

1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the question

The following study seeks to understand the way in which the author of the Fourth Gospel has appropriated the symbolism, traditions, and customs surrounding the named Jewish festivals in his presentation of Jesus. Few full-length treatments of this question have been offered by scholars, and important facets of this background remain to be accounted for. The aim of this work, then, is to examine the use of the three Jewish festivals that appear in the Gospel narrative (Passover, Tabernacles, and Dedication), both with a view to correcting or nuancing earlier appraisals as necessary and shedding new light on the festivals from the evidence of the Jewish backgrounds in a way that provides for a fuller understanding of how each festival contributes to the theology of the Fourth Gospel.

The uniqueness of the annual pilgrimage feasts in John's Gospel becomes immediately evident from a simple comparison with the Synoptic Gospels. The term "feast" (ἑορτή) occurs 17 times in John, which represents 68 percent of total New Testament usage.¹ Similarly, 10 out of 29 or 34.5 percent of New Testament occurrences of "Passover" (πάσχα) appear in John.² Unique among all New Testament books are the references to the feasts of Tabernacles (σκηνοπηγία) at 7:2 and Dedication (ἑγκαίνια) at 10:22. Clearly, John has a special interest in the Jewish festivals in his account of Jesus.

Furthermore, as a quick review of the above uses makes clear, the Jewish festivals play a far more integral role in the story of Jesus in

¹ The term occurs 7 times in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 26:5; 27:15; Mark 14:2; 15:6; Luke 2:41, 42; 22:1) and once in Colossians (2:16). The occurrences in John are at 2:23; 4:45 [2x]; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2, 8 [2x], 10, 11, 14, 37; 11:56; 12:12, 20; 13:1, 29.

² The term occurs 16 times in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 26:2, 17, 18, 19; Mark 14:1, 12 [2x], 14, 16; Luke 2:41; 22:1, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15) and once each in Acts (12:4), 1 Corinthians (5:7), and Hebrews (11:28). The occurrences in John (7 before and 3 within the passion narrative) are at 2:13, 23; 6:4; 11:55 [2x]; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39; 19:14.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-07968-7 - The Role of Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel: Volume 162

Gerry Wheaton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 *Introduction*

John's Gospel than is the case in the Synoptic Gospels. Whereas the Synoptics make reference to Passover alone among the feasts, and that only during the Passion narrative (Luke 2 being the only exception), John portrays Jesus "going up to Jerusalem" over and over again throughout his public ministry to attend not only Passover but Tabernacles and even Dedication (which was not a major pilgrimage feast). John, in other words, does not confine his use of the Jewish feasts to the passion narrative but draws upon them repeatedly during the public ministry of Jesus.

Moreover, as many scholars recognize, John evidently appropriates select facets of the festal symbolism and traditions in shaping the narratives and discourses associated with the various feasts. To take one example, John 7–8 sets the controversy between Jesus and the Jewish leadership surrounding his identity and works during the festival of Tabernacles. Many commentators have recognized that the climactic declarations by Jesus at 7:37–38 and 8:12 allude, respectively, to the water and light ceremonies performed at the Temple throughout the seven-day feast. In this way, Jesus indicates that he fulfills the role of the Temple symbolically enacted in these ceremonies.

The role of the Jewish feasts in the Fourth Gospel has importance in its own right, of course. Beyond this, however, the question also bears upon the much-disputed matter of the relationship between Jesus and Judaism in the Fourth Gospel. Many Johannine scholars today speak in largely negative terms about Jesus' attitude toward contemporary Jewish customs and institutions. This view contributes to the widespread perception of this Gospel as the most anti-Semitic document in the New Testament canon. Other scholars advocate a more moderate interpretation of Judaism in the Fourth Gospel, pointing to the strikingly affirmative statement of 4:22 ("salvation is from the Jews") and insisting that a distinction be maintained between the often-negative rhetoric directed toward "the Jews" and the attitude of Jesus toward Jewish religion. Owing to the relative lack of extended research on the feasts in this Gospel, the evidence of the festivals has not been adequately brought to bear upon the wider question of Judaism. For this reason, although a full-orbed treatment of the representation of Judaism in the Fourth Gospel lies outside the focus of this study, I will devote a chapter to situating my inquiry within this wider debate and then return to the question, albeit in brief fashion, at the conclusion of each subsequent chapter in order to suggest how my findings might contribute to the debate.

