These assumptions are operative in the oft repeatedly injunctions to honor father and mother. To do otherwise, to curse or revile (κακῶς λογεῖν) one’s parents met with severe punishment—death. Similarly, Philo links divine and human authority, so that to blaspheme God is to be against Moses (Alleg. Interp. 2.78) and to dishonor one’s parents is to dishonor the Master (Decal. 119). Likewise, Josephus contends that in matters regarding the observance of the law, disobedience of the priests of the Temple, particularly the High Priest, is the same as disobedience toward God (C.Ap. 2.194). Josephus also said that anyone who acts unjustly toward parents or impiously toward God, even if their acts were not accomplished, met with destruction (C.Ap. 2.217). Lastly, we should also note that Josephus implores judges in every city to demand respect and prohibit blasphemy in their presence, because not

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567 Although Durham (1987) 329 argues that the piel of ἐματαιροῦ (v. 27a) is not synonymous with μὴ εματαιροῦ (v. 27b), which is a stronger term than ἐματαιροῦ, we are satisfied that in LXX the terms κακολογεῖν (v. 27a) and κακῶς λογεῖν (v. 27b) are more-or-less synonymous.

568 Heb. 1 Kgs 21:10.

569 Childs (1974) 479.

570 Several examples suffice: (a) 1 Kgs 10:1 links κύριος and ἀρχοντα [Heb. 1 Sam 10:1 has LORD and leader (תנ.move and ת Sovereign; (b) 1 Kgs 24:11 ties together κύριος and χριστὸς κυρίου; (c) 3 Kgs 20:10 [Heb 1 Kgs 21:10] conjoins θέων and βασιλέα; (d) Isa 8:21-22 melds τὸν αὐτοῦν ἄνω and τὴν γῆν κυρίο [Heb. Isa 8:21 refers to cursing God and king (Ὁ βασιλεύει and κυρίο); (e) Acts 6:11 connects Μωσεῖν and θέων; (f) 1 Pet 2:17 associates θεοῦ and βασιλέα; and (g) Josephus, A.J. 8.358-359, states that Naboth was stoned because he blasphemed God and king

571 Trans. by the author.

572 E.g., LXX Exod 20:12; 21:15-16; Lev 20:9; Prov 20:9; Matt 15:4; Mk 7:10; Josephus C.Ap. 2.206.
to do so can lead to contempt for God (A.J. 4.215). It is not surprising, therefore, that Exod 22:27 links heavenly and earthly authority, nor is surprising that Bock concludes that verse 27 “reflects the view that to speak against God’s rulers is to speak against the wisdom of the God who chose them.”

5.5 Conclusions and Prospects

With some confidence, then, we conclude that first-century Jews would have understood Exod 22:27 as a warning not to blaspheme divine or human authority. The correspondence between heavenly and earthly authority, which is stressed throughout the Book of the Covenant, is reflected in the prohibition not to blaspheme. Since violation of that prohibition would undermine obedience to divine and human law, we have characterized it as the foundational law of laws. The prohibition against blasphemying God and leadership would have been viewed as central, not just to the Book of the Covenant, but also to Jewish society as a whole who saw itself under the reign of God and his authorized leaders. Furthermore, the synonymous parallelism in verse 27 indicates that God and his leaders must be seen synoptically, that contempt for earthly authority alone would be tantamount to blasphemy of heaven itself.

Looking ahead, the prospects for establishing that non-believing Jews would have considered the theology of FG as blasphemous depends partially on keeping in mind that to curse (κακως λεγειν) those authorized to lead the Jewish people was to blaspheme deity. In chapter 10 (§ 10.2), we will also find that Nicanor is accused of blasphemy because he had spoken wickedly (κακως λεγειν) against the sanctuary (1 Macc 7:42). In chapter 14, we will look at Jesus’ statement to the High Priest—“If I have spoken wickedly (κακως ἐλάλησα), bear witness of the evil” (Jn 18:23a)—to see if blasphemy is an issue here in the Jewish trial scene. In chapter 15, we will also look at the so-called ‘anti-Jewish’ rhetoric of FG and ask whether the Johannine community, those who produced and propagated FG, could have been viewed as blasphemous for their apparent contempt of the Jewish leadership, the ιουδαίοι.

572 For similar definitions, see Brichto (1963) 158 and Sprinkle (1994) 167. When we understanding blasphemy in this way, it becomes apparent that the death penalty is an unstated
Lev 24:10-23 is the first reported case of blasphemy within Jewish scripture and, as such, it has provided an important precedent for discussions of blasphemy within subsequent Jewish literature. In fact, Hartley characterizes Lev 24:10-23 as "the paradigmatic case for blasphemy." The pericope begins with a narrative about an Egyptian-Hebrew man who cursed or blasphemed while quarrelling with an Israelite. The man is brought to Moses who, in turn, seeks guidance from Yahweh. Instructions are issued to execute the man, which is followed by a series of seven laws that function as the legal basis for the execution. The narrative ends by noting that Israelites obeyed the instructions of Yahweh by stoning the Egyptian-Hebrew man. There are two main questions that we will attempt to address regarding Lev 24:10-23: What discourse concept of blasphemy emerges from the text? What is the penalty for this offense?

6.1 The Offense of Lev 24:11

Verse 11 states the basic offense of the Egyptian-Hebrew man:

Although the basic offence is presented, it is unclear what precisely that offense entails. This is to be expected because Jews scrupulously avoided any hint of cursing God even when speaking about such incidents. Euphemisms were used, vague
descriptions were employed, and harsh language was toned down. Lev 24:11 seems to reflect this attitude since there are both grammatical and semantic ambiguities, both in LXX and MT, that make interpretation somewhat uncertain and disputed.

In LXX, the meaning of the verbs καταράσματα (to curse or to utter imprecations) and ἐπονομάζω (to pronounce [a name]) is generally agreed on, but the grammar has provoked debate, which has resulted in two ways of reading the verse. (a) The first way views the two verbs as referring to two distinct actions. In this case, the participle, ἐπονομάζας (after naming) is viewed as a temporal participle indicating an action prior to that of the main verb, καταράσατο (he cursed). The verse could then be translated as after naming the Name, he cursed. Brenton's translation of LXX reflects this option. (b) A second way takes the participle, ἐπονομάζας (pronouncing), adverbially, in which case it modifies the action of the main verb, καταράσατο (he cursed). The result is one blended action. Read adverbially, there are again two options: (i) Ἐπονομάζας (pronouncing) could be taken as a temporal participle indicating simultaneous action with the main verb and thereby translated, while naming the Name, he cursed. (ii) Ἐπονομάζας (pronouncing) could be taken as an instrumental participle and thereby translated, he cursed by means of naming the Name, indicating how the curse was carried out. This latter option is exemplified by the NEB: the man “uttered the Holy Name in blasphemy.” To summarize, Lev 24:11 in LXX can be interpreted in two basic ways either (a)
describing two separate offenses of *pronouncing the Name* and *cursing* or (b) describing one offense of *cursing while pronouncing the Name*.

When we turn to the MT, there are differences of opinion regarding both semantics and grammar. Debate over semantics occurs with the first verb because there is some question regarding the root of דִּקְרָשׁ. Is the root דִּקְרַשׁ (*to bore through, to pierce, or to pronounce*) or is it בֵּרָק (*to curse or blaspheme*)? Following current opinion it is likely that the root of דִּקְרָשׁ is the piel form of בֵּרָק for at least three reasons: 586 (a) it eliminates a redundancy—“he cursed ... the name and he cursed”—that would occur in verse 11 if the root was בֵּרָק; (b) it anticipates the two uses of בֵּרָק in verse 16, and (c) early versions, such as LXX and Targum Onqelos, understood the first verb in the Hebrew in the sense of *pronouncing* the name, not cursing it. 587 Furthermore, we also follow Hartley, Gabel, and Wheeler’s judgment that בֵּרָק should be understood in the neutral sense of *vocalizing* something, and not as a euphemism for speaking disparagingly as Wheeler sustains. 588 Therefore, בֵּרָק should not be translated *he blasphemed the Name* (as the NRSV, NIV, and AV), but *he vocalized the Name* (as the NEB).

Debate over semantics continues with the second verb, בָּלָק, which can mean *to make small, to esteem lightly, or to revile* and, in certain contexts, *to curse* in the sense of *hurling imprecations or invoking evil upon someone*. 589 The question is, shall we

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587 LXX has ἐπονομάζω (to pronounce) in Lev 24:11, which is then reiterated once in 24:15, ὄνομα δὲ τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου (and he that names the name of the Lord), and once in 24:16, ἐν τῷ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου (let him die for naming the name of the Lord). The Targums also tend to interpret the first verb in Lev 24:11 as *pronouncing the Name*, but they could be avoiding the use of curse-language in relation to God. As Grossfeld (1988) 54-55, n. 5 explains, *Targum Onqelos*, “in an attempt to avoid using the term ‘curse’ (Aramaic ly!) in conjunction with God, renders qll by the aphel of rgz with the meaning of ‘to provoke’ and nqб by pr’s ‘to pronounce’.,” Hence, *Tg. Neof* states that the man “pronounced the name in provocation.” *Tg. Neof* and *Tg. Ps.-J.* are less consistent in their translation of qll by the *aphel* of rgz. McNamara (1994) 95-96 translates *Tg. Neof* on Lev 24:11 as the man “expressed the holy Name with blasphemies and reviled (it)” and Maher (1994) 197 translates *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Lev 24:11 as the man “pronounced and blasphemed [prysh whrpy] the great and glorious Name that was pronounced explicitly.”


589 Stuart (1992) 1.1218-9; *BDB* 886.
understand בָּלַק in the sense of *reviling* or *showing contempt* (so Brichto, Phillips, and Weingreen)$^{590}$ or in the sense of *cursing* or *imprecating* (so Gerstenberger, Stuart, and B. Levine)$^{591}$ It is likely that we should understanding בָּלַק as *showing contempt*.

According to Brichto’s analysis, which we have drawn upon earlier (see § 5.1), בָּלַק in the Hebrew Bible does not have the connotation of *cursing* or *imprecation*, but rather has a wide range of meanings, “ranging from verbal abuse to action or conduct of an injurious nature. The majority of the cases fall into the latter category, in which verbalization is totally absent or, at a minimum, extrinsic.”$^{592}$ Furthermore, he argues that the precise sense of בָּלַק is dependent on the context and the subjects and objects involved. When בָּלַק is used with parents as the object, it means *to show disrespect* (e.g., Lev 20:9); with kings, *to disparage, repudiate, or renounce* (e.g., Judg 9:27-28); with deity, *to have contempt for the ethical standards that God expects of people* (e.g., Exod 22:27).$^{593}$ Brichto’s analysis is persuasive, but with two qualifications. First, we reject Brichto’s definition of blasphemy. He is adamant that בָּלַק is never used in the Hebrew Bible with the sense of *cursing* or *imprecating* God,$^{594}$ which appears to be so. However, as we noted earlier, he labors under the view that *imprecation against the Deity = blasphemy* and so wrongly concludes that there is a “total absence of blasphemy in the Bible.”$^{595}$ In contrast to Brichto, we have argued that the concept of blasphemy during the late Second Temple and Johannine was much broader in scope than simply *cursing*. Second, Brichto does not adequately deal with the fact that historically some Jews have understood Lev 24:11 as a reference to *cursing God*. Jews during the late Second Temple period translated בָּלַק with קָטָרָמּוֹת (curse) in LXX Lev 24:11, 15$^{596}$ and the rabbinic Sages interpreted Lev 24:11 as a reference to “Blessing the Name with the Name,” a euphemism for

$^{590}$ Brichto (1963) 118f., A. Phillips (1970) 41, and Weingreen (1972) 118, though Weingreen recognizes that the Piel form of בָּלַק “does often mean ‘cursed’ in the sense of invoking calamity upon someone as evidenced, for example, by its occurrence in 2 Kg. ii 24” (119).


$^{592}$ Brichto (1963) 172.

$^{593}$ Brichto (1963) 176-77.

$^{594}$ Brichto (1963) 143-65.

$^{595}$ Brichto (1963) 164, cf. 177.

$^{596}$ Brichto (1963) 177 acknowledges LXX but dismisses it as erroneous.
cursing.\textsuperscript{597} So, while we recognize that some early Jews understood Lev 24:11 in the sense of cursing or imprecating God, Brichto’s analysis persuasively shows that the use of רָעִים, on the basis of the Hebrew Bible alone, means \textit{to show contempt}. But even if we translate רָעִים in Lev 24:11 as \textit{showing contempt}, we also insist that within the context of Lev 24:10-23 the use of רָעִים must be classified as blasphemy by our measure of blasphemy—not in the sense of cursing, but in the sense of \textit{conveying harsh antagonism} and/or \textit{denigrating or dishonoring} someone (see our conclusions to chapter 4). Hence, it is not surprising to find that a contemporary of the Johannine community, Symmachus,\textsuperscript{598} rendered בָּרָעִים in Lev 24:11 as ἐβλασφήμησεν,\textsuperscript{599} nor is surprising that Codex 58 used εὐλογησάμενος,\textsuperscript{600} since both βλασφημέω and λοιδορέω formed part of the terminological base of our concept of blasphemy (see chapter 4).

In addition to the terminological equivocations in MT, there are two grammatical ambiguities to consider. First, there is ambiguity regarding the object of רָעִים (\textit{he showed contempt for}). Is it the Israelite man with whom the Egyptian-Hebrew was fighting?\textsuperscript{601} Or is it the Name, that is, God himself? It is more likely that it is God himself, because (a) Lev 24:15, rather decisively, identifies God (or gods) as the object of רָעִים, (b) in verse 11 והוא (\textit{the Name}) could function as the direct object of רָעִים (\textit{and he showed contempt for}), and (c) אלהים (\textit{God}) can be the direct object of רָעִים (\textit{showed contempt}) as in Lev 24:15 and Exod 22:27.\textsuperscript{602} This interpretation is congruent with Talmudic tradition, which clearly understands Yahweh as the offended party in Lev 24:11.\textsuperscript{603} Second, there is ambiguity regarding the relationship of the two verbs, רָעִים ... רָעִים (\textit{he pronounced ... he showed contempt}). On the one hand, as we saw with the Greek, the two verbs could refer to \textit{two distinct actions} (so

\textsuperscript{597} b. Sanh. 56a.
\textsuperscript{598} Würthwein (1979) 53 dates Symmachus’ version at 70 C.E.
\textsuperscript{600} Wevers (1986) 262.
\textsuperscript{601} Brichto (1963) 146.
\textsuperscript{602} A. Phillips (1970) 41 also notes Isa 8:21 and 1 Sam 3:11ff. “where, as in the LXX, אלהים (‘god’) must be read for בְּרוֹאָל (‘for themselves’) in verse 13, this being designated a \textit{tiqqūn soferim}.”
the RSV). On the other hand, the second verb, מִסְרָה (he showed contempt), could modify the first, בָּרוּךְ (he pronounced), in which case the verse reports one action with two verbal aspects. The verse can then be translated as B. Levine does: “he pronounced ... in blasphemy” or “he pronounced by cursing blasphemously,” indicating one blended action of contumaciously pronouncing the Name (so the NRSV and the NEB).

Here, we can come to a preliminary decision regard the offense depicted in Lev 24:11. The grammar and semantics of both LXX and MT allow for four basic interpretations. The Egyptian-Hebrew:

(a) pronounced the Name and then showed contempt for God (MT),
(b) pronounced the Name and then cursed God (LXX),
(c) showed contempt for God while pronouncing the Name (MT), or
(d) cursed God while pronouncing the Name (LXX).

Since we are not seeking a normative interpretation, but what might have been commended to first century Jewish readers, we must admit that all four options are possible. Nevertheless, if our conjectures have been correct, option (d) should not be ruled out, but option (c) is more likely. Thus, to simplify and to risk overstatement, Lev 24:11 can be understood as one blended action in which the Egyptian-Hebrew demonstrated contempt for God by unambiguously vocalizing the Name itself. The emphasis lays on the second verb וְסָר (contempt) and contempt for God, thus making it a clear case of blasphemy. The first verb בָּרוּךְ indicates how the blasphemy or contempt was manifested—it was vocal. The nefarious act was blasphemy and,

603 b. Sanh. 56a preserves an understanding of the offense as not simply uttering the Name, but using the Name in a curse against Yahweh—“the Name must be blessed by the Name”; cf. Livingston (1986) 352-54.
604 See Gesenius, Kautzsch, and Cowley (1910) 485 on circumstantial clauses with wāw constructions and Waltke and O’Connor (1990) 540 (32.3b) on wāw constructions serving in a hendiadys.
606 In addition to grammatical reasons already cited, the thrust of the passage focuses on וְסָר; after all, the Egyptian-Hebrew offender is twice identified as מִסְרָה, the one showing contempt (Lev 24:14, 23), and not as בָּרוּךְ, the one pronouncing.
because it entailed the maleficent vocalization of the Name, it can also be viewed as a violation of the third commandment as well.\footnote{Contra A. Phillips (1970) 55, who argues that Lev 24:10ff. primarily concerns a breach of the third commandment (Exod 20:7).}

6.2 \textit{Kārēt} and the Blasphemer

In the Levitical account, the people take the Egyptian-Hebrew to Moses for judgment but, as the narrative implies, the likes of such an affront had yet to be witnessed among the people of Israel and so Moses was dumbfounded. Therefore, Yahweh’s guidance was directly sought in the matter, whereupon three instructions immediately issue forth: (a) take \textit{the blasphemer} (τὸν καταρασάμενον or ἱγραπα) outside the camp, (b) lay hands on his head, and (c) stone him to death.

In LXX, the offender is taken outside the camp and for stoning by the whole \textit{synagogue of Israel}, ἣ συναγωγὴ Ἰσραήλ (v. 14, 16). The notion of taking an offender outside the camp\footnote{Why the blasphemer was led outside the camp—ἐξάγαγε ... ἔκω τῆς παρεμβολῆς (v. 14)—probably concerns scruples about matters of purity. Outside the camp was reserved for the unclean (Lev 13:45-46; 14:3, 41, 45, 53). Indeed, B. Levine (1989) 167 argues that \textit{taking the blasphemer outside} was partly due “to the impurity attached to a corpse” and Hartley (1992) 409 states that “the execution was to be done outside the camp in order to avoid defiling the camp by taking a human life.” This is probably right as far as it goes. However, it is also possible that the offense of blasphemy itself (not just the dead corpse) was thought either to defile the larger group, which rendered the group unacceptable to God or implicated the larger group as accomplices to the crime, which made the group objects of divine wrath. Either way, the safety of the larger group was threatened (cf. Deut 19:19-20) and that required a mechanism to protect the community by discharging the impurity (so Snaith, 1967, 253) or the guilt (so Porter, [1976] 194 and Wenham [1979] 311). The instruction to lay hands on the Egyptian-Hebrew blasphemer might be viewed as a mechanism whereby any remaining impurity or guilt was transferred to the offender, who was then ritually expelled and promptly executed. See Budd (1996) 47ff. for comments on transference theory, particularly regarding the scapegoat (cf. Lev 16:21 and Num 27:23).} for execution can be understood in connection with \textit{kārēt} or being \textit{cut off} from the synagogue community.\footnote{See the article on \textit{kārēt} by Hasel (1995) 339-352 and the excursus by Milgrom (1991) 457-60, B. Levine (1989) 241-2, and Wenham (1979) 285-6. The repeated formula of ἡ τὴν ἡμῖν ἀναστήσον (that person shall be cut off from his people) is widely found in priestly writings (e.g., Gen 17:14; Exod 12:15, 19; etc.).} The penalty of \textit{kārēt} or extirpation was stipulated for grave offenses against God,\footnote{cf. \textit{m. Keritot} 1.1 names blasphemy as one of 39 offenses for which extirpation is the penalty; Milgrom (1991) 457 emphasis that \textit{kārēt} pertains to offenses against God, but not against humans, cannot be sustained. As Hasel (1995) 348 demonstrates, the penalty of \textit{kārēt} is imposed on a wide range of offenses “against religion, morality, or sacrallaw.”} including blasphemy.
(Num 15:30-31; 1 Sam 3:13 [cf. 2:31-33]611), idolatry (Lev 20:2-5; cf. Lev 18:21, 29), violating the Sabbath (Exod 31:14-15), failing to circumcise (Gen 17:14), consulting the dead (Lev 20:6), engaging in prohibited sexual relationships (18:6-20, 22-23; cf. 18:29), eating with defiled hands (Lev 7:19-21), eating the fat or blood of animals (Lev 7:19-27; 17:14), and offering sacrifices inappropriately (Lev 17:3-9).

Although most texts that mention the penalty of kārēt do not indicate how that takes place, it can be generally assumed that offenders will be cut off directly by God,612 resulting in premature death (1 Sam 2:31-32), death of descendants (1 Sam 2:33; Ps 109:13), childlessness (Lev 20:18, 20-21), loss of kingly office or status (1 Kgs 2:45), banishment from the land (Lev 18:24-29), or the elimination of a whole people (Judg 21:6).

It is debated, however, whether banishment and execution by human courts can also be considered forms of kārēt; Milgrom thinks not, whereas B. Levine thinks otherwise.

Milgrom argues for a sharp distinction between kārēt, which is accomplished by God alone, and death by stoning, which is carried out by a human court.613 Based on an analysis of nineteen cases of kārēt in the Torah, a few other biblical texts,614 and two Hittite texts,615 Milgrom concludes that kārēt could refer to either the extermination of one’s descendants in this world or the denial of life in the world to come. In this view, it is possible for a human court to execute an offender and then, in a very distinct second action, for God to also extirpate the offender’s line or deny him afterlife. The human and divine actions are sharply differentiated. Milgrom cites Lev 20:2-5 as just such an example where the Molech worshiper is to be executed by a human court and then extirpated by God. Unfortunately, nothing seems to necessitate Milgrom’s interpretation of Lev 20:2-5; indeed, the act of execution (Lev 20:2) could be interpreted as the mode of extirpation (Lev 20:3), which draws together the divine and human actions. Similarly, the execution of the Sabbath violator in Num 15:32-36 appears to be presented as an example of what it means to be cut off in Num 15:30-31. So, contrary to Milgrom’s argument, extirpation by God and execution by human hands do not always appear to be sharply distinguished (cf. also 2 Sam 3:31-34).

In contrast to Milgrom, B. Levine argues that there is a curious cooperation between divine and human agents in the enforcement of kārēt.616 Levine notes that this cooperation comes to the fore in the warning against desecrating the Sabbath in Exod 31:14-15. On the one hand, the one who violates the Sabbath shall be executed (Exod 31:14b and 15b) and, on the other, such an offender shall be cut off from among the people (Exod 31:15a).617 The explanation is that if the community fails to execute the offender, God would not fail to do

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611 MT 1 Sam 3:13 uses דִּבְרָא (the ones blaspheming) and 3 Kgdms 3:13 (1 Sam 3:13) has קָאָכְלוֹאָגֻנְתֶּס (the ones blaspheming God).
612 So Budd (1996) 122; e.g., Lev 17:10 which reports YHWH stating, “I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people” (NRSV).
614 Ps 109:13; Ruth 4:10; and Mal 2:3.
615 Milgrom cites ANET 7 208 (lines 35-38) and 209 (lines 600-18).
617 Horbury (1998) 60 also argues that post-exilic Jews saw cooperation between divine and human agents in the execution of kārēt.
so. Hasel concurs that the cutting off formula “expresses the fact that the ultimate punishment is in God’s hands; only in certain cases has God designated human agents to carry it out (Lev. 20:2; cf. Ex. 31:14).” Furthermore, Levine also argues for a connection between ostracism and being cut off in that “banishment would often have resulted in death,” though Levine’s argument is less convincing on this point. Nevertheless, we can agree with Levine who argues, “In priestly law, the certainty of God’s punitive wrath was institutionalized in the penalty of kārēt.”

The instruction to take the blasphemer outside the camp for execution is of special concern to us because it may shed light on the reference in FG to expelling Jewish Christians from the synagogue. We must ask whether expulsion was ever substituted for execution or kārēt. Horbury’s 1985 study, “Extirpation and Excommunication,” answers affirmatively. After the exile, there is evidence that grave offenders of the covenant were expelled from the community and not executed.

Horbury admits a paucity of evidence, yet he is able to cite more than a dozen supporting texts. After the exile, exclusion from the community occurred on the basis of uncircumcision, uncleanness, and immorality (see Deut 23:1-8). The first biblical evidence of expulsion of non-compliant Jews is found in Ezra 10:8, but there are other biblical examples. Josephus also speaks of apostate Jews who claimed to have been unjustly expelled (ἐξκαταδιάρρηκται) from Jerusalem (Ant. 11.340, 346-7), which is the same verb (ἐκβάλλονται) used for Jewish Christians expelled from the synagogue (Jn 9:34-35). Horbury argues that Josephus’ account is an instance of substituting expulsion for the death sentence, since apostasy was viewed as an executable offense (Ant. 4.309-310; cf. 3 Mace 7:12). Other accounts of substituting expulsion for execution are cited. Thus, in pre-rabbinic Judaism, excommunication from the synagogue was associated with laws concerning who could be admitted to the temple congregation and receive covenant benefits.

Horbury draws two general conclusions: (a) there is evidence from post-exilic times to the rabbinic era for excommunication from the Jewish community, which is sometimes disputed, and (b) excommunication was not kārēt—

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622 One would expect that if non-believing Jews viewed the Johannine Jews as blasphemous, we would find references to executions in FG and not just expulsions from the synagogue (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2a). Although there is one reference to killing Christians in FG and it is linked to excommunication, the reference is vague (Jn 16:2b).
624 Horbury (1998) 49ff cites, for example: Ezra 10:8; the Aramaic passage of Ezra 7:11-26; Neh 10:3; Isa. 56:3; Deut 24:20 (cf. Deut 23); 2 Chron 26:21; 1QS 7.1; CD 12.4-6; Philo Spec. 1.60; Josephus Ant. 11.340, 11.346f., B.J. 2.143f.; 3 Mace 2:33, 7:12-15; and Jn 9:22, 9:34,12:42, and 16:2.
625 See footnote 624.
627 Horbury (1998) 52-59; e.g., Philo Spec. 1.160; CD 12:4-6; 1 Cor 5:13.
629 Horbury (1998) 46-59 rebuts the claim that expulsions from the Jewish community could not have occurred prior to 70 C.E.
extirpation or divinely-inflicted death—but was a substitute for kārēt or preparation for kārēt.\textsuperscript{630} When severe violations of the covenant occurred, "excommunication did sometimes take the place of the death-penalty."\textsuperscript{631} If Horbury’s argumentation is accepted, then the excommunication of the Johannine Jewish-Christians could be understood as a response to some sort of executable offense, such as blasphemy.

6.3 Blasphemy-Laws in Lev 24:15-16

When we return to the Levitical account, we observe that the command to execute the blasphemer (v. 14) is followed by a series of seven laws with accompanying principles and the lex talionis regulation (vv. 15-22) all of which function as a legal basis for the execution.\textsuperscript{632} Our concern is with verses 15 and 16, which provide the first two laws regarding contempt for God and maleficent vocalization of the Name.

Based on our analysis in section 6.1, it is worth pointing out that most English translations, like the one above, are misleading. On the one hand, the NRSV speaks of curing God (v. 15b), which is acceptable from the point of view of LXX, since it uses καταράσσαται (cursed), but is not acceptable from point of view of MT, which uses ἐντύχησεν (showed contempt). On the other hand, the NRSV speaks of blaspheming the name (v. 16), which is clearly unacceptable, since LXX uses ὄνομα ἄνωθεν (the one naming or pronouncing) and MT uses ἐπιφώνησεν (the one pronouncing). So, it is ironic, if

\textsuperscript{630} Horbury (1998) 59-62 addresses whether extirpation (kārēt) was an early form of excommunication (so Morgenstern, Zimmerli, and A. Phillips) or whether extirpation, as the rabbis understood it, was premature death inflicted by God (so Tsevat and Weinfeld).

\textsuperscript{631} Horbury (1998) 62.

\textsuperscript{632} See the structural outline by Hartley (1992) 405-6.
not confusing, that we are arguing that the overall text concerns blasphemy, but that the English translation uses the term *blasphemy* wrongly.633

Nevertheless, three questions concern us here: (a) In verse 15b, who is the object of καταράσηται (cursed) or בַּלְלֶל (showed contempt for)? (b) What is the penalty for this offense? (c) Does verse 16 introduce a distinct offense and a distinct penalty from that already mentioned in verse 15?

First, there is a question about who is being offended, since MT has יִכְּלַל יִלָּדִיו (if anyone shows contempt for his gods or his God) and LXX has ὃς εἴη καταράσηται θεόν (if anyone curses God). The plural form onיִלָדִי allows that the reference could be to “the deities of other nations or even evil spirits.”634 This interpretation, in fact, is argued by Philo, who writes, “clearly by ‘god,’ he is not here alluding to the Primal God ... but to the gods of the different cities who are falsely so called.”635 We will look at Philo’s argument in further detail in chapter eleven but, for the moment, we note that other Jews of the late Second Temple era understood verse 15 as a reference to offending the one God of Israel—LXX Lev 24:15 has θεόν!

Second, the penalty for he who shows contempt (בלל) for God is stated as then he must bear his own sin (אשם אשם; LXX ὀμαρτίαν λήμψεται), which is similar to the phrase in Lev 5:1, then he must bear his punishment (אשם אשם; LXX λήμψεται τὴν ὀμαρτίαν).636 Milgrom argues that this “implies that the punishment will be meted out by God, not by man.”637 Milgrom’s comment, no doubt correct, is contrary to our expectation, since verse 14 had already established that the one showing contempt (בלל) was to be stoned by the hands of the congregation. We can conjecture that emphasis on divine punishment in verse 15 may be due to the nature

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633 NRSV should have used the term *blasphemes* in v. 11 where it uses the term *curses*.
634 Hartley (1992) 410 cites this as a possibility.
635 Philo Mos. 2.205.
637 Cf. Milgrom (1991) 295 on Lev. 5:1, who also cites m. Sanh. 4:5; t. Ṣebu. 3:1, 4; Philo, Laws 2.26.
of בָּלָה itself, which can be public and observable or private and clandestine. If an offense of בָּלָה is private and clandestine, then it can only be known by God and thereby only punished by God through the penalty of קָרֵט (see § 6.2). However, in the case of the Egyptian-Hebrew, the offense was demonstrably public and, unless punished immediately by a human court, it might have undermined the community. Thus punishment was placed in the hands of men and the man was executed (Lev 24:23).

Third, the relationship between verse 15 and 16 is debated. On the one hand, it can be understood within the overall thrust of the passage, which concerns one crime (v. 11), one criminal (v. 14, 23), and one punishment (v. 14, 23). Read in this way, verses 15 and 16 explain in casuistic terms, and with a degree of literary flair, two different aspects of one and the same offense. This is a coherent reading and certainly possible, as Targum Neofiti on Lev 24:15-16 seems to support:

15b ... Any man who pronounces the name of God in blasphemy [שָׁמָהוּ אֱלֹהָא בְּנְעֶמְיָא] will receive (the punishment of) his sins.
16a And whoever pronounces the name of the Lord in blasphemy [שְׁמַי אֱלֹהֶים בְּנְעֶמְיָה] shall surely be put to death; all the people of the congregation will stone him.

What is noteworthy is how Targum Neofiti paraphrases the Hebrew of Lev 24:15-16. In the Hebrew, blasphemy (בלילה) is mentioned in verse 15, but not verse 16; conversely, pronouncing (בָּלָה) the name (בּוּ) is mentioned in verse 16, but not verse 15. Strikingly, Targum Neofiti conflates the language so that the terms for blaspheming, pronouncing, and name are found in both verse 15 and verse 16. Redistributing the terms in this way Neofiti draws the verses into closer parallel construction, which suggests that verse 16 addresses the same offense and the same penalty as verse 15, but with a slightly different poetic emphasis and elaboration. If so, Targum Neofiti understood Lev 24:15-16 as a reference to one offense and one...

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638 Suggested by the analysis of Brichto (1963) 151, 158, who argues that the sense of בָּלָה need not entail a verbal aspect (and therefore a publicly observable aspect), but primarily involves a repudiation of God and his moral standards, which we have consistently translated as contempt.
640 Again, we are concerned with the final form of the document and its plausible interpretation during the first century. For speculation about the origin of the passage, conflation of different sources, and original life settings, see Gerstenberger (1996) 364ff. and Gabel and Wheeler (1980) 227-29.
641 McNamara (1994) 97; his italics.
punishment, not two, and the capital offense was not pronouncing the Name, as Heb Lev 24:16 might lead one to believe, but pronouncing the name in blasphemy or, if we may paraphrase, vocalizing blasphemy against God by unequivocally saying his Name.

On the other hand, there is evidence that early Jews understood Lev 24:15-16 as a reference to two offenses, each with distinct punishments. First, as we mentioned, Philo interprets Lev 24:15 as a reference to cursing "the gods ... falsely so called" (Mos. 2.205). Philo surmises that the warning in Lev 24:15 is to prevent people from becoming disrespectful of the name god in general, but such disrespect is not an executable offense. In contrast, Philo interprets Lev 24:16 as a prohibition against uttering the Name unseasonably (ἐκαίρως), which is worse than cursing the gods and deserves the death penalty (Mos. 2.206). Philo also makes it clear that Lev 24:15-16 does not concern the blasphemy aimed directly against God himself, the thought of which is so shocking to Philo’s sensibilities that he refuses to discuss it, obviously a crime worse than uttering the Name unseasonably (Mos. 2.206). Second, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan also understood Lev 24:15-16 as a reference to two offenses, each with its own penalty:

15b ... any young man or any old man who reviles and blasphemes a substitute name of his God [כְּבָדֶ֣ו שָׁמַ֣יִם כַּנְנָהֵי אַלָּדְיהָ֑י] shall incur his guilt.
16a but any one who pronounces and blasphemes the name of the Lord [יִ֥שָּׁמָ֖א רְדוֹי] shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall pelt him with stones.

With Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, in contrast to Neofiti, there is a sharper distinction between the two verses. The term pronounces is now only in verse 16 and the objects of blasphemy are more sharply distinguished—a substitute name of his God versus the name of the Lord. Hence, we are presented with two types of blasphemy. One type of blasphemy involves the explicit pronunciation of the Name and it is met with the death penalty. The other type of blasphemy involves the use of substitutes for the Name and it is not an executable offense. In making this distinction, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan agrees with the implicit assumption of m. Sanh. 7:5 and m. Šebu. 4:13 that

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643 Maher (1994) 198; his italics.
there is more than one kind of blasphemy. Furthermore, it agrees with the Sages that only blasphemers who vocalize the Name should be executed, which is in contrast to R. Meir (140-165 C.E.) who held that one was liable even if a substitute was used for the Name. Third, Targum Onqelos provides a close paraphrase of Lev 24:15-16 and seems to maintain a distinction between two distinct offenses, each with its own penalty—provocation of God results in bearing guilt and pronouncing the Name of the Lord leads to execution.

6.4 Lex Talionis and Blasphemy

As we have mentioned at the outset, Lev 24:10-23 provides a narrative framework for laws pertaining to blasphemy (vv. 15-16) and laws pertaining to the lex talionis (vv. 17-22). What is interesting is that the redactor has placed specific laws pertaining to the eye-for-eye justice of the lex talionis immediately after the laws concerning blasphemy:

16b ... Aliens as well as citizen, when they blaspheming the Name, shall be put to death.
17 Anyone who kills a human being shall be put to death.
19 Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return:
20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered.
21b ... but one who kills a human being shall be put to death. (NRSV; our italics)

It is significant that the literary structure suggests that pronouncing the Name, or blaspheming the Name (as the NRSV has it) is directly compared to killing, maiming, and violently injuring someone. However, of these violations, only murder and blasphemy carry the death sentence. The implication is clear, as Bock has observed, “to speak against God is the equivalent of verbal murder.”

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644 m. Sanh. 7:4-5 assumes that only a blasphemer who vocalizes the Name is subject to execution, indicating that there is another type of blasphemer who does not vocalize the Name and is not to be stoned.
645 m. Sebu. 4:13 states that R. Meir held that one was liable if he blasphemed God by any of the substitute names—"N (for Adonai), 7" (for Yavheh), Shaddai, Sabaoth, the Merciful and Gracious, Him that is Longsuffering and of Great Kindness, or an Attribute of God. Also see b. Sanh. 55b-57a, 60a, and b. Sebu. 35a.
646 Wenham (1979) 312 writes that the lex talionis law sets out “a fundamental principle of biblical and ancient Near Eastern law, namely, that the punishment must be proportionate to the offense.”
6.5 Conclusions and Prospects

With the exception of Brichto, there is little dispute among contemporary scholars that Lev 24:10-23 concerns blasphemy. Indeed, the Levitical text not only shaped early Jewish perceptions about blasphemy, but also provided the foundation for legal opinions promulgated in the Mishnaic and Talmudic literature. Despite the agreement that blasphemy is an issue in Lev 24:10-23, there is uncertainty about what that entails. Uncertainty inheres in the fact that we are left guessing about what precisely Egyptian-Hebrew was supposed to have said; apparently, the redactors dared not repeat it for fear of perpetuating the offense themselves. Nevertheless, our analysis has uncovered two basic interpretations.

One interpretation of Lev 24:10-23 recognizes two types of blasphemy against God. The first we can call blasphemy, which entails showing of contempt for [or cursing; LXX] God without the vocalization of the divine Name. This violation is punished by God directly, probably involving the penalty of kārēt. The second we can call blasphemy, which entails vocalizing the divine Name in provocation. The covenant community punishes this violation by stoning the offender to death.

Another interpretation recognizes only one type of blasphemy. We can call this blasphemy, which entails showing contempt for [or ‘cursing’; LXX] God by vocalizing the Name. In this interpretation, what was outrageous was not that the Name was vocalized per se—which was never a problem, done in the proper way, at the proper time—but that disdain for God ascended to such hubris that the Egyptian-Hebrew dared to make his contempt unequivocal by calling out the Name itself. It was tantamount to verbal murder and therefore demanded execution in accord with the lex talionis.

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648 Philo Mos. 2.203-206; Tg. Ps. J. on Lev 24:10-23; Tg. Onq. on Lev 24:10-23; m. Sanh 7:5; m. Sebu. 4:13.
649 This interpretation is sustained by the context, grammar, and semantics and in favored by some modern interpreters, such as Bock (1998) 36-37. This reading appears to be supported by Tg. Neof. on Lev 24:10-23.
650 Cf. Gen 4:26, 12:8, 13:4; 1 Kgs 18:24; Ps 116:17; Joel 2:32 (3:5); and Zeph 3:9. However, rabbinic traditions are more restrictive, reserving the right to pronounce the Name for the High Priest in the Temple; cf m. Yom. 6.2 and m. Sofah. 7.6.
The prospects for establishing that non-believing Jews would have considered the theology of FG as blasphemous are partly dependent on keeping in mind how Lev 24:10-23 portrays the Egyptian-Hebrew’s act of blasphemy. That act emerged within the context of a quarrel whereby the man, in attempting to assert himself over his opponent presumed to use the divine Name to curse or repudiate God. It was an act of great presumption and unrestrained contempt for the sake of self-advantage. FG presents numerous quarrels between Jesus and his opponents where Jesus is accused of some form of self-promotion or self-exaltation and blasphemy (Jn 5:18ff; 8:31-58; 10:30-38). Based on the Johannine claims for Jesus, can a case be made that the Johannine community—those who produced, preserved, and propagated FG—could have been viewed as blasphemous, as even misusing the Name or a substitute, in their exaltation of Jesus? Lastly, can the Johannine language of putting the man outside of the synagogue (ἀποσυνάγωγος γένηται; Jn 9:22; cf. 12:42; 16:2) and throwing the man outside (ἐξεβαλον αὐτὸν ἐξω; Jn 9:35) be understood in light of the Levitical command for the whole synagogue to take the blasphemer outside for execution (ἐξάγαγε τὸν καταράωντο ἐξω ... πᾶσα ἡ συναγωγή ... λιθοβολήσουσιν; Lev 23:14; cf. 23:16, 23)?

651 The Rabbis debated whether an inappropriate vocalization of a substitute for the tetragrammaton (such as bilateral Names, like El and Yh) constituted blasphemy (m. Sch‘b 4.13b; b. Sch‘b 35a; b. Sanh 55b-57a, 60a).
The triumvirate of Exod 22:27, Lev 24:10-23, and Num 15:30-31 has been rightly identified by Bock as the legal basis for discussions of blasphemy in Early Judaism. It is surprising, therefore, that Bock also writes, “This text [Num 15:30-31] is not about blasphemy, but it is an important discussion of the death penalty, which allows it in later exposition to become related to blasphemy, since blasphemy also carries the death penalty.” Certainiy, Bock is correct in arguing that Num 15:30-31 sheds light on the death penalty associated with blasphemy, but can we agree that the offense should not be classified as blasphemy? We will respond to this in the context of addressing two main questions: What is the discourse concept of the offense in Num 15:30-31, particularly as it emerges in the overall context of Numbers 11-16? And what is the penalty associated with it?

7.1 Sinning with a High Hand

15:30 But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien, affronts the LORD, and shall be cut off from among the people. (NRSV)

15:31 Because of having despised the word of the LORD and broken his commandment, such a person shall be utterly cut off and bear the guilt. (NRSV)

Num 15:30-31 forms the climax and the main point for verses 21-31. This is indicated by the series of seven repeated phrases regarding the unintentional (υλικού) failure to keep the commandments, leaving sinning with a high hand

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652 Bock (1998) 39 states, “With these three key texts from Exod 22, Lev 24, and Num 15 come the legal roots to the discussion on blasphemy.”
654 Num 15:22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29; LXX uses ἐκδοσίας.
The phrase occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. Milgrom places the phrase within the broad ANE culture and concludes that “the original setting of this metaphor is seen in the statues of ancient Near Eastern deities who were sculpted with an uplifted or outstretched right hand, bearing a spear, war ax, or lightning bolt... The upraised hand is therefore poised to strike; it is a threatening gesture of the Deity against His enemies or a man against God Himself.”

It is likely that this type of defiance is depicted in the story of Nicanor when “he stretched out his right hand toward the sanctuary” (2 Macc 14:33) and is referred to when God promises that the uplifted arm of the wicked will be broken (Job 38:15). Still, on the basis of a close inspection of Num 15:30-31 and the rebellion narratives of Numbers, more can be said about 

First, the sin is against Yahweh—ἡ ἰδιότητα τοῦ Κυρίου (he affronts or blasphemes the LORD) (Num 15:30b). As Ashley notes, the name Yahweh is in the emphatic position, indicating the emphasis is on the one offended. Although the verb יִתֵּן (affront or blaspheme) in the Piel form is found only seven times in the Hebrew Bible, it occurs in key texts concerning defiance or blasphemy against God. The term is also used in latter rabbinic literature for blasphemy as, for example, in the account of R. Simeon b. Laqisch (ca. 250), who repeatedly tears his clothes each time a certain Samaritan blasphemes God. Moreover, as we noted earlier, Strack-Billerbeck state that in rabbinic literature the substantival participle, יִתָּהְלֻם, could refer to blasphemers, idolaters, and people who curse the Name (see § 2.1). However, the sharp distinction between these three types of יִתָּהְלֻם is somewhat artificial, as Strack-
Billerbeck seem to recognize. Furthermore, it is significant to note that LXX Num 15:30 translates ἐξελεξαίνομεν (to despise); this is significant because παρωγήνω is only used in LXX Numbers to identify the type of sin for which the first generation of Israel died in the wilderness.662

After the people of Israel called for a return to Egypt (14:4) and threatened to stone Moses and Aaron, Yahweh said, “How long will this people despise (παρωγήνω) me? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?” (NRSV Num 14:11).

Again, Yahweh states, “None of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised (παρωγήναντες) me shall see it” (NRSV Num 14:22-23).

Foretelling the doom of Korah and his mutineers, Yahweh states, “If... the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised (παρωγήναντες) the LORD” (NRSV Num 16:30).

Later, Yahweh announces, “Let Aaron be gathered to his people. For he shall not enter the land that I have given to the Israelites, because you rebelled (παρωγήνατε) against my command at the waters of Meribah” (NRSV Num 20:24).

The point of citing the four passages above is show that to affront the LORD in Num 15:30b is terminologically and conceptually linked to the story of Israel’s rebellion against Yahweh (Num 11-14, 16-20). It suggests that the rather short phrase regarding sinning with an upraised hand can be illuminated by the extended story of Israel’s uprising against God. Although there are several instances of uprising in the wilderness, the narrative in Numbers makes it clear that each act of rebellion was done intentionally and in full knowledge of God’s signs, wonders, and commands. Set within this account of Israel’s defection, the phrase to affront the LORD (Num 15:30b) seems to take on the additional connotation of blatant and defiant rebellion, even treason and betrayal.

