

I AM

LESSON ONE

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

JOHN 6:35-51

D. A. Carson, in the *Pillar Commentary*, explains the meaning of Jesus as the bread of life.

6:35. In view of his opponents' misunderstanding of his claim to be the bread of God (vv. 34-35), Jesus now speaks plainly: *I am the bread of life*, a claim repeated at the end of this section (v. 48). Most of the intervening verses are an exposition of this theme and its entailments, cast for the most part in terms that are relatively independent of the bread-metaphor. The verse at hand not only specifies that Jesus is the bread of life, but removes another of his opponents' implicit misunderstandings. When they said 'from now on give us this bread' (v. 34), they were suggesting that the bread of heaven needed to be given again and again. But Jesus insists, *He who comes to me will never go hungry*. The thought is not unlike 13:9-10: the person who has been washed by Jesus does not need another bath, but only 'to wash his feet'. So the hungry and thirsty person who comes to Jesus finds his hunger satisfied and his thirst quenched. This does not mean there is no need for continued dependence upon him, for continued feeding upon him; it does mean there is no longer that core emptiness that the initial encounter with Jesus has met. The consummating satiation occurs when those 'who have washed their robes ... in the blood of the Lamb' stand 'before the throne of God' and experience the oracle: 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst' (Rev. 7:14-16).

Four further notes are in order:

(1) The image of 'thirst' is added to 'hunger', thereby anticipating vv. 53ff. In other words, the vivid language of vv. 53ff. is not as removed from the rest of the discourse as some have supposed. *Cf.* notes on 6:49ff.; 7:37-39.

(2) The essentially symbolic nature of 'bread of life' and related expressions in this discourse is disclosed by the mingling of metaphorical and non-metaphorical elements. Jesus is the bread of life, but it is the person who *comes to him* who does not hunger, not the person who *eats* him; similarly, it is the person who *believes in him* who does not thirst, not the person who *drinks* him. Thus, when the language becomes more rigorously metaphorical in vv. 49ff., and we read of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood, the meaning of the metaphors has already been established. *Cf.* the opening notes on 6:22ff., above.

(3) The expression *I am the bread of life* is the first of seven similar claims, each with *ego eimi* ('I am') and a predicate. The other six (plus minor variations) are: I am the light of the world (8:12), the gate (10:7, 9), the good shepherd (10:11, 14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way and the truth and the life (14:6), the true vine (15:1, 5). Two other expressions with 'I am' plus a predicate are structured rather differently in Greek (8:18, 23). The precise form is unique to the Fourth Gospel, but as Barrett (p. 292) notes, the Synoptists display other forms of 'I' utterances, while Synoptic parables 'provide much of the subject matter of the Johannine "I-sayings"'. In addition, of course, John preserves a number of *ego eimi* ('I am') sayings without any predicate: *cf.* notes on 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 18:6; D. A. Carson, EDT, pp. 541-542; Introduction, § III (3).

(4) The Old Testament background to the parallelism of this verse may lie in Isaiah 55:1 (with respect to the eschatological salvation brought about by the word of God) and in Proverbs 8:5 (with respect to Wisdom). Contemporary writers often cite *Ecclesiasticus* 24:21, where Wisdom says: 'Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more.' If John is thinking of this passage at all, what he writes is in marked contrast. Because of Proverbs 8:5 and *Ecclesiasticus* 24:21, many commentators have understood much of John 6 as sapiential, i.e. as presenting Jesus as Wisdom incarnate, Wisdom *par excellence*. However, the connection with Isaiah 55:1 is more likely, not only because Isaiah is the most frequently quoted Old Testament book in the Fourth Gospel, but also because Isaiah 55 deals explicitly with the dawning of eschatological salvation, of a new and everlasting covenant, in the context of the word which effectively proceeds from the mouth of God (*cf.* 1:1). And even the Wisdom of *Ecclesiasticus* 24:21 is quickly identified with Torah (24:23), while (as noted above on v. 32) Wisdom in Proverbs 8:5 was understood in some Jewish circles to refer to Torah. The so-called sapiential interpretation of John 6 is not so much wrong as peripheral. John's approach is fundamentally Christological, and, so far as these Christological claims awaken echoes of old covenant religion, the connections are in terms of prophecy and fulfillment, along typological lines.