Review of previous scholarship

The unique predilection of the Fourth Evangelist for the Jewish festivals as vehicles for his presentation of Jesus has often been noticed but rarely probed in depth by students of this Gospel. I will review below the larger-scale treatments of the feasts. First, however, I must survey the treatment given the feasts among the major commentaries.

The festal settings of the various discourses and narratives in the Fourth Gospel are commonly noted by commentators. However, owing to the limited space available to treat the backgrounds of the feasts, their full significance is often either largely underappreciated or missed entirely. For example, many commentators note the structural significance of Passover for this Gospel as a whole, but few devote substantial space to drawing out the full symbolism of this feast for John's exposition of the cross. Mention of Passover at John 2:13 is routinely noted, but its significance is confined to a temporal marker or to providing a structural frame with 2:23.³ More authors note the symbolic potential of the Passover settings in the "Bread of life" discourse and the Passion account. For example, the festal background in John 6 is often regarded as contributing to a new exodus theme or the establishment of a new Passover, namely the Eucharist, in the body and blood of Jesus.⁴

³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co, 1966, 1970), 123–125; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John (New International Commentary on the New Testament)*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 169; Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 114; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1991), 176; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 104; Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 518; Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading the Fourth Gospel John 1–4* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 95. Gerald Borchert, *John 1–11 (New American Commentary)*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 1.162, claims, "In this Gospel the cleansing of the Temple . . . is a sign that points to the paschal death and resurrection of Jesus (2:19)."

⁴ See esp. E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), 281 (cf. 297–299), who regards the Passover setting as crucial for the themes of the chapter. Cf., also, B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* (London: J. Murray, 1908), 1.211; C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 333; Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5–12* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 38, 46–47, 55–59; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John (Black's New Testament Commentaries)*; London: Continuum, 2005), 211, 234; Keener, 665, 688, 690; Brown, 1.245, 255, 286, 290, 291; Carson, 268; Köstenberger, 200; Borchert, 1.251, 271; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John (Herder's Theological Commentary on the New Testament)*. London: Burns & Oates, 1968–1982), 2.14; John Marsh, *The Gospel of Saint John (Pelican New Testament Commentaries)*.

4 Introduction

At several points in the Passion narrative allusions to the paschal sacrifice are detected, which are thought to represent the crucifixion of Jesus as a paschal sacrifice.⁵ For none of these points, however, do commentators typically devote space to probing the Jewish traditions surrounding this feast. This inevitably impoverishes the reader's ability to discern with precision the fullness of the author's message in these several contexts.

The same pattern obtains with the feasts of Tabernacles and Dedication. The former retains the attention of commentators to a greater extent, perhaps because the customs that accompany the festival are more colorful and elaborate.⁶ The feast of Tabernacles may also receive the most background study of all three feasts, owing in part to the rich and

Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968), 283; Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (*New Cambridge Bible Commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 116 (regarding John 6, "Passover is not just calendar time, but symbolic time"). Morris, *John*, 303, and Ridderbos, *John*, 226, represent a minority who find little or no importance in the Passover setting for the thematic content of John 6.

⁵ Keener, *John*, 1100–1103, among others, argues that the Evangelist has rearranged the Passion chronology found in the Synoptic tradition to highlight the Passover symbolism. Allusions to Passover are also detected at 19:14 (e.g., Keener, *John*, 1129–1131; Francis J. Moloney, *Glory not Dishonour: Reading John 13–21* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 114; Brown, *John*, 833; Borchert, *John*, 2.258), 19:29 (e.g., Keener, *John*, 1147; Moloney, *Glory*, 145–146; Brown, *John*, 930; Lincoln, *John*, 478; Hoskyns, *John*, 531), and in the mention of the unbroken bones (e.g., Keener, *John*, 1153, 1155–1156; Brown, *John*, 952–953; Morris, *John*, 727 (tentatively); Lincoln, *John*, 481; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* [*New Century Bible*. London: Oliphants, 1972], 590; Carson, *John*, 627; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2nd ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 557; Köstenberger, *John*, 553; Hoskyns, *John*, 533; Borchert, *John*, 2.278). Here, again, Ridderbos is representative of the few who see no great significance in the Passover setting (cf. *John*, 589, 606, 617 n. 166, 622–623).

