

THE JEWS AND THE MESSIANIC COMMUNITY IN JOHANNINE LITERATURE

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Resumen

El presente estudio analiza el difícil tema de la así llamada actitud negativa de Juan hacia los judíos. Después de mencionar diferentes aproximaciones a ese problema, se investiga el vocabulario de Juan al referirse a los judíos, a sus antepasados y a las instituciones judías. Se mencionan veinte términos diferentes utilizados en los evangelios sinópticos y en los escritos de Juan antes de estudiar algunos de ellos en forma detallada. Entre ellos están los términos “judíos”, “Israel”, “multitud”, “sumosacerdotes”, “gobernantes” y “fariseos” en el Evangelio de Juan y el término “judíos” en el Apocalipsis. El cuadro que emerge muestra ser mucho más equilibrado que podría parecer a primera vista. En Juan no existe una condenación generalizada de los judíos. En su lugar, Juan destaca una comunidad mesiánica compuesta tanto por los judíos como por todos los que eligen creer en el Mesías.

Abstract

The article addresses the controversial subject of John's so-called negative attitude towards the Jews. After mentioning different approaches to the problem, the vocabulary employed by John pointing to Jews, their ancestors, and Jewish institutions is investigated. The occurrence of twenty different terms used in the Synoptic Gospels and the Johannine literature is mentioned before some of them are studied in detail. These include the terms “Jews”, “Israel”, “crowd”, “chief priests”, “rulers”, and “Pharisees” in the Gospel of John and the term “Jews” in the Apocalypse. The picture that emerges is much more balanced than may appear at first glance. There is no wholesale condemnation of the Jews in John. Instead John points to a Messianic community consisting of Jews and all those who choose to believe in the Messiah.

1. INTRODUCTION

In his book *Who Killed Jesus?* John Dominic Crossan tries to come to grips with the Fourth Gospel's negative attitude over against the Jews. Although written by a Jew, for many people and especially for Jews the text of John's Gospel is quite offensive. Different solutions have been proposed in order to make this gospel less repulsive.

Crossan suggests that the Gospel of John is Christian propaganda.

Does the abuse of Jesus come from history remembered, or from prophecy historicized? Does it come from Christians investigating their sources to know what happened as historical event, or does it come from Christians searching their Scriptures to create what happened as prophetic fulfillment? [...] Here is the question at the heart of my book. Jesus stands before a Roman governor who declares him innocent and wants him

released while a Jewish crowd declares him guilty and wants him crucified. The crowd wins. Is that scene Roman history, or Christian propaganda?¹

He then redefines divine inspiration which comes through human

[...] fear, dislike, and hate as well as through faith, hope, and charity. It can also come as inspired propaganda, and inspiration does not make it any the less propaganda. In its origins and first moments, that Christian propaganda was fairly innocent. Those first Christians were relatively powerless Jews. [...] But, once the Roman Empire became Christian, that fiction turned lethal. [...] However, explicable its origins, defensible its invectives, and understandable its motives among Christians fighting for survival, its repetition has now become the longest lie, and, for our own integrity, we Christians must at last name it as such.²

A second widely accepted theory is that of two layers within the Gospel of John. One layer is what actually happened in the time of Jesus. The other layer is the situation in the time when the Fourth Gospel was written and when the tensions between Jews and Christians were heightened and a break had occurred between synagogue and church. Both levels are intermingled. For instance, the Johannine peculiarity of the expulsion from the synagogue is said to come from a later time and was not directly an issue in the time of Jesus.³ The problem with this approach is not only that

¹ John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper, 1991), x-xi.

² *Ibid.*, xi-xii. See also, 152, 219-220.

³ See here Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1975), 147-56; *idem*, "Anti-Semitism and the Gospel of John," in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (ed. Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993), 113-27. Kysar argues that the expulsion of the Christians from the synagogue at the time when the Gospel of John was written explains the hostile tone toward Judaism. "In summary, the posture of the church was that of defensiveness amid the self-doubt of uncertain identity. The polemical quality of the Gospel of John tells the interpreter more about the evangelist and the Johannine community than it witnesses to the ontological status of the Jews or Judaism. [...] The vitriolic attack on Judaism is nothing more nor less than the desperate attempt of the Johannine Christians to find a rationale for their existence in isolation from Judaism" (122) "But in spite of the best efforts of the fourth evangelist the basic Jewishness of the perspective of the Johannine community is visible between and behind the lines of the text. Hence, an older tradition in which Jesus clearly identifies himself as a Jew and affirms Judaism as the source of salvation (4:22) slips past the watchful eye of the evangelist-redactor to confuse the reader" (123). "Oddly enough, the community that was founded on the sacrifice of an innocent person for their salvation now sacrificed their former Jewish brothers and sisters for the sake of their self-identity" (124). Kysar seems to regret the canonization of the Gospel of John at least to some extent because "canonization means that the shortsightedness as well as the insights of its author and its message may now be taken as divinely sanctioned" (125). As valuable as it is to come up with an explanation of the problem of the Jews in John's Gospel, it is a reconstruction that only built on a number of presuppositions that not all scholars may be willing to share.

we have at least two settings in life, but that part of the text does not reflect the actual historical situation in the twenties and thirties of the first century.⁴

A third approach claims that we have to distinguish between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. The Fourth Gospel may be anti-Jewish, but is not anti-Semitic.

The issue of whether the Gospels contain anti-Semitic material is decided in part by the way anti-Semitism is defined. If it refers only to attitudes based on nineteenth-century racial theories, then the first-century Gospels cannot be anti-Semitic. [...] Condemnation of some Jews on religious grounds is fundamentally different from prejudice to against all Jews on racial grounds.⁵

A final approach suggests that the Gospel of John as well as the Book of Revelation present an “intra-mural Jewish conflict,”⁶ comparable to the one the Qumran community had with the other strands of Judaism or “intra-Jewish polemic”:

Since most New Testament writings can be dated to the period between the mid and late first century CE, the decisive split between the Christian movement and the larger Jewish community had not yet occurred. Therefore, prophetic discourse within the New Testament that might sound anti-Jewish to the modern ear can be better understood as “intra-Jewish polemic,” often aimed at specific parties or authorities within Judaism. The prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible indicates that intra-Jewish polemic can become quite vociferous.⁷

In this study I will try to wrestle with the issue of how Jews are portrayed in the Johannine literature and which conclusion may be drawn from that encounter. My starting point is a close reading of the New Testament, which takes seriously its historical connections. I will take a look at different terms that describe Jews or are somehow related to Jews, such as different groups within Judaism. Then I will turn my attention to the Gospel of John and only briefly to the Book of Revelation. The main focus will be on the Gospel of John because it contains the majority of references to

⁴ For instance, the Sadducees are not mentioned in the Fourth Gospel and, if we delete John 8a, the scribes are not listed either. It may very well be that in the nineties, when supposedly John wrote his gospel, Sadducees had virtually disappeared and he decided not to bother the reader with this group. But such a suggestion which allows John for not painting the full picture is still different from an approach that claims that certain data have been read back into the gospel that originally were not there. In such a case, one cannot really trust the historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel, at least with regard to its original setting. See here Johannes Beutler, “Two Ways of Gathering: The Plot to Kill Jesus in John 11.47-53,” *NTS* 40 (1994): 399-406.

