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‘Come and See’: Tracing the Theological Function of a Johannine Formula in Light of the Palestinian Targums

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the phrase ‘come and see’ in the Gospel of John, highlighting its role in the Johannine narrative as a key expression of divine revelation. It argues that the meaning of this phrase in John can be illuminated by its use in the Palestinian Targums, where it functions as a call to deeper insight into salvation history. By analysing the similarities between the Targumic and Johannine usage, the study reveals how the phrase invites the reader to surpass ordinary understanding and perceive the deeper, theological significance of the revealed person or event. The article contributes to a fuller understanding of the narrative and theological function of ‘come and see’ in the Fourth Gospel.

KEYWORDS: Fourth Gospel, Johannine literature, ‘come and see’, Palestinian Targums, divine revelation

The Johannine narrative of the calling of the first disciples begins with a pivotal question posed by Jesus: ‘What are you looking for?’ (John 1:38). The disciples respond with an inquiry about Jesus’ dwelling: ‘Rabbi, where are you staying?’. Jesus invites them with the words: ‘Come and see’ (ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε; John 1:39). Though seemingly simple, this expression carries profound theological significance within the Gospel of John.

The phrase ‘come and see’ appears five times in the New Testament in various forms.[1] In Matt 28:6, the angel invites the women at the tomb to see the place where Jesus was laid, using the expression ‘come, see’ (δεῦτε ἴδετε) – the only occurrence of the phrase in the Synoptic Gospels. The remaining four instances appear in the Gospel of John in slightly different grammatical forms. It is found once as the collocation of present plural imperative ἔρχομαι and future plural indicative ὁράω (John 1:39 – ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε).[2] On two occasions, the phrase consists of two singular imperatives, where the first verb is in the present imperative and the second is in the aorist form (1:46; 11:34 – ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε), and one time as the adverbial phrase (4:29 – δεῦτε ἴδετε). Despite different grammatical forms the four

1 The translation depends on the grammatical form used in the individual text. When the phrase contains the conjunction καί, the expression will be translated as ‘come and see’. When the phrase appears as an asyndetic construction, it will be translated as ‘come, see’.

2 Thus $\mathfrak{P}^{5\,vid.66.75}$, B, C*, L, W^{s}, Ψ^{c}, 083, f^{1}, 33. 579, sa^{mss}. However, in several manuscripts, the second verb ὄψεσθε is changed to the plural imperative aorist of the verb ὁράω (ἴδετε). This version appears in: ℵ, A, C^{3}, K, N, P, Γ, Δ, Θ, f^{13}, 565. 700. 892. 1241. 1424, $\mathfrak{M}$ latt, bo.

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occurrences of this phrase seem to be thematically linked: John 1:39 (Jesus invites Baptist's two disciples), John 1:46 (Philip invites Nathanael), John 4:29 (the Samaritan woman invites her villagers), and John 11:34 (the villagers of Bethany invite Jesus).

While numerous insightful interpretations have been offered regarding the phrase 'come and see', the aim of this study is not to provide a comprehensive exegetical treatment of each passage, nor to exhaustively explore the rich theological motifs of 'coming to Jesus' or 'seeing' within the Johannine tradition.[3] Rather, in light of the well-established relationship between Johannine literature and the Palestinian Targums, this article seeks to examine how Targumic traditions might illuminate the meaning and function of the phrase 'come and see' in the Fourth Gospel.[4] The aim, therefore, is to investigate a potential convergences between the Fourth Gospel and the Targumic tradition that might reflect a common early Jewish tradition.

This article does not imply that the Johannine narrative borrows from the Targums. Following the approach of scholars such as Keener, I intend to use the Targumic literature 'as one useful strand of evidence by which we seek to reconstruct the broader cultural and social milieu of early Judaism,' believing that 'notable commonalities probably reflect a common source in early Judaism or at times in the generally Pharisaic movement of scholars that coalesced into rabbinic Judaism.'[5] As Chilton notes, 'Targums should be combed for early material (even if expressed in the language of a later age) which might illuminate the N.T.'; however, 'the optimistic assumption that the Targums predate the N.T. may lead us seriously astray.'[6] This caution reminds us that while the Targums can offer valuable insights, we must be mindful of the complex relationship between these

3 According to Brown, 'coming' and 'seeing' are used by the author of the Fourth Gospel as a way of describing faith. Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (I–XII): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1966) I, 79. Tung Chiew Ha agrees asserting that 'each time, the seeing leads to believing and following' highlighting that the phrase 'come and see' carries the meaning of a call or invitation to become a disciple of Jesus. See T.C. Ha, *Biblical Narrative Learning*: *Teaching Adequate Faith in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2015) 115.

4 The Fourth Gospel shows many points of contact with the Palestinian Targums. Many of these are discussed in M. McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible. A Light on the New Testament*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 2010). The expression 'come and see' is mentioned by the author among other theological concepts and linguistic expressions shared by the Targums and the Fourth Gospel. Further studies in this field include: J. Luzzáraga, "Fondo targúmico del cuarto evangelio," *EstEcl* 49 (1974) 251–263; G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (StPB 4; Leiden: Brill 1973) 223–225; F. Manns, "Traditions targumiques en Jean 2,1–11," *Marianum* 45/130 (1983) 297–305; F. Manns, "Traditions targumiques en Jean 10,1–30," *RevScRel* 60/3–4 (1986) 135–157. For a comprehensive summary of the Palestinian Jewish context of the Fourth Gospel, see also C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 2003) I, 180–194.

5 Keener, *The Gospel of John*, I, 187. On the issue of the relationship between the Targumic literature and the Fourth Gospel, see also C.E. Morrison, "The 'Hour of Distress' in *Targum Neofiti* and the 'Hour' in the Gospel of John," *CBQ* 67/4 (2005) 591; G.D. Kirchhevel, "The Children of God and the Glory That John 1:14 Saw," *BBR* 6/1 (1996) 87–93.

6 B. Chilton, "John XII 34 and Targum Isaiah LII 13," *NovT* 22/2 (1980) 178.

texts and the New Testament, avoiding overly simplistic assumptions about their chronological precedence.

This article will proceed in three steps. First, I will outline the *status quaestionis* by presenting key scholarly interpretations of the phrase over time. Second, I will briefly explore the Jewish background of the expression 'come and see,' focusing on its occurrences in the Hebrew Bible and the Palestinian Targums.[7] Third, drawing on the findings of my previous article, 'The Formula "Come, See" in the Palestinian Targums', I will propose a set of potential convergences between the Fourth Gospel and the Palestinian Targumic tradition.[8]

1. Key Interpretations of the Phrase 'Come and See' in the Gospel according to John

The range of interpretations of the phrase 'come and see' in the Fourth Gospel is broad, extending from views that dismiss it as theologically insignificant to those that draw far-reaching conclusions regarding its theological and narrative meaning.

Some scholars believe that the expression 'come and see' has no specific technical sense and should only be understood in the context of Johannine themes. Raymond Brown suggests that the themes of 'coming' and 'seeing' are a part of Johannine faith descriptions.[9] Rudolf Schnackenburg, in his analysis of the phrase, views it as an invitation 'couched in commonplace terms'.[10] He argues that its deeper meaning is associated with the second verb ὄψεσθε, which can evoke the promise given to Nathanael (1:50) and to all disciples (1:51).[11] Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, in their *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* claim that this 'extraordinarily frequent phrase [...] is used to draw attention to something new, important, or difficult.'[12]

Leon Morris, commenting on John 1:39, asserts that:

> This invitation implies more than that they should see for themselves the place where he was lodging; it is an invitation to visit him. It led to their staying with him that day and probably means that they spent the night with him.[13]

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7 Using the notion 'the Palestinian Targums' I refer to *TNeof* and *TPs-J*

8 T. Mazurek, "The Formula 'Come, See' in the Palestinian Targums," *VV* 42/4 (2024) 1017–1038, https://doi.org/0.31743/vv.17475.

