

AN EXAMINATION AND POSSIBLE INTERPRETATION
OF JOHN 14:2-3

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John 14:2-3 has brought comfort to many down through the years but the passage is, even today, not one on which all interpreters have agreed. The purpose of this thesis is to examine these two verses exegetically and suggest a possible interpretation of them.

Initially a survey of some of the interpretations which have been suggested by others is presented. The majority of commentators can be encompassed within four views: (a) The Perspective View affirming many comings; (b) The Passing-Away View which considers the coming to be at death; (c) The Paraclete View which sees Jesus' promise fulfilled by the coming of the Holy Spirit; (d) The Parousia View which affirms the fulfillment to be at the Second Coming. Gundry's view, a unique one, is also presented following the survey of the four primary positions.


Context always contributes major factors in the interpretation of Scripture. Because of this fact, the context of the verses, chapters 13 and 14, were examined for their contributions. The author concluded that the context establishes a primary need, comfort to the eleven disciples in the presence of the Lord, and also some data related to the coming which are not to be ignored.

In Chapter IV the text was closely examined to determine possible meanings for all the words and phrases. At the conclusion of this examination, a suggested translation of the two verses was offered.

A proposed possible interpretation is presented which suggests that the purpose of Jesus' going "to prepare a place" was accomplished through His cross work and this provided the opportunity for a heavenly home which is sufficient for all. The coming which is promised is understood to be identical with the coming which fulfills the promises of 14:18 and 14:23, a spiritual return of the Lord Jesus to take up a permanent abode in these disciples and by application in the life of every believer at the moment of salvation.

An expanded paraphrase of John 14:1-3 is offered in the concluding chapter. The end result of the teaching in these verses as they are applied to believers today is that each child of God should be thrilled because he is indwelt not only by the Holy Spirit but also by Christ the Son and God the Father. The triune God lives within each of His children. This should encourage us to keep our hearts from being troubled, even as Jesus admonished in John 14:1.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
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Adviser



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PREFACE

The completion of this thesis has been used of the Lord to teach many things. Perhaps the primary lesson learned was that to write a thesis and pastor a church full-time is very difficult. In fact, writing a thesis and doing anything else full-time is very difficult. I would admonish anyone thinking of leaving seminary before he completes his thesis to reconsider that decision.

I believe I have also learned about the necessity of disagreeing kindly. I have not yet attained all the needed improvement in this area but this task made some advancement possible. This improvement was aided by my committee who taught me by their own example.

Lastly, I believe I have learned that dedication to Christ and His Word does not demand dogmatism and intolerance. There may be more than one position possible on some passages in God's Word. To place oneself in a differing position does not mean one's commitment to Christ should be questioned.

I would not have completed this project without the encouragement of my wife, Mary, and my two sons, Jim and Cory. I am grateful for all they have done to enable me to reach this point in my walk with Him.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Though John 14:2-3 has brought comfort to many down through the years, the passage is, even today, not one upon which all agree. Some debate realized versus futurist eschatological interpretations. Others cannot decide whether the coming promised took place at Christ's resurrection, takes place at the time a believer dies, or will take place at a future time, called a Second Coming by some and the Rapture by others.

Many writers give the appearance of attempting only to fit this passage into their established eschatological framework rather than adjust their eschatology in accord with the teaching of the passage. One must not assume that such attempts have been done glibly or arbitrarily but one must always be willing to examine each text exegetically and carefully, even again and again. Zemek expressed this need well when he said, "Undoubtedly it is time to return to the exegetical data . . . before pursuing a comprehensive eschatological interpretation."¹

¹George J. Zemek, Jr., "John 14:2-3 and its Eschatological Implications" (unpublished paper presented in Dispensational Eschatology seminar; Grace Theological Seminary, May 14, 1980), p. [23], Note 4.

The Purpose of the Thesis

This work intends to carry out a careful exegetical examination of John 14:2-3, seeking answers to several questions presented below. The literal-historical-grammatical method of interpretation will be followed. The Apostle John is assumed to be the author of the Gospel and Epistles which bear his name.

This examination was not undertaken with the intention of finding support for any eschatological system. This does not mean that the verses examined do not or cannot support a particular eschatological system. The data which are produced must be allowed to direct to whatever conclusion demanded by them.

No discussion will be carried on concerning the debate of John's realized versus futurist eschatology. One must determine what John teaches in this passage then make decisions about the apostle's eschatological preferences. To claim John presents realized eschatology in several passages and conclude that John 14:2-3 must, therefore, deal with a realized eschatology is hardly the best approach to take to the text.

The writer's purpose is not to argue pre-tribulation or post-tribulation matters but, rather, to stir up the minds of God's people lest we become captivated by lethargic thinking. One must guard against the temptation to think that because a particular view has been held for some time and might be considered traditional it thus becomes unassailable

by solid exegetical work. One must balance this thinking with the fact that novel interpretations have no value based upon their novelty. Truly, what is needed is a commitment to learn what the text says and what it means. One must not be content with assumptions but, rather, must seek to know those things which are true.

Questions Which Are Prompted

Several questions cry out for answers when one reads the passage under consideration. Certainly one of the first questions which comes to mind involves the beneficiaries of the promise. Do the eleven men to whom Christ spoke represent the Church? Only the Church? Is the corporate Church in view or are specific individuals to be considered as possibly involved in the fulfillment of the promise? In other words, is the promise of this passage only applicable to the eleven men to whom Jesus was speaking at the time, or may the teaching of the passage be rightly applied to all believers who follow after them? Is Jesus making reference to the Rapture in the teaching recorded in John 14:2-3?

Many people in churches of various denominational ties understand John 14:2-3 to teach that Jesus is currently preparing a huge and glorious "mansion" for them. Is such a large residence involved? Is this preparation completed or still going on? Could Jesus' "going" complete the preparation? What must be involved in the "coming" He promises? What "place" is to be understood?

These questions and more must be answered carefully and exegetically. A great many possibilities must be carefully weighed to guard against glib and unsupported generalizations. Such searching examination is the purpose of this thesis.

Procedure to be Followed

In order that the reader may be familiarized with the variety of interpretations which have been suggested a survey of these suggestions will be presented in Chapter 2. The supremely important matter of context will be examined in Chapter 3. An examination of the text will be presented and a possible interpretation suggested at that point.

CHAPTER II

A SURVEY OF INTERPRETATIONS SUGGESTED BY OTHERS

While not wanting to cover the great variety of interpretations abounding due to variations in understanding of each phrase, a presentation of some of the major positions regarding the passage under consideration should prove warranted and helpful. Some writers have made only general comments while others have written verse-by-verse commentaries dealing with the passage.

Regarding the Passage in General

Augustine commented on the passage with these words: "Thou goest away by becoming invisible. Thou comest by again becoming manifest to our eyes."¹ Luther believed "St. Paul interpreted this to mean that when we have been baptized we already have Christ dwelling in and with us, and have already been transferred . . . into the spiritual, heavenly existence where we are 'fellow-citizens with the saints and

¹Augustine, Homilies on the Gospel of John. Vol. VII. In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 324.

members of the household of God.'" ¹ These two quotes alone indicate the great variety of interpretations available and how far afield from the clear statements of the text some interpreters are willing to go.

Regarding Specific Phrases

The majority of the differences found in interpretation of the passage being examined is due to varying interpretations of specific phrases.

The "Going" Phrases

There is little variety in the understanding of the going which Jesus speaks of here. Barrett is typical of the majority of commentators when he affirms, "The journeying away of Jesus means (a) his death, and (b) his going to his Father's house, or, more simply, to the Father (17:11)." ²

The "Coming" Phrases

Strong differences are found here but one is able to synthesize the various positions into three primary views.

¹ Martin Luther, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 14-16. Vol. 24. In Luther's Works. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 30.

² C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text. 2nd Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 457.