⁵ Jon A. Weatherly, “Anti-Semitism,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992), 13-14. Compare also Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 31-32; Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

⁶ Peder Borgen, “Polemic in the Book of Revelation,” in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (ed. Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993), 204, also 206, 211.

⁷ Lee Griffith, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 62. He applies this also to the Gospel of John.

the Jews. The Johannine Epistles can be excluded, because it seems that they do not touch upon our topic. The Apocalypse must be investigated. However, the different type of literature in Revelation must be taken into account and will also influence the conclusions reached.

2. STATISTICAL DATA

Terms dealing with the Jews or describing Jewish institutions or parts of the Jewish people include the following:

- (1) Jews (VIoudai/oj)
- (2) Israel (VIsrah,l) and Israelite (VIsrahli,thj)
- (3) Pharisees (Farisai/oj)
- (4) Scribes (grammateu,j)
- (5) Sadducees (Saddoukai/oj)
- (6) High priest (avrciereu,j)
- (7) Priests (i`ereu,j)
- (8) Levites (Leui,thj)
- (9) Ruler (a;rcwn)
- (10) Crowd (o;cloj)
- (11) Synagogue (sunagwgh,)
- (12) Outcasts of the synagogue (avposuna,gwgoj,)
- (13) Temple (i`ero,n)
- (14) Temple (nao,j)
- (15) Jerusalem (~Ieroso,luma)
- (16) Judea (VIoudai,a)
- (17) Abraham (VAbraa,m)
- (18) Isaac (VIsaa,k)
- (19) Jacob (VIakw,b)
- (20) Moses (Mwu?sh/j,)

The subsequent table indicates the occurrences of terms in the synoptic gospels as compared to the Johannine literature. These terms include all that are found in the text of the 27th edition of Nestle-Aland, even if some may have to be deleted because

of poor attestation.⁸ However, those that do not somehow relate to the Jewish people or God's people, whatever the term may be, are omitted.⁹

<i>Terms</i>	<i>Number of Occurrences</i>					
	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>1-3 John</i>	<i>Revelation</i>
(1) Jews	5	6	5	70 ¹⁰	0	2
(2) Israel	12	2	12	4	0	3
(2a) Israelite	0	0	0	1	0	0
(3) Pharisees	30	12	27	20	0	0
(4) Scribes	23	21	14	1	0	0
(5) Sadducees	7	1	1	0	0	0
(6) High priest	25	22	15	21	0	0
(7) Priests	3	2	5	1	0	3
(8) Levites	0	0	1	1	0	0
(9) Ruler	2	0	7	4	0	0
(10) Crowd/people	50	38	40	20	0	3
(11) Synagogue	9	8	15	2	0	2
(12) Outcasts of synagogue	0	0	0	3	0	0
(13) Temple (i'ero,n)	11	9	14	11	0	0
(14) Temple (nao,j)	9	3	4	3	0	16
(15) Jerusalem	13	11	31	13	0	3
(16) Judea	8	4	10	6	0	0
(17) Abraham	2	1	15	10	0	0
(18) Isaac	4	1	3	0	0	0
(19) Jacob	6	1	4	3	0	0
(20) Moses	7	8	10	13	0	1

Table 1: Terms referring to Jews, their Ancestors, and Jewish Institutions in the Synoptics and John

This table confirms the omission of the Johannine Epistles in our study. It also shows that Revelation refers only occasionally to the respective terms. Therefore, the focus must be on the Gospel of John. The comparison with the Synoptic Gospels is quite interesting. Although sometimes the use of a word in John falls into the range of the use in the Synoptics, more often there is a sharp distinction between John and the Synoptics. The term "Jews," quite seldom employed by the Synoptics, becomes the word most often used by John surpassing all other vocabulary. John mentions the

⁸ The only time that "scribe" is found in John is in 8:3, which is part of the passage dealing with the woman caught in adultery. This passage, although probably genuine, may not be part of the Gospel of John.

⁹ For instance, the term "ruler" is not only applied to the Jewish leadership but also to Satan, who is "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and to Jesus, who is "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev 1:5).

¹⁰ The term is used once as a reference for the Judean country and therefore it is not counted. The concordance lists 71 entries.

Pharisees less frequently than the Synoptics do. This is especially true for the “scribes.” Sadducees are omitted completely. The crowd is found only half as often as in the Synoptics. The synagogue occurs only seldom in John. However, the special term “outcasts of the synagogue” is a term used by John only and nowhere else in Scripture.

The following table points to the distribution of the previously mentioned terms as they appear in the different chapters in the Gospel of John. Furthermore, we have to take into account that, for instance, personal pronouns continue the discussion of a certain word, even if the noun itself is not used anymore. Therefore, the nouns indicate the minimum and not the maximum of the discussion on a certain subject or concept.

A distribution of the terms as they appear in the different chapters in the Gospel of John is found below. It shows that the heaviest concentration of all the terms occurs in chapters 7-8, 11-12, and 18-19. Most important is the distribution of the word “Jews.” This term is found through chapters 1 to 13. It is not employed in chapters 14-17 which contains the major part of the farewell speeches of Jesus and his high priestly prayer.¹¹ The highest concentration of the term “Jews” is found in the passion story. Later the Jews are mentioned only once in chapter 20 and not at all in chapter 21. A high concentration is also found in the crucial chapter of John 11. The resurrection of Lazarus is the turning point for Jesus, because his death becomes now unavoidable.

A similar picture emerges when we study the term “high priest.” Again, the heaviest concentration occurs in John 13 and the passion narrative. The high priests are only found in connection to the plots to seize or kill Jesus and Lazarus and in connection with Jesus’ trial.

