

A study of the Background of the Concepts “Life” and “Light”
in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel

Peter Manzanga, Hons. B.A

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Supervisor: Dr D.P Seccombe

Co-Supervisor: Professor G.J.C. Jordaan

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any University for a Degree.

Signature

Date

ABSTRACT

The concepts of “Life” and “Light” are prominent in the prologue of the fourth gospel (cf. John 1:4, 5, 7, 8, 9) and have been studied by various scholars as important themes. In the past years, the quest for the conceptual background of the prologue and the entire Gospel has led to converging and diverging opinions. But are all the proposed backgrounds important to the reader to understand and interpret the fourth gospel? Should we find the relevant religious background, could it help us understand and interpret the “Life” and “Light” concepts in the prologue and the rest of the Gospel?

The aim of this study is to identify the most appropriate background against which to read and explore the concepts of “Life” and “Light” in the fourth gospel. We also wish to study other selected passages from the fourth gospel that relate to “Life” and “Light”. The reason for doing this is to find out if they can add meaning to our understanding of “Life” and “Light” in the prologue.

The study reviews and compares crucial literature on the fourth gospel. Attention is given to the development of the debate on the religious background that influenced John. It also seeks to discover if there are any fresh ideas on the religious background of the fourth gospel. Reference will be made to primary material like the Dead Sea Scrolls, first century Palestinian Judaism, Josephus, and Philo of Alexandria. The following proposed backgrounds will be reviewed: Hellenistic Judaism, Philo of Alexandria, Gnosticism, Hermetic Literature, Mandaism, the Old Testament, Rabbinic Judaism, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Samaritan background.

This research is undertaken within the reformed evangelical tradition, and is informed by the historical critical method.

The author argues that the Old Testament and its development in first century Palestinian Judaism is the most plausible background against which to understand the “Life” and “Light” concepts in the fourth gospel.

The study concludes that “Life” in the fourth Gospel is understood as eternal life characterized by quality, happiness, blessedness and many other good characteristics. Believing in Jesus who is the true life leads one to enjoy the authentic life. The life that he gives triumphs over death through the resurrection. Concerning “Light” the study also concludes that to receive the light (Jesus) is to receive salvation accompanied by enlightenment, joy, blessings and victory. It is impossible to receive the “Light” that Jesus gives and to fail to have the “Life” that he gives. The absence of the “Life” and “Light” from him leads to suffering, hopelessness and death without hope. Thus, the Old Testament and Pharisaic Judaism meaning of these two concepts is fulfilled in Jesus the “Life” and the “Light” in the fourth Gospel.

OPSOMMING

Die konsepte “Lewe” en “Lig” is opvallend teenwoordig in die inleiding tot die vierde evangelie (vgl. Joh. 1:4,5,7,8,9) en is deur verskeie akademici as belangrike temas bestudeer. In die laaste vier jaar, egter, het die navorsing in verband met die konseptuele agtergrond van die inleiding tot die evangelie tot wyduiteenlopende opinies gelei. Ons moet dus die vraag stel: is al die verskillende moontlikhede belangrik vir die leser se verstaan en interpretasie van die vierde evangelie? Indien die relevante godsdienstige leerstukke gevind word, sou lg. van hulp wees om die konsepte “Lewe” en “Lig” in die inleiding en in res van die evangelie te verstaan en te interpreteer?

Die doel van hierdie studie is om die mees waarskynlike leerstukke te identifiseer waarteen die konsepte “Lewe” en “Lig” gelees en ondersoek kan word. Verder word ander gedeeltes van die vierde evangelie in terme van “Lewe” en “Lig” bestudeer. Die rede hiervoor is om vas te stel of dit enige bydrae tot die begrip van “Lewe” en “Lig” in die inleiding kan lewer.

Die studie ondersoek en vergelyk die kritiese literatuur rakende die vierde evangelie. Aandag word geskenk aan die ontwikkeling van die debat oor die godsdienstige agtergrond wat Johannes kon beïnvloed het. Dit poog verder om vas te stel of enige nuwe idees aan die lig gekom het met betrekking tot die invloed van die religieuse leerstukke op Johannes. Daar word verwys na primêre literatuur soos die Dooie See-manuskripte, literatuur vanuit die eerste eeuse Palestynse Judaïsme, Josephus, en Philo van Alexandrië. Die volgende potensiele agtergronde word nagevors: Hellenistiese Judaïsme, Philo van Alexandrië, Gnostisisme, Hermetiese Literatuur, Mandaïsme, die Ou Testament, Rabbiniese Judaïsme, die Dooie See-manuskripte en Samaritaanse leerstukke.

Die navorsing word vanuit die gereformeerde evangeliese tradisie onderneem, en pas die histories-kritiese metodologie toe.

Die skrywer voer aan dat die Ou Testament en sy ontwikkeling in die eerste eeuse Palestynse Judaïsme die mees waarskynlike agtergrond bied waarteen die konsepte van “Lewe” en “Lig” in die vierde evangelie gesien moet word.

Die studie kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat “Lewe” in die vierde evangelie as ewige lewe, gekenmerk deur waardigheid, geluk, seëninge en ander geluksalige kwaliteite verstaan moet word. Geloof in Christus as die enigste ware lewe, lei tot die ervaring en vreugde van die ware lewe. Die lewe wat Christus bied, triomfeer oor die dood deur die wederopstanding. Om die “Lig” (Christus) te aanvaar, is om gered te word wat verligting, vreugde, seëninge en oorwinning beteken. Dit is onmoontlik om Christus se “Lig” te aanvaar en nie terselfdertyd die “Lewe” wat hy bied te aanvaar nie. Die afwesigheid van “Lig” of “Lewe”, lei tot leed, wanhoop en dood sonder hoop. Dus, die Ou Testamentêre and Fariseër-Judaïstiese strekking van hierdie begrippe word in Jesus Christus, die “Lewe” and “Lig” in die vierde evangelie, verwesenlik.

KEY TERMS

Background

Life

Light

John 1:4-5

Fourth Gospel

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Key to Abbreviations

Ancient Literature

The Bible

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	Prov	Proverbs
Exod	Exodus	Ecc	Ecclesiastes
Lev	Leviticus	SS	Song of Songs
Num	Numbers	Isa	Isaiah
Deut	Deuteronomy	Jer	Jeremiah
Jos	Joshua	La	Lamentations
Jdg	Judges	Ezek	Ezekiel
Ru	Ruth	Dan	Daniel
1 Sam	1 Samuel	Hos	Hosea
2 Sam	2 Samuel	Joel	Joel
1 Ki	1 Kings	Amos	Amos
2 Ki	2 Kings	Ob	Obadiah
1 Chro	1 Chronicles	Inh	Jonah
2 Chro	2 Chronicles	Mic	Micah
Ezr	Ezra	Na	Nahum
Ne	Nehemiah	Hab	Habakkuk
Est	Eshter	Zeph	Zephaniah
Job	Job	Hag	Haggai
Ps	Psalms	Zech	Zechariah
		Mal	Malachi

The Apocrypha

Bar	Baruch
Macc	Maccabees
Sir	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

New Testament

Matt	Matthew	1 Tim	1 Timothy
Mk	Mark	2 Tim	2 Timothy
Lk	Luke	Titus	Titus
Jn	John	Phm	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb	Hebrews
Rom	Romans	Jas	James
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	1 Pet	1 Peter
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Gal	Galatians	1 Jn	1 John
Eph	Ephesians	2 Jn	2 John
Phil	Philippians	3 Jn	3 John
Col	Colossians	Jude	Jude
1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	Rev	Revelation
2 Thess	2 Thessalonians		

Pseudepigrapha

Ps. Sol Psalms of Solomon

Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Texts

CD	Damascus Document/Rule
1QH	Thanks Giving from the Qumran Cave 1
1QM	War Scroll from Qumran Cave 1
1QS	Manual of Discipline from Cave 1
4QS521	A Messianic Apocalypse
4Q385	Second Ezekiel
1Q27	The Triumph of Righteousness

Other Ancient Writings

Josephus

Ant	Jewish Antiquities
War	Jewish War

Modern Literature

EQ	Evangelical Quarterly
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
NIV	New International Version
NTS	New Testament Studies

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The simplicity of the fourth gospel and its appeal to the young and the old, the less educated and the highly educated compelled Leon Morris (1971:7) to pen the following words, "I liken the comparison of John's Gospel to a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim. It is both simple and profound. It is for the beginner in the faith and for the mature Christian. Its appeal is immediate and never failing."

Numerous volumes of tracts and pamphlets have been made for evangelistic purposes from the fourth gospel. Portions of Scripture have also been committed to memory. The most famous verse, John 3:16 is known by heart by many Christians. Carson (1991:21) alludes to this by saying, "...even a toddler could recite it." The message of the fourth gospel stands out most clearly in its demonstration of the love of God in wanting to save mankind through his Son Jesus.

That is one side of the fourth gospel. It also has difficulties that have caused a lot of writing by scholars. The two preceding scholars (Morris and Carson) and many others strongly agree with this. The saying 'the message of the fourth gospel is simple enough to save a child, but deep enough to drown a theologian' is correct.

Hoskyns said of the fourth gospel after a close study of it, "...he will not be true to the book he is studying if, at the end, the gospel does not still remain strange, restless, and unfamiliar" (Morris, 1971:7). Most students of this gospel would agree and the writer has found this to be true.

The more one gets immersed in trying to comprehend the message of the fourth gospel the more one finds it difficult plumbing its depth. Of the many problems posed by the fourth gospel, one has prompted the following research.

1.1 RESEARCH SUBJECT

This research is a study of the background of the concepts “life” and “light” in the prologue of the fourth gospel (Jn 1:4-5): “In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”¹

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study is going to be focusing on the words “life” and “light” in John 1:4-5. These words are some of the leading themes in the fourth gospel. The meaning of these two words is not immediately apparent until we see the connection between “life” and “light”. The conceptual background of the author helps the reader understand these words better. Scholars of the past and of our time have written and published many books, journal articles, Bible Dictionary articles, dissertations, papers, and reviews on the conceptual background of the fourth gospel. Different backgrounds have been proposed to this gospel.

Dodd (1954:4) is of the opinion that, “if we approach the fourth gospel without its true context we are in danger of imposing a subjective interpretation.” In his book *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* Dodd lists the following areas that he thinks could form the context of the fourth gospel: (a) The setting in early Christianity (b) The Higher religion of Hellenism: the Hermetic Literature (c) Hellenistic Judaism: Philo of Alexandria (d) Rabbinic Judaism (e) Gnosticism, and (f) Mandaism.

Barrett (1955:25-33) acknowledges the importance of Hellenistic Judaism as forming the background of the fourth gospel and puts more emphasis on the literature of apocalyptic and rabbinic Judaism.

A few years later Kilpatrick (1957:43) said, “...we can discard the Hermetic along with the Mandaean text and other evidences of Gnosticism. They constitute no significant part

¹ All the scripture quotations and references in this study will be taken from the New International Version Study Bible, except where indicated otherwise.

of the background of the gospel; they do not provide the key to its interpretation.” On the other hand, the discovery of the Qumran Scrolls (commonly known as the Dead Sea Scrolls) in 1947 has caused some scholars to develop a new perspective on the conceptual background of the fourth gospel. In his book *The Ancient Library of Qumran* Frank Cross Jr. (1961:206) says, “...linguistic and conceptual contacts between the scrolls and New Testament are nowhere more in evidence than in the Gospel of John.”

Still later, Morris also echoes the importance of the milieu in which the author moved as important to the interpretation of the fourth gospel (Morris, 1971:60). He acknowledges the fact that scholars understand this gospel differently because of different opinions on its background (Ibid.60). He is of the opinion that the Old Testament played a significant role in the fourth gospel and draws attention to the Qumran Scrolls.

Kysar in *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel* searches for the intellectual milieu by employing eight themes found in the fourth gospel. Through this method various backgrounds are found to which different scholars subscribe. But in his concluding observations Kysar (1975:144) says, “...the surveys should provide us with some clues as to the direction in which contemporary research is moving; ...one clue is crystal clear, namely, that contemporary research favors a Palestinian, Old Testament, Jewish setting for the thought of the gospel.”

Concisely, this shows us the differences that exist in opinions on the conceptual background of the fourth gospel. With these differences in mind, a fresh approach to the study of the concepts of “life” and “light” in the prologue is called for. How should one understand the background to “life” and “light” themes in the prologue of the fourth gospel and how they are developed throughout the gospel? This study sets out to examine this problem. The questions that emanate from the problem proceed as follows:

1. What is the current state of scholarship regarding the background to the fourth Gospel?

2. Is there any evidence of substantial influence on John of the following: Hermetic Literature, Hellenistic Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism, Gnosticism, Palestinian Judaism, Qumran Scrolls, or the Old Testament?
3. Does our understanding of the background throw light on the statement about “life” and “light” in the prologue of the fourth gospel?
4. Do the following selected passages in the fourth gospel shed more light on “life” and “light” in the prologue: Life (a) John 3:5-18; (b) 5:21-30 and 39-40; (c) 6:32-40; (d) 11:25-26. Light (a) 3:19-21; (b) 8:12; 12:46; and (c) 12:35-36?
5. What is the relevance of the teaching about life and light in contemporary South Africa?

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to identify the most helpful background against which to read and explore the concepts of life and light in the fourth gospel.

To be able to achieve this aim, I will adhere to the following five objectives. Firstly, I wish to review the current scholarship on the background of the fourth gospel. A lot of material has been written on this subject and opinions vary quite extensively. The writer will conduct a survey on what different scholars have written and attempt to show where scholarship is leading us to in this regard.

Secondly, the writer seeks to evaluate the different proposed backgrounds against each other and to identify the most likely background for the prologue and the rest of the gospel.

Thirdly, I wish to determine the meaning of “life” and “light” (in the prologue) with the help of the background. Whether the most likely background throws any light on John’s use of “light” and “life” as they stand next to each other will be dealt with later. The background that one subscribes to certainly impacts on how one understands and interprets these two themes in the rest of the gospel.

The fourth objective is to determine how the understanding gained in objective three can help us to understand other selected passages in the fourth gospel. A study of other passages that relate to “life” and “light” is very important because most of the concepts that are introduced in the prologue (Jn 1:1-18) are elaborated later in the gospel. For instance the following themes: life and light (1:4-5), witness (1:7), true light (1:9), world (1:10), glory and truth (1:14) etc, are introduced in the prologue and later expanded in the gospel (Carson, 1991:111).

Finally, I wish to draw a few lines to the present-day society, showing how our conclusions about “life” and “light” impact on civilization, crime, HIV/AIDS and other issues in South Africa. In the same vein, the author of the fourth gospel wrote with a specific purpose that would bring change in the audience’s life. It is the purpose that he states explicitly in John 20:31, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Following is a consideration of “life” and “light” as they appear in the prologue (Jn 1:1-18).

1.4 THE PROLOGUE (JOHN 1:1-18)

In considering the concepts “life” and “light” it is important to understand the function of the prologue in which they appear. Scholars have expressed diverging and converging views on the function of the first eighteen verses of the fourth gospel. How we understand and view the prologue will certainly impact on how we understand the entire gospel. Following are some opinions concerning the function of the prologue in the fourth gospel.

1.4.1 The function of the Prologue in the Fourth Gospel

“It has been asserted with some cogency that verses 1-18 of the first chapter of the gospel were a later addition used by the author so as to enhance the appeal of his work to a Hellenistic audience” (Valentine, 1996:291). Valentine is referring to Baldensperger who

acknowledges that the prologue serves as an introduction to the entire gospel. He adds that Harnack subscribes to the fact that the prologue is "...not an organic part of the book, but was a post script rather than a prelude" (ibid.291). His main reason for saying this is that the Logos idea is alien to the entire gospel. Logos is only used in the prologue and does not appear again as the gospel unfolds.

Lindars (1972:76) posits the view that the prologue was a secondary thought or an after thought by the author. He says, "...it is probable that the Gospel did not originally include the prologue, and as a result of reflection on his own work John has felt it desirable to place Jesus in the cosmic setting of his relationship to the Father..." Robinson (1962:120) also shares the same idea with Lindars.

For Bultmann, the prologue does not give an indication with regard to the content or the structure of what follows in the gospel. He says it is not essential to anything that follows (Voorwinde, 2002:18). Schnackenburg (1968:223) suggests that the author used "a primitive Christian hymn which celebrated the pre-existence and incarnation of Christ" and the author "added his own comments and forged links between it and the Gospel narrative".

In contrast to the above views, Barrett (1956:126) has no problem with seeing the unity of the prologue and the entire gospel. He is of the opinion that many of the main ideas found in the prologue are central in the body of the gospel as well. He furnishes us with the following examples of the ideas that he is talking about: life, light (v.4), witness (v.7), faith (v.9), world (v.10), glory, truth (v.14). Carson (1991:111) says, "...the tightness of the connections between the prologue and the gospel render unlikely the view that the prologue was composed by someone other than the evangelist. The suggestion that the prologue, though written by the evangelist, was composed later than the rest of the book is realistic, but speculative".

In the same vein of thought, Valentine (1996:293) sees the prologue as "a theological matrix from which the themes of the gospel arise; the seed bed of the gospel's teaching

where, similar to the literary device of *sorites* the author presents a chain of interlocking ideas”. He affirms its importance in introducing the main themes that will follow in the gospel. He calls the prologue “a microcosm of the gospel”. Likewise, Johnson (1986:479) is also of the opinion that the prologue introduces many of the themes found in the gospel. Also, Hooker (1974:40) agrees with the view that the fourth gospel echoes the language of the prologue. Newbigin (1982:1) says that the prologue is properly integrated into the following narrative. And finally, Carson (1991:111) likens the prologue to a foyer for the rest of the gospel, which introduces the reader to important themes.

The foregoing views show a range of opinions that agree and disagree on the relationship of the prologue to the gospel. Harnack, Baldensperger, Bultmann and others’ view of the prologue seems not to be very persuasive. The emphasis that the fourth gospel puts on Jesus as the revealer of God (Jn 1:18) suggests the possibility that John is expounding in the latter part of the gospel what the Word of John 1:1-2 really is.

The rest of the gospel shows a close parallel with the prologue as demonstrated in the following diagram. The diagram shows at least some parallels of themes found in the prologue that are later expounded in the gospel.

Theme	Prologue	Gospel
Pre-existence of the Word	1:1-2	8:58;17:5,24
In him was life	1:4	5:26; 11:25
Light	1:4	3:19; 8:12; 12:46
Darkness rejects light	1:5,10	3:19,20
Light triumphs darkness	1:5	8:12;12:35
Becoming God’s children	1:13	3:6; 8:41-42
Glory of Christ	1:14	12:41; 17:24
The truth in Jesus	1:17	6:46; 14:6

Therefore, I am of opinion that the prologue introduces the themes that are later expounded in the gospel. A study of the prologue shows that it is carefully crafted and coherent with the gospel. The rest of the gospel from verse 19 presupposes the prologue. Whether it was the first or last part to be written, it is the seedbed of the entire gospel. And to say that “life” and “light” are some of the major themes that have their origin in

the prologue and are later elaborated in the fourth gospel is not far fetched. Chapter four of this study will demonstrate this. But as for now let us see how the author introduces “life” and “light” to us in the prologue alone, which is ‘a microcosm of the gospel’ and ‘a foyer’ to use Valentine and Carson’s words respectively.

1.5 LIFE AND LIGHT IN THE PROLOGUE

The words “life” and “light” first appear in the prologue in John 1:4-5. From verses 1-3 the author is talking about the Word who was “in the beginning”, “was with God”, “was God”, “was with God in the beginning”, and all things were made through him. In verse 4, we learn that “life” has always been in the Word that we read about in verses 1-3. The “life” that was in the Word was the “light of men.” There appears to be a very close relationship between “life” and “light” or vice versa. They have always been in the eternal Word of God, that is, Jesus Christ.

“Life” appears once more in the prologue and is never mentioned again directly. It is only referred to indirectly in verses 12 and 13 concerning those who receive and believe in the name of Jesus. And those that acknowledge him are given “the right to become children of God”. This seems to be referring to eternal life that one gets after believing in his name. Therefore, reference is made indirectly to life in this case. Blomberg (2001:72) says “God’s Word as the agent of creation, and hence bringer of life (vv.3-4), is a concept well known from Jewish wisdom literature”. This is something we shall look at closely again in chapter three.

Unlike “life”, the word “light” is repeated seven times in the prologue. The “light of men” (v.4), “shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (v.5). There is a conflict here between the light and the darkness. In v.6, we are introduced to John the Baptist who came as a witness to the “light”. And it is very explicit that he “...was not the light” but only “...a witness to the light” (v.8). The result of his witness to the light was that people would believe in the “light” and not in him (John). So, we have someone greater than John. This is “The true light...” that we find in verse 9. The true light

coming in the world disseminates “light” to every man. If the true “light” was coming into the world, then John and all the prophets were only pointers to the “true light” that was going to come into the world.

Therefore, we see the Word taking on human form in v.14 so that he can give the “life” and “light” to men and reveal the Father. And he is said to be full of grace and truth and comes from the Father and every blessing comes from him. He alone has seen God and makes him known to those who do not know him. That is why his “life” was the “light” of men (v.4). In a nutshell, this appears to be how these two concepts (“life” and “light”) are introduced in the prologue.

But the prologue seems to show a connection between “life and light”. What is the connection between “life and light”? What is the background to John’s understanding of “life and light” that leads him to make this connection? Can we get the answer from the milieu in which the writer lived to understand his use of these words? We shall attempt to understand the depth of this connection as this study unfolds. Following is a brief introduction on how these two concepts appear in the gospel.

1.6 LIGHT IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

Light, like life, is also mentioned in the fourth gospel as early as v.4. In v.5 we see that “light shines in darkness” but darkness never understood it. Instead, there is a conflict between light and darkness, but darkness never prevailed over the light. Morris (1986:135), directs our attention to the fact that the function of light is precisely to continuously shine in darkness. Thus, the activity of the light is continuous and victorious. Light has never been and will never be subject to darkness.

As the fourth gospel unfolds, our attention is also brought to the witness of John the Baptist. He came to testify concerning the light and it is also clear that he was not the light (1:6-8). But “the true light was coming into the world” (v.9). Later in Chapter 3:19-21 we find that people’s decisions and response to “the light that has come into the

world” spell out their destiny. Those who follow darkness are condemned, but those who do good come to the light (vv.19-21).

Also, Jesus made an emphatic and unequivocal declaration that he is the light of the world (8:12; 9:5; cf. 12:46). Furthermore his followers “...will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (8:12). So, this light is the “light of life” just as life is the light of men. Apart from this, Jesus is superior to daylight (the world’s light) and those who walk in him will not stumble (11:9-10). And at the end of his ministry, he challenged the crowd to walk while they had the light and to put their trust in the light “...so that you may become sons of light” (12:35-36). Finally, he came “...into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness” (12:46). This is how these two concepts seem to unfold in the gospel.

1.7 LIFE IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

The author of the fourth gospel refers to life more often than the synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke) do. The fourth gospel uses the concept of life in a different way than the synoptics. In his article Harrison (1986:132) says, “...the synoptics present life primarily as an eschatological experience to be realized in the age to come as in Mark 10: 30. In John, however, eternal life is characteristically a present reality as stated emphatically in John 5:24, where Jesus asserts that, “whoever hears His word and believes the one who sent Him has eternal life.”

On the other hand, in John 12:25 (and in other passages), the eschatological aspect of life is also alluded to. A believer who “...hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” It seems as if the fourth gospel presents life in two perspectives, the present reality of life and the future reality of life. This teaching “...is not found in any explicit form in the synoptics, that the life of the Age to come is already imparted to the believer” (Ladd, 1993:293).

As early as v.4 we are introduced to life that was the light of men in history. People’s relationship with the Word results in having that life. This comports with the purpose of

the fourth gospel found in 20:31, "...that by believing you may have life in his name." And sandwiched in between, the references to life seem to point to Jesus as the ultimate giver and source of life. Again, Harrison (1986:132) makes an interesting point, "...the statement in v.4 is important for the clear indication it provides that life was not imparted to the Word but was His by virtue of His participation in the Godhead. He did not gain it nor did he lose it by becoming incarnate."

During his teaching ministry Jesus said a lot about himself in relation to life. In John 8:58 he said, "... before Abraham was born, I AM!" But the declaration of his eternal existence was not enough. He added predicates of various kinds (Ibid. 132). In these predicates Jesus said he is "the bread of life" (6:35), "the light of the world" (8:12), "the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep" (10:11), "the way, the truth and the life" (14:6), and "the resurrection and the life" (11:25). He also made frequent references to eternal life as in 10:28. The word sometimes appears as "life" or "eternal life" in the fourth gospel. There is a clear distinction between the life that Jesus gives from earthly life that is mortal.

Also, Jesus came down from heaven to earth so that he can give life to the world (6:33). And the life that he gives satisfies mankind's spiritual hunger (6:35). Quite prominent is that the life that one receives from Him "...is not a quickening of any innate powers resident in humanity. It is the impartation of new life, mediated through Christ; and those who do not eat his flesh and drink his blood cannot have that life (6:35)" (Ladd, 1993:293).

In John 6:63 we learn that the very words of Jesus are life and that he is the living bread (6:51ff). He is also the living water as seen in his conversation with the Samaritan woman (4:10, 14). On a further note, the Father is the source of life, but he allowed the Son to have it in himself (5:26). And the life-giving aspect of Jesus culminates in his death and resurrection. He willingly gave himself at the cross (10:15) to save mankind from sin. Not only do we see the appearance of life in the gospel, but that "life was the light of men" (1:4).

But what causes one to have “light” and “life”? Some people understand “life” and “light” as intellectual ability, joy or the presence of God, and others in moral terms. Can the study of the backdrop of the fourth gospel help us understand “life” and “light” better?

1.8 IMPORTANCE OF BACKGROUND STUDY IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND LIFE AND LIGHT

In order to engage in sound and responsible interpretation of the fourth gospel one needs to understand its context of thought. A disregard of the context of thought may lead the interpreter to impose a subjective interpretation. Such interpretation may be alien to the text and the author’s intention (Dodd, 1963:4).

Many years were dominated by the opinion, “John was ‘the gospel of the Hellenists’; it was written by a Greek thinker for the Greeks; it marks a decisive point in the hellenization of Christian faith” (Barrett 1956:3). This kind of understanding had its implications on how scholars interpreted the fourth gospel. But the search for the background aimed at establishing the religious *Sitz im Leben* (“life setting”) with the purpose of wanting to explain the language and religious background of the fourth gospel (Ladd, 1997:253). The fact that writers suggest and subscribe to a particular context of thought, seems to show the importance of background study of the fourth gospel.

Morris (1971:60) also points out clearly that it is important to give attention to the background of the fourth gospel for sound interpretation. He adds that “...we must know the kind of milieu in which the author moved if we are to be sure we understand the meaning because ... scholars understand this gospel differently because they have different ideas of its background.”

Robinson gave the following title to his article "*The New Look on the Fourth Gospel*"². Why the new look? In this article, the author tackles the issue of the background of the fourth gospel. His 'new look' leans very much on the Qumran Scrolls as helpful in understanding the conceptual background of the fourth gospel. In the same vein, W.F. Albright also entitled his article "*Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of St John*"³. This article also zeros on the background of the fourth gospel. This just confirms how important it is to study the context of thought of the author for responsible and sound hermeneutics of the fourth gospel.

Therefore, the background that we subscribe to on the fourth gospel affects our understanding and interpretation of "life" and "light" in the gospel (and the gospel at large).

1.9 METHODOLOGY

The background on the fourth gospel has caused a conflict among scholars. In this research, I will attempt to review and compare the important literature on the background of the fourth gospel with particular reference to the development of the debate in chronological order and to consider the impact of fresh discoveries on the background.

In evaluating the literature on the background, reference will be made to the primary sources like the Qumran Scrolls, first century Palestinian Judaism, Josephus and Philo.