9 Cf. Brown, *John*, I, 79.

10 R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*. I. *Introduction and Commentary on Chapters 1–4* (New York: Crossroad 1980) 309.

11 Cf. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, I, 309.

12 This is my translation of: 'Diese ungemein häufige Wendung [...] dient dazu, um auf etwas Neues, Wichtiges, Schwieriges, Anerkanntes im Voraus aufmerksam zu machen.' H.L. Strack – P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*. II. *Das Evangelium nach Markus, Lukas und Johannes und die Apostelgeschichte* (München: Beck 1924) 371.

13 L. Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1995) 138.

Thomas Weinandy goes further, asserting that Jesus was 'not simply going to show them the structure wherein he hangs his cloak. He [was] going to lead them to where they [could] truly observe he [abode] [...] with his heavenly Father as the Father's Son.'[14]

Robert Lightfoot, in his commentary, does not pay much attention to this phrase. However, he does see the thematic relationship between two occurrences of 'come and see' in chapter 1, with this appearing in chapter 11, suggesting that the reader should recognise the contrast between Jesus' invitation to humanity to behold the source of light and life, and the invitation made by humans to Jesus to witness the realm of darkness and death.[15] Brown, however, evaluates this opinion as an overreading, which 'goes beyond the evangelist's intent.'[16]

More recent research, such as that of Peter Judge, proposes to interpret the examined phrase as a Christological invitation that introduces and progressively deepens the disciples' understanding of Jesus' identity. According to Judge, the formula 'come and see' in the Fourth Gospel serves as a narrative and theological device, inviting characters – and by extension, the readers – into a transformative encounter with Christ. He asserts that 'as the disciples respond to Jesus' invitation and remain with him it is intimated that they are invited into a similar relationship with Jesus as he had with the Father and the Spirit.'[17]

Toan Do, however, building on recent studies on ethics in John, questions whether Christology alone provides a sufficient response to the 'come and see' invitation. He argues that John 1, with its strong Christological emphasis, significantly shaped the understanding of the 'come and see' formula. According to Do, the four occurrences of the phrase 'come and see' are not just examples of 'John's stylistic repetition and variation.'[18] He proposes an ethical interpretation, arguing 'that the invitation would only be fulfilled by an ethic of love in keeping Jesus' command (John 14:15; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:11).'[19] Sherri Brown concurs with this view, highlighting that the verses where 'come and see' appears align with other passages on discipleship in the Gospel. She suggests that 'Johannine discipleship is not solely a call to interior spirituality (but) rather [...] a challenge to participate in [...]

14 T.G. Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus*. II. *A Theological Interpretation of the Gospel of John: Prologue and the Book of Signs* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press 2021) 70.

15 Cf. R.H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary* (ed. C.F. Evans) (Oxford Paperbacks 5; Oxford: Clarendon 1956; reprint London: Oxford University Press 1960) 223.

16 Brown, *John*, I, 426.

17 P.J. Judge, "Come and See: The First Disciples and Christology in the Fourth Gospel," *Studies in the Gospel of John and Its Christology: Festschrift Gilbert van Belle* (eds. J. Verheyden *et al.*) (BETL 265; Leuven: Peeters 2014) 68–69.

18 T. Do, "The Johannine Request to 'Come and See' and an Ethic of Love," *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (eds. S. Brown – C.W. Skinner) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2017) 184. On the repetition in the Gospel according to John, see G. van Belle – M. Labahn – P. Maritz, *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: Styles, Text, Interpretation* (BETL 223; Leuven: Peeters 2009).

19 Do, "The Johannine Request to 'Come and See' and an Ethic of Love," 180.

a life of concrete action through believing in God and receiving, believing in, loving, and abiding with others in this world.'[20]

Most recently, an insightful ecclesiological and missiological interpretation has been proposed by Michael McDowell. In his article, he emphasised that the 'come and see' passages reveal a model of Christian engagement with the world, where the church, while grounded in its internal identity, is open and welcoming to those outside. McDowell suggests that the 'come and see' invitation encourages an active participation in the world, highlighting a missionary aspect that is intrinsic to Johannine discipleship, encouraging believers to invite others into the transformative experience of encountering Christ.[21]

There are those who see the possible influences of broader Jewish literature. Among them is Charles Barrett, who asserts, 'The phrase is common in rabbinic literature, but probably has no special significance [in the Fourth Gospel].'[22] John Bernard notes that the phrase 'come, see' can be found in Talmudic literature as a common formula of authoritative invitation, although he admits that this parallel is not necessarily applicable to the simple phrase in the Gospel of John. However, Bernard claims that, from a theological perspective, 'This is the method of discovery which Jesus commended to the first inquirers, and it is still the method by which He is revealed.'[23] Craig Keener recognises the parallel between the phrase in 1:46 and 4:29, but sees no relation between 11:34 and the other three occurrences.[24] He claims that the phrase 'was probably already idiomatic in the LXX.'[25] Keener searches for the literary context of the phrase in the vast rabbinic literature, where the idiom is applied to 'examples ("come and see the humility of so-and-so," "come see how God loves Israel"), and especially to examples in Scripture.' In his interpretation, it is understood to mean 'come reflect on,' and it is considered similar to the rabbinic phrase 'come and hear' found in the Babylonian Talmud, which is typically used in relation to halakhic discussions.[26] The invitation reflects the distinctive Johannine understanding of knowledge, where a disciple of Jesus is not only familiar with the written Torah but also has a personal encounter with God.[27]

Even if he does not deal directly with the phrase in question, Domingo Muñoz León, discussing the possible points of intersection between the Targums and the discourse of the bread of life (John 6), proposes several terminological insights. Basing his argument on the terminology drawn from the Targums to the Prophets, he highlights the equivalence

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20 S. Brown, *Come and See: Discipleship in the Gospel of John* (BSCBA 6; New York: Paulist Press 2022) 107–108.

21 M.T. McDowell, "An Insider's Church for Outsiders: The Johannine 'Come and See' Passages and Christian Engagement with the World," *Religions* 13/9 (2022) 1–14.

22 C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2 ed. (London: SPCK 1978) 181.

23 J.H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Scribner's Sons 1929) I, 56.

24 C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MI: Hendrickson 2003) II, 846.

25 Keener, *The Gospel of John*, I, 471.

26 Cf. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, I, 471.

27 Cf. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, I, 485.

between 'coming' and 'believing', which reflects a parallel synonymous structure found in Isa 55:1, 3. In this passage, the invitation from God to 'come' is understood as an invitation to 'receive his teaching' or to 'believe'.[28] This conceptual overlap suggests that the phrase 'come and see' in the Gospel of John could echo Targumic theological insights, where 'coming' implies an active reception of divine teaching and belief.

While the aforementioned authors focus on the meaning of the phrase 'come and see' within the Gospel of John, this article aims to explore potential connections with the broader Aramaic literature circulating in Palestine during the Second Temple Period. Specifically, I will examine how the phrase may resonate with similar expression found in the Palestinian Targums, to uncover any shared interpretative or theological patterns that might deepen our understanding of the Johannine text. By investigating these possible links, this study seeks to offer a more comprehensive view of the phrase's significance within both the Gospel of John and its wider Jewish literary context.

2. Jewish Context of the Phrase 'Come and See'

2.1. 'Come and See' in the Hebrew Bible

Before examining the possible points of connection between the use of the phrase in the Palestinian Targums and in the Fourth Gospel, it is necessary first to consider its occurrences in the Hebrew Bible as the most immediate literary and theological source for the author of the Fourth Gospel.