Second, the one who sins with a high hand is characterized as one who disdains the word of the LORD (רָבָּד) (Num 15:31a). The phrase, הָיוֹרָה רָבָּד, in the construct state, occurs only ten times in the Pentateuch and is used to sum up the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:1, 4), the Sinai Covenant (e.g., Exod 24:3-4, Deut 5:5)

662 Where LXX uses παρωγήνω, MT uses יָפָה (Num 14:11, 23; 16:30), הָיוֹרָה (Num 15:30), and
and, very significantly, the Sinai-like revelation of Yahweh to Israel in the wilderness (Num 11:24). As such, הָרְאֵתָא (word of the LORD) in Num 15:31 could be a reference to the broad covenantal decrees of God rather than to any particular law or regulation (e.g., Num 15:1-29). If this is correct, then the reference to disdaining the word of the LORD is tantamount to rejecting God’s covenant or spurning Yahweh’s offer of a relationship. 663 The rebellion of Israel in the wilderness is repeatedly characterized by LXX as transgressing τὸ ἔριπα κυρίου (the word of the Lord), 664 the very phrase that LXX used to translate הָרְאֵתָא in Num 15:31. This connection is enough to suggest that, for the translators of LXX, the rebellion of Israel in the wilderness was sinning with a high hand. Given these connections, it is a step into the available light to suggest that to disdain the word of the LORD (Num 15:31a) is to spurn God’s offer of a covenantal relationship as Israel did in the wilderness.

Third, whoever sins with a high hand is further identified as one who breaks his [Yahweh’s] commandment (ךְפַּדְתְּךָ) (Num 15:31b). The LXX puts an interesting spin on the term רָשָׁע (to break or violate) by translating it with διασκεδάζομαι (to scatter or to disperse). In this way, LXX generates a harvest-metaphor such that the one who sins with a high hand not only rejects the word of God (Num 15:31a), but scatters it to the wind like so much worthless chaff (Num 15:31b). As a consequence, the offender or would-be thresher is himself emphatically rubbed out or ground down like worthless grain—ἐκτριβήσεται ἡ ψυχή ἐκείνη (lit. he [God] shall rub out the soul that shall be rubbed out)—thereby implicitly maintaining the equal and proportionate justice of lex talionis that we saw earlier with Lev 24:10-23. 666

Next, we will consider the consequences of sinning with a high hand and the literary context in which this sin is profiled.

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663 Ashley (1993) 289 concurs.
664 Cf. LXX Num 14:41, 31:16; Deut 1:26, 43; 9:23.
665 The doubling of ἐκτριβήσεται in LXX Num 15:31 reflects the doubling of הָרְאֵתָא in MT—הָרְאֵתָא.
666 The link between blasphemy and the lex talionis is explicit in Lev 24:10-23.
7.2 Being Cut Off (Kārēt)

As we have seen, the penalty for sinning with a high hand is being utterly rubbed out (LXX) or being completely cut off (MT). The warning against sinning with a high hand (Num 15:30-31) could be viewed as the climax and sharp contrast to the series of seven phrases regarding unintentional sin (Num 15:23-29). The crescendo effect is further emphasized by the two-fold repetition of הָרְרֵי (to cut off):

Whoever sins high-handedly ...
affronts the LORD
and shall be cut off (דברים) from among the people,
having despised the word of the LORD
and broken his commandment
such a person shall be utterly cut off (דברים הים) and bear the guilt.

Milgrom believes that the issue of kārēt or being cut off is a primary focus of the passage, identifying it as “the main innovation of this section.” We have already introduced the issue of kārēt (§ 6.2). We found that the penalty of kārēt generally involved divine action against severe breaches of the covenant, resulting in the premature death of the offender or the loss of descendants. Following the work of B. Levine and Hasel, we also observed a type of divine-human cooperation in certain instances such that execution (and perhaps banishment) by human hands could be viewed as part of the process of kārēt.

When we look at the literary structure of Num 15:30-31 and the repetition of הָרְרֵי (to cut off), it is easy to see why kārēt is identified as a central concern. Given this emphasis, it remarkable that kārēt is identified as the inescapable and unmitigated punishment for sinning with a high hand, but there is no explanation about how the penalty was to be accomplished. Nevertheless, the penalties associated with the story of the Sabbath-breaker (Num 15:32-36), the narrative of Israel’s rebellion (Num 11-

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667. Milgrom (1990) 125; Bock (1998) 37 argues that the value of this passage pertains to what it says about the death penalty.
668. M. Karitot 1.1-2 lists 36 offenses for which extirpation is the penalty, if the transgressions were intentional; but, if unintentional, a sin offering is required.
669. We also accepted Horbury’s argument that excommunication not only came to replace execution, but also was viewed as a replacement or preparation for kārēt during the post-exilic period. That does not come to bear in Numbers, but is pertinent to FG.
14), and the account of Korah's attempted mutiny against Moses and Aaron (Num 16) provide implicit commentary on kārēt and, indeed, blasphemy itself. To these accounts we now turn.

7.3 The Literary Context

7.3.1 The Sabbath-breaker

The issue of sinning with a high hand raised in Num 15:30-31 is immediately followed by the account of the Sabbath-breaker in Num 15:32-36. This account is similar in structure and language to the story of the blasphemer in Lev 24:10-23: (a) An offense was committed—picking up sticks on the Sabbath, (b) the offender was brought to Moses and placed in custody, (c) Moses sought Yahweh's council, and (d) finally the offender is taken outside the camp and stoned.

Although the offense is presented as a violation of the Sabbath, the exact nature of the offense is uncertain. Picking up sticks was not expressly prohibited, but picking up sticks could have been understood as working or somehow linked to kindling a fire, both of which were prohibited on the Sabbath (Exod 35:2-3). Why Moses had to consult Yahweh is also debated. What is not debated is that Num 15:32-36 represents a Sabbath violation, punishable by execution or kārēt. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that this case (Num 15:32-36), which the redactors could have been positioned anywhere in Numbers, serves to exemplify the preceding warning about sinning with a high hand (Num 15:30-31). In other words, the Sabbath-breaker
epitomizes what it means to sin with a high hand, to blaspheme God, and to break the commandment of Yahweh.

Therefore, we suggest that the case of the *highhanded* Sabbath-breaker, although primarily about violating the Sabbath, is also an instance of blasphemy (cf. § 6.2). However, unlike the instance of blasphemy in Lev 24, it is non-verbal blasphemy. As if louder than words, Num 15:30-31 leads us to believe that the stick-gatherer, in full knowledge of the prohibition not to work on the Sabbath, defied Yahweh, snubbed his command, and blatantly went about working on the Sabbath. Still, like the instance of blasphemy in Lev 24, there is a dual infraction involving blasphemy plus a breach of a major commandment—the third (the Name) is violated in Lev 24 and the fourth (the Sabbath) is violated in Num 15. And, like Lev 24, the penalty is expressed in the familiar terms of the synagogue of Israel removing the man from the community and then stoning him (LXX Num 15:35-36; cf. Lev 24:14, 16, 23).

### 7.3.2 Israel's rebellion

The case of the Sabbath-breaker is not the only reference to blasphemy and its penalty of *kārēt* in Numbers. Wave after wave of rebellion against Yahweh is presented in Num 11-14, including complaints about Yahweh's provision (Num 11:1), opposition to Moses (Num 12:2), unfaithful reports about the land (Num 13:32-33), and threats against the leadership of Moses and Aaron (Num 14:2-4).673 These uprisings are summed up or characterized in MT Num 14:11 and 23 with the term *'alil* (to despise), a term that depicts "serious[ly] malicious acts against God"674 and a term that is identified by Bock as one of seven key Hebrew terms used to express blasphemy in the Hebrew Bible.675 As we have noted, *'alil* is translated in LXX Num 14:11 and 23 with the term παροξύνω (to despise), the same term used in LXX Num 15:30 to express the blasphemy of sinning with a high hand (cf. § 7.1). The use of παροξύνω in LXX Num 14:11 and 23 sums up the rebellious actions and attitudes of both individuals (11:4; 12:1-3; 13:31-22; 14:36-38) and the community (11:1, 4, 33; 14:1-4, 39-45) and it paves the way to the verdict that anyone, even

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Israel herself, who sins highhandedly despises or blasphemes the LORD, τὸν θεὸν οὐτος παροξύνει (LXX Num 15:30).

If Israel’s rebellions in the wilderness can be classified as instances of blasphemy, then we would also expect to find various individuals and Israel herself cut off. This is exactly what is portrayed. Although the term ἠμαίνομαι (to cut off) is not used in the rebellion narratives, kārēt is unmistakably and emphatically portrayed when Yahweh announces that the first generation of Israelites would perish in the wilderness (14:29-30) and, as a portent of that judgment, the unfaithful spies die of the plague (14:37). The first generation of Israel is truly cut off from future generations.

If our analysis stands, then to characterize the Israel’s rebellions in the wilderness as blasphemous both reinforces and seriously broadens our concept of blasphemy. First, it reinforces our understanding that blasphemy can refer to non-verbal, as well as verbal, offenses against God. Second, it reinforces our previous findings that blasphemy can be charged against those who mutiny against God’s leaders, such as Moses and Aaron (Exod 22:27; cf. Num 12:2; 14:2-4). Third, it broadens our concept of blasphemy to include the type of actions and attitudes with which Israel is depicted, including unmitigated rebellion, profound unfaithfulness despite seeing God’s signs and glory, and blatant rejection of God and his provision.

7.3.3 Korah’s mutiny

The portrayal of Israel’s rebellion continues with the mutiny of Korah and his associates against the leadership of Moses and Aaron (Num 16:1-35). Like the earlier accounts, the rebellious Korahites are characterized as having despised the LORD, παρώχυναι... τὸν κύριον (LXX Num 16:3). The use of παροξύνω 676 recalls previous occurrences of the term in Numbers, particularly in Num 15:30 where it is synonymous with sinning with a high hand and, as we argued, blasphemy itself. The lexical sense of παροξύνω (to despise or to blaspheme) is shaped by each of its successive uses in Numbers such that παροξύνω accrues additional connotative

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675 Bock (1998) 32-33 identifies הָעַל, הָלָל, הָעַר, הָעַר, הָעַר, הָעַר, הָעַר, and the euphemism הָעַר.
676 MT Num 16:30 has חֲנָל (to despise), the same as Num 14:11 and 23.
meaning from narrative to narrative. The accrual of additional meaning results in a unique discourse concept[^677] of נמרנ for Numbers. We have briefly sketched that development through Num 11-15 and have argued that נמרנ has taken on the additional meaning of rebellious-blasphemy (Num 11-14) and blatant-sinning-blasphemy (Num 15). Now, we shall argue that one more connotation can be added to the discourse concept, that of self-exaltative-blasphemy (Num 16).

The rebellion of Korah and his followers begins with the word נמרנ, which can be translated and [Korah] became arrogant (Num 16:1).[^678] It is followed in close succession with a second phrase, וקחר וארט ותה, and they rose up against Moses (Num 16:2). Ironically, Korah and his Levite companions accuse Moses and Aaron of self-exaltation, “You set yourselves above the assembly of Yahweh” (נמל הנ כדי ויה וארט ותה) (Num 16:3), and of exceeding their authority, “You have gone too far” (וה מתה) (Num 16:7). As the narrative moves forward,[^679] Korah’s opposition to Moses and Aaron blends together with a description of the Levites who greedily attempt to seize Aaron’s priesthood (Num 16:10). Moses summarily condemns both Korah and the Levites for opposing Yahweh himself (Num 16:11). It suggests that, like the Sabbath-breaker, Korah’s rebellion is another example of sinning with a high hand against Yahweh. It is an example of arrogance and greed threatening the powers of heaven by colluding to overthrow earthly authority. It is blasphemy by any other name (Exod 22:27).

[^677]: On discourse concepts, see § 4.1.
[^678]: The meaning of נמרנ is difficult to determine, but several scholars have argued that the root is נמר (to be bold or insolent), which appears in Job 15:12; so Snaith (1967) 157-58; Ashley (1993) 298, n. 2; Budd (1984) 180; and NIV. It is obvious that Origen took נמר this way, since he translated it as ὁμοφανεστήρ (he was arrogant). Others have understood נמר to mean he took (the Qal form of נמר). This is not altogether satisfactory, since נמר is a transitive verb and yet no object is supplied. Hence, the RSV is forced to supply the word men, as in he took men, and the NRSV connects he took in verse 1 with the two hundred fifty Israelites in verse 2. Milgrom (1990) 312-13 lists ten possible solutions, but prefers to understand נמר reflexively, he took himself.
[^679]: The repeated reference to Korah throughout Num 16:1-35 indicates that the narrative as a whole, despite complexities regarding sources, was intended to be read as a unified story in the final form. Numbers 16 is a composite of at least three documentary sources (e.g., JE, P_s, P_t) with many redactive difficulties; so Ashley (1993) 301-2; Milgrom (1989) 414-23.
The story reaches a turning point when Korah and his associates approach the very entrance to the tent of meeting, as if to take possession of it (Num 16:19). To prove that Moses is indeed the chosen earthly authority, and not Korah and his band, Moses prophecies that Yahweh will destroy the would-be mutineers. They will die a premature death and be utterly consumed by the ground they walk on—"then you will know that these men have despised [παροξύναν] the LORD" (Num 16:30b). By the time the reader hears that Korah and his mutineers have been labeled despisers of Yahweh, the term παροξύνω carries the semantic freight of several chapters of rebellion that have come to be associated with the term (Num 11-16). From chapter 16, the discourse concept of παροξύνω comes to mean the blasphemy of arrogant self-exaltation and the blasphemy of illegitimately grasping for divine authority! Admittedly, these are cumbersome phrases, but to attentive readers, the discourse concept to which these phrases point comes in the flash of a single word—παροξύνω.

Immediately after labeling Korah and the mutineers as despisers or blasphemers of Yahweh, the earth splits apart and swallows Korah and his household (Num 16:32-33) and fire comes out and consumes his co-conspirators (Num 16:35). In commenting on verse 33, Milgrom insists that this is an instance of kārēt, for even through "the root kārēt does not occur, it is replaced by the attested synonym ābad (e.g., Lev 23:30; Deut 7:24)." For our purposes, it is also important to note that LXX Num 16:33 has they perished from the midst of the synagogue (ἐπώλεν τοι έξ μέσου τῆς συναγωγῆς). Statements regarding the extirpation of blasphemers from the synagogue is not uncommon in LXX and may foreshadow the use of ἀποστραφή (removed from the synagogue) in FG. The presence of the penalty of kārēt in Num 16:33 corroborates our argument that blasphemy is indeed the...

681 MT Num 16:33 has ἀπαλλότριον τοῖς μεξόν τῆς συνεκκομίσεως (they perished from among the community).
683 The language of being extirpated or removed from the synagogue has striking similarities with the thrice repeated, but otherwise unparalleled, Johannine use of ἀποστραφή (removed from the synagogue; Jn 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2).
primary offense of Korah’s mutiny. We can be fairly certain of this because of the 19 offenses for which kārēt is stipulated, only blasphemy fits Korah’s mutiny.

7.4 Conclusions and Prospects

Sinning with a high hand is blatant treason, lifting a war axe or spear against Yahweh. In Numbers, sinning with a high hand is the same thing as blasphemy. It can include speech, but it is primarily defiant behavior. Sinning with a high hand is compared to taking God’s commandment, reading it, knowing it, and then throwing it to the wind as if it was worthless chaff. Such behavior is blasphemous—the contempt, the rebelliousness, the aggression against God and his leaders make it so (§ 3.6). The story of the Sabbath-breaker exemplifies sinning with a high hand. The problem is not simply that the Sabbath-breaker violates the Sabbath by picking up sticks. No. He deliberately sets out to violate the Sabbath. He intentionally and publicly flouts God’s commandment. It is a case of individual blasphemy. The stories of Israel’s rebellion and Korah’s mutiny also exemplify sinning with a high hand. Despite seeing God’s glory and tasting God’s bread, the rebels call God a liar: “God is not providing what he promised, so let us chose different leaders and return to Egypt.” They snub God and scorn God. It is a case of corporate blasphemy. Then there is the story of Korah’s mutiny against God’s leaders. It too is blasphemy. As if lifting a war axe dripping with the blood of self-exaltation, Korah puts Moses down and raises himself up. God will have none of that and Korah drops through the ground. This brings us to the issue of kārēt.

Kārēt is stipulated as the penalty for sinning with a high hand (15:30). In Numbers, we observe different ways in which kārēt is accomplished, but the result is the same—extirpation or destruction. The Sabbath-breaker, and whatever future progeny might have followed, is terminated or cut off through execution (15:35). The rebels also suffer the penalty of kārēt. They are cut off from the promised land when they die prematurely of the plague (Num 14:27; 16:49; 25:1-18). Similarly, Korah and his mutineers are cut off when the ground miraculously opens and swallows them or when fire consumes them (16:32-35). There is little difference between execution by

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human hands and destruction of a line by divine miracle, since the result is the same.\textsuperscript{685}

To look ahead, since Numbers presents blasphemy as \textit{defiant behavior} and \textit{blatant treason} against Yahweh and, as a corollary, \textit{self-exaltation} over God’s chosen leadership, two questions emerge when we turn to FG. First, could the anti-Ἰουδαῖοι language of FG be interpreted as \textit{highhanded sin}? That is, are there any indication that FG’s criticism of the Jewish leadership, the Ἰουδαῖοι, was viewed as treason against God’s chosen leadership? We will address these issues in chapter 15. Second, could FG’s \textit{exaltation of Jesus} have been understood as mutiny against the High Priest and Sanhedrin? Could FG’s \textit{exaltation of Jesus} have been understood as an \textit{affront to God himself} in that the Johannine Jesus, like the Sabbath-breaker, takes it upon himself to interpret or the Sabbath and the Festivals of Passover, Tabernacles, and Dedication? We will address these issues in chapter 13 (§ 13.4).

\textsuperscript{685} Contra Milgrom.
Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah provides another important and widely known account of blasphemy in ancient Judaism. The account of Sennacherib’s invasion spans two chapters from 2 Kgs 18:1—19:37 and dramatically highlights the way in which Yahweh protected Jerusalem from destruction by the Assyrians. The importance of the story is attested by the fact that it is alluded to or recounted in Isa 36:1—37:38, 2 Chr 29:1—32:26, 1 Macc 7:41, 2 Macc 15:22, Josephus’ Antiquities 10.1.1-21, Tobit (S)1:18, and later rabbinic traditions. The account of Yahweh’s protection of Jerusalem is also part of the Zion-theology of the Hebrew Bible, which celebrates Yahweh’s kingship over and faithfulness to Mount Zion—the Temple—and, by metonymy, to Jerusalem and the people of Israel. When all these factors are considered, it is reasonable to suppose that first-century Jews, such as the Johannine group and their non-believing opponents, were aware of the traditions of Sennacherib’s blasphemy.

As with the previous texts, our analysis of Sennacherib’s offense will focus on addressing two questions: What kind of discourse concept of blasphemy emerges from 2 Kgs 18:1—20:21? What penalty is associated with it? In an effort to address

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686 For the Assyrian account, see Pritchard’s ANET (1969) 287-88.
687 Hobbs (1985; Word Biblical Commentary CD Version) shows that Isaiah’s account differs only slightly from 2 Kgs. Hobbs states that Isaiah tends to abbreviate 2 Kings, but “there is no reason to emend the text of 2 Kings on the basis of the Isaiah text” since, as he assumes, Isaiah was not the source for 2 Kings.
688 John Wright (1992) 3.190 argues that the accounts of Sennacherib and Hezekiah in 2 Kgs and 2 Chr were drawn from independent sources; hence, we have independent attestation of the account. There are three parallel sections: 2 Kgs 18:13-37 para. 2 Chr 32:1-29; 2 Kgs 35—20:1 para. 2 Chr 32:20-26; 2 Kgs 20:20-21 para. 2 Chr 32:32-33.
690 Sennacherib is mentioned 48 times in the Talmud (see The Soncino Classics Collection on CD-ROM) and is given extensive comment in b. Sanh 94a—95b, where he is identified as the one who “prated with inflammatory speech against the Most High” (םֶשֶׁת הַנִּצָּרָה רָבָּה בַּלַּא מֵעָלָה) and as “the one who blasphemed” (קֹרֵאתוֹ). See also t. Sotah 3.18.
these questions, we will summarize 2 Kgs 18:1—20:21, look at Hezekiah’s prayer (19:15-19), and examine Isaiah’s three oracles (19:6-7; 21-34; 20:1b).

3.1 The Blasphemy of Sennacherib

The narrative of 2 Kings 18:1—20:21 sets in contrast two kings; one is intensely faithful to Yahweh, the other contemptuous to the point of blasphemy. The narrative can be divided into three parts, each corresponding to three phases of Hezekiah’s reign.692

In the first phase (18:1-12), Hezekiah is introduced as a king who “did what was right in the sight of the LORD.” He is highly praised as one who trusted (תָּנָスキ) and held fast to (תָּאוּני) Yahweh, who led a religious reform, and who threw off the yoke of Assyrian domination.

The second phase of Hezekiah’s reign (18:13—19:37) is dominated by the arrival of the great Assyrian army under Sennacherib, who not only seeks tribute, but also the humiliation of Hezekiah. Of course, it is Sennacherib who is humiliated, but only after pushing Judah and Hezekiah to the brink of disaster. After destroying or capturing most of the fortified cities in Judah, Sennacherib sends envoys to Hezekiah twice. The first time, the envoys come to the gates of Jerusalem and shout out their master's demands. They seek the surrender of Jerusalem, but their strategy is to undermine confidence in Hezekiah by pitching carefully crafted propaganda,693 issuing threats,694 and hurling insults at Hezekiah695 and Yahweh.696 Once Hezekiah is informed of the gravity of the situation, cloths are torn, sackcloth is put on, and

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692 Although there are indications of multiple sources and redactions, that does not concern us here. What concerns us is the final form of the text and how that final form, which can be read as a unified story, influences the interpretation of 19:22. For various source and redaction theories, see John Wright (1993) 3.190 and Hobbs (1985; CD version of WBC on 2 Kings).
693 For example, the Assyrian envoys cleverly remind the Israelites that Hezekiah tore down the high places of the Yahweh in order to centralize worship in Jerusalem. How can Hezekiah then assume Yahweh’s protection (18:22)? What is more, the envoys claim that Yahweh told Sennacherib to destroy Judah (18:25). Using Israel’s images of a golden age of prosperity, the envoys promise life and land flowing with grain, wine, oil, and honey if they surrender to Sennacherib (18:32).
694 E.g., 18:27.
695 Three times the envoys shout out that Hezekiah deceives Israel (18:29; 31; 32b; cf. Exod 22:27[28]).
696 The envoys claim that, like other gods, Yahweh is impotent and cannot save Israel (18:33-35).
Isaiah is called. Isaiah announces that the Assyrians will be shaken by rumors and Sennacherib will die in his own land (19:6-7). True to Yahweh’s word, Sennacherib hears rumors that Ethiopians have flanked his forces and so, rather urgently, he sends envoys a second time to Hezekiah to demand surrender. This time the envoys give Hezekiah a letter that, as we will show, blasphemes Yahweh by denying His power to protect Jerusalem. Hezekiah spreads the letter out in the Temple and pleads for Yahweh’s intervention. Then, in a crucial, three-part oracle Isaiah announces that Sennacherib is condemned for his arrogance and blasphemy. The consequences follow “that very night” so that by dawn the men of Judah see one hundred eighty-five thousand dead Assyrians. Sennacherib is allowed to escape only to die an ignominious death while, ironically, worshiping a god who fails to protect him.

The third phase of Hezekiah’s reign (20:1-21) reveals an unexpected twist—Hezekiah is to die. But, after beseeching Yahweh, Hezekiah is healed and lives fifteen more years.

8.2 Hezekiah’s Prayer

The second time Assyrian envoys come to demand the surrender of Jerusalem, Sennacherib blasphemes or mocks (ὁ νεικίζω; 19:16) Yahweh by:

- calling Yahweh a liar—“Do no let your God deceive you ...” (19:10),
- denying the power of Yahweh to save Jerusalem (19:11), and
- comparing Yahweh with other gods (19:12).

In response, Hezekiah offers prayer with two elements. The first is a request for Yahweh to hear Sennacherib’s blasphemy (19:16c) and to save Jerusalem (19:19a). The second is a series of affirmations regarding the uniqueness of Yahweh—He is God alone (ὁ θεὸς μόνος; 19:15, 19), the living God (ὁ θεὸν ζωντα; 19:16c), the one enthroned (ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν χερουβίν; 19:15a), the creator (19:15b), the God of Israel (ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραήλ; 19:15a), and our God (ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν; 19:19a), and other gods are not gods (οὐ θεοὶ εἰσιν; 19:18). The logic of Hezekiah’s prayer is straightforward. The Assyrians have called God a liar and have denied Yahweh’s power to rescue Jerusalem. Thus, Yahweh’s honor has been challenged which, in an
honor-shame culture, calls for a decisive response. Thus, Hezekiah urges Yahweh to protect Jerusalem from the Assyrians to defend His reputation as Israel’s God and as the one and only Power. As the narrative shows, Hezekiah’s prayer is answered, Jerusalem is spared (19:35), and God’s honor is preserved (19:19).

However, something else is at stake in addition to God’s honor. Hezekiah’s prayer suggests that Sennacherib threatened the monotheistic sensibilities of the Jews. The prayer uses no less than six out of ten forms of monotheistic speech found in Jewish tradition. In other words, the prayer is loaded with monotheistic language and, because it comes directly after Sennacherib’s blasphemous claim, it appears to function as a counter-claim. When we consider this alongside the claim of many scholars who argue that blasphemy, particularly in FG, can be understood as a breach of monotheism (see § 2.7), it raises a critical question: Can Sennacherib’s blasphemy be understood as a breach of monotheism? In a qualified sense, we believe so.

Sennacherib denied the power, if not the reality, of Yahweh, who, in Sennacherib’s mind, was like all the other gods of the nations that Assyria had defeated (19:12-13). Whatever ontological status Sennacherib assigned to the gods, whether real or imaginary, he assumed that Yahweh was like them. Yahweh was just a common god, another impotent god before Assyrian power. Surely, this is a denial (or breach) of the basic monotheistic principle that Yahweh is not like other gods. Yahweh is unique and singular as the One Living God. Whereas Sennacherib claimed that no power could defeat Assyria, Hezekiah counter-claimed that One Power could. That One Power destroys the Assyrian army, a decisive rebuttal of Sennacherib’s claim.

Yahweh is not like other gods, who are made and destroyed by human hands (19:17); rather, He makes (19:15) and He destroys (19:35). He is God alone (ὁ θεὸς μόνος; }

697 In the ancient Mediterranean world, honor (or public reputation) was perceived to be a limited good that could be won or lost. One way in which honor could be won (or lost) was through a form of interaction that cultural anthropologists call “challenge-response (riposte),” a verbal tug of war in which insults and slander, or compliments and praise, are exchanged. Since honor and shame are both individual and group qualities, defending the honor of the group and especially social superiors, such as God, was a basic social obligation in the ancient Mediterranean world. See Rohrbaugh (1995) 185-6; Malina (1993) chapter 2.

698 Rainbow (1991) 83 and (1988) 66-100 identifies the following ten forms of monotheistic speech: (1) divine titles linked with adjectives like εξω and μόνος, (2) language depicting God as monarch over all, (3) the use of living or true with God, (4) confessional formulas like Yahweh is God, (5) explicit denials of other gods, (6) the non-transferability of God’s glory, (7) language describing
Hence, Sennacherib’s blasphemy breached the monotheistic sensibilities of the Jews.

### 8.3 Isaiah’s Oracles

A key to understanding the blasphemy of Sennacherib lies with the oracles of Isaiah, which are dispersed throughout the narrative. The oracles not only reveal Yahweh’s condemnation of Sennacherib, but also Yahweh’s perspective on the motives, character, and intentions of Sennacherib.

#### 8.3.1 First Oracle: Against Sennacherib

Isaiah’s first oracle (19:6-7) flatly states that the envoys of Sennacherib have blasphemed (LXX βασιλεύω; MT מְלֹאכֵי) Yahweh, but nevertheless Sennacherib himself is responsible and must suffer the consequences. Immediately before this oracle, Hezekiah sent word to Isaiah telling him about the disaster facing Jerusalem (19:3). However, Hezekiah’s report ignores the political and military concerns and focuses on the theological crisis: Sennacherib has come to mock the living God (δείξειν Θεὸν ζωντα; 19:4; cf. 18:30, 32-35). Through the voice of his envoy, Sennacherib had mocked Yahweh’s power and promises: First, he compared Yahweh to other gods who were impotent to save their people (18:33). Second, he mocked Yahweh’s promises to Israel, when he offered himself as the basis for life, blessing, and security:

> Make your peace with me and come out to me; then every one of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree, and drink water from your own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive oil and honey, that you may live and not die (18:31-32).

In this way, Sennacherib presents himself as an alternative to Yahweh and His provision. Sennacherib is in effect claiming to be Yahweh’s rival, an alternative god, who can provide what Yahweh is unable to provide. It is no wonder, then, that Sennacherib’s military threat is reported to Isaiah as a threat against God’s

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uniqueness and honor. In an honor-shame culture, a quick-witted and decisive response is required. Isaiah’s response is short and direct. Because of the distress and fear caused by hearing (ἡχοῦσας) the words of blasphemy (19:6), Sennacherib will become distressed and afraid at hearing a rumor (ἀκούστα ἀγγέλιαν) and will die by the sword in his own land (19:7). After the oracle, the narrative shows confirmation of Isaiah’s prediction; the Assyrian camp is in confusion over rumors regarding the Ethiopians (19:9) and Sennacherib perishes by the sword (19:37). Thus, the prophetic word defeats the blasphemous word and Yahweh’s honor is preserved.

8.3.2 Second Oracle: Against Sennacherib

Isaiah’s second oracle (19:21-34) is the longest and the most substantial. As in the previous oracle, Yahweh engages Sennacherib in word-battle, this time defending His honor (vv. 21-28), the remnant of Judah (vv. 29-31), and Jerusalem (vv. 32-34). We will focus on the first part, which is an oracle directed against Sennacherib, but can also be read as a defense of Yahweh’s honor. In Yahweh’s defense, three witnesses come forth.

The first witness is the city of Jerusalem, the virgin daughter Zion, the victim whom Sennacherib has come to rape (vv. 21-23a). Initially, she says nothing, though inwardly she despises (העב) and scorns (활동) Sennacherib and outwardly she shakes her head mockingly (19:21). She has been threatened with rape, but it was not just a threat against her. To threaten her is to mock and blaspheme Yahweh. To make her point, she presents parallel questions and answers within which two verbal roots—blaspheme (נברע) and raise up (נזרה)—form the thematic center (19:22-23a).

A Whom have you blasphemed (נברע) and reviled?
B Against whom have you raised (נזרע) your voice?
B’ You lifted your eyes on high (נשע) against the Holy One of Israel;
A’ By your messengers you blasphemed (נברע) the Lord.

701 Cohn (2000) 133.
702 The content of the rumor only becomes evident in 19:9.
704 So Cohn (2000) 137.
705 Cohn (2000) 137 identified them as three voices.
The chiastic structure is composed of two synonymous parallelisms. There is conceptual parallelism between lines A and B and between B' and A'. When we read line A and line B synoptically, blasphemy is equivalent to verbal assault against Yahweh—raising one's voice. When we read line B' and line A' synoptically, blasphemy is equivalent to self-exaltation above Yahweh—lifting one's eyes on high. Put together, the chiastic pattern stresses that Sennacherib's blasphemy has both verbal and non-verbal aspects.

What is important to note is Sennacherib's threat to Jerusalem is simultaneously interpreted as blasphemy against and self-exaltation above Yahweh. That is, the way in which Sennacherib exalts himself (against Jerusalem and Yahweh) is blasphemy. LXX 4 Kgdms 19:22 (= Isa 37:23) states that Sennacherib raised (ὑψωσάει) his voice, or shouted at God, and lifted his eyes toward heaven (ὑψόσαει). "Ὑψόω literally means to raise something up, but often implies to exalt." The language of exaltation in Isa 37:23 (= 4 Kgdms 19:22) recalls the vision of Isa 6:1, where Yahweh is sitting on a high (ὑψηλός) and exalted (ἐξαίτης) throne. In this way, the language of 4 Kgdms 19:22 (= Isa 37:23) creates an image of Sennacherib attempting a heavenly ascent, even to the throne of God, providing one of the strongest statements of self-exaltation in the LXX tradition. Thus, the virgin daughter of Zion accuses Sennacherib of attempted rape, which is self-exalitative blasphemy against God, hubris and shame of the highest level.

The second witness is Sennacherib himself, a voice imagined by the virgin daughter of Zion (vv. 23b-24). Sennacherib lists his exploits like a god, using the emphatic I
(טֹֽנֶה)—I have ascended, I have cut down, I have reached, I have dug, I have dried up. Each boast refers to a superlative accomplishment regarding the highest mountains, the loftiest cedars, the tallest cypresses, the farthest places, and all the tributaries of the Nile. However, the braggadocio only serves to incriminate Sennacherib of superlative arrogance and foolishness, for Sennacherib has not laid a picture of military conquests before us, but in the eyes of Jews, a preposterous claim to tame nature like a god? 713

The third witness is Yahweh, who puts Sennacherib's boasting into proper perspective (vv. 25-28). Yahweh states that it was He who decided and planned to use Sennacherib for His purpose which, of course, makes Sennacherib only a two-bit player on the world's stage. Furthermore, Yahweh reveals that He knows Sennacherib through-and-through, including Sennacherib's arrogance (יָנָשׁ) and rage (יָרָה) against Him (v. 28a-b). Sennacherib is described like a raging (יָרָה) animal out of control, consumed by self-exalative blasphemy; so the oracle ends fittingly by stating that Yahweh will bridle him and lead him back to Nineveh in shame (v. 28c-d).

Thus, in the battle of honor and shame, the three witnesses make a laughingstock of Sennacherib; he who would claim divinity, to have tamed nature, is but an animal that must be tamed himself.

8.3.3 Third Oracle: Against Hezekiah

Isaiah's third oracle (20:1b), coming shortly after Sennacherib's shameful death, reveals that Hezekiah must die too. In the Deuteronomistic account of 2 Kings, the prophecy is unexpected. Nothing braces the reader to absorb such a punishing blow, especially since Hezekiah remained faithful to Yahweh through his reign. However, the account in 2 Chronicles adds an important piece of information. After Sennacherib's defeat, Yahweh exalted Hezekiah in the sight of all the nations.

712 Arrogance is detested in Jewish tradition. It is God's prerogative to exalt people (LXX Ezek 17:24; Job 17:4; Jas 4:10; 1 Pet 5:6) and those who exalt themselves are thrown down (LXX Prov 18:12; Isa 2:11; Ezek 21:26).

713 So Cohn (2000) 137.
(ὑπερήπτος; LXX 2 Chr 32:23) and, in a twist of fate, Hezekiah became *proud* and *his heart was lifted up* (ὑψόθη καρδία; LXX 2 Chr 32:25). However, unlike Sennacherib, Hezekiah was healed because *he humbled himself* (ἐπιεικέως; LXX 2 Chr 32:26). This reinforces one of the primary themes of the Hezekiah-Sennacherib narrative that Yahweh detests *arrogance*, which was a primary characteristic of Sennacherib's blasphemy.

The first, second, and third oracles of Isaiah are linked by a common theme. Each condemns *making oneself great* vis-à-vis Yahweh and each, in its own way, clarifies the nature of Sennacherib’s blasphemy as *verbal rape and mockery, self-exaltation and arrogance, foolish boasting and uncontrolled rage*.

### 8.4 Conclusions and Prospects

Based on our understanding of βλασφημεω the the sense relationships it has with various partial synonyms and hyponyms (see Chapter 4), it is reasonable to suppose that first-century Jews and Christians would have classified Sennacherib’s action as blasphemous, even if key terms like βλασφημεω had not been used in the narrative. However, as one reads 2 Kgs 18:1—20:21, the narrative adds color and definition to the type of blasphemy perpetrated by Sennacherib, so that, by the end of the account, a unique *discourse concept* of Sennacherib’s blasphemy can be discerned.

Although Sennacherib’s blasphemy can be characterized in a number of ways, it is perhaps best summed up as *self-exaltative blasphemy* against Israel and therefore against God. His blasphemy was a *verbal offense* mediated by his envoys through voice (18:28) and letter (19:14). However, it was more than a verbal offense. Isaiah’s oracles make it clear that Sennacherib’s *attitude* and *action* toward Jerusalem and Yahweh were blasphemous. Because Sennacherib laid siege to God’s city and arrogated divine status for himself, Isaiah characterizes Sennacherib’s attitude as *arrogant, foolishly boastful, and self-exaltative*. In a world where honor was perceived as a limited good, Sennacherib’s acclamations of divinity and his threat to plunder Jerusalem was tantamount to robbing God of His honor. This would have violated Jewish monotheistic sensitivities in that Sennacherib was attempting to take
what belonged to God alone. Sennacherib breached monotheistic sensitivities in other ways as well. When Sennacherib compared Yahweh to other gods, he denied and insulted Yahweh's unique reality and power. When Sennacherib offered himself as an alternative to Yahweh—*Come out to me and I will give you your own vine, fig tree, cistern, and a land of olive oil and honey* (18:31-32)—he offered what only God could offer, violating and insulting Yahweh's claim to have no rivals.

To look ahead, in chapter 13, we will consider whether the Johannine exaltation of Jesus could have been viewed as blasphemous, particularly when we consider a number of connotations associated with *Sennacherib-like-blasphemy*. For example, just as Sennacherib was accused of blasphemy by *lifting himself up* (ὑψώ) above God and the people of God, so also FG uses the term ὑψώ five times for Jesus (3:14 [twice]; 8:28; 12:32, 34), each with a double meaning referring to Jesus' crucifixion and to his exaltation to heaven.
CHAPTER 9
THE BLASPHEMY OF ANTIOCHUS
1 Maccabees 1:20—2:14

1 and 2 Macc depict two blasphemous figures relevant to our examination of FG: Antiochus Epiphanes and Nicanor. In their blasphemy, both figures displayed great arrogance, both acted and spoke contemptuously of the Jews, both threatened or profaned the Temple, both brushed aside God. However, Antiochus goes further than Nicanor in that his blasphemies entailed a claim to be equal with God.\(^{714}\)

It is likely that the Johannine Jewish-Christians and their non-believing Jewish counterparts were acquainted with the stories of Antiochus and Nicanor. The Maccabean histories were originally written in Hebrew\(^{715}\) and, based on the number of copies and versions still extant, we can infer that the Maccabean literature was popular and had widespread appeal.\(^{716}\) Even if most first-century Jews did not have direct access to 1 and 2 Macc, we can assume they had knowledge of Antiochus and Nicanor from oral sources or from written ones, such as Daniel\(^{717}\) and Jason of Cyrene.\(^{718}\) The writings of Josephus confirm that first-century Jews not only knew about Antiochus and Nicanor, but also regarded their infamy as significant.\(^{719}\) Indeed, later references in Talmudic literature testify to the long-term impact of Antiochus.

\(^{714}\) 2 Mace 9:12; cf. 9:28.

\(^{715}\) The Hebrew text is no longer extant, but Origin (ca. 184-254 C.E.) and Jerome (ca. 345-420) refer to Hebrew versions; see Goldstein (1976) 14-16.

\(^{716}\) So Goldstein (1975) 175 and (1983) 124. Textual witnesses include Greek uncial (A, N, and V) and minuscules (particularly the Lucanian recension represented by L\(^{64}\), 236, 281, 534, 728), the Old Latin (La\(^{5}\) and La\(^{6}\)), the Syriac (Sy), the Armenian (Arm), and quotations from early Christian authors (particularly Lucifer of Cagliari).

\(^{717}\) Dan 7, 8, and 11 may allude to Antiochus.

\(^{718}\) 2 Mace 2:23 states that a five-volume history by Jason of Cyrene, which is no longer extant, is a primary source for the work. Goldstein (1983) 32-41 argues that 1 and 2 Macc also drew material from common sources, including a hypothetical “Seleucid Chronicle” and a hypothetical “Common Jewish Source.” In addition, Goldstein (1976) 90-103 and (1983) 35-37 argues that Jason of Cyrene used different sources, including two hypothetical sources, DMP (a martyrdom source) and the Memoirs of Onias IV (a propaganda source from Ptolemaic Egypt).

\(^{719}\) For Antiochus, see Ant. 12.3-9, 13.5-8, and B.J. 1.1, 1.6. For Nicanor, see Ant. 12.402-12 and B.J. 3.8.
and Nicanor on Jewish consciousness. Hence, it is likely that stories about Antiochus and Nicanor formed part of the shared knowledge in which first-century Jews had been socialized, including the Jewish community in which FG was produced.

In this chapter, we will focus on the Antiochus’ blasphemy, particularly as it is portrayed 1 Mace 1:20—2:14, and in the following chapter, we will focus on Nicanor’s blasphemy, particularly 2 Mace 14:26—15:37.

9.1 The Literary Context

In the opening chapter of 1 Macc, the Hasmonean Propagandist (hereafter HP) begins by mentioning the victories, arrogance, and death of Alexander the Great (1:1-7) and then turns immediately to a “second Alexander,” the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes, who is identified as a sinful root. Although the name Epiphanes has a wide range of meaning, historical evidence indicates that we should understand it as the manifest [god]. Indeed, as the first chapters unfold, the plans of Antiochus, the manifest god, are shown to be contrary to the plans of Israel’s God; thus, the events depicted in 1 Macc reveal a battle between rival gods. Antiochus is also identified as a sinful root, probably because his policies of Hellenization were embraced by certain Jews (1:11-15), who are called sinners and apostates from the holy covenant. Over against Antiochus and the Hellenistic sympathizers are the Hasmonaeans (Mattathias, his sons, and their followers), who are characterized as zealous for the law and doers of the law. Thus, 1 Macc present two parallel

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720 For Antiochus, see b. Shab. 21b, 60a, 130a; Pesach 93b; Yoma 16a; Gittin 57b; Kid 66a; Sanh 32b. For Nicanor, see b. Ta'an. 18b; y. Meg 1.70c (Neusner 1.4); y. Ta'an. 2.66a (Neusner 2.12).
721 ῥήος ἀμαρτωλός (1:10).
722 Goldstein (1976) 198 sites Markhom’s study, which identifies a wide range of meaning for Epiphanes, from famous to illustrious to the appearing or manifesting of a god.
723 Goldstein (1976) 198 states that Antiochus was identified as King Antiochus Theos Epiphanes on his coins, on an inscription from Babylon, and in a letter to the Samaritans.
724 1 Macc. does not use the term God, but prefers the term Heaven.
725 ἀμαρτωλός (2:44, 48).
726 άπεστησαν ἀπὸ διαθήκης δέιγας (1:15). They are also called lawless ones (παράνομοι; 1:11), reversers of circumcision (ἐποίησαν εαυτοῦς ἀκποιεισίας; 1:15), sinful people (ἔονος ἀμαρτωλόν; 1:34), and the sons of arrogance (τοὺς οίδοις τῆς ὑπερφανίας; 2:47).
727 ὁ ζηλὼν τῷ νόμῳ (2:26, 27, 50).
728 τοὺς ποιητὰς τοῦ νόμου (2:67). They are also called Israel (Ἰσραήλ; 1:53), seekers of righteousness (ζητοῦντες δικαιοσύνην; 2:29) and strong in the law (ἐσχύσατε ἐν τῷ νόμῳ; 2:64).
battles; one between rival gods and the other between (Jewish and non-Jewish) Hellenists and law-observant Jews.