The writer also proceeds to survey the primary literature looking for the concepts of "life and light" and exegetes Qumran Scroll passages in which "life" and "light" appear.

I also wish to exegete John 1:4-5 and other selected passages in the fourth gospel that deal with the concepts of "life" and "light." The exegesis is done within a grammatical-

² This article is found in *Twelve New Testament Studies* 34, 1962: pp. 94-106.

³ This article is found in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology: Studies in Honour of C.H.Dodd*. 1964: pp.153-171.

historical framework and largely depends on a study of commentaries and other relevant literature.

This research is undertaken within the reformed evangelical tradition, and is informed by the historical critical method.

Finally, by way of an epilogue, I wish to show how this study on “life” and “light” impacts on civilization, crime, HIV/AIDS and other issues in South Africa. This epilogue contains nothing more than a practical application of the research results of the study. The aim is not to start on a scientific analysis of the crime situation, the impact of HIV/AIDS on society and other present-day issues in South Africa. Therefore, the application is directed at a general observation of the South African situation, as reflected in the media.

1.10 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The central theoretical argument of this research is that the Old Testament and its development in first century Palestinian Judaism is the most probable background against which to understand the “life” and “light” concepts in the fourth gospel.

CHAPTER 2: A STUDY OF SOME PROPOSED RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS TO THE FOURTH GOSPEL

Biblical studies that ignore the conceptual background of the author do not seem to do justice to the meaning of the text. It is so with the fourth gospel. To understand its message, a study of the background that impacted the author's thinking is important for better exegesis. In this chapter, we will attempt to deal with those backgrounds that seem to be very important. We will also seek to understand where current scholarship is leading us in this regard. "The three most frequently suggested influences on the evangelist of the fourth gospel are Gnosticism, Hellenistic thought, and Palestinian Judaism" (Brown, 1966:lii). These three main categories have their sub-categories, as we shall see as this chapter unfolds.

2.1 GNOSTICISM

2.1.1 The Study of Gnosticism and John

The relations between the fourth gospel and Gnosticism have been debated for a long time and the debate is still far from settled (Murray, 1987:lv). Bultmann was one of the scholars who posited the view that Gnosticism and John had close relations. Morris (1971:62) says Bultmann "...is an outstanding example of a modern commentator who sees Gnosticism as the important part of the background to John." Bultmann is the proponent of the idea that the Gnostic redeemer myth propels John's idea of Christ who came from God (Heaven) and returned to God.

It is important to note that Bultmann based his view on Bousset and Reitzenstein (from the History of Religions School). Reitzenstein was convinced that he "...found an Iranian doctrine, that concerned the soul or the inner being as a divine being sent down from the world of light to the world of matter, from which it is once more released and summoned back" (Munck, 1962:227). By adopting the view of Bousset and Reitzenstein, Bultmann

was convinced that the author of the fourth gospel presupposed the Redeemer myth and that the gospel could be understood in the light of it (ibid.227). Consequently, in the 1950's the debate about the intellectual milieu of the fourth gospel was either a defense or refutation of Bultmann's "...controversial proposal that the gospel was written out of the context of an oriental Gnosticism" (Kysar, 1975:103).

A deeper understanding of Gnosticism reveals that it was composed of religious/philosophical systems. Dualism is at the core of this religion. Thus matter is considered evil and special "knowledge" is only possible to people through a special kind of revelation from the "Redeemer". Only the minority who gained such revelation were eligible for salvation. In other words, salvation is only possible through "knowledge". The "Redeemer" could not mingle or have contact with this earth or anything material. Anything material was inferior to the Redeemer and replete with evil. Because of this, the "Redeemer" was sent from heaven in a disguised manner so that the hostile powers of the world would not identify him. After completing his task, he ascended to heaven. In other words, God is viewed as holy and had no dealings with the material world.

In a similar way, Christ came from heaven to earth and He returned to the Father after completing his mission on earth. The issue of Christ giving salvation to people is also central to the fourth gospel. However, the following questions stand out. Is the mission of the Redeemer in Gnosticism and that of Christ the same? Did Christ, as our Redeemer, consider anything material to be evil? Also, was he disguised when he came to earth so that evil might not attack him? We will return to these questions later.

In the fourth gospel the author uses words like "You are from below, I am from above" (John 8:23). Bultmann's school believes this dualism is believed to be assimilated in the fourth gospel from Gnosticism. The coming down of Christ to reveal truth and his returning to heaven (Jn 3:13 and 12:31-32) is considered to have a Gnostic background. Because of this the proponents of Gnosticism consider Christ as the Logos-Redeemer, "God walking about the earth in the guise of man" (ibid.lv). In addition to Bultmann and his predecessors, Käsemann and Schottroff also describe the fourth gospel as the first

system known in detail of a Gnosticism which adapts the Christian tradition to its own thought forms (ibid.lv). The author of the fourth gospel employs dualistic terms in his writing. These were possibly prevalent in his community. However, though he uses terms that in Gnosticism are used in dualistic sense, this is not an assimilation of Gnosticism in the fourth gospel. Secondly, in his writing he reacts strongly against Gnosticism. For example, Gnosticism believed in a “redeemer myth” that could not mingle with the earth and humanity, and salvation is through knowledge. In contrast John talks about God who tabernacled on earth and in the midst of mankind for the sole purpose of revealing the Father, so that man can be saved. Jesus lives, dies and rises to save mankind from their sin. Consequently, salvation according to John does not come by “knowledge”; instead, faith in Jesus is the pre-requisite for salvation. This marks a difference between the “Redeemer myth” and the Redeemer that John talks about.

Other Johannine scholars have thrown doubt on Gnosticism as the conceptual background of the author of the fourth gospel. The first objection to this background is uncertainty as to the very existence of the Redeemer myth. According to Morris (1971:63), “...the existence of this Redeemer myth in any pre-Christian form is far from having been proved. So, for all its popularity in some circles this idea must be discarded. The Gnosticism we know is definitely second century.” At the same time, many scholars are of the view that the ideas that led to the manifestation of an early recognizable Gnosticism were evident when John wrote the fourth gospel. But this does not mean that the author of the fourth gospel had Gnosticism as his conceptual background.

Furthermore, Munck (1962:227-228) poses a sharp critique of Bultmann. He argues that Bultmann is wrong in proposing that the fourth gospel can be understood in light of the redeemer myth. Secondly, he notes that Bultmann never attempted to have a deeper analysis of the material he cites. He fails to “...distinguish between probable dependence, the use of the same *terminus technicus* in the same sense, and in quite another sense, and the use of the same imagery in the same sense and quite in another and therefore probably entirely irrelevant sense” (ibid. 227-228). Therefore, the detail that Bultmann gathers is

not convincing because it lacks evidence of critical evaluation. Munck's criticism appears to be opposing Gnosticism as the intellectual milieu of the fourth gospel's author.

Kysar (1975:103), like Morris, is of the opinion that Gnosticism belongs to the second century. He goes on to say that it is not possible to prove that Gnosticism had influence on the formation of Johannine Christianity. The fourth gospel seems not to furnish us with the belief that salvation comes from knowledge through the descending and ascending of the heavenly redeemer. This is what Gnosticism teaches.

Instead, what we learn from the fourth gospel is that the Son of Man took human form (Jn 1:14). He lived with human beings and talked to them on the evil earth. He later died and rose from the dead. Also, the fourth gospel says that mankind is saved from the bondage of sin by having faith in the Son of Man. Salvation does not come through knowledge. Neill (1964:310) comments, "...the fourth gospel knows nothing of an eternal, self-existent world of darkness, separate from the world of light...The Gnostic myth does not give us the clue that we need to the interpretation of the fourth gospel. Can we look for it somewhere else?"

In the light of all this, it would be foolish to treat Gnosticism as the intellectual milieu of the fourth gospel's author. Gnosticism actually undermines the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Not only this, its view of man's relationship to God denies the importance of the person and work of Christ (Drane, 1996:416). What Gnosticism teaches is not compatible with what the fourth gospel teaches. This leads us to study other backgrounds that some of the Johannine scholars have proposed.

2.2 HELLENISTIC THOUGHT

2.2.1 The study of Philo the Alexandrian Jew (Hellenistic Judaism) and John

It has been proposed that John was probably dependent on Philo the Alexandrian Jew. Philo was a contemporary of Jesus. In his writings, Philo attempted to demonstrate how a Jew could comprehend his faith in the face of Hellenistic culture. According to him, not only was a Jew supposed to understand his faith in relation to the culture of the day, he was also expected to expound it to the Gentile world. He (Philo) aimed at combining Judaism and Greek thought (Brown, 1966: lvii). His treatment of the Old Testament was very similar to the way the Greek teachers treated Homer. They all allegorized their scriptures (Murray, 1987: liv). It is also important to note that during Philo's time "... rational thought had compromised with mysticism; eclecticism, both in philosophy and religion, was the order of the day" (Barrett, 1956:28). Such was the situation that the Greeks were confronted with. Thus, philosophy influenced the way Philo understood and expounded the Scriptures to convince the Gentiles that surrounded him.

Stories that seemed to have no significance were allegorized so that they could portray a religious value. Philo too aimed at allegorizing the Old Testament so that it could be meaningful and appealing to the rational minds of the Greeks. Is this approach reflected anywhere in the fourth gospel? Was the author of the fourth gospel dependent on Philo for his thinking?

There are scholars who subscribe to the notion that John was dependent on Philo. For instance, Dodd (1963:33) unequivocally says, "Rabbinic Judaism, *Philo* (italics mine) and the Hermetica remain our most direct sources for the background of thought..." He goes on to mention that Philo's thinking was steeped in the famous Platonic-Stoic philosophy which is reflected in the Hermetica. He also mentions that the Johannine Logos was identical with Philo's Logos. In other words, Dodd sees a direct borrowing of John from Philo. This being the case, is this reflected anywhere in the fourth gospel?

The Logos idea in the prologue has been used as the principal argument for Philo's impact on the author of the fourth gospel. Brown (1966:lviii) put it best by saying, "Argyle attempts to show a wider dependence of John upon Philo because some of the biblical imagery used by John (Jacob's ladder, the brazen serpent, and the vision of Abraham) is used by Philo, precisely in connection with the doctrine of the Logos." John also uses the preceding images in his gospel, but he has moved beyond how Philo understands and interprets them. John is absolutely grounded in the Old Testament while Philo goes beyond his Old Testament background by bringing in philosophical understanding.

The use of symbolism seems to reinforce an affinity between John and Philo. To pick up on Dodd again, he alludes to the symbolism of light, which he says is seen in both Philo and John. According to Philo, light is seen as a symbol of Deity in relation to man and the world. He uses light in many connections in his writings (according to Dodd). It seems appropriate to mention that John does not use light in different connections like Philo. Instead, in the fourth gospel Christ is the light of the world (Jn 8:12) and he is the only true light of men. Life is another concept that has caused scholars to assert John's dependence on Philo. John speaks of the living water in 4:10,14. Similarly, Philo also refers to this (in *De Fuga* 199 and *Leg* 1:303). In Philo's case, the water is sometimes virtue, wisdom, but above all life itself (*De Fuga* 197-8) (Dodd 1963:56). The fourth gospel always connects life with Christ. To deny Christ is to be without life and to accept him is to have life.

Other scholars doubt that John was dependent on Philo. Murray (1987:liv) says, "...the declaration of John 1:14 and the function of the prologue to the Gospel as introducing the revelation and redemption of the Logos within the concrete situations of a local history were beyond Philo's horizons." If John was dependent on Philo, he must also reflect the philosophical writings of Philo. Not only this but also the idea of "knowledge" as the agent of salvation. John constantly refers to the need to have faith in Jesus for salvation. This further demolishes the view that John was dependent of Philo.

Wilson (1953-54:47-49) observes that both Philo and John use the Old Testament and the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. They (John and Philo) seem to run parallel, but their methodological procedures are dissimilar. That is, the philosophical expressions, which are so colorful in Philo, do not exist in the fourth gospel. And the allegories that Philo employs in his writings seem to have no parallels with the text of the fourth gospel.

Dodd's view that Rabbinic Judaism, Philo and the *Hermetica* remain the background of the fourth gospel seems not to be satisfactory. Brown (1966: lviii) responds to this by saying, "...we believe that the evidence points rather toward a common background shared by Philo and John." In other words, both had a Jewish background but were not dependent on each other. Brown also quotes Braun (Jean Théol. II, p.298), who says, "If Philo had never existed the fourth gospel would most probably not have been any different from what it is".

John (1:1-18) and Philo both speak of the Logos as clearly demonstrated in the prologue. The Logos is regarded by both as the mediator between God and man. It is also true that both demonstrate an Old Testament understanding as their background. We can say by using the word "Logos" John is demonstrating an understanding that surrounded him, but he adapts the use of "Logos" ultimately to his own end. The "Logos" according to John becomes flesh, something that we do not learn about in Philo. Also, Philo takes a philosophical perspective in his understanding of the "Logos". This is not found in the fourth gospel. Thus, John is not dependent on Philo even if he employs terms and biblical imagery parallel with Philo. The truth is that they shared a common background but the "methodological procedure" was completely different (Brown, 1966: lviii). They are both dependent on the Old Testament for the Logos idea. This actually leads us to consider another background that could have influenced the thinking of the author of the fourth gospel.

2.2.2 The study of Hermetic Literature and John

Questions on whether the background of the fourth gospel was Greek or Jewish have been posed. Some have boldly claimed that the thinking that lies behind the author of the fourth gospel resembles the Greek Hermetic Literature. These were mystical writings purporting to give knowledge of God, produced in Egypt between A.D. 100 and 200 (Hunter, 1985:9). The Hermetic Literature is found under the name of Hermes Trismegistus in antiquity. This man (Hermes) was regarded as very wise in Egypt; such that he was deified after his death as the god *Thoth* (Dodd, 1963:11).

This body of writing projects a fusion of Platonic and Stoic teaching. Dodd (1963:10-53) wrote quite extensively on the Hermetic Literature in *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*. Painter (1991:53) says that Dodd uses the Hermetic writings to "...illustrate how John would have been read and understood by educated pagans." He asserts that the gospel of John was written for the adherents of Hermetism (ibid.53). The Hermetic Literature portrays some elements of semi-panteism and Gnosticism. The Gnostic element is detected in the notion that salvation comes through revealed knowledge. Only the perfect man is said to possess the knowledge of God. This type of thinking is modeled by the Gnostics after John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: that they *may know* (italics mine) you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Brown, 1966: lviii). Thus by acquiring knowledge about God one becomes a perfect man according to Hermetism.

Parallels between the Hermetica and the fourth gospel have been established. The most prominent scholars who drew such parallels were C.H.Dodd and Braun. These two authors draw parallels that are almost similar but they judge them differently (Schnackenburg, 1968:136). Dodd relies on the Hermetica for the interpretation and understanding of the fourth gospel. This is very explicit in his words, "...the Hermetica remain our direct source(s) for the background of thought..." (Dodd, 1966:133).

For instance, one of the points of contact that Dodd finds between the Hermetica and John is that of "life" and "light". These two concepts are used in the Hermetic Literature

as a description of God or as a reference to the relationship that one enjoys with God. Thus, the following quotation demonstrates how the two concepts have been used in the Hermetica, "I believe and testify: I enter into life and light. Blessed art Thou, O Father" (ibid.18). The use of "life" and "light" in relation to God seems to have some bearing on the fourth gospel. For we learn in John 1:4 that, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." But is "life" and "light" in the Hermetica always used and understood in the same way as they are used in the fourth gospel?

The way "life" and "light" is used and understood in the Hermetic Literature deviates from that of the fourth gospel. According to the Platonic understanding, where reason fails one is encouraged to look to the sun, "...the light of this world, as the offspring and image of the Good," and the sun is clearly considered to be "the image of the heavenly creator God" (ibid.18). This understanding and use of "light" is not found in the fourth gospel. Also, it seems that there is an element of sun worship in the Hermetica because it is the image of the creator God (ibid.18). Nowhere in the fourth gospel do we find the author exhorting people to look up to the sun. Instead, people are urged to put their faith in Jesus who is the Light of the world (Jn 8:12) and the exact eternal image of the Father.

Association of "life" and "light" had its origin in the Hebrew Scriptures, which probably later impacted on the Hermetic Literature. The connection may originate in Psalm 36:9, "For with you is the fountain of life: in your light, we see light." Dodd acknowledges that there is no substantial borrowing between the Hermetic Literature and John. But he still thinks the Hermetic Literature forms the conceptual background of the fourth gospel as cited earlier. Other scholars do not subscribe to this view. What are their objections?

In his article (*"The Religious Background of the Fourth Gospel" in Studies in the Fourth Gospel*) Kilpatrick has expressed a great discontentment with the view posited by Dodd on the Hermetic Literature and John. Brown (1966:lix) quotes him, "Kilpatrick has stressed that the similarities between the two literatures should not be overemphasized. Some of the theological terms that are the most important in the Hermetica are totally

absent from John, for example, *gnosis*, *mysterion*, *athanasia* ("immortality"), *demiourgos* ("demiurge")."

John is considered closer to the Greek Old Testament (LXX) than the Hermetica. An analysis of significant words in John that start with one of the first four letters of Greek alphabet has shown that the fourth gospel has 197 important words and out of these 189 appear in LXX. But only 82 appear in the Hermetic Literature (ibid.lix). This lessens the likelihood of the Hermetica having influenced the author of the fourth gospel.

Brown observes that the authors of the Hermetica seemed to have been acquainted with Christianity and they seemed to write against it. There is also a possibility that there was a scribe who had some knowledge of John. If this is so, the direction of the parallels between John and the Hermetica would have to be seriously examined (Brown, 1966:lix).

The use of life and light in the Hermetica appears to be more philosophical than in the fourth gospel. Some elements of Platonism and Stoicism can be detected in the Hermetic Literature, unlike in the fourth gospel. Neill (1964:324) disagrees with the notion that the Hermetic Literature had an influence on the fourth gospel. He says, referring to the writings of Hermes or Poimandres, "No one, I think, would suggest that they were in any sense direct or indirectly source of the thought or a teaching of the fourth gospel."

Brown and Morris comport with Kilpatrick (1957:43) who says, "...we can discard the Hermetica with the Mandaean texts and other evidences of Gnosticism. They constitute no significant part of the background of the Gospel; they do not provide the key to its interpretation." Kilpatrick seems to find convincing background in the Greek Old Testament rather than other backgrounds. The Hermetic literature is believed to be 2nd and 3rd century by a number of scholars. Therefore, John cannot derive his thinking from it (Williams, 2002:2).

2.2.3 The Study of Mandaism and John

Another intellectual milieu that has been proposed is the influence of Mandaism on the fourth gospel. "Since Bultmann published his programmatic essay in 1925 on the 'significance of the newly-discovered Mandaean and Manichean sources for the understanding of John,' Johannine studies have had to face the Mandaean problem" (Schnackenburg, 1968:138). The Mandaean relationship to the fourth gospel has resulted in divergent views in scholarship. The debate is mainly inclined to finding parallels between the fourth gospel and Mandaism. And currently, "...the attempt to derive the fourth gospel from Mandaean sources is already a curiosity of scholarship" (Morris, 1987: Iviii).

The history and traditions of the Mandaeans cannot be accounted for with ultimate precision. Dodd (1963:115-130) furnishes us with a summary of the Mandaeans. Although he tries to give us a description of the Mandaeans he acknowledges that for, "...any history of the Mandaeans and their beliefs before 700 A.D we are dependent solely on inference and speculation" (Dodd, 1963:115). Thus, their history cannot be narrated with precise accuracy.

However, this does not mean to say that some things cannot be known about the Mandaeans. There is a theory that the Mandaeans were a baptizing sect in the Jordan Valley in the first century. Through the passage of time, their traditions became more established after a migration to Mesopotamia. According to Yamauchi they were non-Jewish, not properly acquainted with the Old Testament, spoke Aramaic and lacked first hand understanding of Christ and Christianity (Murray, 1987: Iviii). Their full-fledged theology reveals "...a highly syncretistic mixture of Jewish law, Gnostic myth, and Syrian Christianity" (Brown, 1966:liv-lv). Dodd (1963:115-116) says that the Mandaean writings are composed of miscellaneous theology, myth, fairy tale, ethical instruction, ritual ordinances, and what purports to be history. There is a lack of unity or consistency in their teaching. It is also not purely monotheistic or dualistic.

According to the Mandaean teaching, Jesus is regarded as one of the false prophets. Judaism and Christianity are other false religions. Mandaeans highly revere their so-called great revealer, Manda d'Hayye ("Knowledge of life"). He is claimed to have been baptized by John the Baptist. Moreover, Manda d'Hayye is said to have taught people the way of salvation, making it possible for people to be integrated in the world of "light" and "life" (Brown, 1966: lv). They believe in the world of "life" and "light" but as to who governs and orders it is not clear.

Explicit in the Mandaean teachings are the concepts of "life" and "light", truth and lie, which are also found in the fourth gospel. Bultmann and Baur (1933) were of the opinion that the concepts must be used to interpret the fourth gospel. Brown (1966:lv) also picks up on Bultmann by saying, "...he supposes that the Mandaean thought represents a later derivative of the very type of Gnosticism that he postulates in the New Testament era among the disciples of John the Baptist and which served as a background for John. Hence he cites parallel symbols, thought patterns, and phrases in John and the Mandaean writings, and he looks on them as echoes of pre-Christian Gnosticism". Bultmann and Baur were of the opinion that Mandaism was the background that impacted the author of the fourth gospel.

The opposing terms, light and darkness, life and death, have great prominence in the Mandaean literature. God is repeatedly praised as "the high king of light" and "the great life". Still one would detect that the usage of these concepts in Mandaism is different from the fourth gospel. "Light" and "Life" are closely linked with Christ in the fourth gospel. In John 8:12 and 14:6, Christ made a direct claim that he is the Light of the world and the Life respectively. Also, the use of these two words by John does not have any Gnostic connotations behind them as it does in the Mandaean theology. Entrance into the "Kingdom" of life and light had a mythological understanding. Also, baptism is performed in running water to help people to come into the realm of Light and Life (Dodd, 1963:116-117). This kind of understanding and teaching seems foreign and non-existent in the fourth gospel.

Schnackenburg (1968:142) says that “it is improbable that the fourth evangelist was inspired by Mandaean literature in particular to take up the pattern of a Saviour Redeemer sent into the world...” He sees John as more inclined to linking salvation and redemption with the historical person of Jesus Christ. Conversely, a closer analysis and examination of the Mandaean Manda d’Hayye (“knowledge of life”) reveals the idea that salvation comes by knowledge that Manda d’Hayye imparts to people. The fourth gospel does not teach that salvation comes through “knowledge”. Faith in Jesus brings salvation according to the teaching of the fourth gospel.

Schnackenburg (ibid.142-143) further posits the idea that “Mandaism can hardly be argued as the immediate background of John, since the many designations of the envoys from the heavenly world do not include the specific title which occurs in the Johannine statements about the descent and ascent of the revealer and redeemer, the “Son of Man”. Attempts to find him behind the figure of Enosh and Anosh have broken down, because the parts of Mandaean literature which come into question have been recognized as late”.

Brown (1966: lv) is of the opinion that the oldest forms of Mandaean theology available to us are late in the Christian era. Hence, there is no possibility of saying that John was influenced by this thought. He further hints that there is no Mandaean work that resembles John. He goes on to oppose Bultmann who cites parallel symbols, thought patterns, and phrases in John and Mandaean writings and looks at them as pre-Christian Gnosticism. Sandmell cautions against such “parallelomania” which seems not to help much (Carson, 1991:59). Like Bultmann, Borig spends some time establishing some parallels between Mandaean sources and John. But he seems to subscribe more to the opinion that John had closer dependence on the Old Testament than on the Mandaean texts (Kysar, 1975:126).

As mentioned earlier, Kilpatrick mentioned that we should discard the *Hermetica* along with the Mandaean texts (Morris, 1971:62). He sees no value at all in the Mandaean texts as forming the conceptual background of the fourth gospel’s author. Like Brown and Schnackenburg, Morris also subscribes to the lateness of the Mandaean literature. Hence,

it may not be regarded as the conceptual background of the fourth gospel. The fourth gospel does not see Jesus and Judaism as one of the false prophets and a false religion respectively. Jesus is the Messiah and the one who reveals God the Father to mankind according to the fourth gospel.

From the evidence cited above, Mandaism is a confused religion of myth, fairy tale, ethics, theology and dubious history (William, 2002:2). It also leans heavily on Gnostic thinking in a number of ways. One of them is that of the redeemer who comes into the world to save mankind. This is a very late body of literature. Therefore, we can say there is a strong possibility that the Mandaean literature borrowed from the fourth gospel because of their lateness. Hence, it is not of much help for us in trying to understand “life” and “light”. This prompts us to look for another background. This automatically rules out the Mandaism as the conceptual background of the fourth gospel.

2.3 THE OLD TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS AND ALLUSIONS IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

The goal of this section is to try to establish that the Old Testament has a prominent impact on the author of the fourth gospel. There are direct quotations and allusions to the Old Testament in the fourth gospel. Scholars say that the fourth gospel contains fewer Old Testament quotations than the synoptic gospels. Based on this idea some scholars have concluded that John did not know the Old Testament very well. We wish to respond to this statement at the end of this section. As for now let us examine how the Old Testament is used in the fourth gospel. We do not wish to be exhaustive in this section but to simply establish the point stated above.

Brown (1966:lix) gives the following analysis of the Old Testament quotations in the fourth gospel. “The Nestle Greek text indicates only 14, all from books in the Palestinian Canon of the Old Testament. In the Westcott-Hort list of Old Testament references used in the New Testament, only 27 passages are listed for John, as compared with 70 for Mark, 109 for Luke, and 124 for Matthew.”

John presents Jesus as the Messiah, the Servant of Yahweh, the King of Israel and as the prophet. In adapting these imageries to his end, he does not expound a lot on them, as we would expect. But a closer study of these imageries reveals that they are rooted in the Old Testament. Some of the allusions that John makes are not very explicit, but their reality and origin cannot be doubted. For example, upon reading John 1:1-4 one is prompted to think of Genesis 1:1-5 but John does not furnish the reader with this background. Also there are references made to Abraham (Jn 8:31-41), to Isaac (Jn 3:16 cf. Gen 22), and to Jacob (Jacob's ladder) (John 4:5f). All these examples demonstrate that the author is thinking of the Old Testament (Brown, 1966:lx).

The story of Moses and the Exodus receives noticeable allusion in the fourth gospel. This has led some scholars to suggest that the crafting of the fourth gospel resembles the Exodus. Smith (1962:329-342) in his articles sees a close connection between Jesus' signs with the plagues that fell on Egypt. Some of the connections that Smith makes appear to be forced and artificial. They misrepresent the message that John wants to communicate. Without following his pattern of analysis, we can still come up with clear references in John that show a similarity with Moses and the Exodus. For instance, John 1:17 makes reference to Moses in comparison with Jesus. The events of the Exodus are also clear in the fourth gospel: the giving of the manna (6:31ff); the water from the rock (7:38); the bronze snake (3:14); and the tabernacle (1:14) (Brown, 1966:lx).

In addition, John 19:36 makes an explicit remembrance of the Paschal lamb. Its bones were not supposed to be broken by the children of Israel according to Exodus 12:10, 46, and Numbers 9:12. The author of the fourth gospel is concerned to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Paschal lamb that was anticipated in the Old Testament by Israel. Also John 19:37 recalls Zechariah 12:10, "...They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a first born son." In other words, Zechariah was pointing to Jesus' death on the cross. This was fulfilled in that Jesus was pierced in his side with a spear and he was the only Son of God. One can trace these events back to the OT and link them to Moses and the Exodus without forcing them.

The Old Testament quotations and allusions that he makes reveal that Jesus is greater than Moses and the Exodus experiences. Jesus redeems mankind from the bondage of sin, which Moses could not do. Murray (1987:lix) posits the idea that the theme of redemption is referred to in John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Murray seems to make a valid point by saying that, "...the language used of the incarnation of the Logos is reminiscent of the dwelling of the Shekinah among the people of God in the wilderness (ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν), and in 1:17 (the law came through Moses, grace and truth through Jesus Christ)" (ibid.lix). The Shekinah that dwelt among the children of Israel finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus who lived and continues to live among his people according to John.