The phrase 'come and see' never appears in the Pentateuch. Outside the Pentateuch, the Hebrew expression לכו וראו occurs on three occasions:[29] in 2 Kgs 6:13, where the king of Aram sends his officials to capture Elisha: 'Go and find out where he is, so I can send men and seize him' (לכו וראו איכה הוא ואשלח ואקחהו);[30] in 2 Kgs 7:14, where the king of Israel sends two horsemen to verify whether the Aramean army has indeed fled Samaria: 'So they took two mounted men, and the king sent them after the Aramean army with the command (וישלח המלך אחרי מחנה ארם לאמר), "Go and see" (לכו וראו),'[31] and in Psalm 66:5, where the psalmist invites all the earth to praise God: 'Come and see what God has done' (לכו וראו מפעלות אלהים).[32]

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28 Cf. D. Muñoz León, "El sustrato targúmico del Discurso del Pan de Vida. Nuevas aportaciones: La equivalencia 'venir' = 'aprender/creer' (Jn 6, 35.37.45) y la conexión 'vida eterna' y 'resurrección' (Jn 6, 40.54)," *EstBib* 36/3–4 (1977) 221–223.

29 Additionally, in LXX, the Greek phrase δεῦτε ἴδετε also appears in Psalm 45:9 (MT 46:9), where it translates the Hebrew לכו חזו. *TOnq* renders this phrase as: אזילו חמון.

30 *TOnq* 2 Kgs 6:13: איזילו וחזו איכא הוא ואשלח ואדברניה.

31 *TOnq* 2 Kgs 7:14: ושלח מלכא בתר משרית ארם למימר איזילו וחזו.

32 *TOnq* Ps 66:5: אזילו וחמון עובדי אלהא.

In the first two instances from 2 Kgs, the phrase does not appear to carry any particular theological significance, functioning simply as an instruction for physical movement and the act of observing. Only in Psalm 66:5 might the phrase be understood as bearing a revelatory character, as it invites the audience to witness the mighty works of God. Given the limited comparative material, discerning a deeper theological meaning of the phrase 'come and see' would be difficult if based solely on the Hebrew text of the Bible.

2.2. 'Come and See' in the Palestinian Targums

In the Palestinian Targums, the phrase 'come and see' surprisingly appears within the non-translational (i.e., expansive or interpretative) portions of the Aramaic rendering of the Hebrew Bible (*TNeof/ TPs-J* Gen 22:10; 28:12; Num 21:6), where 'we can observe the theology of targum at work.'[33] In these contexts, the phrase appears to go beyond a mere call to observe and instead takes on a theological and revelatory function, often serving as an invitation to perceive divine truths or realities hidden within the biblical narrative.

In my previous article, 'The Formula "Come, See" in the Palestinian Targums', I identified several recurring features in the Targums' usage of the phrase 'come, see'. The research enabled me to identify five aspects common to each use of the phrase 'come, see' in the Palestinian Targums: (1) the phrase introduces the revelation; (2) it always appears at a crucial moment in salvation history where a proper understanding of the event is required; (3) the point of departure for the revelation is a common person and their actions; (4) the purpose of the revelation is to guide the receiver to a deeper level of perception; and (5) the narrative function of the phrase 'come, see' is to direct the reader's attention to the true meaning of the event.[34]

These characteristics may offer a valuable framework for understanding the significance of the phrase in the Gospel of John. Building on those conclusions, the present study examines how the use of similar expressions in the Targums can shed light on the Gospel's narrative, enriching our understanding of the invitation to 'come and see' and its theological implications within the Johannine context. The discussion below will consider the possible function of this phrase in the Gospel of John. By applying key aspects drawn from its usage in the Palestinian Targums, the study aims to demonstrate how Targumic tradition intersects with the New Testament, offering a deeper insight into the narrative and theological structure of the Fourth Gospel.

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33 Morrison, "The 'Hour of Distress'," 592. Particular attention is given to the non-translational passages in the Palestinian Targums, as it is in these sections – where the text goes beyond direct translation – that, as Bernstein observes, the theology of the Targum becomes most evident. Cf. M.J. Bernstein, "The 'Righteous' and the 'Wicked' in the Aramaic Version of Psalms, *JAB* 3/1–2 (2001) 5–26.

34 Cf. Mazurek, "The Formula 'Come, See' in the Palestinian Targums," 1036.

3. Instances of 'Come and See' in John's Gospel and Targumic Intertextuality

The expression 'come and see' appears exclusively in the Book of Signs, which, according to Brown, is addressed to those at the beginning of the way of faith.[35] He convincingly explains:

> During the public ministry, as described in the Book of Signs, Jesus' words and deeds were addressed to a wide audience, provoking a crisis of faith – some believed and some refused to believe. The Book of Glory, however, is addressed to the restricted audience of those who believed.[36]

If this is the case, the phrase 'come and see' is employed to achieve a very specific aim – to lead the reader to faith in Jesus. Given the theological purpose of the Book of Signs, the use of the phrase 'come and see' cannot be accidental, and its revelatory function becomes even more evident and theologically meaningful.

The narrative of the Fourth Gospel presents a gradual deepening of insight into Jesus' true identity. Each occurrence of the phrase 'come and see' functions as a gateway to revelation, inviting the recipient to more fully recognise who Jesus is. In three of the four instances (1:39; 1:46; 4:29), the phrase encourages individuals to encounter Jesus personally. The fourth instance (11:34), however, is distinct: here, the invitation is addressed to Jesus himself, asking him to come and see the place where Lazarus was laid.

Because this final usage differs in both direction and function, this study will focus on the first three, where the phrase is directed toward a person and serves to lead them into a deeper understanding of Jesus' identity and mission.[37]

3.1. John 1:39

The phrase 'come and see' first appears in the dialogue between Jesus and the two disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:35–39). The meeting between Jesus and his first disciples is the result of the testimony given by John the Baptist. The narrator emphasises that the disciples followed Jesus after hearing John's words. Their interest in Jesus was sparked by the Baptist's teaching. Therefore, in seeking to understand the use of the phrase 'come and see', one must consider the content of John the Baptist's testimony, as he was the first to recognise in Jesus of Nazareth the long-awaited Messiah.

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35 The phrase 'come and see' appears in John 1:39, 46; 4:29; 11:34. Brown divides the Gospel into four main sections: 1:1–18 – The Prologue; 1:19–12:50 – The Book of Signs; 13:1–20:31 – The Book of Glory; 21:1–25 – The Epilogue (cf. Brown, *John*, cxxxviii). This division serves the overarching purpose of John's Gospel, which is stated by the author at the conclusion of the third part: 'but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God' (20:31).

36 R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (XIII–XXI): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1970) II, 541.

37 Cf. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel*, 223.

3.1.1. 'Come and See' Introduces a Revelation

In John 1:19–36, the narrator introduces Jesus' ministry as one who had previously been revealed to John the Baptist. From the outset, the reader is immersed in the context of revelation. Jesus is presented as someone who must be revealed to individuals and recognised by them. Several elements indicate the revelatory nature of this passage.

The passage's revelatory character is emphasised by the formula of revelation that John uses on several occasions. Brown, following Michel de Goedt, notes that the pattern in which the messenger of God sees a person, says 'look!' and provides a description of the person's mission is a common feature in John's Gospel.[38] Additionally, the vocabulary used in the passage underscores its revelatory nature. The narrator employs verbs that describe the acts of seeing, hearing, and knowing: βλέπω (1:29), ἐμβλέπω (1:36, 42), ὁράω (1:33, 34, 39), οἶδα (1:33), θεάομαι (1:32, 38), ἀκούω (1:37, 40).

The revelatory mission of John the Baptist is explicitly expressed when he says: 'I myself did not know him, but for this purpose (διὰ τοῦτο) I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel (ἵνα φανερωθῇ τῷ Ισραήλ)' (1:31). John the Baptist recognises the specific purpose of his mission. His baptising is to ensure that Jesus could be manifested to Israel. John fulfils his mission, and through his testimony, Jesus begins his revelation, starting with two of John's disciples, who are invited to experience staying with him. This first phase of revelation is introduced with the phrase 'come and see'.

According to Yves Simoens, the phrase τῇ ἐπαύριον (the next day), which appears in verses 29, 35, and 43, does not simply refer to a time span but carries revelatory significance: 'It suggests a defined time with an apocalyptic character. When the end comes, every moment is crucial.'[39] To support this, Simoens cites Exod 9:6, where 'the next day' marks the fulfilment of God's announcement with the fifth plague. The repeated use of 'the next day' closely connects John the Baptist's testimony (1:19–34) with the following narrative (1:35–50), which unfolds as a chain reaction drawing his disciples to Jesus.