In the opening chapters, the battleground is organized around three narratives. The narratives portray atrocities perpetrated against law-observant Jews; first, by Antiochus, who invades Jerusalem and loots the Temple (1:20-24a); then, by Antiochus' collector of tribute, who plunders Jerusalem and builds an intimidating citadel next to the Temple (1:29-35); and finally, by Antiochus' hatchet men, who abolish Judaism, kill Jewish adherents, and profane the altar (1:41-64). Following each set of atrocities, a lament or poem interprets the events and implicitly provides justification for the Hasmonaeans to wage war against the Hellenists and their Jewish sympathizers:

1st Narrative: Jerusalem invaded; Temple looted (1:20-24a)  
1st Lament (1:24b-28)

2nd Narrative: Jerusalem plundered; Temple imperiled (1:29-35)  
2nd Lament (1:36-40)

3rd Narrative: Judaism abolished; Temple defiled (1:41-64)  
3rd Lament (2:7-13)

9.2 The Blasphemies of Antiochus

To get to the heart of Antiochus' blasphemies, we will focus on the third narrative (1:41-64) and the third lament (2:7-13). These two units are linked by a description of the patriarch of the Hasmonaean dynasty, Mattathias, who offers the third lament on behalf of Israel. The lament is framed by the introduction in 2:6 and the conclusion in 2:14, both of which reinforce the point that blasphemy is the issue:

Introduction: 2:6 He saw the blasphemies (τάς βλασφημίας) being committed in Judah and Jerusalem. (NRSV)

Conclusion: 2:14 Then Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly. (NRSV)

The introduction refers to the blasphemies (τάς βλασφημίας), which both points back to the atrocities mentioned in the third narrative (1:41-64)—and possibly to the
first and the second narratives as well—and forward to the interpretation in the third lament (2:7-13). The conclusion punctuates both the third narrative and the lament and highlights the desperate situation facing Mattathias and his sons. They tear their clothes and cover themselves with sackcloth. Such gestures indicate great despair or even remorse for covenantal unfaithfulness, but they also may signal the perception and condemnation of blasphemy.

When we turn to the third narrative, a series of atrocities and offenses can be observed. Antiochus sets forth decrees that aim at unifying his kingdom by eliminating religious practices and customs contrary to his own (1:40-43). The decrees abolish Judaism and authorize Antiochus’ enforcers to violate the Temple and kill law-observant Jews. The offenses can be grouped into two types: verbal offenses in the form of written decrees by Antiochus that contradict the law of God, and non-verbal offenses in the form of repressive and violent acts by Antiochus’ hatchet men that violate the law of God.

### Verbal Offenses instructing people:
- to follow foreign customs (1:44b)
- to forbid sacrifices and offerings to God (1:45a)
- to profane the sabbaths or festivals (1:45b)
- to desecrate the sanctuary and priests (1:46)
- to build altars and shrines to idols (1:47a)
- to sacrifice unclean animals (1:47b)
- to leave boys uncircumcised (1:48a)
- to defile themselves with unclean things (1:48b)

### Non-Verbal Offenses involving:
- forsaking the law (1:52)
- doing evil in the land (1:53)
- building an abomination on the altar (1:54b)
- building altars throughout Judah (1:54c)
- burning the books of the law (1:56)
- using violence against Israel (1:58)
- offering an unholy sacrifice on the altar (1:59)
- killing Jews who circumcised boys (1:60-61V)

The verbal and non-verbal offenses, taken individually or together, do not in and of themselves constitute blasphemy. For example, failure to circumcise, while breaking the covenantal law, is not in itself blasphemy. What makes the verbal and non-verbal offenses blasphemous is the intent ascribed to Antiochus; he imposed his decrees so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances (1:49). In this way, Antiochus is perceived to have flouted the covenantal law and thus God Himself.

Antiochus intentionally snubbed God. Similarly, the desecration of the altar (1:54,
59) is portrayed as an intentional violation of God's Temple. It is no wonder that the verbal and non-verbal offenses are identified as the blasphemies in 2:6. Thus, the third narrative, provides evidence that blasphemy in early Judaism could entail a broad range of verbal and non-verbal offenses. As such, HP's conception of blasphemy is at the opposite end of the spectrum from Jewish interpretations that restrict blasphemy to the inappropriate vocalization of the divine name.⁷³³

9.3 The Lament of 2 Macc 2:7-13

When we turn to the third lament, the multitude of blasphemies mentioned in chapter one merge into one representative blasphemy against the Temple and the Holy City. Through the voice of Mattathias, the Lament is structured around three declarations, three questions, and two exclamations and is thematically bound by nine references to the Holy City (double underline) and eight to the Temple (underlined).

| Exclamation: | 2:7 “Alas! |
| Questions: | Why was I born to see this, the ruin of my people, the ruin of the holy city [τῶν δωματίων  τόπων], and to dwell there when it [οὐρα] was given over to the enemy, the sanctuary [τῷ δωματίῳ] given over to aliens? |
| Declarations: | 2:8 Her [οὐρή] temple [τῷ ναῷ] has become like a man without honor. 2:9 Her [οὐρή] glorious vessels [τὰ ὀψωμα] have been carried into captivity. Her [οὐρή] babes have been killed in her streets. Her [οὐρή] youths by the sword of the foe. |
| Questions: | 2:10 What nation has not inherited her palaces [Βασιλεία] and has not seized her [οὐρή] spoils? |
| Declarations: | 2:11 All her [οὐρή] adornment has been taken away; instead of a free woman [Δίκτυον], she has become a slave. |
| Exclamation: | 2:12 Behold! |
| Declarations: | Our holy place [τῷ ὅσιῳ], our beauty [τῷ καλλιονώ], and our glory [τῷ δόξα] have been laid waste; the Gentiles have profaned it [οὐράε]. |
| Question: | 2:13 Why should we live any longer?” (Author's Trans.) |

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⁷³³ Cf. our discussion on Lev 24:16 in § 6.3 and Tg. Ps-J. on Exod 24:16, Tg. Oruj. on Exod 24:16, m. Sanh. 7:5, and m. Šebu. 4:13.
Given the number of verbal and non-verbal offenses cited in the third narrative, it is extraordinary that the lament primarily focuses on the affront to Jerusalem and its Temple.\(^{734}\)

Although our observation that there are nine references to the Holy City is not controversial, our claim that the lament refers to the sanctuary or holy place eight times could be disputed and therefore our claim deserves comment. First, the reference to the temple (\(\text{o\ ναός}\)) in 2:8 could be challenged on text-critical grounds. Goldstein suggests that 2:8 should be read as “Her people [\(\text{λαός}\)] acted like a base coward.” His argument is not convincing and so we follow the RSV, NRSV, and NAB.\(^{735}\) Second, the term τα σκέπα in 2:9 could be a reference to some type of body armor, as it is in 3:3 and 4:30; however, the preceding chapter used the term to refer to the Temple furnishings or utensils in 1:21 and to its costly vessels in 1:23. Given the reference to the sanctuary (τα δυνασμα) in 2:7, the temple (\(\text{ναός}\)) in 2:8, and our holy place (τα δύτα ήμών) in 2:12, it is likely the use of σκέπα in 2:9 pertains to objects of the Temple, not body armor. Third, the best textual witnesses\(^{736}\) have βασιλεία in 2:10. The word could be the feminine noun βασιλεία (\(\text{kingdom}\)), in which case 2:10 would read: “What nation has not inherited her kingdom?” The NAB and Goldstein prefer this.\(^{737}\) Conversely, the word could be the plural neuter noun of βασιλεία (\(\text{palace}\)), in which case 2:10 would be: “What nation has not inherited her palaces?” This is preferred by the RSV and NRSV, which we adopt on the basis of contextual considerations—the Jerusalem Temple was often referred to as a palace or βασίλευς,\(^{738}\) which fits the context of the lament.

Thus, the lament has a remarkable number of references to Jerusalem and its Temple. It is as if all specific offenses have been rolled into one symbolic violation of Jerusalem and its Temple.

### 9.4 The Temple Symbolism

When we consider that HP summed up the blasphemies referred to in 2:6 by focusing on the Jerusalem Temple in 2:7-13, what does that signal about the nature of Antiochus’ blasphemies? Certainly, the Jerusalem Temple was the focal point of

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\(^{734}\) Jerusalem and the Temple can be thought of as one, united symbol. Mount Zion referred to the Temple Mount and, by extension, the entire temple-city of Jerusalem; so Levenson (1993) 6.1098-99. As N.T. Wright (1992) states, “It [Jerusalem] was not so much a city with a temple in it; more like a temple with a small city round it.”

\(^{735}\) Like the RSV, NRSV and NAB, our translation uses temple (\(\text{ναός}\)), following Α, Ν, Λα\(^{\text{b}}\), Λα\(^{\text{y}}\), and Συλ. In contrast, Goldstein (1976) 231 prefers to read people (\(\text{λαός}\)), following minuscules 93 and 311, Λα\(^{\text{LXG}}\), and Lucifer (an early Christian author). Based on external criteria, reading the temple (\(\text{ναός}\)) is stronger, since Α and Ν date about 500 years earlier than Λα\(^{\text{b}}\) and Λα\(^{\text{y}}\), which are Goldstein’s best textual witnesses. His belief that Λα\(^{\text{b}}\) and Λα\(^{\text{y}}\) seem to preserve the old Latin, as reflected in Cyprian (ca. 200), which may be close to an earlier Hebrew version is too speculative to be convincing (177-8). Based on internal criteria, Goldstein (1976) 231 states that “the context demands the reading λαός,” whereas naos would present an “odd” reading. However, contra Goldstein, the immediate context seems to concern the sanctuary and the holy place (2:7cd, 9a).

\(^{736}\) Α, Λα\(^{\text{LXG}}\), and a wide range of minuscules.

\(^{737}\) Goldstein (1976) 232.

\(^{738}\) Cf. Jer 7:4; 24:1; 50:11; 2 Chr 26:16; 27:2; 29:16; Ps 11:4; 1 Macc 2:10.
Jewish national life. It was the political, economic, and religious center of Israel. Indeed, the life of the Jewish people was intertwined with the fate of Jerusalem and its Temple. It was assumed that whatever happened to the Temple was thought to have happened to Israel and vice versa. Thus, the degradation and blasphemy of the Temple would have been tantamount to degradation and blasphemy against God’s people. But, more can be said about Antiochus’ blasphemy, if we consider three dimensions of the religious, even mythic, symbolism of the Temple.

First, Mount Zion—Jerusalem and its Temple—symbolized the dwelling-place of God on earth. To assault a temple, as Antiochus did, was as direct as humanly possible to striking a transcendent deity. When he plundered and profaned the Temple, he attacked and blasphemed the very Name that dwelled there. Hence, one need not vocalize the Name to profane it, since blaspheming the Temple is to blaspheme the Name.

A central text is Exod 15:17, which states that Yahweh planted Israel on His mountain and made it His dwelling-place and sanctuary. After the Temple was constructed, Solomon declared that it was Yahweh’s dwelling-place forever. For some Jews, Yahweh was so connected to the Temple that He is addressed and praised as a personified Zion rather than God. Conversely, Isaiah 8:14 speaks of Yahweh as if He were a sanctuary. In early traditions, the Name became a synonym for the presence of Yahweh; to speak of the Name dwelling in the Temple was to say that God was there. However, in later Deuteronomistic traditions, anthropomorphisms were disavowed, God’s transcendence was stressed, and the Name, while still dwelling in the Temple, was no longer the literal presence of Yahweh. Still, whatever ontological status is assigned the Name, there is no denying that the Name was thought to dwell in the Temple, that God was present in some special way, and the purity and the sanctity of the Temple had to be preserved because of it. This is evident from the way in which the Temple was protected from defilement by what came to be known as the ten degrees of holiness, a pattern of concentric circles moving from the boundaries of Israel’s land inward toward the most holy inner sanctuary of the Temple. With each...
degree of holiness there was greater restriction regarding who or what may enter. In this way, the Temple and the Name were protected from defilement. As Jubilees portrays it, “God’s Name dwells in the sanctuary (32:10; 49:21; cf. 49:19, 20), and is so bound up with it that defilement of the Temple can be spoken of in the same breath as profanation of God’s holy Name (30:15; cf. very closely 23:21).” Similarly, 2 Mace 8:2-4 links profaning the Temple and violating the Jews with blaspheming the Name. After the destruction of the Second Temple, 4 Ezra expresses the same sentiment: To pollute the Temple is to profane the Name.

Second, Jerusalem and its Temple symbolized the cosmic center of the universe and the place where heaven and earth converged. To plunder and defile the Temple, as Antiochus did, threatened to sever the link between heaven and earth. And it threatened the stability of the world that Israel and her Temple Service were perceived to provide. In his attempt to suspend Judaism and the Temple Service, Antiochus interfered with the divine order and arrogated for himself the prerogatives that belonged to God alone—blasphemy by any other name.

Throughout scripture and Jewish literature, the Temple is presented as the access point to heaven. For example, Isaiah 6:1-5 presents a vision of God enthroned in the heavenly Temple with his train flowing down to fill the earthly Temple, signifying access to heaven. The idea that the Temple was an access point to heaven is reinforced by the story of Jacob’s ladder in Gen 28:10-28. In a vision, Jacob sees a ladder stretching from heaven to earth and, while angels ascend and descend on it, the Lord stands above and speaks to him. Afterward, Jacob identifies the place as the house of God (גְּדוֹלָה הַבּוֹז) and the gate of heaven (פֶּן תְּכֵלֶת הַמֶּרְכָּז הָאָרֶץ). In addition, both Philo and Josephus view the Temple as the center of the cosmos, the high priest as mediator between heaven and earth, and the sacrifices as effective for the whole world. Moreover, as Hayward has demonstrated, Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum (Pseudo-Philo) presents the Temple as inextricably bound up with Israel as the vine mentioned in Exod 15:17 and as the “axis mundi, holding together the abyss, earth, and the heaven.” At one point in LAB, Moses pleads with God to have mercy on Israel because, should the vine be destroyed, the link that holds the universe together would cease to exist and everything would be for nothing. In this view, for God to forsake the vine that He planted on the Temple hill is to forsake creation itself. Scripture and Jewish tradition also present the Temple as the earthly replication of the heavenly sanctuary. A foundational text is Exod 25:9-40, which portrays the tabernacle and its

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747 “For you see that our sanctuary has been laid waste, our altar thrown down, our temple destroyed .... our holy things have been polluted and the name by which we are called has been profaned.” 4 Ezra 10:22 in OTP 2.546.
749 So Nickelsburg and Stone (1991) 57. The inner sanctuary was conceived of as the place where God, who is enthroned in heaven above the cherubim (see Haran [1985] 246-54; e.g., Is 37:16), rests His feet below on the Ark of the Covenant as His footstool (Haran [1985] 254-55; e.g., 1 Chr 28:2). Although Gen 28:10-28 is referring to Bethel, not Jerusalem, the principle is the same.
750 Hayward (1996) 109ff. and 152-3. Even though Philo’s explanations of the Temple and its Service were influenced by Greek thought, he shares this view with other Jews, such as Jesus ben Sira, Aristeas, and the Jews of Qumran (140).
752 LAB 12.8-9; cf. 18.10; 23.12; 28.4; 30.4; 39.7.
furnishings as replicas of the heavenly pattern. Later, Rabbis thought of the earthly Temple as corresponding to the heavenly dwelling such that the throne of God’s glory aligned with the earthly sanctuary. Some Jews went further in correlating heaven and earth by extending it to the service of the priests, the observance of the Sabbath and festival observance, and the keeping of the law. Thus, the Temple and its services, its daily sacrifices and annual feasts, even Israel’s observance of the laws, are heavenly things replicated on earth.

Third, Jerusalem and its Temple symbolized Israel’s election. When the Temple was profaned and Israel’s Services were terminated, Israel’s election as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation were thrown into doubt. It is likely that HP understood the blasphemies of Antiochus as the way in which God was chastising Israel for their apostasy. Thus, Mattathias’ lament functions as a call for Jews to wake up, see what their apostasy is doing, and return to their elective vocation.

God chose Israel as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Exod 19:6), He chose to live among them (Exod 15:17), and He chose the city and the Temple (Deut 12:13-14). Before the Temple was built, the site was marked out by a theophany (2 Sam 24:16; 2 Chr 3:1). Deuteronomy emphasizes that Yahweh selected Mount Zion among all the tribes as a dwelling for His Name (Deut 12:5). Initially, the place was never identified by name, but later it was recognized as Jerusalem and its Temple, probably as a result of Yahweh’s choice of David and His promise that his dynasty would endure in Jerusalem (2 Char 6:5-6; 1 Kgs 11:13, 32). When Sennacherib was repelled from his siege of Jerusalem in 701, Jerusalem and its Temple became visible signs of God’s election of Israel. The destruction of the first Temple in 587 B.C.E. shook that confidence, but the rebuilding of the second Temple in 515 B.C.E. rekindled the notion of Israel’s election.

In sum, Jerusalem and its Temple were the political, economic, and religious center of Israel. What happened to this center happened to Israel. Beyond that we speculate that by focusing on the center, the third lament could succinctly express the catastrophe facing all Israel and, at the same time, tacitly evoke very powerful cultic, cosmic, and covenantal symbolism. By evoking such symbolism, the lament announced that Antiochus’ blasphemies had struck the center of all that was good and true and beautiful; he had struck God, shaken the foundations of heaven and earth,

754 Also see, for example, Ps 48:1-4; Ezekiel’s vision of a new Temple in Ezek 40-48; Josephus Ant. 3.180-2; Heb 9:1-24.
756 Hayward (1996) 87 and 96-7 points out that Jubilees understood the Temple-feasts to replicate the cycle of feasts in heaven (Jub. 6:22-31) and the service of priests to correlate with the service of the highest angels in heaven (Jub. 30:14; 31:14). Hayward (1996) 88 also notes that some Jews believed that they were “like the angels who serve before the Lord, when they carry out the commandments summed up in the law of ḫiṣṭḥ, the fringes of garments” (Tg. Ps.-J. on Num 15:40).
757 Cf. 1 Macc. 1:64; cf. 2 Macc. 5:17b-18, 20b and Ezek 8:1—10:22.
758 This paragraph follows de Vaux (1961) 327-8.
and signaled the end of Israel’s service. The lament emphasized the magnitude of Antiochus’ blasphemy and functioned to call Israel to renewed faithfulness.

9.5 Antiochus as God and Blasphemer

Next, we will briefly look at the way in which 1 and 2 Mace characterize Antiochus as the blasphemer (βλάσφημος) and as the one who claimed equality with the gods (ἰσόθετος). But, we have noted that Antiochus is the chief perpetrator of the atrocities or blasphemies directed against the Temple, Judaism, and the people of Israel, crimes that he committed against other temples and other religions as well. As portrayed by 1 Macc, Antiochus’ plans rival those of God Himself in that Antiochus seeks to destroy loyalty and obedience to God. This is particularly evident in his plunder and profanation of the Temple which, for some Jews, would have been perceived as a threat to the cosmic order and to heavenly realities replicated earth. Antiochus’ actions are blasphemous, to be sure, but 1 and 2 Mace characterized it as a kind of arrogant blasphemy that contends with God and even makes an open claim to deity.

Although Antiochus is characterized as arrogant in 1 Macc, there is only one direct reference (1 Mace 1:21). In contradistinction, 2 Mace repeatedly makes a point of highlighting Antiochus’ arrogance and, at one point, calls it superhuman arrogance. One account is particularly telling. The narrator of 2 Mace tells us that Antiochus entered the most holy Temple (5:15), took holy vessels (5:16), and swept away votive offerings (5:16) with profane hands (5:16). Rather than being filled with awe, Antiochus looted the Temple and was filled with malicious satisfaction (5:17). Later in the narrative, Antiochus is described as “thinking in his arrogance that he could sail on the land and walk on the sea, because his mind was elated” (5:21; NRSV). As Goldstein points out, this is an allusion to Xerxes, “who dared to contend

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759 Cf. 2 Macc 9:12 and 9:28.
761 E.g., Antiochus is characterized as arrogant (ὑπερηφανεία; 2 Mace 5:21; 7:36; 9:7, 8, 11), haughty (ὑπερηφάνος; 9:4), elated in spirit (ἐμπεπρεμένος τῆς διάνοιας; 2 Mace 5:17), elated in vain (ματημετεφώριζον; 2 Mace 7:34), puffed up (φρουστόμενος; 2 Mace 7:34), and insolent (ἀγερωχιάς; 2 Mace 9:7).
with the gods by bridging the Hellespont and digging a canal through Mount Athos. Like Xerxes, Antiochus is presented as a theomachos, someone “who dares to contend with God” and whose punishment was of concern in Greek and Jewish literature. The motif of Antiochus as a theomachos runs from 2 Macc 5 to 9. So that readers do not miss this motif, the author has a Jewish martyr, at the moment of death, declare Antiochus guilty of fighting against God (θεομαχέων; 7:19).

As a theomachos, Antiochus contends with God because he perceives himself to be equal with the gods (δύναται Ἰσόθεα φιλονείν; 9:12). The notion of equality with the gods should be understood within the broader context of how Emperors and kings were perceived in the A.N.E. For example, it was not uncommon for Roman Emperors and Hellenistic kings to be called theoi by their Greek-speaking subjects. Nor was it uncommon to speak of giving the Emperor isotheoi timai, “honours equivalent to those paid to the gods.” As we have mentioned, Antiochus’ claim to divinity and divine honors and his claim to exercise the prerogatives of God were clearly unacceptable to Jewish sensibilities. For the author of 2 Macc, the climax to Antiochus’ career of divine presumption and blasphemy reaches a terminal point when God strikes him with a fatal bowel disease (9:5). The narration of Antiochus’
death, which follows, is filled with caustic irony that lampoons his aspirations of divinity. He who tortured others is now tortured himself. (9:6). Claiming to have risen above others, he falls out of his chariot (9:7). Thinking that he had divine power, he is unable to walk (9:8a-b). Imagining that he could touch the stars, he lies flat on his back with no one to carry him because of his stench (9:10). At one point, sarcasm is shot at point blank range when the author states that the immobility of Antiochus Epiphanes allowed the power of the God to be manifest—
\[\text{manifest} \to \theta\varepsilon\omicron\omicron\nu \text{ (9:8c).} \]
The irony serves to confirm that God is actively defeating Antiochus. Finally, pain and torment overwhelm Antiochus and, in a stunning admission of guilt, he unMASKS himself as a divine pretender, saying:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Δίκαιον οὐ ποτάσσεται τῷ θεῷ καὶ μηθητόν ὄντα ισόθεα φρονεῖν. (LXX)}
\end{align*}\]

It is right to be subject to God; mortals should not think that they are equal to God. (2 Macc 9:12b; NRSV)

Of course, from the position of the author, this is a convenient admission of guilt that only serves to confirm the excessive and presumptuous hubris of Antiochus. We should probably take the reference to equality, not as an ontological claim, but as a claim to have equal of honors of the gods, like the isotheoi timai given to an Emperor. In addition, as Goldstein points out, Antiochus’ confession is a version of a well-known maxim in Greek literature that we paraphrase as human beings should not have divine aspirations. The maxim is so widely accepted that Aristotle cites it as an example something that needs no proof. Although Aristotle’s language is different from 2 Macc, the conceptuality is the same:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{A mortal should have mortal, not immortal thoughts. (Rhet. 1394b)}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{θνατῶ χρή τῶν θνατῶν, οὐκ ἀθάνατα τῶν θνατῶν φρονεῖν.}
\end{align*}\]

We find the same concept in Aeschylus’ Persians though, again, it is stated differently. Aeschylus accuses Darius of presumptuous pride and impious thoughts because, when he invaded Greece, he was not restrained by religious awe and

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770 The power of God appears to be manifested by God’s enforcement of the lex talionis or the law of proportionate justice, the subtext to Antiochus’ death in 2 Macc 9:2-12.
773 Aristotle Rhet. 1394a; maxims are the premises or conclusions of enthymemes and do not need proof.
774 Aristotle’s Rhet. 1394b; trans. by Freese (1926); Greek text by Ross (1959).
therefore he “ravaged the images of the gods and set fire to their temples.” Darius is condemned because:

Mortal man should not vaunt himself excessively. (Pers. 820)

In sum, Antiochus is presented as a career blasphemer, a theomachos, and a divine pretender. Each of these strands of Antiochus’ character portrayal is intertwined and inseparable. In this way, the blasphemy of Antiochus is presented in a unique fashion, a type of blasphemy that (a) contends with God by trampling His people and by stealing from His Temple and (b) attempts to usurp the power, the honor, and even the title of God. It was a type of behavior condemned throughout the ancient world, and even more so in Israel. Regarding such behavior, Philo’s comment is apropos:

There are again some who exceed in impiety, not giving the Creator and the creature even equal honor, but assigning to the latter all honor, and respect, and reverence, and to the former nothing at all... [Open display of such impiety is]... to blaspheme the Deity.

The punishment for such behavior was, as the author of 2 Macc takes ironic joy in depicting, proportionate to the crimes committed. Thus, Antiochus not only receives a divine death sentence, but also humiliating suffering equal in magnitude to the arrogant torment he inflicted on others.

9.6 Conclusion and Prospects

As with previous texts, a unique discourse concept of blasphemy emerges from Maccabean portrayal of Antiochus. There are three elements to that portrayal.

First, Antiochus is accused of blasphemy against God for a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal offenses that were directed against His people and His Temple. The offenses perpetrated by Antiochus were labeled blasphemous because they were perceived to be an affront to God Himself. Second, from the perspective of HP, to say, “Antiochus blasphemed the Temple,” is to say it all. Because of the symbolism attached to the Temple, when Antiochus profaned the Temple, he blasphemed the Name, threatened the stability of the world, and alerted Israel that divine wrath had

775 Aeschylus Pers. 810; trans. by Smyth (1926).
776 Aeschylus Pers. 820; trans. and Greek text by Smyth (1926).
come. Third, the author of 2 Macc portrays Antiochus as a career blasphemer. His penchant for blasphemy is explained by the fact that he is a theomachos, one who dares to contend with God, and that he claimed equal honors to the gods. Although the issue of monotheism is not raised directly by 1 or 2 Macc, the attitude of Antiochus probably violated the monotheistic sensitivities of the Jewish people, not because anyone thought that Antiochus was claiming to be a deity in heaven, but because Antiochus claimed the honor that belonged to τὸν θεόν μονόν, God alone. Because that dishonors God, it was blasphemy; because it denied the uniqueness of God, it breached monotheistic sensibilities.

When we turn toward FG, a number of alarm bells ring. Like Antiochus, who attempts to suspend the Sabbath and Temple festivals, the Johannine Jesus is accused of changing or violating Sabbath practices (Jn 5:17-18; 7:21-24; 9:14-15). In chapter 13, we ask whether non-believing Jews would have viewed these claims for Jesus as blasphemous. Like Antiochus, Jesus is also accused of divine presumption, because he, being a mortal, “makes himself equal to God” (Jn 5:18). Is it conceivable that Johannine members were themselves charged with blasphemy on the grounds of what is said in Jn 5:18? Like Antiochus, Jesus is perceived as threatening the Temple (Jn 2:13-22; 11:48). In chapter 14, we discuss whether this could have led to a charge of blasphemy against Jesus or the Johannine Christians.

777 Philo Dec. 62-63; Yonge’s trans.
778 Yee (1989) 31-47.
In the previous chapter, we argued that the stories of Antiochus and Nicanor formed part of the shared knowledge of first-century Jews and, as such, they are relevant to our discussion concerning blasphemy an the Johannine community. Since Antiochus was the focus in the previous chapter, Nicanor will occupy our attention in the present one. As before, we will attempt to describe a discourse concept of blasphemy, this time in relation to the narrative about Nicanor in 2 Macc 14:16—15:37 with a brief look at the account of Nicanor in 1 Macc 7:33-43. However, before looking at the Nicanor narrative, we will explore the literary context leading up to that account, particularly how the author of 2 Macc (hereafter, the Abridger) fashions a Temple-propaganda vis-à-vis blasphemy.

### 10.1 Temple-Propaganda and Blasphemy

For the Abridger, the status and the fate of the Temple functions as a barometer for the covenantal relationship between the Jews and their God. When the Temple is operating normally and when attempts to pillage it are repulsed, the Jewish people are icons of faithfulness and God’s mercy prevails. However, when the Temple is plundered and profaned, the Abridger takes pains to show that Jewish disloyalty is to blame. The theology or ideology is basically Deuteronomic—disobedience leads to cursing, obedience to blessing.

The theme that God protects His Temple is reinforced by the literary structure of 2 Macc. After the two prefixed epistles (1:1—2:18) and a prologue (2:19-32), the

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779 Although we will concentrate on the account of Nicanor in 2 Macc, we will also refer to the parallel version in 1 Macc (1 Macc 7:26-38 para. 2 Macc 14:15—15:19; 1 Macc 7:39-50 para. 2 Macc 15:20-37).
780 2 Macc 2:19-32 states that the author abridged the work of Jason of Cyrene; cf. the use of the term in Goldstein (1983) passim.
781 Doran (1981) passim characterizes the Abridger’s ideology of the Temple as propaganda.
782 E.g., 2 Macc 5:19-20; 6:12-16.
783 Cf. 2 Macc 6:12-16 and Deut 28:1-68; so Spilly (1985) 86.
narrative falls into three main parts, each of which advances the Abridger’s temple-propaganda that show God protecting the Temple when Jews are faithful.

Part 2: The Profanation of the Temple and its Renewal (2 Macc 4:1—10:9)
Part 3: The Defense of the Temple (2 Macc 10:10—15:36)

Part 1 (3:1-40) serves an apologetic function. It begins with the commission of Heliodorus by King Seleucus IV to remove the mass of wealth that had accumulated in the Temple treasury (3:7). With great dramatic style, the Abridger describes how distraught and helpless the Jews feel in resisting Heliodorus. They prostrated themselves before God, praying that He would “keep the deposits safe and secure for those who had placed them in trust.” While they are praying, Heliodorus arrives at the Temple treasury and is confronted by a manifestation of God’s power. A beautifully adorned horse, with a golden clad rider, appears before his eyes, charges at him, and knocks him down (3:25). Instantly, two splendidly dressed young men appear and flog Heliodorus senseless to the point that he must be carried away on a stretcher (3:26-28). At first, the Jews are speechless, but then break out in praise and rejoicing because of the manifestation of the Almighty Lord (τοῦ παντοκράτορος ἐπιφανέντος), who glorified His own place (παραδοξοζωντα τὸ ἐαυτοῦ τόπον) (3:30). The narrative ends by reinforcing the temple-propaganda:

For he who has his dwelling in heaven watches over that place [ἐξεῖνοι τοῦ τόπου] himself and brings it aid, and he strikes and destroys those who come to do it injury (2 Macc 3:39; NRSV).

In contrast with similar stories in the ancient world, the Heliodorus account has a unique literary and social function. It functions as part of the theodicy or apology of 2

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784 Following Doran (1981) 47-76, who offers, among other things, a defense of the literary unity of each of these sections.
785 So Doran (1981) 52.
786 2 Macc 3:22 (NAB).
787 As Doran (1981) 47-50 has shown, the account of Heliodorus stands alongside other ancient stories that praise a deity who defends his or her temple or city. Among other things, such stories have functioned to deter marauding armies or to reassure citizens that they had divine protection. Examples include: (a) the inscription from Cos, which describes the repulsion of the Gauls from the Temple at Delphi by Apollo in 279 B.C.E., (b) an inscription from Panamaros about Zeus Panamaros’ defense of the city and the literary account of the same action by Pausanias, (c) the Lindos Chronicle’s account of Athene’s defense of Lindos against Datis, the Persian commander, (d) the account by Syriscus, a local historian of the city of Chersonesus, regarding Athene’s defense of that city, (e) Herodotus’ account of the intervention of Apollo in defense of Delphi against Persians, (f) the defense of a temple in the
Mace, which defends God's power and God's faithfulness to Israel despite the overwhelming presence of evil. By including the Heliodorus account at the beginning of the book, the Abridger establishes from the outset that the God of Israel is willing and able to protect the Temple. So, when the Temple is plundered in Part 2, God is already exonerated, His power and faithfulness is above question, and blame for the presence of evil must lie elsewhere, in this case, with Jewish unfaithfulness.

Part 2 (4:1—10:9) focuses on the profanation of the Temple and its renewal. It begins with two Jewish scoundrels, Jason and Menelaus, who successively acquire the high priesthood through bribery and treachery. When Jason is high priest, Judaism is abandoned and Hellenization is imposed (4:10); but later, when Menelaus assumes the priesthood, evil increases to the point where he perpetrates violence against fellow Jews (4:40-42). When Jason is high priest, there is general neglect of the sacrifices and the Temple (4:11-17); but after Menelaus assumes the high priesthood, the Temple is blatantly robbed (4:32). The portrayal of Jason and Menelaus is one of escalating evil and defection from Judaism. This escalation hits a fevered pitch when Jason tries to take back the priesthood through violence and has his forces attack Menelaus (5:1-10). This motivates Antiochus to come and crush what he thinks is a Jewish revolt. After Antiochus arrives, he slaughters eighty thousand Jews (5:11-14), suppresses Judaism (6:6, 7-11), ransacks the Temple (5:15-21), fills the Temple with debauchery (6:4), defiles the altar (6:5), and calls the Temple "the temple of Olympian Zeus" (6:2). While recounting these atrocities, the Abridger reiterates the apologetic theme: The Lord allowed Antiochus to profane the Temple (8:2) and to commit blasphemies against His name (8:4), "because of the sins of those who lived in the city.... And what was forsaken [i.e., the Temple] in the wrath of the Almighty was restored again in all its glory when the great Lord became reconciled" (5:17b, 20b; NRSV). But how is the Lord reconciled? As the story continues, the Abridger shows that the Lord is reconciled by Jewish martyrs who, in their steadfast loyalty, suffer and die, which turns God's wrath into mercy (7:37-38; 8:5). Once reconciled, God is called the ally of the Jews (8:24) and they are said to be invulnerable (8:36).

Kedorlaomer inscription, and (g) Yahweh's defense of Jerusalem and its Temple in the account of Sennacherib in 2 Kgs 18:17—19:36 and 2 Chr 32:1-22.
Thereafter, Judas Maccabeus scores one providential victory after another until Antiochus himself miraculously converts to Judaism on his deathbed (9:1-29). Once Antiochus is eliminated, Judas' recovery and rededication of the Temple is uncontested and the first Hanukkah is celebrated (10:1-9).

When we ask how the blasphemies of Antiochus (8:4)—which are broadly conceived as assaults on Jews, Judaism, Jerusalem, and the Temple—function within the first two parts, we note that they align with the motif of God's wrath, which is understood as God's discipline of the Jews (6:12). In this way, the Abridger presents blasphemy from two different perspectives: From one angle, as we have previously pointed out, blasphemy is an expression of Antiochus' arrogant self-exaltation, an attempt to rival God, which leads to the death of Antiochus. But, from another angle, blasphemy is characterized as an expression of divine discipline, which leads to life for obedient Jews. That is, the blasphemies of Antiochus (= the atrocities against the Jews) are presented as part of God's wrath and discipline of Israel and, in this way, blasphemy within 2 Macc has a rather ironic rehabilitative function.

Part 3 (10:10—15:36) is concerned with showing how God continues to provide protection for the Jews and their Temple after the first Hanukkah. Part 3 has two main units. The first unit (10:10—13:26) presents a series of campaigns highlighting how God continues to help the faithful Jews gain victory over their enemies. The narration of each campaign is noticeably condensed. In contrast, the second unit (14:1—15:36) presents one extended narrative, focusing on a single enemy, Nicanor, the general of King Demetrius. The victorious campaigns described in the first unit

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788 Doran (1981) 56-9 describes 2 Mace 8:1-36 as a skillful literary portrayal of God's help after His wrath is turned to mercy, which leads to the climatic declaration by Nicanor that "the Jews had a Defender and ... the Jews were invulnerable because they followed the laws ordained by him" (8:36).
789 Doran (1981) 59-60 notes that the "deathbed testament" by Antiochus is a well-known literary device and, while the deathbed letter (9:19-27) should not be taken as authentic, there is evidence that it may have been based on official letters.
790 To our knowledge, contemporary scholars have not noted this literary function.
791 The Israelites invoke God's help against the Idumeans (10:14-23), Joppa and Jamnia (12:3-9), Ephron (12:27-28), and Gorgias (12:32-27). During other campaigns, the narrator directly states that God helps Israel defeat the Arabs (12:10-12), Caspin (12:13-16), and Lysias (13:19-17). At other times, heavenly visions accompany Israel as they fight enemies, such as Timothy (10:24-38) and Lysias (11:1-14).
provide miniature versions of the carefully crafted narration of Nicanor’s blasphemy and defeat in the second unit. We now turn to that final unit.

10.2 Nicanor Blasphemes the Temple

The last unit of the book (2 Macc 14:1—15:36) focuses on the final and climatic campaign to protect the Temple. It begins with Demetrius hearing an evil report from Alcimus, a corrupt and treasonous Jew, that Judas will never make peace with the Seleucid dynasty. As a result, Demetrius sends Nicanor to destroy Judas’ army and to install Alcimus as high priest (14:1-14). Even though Nicanor and Judas end up signing a peace treaty (14:15-25), the power politics of Alcimus force Nicanor to break the treaty and chase Judas into hiding (14:26-30). Although it is unclear where Judas has gone, Nicanor confidently goes directly to the center of Judaism, the great and holy Temple, to demand that the priests hand Judas over to him (14:31).

When the priests declare that they do not know where Judas is, the Abridger describes Nicanor’s reaction in the most remarkable way:

He stretched out his right hand toward the sanctuary and swore this oath: “If you do not hand Judas over to me as a prisoner, I will level this shrine of God to the ground and tear down the altar, and build here a splendid temple to Dionysus” (2 Macc 14:33; NRSV).

Although Nicanor’s threat is never acted on, let alone realized, it is identified as blasphemy and this was enough to place him among the most notorious blasphemers in Jewish history. The Abridger’s vivid description of Nicanor shaking his fist and threatening to destroy the Temple and raise another is very

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792 The account of Alcimus in 2 Macc 14:1-27 is at odds with the parallel account in 1 Macc 7:1-25 in some respects. In 1 Macc, Demetrius made Alcimus high priest and, after gaining some control over Jerusalem, Alcimus requests help from Demetrius to withstand the forces of Judas. Nicanor is then dispatched. In 2 Macc, Nicanor is dispatched to install Alcimus as high priest, but without success. 2 Macc never identifies Alcimus as the high priest because, after the purification of the Temple (2 Macc 10), it would have been contrary to the propaganda of 2 Macc to admit that a defiled high priest, like Alcimus, had again compromised the purity of the Temple.

793 Nicanor is called a blasphemer (δοσσόφημος; 2 Macc 15:32) and his action is described as blasphemy (δοσσόφημία; 1 Macc 7:38) and speaking evil (κακως λάλησεν; 1 Macc 7:42).

794 First, Nicanor’s threat is compared with the blasphemy of Sennacherib (1 Macc 7:41; 2 Macc 15:22-24). Second, Jews celebrated victory over Nicanor every year in a festival called “the Day of Nicanor” on the thirteenth of Adar (see Josephus Ant. 12.12; y. Meg. 1.70c [Neusner 1.4] and y. Ta’
similar to other traditions regarding Nicanor.\textsuperscript{795} When we turn to the Abridger’s description, three phrases stand out.

First, \textit{he stretched out} (\textit{προτείνας} \textit{his right hand against the sanctuary} (14:33a)). The phrase, \textit{προτείνειν τὴν χείρα} (\textit{to stretch out the hand}) and similar phrases using \textit{τείνειν} and \textit{ἐκτείνειν}, are primarily used in 2 Macc to refer to stretching out hands toward heaven in prayer,\textsuperscript{796} but they are also used in the sense of stretching out a hand to take a sword for battle.\textsuperscript{797} In 1 Macc, \textit{ἐκτείνειν τὴν χείρα} (\textit{to stretch out the hand}) is used to refer to striking someone in combat.\textsuperscript{798} In addition to combat imagery, \textit{stretching out one’s hand} was also a common prophetic gesture, indicating that \textit{something was about to be taken and destroyed}, such as a nation,\textsuperscript{799} a city,\textsuperscript{800} wicked people,\textsuperscript{801} or a temple.\textsuperscript{802} Nicanor’s fist-waiving gesture was thus a well-known, if not universal, expression of threat or portent of doom. The description of Nicanor is similar to the description of \textit{sinning with a high hand} in Num 15:30-31, which we argued was a defiant, fist-shaking rebellion against God’s law and God Himself. In the case of Nicanor, the fist is not waved against God’s law, but \textit{against the sanctuary} (\textit{ἐπὶ τὸν νεὼ}), a threat to destroy the shrine of God (τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σηκον). Since it is hard to conceive of a more direct way to threaten transcendent deity than to threaten his or her temple, Jews probably interpreted Nicanor’s gesture as a sign of malice against God Himself. And, as we have argued, to express malice toward God is blasphemy (§ 4.4). Thus, aside from whatever Nicanor is reported to have said, \textit{the gesture itself} was blasphemous.\textsuperscript{803} It is a clear case of non-verbal blasphemy.

\textsuperscript{an} 2.66a [Neusner 2.12]. Third, in Palestinian tradition, Nicanor became a primary example of a blasphemer alongside such notorious figures as Goliath (see y. \textit{Ṣebu}.3.34 [Neusner 3.1]).

\textsuperscript{795} A comparison of 2 Macc 14:33 with 1 Macc 7:34, 42, and 47 supports Goldstein (1983) 37-41, who argues for a “Common Source” in addition to 1 and 2 Macc. Furthermore, Josephus \textit{Ant.} 12:402-412 account of Nicanor provides some unique details, suggesting yet another source. He includes Nicanor’s blasphemy and threat to tear down the Temple, but not the raised fist (12.406).

\textsuperscript{796} 2 Mcc 3:20; 7:10; 14:34; 15:12; 15:21; cf.

\textsuperscript{797} 2 Macc 15:12, 15.

\textsuperscript{798} 1 Macc 6:25; 9:47; 12:42.

\textsuperscript{799} Jer 51:25; Ezek 35:3; cf. Exod 7:5, 19; 8:6, 17, etc.

\textsuperscript{800} Josh 8:18-19; Jer 6:12; 15:6; 51:25


\textsuperscript{802} 1 Macc 14:31; 1 Esd 6:32 (Ezra 6:12).

\textsuperscript{803} After his death, Nicanor is identified as a \textit{blasphemer} (δισφήμως) and his offending arm (not just his tongue) is cut off; cf. 2 Macc 15:32-33 nad 1 Macc 7:47.
Second, Nicanor vows: *I will make this shrine of God [fall] to the ground* (τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σηκόν εἰς πεδίον ποιήσω) (14:33b). Here, Nicanor not only verbally assaults the Temple, but also the Temple-propaganda itself. That is, Nicanor assaults the reputation of the Protector of the Temple by suggesting that God is either unwilling or unable to defend the Temple. It is verbal abuse, which is interpreted as blasphemy (cf. 15:32-33). The language of Nicanor’s verbal threat is similar to the description of Antiochus’ action of trying to *make the holy city level to the ground* (ἀγίαν πόλιν ... ἰσόπεδον ποιήσαι) (9:14). In addition, Nicanor’s vow to *tear down the altar* (τὸ θυσιαστήριον κατασκάψω) (14:33c) recalls Antiochus’ *profanation of the altar* (τὸ θυσιαστήριον τοῖς ἀποδιεσταλμένοις) (6:5). By revivifying the memory of the arch-villain, Antiochus, not to mention the Babylonian destruction of the first-temple, the Abridger intensifies the blasphemous threat of Nicanor as part of the climax to his history. But, in contrast with the narrative of Antiochus, there is little mention of suspending Judaism, forsaking the laws, massacring Jews, or burning sacred books. Rather, in the Nicanor-narrative, everything boils down to one main issue, the center of Judaism—the Temple.

Thus, in the Abridger’s *temple-propaganda*, Nicanor’s threat becomes the prime test case for whether God will *protect His Temple* after the first Hanukkah.

Third, Nicanor then adds: *I will raise up here a temple to Dionysus* (ἱερὸν ἐνταῦθα τῷ Διόνυσῳ ἐπιφανεῖς ἐναστήσω) (14:33d). Nicanor’s vow is ambitious. The vow goes beyond the Babylonians, who razed the Temple but did not rebuild another. It is beyond Antiochus, who only renamed the Temple for Olympian Zeus (6:2). Nicanor’s ambition is to *raise up* another temple to *replace* the Temple of God. From the Jewish perspective, God had chosen Zion for his place of dwelling and for Nicanor to make such a claim usurps God’s exclusive right to Zion. Attempting to usurp the prerogatives of God is contemptuous, to say the least and, as we have previously argued, to display such an attitude is blasphemy.

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804 Although the issue of the Sabbath is briefly raised in the Nicanor-narrative (15:3-5), concern for the Temple occupies considerably more attention (14:31-36 and 15:6-37).
805 1 Mace 7:37; Exod 15:17.
Nicanor’s threat to the Temple is thus a frontal attack on the God of the Temple. The priests’ reaction to Nicanor is like Hezekiah’s reaction to the blasphemy of Sennacherib. The priests enter the sanctuary, stretch out their hands toward heaven, and remind God of His commitments to Israel:

O Lord ... you were pleased that there should be a temple for your habitation among us [σκηνώσεως ἐν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι] ... keep undefiled forever this house that has been so recently purified. (2 Macc 14:35-36; NRSV).

