

DOES JUDAS PLAY DEVIL’S ADVOCATE IN JOHN 18:5? AN INTERTEXTUAL INVESTIGATION INTO A JOHANNINE SCENE

Benjamin Lantzer

Minneapolis, MN

7benjamin124@gmail.com

This article investigates John’s narrative aside at the end of John 18:5: “Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.” Interpreters regularly note that this aside does not carry the narrative forward, but rather it helps set the stage of the Johannine arrest scene in some way. This article attempts to pinpoint the way in which the aside “stages” the narrative. It is plausible that John is alluding to Zechariah 3:1–2 and evoking the heavenly courtroom scene by means of this aside. John intends to show that Jesus is the one who fulfills Zechariah’s prophecies about atonement, the temple, and the Davidic dynasty.

Ἰησοῦς οὖν εἰδὼς πάντα τὰ ἐρχόμενα ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἐξῆλθεν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· Τίνα ζητεῖτε; ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ· Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον. λέγει αὐτοῖς· Ἐγώ εἰμι. εἰστήκει δὲ καὶ Ἰούδας ὁ παραδιδούς αὐτὸν μετ’ αὐτῶν.

Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.

John 18:4–5 (NA28; ESV)

INTRODUCTION: REVISITING THE SCENE OF THE ARREST

It is difficult to overstate the significance of the Passion events in the narrative of John’s Gospel. John dedicates nearly half of the book to the Passion events: to the Last Supper, final discourse, arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. The Evangelist had foreshadowed these events in the first half of the Gospel. Readers catch hints of the Passion from John the Baptist, when he introduces Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus

challenges the Jewish leaders to “Destroy this temple,” the temple of his body, so that he could raise it again (2:18–22). Caiaphas the high priest unwittingly prophesies to the Sanhedrin that “it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” (11:50).

Given the fact that John had been preparing his readers for Jesus’s Passion throughout the first half of the Gospel, it is striking that the beginning of the Passion, the arrest scene of 18:1–11, is rather enigmatic. Many questions interrupt the readers at the arrest scene: Why do the soldiers and officers fall to the ground when Jesus presents himself? Is John trying to portray this scene as a theophany with Jesus speaking the divine name, I AM, in verses 5, 6, and 8? Is John trying to portray the scene as a cosmic confrontation between the light and the darkness, between good and evil?

This paper investigates a specific question regarding the center of the arrest scene in verse 5b. The narrator interrupts the action in order to make this comment: “Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.” Why does John mention Judas again at the end of the verse? John had mentioned Judas in verse 2 as the leader of the cohort sent to arrest Jesus. There is no hint that Judas has any other role than traitor to Jesus. So why would the Evangelist emphasize Judas’ presence again in the arrest narrative?

Commentators have frequently noted the odd placement of the comment in John 18:5b. Brown admits the dilemma and appeals to a (clumsy) redactor: “This seems to be a very awkward editorial insertion; not only has Judas’ presence already been mentioned, but he has no further role that would warrant his being mentioned again.”¹ J. Ramsey Michaels concedes, “This notice appears to be another of this Gospel’s undeveloped ‘vestigial scenes,’ in which the stage is set but nothing happens...Here, of course, something does happen, but Judas has no explicit role in it, and it remains unclear why he is mentioned at just this point.”²

As Michaels suggests, John’s comment contributes in some way to the setting of the arrest scene. Thatcher categorizes John 18:5b as a “staging aside,” which functions to “stage an event by defining the physical context in which it occurs.”³ This is a helpful categorization, but the interpretive questions remain: why does the narrator decide to set the stage in the middle of the arrest narrative? And why is Judas near the center again?⁴ The remainder of this paper attempts to answer these questions.

¹ *The Gospel According to John (XII–XXI)* (Anchor Bible 29A. New York: Doubleday, 1970) 810.

² *The Gospel of John* (NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 890.

³ Tom Thatcher, “A New Look at Asides in the Fourth Gospel” *BSac* 151 (October–December 1994) 431, 437. Thatcher’s project builds off other helpful projects by Merrill C. Tenney, “The Footnotes of John’s Gospel” *BSac* 117 (October–December 1960) 350–364; and John J. O’Rourke, “Asides in the Gospel of John” *Novum Testamentum, Vol. XXI fasc. 3*. Tenney initially observed that the narrator in John’s Gospel includes numerous explanatory comments which do not immediately contribute to the plot, and Tenney attempted to categorize them. Tenney counts and categorizes 59 of these comments (or “footnotes”); O’Rourke counts 109 “asides”; Thatcher counts between 191–193.