John's testimony should be understood as the fulfilment of the promise in John 1:7: 'that all might believe through him.' What was revealed to John is now being disclosed to a wider audience, beginning with two of his disciples. These two, in turn, become instruments of revelation for others. Much like the use of the phrase 'come, see' in the Targums, its appearance here serves to introduce a moment of revelation at a decisive point in salvation history – when Jesus, at the outset of his public ministry, begins to call his first disciples.

3.1.2. The Revelation Given to John the Baptist

The Johannine revelation of Jesus unfolds progressively. John the Baptist serves as the first spokesperson for the mystery of Jesus, recognising him through divine revelation.[40] He tes-

38 Other examples of this pattern appear in John 1:35–37; 47–51; 19:24–27. Cf. Brown, *John*, I, 58.

39 This is my own translation of: 'è suggerito un tempo definito, a carattere apocalittico. Quando sopraggiunge la fine, ogni attimo è importante.' Y. Simoens, *Secondo Giovanni. Una traduzione e un'interpretazione* (Testi e commenti; Bologna: EDB 2000) 186.

40 Cf. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, I, 395.

tifies to the vision he received, stating, 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him' (1:32), as well as the words he heard, 'He who sent me to baptize in water said to me [...]" (1:33). Through this revelation, John identifies Jesus under the following titles: the Lamb of God (1:29), the pre-existent One (1:30), the vehicle of the Spirit (1:32–34), and the Son of God (1:34). This revelation, granted to John, differs from that given to the first disciples, as it carries a more supernatural character.

There is ongoing scholarly debate about the significance of the titles that John assigns to Jesus.[41] While this is not the central focus of the present study, one title warrants attention: 'the Lamb of God' (ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ; 1:29, 36), as it resonates with the themes found in Targumic literature.[42] In the first reference, this title is immediately linked with Jesus' mission: 'who takes away the sin of the world' (1:29). John's declaration, 'Behold the Lamb of God,' may evoke the *Targum Neofiti*'s account of Abraham and Isaac's conversation in Gen 22. When Isaac asks, 'Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' (*TNeof* Gen 22:7), Abraham responds, 'From before the Lord has he prepared for himself a lamb for the burnt offering; otherwise, you will be the lamb for the burnt offering' (את הוא אמרא דעלתא; *TNeof* Gen 22:8). In this context, Jesus is presented as the new Isaac, the sacrificial lamb who will be offered by his father on the cross.

Moreover, a further parallel can be found between the Akedah (the binding of Isaac) and the sacrifice of Jesus.[43] In *TNeof* Gen 22:10, the *Bath Qol* refers to Abraham and Isaac as 'two individuals who are in my world' (יחידיין דבעלמי), using the same term applied to Adam in *TNeof* Gen 3:22 to emphasise the original likeness between God and humanity.[44] This comparison underscores the restoration of communion between God and humanity through sacrifice. The sacrifice of Abraham and Isaac, referred to as the sacrificial lamb (אמרא דעלתא), prefigures the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God (ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), who 'takes away the sin of the world' (1:29).[45] In this way, the unfulfilled sacrifice of Isaac

41 For developed and extensive overview on this question, see C.W. Skinner, "Another Look at 'the Lamb of God,'" *BSac* 161 (2004) 89–104; Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus*, II, 56–64; R.B. Edwards, *Discovering John: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (DBT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2015) 73–85.

42 Braun argues that in Jewish tradition the Passover lamb was associated with Isaac's binding, whose merit was believed to save Israel in times of distress. John's identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God presupposes this tradition and presents Jesus as the true Isaac, whose voluntary death definitively removes sin. Cf. F.-M. Braun, "Le sacrifice d'Isaac dans le quatrième évangile d'après le Targum," *NRTh* 101/4 (1979) 491–492.

43 According to Manns, John's Gospel reflects a deeply Jewish hermeneutic, rooted in Targumic tradition, oral interpretation, and liturgical memory, rather than a purely Hellenistic or Septuagintal exegesis. Cf. F. Manns, "'Pour que l'Écriture s'accomplît'. Vers une rétroversion araméenne," *EstBib* 66 (2008) 429–444.

44 In Jewish tradition, the *Bath Qol* (literally 'daughter of a voice') is a post-prophetic phenomenon understood as a divine echo or mysterious voice from heaven, often equated with or functioning alongside the Holy Spirit and the Dibbura/Dibbera (Word of God). As McNamara explains, following the cessation of classical prophecy, the *Bath Qol* served as a rare means through which heaven communicated with earth (cf. t.*Soṭah* 13:2). It appears frequently in rabbinic literature and the Targums as a heavenly affirmation or revelatory voice. Cf. M. McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 174.

45 The parallel becomes even clearer in the account of Jesus' arrest. John is the only Evangelist to mention that Jesus was bound in the garden where he was apprehended (John 18:12), a clear allusion to the binding of Isaac in Gen 22.

finds its completion in the sacrifice of Jesus, who restores the lost communion between humanity and God.

3.1.3. Character of the 'Come and See' Revelation

John's testimony, 'behold the Lamb of God' (1:36), is heard by two of his disciples. On this occasion, John the Baptist takes on the role of the *Bath Qol* in Targumic tradition, revealing divine mysteries. Brown observes that while the Synoptic Gospels describe the theophany and divine testimony from heaven – 'this is my beloved Son' (Matt 3:17) – in John's Gospel, God's revelation is mediated through the person of the Baptist.[46]

The revelation begins with an ordinary person, Jesus, whose appearance initially does not seem extraordinary. John sees Jesus and discloses the truth that transcends ordinary comprehension. After hearing John's testimony, the two disciples, attracted by his words, follow Jesus (1:37).[47] Jesus then asks them, 'what are you looking for?' (τί ζητεῖτε; 1:38). In response, they address him as 'rabbi'. Despite John's proclamation, they address Jesus simply as 'rabbi', indicating that, up to this point, they do not see anything supernatural in him. The use of the term 'rabbi' reflects a deliberate narrative choice in the Fourth Gospel. The title 'rabbi' is used almost exclusively in the Book of Signs, while from chapter 13 onward, in the Book of Glory, the disciples refer to Jesus as 'Kyrios' (Lord).[48] This distribution of titles suggests that the Gospel seeks to capture the disciples' growing understanding of who Jesus is. Therefore, at the moment the phrase 'come and see' is first spoken, the disciples do not yet perceive Jesus as anything more than a teacher. They are drawn to him by John's testimony but must experience more before they can declare, 'We have found the Messiah' (1:41).

Similar to the Targums, the starting point for the revelation in this passage is the ordinary nature of the person and his actions. In *TNeof* Gen 22:10, the *Bath Qol* invites the reader to 'come, see' Abraham and Isaac. In *TNeof* Gen 28:12, the angels urge each other to 'come, see' Jacob. Similarly, in *TNeof* Num 21:6, the *Bath Qol* directs the reader's attention to the Israelites with the phrase 'come, see'. In John's Gospel, Jesus takes on the role of the *Bath Qol*, revealing divine mysteries. The narrator introduces Jesus in the Prologue as the *Logos* (1:1) that reveals God's mysteries and serves as the ultimate interpreter of the divine will, taking on the role once held by the *Bath Qol* in Targumic tradition.[49]

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46 Cf. Brown, *John*, I, 66.

47 Schnackenburg suggests that the act of following Jesus, by the disciples, has both a literal dimension and a deeper, spiritual significance. The second means 'follow as a disciple' (1:44; 8:12; 10:4, 27; 12:26; 21:19, 20, 22). Cf. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, I, 427.

48 The title appears again, in a slightly different form, in John 20:16, where Mary Magdalene addresses Jesus as ῥαββουνί (*Rabbouni*), meaning 'my teacher'.