If all terms are taken together, chapter 7 indicates the heaviest concentration. This is due to the fact that the terms “crowd/people” and “Pharisees” are found most often in this chapter.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Chapters in John</i>																					<i>Total</i>
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>21</i>	
(1) Jews	1	4	2	3	5	3	6	5	3	4	8	2	1					9	13	1		70
(2) Israel	2		1										1									4
(2a) Israelite	1																					1
(3) Pharisees	1		1	1			5	2	4		3	2						1				20
(4) Scribes								1														1
(5) Sadducees																						0
(6) High priest							2			4	1						11	3				21

¹¹ The reference to Jews in chapter 13 is found right in the beginning of Jesus’ farewell speeches so that the farewell speeches refer to the Jews once. But they are mentioned in passing only. In the farewell speeches Jesus focuses on the remaining eleven disciples.

Term	Chapters in John																					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
(7) Priests	1																					1
(8) Levites	1																					1
(9) Ruler			1				2					1										4
(10) Crowd/people					1	4	8				1	6										20
(11) Synagogue							1											1				2
(12) Outcasts of synagogue									1		1					1						3
(13) Temple (i'ero,n)		2			1		2	3		1	1							1				11
(14) Temple (nao,j)			3																			3
(15) Jerusalem	1	2		3	2		1			1	2	1										13
(16) Judea				3			2				1											6
(17) Abraham								10														10
(18) Isaac																						0
(19) Jacob				3																		3
(20) Moses	2		1		2	1	4	1	2													13
	10	11	6	13	11	9	32	22	10	6	20	15	1	0	0	1	0	23	16	1	0	207

Table 2: Distribution of Terms referring to Jews, their Ancestors, and Jewish Institutions in John

John 7 portrays one of the earlier conflicts. However, the temple guards fail to seize Jesus and Nicodemus prevents his condemnation. The attempt to kill Jesus as recorded in John 11 will in the end be more successful. In any case, John 7 is one of the crucial chapters in the Fourth Gospel.

3. THE JEWS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

We will now briefly turn to the different terms and see how they are used. We will not be able to trace and discuss all of them in this study. We will, however, concentrate on those that we consider most important. We will begin with the term “Jews,” because in John it is used most frequently.¹²

3.1. The Jews

As already listed, the masculine form “Jew/Jews” is employed 70 times. In the majority of cases the term is used in the plural. Only three times a masculine singular is used. In 3:25 an unidentified Jew has a dispute with the disciples of John the Baptist

¹² For literature on John and the Jews, see, for example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966), lxx-lxxv; John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2001), 89-90; William G. Johnston, “The Crucifixion of Jesus: Were the Jews ‘Christ-Killers?’” (unpublished manuscript, no date); D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 49-62, 169-73; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John, Volume 1* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 165-67; Urban C. von Wahlde, “The Jews in the Gospel of John: Fifteen Years of Research (1983-1998),” *ETL* 76 (2000): 30-55.

about purification.¹³ The Samaritan woman addresses Jesus as a Jew (4:9). And Pilate states that he is not a Jew (18:35). The remaining 67 instances use a masculine plural.

3.1.1. *Who are the Jews?*

The question arises: Who are the Jews in John's Gospel? They are the descendants of Abraham (8:33-58). They call themselves "the disciples of Moses" (9:28). Their fathers experienced the exodus and ate manna in the wilderness (6:31,49, 58). They were blessed by prophets sent by God (8:53). They had received the law (7:19).

Yet John portrays them often quite negatively: (1) although they have the law, they did not keep it (7:19). The Mosaic law is "their law" or "your law" (8:17; 10:34; 15:25). The phrase may indicate that to a certain degree Jesus, being himself a Jew distances himself from the Jews, i.e., probably their interpretation of the law. Already in the prologue of the gospel law and grace had been contrasted (1:17). (2) They did not believe in Jesus (3:12; 4:48; 5:38; 12:37) and did not receive him (3:19). (3) They grumbled about Jesus (6:41) and claimed that he was demon-possessed (7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20). (4) They made the temple a place of business (2:16). Their eyes were blind and their hearts hardened (12:40). (5) They caused others to fear them (7:13; 19:28; 20:19), and they disfellowshipped people from the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). (6) They persecuted Jesus and would persecute his disciples (5:16; 15:20). They tried to kill him (5:18; 7:1, 19, 20, 25) and attempted to stone him (10:31; 11:8). (7) Satan was their father (8:44). They abandoned their king and instead accepted the Roman Caesar as their Lord (19:15).

3.1.2. *People or Leaders?*

Are these Jews the leaders of the community or the masses of the Jewish people or both? This question is not always easy to answer. Often times the context helps to determine whether they are the leadership or the people. But John uses the term "Jews" for both. Therefore, in some cases a certain ambiguity is noted.

(1) In 3:1 the term clearly points to the Jews as the people. Nicodemus is a ruler of the Jews.

(2) When the Samaritan woman calls Jesus a Jew and the subsequent sentence states that Jews have no dealings with Samaritans (4:9), it is the people and not the leading class.

(3) This is also true for the references to the festivals of the Jews, such as the Passover of the Jews, or to customs of the Jews (2:6, 13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55; 19:40).

(4) The Jews that are offended by Jesus' words about the bread of life and about eating his flesh (6:41, 52) are the crowd.

¹³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), 238, suggest that there may be a possible connection to Qumran. The Qumran community had "a deep interest in ceremonial purification."

(5) When Jesus says, “Where I am going, you cannot come,” he seems to address the people (7:2; 8:22; 13:33; see 8:30, 31).

(6) According to 7:14-15 Jesus is teaching in the temple during a festival of the Jews. The Jews are astonished and ask, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?” Jesus responds to this question. Next we hear that the crowd responds. The Jews and the crowd may be the same group.

(7) In 8:30-31 a somewhat positive statement is found. Many Jews believed in Jesus.¹⁴ “The surprising thing about it is that the other parties to the discussion are Jews who have come to believe (v. 31), but who nevertheless soon (v. 33) contradict Jesus, react with increasing vehemence and at the end want to stone him.”¹⁵ Jesus questions if they are descendants of Abraham—at least in the spiritual sense (8:39)—and in 8:42 he denies that God is their Father. In 8:48, 52, 57 the term “Jews” is again applied to them. In v. 59 they pick up stones to throw at him. Before this happens, they call Jesus a Samaritan who has an evil spirit. “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” This statement seems to refer back to 7:20 where the crowd says, “You have a demon!”

(8) In 10:19 the words of Jesus cause a division among the Jews. Some again claim that Jesus has a demon. Others are more sympathetic and may even defend him. In 7:40-43 there is also a division, however, among the crowd. The Jews are obviously the people.

