

THE MEANINGS OF πιστεύω IN JOHN 2:23-24

by

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A key to understanding the meaning of πιστεύω as it is used in John 2:23-24 is to trace its OT antecedents. Doing this may facilitate the scholar's understanding of how the OT concept of faith influenced John's meaning.

An examination of the OT concept of faith reveals several key words used by the OT writers: כָּסַל, יָעַץ, נָטַח, קָרָה, יָחַל, and חָכַם. נָטַח is the most general term to express trust, or placing confidence in someone or something. The object of this confidence is always determined by the context. Numerous examples of the objects of the verb are clarified by considering the usage of the prepositions בְּ, לְ, and אֶל. Several shades of meaning of this general term (נָטַח) are traced through the OT, and examples given of each.

Another key word (which the LXX almost always adopts for πιστεύω) is the causative form of נָטַח, as in its first occurrence in Genesis 15:6. A study of the importance of נָטַח and נָטַח in the OT gives sufficient reason to believe that John as a NT writer was greatly influenced by his understanding of these words while writing his Gospel.

John had a limited vocabulary of 114 primary or basic words. Πιστεύω appears often, and in the context of 2:23-24 it must be noted that John employs other key words such as σημεῖον and γινώσκω. When his usage of these is understood in light of John's clear understanding of the deity of Christ (as shown in his accounts of Christ's explicit knowledge of the hearts of men), then his use of πιστεύω in these verses is defined by the context. Furthermore, a study of the language employed by John reveals that πιστεύω in both verses shows the kind of faith expressed. To assert that the object instead of the nature of the people's faith is the main issue is to misconstrue John's purpose.

In order to deal fairly with the text of John 2:23-24, controversial considerations concerning the "consensus view" are addressed, and it is concluded that the meaning of πιστεύω must be confined to the context in which it is written. In this case the context and meaning of this word depend ultimately on the interpretation of Jesus Christ, and not on a characteristic usage by John. Christ knew that the multitude in 2:23 were not true believers; therefore, He would not entrust himself to them.

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Adviser

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAGD	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament
BBB	Believers Bible Bulletin
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament
BSac	Bibliotheca Sacra
BT	The Bible Translator
CH	Church History
DNTT	Dictionary of New Testament Theology
ExpTim	Expository Times
GKC	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, ed. E. Kautzsch, tr. A. E. Cowley
GTJ	Grace Theological Journal
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
KB	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros
MT	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TS	Theological Studies
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

## INTRODUCTION

One day, as the writer was reading John 2:23-25, he noticed the fact that here was a group of people "believing in" Christ; yet, Christ would "not believe or entrust himself to them." The first question that came to the writer's mind was, "Why would Christ do such a thing to people who apparently meant business with Him?" The seriousness of the fact that Christ would not commit himself to them led to the question, "What effect does this have on my life and on the lives of others who believe on Christ today?" The writer wanted to know the importance of these verses.

One significance of John 2:23-24 is the light it sheds upon the πιστεύω verbal complex and in particular πίστις in the NT. "Faith" and "belief" in modern English are two words whose meaning is most often rendered as "mental assent, trust, confidence, fidelity, allegiance to duty or person and loyalty."<sup>1</sup>

In the NT πίστις is not separated from actions and life just as in the OT אֱמוּנָה (faithfulness, firmness, steadfastness) indicated a committed or steady life.<sup>2</sup> T. Barrosse observes:

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<sup>1</sup>See Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, 2nd edition (1970), s.v. "faith" and "belief," pp. 169, 658.

<sup>2</sup>BDB, p. 53.

The usual formula for Christian faith (the disciples' faith) is "to believe in" (Gk. *eis*) Christ. By believing in Christ a man becomes His disciple. Only by believing in Him can a man have the eternal life that goes to His disciples (Jn. 6:29, 40). The various passages in which the expression occurs reveal the full meaning of this faith in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

As this study progressed, it became evident to the writer that though this was the usual Christian formula, there was no unimpeachable guarantee that every time this formula was used the person was a true believer. It is the purpose of this thesis to gather all pertinent biblical data in John's revelational sequence so that an understanding of John's use of πιστεύω in John 2:23, 24 might be understood.

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<sup>1</sup>T. Barrosse, "The Relationship of Love to Faith in St. John," TS 18:4 (1957): 539.

## CHAPTER I

### BIBLICAL BACKGROUND OF ΠΙΣΤΕΥΩ

#### Meaning of the Hebrew Words

The purpose of this chapter is to attempt a synthesis of the faith-concept in the OT to show how it may have influenced John's use of the word πιστεύω. There are several key words that may be examined to illuminate the OT concept of faith. Weiser says:

In spite of the purely statistical insignificance of the use of אָמֵן, the meaning of the stems קוּחַ, יָחַל, חָכָה, נָפַשׁ, חָסָה, which originally was very limited, expanded along the lines of הֶאֱמִין in expression of the exclusive personal relation between man and God.<sup>1</sup>

Some brief illustrations of a few of the Hebrew words used to convey the OT concept of faith can be seen in the following verses. For example, Psalm 33:20 says: נַפְשֵׁנוּ (חָכָה) חָכָה לַיהוָה עֲזָרָנוּ וּמִגִּבּוֹר הוּא יְהוָה, "Our soul does wait for (חָכָה) Jehovah, He is our help and our shield." Another key word that carries the idea of faith is found in Psalm 33:18: הִנֵּה עֵינֵי יְהוָה אֵל יִרְאָיו לְמִיֻּחָדִים לְחַסְדּוֹ, "Behold the eyes of Jehovah are upon them that fear him, for them that wait [לְמִיֻּחָדִים] in his steadfast love" (see also Pss. 18:3 and 119:49). Genesis 49:18 provides another illustration of waiting upon the LORD as seen in the following: קוֹיָתִי יְהוָה

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "The Old Testament Concept" in: "πιστεύω, κτλ.," by Artur Weiser, 6:190.

לְיִשְׁעָךָ, "I have waited [קוֹיָתִי] for your salvation, O Jehovah." There is also the idea of God being a refuge, another example of the faith concept seen in the OT; note 2 Samuel 22:3, which says: מִשְׁנִי וּמִנְדִּי מַשְׁעִי מִחַמָּם הִשְׁעָנִי, "God is my rock; I shall take refuge [חֹסֶה] in him. [He is] my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower and my refuge [מִנְיָו]; my saviour, you shall save me from violence."

There are other key ideas that express the OT concept of faith, such as "setting confidence" (פָּסַל) in God (Prov. 3:26); "relying" (שָׁעַן) upon God (2 Chr. 16:7, 8); and "staying" (סָמַךְ) themselves upon the God of Israel (Isa. 48:2). These are only a few of the words that give a picture of the attitude required by the Lord of his believing people in the OT.

It is not the purpose of this writer to do a word study on the afore-mentioned Hebrew words, but to outline two of these key words in their OT context to show how these may have influenced John in his Gospel. The first of these is בָּטַח. Girdlestone comments:

The most general word to express trust is בָּטַח, to confide in, or lean upon. Here it is to be remarked that, though we are in the habit of speaking of faith and trust as the same thing, the Hebrew has two distinct words for them and so has the LXX. Whilst aman answers to πιστεύω, to believe, or realise, bathach, to trust, is never so rendered, nor is the substantive derived from it ever rendered πίστις.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Girdlestone, Synonyms of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1976), p. 104.