49 On the possible influence of the Targumic *Memra* of the Lord on the Johannine *Logos*, see M. McNamara, "Logos of the Fourth Gospel and Memra of the Palestinian Targum (Ex 12:42)," *ExpTim* 79 (1968) 115–117; B. Chilton, "Typologies of Memra and the Fourth Gospel," *Judaic Approaches to the Gospels* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 1994) 177–201; B. Chilton, "Typologies of Memra and the Fourth Gospel," *Textual and Contextual Studies in the Pentateuchal Targums* (ed. P.V.M. Flesher) (SFSHJ 55; Atlanta, GA: Scholars

When the disciples ask Jesus, 'Where are you staying?' (ποῦ μένεις; 1:38), he invites them to 'come and see'. The Gospel does not specify what they saw, but it must have been something transformative, as immediately after this encounter, they change how they address him, calling him 'Messiah' (1:41).[50] They find confirmation of John the Baptist's testimony and gain a deeper understanding of who Jesus truly is.[51] Adam Kubiś sees in this dialogue an invitation addressed to the disciples as representatives of Israel 'to enter into communion with God.' Just as Jacob beheld the face of God, so the disciples are summoned to abide with Jesus and to experience a renewed encounter with the divine presence – a transformative intimacy that marks the beginning of their identity as the reconstituted people of God.[52]

Similar to the Targumic accounts, the phrase 'come and see' introduces a revelation that leads to a deeper understanding of earthly reality. The disciples initially see Jesus as a mere man, addressed as 'rabbi', but after spending time with him, they recognise in him the Messiah. The narrative of the first disciples' call continues with their testimony, which in turn leads to further calls, the next of which is Nathanael's.

3.2. John 1:46

The second instance of the phrase 'come and see' appears in the story of Nathanael's encounter with Jesus (John 1:43–51). In this passage, the reader is led through a chain of testimonies about Jesus. Following the testimony of John the Baptist, two of his disciples, having heard his words, follow Jesus and come to recognise his Messiahship. They, in turn, take on the responsibility of bearing witness to Jesus. Andrew, one of John the Baptist's disciples, finds his brother Simon and brings him to the Messiah (1:41). Later, Jesus himself calls Philip, who then encourages Nathanael to 'come and see' him (1:45).

Press 1992) 89–100; J.L. Ronning, "The *Targum of Isaiah* and the Johannine Literature," *WTJ* 69/2 (2007) 247–278; J. Coutts, "'My Father's Name': A Survey of Research on the Use of *onoma* with Respect to the Father in the Fourth Gospel," *CurBR* 15/2 (2017) 248–260, https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X15602148; C. Grappe, "Les deux anges de *Jean* 20,12. Signes de la présence mystérieuse du Logos (à la lumière du targum d'Ex 25,22)?," *RHPR* 89/2 (2009) 215–233, https://doi.org/10.3406/rhpr.2009.1390; M.S. Wróbel, "The Gospel according to St. John in the Light of Targum Neofiti 1 to the Book of Genesis," *BPTh* 9/4 (2016) 115–130, https://doi.org/10.12775/BPTh.2016.037; M. Wróbel, "Ideological and Intertextual Relations between the Targum Isaiah and the Gospel of John," *ColT* 93/1 (2023) 85–102, https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2023.93.1.04.

50 Alu claims that 'by staying with Jesus, the two potential disciples changed their status' and 'began to be witnesses to the life of Jesus.' A.R. Dimas Pele Alu, "'Whom Are You Seeking?' in the Fourth Gospel," *Sacra Scripta* 18/1 (2020) 111–112.

51 R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray – R.W.N. Hoare – J.K. Riches) (Philadelphia, MA: Westminster Press 1971) 100.

52 Cf. A. Kubiś, "The Tenth Hour in John 1:39: From Narrative Detail to Eschatological Symbol," *BA* 15/3 (2025) 475–518, https://doi.org/10.31743/ba.18549.

3.2.1. 'Come and See' Introduces a Revelation

From the very beginning of this episode, the narrator connects it to the preceding verses by using the note of time: τῇ ἐπαύριον (1:43). As was mentioned before, this notion can carry a revelatory aspect of fulfilment. This note of time is the last in a series (1:29, 35, 43), all dealing with the calling of the disciples. According to Barrett, all these incidents culminate in 2:11, where the narrator concludes, '[Jesus] manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.'[53] Thus, each of the revelatory incidents introduced by τῇ ἐπαύριον culminates in 'on the third day' (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ; 2:1), when Jesus performs his first sign at Cana, revealing his glory. Similar to the previous instance, the revelatory character is emphasised through vocabulary such as the 'Look' formula (1:47) and specific verbs like 'to see' (ὁράω; 1:46, 47, 48, 50, 51) and 'to know' (γινώσκω; 1:48).

The addressee of the phrase 'come and see' in this instance is Nathanael, a disciple mentioned only in the Gospel of John.[54] Scholars have debated Nathanael's identity, with some suggesting that he might be the same person as Simon the Cananean (Mark 3:18; Matt 10:4), or possibly Bartholomew or Matthew.[55] Some scholars suggest that Nathanael holds symbolic significance. In this narrative, he serves as a symbolic figure who is invited to gain deeper insight into Jesus, despite his initial doubts. The deliberate introduction of a mysterious character, such as Nathanael, invites the reader to engage with the narrative more personally, as seen with the unnamed disciple in 1:37–42.[56]

Following Philip's testimony, Nathanael expresses scepticism with his question, 'can anything good come from Nazareth?' (1:46). This question underscores the ordinary reality that the phrase 'come and see' introduces – despite hearing that Jesus is the Messiah, Nathanael does not expect anything extraordinary. However, when Nathanael accepts the invitation and approaches Jesus, his understanding is deepened.[57] In this case, the phrase 'come and see' invites him to move beyond his scepticism and recognise the true nature of Jesus.

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53 Cf. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 189.

54 Nathanael does not appear in any of the synoptic list of the Twelve: Matt 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:13–16.

55 A detailed summary on this topic is found in: Brown, *John*, I, 82.

56 Similar technique might be recognised regarding the disciple whom Jesus loved (13:23–26; 19:25–27; 20:2–10; 21:7, 20–23, 24) and another disciple (18:15–16; 20:2–10). According to Schwankl, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' and 'another disciple' is the same character. Cf. O. Schwankl, "»Kommt, und ihr werdet sehen«. Aspekte der Jüngerberufung im Johannesevangelium," *Erinnerung an Jesus: Kontinuität und Diskontinuität in der neutestamentlichen überlieferung* (eds. U. Busse – M. Reichardt – M. Theobald) (BBB 166; Göttingen: V&R unipress – Bonn University Press 2011) 437.

57 Before Jesus reveals himself to Nathanael, he describes him as 'an Israelite in whom there is no deceit' (Ισραηλίτης ἐν ᾧ δόλος οὐκ ἔστιν; 1:47). Commentators have noted a possible comparison with Jacob, the first person to bear the name Israel (Gen 35:10). See J.P. Heil, *The Gospel of John: Worship for Divine Life Eternal* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2015) 23; N.R. Peterson, *The Gospel of John and the Sociology of Light: Language and Characterization in the Fourth Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2008) 31.

3.2.2. Character of the 'Come and See' Revelation

As presented in my previous article, the phrase 'come and see' appears at crucial moments in salvation history, and this occasion is no exception.[58] According to the Fourth Gospel, Nathanael is the last to join the group of Jesus' disciples. The narrator thus begins and concludes the process of Jesus calling his disciples using the same phrase 'come and see'. This structure forms an *inclusio*, embracing the entirety of the calling stories. The calling of Nathanael is pivotal because it marks the completion of Jesus' formation of his inner circle of disciples. It also represents the fulfilment of the mission of John the Baptist, who came 'in order that He might be manifested to Israel' (1:31). Therefore, like in the Targums, the phrase 'come and see' signals a revelation or manifestation to Israel.

