

# The Use of πιστεύω in the Gospel of John: Some Considerations on Meaning and Issues of Consistency and Ambiguity

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## Abstract

John uses the verb πιστεύω (to believe) more often than do the Synoptic Gospels. The action of believing is important and central to John. There are references to people who are said to believe in Jesus and follow him. However, there are others who also believe but then turn away from Jesus. John uses the same verb πιστεύω throughout his gospel to indicate true believers in Jesus, but sometimes this identification appears unclear and/or ambiguous. The verb πιστεύω is also used synonymously within a wider semantic range that encompasses other action words such as knowing, receiving, and believing in Jesus, God, and the Scripture, doing the will and work of God, seeing, hearing, accepting, remaining, coming to, abiding, and so on. πιστεύω is also subsumed under various descriptors such as being born of God, being chosen and drawn by the Father, and given to Jesus, producing

fruit, receiving the Spirit, obeying Jesus as his sheep, and worshipping him. The methodology in this work is to *examine various passages in John that employ the verb πιστεύω* and assess how John uses this word and its other word associations and descriptors in the given context of the passage(s) under consideration. John seems to be challenging his readers on the question of what constitutes a true believer in Jesus. John challenges his reader(s) on what it means, and what it looks like, to be a genuine believer in Jesus as opposed to a counterfeit believer.

## Keywords

believe, believer, unbeliever, πιστεύω, Jesus, Father

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Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

## 1. The Use of πιστεύω in John

The concept of believing plays a central role in the Gospel of John. By comparison with the other gospels, John uses the verb πιστεύω (to believe) with a much higher frequency.<sup>1</sup> John uses the verb πιστεύω ninety-eight times, whereas Matthew uses it eleven times, Mark uses it ten times (four times in the longer ending of Mark), and Luke uses it nine times (Bauer et al. 2000, s.v. πιστεύω).<sup>2</sup> John, interestingly, never uses the word πίστις (faith) in his gospel.<sup>3</sup> The word πιστεύω means “to entrust oneself to an entity in complete confidence, believe (in), trust, [with] implication of total commitment to the one who is trusted” (Bauer et al. 2000, s.v. πιστεύω). As a verb, πιστεύω implies an action. Believing involves a dynamic commitment

<sup>1</sup> The following chart shows the number of times πιστεύω appears in the NT. John uses the verb πιστεύω far more frequently than any other NT writer. Chart and material provided by Rev. Felix Just, S.J., at <https://catholic-resources.org/John/Themes-Believe.htm> (used with permission).

Greek	English	Matt	Mark	Luke	John	Acts	Paul	Heb	Cath	1John	2and3 John	Rev	NT Total
πιστεύω	verb: to believe, trust; participle: believer	11	14	9	98	37	54	2	7	9	0	0	241
πίστις	noun: faith, trust	8	5	11	0	15	142	32	25	1	0	4	243
πιστός	adjective: faithful, trusting, pure	5	0	6	1	4	33	5	3	1	1	8	67

<sup>2</sup> In 1 John πιστεύω appears nine times.

<sup>3</sup> The word πίστις (“faith”) appears in 1 John 5:4 and is a hapax legomenon in the Johannine literature.

to Jesus. The verb πιστεύω semantically signifies action, not mere belief. For John “the implication of believing means that there is a deliberate intention as an action to entrust oneself obediently to Jesus with complete confidence” (Hickey 2021, 69). Several studies have touched on the topic of believing in John (e.g., McNab 2016; Bonney 2002; Moloney 1993; Tenney 1948), but most of these works tend to be general or focus more as a commentary on the Fourth Gospel. This work seeks to examine some Johannine passages containing the verb πιστεύω and extrapolate from their contexts how this word is used and what are the various nuances it conveys.

## 2. The Ambiguity of the Word “Believer” in John

In the Gospel of John, the identification of what it means to be a believer is not so clear, nor is it immediately obvious. While many are said to “believe” in Jesus, some of these “believers” come to oppose Jesus in very offensive and denunciatory language. This poses a challenge to the reader. What exactly constitutes a true believer in Jesus? By a “true” believer I mean one who has experienced the new birth (John 3:3, 5, 7), who has been born of God (1:13), has been drawn to Jesus by the Father (6:44), and has been given to Jesus by the Father (6:37). Conversely, a “supposed,” “superficial,” “apparent,” or a “mere professing” believer I take to be a pseudo-believer. They may have an outward appearance of being a believer in Jesus, but their actions and works show otherwise; that there has been no real change or conversion, or in the words of the Pastoral Epistles, “having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5; KJV). To use a modern expression, John does not advocate an “easy believism,” that believing is all that is necessary even if it is bereft of any substantial authentication. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1963, 47) spoke of “cheap grace” which was devoid of any true meaning and significance: “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance ... grace without discipleship,

grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” Contextual indicators will be considered to distinguish mere professing believers from genuine believers. The implications of these indicators tend to present a dichotomy in various passages between those who are “in” and those who are “out” of the circle of those who are faithful Jesus.