⁶ See discussions in Westcott, *John*, 1.277; 2.2; Keener, *John*, 722–730, 739, 742, 744, 758 (though he is reluctant to limit the light imagery to this background); Moloney, *Signs*, 84–93; Brown, *John*, 326–329, 343–344; Lincoln, *John*, 254–257, 264–265; Carson, *John*, 321–328, 337; Köstenberger, *John*, 240; Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 173; Hoskyns, *John*, 320–321; Borchert, *John*, 1.290, 295–296; Neyrey, *John*, 147, 153; Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium 1, Teilband, Kapitel 1–10* (*Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2000), 292; Christian Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (*Zürcher Bibelkommentare: NT*; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2001), 226; Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (*Handbuch zum Neuen Testament [HNT]*; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 403; Schnackenburg, *John*, 2.155. Morris, *John*, 374, 388, once again represents the small minority of commentators who find little basis for an allusion to the ceremonies of Tabernacles. While the list of scholars who see no symbolic importance in the feast of Dedication for John 10:22–39 is lengthier (cf. Ridderbos, *John*, 367; Morris, *John*, 460; Neyrey, *John*, 186 n. 291; J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* [*The International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: Clark, 1928], 342–343; Schnackenburg, 2.305; Barrett, *John*, 379; and note the silence of Lindars, *John*, Dietzfelbinger, *Johannes*, Wengst, *Johannesevangelium*, and L. Schenke, *Johannes: Kommentar* [Düsseldorf, 1998]), many discern allusions to the festival in the word about the consecration of Jesus in 10:36 and even the charge of blasphemy in 10:33. See Keener, *John*, 822, 827, 830; Moloney, *Signs*, 148–150; Brown,

suggestive descriptions supplied by a handful of sources from the second-Temple and early-Rabbinic periods. Even here, however, few commentators devote substantial space to a consideration of the background sources, relying instead on the surveys and conclusions of a few earlier authors. In this way commentaries on John's Gospel routinely observe the prominence of the feasts in specific contexts and in his Gospel as a whole but rarely provide the depth of insight into the phenomenon that seems warranted by this distinctive feature of the Fourth Gospel.

Besides the brief observations offered by many commentators, there have been very few extended treatments of the matter. One exception is the monograph by Gale A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel*.⁷ Yee's work provides a helpful introduction to the topic. However, as it is aimed at a general audience, it does not give sustained attention to the many technical and background issues necessary for drawing out the full picture of John's use of the feasts. Her discussion of the Tabernacles narrative, for example, devotes merely three pages to the Mishnah and almost no space at all to other Rabbinic evidence for the celebration of the festival.⁸ A more thorough account of this festival must supply a detailed analysis of the treatment of the water ceremony in *Tosephta Sukkah* 3, for example, which makes an important contribution to the thematic and symbolic background of John 7. In similar fashion, Yee provides a helpful sketch of the historical background of the festival of Dedication but fails to give more than passing attention to the evidence of 2 Maccabees, a work ostensibly intended to promote the celebration of the festival among diaspora Jews.⁹ Though helpful as a general introduction to the question of the festivals in the Fourth Gospel, Yee's work leaves the way open for a more detailed consideration of the subject.

More recently, Michael A. Daise has proposed a new understanding of the function of the feasts in John.¹⁰ He argues, "in an earlier stage of the Fourth Gospel's development (when chapters 5 and 6 were reversed), the feasts fundamentally functioned to accentuate Jesus' 'hour' by quantifying its imminence till it arrived."¹¹ His interpretation

John, 400, 411; Lincoln, *John*, 309; Carson, *John*, 399; Köstenberger, *John*, 316; Hoskyns, *John*, 385, 392; Marsh, *John*, 407; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John (Word Biblical Commentary)*, v. 36. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 177.

⁷ Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989.

⁸ See chapter 3.

⁹ See chapter 4.