The Perspective View

Lange labels Alford's position as being a "comprehensive 'perspective' view."¹ Alford stated his position well when he wrote:

The coming again of the Lord is not one single act,--as His resurrection, or the descent of the Spirit, or His second personal advent, or the final coming to judgment; but the great complex of all these, the result of which shall be, His taking His people to Himself to be where He is. This ἐρχομαί is begun (ver. 18) in His Resurrection--carried on (ver. 23) in the spiritual life (see also ch. xvi. 22ff.), the making them ready for the place prepared;--further advanced when each by death is fetched away to be with Him (Phil. i. 23); fully completed at His coming in glory, when they shall for ever be with Him (1 Thess. iv. 17) in the perfected resurrection state.²

I consider Westcott to be a supporter of a comprehensive view as well. He argues that the thought of many comings must be understood due to the use of the present tense as distinguished from the future tense. He affirms:

Though the words refer to the last "coming" of Christ, the promise must not be limited to that one "coming" which is the consummation of all "comings." Nor again must it be confined to the "coming" to the Church on the day of Pentecost, or to the "coming" to the individual either at conversion or at death, though these "comings" are included in the thought.³

¹ John Peter Lange, John and Acts. Translated by Philip Schaff, et al. In Commentary on the Holy Scriptures. Edited by John Peter Lange. Reprinted (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), p. 436.

² Henry Alford, The Greek Testament. Vol. I. Revised by Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), pp. 849-50. Emphasis his.

³ Brooke Foss Westcott, The Gospel According to St. John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p. 201.

The Passing-Away View

Grotius, Knapp, Tholuck and Hengstenberg advocate this position. Essentially they argue that Christ fulfills His promised coming when a saint dies, thus guaranteeing a blissful death. Lange sees the angels carrying Lazarus to Abram's bosom (Luke 16:22) as adequate substitutes for Christ in this matter, still fulfilling the promise made to His disciples here.¹

The Paraclete View

Those who support this view see fulfillment of the coming which Jesus promises in John 14:3 through the coming of the Holy Spirit. Godet presents this view as the one he prefers.²

The Parousia View

Advocates who have taken the Parousia view cannot all be lumped together into one group which has an identical understanding of what the Parousia is. Calvin, after arguing against the Paraclete view while ignoring the Passing-away view, says the coming here "speaks of the last day of judgment, when he [Christ] will at length, come to

¹Lange, John and Acts, p. 436.

²Frederick Louis Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of John, Vol. II, translated from the third French edition of 1893 by Timothy Dwight (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 127.

assemble his followers."¹ Meyer understands Christ will return to receive "the disciples into His personal fellowship . . . as partakers of His divine δόξα in the heavenly sanctuary which has descended with Him to the earth."² Apparently Meyer is speaking of the Eternal City mentioned in Revelation and Meyer has it in the "Messianic kingdom."³ Obviously this position is far removed from the one Mayhue dogmatically affirms when he states: "Only a pretribulation rapture fits the sequence of events outlined in John 14."⁴

Some commentators whose hermeneutical position would have to be categorized as non-dispensational have chosen to speak in very general terms. Among contemporary writers Hendriksen serves as an example of this position's advocates when he says, "The coming again of which Jesus speaks in this verse is the counterpart of the going away. Cf. Acts 1:9-11. That fact explains its character. In all probability, therefore, it refers to the second coming. . . ."⁵

¹John Calvin, Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Vol. II, translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 83.

²Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John, translated by William Urwich (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 408.

³Ibid.

⁴Richard L. Mayhue, Snatched Before the Storm: A Case for Pretribulationism (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1980), p. 14.

⁵William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel of John, in New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), p. 265.

A Unique Interpretation

All of the above mentioned interpretations have more than one advocate. In addition, each possibility seems to have attracted supporters in every century; i.e., none of the surveyed positions is one which might be said to be a "17th-century" interpretation. None has been rebutted to the satisfaction of all of its adherents in any given time period. Robert Gundry, a contemporary commentator, has posited an interpretation which appears somewhat unique. Because of its unique quality, no survey of interpretations of John 14:2-3 would be complete without reference to it.¹

As one reads of this position, he should keep in mind that it is found in a polemic presentation concerned with refuting a particular understanding of the chronology of the Rapture. One must admit that such a purpose may have influenced Gundry's interpretation of the passage, albeit every writer struggles to overcome such influences.

Gundry argues that the preparatory work anticipated by Jesus in John 14 is not to be localized in heaven. Rather, he contends that the "mansions" mentioned in verse 2 are spiritual dwellings in the person of Christ. The following lengthy quote presents his position and its results in terms of the Rapture:

¹The presentation of Gundry's position is based on my understanding of Gundry's thought presented in Robert H. Gundry, The Church and the Tribulation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), pp. 152-55.

In order to console the disciples concerning His going away, Jesus tells them that His leaving will work to their advantage. He is going to prepare for them spiritual abodes within His own person. Dwelling in these abiding places they will belong to God's household. This He will accomplish by going to the cross and then ascending to the Father. But He will return to receive the disciples into His immediate presence forever. Thus, the rapture will not have the purpose of taking them to heaven. It rather follows from their being in Christ, in whom each believer already has an abode.¹

The presentation of Gundry's unique view concludes the survey of interpretations suggested by others. One must not understand this to have been a totally comprehensive overview of all the positions which have been presented. Obviously, only a small number of writers could be cited. The views presented do cover, however, the majority of the positions presented in the literature dealing with the passage to be examined. That examination will begin in the next chapter with an investigation of the context of John 14:2-3.

¹Ibid., p. 154.

CHAPTER III

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONTEXT

Mickelsen has well stated: "Neglect of context is a common cause of erroneous interpretation and irrelevant application."¹ The importance of context is especially weighty here since the context establishes the mood of the disciples and establishes the setting for the statements under examination. Learning the meaning these statements had for the original hearers is the primary task of the interpreter, one which cannot be accomplished properly unless one looks at chapter 13 prior to his attempt to understand chapter 14.

The Contribution of Chapter 13

Hendriksen points out the importance Chapter 13 has upon the proper interpretation when he says:

There is a close connection between chapter 13 and chapter 14. The comfort imparted in the latter chapter has little meaning apart from the teaching (in connection with the washing of the disciples' feet) and the predictions (concerning Christ's imminent departure, the betrayal by Judas, and the denial by Peter) contained in the former.²

¹A. Berkeley Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), p. 99.

²William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel of John, in New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), p. 261 (hereinafter referred to as John). The emphases are Hendriksen's.

The Setting Involved

Both the physical setting and the chronological setting have bearing upon one's understanding of the events leading up to the teaching recorded in chapter 14.

The Physical Setting

John does not record the details of the directions given to the disciples by Jesus, directions which, when followed, provided a large, upstairs room into which the group of thirteen men entered (Mark 14:12-16; Matt 26:17-19; Luke 22:7-13). As one reads the Synoptic accounts he is forced to be impressed with the demonstration of omniscience and omnipotence evidenced by Christ as He plans His last evening together with His disciples.

The room in which the twelve disciples and their Master gathered would have had a low table and several pallets or couches around the table, upon which the group reclined as the members ate. Ordinarily, a servant would have been present to wash the feet of the guests as they entered from the dusty street.¹ On this night, however, there was no servant present though it is obvious that the necessary containers, towels, and water were available in the room.

¹D. A. Carson, The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 11 (hereinafter referred to as Discourse). This work provides a great deal of information which aids in picturing the scene and appreciating the emotions involved in this situation.

The Chronological Setting

Though the disciples were not immediately aware of this fact, this meeting was to be their last meal together before the crucifixion. At this time, so near the end of the Savior's ministry on earth, one is not surprised that Jesus is troubled in spirit. He had ministered to these twelve men unceasingly. He had patiently instructed them, knowingly endured their apparent slowness of comprehension regarding spiritual truth and lovingly forgiven them again and again. Yet, on this night when He had such great needs, they could not or did not perceive those needs and minister to Him. Instead, He needed to continue to minister to them. A review of the situations found in chapter 13 points this fact out clearly.

The Situations Involved

If one were to sum up the theme of chapter 13 in one word he might choose "surprises." The disciples had been surprised by Jesus' action when He washed their feet. Peter evidenced his surprise when he opposed Jesus and affirmed, "You will never wash my feet."¹ The Savior patiently corrects and instructs Peter yet one more time (not the last time He would be forced to do so) then expands His instruction (John 13:13-17) to the whole apostolic group.

¹John 13:8. All translations are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

Following this teaching the corps of disciples is again surprised by Jesus' matter-of-fact announcement of His impending betrayal by one of them. Jesus had mentioned His suffering, death, and resurrection in the past but never had He communicated such imminency or the fact that His betrayer would come from the apostolic group.¹ John states that Jesus' spirit "was troubled"² and, however this disquietude was manifested, the disciples observed it and understood it as underlining Jesus' words, making them weighty indeed.