To better understand the nature of this 'come and see' revelation, it is necessary to examine the titles by which Philip introduces Jesus to Nathanael. He declares, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph' (1:45). Two aspects should be noted here. First, there is the supernatural dimension: Jesus, as Philip presents him, is the one announced by the Old Testament, the promised one.[59] The second aspect, however, highlights the natural reality of Jesus: he is from Nazareth and the son of Joseph. These two titles together present Jesus as an ordinary man, with his birthplace and earthly father, while also revealing him as the supernatural figure foretold by the prophets. This duality mirrors the character of the 'come and see' revelation in the Targums, where the revelatory voice points to an ordinary person whose actions are intertwined with salvation history.

Nathanael, however, focuses on the earthly aspect of this introduction and responds with scepticism: 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' (1:46). This question echoes doubts that might arise when considering figures like Jacob: Can anything good come from Jacob – the one who stole the birthright and deceived his father? In the Targums, the phrase 'come, see' is used to dispel such doubts by offering divine testimony about Jacob, referring to him as 'a pious man whose image is affixed on the throne of glory' (*TNeof* Gen 28:12). Even if Jacob's actions could be interpreted as morally ambiguous, the Targumic narrative ensures that the reader is not confused but clearly recognises his high moral standing. Just as the angels invite one another to contemplate Jacob and his image engraved on the throne of glory, so too, in John 1:46, Nathanael is invited by Philip to recognise in Jesus not merely an ordinary man from Nazareth, but the Messiah foretold by Moses and the prophets. Both invitations – 'come and see' in *TNeof* Gen 28:12 and in John 1:46 – encourage the recipient to look beyond appearances and gain a deeper understanding of the visible reality.

Jesus responds to Nathanael's approach with a mysterious declaration: 'I saw you under the fig tree' (1:48). This statement profoundly impacts Nathanael, who then proclaims,

58 Cf. Mazurek, "The Formula 'Come, See,'" 1036.

59 Bultmann claims that the phrase: '[the one] of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote' is only the paraphrase of previous 'Messiah' which was an appellative under which Andrew recognised Jesus. Cf. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 103.

'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel' (1:49). While no explanation fully accounts for why the sight of Nathanael under the fig tree provokes such a dramatic confession, the important point here is that Nathanael sees an ordinary man in Jesus, hears ordinary words from him, and yet is drawn into a revelation that brings him to a deeper understanding of the visible reality. As asserted by Moloney,

> to claim that he is 'son *of Joseph*', '*from Nazareth*', [...] is to miss the essential point about Jesus. But this is something that Nathanael will discover as he responds to Philip's repetition of Jesus' invitation to the former disciples of the Baptist: 'Come and see'.[60]

Through this revelation, Nathanael no longer sees Jesus as merely the man from Nazareth, the son of Joseph, but as the Son of God and the king of Israel. He accepts 'the assertion of v. 45 which at first he had received with incredulity.'[61] He sees 'worldly data and facts that anyone can observe [...] but [he sees] more than any eye in the world. This "seeing more" is called "faith".'[62] The expression 'come and see' has fulfilled its purpose by inviting Nathanael to see beyond the ordinary and recognise Jesus for who he truly is and believe in him.

Furthermore, Jesus promises Nathanael and the other disciples a future vision introduced by the solemn phrase: 'Truly, truly I tell you, you will see' (1:51).[63] Worth noting is the fact that the narrator changes the person from second singular (ὄψῃ; 1:50) to second plural (ὄψεσθε; 1:51). Assuming the symbolic interpretation of Nathanael, the plural form ὄψεσθε could be addressed to every disciple of all time or perhaps especially to those who come from Israel. As the last who joined the group of Jesus' disciples, Nathanael represents the fullness of Jesus' disciples called from Israel and invited to recognise the man Jesus as the expected Messiah. This narrative technique also involves the reader, who, by this plural form, becomes an addressee of the promise.

Jesus announces that they will see: 'the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' (1:51). This is commonly understood as a reference to Jacob's vision in Gen 28:12, where Jacob saw a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. However, the Hebrew text is ambiguous here. The noun 'ladder' in Hebrew (סלם) is masculine, creating uncertainty about whether the Hebrew term בו (Gen 28:12) refers to Jacob or the ladder.[64] The Targumic expansion elimi-

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60 F.J. Moloney, "The First Days of Jesus and the Role of the Disciples: A Study of John 1:19–5," *ABR* 65 (2017) 74.

61 Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 155.

62 This is my translation of: 'weltliche Daten und Fakten, die jeder beobachten kann. Aber [...] [er seht] als jedes Auge der »Welt«. Dieses »Mehr-Sehen« heißt »Glauben«.' Schwankl, "»Kommt, und ihr werdet sehen«," 439.

63 This introductory formula occurs twenty times in the Gospel of John. Barrett argues that: 'The origin of the characteristic New Testament use of ἀμήν to introduce a statement [...] is obscure.' (Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 155).But it is clear that this phrase is employed in order to give emphasis to a solemn pronouncement.

64 Cf. J.E. Fossum, "The Son of Man's Alter Ego: John 1.51, Targumic Tradition and Jewish Mysticism," *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christianity* (NTOA 30; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1995) 135–151.

nates this ambiguity, ensuring that the reader understands that the angels were ascending and descending in order to see Jacob:

> Then he dreamed and behold, a ladder was fixed in the earth, and its top was reaching to the heavens. And behold, the angels [...] went up to proclaim to the angels on high saying, 'Come, see the pious man whose image is affixed on the throne of glory, whom you were desiring to see'. And behold, angels from before the Lord were ascending and descending and looking at him (והא מלאכין מן קדם ייי סלקין ונחתין ומסתכלין בה; *TNeof* Gen 28:12).

In light of the Targumic expansion, Jesus – as the Son of Man – appears to take the place of Jacob as presented in *TNeof* Gen 28:12.[65] Just as Jacob's image is 'affixed on the throne of glory', Jesus becomes the new connection between heaven and earth. As Brown puts it, 'Jesus as Son of Man has become the locus of divine glory, the point of contact between heaven and earth. The disciples are promised figuratively that they will come to see this.'[66] The phrase 'come and see' thus functions as an invitation to recognise in Jesus the previously 'unseen ladder, now suddenly visible, through which God will join heaven and earth. Similarly, in the Targumic expansion in Gen 28:12 Jacob becomes the link between heaven and earth.'[67]

The second instance of 'come and see', spoken by Philip, a disciple of Jesus functions as an invitation to observe Jesus – the man on earth – in order to gain a deeper understanding of who he truly is. Similarly, in the Targumic expansions, the phrase 'come, see' introduces a moment of revelation that guides the recipient toward a deeper comprehension of visible reality. Both the Targumic 'come, see' and the Johannine 'come and see' once again invite the audience to move beyond earthly appearances and to adopt a divine perspective on what is seen on earth.

3.3. John 4:29

The phrase 'come and see' introduces the progression in the understanding of who Jesus truly is. The first instance is followed by Andrew's confession: 'we have found the Messiah' (1:41), and the second leads to Nathanael's proclamation: 'you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel' (1:49). After these two episodes, which symbolise the revelation of Jesus

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65 Schwankl in this regard asserts: 'Dieser Traum erneuert und erfüllt sich in Jesus, dem neuen, wahren Jakob, dem Stammvater des neuen Israel, der den »wahren Israeliten« in seine Nachfolge ruft. Er ist »die Tür« (Joh 10,9) und der wahre Tempel (vgl. 2,19.21); er ist das Tor des Himmels, das den Suchenden offensteht, und das Haus Gottes (Bet-El), in dem sie ihre Bleibe finden (vgl. Gen 28,17.19).' Schwankl, "»Kommt, und ihr werdet sehen«," 436.

66 Brown, *John*, I, 91. See also: C. Rowland, "John 1:51, Jewish Apocalyptic and Targumic Tradition," *NTS* 30/4 (1984) 498–507, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500013205.