⁴ It would seem analogous to a production crew coming onto the stage in the middle of the climactic scene of a play to rearrange the props. Why does the narrator come out onto the stage, as it were, during the arrest scene, and briefly place Judas at the center of the action again?

This paper contends that the sentence about Judas in John 18:5b alludes to Zechariah 3:1–2 LXX. The narrator interrupts the plot in order to evoke the cosmic scene unfolding on earth in Jesus’s arrest. By setting the stage with the aside in John 18:5b, John transposes the heavenly courtroom scene onto the events in the Garden. Judas represents Satan, the “adversary” of Zechariah 3:1–2. He stands to oppose Jesus, who represents and fulfills the role of Joshua the High Priest from Zechariah. I will attempt to demonstrate this allusion to Zechariah 3:1–2 LXX in three movements, each with a forensic theme. First, I will examine the character witness by noting three passages in John’s Gospel that form a portrait of Judas. Second, I will advocate for an allusion by applying Richard B. Hay’s seven criteria to my proposal. Third, I will deduce theological implications for the church flowing from my proposal.

EXAMINING THE CHARACTER WITNESS: CHARACTERIZING JUDAS IN JOHN’S GOSPEL

Who is Judas, according to John? How does the Evangelist intend to portray the disciple who betrays Jesus? Three significant texts from the fourth Gospel testify in a singular way. The Evangelist closely identifies Judas with the devil. And this identification is made with Judas’s act of betrayal especially in view. Judas is never more devilish than when he is betraying Jesus.

John 6:70–71

Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

Jesus’s words occur here after many of his followers fall away, and after Peter reaffirms his commitment to Jesus. This is the first time Judas is mentioned in the fourth Gospel. Before Judas is even named, he is identified with Satan. This occurs in strikingly hyperbolic terms: “one of you is a devil.”⁵ In a bit of heavy-handed foreshadowing, John includes and interprets Jesus’s comment about Judas. The readers discover that Judas will be the “betrayer.” The reader has not yet observed the scene of the arrest or the Passion events, but John (perhaps enigmatically, for those who are hearing the Gospel for the first time) divulges that Jesus would be betrayed, and that betrayal would happen through one of his own chosen followers. It is significant that while identifying Judas with Satan, John also identifies Judas with betraying Jesus. The devil and the betrayal would be inseparable elements later in the narrative plot, as the reader discovers.

⁵ There is some question about the definiteness of the noun διάβολος in John 6:70. Jesus could either be saying “one of you is *a* devil,” or he could be making a stronger statement: “one of you is *the* devil.” At the very least, in John 6:70, the Evangelist is blurring the line between Judas and the devil, so to speak.

John 13:1–4a

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.

Here John again emphasizes Jesus’s awareness of the Passion events. Jesus “knew that his hour had come” and that even so, the Father was with him. And here again, John identifies Judas both with Satan and with the act of betrayal. John acknowledges in passing that the devil had already stirred up Judas to betray Jesus. The devil is a murderer “from the beginning” (8:44), and here in John 13:2, at Jesus’ hour, the devil’s desires and Judas’s desires have coalesced.⁶ Jesus would rise from supper, take the place of the servant, and wash the feet of his disciples. But all the while, even as he charges his followers to follow his own example, he concedes that “Not all of you are clean” (13:10–11). Not all would follow Jesus’ example. Not all from the chosen twelve would receive the Spirit (13:20).⁷ Judas instead would go out into the darkness to perform the desires of the devil.

John 13:25–27, 30

So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” ...So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

At the Last Supper, Jesus had again brought up the fact that he had “chosen” the Twelve (13:18) and revealed to the disciples that one of them would betray him. The disciples are shocked and confused, and finally ask Jesus to identify who the betrayer is. Jesus does so by sharing the bread with Judas. John then makes perhaps his strongest statement about Judas’ identification with the devil: “Satan entered into him.” And the apostate disciple disappears into the shadows. Judas is

⁶ There is a minor debate here about whether to translate the clause as “Satan had it in his heart that Judas should betray Jesus,” or to translate it as “Satan placed it in Judas’ heart to betray Jesus.” For the first option, see Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 439; Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville: WJK, 2015) 282–283. For the second option, see George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36, 2nd ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999) 228–229; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 409. Regardless, the narrator is again blurring the line between Judas and the devil, as in the previous text.