Jesus then exposed Judas as the one who would betray Him although the disciples as a group did not understand why Judas left the room. John, however, had received individual instruction about the matter and he, at least, must have been surprised to learn that Judas was the betrayer (John 13:23-26).

At this point in the evening the scene becomes especially tense because Jesus translates His betrayal into terms that involve His separation from the disciples. In 13:33 His "going" is first mentioned and tied to the fact that the disciples would not be able to go where He was going.

¹Matthew 16:21 states that this teaching began after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ and Jesus' announcement of His intention to build His Church. The idea is mentioned in Luke 17:22-23; Matt 20:17-19; Mark 10:32, 35. Matt 26:2 is the first mention of the nearness of the crucifixion.

²John 13:21.

Jesus' announcement of His impending betrayal and imminent death initiated a series of questions from the disciples. These questions were not all addressed to Jesus. Some were interactions between the disciples themselves as they sought to determine who was the betrayer and what was involved in the "going" which Jesus had mentioned.

The element of surprise is again evident, in fact, it is intensified when Peter asks Jesus, "Where are you going?"¹ Jesus' answer is indirect. He simply states that Peter cannot presently follow Him but will follow in the future. Peter at once affirms his willingness to die for Jesus. Such a statement indicates Peter's understanding that Jesus' "going" apparently included physical death.

In 13:38 Jesus answers Peter individually, telling him that he will, in fact, deny his Lord rather than lay down his life at this time. But Peter is not the only man in the group who is surprised. Morris cites Walter Luthi, whose statement brings out the significance of this truth, as follows:

Peter and Thomas and the others are thoroughly shocked, and with good reason. They have followed Jesus, burning their boats, and blowing up the bridges behind them, so to speak. . . . And now He has disclosed to them that He is about to go where they cannot follow Him as yet. That means that they must part from Him. The reason why

¹John 13:36. Note that all occurrences of "go" in whatever form in chapter 13 are translations of forms of ὑπάγω. Πορεύομαι does not occur until 14:2 and 3. This is interesting but the exegetical significance of this word choice, if any, is not known to this writer.

they are so deeply shocked is that separation from their Lord is absolutely unthinkable to them.¹

The importance of the fact that the whole group was shocked is great because Jesus, having answered Peter's surprised question in the closing verses of chapter 13, now turns to the whole group and broadens His answer to include all the disciples. This underscores the connection of chapter 13 and chapter 14 and raises the question of whether there is an unfortunate chapter division following 13:38.

The Connection of Chapters 13 and 14

Hendriksen is not surprised by the fact that some authors have called the chapter division between chapters 13 and 14 "unfortunate." However, he does not agree with them and affirms, "We too would have placed the chapter-division exactly where it is found."² He advances three arguments to support his position which are presented here.

The first, and apparently most important, reason advanced is the change to the use of the plural in chapter 14. Chapter 13 closes with Peter alone being addressed. I contend this is exactly what would be expected in this situation as Jesus expands His answer to Peter to include the whole group. The chapter division breaks that thought and

¹Citation found in Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament. F. F. Bruce, gen. editor (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 637, n. 3.

²Hendriksen, John, p. 262.

causes the reader to lose the advancement in Jesus' argumentation and teaching.

Hendriksen argues secondly that chapter 13 is different in nature from chapters 14-16. He sees the former chapter as "narrative and dialogue" and the latter chapters as "discourses."¹ Such a statement appears to ignore the fact that 14:5 introduces a question from Thomas which Jesus answers and that 14:8 records Philip's question to Jesus which He also answers. Thus, the question and answer "dialogue" which closes chapter 13 really is not concluded until perhaps 14:14, with the "discourse" beginning at that point.

The final argument advanced by Hendriksen is that chapter 13 includes subject matter of a miscellaneous nature while chapters 14, 15, 16, and 17 "have each one central theme."² Perhaps his observations about the themes of these chapters is correct. This truth does not, however, negate the fact that the question and answer process started in chapter 13 continues at least through 14:14.

The conclusion that there is a close connection of the whole passage from 13:31 through 14:14 seems to argue strongly that the chapter division is indeed unfortunate. Consequently, the statements which open chapter 14 must be understood against the background of chapter 13, a background of anxiety and confusion among the eleven disciples

¹Ibid. ²Ibid.

who remained with Jesus in the upper room after the departure of Judas.

The Contribution of Chapter 14

As one studies chapter 14 the ideas of "going" and "coming" are presented again and again. Since both the idea of going and the idea of coming are found in 14:2-3, one should expect the context of chapter 14 to contribute something to the understanding of what is meant when Jesus speaks of going away and coming again.

Contributions Regarding His Going

Thomas complained (14:5) that he and the other disciples did not know where Jesus was going. This complaint followed Jesus' mention of going to prepare a place for them. Though Jesus had preceded this statement with a mention of "the Father's house," Thomas, speaking for all the disciples,¹ evidently did not understand that Jesus was going to the Father's house or the group thought that Jesus intended to tell them that He was going to a place different from the Father's house.

Jesus deals with this lack of understanding in the rest of chapter 14. In 14:12 He says, "I am going to my Father" and if one understands that "my Father" is located

¹One must not overlook the personal pronouns in the passage, especially the second person plural. While there is no personal pronoun used in addition to the verb in 14:5 the fact that Thomas was obviously speaking for the assembled apostolic group should not be ignored.

in "my Father's house" he is perceiving the obvious. But one should note that Jesus felt obliged to make this statement in order to clarify what He had said earlier. In 14:28 Jesus said, apparently with reference to His statements recorded in 14:2-3, "You heard that I myself said to you, 'I am going and I will come to you.'"

If one does understand the statement Jesus makes in 14:28 to have reference to the statements He made in 14:2 and 3, there is a solid reason for understanding that only one departure is involved in Jesus' thought. The supposition that His disciples understood this truth by the end of the discourse recorded in chapter 14 is neither unreasonable nor unsupportable. They understood He was leaving, and His departure would take Him from them but to His Father whose "house" was understood to be in Heaven.

Contributions Regarding His Coming

As chapter 14 unfolds and Jesus clarifies and expands what He has said previously, the idea of coming is mentioned directly or indirectly six times.

Direct Mention of "Coming"

The first mention of coming following verses 2 and 3 is found in 14:18. In this verse Jesus affirms, "I will not abandon you as orphans, I will come to you." The time element mentioned in the following verse, "yet a little time," would support an understanding that the coming here mentioned was that of the post-resurrection appearances.

Hoskyns makes a necessary point when he affirms: "This advent of the Christ is not an interpretation of the coming of the Spirit, as many commentators ancient and modern have affirmed."¹ While I would agree this coming is not a coming of the Spirit I would also affirm it could be a spiritual coming.

One should note that the coming promised in 14:18 is promised specifically to the eleven men being addressed and is probably rightly understood as taking place before their deaths. Christ's use of "orphans" underscores in my mind the thinking that the promised return is something these men will experience while still alive since one seldom thinks of dead people as being orphaned.

The next direct mention of the idea of "coming" is in 14:23 where Jesus makes a general statement and promise, the scope of which goes far beyond the group of eleven men in His presence. Judas, not Iscariot, had asked why Christ would show Himself to the disciples and not to the world. Jesus answered, "If anyone loves me he will come to him and we will make a permanent abode² with him." Most commentators agree that Christ is here speaking of a spiritual, non-physical coming. Morris typifies this position when he comments that "John is not thinking of the second coming, nor

¹Sir Edwyn Hoskyns cited by Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, p. 651, note 54.

²"Permanent abode" translates *μονήν*. The propriety of this translation will be discussed in the following chapter.

of the post-resurrection appearances, but of that state of the believer by which he experiences the immediate presence of the Deity."¹

Here the coming promised is not limited to the eleven listeners but does include them and will take place, apparently, before they die.

In 14:28 another occurrence of the "coming" idea is found but it does not contribute a great deal. Here Jesus says, "You have heard that I said to you, 'I am going and will come again to you.'" The reference to the disciples having heard previously probably relates to John 14:2-3. What does make this verse (14:28) important is that Jesus, having spoken of coming to His disciples twice since the initial introduction of the idea, here refers back to that introduction as if the coming referred to was similar, if not identical to all that had been mentioned. In other words, Jesus mentions a coming in verse 3, in verse 18, in verse 23, and then in verse 28 refers to the mention in verse 3. He says nothing that demands that His listeners understand more than one coming is involved. Verses 18 and 23 do not refer to the Second Coming. One must ask if verse 3 does. The weight of the context seems to indicate it does not.