67 T. Gardner, *John in the Company of Poets: The Gospel in Literary Imagination* (SCL 6; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press 2011) 32. See also Fossum, "The Son of Man's Alter Ego," 137. Sherri Brown in this regard asserts, 'the Son of Man is the new ladder and gateway to heaven, and he will be the new communication of God in and to the world.' S. Brown, *Gift upon Gift: Covenant through Word in the Gospel of John* (PTMS 144; Eugene, OR: Pickwick 2010) 105.

to Israel, the narrator directs his readers to Samaria, where he uses the expression 'come, see' for the third time.[68]

The entire account of the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is one of the most detailed in the Gospel of John, consisting of two sections: 4:1–30, 39–42, where Jesus converses with the Samaritan woman and meets the Samaritans, and 4:31–38, where Jesus speaks with his disciples. The phrase 'come, see' appears in the first section (4:29), spoken by the Samaritan woman, who has already realised that Jesus is the Messiah.

3.3.1. 'Come, see' Introduces a Revelation

Similarly to its usage in Targumic literature, the phrase 'come, see' is not primarily a call for physical movement or observation, but rather an invitation to engage with and uncover the deeper, divine meaning embedded in visible, earthly reality. The entire narrative is introduced by the verb of necessity, ἔδει (4:4), which should be understood not as indicating geographical compulsion, but rather as expressing a theological necessity.[69] Thus, the narrator introduces the reader to the deliberate will of Jesus, leaving no room for coincidence. Everything that happens at Jacob's well is part of a divine plan. This becomes clearer after the first words of the conversation, in which Jesus is presented as the one who takes the initiative. It is worth noting that this was also the case in the previous passages.[70] The revelation always begins with God's initiative, and in each instance, Jesus starts the conversation, leading his interlocutors to a deeper comprehension of visible reality.

The revelatory nature of the meeting with the Samaritan woman is supported by a similar dynamic: the person who meets Jesus is initially convinced that he is an ordinary man ('Are you greater than our father Jacob?'; 4:12),[71] and then, after the conversation, the interlocutor reaches a deeper understanding of Jesus ('Could this possibly be the Messiah?'; 4:29). The person gives testimony and encourages others to approach Jesus ('Come, see someone who has told me everything that I have ever done'; 4:29), and others come to believe ('Through his own word many more came to faith'; 4:41). This structure aligns with the structure in John 1:35–51.

Just as in the account of the calling of the first two disciples (1:35–39), one of whom remains unnamed, the Samaritan woman is also unnamed. Brown proposes that such characters are 'a certain extent foils used by the evangelist to permit Jesus to unfold his

68 The Greek form of this phrase in John 4:29 is an adverbial phrase: δεῦτε ἴδετε. Thus, it will be translated as 'come, see' without the conjunction 'and'.

69 Brown suggests that Jesus 'could have gone north through the valley and then up into Galilee through the Bath-shan gap, avoiding Samaria.' Brown, *John*, I, 169.

70 Jesus is the first who asks two disciples: 'what are you looking for?' (1:38). He begins the conversation with Nathanael saying: 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception' (1:47). In 4:7 again, Jesus begins the conversation disclosing that his presence at Jacob's well is not coincidental.

71 Here we have an echo of the Jacob's account from the *TNeof* Gen 28:10 where the fifth miracle of Jacob is described as follows: 'our father Jacob raised the stone from above the mouth of the well, the well overflowed and came up to its mouth, and was overflowing for twenty years – all the days that he dwelt in Haran.'

revelation.'[72] The reader, who ultimately is invited to believe in Jesus (20:31), is encouraged to take the place of the unnamed disciple (1:35–40), Nathanael (1:45–51), the Samaritan woman (4:4–42), and to progress from understanding Jesus as 'rabbi' (1:38) through 'Messiah' (1:41), 'Son of God' and 'king of Israel' (1:49), to 'Saviour of the world' who gives life (4:42).

The universal character of the purpose of this narrative is confirmed by the use of the second-person plural in 4:21 (προσκυνήσετε τῷ πατρί). Barrett offers two possible interpretations of this plural form. The first possibility suggests that the Samaritans are the addressees of this proclamation. The second possibility is that the plural form refers to John's readers, the future Christians.[73]

Moreover, as in previous instances, the author of the Gospel of John employs vocabulary that emphasises the revelatory character. Notable words and phrases include: to know (οἶδα; 4:10, 22, 25, 42), to see (θεωρέω; 4:19), I am (ἐγώ εἰμι; 4:26), to believe (πιστεύω; 4:39, 41, 42), and to hear (ἀκούω; 4:42).

3.3.2. Character of the 'Come and See' Revelation

Before the Samaritan woman can become the *Bath Qol* for the townspeople, she must first make her way to understand Jesus' deeper significance. The story begins when the woman comes to the well at a time when she does not expect to find anyone there. She is surprised not only by the presence of the stranger but also by his request: 'Give me a drink' (4:7). Her astonishment is evident, and she does not indicate any expectation that she would meet someone special. This marks the beginning of a rich and theologically significant conversation in which Jesus reveals himself.

The text employs a well-known technique in the Gospel of John – misunderstanding.[74] The first misunderstanding concerns Jesus, who, in his appearance, is simply 'a thirsty and helpless traveler',[75] but in reality, he is the Son of God offering the living water. The second misunderstanding is related to the living water itself (ὕδωρ ζῶν; 4:10). The Samaritan woman takes it to mean running water from a spring, but Jesus refers to it as God's gift, which leads to eternal life.[76] Through the ordinary thirst for water, the Samaritan woman, illuminated by Jesus, eventually discovers Jesus' deeper desire to be the giver of living water.

The fact that Jesus points to the earthly reality of water reveals its deeper meaning and further supports the idea of 'come, see' as a revelation. The Samaritan woman is invited by Jesus not only to observe the earthly reality but also to comprehend its profounder

72 To this list he adds also: Nicodemus (ch. 3), the paralytic (ch. 5), and the blind man (ch. 10). Cf. Brown, *John*, I, 176.

73 Cf. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 198.

74 For the discussion about misunderstanding in the Gospel of John and about other characteristics in Johannine style, see Brown, *John*, cxxxv-xxxxvi; Brown, *Gift upon Gift*, 96.

75 Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 195.

76 The parallels of this notion can be found in Jer 2:13 where God calls himself: πηγὴ ὕδατος ζωῆς and Jer 17:13 where the prophet calls God: πηγὴ ζωῆς. It is less plausible that Jesus makes an allusion to these passages since the Samaritans did not accept the prophetical books of the Old Testament.

meaning. The technique of misunderstanding shows clearly that there is a real relationship between natural human life and divine revelation.[77] This process comes to a climax in the Samaritan woman's 'come, see' invitation. She has grasped Jesus' deeper significance, and now, like the angels in *TNeof* Gen 28:12, she invites others to do the same.

The process of gaining a deeper comprehension of Jesus is visible through the titles she associates with him. The most frequent title the Samaritan woman uses for Jesus is κύριε (4:11, 15, 19), which means both 'Sir' and 'Lord'. The most probable meaning intended by the woman is 'Sir', given that she uses this title from the beginning of their meeting. As the conversation develops, she gains a deeper insight into Jesus and calls him a 'prophet' (προφήτης; 4:19), 'a man who told me all the things I have done' (ἄνθρωπον ὃς εἶπέν μοι πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησα; 4:29), and finally the 'Messiah' (χριστός; 4:29).

The title 'prophet' seems to be a simple reaction to Jesus' supernatural knowledge of her past life. The title 'Messiah' is part of a hesitant question, introduced by the interrogative particle μήτι, which, in this case, seems to imply an affirmative answer.[78] Friedrich Blass and Robert Debrunner suggest translating this phrase as 'that must be the Messiah,' or at least, 'perhaps this is the Messiah.'[79] Through this statement, the Samaritan woman reveals that she has received the revelation, recognising Jesus as the Messiah.