In dealing with the meaning of the word  $\text{בטח}$  in the OT it should be noted (as with other words, so is it with this one) that the meaning can be determined only by its usage in context.<sup>1</sup> However, this word has several shades of meaning, some of which are: "feel secure," "to be firm," "to trust," "be confident, rely on."<sup>2</sup> Among these various shades of meaning the basic idea of  $\text{בטח}$  is "to trust."<sup>3</sup> This point may be seen in the following statement: "The basic idea would then have to do with firmness or solidity. Be that as it may, in Hebrew batah expresses that sense of wellbeing and security which results from having something or someone in whom to place confidence."<sup>4</sup> From this one can see that the basic idea of the word is an act of the volition in that the person totally rests or puts his faith in something or someone. The object of trust is determined by the context.

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<sup>1</sup>TDOT, s.v. " $\text{בטח}$ ," by Alfred Jepsen, 2:88. Francis A. Schaeffer points out that central to semantics is the idea that a word as a symbol has no meaning until content is put into it (The Church at the End of the 20th Century [Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1974], p. 135).

<sup>2</sup>TDOT, s.v. " $\text{בטח}$ ," 2:88.

<sup>3</sup>BDB, p. 105. Artur Weiser gives an excellent discussion of  $\text{בטח}$  and  $\text{πιστεύω}$ . According to him the OT concept of these words is used 57 times in a religious sense and 60 times in a secular sense. TDNT, s.v. " $\text{πιστεύω}$  κτλ.," 6:183.

<sup>4</sup>TWOT, s.v. " $\text{בטח}$ ," by John N. Oswalt, 1:101.

The Term נָטַח with בְּ, לְ, or אֶל

A good point to note was made in BDB concerning the preposition בְּ. When it is used with נָטַח it means "to trust in." Numerous examples as to the object of the verb are given, such as God and persons as well as things.<sup>1</sup> Commenting further concerning נָטַח with various prepositions, William Gesenius says נָטַח means:

to cast oneself or one's cares upon any one; comp. לָעַל לְלֵל Ps. 22,9.--with Prov. 11,28. Ps. 28,7; לָעַל 2 K. 18, 20, 24; אֶל Ps. 4, 6. 31, 7. with dat. pleon. Jer. 7,4 אֶל אֶל-הַבְּרִי נִשְׁקָר לֵאמֹר trust not for yourselves in lying words . . . Hiph. fut. apoc. יִנָּחֵל 1. to cause to trust, to persuade to trust. with אֶל and לְ, Is. 36, 15. Jer. 28, 15. 29, 31.<sup>2</sup>

Now that the various meanings of נָטַח have been briefly outlined along with examples of the different usages of נָטַח with the prepositions, its importance can be seen in the following sections.

#### Pentateuchal Usage

A careful study of the Pentateuchal usages of the root נָטַח will reveal the fact that it is used only once in the verbal form meaning "trust" (Deut. 28:52), and several times in the noun form meaning "security"; for example, Leviticus 25:18; Genesis 34:25; Ezekiel 28:26; 34:25, 28; Proverbs 10:9; Hosea 2:20 and others.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>BDB, p. 105. See also KB, s.v. "נָטַח," p. 118, where it is defined as "be reliant, trust."

<sup>2</sup>GKC, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup>BDB, p. 105.

אָמַן in Genesis 34:25 points to the security felt by the inhabitants of the city who were killed because of taking their security for granted.<sup>1</sup> Though the meaning of אָמַן is not determined by this particular passage (as further examples in this paper will show), this context seems to indicate that it is something which is totally subjective. However, the rightness or wrongness of the choice to trust or feel secure seems to be shown by the context. In Genesis 34:25 the people seemingly had every right to feel secure in their city, but the context here indicates that they made the wrong choice in that it cost them their lives.

#### Historical Usage and Understanding

The trust concept in this section is important especially in relationship to God. The verb אָמַן in 2 Kings 18:5 has reference to Hezekiah, who is contrasted with the idolatrous kings in that he "trusted in Jehovah."<sup>2</sup> This passage provides a key to the understanding of the OT concept of faith because the object of trust is most important. Such a

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<sup>1</sup>TDOT, s.v. "אָמַן," 2:90. In another excellent discussion on this idea of security, Hirsch says: "Two factors could have offered resistance to the progress of the enemy: the fortifications of their cities, which seemed strong in their own eyes, and more than this they had the protection of God." He then concludes: "Neither will help them, the former because they trusted in their fortified cities rather than the support of God and the latter because they had become unworthy of it by failing to be faithful to their duty." S. R. Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, Vol. 5 second ed. (Gateshead: Judaica Press LTD, 1976), p. 575.

<sup>2</sup>Charles John Ellicott, "I Kings-Esther," *A Commentary of the Whole Bible*, eds. H. D. M. Spence and J. S. Excell, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, n.d.), p. 173.

usage is not, however, confined to the historical sections of the OT, because this particular faith concept is found throughout both Old and New Testaments.<sup>1</sup> These usages of *בטח* provide illustrations of the different shades of meaning that John as a NT writer would be able to utilize. The fact that John was influenced by OT Scriptures will be affirmed under the section "The Influence of the OT upon John."

### Poetical Usage

*בטח* in the poetical literature as in Psalm 27:3 (*אֵם אֶחָדָה עָלַי מִחְנָה לֹא-יִירָא לִפְנֵי אֵם-תַּקְוִים עָלַי מִלְחָמָה בְּזֹאֵת אֲנִי בִרְבִּיחַ*) shows that the Psalmist is putting his "confidence" in God. This same terminology was used earlier of those putting their confidence in walls; however, here the Psalmist's thoughts are turned toward God.<sup>2</sup> An example of *בטח* in the poetical literature is in the familiar passage of Proverbs 3:5 which states: *בְּטַח אֶל-יְהוָה כָּכֹל לִבְךָ וְאַל-בִּינְיָהֶךָ אֶל-תִּשְׁעֶר*, "Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and lean not upon your own understanding." Most assuredly it is pointed out that "faith" in

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<sup>1</sup>One of the most helpful and excellent sources to be found on the subject of the OT concept of faith is in vol. 4 of *The Biblical Illustrator*, edited by Joseph Excell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.), p. 295. They are deluded who say that the OT has nothing to say about faith and that faith is only emphasized in the NT. All one would have to do is compare Hebrews 11, where the author concludes, "These all died in faith." It was an OT concept also.

<sup>2</sup>Mitchell Dahood, *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 4 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1939), p. 146.

this portion of Scripture means a reliance upon or a trust in someone, as seen in the foregoing verse.<sup>1</sup>

### Prophetical Usage

The significance of trust, confidence and reliance can no doubt be seen throughout the OT; consequently, one will find that the various usages are present in the prophetical writers as well. However, there are new shades of meanings not mentioned earlier. For example, the participle בטח could be translated "complacent," as וְשָׂאֵל הָיָה הַשְּׂאֵנִים בְּצִיּוֹן וְהַבְּטָחִים בְּתֵר שְׁמִירוֹן נִקְבִּי רֵאשִׁית הַגִּזְיוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ לָהֶם בַּיִת, Amos 6:1, seems to suggest.<sup>2</sup> Weiser presents significant data concerning the use of בטח; he says: "Even in later additions to the prophetic literature בטח has taken on the significance of a term of relationship, though sometimes one catches a weak echo of the original sense of a feeling of security."<sup>3</sup>

### The Term אֱמֶן

The second of the key words to be discussed by the writer is אֱמֶן. Though there are several words that capture

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 799. Another short but good work to consult on trust as it is used in the poetical literature is DNTT, s.v. "Faith," edited by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 589. Concerning faith this work states: "This lies in God's covenant fidelity, election and material goods."