The idea of believing can be very broad and can cover a wide range of semantic fields. Rudolf Bultmann (1955, 1–21) addressed this wide semantic range of belief or believing in a 1931 monograph entitled *Krisis des Glauben* (“Crisis in Belief”). Elsewhere, Bultmann (1955, 1) comments that “belief is connected with morality and religion and is always at the same time a human attitude, it is nevertheless differentiated from them by its being a particular belief in something standing over against mankind—a belief in the transcendent.” This seems to be the trajectory that John moves in as belief is ultimately directed to the eternal transcendent Word made flesh. Bultmann (1955, 1) continues, “Belief is not religiosity ... it sees the world and life in the light of a reality lying beyond them.... It sees them in the light of God.” In the Fourth Gospel the parallelism between light and believing is one among many lines of thought that John utilizes (John 1:4, 9; 8:12).

### 3. The Birthright of True Believers

The second time the verb πιστεύω appears in the Gospel is in John 1:12, “But to all who did receive him [Jesus], who believed [πιστεύουσιν] in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”<sup>4</sup> The section of John 1:1–18 comprises the Prologue of the Gospel (Carson and Moo 2005, 225;

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations in English are taken from the English Standard Version (2001). The first time the word πιστεύω appears is in John 1:6 in reference to believing in Jesus through the witness of John the Baptizer.

Kruse 2004, 58–74). Some scholars have also suggested that it formed part of an early hymn (Costa 2021, 163–171; Brown 1997, 337; Carson and Moo 2005, 225). The appearance of πιστεύω in John 1:12 is significant. John indicates what believing in Jesus involves. Jesus came unto his own (the Jewish people), but he was not received (John 1:11). A contrast is presented in verse 12 with the use of the conjunction particle δέ (but). Those who did not receive Jesus are contrasted with those who did receive him. They are described as those who “believed in his name.”

The phrase “believed in his name” appears to be a Johannine stylistic feature. It appears only in John 1:12 and John 2:23.<sup>5</sup> The concept of believing in his name, reflects the idea of “name” as representative of the person, character, reputation, and authority. The idea of “name” functions as a substitute for the person (Bruce 1983, 38; Carson 1991, 125).<sup>6</sup> The language of believing in his name (Jesus), does not appear to be used in Scripture of any mere creature, but appears in reference to God (Pss 9:10; 20:1,7; 33:21; Isa 50:10; Jer 7:14). In the Prologue Jesus is the eternal Word, truly God, who became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1–3, 10, 14). The deity of the Word is so central to John that Barrett (1978, 156) remarked, “if this be not true the book is blasphemous.”

Those who receive Jesus, are those who believe in his name, and have “the right” to “become children of God.” It is *to them* that Jesus gives the right to be children of God. John further expands on this notion by pointing out that those who have believed in Jesus’s name are also “born of God.” The theme of the new birth is introduced early in the Prologue (Carson 1991, 126). John 1:13 states these children of God are those, “who were born, not

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase “believe in the name of his Son” and “believe in the name of the Son of God” also appears in 1 John 3:23 and 1 John 5:13 respectively.

<sup>6</sup> See Ps 20:1, 7. On the name of Jesus see Jas 2:7; 3 John 7.

of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”<sup>7</sup> This divine birth was not predicated on any human agency, nor brought about by any human will via sexual relations, but by the will of God himself. As Carson (1991, 126) correctly notes, the new birth is “nothing other than an act of God.” In Bultmann’s treatment of belief he comments that, “[m]an has no power over the temporal and the eternal. The power which controls them is God,” and it is God “giving him [man] the right to believe in the God whom he would fain believe” (Bultmann 1955, 3, 12).

The actions described in John 1:12–13, receiving Jesus, believing in his name, being given the right to become children of God, and being born of God, become foundational and definitive for what will follow in the gospel. The ones who have believed in the name of Jesus are born of God. In John this divine birth motif is described variously by synonymous terminology such as “born of God” (John 1:13), “born again” (3:3, 7),<sup>8</sup> “born of water and the Spirit” (3:5), and “born of the Spirit” (3:6, 8).<sup>9</sup> All these descriptors are linked to the verb πιστεύω. It is those who believe (πιστεύω) in the name of Jesus that are born of God and are made children of God.