COMMENTARY NOTES

6:36. As Jesus charged the citizens of Jerusalem with unbelief (5:36–38), so now he repeatedly charges his fellow Galileans with the same sin (*cf.* v. 26). True, in one sense Jesus can acknowledge to them, *you have seen me* (the *me* should probably be admitted, even though it is missing from some manuscripts: *cf.* Carson, p. 249, n. 34), but they have seen only a mightily endowed man, a potential king (6:14, 15), not the Son of God who perfectly expresses the Father’s word and deed (5:19ff.); they have seen only bread and power, not what they signify. This crowd has witnessed the divine revealer at work, but only their curiosity, appetites and political ambitions have been aroused, not their faith.

6:37. But if some can see Jesus and his miraculous signs, and yet still not come to faith, does that not suggest his mission is in some measure a failure? The question returns in ch. 12, where it is treated at some length. Already the answer is provided here: however many people do not believe, God’s saving purposes cannot be thought to be frustrated. Jesus’ confidence does not rest in the potential for positive response amongst well-meaning people. Far from it: his confidence is in his Father to bring to pass the Father’s redemptive purposes: *All that the Father gives me will come to me.* Jesus’ confidence in the success of his mission is frankly predestinarian.

The second part of this verse is frequently misunderstood. Formally it is a ‘litotes’, a figure of speech in which something is affirmed by negating its contrary. Thus, ‘a citizen of no mean city’ means ‘a citizen of a rather important city’. When Jesus says *whoever comes to me I will never drive away*, the affirmative that he is expressing in this fashion is often taken to mean ‘whoever comes to me I will certainly welcome’. The second part of the verse then becomes a softening of the predestinarianism in the first part. But in fact, the affirmation expressed by this litotes is rather different: ‘whoever comes to me I will certainly keep in, preserve’. The flow of the verse is then as follows: All that (a singular neuter is used to refer to the elect collectively) the Father gives to Jesus, as his gift to his Son, will surely come to him; and whoever in fact comes (by virtue of being given by the Father to the Son), Jesus undertakes to keep in, to preserve. The second part of the verse moves from the collective whole to the individual, and from the actual coming (consequent on being part of the gift) to preservation. This interpretation is suggested by the verb *ekballo*, ‘drive away’ or ‘cast out’. In almost all of its parallel occurrences, it is presupposed that what is driven out or cast out is already ‘in’. ‘I will never drive away’ therefore means ‘I will certainly keep in’. This interpretation, however strongly supported by the verb, is *required* by the context, the next three verses.

6:38–40. The *For* (*hoti*) introduces the reason why Jesus will perfectly preserve all those whom the Father has given him. The heart of his response is this: The entire purpose of the incarnation, of his coming *down from heaven*, was not to do his own will, but the will of the Father who sent him (v. 38), and that will was that the Son should lose none (*i.e.* no individual) of all that the Father had given him (v. 39, with the same play between the individual and the collective singular as in v. 37). This preservation of each individual in the collective of the elect includes resurrection at the last day. The argument is then reiterated in v. 40, with minor variations in emphasis, and one important one: the one whom the Son does not lose, whom he raises up at the last day, is here described not in terms of the gift of the Father to the Son (as in vv. 37, 39), but in terms of personal faith: *everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.*

Several observations will clarify the argument further:

(1) Divine sovereignty in salvation is a major theme in the Fourth Gospel. Moreover, the form of it in these verses, that there exists a group of people who have been given by the Father to the Son, and that this group will inevitably come to the Son and be preserved by him, not only recurs in this chapter (v. 65) and perhaps in 10:29, but is strikingly central to the Lord’s prayer in ch. 17 (vv. 1, 6, 9, 24; *cf.* Carson, pp. 186ff.). John is not embarrassed by this theme, because unlike many contemporary philosophers and theologians, he does not think that human responsibility is thereby mitigated. Thus, he can speak with equal ease of those who look to the Son and believe in him: this they must do, if they are to enjoy eternal life. But this responsibility to exercise faith does not, for the Evangelist, make God contingent. In short, John is quite happy with the position that modern philosophy calls ‘compatibilism’.