<sup>2</sup>Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, 3:173.

<sup>3</sup>TDNT, s.v. "Πιστεύω," "בטח," 6:192.

the Hebrew concept of commitment, such as trust, hope, and refuge (cf. Meaning of the Hebrew Words, p. 3), for the purpose of this study אֱמוּנָה is pre-eminent. It has been pointed out that "where the word אֱמוּנָה itself is used, one can hardly fail to note its tendency to extend into the most comprehensive possible sphere of application, just as אֱמוּנָה also embraces the whole attitude of a life lived in faith, Hab. 2:4."<sup>1</sup> Concerning the foregoing scope of data it can safely be concluded that אֱמוּנָה generally means faithfulness.<sup>2</sup>

אֱמוּנָה is used in several different ways, such as firmness, steadfastness, fidelity, trust, and steadiness.<sup>3</sup> The importance of this word can be seen in the fact that the LXX almost always adopts πιστεύω as the rendering for the causative form of אֱמוּנָה, as in Genesis 15:6 where it first occurs.<sup>4</sup> The importance of this word and the πιστεύω motif can be seen in the following:

In Biblical and rabbinical literature, and hence in the Jewish conception, "faith" denotes not belief in a dogmatic sense, but either (a) faithfulness (from the passive form = "trusted" or "trustworthy," Deut. vii.9; Deut. xxxii.4: "a god of faithfulness" [emunah; "A. V. "truth"], Ps. xxxvi.6 [A. V. 5]; Prov. xx.6, xxviii.20 "a man of faithfulness" [A. V. "a faithful man"], Hosea

<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "The Old Testament Concept" in "πιστεύω, κτλ.," p. 190. For an excellent discussion of אֱמוּנָה see George J. Zemek, Jr., "Interpretive Challenges Relating to Habakkuk 2:4b," GTJ 1:1 (Spring 1980): 43-69.

<sup>2</sup>Girdlestone, Synonyms of the Old Testament, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup>See BDB, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup>Girdlestone, Synonyms of the Old Testament, p. 103.

11.22 [A. V. 20]: "I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness"; . . . (b) confidence and trust in God, in His word, or in His messenger. . . . In this sense (trust in God) the Rabbis laud and insist on faith as highly meritorious (see classical passage on "amanah" in mek. Beshallah. 6 with reference to Ex. xiv.31); whereas lacking faith ("mehusare amanah." Mek., Beshallah, Shira, 2; comp. ὀλιγοπιστοὶ [= "Men of little faith" = מְחֻסְרֵי אֱמוּנָה].<sup>1</sup>

It is also important to note that אֱמוּנָה is sometimes used to refer to a person's relationship to God, perhaps showing that this relationship is carrying a special emphasis.<sup>2</sup> Jepsen notes:

In all secular usages he'emin occurs in a negative context; there are too many men and relationships on which one cannot rely, and too many messages one cannot consider to be true. It is probably no accident that frequently [אֱמוּנָה] batach, "to trust," stands in parallelism to he'emin (Mic. 7:5; Job 39:11); batach is also used of a false security.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of אֱמוּנָה can be seen in its use with the preposition בְּ or לְ. Turner says:

The phrase "believing into" is, of course, a literal rendering of the Greek πιστεύω εἰς. Again we have to note an unclassical expression. It may possibly be another instance of the postclassical trend whereby the dative weakens and gives place to εἰς with the accusative. More likely, it is a Semitism. In Hebrew, "believe" is rendered by אֱמוּנָה followed by בְּ or לְ. לְ would be rendered most naturally by the Greek dative.

<sup>1</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Faith," by Kohler Kaufmann, 6:326.

<sup>2</sup>TDOT, s.v. "אֱמוּנָה," 1:296.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 303.

which some Hebraists declare to denote not simple "belief" but rather personal "trust," would more easily become εἰς.<sup>1</sup>

After briefly reviewing the OT understanding of what is involved in true faith, from which background the NT writers had drawn, the words of J. O. Buswell are most appropriate: "The Scriptural meaning of faith must be studied from three different points of view: (1) faith as an act of believing, (2) faith as the substance of what we believe, and (3) faith as faithfulness."<sup>2</sup>

It is conceivable, then, as a result of this general study of the OT concept of faith, commitment, hope, and trust (words that embrace the whole OT idea of biblical faith) that one can now approach the NT with a clearer understanding of the OT background from which John in particular had drawn or by which he was influenced.

#### The Influence of the OT upon John

There is no doubt in light of the aforementioned information that John as a NT writer would be greatly influenced by his understanding of the OT. The effects that the Hebrew text or the LXX would have on him would be pre-eminent in his thought process while writing his Gospel. John's dependence upon the OT can be seen in the following comments

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<sup>1</sup>William Turner, "Believing and Everlasting Life-- A Johannine Inquiry," ExpTim 64 (November 1952): 51.

<sup>2</sup>J. O. Buswell, A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 175.

by C. K. Barrett:

John regularly used the LXX, but . . . he was able to use, and on occasion did use the Hebrew. . . . To draw, however, from the small number of explicit quotations the conclusion that John had less interest in and a smaller knowledge of the Old Testament than the other evangelists would be a serious mistake. . . . Old Testament themes, often crudely set forth in the earlier gospels, have thoroughly permeated John's thought, and appear, often without reference to particular passages of the Old Testament, again and again.<sup>1</sup>

This contention hopefully has given the reader light on John's background regarding this particular study. However, in this writer's pursuit of finding out what place the OT played in the writing of John's Gospel, he has also been reminded of the care that should be taken when using linguistics. Turner says:

But there is a danger in the excitement of the linguistic chase. . . . We may forget our ultimate purpose, which is accurate exegesis. The really important question regarding every word and phrase is not "where did it come from?" but "what does the writer mean by it?"<sup>2</sup>

This statement is important in light of the fact that John's Gospel must be seen in its own context and his vocabulary must be ultimately interpreted in light of this context.

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<sup>1</sup>C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Turner, "Believing and Everlasting Life--A Johannine Inquiry," p. 52.

## CHAPTER II

### BELIEVE VOCABULARY IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

Concerning the Gospel of John it has been stated that he has a limited vocabulary of 114 primary or basic words which he uses over and over.<sup>1</sup> Among these 114 words the verb πιστεύω appears often, whereas the noun πίστις does not occur at all.<sup>2</sup>

A key to the understanding of the subject of salvation in John's Gospel involves the recognition of at least three key words. Tenney says, "When these three statements, concerning the words signs, believe, and life are put together the author's key to the Gospel appears plainly."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), pp. 133-34.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. For a simple classification of the uses of πιστεύω in the fourth Gospel see J. Oliver Buswell: (a) Explicit, i.e. ethical content explicitly given by the context; (b) Positive: those uses in which the meaning seems clearly ethical, though the context is not quite explicit; (c) Doubtful: those in which either an ethical or non-ethical meaning may be understood; (d) Negative: those in which the immediate context requires no ethical interpretation (A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, One vol. Pt. III [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974], p. 178).

<sup>3</sup>Merrill C. Tenney, John: The Gospel of Belief (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 32-33.