Later, we will note that the language of God dwelling among us (σκηνώσεως ἐν ἡμῖν) in 2 Macc 14:35 is very similar to the Johannine theology of the Word dwelling among us (ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν) in Jn 1:14. But for the moment, we wish to point out that even though the usual terms for blasphemy are not present in 2 Macc 14:33-36, the solemnity of the priests’ prayer confirms that they are reacting to blasphemy much the same way Hezekiah reacted to Sennacherib. Our reading of 2 Macc is corroborated by the parallel account in 1 Macc 7:33-43.

1 Macc 7:33-43 presents the account of Nicanor with slight, but significant, variation from 2 Macc and highlights Nicanor’s blasphemy. In 1 Macc, Nicanor not only threatens to destroy the Temple (7:35), but he also mocks (μωκτηρίζω), derides (γελάω), and defiles (μεταίνω) the priests (7:34). In this way, Nicanor is shown to violate the two-fold prohibition not to speak evil (κακῶς λεγεῖν) against God and His leaders (Exod 22:28 [27]). After hearing Nicanor’s blasphemy, the priests enter the sanctuary, weep, and plea with God to kill Nicanor and his men for their blasphemies (δισφήμισιν) (7:36-38). This is followed with a prayer by Judas, who reminds God of Sennacherib’s blasphemy and then pleads for Nicanor’s judgment because he had spoken wickedly (κακῶς λαλεῖν) against the sanctuary (7:42). Here, it is worth pointing out that the accusation of speaking wickedly (κακῶς λαλεῖν) is identical to the charge against Jesus in the Johannine trial narrative (Jn 18:23), which we will discuss later. As for Nicanor, his demise is predictable. He is killed in battle and his head and right hand, which he shook so defiantly at the Temple, is cut off and stretched out (ἐκτείνειν) for display outside Jerusalem (7:47).
In sum, Nicanor used both gesture and words to threaten the Temple. His expression of abuse and dishonor toward the Temple is blasphemy. We can speak of this as blasphemy against the Temple, which it is, but such language can also be understood as metonymy for blasphemy against God Himself.

10.3 Nicanor Blasphemes the Sabbath

2 Macc also includes a unique and brief account that can be understood as blaspheming the Sabbath. While pursuing Judas with his troops, Nicanor compels certain Jews to accompany him (15:1). However, when he decides to attack on a Sabbath, the Jews who are with him protest and state that he ought to show respect for the day of rest because the Living Lord Himself, the Sovereign in heaven, has ordained it (15:4). Nicanor's reply is full of arrogance as he mimics the language of the Jewish protesters, stating, I am a Sovereign on earth (15:5).

Nicanor not only contravenes the will of God by forcing Jews to accompany him on the Sabbath but, even more so, flouts God's Sabbath-commandment by issuing his own seventh-day commandment! By defiantly rejecting and then contradicting the Sabbath-commandment, Nicanor sins with a high hand (Num 15:30-31), which we argued was blasphemy against God (§ 7.1).

In addition, when Nicanor designates himself as sovereign on earth, he presents himself as the other (δὲ ἐτερος; 15:5), the one who stands over against the Sovereign in heaven. It is as if he is announcing, “You have heard it said, keep the Sabbath; but I say to you, let the ruler of heaven keep to heaven, I am ruler on earth.”

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896 One slight and insignificant variation—
κατασκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν (dwelling among us)—occurs in 2 Macc 14:35 and is witnessed by a group late minuscules (L' 58 311) that may represent an earlier Lucianic recension.
In this way, the Abridger describes Nicanor as casting himself as the god of earth, limiting God to heaven, and thus recapitulating the blasphemy of Antiochus in his claim to divinity (2 Mace 9:12, 28; cf. § 9.5). By limiting God’s authority to heaven, Nicanor is also implying a type of cosmic duality where there is a sharp cleavage between heavenly and earthly authority. Of course, Nicanor’s cosmic duality violates Jewish monotheistic sensitivities, which has a unitive view of heaven and earth with One Sovereign over both.  

So, on the one hand, we have described this as blaspheming the Sabbath, which it is because Nicanor denigrates the honored Sabbath. On the other hand, to speak of blaspheming the Sabbath is metonymy for blaspheming the Lord of the Sabbath, which the rest of our brief analysis has attempted to point out. Nicanor dishonors and is contemptuous of the Sabbath and, for that reason, he dishonors and is contemptuous of God, and that is blasphemy (§ 4.4).

10.4 Nicanor’s Defeat and Death

Lastly, we look at the outcome of Nicanor’s blasphemy, which highlights the verbal and non-verbal aspects of his blasphemy and is an application of the lex talionis or the law of proportionate justice. Like the account in 1 Macc, when Judas defeats Nicanor and his army in battle, the head and right arm of Nicanor is cut off and taken back to Jerusalem (2 Mace 15:30). Then, in accord with the Abridger’s Temple-propaganda, Judas is described as graphically verifying that God keeps his Temple from defilement (cf. 15:34b).

He showed them the vile Nicanor’s head and the wretched blasphemer’s arm that had been boastfully stretched out against the holy dwelling of the Almighty. He cut out the tongue of the ungodly Nicanor, saying he would feed it piecemeal to the birds ... (2 Mace 15:32-33a; NAB).

καὶ ἔπιδειξάμενος τὴν τοῦ μισροῦ Νικάνορος κεφαλὴν καὶ τὴν χεῖρα τοῦ δισαχημοῦ ἣν ἐκτέινας ἐπὶ τῶν ἄγιων τοῦ παντοκράτορος οἴκων ἐμεγαλαύχησεν, καὶ τὴν γλῶσσαν τοῦ δυσσεβῶς Νικάνορος ἐκτεινὸν ἔφη κατὰ μέρος δῶσειν τοῖς ἀρνέωις ... (LXX 2 Macc 15:32).

N.T. Wright (1992) 252-59 analyzes Jewish monotheism in terms of ten dualities, some of which are compatible with Jewish monotheism and some that are not. According to Wright, cosmological duality is not compatible with Jewish monotheism (253) and therefore Nicanor’s claim (for cosmological duality) violates Jewish monotheism.
Certainly, the Abridger could have narrated the death of Nicanor without including the gruesome details about his severed head, arm, and tongue. However, the dismemberment is mentioned three times in a very short space, indicating some significance (15:30, 32-33, 35). It is likely that, in accord with the *lex talionis*, the offensive organs—the tongue that wagged and the fist that shook—are shown to have been dealt with, never to blaspheme again. As we suggested earlier, by highlighting the tongue and fist of Nicanor, the Abridger also highlights the verbal and non-verbal instrumentality of blasphemy.

### 10.5 Conclusion and Prospects

The Nicanor narrative provides a unique *discourse concept* of blasphemy that may provide an important perspective for understanding the theology of FG and its possible offense that theology may have caused non-believing Jews.

2 Macc has highlighted the importance and centrality of the Temple for early Judaism. According to the Abridger, God takes great concern for the Temple and, so long as Jews are faithful to the covenant, God protects it from all harm and defilement. However, as implied in the Temple-propaganda, unfaithful Jews are particularly dangerous in that they invite divine wrath and open the possibility that God will allow atrocities and blasphemies to be committed. The mere appearance of blasphemy is both a sign of Jewish disloyalty and a sign of God’s rehabilitative wrath. After the blasphemies of Antiochus and the rededication of the Temple, 2 Macc demonstrates that Israel remains faithful to God and so God *continues* to protect the Temple. For the Abridger, Nicanor provides the ultimate test case regarding whether God would protect His Temple when Jews remain faithful to the covenant.

As we saw, Nicanor verbally and non-verbally threatened to destroy the Temple and thereby challenged the reputation and honor of God as the Protector of the Temple. Such action was interpreted as blasphemy. Furthermore, in claiming that he would raise a new temple for Dionysus, he contemptuously arrogated to himself the prerogatives of God. Again, this is blasphemy. Moreover, Nicanor dishonored (blasphemed) the Sabbath and the God of the Sabbath; first, by contradicting the
Sabbath-commandment and, second, by claiming that he, not God, was a ruler on earth. In sum, Nicanor’s blasphemy can be characterized as contemptuous and disparaging of God, the Protector of the Temple and Lord of the Sabbath.

When we turn to FG, a number of parallels are suggested. First, like Nicanor, Jesus appears to challenge the sovereignty of God regarding the Sabbath-commandment (Jn 5:2-18) and, in response to questioning, suggest that there are two sovereigns, God the Father and himself (Jn 5:17, 19-30). Could non-believing Jews have viewed this as blaspheming the Lord of the Sabbath? This is addressed in chapter 13. Second, like Nicanor, Jesus made threatening gestures toward the Temple (Jn 2:13-16) and, in the same context, verbalized its doom (Jn 2:19). Could non-believing Jews have understood Jesus as blaspheming the Temple? Similarly, in the so-called Jewish trial narrative in FG, Jesus is portrayed as defending the charge that he had spoken wickedly (κακῶς λαλέιν; Jn 18:23), the very accusation that was brought against Nicanor for his blasphemy of the Temple (1 Macc 7:42). Could the use of speaking evil in Jn 18:23 have been alluding to Jesus blaspheming the Temple? We will look at this in chapter 14.
In chapters 5 to 10, we looked at various discourse concepts of blasphemy as they emerged from selected Jewish texts, texts that were widely known in early Judaism, probably influencing or reflecting the shared knowledge of first-century Jews. It is not surprising, therefore, that Philo (20 BCE – 50 CE) not only knew, but also very familiar with all three of the Mosaic texts that we have examined. In this chapter, we look at Philo’s understanding of blasphemy and, in particular, his description of the blasphemy of an Egyptian ruler in Somn. 2.123-132. Although Philo mentions blasphemy in number of different texts, we will look at Fug. 84, Mos. 2.205-206, and Decal. 61-69 before concentrating on Somn. 2.123-132. In contrast with previous chapters, we will not seek a literary discourse concept of blasphemy, since we are dealing with multiple treatises and not one discourse. However, broadly conceived, we are seeking a discourse concept of blasphemy insofar as Philo’s thoughts about blasphemy form a unified discourse within a single mind.

11.1 Fug. 84

As part of a larger group of works dedicated to the allegorical interpretation of Genesis, De fuga et inventione (On Flight and Finding) presents an exposition of each verse of Gen 16:6-12 (omitting v. 10), which concerns Hagar’s flight. Here we will briefly trace part of Philo’s thought, which leads from talking about cities of refuge to blasphemy of God.

Philo argues that God mercifully provides cities of refuge for unintentional murderers (Fug. 53), because God ordains unintentional sins (Fug. 76). In contrast, whoever

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808 QE 2.5 comments on LXX Exod 22:27 and Philo alludes to it in Spec. 1.53, Fug. 84 (cf. chapter 5). Philo comments on Lev 24:10-23 in Mos. 2.205-8 (cf. chapter 6). Philo’s knowledge of Num 15:30-36 is reflected in Spec. 1.265, Spec 2.64, Mig 91, and Virt. 171-174 (cf. chapter 7).

809 Philo uses a range of terms for blasphemy, including βλασφήμω (10 times), βλασφημία (11 times), βλάσφημος (twice), δισφημένο (once), κατασταλέω (5 times), λοιπορέω (4 times), and λοιπόρια (4 times). Cf. Philo’s Index by Borgen, Fuglseth, and Skarsten (2000).
commits intentional murder is responsible for his sin and cannot say God ordained it (Fug. 79). Philo contends that there is no refuge for intentional murderers (Fug. 81) and, if such a person tries to seek refuge, it is tantamount to blaming God for his sin (Fug. 80). Anyone who blames God deserves punishment and, Philo asserts, Exod 21:15 indicates the type of penalty required: Whoever falsely accuses or speaks against (κακολογεῖσι) father or mother should be put to death (Fug. 83). Philo believes that, in this way, Moses proclaims the death penalty for those who speak against God:

He as good as proclaims in a loud voice that no pardon must be granted to a blasphemer against God (Fug. 84; Loeb).

μονονοῦ γὰρ βοᾷ καὶ κέκραγεν, ὅτι
tōn eἰς τὸ θέαν βλασφημοῦντων
οὐδὲνι συγγνώμης μεταδοτέον
(Fug. 84; Loeb).

Philo’s argument is that individuals, who blame God for the evil they intentionally commit, blaspheme God and should be executed. It is a Qal wa-homer (lit. light and heavy) argument81; that is, if speaking against (κακολογεῖσι) parents requires the death penalty (Fug. 83), then surely in the more important case of speaking against (βλασφημεῖσι) God, execution must be exacted (Fug. 84).

On the surface, therefore, Fug. 84 concerns intentional murderers who claim to deserve a place of refuge. Intentional murders do not deserve refuge and, if they claim refuge, it is to attribute evil to God, which is blasphemy. For such, there is no pardon. Underlying the discussion, however, the issue seems to concern misrepresenting God or lying about God. That, too, would be blasphemy.

11.2 Mos. 2.203-208

De vita Mosis 2 (On the Life of Moses 2) treats the character of Moses as legislator (2.1-66), priest (2.67-186), and prophet (2.187-287). In the last part, Philo offers four examples of Moses’ prophetic function. One of the examples focuses on blasphemy and, in particular, Moses prophetic judgment regarding the Egyptian-Hebrew offender mentioned in Lev 24:10-23 (2.192-208). There are at least three aspects of Philo’s exposition that provide a window to his perspective on blasphemy.

811 Bock (1998) 62 states that it is a “classic lesser to greater argument.”
First, Philo’s commentary on Lev 24:10-23 provides an underlying cause for the
blasphemy when he describes the Egyptian heritage of the offender (2.193-195). The
offender not only set aside the Jewish customs of his mother, but he embraced the
customs of the Egyptians, whom Philo characterizes as having set up earth as a
data(power to challenge heaven (γὴν ἐπετείχισαν οὐρανοῦ) and as having given earth
honor equal to gods (ἰσοθέου τιμῶν) (2.194). The offender is portrayed as so
thoroughly influenced by Egyptian atheism (Ἄγυπτικῆς ἀθετητος) that, when
he quarrels with a Jew, he freely and wickedly curses (καταράομαι) the God of
Israel (2.196). In this way, a picture is painted of a man who, fueled by Egyptian
idolatry, refuses to reverence God (μὴ σέβειν θεὸν) and therefore blasphemesis God
(2.198).

Second, Philo’s commentary on Lev 24:10-23 makes a distinction between two types
of verbal offense.\footnote{Cf. the discussion in Goldenberg (1997) 67-8; Bock (1998) 63-4.} After noting the imprisonment of the Egyptian-Hebrew, Philo
states that Moses promulgated a two-pronged law:

> Whoever curses god, let him bear the
guilt of his sin, but he that nameth the
name of the Lord let him die (Mos. 2.203;
Loeb).

Philo contends that cursing (καταράομαι) is forbidden, but it is a lesser crime than
vocalizing or naming the Name (ὀνομάζῃ τὸ ὄνομα), which is punishable by death
(2.204). Philo then argues that Moses’ use of the term god did not refer to God, but
so-called gods (2.205). Admittedly, this is an unexpected twist, since the Egyptian-
Hebrew man cursed the God of Israel, not a so-called god (cf. 2.196). Nevertheless,
Philo insists that Lev 24:16 prohibits insulting (βλασφημίας) false gods, because it
teaches Jews reverence for the name or title of “god” and thus God Himself (2.205).
This line of reasoning is evident elsewhere in Philo (Spec. 1.53) as well as in
Josephus (Ant. 4.207), so it is likely that Philo is expressing a Jewish perspective that
is not simply his own. Philo argues by analogy that just as we do not call our parents
by their personal names out of honor for them, so we should not use the divine Name
(2.207). Thus, it is simply unpardonable to use recklessly or unseasonably the divine
Name (2.208). In another treatise, Philo refers to the Name as that “which only those whose ears and tongues are purified may hear or speak in the holy place, and no other person, nor in any other place at all” (Loeb; Mos. 2.114). By inference, using the Name outside the Temple or by a person not properly purified would count as unseasonable use of the Name and therefore blasphemous.

Third, while discussing the meaning of naming the name, Philo also mentions a third type of verbal offense:

But if anyone, I will not say blasphemes the Lord of gods and men, but even ventures to utter His name unseasonably, let him suffer the penalty of death. (Mos. 2.206; Loeb).

Although Philo is expanding on what naming the Name means, one can see in the quotation above that, in a very cautious way, Philo alludes to blaspheming the God of Israel, which is a worse than naming the Name. In this way, Philo indicates a third verbal offense to add to the previous two. What that blasphemy entailed, Philo does not say in this context.

The result is a three-tiered scheme of verbal offense: (1) Cursing a god is a high crime, it is classified as blasphemy, and it is forbidden because it can lead to irreverence for the One who is properly called “god”. (2) Vocalizing the Name is a higher crime, it is unpardonable, and it demands the death sentence. Whether Philo classifies this offense as blasphemy is unclear. (3) Blaspheming the God of Israel, nearly unthinkable for Philo, is the highest crime and, as he states elsewhere,

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813 Follows LXX Lev 24:15a-16b; see our discussion in chapter 6.
814 According to Wolfson (1948) 121-22, the most holy name of God, mentioned in Mos. 2.208, refers to the name YHVH, which Philo describes as the quadriliteral (τεταραγράμματον) name (Mos. 2.115, 132) or the proper name (κύριον δύναμι) (Mut. 2, 11, 13; Somn. 1.39, 230) and distinguishes it from the many other forms of the name (πολυόνυμον δύναμι) of God (Decal. 19, 94). The name was not to be vocalized except by the high priest in the temple (Sifre Num. § 39; m. Sotah. 7.6; m. Tamid. 7.2).
815 See Wolfson (1948) 121-24, who treats Philo’s exposition on blasphemy and naming the Name as part of his argument that “the principle of the unnamability of God ... was taken by Philo to imply that God is incomprehensible” (123-24).
816 To our knowledge, contemporary scholars have not observed this three-tiered scheme.
demands the utmost penalty without delay, without jury, and without mercy (Spec. 54-55).

11.3 Decal. 61-65

De decalogo (On the Decalogue) is a treatise on the theophany on Sinai and an exposition of the Ten Commandments. The treatise has four main sections dealing with questions about the Sinai-theophany (Decal. 1-49), the first five commandments (50-120), the second five commandments (121-153), and a synopsis of Mosaic legislation (154-178). Our focus is on Philo’s exposition of the first commandment (52-65), which has a sharp, polemical tone directed against those who give honor and glory to the created order rather than to the Creator. Since Decal. 61-65 is very significant for our purposes, it warrants substantial quotation:

(61) So just as anyone who rendered to the subordinate satraps the honours due to the Great King would have seemed to reach the height not only of unwisdom but of foolhardiness, by bestowing on servants what belonged to their master, in the same way anyone who pays the same tribute to the creatures as to their Maker may be assured that he is the most senseless and unjust of men that he gives equal measure to those who are not equal, though he does not thereby honour the meaner many but deposes the one superior.

(62) And there are some who in a further excess of impiety do not even give this [i.e., the Creator and the creature] equal payment, but bestow on those others all that can tend to honour, while to Him they refuse even to the commonest of all tributes, that of remembering Him.

(63) Some again, seized with a loud-mouthed frenzy, publish abroad samples of their deep-seated impiety and attempt to blaspheme the Godhead, and when they whet the edge of their evil-speaking tongue they do so in the wish to grieve the pious ...

817 Following the translation by Yonge (1993 [1854]) 523, we have added the phrase the Creator and the creature in brackets, because it is not in the Loeb translation or in the Greek; however, it is the implied referent of this.
(64) Let us then reject all such imposture and refrain from worshipping those who by nature are our brothers⁸¹⁸ ... 

(65) Let us, then engrave deep in our hearts this as the first and most sacred of commandments, to acknowledge and honour one God Who is above all... (Loeb).

The underlined text focuses our three comments. First, the issue of honor binds the passage together. Reference to honor (τὰς τιμὰς) begins the passage in 61 and reference to honor (τιμῶν) ends the passage in 65. In between, honor (τιμή) is mentioned twice, once at the end of 61 and once in 62. Other honor-like language is also used, including worship (προσκυνώμεν) in 64 and giving equal [payment or honor] (τὸ ἵσον ἀποδιδόντες) in 62. The concepts of being equal (ἵσοι in 61 and ἵσον in 62) and unequal (ἀνίσοις in 61) also bind the passage. Put together, Philo is arguing that Creator and creature should not be honored equally, but unequally, because the Creator and creature are not on equal levels; rather, one God is above all (Ἐνα τὸν ἀνωτάτω ...θεόν).

Second, Philo mentions that certain individuals make an open display or publish abroad (προφέποντες) their impiety and attempt to blaspheme the Godhead (βλασφημεῖν ἐπιχειροῦσι τὸ θεόν) (63). Other than saying that it entails public display (προφέποντες) and involves an evil-speaking tongue (κακήγορον γλῶτταν), Philo does not describe what blasphemy entails, what was said or how it was said. However, the context suggests that to blasphemy is to dishonor God in some fashion, probably by giving human rulers (indicated by 61) or celestial bodies (indicted by 66) honor equal to God Himself. In this context, blasphemy is not a direct verbal assault on or defamation of God, but idolatry, stealing God's honor and giving it to human leaders or objects of pagan worship. Here, blasphemy and idolatry kiss.⁸¹⁹

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⁸¹⁸ Decal. 64 indicates that brothers refers to created things (τὰ γενόμενα); Colson (1937) 38-39 states that brothers refer to the heavenly bodies (citing De Gig. 8) and not angels.

⁸¹⁹ As Bock (1998) 67 observes, “The linkage of blasphemy and idolatry is something that will frequently occur in the rabbinical material.” For example, see y. Sanh. 7:25a-b [Neusner 7:8-9] and the comments by Bock (1998) 93-95. Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1010 argue that both the blasphemer and the idolater are viewed as rejecting the entire law, both are stoned to death, and both are then hung.
Third, Bock's statement, that "Philo is appealing to his audience not to worship rulers, who claim to be like God," is slightly misleading. The issue is not primarily about claiming to be like God but, more narrowly, giving and receiving honor that properly belongs to God. Thus, Philo is appealing to his audience to honor the Creator and not to honor those who claim the glory that belongs to God alone.

11.4 Somn. 2.123-132

Although Philo wrote three treatises on the nature of dreams, only two survive, De somniis 1 and 2 (On Dreams 1 and 2). In Somn. 2, Philo interprets six dreams from Genesis. Our focus is on the second dream of Joseph (2.110-154). In this treatise of Philo, Joseph represents human arrogance and vanity. At one point, Joseph is even rebuked by his father for dreaming that the heavenly bodies would give him worship (προσεκύνουν) (2.111). The dream is a warning for all those who exalt themselves over other people and over nature itself (2.115). Philo then provides three examples of people, like Joseph, who foolishly exalt themselves over nature itself.

First, Philo points to Xerxes, who tried to change the course of nature by putting a canal through Mount Athos and who attacked heaven by shooting arrows at the sun (2.117-20). Second, Philo cites the Germans, who tried to repel floodwaters with their swords and thus, he says, deserve ridicule for attempting the truly impossible (2.121-22). Third, in the most foolish exhibition of human arrogance, an unnamed ruler of Egypt tried to do away with the Sabbath (2.123-32). The account of the Egyptian leader concerns us and bears extended quotation:

(2.123) Not long ago I knew one of the ruling class who when he had Egypt in his (2.123) δ' οὖ πρώην δύνα τινά οἶδα τῶν ἡγεμονικῶν, δέ, ἡπείδη τὴν

(m. Sanh 6.4; y. Sanh. 6.23c, 19). What can be said of one can be said of the other (Sifre Deut. 21.22; Sifre Num 15.31; y. Sanh. 7.25b, 9).


Two dreams by Joseph (2.1-154), one dream by the chief baker and another by the chief butler (2.155-214), and finally two more by Pharaoh (2.215-302).

So Colson (1938) 436; see also Kraft (1991) 136-8.

We have called the ruler an Egyptian; however it is possible that the ruler was in fact Jewish origin. Kraft (1991) 135, 138-141 argues that the ruler was Philo's own nephew, Tiberius Julius Alexander, who became prefect of Egypt in the late 60s. Others have argued that the ruler was Flaccus (so Mangey), or a "coded reference" to the Romans (so Goodenough), or the Flaccus' two predecessors, Iberus or Vitrus Pollio (so Colson). Although there is little agreement about who was the leader, commentators agree that the unnamed ruler was a real person.
charge and under his authority purposed to disturb our ancestral customs and especially to do away with the law of the Seventh Day which we regard with most reverence and awe. He tried to compel men to do service to him on it and perform other actions which contravene our established custom, thinking that if he could destroy the ancestral rule of the Sabbath it would lead the way to irregularity in all other matters, and a general backsliding (Loeb).

Philo goes on to describe how the Jews refused to submit to such demands (2.124) and how their refusal evoked an ominous speech from the Egyptian ruler who, in essence, said, “Suppose you were attacked, or suppose a flood, fire, terrible storm, famine, plague, or earthquake came. Would you not get up and protect yourselves, even on the Sabbath?” (2.125-128). After setting up his Jewish opponents with such rhetorical jabs, the ruler finished his speech with a knockout blow:

(2.129) “See then,” he went on, “I who stand before you am all the things I have named. I am the whirlwind, the war, the deluge, the lightning, the plague of famine or disease, the earthquake which shakes and confounds what was firm and stable…” (Loeb).

The logic of the Egyptian was clear, the Sabbath could be suspended for natural disasters or acts of God; equally evident was the hubris of the Egyptian, who declared that he himself was just such an extraordinary act of God. In response, Philo is incensed and accuses the ruler of a series of atrocious impieties:

(2.130) What shall we say of one who says or even merely thinks these things? Shall we not call him an evil thing hitherto unknown: a creature of a strange land or rather one from beyond the ocean and the universe—he who dared to liken to the All-blessed his all-miserable self?

(2.131) Would he delay to utter blasphemies against the sun, moon, and other stars…?

(2.132) Nay … [he would] accuse the stars of not paying their regular tribute, and scarce refrain from demanding the honour and homage be paid by the things
of heaven to the things of earth, and to
himself more abundantly inasmuch as
being a man he conceives himself to have
been made superior to other living
creatures. (Loeb).

Regarding this series of atrocious impieties, we have five comments. First, as Kraft
has argued, Philo is speaking about a real person of authority in Egypt, someone that
Philo personally knew in his recent past, and thus the example refers to real events
(2.123). The ruler was probably a Roman prefect of Egypt, he had Egypt in his
charge and under his authority (τὴν προστασίαν καὶ ἐπιμέλειαν ἔχειν Ἁγουπτοῦ). This ruler tried to force Jews to abandon Sabbath practices and,
through it, to change Jewish law and practice as a whole. The situation was serious
and, while the provocation for the crisis is not clear, the issue was work related, thus
concern for local productivity or regional commerce may have been the catalyst.

Second, the Egyptian ruler apparently dared to compare himself with the destructive
powers of nature—I am the whirlwind, the flood, and the earthquake (2.129). At first
blush, this sounds pompous and unrealistic. However, when we consider that the
ruler was trying to motivate the Jews to work on the Sabbath with threats, which had
yet to become violent, it is possible that such language was used. He apparently knew
Jewish custom and he knew that under extraordinary circumstances the Jews would
not sit unmoved on the Sabbath. The ruler took that knowledge and told the Jews
that they should consider themselves threatened by such extraordinary circumstances,
namely himself, his authority and his military power. Animated by some degree of
arrogance, the ruler used hyperbole to express the threat—I am the whirlwind and so
on (2.129). No doubt Philo put the threat into its current literary form to highlight its
blasphemous implications, but we can sense that behind Philo’s redaction is a very
real and ominous warning of a ruler exasperated by Jewish non-compliance.

825 So Goodenough (1938) 29.
826 E.g., 1 Macc 2:41.
Third, Philo draws out the implications of the ruler’s warning—as if possible, he dared to compare his all-miserable self to the All-Blessed (2.130). Philo is trying to mobilize Jewish resistance against the ruler by showing that his hubris threatens, as if possible, the very source of creation itself, namely, God Himself. The operative phrase is he dared to compare himself (εαυτόν εξομοιοφυν ετόλμησεν). The infinitive, εξομοιοφυν, means to make quite like or to assimilate. The conceptuality is similar to Decal. 61-65, where Philo implies that it is blasphemous to give equal (ισος) honor and worship to creature and Creator alike, and Leg. 1.49, where Philo states that the selfish and atheistic mind supposes it is equal with God.

Sennacherib, Antiochus Epiphanes, Nicanor, and other characters that compared themselves with God, also come to mind.

Fourth, Philo states that the Egyptian ruler would blaspheme (βλασφημεω) the sun, moon, and stars (2.131). Although he does not directly say that the ruler blasphemes God, we should understand it that way, since the blasphemous attitude is directed toward heavenly realities that, in the ancient world, would include God Himself.

Fifth, according to Philo’s interpretation (2.132), the blasphemy of the Egyptian ruler was two-fold. On the one hand, he audaciously expected heavenly realities to honor and worship him (τιμασθαι ... και προσκυνεσθαι ... εαυτόν). On the other, he egotistically confused his creaturely status with that of the Creator since, being a man (ανθρωπος ... ου), he conceived himself to have been made above (διεννοεχεναι) other living creatures. In this regard, Goodenough’s comment on Somn. 2.95ff is equally apropos here: “To God should be given the real prostrating (προσκυνησις) and honor (τιμη), and if any ruler takes to himself the ‘honor’ of God and calls upon

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827 Our translation of ει γε το παντα μακαριο ω παντα βαρυδαμον εαυτον εξομοιοφυν ετολμησεν, taking the ει with the aorist ετολμησεν as an expression of impossibility, as if possible ... he dared; see Liddell and Scott (1889) 226.
828 Liddell and Scott (1889) 275.
829 Philautos δε και άθεος ω νος οιμενος ισος ειναι θεοι (Leg. 1.49a).
830 Perf. pass. inf. of διαφέρω, a term that can express superior value and has a paradigmatic relationship with such terms as τιμιος (being of considerable value), δοξάζομαι (to be of exceptional value), υψηλος (very valuable, of exceptional value); see Domain 65 in Louw and Nida (1989).
his subjects to a cult of himself personally (πρὸς τὴν ἰδίαν θεραπείαν), a proper man will be violently enraged."³³¹

11.5 Conclusions and Prospects

We have looked at four different texts, each of which provides a window to Philo’s conception of blasphemy. In Fug. 84, Philo’s concept of blasphemy involved the notion of accusing God falsely by attributing evil to God. Offenders deserve immediate execution. In Mos. 2.203-208, Philo’s exposition on Lev 24:10-23 suggested that idolatry—giving earthly realities equal honor or greater honor than God—provides fuel for blasphemy. In addition, Philo provided a three-fold scheme of blasphemy: cursing a so-called god is a high-crime, vocalizing the Name is a higher, and blaspheming God (revolting and nearly unthinkable) is the highest crime. In Decal. 61-65, Philo links blasphemy with stealing God’s honor either through a public display of evil speech against God or by offering the honor that is due to God to human leaders or created realities. In Somn. 2.123-131, an Egyptian leader claimed to be as powerful as God and, to overstate it, thought he could rule over nature by changing the Seventh Day. Philo identified this—comparing oneself with God—as blasphemy. All four texts share some common themes. All four highlight the verbal character of blasphemy, but do not preclude non-verbal aspects. Three texts state that execution is the punishment for blasphemy. Three texts link blasphemy with idolatry and attempting to steal honor from God. And three texts talk about blasphemy in terms of comparing oneself to God or making oneself equal to God or grasping for honor that belongs to God.

How does Philo’s perspective on blasphemy illuminate FG? First, as we saw in Fug 84, falsely accusing God or attributing evil to God counted as blasphemy. Nowhere in FG is Jesus or the disciples accused of this, even when FG presents Jesus defending himself against speaking evil (Jn 18:23).³³² Second, both Mos. 2.203-208 and Decal. 61-65 make it clear that giving earthly leaders and realities honor equal to

³³¹ Goodenough (1938) 27.
³³² However, the Jewish disciples, who thought Jesus was from God, might have accused non-believing Jews of blasphemy for accusing Jesus of evil. That is, charges of blasphemy may have gone both ways between non-believing Jews and Jewish Christians. See Anderson (1986), who argues that Mark presents a battle of the blasphemies between Jews and Christians.
the gods (ἰσοθέων τιμῶν) paves the way to blaspheming Heaven. The issue is stealing honor from the God of Israel and giving it to false claimants, infringing on Jewish monotheistic sensitivities. There are indications that Jesus and his disciples were accused of this type of blasphemy. This will be addressed in chapter 13. Third, the most remarkable of all is Somn. 2.123-132, which condemns the Egyptian ruler of blasphemy because he tried to change Sabbath practices, making himself like God (Somn. 2.130). For anyone familiar with FG, this probably arouses thoughts of Jesus being accused of changing Sabbath practices (Jn 5:16-17) and then being stoned for comparing himself with God (Jn 5:18). Moreover, the problem with the Egyptian ruler was that he was a mere man, claiming to be superior to others (Somn. 2.132), which is just the sort of charge repeatedly brought against Jesus—You, being a mere man, claim to be God (Jn 10:33) and He claimed to be the Son of God (Jn 19:7).

These issues will be addressed in chapter 13. Fourth, the Egyptian ruler’s claim, I am the whirlwind (Somn. 2.129), and other self-comparisons with the acts of God or nature, reverberate with Jesus’ famous I am sayings, such as I am the bread of life (Jn 6:48) or I am the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6). Issues surrounding Jesus’ use of the I am formula and blasphemy will not be addressed in this study, but it leaves room for further tantalizing research.
CHAPTER 12
CONVERGING PORTRAITS OF BLASPHEMY

At this point, we want to present a composite sketch of blasphemy that draws from the seven discourses that we have just examined. As we have argued throughout, the seven discourses reflect first-century Jewish thought or else represent Jewish traditions that were well known during the first century. As such, we contend that Johannine Jewish Christians and their non-believing Jewish counterparts would have recognized our composite sketch. The sketch is composed of four strokes and responds to our guiding questions—What is blasphemy? And what are the consequences of committing blasphemy?

12.1 Against God

The first stroke in our sketch of blasphemy is that it is an offence against God. Even though Philo and Josephus warn about blasphemy the gods, their warning was ultimately for the purpose of preventing people from speaking evil against the one true God. Once that is taken into consideration, we can summarize the accounts of blasphemy that we have examined as depicting an individual or a group of individuals who arrogantly and intentionally do or say something that discredits, disparages, or dishonors God. This description has six elements to unpack.

First, blasphemy is performed by an individual or a whole group. Sennacherib, Antiochus, and Nicanor epitomize the blasphemer, yet whole groups such as Korah and his companions can be perpetrators of blasphemy.

Second, blasphemy is invariably associated with extreme arrogance and intentional antagonism toward God. Extreme arrogance is the odor of blasphemy. Take, for example, Antiochus, whose career reeked of violating one god’s temple after another and who claimed equal honor with the gods. Or again, consider Nicanor, whose blasphemy stank with the assertion that he, not God, was sovereign over earth, or the Egyptian ruler, who dared to compare himself with God and even attempted to
change nature (the Seventh Day) itself. We have referred to this as *self-exaltative blasphemy*, where the offender attempts to elevate himself above others and even God, if that were possible. Remember the mockery of Sennacherib’s boasting of *I have ascended* the highest mountains, *I have cut down* the tallest trees, *I have reached* the farthest places or, even more boastful, the Egyptian ruler’s *I am* the whirlwind, the war, and the deluge. Blasphemy also invariably includes intentional antagonism toward God. Intentional antagonism distinguishes blasphemy from other grave offences, such as idolatry. Other grave offences may be committed unwittingly or ignorantly, but not blasphemy. Blasphemy is *high-handed sin*, knowingly and wittingly taking on God Himself. The Sabbath-breaker was one such character. He publicly and intentionally flouted the God of the Sabbath. Not least were the first Israelites who, in full knowledge of God’s signs, wonders, and commands, blatantly rebelled or blasphemed God in the wilderness.

Third, blasphemy is performed by *doing or saying something* against God. The doing or saying is a public, not a private, event. In this way, blasphemy is a social reality in terms of perception and labeling. The concept of blasphemy changes from time-to-time and from group-to-group. With later rabbinic thought, blasphemy was largely limited to a verbal offence, but earlier Jewish literature indicates that blasphemy was perceived in a wide variety of actions, both verbal and non-verbal. Certainly, *naming the Name*, a reference to pronouncing the Name in a disrespectful manner or outside the appropriate context of the Temple, was a verbal offence in rabbinic and pre-rabbinic eras. Most blasphemy has a verbal component. Recall the depiction of Sennacherib, who shouted at God and threatened to rape Daughter Zion. Still, there are accounts of blasphemy in early Judaism entail non-verbal actions or malicious gestures against God. Think of Antiochus, whose blasphemies included a long list of non-verbal atrocities aimed at suppressing Judaism, and Nicanor, whose blasphemy included shaking his fist at the Temple.

Fourth, blasphemy *discredits God*. By this we mean that in the performance of blasphemy, the offender says or does something that aims at damaging the reputation of God or causing people to distrust Him. Sennacherib comes to mind. He attempted
to discredit God by insinuating that God was either unable or unwilling to stop the Assyrians from sacking Jerusalem. It was an assault on the credibility of God.
Likewise, intentional murderers also blaspheme or discredit God when they claim divine refuge or protection because, as Philo argued, they make God an accomplice of their evil. It discredits the character or goodness of God.

Fifth, blasphemy *disparages God*. As we have seen, blasphemers make light of God, minimize His commandment, or show contempt for Him. We saw this with Sennacherib who mocked God’s power and promises and then offered himself, not God, as a savior of Israel. Likewise, consider the *high-handed sin* of the Sabbath-breaker, who publicly snubbed God and brushed aside His commandment by picking up sticks on the Sabbath. Such *high-hand sin* reads the law, knows the law, and yet throws it into the wind like worthless chaff.

Sixth, blasphemy *dishonors God*. In the performance of blasphemy, God’s honor and glory are threatened. This happens when God is lowered, as when Sennacherib spoke of God as though He were another impotent so-called god, or when a person is elevated, as the Egyptian ruler and Antiochus who dared to compare themselves with God. Here, Jewish monotheistic sensitivities are violated when equal honor is given to Creator and creature, or when more honor is given to the creature than the Creator. In an honor-shame culture, where honor is viewed as a limited good, claiming such honor tantamount to stealing from God. Claiming the same honor, glory, power, or prerogatives as God denies God’s uniqueness. It is like saying there is “someone else” in addition to God or instead of God that deserves such glory. Here, blasphemy and idolatry are fused and conspire to violate monotheism.

12.2 Against the Temple

The second stroke in our sketch of blasphemy is that verbal or non-verbal attacks on the Temple *count as* blasphemy against God Himself. In the ancient world, it is hard to conceive of a more direct way to threaten a deity than to threaten his or her temple. For the Jews, the Temple symbolized the dwelling-place of God, the cosmic center of the universe, and the election of Israel. To blaspheme the Temple was to assault God,
the stability of the world, and Israel herself. To profane the Temple was to blaspheme the very Name that dwelled there. Consider Nicanor, whose threat to destroy the Temple and raise another was characterized as blasphemy (δυσφημείν) the Temple and speaking wickedly (κακως λαλείν) against the sanctuary. Or think of Antiochus, who was a theomachos (one who contends with God), not just because he stole God’s honor by claiming equality with God, but more literally because he tramped into the house of God and dared to rob it. It is little wonder that in response to Antiochus’ wide ranging blasphemies, Mattathias’ lament focuses almost entirely on Antiochus’ violation of the Temple. In early Judaism, threatening and plundering the Temple was a vivid and concrete attack on God.

12.3 Against the Leadership

A third stroke in our sketch of blasphemy is that verbal or non-verbal attacks on the leaders of God’s people can count as blasphemy against God Himself. As we saw, the Book of the Covenant presents earthly authority going hand-in-hand with heavenly authority. Thus, the parallelism in Exod 22:27(28) is no surprise: To speak evil (κακως λογείν) of Israel’s rulers is to blaspheme (κακολογείν) God. The indissoluble union between heavenly and earthly authority is reflected in the often-repeated injunction in Jewish literature to honor father and mother because, as human authorities, they reflect the Father and Maker of us all. Recall Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness. It began as opposition to the leadership of Moses and Aaron and led to despising and blaspheming God. Think of the mutiny of Korah and his associates against Moses. It was portrayed as an illegitimate and blasphemous grasp for divine authority; thus God, not Moses, eliminated the mutineers. Or consider Sennacherib, whose verbal attack on God went hand-in-hand with derision of Hezekiah the king, or Nicanor, whose threat to the Temple included mocking, deriding and defiling the priests. To speak or act contemptuously of earthly authority is to blaspheme heaven itself.

12.4 Results in Death

A fourth stroke in our sketch of blasphemy concerns its consequences, namely, execution or excommunication of the offender. In the case of the Egyptian-Hebrew,
who had cursed God, Moses is presented as making a precedent-setting judgment because such an offense was the first of its kind. Moses decided that the people were to lead the offender outside the camp, lay hands on him, and then stone him to death. We argued that this action could be understood as *kārēt* or being *cut off* from the people of God. *Kārēt* involves the extirpation of a person and his descendants, sometimes by human action (execution) and sometimes by divine action (extermination). Following Horbury, we also argued that during the Second Temple period *excommunication* sometimes *took the place of the death penalty*. That blasphemy leads to death is confirmed by almost every case that we have examined. The Sabbath-breaker was stoned to death. The rebellious Israelites, who despised God and snubbed his covenant, died in the wilderness and never made it to the Promised Land. The ground miraculously swallowed Korah and fire consumed his co-mutineers. Sennacherib's sons assassinated him, Antiochus died a humiliating and painful death, while Nicanor was killed in battle and then dismembered.

### 12.5 Conclusions

*Blasphemy strikes at the very core of Judaism*, which centers on one God, the Temple, and the election of Israel, represented by her leaders. In Part three, we will compare this sketch of blasphemy with the theology of FG. In chapter 13, we examine the exaltation of Jesus and compare it with the first stroke of blasphemy. In chapter 14, we examine FG's theology of the Temple and compare it with the second stroke. And, in chapter 15, we examine FG's polemic against the ὑποδοχή and compare it with the third stroke. In our conclusion, we suggest connections between the fourth stroke and the expulsion of the Jewish Christians from the synagogue.

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833 Dunn (1991) 18-36 provides a useful description of Second Temple Judaism in terms of *four pillars*: monotheism, the Temple, the election of Israel, and the Torah.
PART III

THE BLASPHEMY OF THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

In Part III, we will use the composite portrait of blasphemy to examine whether non-believing Jews would have viewed the Johannine community as blasphemous. We focus on three Johannine claims that correspond to the first three strokes of our composite sketch of blasphemy—Jesus is equal with God (chapter 13), Jesus is the New Temple (chapter 14), and the Τουδσιοι are of the Devil (chapter 15)—and argue that non-believing Jews would have regarded each of these claims as blasphemous. We conclude by suggesting that non-believing Jews would have condemned and excommunicated the Johannine Jewish Christians as blasphemers (chapter 16).
CHAPTER 13
"JESUS IS EQUAL WITH GOD"

In the previous section we argued that blasphemy in early Judaism may be characterized as verbal or non-verbal public displays intended to discredit, disparage, or dishonor God and, by association, similar attacks on God’s Temple or God’s chosen leaders also counted as blasphemy. Thus, any attack against God, God’s Temple, and God’s chosen leaders would have been grounds for the charge of blasphemy.

In this chapter, we focus on the statement that Jesus was ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ (making himself equal with God) (Jn 5:18) and address whether that would have been considered an attack against God, His honor or His uniqueness. We address what the author of FG wanted readers to understand about the claim in 5:18, how a first-century Jewish audience might have interpreted it, and whether non-believing Jews would have considered it to be blasphemous.

13.1 A flashpoint for the Johannine community

Within the narrative of FG, the claim that Jesus was making himself equal with God is presented as the basis for a violent reaction from non-believing Jews. Because of the uniqueness of the language used to express the claim in 5:18, the vehemence of the Jewish reaction, and the extended monologue in 5:19-47, which functions as an explanation for what is said in 5:18, it is likely that 5:18 exposes a point of sensitivity or a flashpoint in the social and theological milieu of FG. The text is, therefore, a

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834 As stated earlier, the term the Jews and Jews (in italics) will refer to the literary construct or corporate character within the narrative of FG, whereas the term without italics has historical reference.