(9) A new passage seems to start with 10:22 which, however, is closely connected to the previous one and still deals with Jesus as the good shepherd. The Jews are found in 10:24, 31 and 33. V. 31 reads: “The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.” “As in 8:59, they intend to stone him. [...] The evangelist makes the connection with it through *παλιν*. Jesus’ discourse about his divine nature, which had been interrupted then, is now continued; but at the same time the Messianic claim made by Jesus at that earlier stage is more clearly defined and expanded.”¹⁶ Since the Jews in chapter 8 obviously were the people, it is best to understand them here also as the crowd. This is reinforced by the close connection to 10:19. In addition, we know from John 18:31 that at that time the Jews were not allowed to put an individual to death.

¹⁴ In 8:30 *επι,στευσαν εις αυτον* is used, whereas in 8:31 *πεπιστευκο,ται αυτω* is employed. In the first case an aorist followed by a preposition and a personal pronoun is found, in the second case a perfect participle without preposition but followed by a pronoun in the dative occurs. Some commentators make a difference between the two phrases, and some see different groups in v. 30 and in v. 31. For them *πιστευσεν εις* points to real faith whereas *πιστευσεν αυτο* is nominal faith. See Francis D. Nichol et al., eds., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (7 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1980), 5:989; Randolph V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John* (INTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), 117. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 1:354, following Dodd rejects such a distinction here. In any case, those who believe in Jesus in 8:30 are Jews as are those mentioned in 8:31.

¹⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John, Volume 2* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 204.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 309.

This right was reserved of the Romans, and the Jewish leadership made sure that the Romans agreed to execute Jesus. Thus, one is wondering if in John 8 and 10 we have a case of lynch law by the Jewish people.¹⁷

(10) In John 11 the resurrection of Lazarus is reported. Jews are found in 11:8, 19, 31, 33, 36, 45, 54, 55. All these references seem to refer to the Jewish people. John 11:8 looks back at the attempt to stone Jesus. However, most of the other verses portray a much more favorable picture of the Jews. They came to Martha and Mary in order to console them (11:19, 31). They wept with Mary. They confirmed that Jesus has loved Lazarus (11:36), and many of them believed in him (11:45).¹⁸ The resurrection of Lazarus leads to the plot to kill Jesus. Those who are involved are, however, the high priests, the Pharisees, and the Sanhedrin (11:46-53). Jews are found in 11:54 again, where it is stated that “he no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews.” 11:55 mentions the Passover of the Jews.

(11) According to 12:9 a large crowd of the Jews came to Jesus “not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus.” And so the chief priests decided to kill Lazarus also (12:10).

(12) Some references in the passion narrative point to all Jews. Jesus states in 18:20 that he has taught publicly in the synagogue and in the temple, where all Jews come together.¹⁹ Pilate asks the rhetorical question, “Am I a Jew?” (18:35). Many Jews read the inscription on the cross (19:20). But the Jewish chief priests protested against it (19:21). A Jewish custom is found in 19:40. The other references point to Jesus, the King of the Jews (18:33, 39; 19:3, 19, 21[2x]).

The Jews are not only the crowd, but also the leadership group of the Jewish nation. This seems to be implied in the references to which we now turn.

(1) According to 1:19 the Jews sent a delegation consisting of priests and Levites to John the Baptist in order to find out who he claimed to be. In this case, the Jews must be the leadership.

(2) In John 5 Jesus heals a man who was sick for 38 years on a Sabbath day. Jews are mentioned in 5:10, 15, 16, 18. It seems that the Jews in these verses also refer to the Jewish leadership. Obviously, the man who was healed was a Jew. Yet he is only

¹⁷ For a discussion of the historical data regarding the death penalty in Jewish territories, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI* (AB 29A; New York: Doubleday, 1970), 849-50; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John, Volume 3* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 245-46.

¹⁸ Here *evpi,steusan eivj* is used.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the synagogue and the temple in John, see, Judith Lieu, “Temple and Synagogue in John,” *NTS* 45 (1999): 51-66. She writes on p. 61: “In each of the Gospels, ‘synagogue’, ‘house’, and ‘temple’ play narrative roles in the exploration of the relationship between Jesus with his community and the community of the Scriptures and contemporary Judaism. John’s use of these narrative spatial-markers is very different and does not trace the separation of John’s community from the synagogue, as often supposed. Instead, the Temple is the place for divine manifestation and where Jesus must be both revealed and rejected.”

called “the human/the person (αἰνῶντος)” and is contrasted with the Jews who interrogate him. These Jews sought to kill Jesus.

(3) “After this Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him” (7:1). The inhabitants of Galilee were also Jews.²⁰ Apparently, the Jews of 7:1 are the Jewish leadership. We are not so sure about v. 11. But in 7:13 the Jews that are feared by their fellow Jews are the Jewish leaders.

(4) After having healed the man, who was blind from birth, a conflict arose. The healed man was brought to the Pharisees because the healing took place on a Sabbath. During the interrogation the Pharisees become “the Jews” (9:18). Only at the very end of the chapter, are the Pharisees mentioned again (9:40). These Jews were feared by the parents of the healed person, because they had decided to put those out of the synagogue who would confess Jesus as the Messiah (9:22 [2x]). Thus, the Jews of John 9 represent Jewish leaders.

(5) A clear reference to the Jews as the leadership circle is found in the passion narrative. Although the term “Jews” is also used for the people within the passion narrative, as we have seen those who are at least partially responsible for the death of Jesus are the Jewish leaders. They are described as chief priests and Pharisees in 18:3, from then on as chief priests only (18:10, 13, 15, 16, 19, 22, 24, 26, 35; 19:6, 15, 21) and as Jews (18:12, 14, 31, 36, 38; 19:7, 12, 14, 31, 38). The plot to kill Jesus and have him crucified was successful. Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified (19:16).

(6) Three times in Scripture the phrase “for fear of the Jews” is found, each time in John.²¹ The references are 7:13; 19:38; 20:19. In 9:22 a verb instead of a noun is used. This fear of the Jews caused the people not to talk about Jesus and to be extremely cautious in interrogations. It prevented Joseph of Arimathea from confessing Jesus publicly and the disciples from moving around freely after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Clearly, the leading class is implied.

3.1.3. *Positive or negative?*

We have already noticed that the Jew whether representing the leadership or describing the people, are portrayed quite negatively. However, this is not the entire picture. Some of the references to Jews are neutral in character or show some indifference. Jewish customs such as the purification (2:6) or the burial of dead persons

²⁰ Kysar, “Anti-Semitism and the Gospel of John,” 118, points to the following suggestion: “The most frequent nominees for the position as referent of the expression are Judeans, as opposed to Galilean Jews, and the religious leaders of the Judaism contemporaneous to the fourth evangelist.” Kysar rejects this and points the reader of his article to the historical situation when the gospel was written as the clue for understanding the issue.