### The Importance of Σημεῖον

The first of these words that will be briefly discussed is σημεῖον. Since the text of this thesis (John 2:23, 24) begins with the fact that Christ performed many miracles (σημεῖα), it is imperative then to touch upon the basic purpose of miracles. It has been stated that John "knows and uses σημεῖον in the sense of sign, pointer, mark in such a way as to do justice to the formal character of the word."<sup>1</sup> Hofius comments that "the basic meaning of semeion is a sign (as a rule, visually perceived, but occasionally also heard) by which one recognizes a particular person or thing, a confirmatory, corroborating authenticating mark or token."<sup>2</sup>

In light of this one would be compelled to ask what Christ was confirming, authenticating, corroborating, pointing to, etc. in his use of miracles. Dr. Whitcomb says that Christ performed miracles during his public ministry to "identify Himself as Israel's true Messiah and to confirm the revelation He was bringing to the nation (John 20:30, 31; Acts 2:22)."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "σημεῖον in the Johannine Writings," by Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, 7:243.

<sup>2</sup>DNTT, s.v. "σημεῖον," by Otfried Hofius, 2:626.

<sup>3</sup>John C. Whitcomb, Does God Want Christians to Perform Miracles Today? (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1979), p. 6.

### Believing and the Fourth Gospel

The second and most important of these key words as they relate to this thesis is πιστεύω. In this section the writer will briefly examine several passages in John which deal with this verb. John uses this verb over ninety-eight times<sup>1</sup> in his Gospel and in each case the verb is defined by its context.<sup>2</sup> It constitutes the theme of the whole book of John.<sup>3</sup> John 20:30, 31 says "Many other signs therefore Jesus did in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you might believe [πιστεύσητε] that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and believing [πιστεύοντες] you might have life [ζωὴν] in his name." Further examples of John's use of "believe" can be seen in the following; John 3:18 states: ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν οὐ κρίνεται ὁ δὲ μὴ πιστεύων ἤδη κέκριται, ὅτι μὴ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ μονογενοῦς υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ." Notice that the construction here is used of salvation. The

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<sup>1</sup>W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, A Concordance to the Greek Testament, Reprint of 3rd edition, revised by H. K. Moulton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), pp. 806-07.

<sup>2</sup>See p. 5 footnote 1, Francis A. Schaeffer.

<sup>3</sup>Merrill C. Tenney, New Testament Survey (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), p. 193. Tenney also says: "Concerning the key words in John πιστεύω is the most important. It occurs ninety-eight times in the Gospel and denotes a concept of major importance." He also gives an excellent discussion of the fact that πιστεύω is used in eight different constructions. This is one of the most helpful sources dealing with John's usage of the word "πιστεύω." (Tenney, "The Growth of Belief," BSac, 132 [1975]: 343-45.

one who believes in him [ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτόν] is not judged; but the one who does not believe [μὴ πιστεύων] is judged already because he has not believed in the name [μὴ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα] of the only begotten Son of God. Concerning this verse Lenski says, "Both substantivized participles are durative as in v. 15 and 16; continuous believing marking the one man, continuous non-believing the other."<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted that John uses other constructions in speaking of saving faith. For example, (3:15) "that all believing in him [ὁ πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ] might have eternal life," "and many believed [ἐπιστεύσαν] because of his word"; (6:47) "Truly, truly I say to you, the one believing [ὁ πιστεύων] has eternal life." John says of the Jews in 8:31, "Ἐλεγεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς πεπιστευκοτάς αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους, Ἐὰν ὑμεῖς ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ, ἀληθῶς μαθηταί μου ἐστέ"; here it should be noted that true discipleship is characterized by continuing in the word of Christ. In 8:31ff is an example of John's using the verb πιστεύω of those who did not continue with Christ; in fact, by the end of the chapter (v. 59) "they took up stones to cast at him." Concerning this verse Maclaren comments:

So John would show us that there is a kind of acceptance which may be real, and may be the basis of something much better hereafter, but which, if it does not grow, rots and disappears; and he would draw a broad line of distinction between that and the other

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<sup>1</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), p. 267.

mental act, far deeper, more wholesome, more lasting and vital, which he designates as 'believing on Him.'<sup>1</sup>

In the above example, one must conclude that the Johannine concept of "believing" is much more than giving a mental assent to the claims of Christ. But, as John would demonstrate, it is followed by a positive response toward Christ. A final example of this Johannine concept of saving faith can be seen in John 9:38 where John writes: ὁ δὲ ἔφη, Πιστεύω, Κύριε καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ ("and he answered, 'Lord! I believe'; and he worshipped him"). Here true belief is manifested through worship of Christ. Barnes calls this "the overflowing expression of gratitude and faith."<sup>2</sup> The force of this man's response can be summarized in the words of Lenski, who says, "His act is a definition of his word."<sup>3</sup>

In light of these verses it is imperative for one to conclude that John is not confined linguistically to the use of only one construction to show true saving faith in his Gospel. Daniel C. Arichea has made some generalizations which are helpful in this present study:

"Believe" with someone or something as object in most cases in John's Gospel, the object of believe is clearly mentioned in the text. The object may be divided into

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander Maclaren, Exposition of Holy Scripture: Gospel of St. John, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), p. 331.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament Luke and John, edited by Robert Frew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 284.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, St. John's Gospel, p. 705.

two general classes: (1) believing in something, and (2) believing in someone.<sup>1</sup>

Warfield says, "To believe is a technical term to express reliance on Christ for salvation."<sup>2</sup> An example of what Warfield is saying can be seen in Ephesians 1:13, where Paul writes, "In whom you also having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed [ὃ καὶ πιστεύσαντες] you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise." Though Christ is not mentioned in this verse, the participle πιστεύσαντες, "having believed," is sufficiently defined by the context. Warfield comments, "It would seem then, that they were called 'believers,' those who had turned to Christ in trusting reliance (οἱ πιστεύσαντες)."<sup>3</sup>

The present writer has briefly examined several of the ninety-eight passages where πιστεύω is used in the Book of John to demonstrate that each context must be carefully considered before any conclusions can be made concerning the meaning of πιστεύω in this Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel C. Arichea, Jr., "Translating 'Believe' in the Gospel of John," BT 30:2 (April 1979): 205.

<sup>2</sup>B. B. Warfield, Biblical and Theological Studies, edited by S. G. Craig (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968), p. 440.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

## The Importance of γινώσκω and Its Relation

### To the Interpretation of John's Gospel

John's usage of γινώσκω has been discovered to be a key in the correct interpretation of John 2:23, 24. It is essential, then, to note something of its importance and its relationship to the overall interpretation of the passage, in addition to the two key words already studied. Turner says:

It should be noticed that in many ways the verb πισ-  
teuo and ginosko (to have divine insight) in St. John's  
gospel are synonymous, although Jesus who is said to  
'know' God is never said to 'believe' in Him. However,  
to 'believe' (11<sup>42</sup>) and to 'know' (17<sup>3</sup>) are used in the  
same context. Clearly the words are synonymous in a  
passage like this: 'they have known . . . that I came  
from Thee and they have believed that Thou didst send  
me' (17<sup>3</sup>). Faith is a deep insight, sure and divine  
knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

If Turner's assessment is true, then the knowledge that Christ had of the true attitude of the hearts of those who believed on Him in John 2:23 is of major importance and should not be disregarded. The true interpretation of this verse must be seen from the divine perspective.