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<sup>7</sup> There is an interesting variant in the Old Latin manuscripts which is also supported by a few Syriac manuscripts where the plural “who were born” is replaced by the singular “who was born” (qui natus est). Both Irenaeus and Tertullian bear witness to this variant reading. Tertullian accepted it as original and accused the Valentinian Gnostics of changing the singular relative pronoun “who” to the plural “who were” to undermine the virgin birth of Jesus. This variant seems to have been born out of the desire to have explicit Johannine testimony to the virgin birth of Jesus. The complete absence of this variant in the Greek manuscripts argues strongly for the spuriousness of this variant reading. (See Bruce 1983, 39; Barrett 1978, 164; Pryor 1985, 296–318; Brown 1973, 59).  
<sup>8</sup> Or “born from above” as seen in NRSV, LEB, NAB, NET, YLT, and CEV. Outside of the Johannine corpus the new birth appears in 1 Pet 1:3 (“he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”) and 1 Pet 1:23 (“since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God”).  
<sup>9</sup> The new birth motif is also attested in 1 John with the phrase “born of God” (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).

## 4. Believing Jesus and the Scripture

The disciples of Jesus are said to believe in Jesus because of what Jesus said (John 1:50) and by the signs that he had performed, such as his first sign of turning water into wine during the wedding at Cana (2:11). Another way πιστεύω is used in John is in relation to believing the Scripture(s). The disciples are also said to have believed the Scripture because of what Jesus said, especially after he was raised from the dead (2:22). To believe the Scripture is to believe Jesus. A marker of true believing involves following Jesus and believing his words and the Scripture(s) which point to him (5:39).

### 4.1. *They believed in Jesus ... but Jesus did not believe in them*

In John 2:23–25 a scenario appears where people are said to believe (πιστεύω) in Jesus, but he does not entrust himself to them:

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

This passage appears to contain a measure of doubt on the part of Jesus towards the people. Many “believed in his name” because they saw the signs he was doing. Even though many are said to have believed in him in John 2:23, Jesus, nevertheless, did not entrust himself to them. There is a play on words in John 2:24 which is not apparent in English translations. While many are said to have ἐπίστευσαν (believed) in his name, Jesus, on the other hand, οὐκ ἐπίστευεν (did not believe) himself to them. He did

not believe or entrust himself to them. Godet (1881, 372) captures this sense when he notes that “[t]here is a sort of play upon words ... *He did not believe*, did not trust Himself ... He did not have *faith in their faith*.”<sup>10</sup> They were “spurious converts” (Carson 1991, 184), who stopped only at the miraculous aspect, but did not, according to Brown (alluding to St Augustine’s words), “perceive what was signified,” namely Jesus himself (Brown 1997, 341). John adds that Jesus could discern between those who were genuine and false believers because “he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man” (John 2:25). The only one who truly knows what “was in man” and could read his mind and heart is God alone (1 Chr 28:9; Jer 17:10).<sup>11</sup> It appears that many believed in him, but only because “they saw the signs that he was doing.” They believed because of external factors; what Jesus did. While they did believe in one sense, John intends the reader to see that such belief was not sufficient nor adequate in and of itself. The signs and works of Jesus are pointers, meant to point people to him (John 10:25, 37–38). The reader is left with an ambiguity here, that while the people believed in Jesus, he did not believe in them. The reader is challenged to read more deeply and probe the nuances of what it means to believe in Jesus. Belief should not merely be predicated on external factors but must involve a wholesome trust and acceptance of Jesus.

John opens a new section where Jesus further explains how true believers are to be distinguished from apparent believers. He addresses the

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<sup>10</sup> Italics in original.

<sup>11</sup> The theme of Jesus’s divine knowledge is also seen at the end of the Gospel, “Lord, you know everything [“all things”; KJV, NKJV, NASB]” (John 21:17; cf. Rev 2:23). Among the seven things that rabbinic literature states are unknown to man except for the day of his death and the restoration of the messianic kingdom, is “what is within another” (Mekhilta Exod 15:32).

subject of the new birth in John 3:3, 5–8, which recalls John 1:13 where true believers are said to be “born of God.” Jesus further defines those who truly believe in him as those who will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Those who believe will not be condemned, while those who do not believe are condemned already “because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (3:18). True believers have life now, they will not enter into judgment but pass from death to life (5:24), while those who disobey Jesus do not have life, but the wrath of God remains on them (3:36). Jesus is the Light to whom believers come and become “sons of the light” (12:36). Unbelievers hate and reject and prefer the darkness (3:19–21). John thus delineates here between those who are *in* from those who are *out*. Jesus becomes the dividing line for John.<sup>12</sup> As Bultmann (1955, 85) noted, “In Jesus Christ the destiny of every man is decided. He [Christ] is *the eschatological act of God*.”