²¹ The phrase is *dia. to.n fo,bon tw/n VIoudai,wn*. A similar and yet different phrase occurs twice in Revelation, namely *dia. to.n fo,bon tou/ basanismou/ auvth/j*, “because of the fear of her torment” (18:10, 15) where it refers to Babylon.

(19:40) are mentioned in passing. No negative connotations seem to be attached. This is also true for the Jewish festivals that are found in John.

But the term “Jew”—whether singular or plural—is also used in a positive way. (1) Jews support Martha and Mary when they are mourning (11:19, 31, 33).²² (2) Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, is a positive figure and takes a stand for Jesus not only in John 7, when he prevents his condemnation, but also in John 19, when he brings myrrh and aloes for Jesus’ burial. Joseph of Arimathea must be also mentioned. (3) Jesus is a Jew. The evangelist does not suppress this information. Therefore, his gospel does not contain a wholesale condemnation of the Jews. (4) Jesus himself states in 4:22 that “salvation is from the Jews.” (5) There are not only Jesus’ disciples who obviously are Jews and believed in him (2:11, 22; 20:8, 29), but many other Jews believed in Jesus. Sometimes this faith in Jesus is not very strong and may even disappear here and there (2:23; 8:31). Nevertheless, there are Jews who believe in Jesus, some with all their heart and some more superficially. Believers in Jesus include the royal official in 4:50, 53, those who saw his miracles (7:31) or heard his proclamation (8:30; 10:42), the healed blind man (9:38), Martha (11:27), those who watched the resurrection of Lazarus (11:45), and even some of the rulers (12:42). (6) Finally, John emphasizes that Jesus is the King of the Jews. Among the four gospels only John reserves the title “king” for Jesus alone. Whereas the Synoptics stress his kingdom, John stresses him as the only legitimate king. Only in John does Jesus call himself king (18:37). Although Jesus is briefly introduced as the king at the beginning of John, the title is primarily used in the passion narrative.²³ Jesus is the King of the Jews. The gospel does not protest against this title. On the other hand, it is obvious that to reject this king is a grave mistake.

3.1.4. Summary

So far we have seen that the term “Jews” is used for individuals such as Jesus and for the people as well as its leadership. Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether John applies the plural to all Jews or to its leaders only. The term is predominantly negative, but neutral and even positive aspects have also been found. Although at

²² See here Mark W. G. Stibbe, “A Tomb with a View: John 11.1-14 in Narrative-Critical Perspective,” *NTS* 40 (1994): 38-54. On pp. 47-48 he notes: “The Jews appear in v. 33. The narrator refers to them as a group of people who have been mourning with Mary inside Lazarus’ home. This comes as something of a shock to the reader after the rather unsympathetic behaviour of the Jews hitherto. They show little concern for the crippled man in chap. 5 or the man born blind in chap. 9. Indeed, they expel the latter from the synagogue. Here, in complete contrast, they are portrayed alongside Mary in her grief. They are shown ‘weeping’ (v. 33). Indeed, it is in part their weeping which provokes the tears which Jesus sheds. There seems, at last, to be something positive and distinctly humane about the Johannine portrait of the Jews.”

²³ 12 out of 16 times it is used in John 18-19. In addition it is found in the events leading up to his passion, namely twice in the triumphal entry in John 12. See Ekkehardt Müller, “Der Begriff ‘König’ in den Evangelien des NT” (unpublished manuscript).

times the crowd attempts to kill Jesus, obviously they are not directly involved in his death. The final decision to execute Jesus is made after the marvelous resurrection of Lazarus. The responsibility for Jesus' death is with the Jewish leadership and Pilate. John is not as negative on the Jews as perceived at first glance.²⁴

3.2. Israel

The term "Israel" is found only four times in John.²⁵ In addition there is the word "Israelite." Israel is a positive term in all instances. John the Baptist in talking about the Messiah mentioned that he did not know the Messiah but that he was sent so that the Messiah might be revealed to Israel (1:19). Nicodemus is somewhat rebuked by Jesus: "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?" (3:10). But Israel is not a negative term; rather it is a term of honor. The other two references in John talk about Jesus "the King of Israel." Right in the beginning of John's gospel a confession of Nathanael is found. Rabbi Jesus is the son of God and the King of Israel. Indirectly Jesus confirms this confession, and John the evangelist does not doubt or downgrade it. At the triumphal entry this confession is repeated by the crowd. Again Jesus does not hinder or correct the people. On the contrary, the event is understood as the fulfillment of OT prophecy. Because Jesus is the King of Israel at the beginning of his ministry and at the prelude to his passion, he is also the rightful King of the Jews during his passion.

Nathanael, who confessed Jesus as the King of Israel, was called by Jesus himself "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit" (1:47) just a moment before his confession. "Although 'Jews' (Ἰουδαί/οι) is characteristically, though not always, a term of opprobrium in the Fourth Gospel, 'Israel' and 'Israelite' uniformly appear in a positive sense. [...] 'Israel' and 'Israelite,' the designations preferred by the Jews themselves, remain entirely positive."²⁶ This seems also to be true for the names of the Patriarchs. Jesus does not attack Abraham or Moses. He only challenges a wrong feeling of security by relying on the forefathers and yet not living up to their example or their teachings.

²⁴ Compare here Donald A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 171; and Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, 171. Crossan's suggestion [Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 90]: "Peter [Gospel of Peter]: Jewish authorities bad and Jewish people good; Luke (Gospel): Jewish authorities bad and Jewish people good; Mark: Jewish authorities bad and Jewish 'crowd' bad; Luke (Acts): Jewish authorities bad and Jewish people bad; Matthew: Jewish authorities bad and Jewish people bad; John: Jewish (no distinction) bad," seems to be an overstatement, especially in the light of the terms still to be investigated.

²⁵ See Mark Adam Elliott, "Israel," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight and I. Howard Marshall; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992), 356-63.

²⁶ Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, 172.

3.3. The Crowd/People

Interestingly enough, the term “crowd” or “people” is only found in a few chapters. It occurs in chapters 5 through 7 and 11 and 12. The references in John 5 and 6 are mainly neutral. In chapter 5:13 there is a crowd in a certain place. Jesus withdraws from them. In 6:2, 5, 22, 24 the crowd is the audience of Jesus which experiences the feeding of the 5000 and dialogues with him on the subject of the bread of life. Only toward the end of chapter 6 a division occurs. Jesus loses many of his disciples, but we do not hear about an attempt to harm, persecute, or kill him.