John 14:30 has another mention of the "coming" idea, although the verse does not refer to the coming of Jesus. Here Jesus affirms that "the ruler of the world is coming."

¹Morris, John, p. 654.

Jesus is obviously speaking of His impending death in which Satan plays such a major role. This "coming" would take place in the very same night. No long wait is envisioned, yet no reference is introduced to alert his listeners to a coming different in time than that previously mentioned. The disciples would have reasonably understood that every coming mentioned would take place in their lifetime.

While one may assert that the disciples were mistaken in their understanding of what Jesus said, the burden for the proof of that position must be borne by the one who contradicts what seems clear. What the disciples would have understood is a weighty factor in determining the correct interpretation of the passage under consideration.

Indirect Mention of "Coming"

At least two verses in John 14 speak indirectly of Jesus' coming. In 14:19 Jesus affirms the disciples will see Him, although the world will not be able to see Him. He goes on to say (14:20) that "In that day, you yourselves will know that I am in my Father." Here the reader finds great emphasis given through the use of personal pronouns in addition to a second person plural verb. This argues forcibly with regard to Jesus' intent to communicate an occurrence in which these men would be personally involved. That they would still be alive, even as "the world" with which they are contrasted is alive, is patent.

In 14:21 Jesus promises to show or manifest Himself to the one who "has" and "keeps" His commandments. Present tense participles make it obvious that the intent involves a relationship with a person who is doing these things, not one who has done and is now deceased. So, again, one sees a context which frequently and repeatedly speaks to a specific group of men in terms of events which would occur within their lifetimes.

Some Conclusions Based on Context

While the contributions to interpretation made by a text's context are not totally determinative, neither may one set them aside without some evaluation as to the effect they have on the correct understanding of the text under consideration. With this thought in mind, some conclusions based on the context are presented here.

The Need to be Met: Comfort

The context of the text under consideration puts some limitations upon the interpretation of John 14:2, 3. The mental state of the ones to whom Jesus spoke these words is one of disturbance. John 14:1 confirms this. The disciples have been surprised again and again. Jesus is going away. Soon! His betrayer is in their midst. Even Peter will deny the Lord.

So, as Jesus launches His final discourse, He knows He must do something to comfort, to stabilize His followers. As the record moves from chapter 13 to chapter 14, the

attention of Christ moves from Peter individually to the whole group with Him, eleven men desperately in need of comfort, for themselves, immediately.

Jesus recognizes the immediacy of the "comfort need" of the men before Him. He then speaks truth to them to bring them that comfort. In the opinion of this writer, any interpretation which does not place primary emphasis on those men standing before Christ and their immediate need must be laid aside.

As I have read and re-read the passage under discussion I have become convinced that the disciples were not thinking about their death and what would occur after that. The death they were concerned with, rather, was the death of Jesus Christ and the fact that they would necessarily have to go on living without Him because He would be gone from them. I would like to suggest that some interpreters have lost sight of this truth. They have allowed the sense of the tension in the atmosphere of that upper room to escape their notice and have brought New Testament truth which would be revealed later through Paul into this setting.¹

A great deal of caution is demanded here. I am firmly convinced that Second Coming truth brings comfort to

¹A discussion of how much the disciples knew about the Second Coming, Rapture and Revelation, at the time of the events of John 14 is beyond the scope of this paper. Paul did label his teaching of Rapture truth a "mystery," however, so it is not totally unrealistic to believe that revelatory teaching on the matter had not preceded Paul's time of writing.

a believer of any age, whether that coming will take place during his lifetime or not. I also realize that there are occasions recorded in the New Testament where Jesus taught His disciples truth, especially eschatological truth, which they did not understand. I understand that in some situations Jesus used the plural personal pronoun "you" when the immediate hearers would not be involved in the events of which He was speaking. All of these matters are true.

The question as I perceive it here, however, is not what could be done but what was done. That Jesus used the plural personal pronoun and meant the men in His presence would be involved is without doubt. In fact, their needs are the primary ones to be met.¹ Bible teaching does meet needs but to present totally new truth, as Second Coming truth would be to the disciples, with no explanation does not satisfy needs as I believe Jesus would have wanted to do.

The intent of these statements is not intended to affirm that Jesus could not have spoken of the Rapture in John 14:2-3. Rather, another possibility has been suggested as supported by the context.

¹This matter will be examined in more depth later and must not be minimized. The tendency among interpreters has been to assume an application to the Invisible Church and write expositions of this application. One should not have to issue the reminder that the chorus "Every Promise in the Book is Mine" may be fun to sing but makes for very poor hermeneutics.

A Note to Be Made: Coming

Conclusions from context need not be limited to the fact that comfort for the disciples is a prime concern in the promise of John 14:2-3. I believe the context has much to say about the coming as well.

One does an injustice as an interpreter if he overlooks the fact of the continuity of chapters 13 and 14. No more inappropriate title could be found than one like "Disconnected Thoughts on Unrelated Topics." Yet many have ignored this fact. This writer has found no evidence that there be more than one coming involved in the entire context. Nothing demands one coming, the Rapture, for example, in 14:3; a post-resurrection coming in 14:18; and a spiritual coming in 14:23. The possibility of one coming fulfilling each occurrence of a promise to come to the disciples cannot be denied by anything found in the context. To state that one coming is demanded to fulfill these promises is an overstatement; however, an exhortation to consider this possibility is proper. An examination of the text will furnish further data.

CHAPTER IV

AN EXAMINATION OF THE TEXT

This chapter presents the meanings of words and phrases in the two verses under consideration, seeking to provide all necessary information with which to suggest an interpretation in the following chapter.

The Content of 14:2

There appears to be little doubt about what words are in the text of this verse. Only one textual problem is noted by commentators and that arises because some manuscripts omit ὅτι. Metzger notes that its absence is probably to be explained as a simplification introduced by copyists who took it as ὅτι recitativum, which is often omitted as superfluous.¹ This writer finds this decision one which is easily supportable and accepts the genuineness of ὅτι.

"In My Father's House"

There seem to be only three major possibilities for the meaning of this phrase. The first would involve

¹Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 243. This argumentation is not new. Cf. Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 405 (hereinafter cited as John).

translating οἰκία as "household" or "family" which would be understood to deal with what might be called the "family of God." There are New Testament occurrences where οἰκία is translated by "household" when referring to a man's family.¹ The reference in 14:2, however, uses a designation for deity in the genitive case, τοῦ πατρός, with οἰκία. No parallel reference could be found where translating with the meaning "family" or "household" was most appropriate.

A second possibility is illustrated in John 2:16 where Jesus refers to the Temple as "my Father's house." Though οἶκος is used in 2:16 and οἰκία is used in 14:2 the words are essentially synonymous and speak of "a dwelling place."²

In the context of John 14, however, Jesus is clearly not speaking of the Temple. John 14:6ff. speak of seeing, knowing, and coming into the presence of the Father, thus strengthening the idea of a dwelling place. Thus, accepting the third possibility usually offered, one may rightly understand Jesus to mean "the place where my Father dwells." Both Old Testament and New Testament references³ support the position that this dwelling place is heaven.

¹Cf. 1 Cor 16:15.

²W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. II (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), pp. 236-37. Vine points out that οἶκος "denoted the whole estate" while οἰκία "stood for the dwelling only." This distinction, found in Attic law, fades in later Greek and there is no reason one should attempt to make a point of the difference of the two words here.

³Cf. Isa 63:15; Ps 33:13-14; Matt 6:9.

Of the three possibilities, "household," "temple," or "heaven," the last one seems the best. Alford was so convinced of this he simply stated boldly: "The οἶκος is heaven."¹

"Many Mansions"

This phrase is problematic due both to the Greek word, μονή, and the usual English translation, "mansion." The English term "mansion" in contemporary usage communicates the idea of a palatial dwelling. When Tyndale introduced it in his translation, however, the word simply meant "dwelling place." This misunderstanding has promoted such song lyrics as "I've got a mansion over the hill-top" and "A tent or a cottage, why should I care?/They're building a palace for me over there." (Note how the "mansion" has been upgraded to a "palace.") That the idea of a large, beautiful and well-furnished estate-house is not in view may be better understood from an examination of the Greek word, μονή.