835 In the NT, the adjective, ἴσος, ἦν, ὅν (equal to, the same as), is only used twice in reference to Jesus; once in Jn 5:18—ἵσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ (making himself equal with God)—and once in Phil 2:6—οὐκ ἀρπαγμόν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσον θεῷ (he did not count equality with God something to grasp).

very important window into the Johannine world and the struggles they faced. In this way, we assume a moderate two-level reading of FG, where the story of the Johannine Jesus reveals something about the trauma and experience of the Johannine community. As Loader has argued, the accusations reflected in Jn 5:18 "are doubtless ... real accusations hurled at the Johannine community by Jewish critics." 837

As we have noted earlier, FG seems to invite a two-level reading. For example, before his departure the experience of Jesus is projected forward in time to the experience of his disciples—"If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you" (NRSV; Jn 15:18). Or again, as we mentioned earlier, FG is cast in the form of an extended trial that witnesses to both the trial of Jesus and the trial of his followers. 840 The two trials merge and yet are distinct. They merge in Jn 3:11, where Jesus speaks in the first person plural: "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony" (NRSV). Yet the trial of Jesus is distinct from his followers' trial. Jesus states that after his departure it will be necessary for both the Advocate and his followers to testify on his behalf, particularly when the time comes when they face expulsion from the synagogue and threats of death (Jn 15:26—16:4).

The two-level reading, made famous by Martyn, is defended elsewhere. 841 Our acceptance of a two-level reading does not mean that we believe every tradition or pericope in FG addresses the Sitz-im-Leben of a specific local community, or that each character or event in FG has an allegorical counterpart in the Johannine

that each of five controversy dialogues are conspicuous in depicting Jesus and the Jews in conflict and, he believes, are foreign elements in FG in that they depict a time long after Jesus' death (24). 842 Bauckham (1998) 9-48 challenges the long-standing assumption that the Gospels were intended for a specific church or group of churches, arguing that the Gospels had a much broader audience, all Christians. Esler (1998) 235-47 criticizes Bauckham's argument on several counts. Two are worth mentioning here. First, Bauckham only sees two options; either the Gospels were written to a local community or to all Christians. Esler argues that Bauckham overlooks a third option; that is, the Gospels were written within for a local community (reflecting the social world of the ancient Mediterranean where people were embedded in groups), but with the view that they could have broader circulation. Second, Esler rejects Bauckham's category of all Christians, which "did not exist as a category of persons capable of being addressed in this period. What existed was a network of cells, possibly in communication but if so probably troubled with division, which simply did not provide a basis for such a general communicative aim" (242).
community, or that a detailed historical development of such a community can be reconstructed on the basis of hypothetical source and redaction criticism. It is to make the more modest claim that when we discern points of sensitivity in FG it is likely that they signal something about the experiences and concerns of the Jewish Christians who produced and propagated the Gospel. Thus, we assume that Jn 5:18, because of the force, the depiction of the reaction, and the uniqueness of the language, reveals a point of sensitivity or witnesses to a flashpoint in the life of the Johannine community.

13.2 The structure of Jn 5:16-30

A number of scholars have written on the trial motif in FG, and most recently, and most thoroughly, Andrew Lincoln has contributed a monograph on the topic. Among other things, Lincoln traces the trial proceeding through eight stages, highlighting elements of the lawsuit motif and their function at each step. In Lincoln’s scheme, Jn 5:16-30 forms part of the third stage in the extended trial and it narrates the first time the Jews try to stone Jesus in FG.

Our target text is comprised of two verbal exchanges between Jesus and the Jews (5:16-18 and 5:19-30). Each exchange has a reaction-explanation-response pattern with the second response forming an extended reply in a chiastic structure.

Reaction: Persecuting Jesus (16a)
Explanation: Because Jesus works on the Sabbath (16b)
Response: “My Father works until now and I am working” (17)

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843 E.g., Martyn (1979).
845 See § 3.3; Harvey (1976) passim; Trites (1977) 78-127; Lincoln (1994) 3-30.
846 Lincoln (2000) 57-138 delineates eight key stages or passages that carry the lawsuit motif forward in FG, including pericopes on (1) the testimony of John the Baptist (Jn 1:1-8, 15, 19-34; 3:25-30); (2) the testimony from above and judgment of the light (3:11-21, 31-36); (3) Jesus as Just Judge and the testimonies to Jesus (5:19-47); (4) the truth of Jesus’ testimony and judgment (8:12-59); (5) the interrogation of the man born blind (9:1-41); (6) Jesus and the judgment of the world (12:37-50); (7) the preparation of the disciples for testifying and the role of the Paraclete (15:26-16:15); and (8) the trial before Pilate (18:2-19:16a). Lincoln admits that more passages could be added, such as the disputes during the Feast of Tabernacles (7:14-39) and the interrogation or mini-trial of Jesus (10:22-39).
847 Our argumentation will not depend on the chiastic structure, though it does seem to lend itself to such a structure on the basis of subjective (thematic) and objective (grammatical/linguistic) criteria. See Mlakuzhyil (1987) 126-8 and Talbert (1992) 124.
Reaction: Seeking to kill Jesus (18a)
Explanation: Because he broke the Sabbath and made himself equal with God (18c-d)
Response: Jesus answered (19a)

Dependence: The Son is not able to do anything from himself (19b)
Amazement: The Father shows the Son everything ... you will be amazed (20)
Life/Judgment: The Father gives life, so also the Son (21-22)
The Son is given all judgment so that all may honor him (23)
Hearing/Life: The one hearing and believing has life (24)
Hearing/Life: The dead will hear and have life (25)
Life/Judgment: The Father has life in himself, so also the Son (26)
The Son has authority to judge, because he is Son of Man (27)
Amazement: Do not be amazed... resurrection is coming (28-29)
Dependence: I am not able to do anything from myself (30)

The outline highlights the balance, symmetry, and repetition of the passage, which can provide clues for its interpretation. Even points of asymmetry—regarding honoring the Son (23) and he is the Son of Man (27)—may signal where the author was clarifying an important point. For the moment, however, we want to focus on how the structure places emphasis on 5:18.

In the first verbal exchange (5:16-17), Jesus’ response in 5:17b is only comprised of eight words. However, in the second exchange (5:18-30), Jesus’ response in 5:19-30 is comprised of 252 words and, if 5:31-47 is included, then Jesus’ second response has 523 words (UBS4). Clearly, FG puts a great deal of emphasis on Jesus’ second response. It highlights the significance of what the second response is responding to, namely, the astonishing charge in 5:18:

For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God (NRSV).

The charge of making himself equal to God in 5:18d can be understood as the hinge on which the rest of the passage turns. In 5:18d looks back to Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath (5:1-9) and his claim to work as the Father works (5:17) and it looks forward to Jesus’ qualification in 5:19-30 and the witnesses he draws on in 5:31-47. Here, we want to focus on the inner structure of 5:16-19ff,448 because it highlights some of the

448 This is similar to Robbins (1996) 7-37 use of the term inner texture.
structural and semantic parallels which, in turn, have important theological consequences! There are clear parallels between 5:16-17 and 5:18-30:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Therefore (διὰ τοῦτο) the Jews started persecuting (ἐδίωκον) Jesus, (16)</td>
<td>because (διὰ) he was doing such things on the sabbath.</td>
<td>Jesus answered (ἀπεκρίνατο) them, (17) “My Father is still working, and I also (καὶ γω) am working.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For this reason (διὰ τοῦτο) the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, (18)</td>
<td>because (διὰ) he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.</td>
<td>Jesus said (ἀπεκρίνατο) to them ... (19-30) (NRSV)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reaction of 5:18a parallels the reaction of 5:16a. Both begin with διὰ τοῦτο, both have the same subjects (the Jews), both set an impromptu trial in motion, and both state the intentions of the Jews with the imperfect tense, either “they started prosecuting Jesus” (ἐδίωκον ... τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) or “they were seeking to kill him” (ἐξήτουν αὐτὸν ... ἀποκτείνατι).

The explanation in 5:18b—“because he was not only breaking the Sabbath”—answers why the Jews were seeking to persecute or prosecute (ἐδίωκον) Jesus and reiterates the explanation in 5:16b—“because he used to do such things on the Sabbath.” It is noteworthy that in the escalating battle of wits between Jesus and the Jews, the Sabbath violation is not left behind, like an irrelevant stepping-stone. It is reiterated and brought alongside the next charge in 5:18c. The connection with the Sabbath will be discussed in § 13.5.

The explanation in 5:18c is a new charge—“he was calling God his own Father.” It is in response to Jesus’ claim in 5:16b—“My Father is still working, and I (καὶ γω) also am working.” Jesus’ claim that he works just like God justifies his healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath, but it also functions to further incriminate him. For the

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849 Harvey (1976) 51 argues that διὰκελεύω can mean to bring a charge against, to prosecute, as well as to persecute.

850 Harvey (1976) 51 argues that διὰκελεύω can mean to bring a charge against, to prosecute, as well as to persecute.
moment, it is important to note the reciprocal force of the term καθω (and I)\textsuperscript{851} in 5:17b and how it places Jesus on equal footing with God before the word ἐσθο (equal) is used in 5:18d.\textsuperscript{852}

The explanation in 5:18d—he was “thereby making himself equal to God” (ἰσον ἐαυτόν ποιόν τῷ θεῷ)—draws out the offensive implication of 5:18c. That is, taking the participle, ποιόν, as an adverbial participle of result\textsuperscript{853} explains why calling God his Father was so offensive. Why calling God, Father, is so offensive is not readily apparent since, presumably, it was the right of every Jew. However, once we look at the text, it is not simply that Jesus is calling God, Father; he is claiming that there is continuity (of authority to work) between himself and the Father expressed by the use of καθω (and I) in 5:17b. Thus, the Johannean Jesus expresses the Father-Son relationship as one of continuity and equality, and that was offensive.

Lastly, but of critical importance, Jesus’ response in 5:17—“My Father is still working, and I also am working”—parallels Jesus’ response about the Father-Son relationship in 5:19-30. In this way, the Father-Son relationship, which is introduced in 5:17, and then picked up and interpreted by the phrase “making himself equal with God” in 5:18, is finally expanded and qualified in 5:19-30.

13.3 Who claims that Jesus is making himself equal with God?

What conclusion did the author of FG want readers to draw concerning the phrase making himself equal to God (ἰσον ἐαυτόν ποιόν τῷ θεῷ)? Was it something the narrator of FG was affirming about Jesus, but which the Jews refused to accept? Or was it a misunderstanding by the Jews, which needed to be corrected? There are many interpretations of 5:18d, but they can be grouped into three basic options: a

\textsuperscript{851} Formed by crasis from καθ and ἔγω, the word καθω expresses a reciprocal relationship; so BAGD, 286. This is born out in Jn 10:15, 38; 14:20; 15:4.

\textsuperscript{852} See Barrett (1978) 256.

\textsuperscript{853} The force of the participle ποιόν is probably best understood as an adverbial participle of result; thus, ἐσθο ἐαυτόν ποιόν τῷ θεῷ expresses the outcome or corollary of πατέρα ἰδιὸν ἐλεγεν τὸν θεόν. See Wallace (1994) 638. In contrast, McGrath (1998b) 472 offers a novel reading of ποιόν as a concessive participle thereby rendering the phrase although he claimed equality with God.
'Jewish' misunderstanding, the narrator's authoritative comment, or an ironic misunderstanding. We will examine each in turn.

13.3.1 A Jewish misunderstanding

Some scholars argue that verse 18d expresses a Jewish misunderstanding. Scholars of this persuasion argue that the Jews thought Jesus was claiming equality with God (5:18) when he called God his Father (5:17); however, Jesus never claimed such equality and because the Jews misunderstood Jesus, they mistakenly and unlawfully sought to kill him on the grounds of blasphemy. For example, de Jonge writes, "the author of this gospel argues at great length to refute this charge of blasphemy; for him too, it was unthinkable that Jesus would have claimed equality with God." This option has been supported by two basic arguments.

The first argument focuses on what the Jews misunderstood. Odeberg, whose analysis has influenced many Johannine scholars, begins by describing how first century Jews would have heard 5:18. Odeberg writes:

The formula ἵσως τὸ θεό corresponds exactly to the Rabbinic expression ματαιαία θέλημα ἡμῶν which to a Rabbinic ear is equivalent to 'makes himself independent of God.'

Odeberg explains that Jesus' offense was not that he called God Father but that, to Jewish ears, he would have sounded like a son who had rebelled against paternal authority by claiming the right to perform the same work as his Father. The phrase, ἵσως τὸ θεό, was heard as a declaration of independence from God, setting Jesus up as a rival god, the offense of Antiochus Epiphanes, if not Lucifer himself.

However, as Jn 5:19-30 reveals, Jesus directly and vigorously denies this Jewish
misunderstanding by claiming complete dependence on the Father. Still, most interpreters believe that Jn 5:19-30 suggest some type of qualified (e.g., functional) equivalence between the Son and the Father. Dodd’s final comment on the matter is worth quoting: “It is difficult to deny τὸ ἵσσος εὐος, in some sense … [but] … if the evangelist had been asked whether or not he intended to affirm that Christ was ἵσσος τῷ θεῷ, he would have been obliged to reply that ἵσσος, whether affirmed or denied, is not a proper term to use in this context.”859 Dodd believes FG’s preferred way to speak of the Father and Son relationship was not in terms of equality, but in terms of oneness.

A second argument, put forward by Margaret Davies, depends on distinguishing between the narrative time (roughly when the author presented the story) and the story time (roughly when the events in the story supposedly occurred). When applying this distinction to Jn 5:18, Davies writes:

Although this is a narrative account of ‘Jewish’ accusations against Jesus, commentators propose that it is to be understood ironically, as an accusation within the story, but as a true statement on the narrative level. It can hardly function in that way, however, because Jesus’ discourse in 5:19-46 refutes this accusation. Jesus is the Son of God, but he is not equal to God. He can do nothing of his own accord (5:19, 30). 860 For Davies, Jn 5:18d expresses a non-ironic, Jewish misunderstanding that is refuted by Jesus in Jn 5:19-47. If Jn 5:18 was ironically true at the narrative level, it would contradict what is expressed by Jesus at the story level, and this cannot be. Hence, for Davies, FG presents Jesus as an exemplary human being, totally dependent on God, but not equal to God.

This option (exemplified by Odeberg and Davies) is appealing because of its use of comparative literature to help sort out the problem, but ultimately it must be rejected. It is weakened by the fact that Odeberg’s rabbinic sources are not confirmed.861

858 On Antiochus, see chapter 9. Dodd (1953) 327 draws a connection with Lucifer—see LXX Isa 14:14: “I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים the Most High”—and states that “the heresy of the ‘two principles’ arises; there is a διάπονος θεός.”
859 Dodd (1953) 328, n. 2.
860 Margaret Davies (1992) 135.
861 Odeberg (1968 [1929]) 203, n. 2, lists “GrR. 28 SH 28b O.a.s.p 136” as sources. In commenting on Odeberg’s argument, Dodd (1953) 326 writes, “This would fit the present passage [5:18] admirably, but I have not been able to confirm the quotation.” Similarly, neither we (using the
though McGrath has recently come to Odeberg's assistance. McGrath argues that even without the elusive Rabbinic references, Odeberg's insight—that a claim to be equal with one's father would be viewed as rebellious—can be sustained by other literature of that period. McGrath and Odeberg assume that Jesus' claim to sonship in 5:17 is non-unique claim and so believe that the Jews are not objecting to Jesus calling God his Father per se, but only to his rebellious tone. Unfortunately, this contradicts the explicit statement that the Jews condemned Jesus for his claim of unique sonship with God (cf. 19:7). McGrath and Odeberg also believe that the Jews (mistakenly) object to Jesus claiming equality with God, something they believe Jesus denies in 5:19-30. However, their argument is not convincing, since it overlooks the fact that, while Jesus rejects the notion that he is a rebellious son (5:19, 30), he also claims equality with the Father in matters of honor (5:23), judgment (5:22, 27), and giving life (5:22, 26-7). Davies' argument does not rescue this interpretation either. Her distinction between the story and the narrative levels is valid, yet she fails to see that the irony of Jn 5:18 can function on both the story and narrative levels. As argued in § 13.3.3 below, within the story, Jesus refutes part of the charge as false (making himself something) and yet, still at the story level, Jesus affirms another part of the charge as true (equality with God).

**13.3.2 The narrator's authoritative comment**

Some scholars argue that Jn 5:18d expresses an authoritative comment by the author of FG. In this view, the narrator tells us that whenever Jesus called God his own Father, he was "thereby declaring that he was equal to God." The Jews correctly

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Davka’s Judaic Classics Library on CD-ROM, Soncino Classics Collection) nor McGrath (1998b) 470-73 have found the quotation in Rabbinic sources.

862 McGrath (1998b) 470-73 argues that the customary father-son relationship in the first-century was one of superior father relating to subordinate son. A disobedient or rebellious son brought great shame and was routinely castigated by ancient authors. Thus, a claim to be equal to one's father would be viewed as insubordination and therefore rebellious and contemptible.

863 McGrath (1998b) 472, n. 14, argues that the use of ἐαυτῷ in 5:18c should be understood as simply his Father and not emphatically as his own Father.


865 BAGD 682 translates ἵσον ἐαυτόν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ in this way.
understood what Jesus was claiming and so, given their understanding of Jewish law, sought to execute him. Thus, Jn 5:18d reflects the christology of FG itself. For example, Pancaro asserts that "The Jews are not mistaken in their interpretation of Jesus' words: he is calling God his Father in a special sense, making himself equal to God."\(^{866}\) This viewpoint has been supported in four ways.

First, 5:18d is an explanation by the narrator of FG and thus it is not misleading, since the narrator of FG is both omniscient and reliable.\(^{867}\) The narrator of FG knows everything, from what happened before the beginning of creation (1:1-3) to what Jesus is thinking (2:24-25). The narrator of FG never misleads the reader and often clarifies ambiguities and explains what might be misunderstood. Because Jn 5:18 is in the narrator's voice, it is unlikely that it expresses a Jewish misunderstanding.\(^{868}\) If the narrator was expressing a Jewish misunderstanding, we would expect the narrator to tell the reader—"The Jews sought to kill Jesus because they thought he was making himself equal to God"—as in other instances when the narrator reads the minds and motives of the Jews.\(^{869}\)

Second, if one takes 5:18d as an authoritative comment by the narrator, then it is describing Jesus as equal with God (\(\text{τὸ θεὸν} \) and \(\text{καὶ θεὸν} \)) in 5:17. Furthermore, equality with God is confirmed by Jesus' response in 5:19-30 where he declares that he completely and veraciously exercises the two great powers of God—giving life (5:21, 24) and rendering judgment (5:22, 27).\(^{870}\) It also resonates with other things FG tells us about

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\(^{866}\) Pancaro (1975) 155.

\(^{867}\) Culpepper (1983) 16-49, esp. 21-26 and 32-33.

\(^{868}\) Culpepper (1983) 152-65 identifies 18 instances of misunderstanding, none of which includes 5:18. However, D. Lee (1994) 112-13 views 5:18 as exemplifying misunderstanding in the third of five narrative stages.

\(^{869}\) Other examples of the narrator's ability to understand and explain the mind and motives of the Jews include: (1) Jn 8:27: "They did not understand that he spoke to them of the Father." (2) Jn 12:42: "Many of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it." (3) Jn 12:43: "They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

\(^{870}\) b. Ta'an. 2a refers to two ways in which God is active on the Sabbath: giving life and judging life at death. Dodd (1953) 322-23 suggests that the two supreme powers of God, salvation and judgment, are alluded to in Jn 5:19-29. Neyrey (1988) 21-22 identifies the two powers as God's creative power (5:19-20) and God's eschatological/judgmental power (5:21-29). Concerning the two-powers heresy, see §13.3.3 and Segal (1979).
Jesus, including his title as θεός (1:1, 18; 20:28), oneness with God (10:30, 38; 14:11; 17:11), use of ἐγώ εἰμι (6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-6, 8), origin and destiny (1:1-5; 16:28; 17:5), and divine authority (3:35; 5:21-22, 26-27).

Third, an important consideration is FG’s use of ποιεῖν (to make) in 5:18, which has a positive connotation (contrary to the assumption of the first option). That is, the claim that Jesus was making (ποιῶν) himself equal to God has a positive (not a negative) valence within chapter 5. For example, the use of ποιεῖν (to do or to make) pertains to doing healings (5:11, 15, 16) and what the Father and Son do (5:19), including making life (5:21) and making judgment (5:27). Whatever Jesus does, it is the Father working in and through him. Thus, Pancaro writes:

The use of ποιεῖν in Jn culminates in the affirmation: Jesus made (ποιεῖν) himself equal to God (5:18; 8:53; 10:33) by making (ἐποίησεν) himself the Son of God (19:7). We are to understand: his making himself equal to God was the result of what he did (ποιῆσα). His ἐργα, σημεῖα, his ἐργάν of giving life (ζωοποιεῖν) and judging (κρίνειν ποιεῖν).... When Jn asks that the Jews come to know what Jesus “does,” he is asking that they come to recognize Jesus for what he is. The two go hand in hand.

In this way, Pancaro argues that FG’s use of ποιεῖν (to make) in Jn 5:18d implies that ontological christology (who Jesus is) flows out of functional christology (what Jesus does); in this respect, Jesus makes himself equal with God.

This option (exemplified by Pancaro and Barrett) is appealing because it recognizes the function of the narrator and draws on the literary context of FG. However, it is not entirely persuasive. Arguing that 5:18d is a reliable explanation by the narrator of FG, who does not mislead readers, may itself be misleading. Jn 5:18d could express Jewish misunderstanding without the narrator explicitly telling the reader. This seems to happen in Jn 18:28 when the narrator tells the reader that the Jews “lest they defile themselves.” Of course, from the author’s perspective the Jews would not have ritually defiled themselves, but it did not thereby require the

871 The absolute form of ἐγώ εἰμι (I am) in FG recalls its use in the LXX, where it substitutes for the tetragrammaton (e.g., Exod 3:13-15; Isa 43:10-11, 25-26). Lincoln (2000) 46-9 argues that FG reworks the Deutero-Isaiah lawsuits such that Jesus use of ἐγώ εἰμι emphasizes his oneness with the Father. Williams (2000) now appears to be the definitive work on the ἐγώ εἰμι formula.

872 See the treatment of ποιεῖν (to make) and τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ποιεῖν (to do the will of God) in Pancaro (1975) 155-56 and 368-402.
narrator to say, "because they thought it would defile them." Furthermore, Pancaro's analysis of the verb, ποιεῖν (to make), is impressive, but he does not consider the verb, ποιεῖν (to make), in combination with the reflexive pronouns, εὐαυτοῦ (of himself) or ἐγὼ (himself). Hence, his analysis of ποιεῖν is forced and must yield to the analysis of ποιεῖν εὐαυτοῦ in option three.

13.3.3 An ironic misunderstanding

Some scholars understand 5:18d as an ironic misunderstanding involving the two-fold phrase (1) making himself (2) equal with God. In this view, the Jews have incorrectly assumed that Jesus is making himself something—that he is self-promoting—when in fact he is not. Jesus rejects this aspect of the charge (5:19, 30). Ironically, the Jews, who are portrayed as masters of misunderstanding throughout FG, correctly discern that Jesus is claiming equality with God when he calls God his Father. Jesus affirms this aspect of the charge. He is equal to God in matters of honor (5:23), judgment (5:22, 27), and giving life (5:21, 26). From within this interpretative framework, Meeks write: "Jesus has not ‘made himself’ θεός or οὐκ θεός; he was from ‘the beginning.’" There are three supporting arguments.

First, the parallelisms between Jn 5:18, 10:33, and 19:7 "suggest that ἴσος τῷ θεῷ, οὐκ θεὸς τῷ θεῷ, and θεός, as applied to Jesus, all have roughly the same force for the Johannine Christians or for their opponents." That is, within the μονός θεός commitments of the Johannine community (5:44; 17:3), the terms God, Son of God, and equal with God are also valid christological predicates (5:18; 10:33; 19:7).

Second, the use of the genitive reflexive pronouns εὐαυτοῦ (of himself) and εὐμαυτοῦ (of myself) in Jn 5:18-30 reveals an emphatic denial by Jesus. The charge that Jesus was making himself (ἐγὼ ποιῆσαι) something (5:18d) is emphatically denied in

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874 Pancaro (1975) 155-56.
875 Most scholars in this camp view the equality as functional, not ontological. Thus, Loader (1992) 161 writes, “In his being he is dependent and subordinate; in his doing he is equal.”
876 Meeks (1990) 310.
877 Meeks (1990) 310.
5:19-30. Jesus categorically denies that he made anything of himself (ἐὰν' ἑαυτοῦ) (5:19, 30). Jesus did not make himself God's equal; he was so already!

Third, the use of the verb ποιεῖν (to make) with the reflexive pronouns, either the accusative, ἑαυτῶν (himself), or genitive, ἑαυτοῦ (of himself) reveals something about the Johannine conception of blasphemy. The verb and the reflexive pronoun occur eight times in FG with three different voices.

- Narrator: He was making himself equal with God (5:18d)
- Jesus: The Son is not able to make anything of himself (5:19)
- Jesus: I am not able to make anything of myself (5:30)
- Jesus: You will know that I am (ἐγώ ἐμαύ) and I make nothing of myself (8:28)
- Jews: Who do you make yourself (8:53)
- Jews: Being a man you make yourself God (10:33)
- Jews: He made himself the Son of God (19:7)
- Jews: Everyone who makes himself king speaks against Caesar (19:12)

Here we can see that for the Jews the verb ποιεῖν (to make) with the reflexive pronoun ἑαυτοῦ (of himself) is a deadly combination that signals presumptuous self-exaltation (8:53), rebellion of the highest order (19:12), and contemptuous disregard of the human/divine boundaries (10:33; 19:7). The only time Jesus uses the combination is negatively—ἐὰν' ἑαυτοῦ οὐδέν (5:19), ἀπ' ἑμοὺς ὁ ὀφείλει (5:30), and ἀπ' ἑμοὺς ... οὐδέν (8:28)—to deny that he makes anything of himself. On the basis of the verb ποιεῖν (to make) and reflexive pronoun ἑαυτοῦ (of himself) combination in FG, we can see that the issue of blasphemy is in view here. The Jews are concerned about arrogant self-promotion, rebellion against authority, and grasping for divine honor and divine prerogatives, all elements of our composite portrait of blasphemy (see chapter 12). In Jn 5:19-30, Jesus responds to the charge point-for-point: he attributes nothing to himself (5:19a, 30a), he does what God shows him and tells him (5:19b, 30b), he seeks not his own will but God's (5:30c); indeed, he does not seize power, but only exercises the authority given to him by God (5:22, 26-27).

This option (exemplified by Meeks, Neyrey, and Ashton) is persuasive. It affirms elements of option one (the Jews misunderstood Jesus to be exalting himself) and option two (FG claims Jesus' equality with God). Admittedly, option three is subtle,
but that should not put us off, since the author of FG was a master of innuendo, irony, and metaphor.\textsuperscript{878} Therefore, as a preliminary conclusion, we contend that Jn 5:16-30 depicts the Johannine Jesus announcing that as his Father works continually, so he works continually, even on the Sabbath (5:16-17). On hearing this, the Jews believe that Jesus is exalting himself and claiming what belongs to God alone. The Johannine Jesus rejects the first assumption (5:19a, 30), but affirms the second—he is \textit{iσος τῷ θεῷ} \textit{(equal with God)} precisely because his work is in continuity with that of the Father (5:17b, 19b-29).

13.4 How is the claim that Jesus is \textit{equal with God} qualified?

The foregoing argument indicates that the author of FG and by extension Johannine community spoke of Jesus as \textit{iσος τῷ θεῷ}, but that is not the end of the story. By the structure of the passage, it is apparent that the Johannine Jesus clarifies or qualifies what is said in 5:18 with a monologue extending from 5:19 to 5:47. As McGrath states, “There is much to support the conclusion that the whole passage (John 5.19-47) represents one of the clearest examples in John the Evangelist engaging in legitimation, in the defense of his community’s beliefs about Jesus.”\textsuperscript{879} In what follows, then, we will attempt to answer how the author of FG wants readers to understand the claim that Jesus was \textit{iσος τῷ θεῷ} \textit{(equal with God)} and how a first-century Jewish audience might have interpreted the claim. We will approach the text from several different angles or contexts, including (1) the \textit{intra-textual context}, (2) the \textit{intertextual context}, and (3) the \textit{socio-cultural context}.

13.4.1 \textit{Intratextual context: Endowed equality with God}

In response to the charges voiced in 5:18, it is apparent that Jesus does not directly respond to the accusation that he \textit{broke or loosed the Sabbath}, but only to the accusation that he \textit{made himself equal with God}.

\textsuperscript{878} The work of Culpepper (1983) is a benchmark for literary analysis of FG which, among other literary concerns, spotlights its use of figurative language. In addition, Duke (1985) and O’Day (1986) have contributed volumes on irony and Koester (1995) on symbolism in FG.

\textsuperscript{879} McGrath (2001) 80-81.
First, Jesus denies the charge that he made himself something (ἐαυτὸν ποιῶν) (5:18d), that he exalted himself or sought his own glory, by using the same verb, to do or to make (ποιεῖν) and the same reflexive pronoun (ἐαυτὸν) throughout 5:19-30. Jesus begins his response by stating, "the Son is not able to make anything of himself" (ποιεῖν ἀφ' ἐμαυτοῦ) (5:19), and ends his response with the reiteration, "I am not able to do anything of myself" (ποιεῖν ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ) (5:30). In between, the reflexive pronoun is picked up again in 5:26. Here Jesus claims to have life in himself (ἐν ἐμαυτῷ), but it is because the Father has life in himself (ἐν ἐμαυτῷ) and has given it to the Son. All three uses of the reflexive pronoun stress Jesus’ dependence on the Father and function as an emphatic denial that he is claiming to be independent from God or some sort of rival to God. In the midst of claiming absolute dependence on the Father, as we have seen, Jesus also claims to do (ποιεῖν) precisely what the Father is doing (ποιεῖται).

Second, Jesus admits to the charge of being equal with God (ἰσος τῷ θεῷ) in a qualified sense. As we previously noted, Jesus’ response in 5:19-30, as a whole, parallels his response to the charge of Sabbath violation in 5:17, where he said, “My Father is still working, and I (κῶγω) also am working” (5:17). As we argued earlier, this showed continuity between the Father’s working and the Son’s working, expressed by κῶγω in 5:17. This continuity or harmony between Father and Son is again picked up and thoroughly recapitulated in 5:19-30:

- Whatever the Father does, likewise (ὁμοίως) the Son does (19)
- The Son does only what the Father shows him; the Father shows the Son everything (20-21)
- Just as (ὡστερ) the Father raises the dead, so also (οาะτός καὶ) the Son gives life (21)
- As (καθώς) the Father is honored, so (ινα) the son should be honored, (23)
- Just as (ὡστερ) the Father has life in Himself, so also (οาะτός καὶ) the Son (26)
- The Son only judges as (καθώς) he hears the Father (30)

In this way, the relationship between the Father and the Son—highlighted by the use of the comparative adverbs just as (ὡστερ) .... so also (οาะτός καὶ)—could be characterized as one of continuity, mutuality, unity, and imitation. Here, one suspects
that the author has allowed the message and the medium to become one in that the symmetry of the chaistic structure of 5:19-30 mirrors the mutuality of the Father and Son’s work. So, on the one hand, the relationship is equal. The Father and Son share the work equally, and there is no limit to the sharing of work because the Son does whatever the Father does and shows him (5:19, 30), which is everything (5:20). On the other hand, the relationship is not equal. The Son is dependent (5:19, 30) and always in the receiving position (5:22, 26, 27). Even when the Son exercises judgment alone, it is because the Father has granted the authority to the Son (5:22).

To sum up, an intratextual analysis of 5:19-30 depicts the Johannine Jesus having endowed equality with God, nested within a dependent relationship with the Father. This is not surprising, of course, given the oneness motif elsewhere in FG (e.g., 7:29, 8:19; 10:30, 38; 14:7, 9-11; 17:21, 23). 880

13.4.2 Intertextual context: The apocalyptic Son of Man

The symmetry between the Father and Son’s relationship in 5:19-30 is conspicuous. However, there is an equally conspicuous asymmetry: “The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son” (5:22) and this grant of authority is “because (δίκαιος) he is the Son of Man” (5:27b). Because of the widespread use of (the) Son of Man in early Jewish literature, it is important to discern how the intertextual environment might have influenced the writing or reading of Jn 5:19-30, particularly regarding (the) Son of Man in 5:27.

The enormous complexities surrounding the use of the term Son of Man are only surpassed by the countless theories that litter the graveyards of scholarship meant to address such complexities. 881 However, there is some agreement on a few issues regarding FG. For example, the thirteen references to (the) Son of Man in FG 882 are used self-referentially and as a title by the Johannine Jesus. 883 Even the unique use of

880 On the oneness motif in FG, see Appold (1976) passim, esp. 18-34.
the anarthrous form, ο ὄνομα του (Son of Man), in Jn 5:27 should be understood as a title, though it probably stresses quality rather than identity. As with the Synoptic Gospels, FG uses (the) Son of Man in reference to the future judgment by Jesus, his humanity, and his death. However, in distinction from the Synoptics, there are hints that the author of FG encouraged an interpretation of (the) Son of Man in accord with certain, primarily apocalyptic, traditions.

(1) The manifestation of Yahweh’s glory. Although there are many possible traditions that might have influenced the writing or the reading of FG use of (the) Son of Man, recent scholarship has emphasized the influence of apocalyptic and Merkabah traditions. Such traditions are characterized by manifestations or visions of YHWH’s glory, a theme that is associated with (the) Son of Man throughout FG (e.g., 12:23; 13:31). Within FG, the verb ὑψω (to lift up) is used three times and each time it is associated with the Son of Man in the double-sense of being lifted up.

884 Of the 85 occurrences of (the) Son of Man in the NT, ὁ ὄνομα του (Son of Man) occurs 83 times and ο ὄνομα του occurs twice (Jn 5:27 and Heb 2:6).
886 So Hare (1990) 92-3, 96; Moloney (1976) 82 writes, “It appears that ‘Son of Man’ (5:27) in its present context is definite, i.e., titular, but it may well retain a ‘qualitative’ sense.”
887 Burkett (1991) 20-37 organizes the various traditions and approaches into three categories: (1) Jewish apocalyptic traditions, such as Daniel 7, Enoch, and 4 Ezra 13. (2) Non-apocalyptic traditions, such as the Son of Man in Ezekiel; Bultmann’s Gnostic Redeemer; Borsch’s Primal Man-King; Lindsar’s understanding of bar-enasha; Abel in T. Abr. 12-13; and Burkett’s theory regarding Prov 20:1-4. (3) Modified Apocalyptic traditions, such as Iber’s theory that a Gnostic myth was added to Jewish apocalyptic thought; Dodd’s theory, which combines Synoptic material with the hermetic tractate Polimandrus; Talbert’s theory that a Synoptic-type Son of Man overlapped with Hellenistic descent/ascent myths; theories drawing on Philo’s heavenly man speculation; and theories combining apocalyptic Son of Man imagery with personified Wisdom.
888 Regarding apocalyptic trends in FG, Ashton (1991) 381-406 argues that an apocalyptic worldview is governed by the urgent conviction that God intervenes in human history and, by His initiative, reveals the heavenly blueprint to a seer or prophet in extraordinary ways, not least of which is through manifestation of His glory. In FG, Ashton finds several “intimations of apocalyptic,” including: (1) the two-ages or stages of revelation, (2) visions and dreams, (3) riddles for insiders and outsiders, (4) the correspondence between above and below.

Regarding Merkabah trends in FG, Kanagaraj (1998) 312-17 identifies eleven aspects of first-century Jewish mysticism (primarily Merkabah mysticism) in John, including (1) heavenly ascents, (2) seeing God on a chariot-throne (reinterpreted by John using δοξα and δοξαω), (3) visions of fire and light, (4) angelic mediation (ascribed to Jesus by FG), (5) visions of a human-like figure, the angelomorphic Son of Man who represents God as His Agent, (6) salvation and judgment, (7) personal transformation, (8) divine commissioning, (9) the identification of δοξα with the Name of God, (10) communal mysticism, and (11) esoteric features (like irony, symbols, signs, and misunderstanding) that point to an ultimate reality beyond the world of appearance. Others who have linked FG and Merkabah mysticism include: Odeberg (1968 [1929]) 72ff., Meeks (1986) 141-73, Borgen (1986) 67-78, esp. 73, and Dunn (1998 [1983]) 345-75, esp. 359.
For those initiated into the secrets of the Johannine community, the lifting up motif was apparently an invitation to see Jesus’ death, not as humiliation, but as the very moment of his kingly glorification (3:14; 8:28; 12:34). Dahl and Kanagaraj argue that this understanding of δόξα (glory) goes beyond recalling the manifestation of God’s glory at Sinai. It also alludes to a vision of YHWH’s glory seen in the form of a human sitting on the heavenly throne, a vision that is echoed by Merkabah texts based on Ezek 1:26-28 and Isa 6:1-5. The idea of a human sitting on the throne of glory becomes explicit in FG when Isaiah’s vision of YHWH’s glory in Isa 6:1-5 is interpreted as a vision of Christ himself in Jn 12:41. What is more, FG links this vision of the glorified Christ with the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah (Jn 12:38; cf. Isa 53:1). Hence, it is not surprising to find that the verbs to glorify (δόξα) and to lift up (ὑψίστα) associated with (the) Son of Man in FG are also associated with the Suffering Servant in Second Isaiah (LXX Isa 52:13-14). However, FG introduces a significant restriction on visions of God’s glory—“no one has seen God,” but “we have seen his glory.” For the Johannine community, a vision of YHWH’s glory was only be seen by them in the suffering of the Son of Man lifted up (exalted) on the cross (Jn 3:13-14). This brings us to an important point: FG’s proclamation of (the) Son of Man as a manifestation of God’s glory appears to have a sharp polemical edge

890 This motif is recognized by most major commentators; e.g., Meeks (1986) 155-57; Moloney (1998) 95.
891 Culpepper (1983) 159 highlights how ὑψίστα is part of the misunderstandings motif and plays a role in the implicit commentary of FG. Bultmann (1971) 350 writes, “Yet they [the Jews] do not suspect that by ‘lifting him up’ they themselves make him their judge. The double-meaning of ‘lifting up’ is obvious. They lift up Jesus by crucifying him; but it is precisely through his crucifixion that he is lifted up to his heavenly glory as the Son of Man. At the very moment when they think that they are passing judgement on him, he becomes their judge.”
893 The goal of the Merkabah mystic was to enter into an experience (vision or dream) of the Throne of Glory (Hekhalot Rabbati 22.2; Synopse §§ 236, 248) and to see the King, on his Throne (Hekhalot Rabbati 15.1; Synopse § 198); see Kanagaraj (1998) 81.
894 McGrath (2001) 96-98 provides an interesting discussion regarding the tradition that God would appoint a human being to judge humanity (cf. T. Abr. A 13:3; Acts 17:31; Heb 2:17; 4:15-16).
895 E.g., LXX Isa 52:13-14; see the comments by Lincoln (2000) 45 and our comments in § 3.3. The connection between suffering and exaltation is found in the Wisdom of Solomon, where the righteous one is persecuted and then exalted, and where the righteous one is God’s son (ἔστιν ὁ δίκαιος γὰρ θεός) and boasts that God is his father (ἀλογονεύεται πατέρα θεόν) (Wis 2:16-18).
896 Jn 1:18; cf. 5:37; 6:46.
directed against Jewish mystics, who may have claimed visions of divine glory, or against Jewish traditions that exalted patriarchs and prophets, who were said to have mystical visions and revelations.

(2) The descent/ascent of a heavenly mediator. Apocalyptic and Merkabah traditions also refer to supernatural figures descending and ascending from heaven. Similarly, FG links (the) Son of Man with a decent/ascent motif. The promise by the Johannine Jesus that "you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (Jn 1:51; NRSV) resonates with descriptions of descents and ascents of heavenly figures in apocalyptic traditions. For instance, in the Testament of Abraham (Recension A), Isaac recounts one of his dreams and states that "I saw the heaven opened and I saw a luminous man descending from heaven, shining more than seven suns. And this man of the sunlike form came and took the sun from my head and went back up into the heavens from which he had descended" (T. Ab. A 7:3-4; our italics). Admittedly, one could find dissimilarities between FG and the Testament of Abraham, but there are obvious family resemblances. As Talbert has shown, heavenly revelation, heavenly figures, and ascents and descents from heaven are common in Jewish angelological traditions, from the angel-messenger (מַעֲשֵׂה מֶרְקָבָה) in the OT, who is almost fused with Yahweh, to various archangels who appear as redemptive figures in first-century apocalyptic literature. "There existed a mythology with a descent-ascent pattern, in which the redeemer figure descends, takes human form, and then ascends back to heaven after or in connection with a saying activity." FG shares this mythology or symbolic universe with apocalyptic and Merkabah traditions.

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898 See Morray-Jones (1992) 1 who argues that "the talmudic references to ma'aseh merkabah indicate the existence of an esoteric tradition or traditions within first-and second-century rabbinism. These traditions were associated with exegesis of Scriptural accounts of visions of the enthroned deity (Daniel 7, Isaiah 6 and, pre-eminently, Ezekiel 1) but it is probable that visionary-mystical practices were also involved."


900 The translation is from M. E. Stone (1972) 16-17.

901 Talbert (1975/6) 422-26 describes the ascent/descent of archangels in Tobit, Joseph and Aseneth, Testament of Job, the Apocalypse of Moses, the Testament of Abraham, and the Prayer of Joseph.

When the Johannine Jesus contends that “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man” (Jn 3:13; NRSV), it brings to mind claims made on behalf of Moses. Borgen and Meeks explain the Johannine ascent/descent motif in relation to traditions about Moses who, not only climbed Mount Sinai to receive the law, but also ascended into heaven itself. In Philo’s account of the ascent, Moses enters into heaven, sees what is invisible to human eyes, has communion (κοινωνίας) with the Father and Maker of the universe, is named ... God and King (ὁ νομισθη ... θεος καὶ βασιλεύς), and then returns as a model (παράδειγμα) for mortals to imitate (Mos. 1.157-158). Thus, Moses becomes the divine mediator of God par excellence, bringing heavenly secrets to humanity and recovering the lost image of God. A vivid rendition of this tradition is found in Ezekiel the Tragedian written probably in the second century B.C. The drama describes a dream of Moses where, after climbing Mount Sinai, he sees a great throne touching heaven. Sitting on the throne is a man, who gives Moses his scepter and crown, and invites Moses to sit on his throne, whereupon heavenly bodies parade before him in worship (Ezek. Trag. 68-82). An interpretation of the dream immediately follows, which reveals that God has granted Moses two great powers, the authority to judge and to lead mortals on earth (Ezek. Trag 83-89). As Borgen and Meeks point out, when these types of Mosaic traditions are compared with the Johannine claim that “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man,” it appears as though the Johannine group emphatically denied that Moses (or anyone else) had ever made such a journey. When compared to Moses’ ascent, Jesus “represents the reverse phenomenon of descent from heaven and subsequent exaltation.” Given the abundance of references and allusions to Moses in FG, it is likely that FG witnesses to a conflict.

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904 Cf. the discussion in Meeks (1976) 43-67, esp. 46-48, and Meeks (1968) 354-71. Philo calls Moses God and King, which may have been influenced by his reading of Exod 4:16, where Moses is said to be god to Aaron, or Exod 7:1, where Moses is made god over Pharaoh.
906 Meeks (1967) 297-301; Borgen (1977) 243f.
907 Borgen (1977) 245.
908 Meeks (1967) passim.
between two rival groups within the synagogue. One group claimed to be the disciples of Moses; the other, disciples of Jesus, the Son of Man (Jn 9:28-29, 35-37).