And the lifting up of the Son of Man (3:14) recalls the Exodus experience of the lifting up of the brazen serpent in the wilderness. The lifting up of Jesus on the cross brings eternal life and ultimate healing which the brazen serpent could not do. Also, the discourse on the bread of life recalls the manna given to Israel during her wilderness experience. That manna was pointing to the true Manna that also came in the person of Jesus. John 6:33 explicitly says, "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Also, Jesus fulfills all the Feasts of Israel. The main feasts that feature in the fourth gospel are the Passover (Chap 6), the Feast of Tabernacles (Chap 7), and the Feast of Dedication (Chap 10). It is at the Feast of Tabernacles where Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). We also see him making another direct claim in the bread of life discourse. He said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

The author of the fourth gospel also has clear quotations from the prophets. He quotes from Isaiah 40:3; 54:13; 44:3 and Zech 9:9; 13:7. Also, Deutero-Isaiah has good parallels with John especially on the Johannine usage of the "I am" (Brown, 1966:lx). Apart from

the prophets, Wisdom Literature also plays an important role in understanding the fourth gospel, especially the Psalms and Proverbs. All this establishes the point that the Old Testament had a remarkable impact on John.

The following schematic diagram by Fraser (2003) may help us to see that John's thinking was couched in the Old Testament. The diagram does not purport to cover every direct use and allusion of the Old Testament in the fourth gospel. It is only serving us here as an illustration to prove the point that the Old Testament influenced John's thinking.

Reference	Text of John's Gospel	OT Refs.	Equivalent OT Text
Jn 1:23	"I am the voice of one calling in the desert, Make straight the way for the Lord"	Is 40:3	"In the desert prepare the way for the Lord make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God."
Jn 2:17b	"Zeal for your house will consume me."	Ps 69:9	"...for zeal for your house consumes me..."
Jn 3:14	"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert so the Son of Man must be lifted up."	Num. 21:9	"So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole."
Jn 6:31	"He gave them bread from heaven to eat."	Ex 16:4 cf. Ps 78:23ff	"I will rain down bread from heaven for you."
Jn 6:45	"They will be taught by God."	Is 54:13 cf. Jer 31:33f	"All your sons will be taught by the Lord,..."
Jn 7:38	"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."	Is 44:3 cf. Zech 14:8	"I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,..."
Jn 7:42	"Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"	Mic 5:21 cf. 1 Sam 16:1f	"But you Bethlehem... out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel,..."
Jn 8:17	"In your law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid."	Num. 35:30	"But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness."
Jn 10:34	"Is it not written in your law 'I have said you are	Ps 82:6	"I said, You are 'gods'..."

	gods.”		
Jn 12:13	“Blessed is who comes in the name of the Lord.”	Ps 118:26	“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.”
Jn 12:14-16	“Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your King is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”	Zech 9:9	“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, your King comes to you, ...gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
Jn 13:18	“He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.”	Ps 41:9	“Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread has lifted up his heel against me.”
Jn 16:32	“But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home.”	Zech 13:7	“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” ...Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered,...
Jn 19:36	“Not one of his bones will be broken.”	Ps 34:20 cf. Ex12:46; Num. 19:12	“He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.”

A study of how John makes Old Testament allusions and quotations (that have inaccuracies) has led some scholars to agree that the evangelist did not have written Old Testament texts. He probably simply perpetuated the information found in his traditions. And Kysar (1975:106) observes that, “the evangelist’s traditions indicate that his community was acquainted with and drew upon a general stock of Old Testament knowledge common to Jewish and Christian instruction. More specifically, he was probably related to a community deeply immersed in the Wisdom tradition whose language and conceptuality is coined from the Old Testament.”

Finally, some scholars have demonstrated diverging opinions on how John understands the Old Testament. Some are of the view that John had a low knowledge of the Old Testament while others say he had a high knowledge of the Old Testament. But their common ground is that the author’s community was immersed in the Old Testament. It

seems to me that, whether the author had a high or a low knowledge of the Old Testament, he seems to be very faithful in propagating the knowledge found in his tradition. He appears to be someone who has absorbed the Old Testament and pondered it deeply. Barrett (1956:25) concludes that "...the Old Testament, therefore, was so well known and understood that John could use it not piecemeal but as a whole, maybe taken as an essential element in the background of the gospel." And finally, Schnackenburg (1968:124) also concedes that "...this gospel would be unthinkable without the Old Testament basis which supports it." Thus, the Old Testament is an essential part of the conceptual background of the fourth gospel.

2.4 THE STUDY OF PALESTINIAN JUDAISM AND JOHN

A substantial number of Johannine scholars' incline to the view that the main background for the conceptual thought of the fourth gospel is first century Palestinian Judaism. This Judaism had different approaches and teachings drawn from the Old Testament. Does this body of literature contribute anything to the conceptual background of the author? We shall concentrate on Rabbinic Judaism, and the Judaism of the Qumran sectarians.

2.4.1 The study of John and Rabbinic Judaism

The echoes of rabbinic theology in the fourth gospel prompted the search for the relations between the two. Some major sources of rabbinic theology are namely: the Mishnah, the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, the Midrashim and the Targums (Gordon, 1988:55). Dating of the rabbinic documents cannot be done with accuracy. They were written quite late, after the fourth gospel. But they contain some "...very early material going back to the time of Jesus and even before" (Brown, 1966:lxix). What is the relationship between John and this literature?

John's familiarity with rabbinic thinking can be gleaned without much difficulty from the Old Testament passages that he cites. Barrett (1956:27) confirms that Rabbinic Judaism is the heir of Old Testament religion. While Barrett is true in what he says, it is also well to be clear that Rabbinic Judaism is not an exact propagation of the Old Testament. The Rabbinic Literature covers a number of issues that seem to be foreign to the Old Testament. For instance, it deals with human activity and thought. It also deals with criminal, civil and religious law. And it contains history that is mixed with folk tales, legends, liturgical details, biblical exegesis, and some elements of mysticism are scattered in these writings (Ibid.27). Some of the issues dealt with in this broad spectrum of theology are reflected in the fourth gospel.

In John 7:51, the protocol followed in bringing a criminal to justice is assumed. Nicodemus poses a question to the Jewish leaders, "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" Their law could not condemn the accused without granting him the right to present his case before the judges. So before any condemnation was assumed, Jesus had the ultimate right to have a hearing before the judges. He is denied the right to do so in this incident. John is expressing the understanding of the rabbis. And 8:17 says, "In your own law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid." Jesus said these words after he was accused of being his own witness. A fact could only be established if two witnesses testified the same thing against the accused. But Jesus testified for himself and the Father who sent him testified for him too (8:18). John reflects the rabbinic teaching and shows that Jesus did not breach the laws of the rabbis that were consistent with the Old Testament teaching.

The evangelist also projects knowledge of rabbinic interpretation of Scripture. This is seen in the following statement by Jesus, "...I tell you the truth you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:51). The verse recalls Genesis 28:12, where the angels ascended and descended on a ladder before Jacob's eyes. In the fourth gospel the angels ascend and descend on the Son of Man. In *Midrash Rabbah* lxix 3, a few rabbis read "on him" (Jacob) instead of "above it" as in Genesis 28:13. Some scholars say that the "on him" is behind John's statement and

this would mean that the Son of Man replaces Jacob (Brown, 1966:90). Some scholars do not subscribe to this idea. But something that is clear in this is that the rabbis are dependent on the Old Testament for this story.

In *Midrash Rabbah* lxviii:12 on Genesis 28:12, “we find that Jacob’s true appearance is in heaven while his body lies on earth, and the angels are traveling back and forth between them” (Brown, 1966:90). Applying this to John 1:51, Murray (1987:lx) states, “...the Son of Man replaces Jacob and becomes the place of mediation to man of the revelation and redeeming powers of the kingdom of God.” Some scholars subscribe to this idea but they do so with some variations. Once more, the idea still finds its origins in Genesis 28:12-13. Also, the study of John 8:56, “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” echoes Rabbinic exegesis. This calls to memory Genesis 24:1. Abraham “...went into the days of history and therefore saw in advance the day of the Messiah (Barrett, 1956:27).

Another evidence of John’s knowledge of Rabbinic Judaism is in John 5:17 where Jesus said, “...My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” This verse is making two claims. Firstly, God continues to work even on his Sabbath. Secondly, Jesus, God’s Son, similarly works on the Sabbath. “According to the rabbis the works of God after creation, when God entered upon his Sabbath, are restricted to anticipating his judgement on the wicked in the future, and the rewards he will give to the righteous. So also, reports the evangelist, the Son, like the Father, gives life to whom he will and has authority to exercise judgement (vv. 21-22)” (Murray, 1987:lx).

It is also interesting to learn that the use of the word “Law” in the fourth gospel reflects a rabbinic understanding. Like the rabbis, the evangelist uses “Law” to refer to the Law of Moses. He also uses the same word to refer to the entire Scripture. John 1:17 is making reference to the Mosaic Law, “...For the Law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” And the following verse is referring to all the scriptures, “...We have heard from the law that the Christ will remain forever...” (Jn 12:34). The study of

the law by the rabbis was considered to be life giving according to 5:39, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life..."

According to the Mishnah,⁴ the studying of the Torah was something that a man needed to spend his time on. Aboth 1:5b says, "So long as a man talks too much with a woman he brings trouble on himself, wastes time better spent on studying the Torah, and ends up an heir of Gehenna." Still in Aboth 1:15 Shammai says, "Make your learning of Torah a fixed obligation." Also in Aboth 2:7b we learn that, "Lots of Torah, lots of life ...if he has gotten the teachings of the Torah, he has gotten himself life eternal." Eternal life is found in the studying of the Torah according to the few preceding quotes. In Proverbs 6:23⁵ cf. Psalm, 119:105 we learn that the commands of God are a lamp and those who learn from them have light. In the fourth gospel, the evangelist is crystal clear that the Scriptures (Torah) testify about Christ and they have their fulfillment in him. He is the "light" and "life" anticipated in the Torah. In other words believing in the Scriptures without believing in the one they testify about could not save the rabbis, according to John. About these sources Barrett (1956:27-28) says,

"No part of the Rabbinic literature was written down until a date later than the composition of John. Direct literary relationship is out of question, and some apparent parallels may be merely fortuitous. But when all such allowances have been made it remains very probable that John himself was familiar with the oral teaching which at a later date was crystallized in the Mishnah, the Talmud and the Midrashim."

Morris (1971:60) also acknowledges that the teachings of the Rabbis cannot be overlooked in studying the fourth gospel. But he notes that the readers needed to be on their guard for the rabbinic sources have a late date. Strack-Billerbeck (1922) drew enough parallels to suggest that we cannot overlook them in the fourth gospel. The Jewish influence on the fourth gospel is not difficult to detect (though we need not exaggerate some of the parallels).

The nature of the relationship between John and these sources is that they are both aware of the Pharisaic Judaism of Jesus' time. Also, the rabbinic sources bear witness to the Old

⁴ These references are taken from *The Mishnah: A New Translation*. By Jacob Neusner. 1988.

Testament and John shares the same background. Thus, the study of the Old Testament and Rabbinic Judaism can help us understand the fourth gospel better. And to say that Rabbinic Judaism forms part of John's conceptual background is not far fetched. Is there another background that we can turn to?

2.4.2 The Qumran Revolution and John

Josephus mentions three Jewish philosophical schools in *War*⁵ 2:119-121: the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. The description that Josephus gives about the Essenes has made them possible candidates for the writing of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In *War* 2:122 Josephus says, "... Those entering the sect transfer their property to the order." This description is reflected in *The Community Rule* (1QS). A further description of this sect is found in *War* 1:11-12; 5:1-2. In *Ant* 13:173 Josephus says of them, "But the sect of the Essenes affirms that fate governs all things, and that nothing befalls men but what is according to its determination." They are also known for their strict observance of Torah (especially the laws that spoke about purity) and taking solemn oaths of piety and obedience.

Those who wish to join the Essenes sect were put on trial for one year according to *War* 2:137-138. Their rules, which were stricter than those of the Pharisees and Sadducees, are seen in *War* 2:147 where Josephus says, "They also avoid spitting in the midst of them, or on the right side. Moreover, they are stricter than any other of the Jews ..." Because of their differences with other Jewish religious philosophical groups they withdrew to the Judean desert under the leadership of the Teacher of Righteousness. They wanted to wait for the Messiah without any defilement (from the Romans and other Jews) and to prepare the way of the Lord (Isa 40:3). The Teacher of Righteousness taught his followers their eschatological role in the Scriptures and how to interpret them correctly (Bruce, 1998:187). So, they looked forward to the coming of the Messiah by observing the Torah

⁵ Psalm 19:8 says, "The precepts of the Lord are light, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes." The law is a way of life as in Proverbs 3:22; 4:22. So, the Torah is a source of light and life to those who hold on to it.

⁶ For convenience sake, I will be using 'War' instead of *The Jewish War*. And for *The Antiquities of the Jews*, I will be using 'Ant'.

under the leadership of the Teacher of Righteousness. Our concern in this section seeks to find out if they contribute anything to the conceptual background of the fourth evangelist. Hunter (1968:27) said of the Dead Sea Scrolls, "...they give us a body of thought, which may provide an actual background for the fourth gospel, both in date and place (southern Palestine in the first century B.C/A.D) and in basic theological affinity." Kümmel (1975:158) also attested to the similarities between John and the Qumran. He says, "John and Qumran presuppose a common background, but the thought world of Qumran cannot be the native soil of the Johannine thought forms." I think Kümmel is making a valid point by saying there is a "common background" but the way they understand and develop their theology is different. John and Qumran believe in the Messiah but his advent strikes a remarkable difference. For instance, the Qumran sect looked forward to the coming of the Messiah for their deliverance. But for John the Messiah has come and has brought redemption to his people.

Important for our comparison with the fourth gospel is the Qumran attitude to the Temple and its priesthood (Murray, 1987:lxii). They considered themselves as the actual temple of God and the absolute faithful priesthood. There is a repeated reference to this in *The Community Rule* and other documents. *IQS* 8:5:⁷, "At that time, the men of the community shall set apart a House of Holiness for the community of Israel, for those who walk in perfection." The fact that they lived in holiness led them to regard themselves as the "Temple of God". The preceding reference could have some similarities with John 2:19-21. It is in verse 19 where Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." His body is the temple according to John, but the meaning and the thought forms of John and Qumran are different.

"While the community is characterized by a vivid eschatological hope, it appears that its members view themselves as possessing the blessings of the kingdom in advance of its full revelation" (ibid.Ixii). The Qumranians spoke about the resurrection or rescue from death and entrance into life. For instance *IQH* 3:20 says, "I thank Thee, O Lord for Thou

⁷ All the quotations on the Dead Sea Scrolls are taken from Geza Vermes *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. 1995. Except where indicated.

hast redeemed my soul from the Pit and from the hell of Abaddon Thou hast raised me up to everlasting height.” In the fourth gospel, the teaching on resurrection is directly linked with Jesus. He made an emphatic declaration that he is the resurrection and the life (Jn11:25). They also believed in the remission of sins and becoming a new creation. There is also mention of the Holy Spirit who will be given to them in the last days. All this understanding is related to salvation (cf. *IQH* 11:71-14; 16:8-12 and *IQS* 11:2-9). But the salvation of the Qumran and that of the fourth gospel has a difference. Salvation at Qumran did not have its focus on the realized eschatology found in the fourth gospel (Murray, 1987:lxiii). Nevertheless, their anticipation of eternal life after being resurrected from the dead has some relations with John.

There is also mention of the Holy Spirit in John and the Qumran (*IQS* 11:5; *IQH* 14:10). It is often considered that the Paraclete doctrine of John is rooted in the Qumran teaching (ibid.lxii). But Murray adds that the word “rooted” seems not to be the right word to use here. He rather prefers “relation” than “rooted” which suggests John’s total dependence on the Qumran. Going back to *IQS* 11:5, the phrase, “...the light of life” suggests a close relation with John 1:4 and 8:12. The Qumranians seem to see a close relationship between light and life. This might suggest a common milieu between John and the Qumran.

Another aspect worth exploring is that of dualism. Both John and the Qumran writings use dualistic terms (light and darkness, above and below etc). LaSor (1972:196) quotes R.Brown who uses the term “modified dualism.” He says, “By dualism we mean the doctrine that the universe is under the dominion of two opposing principles, one good and the other evil. Modified dualism adds the corrective that these principles are not uncreated, but are both dependent on God the creator.” The Qumran literature teaches that God created all things. For instance *IQS* 3:15-20 says, “He has created man to govern...has appointed for him two spirits in which to walk until the time of his visitation: the spirit of truth and justice. Those born of the truth of the spirit are from the fountain of light, but those born of injustice spring from a source of darkness. All the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light,

but all the children of injustice are ruled by the Angel of Darkness...” John also says, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (Jn 1:3). “In the Qumran doctrine, however, the spirits of light and darkness were created by God. In John there is no such doctrine concerning the spirits of light and darkness” (LaSor, 1972:197).

In *IQS* 3:15-20 above the Qumran literature assumes a conflict between “the Prince of Lights” and the angel of darkness. The fourth gospel tells us that Jesus came into the world to overcome darkness (Jn 1:4-5,9) and that all men must choose between light and darkness (3:19-21) (Brown, 1966:lxii). Still, on the “Prince of Light” it is worth noting that John says Jesus is the Light of the world (Jn 8:12). This actually contradicts the Qumranians view of light always connected with “Prince of Light” (Morris, 1969:328).

Also, the Qumranian’s understanding of sin is different from John’s understanding. In the Qumran writings, the children of light devote themselves to the Law as taught by the Teacher of Righteousness. According to John the children of light are those who believe in Jesus and receive everlasting life. In the Qumran writings, darkness is disobeying the Law of Moses. But in John, darkness is the rejection of Jesus the light of the world (Ladd, 1993:271).

These men see themselves as the sons of light and they are proud of their sect, both in its present state and future victory. John is more concerned with what God is going to do in Christ. The coming of Christ for him revolutionizes everything. No wonder he says that Jesus is also the Light (Jn 8:12) and the truth (Jn 14:6) and the Spirit of Truth will help those who believe in him to overcome evil. The terms “light and darkness” are both used in John and Qumran. Some scholars (e.g. Brown, Kuhn and LaSor) suggest that the dualism does not exist in the Old Testament. Another important fact is the brotherly love in John and the Qumran. In the Qumran literature, the sons of light are commanded to hate the sons of darkness. *IQS* 1:10 says, “...and that they may love all the sons of light⁸,

⁸ The division of mankind into two camps, “sons of light” and “sons of darkness”, is characteristic of the Qumran. But John insists that the attitude of men to Christ determines which camp one belongs to. Also,

each according to his lot in God's design, and hate all the sons of darkness, each according to his guilt in God's vengeance." Harsh curses were also pronounced on the sons of darkness (*1QS* 2:5-10). In John 13:34-35; 15:12; 1 John 2:10 there is an emphasis on loving the brother in Christ. But it is also true that the New Testament teaching encourages us to love our enemies, feed them, not repaying or avenging against them etc. The Qumranians hate their enemies constantly to the point of cursing them. This is where the difference between John and the Qumran lies in this matter.

What shall we say about the parallels and the differences that exist between John and the Qumran? Many parallels exist between John and the Qumranians. They both demonstrate an understanding of the Old Testament. But this may not make all the parallels genuine and intimate. Brown (1966:lxiii) makes a valid point when he says, "...if these two literatures have capitalized on relatively insignificant Old Testament terms and have developed them in much the same way, then we have significant parallels." Also, Morris (1969:328) gives us an important caution. He notes that the similarities that exist between the Qumran and John "should not be overlooked." He adds that differences are also striking.

Finally, the Qumranians used similar terms like light, life, darkness, Holy Spirit, etc. Do they have the same understanding and treatment in both literatures? Brown (1966:lxiii) argues, "...the parallels are not close enough to suggest a direct literary dependence of John upon the Qumran literature, but they do suggest Johannine familiarity with the type of thought and vocabulary exhibited in the scrolls." The "type of thought" is that of the Old Testament and first century Palestinian Judaism. Both John and Qumran use dualistic terms. But John strongly opposes the gnostic dualism. This is explicit in "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).

The differences as discussed above, "lead to the conclusion that any influence of Qumran on John is in the area of idiom and terminology and not in the fundamental theology

reference is made to the "living waters" in the Scrolls. John's argument is that only Christ gives the living water that springs into eternal life.

(Ladd, 1993:271). In other words, both share a common background but they sometimes express it differently. This agrees with Painter (1975:114) who says, "The evidence of the contents of the Gospel and the relation of its language to the Qumran texts indicate the Jewish background of the Gospel."

2.4.3 The Samaritan Background to the Fourth Gospel

The Samaritan religious traditions have been assumed to have some affinities with the fourth gospel. John shows more interest in the Samaritans than the synoptic gospels. Mark mentions very little about the Samaritans. On the other hand, Matthew retells Jesus' command to the disciples not to divert to Samaria but to minister to the house of Israel first (10:5). Luke displays a sympathetic attitude to the Samaritans by stating that Jesus refuted his disciples when they displayed their rage against the Samaritans (9:51-55) (Murray, 1987:lxiii).

The reflection of Samaritan religious traditions in the fourth gospel has led scholarship towards a Samaritan Background. Bowman in his article (*Samaritan Studies:1958*) furnishes us with the five-point creed of the Samaritans. He says that they had a belief in God, in Moses, in the Scriptures, in Mount Gerizim and in the Day of Vengeance. Such were also the basic beliefs of the Jews with the exception of the belief in Mount Gerizim as the place where God is to be worshipped (ibid.lxiii). The Samaritans believed that Mount Gerizim was the place where God had to be worshiped according to John 4:20. The Jews worshipped God in Jerusalem.

The Samaritans focused on Moses with great attention. "If the Christian view of Jesus was decisively affected by the resurrection on the third day, the Samaritan view of Moses was especially conditioned through the ascent of Moses to the mount of God and the giving of the law, interpreted as an ascent to God in heaven" (ibid.lxiv). This in itself consolidates how important to the Samaritans Moses was. He revealed God to them through the Torah. This resulted in them also identifying him with the word and the light (possibly just like John the Baptist as a witness concerning the Light). God used Moses to bring salvation to the Samaritans and Israel at large. The words that he spoke to people

were life. Moses is considered a man of great importance for the Samaritans and the Jews because he received the Torah from God. A substantial amount of material has been written on the Samaritans⁹. It is true that John gives them greater attention than the synoptics as stated earlier. The fourth chapter of the fourth gospel is devoted to the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Possibly John would like to show them that their belief in Moses as the word, light, revealer, redeemer etc; finds its fulfillment in Jesus. Because John pays more attention to them in his gospel, can we say that they form part of his milieu?

Murray (1987:lxv) says that a closer look at Johannine Christianity shows that it is not founded on Mosaic traditions. Instead, the Son of Man and Son of God concept appearances are crucial for the Christology of the fourth gospel. He also adds that we cannot assign the concepts of Logos, light, life, Saviour, and Paraclete to Moses. On the other hand, Keener (2003:170) argues,

“There is a further, practical problem with appealing to a “Samaritan background” for the fourth gospel: nearly all our sources for Samaritan theology are quite late—generally medieval. It is quite precarious to reconstruct Samaritan theology in the first century and use it as backdrop for Christian documents which long precede the extant Samaritan sources and could have influenced them. We cannot deny the possibility of some Samaritan Christian thought in the Johannine community or among those who influenced it. But we lack sufficient evidence to make it a context of the Gospel.”

So, Keener and Murray agree that there is a possibility of Samaritan influence but they do not overemphasize the point. This field is still open for further investigation. We cannot say with confidence that the Samaritan background is the milieu of John. One would need to come up with more convincing evidence of a Samaritan background for John.

2.5 CONCLUSION

⁹ Bowman, J. “Samaritan Studies.” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University library of Manchester*. 40 (1958) 298-327. Freed, E.D. “Did John Write His Gospel Partly to win Samaritan Converts?” *NovT* 12 (1970) 241-56. Buchanan, G.W. “The Samaritan Origin of the Gospel of John.” *Religions in Antiquity*. Ed. J. Neusner. Leiden: Brill, 1968. 149-75. Scobie, C.H.H. “The Origins and Development of Samaritan Christianity.” *NTS* 19 (1972-73) 390-414.

The above study has attempted to review the religious background that could have impacted John. Bultmann suggested that Gnosticism could be an important background to understand the fourth gospel. The dualistic terms and statements in Gnosticism and John have been the basis of this view. Gnosticism believes in a “redeemer” that could not mingle with the material world and that salvation comes through knowledge. But John talks about God who takes human form and mingles with humanity (1:14). Also, salvation does not come through knowledge but through faith in Jesus. John’s frame of mind is antithetical to many of the ideas of later gnosticism. Thus, to say that Gnosticism formed his milieu is tenuous.

Secondly, there are good points of contact between John and Philo (Jew of Alexandria), especially in the prologue (1:1-18). Both refer to the Logos as the mediator between man and God. “Even if John did take the idea from Philo, his conception of the Logos is radically transformed. Philo uses the plural “*logoi*” on occasions. The Word becomes incarnate in Christ, an idea quite alien to Philo” (Williams, 2002:1). Also, they are indebted to the OT for their background but how they use it is completely different. The philosophical and rationalistic approach in using the OT of Philo is missing in John.

Thirdly, the Hermitic Literature and Mandaism are some of the proposed backgrounds of the fourth evangelist. The Hermitic Literature makes use of terms like “light” and “life”, and many others similar to John. Since this body of literature is considered to be second and third century, John was not influenced by it in any way. On the other hand, Mandaism is a confusing mixture of myth, theology, ethics and dubious history. It is also considered to be very late. Thus, Mandaism borrowed from John, not John from Mandaism (Ibid.2).

The current scholarship says that the Old Testament, Rabbinic Judaism and the Dead Sea Scrolls are the most probable backgrounds against which the fourth gospel could be read and understood. Therefore, against these backgrounds, we wish to attempt to read, exegete and understand what John means by “light” and “life” in the fourth gospel.

CHAPTER 3: THE JEWISH UNDERSTANDING OF “LIFE” AND “LIGHT” COMPARED TO JOHN 1:4-5

The preceding chapter has attempted to review and document the proposed backgrounds to the fourth gospel. The review has shown that opinions vary remarkably in this regard. Some of the suggested conceptual backgrounds (as noted above) to John’s gospel are tenuous. But this does not mean that something cannot be learned about the milieu that had an impact on the author of the fourth gospel. The weight of scholarship on this subject is pointing to the Old Testament and its development in first century Palestinian Judaism. Now how did the Jews of these times understand and interpret “life” and “light”?

In this chapter, our study is focused on “life” and “light”. We would like to study and understand the meaning to “life” and “light” in the Old Testament and the intertestamental literature. And to answer the following question: Does our understanding of the background throw light on the statement about “life” and “light” in the prologue? We also would like to exegete and understand the meaning of “life” and “light” in John 1:4-5 (the prologue).

3.1 THE JEWISH UNDERSTANDING OF “LIFE” AND “LIGHT”

The fourth gospel gives a greater treatment of “life” (5:25, 26; 29, 6:33; 11:26) and “light” (1:4, 5, 7, 8; 3:19; 20, 21; 8:12) than the synoptics. The Old Testament also views “life” and “light” as crucial elements. The propagation of the Old Testament in Judaism expressed some regard and understanding to “life” and “light” as well. Keener (2003: 328) says about life “...the vast majority of its occurrences are in Jewish sources...” Though drawing from the Old Testament, Palestinian Judaism expounded the Old Testament with modifications in some texts. But firstly a study of “life” in the Old

Testament is crucial for understanding John's meaning on "life" in the fourth gospel. The same applies to "light" as well.