Most commentators are in agreement with the usual lexical meaning given for μονή; i.e., "dwelling (-place, room, abode)."² Problems arise, however, when consideration is given to the nature of these dwelling places. Are they

¹Henry Alford, The Greek Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), Vol. I, p. 849.

²William F. Arndt and F. William Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 529 (hereinafter referred to as Lexicon).

to be understood as literal places or spiritual relationships? Are they only temporary stops for rest or permanently occupied by the saints?

Literal Places or Spiritual Relationships

Concerning the first question, Gundry affirms "we are to think of . . . not mansions in the sky but spiritual positions in Christ, much as in Pauline theology."¹ Gundry attempts to support his position through the use of several passages, primarily in 1 John, where μένω denotes spiritual relationships. He fails to mention that μένω occurs several times in John's Gospel where it does not deal with spiritual relationships.² This one-sided presentation weakens his position and causes one to wonder if perhaps Gundry's pre-suppositions have not overly affected his exegesis. Gundry also attempts to find support for his position from 14:23, the only other occurrence of μονή in the New Testament. A spiritual relationship is certainly in view in 14:23 but the idea of a literal occupation of a dwelling-place is there as well.

It seems best therefore, to understand the μονή to mean an actual "abode" or "place to stay." This is not to contend that walls, floor and ceiling are demanded but does

¹Robert H. Gundry, "'In my Father's House are many Μοναί' (John 14:2)," Zeitschrift Fur Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 58 (1967), 70 (hereinafter referred to as "Μοναί").

²Cf. for examples John 1:38, 39; 2:12; 4:40; 8:35; 10:40; 11:6; 19:31; 21:22, 23.

mean that there is more than a spiritual relationship in view. An actual location is in view here where those involved can take up residence.¹

Temporary or Permanent in Nature

On the question of the temporary or permanent nature of the dwelling places, Westcott opted for something of a temporary nature. He understood the meaning to be akin to a rest-station "where travellers found refreshment."² Westcott believed this indicated a future existence of combined but "contrasted notions of repose and progress."³ This idea of temporary rest-stations "on the road to God" is found as early as Origen.⁴

Tasker counters the temporary-nature idea attributed to Origen well when he says that such a meaning

was not however the interpretation generally given to the word by the ancient Fathers, and by the derivation it would seem to denote much more the idea of permanence. It is found once more in the New Testament, in xiv. 23, where the permanent dwelling of the Father and the Son in the hearts of loving disciples is stressed.⁵

¹Cf. Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According to John, Vol. II, in The Anchor Bible, ed. by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 618-19.

²Brooke Foss Westcott, The Gospel According to St. John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), p. 200.

³Ibid.

⁴Brown, The Gospel According to John, II, p. 619.

⁵R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to St. John, reprinted in The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, R. V. G. Tasker, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), p. 171.

The importance of the only other occurrence of *μονή* in John 14:23, can hardly be over-emphasized in determining the nature of the dwelling involved. While the word may involve either a temporary or a permanent dwelling, the fact that a permanent dwelling is in view in 14:23 is difficult to dispute. Thus Morris' statement seems proper when he concludes, "It seems better understood as 'permanent residences' than as 'steps along the way of development.'"¹

Hauck supports the position which understands the dwelling place to be permanent. He believes *μονή* was "deliberately chosen to express the fact that our earthly state is transitory and provisional compared with eternal and blessed being with God."²

A last item of support may be found in the LXX occurrence in 1 Maccabees 7:38. The text reads *μη δῶς αὐτοῖς μονήν*. Fischel translates "suffer them not to live any longer" and suggests the idea is to "permanently end their life."³

¹Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament, F. F. Bruce, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 638.

²Friedrich Hauck, "*μένω . . . μονή, κ.τ.λ.*" Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (hereinafter referred to as TDNT), Vol. IV, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 580.

³Henry Albert Fischel, The First Book of Maccabees Commentary (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p. 63.

The fact that there are "many" dwelling places should not be overlooked. Apparently the Lord Jesus wanted to communicate the idea that "there is room for all the faithful."¹

The conclusion I have reached concerning *μονὰὶ πολλαί* is that there are sufficient permanent dwelling places available for those concerned.

"εἰ δὲ μή, εἶπον ἂν ὑμῖν ὅτι"

Zemek has correctly stated that the "textual and particularly the syntactical challenges of [this phrase] are staggering."² The task would be simplified were it possible to say as Brown does, "All in all, the translation without ὅτι makes the best sense."³ However, ὅτι seems to be authentic⁴ so one is compelled to seek a meaningful translation which recognizes the contribution the word makes.

Before affirming that the ὅτι should be omitted from the translation, Brown suggests four possible translations which include ὅτι. His suggested possibilities are:

¹C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text, 2nd edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 533.

²Zemek, "John 14:2-3 and its Eschatological Implications," p. 9.

³Brown, The Gospel According to John, p. 620.

⁴See discussion above.

- (a) "otherwise I would have told [=warned] you, because I am going off to prepare. . . ."
- (b) "otherwise would I have told you so, because I am going off to prepare. . . ?"
- (c) "otherwise I would have told you that I am going off to prepare. . . ."
- (d) "otherwise would I have told you that I am going off to prepare. . . ?"¹

Brown does not accept any of these suggestions but in his discussion of (a) he states that possibility can make sense "only if 'otherwise I would have told you' is put in parentheses."² A translation with such a parenthetical insertion would read: "In my Father's house are many mansions; (if it were not so, I would have told you;) because I go. . . ." Morris agrees that this option is probably the best one and translates, "'In my Father's house are many rooms (if it were not so, I would have told you), for I go to prepare a place for you.'"³

This writer believes the parenthetical treatment is the best one available but would shorten the translation somewhat. Εἰ δέ μὴ is used "elliptically in the sense of otherwise, . . . to introduce an alternative statement or command."⁴ Consequently, the translation is rendered: "In my Father's house are many permanent dwelling-places (otherwise, I would have told you), for. . . ."

¹ Brown, The Gospel According to John, p. 619.

² Ibid.

³ Morris, John, p. 639.

⁴ Ernest DeWitt Burton, Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), p. 111.

"I am going to prepare a place for you."

This phrase is best thought of as a unit but better understood by dealing with its parts. Consequently, four parts will be examined individually.

Πορεύομαι

This verb in the present tense is perhaps best understood as a futuristic present. Jesus is making a confident assertion which is intended to arrest the attention of His listeners. He understands that an imminent fulfillment is in mind. He had already introduced the idea of His going or His leaving the disciples in John 13:33. Here He intends to tell His disciples why He is leaving them.

While πορεύομαι is used here, a change from ὑπάγω in 13:33, there is no difference in meaning intended.¹ The context makes the meaning clear. Jesus speaks of His crucifixion, burial, and initial ascension to the Father when He speaks of His "going." All the events of His death, the visible acts of His separation from His disciples, are included in His "going to His Father."

ἑτοιμάσαι τόπον

The primary meaning of ἑτοιμάζω is "put or keep in readiness, prepare."² The word is translated "make ready" in Mark 14:16 and Luke 9:52. However, one should not

¹Cf. earlier discussion and Barrett, John, p. 457.

²Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 316.

overlook the possible meaning of "to furnish." Euripides spoke of "those furnishing tears" when he wrote: δακρύα ὁ ἐτοιμάζουσι.¹ Thus, the idea of furnishing or providing is not foreign to the meaning of this word. A first-century citation from Josephus, εἰς ἐτοιμασίαν ὑμῶν παρεχεῖν, is translated, "to place at your disposal."² That the idea of "furnish" might be involved in the word is obvious. The possibility that the Lord Jesus was speaking of providing or furnishing something must not be overlooked in the translation and interpretation of this word.

Sproule has correctly affirmed that the infinitive is one of purpose.³ The distinction between purposive and resultive infinitives is often difficult but in this case it seems that the goal or aim of the main verb is given and, thus, the infinitive is one of purpose. One must be alert to the fact that this does not demand that Jesus reach the Father's house before the purpose could be accomplished. The purpose of preparing could certainly be accomplished prior to arrival in heaven and still be compatible with the language found here. Further discussion of the interpretation of this word will be reserved for the following chapter.