Taking both the apocalyptic/Merkabah and Mosaic traditions into consideration, Ashton argues that within the *son of man* motif in FG there is "a fusion of two mythological patterns, one angelic, starting in heaven (stressed by Talbert), the other mystical, starting from earth (stressed by Borgen)."909 In early Judaism, the two patterns—the descent of an angelic figure and the ascent of a human being—could exist, even side-by-side, as the angel Michael and Abraham do in the Testament of Abraham, without threat to Jewish sensibilities. However, the fusion of the two patterns, as we find in FG, had consequences that Judaism could not contain. As Ashton writes:

Taken separately neither pattern presented any threat: the blending of the two meant a new religion. The conviction that the heavenly being was human and the human being heavenly was the conceptual hub round which the huge wheel of Christian theology would revolve for centuries to come.910

(4) A glorious human-like figure. Apocalyptic and Merkabah traditions refer to the appearance of a glorious human-like figure or Son of Man,911 a figure that is invariably traced to Daniel 7.912 For example, VanderKam argues that Daniel 7 undoubtedly influenced the Similitudes and its use of the term *son of man* (Dan 7:13; 1 En. 46:2-4), its depiction of the *head of days* (Dan 7:13b; 1 En. 46:1), and its portrayal of the afflicted (Dan 7:24-25; 1 En. 46:2-8).913 VanderKam also points out several ways in which the Similitudes develop and transform Daniel’s conceptuality, including making explicit what was only implicit in Daniel 7, namely, that “the son of man is definitely the judge in the eschatological courtroom.”914 VanderKam has also shown that the Similitudes bring two prominent designations, *son of man* (from

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912 With respect to the use of the *son of man* in the Similitudes and 4 Ezra 13, J. J. Collins (1992) 448-66 argues for a Danielic origin. With respect to FG, Ashton (1991) 340 states that “the remote origin of all the sayings is the Danielic Son of Man.”
914 VanderKam (1992) 188.
Daniel 7) and chosen one (from Second Isaiah), to refer to the same exalted being, who is closely associated with God, the future judgment of the nations, and the vindication of the suffering saints. The Son of Man is the great eschatological judge, who sits next to God (1 En. 45:3; 46:1-3; 51:3; 61:8: 62:2-6; 70:27; 71:1-17). VanderKam’s analysis highlights the type of mythological environment in which the Johannine group would have understood the term son of man.

Like the Similitudes, there are substantial points of comparison between the Danielic son of man and FG’s use of the term. Although some have denied such a connection, the following observations indicate otherwise. The Danielic son of man and (the) Son of Man Jn 5:27 have at least four striking similarities. First, the anarthrous use of ὄς ἄνθρωπος (son of man) in Jn 5:27 parallels the anarthrous ὃς ὀνόματος ἄνθρωπος (like son of man) in LXX Dan 7:13. Second, the phrase ἐξουσίαν ἐδώκεν αὐτῷ (he gave authority/power to him) in Jn 5:27 parallels ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία (authority/power was given to him) in LXX Dan 7:14a. Third, the authority of ὄς ἄνθρωπος (son of man) to judge in Jn 5:27 is similar to the judgment by the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:22, since the Ancient of Days was identified as ὄς ἄνθρωπος (son of man) in some LXX manuscripts. Fourth, Daniel 7 presents a heavenly duo; a senior one described as the Ancient of Days and a second one described as like a son of man. They are placed in close juxtaposition—both are directly compared to each other with the use of ὃς (Dan 7:13), both are identified as the one coming (Dan 7:13, 22), both are worshipped (Dan 7:13-14). And

915 VanderKam (1992) 169-91 argues that the Similitudes also use the terms a righteous one and an anointed one to refer to that being, but only son of man and chosen one are prominent.
916 Hare (1990) 92 notes that Higgins and Borsch have challenged the idea that FG was influenced by Dan 7:13 on the grounds that FG is nonapocalyptic in nature. However, Ashton (1991) 383-406 argues that while not an apocalypse, FG shares apocalyptic elements in several ways. Even if FG were judged to be nonapocalyptic, it does not rule out that FG could have adopted the use of Son of Man from Jewish or Christian traditions that were in the air (e.g., 1 Enoch 37-71, 4 Ezra 13) or even from Daniel 7 itself.
917 See Stuckenbruck (1995) 268-76. The OG Dan 7:13 has ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὃς ὀνόματος ἄνθρωπος ἡρχότα, καὶ ὃς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν παρῆ (Behold, on the clouds of heaven [one] like a son of man was coming, and he was present like the Ancient of Days). See Rahlfs’ OG LXX, which follows Codex Chisianus 88, Syro-Hexapla, and Papyrus 967. In contrast, θ’ Dan 7:13 has ἰδοὺ μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὃς ὀνόματος ἄνθρωπος ἔρχομεν ἢ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ παλαιοῦ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἔθαυξεν καὶ ἐκώπων αὐτῷ προσηηθῆ (Behold, with the clouds of heaven [one] like a son of man was coming and he came to the Ancient of Days). See Rahlfs’ θ’ LXX for Daniel, which follows Codices A and B.
this is expressed in the context of vigorous monotheism (Dan 3:18; 6:26-27). Like Daniel 7, Jn 5:19-30 also presents a supreme duo; a senior one described as Father and a second one described as Son/Son of Man. They are placed in close juxtaposition—both are compared to one another with the construction ὁσπερ ... καὶ (5:21, 26), both are identified as giving life (5:21, 25, 28-29), both are to be honored equally (5:23). And, like Daniel 7, this is expressed in the context of μόνος θεὸς commitments (5:44; 17:3).

If we grant that there are enough similarities between Daniel 7 and Jn 5:27 to posit a that the Johannine Son of Man has Danielic overtones, we still need to consider what type of figure would have been evoked by Jn 5:27 for first-century Jews. Although there is a great deal of debate about who (or what) is referred to by the use of the Son of Man, Chrys Caragounis and John Collins have independently provided cogent and mutually supportive argumentation in this regard. Part of Caragounis’ study on the Son of Man involves a detailed analysis of Daniel 7. Based on philological considerations, a comparison of the rule of the beasts and that of the son of man, the characteristics of the son of man, and the identity of the son of man, Caragounis concludes that the Danielic son of man “is conceived not as a symbol for the pious Jews, but as a pre-existent, heavenly Being, who appears as the leader of the saints.” The Danielic son of man has “the honors and powers normally predicated of God, and is ... identified with the ‘Elyōnin,” a Figure who is distinguished from the Most High (the Ancient of Days or God) and who functions as the Vindicator and Leader of God’s people and as the Agent of God’s Kingdom. In an independent study, Collins focuses on Daniel 7, the Similitudes, and 4 Ezra in an attempt to discern common assumptions regarding the Son of Man during the first-century C.E. He concludes that “Daniel 7 remains the source of Jewish expectation of an apocalyptic Son of Man,” but, by the first century CE, “there were some common assumptions about the figure in Daniel’s vision that go beyond what is explicit in the biblical text.” By the first-century, the Similitudes and 4 Ezra both agree that the

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921 Caragounis (1986) 188-89 (cf. 61-81).
923 Collins (1992) 449.
Son of Man refers to (1) an individual and not a collective symbol, (2) the messiah, (3) a pre-existent, transcendent figure of heavenly origin, and (4) possibly the Isaianic Servant of the Lord, but without the connotation of a suffering servant. Together, Caragounis and Collins' works suggest that the use of (the) Son of Man in Jn 5:27 could have evoked very similar notions about the Johannine Jesus, a pre-existent heavenly Agent or Messiah who exercises the authority of God.

(5) God's two powers. As we have seen, there was a wide spectrum of divine duties or functions associated with (the) Son of Man in early Jewish literature. Jn 5:19-30 focuses only on two functions, the creative and judging powers of God. This is emphasized by the chaistic structure of Jn 5:19-30, centering on verses 21-27 and the two great powers that the Father has given to the Son—giving life and judging.

Life/Judgment: The Father gives life, so also the Son (21-22)
The Son is given all judgment so that all may honor him (23)

Hearing/Life: The one hearing and believing has life (24)
Hearing/Life: The dead will hear and have life (25)
The Father has life in himself, so also the Son (26)

Life/Judgment: The Son has authority to judge, because he is Son of Man (27)

Jewish tradition often refers to God as both merciful and just, attributes representing God’s creative power and his judging or ruling power respectively. In this regard, both Philo and the Rabbis held that there were two great powers or measures (middoth) of God.

According to Philo, people cannot see God, but they can know God through what he does in the world, through His creative power (δυνάμεις ποιητική) and in His ruling power (δυνάμεις βασιλική). All aspects of God's power are represented by the two powers, which were sometimes referred to as the two hands of God. On the one hand, δυνάμεις ποιητική includes goodness, kindness, beneficence, and creative power; on the other hand, God's δυνάμεις βασιλική includes sovereignty.
authority, governing power, punitive power, and ruling power. Moreover, Philo presents the two powers as flowing out of the figure of the Logos. In Fug. 100-101, Philo describes the two powers of God, first in terms of the ark and the two cherubim and then in terms of a chariot and its charioteer.

Here, the two powers (the cherubim) are controlled by the Logos (the charioteer), who is inseparable and yet distinct from God who, in turn, sits in the chariot and gives instructions to the charioteer (the Logos). When Philo speaks about the two powers, perhaps on the basis of wider tradition, he gives them exalted titles—the creative and merciful power is identified as Θεός (Theos) and the ruling or judging power is called Κύριος (Kurios). Take, for example, Philo’s statement in Mos. 2.99:

I should myself say that they [the cherubim] are allegorical representations of the two most august and highest potencies of Him that is, the creative and the kingly. His creative potency is called God, because through it He placed and made and ordered this universe, and the kingly is called Lord, being that with which He governs what has come into being and rules it steadfastly with justice. (Mos. 2.99; Loeb; our underlines)

Similarly, the Rabbis taught that Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) was used in scripture whenever God’s justice was emphasized and the tetragrammaton, YHWH (יהוה), whenever

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929 Deus 73; Somn. 2.265; Plant. 50.
930 See the evidence provided by Neyrey (1988) 25.
931 Our translation conflates Colson’s and Yonge’s.
932 E.g., Mos. 2.99; Plant. 86; Mig. 182; Somn. 1.159.
God's mercy was understood. As Dahl and Segal point out, Philo and the rabbis reverse the names and the powers, but the underlying conceptuality is similar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philo</th>
<th>Lord (κύριος = YHWH in LXX)</th>
<th>Theos (θεός = Elohim in LXX)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruling and judging power</td>
<td>Merciful and creative power</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rabbits</th>
<th>YHWH (יהוה)</th>
<th>Elohim (אלוהים)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite reversals, both the Rabbis and Philo agree that the two measures of mercy and judgment are not in contrast, but complementary, and that fear and love are the two complimentary ways in which people should relate to God. The importance of properly conceptualizing the two measures of God is emphasized by a well-known tradition found in b. Hag. 14a. In this tradition, R. Akiba drew the inference from Dan 7:19 that there were two powers [God and the Messiah] in heaven!

One passage says: His throne was fiery flames; (16) and another Passage says: Till thrones were placed, and One that was ancient of days did sit! (17) — There is no contradiction: one [throne] for Him, and one for David; this is the view of R. Akiba. Said R. Jose the Galilean to him: Akiba, how long wilt thou treat the Divine Presence as profane! (18) Rather, [it must mean], one for justice and one for grace. (19) Did he accept [this explanation] from him, or did he not accept it? — Come and hear: One for justice and one for grace; this is the view of R. Akiba.

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933 Dahl and Segal (1978) 1; Urbach (1979) 448-61, esp. 451, where he cites Sipre Deut. 27; Mek. R. Ishmael, Shir 4; Mek. R. Simeon b. Yahai; Sipre Deut. 27; Sipra. 'Atare, ix, 85c: “I am the Lord your God”—I am the Lord who spoke and the world came into being; I am Judge; I am full of compassion.”

934 Urbach (1979) 452-93 argues that Philo reversed the Palestinian tradition because he was influenced by the LXX, which substituted Lord (κύριος) for YHWH (יהוה), and then Philo treated the word κύριος in its accepted sense. Even so, Segal (1999) 83 notes that Philo’s designations are followed by Mek. R. Ishmael, Shir 4, which means that Philo is not alone in his designations.

935 Dahl and Segal (1978) 1.

936 Dahl and Segal (1978) 9, 11.

97 The Hebrew and English of b. Hag. 14a, 15b-19a are from the Soncino CD-ROM Classics Collection.
In this account, R. Akiba and R. Jose are discussing the apparent contradiction in Dan 7:9. On the one hand, thrones (plural) are set; on the other, only the Ancient of Days sat on a throne (singular). R. Akiba inferred that the other throne was for one like a son of man in Dan 7:13, which he identified as the Davidic Messiah. R. Jose was shocked and accused R. Akiba of profaning the Divine Presence or Shekhina (שכינה). After R. Jose’s admonition, “R. Akiba agreed that the two thrones in heaven should symbolize the two aspects of God’s providence—His mercy and His justice. God is viewed as sitting on one throne when judging mercifully and on the other when judging by strict justice.” Even though, as Segal contends, “no one would suggest these are Akiba’s actual words,” the tradition may date just beyond the first-century—since both Rabbis, Jose and Akiba, are late-second or third generation tannaim (120-140 C.E.) and may reflect common concerns, thoughts, and assumptions of the late first- and early second-century Judaism.

(6) Summary. We have argued that Jn 5:19-30 provides a qualification for the Johannine claim that Jesus was equal with God (Ἰησοῦς θεός) in Jn 5:18. It is likely that the writer and earliest readers of Jn 5:19-30 would have understood that qualification in light of other early Jewish, particularly apocalyptic, traditions about (the) Son of Man. Against this backdrop, the claim that Jesus is equal with God is not a claim that Jesus is God. Rather, it asserts that Jesus functions as the Viceroy of God, a pre-existent heavenly being who sits next to God, has the authority of God, and is entitled to equal honor with God. Furthermore, Jesus’ crucifixion on earth is the only means by which to see an epiphany of heavenly glory. Only Jesus is the Revealer, the only Man who has descended from God, able to mediate between heaven and earth. For these reasons, it is likely that the Johannine claim that Jesus was equal with God as (the) Son of Man was interpreted by non-believing Jews as an aggressive remark against those who claimed that Moses (or perhaps another mystic-

938 Segal (1977) 48.
939 Stemberger (1996) 57 states, “The study of extensive text units (e.g., by J. Neusner) has shown that at least in Tannaitic collections these attributions are largely reliable.” Danby (1933) 799 dates Akiba and Jose the Galilean to 120-140 and Stemberger (1996) 71-72 dates Akiba with the “younger second generation of Tannaites” (ca. 90-130 C.E.).
visionary) had seen the glory of God or was able to mediate between heaven and earth.

Moreover, late first-century Jews, who were familiar with traditions similar to those of Philo and the Rabbis, would have understood Jn 5:19-30 as a claim that Jesus exercises the two great powers of God—the power to give life (5:21-22) and the power of eschatological judgment (5:23, 27).\footnote{Dodd (1953) 322.} Declaring that the Son exercised the two great powers of God clarifies in what sense the Johannine community claimed that Jesus was equal with God. What is more, the narrative context of chapter 5, where Jesus heals a paralytic (Jn 5:1-15), reinforces the notion that Jesus exercises the creative or merciful power of God (which Philo designated as θεός). The notion that Jesus works on the Sabbath like the Father coheres with the idea that Jesus exercises the ruling power of God (which Philo designated as κύριος). Admittedly, this is conjecture, and we are not suggesting that FG uses θεός and κύριος in accord with Philo's speculations,\footnote{Neyrey (1988) 28; a cursory look at the 52 uses of κύριος in FG does not suggest a close connection between Jesus exercising the power of judgment and predicating the title Lord to him.} but it is possible that the combined use of θεός and κύριος may have been a way for some Jews (beyond Philo and John) to refer to the totality of Divine powers in so far as humans may experience them, akin to the Rabbinic use of YHWH and Elohim.\footnote{This recalls Paul's statement that "for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:6; NRSV). Paul's statement along with other NT texts has raised ongoing debate about the nature of early Jewish and Christian conceptions of monotheism. See N. T. Wright (1991) 120-6, Dunn (1991) 195-97 and Dunn (1998a) 337-39; Hurtado (1988) 97-99 and (1999) 63-97 who characterizes Christian monotheism as binitarianism; Bauckham (1998) 25-42 who speaks of Christological monotheism.} It is all the more noteworthy, therefore, that in a key post-resurrection scene Thomas honors Jesus as both Lord (κύριος) and God (θεός) (20:28).

13.4.3 Socio-cultural context: God's principal agent and broker

So far, we have looked at how the intra-textual and intertextual contexts may have influenced a first-century reading of Jn 5:19-30. In this section, we continue to ask how Jn 5:19-30 qualifies Jn 5:18, but now we shift to the potential socio-cultural context. In the socio-cultural context of the ancient world, a predominant social value
was honor. Honor was in fact a concern for the Johannine group, because the text itself raises the issue directly: “Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the father who sent him” (5:23b; NRSV). We will look at how, from the perspective of FG and Jewish textual traditions, Jesus is presented as “the sent one,” the Agent of the Father, and how, from the perspective of patronage and kinship models, Jesus is portrayed as the Broker of the Great Benefactor.

(1) Jesus as God’s Agent. Several recent studies have highlighted the role of the Johannine Jesus as God’s envoy or agent. First, the notion that Jesus is presented as God envoy is linked to the sending motif in FG. As Loader has noted, on the lips of Jesus, “he who sent me,” almost becomes a formal designation for the Father. Jesus refers to the Father as “the one who sent me” (anosotéllw) twenty-three times and another seventeen times anoTaÀAAw is used to refer to the Father sending the Son. The sending motif is not limited to uses of πέμπω and anoTaÀAAw, but also includes references to Jesus coming and going, ascending and descending, and being from God. Second, the idea that FG portrays Jesus as God’s envoy is supported by at least six principles of agency in Jewish tradition.

946 Both πέμπω (e.g., 13:20; 15:21, 26; 16:7; 20:21) and anoTaÀAAw (e.g., 5:38; 7:29; 8:42; 11:42; 17:8, 18, 23, 25) are used to express the idea of the Father sending the Son. Loader (1992) 30 believes that, contrary to Regstoff’s claim that anoTaÀAAw stresses authority and πέμπω stresses God’s involvement, the two terms have the same meaning.
949 E.g., Jn 3:2; 6:46; 7:17; 8:40, 42; 9:16, 33; 13:3; 16:30
950 Borgen (1986) 67-78 has identified six basic principles echoed in FG. The first principle of Jewish agency is that “an agent is like the one who sent him” (Mek Exod 12:3, 6; b. Bera 5:5; b. Hag. 10b), which parallels sayings like, “He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me” (Jn 12:44; cf. 13:20; 14:9; 15:23). The second principle echoed in FG is that the agent is subordinate to the sender (Gen. Rab. 78; cf. Jn 13:16). The third principle is that the agent carries out the mission of the sender (b. Qid 2:4; cf. Jn 6:38). The fourth principle is that the mission of the agent is set within the context of a lawsuit. Thus, we find the statement, “Go forth and take legal action so that you may acquire title to it and secure the claim for yourself” (B. Qam. 70a), which sounds similar to the transfer-language of “Yours they were and you have given them to me” (Jn 17:6). Borgen (1986) 70 writes that “According to the halakah the sender transferred his own rights and the property concerned to his agent.” In the words of FG, the Father has transferred his rights to Christ, who in turn functions as the Father’s agent in the lawsuit with the world. The fifth principle concerns the agent’s return and reporting to the sender (b. Hag. 76f; cf. Jn 13:3; 17:4). The sixth is that “an agent can appoint an agent” (b. Qid. 41a), which has striking resemblance to Jesus’ statement that “As the Father
The most basic principle is that "an agent is like the one who sent him." For example, the Talmud states that "the agent of the ruler is like the ruler himself" (b. B. Qam. 13b). This is similar to the description of the Son imitating the Father in Jn 5:17 and 5:19-30. *Sipre* on Num 12:9 states that to speak about the king's agent is to speak about the king himself, which is very similar to several sayings in FG.

*Sipre*: “you have not spoken concerning my servant but concerning me”

Jn 12:44: “he who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me”

Jn 5:23: “whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him”

Jn 13:20: “he who receives me receives him who sent me”

Jn 14:9: “he who sees me sees him who sent me”

Borgen notes that the basic halakhic principle means that the agent was like the sender in legal matters but, in certain strands of mysticism, "the agent is a person identical with the sender." Although the legal traditions that Borgen cites date to the third and fourth century C.E., they probably witness to earlier Jewish legal traditions. Third, the idea that FG is presenting Jesus as God's agent is reinforced by the repeated use of father-son language. In the ancient world, the son was a father's agent *par excellence*. In Roman society, a father had legal authority over a son and could even treat him like a slave. The son could hold no property and was entirely subordinate to his father. As Epictetus wrote, a son's profession is "to treat everything that is his own as belonging to his father, to be obedient to him in all things." In Jewish society, it was similar. Honoring father and mother was the highest duty next to honoring God. Thus, in first-century societies, a son was dependent on his father for most things in life, from education to vocation. Often the son was the father's apprentice and, in time, inherited the father's business and possessions. This not only meant that a son knew his father well, but would act in the father's best interests, because a son would eventually inherit his father's estate.

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951 Borgen (1986) 68 cites Mek. Ex. 12:3; 12:6; b. Ber. 5:5; b. B. Mevi 96a; b. Hag. 10b; and other texts.

952 *Sipre* on Num is a mid-third century text, according to Stemberger (1996) 267.

953 The examples come from Borgen (1986) 68.

954 Borgen (1986) 68 cites b. Qod 43a.

955 Since it is hardly likely that FG influenced the Rabbinic traditions (!), it is likely that the traditions cited by Borgen reflect earlier Jewish traditions of which FG may be one of the earliest witnesses.

956 *Discourses* 2.7; see comments by Margaret Davies (1992) 130.

Thus, in the father’s absence, the son was the father’s most useful and trusted agent in conducting business.\(^{958}\) FG assumed social conventions of this nature when it used the father-son metaphor to depict Jesus’ relationship with God. Jn 5:17 and 5:19-30 depicts Jesus as imitating the Father in every aspect of the Father’s work; he is the Apprentice-Son and thus the Father’s most trusted Agent.

(2) **Jesus as God’s Broker.** Because FG was written in a *high context society* of the ancient Mediterranean world,\(^{959}\) it is important to consider elements of that social system that would have been taken for granted by the original hearers or readers of FG. Each text would have evoked elements of the social system—such as honor and shame schemes; patron, broker, and clients models; male and female roles; and assumptions about purity and pollution—that first-century readers would have known and appropriated to *decode* the passage.\(^{960}\) In the case of Jn 5:17-30, two different socio-cultural scenarios from the ancient Mediterranean world come to bear on its interpretation: patronage and kinship systems. First, from the perspective of a patronage system, Malina and Rohrbaugh argue that Jn 5:19-30 is “a classic statement of Jesus’ brokerage.”\(^{961}\) In this scenario, a broker (Jesus) acts on behalf of the benefactor-patron (God) in offering the patron’s resources to freeborn retainers or clients (Israel). The broker would *not* be viewed as the social equal of the patron, because the broker is only the patron’s surrogate. As such, the honor claimed by the broker and acknowledged by the public is derived solely from the honor already accorded to the patron. From the perspective of patronage, Jesus was in no wise claiming to be God’s equal, much less to be God Himself; rather, as God’s surrogate, Jesus was claiming that people ought to give him the honor they would normally give the Great Benefactor (cf. Jn 5:23). Second, from the perspective of kinship relationships, which we have touched on in the previous paragraph dealing with

\(^{958}\) Margaret Davies (1992) 131.

\(^{959}\) According to Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 16, a *high context society*, like the ancient Mediterranean world, “presumes a broadly shared, well-understood, or ‘high,’ knowledge of the context of anything referred to in conversation or in writing.” Documents written in *high context* societies tend to be sketchy, because they assumed that readers and hearers were able to fill in the gaps with their knowledge of the prevalent customs, idioms, values, and symbols of the society. In contrast, *low context societies*, like the modern western world, assume a low knowledge of the social system, produce documents that are specific and detailed, and leave little room for readers to fill in the gaps (17).

agency, Jesus’ use of the father-son metaphor would have evoked a whole host of socio-cultural associations and unstated assumptions. Take, for example, kinship relationships. "Kin group members are embedded in each other and share a common honor status. To refuse honor to one is to refuse honor to all." Although a father would always have greater honor than a son, the kinship structure would ensure that the son had roughly the same honor as the father. So, between the father and son relationship, the son was subordinate, but from the perspective of people outside that kinship relationship, the son was accorded the same honor as the father.

(3) Summary. On the basis of Jewish principles of agency as well as models of patronage and kinship, it is probable that first-century readers or hearers of Jn 5:19-30 would have understood the Johannine Jesus to be announcing that he was God’s principal mediator who had an elite status and power second only to God Himself.

13.5 How is Jesus’ equality with God related to ‘breaking’ the Sabbath?

Here, we would like to consider Neyrey’s contention that Jn 5:1-47 reflects two distinct redactions, each with a different charge, one in 5:16 and one in 5:18, and each with a different defense, one in 5:30-47 and one in 5:19-29. Neyrey discerns an earlier redactive layer (reflecting a low christology and an earlier stage ofFG development) and a later redactive layer superimposed over the first (reflecting a high christology and later Christian experience).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Layer: 5:10-16, 30-47</th>
<th>Second Layer: 5:17-18, 19-29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charge</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabbath violation</td>
<td>Blasphemy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defense</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnesses testify about Jesus’ sinlessness and his authority</td>
<td>Jesus explains that he is equal to God since he has God’s powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Judge</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews judge Jesus</td>
<td>Jesus judges all people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

963 Neyrey (1988) 9-36, esp. 10-18. Similar redactional analysis can be found in Lindars (1972) 52, 216-18, who argues for a Galilean source and a later Jerusalemite source; see also Dodd (1953) 320 and Dodd (1963) 118.
964 The chart is adapted from Neyrey (1988) 18.
Neyrey’s analysis suggests that the charge of violating the Sabbath is unrelated to the charge of Jesus claiming equality with God.\(^{965}\) However, there are at least three reasons for seeing a close connection between the two charges.

First, as we have shown, the charge that Jesus \textit{broke or released} (\textit{l.u£1v}) the Sabbath (5:16, 18b) and the charge of \textit{claiming equality with God} (5:18c-d) are held together in a tightly composed parallel pattern, consisting of two reaction-explanation-response units (cf. § 13.2 and § 13.4.1). The fabric of Jn 5:1-30 is woven together with common language and themes.\(^{966}\) Verses 16-18 are also narratologically connected. They exhibit an escalation of conflict from prosecuting Jesus (\textit{έδιωκον ... τὸν Ἰησοῦν}) in 5:16 to Jesus’ defense regarding his imitation of the Father in 5:17 to the finally charge that Jesus is making himself equal to God in 5:18d.

Second, the connection between \textit{working on the Sabbath} (5:16) and \textit{equality with God} (5:18) is further strengthened by what appears to be the underlying assumption of 5:16-18. It presupposes early Jewish discussions reflected in the writings of Aristobulus,\(^{967}\) Philo, and the Rabbis on whether God is active on the Sabbath.\(^{968}\)

Although there are several explanations, there was general agreement that God continued to exercise his providential activity on the Sabbath.\(^{969}\) The fact that humans were born and died on the Sabbath was proof that “God was active on the Sabbath in these two ways: \textit{in giving life and in judging over life at death} (cf. \textit{b. Ta’anit} 2a).”\(^{970}\)

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\(^{965}\) Neyrey (1988) 16 states that “violating the Sabbath is \textit{not} the same thing as claiming to be equal to God” (his italics).

\(^{966}\) The verb, ποιεῖν (\textit{to make or to do}) is used 12 times (Jn 5:11, 15, 16, 18, 19 [4xs], 20, 27, 29, 30), primarily in reference to healing or giving life. The verb, ἐγείρειν (\textit{to raise [the dead] or to bring into being}), is used twice in crucial places (Jn 5:8, 21).

\(^{967}\) Borgen (1996) 111 dates Aristobulus to the second century BCE.


\(^{969}\) Yee (1989) 37-39 discusses three different Rabbinic explanations based on \textit{b. Ta’anit} 2a; \textit{Mek. Shabbata} 2.25; and \textit{Gen. Rab.} 11.5, 10, 12.

\(^{970}\) Yee (1989) 38; our emphasis.
Here, the Sabbath and the two great powers of God are linked, the same powers that Jesus claims to exercise in Jn 5:21-22, 27-28 (see § 13.4.2). In this way, Jesus claims that he, like God, continues to work on the Sabbath in matters of giving life and judging and it is in this way that he claims equality with God.

Third, as we have shown, leaders who attempted to suspend Sabbath customs were viewed as comparing themselves with God. Think of the nameless Egyptian ruler (Philo's Somn. 2.123-32; see § 11.4). Here was a powerful and presumptuous ruler who attempted to dissuade Jews from keeping the Sabbath and, through this, to undermine other Jewish customs. According to Philo, the Egyptian ruler tried to make the Sabbath a workday which, because it usurped divine prerogatives, was nothing short of making himself comparable to God—he dared to liken himself to the All-blessed (Somn. 2.130). Philo takes it for granted that any attempt to change the customs of the Sabbath was to play God. Like the Egyptian ruler, Jesus' practice of working on the Sabbath, which tacitly authorized the Johannine community to do the same, was tantamount to claiming equality with God. Thus Jn 5:16-30 not only affirms Jesus' divine status, it also marks the end of the Sabbath observance for Johannine Jewish believers.

13.6 The Johannine blasphemy against God

Jn 5:16-30 does not mention blasphemy directly, but we are now in a position to identify how Jn 5:16-30 pertains to blasphemy and to articulate what theological and social implications the text had for the Johannine community—those who produced, preserved, and propagated FG during the late first-century.

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971 In addition, Borgen (1987) 91, 97 argues that Philo was even critical of Jews who spiritualized the Sabbath and thought that they could acknowledge the universal principles and activity of the Creator without keeping particular laws and observances, such as the Sabbath (see. Migr. 89-93).

972 The verb in the phrase, τελείων ἐν θεῷ (Jn 5:16), can be translated as an iterative imperfect, *he used to do these things on the Sabbath*, suggesting repeated past action.

973 Several scholars have noted this. Borgen (1996) 111-113 argues that Jn 5:1-18 leads to the conclusion that the Sabbath observance is to be abrogated based on his comparative analysis of Philo's Leg. 1:5-6, 18 and Migr. 89-93. Weiss (1991) 311-21 has come to a similar conclusion, arguing that the Johannine community "eschatologized the sabbath" and, as a result, "What the Johannine community explicitly came to say about the temple ('neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father ... The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth' [4:21, 23]), it could have said also about the sabbath ('neither on this day nor on the sabbath will you worship the Father; the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (320). Similarly, see Yee (1989) 39-42 and Borgen (1987) 88-97.
First, we argued that the affirmation that Jesus is equal with God was a claim propagated by the Johannine community. Because of the uniqueness of the claim, the vehemence of the Jewish reaction in 5:18, and the disproportionately large clarification that follows in Jn 5:19-30 (with the supporting witnesses in Jn 5:31-47) it is likely that the claim reflects a theological and social flashpoint for the Johannine community. Given the Jewish traditions that we surveyed, particularly Philo’s perspective that giving earthly leaders honor equal to the gods (ἰσοθέων τιμῶν) paves the way to blaspheming Heaven itself, it would not be surprising to find that the Johannine confession that a man was equal with God would have brought the charge of blasphemy against the Johannine members themselves.

Second, the Johannine affirmation that Jesus is equal with God would have recalled imagery of some of the most notorious blasphemers in Jewish history. Take Antiochus Epiphanes, who is characterized for Jewish posterity as a great blasphemer, who profaned the Temple of God (cf. § 9.3) and murdered Jews (cf. § 9.3). According to self-acclaim, Antiochus was “Epiphanes,” the manifest [god] (cf. § 9.1). According to the Abridger of 2 Mace, Antiochus was a classic theomachos, one who contends with God, who thought he was equal with the gods (δυνατός ἱσόθεος φονείν; 2 Mace 9:12), and yet died a deservedly shameful death after much humiliation and suffering (cf. § 9.5). In a number of other instances, we saw how blasphemy against God was invariably associated with arrogance or self-exaltation, the most odious form of which was direct comparison with God or self-exaltation above God. Such exaltation or comparison either denies God’s uniqueness or diminishes His honor. The Johannine community could have been perceived as exalting Jesus in the same way, thereby blaspheming God. From the perspective of the Johannine community, what differentiated Jesus from Antiochus and other infamous blasphemers, was that Jesus did not exalt himself—he made nothing of himself (Jn 5:19, 30)—but was lifted up or exalted by divine initiative (Jn 3:13-14). Within early Judaism, there was an assumption that God could exalt a man or an

974 Cf. Mos. 2.203-208 and Decal. 61-65 and our comments in § 11.2 and § 11.3.
angel to be as God, but if one made himself God, then divine punishment followed.975 Jewish tradition accepts that certain men, like Moses (Exod 7:1; Mos. 1.155-159; Heb. Sir 45:2),976 and certain heavenly figures, like Melchizedek (11QMelch 2.10, 24-25) and Yahoel (Apoc. Ab. 10:3-4), can be spoken of as God without misgiving, but only because God exalted them. And that was the Johannine claim regarding Jesus—God exalted him—a repudiation to the charge that they share in the self-exaltative blasphemy of their master.

Third, if asserting that Jesus was equal with God did not provoke stone-throwing at Johannine members, then the Johannine clarification in Jn 5:19-30, or a similar explanation, certainly would have. Based on our analysis of the intratextual context, we concluded that Jesus was characterized as having endowed equality with God. By that we meant the Son was portrayed as exercising identical authority and power with the Father, but such authority and power was entirely granted or endowed to the Son by the Father. It dispels any notion that Jesus was a rival god. Still, the Johannine clarification—Jesus had endowed equality with God—would have been construed as blasphemous by non-believing Jews in that the Johannine Jews claimed for Jesus what belonged to God alone, His honor and His authority. It was tantamount to stealing from God, the metaphysical parallel to Antiochus plundering the Temple. In this way, non-believing Jews could easily have accused the Johannine group of gravely dishonoring God or blasphemy. Indeed, the Johannine clarification could be viewed as diminishing God’s uniqueness—as if the Johannine group were saying “Jesus deserves divine honor and glory, not just God”—thus violating Jewish monotheistic sensitivities.

Fourth, if the Johannine group had encountered non-believing Jews who had been influenced by apocalyptic Son of Man traditions, then another set of assumptions regarding blasphemy come into play. The Johannine clarification in Jn 5:19-30 qualifies the phrase, equal with God, with the statement that Jesus is (the) Son of Man (5:27). FG presents Jesus as the glorified Son of Man and the only manifestation of

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975 Paraphrasing Beasley-Murray (1987) 75, who refers to God making Moses as God (Exod 7:1), but making Pharaoh nothing because he presumed to be God (cf. Tanh. B 12).
YHWH’s glory for human experience. For non-believing Jews, the blasphemy is two-pronged. On the one hand, it would have been perceived as an affront to God. As such, it was theological theft, robbing God of His glory and giving it to a man but, even more, because it was giving God’s honor to someone who had died as a criminal under humiliating circumstances, it shows additional contempt for God. On the other hand, it is possible that it would have been perceived as an affront to God’s chosen leaders. It denied that any leader of Israel, such as Yohanan ben Zakkai, had ever had mystical revelations of divine glory. And it denied that Moses had ever ascended Mount Sinai and basked in YHWH’s glory (cf. Mos. 1.157-58; Ezek. Trag. 68-89). Such polemic points to two rival groups within the synagogue, disciples of Moses (or Yohanan) and disciples of Jesus (cf. Jn 9:28-29, 35-37).

Fifth, given the common assumptions regarding the Son of Man that circulated during the first century, it is conceivable that when the Johannine community spoke of Jesus as (the) Son of Man it would have been understood that they were saying Jesus was a pre-existent glorious being, who was both God’s second in heaven and the leader (messiah) of God’s people on earth. If the Johannine claim was so interpreted, it is possible that it would have been an affront to the non-believing Jewish leadership and therefore perceived as blasphemous. Furthermore, the Johannine rendition of (the) Son of Man tradition has the Son exercising the two great powers of God, mercy and justice. By linking the Son of Man with the two great powers, the Johannine clarification in Jn 5:19-30 forms a bridge between the Danielic Son of Man tradition (Dan 7), which expresses divine sovereignty in anthropomorphic language, and later Rabbinic tradition (b. Hagg. 14a), which resists compromising God’s transcendence by expressing divine sovereignty in the language of abstract powers, justice and mercy. The Johannine clarification that Jesus functioned as God’s Viceroy, second in rank to God, would have met with mixed reaction. For some Jews, belief that God had a Viceroy and that heaven was

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977 Later Jewish tradition asserts that Yohanan, who was the founder of the Rabbinic movement in Yavneh, was a master of Mishnah, Talmud, and mysticism (‘Abot R. Nat. A 14, B 28; b. Sukkah 28a; y. Ned. 5, 39b).
978 My appreciation to Loren Stuckenbruck for pointing out how Jn 5:19-30 appears to bridge earlier Danielic and later Rabbinic traditions.
populated with a hierarchy of divine beings would not have been disturbing, though identifying Jesus as that Viceroy might not have been acceptable. For other Jews, belief that God had a Viceroy, that Jesus functioned as a second power in heaven, might have been viewed as blasphemy on the grounds that it dishonored God. However, the concept of two powers in heaven was itself not blasphemous; it only becomes blasphemous when it is perceived to discredit, disparage, or dishonor God. As we have seen, there is evidence of Rabbinic opposition to two-powers beliefs in the early second century, and it is not unthinkable that some non-believing Jews, even in the first-century, would have found the Johannine claim—"Jesus is God’s Viceroy"—to be offensive and would have picked up stones to throw or, perhaps, like R. Jose, cried out, "You profane the Shekhina!" (b. Hag. 17). The blasphemy, however, would have pertained to dishonoring or disparaging God, not to how many powers populated heaven.

Sixth, even if the Johannine community encountered non-believing Jews who were not aware of apocalyptic Son of Man traditions, it is likely that the Johannine clarification in Jn 5:19-30 still would have provoked the charge of blasphemy against the Johannine group. From what can be assumed about patronage systems of the ancient world, the Johannine clarification in 5:19-30 presents Jesus as the power broker for God. As such, Jesus (the broker) was not the social equal of God (the patron) but, nevertheless, for the patronage system to work, clients must treat the broker like the patron. As Borgen noted in regard to Jewish halakah, the agent (broker) is like the Sender (patron). From this perspective, the Johannine clarification would be asserting that Jesus must be treated like God because he is God’s honored broker—"Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (Jn 5:23b; NRSV). Furthermore, from the perspective of kinship relationships,

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979 There is plenty of evidence that Jews believed in divine beings; see § 13.4.2 (no. 4), footnotes 536-538, and Hurtado (1988) 71-92 for his treatment of principal angels in early Judaism.

980 Philo speaks of "the two ... powers, the creative and the kingly" (δύο ... δυνάμεις, τήν τε ποιητικήν και βασιλικήν) (Mos. 2.99).

981 Segal (1979) 159-219 provides good evidence that Philo, certain NT writings, and apocalyptic and mystical traditions exhibited two-power beliefs. However, Segal (wrongly) categorizes such beliefs from the first-century as heresy (118). It is heresy only from the retrojected perspective of Rabbinic Judaism. Segal is unable to cite evidence that opposition to two-powers beliefs emerged during the first-century and at one point states, "the rabbinic polemic against ‘two powers’ ... can not be dated earlier than the time of Ishmael and Akiba" (260), which is ca. 130-140 C.E.
which assumes that family members share a common status, the Johannine use of the father-son metaphor tacitly demands that people give the same honor to Jesus as they give to God. So, from the perspective of patronage and kinship systems of the ancient world, it is likely that the Johannine clarification—Jesus is both the Son and broker for the Father—would have been heard as audacious blasphemy by non-believing Jews.\(^{982}\) As Philo essentially argues in Decal. 61-65, to give earthly leaders equal honor to God (ισοθέων τιμῶν) is to blaspheme (see § 11.3).

Seventh, and last, we argued that the issue of breaking or releasing (λυεῖν; 5:18b) the Sabbath was intimately connected to the Johannine claim that Jesus was equal with God, that he exercised the two great powers of God. Keeping the Sabbath\(^{983}\) was a visible reminder of God’s creative power and an enduring symbol of His covenant relationship with Israel.\(^{984}\) Releasing (or breaking) the Sabbath would have invited harsh criticism from fellow Jews (cf. Migr. 89-93) and attempts to establish a practice of working on the Sabbath was tantamount to playing God (Somn. 2.123-32). The Johannine claim that Jesus was equal with God, that he played God by exercising the great powers of creating and judging, even on the Sabbath, may have functioned as authorization for the Johannine members to release the Sabbath themselves and establish new Sabbath customs. If so, then they could have been viewed sinning with a high-hand, like the Sabbath breaker who flouted God (Num 15:30-36),\(^{985}\) and blaspheming God by their overt public contempt for the Sabbath.

The apparent “treachery” that the Johannine Jews may have embarked on is reinforced by the story of Nicanor forcing Jews to work on the Sabbath (cf. § 10.3; 2 Macc 15:4-5). When he was told not to disrespect of the Sovereign in Heaven who ordained the Sabbath, Nicanor claimed that he was a Sovereign on earth! and could do as he pleased. Like Nicanor, Jesus (and the Johannine Jews) is warned not to

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\(^{982}\) Jn 5:17-18 in light of 19:7 reinforces this conclusion.
\(^{983}\) Keeping the Sabbath is largely understood in terms of prohibitions. The Hebrew Bible prohibits working (Exod 31:15), cooking (Exod 16:23), farming (Exod 34:21), lighting fires (Exod 35:3), gathering sticks (Num 15:32), conducting business (Amos 8:5; Neh 10:31; 13:15-18), and carrying burdens (Jer 17:21-22). Later, the Rabbis deduced thirty-nine classes of work that were prohibited on the Sabbath (m. Sabb. 7:2).
\(^{984}\) Exod 31:15-17; Yee (1989) 34.
\(^{985}\) See § 7.1 and § 7.3.
disrespect the Sabbath, but in response Jesus (and the Johannine Jews) claim that he as equal authority as the Father! and could work on the Sabbath as he/they pleased.

13.7 Conclusions

We have argued that there are good reasons for supposing that the Johannine Jewish Christians were perceived as blasphemers. We argued that the author of FG wanted readers to understand that the claim made in Jn 5:18—that Jesus was equal with God—was a Johannine claim. The claim was affirmed and qualified in Jn 5:19-30. As FG affirms, Jesus was equal to God because God endowed him, (the) Son of Man, with the power to give life and to judge. For a Jewish audience in the late first-century, such a description could have brought to mind a number of traditions or assumptions regarding an apocalyptic Son of Man, visions of YHWH's glory, God's two great powers, as well as patronage and kinship relationships in the ancient world.

For each of these traditions or assumptions that might have influenced a first-century interpretation of Jn 5:18-30, we have concluded that it was reasonable to assume that the Johannine claim and the Johannine clarification regarding Jesus' equality with God would have been regarded as blasphemous by non-believing Jews. We have argued that non-believing Jews would have been repulsed by the Johannine exaltation of Jesus, not only because it appeared to disparage and dishonor God, but also because it seemed to violate the unique status of the God of Israel.

To the extent to which the Johannine community declared that Jesus was equal with God, whatever precise language they may have used, they committed blasphemy in the perception of non-believing Jews. At one time, non-believing zealous Jews felt it their duty to force Christians to blaspheme (Acts 26:11), but with the publication of FG, Jewish Christians had become openly “blasphemous” in their exaltation of their master, who had been accused of the same crime years before.
We have argued that blasphemy in early Judaism may be characterized as an attack against God, God's Temple, or God's chosen leaders. In the previous chapter, we focused primarily on whether FG and the Johannine community would have been perceived as attacking God by their exaltation of Jesus. In this chapter, we ask whether FG and the Johannine group would have been perceived as attacking the Temple in some way. We focus on how FG treats the Jerusalem Temple that was razed in 70 CE and the Temple of Jesus' body that was raised from the dead.

First, we review how, in the aftermath of the catastrophe in 70 CE, the memory of the Temple continued to provide a basis of self-identity, authority, and hope for many Jews during the late first-century. Second, we show that FG places an extraordinary emphasis on the Temple and its symbolism and applies them to Jesus. Lastly, we argue that the Johannine community, because of their claim that Jesus was the New Temple, ran the risk of being charged with blasphemy by non-believing Jews.