In the healing of the official’s son in John 4:46–54, the official is said to have “believed the word that Jesus spoke to him” (v. 50), and as a result, he “believed, and all his household” (v. 53). In this same passage Jesus almost indignantly asks, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” (John 4:48). It is interesting that while Jesus addressed the official in this passage, the second person aorist subjunctive ἴδητε (you may see) used here is in the plural. Bruce (1983, 118) has suggested that Jesus may have made this statement as a test of the official’s faith, but most probably Carson (1991, 236) is correct when he notes that “Jesus’s rebuke (v. 48) is in the

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<sup>12</sup> The question Paul asks in 2 Cor 13:5–6 also involves a call to examine one’s faith, whether it is genuine or not, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? –unless indeed you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.”

plural, addressed to the people at large.” Believing the word of Jesus is thus a descriptor, for John, of what it means to believe.

## 5. The Work and Will of God as Believing in Jesus

Another way in which πιστεύω is used by John is by associating it with the work and will of God. In the story of the feeding of the 5 000 and the Bread of Life discourse, the crowd asks Jesus what sign and work he could do, “that we may see and believe you?” (John 6:30). This recalls John 2:23 where people “believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing” and yet Jesus did not believe or entrust himself to them (2:24). In John 6 Jesus defines and delineates the parameters of what constitutes a true believer. The dependence of these supposed believers in John 6 on merely external signs (like those in Jerusalem), and material needs is heightened when Jesus tells them that they sought him because he met their physical needs with physical food (6:26). Jesus tells them to desire the bread of life that lasts forever that can be found only in him.

While the crowd is focused on material needs such a bread, Jesus points to the reality that eternal life consists of eating and drinking spiritual food which Jesus provides. Jesus defines this eating and drinking as respectively coming to him, and believing in him, “I am the bread of life; *whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst*” (John 6:35; italics mine). Jesus informs the crowd that they are not, in fact, true believers, “But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe [οὐ πιστεύετε]” (6:36). Jesus can perceive the true condition of the hearts of the people (cf. 2:25). The perception of the crowd on the ability of Jesus to extraordinarily provide for physical and material needs aroused their messianic expectations to a fever pitch, as they wanted to make him king by force (6:15). The crowd pushed and came towards Jesus with a false belief

and motive, and in response to their intentions, Jesus withdrew himself from them.

The association of the messianic identity of Jesus is tied to the signs that he performs, and it is on the signs themselves that people tend to be fixated (John 7:31; 10:25, 37–38). Even with the raising of Lazarus from the dead, *many* were said to believe in Jesus (11:45), but *some* went to report Jesus to the Pharisees (11:46). The text delineates those among “the many” who believed in Jesus, and “the some” from among “the many” who reported Jesus. The “latter it is implied,” according to Bruce (1983, 249), “did so with no friendly intention (the more so as they are set in contrast with the many who believed).” The ironic relationship of believing in Jesus, and yet later wanting to take his life is a recurring ambiguity in John.

In addition to asking for a “sign” from Jesus, they ask what “work” he can perform for them. The people want to be able to do the “works [plural] of God” (John 6:28), or better still, “to do the works God requires” (NIV; cf. NET). The work of God, which is in the singular, in contrast to the people’s description of “works,” is defined as believing in Jesus: “This is the work [singular] of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (6:29; cf. 20:31). The NET reads, “This is the deed God requires—to believe in the one whom he sent.” In this case work/deed equals believing. Doing the work of God is used as a descriptor of πιστεύω. Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life (6:47). The singular work of God is not based on signs and wonders, or material sustenance, but to believe in Jesus first and foremost. Jesus expands on the theme of what constitutes a true believer by stating that it is the will of the Father that all who look on the Son and believe in him should have eternal life and be raised on the last day (6:40). Both the “work of God” and the “will of the Father” is that people look and believe in his Son and have eternal life. The will of God, like the work of God, is used

synonymously with πιστεύω. This is in direct contrast to the demands of the crowds. Even though they saw Jesus, they “yet do not believe” (6:36).