COMMENTARY NOTES

(2) The obedience of the Son (v. 38), a theme extrapolated from 5:19ff., stands behind the assurance that those whom the Father has given to the Son will be preserved to the end, and will be resurrected on the last day. In other words, if any of them failed to achieve this goal, it would be the Son's everlasting shame: it would mean either that he was incapable of performing what the Father willed him to do, or that he was flagrantly disobedient to his Father. Both alternatives are unthinkable, not because he never experienced the temptation to disobey, but because succumbing to the temptation, however acute that temptation might be, was itself unthinkable to him. The Fourth Gospel does not record the agony of Gethsemane (*cf.* Mt. 26:36–46; though *cf.* notes on 12:27–28), including the resolute 'Yet not as I will, but as you will', but its entire Christology is an expression of that same resolution.

(3) In the first instance, those whom the Father has given to the Son are the immediate band of sincere disciples. At that level, it is possible to record at least the initial fulfillment of the Son's duty in 17:11–12, where Jesus avers that he has kept them all safe while he was with them, and now asks his Father to take over the task in view of the Son's imminent 'departure'. But that is not the end of the Son's task; it is only the *initial* fulfillment. He must still raise them at the last day. Moreover it becomes clear, especially in chs. 10 and 17, that the Father gave to Jesus others than the first disciples. These other sheep (ch. 10) must also come, those who would believe through the message of the first believers. All these the Son undertakes to resurrect on the last day. He loses none of them.

(4) The one exception is Judas Iscariot. This turns out not to be an exception at all. It was not that the Son's preserving power broke down in this one instance; rather, Judas was the son of perdition from the beginning (*cf.* notes on 17:12). Jesus *chose* him to be one of the Twelve, but knew from the beginning that he was 'a devil' (*cf.* notes on 6:70–71).

(5) The futurist eschatology, in clear references to the final resurrection (vv. 39, 40, 44, 54), is not at all out of place (*cf.* notes prefacing vv. 22ff., above), but the culmination of the eternal life (v. 40) granted to everyone 'who looks to the Son and believes in him'. This 'eternal life' is more than mere unending existence: it is primarily the passing over from condemnation to acceptance, from death to life (5:24), and then it is a foretaste, the full banquet of which occurs in resurrection life (*cf.* 5:28–29).

(6) The verb 'looks' (v. 40) renders *theoreo*. In earlier Greek the verb was frequently used of a particularly perceptive and discerning 'looking'. In John, however, such use is not consistent. If there is particular perception here, it is because the context, and especially the next clause 'and believes in him', specifies the meaning.

(7) All of this explanation is part of the bread of life discourse. These verses not only contribute to the explanation as to why some believe and some do not, but, culminating in the promise of eternal, resurrection life, they unpack in non-metaphorical categories just what kind of life the 'bread of God' provides (vv. 33, 35).

6:41–42. 'The Jews' (*cf.* on 1:19) who grumble must be either the synagogue congregation of Capernaum (*cf.* v. 59), or at least its leaders. Their grumbling shows them to be of the same spirit as that displayed by their fathers in the wilderness who complained before (Ex. 16:2, 8–9) and after (Nu. 11:4ff.) the manna was provided. 'The Jews' in Jerusalem (5:18ff.) were incensed because they recognized Jesus said things that put him on a par with God; these Galilean Jews are incensed because they think they know a fellow Galilean, and take umbrage at his claims. It is not so much his claim to be bread that offends them, as his claim to be bread from heaven, his claim that he *came down from heaven*. How could this be so, when his family had moved to Capernaum and he was known there (*cf.* notes on 2:12)? Parallel suspicions were raised in Nazareth (Mk. 6:2–3; Lk. 4:22).