3.1.1 Life in the Old Testament

The Old Testament does not furnish the reader with a simple definition of the meaning of "life". Certain terms and concepts are used that demonstrate how "life" is understood. Does life in the Old Testament mean the physical/organic life? Does it refer to the soul, which is resident in both man and animal as we read in Job 12:10? But a man's soul differs from that of an animal in that a man's soul has "a passionate appetite for God" (Ps 42:1), and also in that it is created in God's image (Waltke, 2001:71). One might also ask if "life" means spirit or breath? This is something which delineates the living from the dead. Once a person dies he loses his spirit or breath. The Psalmist said concerning this, "When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust" (Ps. 104:29). In this verse, we learn that the physical (organic) and the spirit form what we call man. Ellis (1996:687) writes, "life" is given to man as a psychosomatic unity in which our own distinction between physical, intellectual and spiritual life do not exist."

The creation account in Genesis serves as our springboard for all the later occurrences of "life" in the Old Testament and later times. On day five God created the living creatures (Gen 1:20-25). "Life" in the creatures came into existence through God's word of command. The life in them is the result of the direct creative act of God. Though they are destined to perish on earth, they are capable of passing on the life they received from God through their own procreation (Von Rad, 1966:54-55). The fact that they owe their existence to God remains unchallenged in spite of their earth bound life. Here we have reference to organic or physical life for the animals.

In Genesis 1:26-28, we are introduced to the creation of man. His creation is very impressive and unique in that there is a divine resolution to attend the creation of man.

This decision is marked by the words: “Let us make man in our image¹⁰, in our likeness...” (Gen 1:26). “God participates more intimately and intensively in this than in the earlier works of creation” (ibid.55). In Genesis 2:7, we learn that God forms the man from the dust and breathes into his nostrils the breath of life. So, from this animation of his material body he becomes a living “soul” (*nephesh*). In this case, the physical part of man and the breath of God in him form a living being. God is the source of the life that man has. Because his life is physical and active, God gives him the mandate to rule and subdue the earth (1:28). The type of life that the first man experiences is a life not threatened by any danger. Its nature is prosperous and blessed life with ultimate quality. We can say this is the type of life that God intended for man.

Before the fall of man, in Genesis 3, a relationship unhindered by sin existed between God and man. We must surely add this to the quality side of the biblical concept of life. God therefore wanted him to live forever (Gen 3:22). Immortality was meant for man before he succumbed to sin. But this proved impossible after he sinned against God.

The fall of man did not prove to be utter doom and the annihilation of the life of man. In Genesis 3:15 there is hope for life again, based on the enmity put between the seed of the serpent¹¹ and the seed of the woman and their offspring. The verse says, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.” The punishment that God pronounced on the man and the serpent has a difference. The word “cursed” is only used of the serpent in Gen. 3:14, the ground v.17 and of Cain 4:11. Regarding the man and woman, God does not use this word. The enmity or antagonism between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman seems to suggest a threat against human life. But verse 15 sounds “...a positive note about the seed of the woman who would strike on the serpent’s seed. Paul will say

¹⁰ The understanding of *God's image* in man has received various interpretations. We do not wish to deal with this subject in this study. But for various opinions on the subject see Hamilton, V.P. *New International Commentary on the OT: Genesis 1-17*. 1990: pp.133-139. See also Von Rad, G. *Genesis: OT Library*. 1963: pp. 55-59. And, Hoekema, A.A. 1986. *Created in God's image*.

¹¹ See Ronning, J. “The Curse on the Serpent (Gen 3:15) in Biblical Theology Hermeneutics,” Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, PA, 1997. See also LaSor, WS. “Prophecy, Inspiration, and *Sensus Plenior*,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 29: (1978): pp. 56-57. He sees the verse as playing a very important role in God's redemptive plan.

that it is Jesus who reigns until he puts all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:25 cf. Isa¹² 9:7)” (Hamilton, 1990:200). Victory will come from the life of the seed of woman. It is victory in the midst of a life and death struggle. What is the nature of this victory? We will be able to answer this question after looking at what else the Old Testament says about life.

Man, understood as a unified being (body and spirit), is confronted by death after the fall. The result of disobedience is death according to God’s pronouncement in Genesis 3:19. Not only is man condemned to die, but he is cut off from the source of continuing life (Gen. 3:24). Because of this, Job 7:9 said concerning human life: “As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return”. “This image is poignant because a cloud that moves quickly across the sky disappears without a trace, never to return. With this image, that captures the transient, insubstantial nature of human life, Job wants God to realize the extreme urgency of his request” (Hartley, 1998:147). He needed to be delivered from his suffering. Human life (physical life) is fleeting; it grows and withers like grass (Ps 39:4; 90:5-6).

Anything that threatens physical life can be understood as the invasion of death into human life (Ellis, 2003:687). Consequently, deliverance from life threatening circumstances is actually deliverance from death. This means one’s life is spared or restored from perishing. For instance, David is snatched “out of the depths” by God so that his enemies could not despise his faith in God (Ps 130:1-3). The Lord secured victory and healing from sickness for him such that death does not encompass him (v.2-4). He had visualized his soul as ensnared by the underworld, where according to popular belief all relationship with God is cut off (Weiser, 1962:269).

So to be threatened by the enemy, to be sick, to be hungry etc, can infringe on one’s physical life, resulting in death if there is no deliverance. This recalls the nation of Israel perishing under slavery in Egypt. God sends Moses to deliver them so that they can be free from their enemies and participate in the quality of life that God has in store for

¹² The Isaiah addition is mine.

them. In this deliverance God wants them to enjoy life, living in his presence and obeying his will. For instance in Deuteronomy 8:1 (see also vv.3, 6, 11) Israel is commanded to obey the commands of God in order to enjoy life. Failing to obey the commands of God leads to death (vv.19-20). Thus, authentic life is linked with obeying the commands of God.

The Old Testament (after the fall) understands “life” as temporal life. For example, life in the midst of sorrow, pain, constant threat of death and other adversities. So, when John talks about “life” is this the type of life he has in mind? Or is he referring to something else? We seek to uncover other ways of understanding “life” in the Old Testament, before we set out to discover the concept that best fits John.

According to Proverbs (3:16), longevity of life (physical life) is understood as the gift of wisdom: “Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour.” Personified as a woman, wisdom is depicted as granting long life, riches and honour. This association of life with riches and honour suggests a quality life accompanied by pleasantness and peace. A life lived without such quality is regarded as a curse instead of a blessing. The quality of life is constantly mentioned in Proverbs¹³, as opposed to a life that lacks quality (Buzzell, 1987:333). Proverbs 13:18 refers to long and fulfilled life, which equals quality of life. It is a life worthy of living. In Genesis 2:9, the “tree of life” was a source of immortality for man. Wisdom is also understood as a “tree of life” in Proverbs¹⁴. Not only do riches and honour characterize quality of life. But good health, guidance, immortality and other good qualities form part of authentic life. In Deuteronomy 30:16, those who choose to obey the precepts of the LORD will have life, prosperity and other blessings.

God is the source of long life as suggested by the fifth commandment: “Honour your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land your God is giving you.” (Deut

¹³ Proverbs 3:22; 4:13; 6:23; 8:35; 10:11, 16-17; 11:19,30; 12:28; 13:14; 14:27; 16:22; 19:23; 21:21; 22:4.

¹⁴ Proverbs 11:30; 13:12; 15:4.

5:16). There are two things promised in here. First, there is a promise of long life. The second promise is that everything will go well for Israel and this connotes prosperity and victory in life. If they obeyed their parents they were obeying the God who gave the commandment, and this guarantees a life worth living. So, quality life lies in obeying what God commands just as Proverbs 19:23 says, “The fear of the LORD leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble.” If they disobeyed their parents they were disobeying the God who issued the commandment and the result was going to be disaster, poverty, defeat etc.

The same God said to Israel, “See I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction” (Deut 30:15). It was up to Israel to choose quality life and prosperity or death and destruction. People are confronted with two options, to choose quality life under God’s rule or to choose a life estranged from God accompanied by discomfort. In 1 Samuel 10:24, when Saul was made king over Israel, people shouted, “Long live the king.” The “long live” does not only refer to long life, but it also refers to prosperity and blessings that come with long life if he obeys God (Ellis, 2003:687).

Quality of life in the Old Testament is only possible through obedience to God’s commands. A relationship between obedience to the Torah and life is prevalent in the Old Testament. God had a unique covenant relationship with the nation of Israel. Amos 3:2 declares that God chose Israel out of all the families of the earth. This divine initiative meant life and blessings from God (Deut 30:15). Israel’s obedience to the commands, decrees, and laws of the LORD was a guarantee for pleasant life and blessings (Lev 18:5; Deut 8:1; 30:16). Should Israel fail to obey the laws by worshiping foreign gods, curtailment of life and all the blessings would be imminent (Deut 30:17-19). The LORD promised to be their life if they obeyed his decrees. In Deuteronomy 32:39 the Lord declared, “...I put to death and I bring to life...” Thus, obedience to the law of God brought with it the quality of life found in God alone. Do people under God’s rule live to be blessed by quality life and prosperity only to be faced with death at the end? Could John be talking about a long, quality life of prosperity and happiness that ends with death? Or does he have another type of life in mind?

“Beyond reasonable doubt, however, people in the Old Testament shrank from the prospect of death, which involved a shift from the known to the unknown” (Harrison, 1986:130). Since death concludes human life it is fitting to understand what the Old Testament says about death.

Death is the rival of life. Psalm 89:48 says, “What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave.” Irrespective of one’s background, status in society, religious beliefs and race; every man’s physical life is concluded by death. No one has the power invested in him to deliver himself from death. The Old Testament also understands death as “Sheol.” In “Sheol”, as noted above, there is no activity of life. It is utter separation from the living and being completely cut off from God. Job 17:13ff states that “Sheol” is in the dust and it can best be understood as “grave”. In the grave there is utter silence, darkness, no memory (Job 13:16f, Ps 6:5; Ecc 9:5, 10) (Ellis, 2003:688).

People spoke of death as a shadow that hangs over human life without hope. The following verses (Job 7:21; 10:9; 34:15; Ps 146:4; 22:15; 90:3) speak of death as returning to the dust without a hint of hope for life. Death is understood as the end of life. Sometimes death is understood as peaceful and content (Gen 25:8; 49:33). On the other hand, death is understood as violent whether by divine intervention (1 Sam 25:38) or not (Johnston, 2000:447).

It is understood as the separation of the breath from the physical body. The parting of the soul from the “...body does not mean a bettering of its condition, it does not signify a blessing or a liberation; the body is not the prison of the soul, but, on the contrary, is indispensable to it, and therefore to be deprived of the body is an evil thing for the soul” (Martin, 1960:32). Martin suggests that the soul and the body are a unity and that death must be conquered some time later. Genesis 3:19 and other passages¹⁵ state that when man dies his body goes back to the dust, but the breath goes back to God who gave it (Ecc 12:7 cf. Gen 2:7). Abraham, “...died at good old age, an old man full of years; and

¹⁵ Job 10:9, “Remember that you modeled me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again?” Psalm 144:4, “Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow.” See also Ecclesiastes 12: 7.

he was gathered to his people” (Gen 25:8). Though his life was good and pleasing he died and was buried. In the hour of her death Rachel’s soul departs, leaving her body (Gen 35:18). The phrase “...leaving her body” could mean relief from life’s cares, pains, and sorrows rather than to connote lack of consciousness in the intermediate state (Harrison, 1986:130-131). If all the activities and quality of life for humans simply culminates in death, is life meaningless (Ecc 12:8 cf. Ps. 89:47)? Do John’s words, “In him was life” (1:4), point to a solution to this problem?

Thus, we may ask, is there any hope of victory over death in the Old Testament? If there is life after death, what kind of life is it in relation to its quantity and quality? One’s view on the nature of God in the Old Testament determines whether there is victory over death. God is able to speak into life (as seen in creation) and is able to act (in the rest of the Bible). He is understood as the living God according to Numbers 14:21, 28. This description of God in the Old Testament makes him completely unique from the other gods. Isaiah 46 emphasizes the uniqueness of the LORD over man made gods (vv.6-7). God reminds the house of Jacob of his faithfulness. He promises to carry, sustain and rescue Jacob (v.4). In verse 5 he states, “To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?” The answer is to no one and to nothing in the whole universe. The same point is hammered again in verse 9, “I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me.” The power to create and his providence make him ultimately unique. Martin (1960:12) also states, “He reveals Himself as a living Person, who speaks, acts, sees, and hears, in contradistinction from a mute and motionless idol.” This establishes the uniqueness of God as opposed to gods.

The uniqueness of God is further seen in his ability to uphold life (Jer 10:10). If God is the source of life and the upholder of life, then he should also have power over death. Sheol cannot hold dead bodies captive forever. We read in Deuteronomy 32:39¹⁶, “See now that I myself am He! There is no god beside me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.” There is a

¹⁶ See also Gen. 6:17; Judges 13:3, 23 (if he can let the sterile have children can’t he give life back to a dead body?); 1 Sam 2:6; 2 Kings 5:7.

“...noble declaration of the nature of God (v.39) presented in contrast to the powerless foreign gods (vv. 37-38)” (Craigie, 1976:388). The statement “I put to death and bring to life” suggests that God could have an answer to death.

But we have noted above that in Sheol man is dust, is dead, is in thick darkness and does not communicate with the living let alone with God. The Old Testament teaches that God has power over Sheol. He reigns over death (Ellis, 2003:688). He also has the power to do the following: (1) to heal (2 Kings 5:7, 14), (2) to cause life to bud in a barren woman (Gen 17:15ff; Jdg 13:2f; 2 Sam 1:19f; 2:6), (3) to deliver Israel from national death (Jdg 7:2ff; Ezek 37) and (4) to raise the dead (1 Kings 17:20ff; 2 Kings 14:16, 33ff). “All these references suggest God’s power over Sheol, for the maladies are themselves invasions of death into which God interjects resurrection power” (ibid.688).

If God is able to “interject resurrection power”, how widespread is this idea in the Old Testament? In Isaiah 25:8 we read, “...he will swallow up death forever. The sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces...” God alone has the power to conquer death. The idea is made much clearer in Isaiah 26:19, “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You, who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy...the earth will give birth to her dead.” The risen people shall be able to praise the LORD again. This means physical existence before the LORD. But what kind of life is it? Does it involve enhancement of quality? Is it no different from the life that one had before death? We will come back to this question.

Job, though he experienced a gruesome depression, confidently uttered the following words: “And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes - I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:26-27). This further suggests physical life¹⁷ beyond death: eternal life in God’s presence. Does the Old Testament have any explicit reference to the idea of “eternal life”? Or is the phrase “eternal life” exclusively Johannine? We find an explicit reference

¹⁷ See also Pss 16:8-11; 49:14f

to eternal life in Daniel 12:2, “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”

The metaphor of “sleep” for death was widespread. Sleeping in the dust of the earth was a biblical way of referring to death. Reference is made to the bodily resurrection by the word “awake” (Wright, 2003:110). Harrison (1986:131) notes that Ezekiel 37:10 is close to Daniel 12:2 in time and nature. Here we have a bodily resurrection that is accompanied by unending quality life in the hands of God. The Daniel text does not suggest that all people will rise to be with God forever. It is only “those who lead many to righteousness” (Dan. 12:3). These will shine like stars infinitely. The unrighteous are assigned to everlasting contempt. This is still a future thing, which God will grant to those he chooses.

Going back to our questions asked above, the resurrection life is “life” with prosperity; peace and fullness is multiplied. And escape from Sheol is envisaged (Isa 27 cf. Rev. 21-22). This marks the difference between the quality life lived under God’s rule before death. Ellis (2003:688) writes that the God who, by his creative word, called man into existence will again call him into life through the resurrection. So, what can we conclude from the Old Testament understanding of the meaning of life?

3.1.2 Summary and Conclusions

Life in the Old Testament is firstly understood as physical life under God’s rule before the fall of man. It is a life characterized by immortality and independent of the maladies that bring death. After the fall, man became mortal. His life becomes short and he is confronted with life threatening situations that lead to death.

Secondly, long quality life is promised to those who choose to live under God’s rule. It is fellowship with God (Bromiley, 1985:291). Such people are promised prosperity (Israel in the promised land) and victory over enemies and circumstances that are likely to cause death. Such people will go through unbearable situations, but the LORD promises victory on their behalf and ultimate prosperity.

Obedying God's commands and possessing wisdom makes this quality life possible. However, obedience to God's commands does not insulate one from death. A great number of faithful people lived quality lives and death concluded everything for them. But there is life beyond "Sheol" (the grave) in the Old Testament. This life is possible because of the hope of bodily resurrection¹⁸ that God will grant to his righteous people (Deut 32:39; Job 19:25; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2). This type of life has more quality and greater quantity than the life lived before death. Sickness, poverty, pain, attacks from physical enemies and death are foreign to the resurrection life. Thus, there is another type of life lived in the body beyond death in the Old Testament, and this life is only possible through the resurrection. The Jews of the intertestamental period pointed to the idea of life from the Old Testament and elaborated on it.

3.1.3 "Life" in Palestinian Judaism

There are many ideas about life, death and life after death in Palestinian Judaism. For instance, life is understood as physical existence and needs nourishment. God is the Lord of life and gives life. Life is health, salvation and a blessing. Death is common to all people. Human beings are mortal and Sheol waits for every man (Bromiley, 1985:293). After death, the souls of the righteous are believed to be in the hands of God, in Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-6. These souls will stay in God's hands until "the time of their visitation", and this probably refers to the resurrection (3:7-8) (Johnston, 2000:445). We are not going to treat all the ideas about life, death and life after death that prevailed in this period. We wish to be selective to demonstrate the type of understanding that could form a background to John's understanding of life.

The Old Testament concept of life is maintained and expanded in the intertestamental literature and Palestinian Judaism. Humankind's physical existence hinges on God as the

¹⁸ Wright (2003:122) notes, "The resurrection hope is not like that of ancient Egypt, where life after death was thought of as a continuation of normal life. Such an idea would have been seen by ancient Israel as a denial of the hope for nation, family and land to thrive and flourish." This comports with the idea that there is hope of life beyond suffering and death. It is the life that God alone grants to his people.

source of life. Life lived apart from God was accompanied by distress, pain and a lack of the blessings and health promised by God (*1 Enoch* 22:11-13).

Therefore, the Jews of the intertestamental period believed that obedience to the Torah meant life. *2 Baruch* 38:2f says, “Your law is life, and your wisdom is the right way.” In 32:1 cf. 38:24 and 48:24 (though not very explicit), but the Law is regarded as the source of life to those who obey it. Those that seek to live “in the righteousness of his commandments, in the Law” which the Lord commanded for their life, are favored by God (*Ps Sol* 14:2). Thus, the Law was given for them to obey so that they could have the quality of life that God had purposed for them. It is a life of prosperity, good health and salvation from God.

Also, the Torah seen as “the right way” meant that the lives of those who willingly chose to adhere to its teaching had different lifestyles from those that chose to disobey it. Obedience to the Law is actually obedience to God who gave the Law to the people. In *Sirach* 7, Israel was given knowledge, the law of life for heritage. “The law of life” could mean that the law is an essential constituent of real life. Also speaking of the giving of the law to Moses *Sirach* 45:5 says; “...God gave him commandments before his face, even the law of life and knowledge that he teaches...”

Furthermore, in *Baruch* 4:1 we learn that the law endures forever and those “...that keep it shall come to life...” and those who disobey it shall die. Death is referred to as eternal separation from God, while those that embraced the law live eternally with God. This suggests a life that has a better quality and quantity than the life lived on earth. In verse 2 of the same chapter the law is light and illuminates those that adhere to it (this is suggestive given John’s juxtaposition of light and life). Israel is given the commandments of life and is supposed to obey them to gain wisdom (3:9). In *Aboth* 2:7 Hillel says: “Lots of Torah, lots of life and he who has the teachings of Torah, has for himself eternal life”.

Wisdom also provides quality of life. Those who heed the laws and instructions of wisdom are assured of incorruption (which could mean resurrection) (*Wis* 6:18). And in

7:14 she (wisdom) is regarded as an unfailing treasure to man. Those that use her become friends of God and will have a gift that comes by learning from her. This could be the gift of blessings, good health, making the right decisions, having fellowship with God or eternal life. Wisdom is also considered as a means of immortality in 8:13: "Moreover by the means of her I shall obtain immortality and leave behind me an everlasting memorial to them that come after me." Those that seek wisdom will certainly die, but death does not keep them in the grave. There is life beyond the grave, which is suggested by the use of the word "immortality." "Immortality" is only possible if people live again after death. Finally those that love her (wisdom), love life; and those that seek her early shall be filled with joy (*Sirach* 4:12).

Life was understood as quality physical life accompanied by healing, long life, success. These were to be enjoyed by the sons of truth in this world. In the age to come, they looked forward to experiencing a new life without an end. It is characterized by "eternal joy without end", with "a crown of glory and a garment of majesty in unending light." The opposite of a blessed life was true for the sons of darkness (*IQS* 4:6-8).

As in the Old Testament, death is the common end of human physical life. Even after living under God's commands and in fellowship with him, death is inescapable. Was there any hope of life beyond it? The following story of the seven brothers may help us to answer these questions.

The life of the Israelites between the Old Testament and New Testament is characterized by turbulent moments. They were confronted with pagan persecution. Wright (2003:151) notes, "the Syrian tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes, as part of his drive to bring Judaism into line with his imperial ambitions, is attempting to make loyal Jews disobey their God-given laws under pain of torture and death."

Nevertheless, as the life of this world became fragile and flimsy, the faithful Jew's hope was anchored on the life of the age to come (Harrison, 1986:131). This is illustrated in *II Maccabees* 7:1-42¹⁹.

In this incident the king arrests seven brothers along with their mother. They are tortured with whips and thongs to force them to eat pork, a practice detestable to the Jews and forbidden by the Torah (7:1-2, 30).

Their refusal to partake of the pork culminated in the gruesome torture and killing of this family (7:3-6ff). In the midst of all the pain, the second brother boldly expressed obedience to the Torah and faith in God: "You, you fiend, are making us depart from our present life, but the King of the universe will resurrect us, who die for the sake of His laws, to a new eternal life" (7:9). To the king who was torturing them the fourth brother said, "...you shall have no resurrection unto life" (7:14). And the younger youth (probably the youngest brother) said: "My brothers, having borne pain for a short while, now have inherited eternal life under the terms of God's covenant..." (7:36). The understanding of "resurrected to eternal life" in the verse probably comes from Daniel 12:2. Goldstein (1983:305) states that the writer of II Maccabees is interested to show that there will be two kinds of resurrection: a permanent revivification of the righteous and the awakening of the wicked for eternal annihilation.

Death did not mean a permanent end to life in their understanding, for the "king of the universe was going to resurrect" them. God was going to restore them to life from the grave. And the quality of the resurrection life is a life without pain, death, and all the troubles of life. It is a life lived forever under God's rule. That is why the brothers

¹⁹ In *2 Maccabees* 14:43-6 a Jew named Razis fell on his sword instead of going through the torture of the soldiers. He called upon the "Lord of life" and committed his spirit back to him again. The main point of this incident is that the God who gives "life and breath" (Gen 2 and Ezek 37) will give new bodies to the martyrs (Wright, 2003:152). See also *2 Baruch* 30:1f; 50:2-4; 51:8-12; *4 Ezra* 7:28-53. Josephus too testifies that death is not the end of life. He writes, "Every person, trusting in the evidence of their own conscience, on the basis of the lawgiver's prophecies and the strong faithfulness of God, is persuaded that if they observe the laws and, if necessary, are prepared to die for them, God has given them a renewed existence, and to receive a new life out of the renewal" (*Against Apion* 2:217f). See also *War* 3:355-60; 3:371; 3:374f; 2:163.

maintained such a positive attitude and hope for life in the midst of torture that ended up in death. So, a belief in bodily resurrection to new life is common in the Old Testament and intertestamental period.

A similar understanding of a life beyond this present life is found in *1 Enoch* 58:3: "The righteous ones shall be in the light of the sun and the elect ones in the light of eternal life which has no end, and the days of the life of the holy ones cannot be numbered." The termination of earthly life is not a permanent end, especially for those who have faith in God. Their life continues in the presence of God. The believing are further described as those that loved God more than their life in this world after the resurrection (*1 Enoch* 108:10). *Psalms of Solomon* (3:12) states: "...those who fear the Lord shall rise up to eternal life, and their life shall be in the Lord's light, and it shall never end". In 13:11 (cf. 14:10); we also learn that the lives of the righteous continue forever and the unrighteous face destruction. In these Jewish writings, eternal life is only preserved for the righteous.

The Qumran community also believed there was hope of life beyond death. The Messianic Apocalypse (4Q521) is one key explicit text testifying to the bodily resurrection of the dead. I will quote it here in its entirety:

"The heavens and the earth will listen to His Messiah, and none therein will stray from the commandments of the holy ones. Seekers of the Lord, strengthen yourselves in His service! All you hopeful in your heart will you not find the Lord in this? For the Lord will consider the pious and call the righteous by name. Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power. And He will glorify the pious on the throne of the eternal Kingdom. He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the bent. And forever I will cleave to the hopeful and in His mercy... And the fruit will not be delayed for anyone. And the Lord will accomplish glorious things, which have never been ...For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor."

The language of this text speaks about the coming of the Messiah in a manner not very different from John 6:39-40. There is the expectation that the Messiah will bring the dead back to life. Wright (2003:187) argues, (referring to line 12 of fragment 2) the resurrection in view here does not refer to the "eventual resurrection in the sense intended by Daniel 12, but rather of the sort of actions performed by Elijah and Elisha - and, according to the gospels, by Jesus - in bringing back into the present life some who had

just died: a dramatic extension of 'healing', in fact." If brought back to this life, it means such people still had to experience the hardships of this life and face death again. After this there will be a final bodily resurrection, which Daniel 12 has in view. The resurrected will not be subject to pain or death, but will have eternal life. *4Q385* also, testifies to bodily resurrection. This passage recalls Ezekiel 37. This is how the true Israelite will be rewarded in response to the question: "And how will their piety be rewarded?" Their reward is to enjoy eternal life with God. *CD* 3:20 suggest the perspective of life beyond death: "Those who hold fast to it are destined to live for ever and all the glory of Adam shall be theirs." So, the Qumran hope of life beyond death follows on from the Old Testament.

3.1.4 Summary and Conclusion

In summary, Palestinian Judaism understood "life" as existence under God's rule. This life is characterized by longevity, prosperity, joy, good health, friendship with God and many other good things. Obedience to the Torah and Wisdom result in quality of life. Those who live in rebellion are characterized by misery without God's intervention. They are excluded from all the blessings that come with a life of obedience.

But at the end of life was death, to the righteous as well as the unrighteous. But for the righteous Jew, there was hope of life beyond death. Their hope of life beyond death was anchored on the fact that God will restore their dead bodies to life. Thus, they hoped for life in a new age, a life to come, or eternal life effected by God alone. This was understood as a life free from suffering and this is similar to the Old Testament view of a true life. True life was understood as eternal life. This was understood as a future experience and something that one could not experience in the present age.

From this study, we can say the understanding of life in the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism has close similarities. Palestinian Judaism is dependent on the Old Testament for its understanding of life. We will only be able to understand the meaning

of “life” in the fourth gospel when we exegete John 1:4-5. For now let us try to understand the meaning of “light” and see in what ways it can be connected to “life”.

3.1.5 Light in the Old Testament

Light is another important theme found in the fourth gospel. “Light” and “life” were natural images used together as we shall see (Keener 2003:386). “Light” is mentioned as early as John 1:4-5: “In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in darkness, but darkness has not understood it” (NIV). Though our new focus is on light in this section, we will also refer to darkness where necessary. What is the Old Testament understanding of light?