¹⁰ See *Feasts in John: Jewish Festivals and Jesus' "Hour" in the Fourth Gospel (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament, 2.229)*; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

¹¹ *Feasts*, 5.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-07968-7 - The Role of Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel: Volume 162

Gerry Wheaton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 Introduction

is based upon two basic ideas. First, the Passover of John 6:4 is the “second Passover” of Numbers 9:9–14. This is evident, he argues, from the mention of the barley loaves at John 6:9, which could not legally have been used for noncultic purposes until the firstfruits of the barley harvest had been offered in the Temple, and this did not happen until the day after the Sabbath following the first Passover (cf. Lev 23:11–15). Thus, if Passover was said to be near (6:4) and yet barley was being used for noncultic purposes, then it must have been the second Passover, which took place in the month of ‘Iyyar.¹² The second idea upon which he bases his reading is that John 5–6 must have been reversed in an earlier version of the Gospel.¹³ These twin conclusions lead Daise to view the Gospel of John at an earlier stage of its redaction as having ordered the feasts in a perfect chronological schema such that the festal cycle from John 2 to 12 spans a single year (Passover, *second* Passover, the unnamed feast, Tabernacles, Dedication, and Passover), and this cycle highlights the advance of Jesus’ hour from “not yet” in John 2 to its arrival in John 12.

The aim of Daise’s work is primarily to elucidate the contribution of the feasts to the structuring of the Fourth Gospel or, more precisely, an earlier version of it.¹⁴ For this reason, he devotes little attention to the symbolic and traditional background of the respective feasts and how these factors contributed to the shape of the narratives and discourses set against the feasts.¹⁵ His conclusions, therefore, do not bear directly upon the present study, since I aim to elucidate the *thematic function* of the feasts in the Fourth Gospel *in its current form*. Indeed, Daise concludes his work by noting that the reconfiguration of the chronology of John’s Gospel that has diminished the earlier *structural* significance of the feasts (as he interprets them) leads naturally to the question of whether the feasts function in more *thematic* fashion in the final form of the Gospel. That is, the conclusions of Daise’s work highlight the need for the very line of inquiry I wish to pursue.¹⁶

¹² See *Feasts*, ch. 4, for elaboration and argumentation.

¹³ For this he leans heavily upon the work of earlier scholars. See discussion in *Feasts*, 12–15.

¹⁴ He recognizes that his interpretation bears almost exclusively on understanding this earlier edition of the Gospel, since the final reconfiguration of chapters 5 and 6 dramatically reduces the force of the chronological schema he proposes (*Feasts*, 172). The recent review by Glen Balfour, though largely laudatory, nevertheless notes the unlikelihood that an early reader of the Fourth Gospel in its current form could have discerned the meaning elucidated by Daise. See the review in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 30.5 (2008), 69–70.

¹⁵ See *Feasts*, ch. 2, which treats the structural position of the each feast but almost entirely omits any treatment of their symbolic and traditional value in contemporary Judaism.

¹⁶ *Feasts*, 172–173.

Review of previous scholarship

7

A third, recent study also merits attention for its proposal concerning the function of the feasts in the Fourth Gospel. In her 2005 monograph on Passover, Christine Schlund surveys the symbolic significance of the festival in Jewish tradition represented in the LXX, Jubilees, Ezekiel the Tragedian, Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, and Josephus before turning to its role in John.¹⁷ Her investigation of the Jewish sources leads to the conclusion that the festival bears two primary lines of significance.¹⁸ In the first place, Jubilees, Ezekiel the Tragedian, and Josephus are among the sources that evince a focus on the apotropaic value of the yearly Passover celebration.¹⁹ In this view, the faithful observance of the festival secures divine protection for the people of God in the coming year. The second area of symbolism revolves around community identity. Sources such as Josephus, Philo, and Jubilees indicate that the feast of Passover was an important instrument for confirming and strengthening community identity and solidarity.²⁰ Schlund concludes,

Das Pesach verifigte also in frühjüdischer Zeit über ein weitgefächertes Interpretationspotential: Es verkörperte Schutz und Bewahrung vor Verderben bringenden Mächten und die Überwindung des Todes im Moment der Konfrontation genauso wie die Vergewisserung des rechten Gottesverhältnisses und die Konstitution bzw. Bestärkung der Identität des Gottesvolkes.²¹