The language does not necessarily mean that Joseph was still alive. The crowd's point is simpler. They say, in effect, 'We know who Jesus' parents are. What right then does he have to claim nobler, even divine, heritage?' John's record of their question is steeped in irony (*cf.* Duke, pp. 64–65). The Jews think they know all there is to know about Jesus' paternity, but they speak in ignorance not only of his virginal conception but of his true identity. Repeatedly Jesus insists that his opponents do not know his (heavenly) Father at all (4:22; 8:19, 55; 15:21; 16:3; 17:25). Indeed, it will transpire that Jesus knows their 'father' (8:42ff.) far better than they know his! Unlike the readers of this Gospel, they do not know the Prologue—that the eternal Word became flesh (1:14)

COMMENTARY NOTES

6:43–44. The grumbling was not only insulting, but dangerous: it presupposed that divine revelation could be sorted out by talking the matter over, and thus diverted attention from the grace of God. ‘So long as a man remains, and is content to remain, confident of his own ability, without divine help, to assess experience and the meaning of experience, he cannot “come to” the Lord, he cannot “believe”; only the Father can move him to this step, with its incalculable and final results’ (Lightfoot, pp. 160–161).

The thought of v. 44 is the negative counterpart to v. 37a. The latter tells us that all whom the Father gives to the Son will come to him; here we are told that no-one can come to him unless the Father draws him (*cf.* Mk. 10:23ff.). And again, it will be Jesus himself who raises such a person up at the last day. The combination of v. 37a and v. 44 prove that this ‘drawing’ activity of the Father cannot be reduced to what theologians sometimes call ‘prevenient grace’ dispensed to every individual, for this ‘drawing’ is selective, or else the negative note in v. 44 is meaningless. Many attempt to dilute the force of the claim by referring to 12:32, where the same verb for ‘to draw’ (*helkyo*) occurs: Jesus there claims he will draw ‘all men’ to himself. The context shows rather clearly, however, that 12:32 refers to ‘all men without distinction’ (i.e. not just Jews) rather than to ‘all men without exception’. Yet despite the strong predestinarian strain, it must be insisted with no less vigour that John emphasizes the responsibility of people to come to Jesus, and can excoriate them for refusing to do so (*e.g.* 5:40).

6:45. Jesus proceeds to explain what kind of ‘drawing’ (v. 44) the Father exercises. When he compels belief, it is not by the savage constraint of a rapist, but by the wonderful wooing of a lover. Otherwise put, it is by an insight, a teaching, an illumination implanted within the individual, in fulfillment of the Old Testament promise, *They will all be taught by God*. This is a paraphrase of Isaiah 54:13, addressed to the restored city of Jerusalem that the prophet foresees: ‘All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children’s peace.’ The passage is here applied typologically: in the New Testament the messianic community and the dawning of the saving reign of God are the typological fulfillments of the restoration of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile.

In fact, this need for internal illumination is a commonplace of both Testaments. Jeremiah looks forward to a new covenant when God will put his law in the minds of his people, and write it on their hearts (Je. 31:31–34). In Ezekiel, God promises a new heart and a new spirit (Ezk. 36:24–26). The prophet Joel anticipates the time when God will pour out his Spirit not only on Jews but on all people (2:28ff.). In the Fourth Gospel, the new-birth language of John 3 announces the fulfillment of these prospects (*cf.* notes on 3:5). Jesus in the Farewell Discourse promises the coming of the Holy Spirit—with a *teaching* role (14:26–27; 16:12–15). This is equivalent to the ‘anointing from the Holy One’ (1 Jn. 2:20, 26–27). *Cf.* also 1 Corinthians 2:9–16; 2 Corinthians 3:4–4:6; Hebrews 8:6–10:18. Even the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi owed everything to the revelation of the Father (Mt. 16:17 par.). ‘Those who receive this divine illumination and respond to it show by their coming to Christ that they are children and citizens of the new Jerusalem, as the prophet foretold’ (Bruce, p. 157).

6:46. Some take this verse to be a parenthetical remark by the Evangelist, since at first glance its connection with the preceding is obscure. But the connection, once seen, is profound. Verse 45 must not be interpreted to mean that a person may enjoy a direct, personal, mystical knowledge of God *apart from the revelation that has been given in Jesus*, not even if in consequence of such an experience he or she then becomes a follower of Jesus. Only Jesus *has seen the Father*; no-one has seen God *except the one who is from God* (*cf.* 1:18; 3:13; 14:7ff.). Jesus himself is the mediator of such knowledge: he is the one who ‘narrates’ God (*cf.* 1:18; 12:45). Thus, however much people are unable to ‘hear’ Jesus because of their moral delinquency (8:43), however much they can hear him only if they are ‘taught by God’, it is simultaneously true to say that they are ‘taught by God’ if and only if they truly ‘hear’ Jesus. Only then will they be truly attracted to him. The argument is of course circular, but not vicious.