## 6. The True Children of Abraham and God, and the Impostors: Those Who Hear and do not Hear

Another way πιστεύω is employed by John is in terms of those who are true children of Abraham, who hear the word of God. Conversely, those who are not true children of Abraham, are those who do not hear the word of God. Earlier in the gospel, the Samaritans are said to have believed in Jesus because of the testimony of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:39), and “many more believed because of his word” (4:41). The connection with John 2:22 about believing the word of Jesus as a marker of a true believer is seen here as well. An ironic twist emerges in John at this point. While many Samaritans come to believe in Jesus because of his word, Jesus is later accused of being a “Samaritan” by his fellow Jews (John 8:48). Jesus rejects their claim to being children of Abraham and God (John 8:39–42).<sup>13</sup> The implication of the words of Jesus, is that the *true* children and sons of Abraham, and the *true* children and sons of God would receive him as God’s Son, and hear and believe his word. The marker of a true believer in Jesus is not only believing his word, but also having God’s word abiding in them: “You do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent” (5:38). Here again πιστεύω is synonymously being used interchangeably with the idea of God’s word abiding in the believer’s heart and believing in Jesus. This dichotomy is also communicated by Jesus

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<sup>13</sup> The hearers of Jesus took these questions of their paternal legitimacy to Abraham and God as aspersions on their identity. The nation of Israel was collectively God’s son (Exod 4:22–23), and individually they were the sons of Yahweh (Deut 14:1). Yahweh was a father to Israel (Jer 31:9).

in John 8:47, “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” Indeed, those who hear the words of God are also those who are taught by God (6:45). Those who keep the word of Jesus will never see death (8:51). Thus, believing (πιστεύω) involves hearing the word of God so that πιστεύω is equal to hearing God’s word.

There is a distinction between those who truly believe and those who are apparent believers. They are defined respectively as those who hear the words of God, and those who do not hear his words. Jesus addresses these words to an audience that gradually became hostile to him but earlier were described as the many who “believed in him” (John 8:30). Those who are of God and hear his word, are also his children (cf. 1:12–13) and are distinguished from those who do not hear his word and are children of the devil (8:37–46).<sup>14</sup>

Jesus addressed the “Jews who had believed him” (John 8:31). A sense of ambiguity is presented here with πιστεύω. These Jews who were said to believe in Jesus, then proceed to oppose him when he declares that if they knew the truth, the truth would set them free— they took this as an insult. The importance of truth is a central theme in John. Jesus claimed to be “the truth” and those who love truth hear the voice of Jesus (14:6; cf. 18:37).

Bruce (1983, 197), sensing this ambiguity, views these Jews who opposed Jesus as different from the ones who were said to believe in him and argues, “At some point early in the exchange the circle of his interlocutors widens; by the time verse 37 is reached it is *unbelieving Jews* who are addressed.”<sup>15</sup> The text, however, does not make this supposed

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<sup>14</sup> This sharp dichotomy between the “children of God” and the “children of the devil” also appears in 1 John 3:10.

<sup>15</sup> Italics are mine.

distinction clear at all. Jesus is speaking to the *same* people who were said to believe in him. Against Bruce's argument, Kruse (2004, 209, 211) rightly notes, "These people 'who put their faith in him' were not true believers, for straightaway they rejected what Jesus said.... It is surprising that Jesus accused 'believers' of being ready to kill him."<sup>16</sup> Morris (1995, 403–404) also recognizes the tension here, "This section of discourse is addressed to those who believe, and yet do not believe" and this passage has "troubled commentators through the centuries."

Jesus says to these Jews who were said to believe in him, that they are seeking to kill him "because my word finds no place in you" (John 8:37; cf. v. 40). Jesus tells them they do not understand him because they cannot bear to hear his word (8:43). Having the word of Jesus in oneself is a description of πιστεύω, a marker of a true believer. Conversely, not having the word of Jesus in oneself implies one is not a genuine believer. Jesus then proceeds to denounce these supposed believers as children of the devil (8:44), who do not have God as their Father (8:42). Jesus's statement here, is "tantamount to a charge of spiritual illegitimacy" (Marsh 1968, 365). If they do not have God as their Father, then it would seem to follow they are not truly "born of God" (John 1:13), and hence are not children of God (1:12). They are not genuine believers, even though earlier they were said to have believed in Jesus.

While the same verb πιστεύω is used here of these supposed believers in Jesus, the context bears out very emphatically that while being superficial believers, they were not genuine or real believers in Jesus. They do not have his word in them, nor can they bear his word. Jesus then directly tells them,

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<sup>16</sup> Also see Carson (1991, 349) who is of the same opinion.

"you *do not believe* me" (John 8:45; italics mine). They "believed in him" (8:30), but, in fact, they did not truly believe.

## 7. Literary Indicators and Descriptors to Distinguish Insiders from Outsiders

True belief, in John's Gospel, involves not only having Jesus as the object of belief, but the Father as well. The Son works in harmony with the Father as he is equal with God (John 5:18–19). The Son does not work as a lone agent but works conjointly and in concert with the Father (10:29–30). All must honor the Son just as they honor the Father (5:23). One must also believe in the Father who sent Jesus (5:24). Belief in the Father and the Son is essential (14:1; 17:3).<sup>17</sup> Several literary indicators appear to distinguish the insiders from the outsiders. The divine acts of giving, drawing, and choosing true believers, are among the other semantic ranges of πιστεύω in John.