14.1 The Jerusalem Temple in Memoriam

The destruction of the Temple by Titus in 70 CE was the last in a series of major threats, desecrations, and destructions by Sennacherib in 701 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar in 586/7 BCE, Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BCE, Nicanor in 162 BCE, and Pompey in 63 BCE. The fall of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE had important repercussions for various Jews groups, each of which responded with different ideas about the Temple's significance and future.986

One repercussion, according to Cohen, was that the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE marked the end of sectarianism. Jewish sects987 in the first century "advanced

986 On the importance of the Temple as the center of Jewish national life and how it symbolized the dwelling-place of God, the cosmic center of the universe, and Israel's election, see § 9.4.
987 Cohen (1984) 29-30 includes the Essenes, Christians, Sadducees, and the Pharisees as sectarian and, following the works of Brian Wilson, defines a sect, among other things, "as an
different theories of self-legitimation, but the authority figures against whom they always defined themselves were the priests of the temple. They polemicized against the temple of Jerusalem, saying that either its cult was profane or its priests were illegitimate and, just as it was claimed that the Jerusalem Temple was the only house of God, so different groups claimed that they were the (temporary) replacements or equivalents of the one Temple. In this way, each group, including Christians, defined themselves vis-à-vis the Temple and appropriated the Temple’s exclusive claims for themselves. With the destruction of the Temple, the institutional basis for such claims was removed and certain sects virtually disappeared. However, for certain Jews (as we shall argue), the significance and symbolism of the Temple, even after its fall, continued to be used to legitimate authority, provide hope, and consolidate their identity. In essence, the Temple lived on in memoriam.

First, Rabbinic literature and the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (132-35 CE) attest to the enduring significance and role that memories of the Temple played for early Judaism. Rabbinic literature preserves some of the most important memories of the Temple, because the Rabbis believed that the Temple continued to define Jewish life and thought. As Neusner observes, the Mishnah stresses “the priestly caste and the Temple cult,” since it focuses on the Mishnah’s principle concern, which is sanctification. Just glancing at a few of the 63 tractates (massekhet) of the Mishnah confirms Neusner’s observation: Sheqalim deals with Temple tax, Yoma with regulations regarding the Day of Atonement and the preparation by the high priest, Hagigah with the three festivals of pilgrimage to the Temple, Zebabim with the preparation of sacrifices, Tamid with laws concerning the daily prayers and burnt offering in the Temple, and Middot with the measurement of the Temple and its

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organized group which separates itself from the community and asserts that it alone has religious truth” (29).


E.g., Josephus Ag. Ap. 2.193 states that there is only “one temple for one God.”

For example, the Qumran community rejected the Jerusalem Temple and priesthood; they saw themselves as a faithful remnant of Israel and, to some extent, as the Temple. The Samaritans also rejected the Jerusalem Temple and priesthood and advocated their own cultic worship on Mount Gerizim. The Zealots probably defined themselves in relation to the earthly Temple in Jerusalem, not the heavenly temple.

furnishings. It is as if the Temple continued to exist in the Rabbinic literature itself, preserving a wealth of information that would be necessary to rebuild the Temple when the time came. 993

Second, the enduring significance of the Temple, and the religious cult which it symbolized, is also evident in the minting of the silver tetradrachma coins by Bar-Kokhba dated as year 1 (132/133 CE), depicting the façade of the Temple with the ark of the covenant in the center and the inscription, Jerusalem, on the side (see photo). 994 "The coins of the Second Jewish Revolt were struck under the aegis of Bar Kokhba in an effort to restore the Temple and reinstitute services." 995 Thus, more than 60 years after the destruction of the Temple, the Temple not only loomed large in Jewish memory, but also became a rallying point for Jewish nationalism. The hope for another earthly Jerusalem Temple persisted beyond the Bar-Kokhba revolt (132-35 CE), including an attempt to rebuild it during the reign of Emperor Julian (362-63 CE) and another effort during the Persians' control of Jerusalem (614 CE). 996

Third, certain Jewish apocalypticists also attest to the enduring significance and memory of the Temple after 70 CE but, in comparison with Bar-Kokhba and the Rabbis, a heavenly Temple comes more to the fore. Written in response to the catastrophe in 70 CE, 2 Baruch presents the idea that the earthly Temple has a heavenly counterpart that cannot be harmed by earthly destructions and profanations (2 Bar 4:2-6). 997 It is uncertain whether the author of 2 Baruch was concerned with building a new earthly Temple, but certainly he affirms an eschatological restoration of some type. 998 Again, written about the same time, 4 Ezra presents a series of visions, one of which includes a heavenly revelation of the glory of the future

994 See Betlyon (1992) 1,1088 for a description. The photo is from Edersheim (1997) 111.
995 Betlyon (1992) 1,1088.
996 See Meyers (1992) 367 for more details of these three endeavors.
997 Regarding the heavenly Temple, 2 Baruch makes explicit what was already implicit in Exod 25:9, Ezek 40-48, and Isa 6:1-5.
restored Jerusalem (4 Ezra 7:26; 10:25-27, 50-54).\textsuperscript{999} The *Apocalypse of Abraham*, also written during this period, presents a heavenly vision of the ideal Temple as a foil against which God criticizes his people (*Apoc. Ab. 25:4*). In fact, for the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, “the focal point of history is the destruction of the temple,” a calamity which is attributed “to the sins of the Jews” where the problem appears to be cultic defilement and idolatry.\textsuperscript{1000} Although all three apocalypses focus on a *heavenly* Temple, unassailable from the evil vicissitudes of earthly life, they also implicitly affirm the restoration of a new earthly Temple,\textsuperscript{1001} probably reflecting the hope that the Temple would be rebuilt just as it had been after the Babylonian destruction.\textsuperscript{1002} 

Fourth, we can add some Christian perspectives. It is clear that early Christians adopted Jewish traditions that referred to a heavenly or eschatological Temple, spoke of the community as the Temple, and criticized the Temple and its cult.\textsuperscript{1003} What is remarkable is that *early Christian writings never mention that the Temple might be rebuilt*. Jesus’ own attitudes toward the Temple stood within the traditions of Second Temple Judaism.\textsuperscript{1004} Nevertheless, beginning with the Stephen affair (Acts 6:8—7:60) there was “a growing breach with Temple-centred Judaism.”\textsuperscript{1005} As Acts describes it, *Stephen was stoned for blasphemy, not because of what he said about Jesus the Messiah, but for what he said about the Temple.*\textsuperscript{1006} Even before the destruction, Paul transformed the symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple so that the Temple was valuable for its imagery, but not for its actuality.\textsuperscript{1007} With the Epistle to

\textsuperscript{999} See comments by Collins (1998) 205-6.  
\textsuperscript{1000} Collins (1998) 231.  
\textsuperscript{1002} So Dunn (1991) 87.  
\textsuperscript{1003} Nickelsburg (1991) 77-84.  
\textsuperscript{1004} So Dunn (1991) 37-56.  
\textsuperscript{1005} So Dunn (1991) 74.  
\textsuperscript{1006} So Dunn (1991) 64. The offense is particularly evident in Acts 7:48: “The Most High does not dwell in houses made of human hands,” where the term, ΧΕΙΡΟΓΙΩΝ (made with hands) is used to describe the Temple, a term often used to describe idols, thus insinuating that “the Temple itself [was] an idol!” (67).  
\textsuperscript{1007} So Dunn (1991) 75-86 who argues that the imagery was useful, for example, in describing the community of Christians as the Temple (e.g., 1 Cor 3:16), Christ’s death as sacrifice (e.g., Rom 3:25), purity issues (Rom 14:14), and the new ideal, heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:21-31).
the Hebrews, probably written to Jewish Christians during or shortly after the Jewish revolt (66-70 CE), the Temple and its cult were not only criticized, but the future heavenly Jerusalem was described as already present for the followers of Jesus, making the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple superfluous. This trend is developed further by 1 Pet 2:5-9 and Rev 1:5-6 (cf. 5:10). In fact, in his vision of the New Heavenly Jerusalem, the author of Revelation has no place for a Temple:

_1 saw no temple_ in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb (Rev 21:22; NRSV)

Regarding Rev 21:22, Sanders writes, “This is clearly a polemic against the normal expectation of Judaism,” which he argues involved the restoration of Jerusalem and its Temple.

The point we are making is that _debate over the significance and the future of the Temple_ was alive and well during the late first-century. In the aftermath of the Temple’s destruction, when Judaism was struggling to survive without a central place of worship, it is not surprising that FG also refers to the loss of the Temple and, as we argue in the following, has much to say about its significance and future.

14.2 The Johannine Temple _in the making_

At this point, we move on to indicate how FG appropriates the significance and symbolism of the Temple and, simultaneously, show that FG makes repeated references to the Temple and its traditions, which, in the least, signals that the Temple was a central concern for the Johannine community. What is more, the _tone_ with which statements are made about the Temple, the _frequency_ with which they are made, the _uniqueness_ of some of the expressions, and _historical factors_ of the late-first century suggest that the Temple was a point of sensitivity or flashpoint between

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1010 E.P. Sanders (1985) 86; cf. 88.
1011 This is suggested by three statements: “destroy this Temple” (Jn 2:19), “the hour is coming when you worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (Jn 4:21), and “the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation” (Jn 11:28).
the Johannine community and other Jews. In our survey of the Johannine material, we divide it into Johannine statements and Johannine themes about the Temple.

14.2.1 Statements about the Temple

(1) "The word dwelled among us" (Jn 1:14). At the beginning of the Gospel, John strikes out with a bold pronouncement:

The Word became flesh and dwelled (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (Jn 1:14; RSV).

The verb in this phrase comes from σκήνω and can be translated dwelled, set up his tent, or even tabernacled. The verb recalls, in both sound and meaning, the Hebrew הֵגֶּשׁ and the Greek κατασκήνωω, both of which were used to describe God dwelling with Israel in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. Prophets like Joel, Ezekiel and Zechariah also use the words הֵגֶּשׁ and κατασκήνωω to speak of God dwelling or coming to dwell with his people in Zion. A striking parallel to Jn 1:14 can be found in 2 Mace 14:35, which states that the temple (ναόν) is the Lord’s dwelling among us (σκήνωσεως ἐν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι).

In later rabbinic literature, הֵגֶּשׁ became a technical term for God’s presence, particularly among those who meet for the study of the Torah and, in the Targums, הֵגֶּשׁ was used as a way of speaking about the divine presence and as a substitute for the divine name. It is also important to note that the dwelling of God among his people was linked to his glory (גּוֹרָה; δόξα), which appeared in the cloud that led Israel (Ex 16:10) and came to reside in both the Tabernacle (Ex 40:34-38) and the Temple (1 Kgs 8:10-11). After the destruction of Solomon’s Temple, Ezekiel

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1012 Here we follow the criteria for mirror-reading a polemical text; see Barclay (1987) 73-93, esp. 84-5.
1013 The Hebrew noun for ‘tabernacle’ is הֵגֶּשׁ and the LXX is σκήνη.
1014 Ex 25:8-9; cf Ex 40:43-38; 1 Kgs 8:10-11; Ezek 43:7; Joel 3:17; Zech 2:14[10]; Barrett (1979) 165-6; Brown (1966) 32-4; Schnackenburg (1968) 1.269.
1015 Joel 3:17; Ezek 43:7; Zech 2:10.
1016 Εὐ κύριε ... ἡμῶν τῆς σκήνωσεως ἐν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι (2 Mace 4:35), which we translate, “You, Lord ... were pleased there should be a temple for your dwelling among us.”
1017 m. Aboth 3.2b: “But if two sit together and words of the Law [are spoken] between them, the Divine Presence (הֵגֶּשׁ) rests between them”; see Danby (1933) 450.
said that God’s glory left the city but, in a subsequent vision of the restored Temple, he saw the glory of God once again filling the building (Ezek 11:23; 44:4). The connection between God’s glory and his presence in the Tabernacle and Temple may also account for the mention of δόξα in Jn 1:14. Although much more could be said, it is sufficient to say that FG describes Jesus in language that is appropriate to the Tabernacle and Temple traditions of Israel.

(2) “You will see heaven opened” (Jn 1:51). In an opening scene of FG, Jesus demonstrates foreknowledge of Nathanael who, in amazement, names Jesus the Messiah. But the author of FG is not satisfied with purely messianic titles, which do not penetrate the mystery of Jesus’ identity, and so Jesus promises that Nathanael will see greater things (μείζων τοῦτων), namely, heaven itself being opened:

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven already opened (ἀνευφύότα), and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (1:51; our translation).

The verse has its difficulties, but there is some agreement about its meaning and function within FG. First, there is general agreement that the perfect passive participle, ἀνευφύότα (having been opened), refers to the heavens as already having been torn open and continuing to be open, not a future event as in the Synoptics. Second, it is widely agreed that Jn 1:51 alludes to Jacob’s dream in Gen 28:10-22.

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1018 Brown (1966) 34.
1019 About Jewish wisdom literature; cf. 1 Enoch 42:1, Bar 3:38; Sirach 24:8, 11-12; Wis of Sol 9:8,10. More could also be said about God dwelling with his people; cf. 2 Mac 13:11 (para Jn 1:14), Rev. 21:3.
1021 Brown (1966) 88 observes that “this verse has caused as much trouble for commentators as any other single verse in the Fourth Gospel.” First, there are questions about variant readings. Barrett (1979) 186 notes that ἀν’ ἀρτι (from now) prefixes the phrase ἐφέσει τὸν οὐρανόν ἀνευφύότα (you will see heaven having been opened) in Θ Ω λ φ e pesh Chrysostom Augustine, but should be rejected. Second, there are questions about Johannine redaction; Brown (1966) 88-9 cites five redactional problems. Third, there are great complexities associated with the use of (the) Son of Man; see § 13.4.2 and Hare (1990) 80-81 who lists six different interpretations. Fourth, there are questions about the literary environment in which ascent and descent language can be properly understood; see § 13.4.2.
And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it... Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen 28:12, 15-16; NRSV; our underlining).

Precisely how Jn 1:51 alludes to Gen 28 is debated. Suffice to say, according to Brown, there are at least five basic interpretations,\(^{1025}\) each based on various Jewish interpretations of Gen 28.\(^{1026}\) Brown sums up the five approaches by saying, "in the theme that they have in common they are probably correct ... the vision means that Jesus as Son of Man has become the locus of divine glory, the point of contact between heaven and earth."\(^{1027}\) As Brown’s survey brings out, there is broad agreement that Jn 1:51, in light of Jewish interpretations of Gen 28, alludes to the Temple or to themes associated with it. His summary, which is very similar to those of other commentators,\(^{1028}\) could have been applied to the Temple—"the locus of divine glory, the point of contact between heaven and earth." As we argued in § 9.4, the Temple was perceived as the place where heaven and earth converged and the center from which God dealt with humanity. Thus, what Jacob concludes about the place—it was the house of Divine Glory, the gate of heaven—can be said of the person, (the) Son of Man, who is the locus of Divine Glory.\(^{1029}\)

(3) "Zekel for your house will consume me" (Jn 2:17). Another indication of the importance of the Temple for FG is the placement of the so-called Temple cleansing incident at the beginning of the Gospel (2:13-22), rather than at the end as in the Synoptics. In this way, the Temple cleansing incident is programmatic for FG.\(^{1030}\) It not only sets in motion a conflict between Jesus and the Temple

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\(^{1025}\) Brown (1966) 90-91.

\(^{1026}\) See Midr. Rab. 69.3 on Gen 28:13; Midr. Rab. 68.12 on Gen 28:12; see Tgs. Onq., Neof., Ps.-J., and Frag. Tg pertaining to Gen 28; Brown (1966) 90-91 also cites other non-specified Jewish tradition.

\(^{1027}\) Brown (1966) 91.

\(^{1028}\) E.g., Schnackenburg (1968) 320 states that John alludes to Jacob’s vision to show “that the Son of Man is the ‘place’ of the full revelation of God (‘Bethel’), where God manifests his glory to the vision of faith (cf. 2:11; 11:40; 14:8ff.).” Further on, he writes, “Thus the Son of Man on earth is the ‘gate of heaven’ (cf. Gen 28:17), the place of the presence of God’s grace on earth, the tent of God among men (cf. 1:14)” (321).

\(^{1029}\) Ashton (1991) 348 who argues similarly.

\(^{1030}\) Ashton (1991) 414-8 talks about the “Temple cleansing” narrative as programmatic, but in a different sense than I will explore here. Ashton argues that Jesus’ riddle—“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it” (2:19)—provides the key for reading the Gospel. Only from a post-
authorities, it sets Jesus in tension with the Temple itself. On the first Passover mentioned in FG, Jesus goes into the Temple, drives out some animals, overturns the tables of the money changers, and declares that no one should make his father's house a market place. It seems as if the violence displayed by Jesus demanded an explanation and so the author of FG supplies one:

His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for thy house will consume (καταφόγεται) me.” (Jn 2:17)

The disciples are interpreting Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple in light of scripture, which says, “Zeal for your house will consume [καταφόγεσθι] me” (2:17). The quotation is from the LXX Psa 69:9, except that the tense of the verb has been changed from the past (has consumed) to the future (will consume). It is undoubtedly an allusion to Jesus’ death, since the next three verses explicitly refer to his death (2:18-21). In this way, Jesus’ death is linked to his confrontation with the Temple establishment. No other NT document is as clear as FG in this: Jesus died because of his conflict with the Temple.

(4) “I will raise up a new Temple” (Jn 2:19). After Jesus cleanses the Temple and declares that no one should make his father’s house a market place, the Jews challenge his authority and ask him for a sign (2:18). Jesus replies with a riddle,

Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up (Jn 2:19; RSV).

The verb, destroy (λύσετε) is an aorist imperative, a command to demolish the Temple. Because this riddle follows right after the cleansing, it is natural to assume that it refers to Herod’s Temple. Making this assumption, the Jews respond to Jesus with ridicule: “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” (2:20). But the Jews have misunderstood Jesus, as we will see. What is noteworthy is what the Jews are focusing on. Are the Jews concerned with the destruction of the Temple? Or are they concerned with the 

resurrection perspective did the disciples understand that Jesus was talking about his body. Thus the Temple riddle informs the readers from the beginning that what Jesus’ hearers could not understand, John’s readers could. Hence, FG witnesses to two stages of revelation (two levels of understanding); at one level, to the events of Jesus’ lifetime and, at another, to the events experienced by the Johannine community (so Martyn [1979] 30).

rebuilding of the Temple? Clearly, they focus on the rebuilding of the Temple—they ask, “will you raise it in three days?” This suggests that the Johannine account was addressing a post-70 CE situation in which Jews were concerned about if and when God would rebuild the Temple. It is in this context that the narrator intrudes into the account and says that, of course, Jesus was not talking about the rebuilding of Herod’s Temple, but the temple of his body (τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος) (2:21). For the Johannine community, the claim that the Temple of Jesus was already risen, when the ruins of the old Jerusalem Temple were plainly visible to all, undoubtedly meant that somehow, the person of Jesus was the New (and only) Temple, replacing the old.1033

(5) “Neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (Jn 4:21). If John and the Johannine community were presenting Jesus as the New Temple, whatever precisely that meant, it would have made any hopes or desires for rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple superfluous.1034 The redundancy of the Jerusalem Temple seems to be the conclusion reached by Jesus in his discussion with the Samaritan woman. When she asks him to resolve the dispute between the Samaritans and the Judeans regarding where the Temple should stand—whether on Mount Gerizim or Mount Zion—he tells her,

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... the hour is coming, and is now here” (Jn 4:21-22; RSV).

Given that the Samaritan Temple at Gerizim had been destroyed in 128 B.C.E.,1035 Jesus’ prediction that the Jerusalem Temple would meet the same fate can hardly be missed. That the predicted destruction had happened is suggested by the phrase, “the time is coming and now is.”1036 The point seems to be that another Temple, whether

1032 The imperative is conditional; Schnackenburg (1968) 1.350, n. 27; Barrett (1979) 199.
1033 The novelty of speaking about a specific person as the Temple is not without comparison. The Qumran council of the community thought of themselves as a Temple of God (1Q5 8.5-14). Paul spoke of the church as a Temple of God (1 Cor 3:16). Isaiah even declared that YHWH “will become a sanctuary” (Isa 8:14a).
1034 Since there is only one God and one Temple; so Josephus Ag.Ap. 2.193.
1035 Josephus Ant. 13:9.1; War 1.2.6; cf. Lott (1992) 2.993.
1036 Barrett (1979) 237 notes that this phrase “refers to events which seem on the surface to belong to a later time,” but contends that it refers to “a pure and spiritual worship” proleptically present.
on this mountain or that, need not be built. This would not have pleased some Jewish contemporaries of John, like the writer of 2 Baruch, who had hopes for a new Jerusalem Temple. 1037 The coins minted by the Bar Kokhba government (132-5 C.E.), which depicts the Temple façade, also witnesses to that hope. 1038 Even more striking are the rabbis. "In their fervent hopes and beliefs that they would regain Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, they took pains to retain and clarify all the information that would be necessary to rebuild the Temple and restore its service." 1039 We can see a potential clash between those who hoped and planned for a rebuilt earthly Temple and those who claimed that a New Temple already existed. It is likely that FG was written, at least partly, to argue against the notion that a rebuilt earthly Temple was necessary.

(6) "I have always taught in the Temple" (Jn 18:20). In FG, Jesus does not teach outside of the synagogue or Temple. 1040 The Synoptic Gospels explicitly describe Jesus as teaching from village to village (Lk 13:22), by the sea (Mk 4:1), in a boat (Lk 5:3), on a mountain (Mt 5:2), on a level place (Lk 6:17), in synagogues (Mt 4:23), and in the Temple (Mt 26:55). But in FG, when Jesus is explicitly identified as teaching, he does so in a synagogue once (Jn 6:59) and in the Temple five times:

- Jn 7:14 “Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach.”
- Jn 7:28 “Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple.”
- Jn 8:2 “Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them.”
- Jn 8:20 “He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple.”
- Jn 18:20 “I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.”

The Temple is the place where Jesus manifests himself to the world. In 7:26, in the midst of the Temple, the crowds say: "Behold he is speaking openly." And when Jesus leaves the Temple in 8:59, the narrator says, "Jesus hid (κρυπτάω) himself and

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went out of the temple" (NRSV). Strikingly, the glory of Jesus is never perceived in the Temple, but only by the disciples outside of its precincts (e.g., 1:14; 2:11).

(7) "They will destroy our Temple" (Jn 11:48). The conflict about who has authority over the Temple and the worship associated with it, which began with the Temple cleansing, comes into view throughout the Gospel. The tension becomes particularly acrimonious in Jn 5-11, which can be described as an extended trial narrative. FG does not have a formal Jewish trial as in Mark. Rather, John appears to have artistically spread the trial material over seven chapters (Jn 5-11) and thematically aligned it with festivals associated with the Temple—Passover (6:4), Tabernacles (7:2), and Dedication (10:22). Throughout the extended trial, the Temple and its Feasts provide the setting for a series of confrontations between Jesus and his opponents. What is remarkable is that this carefully crafted section culminates with the one and only gathering of the Sanhedrin mentioned by FG. In Jn 11:45-54, we find the Sanhedrin gathered in the Temple to discuss the future of Jesus. Through the voice of the high priest, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin formally pronounces the death penalty on Jesus in absentia. Why did they condemn him? Interestingly, Jesus is not condemned because he claimed to be the Son of God—which is the formal charge the Jews brought before Pilate in Jn 19:7—rather, Jn 11:48 tells us that the Sanhedrin was afraid that Jesus would raise up followers and that the Romans would come and destroy both the Jewish nation and the Temple.

"If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." (Jn 11:48; RSV)

Jesus was perceived to be a threat to the Temple and, from what can be gathered from Jn 11:45-54, it was the motivating factor for sentencing him to death. This motive to kill Jesus looks back to the Temple cleansing incident where the disciples...

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1041 However, as Lieu (1999) 54-5 points out, there is some ambiguity. E.g., in 10:24, they demand, "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly" (NRSV). They did not believe and so could not see. Only Jesus’ disciples witnessed his glory (2:11; 17:6; cf. 21:1) and only they have the promise of the coming Paraclete (14:26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11). Righly, Lieu says, “Jesus’ openness is not transparent. It does not guarantee understanding and belief.”

1042 Harvey (1976).

1043 In Mk 14:58 and Matt 26:61 describe false witnesses testifying that Jesus threatened the Temple; the closest thing to that is Matt 24:1-2 and Mk 13:1-2, where Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple.
remembered the saying that "Zeal for your house will consume (kill) me" (2:17), which was the first hint that Jesus’ death would be linked to his alleged threat to the Temple.

(8) "In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places" (Jn 14:2). The final meal and discourse of Jesus extends from 13:1—17:26. In this context, Jesus prepares the disciples for his departure and extends to them this promise:

In my Father’s house (οἶκοι) there are many dwelling places (μοναὶ πολλαί) (Jn 14:2).

This verse recalls the earlier use of "my father’s house (οἶκος)" in Jn 2:16, where it was a reference to the Temple.¹⁰⁴⁴ On the one hand, the use of οἶκος (2:16) and οἶκοι (14:2) resonates with typical Jewish understandings about the Temple, which was called the House of the Lord (יְהוָה יִשְׂרָאֵל) and perceived to be the very dwelling of God. On the other hand, Jesus’ reference to the Temple as my father’s house initiates an entirely new way of speaking about the Temple in personal and familial terms. Coloe argues that, in scripture, the phrase, my father’s house, usually refers to a group of people who make up a household, including family members, servants, and even future descendants.¹⁰⁴⁶ Using language of this type, FG formulates a relational and personal way of understanding the Temple. In Jn 2:10-23, the image of the Temple shifts from the Temple-as-building (Jn 2:20) to the Temple-as-person (Jn 2:21). In Jn 14:2, the Johannine image of the Temple continues to develop, this time beyond a single person, Jesus, to a group of people in a household or family.

As Coloe contends, the reference to many dwellings (μοναὶ) in 14:2 is best understood in light of FG’s use of the related verb, μένω (to dwell or abide), and noun, μονή (dwelling). In chapter 14, there are a series of dwellings. The Father dwells (μένει) with Jesus (14:10), the Paraclete dwells (μένει) with believers, the Father and Jesus make their dwelling (μονὴν) with the believer (14:23), and Jesus dwells (μένει) with his disciples (14:25). In each instance, the act of dwelling

¹⁰⁴⁴ The following argument on Jn 14:2 is largely dependant on Coloe (2001) 160-64.
¹⁰⁴⁵ The phrase, הָיוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל, occurs 259 in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Exod 23:19; 1 Sam 1:24; 1 Kgs 7:40; Isa 66:20).
involves the divine descending to the human realm. Taking this into consideration, the imagery of 14:2 is best understood as a series of interpersonal relationships made possible by divine indwelling of persons on earth, not of humans ascending into heaven above. In this way, the Johannine community is presented as the House(hold) of God, the living Temple.

(9) “If I have blasphemed, provide the evidence” (Jn 18:23). When scholars compare the Gospel accounts of the Jewish trial (or examination) of Jesus, they often overlooked that the issue of blasphemy is implicitly or explicitly also raised in FG (cf. Jn 18:23; Mk 14:64; Matt 26:65; Lk 23:71). FG refers to blasphemy during Jesus’ conversation with Annas, the high priest, in Jn 18:23. Unfortunately, this verse is invariably translated in a way that obscures the reference to blasphemy. Take, for example, the RSV:

Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” (Jn 18:23; RSV).

As we discussed earlier in § 4.3.3, the phrase, κακῶς λαλεῖν (to speak wickedly), functions as the adverbial form for κακολογέω (to speak evil against or to curse), both of which have overlapping synonymy with the term βλασφημέω. The patient of κακῶς λαλεῖν and κακολογέω is almost always a person or symbol of authority. Thus we find the following typical instances:

1. A warning not to curse (κακολογήσεις) God (LXX Exod 22:27a)
3. A statement about blaspheming (κακῶς ἐρέεις) king and gods (LXX Isa 8:21)
4. A reference to Nicanor speaking wickedly (κακῶς ἠλαλήσεν) about the Temple (1 Macc 7:42)

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1047 We concur with Coloe (2001) 163.
1048 Aune (1972) 130 states, “It is probable that in John 14:2 (and also 8:35) the term οἶκος (τοῦ πατρός) reflects the self-designation of the Johannine community.”
1049 E.g., see the comparison in Rowland (1985) 164-74.
1050 See our analysis in § 4.3.3. Κακῶς λαλεῖν occurs six times in LXX (Exod 22:27; Lev 1:14, 20:9 (twice); Isa 8:21; 1 Macc 7:42) and only once in the NT (Jn 18:23). The phrase does not occur in Philo or Josephus.
1051 See our analysis in § 4.3.3. Κακολογέω occurs six times in LXX (e.g., Exod 21:16 and 22:27), four times in NT (e.g., Mk 9:39), and twice in Josephus (A.J. 20.180 [twice]).
1052 Regarding the term patient, see § 4.2.
1053 See chapter 5 regarding LXX Exod 22:27 (§ 5.4) and chapter 10 for 1 Macc 7:42 (§ 10.2).
Since, as we argued in Part II, each of these instances can be understood as references to blasphemy, it is likely that the phrase κακῶς ἐλάλησεν in Jn 18:23 also refers to blasphemy. In addition, Jesus also asks his accusers to bear witness to the wrong in Jn 18:23. If so, then we can paraphrase Jesus as saying, “If I have blasphemed, you provide testimony confirming it.” In the present form of Jn 18:19-24, it appears as though Jesus insults Annas, the high priest, whereupon a guard hits Jesus and rebukes him for speaking improperly, which is followed by Jesus denying he has done any wrong. However, if Jesus is being accused of having just insulted the high priest, why does Jesus then say, “you (sg.) provide testimony” (μαρτύρησον), as if Jesus expects the guard or Annas to prove (by testimony) that Jesus has just insulted or blasphemed the priest. Another explanation is desirable.

It is possible that FG is drawing on traditions that originally included a scenario where witnesses were brought in to testify about some grievous fault of Jesus. In this regard, E.P. Sanders notes that there are several traditions that contain the charge that Jesus threatened the temple. One is in the trial scenes of both Mark and Matthew:

Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’” (Mk 14:57-58; NRSV)

At last two [witness] came forward and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’” (Matt 26:60b-61; NRSV)

Both traditions emphasize that the testimony came from false witnesses, who claimed that Jesus threatened to destroy the temple and then rebuild it. What is striking is that the charge reappears elsewhere both in Mark and Matthew:

Those who passed by derided him shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross!” (Mk 15:29-30; NRSV; para. Matt 27:40).

We know that, according to Mark, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple (Mk 13:1f), which could have been misunderstood by Jesus’ opponents as a

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1054 We follow E.P. Sanders (1985) 71-75 in much of the following argument, through he does not refer to Jn 18:23.
threat to destroy it. This appears to be supported by FG when Jesus is cleansing the Temple in Jn 2:13-22. After Jesus causes a ruckus in the Temple, the Jews demand a sign indicating his authority to do such a thing:

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (Jn 2:19; NRSV).

This, of course, is a classic Johannine misunderstanding. The Jews think he is referring to the Jerusalem Temple (Jn 2:20), but his disciples, after Jesus’ resurrection, know that he was referring to his body (Jn 2:21-22). There is historical reason, therefore, to argue that non-believing Jews thought that Jesus had threatened to destroy the Temple, something that Jewish-Christians fought to dispel. Turning again to Jesus’ conversation with Annas, it is possible that there is a veiled reference to Jesus’ alleged blasphemy against the Temple. If so, Jn 18:32 could be paraphrased as, “If I have blasphemed the Temple, where are your witnesses?

14.2.2 Themes about the Temple

(1) Overlexicalization and Relexicalization. FG uses a variety of terms for the Temple, which may reflect the overlexicalization of terms typical of an antisociety, including: the temple (τὸ ἱερον), the sanctuary (ὁ ναός), the father’s house (ὁ ικός τοῦ πατρός), the holy place (ὁ τόπος), the temple, that is, his body (τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ) and, possibly, the true vine (ἡ ἀμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή) and the foundation (ἡ καταβολή).

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1055 See the socio-linguistic study of M. A. K. Halliday (1978) 164-182, who devotes a chapter to the discussion of “antilanguage,” “relexicalization,” and “overlexicalization” with respect to subcultures. Also see Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 5, 7, who have adapted Halliday’s insights to Johannine studies.


1057 Jn 2:19, 20, 21.

1058 Jn 2:16 (twice), 17; cf. Jn 14:2 and 1 Enoch 45:3.

1059 Jn 11:48 (NRSV); cf. LXX Deut 12:11; 14:23; 16:11; 26:2 where ὁ τόπος refers to the holy place where offerings are brought to God and where his Name dwells.

1060 The genitive τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ is in apposition to ναοῦ; see Bultmann (1971) 127, n. 5; Moloney (1998) 82.

1061 Jn 15:1, 4, 5. The vine metaphor has been linked to a wide variety of meanings, including the Land of Israel, wisdom, the Messiah, the eucharistic, and, not least, the Temple; Burge (1994) 391-4. Pseudo-Philo Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum XII.8-9 depicts Israel as the vine that links heaven, the earth, and the abyss. Since God planted Israel on His Holy Mountain, the imagery of the vine is necessarily linked to the Temple. Hayward (1996) 160-1 argues that “The vine symbol belongs firmly
FG’s tendency to use many words for the same area of concern has been identified by Malina and Rohrbaugh as *overlexicalization*, the tendency to use common terms with new meaning for insiders (e.g., his body = New Temple) is identified as *relexicalization*. According to sociolinguistics, *overlexicalization* (the use of many synonyms for the same concept) and *relexicalization* (the use of common words, but with new meaning) are features of an antilanguage used by an antisociety, “a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it.” People within an antisociety use *overlexicalization* and *relexicalization* to define themselves over against a dominant group. In § 3.2, we used Coser’s theory of conflict to argue that the Johannine group was in a close relationship with a parent group, but in sharp and ongoing conflict with it even as FG was first written. The *overlexicalization* and *relexicalization* of Temple terms reinforces that conclusion and suggests that the use of temple-language by FG identifies a *point of friction* between the Johannine group and their non-believing Jewish counterparts.

(2) The Temple Feast of Passover. Since Jesus has been identified as a New Temple (2:21), it is not surprising to find John continuing to reveal Jesus’ identity by comparing him to key worship practices of the Temple. This occurs most dramatically with the Temple Festivals. For example, FG refers to the Feast of Passover (πάσχα) more than any other NT writing. In fact, 11 out of 21 chapters of FG have the Passover as a setting. Passover was one of the three great pilgrimage Feasts of the Temple and was punctuated by the sacrifice of

in the realm of beliefs about the Temple: if the author of LAB lived in the last days of the second Temple, he would have known, and possibly have seen, the golden vine which decorated the entrance to the sanctuary (Josephus *War* V.210-211; *Ant.* XV.395; *m. Middoth* 3.8).” Cf. Barker (1991) 103.

1062 Jn 17:24. The term κατασκευή is used by Aristeas 89 to refer to the foundation of the Temple. That foundation was viewed as the cosmic center of the universe, a place where heaven and earth unite and from which God controls the universe. See Hayward (1996) 8-10, 32, 166-7.

1063 Regarding the use of these terms, see Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 4-15, Malina (1994) 167-82, esp. 175-78, and M. A. K. Halliday (1978) 164-82.

1064 Halliday (1978) 164, which is quoted with approval by Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 7.


1066 Of 29 NT occurrences, 10 are in FG, 7 in Lk, 5 in Mk, 4 in Mt.


1068 Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost; see Deut 16:16; Haran (1985) 341-5.
Paschal lambs in the forecourt of the Temple.\textsuperscript{1069} It is noteworthy, therefore, that FG correlates the slaughter of the Paschal lambs in Jn 19:14 with the very hour of Jesus' crucifixion in Jn 19:15.\textsuperscript{1070} The Synoptic Gospels have Jesus eating the Passover meal followed by his crucifixion the next day. Not so with FG. Jesus does not eat the Passover meal; he \textit{is} the Passover meal (to use Johannine exaggeration). It is not surprising, therefore, to hear Jesus say that “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (6:51); nor is it surprising that this saying comes from John 6, which appears to reflect themes drawn from a Passover \textit{seder} using Exodus 16 and Psalm 78.\textsuperscript{1071} Much more could be said about how Passover symbolism is appropriated by FG in witnessing to Jesus’ identity.\textsuperscript{1072} Nevertheless, it is sufficient to say that the Passover symbolism used by FG points to an ongoing concern by the Johannine community for the Temple, despite the fact that the Jerusalem Temple had been destroyed years before.

\textbf{(3) The Temple Feast of Tabernacles.} FG continues a focus on the Temple when it mentions the Feast of Tabernacles (σκηνοπηγία; 7:2) and the Feast of Dedication (ἐγκαίνια; 10:22). The Feast of Tabernacles forms the setting for chapters 7-8 and the Feast of Dedication is the setting for chapter 10. It is remarkable that FG is the only NT document to mention these Feasts, which may suggest that it was prompted by some situation facing the Johannine community, rather than inherited Christian tradition.\textsuperscript{1073} In any case, as with the Passover traditions, FG draws on the rituals and symbols of Tabernacles and Dedication to reveal Jesus’ identity.\textsuperscript{1074}

If we look first at the Feast of Tabernacles, two rituals are significant. The first is a water-pouring ceremony that occurred on each of the seven days of Tabernacles. It is

\textsuperscript{1069} 2 Chron 30:15ff; Jub. 49:16, 20.
\textsuperscript{1071} Guilding (1960) 58-68; Brown (1966) 277-80; Borgen (1981) passim; Lieu (1999) 65. If there are elements of a Passover \textit{seder}, it would reflect a post-70 C.E. period when Passover celebrations had moved from the sacrificial setting of the Temple to a non-sacrificial atmosphere of the home or synagogue.
\textsuperscript{1072} See Yee (1989) 48-69; Guilding (1960) 58-68.
\textsuperscript{1073} This is the criterion of uniqueness for mirror reading a polemical text; see Barclay (1987) 85.
an elaborate ceremony where water is poured out on the altar of the Temple. It functioned as a reminder of the water God provided for Israel in the wilderness when Moses struck the rock (Ex 17:1-6). The ceremony was also linked with the coming of the LORD when, on that day, water would flow out from underneath the Temple threshold. Ezekiel foretells of the life-giving waters that would flow from the Temple and Jerusalem, the center of the world, and renew the earth. So, as FG tells the story, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stood up and shouted:

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (7:37-38).

For every Jew familiar with the traditions of Tabernacles, Jesus' announcement would have been like a thunderclap from heaven. Jesus declares another source of living water, a new rock from which water flows. It coheres with the notion that Jesus is a New Temple and, if so, then a new center of the world. A second significant ritual from the Feast of Tabernacles is the light service. At the end of the first day of Tabernacles, four very tall, golden candlesticks were set up in the Court of the Women, part of the Temple precincts. The Mishnah states that when the four candlesticks were lit, which represented God shining upon them, "there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the Beth ha-She'ubah (the House of Water Drawing)."

Then, in a ceremony in the Temple courtyard, two priests would proclaim that their ancestors turned their backs to the Temple and worshipped the sun toward the east; "but as for us, our eyes are turned toward the..."

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1074 A key feature of this annual celebration was setting up booths or temporary shelters in the courtyard of the Temple. Deut 16:13, 16; Lev 23:34, 42-43; the Feast of Ingathering in Ex 23:16 and 34:22; cf. m. Sukkah

1075 m. Sukkah 4:9 describes the process whereby water was taken from the pool of Siloam and ceremoniously carried back to the Temple altar where it was poured into one of two silver bowls. Into the other bowl, a priest would pour wine. Spouts from each bowl would then allow the water and wine to flow out on the altar. Yee (1989) 75.


1077 Jerusalem as the center of the world, see Ezek 47:1-11; Ezek 38:12; Jub 8:19; b. Sanh 37a.

1078 The translation is from Moloney (1998) 251. The punctuation, the meaning of κοιλία, and original text referred to in v. 38 is much debated. The question of punctuation concerns from whom the rivers of living water will flow; is it from the believer or from Christ? Barrett (1979) 327 and Bernard (1929) 282-3 favor the notion that the water flows from the believer; Beasley-Murray (1987) 114-6, Moloney (1998) 256, and Brown (1966) 320-3 favor the christological reading.

1079 m. Sukk 5:2-4.

1080 m. Sukk 5.3; Danby (1933) 179-180.
In the context of a Feast where the Temple courts became the light of Jerusalem, Jesus announces, "I am the light of the world" (8:12). Again, Jesus presents himself as an alternative, and a brighter one at that—he lights the world, not simply Jerusalem.

(4) The Temple Feast of Dedication. In turning to the Feast of Dedication, the same sort of appropriation of symbols occurs. The Feast of Dedication celebrated the rededication of the Temple after Antiochus had desecrated it. Antiochus IV, who called himself Epiphanes or the Manifest (God), had sacked the Temple, stripped it of its wealth, tried to abolish all vestiges of Judaism and, as an act of final defiance, set up a pagan altar in the Temple itself. After Antiochus was defeated, Judas Maccabeus rebuilt and refurbished the sanctuary in 164 B.C.E. and instituted an annual Feast celebrating the rededicated Temple and the defeat of the Manifest (God). When we turn to FG, within the context of the Feast of Dedication (10:22), we hear Jesus claim that he and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). Shortly thereafter, Jesus is accused of blasphemy, because he (like Antiochus), being only a man, is making himself to be God (10:33). In response, Jesus not only claims that the Father sent him, but the Father dedicated him (ἐνων ὁ πατὴρ ἡγίασεν) (10:36). Much can be said about this passage, however, for our purposes, it is enough to note that, once again, Jesus has appropriated Temple symbolism for himself—it is not that the Jerusalem Temple is dedicated, rather Jesus, the New Temple is dedicated by the Father.

(5) Additional Temple motifs in FG. In addition to the points cited above, FG appears to allude to the Temple and Temple traditions in a number of other ways. For our purposes, it is sufficient to list these with little comment: (a) As we mentioned earlier, FG refers to Isaiah seeing the Glory of Jesus in Jn 12:41, an allusion his vision of the glory of Jesus/God enthroned high in the heavenly Temple (Isa. 6:1-5). (b) Throughout FG, there is a sustained focus on the glory of God and Jesus; Jesus glorifies God on earth (e.g., Jn 17:4) and, in turn, Jesus is glorified by God.

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1081 m. Sukk. 5.4; Danby (1933) 180.
1082 See § 9.5.
1083 1 Macc 1:20-28.
247

(e.g., Jn 8:54). The language of *glory* recalls the glory of YHWH in the Temple. 1086
(c) There are frequent references to Jesus having God’s Name (e.g., 17:11) and making God’s Name known (e.g., 17:6, 26), which may allude to the divine Name placed in the Temple (Deut 12:5; 12:11; 16:11; 16:2-3). (d) Jesus’ frequent uses of the absolute form of *I am* (e.g., Jn 8:58) may also be linked to the Temple. As Stauffer argues, the Hebrew, *Ani Hu* (*I am*), was a functional equivalent for the Divine Name and spoken sung out in praise in the Temple (*m. Sukk* 4:5). 1087 (e) The judgment motif in FG might also have brought up notions of the Temple, since judgment that takes place before the throne of God in the heavenly Temple (e.g., Jn 5:27). (f) On the matter of purification (καθαρός), which was required before entering the Temple, FG asserts that the only purification that matters comes through Jesus’ washing (νιπτω) (Jn 13:4-12; cf. 15:4).

14.2.3 Summary

We have been arguing two things: First, according to FG, the significance and symbolism of the Temple has been transferred to the person of Jesus and, by association, to the Johannine community in a more limited sense. Second, the repeated references to the Temple (the criterion of frequency), the use of terms not used in other NT documents—like Feasts of Tabernacles and Dedication—and the appearance of antilanguage 1088 (the criterion of uniqueness), and the general evidence regarding Judaism in the aftermath of the Temple’s destruction (the criterion of historical plausibility), indicate that the issue of the Temple was a point of sensitivity between the Johannine group and their non-believing Jewish counterparts. 1089

1086 See § 9.4; Hayward (1996) 16 observes that biblical tradition understands God’s presence in the Temple as *glory* defined as the dazzling radiance of God that accompanies Israel (cf. Ex 40:34-38; Lev. 9:4, 6, 23; Num 14:10). FG uses δόξα 23 times, more than any other NT book. It primarily refers to the glorification or exaltation of God or Jesus (e.g., Jn 7:39; 8:54; 13:31; 17:1, 4, 5, 10). FG uses δόξα 19 times of which 15 refer to God or Jesus 15 times (e.g., Jn 1:14; 2:11; 5:44; 8:50, 54; 12:41, 43; 17:5, 22, 24).

1087 Stauffer (1960) 142-59; see also the thorough study of *Ani Hu* by Williams (2000).

1088 On “antilanguage,” see pages 242-44 and footnote 1055.

1089 On the criteria for mirror-reading a text, see § 3.4. Motyer (1997) 24-5 who has argued in a similar, but more limited form.
14.3 The Johannine blasphemy against the Temple

The evidence from FG convincingly shows that the Temple was more than simply an interest of the Johannine community; it was probably a point of sensitivity between the Johannine group and their non-believing Jewish counterparts. From amid all that the author of FG says about Temple, a portion of it indicates that FG’s theology concerning the Temple would have been perceived as blasphemous by non-believing Jews, because it implicitly or explicitly threatened the Temple or dishonored it.