¹Cited in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, compilers, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), Vol. I, p. 703 (hereinafter referred to as Lexicon).

²Ibid.

³John Sproule, "An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," Th.D. Dissertation, Grace Seminary, 1981 (hereinafter referred to as "Defense").

τόπος ordinarily means "place, region."¹ However, a point should be made of the fact that of eighty locations in the New Testament where τόπος is translated "place" at least four references² other than the one under consideration have a metaphorical meaning equal to "opportunity" or "opening." Lexical citations support this metaphorical usage as early as the second century B.C. and on to at least the third century A.D. While the early usage is not that determinative, this usage over at least five centuries cannot be ignored.

Later discussion must determine the meaning of these words in their context but a translation of "to furnish (provide) opportunity" for the phrase under consideration is certainly a possibility. Admittedly, this possibility is rather remote. There are much better ways of stating "opportunity" than through the use of τόπος. Nevertheless, the usage does occur and must be considered. One must note, however, that such usage never occurs with ποῦν though this must not be considered as prohibiting such usage since ποῦν occurs only two times in the New Testament and both of those times are in John 14.

οὔτις

Consideration of this word, the meaning of which can hardly be disputed, is only given as an hermeneutical

¹Liddell and Scott, Lexicon, p. 1806.

²Rom 12:19; 15:23; Eph 4:27; Heb 12:17.

reminder that the primary interpretation of these verses must be the meaning as understood by and related to the eleven men to whom Christ was speaking. They are the primary beneficiaries of any promise and it is primarily for their comfort that this discourse is given. Any group beyond the eleven which might benefit from the promise given here must do so by application, not by direct interpretation. This same truth applies to the promised "coming again" of the following verse as well.

The author is aware that there are occurrences in the New Testament where the second person plural pronoun is used and the ones addressed are not the people who are actually involved in what is being said. The context of such use generally makes it clear to the reader whether what is said applies to the immediate listeners or not. For example, in Matthew 24:15 ("Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation . . .") one recognizes that Jesus' listeners were not involved in the fulfillment in their lifetime. In Matthew 5:27, however, ("You have heard that it was said . . .") there is little doubt that the listeners were the ones personally involved in the thought.

In John 14 the context argues for the reader to understand ὑμῖν as being directly applicable to the group addressed. They are the ones needing comfort. In addition, in the verses under consideration, one would have a difficult task if he attempted to persuade anyone that Jesus did not have specific reference to the eleven men before Him when

He said, "I would have told you." To move on in the Greek text five more words ("I go to prepare a place for you") and understand a group other than or even greater than the eleven is questionable hermeneutics in my mind.

This writer contends that every occurrence of the second person plural in John 14:2-3 must be understood, in its primary interpretation, as including the eleven men addressed and no others. If a wider group is to benefit from the promise here given it must do so by application, not through initial interpretation. I believe this contention is supported by Jesus' words in John 14:23. There, in a promise which obviously goes beyond the eleven, he says, "If any man loves me . . . we will make our dwelling place with him."

In review, I am not arguing that the personal pronoun must be limited in every occurrence in the New Testament. I am arguing that in John 14:2-3 the interpretation of that personal pronoun must be limited, because of its usage there and because of the context.

The Content of 14:3

This verse has fewer problems with which to deal, but the magnitude of the major problem has motivated many to write much over the years.

παράλημψομαι

Perhaps there is no other single word in this text which demands such care in translation. The meaning

of this word is crucial to a proper understanding of the text.

The word is not complex in its composition. The preposition παρά has been prefixed to the verb λαμβάνω which is deponent in the future. Thus we are dealing with the future active of παραλαμβάνω. The prefixed preposition serves to "strengthen or enlarge the basic meaning" of the verb so that παραλαμβάνειν has the meaning of "to draw someone to oneself" when used with a personal direct object as in this case.¹

Siede indicates that this verb's usage in the New Testament supports a meaning of "to take someone with oneself, to choose out from a large number, offer fellowship to a chosen one or introduce a particular plan."² Several citations from LXX, Josephus and extra-Biblical literature are available to support the usage which Siede suggests as a proper one.³

Sproule indicates his awareness of a problem which has hindered the interpretation of this verse when he states, "The word, in and of itself, does not imply taking one back

¹ Burghard Siede, "λαμβάνω," The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. III, Colin Brown, gen. ed., trans. and ed. by Lothar Coenen, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 748.

² Ibid., 3:751.

³ Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Version of the Old Testament (Austria: Akademische Druck, 1954), Vol. 2, p. 1061. Liddell and Scott, Lexicon, p. 1315. Gerhard Delling, "λαμβάνω, κ.τ.λ.," TDNT, 4:11-14.

to heaven as pretribulationists might hope."¹ Some interpreters have attempted to force a rapture meaning on this word to the detriment of a clear and careful handling of the passage.

It is the conviction of this writer that in the haste of some to include this verse in their particular eschatological framework, a far more fitting understanding of the word can be used, one which fits the context better on several points. As was pointed out above one meaning παραλαμβάνω has is the meaning of choosing out from a large number, even offering fellowship to a chosen one. This meaning fits the context on at least three points.

First, as has been pointed out, the major concern of Jesus' words here is to bring comfort to a group in His immediate presence. The members of this group are concerned because of the impending interruption of the fellowship which they have enjoyed with Christ. He is going away. So to pick a meaning which is related to such a fellowship is certainly an appropriate choice. Peter seems to have underscored this idea when he stated he would be willing to go so far as to die in order to remain with Jesus (13:38).

Secondly, while Jesus does say He is going away, He says He is coming back. I certainly appreciate the pressures here to move the scene to a heavenly one, but I believe the disciples' thoughts were centered on a

¹Sproule, "Defense," p. 170.

relationship which they had enjoyed and desired to continue here on earth. The text does not demand that anyone be removed from the world to enjoy the fellowship Jesus is promising, though, admittedly, it certainly allows for such a situation.

Thirdly, the interpretation must be understood primarily in reference to these men. They have died and are now with Christ. He certainly knew this would happen. He did not tell them about the Rapture as a means of re-establishing fellowship with Him when He knew they would enjoy such fellowship for at least 1900 years before the Rapture took place.

One might well object that the Thessalonians also received a promise but died without receiving that promise. I certainly agree that to understand the fulfillment of that promise in 2 Thessalonians as occurring at the Second Coming is very proper handling of the text. That promise, however, seems to be more general in scope than the one in John 14:2-3. It involves statements like "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed" (2 Thess 1:7) not "I am coming back to receive you."

The reader should be reminded that the intention of the writer of this thesis is not to rule out every possibility of the various understandings of John 14:2-3. Rather, I hope to suggest some new possibilities for consideration, lest some think that the final word has been said.

Returning to the suggestion that the idea of παραλαμβάνω includes meaning beyond that often used, I would suggest that the idea of choosing from a number fits the context of a coming spoken of later in chapter 14. Beginning in verse 15f Jesus speaks of a coming of the "Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive." This coming is a selective coming, one which is based on a choosing out. In verse 18 Christ says, "I will come to you." This also involves a choosing out, a selective choice for fellowship. Therefore, the most appropriate meaning for παραλήμψομαι is that of offering fellowship to a chosen one.

The Remaining Portion of 14:3

There are no translation difficulties in the rest of John 14:3 so the discussion of this portion, Jesus' purpose in His coming again, will be left to the following chapter.

A Suggested Translation of John 14:2, 3

At this point one is able to suggest a translation for the verses under consideration. In the next chapter a discussion of the meaning of the verses will be undertaken.

John 14:2-3:

In my Father's house are many permanent dwelling places (otherwise, I would have told you) for I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and offer you fellowship with me, so that where I am you may be also.

CHAPTER V

A PROPOSED INTERPRETATION

Before attempting an interpretation of these verses, a brief review of the context is helpful. Carson's warning is apt:

The Farewell Discourse must not be treated simplistically, as nothing more than Christian comfort designed to console defeated saints. Rather, it is first and foremost an exposition of the significance of Jesus' "going away" to his Father via the cross. It is elemental theology; and only as such does it offer encouragement and consolation.¹

This theology is found in an address to eleven specific men, Christ's disciples, in the room before Him. Meyer notes the change as to the persons being addressed; "From Peter, Jesus now turns, with consolatory address in relation to His near departure, to His disciples generally."²

One must be careful to keep the idea of the disciples central in the proposed interpretation. There is no

¹D. A. Carson, The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 19 (hereinafter referred to as Discourse). Emphasis his.

²Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John. Translated by William Urwich. The translation revised and edited by Frederick Crombie (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 406 (hereinafter referred to as John).

overstatement when Enns states: "The disciples' comfort is a major purpose for the Upper Room discourse."¹

As one turns to the specific verses under consideration, the "usual understanding of these verses" is seen to be Jesus consoling "his disciples concerning his imminent departure by promising to prepare mansions for them in heaven and to take them to their heavenly homes at his return."² Several commentators opt for this understanding, some without even interacting with other possibilities.

This writer would suggest that Jesus is in the early verses of John 14 presenting what may be considered a prescription for treating the anxiety of His disciples. In verse one He tells them that continued trust in His person, even though He will soon no longer be visibly present, is one ingredient in the proposed prescription. In verses 2 and 3 He presents two additional elements which aid in the treatment of anxiety.

Faith in Christ's Provision

As pointed out in the previous chapter, there can be little doubt that the Father's house is heaven. But the provision which Christ speaks of here does not consist of a

¹Paul Peter Enns, "The Upper Room Discourse: The Consummation of Christ's Instruction," Th.D. Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979 (hereinafter referred to as "Discourse").

²Gundry, "Movaì," p. 68. This is not to be understood as Gundry's position but merely his statement of the usual understanding. He cites commentators from Godet to Lenski who take this position.

mansion, or even a permanent dwelling place. The idea of the statement "In my Father's house are many permanent dwelling places" is that there is room for as many as believe according to the admonition in verse one. "'Plenty room in heaven, room for me but also room for you,' is the one idea conveyed here."¹ Christ is making a statement to the effect that the eternal dwelling place of believers is not tied to their continuing in His physical presence. In fact, there is plenty of room for all but the very opportunity to enter this spacious heaven is tied to Christ's departure. "There is room enough for all there: though you may find no shelter among men (xvi. 1, 2), you shall find it amply with my Father."²

Christ's Going

The foundation for participation is given in the next sentence where Christ gives the purpose of his going. Enns has spoken well of what the disciples understood by this going:

Since both the Johannine emphasis on Jesus' returning to the Father (cf. John 13:33, 36; 14:4, 28; 16:5, etc.) and the synoptic emphasis on the death of Jesus (Matt. 26:24; Mk. 14:23) were mentioned in the upper room, it appears Jesus wanted to [sic (probably should be "his")] disciples to understand His going away meant he would die, be raised again and go to the Father.³

¹Hendricksen, John, p. II:265.

²Westcott, John, p. 200.

³Enns, "Discourse," p. 113.

Of the phrase "I go to prepare a place," Maclaren says surprisingly, "I would not insist upon the literal interpretation of such words."¹ If one is not to understand these words literally, what options are left? They clearly give the purpose of Christ's going. Kent seems to understand the infinitive as one of purpose when he says, "The purpose of his going was to secure access to heaven for men (Heb. 6:20)."² In the next sentence, however, he speaks of the result; "It would be accomplished by the expiation of sin which Christ was about to make at the cross."³ That the going resulted in the "preparation" is most clearly stated by Carson:

In John 14:2, therefore, Jesus is not saying, in effect, "I am returning to my Father's house so that, after I get there, I'll be able to get the place ready for you"; but rather, "I am returning to my Father's house in order that this very return, this redemptive journey, may be the means of preparing the place." . . . Jesus' going is itself designed to prepare a place for his followers, not least by preparing his followers for the place, as Augustine has so finely put it.⁴

One might wonder why such distinction between purpose and result needs to be made, especially when the two uses of the infinitive so often seem to merge. The

¹Alexander Maclaren, St. John. Chpts. 1-14. In Expositions of Holy Scripture (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 266.

²Homer A. Kent, Jr., Light in the Darkness: Studies in the Gospel of John (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1974), p. 172.

³Ibid.

⁴Carson, Discourse, p. 24.

distinction must be made to avoid the kind of thinking illustrated by this statement: "A Christian should have great interest in that place to which Jesus has gone, which He is preparing for us."¹ This writer believes with Pink that Christ "has 'prepared' for us a place"² and that there is no preparational work going on at the present time. The fact that there is a hell prepared already for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41) makes the thought of continuing preparation on heaven an incongruity.

Christ's "Preparation"

Christ follows His statement of available room by saying His death and resurrection, His going, provides or furnishes the disciples the opportunity to participate in this eternal existence. That such meaning is possible for ἐτοιμάσαι τόπον ὑμῖν has been demonstrated earlier. The propriety of such an understanding seems to follow naturally as Christ explains why His departure is necessary. He is saying, "There is plenty of room available but my going is demanded to provide an opportunity for you to enjoy this room. So do not object to my going or attempt to hinder me from carrying it out." This understanding seems to be what

¹James Montgomery Boice, The Gospel of John (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), Vol. IV, p. 99.

²Arthur W. Pink, Exposition of the Gospel of John (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1945), Vol. II, p. 351. Emphasis added.

Grundmann means when he says, "The death and resurrection of Christ prepare eternal salvation for His people."¹

The proposed interpretation of John 14:2 understands 1) a statement of adequate room for all who believe; 2) a parenthetical statement in which Christ reminds His disciples of His characteristic openness with them by affirming their knowledge that He would have told them if the situation were otherwise; and 3) a clear declaration of the purpose of His required departure, i.e., that opportunity for the disciples would thus be furnished for their eternal dwelling in the Father's roomy house.

Faith in Christ's Promises

From the instruction to trust in His provision for them, Christ exhorts them to trust in His promises. Verse 3 records two promises and the purpose for them.

The Promise of a Return

In verse 3 Jesus clearly promises that He will come again. The variety of suggestions as to the meaning of this promise would amaze most who read commentaries. The simplistic approach may be seen in this quote from one who seems to be in the traditional dispensational camp.

The doctrine of the second coming of Jesus Christ has two facets, although they are more implicit than explicit in Johannine teaching.

¹Walter Grundmann, "ἑτοιμος, κ.τ.λ.," TDNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), II:705.

a. In John 14:2-3 Jesus' promise to come for believers in this age is seen to follow His present activity of preparing many abiding places, which together make up one place called by Jesus "My Father's house."¹

While this writer has no desire to contradict Cook's opening sentence, the assumptions and presuppositions of the second sentence are staggering.

Both Westcott and Alford argue, perhaps on the basis of the present tense verb, that "the promise must not be limited to that one 'coming' which is the consummation of all 'comings.'"² The present tense, however, is best understood as futuristic and thus does not support a multiplicity of comings.

Augustine seems to argue for the necessity of a physical, bodily return; "Thou goest away by becoming invisible, Thou comest by again becoming manifest to our eyes."³ Sproule seems to believe a physical, bodily return is demanded as well for he asks why Christ would have to return bodily.⁴

¹W. Robert Cook, The Theology of John (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), p. 229.

²Westcott, John, p. 201. Cf. also Henry Alford, The Greek Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), Vol. I, p. 849.

³Augustine, Homilies on the Gospel of John in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Philip Schaff, editor (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), Vol. VII, p. 324.

⁴Sproule, "Defense," p. 177. The argument is advanced that the context adds a specific dimension to Christ's statement but just what in the context does so is not stated. Everything else explicitly said about a coming of Christ in Chapter 14 is clearly speaking of a spiritual coming.

The Possibilities

One need not, in fact must not, limit himself to the Rapture as the only possibility to fulfill this promise. The resurrection could be a possibility or the appearances following the ascension mentioned in John 20:17 but preceding the ascension of Acts 1:9. The purpose stated in the *et* clause, continuing fellowship, does not seem to be met by these comings, however. Other possibilities were presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis and will not be rehearsed here again.

The Rapture is a possibility but this writer fails to see how this offers any true comfort to the eleven men who first heard this promise. Rather, they surely must have understood a coming which they would experience prior to their deaths, which are not under consideration here.

A Proposal

This writer would like to propose that the coming to which Jesus refers in 14:3 is identical with the coming mentioned later in the chapter (14:8, 23, 28). If there is a reason in the text of chapter 14 which demands that the interpreter understand two different comings that reason is not an obvious one. The coming in 14:8, 23, and 28 is obviously the same coming and is a spiritual coming. No commentator was found who disagreed on this point. The coming of 14:3 makes no demands that this spiritual coming could not fulfill.