In John 7 the crowd is again divided (7:12, 32, 40). Those who reject Jesus may be bolder now than they were in the previous chapters. While some claim that Jesus is a good man (7:12) and *the* prophet, probably referring back to Deut 18:15,²⁷ and while many of the people believed in him, others claim that Jesus leads the people astray (7:12) and that he is even demon-possessed. The division among the people and their muttering about him causes the intervention of the high priests and the Pharisees (7:32). However, their attempt to seize Jesus and condemn him is thwarted. The end of chapter 7 pictures a contrast between the leading class of Jewish society and the people. This goes so far that the people are even accursed by the leading Pharisees. “But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed” (7:49). Many seem to support Jesus.

In John 11 the Jews are presented in a quite positive way. They are the people. The Jews occur in 11:36-37 and again in 11:45. In the section between these verses they are called “the people.” Jesus in his prayer to his heavenly Father prays for the people. His desire is that they may believe. Far from accusing them, as the leaders did, he is interested in them and wants them to be saved.

John 12 is the last chapter of the Fourth Gospel to talk about the people. The people desire to know where Jesus is in order to see him (1:9, 12). When they hear that he will be coming to Jerusalem, they prepare for his triumphal entry. Those people who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus (12:17) praise God. The crowd goes up to meet Jesus (12:18). However, they misunderstand the heavenly voice addressing Jesus (12:29), and they have questions about the Messiah. They do not understand that he will be “lifted up” and die. Instead they believe that the Messiah is to remain forever.

These references to the crowd are very interesting. We notice that quite often the term is used in a positive way. Even though the crowd does not understand Jesus and even though sometimes some of them make negative judgments about Jesus, the people also follow Jesus, want to understand him, and desire to be with him. Thus the

²⁷ See 6:14. This may be the perception that Jesus is the second Moses who was expected and who would do signs similar to the original Moses.

term “the crowd/the people” is quite different from the term “Jews” having often-times no negative connotations in John’s gospel.

3.4. The High Priest, the Rulers, and the Pharisees

“Rulers” are found in four places in John, twice in chapter 7 and each time in a question that requires a negative response. “Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ?” (7:26). According to 7:25 Jesus is the one that they want to kill. No, the rulers do not accept Jesus as the Messiah. In 7:48 the Pharisees chide the temple guards, who did not seize Jesus, and ask a rhetorical question: “Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?” Answer: No, only the ignorant people do, and they are accursed.

The rulers in John 7 are negative and do not believe. However, rulers mentioned in chapters 3 and 12 do believe. This looks almost like an inclusion. Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night because he does not want to be associated with Jesus. But Nicodemus seems to be an honest man, who becomes a secret disciple of Jesus (3:1). The ruler Nicodemus is balanced by a group of rulers in 12:42, again secret believers, who believe in Jesus but do not dare to confess their faith openly because they fear the Pharisees and are afraid that the public opinion may turn against them. John 12:43 contains an indirect reproof of their cowardice.

Thus, the term ruler is once associated with the Pharisees. Rulers are not a totally negative group. A number of them are even followers of Jesus. Some of them come out and are willing to bear the consequences of being disciples of the Lord. Whereas in 7:48 the Pharisees and the rulers are allied, in 12:42 they are clearly contrasted.

What about the Pharisees? Pharisees are found most often in John 7, 9, and 11, when the conflict grows the strongest.²⁸ They first occur in 1:24. Apparently, they are to be equated with the Jews of verse 19, who have sent out priests and Levites in order to find out who John the Baptist claimed to be. They hear about the increase in number of Jesus’ disciples (4:1). They hear the muttering of the people about Jesus in John 7:32. They seem to be well informed (8:3; 11:46; 12:49). In John 7 the collaboration between the Pharisees and chief priests starts. Although their theological views may have been divided, they work together against Jesus. This cooperation is expressed in 7:32, 45; 11:47, 57; and 18:3. They send out servants to catch Jesus (7:32; 18:3). They have a gathering and plot to arrest and kill Jesus (11:47). They give “orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it” (11:57).

The Pharisees seem to take the initiative against Jesus in chapter 7 and in any case in chapter 9, in which the high priests are not involved and in which they interrogate the healed blind man. At the end of chapter 9 a reversal takes place. The man with

²⁸ John 7:32 [2x], 45, 47, 48; 9:13, 15, 16, 40; 11:46, 47, 57.

physical blindness is healed. The Pharisees, however, seem to experience spiritual blindness without having an excuse.

The Pharisees are involved in the plot to kill Jesus after he had raised Lazarus and also in the events leading up to the crucifixion. However, in these cases the chief priests take the initiative.

In 8:3 the scribes and Pharisee tempt Jesus with the woman caught in adultery. In 8:13 the Pharisees attack Jesus and claim that Jesus lies. For a while they are frustrated. “You see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after him” (12:19). But they seem to be able to disfellowship those who believe in Jesus from the synagogue (12:42).²⁹ Finally, the plan to have Jesus killed succeeds, although the Pharisees are not portrayed as being involved in the trials.³⁰

The Pharisees are among the chief opponents of Jesus according to John. The picture would be totally bleak if it were not for one laudable exception, Nicodemus. He is the only sincere Pharisee and at the same time a ruler in Israel.

One group is left, namely the chief priests, which may stand for the priestly nobility in Jerusalem. We find them in the crucial passages of John’s gospel, in chapters 7, 11, 18, and 19. The issue is always to kill Jesus. The only exception is a short notice in 12:10, which adds to the cruel picture that John paints: “So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus also to death.”

In John 11 Caiphas referring to Jesus suggests: “It is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish” (11:49). In John 18 Jesus is tried before the high priest before he is brought to Pilate. Pilate’s statement:

²⁹ D. Moody Smith, “The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John,” in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John, In Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1990), 275-294, quotes on p. 281 a comment by Martyn on 16:2: “In light of the fact that the horrible and heinous and centuries-long persecution of Jews by Christians has sometimes been ‘justified’ by the theory that the Jews did the first persecuting, it is understandable that a number of Christian interpreters have wished to see this verse as a reference to the persecution of Christians not by Jews, but by Roman authorities. Yet the Greek word rendered ‘act of (worshipful) service’ refers elsewhere in the New Testament to Jewish worship; and the other experience referred to in this text, excommunication from the synagogue, points to the action of Jewish authorities. Modern relations between Christians and Jews are not helped by an antihistorical interpretation of Biblical texts.”

³⁰ See Urban C. von Wahlde, “The Relationships between Pharisees and Chief Priests: Some Observations on the Texts in Matthew, John and Josephus,” *NTS* 42 (1966): 518, who writes: “In summary, it can be said that we find in the gospel a portrayal of the Pharisees which is parallel to that in Josephus. They are a group which has influence but not direct political power; they join with the chief priests to bring about direct action.” He continues later: “When the passages are looked at together, rather than in isolation, it seems that the picture of the association of Pharisees with chief priests is not anachronistic but in fact provides us with a glimpse of a lesser known dimension of the political and religious relations between Pharisees and chief priest and so reveals one further aspect of the interaction of Jewish religious groupings in the first century, an aspect heretofore regarded with excessive suspicion (p. 522).”

“Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me” (18:35) must be understood in the corporate sense. It was not the entire Jewish people that handed Jesus over to Pilate. It was the leadership. The culmination of evil is found in John 19. Like beasts the chief priests cry out and shout “Crucify him, crucify him!” If one does not have good reasons he or she must shout louder. If arguments fails voice and body language have to make up for what is missing. But it goes further. In 19:15 they finally disown themselves: “We have no king but Caesar.” God, their King, is replaced by the Roman Emperor.³¹ Therefore, they had to reject Jesus, the King of the Jews (19:21).

Among the three leading groups the rulers were still the most sympathetic. Not much good can be said about the Pharisees and nothing about the chief priests.

3.5. Summary

Having briefly investigated relevant terms in the Gospel of John a clear picture emerges. The expression “Jew/Jews” is oftentimes a negative term. It may describe individuals, the people, or the leadership of the Jewish nation. Jews are oftentimes portrayed as being in opposition to Jesus and not believing in him. However, there are important exceptions. Jesus is a Jew. Salvation comes from the Jesus, and there are Jews who believe in Jesus and follow him.

“Israel” and “Israelite” are positive terms in John.³² The expression “crowd” is sometimes used interchangeably with “Jews.” However, in John this term is often positive. John makes it clear that the common people were not involved in the plot to kill Jesus and had nothing to do with his crucifixion.

When it comes to the leadership of the Jews differences become also evident. The expression “ruler” is sometimes used negatively and sometimes used positively. In John, Pharisees are with one exception negative. In Jesus’ trials they recede to the background. The expression chief priests is always negative.

Since the gospel carefully distinguishes between different groups and individuals, we are also called to be extremely careful when we evaluate others. “[...] it is an [...] unnecessary mistake of tragic proportions to assume that ‘the Jews’ in the Gospel of

³¹ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 737-38, notes: “Thus by choosing a heathen ruler, the Jewish nation had withdrawn from the theocracy. They had rejected God as their king. Henceforth they had no deliverer. They had no king but Cesar. To this the priests and teachers had led the people. For this, with the fearful results that followed, they were responsible. A nation’s sin and a nation’s ruin were due to the religious leaders.” Compare also Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1062.

³² For a discussion on Jews and Israel in John see Peter J. Tomson, “‘Jews’ in the Gospel of John as Compared with the Palestinian Talmud, the Synoptics, and Some New Testament Apocrypha,” in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneville; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 176-212. See also Elliott, “Israel,” 360.

John means all Jews in every time and place.”³³ Whereas we encounter in John a somewhat negative attitude toward some Jews, especially toward the Jewish leadership and those who have rejected Jesus, we also notice that the Gospel contains traces of the new community.

4. CHRIST’S COMMUNITY

Although John does not use the term “church” (evkkhlsi,a) in his Gospel—he uses it in 3 John and in Revelation—the Gospel contains references to the new community of Jesus. Some scholars call it a remnant. “[...] if the word of God created a remnant in Israel’s past, it must be considered inevitable that such a remnant would be created by God’s word to Israel through Jesus today. [...] It appears, therefore, not only that Jesus expected a remnant, but that he cooperated with its formation by intending, gathering and calling.”³⁴

Which glimpses do we get of this community? Here are some:

(1) In John 10 we hear about Jesus’ sheep for which he cares. They hear his voice, Jesus knows them, and they follow him. They are safe in Jesus’ and the Father’s hands. Jesus is the shepherd, and he has a flock, a new community.

(2) But Jesus has still other sheep “that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd” (10:16). There is a messianic community or church. The messianic community believes in Jesus as the Messiah. It has twelve apostles like Israel has twelve tribes. All of them are Jews as is their Lord. This community consists of all who follow Jesus. In the Gospel of John this includes Jews, Samaritans, and whoever accepts Jesus as Savior and Lord.

(3) During Jesus’ life his followers were already threatened with expulsion from the synagogue. In 16:2 Jesus predicted the expulsion of his followers from the synagogue. Thereby two different communities are presupposed. However, Jesus’ new community would gather the remnant, namely those Jews who believe in him.

(4) Especially in his farewell speeches and his high priestly prayer Jesus gives us insights into his new community and even shapes this new community. Whereas in chapters 13-17 the particular vocabulary, which we have investigated, is almost completely missing, it is precisely in these chapters that Jesus points to his church.

a. Jesus chose his followers (15:19) and established his community.

b. His followers have certain characteristics, which in their entirety do not apply to those Jews who do not follow Jesus. (1) They love each other (13:34-35), and they love God (14:15). (2) They have accepted Jesus as the only way to the Father, as the truth, and as the life (14:6). They have seen God the Father through Jesus Christ.

³³ Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, 56.

³⁴ Elliott, “Israel,” 362.

They accept that other ways to maintain a saving relationship with God aside from Jesus are not available. (3) They are obedient to Jesus and God (14:15, 21, 23). (4) They are the ones to receive the Holy Spirit. Because they have Jesus, they also receive the Holy Spirit who is Jesus' representative. Thus, the community of Jesus is also the community of the Holy Spirit (14:18, 26; 15:26). (5) They remain in Jesus (15:4-6). He is the vine, and they are the branches (15:1, 5). (6) They bear fruit (15:4-5). (7) They live with eschatological hope and trust Jesus' promise that he will prepare rooms in his Father's house and will come again to take them home (14:1-3).

c. They will go through difficult times and may have to suffer persecution and even death. They will be hated by the world (15:18-16:4), which in John at times may include Jews (8:22-23), and will be expelled from the synagogues (16:2). When Jesus was crucified his community wept (16:2) while the world rejoiced (16:22).

d. Jesus prayed for his present and future followers (chapter 17) and especially for unity among them.

Thus, a new community of believers is envisioned in John's Gospel. It is further spelled out in 3 John and in the Book of Revelation. Whereas the Jewish leaders disassociate from God as their king by saying: "We have no king but Caesar," Christ establishes his church consisting first of all only of Jews and only later on also of non-Jews. The relationship between the synagogue and the church is not further discussed in John. However, those who do not believe in Christ are normally not described in a positive way. The Gospel of John makes it very clear that it is crucial to believe in Jesus as the Christ. He is at the center of the Gospel, and life always depends on him.