⁷ See the comments on 13:25–27 by Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Volume Two (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003) 919: “Satan’s entrance in Judas contrasts starkly with the promise of God’s Spirit entering the other disciples[.]”

a flat character in John's Gospel. In the three texts above, the Evangelist portrays Judas in close connection with the devil and foreshadows Judas's act of betrayal. With this characterization in hand, this paper will move to make a case for an allusion to Zechariah.

ADVOCATING FOR AN ALLUSION: TESTS FOR INTERTEXTUALITY

This paper utilizes the method of Richard B. Hays and his seven tests for intertextuality.⁸ The first test is that of *availability*. "Was the proposed source of the echo available to the author and/or original readers?"⁹ It is safe to assume so. John's Gospel clearly cites two passages from the second half of Zechariah (Zech 9:9 in John 12:15; Zech 12:10b in John 19:37). And so the first half of Zechariah was presumably available to the Evangelist and his audience. What is more, it seems likely that John makes larger metaleptic connections between his narrative and the context of the second half of Zechariah, as William Bynum suggests.¹⁰ Bynum explores and confirms the hypothesis that John quotes two passages from Zechariah "not simply as two coincidentally relevant citations from the Zechariah material, but *as a deliberate reflection by the author on the entire context from which they are drawn*["]."¹¹ We have reason to conclude then that John not only has access to Zechariah, but is also "deliberately reflecting" on large sections of the book in light of Christ's incarnation and exaltation.

Hays' second test is *volume*, i.e., primarily "the degree of explicit repetition of words or syntactical patterns."¹² In the case of John 18:5b, there are two names (Ἰησοῦν [Joshua and/or Jesus]; ὁ διάβολος [as a appellation for Judas via John 6:70 especially]), and an identical verb (εἰστήκει). The verb, while common to the Gospel of John and the NT, occurs in John 18:5 as an uncommon form used seven times in the fourth Gospel (Jn 1:35; 7:37; 18:5, 16, 18; 19:25; 20:11;

⁸ Scholars have celebrated and critiqued Richard B. Hays' landmark work on various fronts. For a sampling of perspectives on the legitimacy and helpfulness of Hays' methodology, see Samuel Emadi, "Intertextuality in New Testament Scholarship: Significance, Criteria, and the Art of Intertextual Reading" *CBR* Vol. 14(1) 2015, 8–23; Paul Foster, "Echoes without Resonance: Critiquing Certain Aspects of Recent Scholarly Trends in the Study of the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament" *JSNT* Vol. 38(1) 2015, 96–111; Marianne Meye Thompson, "Hearing Voices: Reading the Gospels in the Echo Chamber of Scripture" *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11.1 (2017) 37–48; Thomas J. Millay, "Septuagint *Figura*: Assessing the Contribution of Richard B. Hays" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70(1) 2017, 93–104; Alec J. Lucas, "Assessing Stanley E. Porter's Objections to Richard B. Hays's Notion of Metalepsis" *CBQ* 76 (2014) 93–111. Though Hays' seven tests involve numerous theological presuppositions and are inescapably subjective, they nonetheless provide a useful investigative framework far superior to an intertextual hermeneutic without controls

⁹ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale, 1989) 29–30. In this section and throughout the paper, "allusion" and "echo" (aligning with Hays' method) do not assume distinct technical meanings and are thus used interchangeably.

¹⁰ William Randolph Bynum, "Quotations of Zechariah in the Fourth Gospel" Pages 46–74 in *Abiding Words: The Use of Scripture in the Gospel of John* (Edited by Alicia D. Myers, and Bruce G. Schuchard. Atlanta: SBL, 2015).

¹¹ "Quotations of Zechariah," 49. Emphasis mine. Bynum, "Quotations of Zechariah," 47–48, suggests, "It is evident that, at a minimum, John was in some sense including the Zech 9–14 material in his meditation on the significance of the passion of Christ. But further, if this is seen as a deliberate literary *inclusio*, John has bracketed his passion narrative by these 'bookends,' as it were, demonstrating the significant influence of Second Zechariah on his theological interpretation of the entire passion of Christ." Bynum's observation stands regardless of whether his hypothesis about the composition of Zechariah is correct.

¹² Hays, *Echoes*, 30.

ἵστημι in all its forms occurs twenty times in John’s Gospel).¹³ These proposed syntactical parallels are laid out and emphasized in the following chart.