The importance of γινώσκω again can be seen in the following statement by Aaffney:

Some instances of the figurative use of seeing: In 3:13, "We speak of what we know (ho oidamen) and bear witness to what we have seen (ho heorakamen)," suggests that eidenai and horan, knowing and seeing, are here alternative expressions for the receiving of revelation. In 17:7, "Henceforth you know (ginoskete) Him and have seen (heorakete) Him" draws a similar parallel between

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<sup>1</sup>Nigel Turner, Christian Words (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), p. 157.

ginoskein and horan as denoting knowledge of the Father. The Isaian passage in 12:40 links zoein with horan in much the same way.<sup>1</sup>

John has given the course of his Gospel by showing, among many of Christ's supernatural powers, the power of explicit knowledge of the human heart. When people came into the presence of Christ He could reveal the thoughts and intents of their hearts. The Nathanael episode in John 1:43-51, where Christ revealed an unequivocal knowledge of Nathanael, is an example. Nathanael asked, "πόθεν με γινώσκεις." Another demonstration of the unequivocal knowledge of Christ is in the narrative concerning the Samaritan woman, who concludes her long dialogue with the Lord (4:5-38) by saying, "δεῦτε ἴδετε ἄνθρωπον ὃς εἶπεν μοι πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησα μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός" (v. 29). The present writer will later demonstrate that the omniscience of Christ is a key to the interpretation of John 2:23, 24.

### πίστος

The last word the writer will briefly discuss in this section is πίστος. It was noted earlier that one of John's key words in his Gospel was πιστεύω. However, the word πίστος is also used in John 20:27 once with the alpha privative (ἄπιστος) meaning unbelieving, mistrustful or not trusting<sup>2</sup> and once noting what Christ wanted Thomas to do in relation

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<sup>1</sup>J. Aaffney, "Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel," TS 26 (1965): 217-18.

<sup>2</sup>H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, Revised by H. S. Jones (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 1408.

to Him, that is, "Don't be unbelieving (ἄπιστος) but believing (πίστος)." "Ἀπιστος can also mean "without trust or confidence."<sup>1</sup> Thomas wanted to see Christ before he would believe. Lange comments, "Religious belief which demands the support of sensuous perception runs the risk of making an entire loss of faith."<sup>2</sup> The truth of this statement may be seen in light of the belief of those who saw the signs which Christ did and their response to them in John 2:23.

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "Πιστεύω κτλ.," 6:204.

<sup>2</sup>John Peter Lange, John (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 622.

### CHAPTER III

#### CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF JOHN 2:23-25

Implications or traditions have it that the Gospel of John was written because many of those who were close to John desired to see in writing what they heard from the apostles' lips.<sup>1</sup> It is pointed out that "the Gospel is not specifically polemical, or supplementary, or didactic even though the author elsewhere does speak out against Ebionitic and Docetic error (comp. 1 John 2:22, 4:2) and the false claims of the disciples of the Baptist (cf. Acts 19:3ff)."<sup>2</sup>

#### The Larger Context of John

In John 20:30, 31 the declaration of the author's intention is made clear. These verses are broken into two main categories: (1) Jesus performed many signs which are not recorded in this book, and (2) those that are recorded are recorded for a definite purpose. John knew more than

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<sup>1</sup>B. F. Westcott, The Gospel According to St. John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950), p. xxxv.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 40. See Guthrie, who adds several different possible reasons John wrote his Gospel: the theories that he aimed to supersede the Synoptic Gospels, wrote against unbelieving Jews, was combating Gnosticism, was presenting a Hellenized Christianity, was correcting a Baptist cult, was pursuing ecclesiastical polemic aimed to correct Church eschatology, or aimed to preserve a tradition suitable for liturgical use. Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 274-82.

he wrote, and what he did write had a definite purpose.<sup>1</sup> In order to answer the chief question of this paper--why would Christ not believe those people who professed belief in Him--the present writer will now turn his attention to the main text under consideration.

#### The Immediate Context of John 2:23-25

The immediate context of John 2:23-25 is centered around Christ's ministry during the cleansing of the Temple at Jerusalem. Two key events surrounding this context are the miracles which Christ did with the response of the people involved, and the Nicodemus episode, which some see as a vital link to the negative response of the people.<sup>2</sup> Westcott says, "Christ's dealing with the people generally. In this brief passage the false faith of the people is contrasted with the perfect insight of Christ."<sup>3</sup> Concerning these two key events, Eerdman summarizes this section by pointing out:

The former shows the absolute unbelief of the rulers, and the true faith of the disciple, the latter pictures a ruler whose faith is only the incipient, imperfect belief of those who accept Christ as a worker of

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill C. Tenney, John: The Gospel of Belief, p. 28. Tenney writes concerning the outstanding words used in John: these are believe, signs, and life. He considers "believe" to be the pivot of Johannine thought. Gromacki agrees with Tenney concerning John's purpose; however, he adds, "John's purposes are both apologetic and evangelistic" (Robert G. Gromacki, New Testament Survey, p. 134).

<sup>2</sup>See Kiyoshi Tsuchido, "The Composition of the Nicodemus Episode," BSac 1:1 (November 1965): 92.

<sup>3</sup>Westcott, The Gospel according to St. John, p. 44.

miracles; but as he is sincere his faith deepens. Christ does reveal himself to him, and the ruler becomes also the disciple.<sup>1</sup>

Concerning this same context Lenski notes:

The brief glimpse of the effect of the first public activity of Jesus presented in vv. 23-25 rounds out the preceding account of the Cleansing of the Temple and forms a transition to the conversation with Nicodemus, furnishing us with historical background and general attitude of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Though this paper is not dealing primarily with the Nicodemus episode (John 3:1ff), it is crucial to the understanding of verses 23-24 in this writer's estimate. An interesting observation can be made from Kiyoshi Tsuchido's article<sup>3</sup> in which he discusses the composition of John 2:23-3:21. Much of this article deals with the original order of the verses. The author refutes the conclusion of Schnackenburg, whose whole argument was that there was no meaningful sequence to the episodes recounted in these verses. Tsuchido concludes on the basis of his analysis that "the whole composition of John 2:23-3:21 was composed as a sequence by the evangelist himself and reflects the evangelist's 'Sitz im Leben.'"<sup>4</sup>

The proposition that verses 23-25 were a transition to the Nicodemus episode poses no problem to one reading

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<sup>1</sup>Eerdman, The Gospel according to St. John, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, St. John's Gospel, pp. 222-23.

<sup>3</sup>Tsuchido, "The Composition of the Nicodemus-Episode," pp. 91-103.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

the original text. It has been clearly stated:

There was one man, however, whose interest in Jesus was of a sort which set him apart from most of the people in Jerusalem. In the original text there were no chapter divisions or versification and in addition there is the word "but" (de) which ties 3:1 to 2:25. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Eerdman agrees with this conclusion when he says, "These verses [23-25] form the link between the preceding and the following striking narratives."<sup>2</sup> Godet calls this section a "preamble,"<sup>3</sup> i.e. this is the "general picture of the activity of the Lord at Jerusalem, following after His undertaking in the temple."<sup>4</sup>

Now that the immediate context of John 2:23-3:21 has been succinctly set forth, the writer will now elucidate the text in the following section.

#### A Textual, Grammatical and Exegetical

##### Study of John 2:23-25

##### The Character of the Multitude and Response

It has been pointed out that these verses (23-25) form a transition to the Nicodemus episode. The difference between his attitude and the attitude of the multitude will

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<sup>1</sup>Homer A. Kent, Jr., Light in the Darkness: Studies in the Gospel of John (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1974), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>Eerdman, Gospel of John, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>Frederick Louis Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of John, with an Historical and Critical Introduction, translated by Timothy Dwight (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 371.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

be seen. John writes in 2:23: Ὡς δὲ ἦν ἐν τοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐν τῷ πάσχα ἐν τῇ ἑορτῇ, πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, θεωροῦντες αὐτοῦ τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίει.