The Fourth Gospel has a rich theology including an elaborate Christology. Jesus' suffering and death is described as exaltation and glorification. What looks like a great defeat in human eyes, is the greatest victory of all times. And in spite of all plots to kill Jesus, the Lord is still in control. "I lay down my life for the sheep. [...] For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (10:15, 17, 18). This dimension of Jesus' voluntary self-sacrifice must be added when we talk about the Jews in John, as must be the other one: Salvation has come and is available for everybody. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-31). Salvation is for Jews and Gentiles!

5. THE JEWS IN REVELATION

A few remarks on the Apocalypse seem to be in order. In the Book of Revelation Jews are found twice, namely in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9. In both cases they "say that they are Jews and are not." They are also called "a/the synagogue of Satan." Scholars

differ in opinion whether the Jews mentioned here are Jews in a figurative sense or not.³⁵

These phrases found in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 may refer to literal Jews³⁶ because the letter frame of the Apocalypse to which they belong (Rev 1-3 and Rev 22^b) is not as rich in symbols as is the apocalyptic part.³⁷ But even if these Jews have to be understood literally, we need to keep in mind that in Revelation Israel is a positive term (2:14; 7:4; 21:12) as are Mount Zion (14:1), the Lamb, the root and the offspring of David (22:16), Jerusalem, and other terms normally associated with Israel.³⁸ Priests are mentioned in a positive way, although they are now all believers. The crowd has become the great multitude “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues” (7:9). The 144,000 is a group which is comprised of twelve tribes of Israel.³⁹ This symbolic number seems to encompass the old people of God as well as the Christian church—twelve times twelve times one thousand—and may be reflected in the description of the twelve gates and the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem representing the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Even the term “Jews” is not negative in the Apocalypse. Although certain Jews are disclaimed as not being true Jews, obviously the term “Jew” is appreciated by the author of Revelation and maybe attributed to the Christian community which consisted of Jews and converted Gentiles. Peder Borgen, discussing the contributions of D. Moody Smith and A. Yabro Collins, writes:

‘Jew’ is still used in a positive sense even if the ‘synagogue of Satan’ means Jews in Smyrna, or Philadelphia, or even contemporary Jews generally. In that case, they have defected from proper Judaism. A. Yabro Collins entertains a similar view: the name

³⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), 93; and Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:746, both propose a figurative meaning. This is rejected by Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 241; John Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1990), 85; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1992), 164-66; and obviously also by David Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC 52; Dallas, Tx.: Word, 1997), 164-65.

³⁶ See Jan Lambrecht, “‘Synagogues of Satan’ (Rev. 2:9 and 3:9): Anti-Judaism in the Book of Revelation,” in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 279-92.

³⁷ While in the letter frame Jesus appears as Jesus and Christ, in the apocalyptic section starting with Revelation 4 he is portrayed as the Lamb. See also the *evkkh̄si,a* in the Apocalypse.

³⁸ See also Borgen, “Polemic in the Book of Revelation,” 201. Borgen continues to mention scholars who propose that the Jews who are not Jews are in reality fellow Christians. He also mentions E. Schüssler Fiorenza who is opposed to that explanation on the grounds that Revelation 2:9-10 seems to indicate that Christians had to experience some kind of persecution from the “Jews” which, however, can hardly be attributed to fellow Christians. Revelation does not even contain a hint that Christians persecuted other Christians.

³⁹ The list is irregular and does not include all original tribes.

‘Jew’ is denied the Jews of the local synagogues because the followers of Jesus are held to be the true Jews; thus the term ‘Jew’ is not here derogatory in and of itself.⁴⁰

In Revelation three texts directly call Christians “priests,” (Rev 1:6; 5:10 and 20:6). While the first two describe kingship and priesthood of the saints as a present reality, Revelation 20 applies kingly reign and priesthood to the future. The statement about the kingdom and priests in Revelation 1:6 is based on Exodus 19:6. The language is one of installment to office. The privileges of ancient Israel are attributed to the Christian church. Revelation 5:10 is part of the first hymn addressed to Jesus.⁴¹ He is praised for his sacrificial death, for having purchased for God people from all nations, and for having made the redeemed a kingdom and priests. These statements remind the reader not only of Revelation 1:6 but also of Daniel 7:22-23 and Exodus 19:6. The expressions “kingdom” and “priests” are parallel, and these concepts have been universalized.⁴² Revelation contains the concept of the Christian community forming a kingdom and priests having inherited the Jewish privileges. A sharp distinction between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians is not made, but Christ’s “death is so fundamental that it constitutes the people of God (the true Jews) as such [...]”⁴³

Revelation is more explicit than the Gospel of John when it comes to ecclesiology. Not only have the privileges of Israel become the privileges of the messianic community, the term *evkkhlsi,a* is found twenty times in Revelation, and the concept of the remnant is employed. The term *evkkhlsi,a* is only used in the letter frame of the book to describe the church of Christ. In the apocalyptic section symbols such as the woman clothed with the sun are used to point to the church. The eschatological remnant is found in the center of Revelation, namely chapters 12-14. Its characteristics include keeping the commandments, having the testimony of Jesus, endurance, and faith in Jesus (12:17; 13:10; 14:12). All nations and tribes and tongues and peoples (14:6), Jews and Gentiles are invited to join this remnant and “fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters” (14:7). According to Borgen “John has interpreted the church as the inclusive eschatological Israel that comprises both Jews and Gentiles in the one people of God. [...] The redemption through the death of Christ constitutes the true people of Israel who are drawn from the Jewish nations as well as other nations. As implied in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, they are then the true Jews [...]”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Borgen, “Polemic in the Book of Revelation,” 200.

⁴¹ In Revelation 4 and 5 five hymns are listed. Two are addressed to God the Father; two are addressed to the Lamb; and one is addressed to both Father and Lamb. The third hymn, which is the first one addressed to Jesus, is the most extensive one and is called a “new hymn” (Rev 5:9-10). The fourth hymn contains a sevenfold praise of the Lamb.

⁴² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 361.

⁴³ Borgen, “Polemic in the Book of Revelation,” 208.

⁴⁴ Borgen, “Polemic in the Book of Revelation,” 209. On page 210-211 he states: “Since John understood the true Israel to be cross-national, the *evkkhlsi,a* comprised both Jewish Christians and gentile

6. CONCLUSION

Although the Book of Revelation contains little material on the Jews directly, it corresponds with the Gospel of John in certain respects. Beside negative terms there are very positive expressions. Nowhere do we find a wholesale condemnation of all Jews of all times. Salvation comes from the Jews through Jesus Christ and is extended to both Jews and Gentiles. Both are invited to join Jesus' remnant community.

Christians. Nevertheless, the strong Jewish character of the book and the Jewish community features mentioned above indicate that John and the Christian congregations referred to still had their base in Jewish milieus, and the congregations had Jews as members.