Her question, 'Are you greater than our father Jacob?' (4:12), evokes the patriarch Jacob, a more developed character in the Targumic version of Gen 28:12. In the light of the features under which Jacob is recognised by the angels of the Lord ('the pious man whose image is affixed on the throne of glory, whom the angels desired to see'), the woman's question acquires a special meaning. It seems impossible to be greater than Jacob, who is claimed to be present in heaven through his image on the throne. However, after her conversation with Jesus, the woman leaves her water jar – the reason she came to the well – and discloses that Jesus fulfilled her deeper desires beyond her thirst. Thus, she recognises that Jesus is truly greater than Jacob. In her eyes, Jesus, once an ordinary man, becomes the prophet, the Messiah, even greater than Jacob.

The Samaritan woman takes on the role of the *Bath Qol* in *TNeof* Gen 22:10 and the angels from *TNeof* Gen 28:12, inviting her fellow citizens: 'Come, see (δεῦτε ἴδετε) the man (ἄνθρωπον) who has told me everything that I have ever done! Could this possibly be

77 Bultmann describes the relationship between natural human life and the revelation of God writing as follows: 'This relationship consists in the fact that whereas human life is false and inauthentic, the revelation bestows true, authentic life. For the false points to the true, the inauthentic to the authentic. The very fact that man mistakes what is inauthentic for what is authentic, what is temporary for what is final, shows that he has some knowledge of what is authentic and final. He knows what the revelation means, inasmuch as he attributes an importance to earthly things which can only properly be attributed to the revelation.' Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 182.

78 Toan Do does not agree with this statement asserting that 'the woman raises doubt about her knowledge of Jesus and expects that the townspeople would agree with her suspicion that Jesus was not the Messiah.' Do, "The Johannine Request to 'Come and See' and an Ethic of Love," 189.

79 Even though μήτι is commonly classified as a negative particle, it can imply also an affirmative answer. John 4:29 is one such case. Cf. F.W. Blass – A. Debrunner – R.W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1961) § 427[2].

the Messiah (ὁ χριστός)?' (4:29). She, having already gained a deeper understanding of the person of Jesus, now encourages others to gain a similar experience, becoming for them the witnesses of God's revelation. In her testimony, a visible dynamism is expressed that was previously seen in each of the 'come, see' passages.

The townspeople are invited to see the man (ἄνθρωπον). As in the Targums, the reality that is the object of the revelation belongs to the earthly plane. Similarly to *TNeof* Gen 22:10, 28:12, and *TNeof* Num 21:9, the introductory 'come, see' focuses attention on a specific person and his actions. However, the purpose of this seeing is to reach a deeper truth about this person.[80] The second part of the Samaritan woman's testimony reveals the intended goal of their coming and seeing: to recognise in Jesus the expected Messiah. Just like the Samaritan woman, who saw the ordinary man but recognised in him the Messiah, the townspeople too are about to discover that the man Jesus is the Messiah. Once again, the phrase 'come, see' functions as an introduction to the revelation.

In John 4:42, the narrator summarises the impact of the meeting with Jesus on the townspeople: 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves' (4:42).[81] The last sentence of this verse is even stronger because they admit, 'we know (οἴδαμεν) that this One is indeed the Saviour of the world' (4:42).[82] It is worth noting that these phrases hint at the technical meaning of the 'come, see' expression. The Samaritans come to believe in Jesus not because they merely saw him, but because they heard him, and this is emphasised three times.[83] Thus, the phrase 'come, see' cannot be interpreted as a literal encouragement to physically see the person of Jesus, but rather as an invitation to enter into the revelation that provides a deeper insight into his person.

Once again, the phrase 'come, see' introduces the revelation of a particular character. This time, the Samaritans are invited to observe and hear Jesus, who appears as an ordinary man, yet they are encouraged to surpass the visible reality in order to reach a deeper insight and understand something beyond their normal comprehension. Ultimately, they profess

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80 This process is called by D'Sa a '*dhvani-* dimension' of the reality. He asserts: 'To be able to see things from the *dhvani*-standpoint, one must first recognize that the eyes are blind, and it is the heart with which one sees.' This is my translation of: 'Um nun die Dinge vom *dhvani*-Standpunkt her betrachten zu können, muß man zunächst erkennen, »daß die Augen blind sind und es da Herz ist, mit dem man sieht«." F. D'Sa, "Sehen – Glauben – Innewohnen. Joh 1 als hermeneutisches Modell," *Wir werden bei ihm wohnen. Das Johannesevangelium in indischer Deutung* (ed. G. Soares-Prabhu) (TDW 6; Freiburg: Herder 1984) 108.

81 Commenting on this passage Levine notices that the Samaritan women couldn't be of 'ill repute', ass claimed by numerous of interpretations, since the villagers left Sychar and went to see Jesus because she had told them 'Come, see.' Cf. A.-J. Levine, *The Gospel of John: A Beginner's Guide to the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2024) 31. For a view that challenges the assumption of the woman's immoral character, see C.M. Conway, *John and the Johannine Letters* (CBS; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2017) 64.

82 Bultmann rightly notices that: 'A man must recognize the Revealer when he encounters him in tangible form [...]. Such recognition is a recognition in spite of appearances; it must overcome the offence of the σάρξ.' Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 180–181.

83 'ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν τῶν Σαμαριτῶν διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς γυναικός' (4:39); 'πολλῷ πλείους ἐπίστευσαν διὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ' (4:41); 'οὐκέτι διὰ τὴν σὴν λαλιὰν πιστεύομεν, αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀκηκόαμεν' (4:42). Three times, faith is connected with the words of the Samaritan woman or Jesus.

their faith, saying to the woman: 'This One is indeed the Saviour of the world' (4:42).[84] Similarly, in the Targums, where the phrase 'come, see' appears at crucial moments in salvation history, when proper comprehension of the event is required and the risk of misunderstanding the event is present, in the Samaritan episode, this expression directs the reader's attention to a significant moment in Jesus' mission. Jesus, for the first time, crosses beyond the boundaries of his world into the Samaritan world, showing that salvation is not limited to Jews only. This event finds no parallel in the Synoptic Gospels and is unique to John. The reader is allowed to observe the recognition of Jesus as the Saviour of the world, and this occurs beyond the boundaries of his usual activities. By coming to Sychar, Jesus anticipates the future mission of the Church. On this occasion, the text employs the phrase 'come, see' to protect its readers from misunderstanding the event and to underscore its relevance.

Conclusion

The Johannine phrase 'come and see' emerges as far more than a simple invitation to physical observation; it is a theological summons into revelation and relationship. Across the narratives of John 1 and 4, this formula consistently marks pivotal moments in salvation history, guiding disciples, sceptics, and outsiders alike toward a deeper understanding of Jesus' true identity.

The comparison with the Palestinian Targums reveals striking convergences. In both corpora, the expression functions as an interpretative key: it directs attention to an apparently ordinary reality while unveiling its hidden, divine dimension. In the Targums, the phrase introduces moments when God's action in history requires proper discernment; in John, it invites the reader to perceive in Jesus not merely a rabbi, a man from Nazareth, or a weary traveller at a well, but the Messiah, the Son of God, and ultimately, the Saviour of the world.

This intertextual resonance enriches our understanding of Johannine theology. The evangelist does not simply recount a series of encounters; he crafts a narrative that invites both characters and readers into a progressive journey of faith. To 'come and see' is to step into the dynamic space where revelation unfolds and where seeing becomes believing. In this sense, the phrase functions not only as a narrative device but also as a theological invitation – calling the community of believers in every generation to recognise in the man Jesus the locus of divine revelation, the 'ladder' between heaven and earth.

Ultimately, the study of 'come and see' within its broader Jewish milieu underscores the Gospel's rootedness in early Jewish tradition, while also highlighting its transformative vision. The Johannine Jesus, echoing the revelatory voice of the Targums, beckons all who

84 Some manuscripts add Messiah: A C_3 D K L N Γ Δ Θ Ψ f_1.13. 33. 565. 579. 700. 892. 1241. 1424 𝔐 e f q $sy_{p.h}$ bo_{pt}.

hear: to come, to see, and to believe – entering into a relationship that transforms perception and grounds the life of faith in the mystery of the incarnate Word.

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