### 7.1. Believers are given by the Father to the Son

Among these literary indicators we find language about a group of people who are *given* by the Father to Jesus (John 6:39; 17:9, 11–12, 24).<sup>18</sup> Those who are given to Jesus by the Father are said to be kept safe by both Jesus

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<sup>17</sup> See discussion in Costa (2013, 432–433, n. 127). The close association of the Father and the Son, and the necessity to believe in both to have eternal life is also emphasized in the Johannine epistles (1 John 1:3; 2:22–24; 4:14; 2 John 3, 9). Mere belief that there is only one God is not sufficient for one to have eternal life. James 2:19 states, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" While the demons believe that God is one, (cf. Deut 6:4), it does not follow that they are redeemed. The argument in James is that confession (faith) must be followed by action (works). Bultmann (1955, 12) comments that "belief in God simply cannot and must not arise as a general human attitude, but only as a response to God's Word and that is this one Word—found in the New Testament and based on the Christ-event—which is God's Word" (Italics in original).

<sup>18</sup> In John 17:20 Jesus prays for future believers who will believe in him through the preaching message of the apostles.



and the Father (10:28–29). Jesus says concerning those who are given to him by the Father, whom he calls his sheep, “I give them eternal life, and they will never [οὐ μὴ] perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (10:28). Jesus himself is said to *give* “eternal life” to his sheep, a divine attribute which he shares with the Father (5:21). The use of the double negative particles οὐ μὴ (no/not) communicates the sense that those who are given to Christ will never perish. The verb πιστεύω in this case includes the ones given by the Father to Jesus.

### 7.2 *Believers are drawn by the Father and the Son*

Those who are given to Jesus by the Father are also said to be *drawn* to Jesus by the Father. When Jesus addresses the crowd whom he miraculously fed, who were “seeking” him (John 6:24–26), he tells them, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws [ἐλκύσῃ] him. And I will raise him up on the last day” (6:44).

Jesus states that no one can come to him unless the Father draws them. As Carson (1991, 293) notes, “this ‘drawing’ is selective, or else the negative note in v. 44 is meaningless.” The verb ἔλκω (“draw”) means “to move an object from one area to another in a pulling motion, *draw*, with implication that the object being moved is incapable of propelling itself or in the case of [persons] is unwilling to do so voluntarily, in either case with implication of exertion on the part of the mover” (Bauer et al. 2000, s.v. ἔλκω; italics in original). Louw and Nida (1988, s.v. ἔλκω) similarly state that this verb means “to pull or drag, requiring force because of the inertia of the object being dragged ... to drag or pull by physical force, often implying resistance.” Believers are drawn by the Father and given to the Son. These are the ones who received and believed Jesus and have been born of God (John 1:12–13). While the statements about the Father drawing people to Jesus according to Carson (1991, 293) has a “strong predestinarian strain”

to them, John does emphasize the responsibility of people to come to Jesus. Jesus denounces the refusal of people to come to him in the strongest of terms, “yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:40), and “he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin” (19:11). There is a compatibilist view at play in John between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. While Jesus can say “whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (6:37b), the ones who come to him are at the same time given to Jesus and drawn by the Father (6:37a, 44). Here the verb πιστεύω is connected to those who are drawn by the Father, for they are the ones who truly believe in Jesus.

### 7.3 *True believers are chosen by the Father and the Son*

True believers are described as chosen by the Father but are also said to be chosen by Jesus (John 15:16; cf. 6:70; 12:32). Believers are chosen and known by Jesus. In John, Jesus not only knows those who are genuine believers, but also those who are superficial or supposed believers:

“But there are some of you who do not believe [οὐ πιστεύουσιν].” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (6:64–65; cf. 2:25)

Here the verb πιστεύω is connected to coming to Jesus and being drawn by the Father.

These who “do not believe” are referred to as “many of his disciples,” “[who] turned back and no longer walked with him” (John 6:66). These were

disciples of Jesus, and yet, they were not true believers.<sup>19</sup> While Jesus chose the twelve apostles, he knew that one of them, Judas Iscariot, was not truly a believer (6:70–71), and not among those who were given to Jesus by the Father (17:12). While many supposed disciples of Jesus abandoned him, true disciples are described as those who recognize that Jesus alone has “the words of eternal life.” John presents “a gradual recognition of who Jesus is” (Brown 1997, 338). They confess and know that he is “the Holy One of God” (John 6:68–69).<sup>20</sup> While it is the Father who draws true believers to Jesus, Jesus is also said to draw people to himself. In speaking of his coming death Jesus states, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw [ἐλκύσω] all people to myself” (John 12:32).<sup>21</sup> The Father and the Son are co-workers in the redemptive plan. The verb πιστεύω is intricately connected to those who are chosen by the Father.