First, Jesus and the Johannine community were probably perceived as blasphemers because they threatened the Jerusalem Temple. Our composite portrait of blasphemy indicates that threats against the Temple counted as threats against God, whose Temple it was. As we argued earlier, in the mythology of the ancient Jewish world, aggression against the Temple endangered the stability of the world, the place where heaven and earth converge, and Israel’s very election as a priestly nation. Threats to the Temple were grave offences.

Consider Nicanor who came to the great and holy Temple in pursuit of Judas and demanded that the priests turn him over. When Judas was not delivered to him, Nicanor was enraged and stretched out his hand and vowed, “I will level this shrine of God to the ground ... and build here a splendid temple for Dionysus” (2 Macc 14:33; NRSV). Nicanor was subsequently killed and literally hung as a public spectacle for all of Jerusalem to witness (2 Macc 30-35). That day, the thirteenth day of Adar, became a national day of observance (2 Macc 15:36; cf. Ant. 12.402ff.). We should note two things. First, Nicanor's threat to destroy the Temple is conjoined with a declaration to build another in its place. Second, as argued previously, the outstretched hand of Nicanor was an act of blasphemy. Menacing gestures against the Temple would have been interpreted as a threat from a competitive deity.

When consider the notoriety of Nicanor, that several strands of early Jewish tradition identifies speak of him as a blasphemer, that a special day of observance was established when he was executed, it is not a leap in the dark to suggest that the

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1090 See § 9.4.
1091 See footnote 720 and our discussion of Nicanor and Antiochus.
Nicanor-like utterance of Jesus, “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it” (Jn 2:19), would have sparked Maccabean-like reactions against whoever would express such a contemptible remark. Even without the *logion* in Jn 2:19, the Temple cleansing incident links Jesus with what appears to be a menacing gesture against it.

As we argued above, non-believing Jews associated Jesus with some kind of threat to destroy the Temple, an association that FG itself indirectly substantiates (cf. Jn 2:15-16, 19; 11:48; possibly 18:23). In this way, Jesus and probably the Johannine community, who talked about another temple replacing the one in Jerusalem, were perceived to blaspheme the Temple.

Second, Jesus and the Johannine community were probably perceived to disparage and dishonor the (Jerusalem) Temple. The Temple was personified and viewed as a person. It had honor and could be insulted, violated, dishonored, and blasphemed.

Recall Antiochus’ torrent of *blasphemies* perpetrated against Jerusalem and the Temple (1 Macc 1:20-64; cf. § 9.2). What was remarkable was that the author of 1 Macc depicted Mattathias lamenting, not the vast array of atrocities committed by Antiochus, but the fate of the Temple—its sanctuary was given over to aliens (1 Macc 2:7), her glorious vessels were taken (1 Macc 2:9), he says, “our holy place ... and our glory have been laid waste” (1 Macc 2:12) and, most striking of all, he announces that “Temple has become like a person without honor (δοξος)” (1 Macc 2:8). The Jerusalem Temple, which was regarded by many (but not all) Jews as the one Temple for the one God, was something to be honored and revered. In dishonoring the Temple, one blasphemed its personnel, its priests, and the One who dwelled there, namely, God. Hence, it is possible, even likely that the Johannine community—in their commitment to Jesus as the New (only) Temple of God, in their transference of the Temple-symbolism and Temple-glory (honor) to Jesus—would have been viewed as *dishonoring the memory and future of the Jerusalem Temple*. They not only plundered the Temple of its glorious symbolism, but they left the memory of the Temple in ruins. For non-believing Jews committed to the Jerusalem Temple, people who propagated the temple theology of FG would have been blasphemous.

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14.4 Conclusions

We have tried to demonstrate two things: First, FG places extraordinary emphasis on the Jerusalem Temple and the worship associated with it in order to contrast that with Jesus, who is the New Temple. The implication is that the Temple—Jerusalem or Jesus—was an obvious point of sensitivity for the writer of FG and, therefore, probably a point of friction between the Johannine community and other Jews. Second, we have argued that the Johannine community probably would have been perceived blasphemous for threatening and dishonoring the memory and the future of the Jerusalem Temple when they spoke of Jesus as the New (only) Temple and when they transferred the symbolism and glory (honor) of the Temple to Jesus.
CHAPTER 15
"THE IOYΔAI0I ARE NOT OF GOD"

We have argued that blasphemy in early Judaism may be characterized as a verbal or non-verbal attack on God, God’s Temple, or God’s chosen leaders. In the previous two chapters, we focused on the perception that the Johannine community blasphemed God and the Jerusalem Temple. In this chapter, we address whether FG and the theology or ideology that it reflects would have been perceived as an attack on the religious leaders of Israel. Specifically, we ask whether non-believing Jews would have perceived the Johannine polemic against the 'IOUΔCAI0I as blasphemous.

15.1 The problem of the 'IOUΔCAI0I

FG’s invective against the Jews is widely recognized as some of the most caustic polemic in the NT. Sandmel writes, “John is widely regarded as either the most anti-Semitic or at least the most overtly anti-Semitic of the gospels.”1093 We need only look at the use of John throughout history, from Chrysostom to Luther to Nazi Germany.1094 In this century, the first page of a children’s picture-book published in Nazi Germany has the slogan, Der Vater der Juden ist der Teufel, an obvious allusion to Jn 8:44 where Jesus says to the Jews, “You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires.”1095 It is not surprising, therefore, that some scholars identify Johannine passages like Jn 8:44-47 as “the road to Auschwitz.”1096

Even with efforts to dampen or explain why FG uses such a harsh tone, FG lends itself to anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish interpretations. A major reason for this involves FG’s distinct use of the term oî 'IOUΔCAI0I, which can be translated as either the Judeans (stressing the ethnic-geographic connotation) or the Jews (stressing the

1096 Freudmann (1994) 267. Ruether (1974) 28, 116 argues that “there is no way to rid Christianity of its anti-Judaism,” because the roots of Christianity go back to the “dispute between Christianity and Judaism over the messiahship of Jesus.”
religious-cultural connotation). As we will see, what FG says about the 'Ιουδαίοι can sound harsh and anti-Semitic. The harsh tone is amplified by the fact that FG uses the term of 'Ιουδαίοι more frequently than all the other Gospels combined. Both the harsh tone and frequent use of 'Ιουδαίοι signal a point of friction between the Johannine community and their non-believing Jewish counterparts.

In this chapter, we will address: (1) the literary function of the 'Ιουδαίοι in FG, (2) the historical reference or identity of the 'Ιουδαίοι, (3) the socio-historical situation that evoked FG's use of the term 'Ιουδαίοι, and (4) whether non-believing Jews would have understood FG's use of the 'Ιουδαίοι as blasphemous.

15.2 The function of the 'Ιουδαίοι in FG

The role or function of the 'Ιουδαίοι concerns how they are portrayed within the narrative of FG without reference to historical persons behind the text. A character sketch of the 'Ιουδαίοι describing what role they play in the narrative, reveals their function. Here, we can only give a sketch of some of the characteristics of the 'Ιουδαίοι according to FG:

1. At least some 'Ιουδαίοι are inhabitants of 'Ιουδαία (Judea) and, therefore, can be called Judeans (e.g., Jn 7:1). In fact, when the term 'Ιουδαίοι is used to

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1097 On the difficulty translating 'Ιουδαίοι, see Lowe (1976) and Meeks (1975) 182.
1098 The adjective, 'Ιουδαίος, occurs 71 times in FG, 68 in the plural form. In contrast, Matthew uses it five times; Mark, six times; Luke, five times. Only Acts uses it more frequently (79 times).
1101 Ashton (1994) 53-54 uses function and reference in a way similar to Frege's distinction between sense and reference. The sense of a word concerns the concept indicated by the term and is closely related to its lexical definition(s). A word does not carry all of its senses in each passage; rather, its sense is limited or determined by the context. In contrast, the referent is the actual thing to which the word points. Thus, it is possible that the sense of a term may be clear, but have no referent (e.g., the talking horse).
describe non-authority figures in FG, it is found thirty-six times in a Judean context, but only twice in a Galilean context (Jn 6:41, 52).\footnote{So Lowe (1976) 122.}

2. The narrator does not identify with the Ιουδαιοί and distances readers from them. This is accomplished with phrases like “the feast of the Jews” (not “our feast”)\footnote{Jn 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55.} and “your law” (not “our law”),\footnote{Jn 8:17; 10:34.} by explaining Aramaic and Hebrew words and customs as if the reader was an outsider,\footnote{Jn 2:6; 4:9; 19:40, 42; cf. Also Jn 1:38, 41-42.} and by presenting the Ιουδαιοί as if they were an alien group from Jesus and the disciples.\footnote{Jn 11:8; 13:13; 18:20, 36.} Most importantly, distancing the reader from the Ιουδαιοί is accomplished by depicting them as opponents of Jesus, who is the hero of FG. The Ιουδαιοί not only misunderstand Jesus,\footnote{Jn 2:20-21; 3:4-10; 6:41; 8:57.} they oppose him\footnote{Jn 2:18; 6:41; 7:13, 35; 8:48, 57, 59; 9:22; 19:7, 12, 38; 20:19.} and seek to kill him.\footnote{5:16-18; 7:1; 8:59; 10:31, 33, 39; 11:8; 18:12}  

3. Furthermore, the Ιουδαιοί are characterized as unfaithful to the Torah (Jn 7:19), children of the devil (Jn 8:44), ignorant of scripture (Jn 5:39), not listening to Moses (5:45-47), and idolatrous (Jn 5:44; 19:15).\footnote{Jn 12:42.}

4. The φαρισαίοι (pharisees) and the ἁρχιερεῖς (high priests) are distinct subgroups within the Ιουδαιοί\footnote{Compare Jn 1:19 & 1:24; 7:32 & 7:35; 8:13 & 8:22; 9:13-16 & 9:19; 9:22 & 12:42.} and together they function as leaders and authority figures,\footnote{Jn 4:1; 8:13; 12:42.} though at one point the Pharisees are distinguished from certain unnamed ἡρῴντοι (rulers) who believe.\footnote{Jn 2:18; 6:41; 7:13, 35; 8:48, 57, 59; 9:22; 19:7, 12, 38; 20:19.} As a sub-group within the Ιουδαιοί, the φαρισαίοι (pharisees) are often interchangeable with Ιουδαιοί.\footnote{Jn 2:18; 6:41; 7:13, 35; 8:48, 57, 59; 9:22; 19:7, 12, 38; 20:19.}

5. The φαρισαίοι (pharisees) and the ἁρχιερεῖς (high priests) sharply oppose,\footnote{Jn 4:1; 8:13; 12:42.} seek to apprehend,\footnote{Jn 2:18; 6:41; 7:13, 35; 8:48, 57, 59; 9:22; 19:7, 12, 38; 20:19.} and try to kill Jesus.\footnote{Jn 2:20-21; 3:4-10; 6:41; 8:57.} In return, Jesus describes them as blind
guides and false leaders. FG also gives the impression that the ἐφεσιοί (pharisees) and the ἀρχιερεῖς (high priests) are solely responsible for Jesus’ arrest, trial, and death. It appears as if Pilate hands Jesus over to the ἀρχιερεῖς (high priests) for execution, though στρατιώται (Roman soldiers) exact the penalty.

6. Ironically, one gets the impression that the Ἰουδαῖοι should be differentiated from John the Baptist, the Galileans, the crowds in Jerusalem, the parents of the blind man, the Ephraimites, Martha, the disciples, and Joseph of Arimathea. It is puzzling why the narrator never tells the reader that these groups or individuals are the Ἰουδαῖοι too.

7. Further ambiguity is added when we read that Jesus himself is a Ἰουδαῖος (Jn 4:9; 18:35) and that salvation is from the Ἰουδαῖοι (Jn 4:22). Jesus is even called ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων (the king of the Jews) seven times. Furthermore, certain Ἰουδαῖοι are neutral inquirers or admirers of Jesus, while others even believe in him. Even Nicodemus, a leader of the Ἰουδαῖοι, defends Jesus’ rights and eventually helps bury him. The Ἰουδαῖοι are deeply divided on the issue of Jesus.

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1118 Jn 7:32.
1122 Jn 19:15-16.
1123 Jn 19:23.
1124 Jn 1:19.
1125 Jn 4:43-45.
1127 Jn 9:18.
1128 Jn 11:54.
1129 Jn 11:19, 31.
1130 Jn 13:33.
1131 Jn 19:38.
1132 Jn 4:9; 18:35.
1133 Jn 18:3, 9; 19:3, 14, 19, & 21 (twice). Jesus is called, ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, twice (1:47; 12:13).
1134 Jn 7:15; 10:24; 11:36.
1135 Jn 8:31; 11:45; 12:11.
1136 Jn 7:50-51; 19:39.
1137 Jn 10:19; (cf. 1:11-12; 7:43; 9:9, 16).
8. The religious commitments of the 'Iouδαιοι are also severely criticized. From the perspective of the implied author of FG, the Judaism of the 'Iouδαιοι falls desperately short of the ideal Judaism of true Israel (’Ισραήλ).1138 Somehow—and scholars are divided on this issue—Jesus is presented as correcting, reinterpreting, or abrogating the Judaism of the 'Iouδαιοι.1139

Although the irregular use of 'Iouδαιοι undermines any one-dimensional explanation, it is hard to deny that, on the whole, the 'Iouδαιοι have a negative role to play in FG. In this regard, Bultmann and scholars1140 contend that the 'Iouδαιοι function as representatives of unbelief and should be distinguished from historical Jews.1141 However, overemphasizing the function of the 'Iouδαιοι has led scholars to minimize, even deny, any historical reference.1142 Nevertheless, the historical question cannot be dodged: Why was that term—a term widely used in the first century—used and not another?

15.3 The reference of the 'Iouδαιοι

This leads to the issue of the historical identity or referent of the 'Iouδαιοι. To whom did the term refer at the time FG was written? Three options have emerged.

15.3.1 All Jews

According to Cohen, who has carried out an extensive philological study on the term 'Iouδαιοι, the (English) term 'Jews' has religious-cultural connotations, but "never

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1138 Pancaro (1974-75) 398-403 argues that FG presents a sharp contrast between the Johannine community as the true Israel (’Ισραήλ), of whom Nathanael is a symbolic figure (Jn 1:47), and a false Israel, of whom the 'Iouδαιοι represent. The contrast between true Israel (’Ισραήλ) and people from Judea (Iouδαίοι) is also made by the Damascus Document, which prefers the self-designation of Israel (CD 3.19) and who will "no more consort with the house of Judah" (4.11).
1141 Bultmann (1971) 86 and 87.
1142 Fortna (1974) 95 argues that John "is not finally concerned with Judaism itself as a historical phenomenon alongside Christianity, so much as with the human condition." Culpepper (1983) 125 writes, "It should be clear that we are no more concerned with the 'historical' Jews [in FG] than with the historical Jesus." Culpepper (1998) 45 identifies the referent of 'Iouδαιοι as the Judeans.
has geographic meaning. "1143 He defines 'Jews' as those who venerate "the God of the Judeans, the God whose temple is in Jerusalem (the capital of Judaea)."1144 With this in mind, in our judgment FG never uses of the term 'Ιουδαίοι to refer to 'all Jews.' FG has used 'Ιουδαίοι with a much more limited historical referent.

15.3.2 The Judeans

According to Cohen, a 'Ιουδαίος is first and foremost "a Judean—a member of the Judean people or nation (ethnos in Greek, or a similar term) living in the ethnic homeland of Judea (Ioudaia in Greek)."1145 Thus the use of term 'Ιουδαίοι in FG could refer to Judeans, people from the land of Judea. A major proponent of this view is Malcom Lowe who, supported by others, marshals two types of evidence.1146

First, according to Lowe, historical evidence suggests that the term 'Ιουδαίοι should be translated 'Judeans' because is had regional-geographical connotations during the first-century.1147 After examining ancient sources, Lowe concludes that the primary meaning of 'Ιουδαίοι was geographical but, among Gentiles and Diaspora Jews, the word had a secondary religious meaning.1148 Josephus states that the 'Ιουδαίοι derived their name from the tribe of Judah and that, from the time the exiles returned from Babylon, both they and the country gained that name (A.J. 11.173). Furthermore, Josephus reports that the 'Ιουδαίοι rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem

1146 Lowe (1976) 104-5 provides several strands of evidence and rationale. On the one hand, Josephus uses 'Ιουδαίοι in a religious-ethnic sense when he differentiates 'Ιουδαίοι from Gentiles. On the other hand, Josephus uses 'Ιουδαίοι in a geographical-national sense to designate inhabitants of Judea; e.g., see A.J. 18.88; Ag. Ap. 2.8 (cf. 1.252); Life 346, 391. In a most instructive text—A.J. 17.254ff—Josephus switches between the two different senses. First, he describes the Galileans, Idumeans, and people from Jericho and Perea celebrating Pentecost in Jerusalem, where they are joined by the Judeans themselves (αὐτοῖς 'Ιουδαίοι). Then, he describes the Romans attacking the crowd of 'Ιουδαίοι, which should be translates the Jews, because it refers to the whole crowd of Galileans, Idumeans, Judean, and others who have gathered to celebrate Passover.
1148 Lowe (1976) 103-7 draws from 1 and 2 Maccabees, Josephus, the Mishna, Strabo, Dio Cassius, the Talmud, and Pompeius Trogus. Following K. G. Kuhn's TNDT article on 'Ισραήλ, Lowe (1976) 106-7 argues that the name 'Ισραήλ was a typical religious self-designation among Jews in
(A.J. 11.84) and were powerful enough to exclude the local Samaritans (A.J. 11.19-30-30, 84-8), which Ezra identifies as the people of the land (יִשְׂרָאֵל הָגוֹי) (Ezra 4:4). Josephus’ description of the 'יוֹדֶךְיוֹת sounds similar to that of FG’s. In both cases, the 'יוֹדֶךְיוֹת operate out of Jerusalem, center on the Temple, and view the crowd ( gridView = יִשְׂרָאֵל הָגוֹי) as ignorant of the Torah and cursed (Jn 7:49). According the Lowe and others, ancient testimony is fairly consistent in this regard. During the first-century, the 'יוֹדֶךְיוֹת referred to people who either lived in the territory of Judea or could trace their origins and religious customs to Judea. Lowe contends that it was only after the Bar-Kochba revolt, when most of the Jewish population was eliminated or expelled from Judea, that the geographic connotation of 'יוֹדֶךְיוֹת began to lose its force and the religious sense became predominant. Lowe’s contention that a decisive semantic shift occurred relatively late, must now be weighed against the recent findings of Cohen, who concluded that

All occurrences of the term loukaioi before the middle or end of the second century B.C.E. should be translated not as ‘Jew,’ a religious term, but as ‘Judean,’ an ethnic-geographic term. In the second half of the second century B.C.E. the term loukaioi for the first time is applied even to people who are not ethnic or geographic Judeans but who either have come to believe in the God of the Judeans (i.e., they have become “Jews”) or have joined the Judaen state as allies or citizens (i.e., they have become “Judeans” in a political sense).

Thus, Cohen’s study suggests that the semantic shift began to occur about two centuries before the Bar-Kochba revolt and, by the first-century, Cohen provides some evidence that the term 'יוֹדֶךְיוֹת had acquired a religious-cultural meaning. Still Cohen largely agrees with Lowe that the term 'יוֹדֶךְיוֹת had a primary ethnic-geographical meaning and a secondary religious-cultural meaning.

Palestine, whereas 'יוֹדֶךְיוֹת had geographical connotations. In contrast, the self-designation of Diaspora Jews was 'יוֹדֶךְיוֹת, since they were known as such among the Gentiles.

1150 Meeks (1975) 182; Cohen (1999) 71-78; Lowe (1976) 106-7, esp. 105, n. 17, cites Dio Cassius (late 3rd cent.) R. Hist. XXXVII, xvi.5-vii.1 as reporting that Palestine was called 'יוֹדֶךְיוֹת and that 'יוֹדֶךְיוֹת referred to either inhabitants of Judea or was applied to other nations (אַחֲלָאֲבָה) who adhered to their customs (טַנְוִיָּה אָוְּתֵיהָ).
Second, Lowe argues on internal grounds that oinion should be translated the Judeans throughout FG. The clearest evidence comes from Jn 7:1 and Jn 8:7-8 where the 'Ioudaioi are obviously the inhabitants of the region of 'Ioudaia (Judea). Lowe also shows that the often repeated phrases, ἡ ἐορτῆ τῶν 'Ιουδαίων and ὁ βασιλεύς τῆς 'Ιουδαίων, can be translated as the feast of the Judeans and the king of the Judeans respectively. Finally, Lowe marshals more than forty passages to argue that whenever 'Ioudaioi is used to refer to crowds of people or to authorities that oppose Jesus, Judean crowds and Judean authorities are denoted.

Lowe’s position is not without weaknesses. First, some instances of 'Ioudaioi in FG do not denote Judeans unambiguously; for example, there seem to be Galilean 'Ioudaioi (6:41, 52) and the Temple is where πάντες οἱ Ιουδαίοι συνέχονται (all the Jews gather) (18:20). Second, several uses of 'Ioudaioi could be translated as either Jews or Judeans, which Lowe admits. A third, and substantial, criticism comes from Ashton who argues that Lowe’s thesis overemphasizes local or tribal enmity, which obscures the specifically religious nature of the antagonism between Jesus and the 'Ioudaioi. While some degree of geographical or local rivalry is apparent between Galileans and Judeans (Jn 4:9 and 7:45-52), Ashton argues that it is not an adequate explanation for the intense religious rivalry witnessed in FG. As a result, Ashton prefers to translate oinion 'Ioudaioi as the Jews rather than the Judeans. Ashton recognizes that prior to C.E. 135, 'Ioudaioi had both geographical and religious connotations, but argues that the uniquely religious valence placed on the term by FG suggests that the term refers to “a particular religious group ... which might plausibly be regarded as the chief target of the evangelist’s resentment.”

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1154 So Lowe (1976) 115-9; however, he admits there are two exceptions (Jn 4:9, 22) where 'Ioudaioi denotes Jews, not Judeans (124-6), and a third possible exception (Jn 18:20) (129).
1155 Cf. 1 Thes 2:14 and J. Ant. XVIII, 2, which describes Coponius and Quirinius arriving in τὴν 'Ioudaian to rule over and evaluate the property of the 'Ioudaion.
1158 So Ashton (1994) 133-4.
The term ‘Ιουδαίοι in FG could refer to a certain group of religious authorities. Urban von Wahlde has been the most influential proponent of this view. Von Wahlde argues that when the term is used in the “characteristically Johannine way”—when it refers to people hostile to Jesus—it refers to certain Jewish authorities. Von Wahlde concludes that of the 71 times ‘Ιουδαίοι is used in FG, 38 instances refer to people who are hostile to Jesus. When von Wahlde looks at these 38 occurrences, he raises an important question: Do these occurrences of ‘Ιουδαίοι refer to common Jews and Jewish authorities (which suggests FG is anti-Semitic) or do they refer to Jewish authorities alone (which suggests FG is engaged in intra-Jewish debate)? Von Wahlde concludes that 36 of the 38 occurrences refer to Jewish authorities and the remaining two can be dismissed as the product of redactional activity. Unfortunately, in our judgment, von Wahlde’s analysis is flawed. From the outset he focuses on the term ‘Ιουδαίοι, without looking at synonyms. In this way, he overlooks FG’s report that many authorities believed (ἐκ τῶν ἀρχόντων πολλῶν ἐπίστευσαν) (12:42). From the outset he eliminates the so-called neutral use of ‘Ιουδαίοι. By eliminating the so-called neutral uses, some of which are strikingly positive (e.g., 11:45), von Wahlde fails to acknowledge that the neutral use of ‘Ιουδαίοι also shapes the meaning of the “characteristically Johannine use” since, after all, both uses lie side-by-side throughout the Gospel. This is a design flaw in von Wahlde’s analysis and it becomes apparent when he discusses 14 instances of ‘Ιουδαίοι who express hostility toward Jesus and yet there is nothing in the context to indicate that they are authorities. In dealing with these instances, von Wahlde argues that because “there is no evidence to indicate that the people are the common

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15.3.3 Religious leaders

people," they must be references to authorities.\textsuperscript{1167} This is an argument from silence. Nevertheless, von Wahlde's analysis contributes one very important insight—the 'Ιουδαῖοι that are hostile to Jesus in FG are usually religious authorities. It suggests that the opponents of the Johannine Jews were certain Judean religious authorities.

\textbf{15.3.4 Implications}

Regarding the historical referent of 'Ιουδαῖοι, Ashton is right to point out that any translation of the term will be misleading in some degree.\textsuperscript{1168} Still, based on the analysis of Lowe, and now supported by Cohen,\textsuperscript{1169} it is likely that the first readers of FG would have understood the term 'Ιουδαῖοι predominantly as a reference to Judeans, people from Judea. Because the term Judean encompasses both an ethnic-geographical (primary meaning) and religious-cultural (supplementary meaning) and because it prevents confusion with the modern notion of Jew and Jewishness, as a general principle, the term 'Ιουδαῖοι in FG should be translated Judeans. In addition, FG often uses the term, 'Ιουδαῖοι, to refer a certain group of religious (Judean) authorities that violently oppose Jesus and his disciples, including the Johannine group.\textsuperscript{1170} Thus, when FG uses the term, 'Ιουδαῖοι, there are three potential historical referents—Jews (people linked to the religious practices of Judeans, whether in Judea or not), Judeans, and Judean authorities.

Regarding the function of the 'Ιουδαῖοι within FG, we have seen how they represent unbelief and opposition to Jesus and his disciples. The 'Ιουδαῖοι align with the negative side—the world, darkness, death, and judgment.\textsuperscript{1171} Alignment of the 'Ιουδαῖοι with the negative side infuses the 'Ιουδαῖοι with a cosmic or mythic significance that overwhelms the historical reference.\textsuperscript{1172} The Johannine community probably knew certain Judean religious leaders to whom they could have pointed to as the historical 'Ιουδαῖοι. Nevertheless, when the composite portrait of the

\textsuperscript{1167} Von Waldhe (1982) 48.
\textsuperscript{1168} Ashton (1991) 39.
\textsuperscript{1169} Cohen (1999) 69-106.
\textsuperscript{1170} Brown (1979) 41 writes, "John deliberately uses the same term for the Jewish authorities of Jesus' time and for the hostile inhabitants of the synagogue in his own time."
\textsuperscript{1171} These are the negative aspects of four dualisms identified by Ashton (1991) 206-26.
\textsuperscript{1172} Smiga (1992) 168-9.
'Ἰουδαίοι is drawn from the pages of FG, when the three referential levels merge into a unified character that represents the world, darkness, death, and judgment, the historical 'Ἰουδαίοι vanish and a non-historical, symbolic literary 'Ἰουδαίοι emerges. The relationship may be diagramed as follows. 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Reference} \\
\text{All Jews} \\
\text{Judeans} \\
\text{Judean Authorities} \\
\hline
\text{Function} \\
\text{Representatives of unbelief, the world, darkness, death, judgment, and hostility toward Jesus and the Johannine Community} \\
\end{array}
\]

Although FG itself is thoroughly Jewish in what it assumes to be good and true, and even though the earliest members of the Johannine community saw themselves as faithful Jews, FG cannot escape the charge of being anti-Judean on the historical level nor, for many modern readers, anti-Jewish on the symbolic level. However, a historical-critical reading, which acknowledges the reality of competing Judaic systems in the first-century, dispels any notion that FG is anti-Jewish in the modern sense of the term.

15.4 The socio-historical context

The complex usage of 'Ἰουδαίοι in FG is probably explained by the difficult socio-historical situation in which the Johannine community lived. As we have previously argued (§ 3.1), there is widespread agreement that FG was written within the context of a dispute with nascent Yavnean Judaism. When the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem, Yohanan ben Zakkai escaped and went to Yavneh where, sometime later, he established an academy for Torah study. At Yavneh, a major concern for Yohanan

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{1173} This is a substantially modified version of the diagram in Smiga (1992) 162. \textsuperscript{1174} Dahl (1986) 99-119, esp. 111; Martyn (1979) passim; Freyne (1985) 125.}
and the band of Judeans that followed him was the consolidation and reinterpretation of Judaism without the Temple.\footnote{Yee (1989) 16-21.} The reforms instituted by the Yavnean academy touch on concerns raised by FG, including the issues of Torah, Temple, festivals, and forgiveness of sins, but in different ways (§ 3.1.2). In this way, FG and the Johannine community are addressing vital issues confronting Jews in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple and, possibly, going head-to-head against the Yavnean authorities, who have been characterized as closing their ranks, consolidating their power, and absorbing (or eliminating) competitive forms of Judaism.\footnote{W. D. Davies (1964) 272-86, Manns (1988) passim, and Pancaro (1974-5) 401.} With this potential context in mind, the polemic against the ‘\textit{Ioudaios}’ in FG may be understood as a polemic against certain ‘Judean religious authorities’ aligned with Yavneh or a similar group. If so, then the Johannine group and the Judeans were locked in combat over who controlled the heritage of the Jewish religion without the Temple.\footnote{Dunn (1993) 200.}

We have also argued (§ 3.2) that the Johannine group was in close relationship with their non-believing Jewish or Judean counterparts and that, according to Coser, explains the intensity of the polemic against the ‘\textit{Ioudaios}’. When FG was written, both groups were fighting to establish their identities and draw boundaries between those in and those outside their respective groups. Because conflict helps establish and maintain group boundaries (§ 3.2.2), we can understand that the verbal and non-verbal attacks that passed between the Johannine group and their Judean counterparts functioned as part of the process that strengthened and consolidated their identities. Each group slandered the other, labeled the “other” as deviants, and occasionally took up violent measures. Religious fanaticism of this sort, with mutual recriminations between rival groups, was not uncommon in first-century Palestine or, for that matter, much of the ancient Hellenistic world.\footnote{\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}\textit{\textit{c}}} (1989) 16-21.}

Thus, the socio-historical context suggests that there were two religious groups locked in bitter conflict, concerned with who were the rightful heirs to Israel’s inheritance, and using every honorable (from their perspective) means necessary to
ensure their survival. Issuing sharp invectives toward one another was apparently one of the means they used—the 'Iou8a1ot are of the Devil (8:44), Jesus is a Samaritan and has a demon (Jn 8:48), the 'Iou8a1ot are idolatrous (Jn 19:15), and Jesus is a blasphemer (10:33).

15.5 The Johannine blasphemy against the 'Iou8a1ot

In an effort to consolidate their identity over against what appears to be a Yavnean influenced synagogue, the author of FG and the Johannine community wanted the negative sentiment that was directed toward the opponents of Jesus to be transferred to those persecuting the Johannine group. One of the mechanisms of transference was the alignment of the symbolic 'Iou8a1ot—the 'Iou8a1ot of devilish origin and mythic proportion—with the referential 'Iou8a1ot, the Judean religious authorities who opposed, expelled, and persecuted the Johannine Jewish Christians during the late first-century. Here is a sample of the type of verbal attack that could have been transferred to and heard by the Judean religious authorities:

- You are teachers, yet you do not understand (3:10)
- You have never heard God (5:37)
- You do not have the love of God (5:42)
- You seek your own glory (5:44a)
- You do not seek God's glory (5:44b)
- Your accuser is Moses (5:45)
- You do not believe Moses (5:46)
- You do not keep the Torah (7:19)
- Your father is the devil (8:44)
- You are not from God (8:47)
- You are blind and live in darkness (9:39-41)
- You are idolaters (19:15)
- You sought to kill Jesus (5:18; 7:1; 8:59; 10:31, 39; 11:8; 18:12)

1178 Johnson (1987) 419-41
We can imagine the reaction of the Judean authorities, for if there had been reasons for killing Jesus in his time, there were now reasons to kill him again in John's time. The Johannine accusations are hot-tempered, to say the least, but it is obvious from the language that it reflects the concerns and passions of Jews speaking to other Jews. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the Judean authorities, such attacks would have been regarded as *blaspheming the leaders and the God of Israel* and the following shows why.

First, in Jewish tradition there is a close relationship between divine and human authority, such that if one is blasphemed the other is also. For example, the Book of the Covenant closely aligns Israel's judges with God, so that cursing civil authorities (assumed to be appointed by God) is to curse God Himself (§ 5.3). We argued that the parallel structure of Exod 22:27 (28)—"You shall *not curse* God and you shall *not blaspheme* the leader of your people"—is an invitation to see God and leaders synoptically; hence, to have contempt for *earthly authority* is to blaspheme *Heaven* (§ 5.3). The link between blaspheming religious authority and showing contempt for God is almost taken for granted by many Biblical and non-biblical texts. For example, Sennacherib's *contempt for God* went hand-in-hand with *derision of Hezekiah* the King (2 Kgs 18—19:37; cf. chapter 8). Stephen is accused of *speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God* (Acts 6:11). Nicanor is described as *mocking and deriding the priests* of the Temple, which is interpreted as blaspheming or speaking wickedly (*κακῶς λαλεῖν*) (1 Macc 7:36-38). Goliath is portrayed as *defying* (Heb הָנָי) or *insulting* (LXX ὀνείδιζεῖν) Israel, which is interpreted as defying or insulting *God* (1 Sam 17:10, 26, 45). Certainly, if the Judean authorities in John's time saw themselves as leaders of Israel and had perceived the Johannine invective toward the *Ἰουδαίοι* as directed toward them, then it is hard to imagine that the Judean authorities would not have viewed the Johannine group as blaspheming both them and the God they represented.

Second, as an addendum to the first point, Jewish tradition provides a precedent for accusing and punishing entire groups for blaspheming their leaders. When we traced the discourse concept of blasphemy through Numbers 11-16, we found that *sinning*
with a high hand (blasphemy) was openly and defiantly rebelling against God, which resulted in kärēt (being cut off) (Num 15:30-31) (§ 7.1 and § 7.3.2). When we traced the key term in LXX (παροξύνω = to despise or blaspheme), it became clear that the first generation of Israel died in the wilderness because they “threatened to stone Moses and Aaron,” which was interpreted as despising God (Num 14:11). Israel committed corporate blasphemy by mocking, criticizing, and threatening their leaders and so perished in the wilderness. Similarly, Korah lead a rebellion against Moses (Num 16:1-35), which was also interpreted as despising or blaspheming God (Num 16:1-35) (§ 7.3.3). Korah and his mutineers were described as illegitimately attempting to grasp divine authority and so were cut off. In view of these accounts, it is likely that the Johannine group was viewed as illegitimately grasping for power as well as harshly criticizing the Judean leadership. From the Judean’s perspective, the Johannine group would have been blaspheming and deserved being cut off.

15.6 Conclusions

We have argued that the characterization (function) of the 'Iouðοτε in the narrative of FG is complex and multi-layered. The dominant characterization of the 'Iouðοτε is negative; they are aligned with the devil, the world, darkness, and judgment. It is likely that the audience of FG would have identified the 'Iouðοτε with Judean religious leaders (referent), perhaps linked to the Yavnean leaders who recently came from Judea. We suggested that the negative characterization of the 'Iouðοτε in FG (function), once projected onto the Judean religious authorities (referent), would have led non-believing Jews to consider the Johannine community as blasphemers of both the legitimate leaders of Israel and God Himself.
We believe that foregoing study has provided ample evidence to warrant the conclusion that non-believing Jews viewed members of the Johannine community as blasphemous. The evidence and rationale for this judgment has been provided from chapters 5-15 and, as such, the primary task of this thesis, as set forth in chapter 1, has been addressed to our satisfaction (§ 1.6). Since we have provided conclusions at the end of each chapter and summaries along the way, we will not summarize the entire thesis. Here, we will (a) draw together the findings and implications from chapters 13-15 regarding what we identified as three flashpoints for the Johannine Jewish community and (b) address the issue of the excommunication.

16.1 Three Flashpoints

In chapters 13-15, we focused on three points of sensitivity or flashpoints for the Johannine community: the claim that Jesus was equal with God, the affirmation that Jesus was the New Temple, and the allegation that the Ἰουδαίοι are of the Devil. By points of sensitivity, we mean that these three claims reflected issues that the FG was taking extra effort to communicate, because they either needed clarification or because they needed defending. For each of the three claims, we provided criteria, evidence, and rationale to show that they were points of sensitivity for the author of FG. Because the author took such effort, it is reasonable to infer that these issues were of critical concern to the audience of FG, namely, the Johannine community. It is also reasonable to infer, simply on the basis that FG was considered worthy of copying and passing on to future generations, that the Johannine community latched onto the theology or ideology that Jesus was equal with God, that he was the New Temple, and that the Ἰουδαίοι were of the Devil. We assumed, therefore, that these beliefs were not merely locked up in a scroll or codex, but were publicly articulated, in one form or another, by the Johannine Jewish group. Based on our findings, we
offer a brief reconstruction of the interplay between the Johannine Jewish believers and their non-believing Jewish counterparts.

First, we assume that the Johannine Jewish Christians publicly or privately voiced—even in and around the synagogue(s), with other Jews to whom they were drawn by kinship or friendship—their belief that Jesus was equal with God. By that they meant that Jesus was God’s agent or viceroy, that he had God’s authority, and therefore deserved equal honor with God. Of course, such a claim is reminiscent of the braggadocios of infamous blasphemers, such as Antiochus Epiphanes and the ‘nameless’ Egyptian ruler. For Jews, giving equal honor to Creator and creature alike is blasphemous; it denies God’s uniqueness and diminishes His honor. But the Johannine Jewish Christians believed, and told others, that God Himself had sent Jesus into the world and, when Jesus was crucified, it was God that exalted him. The Johannine Jewish believers were quite adamant that Jesus never arrogantly promoted himself; his equality with God was endowed, just as a son shares the honor of his father. In addition, they claimed that Jesus was the eschatological Son of Man, who exercised the two great powers of God, the power to give life and the power to judge humanity. Jesus had power and authority equal with God. For this reason, Jesus could perform healing miracles on the Sabbath and, what is more, the Johannine group themselves, because of their special relationship with Jesus, could also suspend Sabbath laws in order to imitate him. These claims, which would have overwhelmed a non-believing Jew with blasphemies, probably came out in bits and pieces through ordinary conversation. Nonetheless, the cumulative impact of such statements multiplied by the number of believing Jews brave enough to state their claims on behalf of Jesus, would have ultimately raised the ire of the Judean religious authorities, who were apparently in the neighborhood. The claim that Jesus was equal with God, as we have shown, was clearly blasphemous and the Judean authorities, under divine constraint, would have taken stern measures against the blasphemers, as FG bears witness (Jn 9:22; 12:42: 16:1-4).

Second, the Johannine Jewish believers placed an extraordinary emphasis on Jesus as the New Temple. They transferred all of the major symbolism attached to the former
Temple in Jerusalem to Jesus and, not only that, they claimed to participate in the New Temple of Jesus' body. From their perspective, there was no need to rebuild another earthly Temple. God already dwelled among them; indeed, they were the House of God themselves! However, from the perspective of non-believing Jews, the Johannine Jews disparaged the memory and future of a glorious earthly Temple and the God of the Temple. And, even more to the point, when the Johannine Jews transferred all the symbolism of the Temple to Jesus, it is as if they trampled into the Temple, robbed God's House of all its glory, and gave it to a man once crucified as a criminal. They dishonored the Temple and mocked God by giving His honor to a criminal—blasphemy of the highest order! The non-believing Jews also knew stories about Jesus threatening to destroy the Temple and, since threatening the Temple was considered blasphemous, the Johannine Jews shared in the blasphemy of Jesus simply by being the advocates of someone who once threatened the Temple.

Third, the Johannine Jewish Christians became locked in a bitter conflict with the Judean religious leaders or the 'Iouđaiot. Each group claimed to be the rightful heirs of Israel's inheritance and each group used every honorable (from their perspective) means necessary to survive the struggle. Both sides apparently used very harsh invectives toward the other group. We can hear some of this in FG itself—the 'Iouđaiot are of the Devil (8:44), Jesus is a Samaritan and has a demon (Jn 8:48), the 'Iouđaiot are idolatrous (Jn 19:15), and Jesus is a blasphemer (10:33). The verbal attacks against the 'Iouđaiot in FG were probably voiced against the Judean religious leadership by the Johannine community both in private and in public. From the perspective of non-believing Jews, that was blasphemy; to show contempt for God's chosen leaders was to show contempt for God. Sennacherib's derision and mockery of Hezekiah the King went hand-in-hand with his contempt for God. The type of derision that we hear against the 'Iouđaiot in FG was not uncommon among rival Jewish groups in ancient Palestine. Take, for example, the Rule of the Community, which curses "all the men of the lot of Belial," who are "traitors," "wicked," and "sons of Belial" (1QS 2.1-25). Similarly, the Johannine group was more than likely accused of blasphemy for despising and rebelling against the Judean authorities. And, like the first generation of Israel who despised and rebelled against
Moses and Aaron, and who was punished with death in the wilderness, so it is likely that the Johannine Jews were perceived to be rebellious and deserved to be cut off.

16.2 Excommunication from the synagogue

The evidence that the Johannine Jewish community was perceived to have blasphemed God, the Temple, and the Judean leadership is on firm ground. The question now before us regards what measures non-believing Jews took, indeed, felt divinely obligated to take when they perceived the Johannine Jewish believers blaspheming.

As we have seen, the penalty for blasphemy was kārēt, being completely cut off (§ 6.2 and § 7.2). Kārēt or extirpation was stipulated for grave offenses against God, including blasphemy. Most texts that deal with kārēt do not indicate how the penalty was exacted. Nevertheless, there are indications that there was a curious cooperation between divine and human agents in the enforcement of kārēt. Hasel has argued that kārēt “expresses the fact that the ultimate punishment is in God’s hands; only in certain cases has God designated human agents to carry it out (Lev. 20.2; cf. Ex. 31.14).” Levine has also drawn a connection between ostracism from the community and being cut off in that “banishment would often have resulted in death.”

Horbury has made a good case that excommunication from the community for grave offenders of the covenant served as a substitute for, or preliminary to, the death penalty. Although he admits that there is a paucity of evidence, he is able to cite more than a dozen supporting texts. After the exile, exclusion from the community occurred on the basis of various violations of the covenant (Deut 23:1-8). Both Philo (Spec. 1.324-45) and Josephus (Ant. 4.290-91) interpreted Deut 23:1-8 as warrant for excluding members of the Jewish community on physical and moral grounds. The first biblical case of expulsion of non-compliant Jews is found in Ezra 10:8 (cf. Neh

13:3 and Isa 56:3). Josephus speaks of apostate Jews who claimed to have been unjustly expelled (ἐκβεβληθοσι) from Jerusalem (Ant. 11.340, 346-7), which is the same verb (ἐκβάλλω) used for Jewish Christians expelled from the synagogue in Jn 9:34-35. Horbury argues that Josephus’ account is an instance of substituting expulsion for the death sentence, since apostasy was viewed as an executable offense (Ant. 4.309-310; cf. 3 Macc 7:12). In addition, Philo (Spec. 1.60) and the Damascus Document (CD 12.4-6) also substitute expulsion for execution. Evidence that exclusion from the community was a disciplinary measure is also found in the NT. For example, Lk 6:22 states “blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude (ἐκβάλλωσιν) you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man” (NRSV). The term ἐκβάλλω is the same one used for excluding the Johannine Christians from the synagogue in Jn 9:34-35. Horbury mentions several NT texts, of which 1 Cor 5:5 is most important. Here is a reference to the excommunication of a man from the Corinthian community “for the destruction of the flesh,” suggesting that excommunication was a form of death or a preliminary to death. Similarly, for FG, there was a close connection between being expelled from the synagogue (ἐποσονασώγους) and those who kill you (πας ὁ ἀποκτεῖνας ὑμᾶς) in Jn 16:2.1182

Thus we conclude that the Johannine Jewish Christians were viewed as blasphemous and therefore subject to execution. However, since stoning and other direct measures of execution may not have been possible in the Jewish community to which the Johannine group were affiliated (Jn 18:31), and because excommunication was viewed as a surrogate for execution, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of the Johannine Jewish believers were excommunicated from the synagogue on the grounds of blasphemy. This would provide a plausible alternative to the problematical hypothesis that Johannine Christians were excommunicated on the basis of the Birkat ha-minim. In this way, just as Jesus was accused of blasphemy and executed, so also the Johannine community shared in the blasphemy of their master and were executed, as it were, through excommunication.

1182 Setzer (1994) 93-96 argues that expelling Christians from the shelter of Judaism would have deprived them of the right of assembly and exemption from imperial worship, thus making them vulnerable to accusations of impiety or treason. In this scenario, expulsion from the synagogue ‘killed’ Jewish Christians by withdrawing the protection of Judaism.
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