Robinson points out that "the use of δὲ in explanatory parenthesis is seen in Jo. 3:19 ('And this is,' etc.); 19:23 ('Now the coat,' etc.). For ὡς δὲ ('and when,' 'so when') in John see 2:9, 23."<sup>1</sup> So when He was at Jerusalem during the Passover at the feast many (πολλοί) believed.

It was during the Passover Feast at Jerusalem that Christ revealed himself to an untold number of people. Godet comments, "The pronoun πολλοί, many, denotes nothing more than individuals."<sup>2</sup> John 2:23 reveals the fact that they "believed" (ἐπίστεύσαν) in His name, indicating they had faith. Thomas Whitelaw cites some strong evidence concerning the nature of their faith:

Unlike the rulers who rejected Christ's messianic pretensions, these accepted them not at first decisively or even firmly, perhaps doubtfully and hesitantly, but still honestly and sincerely. If milk faith it was still faith; imperfect or immature faith (Westcott); hardly to characterize as unbelief in the form of belief. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Agreeing perhaps with Whitelaw, Archea states:

A very common expression in John's Gospel is "believe in" (literally "believe into"--Greek pisteuein eis). Except in two cases (12:44 and 14:1, where the object of belief is God), the object of belief in these

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Godet, The Gospel of John, p. 371.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Whitelaw, The Gospel of St. John (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1888), p. 62.

expressions is Jesus himself. In three instances (1.12, 2.23, 3.18) we find the expression "believe in the name," but it is quite clear from the context that "name" in these verses refers to Jesus Himself . . .<sup>1</sup>

The problem then is not the object of the multitude's faith but rather the kind of faith that they expressed towards Christ. The present writer does not agree with Whitelaw's conclusion that the people's faith was genuine. Part of the support cited by Whitelaw is obviously misconstrued (cf. Westcott, who holds the position that the people exercised false faith<sup>2</sup>). One of the best summations concerning the Johannine concept of faith was stated by Albert Rabil, Jr.:

Faith is not belief in ceremonies (sacrificing beasts, keeping the sabbath, choice of meats, outward garments), but belief in God's Son. But belief in God's Son is shown in the way one behaves. "It is not sufficient to have accepted my commandments, unless a man retain them in mind. And it is not enough to remember them, except they be kept."<sup>3</sup>

Tenney, in dealing with πιστεύω εἰς, concludes that this construction

implies a definite committal to a person, usually the person of Christ, and also in three instances occurs with το ὄνομα, or "name." To believe "in His name" seems to imply acceptance of the messianic mission, and does not indicate a wholehearted committal . . . The preposition shows the direction or object of faith which usually is genuine.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>D. C. Archea, "Translating 'Believe' in the Gospel of John," BT, 30:2 (April 1979): 206.

<sup>2</sup>Westcott, The Gospel of John, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Rabil, Jr., "Erasmus' Paraphrase of the Gospel of John," CH, 48 (June 1979): 154.

<sup>4</sup>Merrill C. Tenney, "Topics from the Gospel of John," BSac 132 (October 1975): 344.

Yet Hawthorne varies in his position on this same phrase, stating, "Thus πιστεύειν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ would not be simply to accept His claim, by intellectual assent, but to acknowledge that claim by yielding allegiance."<sup>1</sup>

It has been stated with substantial evidence that the evangelist clearly teaches that the gift of everlasting life is bestowed upon those who believe "into" or "unto" the Lord. This is the literal rendering of the Greek πιστεύω εἰς.<sup>2</sup> Again, the words used by Calvin to describe the context of this verse give a great summation of verse 24. He notes, "There was indeed some result of the signs in that many believed in Christ and in His name so as to profess their readiness to follow His teachings--for 'name' is used here for authority."<sup>3</sup> However, in showing what this faith was, he says,

It was also a cold belief, a persuasion empty of any serious attitude of heart . . . so when the Evangelist says that those men believed, I do not take it as a pretended and non-existent faith, but that they in some way constrained to enlist on Christ's side: and yet that it was not a true and genuine faith is shown by Christ excluding them from the number of those whose conviction could be relied on.<sup>4</sup>

One does not have to look far for the answer concerning

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<sup>1</sup>Gerald F. Hawthorne, "The Concept of Faith in the Fourth Gospel," BSac 116 (April 1959): 122.

<sup>2</sup>Turner, "Believing and Everlasting Life--A Johannine Inquiry," p. 51.

<sup>3</sup>John Calvin, The Gospel according to St. John 1-10, trans. by T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), pp. 57-58.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

the cause of faith by the people in the phrase θεωροῦν τὰ αὐτοῦ τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίησεν. Concerning this Rudolf Bultmann comments, "The very fact that many people have been brought to faith by the miracles is an indication that such faith is of doubtful value."<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion concerning signs, refer to the previous chapter. Godet, in viewing this verse, simply states, "The faith of the people was not true faith in that it rested upon the external fact of Christ's miracles."<sup>2</sup> Each of the above statements has much to say concerning the miracles which the multitudes saw; therefore, any conclusion as to the real nature of their faith must include some discussion on the purpose of miracles. Consequently, it can be shown that this was not saving faith. Phillip Hook gives an excellent discussion concerning saving faith; he says:

There seem to be three erroneous approaches to saving faith on the theological front today. One, while seeking to emphasize the importance of faith, is unwilling to define its object. This may take two forms, the liberal who really believes in ultimate goodness or human reason, or the neo-orthodox who cannot allow for propositional truth in relation to the object of faith. The second approach finds faith in the gospel alone an "easy believism" and seeks to add something to faith in order to accomplish salvation. Third, the contemporary Arminian view holds that faith accomplishes salvation only if it continues; thus, to depart from faith or to

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<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, The Gospel according to John, translated by G. R. Beasley (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), p. 131.

<sup>2</sup>Godet, The Gospel of John, p. 371. Barclay comments, "To John the supreme thing about the miracles of Jesus was that they told men something about the nature and character of God" (William Barclay, The Gospel of John, Vol. 1, revised ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971], p. 119.

fail to continue to believe is to be severed from Christ. Each of these views seems to miss part of the teaching of Scripture concerning faith.<sup>1</sup>

In light of the above article, one must conclude that it is important, when the term "faith" is used, to examine the type of faith it is, since not all views of saving faith are the same. The present writer will now briefly examine Christ's response to the multitude.