In John 14:3 Jesus makes a promise to come again to those eleven men who were with Him as Godet makes clear; "Undoubtedly this promise . . . has in view, nevertheless, first of all, the disciples personally, whom Jesus wishes to strengthen in their present disheartenment."¹ In John 14:18 Jesus says to the same group, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you" (emphasis added). The time element for this coming is implied by "Yet a little while" in verse 19. The Rapture hardly fulfills that.

There is no evidence that the disciples understood that two different comings were being spoken of. Neither is there evidence that two different comings are needed. The promise of 14:18 leads to the promise of 14:23. The "come again to you" (emphasis added) of 14:28 is clearly the same coming as that in 14:23 but the language of 14:3 is used; i.e., "You heard that I said to you, 'I am going away and I will come to you.'"

Almost as if He were attempting to clear up any possible doubt about the meaning of the promised coming, Jesus makes a second promise in 14:3 which is adequately fulfilled by the spiritual coming of John 14:23. In fact, this writer would contend it is best fulfilled by that coming.

¹Frederick Louis Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of John (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), Vol. II, p. 270.

The Promise of a Reception

The second promise Jesus makes here involves the phrase παραλήμψομαι ὑμᾶς πρὸς ἑμαυτόν which has been translated earlier by "I will offer you fellowship with me."

Again one needs to remind himself of the need being met by these words; Jesus is instructing a certain group concerning the continuation of their relationship with Him. "It is true I am going away, but I am coming again and our fellowship will be restored," he affirms.

The Particulars of the Reception

Παραλαμβάνω with a personal object as it is found here means especially "to take into fellowship."¹ This idea of fellowship is not always present (cf. Matt 4:5, 8 where the devil "takes Christ") but the context of John 14 certainly supports that choice here. Many writers suggest that to take with is inherent in the verb but its use in Matthew 12:45 seems to argue against this since it is followed by μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ, though the possibility of redundancy is present.

Humphries has attempted to present support for translating πρὸς ἑμαυτόν with "to my home."² He is

¹Gerhard Delling, "λαμβάνω, κ.τ.λ.," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. IV, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 11-13.

²A. Lewis Humphries, "A Note on πρὸς ἑμαυτόν (John XIV.3) and εἰς τὰ ἴδια (John I.11): A Plea for a Revised Translation," The Expository Times, 53 (October 1941-September 1942), 356.

convinced of "an occasional and special use of the reflexive pronoun for which there are parallels in N.T. Greek."¹ This writer remains unconvinced, however, since all the references cited (John 20:10; Luke 24:12; 1 Cor 16:2) deviate from the one under consideration. In John 20:10 the reflexive is third person rather than first person! Luke 24:12 has the third person also and probably relates to the participle rather than the main verb.² In the case of 1 Corinthians 16:2, the third person reflexive is found again and the preposition is παρά and not πρὸς. In addition, the last reference does not rightly translate as "in his home" but, rather, "with himself."

In the only other New Testament occurrence of πρὸς ἑμαυτόν (Phlm 13), the most natural translation is "with myself." Therefore one is certainly warranted in rejecting Humphries' plea for a revised translation and following what has been suggested: "I will offer you fellowship with myself."

Additional support for this position can be provided since παραλαμβάνω means "to offer fellowship to a chosen one," a meaning demonstrated earlier.³ The idea of a specially chosen one enjoying the fellowship which is

¹ Ibid.

² So the translation would read "he went away wondering to himself" (cf. NIV) rather than "he went away to his home, marveling" (cf. NASB) as Humphries suggests.

³ Siede, NITDNT, 3:747.

offered by the returning Christ fits very well the statements of Jesus in 14:18-19 and 14:23, 24. There Jesus makes it clear that not everyone will benefit from this return for fellowship. Yet it is clear that the believers are not removed from the world but rather chosen out from among others to benefit from the fellowship offered.

Some might object that the coming of Christ promised in the latter part of chapter 14 is fulfilled by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. While the coming of the Spirit is promised in 14:16, 17, the coming of Christ and the Father are also promised. To attempt to defend a position in which the Spirit equals the Father and/or the Son is to plunge oneself into a kind of modalism or worse. One must constantly distinguish between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and to treat the coming of the Holy Spirit as if it fulfilled a promised coming of the Son is to confuse the Persons of the Godhead and render the Trinity a meaningless term indeed.

The proposal here presented, then, regarding Christ's promised return and reception as presented in 14:3 is that of understanding only one coming in chapter 14 and that, a spiritual one in which the Son of God, accompanied by the Father, comes and takes up a permanent abode in the believer. Martyn speaks to this point when he reminds his reader that Christ says

he will come again and take [believers] not to these rooms but to himself. Thus, the problem of separation is ultimately to be met with the preparation not of

rooms, but of a room, and that room is not in heaven, but on earth. The disciple can overcome his fear and make his way in the period after Jesus' departure not by recalling that at the close of his own lifetime there will be a room for him in heaven, but rather by knowing that in the present time both the Father and the Son come and make their home with him.¹

The Accomplishment of this Reception

The final clause in John 14:3 states the purpose for Christ's promised return and reception. The full clause reads: "ἵνα ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ καὶ ὑμεῖς ᾗτε, ". . . in order that where I am you also may be." Jesus affirms He will return and offer fellowship with Himself to specially chosen ones so that the departure which has filled them with concern would not continue as a long separation but rather would begin a relationship of mutual existence always.

Admittedly, one would more naturally expect Jesus to say "in order that where you are I will be also" if He referred to a fellowship relationship on the earth. Scripture seems to emphasize the need of men to be with Christ much more than Christ being with men, however. In Luke 23:43 the Lord Jesus assured the repentant thief, "Today with me you shall be in Paradise."

More to the point is the expression of John 12:26 where Jesus says, ". . . and where I am there also shall my servant be." The concern of one who knows and loves the Lord is that he might be with his Lord at all times.

¹J. Louis Martyn, History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p. 147.

Because of the promised return and reception in John 14:3, that is a reality for every believer. The eleven disciples were the first to benefit from the coming again of the Lord Jesus as it fulfilled the promise in John 14:3 and 14:23. Since that time every believer is brought into this relationship of fellowship at the moment of salvation. At that time the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit come and take one of God's specially chosen ones into fellowship with God Himself. From that moment on, the believer and his living Lord are together, never to be separated again.

CHAPTER VI

AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE AND CONCLUSION

A possible translation was proposed at the end of Chapter 3. A paraphrase is presented here including verse 1.

An Expanded Paraphrase

Stop letting your heart be troubled! You trust in God though you cannot see Him. Continue to trust in me though I am departing from you in terms of a visible manifestation.

There is plenty of room in Heaven for you (You know I would have told you if that were not the case) because I'm departing to die, rise again and ascend to my Father thus providing you with the opportunity to enjoy salvation.

Since I am departing to do all this, I will come back again, though not physically at this time, and I will take you into a fellowship with myself so that we can be together from that time forward.

The Conclusion of the Matter

Several conclusions may be stated as a result of this study. First, the primary beneficiaries of the promises of John 14:2-3 were the eleven disciples and, by expansion, others who believed at that time. They saw the Lord Jesus crucified and buried. They saw Him following His resurrection. But, in a unique way, they were the only ones to experience the "coming again" which He promised in 14:2-3 and 14:23. Today's believer really has no connection to the promises of the passage, even by application. The fellowship

relation spoken of in 14:23 is accomplished at the moment of saving faith but the "coming again" in the way it was intended when Jesus spoke cannot be experienced by today's believer who has never been separated from the Christ in whom he believes.

John 14:1-3 need not be laid aside as a text not to be preached and taught today. God's prescription for anxiety still includes faith in the person of Christ, faith in the provision of Christ, and faith in the promises of Christ. However, this writer is convinced that when one desires to preach or teach of Christ's promises to come again to rapture His own, he ought to turn to another text than John 14:1-3.

Nonetheless, the teaching of the fact of an indwelling, Triune God needs to be preached in a balanced way with the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit specifically. Some have so emphasized the Spirit's indwelling that the glorious truth that all three persons of the Godhead have a permanent abode within the believer is almost unknown and unheard in today's church. May God grant that this study might be an impetus to change that fact.

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