6:47–48. With yet another strong Assertive (*cf.* on 1:51), Jesus repeats the thought of 3:15. Notwithstanding the strong note of predestinarian thought in the preceding verses, this is an implicit invitation to believe, an implicit warning against unbelief. In this context, however, it strips the would-

COMMENTARY NOTES

be disciple of all pretensions, of all self-congratulation, of all agendas save those laid down by Jesus himself. Those who believe, in a context like this, cannot approach Jesus as if they are doing him a favour, or, worse, as if they know what is best for him (as in 6:14-15). They *must* believe—but they do so on his terms, and by his grace. And their immediate inheritance and possession is *everlasting life* (NIV—the same Gk. expression stands behind ‘eternal life’ in v. 40).

All this, then, is what Jesus meant by saying *I am the bread of life* (v. 48; cf. v. 35). These two verses form ‘the natural conclusion of this pattern of exegetical debate’ (Borgen, p. 86). The remainder of the discourse resorts to metaphor. If Jesus’ opponents find his words unacceptable when he unpacks his ‘I am the bread of life’ claim in non-metaphorical fashion (vv. 35-48), he will revert to the metaphor itself, and extend it. Now the terms ‘eat’ and ‘feed’ dominate the passage (vv. 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 58). This makes attempts to see a major break at v. 51 or v. 52 (or, with Bultmann, pp. 234-235, and others, at v. 51c) rather speculative (on the unity of the passage, cf. notes preceding vv. 22ff., above).

6:49-50. The contrast between the Old Testament manna and Jesus the bread from heaven has already been introduced (vv. 30-33). Now one further aspect of that contrast is developed: the manna in the wilderness, heaven-sent though it was, and useful for sustaining natural life under desert conditions, could not bestow *eternal* life. The proof is irrefutable: all the Fathers died. By contrast, Jesus is the bread come down from heaven such that, if anyone *eats of this bread* (i.e. appropriates Jesus by faith, as in the preceding verses), eternal life is the assured result.

6:51. The first two sentences of this verse forcefully recapitulate the last two verses, and again (cf. vv. 35, 48) portray Jesus identifying himself as *the living bread*, an expression synonymous with ‘the bread of life’. In the third sentence, the term ‘bread’ is further elucidated: *This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world*. Both clauses have generated much discussion.

The first of these two clauses inevitably calls to mind the institution of the eucharist: ‘This is my body’ (Mk. 14:22 par.). That John uses the term ‘flesh’ (*sarx*) rather than ‘body’ (*soma*), found everywhere else in the New Testament when the Lord’s supper is clearly in view, suggests (though it does not prove) that John is not making any *direct* reference to it. Those who argue that John’s thought is here primarily or exclusively eucharistic suppose that John is simply following another linguistic custom, or even that ‘flesh’ was the more primitive form (an argument that can be refuted: cf. the sources in Beasley-Murray, p. 94). But the alert reader will think of 1:14: the Word became ‘flesh’ (*sarx*). ‘It is as the incarnate logos that Jesus is able to give his “flesh” for the life of the world’ (Moloney, p. 115). Cf. also the discussion on v. 54, below. That there may be a secondary allusion to the Lord’s supper is another matter (cf. notes introducing 6:22ff.).

The second clause must be taken in a sacrificial sense, the more so since, if the bread of life is Jesus, what Jesus is giving is himself. The preposition in ‘for the life of the world’ (*hyper*) is repeatedly found in a sacrificial context in the Fourth Gospel (cf. 10:11, 15; 11:51-52; 15:13; 17:19; 18:14; cf. also 13:37-38). Readers could not help but remember that Jesus has already been presented as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29, 36). Jesus himself is the one who gives his flesh: his sacrifice is voluntary (cf. Heb. 9:13-14). And since it is *for the life of the world*, his sacrifice is vicarious. It is hard not to think of the Suffering Servant (Is. 52:13-53:12), the more so since Isaiah 54 has just been quoted (Jn. 6:45) and becomes quite central to the thought of John 12. Isaiah’s ‘Servant’ reaches out to Jews and Gentiles alike (Is. 49:6); the same emphasis is struck here, in that Jesus gives himself for the life of *the world* (cf. 3:15-17; 4:42).¹

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 288-295.