#### Christ Withholds Himself from the Multitude

The fact that the multitude had not made a genuine commitment of faith can be seen in verse 24. The present writer believes that when the text of John 2:24 is properly understood, a clear comprehension of the concept of biblical faith will be ascertained. John writes, αὐτός δε Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἐπίστευεν αὐτὸν αὐτοῖς διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν γινώσκειν πάντας. In this verse John, by his use of αὐτός δε Ἰησοῦς, is showing a contrast between what the multitude believed and what Jesus believed concerning their faith. Lenski notes:

αὐτός το ὁ Ἰησοῦς intensifies the subject; yet it does not mean "Jesus himself," which would wrongly contrast him with others, but means "Jesus on his part," contrasting his action with the other action just reported, with adversative δέ, "however," pointing this out. The contrast lies between ἐπίστευσαν in v. 23 and οὐκ ἐπίστευεν αὐτὸν (some prefer αὐτόν, R. 476): they "trusted," he "was not entrusting himself."<sup>2</sup>

Barrett, agreeing with the finding of Lenski, says αὐτός is probably not due to the influence of the redundant Aramaic

<sup>1</sup>H. Phillip Hook, "A Biblical Definition of Saving Faith," BSac 121 (482) (April 1964): 134.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, St. John's Gospel, p. 224.

pronoun αὐτῷ; it emphasizes the contrast between the two uses of πιστεῦειν.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of verse 24 several words may be employed to exegete the meaning of ἐπίστευεν in this verse. Christ would not commit, entrust, believe or trust himself to the multitude. Calvin says:

The Evangelist means rather, in my opinion, that they were not regarded by Christ as genuine disciples but despised as light and trifling. This passage should be observed carefully; not all who profess to be Christ's are such in His estimation.<sup>2</sup>

The simple fact of what John is saying in this verse is pointed out by Alford, who states, "They entered into no spiritual relation with Him, and He in consequence into none with them."<sup>3</sup> This is what the present writer will later refer to as the "consensus view," which holds that the multitude was never saved (true disciples). They were "enamored of the miracles Jesus performed, and thus led to believe on Him."<sup>4</sup>

Hendriksen, whose view has become of major importance in this paper, says:

Many trusted in his name; i.e., because of the manner in which his power was displayed they accepted him as a

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<sup>1</sup>C. K. Barrett, The Gospel according to St. John, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 202.

<sup>2</sup>Calvin, The Gospel according to St. John, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Alford, The Greek Testament, revised by Everett F. Harrison, Vol. 1: The Four Gospels (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 711.

<sup>4</sup>Herman A. Hoyt, The New Birth (Findlay: Dunham Publishing Company, 1961), p. 13.

great prophet and perhaps even the messiah. This, however, is not the same as saying that they surrendered their hearts to him. Not all faith is saving faith (cf. 6:26).<sup>1</sup>

It was noted earlier what "saving faith" is not.<sup>2</sup> Here are some elements of saving faith as presented by H. Phillip Hook:

In attempting to define faith it would be well to start by analyzing the elements that compose such a faith. There seem to be at least three elements clearly set forth in Scripture. The first of these is knowledge and assent to that knowledge. A second element is trust or dependence which appropriates the knowledge to one's self. The final element is the product of faith, thus demonstrating its reality. These three in proper relationship are of considerable value in understanding the whole.<sup>3</sup>

Bultmann, commenting concerning genuine faith, says:

Genuine faith must not be confused with a seeming faith that is aroused by Jesus' "signs" . . . such faith may be a first step toward him, but has yet to prove itself as genuine faith. As "hearing" the word must be supplemented by "keeping" it, so genuine faith can be called "keeping" the word (8:51; 14:23; 15:20; 17:6) or as "abiding in the word" (8:31 tr.).<sup>4</sup>

There must also be a special recognition given in the text to  $\delta\iota\alpha\ \tau\acute{o}$ . Robertson points out, "It is always the cause that is given by  $\delta\iota\alpha\ \tau\acute{o}$ ."<sup>5</sup> The strongest evidence in 2:24

<sup>1</sup>William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: The Gospel according to John (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 127.

<sup>2</sup>See pp. 31-32.

<sup>3</sup>Hook, "A Biblical Definition of Saving Faith," p. 135.

<sup>4</sup>R. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1, translated by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup>Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 1071.

which demonstrates that this was not genuine faith can be seen in the fact that John does not leave his reader to guess why Christ responded negatively to the multitude. John's explanation is that Christ literally knew "all things" (πάντας). Westcott says, "This knowledge is elsewhere attributed to Jehovah (Jer. xvii.10, xx.12). It was immediate (of Himself), universal (all men)."<sup>1</sup> Tenney notes that Christ "knew their hearts and could evaluate their faith exactly."<sup>2</sup> This can be further elucidated by Johnson, who writes:

The words concerning Jesus' knowledge of men are a strong statement indirectly of His Messiahship and divine Sonship. In the Old Testament it is written, "Then hear thou in heaven, thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest (FOR THOU, EVEN THOU ONLY, KNOWEST THE HEARTS OF ALL THE CHILDREN OF MAN)" (1 Kings 8:39). These words are part of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, and they are words that refer to God. John, however, attributes the same knowledge to Jesus Christ, the knowledge that Solomon says belongs only to God (cf. 1:48). It is a magnificent claim to deity for the Son.<sup>3</sup>

This knowledge could be seen again in verse 25 where John writes, καὶ ὅτι οὐ χреῖαν εἶχεν ἵνα τις μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου· αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐγίνωσκε τί ἦν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ. It is seen in this verse that Christ had "not only the special, miraculous, physiognomic knowledge, but also the general

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<sup>1</sup>B. F. Westcott, The Gospel of St. John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Tenney, John: The Gospel of Belief, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "The Gospel of John--John 2:23-3:3," BBB 11 (January 24, 1982): 2.

knowledge of the constitution of human nature (John iii)."<sup>1</sup> Christ could look into the hearts of men, and, as Hendriksen so well states, "concerning any particular person, for his own penetrating eyes were able to look into the very depths of that person's heart; take, as an example, Nicodemus."<sup>2</sup>

### Controversial Considerations

The writer feels that anyone seriously studying John 2:23-25 must give a careful yet cautious consideration to the article by Zane C. Hodges on this passage.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps his is the most stimulating and challenging argument against the "consensus view"<sup>4</sup> discovered in the development of this paper. The present writer feels that it is imperative for the exegete to consider as well as understand the arguments posed by Hodges. It is also this writer's purpose to demonstrate how these arguments fall short and are inconsistent in light of Scripture.

The first area that must be examined concerns "believing in His name" (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ). This phrase is first found in John 1:12, a "familiar salvation passage."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: John, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Hendriksen, John, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup>See p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>Zane C. Hodges, "Problem Passages in the Gospel of John Part 2: Untrustworthy Believers--John 2:23-25," BSac 135: 538 (1978): 140.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Hodges suggests that if John used this phrase one time, the second use must be viewed the same as in the first, since John indicates nothing to prepare the reader to understand 2:23 differently from 1:12. Hodges continues by showing that the "consensus view" of 2:23 is damaged by the fact that John 3:18 expressly affirms that the grounds of man's condemnation are to be found in the fact that "he hath not believed in the name (μὴ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα) of the only begotten Son of God."<sup>1</sup>

Hodges' concluding argument is based upon the fact that he felt John was not confined linguistically by the form of the expression, i.e. John did not have to say that "many believed in His name" and at the same time be of the opinion that these were still under condemnation. This conclusion is based upon "John's thematic statement in 20:31 where he declares, ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύσητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ."<sup>2</sup>

The above argument seems to fall short in light of the overwhelming evidence. J. Swetnam says:

Jn 8,31 offers a challenge to the ingenuity of commentators. The verse portrays Jesus as speaking πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους. But then the subsequent dialogue has these Jews apparently attacking Jesus verbally (v. 33) and Jesus saying that these same Jews are trying to kill him (v. 37) and that they do not believe him (v. 46). Further, v. 31 stands adjacent to v. 30, which contains the phrase πολλοὶ ἐπιστεύσαν εἰς αὐτοῦ.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Elsewhere in John's Gospel this phrase is usually found in juxtaposition with reference to Jews who are violently opposed to Jesus. . . . If the participle πεπιστευκότας in Jn 8,31 is interpreted as meaning those who had believed but who now believe no longer, the apparent conflicts with the context are resolved. The difficulties about the lack of faith (v. 46), the accusation of a desire to kill (v. 37), all fall into place.<sup>1</sup>

The above article indicates that πιστεύω must be considered in its context and not according to the linguistic argument as stated above by Hodges.