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**19** A similar thought is found in Matt 7:21–23 when many on judgment day will affirm that they called Jesus “Lord” and claimed to have worked many wondrous signs in his name to which he will respond, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (7:23). Matthew connects this to the saying of Jesus that those who hear and obey him build their house on a rock, whereas those who hear and do not obey build their house on sand (Matt 7:24–27) and face utter ruin when a storm strikes.

**20** Some commentators have argued that this confession of Peter is the Johannine version of the Petrine confession in the Synoptics (Matt 16:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). This is unnecessary. Could Peter not have made more than one confessional statement regarding Jesus? The two confessions were made in two different locations. In the Synoptics, Peter makes his confession in Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13; Mark 8:27), while in John the confession is made in Capernaum (John 6:59).

**21** The reference to Jesus drawing “all people” to himself does not contradict the selective drawing of the Father in John 6:44. Carson (1991, 293) makes the important observation that the “context shows rather clearly, however, that [John] 12:32 refers to ‘all men without distinction’ (i.e., not just Jews) rather than ‘to all men without exception.’” See also Kruse (2004, 272–273) and Barrett (1978, 427). That the death of Jesus will draw “all men without distinction” is further supported by John 11:51–52; 12:20–22.

#### *7.4 True believers are fruit producers*

Another sign of a true believer is that they will bear fruit. Jesus compares himself to a vine and his followers to the branches. Jesus is “the true vine” (John 15:1), as opposed to the false vine, who will bear fruit. Israel as Yahweh’s vine failed to produce fruit for God (see Barclay 1964, 200–202). Jesus as the *true* vine will do what Israel failed to do: bring fruit in abundance to God.<sup>22</sup> The branches that bear fruit become more productive, a description of true believers; branches that bear no fruit are taken away and thrown in the fire, which by contrast is a description of supposed believers (John 15:1–8). Jesus desires that his followers “bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (15:8). The disciples who are identified with the healthy branches are also called the “friends” of Jesus (15:14–15).<sup>23</sup> The proof that one is a true believer is that one does, in fact, “bear much fruit.”<sup>24</sup> The action of bearing much fruit is connected to πιστεύω, for only true believers can bear such fruit.

#### *7.5 True believers as recipients of the Holy Spirit*

Those who are drawn and given by the Father to the Son are also said to be given and receive the Spirit (John 7:39). Jesus had spoken about the necessity of being “born of the Spirit” (3:5, 8). The Spirit is only to be given to those who are true believers in Jesus. Jesus spoke of living waters flowing out of the hearts of true believers: “he said [this] about the Spirit, whom

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**22** The allusion to the vine recalls the theme of Israel as the vineyard of Yahweh (Isa 5:1–7). On the imagery of Israel as the vine of Yahweh see Ps 80:7–8, 14–17; Jer 2:21; Ezek 15:1–8; 19:10–14.

**23** In the OT, the only one who is called God’s friend is Abraham (Isa 41:8). Jesus calls the disciples his friends because he tells them what the Father has revealed (John 15:15). God also reveals to his friend Abraham what he is going to do in bringing judgment upon Sodom (Gen 18:17–21).

**24** The sign of genuine faith is that it will produce good works. This theme is also addressed elsewhere in the NT (Gal 5:22–23; Eph 2:8–10; Phil 2:12–13; Titus 2:14; Jas 1:22; 2:14–26; 1 John 3:18).

those who believed in him were to receive” (7:38–39). Here, again, we see the close synonymous association of receiving the Spirit with πιστεύω. After the resurrection, the risen Jesus appeared and breathed on the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). This imagery echoes Genesis 2:7 (cf. Ezek 37:9) where God created Adam from the dust of the ground and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became *a living creature*” (italics mine). The risen Jesus creates a new humanity, composed of true believers through the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> True believers are empowered, led, and taught by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will bear witness to Jesus, reminding his disciples of what Jesus said and taught (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). The world of unbelievers on the other hand, cannot receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit condemns the world/unbelievers (16:8), because they have not truly believed in Jesus (16:9).