Working from these conclusions about the Jewish background of the festival, Schlund turns to the use of Passover symbolism in the Gospel of John. Beginning with the passion account, she finds both the Scripture citation at John 19:36 and the coordination of Jesus' death with the slaughter of the lambs in the Temple to be likely allusions to Passover (the latter by way of Exod 12:46).²² She stops short, however, of finding in these allusions a clear indication of the *meaning* of Jesus' death. Instead, she discerns the meaning of Jesus' death as a paschal sacrifice in the main body of the Johannine narrative prior to the passion narrative. Specifically, her investigation draws three elements into focus:

¹⁷ *“Kein Knochen soll gebrochen werden”*: Studien zu Bedeutung und Funktion des Pesachfests in Texten des frühen Judentums und im Johannesevangelium (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament; Neukirchen-Vluy: Neukirchener Verlag, 2005). She also devotes some space to a consideration of Passover in other New Testament documents.

¹⁸ *Kein*, 112–114.

¹⁹ These sources are treated at length in *Kein*, chapters 3–5.

²⁰ Philo is treated in *Kein*, chapter 3.

²¹ Schlund, *Kein*, 113.

²² *Kein*, 120–129.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-07968-7 - The Role of Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel: Volume 162

Gerry Wheaton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 Introduction

“Sammlung, Überwindung und Reinheit.”²³ The last, the association of Passover with purity concerns, emerges from John 13. Set expressly on the eve of Passover, Jesus washes the disciples' feet to purify them ritually for the Passover meal, the meal he will shortly provide by his death. Consistent with the Jewish evidence she surveys in the earlier sections of her work, she does not believe that John represents the paschal sacrifice of Jesus as effecting cleansing from sin.

The second element of John's Passover symbolism, *Überwindung*, is most evident in passages such as John 12:27–33 and 17:15, where Jesus connects his death with the deliverance and protection from the “evil one.” This “apotropaic” dimension of Passover symbolism, she points out, is common in Jewish literature, especially Jubilees.²⁴

Finally, within the context of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the coming of the Passover celebration, the episode of the coming of the Greeks to Jesus (12:20–21) suggests to Schlund the “Sammlung” or “Gemeindkonstitution” dimension of John's Passover symbolism.²⁵ Her treatment of this question, though suggestive, is striking for the short space accorded to John 6, the central Passover context in the Gospel and arguably the context where the import of the symbolism is most clearly elucidated.²⁶ In my judgment, this *Gemeindkonstitution* dimension of John's Passover symbolism is the most promising and underappreciated facet of the whole question. It is, therefore, all the more unfortunate that the matter receives so little attention from Schlund. In my treatment of Passover following, I hope to fill precisely this lacuna. Indeed, the results of my work may be seen to fit quite neatly with the conclusion of Schlund's work on other sections of John's Gospel.

Apart from Yee, Daise, and Schlund, most extended discussions of the Jewish feasts in John appear as chapters in works devoted to the theme of the Temple in John. For example, Mary Coloe, in *God Dwells with Us*, reads the Temple theme in John against the backdrop of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, an event she regards as “a major turning point” not only for orthodox Jews but for Christians as well, precipitating among both groups “a major religious struggle for self-identity.”²⁷ This identity

²³ See *Kein*, 142–165.

²⁴ *Kein*, 151–159, esp. 155–156.

²⁵ *Kein*, 142–151.

²⁶ She devotes barely two pages to John 6, focusing primarily on a parallel with Joshua 5.

²⁷ See *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001) 2.

crisis became especially acute for the Christians when they found themselves removed from their synagogues. All of this raised a “painful question: How could they maintain their Jewish traditions, especially their rich cultic traditions, and maintain their new faith in Jesus?” Thus, “the Fourth Gospel is the written record of one Christian community’s response to this question.”²⁸

With respect to the role of the feasts in John, Coloe believes Jesus appropriates to himself the cultic symbols of bread, water, light, and sacred place. For example, in her treatment of the feast of Tabernacles, Coloe argues that the “last and greatest day” of the feast (John 7:37) denotes the eighth day, when the water and light ceremonies had ceased. It is against the backdrop of this absence of water and light that Jesus makes his twin Christological claims (7:37; 8:12). Coloe views this as part of a larger pattern across the Gospel, which she dubs “the paradox of presence in absence.”²⁹ In the absence of the Temple and its associated institutions and traditions following 70 CE, Jesus provides the needed means and location of worship.³⁰