The second argument postulated by Hodges concerns "faith and signs." He comments:

Commentators are prone to point out that the believers in John 2:23 were induced to exercise faith on the basis of the many signs, or miracles, Jesus was doing. From this it is commonly inferred that the faith described here was inadequate to regenerate precisely because of this basis. But this conclusion is as false to Johannine thought as is the effort to construe πιστεύειν εἰς ὄνομα in a non-regenerating sense.

This becomes obvious when it is considered how the signs function within the purpose of John's Gospel as a whole. . . . So far was John from disowning a faith based on signs that he actually included them in his book to elicit belief on the part of his readership! It is plain, therefore, that no case can be constructed from the Gospel of John that a faith resting on signs is ineffectual or unregenerating . . . signs function as aids to faith . . . those who exercise faith apart from actually seeing these signs are deserving of special commendation [e.g., 20:28].<sup>2</sup>

The present writer feels that Hodges has presented an unbiblical argument concerning the purpose of signs and John's use of σημεῖα in salvation. For the present writer's position concerning the purpose of signs, see page 15. It has been stated that "John sought to lead his reader to a

<sup>1</sup>James Swetnam, "The Meaning of πεπιστευκότας in John 8,31," Bib 61 (1980): 106.

<sup>2</sup>Hodges, "Problem Passages in the Gospel of John Part 2: Untrustworthy Believers--John 2:23-25," p. 142.

settled faith on the basis of actual signs."<sup>1</sup> But it can be shown that Hodges' argument reveals glaring inconsistencies. Concerning the signs he states, "All such faith Jesus accepts as real faith. There is absolutely no suggestion that He does not."<sup>2</sup> However, in the present context one must confess that Hodges' argument weakens in light of the fact that the faith of the multitude is not accepted by the Lord since He was not entrusting Himself to them.

Hodges has observed with no credence that Hendriksen's observations are questionable<sup>3</sup> by stating:

Unfortunately, such remarks show only too clearly how a preconceived opinion can distort the treatment of a text. In light of the Johannine usage of πιστεύειν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, . . . there are surely no grounds whatever for postulating that the faith described in 2:23 involved an acceptance of Jesus "as a great prophet" and only "perhaps" as the messiah. Even more gratuitous is the observation that this faith did not involve the surrender of their hearts to Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Though the passage does not say anything concerning "a great prophet" or "the Messiah," a careful observation of the life and times of the Messiah does reveal that this can be the meaning of the passage. MacGregor well notes, "They believed Jesus to be what he professed to be, namely, the Messiah, as they witness (day by day--the word is emphatically present

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<sup>1</sup>Tenney, John: The Gospel of Belief, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Hodges, "Problem Passages in the Gospel of John Part 2: Untrustworthy Believers--John 2:23-25," p. 143.

<sup>3</sup>See pages 32-33 where Hendriksen's view is cited.

<sup>4</sup>Hodges, "Problem Passages in the Gospel of John Part 2: Untrustworthy Believers--John 2:23-25," pp. 141, 142.

tense) the signs which he performed."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in light of this testimony one can observe that Hendriksen's view is consistent with what Christ has declared Himself to be in John 4:25-29, which states, "λέγει αὐτῇ ἡ γυνή, οἶδα ὅτι Μεσσίας ἔρχεται, ὃ λεγόμενος Χριστός· ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, ἀναγγελεῖ ἡμῖν ἅπαντα. λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐγώ εἰμι, ὃ λαλῶν σοι. . . . μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός." Concerning this verse Tenney says, "Her language implies that there was no doubt in her mind."<sup>2</sup> Yet, in this passage there is no indication that Christ or John condemned the Samaritan woman for accepting Jesus as the Messiah.

Hodges seems quite willing to violate his own principle, having no grounds for postulating his view. This is revealed by his statement:

It is frequently overlooked that an important sub-theme in the Gospel of John is the subject of intimacy with the Lord Jesus. The full flowering of this significant motif is found, of course, in the so-called Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17).<sup>3</sup>

The question that comes to the present writer's mind is, if John was intimate with Christ and he was writing that "men might believe that Jesus is the Christ," why then could he not report what Christ knew and felt concerning the faith of the people? On this subject Alford writes:

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<sup>1</sup>G. H. C. MacGregor, The Gospel of John, in the Moffatt New Testament Commentary, edited by James Moffatt (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>Tenney, John: The Gospel of Belief, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup>Hodges, "Problem Passages in the Gospel of John Part 2: Untrustworthy Believers--John 2:23-25," p. 143.

The fact of this being narrated shows that it made an impression on the Evangelist, and led him perhaps first to the conclusion which he here expresses, and which higher knowledge enabled him afterwards to place, as he here does, on its right ground--His knowing what was in man.<sup>1</sup>

This conclusion captures a truer reflection of one who had "intimacy with Christ."

A final inconsistency in the premise of Hodges is seen in the fact that he makes the same mistake he accused Hendriksen of earlier when he comments:

Looking with supernatural discernment into their hearts, Jesus did not regard them as truly prepared--just then at least--for friendship with Himself.<sup>2</sup>

There is no basis for Hodges to make the statements cited above. There is nothing at all in these verses which suggests that Christ did not regard them as truly prepared for friendship with Himself. It seems clear that John is showing the divinity of Christ by verse 24. Barrett comments:

In Jewish literature knowledge of what is in man belongs to God (Mekhilta Exod. 16:32 (ויטע §6): There is no man who knows what is in his neighbor's heart, של חבירו מה (בלבו). This knowledge is however possessed by the supernatural being Metatron (3 Enoch 11).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Alford, The New Testament for English Readers, Vol. 1 (London: Deighton Bell and Company, 1872), p. 479.

<sup>2</sup>Hodges, "Problem Passages in the Gospel of John Part 2: Untrustworthy Believers--John 2:23-25," p. 148.

<sup>3</sup>Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 202. See also the discussion of this concept on pp. 34-35.

## CONCLUSION

The writer has demonstrated that any interpretation of πιστεύω in John 2:23-24 must rest heavily upon the response of the Lord. It is the desire of this author in light of the evidences presented that one will not dogmatically use grammatical constructions or linguistics as absolutes in themselves. On the other hand, it should be remembered that a word as a symbol has no meaning until content is put into it.

Any final conclusion regarding verses 23 and 24 must be interpreted in light of the immediate context. John has presented Christ as one who walked among men with complete knowledge of them. The deity of Christ has been confirmed in John's mind (John 1:1). Calvin says, "These verses 23-25 seem to teach that, not all who profess to be Christ's are such in His estimation. Only those disciples approved by Christ are His."<sup>1</sup> The passage states that the people believed in Jesus' name, and to some they appeared to exercise genuine saving faith. However, in light of the previous information it is shown that a closer study of the passage reveals that the faith of the people rested totally in the miracles (not a proper vehicle for genuine faith) without a commitment to Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>Calvin, The Gospel according to John, pp. 58-59.

πιστεύω, limited and defined in the context of John 2:23-24, can be interpreted as Christ not believing in their believing, not trusting in their trusting, or not having faith in their faith. The Johannine concept of "faith" is not facts to be kept in mind, but a definite commitment to the person of Christ. From this context one must conclude that the multitude were fascinated by what they saw rather than transformed by a personal trust in Christ. This present writer concludes, then, that no genuine faith in the hearts of the people brings a likewise negative response from God.

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