In the Old Testament “light” is first mentioned in Gen. 1:3: “Let there be light.” Light is the first thing created by God. Hamilton (1990:119) writes, “...the existence of light is the *sine qua non* for the creation of anything else. All creation takes place in light.” Light existed before the sun and other luminaries were created. God allowed the light to shine from another source and not from the sun for the first three days since we have the creation of the sun in Gen. 1:14-19. Some people worshipped the sun as a god in the Old Testament times. This practice is forbidden in Deut 4:19; 17:3 and in Joshua 10:12-14; 2 Kings 20:8-11 for God is in control of the sun. The light (of the sun) was neither god nor creator, because God created it (Harrison 1986:135). People should rather worship the Creator instead of creation. The light created by God was good and he separated it from darkness²⁰. He called the light “day” and the darkness “night” (Gen 1:4-5). Thus, the light in Gen. 1:3 is a created light, but is superior to the light of the sun and the moon.

Secondly, light is understood as the presence of God, as demonstrated in the Exodus experience. Walking in his presence is the God - intended goal for human life. This is what the LORD wants for Israel as she comes out of Egypt. In the ninth plague on Egypt, he allowed the light to shine on the camps of Israel while the Egyptians experienced utter

²⁰ “Separate” means here not to pull apart, but to assign each part to its respective sphere and slot. God’s work in Gen.1 is often work of separation, as we learn in vv. 4, 6,7,14, and 18. In creation, there is separation towards order. In sin there is separation toward disorder (e.g. man and woman from God, man from woman, man from the soil, man from the garden) (Hamilton 1990:119-120).

darkness (Ex 10:22-23). Also, when the Egyptians pursued the Israelites to the Red Sea with the intention of killing them, light shone on Israel and Egypt experienced darkness (Ex 14:20). Exodus 13:21 (cf. 14:24) says, "By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night." On these three occasions, the LORD is the light of Israel. Even in the midst of darkness he continues to shine and grants victory for his people as the divine warrior. His presence provides Israel with guidance and blessing. Lack of "light" means failure, suffering and death, as we see in Isaiah 8:22: "Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness." The following verses testify to the same understanding for those who lack the light of God (Jer 23:12; Amos 5:18, 20; Ps 23:4; Job 17:12; 29:3). To be out of God's presence means to experience darkness and the consequences of being in it.

The presence of God as light is also seen after the Exodus. In a very personal way David says, "The LORD is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life - whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps 27:1 cf. 2 Sam. 22:29). The Psalmist puts complete confidence in God and does not rely on his own strength and abilities. He employs two metaphors that describe God's presence in his life: "light" and "stronghold". The LORD as "light" refers to the experience of salvation and the joyous victory that God purposed for his people. The words "light" and "salvation" mean the same thing. God provides victory for his people, blessings and life. He is also the "stronghold". This imagery is common in the Old Testament (Ps. 18:2; 28:8; 31:2, 4; 43:2). This means he grants protection to his people, especially those who seek refuge in him (VanGemeren, 1991:243). In Isaiah 10:17 the LORD is referred to as "the Light of Israel" that will bring judgement on Assyria. The purpose of light is not only to illuminate and show the way, but also to judge. "The light which is in its fullest sense is yet to come (9:1; 30:26) is already present. In the darkness of calamity, faith walks in the light" (Motyer, 1993:116). The LORD as light gives victory and success to his people (60:1). When his people are taunted by the enemy and walk in darkness he gives success and delivers them (Mic. 7:2).

Thirdly, the return of God's presence is understood as light. The prophet Isaiah (9:2ff) says: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." The remnant of Israel, involved in the struggles "...of national calamity, have been walking in darkness, enduring the hiding of the Lord's face (8:17)" (Motyer, 1993:100). They feel forsaken and a shadow of death hangs over their lives. They live "in the land of the shadow of death" (9:2). But they do not despair, but hope that the Lord will show himself to them again (8:21). Then God reveals himself to them such that a light dawns in their lives. So, the return of God's presence in people's life means deliverance from death. It also means God's favour (Ps 4:6) and revelation of truth (Isa 42:6). In the servant of the LORD passages we learn that the servant of the LORD will "be a light for the gentiles" (42:6). The LORD will make him a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the entire earth (49:6). These passages are referring to the coming of the Messiah and the salvation that he gives as light to his people. In other words, the servant of the LORD is the light that will rescue people from darkness and death. The nature of his ministry is explicit in 9:6, "And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Thus, light is understood as the salvation that God gives. These verses indicate the importance of God in man's life to provide him with salvation and help.

Fourthly, "Light" is also understood as light of the Torah and of Wisdom in the Old Testament. The notion of Torah and Wisdom as guides that give light is similar to the idea of walking in the light. The teachings of the law are regarded as a lamp²¹, which is the same as light. Not only do the teachings of the law bring understanding and guidance but "they are the way to life" (Prov 6:23). The word (law) of God is also recognized as a lamp to the feet and light for the path (Ps 119:105). It is a guide for life and sustains life for those who obey its teachings. The author of Ecclesiastes (2:13) wrote about wisdom, "I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness." The one who acquires wisdom acquires light - guidance, understanding and life with a purpose. In Psalm 119:130 the law enlightens and gives understanding. To be enlightened or to have

²¹ Sometimes "light" replaces lamp as figure of success and salvation (Ps 18:29; 2 Sam 22:29; Prov 13:9; 24:20; Job 18:6; 21:17; 29:3).

understanding is similar to having wisdom. Light is used parallel to wisdom or understanding and darkness with foolishness (Ecc 2:13; Dan 5:11; Job 38:2; Mic 3:6). Thus light (wisdom or understanding) is God's gift to man. When his light shines in man, it changes the way he thinks and behaves to suit what God commands. No wonder the Psalmist (36:9) said, "For with you is the fountain of life: in your light, we see light". In this verse, we learn that God is the absolute source of true life. This life is only possible when one lives in communion with God. Von Rad (1962:311) states:

"Just as everything subsists on the sun's life and heat, and just as the flower opens and blossoms in response to the sunbeams, so it is the "light" of God, the heavenly light of the glory (*kabod*) of his presence, which causes the life of man to grow and prosper joyously, and which gives it its meaning and transparency, its strength and stability. Without God man's life is exposed to meaninglessness, darkness and destruction."

God also rescues man's soul from death so that "...the light of life may shine on him" (Job 33:30). And "to see the light," means much the same as "to be alive" (Job 3:16; 33:28) (Harrison, 1986:135). Those that are separated from God will never see the "light of life" (Ps 49:19).

Finally, "light" is used as a figure of success, well being, happiness, life and salvation in the Old Testament. Job's friends were optimistic that his suffering would be turned into joy before he dies. This is further anticipated by the phrase: "The Light is near" (Job 17:12). In Job 22:28, what Job wishes for will come to pass. The LORD will give him that success for God's "light will shine on his ways." To have his light shine in the way means success, guidance, victory and a life worth living. Proverbs 13:9 (see also Prov 4:18-19; Ps 43:3; Job 22:28) also use "light" figuratively with reference to success, joy, good life and well being for the righteous. But the righteous are not insulated from the threats of darkness (Mic 7:8) so that they might see the light (Isa 50:10; 53:11).

3.1.6 Summary and Conclusion

The Old Testament understands light as the created light in Genesis 1:3 and 1:14-19. Secondly, God is understood as the light of man. This refers to the importance of God in

man's life in providing salvation and help. To be able to see his light means to experience his deliverance from adversity or to experience his salvation (Isa 9:1; 53:11). Thirdly, "light" is also used as a figure of success and well being in life (Job 17:12; Pr. 13:9). To be in God's light could refer to walking according to his instructions. This results in success and wellbeing. To walk in the light of God is the godly ordained goal of human existence. Lack of light means failure, pain, suffering without hope, and death (Ps 23:4). Finally, light is understood as the enlightenment and guidance that the Law and Wisdom give. Obeying the two is similar to walking in the light. We are still yet to find out which understanding of "light" John has in mind when he says "...and that life was the light of man. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it" (Jn 4b-5). What connection can be made between the physical light in Genesis 1:3-5 and the metaphorical use of light? We hope to come back to this question in 3.2 when we exegete John 1:4-5. For now, we need to ask how the idea of "light" is featured in the intertestamental period.

3.1.7 "Light" in Palestinian Judaism

The Jewish literature of this period acknowledged that light existed before all things. 2 *Enoch* 24:4 says, "For, before any visible things had come into existence, I the ONE, moved around in the visible things, like the sun, from east to west and from west to east." In the preceding verse, the image applied to the primeval light before or after creation could be a concept that has some relevance to the context of John 1:1-4 (Keener, 2003:383-384). "Light" cannot be accounted for and is not understood as beginning from creation in this verse. This being the case we can say that God, the creator of all the luminaries, is in view here; He is the Light.

On the other hand, light was understood as an image of peace, blessedness, and prosperity in life. 1 *Enoch* 1:8, "And to all the righteous he will grant peace. He will preserve the elect, and kindness shall be upon them. They shall all belong to God and they shall prosper and be blessed; and the light of God shall shine unto them." Also 1 *Enoch* 5:7 (cf. 1 *Enoch* 108:11-13) also says "...to the elect shall be light, joy, and peace

and they shall inherit the earth.” The mention of light is also understood as victory over evil and victory of “light” shall prevail forever for the elect (*1 Enoch* 58:6). The wicked do not participate in this blessed life. Their destiny is a place of sorrow and death (*1 Enoch* 108:15). As in the Old Testament (e.g. Isa 9:2-6; 42:6-7; 49:6; 60:1-11), “light” is sometimes understood in eschatological terms. So having the “light of God shine unto them” points to the blessed life, that is, future. God will be their “light” forever²².

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, “light” is further understood as victory over evil. *1Q27* 1:5-6 talks about righteousness having victory over wickedness, in a similar way to which darkness is banished by light. To be righteous or to be in the light results in victory. This is further articulated in the conflict between the “sons of light” and “the sons of darkness”. The sons of light, those who lived according to the rules of the community will be given victory over the sons of darkness (*1QS* 3:20). The victory of the sons of light and the blessings that accompany them is further explained in *IQM* 1:5-10. They shall shine continually having all the works of darkness defeated. In *IQM* 13:5-6 (cf. 14-15), all that are in the company of Satan are cursed but “...the company of God is one of eternal Light.”

Keener (2003:383), argues that the Dead Sea Scrolls added dualism to Old Testament images, especially on the dualism between the sons of light²³ and sons of darkness. He continues to argue that the image’s roots lay in the Old Testament, though probably accentuated under Persian influence during the exile. Thus, Qumran and John could be building on the Old Testament. At Qumran, the victory of light over darkness lay in the future.

²² Revelation 22:5 confirms this by saying, “There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever.” Thus, the enjoyment of light is for those that put their faith in God from the moment they believe.

²³ “Sons of light” is another usage found in John and the Qumran (see *1QS* 3:13 and Jn 12:36). In the Qumran the sons of light are those who abide by the rules of the community. In John the sons of light are those that put their trust in the light-Jesus.

In the rabbinic tradition people that were considered to be righteous were called light. The following people Abraham, Jacob, Moses and David were considered to be light.²⁴ Like these people, John the Baptist is called a light in the fourth gospel. John 5:35 says, "John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light." But John was not the true light according to 1:8-9.

The Messiah is also referred to as the light. In *1 Enoch* 48:4 we read, "He will become a staff for the righteous ones in order that they may lean on him and not fall. He is the light of the Gentiles and he will become the hope of those who are sick in their hearts." This verse seems to recall Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 and points to the coming of the Messiah as the light that will save the world. This could be pointing to John 8:12 where Jesus clearly declares himself to be the light of the world. His light gives man understanding and a way of life. Jesus himself is the light according to *2 Bar* 9:14, "All glorify God, and the Son of God who awakens us, Jesus Christ the light of all the aeons, the inextinguishable lamp, the life of faith." Thus, light is closely linked with the Messiah. Could this be what John has in mind when he talks about light in the fourth gospel?

As in the Old Testament, Wisdom and Torah embody light. In *Wisdom* 6:12, wisdom is considered to be glorious and will never fade away. Those who love wisdom find her. The glory of wisdom has no end. *Wisdom* 7:26 adds, "For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of God, and the image of his goodness." Wisdom is superior to all the luminaries created by God. Wisdom has always been shining since before everything was created. Because she has been shining, evil cannot prevail against wisdom (*Wisdom* 7:29-30). The Dead Sea Scrolls (*IQS* 2:3) also acknowledge that wisdom gives light and life that last into eternity. Wisdom is the fountain of righteousness and a spring of glory (*IQS* 11:5-6). She is a source of guidance, illumination that changes behavior, and quality of life.

On the other hand, obedience to the Torah is a source of light. The law is a lamp that lighted the way for the generations of Israel (*2 Bar* 17:14). The law came from the true

²⁴ *Gen. Rab* 2:3; *Pesiq. Rab* 20:2; *Ruth. Rab* 2:12; *11QS* 27:2; *Exod. Rab* 1:20, 22, 24.

light, “He who lighted took from the light, and there are few who imitated him (Moses).²⁵ But many whom he illumined took from the darkness of Adam and did not rejoice in the light of the lamp” (2 *Bar* 18:2). The phrase “took from the light” could help to explain John 1:9, “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” Also, “...did not rejoice in the light of the lamp” could also help to explain John 3:19, “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.” “Their deeds were evil”; in 2 Baruch 18:2 they disobeyed the law because of the darkness they received from Adam. The darkness initiated by Adam continues to this day.

Still in 2 *Baruch* (59:2), “...the lamp of the eternal law which exists forever and ever illuminated those who sat in darkness. This law will announce to those who believe the promise of their reward and to those who deny the punishment of the fire which is kept for them.” The purpose of the law was to shine in darkness so that people can find their way. Those that rejected it stand eternally condemned. John 1:5, talks about the light that shines in the darkness, which the darkness has not understood. Those who believe in the Son of God (the Light) are not condemned and those who reject him stay condemned (John 3:18). The glory of the Law continues forever, “For we who received the Law and sinned perished, as well as our hearts that received it; the Law, however, does not perish but remains in its glory” (4 *Ezra* 9:36-37). The unfading glory of the law points to the glory of Christ in John 12:23; 13:32; and 17:5. When referring to the eschatological joy and happiness “light” and “life” are conjoined in 2 *Enoch* 42:5. As in the Old Testament, the “light” of the law could mean guidance, well being, success, and blessedness in human life.

3.1.8 Summary and Conclusion

In addition to the Old Testament, Palestinian Judaism understood God as light in the sense that he gives guidance, protection, success and deliverance in life to those who obey him. He is the eternal light and created all the luminaries. Philo also shares this

²⁵ Moses was considered as the lamp that gave light. Similarly, “John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.”

understanding. According to *1 Enoch* 1:8 to have “light” is to have peace and prosperity in life. A life of this nature was strictly for the elect and the wicked could not participate in it. In the Dead Sea Scrolls (*IQM*) association with “light” especially for “sons of light” results in victory over the “sons of darkness”. Darkness cannot overpower or master them.

Some people who lived righteous lives were called “lights” (Abraham, Moses, David etc). But the Messiah is ultimately understood to be the light that is to come (*2 Bar.* 9:14). His role would be to grant people understanding, guidance, prosperity, and triumph over darkness. The light that the Messiah gives lasts into eternity and is the true light. Also, Torah and Wisdom were the source of the light of understanding, guidance, and quality of life to those who obeyed.

We tried to understand what “life” and “light” mean in the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism. The intertestamental literature leans on the Old Testament for its understanding of these two concepts. At the same time, we must acknowledge the differences in understanding that exist between the two groups of literature. For instance, the dualism between “life” and “light” found in Palestinian Judaism is not so marked in the Old Testament. Also, Palestinian Judaism has a more futuristic understanding of “life” and “light” than the Old Testament. “Life” and “light” are so closely associated that it is impossible to have “light” without “life” or vice versa. With this background in mind, our task is to inquire into what John has in mind when he refers to “life” and “light” in the fourth gospel.

3.2 An Exegesis of John 1:4-5 within the Prologue

The word “life” is used 36 times in the fourth gospel, more than any other New Testament writing. In Revelation it occurs 17 times, Romans 14 times, and 1-3 John 13 times (Morris, 1971:82). “Light” also has more occurrences in the fourth gospel than in other New Testament writings. In John, it occurs 23 times, in the synoptics 15 times, in 1-3 John 6 times, and in Revelation 4 times (Brown, 1966:515). The higher frequencies of

“life” and “light” show their importance (as they relate to Jesus) in the fourth gospel. It is vital, therefore, that we investigate the meaning of “life” and “light”.

For easy reference later, the text of John 1:4-5 is provided below in Greek and English:

Greek (BNT)	English (NIV)
⁴ ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων· ⁵ καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.	⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

3.2.1 Life in the Word (John 1:4a)

Verse 4a starts by saying, “In him was life” (ἐν αὐτῷ ζωῇ). The subject is the Word. We are introduced to the Word in vv.1-3. In verses 1-2 we learn that the Word has always existed and the divinity of the Word is asserted. In verse 3, the subject is still the Word and all the discussion centers around him. Verse 3 moves from eternity and passes to time. The Word created all things and they owe their existence to the Word. So, the Word, unlike creation is eternal (Lightfoot, 1957:78).

The reference to “life” at this point is not yet in relation to people - this comes in 4b (Ridderbos, 1997:38). The prepositional phrase “In him...” (not “through him”) alerts the reader to the sphere in which life exists. “Life” resides in the Word and apart from him there is no life in the universe. This understanding is necessary if verse 4 is read in connection with verse 3. Verse 4a prompts us to go behind the first act of creation to the eternal existence of life in the Word.

Most scholars see a connection between this verse and 5:26, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the son to have life in himself.” In the prologue, we learn about the relationship between the Father and the Son and this relationship is evident in the rest of the gospel. Highlighted in 1:4 and 5:26 is the fact that the Word shares the self-existent

life of the Father (Carson, 1991:118). Ultimately, what the Father is and has, the Son is and has as well.

But what does John mean by the term “life”? Hendriksen (1954:71) poses the following question: “Does life refer to every kind of life, physical as well as spiritual, the life of the butterfly as well as that of the archangel?” His view is that “life” and “light” belong to the spiritual sphere. However, to understand “life” as completely spiritual life does not do justice to other passages in the fourth gospel, as we shall see later. To say that “life” in the prologue and the rest of the gospel refers strictly to “spiritual life” is to break radically from the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism we have uncovered. This would also push our understanding of John in the direction Hellenistic philosophy. This philosophy had a tendency to separate the material from the spiritual and the author of the fourth gospel is against this teaching (Carson, 1991:118). This must be rejected as a serious limitation of meaning to “life”. Newbigin (1982:3) agrees with Carson that the dichotomies that dominated the world to which the gospel came, and which still dominate much of the world’s thought are eliminated. It is true that “spiritual life” has a place in the fourth gospel. But that is not the only way John understands life.

So what does “In him was life” mean? Morris (1971:83) notes that we probably have “a characteristic Johannine double meaning here.” Firstly, the kind of life that John could be talking about is the life that we see in the world. This includes anything that God created that has life in it, thus physical life is in view here. Like we note above, this understanding is possible if verse 4 is read with verse 3. Secondly, John could be talking about spiritual life, which is of such great importance to him with the result that he speaks of it as “the life” (ibid.83). I also would like to add that John could be talking about the resurrection life or the potential for resurrection life (5:21; 6:39-40; 11:25). All these meanings are possible depending on the context in which “life” is used.

The second appearance of “life” in the prologue is in 4b where life is described as “the light of men.”²⁶ “Life” is used here specifically in relation to man. The life in the Word in some way illuminates mankind. This “life” is of superior quality because it gives understanding, a change of behavior, and quality of life. The result will be that the existence of mankind is of greater quality because of the “life” that the Word imparts to men, especially after the resurrection. This life is possible because of close fellowship with God (17:3).

As in the prologue, the entire gospel repeatedly associates life with Jesus. So, when reference is made to “life” it refers to physical existence under God’s rule. It is a life of happiness, wellbeing, success and a life intended for mankind by God. This life is subject to physical harm and ends in death according to John 10:10: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” The verbs ‘steal’, ‘kill’, and ‘destroy’ refer to the physical harm that the thief inflicts on the sheep (people). Jesus comes so that people can have “life to the full”. The phrase “...have it to the full” suggests the resurrection life in which all the maladies of death are removed. This brings in John’s thinking on the now and not yet in his gospel.

As we can learn in John 10:10, life is experienced now, but it is only experienced fully in the age to come at the resurrection (10:28; 11:25). This life knows no thief, danger, suffering, pain, or death. It is a life to be enjoyed forever. This is a life worth living because it is lived under God’s protection. Finally, we can say that when John talks about “life” he connects it with the resurrection life (1:4; 3:14, 16; 4:13; 5:24-26; 6:39-40, 44, 58; 10:10; 11:25; 12:25). The authentic life that we experience now will be fully realized when God physically raises us from the grave.

3.2.2 The life of the Word is light (John 1:4b)

The life in the Word (the source of the existence of all things) was not just passive life. This life actively manifested itself among men and is important to them. The

²⁶ We do not wish to deal with “light” here in detail. We will refer to it so that we can highlight our argument on the meaning of “life” in the prologue.

manifestation of that life results in men having the “light of life.” Unlike in 4a, life in 4b is now used in relation to humans (in 4b): “the life was the light of men.” John the Baptist was a witness to the light but he “was not light” (v. 7). The true light was coming into the world and this light was going to give light to every man (v.9). Someone greater than John the Baptist was coming (v.15). “Light” also appears in (vv.7-8) and seems to be crucial to John. This suggests the light of the Messiah that we have uncovered earlier.

Our previous study above has shown that “light” is mostly associated with the presence of God, the return of his presence, happiness, salvation, blessing, success, guidance, and quality life. God is the source of life and light according to Psalm 36:9, “For with you is the fountain of life: in your light we see light”. Could John have this understanding in his mind when he says, “that life was the light of man?” Since John is writing about the Logos, we can say the Logos is the light of men. And the Logos as “the light” reveals the love of the Father to mankind. The revelation of this love illuminates lives that are covered in darkness. When this happens people experience the joy, peace, salvation, and life that is lived according to the enlightenment received from the Logos. In the Old Testament, the Torah and Wisdom played a significant role as light and life. And we have noted that it was impossible to have the light of the Torah and Wisdom without having life. John has replaced the Torah and Wisdom with Christ. In other words one could not have “life” without having “light.” When John says, “that life was the light of men”, the Old Testament association of life and light influences him. The same understanding is echoed in the intertestamental period literature as noted above.

John associates light and life with Jesus in the fourth gospel. Jesus is the light of the world (8:12; 9:5). Those who choose to follow him shall never walk in darkness, but will have the “light of life” (8:12). Thus, the role of the Torah and Wisdom in giving guidance, joy, salvation, success and quality of life under God’s rule is fulfilled in Jesus. The life that Jesus gives to those who choose to believe in him is light and life, in the sense of salvation, joy, enlightenment and life transformation.

The coming of Jesus into the world as light could also mean judgement. This understanding appears in verse 5 and 10 and is later elaborated in 3:19-21 and 12:46. The way people live, think, and interact with society changes when they accept the life which is the light of men from Jesus. We wish to explore more about Jesus as life and light in the next chapter. John goes on to note that the light shines in darkness.

3.2.3 “The Light shines in darkness...” (John 1:5).

The mention of light in religious circles cannot be made without referring to darkness. In John 1:5 we learn about the conflict between light and darkness. The conflict occurs frequently in the fourth gospel.

But how is verse 5 to be understood within its context? From verses 1-4 John has used the past tense. In verse 5a he suddenly switches from the past to the present tense, “The light shines in darkness...” The present tense “shines” also distinguishes itself from verse 6 which uses the past tense “...came a man who was sent from God...” and verse 11, “He came to that which was his own...” We should also note that “shines” in verse 5 is used figuratively. The use of the present tense “shines” has led scholars to discuss whether John has in his mind the pre-incarnate Christ in the Old Testament or the incarnation.

For instance, Holtzmann and Weiss suggest that the clause refer to the incarnation. On the other hand, De Wette refers to the pre-incarnation light in Old Testament prophets (Dods, 1951:685). Whether John is referring to pre-incarnation or incarnation we cannot vouch to say. What we can say is that John wants to reinforce the fact that the essence of Light (the Logos) is to shine unceasingly regardless of its circumstances. Morris (1971:85) argues that “shines” points to the essential action of light in itself, rather than to the effect of light in illuminating men, which we latter see in v.9.”

The Old Testament testifies to the light that shines in darkness. For instance, the creation account, the book of Exodus with its Passover Lamb, the plague of darkness and the pillar of fire that went ahead of Israel point to Christ. The shining of the light is also manifest in the prophecies, promises and invitations (Isa 1:18; 7:14; 9:6; 53; 54; 63; 65;

Hosea 11:18; Mic 5:2; Zech. 9:9; Mal. 1:11) made in the Old Testament (Hendriksen, 1959:73). All these and other instances in the Old Testament testify to the life of the Logos that shines no matter where it finds itself. John understands that there has not been a moment that the light ceased to shine. Thus, “shines” could cover history and the present.

The shining of the light is confronted with a negative reception, “...but the darkness has not understood it” (1:5). The element of rejection of the Logos by men in darkness is further seen in verse 10, “...the world did not recognize him” and verse 11, “...but his own did not receive him.” The verb in verse 5 “understood” has a double meaning to it; “to seize,” from this meaning we also derive “to overcome”. “To seize” can also refer to seizing with the mind, that is, “to understand or grasp with the mind”. Carson, Barrett, and Hunter agree that John has both meanings “to seize” and “to understand with mind”. But when John says “the light *shines in darkness*” (italics mine) to which event is he referring to?

Borgen (1983:107) suggests that the event in view could be the fall of man in Genesis 3, “or Adam and the sin of the first generations”. He goes on to note three lines of thought on the fall in Jewish sources. Firstly, the primordial light was removed, concealed because of the sin of Adam. The second thought is that the sin of Adam and the first generation led to darkness and night. “But the eventuality of complete darkness was averted by God’s goodness and Adam’s repentance (*Gen. Rab.* 11:2 and 12:6)” (ibid.107). Darkness is seen as result of sin. The third line of thought “identifies sin and darkness” This is also found in the Dead Sea Scrolls where the spirit of light and darkness and the children of light and darkness recur.

In the fourth gospel (12:35; 3:19) darkness is identified with unbelief and sin. We can also say of John 1:5b that the darkness referred to is the sin resident in mankind (3:19-20). This of course goes back to the origin of sin found in the fall of Adam. The result of his fall is that mankind has become corrupt. That sin could be the darkness that John refers to. But the light was not overcome by darkness. In 1:9 (cf. 12:46), the true light

was coming into the world. This refers to the revelation of Jesus (v.14). His coming to mankind restores the “life and light among other things lost at the fall” (Borgen, 1983:108). So, the shining of the light in darkness could mean victory. With this in mind, light and darkness do not here have equal power.

It is difficult to imagine darkness trying to understand light. And for John sometimes “darkness” refers to the world estranged from God because it refuses to associate with him. Men in this world choose to “...walk in darkness...” (8:12). The conflict between light and darkness is explicit in the gospel. People receive condemnation from God because they love darkness instead of light (3:19). Jesus invites people to follow him so that they cease to walk in darkness (8:12). They are urged to walk while they have the light, before darkness overtakes them (12:35). The verb “overtakes” in this verse is the same as that used in 1:5 (κατέλαβεν). This may suggest that Jesus sees the cross as darkness attempting to “overcome” the light as in the case of Judas (John 13:21). His death on the cross also can be understood as darkness trying to overcome him (John 19:30). But Jesus overcomes the work of darkness through the resurrection (John 20:1ff).

The ultimate purpose of Jesus coming into the world as light was that people might not continue to stay in darkness (12:46). The light continues to shine in darkness and triumphs over it. Thus, to have the light that Jesus gives means to have victory over death, direction, understanding, and success over a depressing or enslaving situation. John understands this enslaving situation as the darkness - as the sin of mankind.