Zechariah 3:1–2a	John 18:5
<p>Καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι Ἰησοῦν τὸν ἱερέα τὸν μέγαν ἑστῶτα πρὸ προσώπου ἀγγέλου κυρίου,</p> <p>καὶ ὁ διάβολος εἰστήκει ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀντικειῖσθαι αὐτῷ.</p>	<p>ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον. λέγει αὐτοῖς· Ἐγὼ εἰμι.</p> <p>εἰστήκει δὲ καὶ Ἰούδας ὁ παραδιδούς αὐτὸν μετ’ αὐτῶν</p>

The third test for identifying an allusion is *recurrence*. How often does John cite Zechariah 3 in his Gospel? John does not appear to cite Zechariah 3 elsewhere in his Gospel.¹⁴ However, as noted already, John quotes Zechariah 9:9 and 12:10 at critical junctures of his narrative.¹⁵ Several other allusions to Zechariah in John’s Gospel conform to the LXX version of Zechariah.¹⁶ This reinforces the likelihood that John is viewing Christ’s passion with a “Zecharian” lens, and at least opens up the possibility that there may be further allusions to Zechariah LXX in John’s account of the passion.

Hays’ fourth test is that of *thematic coherence*. Does the proposed allusion fit to the argument or plot that the NT author is developing? Does the NT author use quotations from the same source in a consonant way? There are several notable correspondences between John 18:1–12 and the Zechariah 3:1–10 narrative contexts. Both contexts are concerned with the mediatorial or priestly role of the human protagonist. Relatedly, both contexts connect the protagonist to atonement. Further, both contexts anticipate a restored—or resurrected—temple. And finally, in both contexts, the protagonist faces opposition.

The fifth test is that of *historical plausibility*. Could the author have intended the proposed allusion, and would his audience reasonably have caught it? In this case, the question is if the scene that John evokes through this allusion would be one that held significance for himself and his audience. And it seems likely that, with John’s emphasis on the cosmic dimension (“below” and “above”; cf. John 3:12, 31; 8:23), and the prevalence of literature in the

¹³ The form is a pluperfect active indicative, specifically in John 18:5b as a third person singular.

¹⁴ However, there may be overlap between the symbol of the “Branch” (Ἀνατολήν; πῦξ) in Zechariah 3:8; 6:12–13 and the “Vine” (ἡ ἄμπελος) of John 15:1–17. Isaiah 4:2–5:7 blends the two symbols together, and perhaps this OT context influences John’s use.

¹⁵ Regarding the latter quotation (Zechariah 12:10 in John 19:37), a good case can be made that John is also intending a connection to Zechariah 13:1 alongside the image of Jesus’ pierced side in John 19:34. The “fountain opened for sin and impurity” in Zechariah 13:1 finds its counterpart in Jesus’ wound pouring out both “blood and water.” In the historical context of Zechariah, blood was the primary solution for sin, and water for impurity. Even more, both of those solutions were offered in the temple, or as part of the priestly ministry. It seems that this priestly ministry is precisely what John is trying to evoke in the crucifixion scene by means of OT citations and allusions (cf. John 2:18–21).”

¹⁶ Maarten J.J. Menken, “Allusions to the Minor Prophets in the Fourth Gospel,” *Neotestamentica* 44.1 (2010) 67–84, identifies allusions to Zechariah 1:5 (Jn 8:52–53) and 13:7 (Jn 16:32) LXX.

first century and following on the “heavenly ascent,” this allusion would have held significance.¹⁷ Further, for an audience that was familiar with the temple worship and with the OT, this allusion would have reinforced John’s point that Jesus is the Mediator who would restore the temple, or rather, would transcend the temple (John 4:19–24).

Hays’ sixth test is the *history of interpretation*: “Have other readers, both critical and pre-critical, heard the same echoes?”¹⁸ This test does not favor the allusion. It seems that at least no critical interpreter has heard this allusion.¹⁹

The seventh and final test is *satisfaction*. Does the proposed allusion help illuminate the context? Does the echo sound with significance for the reader who has a grasp on both the OT and NT contexts? This is perhaps the most subjective test, and also the most important for determining if there is an intertextual echo.