COMMENTARY NOTES

JOHN 6:35-51

Colin Kruse, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, helps us not miss what the crowd missed in Jesus' provision:

35. The crowd misunderstood the nature of the true bread of which Jesus spoke, so *then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'* Jesus explicitly identified himself as 'the bread of life'. This is the first of seven different 'I am' sayings with predicates in the Fourth Gospel (35, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5—see Additional note: *Ego eimi*, p. 139). Because Jesus was 'the bread of life' he could promise that those who came to him would never hunger, and, changing the metaphor, those who believed in him would never thirst (cf. 6:53-57). Hunger and thirst are metaphors for the human need to know God, and knowing God is the present experience of eternal life (17:3). Those who come to Jesus, i.e. those who believe in him, are brought into relationship with God and their hunger and thirst to know God are satisfied (see commentary on 4:13-14).

36-37. However, Jesus knew that his invitation to come to him would meet varied responses. In respect of the majority of the crowd Jesus said, *But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.* They had seen him and some of the miracles he had performed (2), but still they did not believe (see commentary on 6:26). Lest it be thought he was surprised or disappointed by this response, Jesus added, *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.* The word translated 'all' (*pan*) is neuter singular, not masculine plural as might be expected, thus depicting those whom the Father gave Jesus as a collective entity. In several places in the Fourth Gospel Jesus speaks of believers as those whom the Father has given him (37, 39; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 9, 24). Viewed from the human side, those who come to Jesus are those who believe in him; but viewed from the divine side, they are those whom the Father has given to Jesus. The Prologue says a similar thing in different words: 'Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God' (1:12-13).

Faced with lack of positive response, Jesus affirmed that all the Father has given him will come and believe in him. The saying 'whoever comes to me I will never drive away' employs a strong double negative (*ou me*) underlining the security of those who come to Jesus.

38-40. In these verses Jesus connects the eternal security of those who believe in him with his own mission: *For [because] I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.* The reason why none who come to him will be cast out is because Jesus came to do his Father's will, *and, he said, this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.* The 'all' (*pan*) whom the Father has given are once again depicted as a collective entity (cf. 6:37). Their eternal security is tied to the Son's obedience to the Father, on the one hand, and to the will of the Father, on the other. For any of those whom the Father has given to his Son to be lost would mean that Jesus failed to carry out his Father's will, and that the will of the Father had been thwarted. Both of these things are unthinkable. *For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.* Those whom the Father has given him will receive eternal life in the here and now and be raised up on the last day. The 'last day' is the day of resurrection for those who believe in Jesus (5:28-29; 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24), but a day of judgment for those who reject him (5:28-29; 12:48).

41-42. The evangelist explains the reaction of 'the Jews': *At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'* This is the first place in chapter 6 where those who listen and partake in a dialogue with Jesus are called 'the Jews'. Up until this point they have been described as 'the crowd' (2, 22, 24) or 'the people' (10, 14), or simply referred to as 'they' or 'them'. Only here and in 6:52 are they spoken of as 'the Jews'. In the Gospel of John this term very often refers to those who were opposed to Jesus (see pp. 49-50). Earlier (33-34) the crowd appeared to pass over Jesus' claim to have come down from heaven, because they were interested in

COMMENTARY NOTES

the 'bread' he promised. But 'the Jews', now realizing the bread Jesus offered was not physical bread, took offence and grumbled, just as their Israelite forefathers grumbled in the wilderness (Exod. 16:2, 7, 12). *They said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I came down from heaven"?'* This is the second of only two occasions in the Fourth Gospel when Jesus is referred to as 'the son of Joseph' (1:45; 6:42). There is irony here, for 'the Jews' were sure they knew Jesus' origins, but the readers of the Gospel know differently. The Prologue says that Jesus is the Logos become flesh, and readers aware of Synoptic traditions would know that though he was supposed to be the son of Joseph (Matt. 13:55; Luke 4:22), this was a mistaken supposition (Luke 3:23). Because of their mistaken view about his origins, 'the Jews' grumbled about Jesus' claim to have come down from heaven.