In the fourth gospel, the Logos enlightens the life of man. The same terminology emerges in Qumran literature. *IQS* 11:3 says that from the fountain of his knowledge God allows his light to shine and illumines the hearts of those that obey him. So this is not something done to everyone but to those who choose to obey God. Also, *IQH* 4:5 states, “I thank Thee, O Lord for Thou has illumined my face by Thy Covenant”. And “...my light shine forth in Thy glory. For as a light from out of the darkness, so wilt Thou enlighten me” (*IQH* 9:26f).

This theme is crucial for John, just as it is for the Qumran community. The men of Qumran were a “Jewish sect who thought and spoke in terms very much like John’s” (Hunter, 1965:9). But there are differences between John and the Qumran community in relation to the theme of light and darkness. The Qumran men saw light and darkness as locked in a long struggle. The sons of light were only waiting for their victory at the final battle. At this battle light triumphs over darkness. Unlike the fourth gospel, there is no hint of salvation (conversion) for the “children of darkness”. They are bound for utter annihilation. The light in John’s mind is not the “sons of light”, “a holy community” or the “Torah” as in the Qumran. Instead, the light is Jesus. He has never ceased to shine in darkness, so he can dispel darkness.

Another crucial difference is that in the Qumran literature “the Teacher of Righteousness” gets enlightenment from God, which he would pass on to the community. This would allow for other members of the community to be enlightened as well. In 1QH 4:23, 27 he claims to receive light from God and instructions that he conveys to others. “The teacher of Righteousness” is human and is bound to err just like any other member. But the communication of life and light in John is different. “It is the Logos who gives enlightenment, revelation, life, salvation...” victory and success in life (Schnackenburg, 1968:249). The Logos is God himself.

3.3 CONCLUSION

Our main argument is that the Old Testament and its development in first century Palestinian Judaism is a more plausible background to understanding the “life” and “light” concepts in the fourth gospel than other backgrounds. We have attempted to understand what John means by “life” and “light” in John 1:4-5. “Life”, is associated with the Word (1:4). The higher occurrences of “life” and “light” in John’s Gospel show us their importance as they relate to Jesus. It is important to note that John understands life in two dimensions- spiritual and physical. It could be that he has in mind the resurrection life or the potential for resurrection. But the context must determine, as we shall see later. Also the life inherent in the Word illumines mankind and grants them quality life (on earth) which becomes of greater quality after the resurrection.

“Life in these two ages would differ not only quantitatively (duration), but qualitatively. There would be a different kind of life in the age to come” (Brown, 1966:507). It is a life accompanied with joy, peace, fellowship with God, guidance, protection, and other blessings. John is largely concerned with *Zoe* (*not Bios and Psyche*), occasionally modified by “eternal” which refers to “life” as a gift from God. According to John this type of life is something that is realized now and continues into the future.

John also talks about “light” in 1:4b-5a. He also links “light” with the Word, “...that life was the light of men. The light shines in darkness...” “It was through this Word of life that light (cf. 1 Jn 1:1) came to mankind” (Johnson, 1992:471). To have light means to have enlightenment or illumination, revelation, understanding. Later Jesus claims to be the light (8:12; 9:5) as opposed to the physical light of the world (11:9). God’s light in the Old Testament is understood as salvation. Thus, the purpose of the Word as light is to save, and to deliver mankind from darkness so that they can have the life that he gives. As the light shines into the lives of people, they will be able to know their situation. Not only will they know their situation, but they will also decide whether they want to live under God’s revealed will. The “Light” also exposes those who accept or reject its illumination. This is part of the Johannine understanding of judgement (3:19-21) (Shirbroun, 1992:473).

In the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism light was used figuratively to mean prosperity and happiness (Esther 8:16; Amos 5:20; Isa 45: 6, 7). And lack of light means adversity, walking in darkness and sorrow. In John to have the “light of life” could also mean happiness and prosperity in life. When John talks about darkness in 1:5 he refers to the darkness that was there before the coming of the light (8:12; 12:46). Secondly, he also has in mind the darkness that encompasses those who willingly reject the “light” and choose to live in darkness (3:19-20). Thus, John understands or uses “light” as a symbol of revelation and salvation with the blessing that comes with it. In the following chapter our aim is to exegete some passages of John to determine whether they help our understanding of the concepts “life” and “light” concepts.

CHAPTER 4: EXEGESIS OF THE SELECTED PASSAGES THAT RELATE TO “LIFE” AND “LIGHT” FROM THE FOURTH GOSPEL

We have already stated in chapter one that “life” and “light” concepts are later developed in the rest of the fourth gospel. In developing them, the author links “life” and “light” closely with Jesus. In this chapter we seek to exegete the selected passages that relate to “life” and “light” in light of the background understood above. Secondly, we also wish to study if the selected passages help us understand what the author says about “life” and “light” in the prologue and the rest of the gospel. For easy reference, in this chapter the Greek text and the English translation of all the passages to be exegeted are provided. Where some passages are too long, we are going to confine ourselves to the most essential verse(s) containing references to life and light.

4.1 Salvation through the Son of Man (John 3:5-18)

Our quest in this passage is to answer the following questions: How does this passage help the reader understand the reference to “life” in the prologue? Is there any further clarification of the meaning of “life” apart from the meaning obtained in John 1:4?

Greek (BTN)	English (NIV)
¹⁴ Καὶ καθὼς Μωϋσῆς ὑψώσεν τὸν ὄφιν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, οὕτως ὑψωθῆναι δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ¹⁵ ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον. ¹⁶ οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ’ ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον. ¹⁷ οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἵνα κρίνῃ τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλ’ ἵνα σωθῇ ὁ κόσμος δι’ αὐτοῦ.	14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him

¹⁸ ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν οὐ κρίνεται· ὁ δὲ μὴ πιστεύων ἤδη κέκριται, ὅτι μὴ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ μονογενοῦς υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.	is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.
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4.1.1 Exegesis of 3:5-18

The fourth verse reflects Nicodemus's failure to understand what Jesus said in verse 3. The phrase "...unless he is born again," is further explained as born "...of water and Spirit" (γεννηθῇ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος) (v.5). Born of water and Spirit could be interpreted to mean "born again" or "born from above" (Kruse, 2003:106). Thus, verse 5 should be understood in light of verse 3 where the idea of rebirth first appears. "Born of water" refers to John's ministry which dealt with the baptism of water (John 1:26,31) as a sign of repentance. And "born of Spirit" could refer to the inward grace of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was going to give (John 1:31-33) (Alford, 1976:714). Elsewhere water and Spirit are found side by side, mostly in connection with baptism (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). Scholars have expressed various opinions²⁷ on the relationship of water and Spirit in this verse.

The collocation of water and Spirit in eschatological hope finds its origins in Jewish thinking. The conjunction of the two is mentioned in Ezekiel 36:25-28, which read as follows:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God."

In Chapter 37, we have Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones where the Spirit restores the dead to life. "What is needed is a new heart and a new life, that is, the Spirit must give

²⁷ For different opinions see: Murray, B. 1987. Word Biblical Commentary: John. P.48-49. And Alford, H. 1976. Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary. p.714. See also Morris, L.1971. The Gospel According to John. p.215-219.

birth to spirit (Jon 3:7)” (Whitacre, 1999:88). The major underlying principle in the above verses is God’s initiative in bringing “life”. We first encounter this initiative when God gives biological life to Adam (Gen 2:7) and spiritual life in this passage. The latter is reinforced in John 3:8 with an illustration from wind as explained below. The divine initiative of God’s grace is central and crucial in the Old Testament (Isa 26:17-19; 66:7-14; Hos 13:13-14).

The following apocalyptic writings also recognize the cleansing work of the Spirit and are rooted in Jewish thought. For instance, *Jubilees* 1:23, “But after this they will return to me in all uprightness and with all of their heart and soul... And I shall create for them a holy spirit, and I shall purify them so that they will not turn away from following me from that day and forever.” Still God has the divine initiative in creating a new heart in his people. Also, the Testament of Judah (24:3) attests to the cleansing work of the Spirit with the result that people’s hearts will be transformed. It was a transformation that led to a new life lived under God’s direction and guidance. The people of this period understood that transformation of life was the work of the Spirit.

The Qumran’s *Manual of Discipline* links Ezekiel 36 with an immersion accompanied with repentance (*1QS* 3:8-9) (Keneer, 2003:551). Within this frame of mind, the Qumran community taught that the “Spirit of holiness” cleanses the people of God from sin. *1QS* 3:7 states, “He shall be cleansed from all his sins by the spirit of holiness uniting him to His truth, and his iniquity shall be expiated...” Within the same verse the cleansing work is likened to purifying waters. This work is performed only in his chosen people at the end of time (*1QS* 4:21). So the Qumran sectarians saw immersion and repentance as cleansing and hope for the Spirit. By this they began to see the kingdom of God (*1QS* 3:6-9; *1QH* 11:12-14) (Murray, 1987:49). According to John, the cleansing work of the Spirit begins by believing in Jesus. Those who do so have eternal life in Christ (vv.14-15).

Being baptized with water does not result in the eternal life that we learn about in John. John the Baptist explicitly states that the reason why he baptized with water was that

Jesus might be revealed to Israel (1:31). Later he said Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:33), which implies that the baptism of the Spirit that Jesus gives supercedes that of John the Baptist. In other words, John's baptism was incomplete and was a preparation for the coming of Jesus. But this does not minimize the sign of baptism that John the Baptist administered to those who repented of their sin. "It is of great importance both as a pictorial representation and as a seal" (ibid.48). Westcott (1954:108) notes that the Pharisees denied the baptism of John the Baptist (Luke 7:30) and by so doing cut themselves off from the grace that came with it.

But the sign should be accompanied by the thing signified: "the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit" (Hendriksen, 1954:134). It is the birth of the Spirit that allows one to have life in Jesus (1:4). This life differs in quantity and quality from natural life. As stated earlier, this is what John constantly calls "eternal life". This understanding complies with verses 6 and 8 for the birth of water is no longer mentioned but birth of the Spirit only as very important. Those that receive the outward sign (baptism) and cleansing work of the Spirit would be able to see the kingdom of God (Alford, 1976:714).

In verses 6-8, Jesus tells Nicodemus that entrance into the Kingdom of God could not be achieved by legalism or outward formalities. This is what Jesus means by, "Flesh gives birth to flesh..." (6a). In other words, natural life gives birth to natural life. Race, culture, heredity and background find absolutely no place in securing membership in God's kingdom (Tenney, 1981:47). Entrance into God's kingdom calls for a radical inner change effected by the Spirit. This is the direct act of God upon man. "Flesh" has the connotation of weakness in man as God's creature, and "Spirit" has the connotation of God's power in the world he created (Isa 31:1-3 cf. John 1:13).

In verse 8, Jesus speaks in a parabolic way that "exemplifies the reality yet also the incomprehensibility of the work of the Spirit in man: 'the wind is invisible and mysterious, yet known in experience'" (Murray, 1987:49). It is so with the one born of the Spirit, that the new life cannot be fully comprehended by the ordinary mind, though it cannot be denied.

The discussion about the wind that blows freely seems to go against the teaching fabric of the Law according to Nicodemus (Temple, 1950:46). He therefore asks a question in v.9, “How can this be?” This question reveals that Nicodemus does not understand. Thus, the question could be a plea for direction. Probably the knowledge he had amassed in Judaism never had the teaching of this nature.

The Israelites were sons of Abraham and children of God by covenant from birth (Tenney, 1981:48). Though Nicodemus is the son of Abraham, Jesus expects him to repent and have eternal life or new life in the Spirit. Jesus picks up that Nicodemus does not understand although he was “Israel’s teacher” (v.10). He was able to teach others the things of God. But in this incident he should have known that no one is able to come to God in his own strength and righteousness. He needs rebirth. He needs the quality of life that Jesus has (1:4a) and such life is only possible through faith in Jesus. In this passage John reveals how “life” in Jesus can be obtained.

From verses 11-21 the dialogue turns into a monologue; Nicodemus is paying attention to what Jesus is saying. In the eleventh verse the plural “ὁ οἶδαμεν λαλοῦμεν” is different from the singular of verses. 3, 5, 7 and 12 which are not emphatic. The “we know” posed by Nicodemus in 3:2 based on human knowledge is undermined by Jesus’ own “we know” in verse 11. His “we know” is based on his communion with the Father (5:20; 14:10). Also, by using the plural “we know” Jesus is not referring to the prophets as some scholars suggest. He wants to hammer the fact that what he has said to Nicodemus about regeneration is undoubted. The word “testify” used in verse 11 brings to mind what was uttered concerning John the Baptist (1:7, 8, 34). On the other hand, “enter the kingdom God” and “born of water and Spirit” in 3:5 reflect the work of John the Baptist (Hendriksen, 1959:136). Jesus further said, “...you people do not accept our testimony.” He could say this because “...he knew what was in a man” (2:25). The plural “you” used by Jesus does not refer only to Nicodemus and his accomplices of the Sanhedrin who did accept the teaching of Jesus, but to everyone.

Following this in v.12 Jesus gives a distinction between “heavenly things” and “earthly things” in the form of a question. The issue of rebirth becomes earthly in the sense that it happens on earth. Also, Jesus could be referring to his language of vv. 3, 5, 6, and 8 where he has used earthly terminology for Nicodemus with reference to new birth. Immediately, Jesus switches to “heavenly things” and this refers to God’s activity and initiative behind the new birth. Of course, the heavenly things have to do with Jesus as “the Son of Man” (v.13). According to John the Son of Man tabernacles on earth in human form (1:14).

Crucial also in John is the kingdom tension - the now and not yet. This occurs because of the presence and revelation of the Son of Man. Thus, the mention of the Son of Man sayings in John that point to the Messiah from heaven who brings God’s life (life in the logos 1:4) and judgement through his death on the cross (Whitacre, 1999:90).

The connection between verses 13 and 14-15 lies in the mention of the Son of Man. John takes us back to the Old Testament in Numbers 21:4-9 where the lifting up of the snake by Moses occurs for the healing of the Israelites. Similarly, “the Son of Man must be lifted up.” The most important parallel between the bronze snake and Jesus is the “lifted up”. “The Greek verb for “lifted up” in its four occurrences in this gospel (cf. 8:28; 12:32, 34) always combines the notions of being physically lifted up on the cross, with the notion of exaltation” (Carson, 1991:201). Also, the term “lift up” has a connection with δοξάζειναι “be glorified,” as we read in 12:23 and 13:31f. In the context of the suffering servant, Isaiah combines being lifted up and being glorified together (Isaiah 52:13; 53:12). Especially Isaiah 52:13 could be in John’s mind: “My servant will be wise and exalted and greatly glorified” (Murray, 1987:50). Now if Jesus came down from heaven, then through being lifted up he goes back to heaven to enjoy the glory he had with the Father before the world began (17:5). His exaltation draws people to himself (8:28; 12:32). Moses urged the Israelites to look up to the serpent for new life. Similarly, within our context, here Jesus is challenging Nicodemus to turn to him in faith so that he can “have eternal life” (v.15). This is the purpose of being lifted up which is indicated by the connective of reason “that, so that”.

Still in verse 15 John uses the verb “to believe” as the only condition that allows one to have eternal life (6:47; 20:31). Jesus is the absolute object of the faith that John talks about in this gospel. The words “eternal life” create a remarkable difference between Jesus and the serpent “lifted up” in the desert. We read in 2 Kings 18:4 that King Hezekiah later destroyed the snake. The reason being that people revered it as if it had some magical power. God’s grace spared the Israelites from the desert snakes and they thought the means was the bronze snake. But Jesus is far greater than the bronze snake in that the Father grants life in him (5:26); and he is the resurrection and life (11:25) (Carson, 1991:202). Those who put their faith in him have “eternal life.” Here we have the first occurrence of the term “eternal life” in this gospel. “Eternal life” means the quality life that Jesus gives. It could mean the life of the age to come, and therefore resurrection life. It commences by having faith (believing) in Jesus and continues into the age to come. In the Prologue, we have learnt that “life” always has and continue to reside in the Word (1:4). Thus, the evangelist has “eternal life” in mind when he speaks about “life” in 1:4.

Verses 16 onwards may be considered to be the continuation of Jesus’ words to Nicodemus or an elaboration of the evangelist stemming from the conversation (Lightfoot, 1957:118). Either case, here we have the most profound message of the Gospel. Bruce (1983:90) says that the message of salvation is unmistakably plain in verse 16 to the extent that people of different races and cultures have found authentic life through these words.

In the preceding verses rebirth is made possible by the descending of the Son of Man to earth and his being lifted up so that those who put their faith in Him may have eternal life. Eternal life is possible because of God’s incomprehensible love for the world effected through the giving of his Son to die on the cross (3:16). It is a world estranged from him because it is hostile, rebellious, and sinful. It is a world that is supposed to be the object of his wrath (v.36). The words “he gave” his Son, when translated mean, “he delivered up,” which presupposes (παρεδωκεν) in the Greek, which is the standard term in early Christianity for Jesus’ being delivered up to be nailed to the cross

(Schnackenburg, 1968:399). This understanding could recall the sufferings of the servant of the Lord in (Isa 53:6, 12). God's manifestation of love reached its pinnacle by giving up his Son to die for the sins of the world. In other words, Jesus gives up his life (*bios*) so that we can have eternal life (*zoe aionois*).

Still on the idea of "giving", John's audience could have thought of the giving of the land that is dominant in Deuteronomy. On the other hand, they probably thought of the giving of the Torah (Exod 24:12; Lev. 26:46). The giving of the Torah found great emphasis in early Judaism. Josephus (*Ant.*4: 318) speaks of the keeping of the Laws given to them. The rabbis also emphasized the Torah according to *Exod. Rab* 1:1; *Lev. Rab* 35:8 and *Num. Rab* 19:33. It is interesting to note that Israel alone received this gift and other races and nations were deprived of it. But in John God gives the gift of his Son to the world, so that those that believe him may have eternal life (Keneer, 2003:567). Unlike the giving of the land and law to Israel alone, the giving of eternal life has no boundaries.

Appropriating faith in the crucified Jesus yields eternal life. The only Old Testament mention of "eternal life" is found in Daniel 12:2. Even in the intertestamental period "eternal life" is mainly understood as "life of the age to come" according to *II Mac* 7:1-42; *I Enoch* 58:3; *Ps. Sol.* 3:12 and other references mentioned in point 3.2.2 above. The Torah leads people to life (*Sirach* 7; 45:5) and those who obey it never see death (*Baruch* 4:1). The study of the Torah gives more life (*Aboth* 2:7). Wisdom too gives life (meaning of life in Torah and Wisdom discussed 3.1.1 and 3.1.3 above) (*Wis* 6:18; 7:14; 8:13). But according to John in 3:16, "eternal life" is not only eschatological, but it can be experienced the moment one commits himself to Jesus. Torah and Wisdom find their fulfillment in Jesus who gives eternal life regardless of one's nationality on the basis of faith in him.

Explaining the meaning of "eternal life", Tenney (1981:50) states: "eternal, the new life God gives, refers not solely to the duration of existence but also the quality of life as contrasted with futility..." It can never be exhausted in any measurable span of time, but it introduces a totally new quality of life. The believer becomes imperishable; he is free

from all condemnation; he is approved by God.” This is the life that was in the Logos, which became the light of men (1:4). The work of Christ on the cross leaves man with two options: to believe and have eternal life or to deny him and perish. Denying him is complete failure and loss of all that makes existence worthwhile (ibid:50).

In verses 17-18, the reason why God sends Jesus into the world is to save men from the oppression of sin and to give them eternal life. We have God stooping down to the level of men to save them, not to condemn. If men fail to have eternal life, it means they have refused to put their faith in Jesus, the source of life (1:4). In verse 18 the consequences of belief and unbelief are clearly defined. “By combining the negative and the positive Jesus throws into bold relief the great purpose of God’s love and at the same time intensifies the call to faith for Nicodemus” (Lenski, 1943:267).

Thus, this passage, firstly, life is understood as being given by God and having more quality, than natural life. Secondly, “eternal life” is only possible in a saving relationship with Jesus through faith in him. This “life” is accomplished by the recreating work of the Holy Spirit which is as close as the kingdom of God (Murray, 1987:49). Apart from the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to experience eternal life. This is what Jesus wants Nicodemus to understand in the passage. Thirdly, “eternal life” according to John commences now and lasts into eternity for those who choose to believe in Jesus.

4.2 Life through the Son, present and future 5:21-30 and 39-40

In this passage new connections are made with “life”, namely resurrection and judgement. Do these new connections add something to the meaning of life in the prologue? The answer to this remains to be discovered as we exegete this passage.

Greek (BTN)	English (NIV)
²⁴ Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί με ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον καὶ εἰς κρίσιν οὐκ	24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who send me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he

<p>ἔρχεται, ἀλλὰ μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν.²⁵ ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν ὅτε οἱ νεκροὶ ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀκούσαντες ζήσουσιν.²⁶ ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ἔχει ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ, οὕτως καὶ τῷ υἱῷ ἔδωκεν ζωὴν ἔχειν ἐν ἑαυτῷ.</p>	<p>has crossed over from death to life. 25 I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he granted the Son to have life in himself...”</p>
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4.2.1 Exegesis of 5:21-27 and 39-40

Verse 21 begins with “For” which points back to what has been said in vv.19-20. That the Son does everything the Father does and the Father takes great pleasure in revealing himself to the Son alone. This demonstrates the oneness and harmony that exist between the two. This is also demonstrated in the following parallelism: “...just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it” (v.21).

In the Old Testament there is an assumption that the raising of the dead is confined to God alone and nobody else can execute that responsibility. In 2 Kings 5:7 (cf. 1 Sam 2:6) we read, “Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life?” “Rabbi Johanan asserted that three keys remained in God’s hand and were not entrusted to representatives: the key of the rain (cf. Deut 28:12), the key of the womb (cf. Gen 30:22), and the key of the resurrection of the dead (cf. Ezek. 37:13)” (Carson, 1991:253).

In Genesis 2:7 God breathed into the nostrils of man the “breath of life”. When confessing their sins the Israelites could even confess that God alone gives life to everything (Neh 9:6). Sometimes Elijah was regarded as the man of God that brought the dead back to life. It is crucial to point out that he was only a representative of God when he did this. Now the authority of Jesus goes beyond that of Elijah, in that Jesus gives life “...to whom he is pleased to give it,” something, that Elijah could not do. At the pool of

Bethesda he chose to restore the man's body (v.6; cf. 15:16). Whatever the Son did was and continues to be in complete harmony with the Father.

In Jewish literature, the resurrection of the dead and the giving of life were entirely divine works. In *II Maccabees* 7:9 (cf. 14:46); we read that the King of the world shall raise up those that died to everlasting life. In the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q521) (*A Messianic Apocalypse*) we read that God will heal the wounded, revive the dead and bring good news to the poor. This sounds like Isaiah 61:1 "...the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." In the case of Jesus, the healing of the man at Bethesda is a prefigure that he will raise (ἐγείρει) the dead just as he commanded the man to rise up and walk (5:8 cf. 4:50). His physical life is restored so that he enjoys living in his body. This is a foretaste of the blessings of the age to come. In other words, this implies that the life of the age to come is completely independent of any life threatening situations.

The point is that Jesus has the authority to raise the dead. Thus, death has no power over eternal life. If Jesus can do this, he also has authority over the Sabbath (5:18). The divinity of Jesus is revealed; God brings to life and gives life to those he chooses (6:37, 44, 65) (Keneer, 2003:651). Thus, "life" in the Logos (1:4) is not meant for everyone. It is given to those who receive him (1:12), because he chose them. In other words, the life that one receives upon believing in him is a deposit or a foretaste of the authentic future life.

In verse 22, the NIV renders *oude gar* as "Moreover", which suggests a continuation of what has been said in vv.19-20. In this verse (v.22) the author gives us a further reason for the claim made in v.21. The Son does not only give life to whom he pleases, but he also has the authority to judge. The parallelism that exists in v.21 is not found in verse 22. In v.22, the Father has entrusted judgement to the Son and he (the Father) judges no one. Carson (1991:254) suggests the following flow between these two verses: "The Father and the Son both enjoy the prerogative of giving life (v.21), for the Father has determined that it will not be his direct task to judge anyone, but has instead entrusted all judgement

to the Son.” The life that Jesus gives is not only “eternal life”. It is also judgement to people if it is not received by faith.

In the Old Testament, God is acknowledged as the judge of all the earth in Genesis 18:25. Still in the Old Testament, God administered judgement to his covenant people when they deviated from his commands. Also, God executed judgement on nations as demonstrated in Isaiah 13-23. Daniel speaks of the Son of Man reigning (Dan 7:13-14). The Daniel text finds its fulfillment in Christ exercising judgement according to John 5:23.

Apart from the Old Testament, the Jewish literature also sees the Son of Man as exercising judgement in the last day (*1 Enoch* 69:27). God’s people shall also exercise judgement in the eschatological war. We read in *Wis.* 3:7-8: “And in the time of their visitation they shall shine, and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble. They shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign forever.” Also *1 Enoch* 95:3 (cf. 98:12): “...For the Lord will again deliver them into your hands, so that you may carry against them anything you desire.” In *1QM* 16:1 we also read: “For the God of Israel has called out the sword against all the nations, and He will do mighty deeds by the saints of His people.” Keneer (2003:651) notes that these judgements should be understood in a limited sense. The dominant picture is that of God judging alone. Thus, we have Jesus in verse 22 judging alone because he is the Messiah. But Jesus does not carry out this judgement independently of the Father, because he seeks to please the one that sent him (v.30).

In chapter 3:17 we have learned that the Father did not send the Son to condemn the world. In 5:22 we have the Father entrusting all judgement to the Son. These verses seem to be conflicting. Carson (1991:254) makes a valid comment about this seeming tension. He says: “The resolution turns in part on the semantic range of judge and its cognates: it can refer to a (usually judicial) principle of discrimination, or to outright condemnation.” He goes on to say that 3:17 speaks of outright condemnation and 5:22 speaks “more broadly to the former.” Understood in this way, the Son did not come to completely

condemn the world (3:17). His primary purpose was to give life to those who choose to hear his word and believe in him. But those that chose not to entrust themselves to him are eternally discriminated or judged (John 5:22).

There is a reason why the Father entrusted all the judgement to the Son. We read in verse 23: "...that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent me." The Father is at one with the Son in essence (vv.17 and 18), in works (vv.19-22), and in honour (Hendriksen, 1954:199). This makes Jesus a special envoy whose authority equals that of the sender. Schnackenburg (1979:108) notes, "The evangelist's view of mission is deeply influenced by the Jewish doctrine of the envoy, with its fundamental affirmation that 'a man's envoy is as the man himself.'" The Jews saw Jesus as a mere man and this probably shocked them when he claimed to be equal with God (vv.17-18). They failed to understand that what brings glory to the Son automatically glorifies the Father.

In verse 21, the evangelist has told us the Son gives life to those he chooses. Who are these people that are privileged to have this life? We are told in verse 24: "...whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned..." By his *word* the son healed the infidel at the pool of Bethesda. Similarly, hearing his *word* brings eternal life (cf. 6:63). The aspect of realized eschatology is highlighted in "...he has crossed over from death to life." "Has crossed over" is written in the perfect tense indicating an accomplished transit and a settled state (Tenney, 1981:65). Death no longer has its grip on them for they have eternal life in Jesus. The qualitative aspect of eternal life begins in the present and continues into the future. Physical death becomes a passage to eternal life for those that hear his word. It (death) is regarded as something that belongs to the past (Ridderbos, 1987:197). Thus, the life in the Logos (1:4) can only be received through believing in Jesus. And when that life is received, condemnation cannot hover over those that appropriate their faith in Jesus. They stand protected, acquitted and theirs is the joy of eternal fellowship with God.

The kingdom tension between the “now” and “not yet” is repeated in verse 25; “...a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.” Both the present and the future are in the evangelist’s mind, unlike in verse 28 where he strictly speaks of the future. In verse 25, “...the coming hour already is: the resurrection life for the physically dead in the end time is already being manifest as the life for the spiritually dead” (Carson, 1991:256). The voice of the Son of God calls out the dead and “those who hear his voice will live” (v.24; 6:63, 68; 11:43). The dead in Christ shall be physically raised and restored to life again, and all the life threatening circumstances shall have no grip over them, even death.