Nevertheless, Coloe does not give adequate attention to important dimensions of John’s use of the festivals. For example, Passover receives attention only in connection with Jesus’ association with the paschal victims in the passion narrative.³¹ No account at all is made of the theme of the Passover meal, nor is space given to consideration of contemporary associations linked to the festival. She devotes a full chapter to Tabernacles in John 7–8, but here again she neglects the important background of the Tosephta and so overlooks any contribution this text makes to Jesus’ statements in this context.³² In similar fashion, her treatment of Dedication suffers for lack of engagement with important background material (especially 2 Maccabees).³³

²⁸ *Dwells*, 2.

²⁹ *Dwells*, 130.

³⁰ This is a helpful perspective from which to begin her inquiry, and one that, on many occasions, is fleshed out by use of careful language to describe the relationship between Jesus and Judaism. For example, she says, “The traditions and institutions of Israel were valid but incomplete gifts; in the life of Jesus something new is being offered which brings to perfection the former gifts to Israel” (*Dwells*, 205). Elsewhere she says, “A consistent Johannine theme has been the presentation of Jesus as the one who brings to completion the rituals and symbols of Israel’s cult” (*Dwells*, 62). At many points her view approximates the one I will argue for below. See, e.g., the concluding comments in my next chapter.

³¹ *Dwells*, 190–196.

³² See chapter 6. On pages 131–132 she comments briefly on the relevant section of the Tosephta, relying heavily on the work of Pierre Gelot.

³³ See chapter 7.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-07968-7 - The Role of Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel: Volume 162

Gerry Wheaton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 Introduction

Alan Kerr's treatment of the Temple theme in John also devotes substantial space to the feasts.³⁴ Largely following conventional lines of interpretation, Kerr views the feasts as finding their fulfillment and replacement in Jesus. At many points, his discussion is helpful,³⁵ even though he adopts a more confrontational view than Coloe of the relationship between Jesus and the festivals. This is clearest in his suggestion that the unnamed feast in John 5 represents all the feasts and that the setting of sickness and disease represents "a picture of Judaism (including the festivals) in its weakness and impotence." In similar fashion, Passover is "superseded" by Jesus. He summarizes, saying that "the 'flesh' of the Jewish Passover is of no avail; it is spiritually ingested Jesus . . . that brings life." This negative appraisal of the Jewish institutions in John runs throughout Kerr's assessment of the Jewish feasts and becomes explicit in his concluding reflections. He comments: "Jesus seemed to have little respect for the festivals. He scarcely attended them, and when he did go to the Tabernacles festival he hijacked it for his own purposes . . . There seems to be an underlying critique of the festivals running through chs. 5–11 of the Fourth Gospel."³⁶

In my next chapter I will take up the matter of the general picture of Judaism in John, and there I will discuss John's representation of the limitations inherent in Jewish institutions. Notwithstanding the presence of such limitations, I will argue that language such as Kerr employs is unduly bleak and misrepresents the portrait of Judaism in the Fourth Gospel.³⁷ Moreover, I will argue in my treatments of the individual festivals that so far from rejecting or belittling them, Jesus holds them in the highest regard and frames the salvation he brings in terms of

³⁴ *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 220; Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2002) ch. 7.

³⁵ Cf., e.g., his treatment of John 6 and the question of the background in the Jewish Passover Haggadah on pages 211–215.

³⁶ *Temple*, 266–267.

³⁷ It is more than a little odd that Jesus could be said "to have little respect for the festivals" and to have "scarcely attended them" when John devotes so much attention to the Jewish festal calendar and has Jesus attending two Passovers in Jerusalem, teaching at a synagogue during a third, and attending two other feasts in Jerusalem (again, contrast the Synoptic Gospels, where Jesus attends only one festival, and only at the very end of his ministry). Kerr's appraisal is also belied by the application to Jesus of various symbolic elements from the feasts (paschal victim, 1:29; Passover meal, 6:53; water, 7:37; light, 8:12; altar, 10:36).