43-44. Jesus said to them, *Stop grumbling among yourselves*. Then, showing he was not surprised or downcast by their rejection, he said, *No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*. In the OT God 'draws' people to himself with the bands of love (Jer. 31:3; Hos. 11:4). Here, however, the Father draws people to his Son, and unless he does so no-one can come to him. Viewed from the human perspective, all may come to Jesus and believe in him, and in fact are required to do so (28-29). Viewed from the divine perspective, only those drawn by the Father can come and put their faith in Jesus, a perspective found also in other parts of the NT (Matt. 16:17; Acts 16:13-14). Concerning those whom the Father draws to him Jesus said, *I will raise him up at the last day*. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus speaks frequently of 'the last day'. For those who believe, their resurrection on 'the last day' is the consummation of the eternal life they experience now (39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24), but for those who do not accept his word it is a day of reckoning (12:48).

45. Expanding the idea of the Father drawing people to him, Jesus said, *It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.'* The quotation is from Isaiah 54:13 ('All your sons will be taught by the Lord, / and great will be your children's peace') and is part of a long passage that speaks of the blessings to be showered upon the Jews at the restoration following their Babylonian exile. Among these blessings is the fact that 'all your sons will be taught by the Lord'. Jesus took this text and applied it to his ministry: *Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me*. People listen to and learn from the Father by listening to the teaching of his Son and learning from him. An example of this is found in the account of the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi. When he confessed Jesus as the Christ, Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven' (Matt. 16:17).

46-47. Jesus explained why it was vital that people came to him: *No-one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father*. It is a fundamental teaching of the OT that no human being has seen God. The evangelist stresses this fact in the Prologue: 'No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known' (1:18). People need to come to Jesus for no-one else can reveal the Father to them. Perhaps it is significant that in a passage where Jesus denies contemporary beliefs that Moses was the one who provided the manna in the wilderness (32), he also implies that Moses never saw God. Only the one who is from God has seen the Father. Although no-one can say they have seen God, Jesus said, *I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life*. This statement is introduced by the solemn formula 'I tell you the truth' (*amen amen lego hymin*). While God cannot be seen in the present time, the gift of everlasting life, a relationship with the invisible God through faith in Christ (17:3), is available.

48-50. Picking up again the theme of 6:32-35, Jesus said, *I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died*. The manna was not the true bread of life because all who ate that still died. So Jesus said, *But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die*. The one who 'eats' of the true bread from heaven will not die. To 'eat' the true bread is a metaphor for believing in Jesus (cf. 6:35), something that becomes abundantly clear when we compare the two statements that stand in parallel in this context: 6:47: 'he who believes has everlasting life', and 6:50: 'a man may eat and not die'.

COMMENTARY NOTES

51-52. Jesus reiterated, *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever*, and then introduced a new and startling metaphor: *This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world*. In this verse it is no longer the Father who gives the living bread, but Jesus himself, and for good reason. The living bread was his flesh (not his 'body' as in Eucharistic texts), which he would give for the life of the world. This is an allusion to his death on the cross. Jesus, the Logos who became 'flesh' (1:14), became the bread of life for a sinful world only by laying down his life so that others might live. However, this allusion was not appreciated by his hearers: *Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'* Why 'the Jews' argued among themselves is not explained. Perhaps some were disposed to accept what Jesus said even though they could not understand it, while others who took his words literally found them repulsive.²

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*
David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*
Richard D. Phillips, *John*, Reformed Expository Commentary
Colin G. Kruse, *John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary
Gerald Borchert, *John*, New Application Commentary
Jey J. Kanagaraj, *John*, New Covenant Commentary Series
Rodney Whitacre, *John*, IVP New Testament Commentary
Bruce Milne, *The Message of John*, The Bible Speaks Today
Grant Osborne, *John*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary
Barclay Newman and Eugene Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, UBSH

²Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 170-174.