Like the other verses (vv.18, 21-22), verse 26 begins with the logical connective “for” (γὰρ). The connective serves to introduce to the reader to why the Son has authority to give life and grant resurrection of life through his word. The reason is because “...the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself” (v.26).

The Jews addressed God as uncreated. They also called God the “unbegotten”. The writings of Josephus testify this in (*Against Apion*) 2:167: “...he presented God as unbegotten and immutable through all eternity superior to all mortal conceptions in pulchritude; and, though known to us by his power, yet unknown to us as to his essence.” In the Old Testament they also recognized God as the living one as in Deuteronomy 5:26²⁸; “For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire.” Joshua 3:10 also says, “This is how you will know that the living God is among you...” The Psalmist (42:2 cf. 84:2) could also say, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” Also Isaiah 37:4, “...the king of Assyria has sent to ridicule the living God,...” In Daniel 6:20 God is also acknowledged as the living God that Daniel served. Even in the New Testament²⁹ God is still understood as the living God. Thus, he is the God that has life in himself (Jn 5:26). He exists in the past and future just as he exists today (Exod 3:14).

²⁸ Other OT references are, 1 Sam 7:26; 2 Kings 19:4; Jer 10:10; Hos 1:10.

Even the Jews of the intertestamental period recognized God in this way. *2 Baruch* 21:10 says, “For you are the only Living One, the Immortal One and the Inscrutable One, and you know the number of men.” In *Tobit* 13:1 (Apocrypha) God is addressed as the God that lives forever in Tobit’s prayer.

Therefore, when Jesus claimed to have “life in himself” (v.26), it is an undisputed direct claim to deity. In a Jewish setting man was completely unable to communicate God’s life to man. Life was found in Wisdom and the Torah. The Jews in the fourth gospel saw Jesus as a mere man. If a mere man, then all human beings draw their life from God. But God chose to grant life in his Son alone and to nobody else on earth, to the effect that he has “life in himself.” This recalls the statement that we have in 1:4, “In him was life.” So, we understand that the life in the Father is exactly the life in the Son because he is God. This demonstrates the relationship between the Word and the Father. It is a relationship that existed “In the beginning” (1:1), not bound by time or anything. Thus, “the life in himself” from the Father grants him the authority to call the dead to life by his powerful word (Carson, 1991:257).

Verse 26 is naturally followed by verse 27, “And the Father has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.” The conjunction “and” in verse 27 makes this natural follow so possible. The power to judge has also been given to the Son. He alone can understand the views and needs of men because he became man himself (1:14 cf. Heb 2:17). But of paramount importance is the fact that he is the Son of Man. The only one that has seen God and has made him known (1:18) knows the mind of God.

From verses 31-47, the evangelist writes about the testimonies about Jesus. And the great testimony that Jesus has is that the Father has sent him to do the work he is doing (v.36). John the Baptist testified concerning Jesus (v.33-35). More importantly, the Father testifies concerning him (v.37). The Jews flipped through and intelligently read the Scriptures to verify the testimony of Jesus (39a). Jesus is definitely not against the study

²⁹ For references in the NT see: Matt. 16:16; 26:63; Acts 14:15; Rom. 9:26; 2 Cor 3:3; 6:16; 1 Thess 1:9; Heb. 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22.

of the Scriptures. But he denies the Jewish mentality that the life of the present age and the age to come is found in Scriptures.

The Jews believed that life is stored in the Torah. *Sirach* 17:11 reads, “Besides this, he gave them knowledge and the law of life for a heritage (cf.45:5).” And in *2 Baruch* 4:1 wisdom is identified with the Torah, “This is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures forever: all they that keep it shall come to life; but such as leave³⁰ it shall die.” Also, in Psalms of Solomon 14:1-4 those that live in the commandments of God (the Law) will live forever. *2 Baruch* 38:2 also attests that the law of God is life and his wisdom is the right conduct. Finally, Hillel in *Aboth* 2:7 reinforces that the more study of the law, the more life. Also, that once a man gains himself words of the law he has gained for himself life in the world to come (Carson, 1991:263).

From verse 39b-40 Jesus says, “These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” Failure to believe and apply what the Scriptures say defeats the whole purpose of intelligent study. Eternal life is received by believing in the Word that has life in himself (1:4 cf. 5:26). Thus, the Torah that the Jews were devoted to actually points to and is fulfilled in Jesus.

In this passage, the life that Jesus has (1:4) does not end with death. While this present life ends in death Jesus gives the assurance that the dead will hear his voice and those who hear it shall live (v. 25). It follows that we live this life with the hope of physical existence beyond death after the resurrection. The life of the resurrection shall no longer be subject to suffering and death. This is the “authentic life” (Painter, 1975:33). On the other hand, one’s rejection of the revealed life brings judgement or condemnation. The judgement means exclusion from participating in the quality of life that Jesus gives to those who receive him. They will rise to be condemned (v.29), because they choose to live a false life. Such people live in darkness (1:5), they are the world (1:10) and they do not receive him (1:11). Thus, something is added to our understanding of life in the

³⁰ The end of this quotation seems to sound unclear. Where it says, “...but such as leave it shall die” means those who abandon or forsake the law shall face death.

prologue and that is the resurrection dimension of life found in accepting the Word (Jesus).

4.3 Jesus the bread of life 6:32-40

In this section, our aim is to discuss what Jesus means by the bread of life (6:35). We also would like to find the relationship between 6:35 and 39-40. Are these verses saying the same thing? Or is there a life now plus resurrection? Do we have another understanding of the meaning of life in the prologue?

Greek (BTN)	English (NIV)
<p>³³ ὁ γὰρ ἄρτος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστὶν ὁ καταβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ζωὴν διδοὺς τῷ κόσμῳ. ³⁵ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς· ὁ ἐρχόμενος πρὸς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ πεινάσῃ, καὶ ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ διψήσῃ πώποτε. ³⁹ τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με, ἵνα πᾶν ὃ δέδωκέν μοι μὴ ἀπολέσω ἐξ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸ [ἐν] τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ. ⁴⁰ τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρός μου, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ θεωρῶν τὸν υἱὸν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον, καὶ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν ἐγὼ [ἐν] τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ.</p>	<p>33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. 35 Then Jesus declared, “ I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”</p>

4.3.1 Exegesis of 6:32-40

The Jews request a sign from Jesus (v.30). It could be that they are asking for an interpretation of the feeding of the five thousand (Whitacre, 1999:156). The feeding which had just taken place prompts them to think of the giving of manna in the desert (v.31). The quote given reflects Exodus 16:4, Nehemiah 9:15 and Psalm 78:24-25.

The Jews probably thought that Moses was far superior to Jesus standing in their midst. Jesus clears the mist in their minds by telling them that his Father gave them the manna, not Moses. In this verse, the author uses two tenses. First, he uses “has given,” which is a past tense, referring to the time of Moses when God gave them the manna. Secondly, he uses the present tense “gives” (δίδωκεν). The Father continues to give bread from heaven in the person and ministry of Jesus. In verse 33, he adds that the bread of God is the one who comes from heaven. He does not only come from heaven but gives life to the world. Jesus is the bread himself (the inexhaustible source of life), something which Moses was not. Then, in verse 34, they request that Jesus give them the bread. They understood little about this bread. The words, “...from now give us this bread”, are similar to “Sir give me the water...” (4:15). “The request operates on a mundane level” (Carson, 1991:287).

In verse 35 what has been a dialogue turns into a monologue. Jesus strongly states, “I am the bread of life.” This is the first of the seven “I am” sayings in this gospel. Brown (1966:534) notes that the stress is not on the “I” exclusively for Jesus also wants to emphasize the predicate which reveals something of his role. Thus, the predicate serves not as a description of Jesus, but a description of what he really is in relation to man. Jesus is the source of eternal life for men. The fact that he is the source of life is first mentioned in (1:4) by the prepositional phrase “In him was life.” Outside of him, there is no life, but suffering and death.

Jesus reveals himself (v.35, 48) in words which resemble the Old Testament statement uttered by God (Exod 3:14; 20:2; Isa 51:12) (Hill, 1981:36). Deuteronomy 8:3 says, “...man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” Painter (1975:40) says, “Moses gave the people bread (manna) and the Law. Jesus gave the multitude bread and claims that the Father, not Moses, gives the true bread from heaven. That bread is Jesus himself (6:32-33, 35, 41, 48, 50-51). Jesus also gives the bread...”

Bread was used as a symbol for the Law by the Jews but it (the Law) was considered as life-giving principle (*Sirach* 15:3; 24: 19-21; cf. John 5:59) (Painter, 1975:39). In *Sirach* 24:21, "They that eat me shall not be hungry, and they that drink me shall not be thirsty." This is similar to verse 35b, "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." In these two verses, reference is made to the Law. Also, Wisdom is considered as "...the book of the covenant of the most high God, even the law, which Moses commanded for a heritage..." Keneer (2003:681) states, "...bread often related to wisdom." Wisdom will feed people with the bread of understanding (*Sir* 15:3). This could be where John 6:35 is emanating from. Jesus is greater than the Wisdom, Law and Manna in that these three find their fulfillment in him. The words that he speaks to people are spirit and life (6:63).

Jesus called himself the bread that came from heaven to give life (6:33, 38). In *Wisdom* 9:10, the Jewish teaching acknowledges wisdom to have a heavenly origin also: "...sent her out of the holy heavens." But Jesus is the epitome of wisdom and the Torah that God conveyed through Moses. If people thought that they could get life in Wisdom and Law, Jesus is the bread of life. Consequently, "What matters is not just what Jesus can do for you; what matters is who Jesus is" (Wright, 2002:79). As the bread of life, Jesus is able to eternally sustain and nourish human life such that life becomes worth living and lived with a purpose.

The use of the article "the life" (τῆς ζωῆς) in qualitative genitive, indicates not normal life in general but "the" life and that is everlasting life (Hendriksen, 1954:233). This is what Jesus means by "I am the bread of life" (6:35). The loaves of bread he had just fed to the crowd could not have had such sustenance and nourishment. The loaves could not give them eternal life, but faith in Jesus enables man to attain the authentic life. "The giving of the bread became a reality when Jesus gave his flesh over to death in order that the world might have life" (Painter, 1975:40).

Kysar (1986:102) notes that verse 36 has two problems. First, it is not clear to what previous statement of Jesus is alluded. A problem which he says occurs in 6:65; 10:25,

36; 11:40. The second problem he calls a textual one. The “me” is not found in some manuscripts. He suggests that without the “me” the text would make better sense in this context. It would read, “You have seen and still you do not believe.” The “me” should be omitted so that the text refers to verse 26 with clarity. “The sign of the loaves quickened the appetite not the faith” (Barrett, 1956:243). Thus, Jesus was talking about the bread that gives eternal life but the Jews could not understand what he was talking about. The miracle did not lead them to believe in him so that they could have eternal life. In verse 37, only those who respond to his invitation by faith will have life. He pledges his ultimate care for them; “I will never drive him away.” More important in this verse is that unless God gives them to Jesus it is impossible to be saved. This is a work of grace but human responsibility is still in view.

The reason for Jesus’ coming down from heaven is to do the will of the Father vv.38-40. In verse 37 Jesus said he would never drive away those that the Father gives to him. And in verse 39 something is added, “...I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.” The verse recalls Jeremiah 23:4 (cf. Isa 27:3) where the LORD promises he will not lose any of his sheep. Unlike in Jeremiah 23:4, Jesus is not only a shepherd but he has the power to raise to eternal life those that believe in him.

In vv.39-40 there is life now plus the resurrection. The life that Jesus gives as the bread of life cannot be destroyed by death. He restores it “...to everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him...” at the resurrection (v.40). Thus, the life that we receive now from him is a foretaste and the full banquet occurs at the resurrection (Carson, 1991:292). These verses (39-40), “...unpack in non-metaphorical categories just what kind of life the ‘bread of God’ provides (33, 35)” (ibid.292). Therefore, there is a tight connection between 6:35 and 39-40. This brings comfort and security to those the Father draws to Jesus.

The $\pi\alpha\nu$ in v.39 is collective with reference to all the believers. But in verse 40 the collective aspect is dropped so that we have $\pi\alpha\varsigma$. The life in the Word (1:4) requires individual responsibility appropriated by faith to gain it. Jesus as the bread of life sustains

the believer's life such that death loses its grip on them after the resurrection. Thus, the life in the Word (1:4) begins now by faith in Jesus and continues after the resurrection.

4.3 Jesus the resurrection and the life 11:25-26

Our aim in this section is to answer the question: What does Jesus mean by "I am the resurrection and the life?"

Greek (BTN)	English (NIV)
²⁵ εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ· ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ καὶ ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται, ²⁶ καὶ πᾶς ὁ ζῶν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. πιστεύεις τοῦτο;	25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

4.4.1 Exegesis of 11:25-26

When the people failed to comprehend His identity Jesus declares (vv.25-26): "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" This declaration and question by Jesus was uttered in response to Martha's answer in verse 24. But his disciples and the Jews that were present also felt the impact of the statement and the question. In Martha's answer (v.24), the hope of the future resurrection did not give her much consolation. "Jesus must now show her that the last day has already dawned. Jesus himself, in his own person, the *eschatos*, the end as he was the beginning... Jesus is the presence of life which is God's gift here and beyond death" (Newbigin, 1982:142).

Possibly Martha was simply restating what she learned from the mainstream Judaism. Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead on the last day. Josephus says about the Pharisees (*War* 2:163): "They say that all souls are

incorruptible; but the souls of good men are only removed into other bodies, but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment.”

The belief in the immortality of the soul is also found in the Old Testament. The resurrection language is used in a figurative sense when speaking about deliverance from danger (Ps. 9:13) (Keener, 2003:844). Though used and understood figuratively, this suggests that death was not the termination of life. Martha speaks of the “resurrection at the last day”. She is obviously referring to the last day when God will judge the world and raise the dead to eternal life.

The resurrection is marked by two destinies in Daniel 12:2. Firstly, we have those who will rise to eternal life, to which Martha was referring (John 11:24). Secondly, we have those that shall rise to eternal condemnation or doom. Also, in Isaiah 26:19 we learn: “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy...the earth will give birth to the dead.” There is hope of eternal life after death in the Old Testament especially for those who live in fellowship with God.

The idea is further echoed in *Sirach* 9:12, where the unrighteous do not go to the grave unpunished. This would equally mean that the righteous will be rewarded and this implies life beyond death. In 3.1.3 above, we dealt with life in the intertestamental period and we do not wish to repeat this here. In this period, the Jews believed in life of this age and the life of the age to come, which is the resurrection. As stated earlier, the lives of these camps differ quantitatively and qualitatively depending on where their hope was fixed. On the other hand, Josephus in *Ant* 18:14 mentions that the soul has an immortal vigor in it and that those who live virtuously shall live again. In *Ant* 18:18, the Essenes believed in the immortality of the soul but one had to strive for his righteousness. Also, in *War* 2:154-155, the soul is believed to live forever. Finally, death is not something to be feared because it is a gateway to life in *War* 7:343-345.

In light of the above understanding on the immortality of the soul, how should we understand and interpret vv25-26? Martha had in her mind the resurrection of the end of

the age. This triggered Jesus to say “I am the resurrection and the life.” He does not promise that he will give the resurrection and the life to people. Instead, he says that he is the resurrection and life (Morris, 19971:550). Do resurrection and life refer to the same thing or do they complement each other here? Schnackenburg (1971:331) prefers the second opinion that they complement each other. The linking of the two is not a pleonasm. Schnackenburg goes on to add that “life” does not add new meaning to “resurrection.” “Life” simply unlocks the inside of the word “resurrection” and this is a technique used in other sayings (6:35, 48, 51; 8:12; 14:6) (ibid.331). Surely the two words do not have different meanings, they mean the same thing. Jesus cannot be the “the resurrection” without being the “life”. On the other hand, to have him as “the life” means that he is “the resurrection”.

In the next clause Jesus explains what he means by resurrection. Those who believe in Jesus will be raised to life although they die. Thus, death is simply a transition to the life of the resurrection. Faith in Jesus is of paramount importance if one needs to live even after death. He clearly states, “He who believes in me will live.” In the second clause (v.26) Jesus explains how one gets that “life”. He states, “...and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” Thus, while one has this natural life, there is a need to believe in Jesus in order to live forever. Brown notes (1966:434), “Whoever receives the gift of life through belief in Jesus will never die a spiritual death, for this life is eternal life.” The verb “to live” is related to *zoe*, “life”. This is John’s word for eternal life. Thus, the life referred to in vv.25-26 is quality life lived in the body after the resurrection.

The evangelist’s reference to realized eschatology is explicit again here. Eternal life is not only a future life, like in the Old Testament and intertestamental period. It is something that begins the moment one entrusts his faith in Jesus. By putting emphasis on the present reality of eternal life for those who believe in Jesus, John does not refuse the prospect of ultimate resurrection (Carson, 1991:413). This goes against the Jews who only believed in the ultimate reality of the resurrection (eternal life) and seemed not to see the present reality of eternal life. This is the life in the Word (1:4).

Therefore, though common to many, death is not the end of life, especially to those that believe in Jesus. At the resurrection Jesus will restore their lives from the grave. And that life is lived in eternal fellowship with God without any life threatening circumstances. This comports with the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism understanding of the life of the age to come. The only difference would be that in John it is something that is realized and spills into eternity.

Our study of “life” in these selected passages has shown that John understands “life” in the Word (1:4) as eternal life. One attains life by putting faith in Jesus. Its quality is different from natural life in that it begins now and lasts forever. Those who have it live in hope of life beyond death because God will physically restore them to life (11:25-26). On the other hand, the revelation of this authentic life to mankind brings judgement to those who refuse to accept it. Such people stand condemned and eternally excluded from enjoying quality life in Jesus. Unlike in the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism which emphasized the future life only, John emphasizes the now and not yet of eternal life. Finally, Jesus is the only hope and source of quality life. In the following section we are going to try to understand what John means by “light” in his gospel.

4.4 Coming to the light 3:19-21

In this section our quest is to understand what John means by “light”. What is the purpose of the coming of the “light” in relation to man? Can this passage help the reader to better understand John 1:4b-5? The word “light” is mentioned five times in these three verses and this shows how important it is for John.

Greek (BTN)	English (NIV)
<p>¹⁹ αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ κρίσις ὅτι τὸ φῶς ἐλήλυθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον καὶ ἠγάπησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι μᾶλλον τὸ σκότος ἢ τὸ φῶς· ἦν γὰρ αὐτῶν πονηρὰ τὰ ἔργα. ²⁰ πᾶς γὰρ ὁ φαῦλα πράσσων μισεῖ τὸ φῶς καὶ οὐκ ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸ φῶς, ἵνα μὴ ἐλεγχθῇ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ. ²¹ ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸ φῶς, ἵνα φανερωθῇ αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ἐν θεῷ ἐστὶν εἰργασμένα.</p>	<p>19This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.</p>

4.5.1 Exegesis of 3:19-21

The word translated “judgement” (κρίσις) in verse 19 does not have a primary reference to “the sentence of condemnation.” It highlights the process of judging (Morris, 1971:233). Jesus did not come with the purpose of condemning. His coming as “Light” causes division so that men and women might be saved. But some choose to stay condemned by refusing the revelation of the light (Painter, 1975:34). The meaning of “light” has two sides to it. “Light” is used in the metaphorical sense where it represents something good over the bad or evil. The second side is that Christ is the “Light” as we learn in this gospel (1:9; 8:12; 9:5). Thus, when the evangelist talks about the “Light” (cf. 1:4) that has entered the world in verse 19 he is referring to Christ.

The differences in people’s attitude to the “Light” are caused by their moral decisions. In verse 19 we learn that in spite of the revelation that the light gives man “loved” (ἠγάπησαν) darkness. The word “loved” here could mean desire, to long for or put ones affection on something. Thus, people choose to have a desire for darkness (σκοτός) because their deeds were evil. In other words, the moral dimension of man’s life will determine whether he will choose the light.

In the fourth gospel judgement begins now and proceeds into the future for those who choose not to come to the light by faith. But contextually, judgement “is nothing more or less than the fact that the “light”, the Revealer, has come into the world” (Bultmann, 1971:157). Thus, Christ as the light enlightens the lives of people and brings judgement. Bruce (1983:91) states that the essence of this judgement is described in terms of light and darkness. The light that shines in darkness is Christ, in this passage. His revelation allows men to see their moral standing before God. The stark conflict between light and darkness stated in the prologue (cf. 1:5b) appears in this text. We have already noted that the purpose of light is precisely to shine in darkness and to expel the darkness. It is impossible for the two to coexist. In the Jewish tradition those who rejected the Torah were under darkness (2 *Baruch* 18:1-2). The rabbis also spoke of the nations as covered in darkness because they rejected the Torah, and the Israelites were in the light because

they accepted the Torah (*Pesiq. Rab Kah* 7:12, *bar*) (Keener, 2003:571). Thus, obeying the Torah equals walking in the light. Whereas for John, belief in Jesus brings revelation and salvation, such that the burden of condemnation is lifted, the opposite is true for those who reject Jesus.

Brown (1966:148) comments, "It should be noted that the dualistic vocabulary of vv.19-21 (light/darkness; practicing wickedness/doing truth) has remarkable resemblances in the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially in *IQS* iii-iv." The following references demonstrate what we mean by this remarkable similarity between this passage and the Qumran. A man who refuses to enter into the covenant of God "...shall not be justified by that which his stubborn heart declares lawful, for seeking the ways of light he looks towards darkness (*IQS* 3:4). This is similar to John 3:19 "...but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." *IQS* 3:18 states, "Those born of truth spring from a fountain of light, but those born of injustice spring from a source of darkness." Similar to John (5:21), this could be "whoever lives by the truth comes into the light."

In John those who come to the Light are those who put their faith in Jesus and always come to God (the light) (v.21). And those who reject the light are always associated with darkness. In *IQS* 3:20, "All the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light, but all the children of injustice are ruled by the Angel of Darkness in the ways of darkness." The heritage of the sons of light and of darkness spells out who belongs to which camp (*IQS* 4:24). In *IQS* 3:25f, there is victory for the "sons of light" and "the sons of darkness" are without hope and stand condemned forever. Unlike the sectarian community, in the fourth gospel those who walk in darkness have the hope of salvation if they believe in Jesus.

In spite of some differences between John and the Qumran, the thinking of the Qumran community has a close resemblance to that of John. John could be using words and terms from Qumran but his theology is ultimately different from theirs.

In verse 20, the unbeliever always moves away from light for the fear that his deeds will be exposed. People reject the light because they want to conceal their sins as much as they can (Calvin, 1994:80). The fact that everyone who does evil hates the light does not suggest that one's moral life before coming to the light can stop him from coming to the light. The Samaritan woman who had an immoral lifestyle came to the light. Neither does the phrase "But whoever lives by the truth..." (v.21) suggest salvation by works. The entire context of these verses (vv.19-21) talks about believing in Jesus (vv. 12, 15, 16, 18). Doing good refers to believing in Jesus, that he is the light and continuing to walk in him.

And doing the truth "is not just a matter of morality - it involves not being deceived, having a right evaluation of oneself in relation to God. Truth for John, has to do with reality, and here the issue is the reality of one's claim to have fellowship with God" (Whitacre, 1999:93). Though men are estranged from the light by their love of evil actions, they are still held accountable for their actions. They have only two options to choose from, evil actions or truth. Thus, Jesus as the light reveals where men stand in their relationship with him. And coming to the light would be similar to having eternal life.

Thus, the purpose of the "Light" is to bring revelation, division, condemnation of false life and ultimately salvation to those who choose the light. Choosing to be in the light means the opportunity to come to authentic life (Painter, 1975:33). One is able to live in fellowship with God and able to hate the works of darkness. People could choose to stop living in falsehood of life because they know the truth. Tenney (1981:51) best summarizes this section, "In John 1:5 we are told of the natural antipathy that exists between light and darkness. Verses 19-21 of Chapter 3 lift this battle from the realm of the abstract to the concrete by showing that it is the love of evil deeds that keep men from responding to the light. There is no missing the fact that men are held accountable for their actions, and the choice is theirs: evil deeds or truth."

4.6 Jesus the Light of the world 8:12 and 12:46

Our main aim in these verses is to understand what Jesus means by “I am the light of the world”. Below is the Greek and English translation of John 8:12.

Greek (BTN)	English (NIV)
¹² Πάλιν οὖν αὐτοῖς ἐλάλησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγων· ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου· ὁ ἀκολουθῶν ἐμοὶ οὐ μὴ περιπατήσει ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ’ ἔξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς.	12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

4.6.1 Exegesis of 8:12 and 12:46

Apart from the “I am” of 6:35, this is the second “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι) (8:12) uttered by Jesus. In the prologue (1:4) we have already discovered that the life in the Logos “was the light of men.” And here Jesus unequivocally declares that he is the light of the world. He directly reveals his identity and what is highlighted in the prologue is further revealed. Those that choose to walk in him will never stumble in darkness. Instead, they are promised that they will have “the light of life.”

The “light” metaphor that John applies here finds its origins in the Old Testament. The glory of God, in the form of a cloud and pillar of fire, led Israel to the Promised Land (Exod 13:21-22). The Lord was with his people and went ahead of them. Also, the angel of God protected Israel from the Egyptians by causing darkness to prevail over the Egyptians and the light prevailed over the Israelites (Exod 14:19-25). In Psalm 27:1 David says: “The LORD is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life of whom shall I be afraid?” We see in this verse the coining of light and life together. The word salvation is similar to the word “life” and “light” in this verse. And in John 8:12 we learn that those who choose to believe in Jesus walk in the “light of life.” Jesus illuminates the way for life just as the pillar of fire lighted the way for the nation of Israel.

The prophet Isaiah (9:2) was also moved to say, “The people walking in darkness have seen great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” The dawning of the light brings with it salvation, or life, to those who were on the verge of dying. Still in Isaiah (49:6), the role of the Servant of the LORD was to be a light for the Gentiles for the salvation (life) of the earth. “The coming eschatological age would be a time when the LORD himself would be the light for his people (Isa 60:19-22; cf. Rev 21:23-24)” (Carson, 1991:338). Jesus claims to be exactly that in John 8:12.

The word of God or the law of God (νόμος) is regarded as “a lamp to my feet” and a “light to my path” (Ps. 119:105; Pr 6:23). More so, the unfolding of God’s word gives light (Ps. 119:130). Thus, whoever abides by the word of God or the law had illumination of life. Apart from the law, Barrett (1978:336) notes that Wisdom also comes within the range of the light metaphor in Proverbs 8:22. To gain Wisdom is to get the illumination of life.

Zechariah 14:5-7 could be important with its mention of ceaseless light on the last day. This is also followed by the continuous flow of living waters from Jerusalem. This passage could be part of the liturgical readings of the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7:37-39 (Carson, 1991:338). Also, the burning of the lights was part of this feast. In *Sukkah* 5:2-4 (see also Josephus *Against Apollion* 2.118) a description of this feast is given. “In the Court of Women there were four golden candlesticks ...with four golden bowls on the top of them and four ladders to each candlestick....They made wicks from the worn out drawers and girdles of the priests and with them they set the candlesticks alight, and there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the House of Water drawing...” (Barrett, 1978:335). The lighting celebration recalled the pillar of fire in the wilderness that led Israel at night (Ex 13:21; cf. Ps 78:14; 105:39; Neh 9:12, 19). Interestingly, the evangelist does not confine the light imagery strictly to this feast (Keener, 2003:739). Jesus stands in the Court of the Women and utters the declaration: “I am the light of the world.” The light of the candlesticks could only illuminate the courtyards of Jerusalem.