This allusion illuminates the context in a way that previous proposals have not. The proposed allusion more satisfactorily explains why John takes the time to set the stage in the middle of the arrest narrative. The proposed allusion makes sense of why Judas is mentioned a final time before disappearing into darkness for the rest of John’s narrative. By alluding to the heavenly scene in Zechariah 3:1, John is evoking the cosmic dimension that is never far from his peripheral vision. The proposed allusion further deepens John’s “Zecharian” envisioning of Christ’s passion, and accordingly suggests to the readers of the fourth Gospel that Jesus is the true “Joshua”: the true High Priest, Restorer of the Temple, and Royal “Branch.”

DEDUCING THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

If John is alluding to Zechariah 3:1–2 in John 18:5, what does that mean for the church? What should Christians do if this connection holds between the Evangelist’s narrative and the prophet’s vision?²⁰ This paper aims to draw one implication for Christians.

¹⁷ For an investigation into Paul’s potential interactions with the “heavenly ascent” concept in a different context, see Thomas J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae* (LNTS 53. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991).

¹⁸ Hays, *Echoes*, 31

¹⁹ However, Tertullian may be a pre-critical interpreter who heard the echo. Tertullian, alongside Jewish tradition, reads Zechariah 3 as a reference to the Messiah. Further, Tertullian, “Prophecy Sets Forth Two Different Conditions of Christ,” (*ANF03*) seems to assume the connection between John 18:5b and Zechariah 3:1–10 that this paper aims to identify:

So also in Zechariah, Christ Jesus, the true High Priest of the Father, in the person of Joshua, nay, in the very mystery of His name, is portrayed in a twofold dress with reference to both His advents. At first He is clad in sordid garments, that is to say, in the lowliness of suffering and mortal flesh: then the devil resisted Him, as the instigator of the traitor Judas, not to mention his tempting Him after his baptism: afterwards He was stripped of His first filthy raiment, and adorned with the priestly robe and mitre, and a pure diadem; in other words, with the glory and honor of His second advent.

Tertullian connects the Zechariah 3 passage to the devil’s resistance and Judas’s betrayal of Jesus. For the test of history of interpretation, on the one hand, few if any Christian interpreters have caught this allusion in John 18:5b. On the other hand, it seems that an early Christian reader may have heard the echo this paper attempts to establish.

²⁰ With this question is the implicit acknowledgement that this project may be mistaken in its intention or its conclusion. Admittedly, there are two weak points in this project. One is the NT prevalence of the verb ἵστημι and the corresponding difficulty in making an argument based on it. Here I see the unusual parsing of the verb in John 18:5 as mitigating against this difficulty. Another of the weak points in this project is that it seems no recent critical interpreter has recognized the echo that this project proposes. However, Hays, *Echoes*, 31, suggests that the history

Christians should aim to know their Old Testament more fully so that they might know Jesus their Messiah more fully. This is an implication of the methodology used in this project, and more importantly, an implication of Scripture itself. Hays puts this implication well in the concluding chapter of his book *Reading Backwards*:

The pervasive, complex, and multivalent uses of Scripture that we find in the Gospels could arise only in and for a community immersed in scriptural language and imagery. Scripture provided the “encyclopedia of production” for the Evangelists’ narration of the story of Jesus. Their way of pursuing what we call “doing theology” was to produce richly intertextual narrative accounts of the significance of Jesus.²¹

Jesus puts this implication more forcefully in his condemnation of the Pharisees in the fourth Gospel: “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” (John 5:45–46). The Apostle Paul exhorts the Roman Christians to make use of OT Scripture because “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). The Apostle Peter acknowledges that “It was revealed to [the prophets] that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Peter 1:12). James calls attention to OT figures: “As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast” (James 5:10–11). Time and space fail the author of Hebrews when it comes to giving an account of the OT heroes of faith: “And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets” (Hebrews 11:32).

Christians should know the OT in order to know Jesus. Believing in the Messiah does not mean Christians spend less time hearing Moses or the Prophets. On the contrary, perhaps it means they spend more time thinking through Moses and the Prophets—to see especially how they speak of Christ. Practically, this could take various forms. Perhaps a local church will put more emphasis on OT Scripture readings in their worship services. A minister might intentionally preach from OT passages as often as from NT passages. Local churches might partner with seminaries and help support Christian scholarship on the OT. Christians should read histories of the Ancient Near East and gain an understanding of the world that Moses and the prophets inhabited. Christians should memorize OT scripture. And Christians should read their Bibles expecting to find Christ prefigured in the OT.

of interpretation should not bear too much weight in recognizing an echo, given that echoes fall out of resonance when reading communities do not intentionally carry them on.

²¹ Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014) 102–103.

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