But Jesus claims that he is the light of the entire world. In other passages, he spoke about life-giving, but in this context he speaks about the life-giving light. Like in other passages this could be referring to his revelation and salvation that comes with enlightenment (Brown, 1966:344). It is only in him and through him that the glorious attributes of God are revealed. He alone is the light. This has a close connection with 1:4 and 1:9. The one who had been shining and fighting for Israel in the wilderness was in their midst. The purposes of the Torah and Wisdom as light find fulfillment in Jesus. The Feast of Tabernacles is fulfilled in Jesus. All these were pointing to him and nothing can go beyond him. The imperishable light of the Law mentioned in Wisdom 18:3-4, is Jesus.

The declaration is the culmination of the prophecy in Isaiah 42:6; 49:6 and 51:4, which speak of the Servant of the Lord as a light to the Gentiles, and indeed the Lord himself as the light to the nations (world) (Kruse, 2003:202). He is the eschatological light (3:9; 12:46).

This declaration (8:12) is strategically placed because Jesus in 9:5 says again, “I am the light of the world.” This was after Jesus restored the sight of the man who was born blind. If he can restore the sight of the blind, he can purge the darkness in our hearts so that we can have “the light of life”. Thus, the evangelist seeks to consolidate and clarify (1:4; 1:9; 8:12 and 12:46).

Jesus does not leave his audience in mid air. He goes on to make a promise: “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” The phrase “Whoever follows me...” prompts one to think about the nation of Israel following the presence of the Lord in the form of a pillar of fire (Ex 13:21; Neh 9:12; Ps 78:14; 2 *Esdras* 1:14). The promise of salvation that Jesus lays down here is much broader than the salvation experienced by Israel. Israel’s deliverance (salvation) was from national enemies. But those who follow Jesus will be saved from evil forces and will have an ongoing life not characterized by darkness because they have the “light of life” (Whitacre, 1999:211). Jesus also used the “Whoever or All” meaning not only Jews, but

also anyone who believes in the teaching of Jesus and follows him will not walk in darkness but in the light.

“Walk in darkness,” is understood as a description of humanity living in sin in the Dead Seas Scrolls. It (darkness) is the domain of death and a lack of a saving revelation, resulting in a life that has no direction (12:35) (Schnackenburg, 1971:191). In *1QS* 3:20-21 we read, “All the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light, but all the children of injustice are ruled by the Angel of Darkness and walk in the ways of darkness.” Though, their emphasis is on moral life there is emphasis on “walking in light” and “walking in darkness” (cf. *1QS* 4:11; *1QM* 13:12). The ideas in these passages seem to have a closer connection with the fourth evangelist. Those who choose not to follow Jesus will walk in darkness. Their lives lack the saving revelation that comes from God himself.

The phrase “...the light of life” refers to “the light which both springs from life and issues in life; of which life is the essential principle and the necessary result” (Westcott, 1908:3). Jesus promises that his followers will have “the light of life.” This phrase recalls 1:4: “In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” People will be able to live in fellowship with God because their lives have been enlightened. The quality of their life is transformed. The possession of the “light of life” is not something distant according to John. It commences the instant someone puts his faith in Jesus (3:16) and it lasts into eternity (6:51, 58 cf. 8:51-52; 10:28; 11:26).

The “light of life” phrase has its origins in the Old Testament, Job 33:30, “...to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him.” Also Psalm 56:13, “For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life” (see also, Job 3:16; 18:18; Ps 38:10; 36:9; 49:19; Prov 29:13; Eccl. 12:2). Here we have the coining of life and light in the Old Testament, something that we also find in John 1:4; 8:12.

“In apocalyptic literature, the phrase acquires an eschatological significance” (Schnackenburg, 1971:191). *1 Enoch* 58:3, “The righteous ones shall be in the light of the sun and the elect ones in the *light of eternal life* (italics mine) which has no end, and the days of the life of the holy ones cannot be numbered.” *Psalms of Solomon* 3:12 describes how this is achieved, “...but those who fear the Lord shall rise up to eternal life, and their life shall be in the Lord’s light, and it shall never end.”

Jesus Christ is understood as the “light of all the aeons, the inextinguishable lamp, the life of faith (*4 Bar* 9:14). He is the “true light that enlightens me” (*4 Bar* 9:4). This verse has a close parallel with John 1:9, “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” At the coming of Jesus the Law, John the Baptist and any witness to the light were rendered obsolete (8:12; 9:5) (Painter, 1975:33). The illumination that Jesus gives is similar to his life giving aspect. The two are inseparable for it is impossible to have one without the other.

The Dead Sea Scrolls give us further parallels on the “light of life” phrase in John. In *IQS* 3:7, “For it is through the spirit of true counsel concerning the ways of man that all his sins shall be expiated that he may contemplate the light of life.” Barrett (1978:338) notes, “light of life” “probably refers to the Law and is thus a parallel only in that Jesus takes the place of the Law.” In *IQS* 4:7-8, there is reference to life which endures forever which is an understanding similar to John. Also in *IQM* 13:5; cf. 17:16, we learn that the company of God is one of eternal Light.

Thus, Jesus is the fulfillment of the light mentioned in the Old Testament and the Palestinian Jewish writings of the first century. In the Old Testament, apocalyptic writings, and Dead Sea Scrolls, the “light of life” could refer to God or the Law. But John links the “light of life” directly with Jesus the Light of the world. So, choosing to follow Jesus the Light of the world, gives the believer salvation and the assurance of avoiding the perils and snares of the darkness and the promise of possessing “the light of life” (Murray, 1987:128).

For the Jews, the Torah was their light. It showed them how to live for God. “Their basic error was in thinking that they knew the way of life and already possessed it. They put their faith in the Feasts and in this case the Feast of Tabernacles. All these were witnesses to the Jesus who is the “Light of the world.” He reveals the true life that mankind should choose. He is the light of mankind who are living in darkness. The revelation that he gives condemns the false life and illuminates the authentic life (eternal life). Those who choose to believe in him are saved from walking in darkness. This is what John means by “...and that life was the light of men” (1:5). The light of the Feast of Tabernacles could be extinguished, but the light of Jesus continues forever in the whole world.

4.7 Putting faith in the light 12:35-36

“Light” is repeated four times in these verses. Do all the appearances have the same meaning? If the meanings are different, do they contribute to our understanding of “light” in the prologue? Following is the Greek text and a translation of the verses in English.

Greek (BTN)	English (NIV)
<p>³⁵ εἶπεν οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἔτι μικρὸν χρόνον τὸ φῶς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστίν. περιπατεῖτε ὥς τὸ φῶς ἔχετε, ἵνα μὴ σκοτία ὑμᾶς καταλάβῃ· καὶ ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει. ³⁶ ὥς τὸ φῶς ἔχετε, πιστεύετε εἰς τὸ φῶς, ἵνα υἱοὶ φωτὸς γένησθε.</p>	<p>35 Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.”</p>

4.7.1 Exegesis of 12:35-36

In verse 35 Jesus is supposed to answer the question, “Who is this Son of Man?” He chooses not to answer it. If his audience was listening and understanding what he was saying, such misunderstandings could be avoided. So, because they failed to understand him each time he spoke, judgement was imminent (v.31).

Jesus tells them a parable which serves as a final appeal for them to believe in him before it is too late (Lindars, 1978:435). In other words, his reply channels them to respond to the light in their midst. Should these people choose to abandon their misconception about the Messiah their mist will be cleared. They were going to have the light "...a little while longer." This refers to Jesus' physical presence on earth before he goes back to the Father. Because of the shortness of his time on earth, he commands them to walk while they have the light.

Lindars (1978:435) notes that this seems to recall 9:4; 11:9f and 8:12. We must note that in 9:4 and 11:9f Jesus is referring to the physical light of the day. But the idea of walking while the light is present is what matters for our study. And in 8:12 and 12:35-36, "light" is directly linked with Jesus. The statement, "Walk while you have the light," (v.35) is written in the present imperative with the sense "keep on walking" (Morris, 1971:600). Failing to entrust one's faith to the light (Jesus) results in being overtaken by the darkness. This recalls 1:5, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not understood it."

The purpose of the light is to overcome the darkness. It is so with those who choose to walk in the light. "Light which is the life of God himself, has come into the world. The only proper response is to welcome it, go toward it and walk by it" (Newbigin, 1982:163). Isaiah 50:10 exhorts the one walking in the dark to "...trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God." Jesus also commands people to walk while they have the light. When John uses "walk", it is not used in a strict literal sense, but is used in connection with moral life (8:12; 11:9) (Barrett, 1978:428).

In verse 36a, Jesus encourages his audience to put their faith in the light. And verse 36b, states the reason why they should do so, "so that you may become sons of light." The phrase "sons of light" "fits the language of the sectarian Palestinian Judaism which spoke of the "children of light" versus the "children of darkness" (Keener, 2003:882). Those who enter into the covenant of the community while walking with idols, "shall be cut off from the midst of all the sons of light" (*1QS* 2:6). In *1QS* 3:13, the role of the Master is to

instruct all “the sons of light.” The evil spirits seek to overthrow the “sons of light” but God will grant victory to the “sons of light” (*IQS* 3:24-25).

Unlike their enemies, the “sons of light” shall enjoy the blessing of God and they shall shine eternally (*IQM* 1:9 cf. 1:10-13). In the end time, on the final day of battle the angel shall “bring Darkness low and magnify Light...to stand forever and to destroy all sons of Darkness” (*IQM* 13:14-15). Morris (1971:600-601) notes that both John and the Qumran are indebted to Isaiah 50:10. But they understand and apply it differently.

The “sons of light” who are the members of the Qumran Community hope to have victory over the “sons of darkness” because they obey and abide by the commands of God. Whereas in John those who have victory over darkness “put trust in the light.” Jesus is the light that dispels the darkness that encompasses them. Also, the language of Qumran leaves the “sons of darkness” without hope of salvation. They will be completely annihilated. There is hope in the fourth gospel for the “sons of darkness” if they choose to put their faith in the light and become “the sons of light.” This makes a remarkable difference from the Qumran. At Qumran, they are never summoned to believe in the light and to be part of the “sons of light.” Thus, to have the light of Jesus through faith is to have the light of life (1:4).

4.8 CONCLUSION

Similar to the prologue, in this chapter John links life and light with Jesus. Firstly, life he understands in terms of its quality as it relates to Jesus. To be eligible for the quantity and quality of life one needs to believe in Jesus (Jon. 3:16). This is suggested in the prologue (1:7, 12) and is later attested to as the gospel unfolds. The possession of life by faith in Jesus is something that the recipient experiences now and lasts into eternity. Death concludes human life, but at the resurrection Jesus physically restores the lives of those who believed in him. Life now can have quality and transformation if it is lived in fellowship with God. The life received at the resurrection has more quality and quantity in that all the life-threatening circumstances will be foreign to this life. So, death is not

viewed as a threat to those who put their faith in Jesus. Instead, it is a gateway to the more desirable life - a life of eternal fellowship with God. God, through the revelation of Jesus takes the initiative to bring life to mankind (John 3:16). The roles of the Law and Wisdom in the Old Testament and Palestinian Jewish writings are fulfilled in Jesus (e.g. *Sir* 7; 45:5; *Baruch* 4:1; *Wis* 6: 18; 7:14). "Jesus is himself the presence of the life which is God's gift beyond death" (Newbigin, 1982:142).

On the other hand, the theme of light is crucial to the fourth gospel. As early as 1:4, we learn that the life of Jesus is the light of men. He was the true light coming into the world (1:9). This "light" refers to the revelation, enlightenment, and illumination of God through Jesus. To have "light" is similar to having "life" according to John. One cannot have one without the other. So Jesus later declares, "I am the light of the world" those who believe in him will have the "light of life" (8:12). The purpose of the light (Jesus) is to dispel the darkness, and darkness and sin according to John mean the same thing. Darkness will never conquer the light. That is why the light shines in darkness (1:5). In this way the "light" is understood as victory, success and all the blessings that come with it. The lack of "light" means suffering, defeat, pain and ultimately death without hope of life. The same applies to those who deny the life in the Word. Thus, Palestinian Judaism and John both have their roots on "life" and "light" in the Old Testament. But John is very explicit in that Jesus is the light and life. Unlike the Old Testament and the first century Palestinian Judaism, John focuses more on the present and future reality of the life and light that we have in Jesus. Finally, John uses terms and ideas very close to Qumran but his theology is different from theirs.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter seeks firstly to establish the conclusions of the previous research. Secondly, it seeks to establish a determination of the role of “life” and “light” and how they relate in the fourth gospel. Thirdly, it seeks to find the significant implications the above study has for the understanding of the fourth gospel. And finally, we wish to find out how this study impacts contemporary Christianity in South Africa.

5.1 Research Conclusions

In our study thus far we have examined the background of the concepts “life” and “light” (Jn 1:4-5).

In Chapter one, we discussed the relationship of the prologue to the rest of the gospel. We saw that opinions vary. Some scholars believe that the prologue does not have any relationship with the rest of the gospel, others say that it has a close connection with the rest of the gospel. Our study has shown that the prologue is carefully crafted and coherent with the rest of the gospel. Thus, our study on “life” and “light” begins in the prologue and is elaborated in the rest of gospel.

Still in chapter one, we discussed the importance of the religious background that influenced the author of the fourth gospel. A study of this background should help the reader understand better what John meant by “life” and “light”. The study of the religious background is one way of engaging in sound and responsible hermeneutics. Scholars have proposed and subscribed to different conceptual backgrounds. Some of them have proved helpful in understanding the fourth gospel. Our central argument is that the Old Testament and its development in first century Palestinian Judaism is a more plausible background to understanding the “life” and “light” concepts in the fourth gospel than other backgrounds.

In Chapter two, we discussed some of the proposed backgrounds of the fourth gospel. We attempted to accomplish two objectives. Firstly, we wanted to establish the current state of scholarship regarding the background of the fourth gospel, and secondly, to identify the most helpful background that one can use to read and explore “life” and “light” in the fourth gospel.

The first possible background that we discussed was Gnosticism. We saw that John’s thinking was antithetical to the entailing ideas of later Gnosticism. Dualism is at the core of this religion. It centers on a redeemer who could not mingle with the material world. But John speaks of a redeemer who took on human form and dwelt among men (Jon. 1:14). Also, in Gnosticism salvation is received through revealed knowledge to individuals. John instructs his readers that salvation comes to individuals through faith in Jesus. This makes it very unappealing that Gnosticism was the conceptual background that influenced John.

Some scholars propose that John was dependent on Philo the Alexandrian Jew. A close look at Philo reveals that he sought to combine Judaism with Greek thought. In our study, we saw that philosophy, eclecticism and religion infiltrated his thinking. A major point of contact between Philo and John is seen in the use of Logos. But a closer study of the Logos idea shows that the philosophical thinking found in Philo does not exist in the fourth gospel. Sometimes Philo used the plural “*logoi*” and this is not found in the fourth gospel. Also, in Philo the Logos does not become flesh as we learn in John 1:14. Like Philo, John is firmly grounded in the Old Testament. John and Philo derive their Logos idea from the Old Testament. But Philo goes beyond the Old Testament by incorporating contemporary Greek philosophical thinking. And the allegorical understanding that he employs has no parallel in John. John uses the Logos idea but he presents it in a way that is different from Philo. The truth is that they shared the same background but their “methodological procedure” was completely different (Brown, 1966:lviii).

Others proposed that the fourth gospel is similar to Greek Hermetic Literature. This body of literature demonstrates a combination of Platonic and Stoic doctrine. The gnostic

elements are also prevalent in Hermetic writings. Also, notable in this body of literature is the use of “life” and “light” concepts. Their frequent occurrences led some scholars to say that Hermetic writings form part of John’s background. If Gnosticism cannot be the conceptual background that influenced John, then the Hermetic writings automatically fall to the ground for two reasons. The first reason is that the gnostic elements found in Hermetic writings are not reflected in John. Secondly, this body of literature is considered by many scholars to be 2nd or 3rd century. Therefore, John cannot derive his thinking from it because of its lateness. Thus, it offers the reader no help in interpreting the fourth gospel.

Still, others have proposed the possibility of having Mandaism as the background that influenced John. Williams (2002:2) describes it well, “this is confused religion of myth, fairy tale, theology and dubious history.” It is also very late and there is no way John could have borrowed from it. Instead, it would make sense to say that Mandaism borrowed from John. The other background that has not received great attention is the Samaritan background, this is considered to be very late and cannot form part of John’s background.

The current state of scholarship suggests that the Old Testament, Rabbinic Judaism and Qumran are the most probable backgrounds for interpreting the fourth gospel. Our study has demonstrated that some of the ideas and terms found in John have parallels with Pharisaic Judaism of Jesus’ time. This suggests that they share the same source (the Old Testament). While the parallels between Pharisaic Judaism of Jesus’ time and John are so real, we cannot also neglect their differences.

Some scholars have expressed the view that John does not know his Old Testament very well. However, we concluded that, firstly, whether John had a good or bad understanding of the Old Testament, he demonstrates great faithfulness in propagating the knowledge found in his tradition. Secondly, he is someone who has absorbed the Old Testament and pondered it seriously. Thus, the Old Testament and its development in first century

Palestinian Judaism is the most plausible background to understanding “life” and “light” in the fourth gospel compared to other backgrounds.

In Chapter three, we sought to understand the meaning of “life” and “light” in the Old Testament and the intertestamental literature, with a view to better understand the meaning of “life” and “light” in John.

We found that the Old Testament does not furnish the reader with a specific meaning of life. But certain terms and concepts (physical life, soul and spirit) that demonstrate how “life” is understood are used. Life is understood as physical life under God’s rule before the fall of man in Genesis 3. This life was characterized with immortality and not threatened by the maladies that bring death. After the fall, it became impossible for humans to live forever because of the sin that entered human life. Man’s relationship with God was affected in every way. Life threatening circumstances affected man’s life. This led Job to say that man goes down to the grave and does not return (Job 7:9). Human life is understood as growing, fleeting and withering like grass (Ps. 39:4; 90:5-6).

On the other hand, longevity of physical life is understood as a gift of Wisdom. This life is accompanied with riches, good health and honour. This suggests quality life. Proverbs constantly makes a comparison of quality life with non-quality life. God is the source of this type of life (Deut 5:16). Also, obedience to the Torah led to the assurance of quality life. Failure to obey God’s commands resulted in suffering, defeat and death for Israel (Deut 30:17-19).

But whether one lived in obedience or not, no one is insulated from death. There arose a hope of life beyond death based on the nature and uniqueness of God (Isa 46). He is able to uphold life (Jer 10:10). This is the nature of God. Then he has power over human life and death (Deut 32:39). God can grant life beyond the grave. The dead are physically raised to life again (Isa 26:19). The righteous will be raised to everlasting life while the wicked will be raised to shame and everlasting contempt (Dan 12:2). The quality of the

resurrection life is greater than that of the life lived under God's rule before death. Therefore, death can be understood as a gateway to eternal life for the righteous.

Like the Old Testament, Palestinian Judaism also attests to the fact that God is the source of human life. And life lived apart from him is accompanied with pain, distress and lack of other blessings. Obedience to the Torah was also understood as a way to quality life (2 *Bar* 38:2f). People who chose to abide by the Law received favour from God (*Ps Sol* 14:2). The more one obeyed the Torah the more life one got (*Aboth* 2:7). Wisdom has the same role as in the Old Testament. Those who obeyed the instruction of wisdom were assured of incorruption and eternal life (*Wis* 6:18).

In the intertestamental period, the Israelites faced persecution from their enemies. Some of this persecution culminated in some of them being murdered by their foes. But the conviction of life after death caused them not to denounce their beliefs. In 2 *Maccabees* 7, they believed that God was going to raise them to eternal life. They looked forward to the resurrection life because they knew that it was free of pain, death and all the troubles found in life. In *Enoch* 58:3, the righteous shall be in the light of the sun and have eternal life. The same hope of a life beyond death is expressed in *4Q521*. The Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism express close similarities in their understanding of life.

After exploring all the possible meanings of "life" in the Old Testament and the intertestamental period, what could be John's understanding of life? We concluded that John refers to eternal life lived under God's rule. This is quality life, which begins now and lasts into eternity according to John. So when he says, "In him was life" (1:4) this is what he means. It is given to those who choose to put their faith in Jesus. And those who refuse to do so are faced with the maladies of life without any hope of deliverance.

Our study also attempted to understand the meaning of "light" in the Old Testament and the intertestamental period and we came up with the following meanings. In the Old Testament light is firstly understood as physical light mentioned in Genesis 1:3. In later times, people worshipped the lights and God commanded them not to do so (*Deut* 4:19;

17:3). It is part of creation and God wants all the worship to be directed to him as the Creator.

God is also understood as light in Psalm 27:1. Reference is made to the salvation and joyous victory that he brings to his people as light. Not only does his light bring salvation, it also brings judgement (Isa 10:17). Thus, light serves to illuminate and to judge those who deny its presence. To walk in the light according to the Old Testament is the God-ordained purpose of human existence. Those who do not walk in the light face failure, suffering, hopelessness and ultimately death (Isa 8:22; Ex 10:22-23). "Light" is also understood as light of the Torah and Wisdom. The presence of the Torah and Wisdom in one's life brings quality of life, success, victory and guidance.

The understanding of light in the intertestamental period is similar to the Old Testament understanding of light. To have the light of the Lord meant peace, blessedness and prosperity in life (*1 Enoch* 58:6). The lack of it meant sorrow and death (*1 Enoch* 108:15). Also, in Jewish tradition people like Abraham, Moses and David were considered as lights because of their righteous acts. But the Messiah is the ultimate light, who was still to come (*1 Enoch* 48:4 cf. Isa 42:6; 49:6). This thought becomes very explicit in *2 Baruch* 9:14 that Jesus is the light. And as in the Old Testament, Torah and Wisdom played the same role as light (*2 Bar* 17:14; Wis 7:26). And the absence of the two results in dire consequences.

Both the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism saw a close association of "life" and "light". The meaning of "life" and "light" display very intimate similarities. It is impossible to have "life" without "light" or vice versa. Palestinian Judaism develops this close association of the two concepts found in the Old Testament.

After studying John 1:4-5 one finds that John is speaking about "life" that is qualitatively different from natural life (*psyche*). Death cannot destroy this life (11:26). This type of life together with all its blessings is linked with the Logos. John talks about other types of life but he is largely interested in *zoe* in the fourth gospel. "Light" means illumination

that leads to salvation and ultimately to quality of life. As in the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism, it is also impossible to have the “life” that Jesus gives without “light”. John sees a close association of the two concepts. And the function of the Torah and Wisdom as light in the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism is fulfilled in Jesus (Jn 5:39-40).

Through the exegesis of selected passages that relate to “life” and “light,” chapter four clarifies John’s understanding of these concepts. In passages that relate to “life” (Jn 3:5-18; 5:21-30, 39-40; 6:32-40), “life” is closely linked with Jesus. He is the source of life. The life that he gives to those who believe in him has quality and lasts forever. Life lived apart from Jesus is characterized by lack of hope, guidance, quality and ultimately death. The “life” that Jesus gives cannot be defeated by death and he will physically restore it to his people at the resurrection. Even in the face of difficulties, the quality of this life overcomes and does not depreciate.

Unlike in the Old Testament and first century Palestinian Judaism, John highlights that the “life” that Jesus gives begins now and continues forever. So when John says, “In him was life” (1:4a) he refers to the quality and everlastingness of the life that Jesus gives.

Like “life”, “light” is also linked with Jesus in the fourth gospel. In the following passages: John 3:19-21; 8:12; 12:46 and 12:35-36, we found out that light means the illumination, salvation and transformation that Jesus gives. It is a “light” that rescues people from dying in darkness by continuously shining. Jesus claims to be the light of the world. The rejection of Jesus as the Light of the world also brings judgement on those who do so (3:19-21). The coming of Jesus as “the Light” divides mankind, condemns false life and leads some to the authentic life that he alone gives.

The role of Torah and Wisdom as light in the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism is taken now by Jesus. Jesus as the light illuminates people’s hearts such that their lives are transformed. The transformation leads such people not to live as those in darkness. They love to live in obedience and honour of God. This points to a quality of life that is

different to our general physical existence on earth. Therefore, the “life” and “light” concepts in John have a deeply related meaning.

5.2 The significance of this study in understanding the fourth gospel

The religious background that influenced the author of the fourth gospel is important in the understanding of the fourth gospel. In our study, the Old Testament and its development in first century Palestinian Judaism is the most plausible background against which to understand the “Life” and “Light” concepts in the fourth gospel. An understanding of the conceptual background prevents the reader from engaging in a subjective interpretation of the fourth gospel.

Pharisaic Judaism of the first century has surely assisted us in finding John’s background. But some scholars have abused it. Caution should be taken against engaging in what some scholars call “parallelomania”. Thus, the Jewish texts that we use need to be studied and used properly, not just for the sake of having parallels. After comprehending the conceptual background of the author, it is the responsibility of the reader, to demonstrate how it fits in with the understanding and interpretation of the fourth gospel.

5.3 Epilogue: How does the study impact contemporary Christianity in South Africa?

Modern life has been understood by many as the ideal life. It is a life marked by material possessions and good physical outlook to impress those around us. This type of life is limited to those who have the financial capability and has some quality of its own that is temporal. The poor are excluded from such life and are looked down on by the rich classes in society. But when disaster strikes such life proves futile and hopeless. This research has led us to the fact that our lives can only have meaning, purpose, hope and eternal quality if we by faith receive the life that Jesus gives. This life begins now when we put our faith in Jesus and continues forever. This is because we are created to live in

fellowship with God. Thus, we are made to live under God's rule. We were not created to live in any way we like.

Although we face death, God physically restores our life to us at the resurrection. The resurrection life shall be independent of all the life threatening circumstances. The life that Jesus gives is not restricted to any specific group of people. Neither does it create a sense of inferiority. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved *the world*³¹ that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." And in John 17:3 Jesus says, "Now this is eternal life: that they may *know you*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent". Eternal life comes by having a personal saving relationship with God.

On the South African national television I have often heard people saying, "If you want success and good life, you have to believe in yourself." Our study has proved that success and authentic life comes by having faith (believing) in Jesus. There is nothing more or nothing less to this. Even in the midst of terminal sickness, oppression, racial prejudice, segregation, HIV/AIDS and natural catastrophes in South Africa, the life that Jesus gives continues. It does not diminish with adversity.

"Light" is understood today by many in South Africa as technological advancement and academic achievement. People in these two camps are considered enlightened. But this kind of "light" is easily overcome by numerous troubles found in earthly life. For instance, many South Africans place their confidence in technology. To have the latest mobile phone, computer, car etc, are some of the things that prove that one is enlightened.

But with incessant crime in this country, some do not live to see the next day or what they put their confidence in gets stolen. It is stated (Website article titled "South Africa's Crime Crisis"), "A serious crime is committed every 17 seconds in South Africa and Johannesburg is the epicenter of the crisis." This clearly spells out the constant loss of

³¹ Italics mine

lives experienced in South Africa. Many people are traumatized and live in constant fear. In another article published in 2005, approximately R11 billion has been set aside to fight against crime and this amount is equivalent to 11% of total government spending.

Given the current state of the depressing circumstances in South Africa, what matters most is our union with Christ, the true light. Men and women involved in a series of crimes can have true enlightenment if they receive Jesus as the light of the world. They would know how to use the enlightenment they received from technology for a good cause. The “light” that Jesus gives through his word brings true illumination, quality of life, hope, well being, salvation, eternal security, and true enlightenment. It changes the way people think and behave so that they will live for God alone. And those that are on the verge of dying because of HIV/AIDS and in total darkness could receive salvation and live under God’s rule as God’s people. This reminds us of 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in face of Christ.” Jesus is the “Life” and “light” (Jn 8:12; 11:25) needed by South Africa and the world at large.

The transformation that the light brings leads to quality life and ultimately transformed society because Jesus is the anchor of this life. Similarly, when one receives “life” he receives the enlightenment (light) that comes with it. It is impossible to receive the “life” that Jesus gives and not to have the “light” shine in our hearts.

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