### 7.6 True believers as sheep of the Good Shepherd

True believers are also marked out as Jesus’s sheep. Jesus refers to himself as the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14) who lays down his life for his sheep. He knows his sheep personally, he calls them by name, and his sheep know him, and they follow him (John 10:3–4). The sheep recognize the voice of their Shepherd (10:27). This shepherd language is also used of Yahweh (Ps 23:1; Ezek 34:12; see discussion in Barclay 1964, 60–66). These words of Jesus cause dissension among his audience causing some to discredit him while others point to the signs Jesus had performed (John 10:20–21). Jesus then makes a poignant statement to those who disbelieve, “you do not believe because you are not among my sheep” (10:26). The sheep of

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<sup>25</sup> The act of Jesus breathing on his disciples and giving them the Holy Spirit reinforces his deity. The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of God (Gen 1:2; Rom 8:9), but also the Spirit of Jesus/Christ (Acts 16:7; Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19). Jesus as the last Adam became “a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45; italics mine). Adam received life but Jesus gives life.

Jesus believe in him. These sheep are the same as those who have been given to Jesus by the Father and drawn by the Father to Jesus. All these action words as we have seen are associated synonymously with πιστεύω.

Jesus speaks of other sheep that he has yet to bring in; they too will hear his voice and will come in (John 10:16). True believers in Jesus will be called from everywhere. His sheep will never be lost and will never perish (10:28–29). They are secure, as Carson (1991, 394) notes, “both the Father and the Son are engaged in the perfect preservation of Jesus’s sheep.” The voice of Jesus is what raises the spiritually dead to life (5:25). It is the drawing power of the Father (6:44), and the life-giving voice of Jesus, who is “the resurrection and the life” (11:25), which raises the spiritually dead. All these descriptions are all aligned with the meaning of πιστεύω.

### 7.7 True believers and the worship of Jesus

Another marker of a true believer is the worship of Jesus. The blind man healed by Jesus was asked if he believed in the Son of Man. He answered, “‘Lord, I *believe,*’ and he *worshiped* him” (John 9:35–38; italics mine). The close association of πιστεύω with the worship of Jesus cannot be missed here. There is a direct connection between believing and worshiping Jesus. The self-designation of Jesus here as the Son of Man is important in relation to the question of the worship of Jesus. This title appears to be a reference to the “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7:13–14. This figure is a divine, heavenly being who comes with “the clouds of heaven,” a designation used for Yahweh in the OT (Deut 33:26; Pss 68:33; 104:3; Isa 19:1), and Canaanite deities like Baal (Costa 2021, 215–217; Marshall 1976, 63–82; Marshall 1992, 775–781). This figure receives universal worship from all the nations (Dan 7:14, 27), and is implicitly appointed judge over the nations (Dan 7:10, 22, 26). This is reflected in John 5:27, “And he [the Father] has given him [the Son] authority to execute judgment, *because he is the Son*

of Man” (italics mine). This heavenly Son of Man figure is pre-existent (1 En 37–71). Jesus refers to himself as the pre-existent Son of Man who “descended” or “came down” *from heaven* “where he was before” (John 3:13; 6:62).<sup>26</sup> The “Son of Man” designation in John should thus be understood as a reference to the deity of Jesus against the background of Daniel 7 and an important corollary to the worship of Jesus in the Christian community.<sup>27</sup>

True belief results in the worship of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> This is highlighted in what is believed to be the climax of John, the confession of Thomas, who said to the risen Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28; cf. Ps 35:23 where Yahweh is also called “Lord” and “God”). As Harris (1992, 110) notes, this confession is generally accepted by grammarians, lexicographers, and commentators as an address *to* the risen Jesus. Bultmann (1955, 276) comments that in John 20:28 Jesus is clearly “addressed as God.” Thomas finally believes and recognizes Jesus as Lord and God, bringing the Gospel full circle back to the Prologue where the Word is called “God” (John 1:1c). Bultmann (1955, 11) captures this moment of believing when he notes that “For Christianity belief in God is not belief and trust in God as a general principle, but belief in a definite Word proclaimed to the believer. The event is *Jesus Christ*, in whom ... God has spoken, and whom the [NT] itself calls ‘the Word’” (italics in original).

Jesus makes belief in his divine identity a necessary requirement for eternal life. To deny the divine identity of Jesus is to die in one’s sins. Jesus states, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you

believe that I am he [ἐγὼ εἰμί] you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).<sup>29</sup> In John 8:58 Jesus claims that before Abraham came into existence, “I am” (ἐγὼ εἰμί) which causes his hearers to pick up stones to kill him (8:59) for implicit blasphemy (Brown 1997, 347). The ἐγὼ εἰμί (I am) statements of Jesus in John 8:24, 28, and 58 are understood contextually to refer to the name whereby God revealed himself to Moses—a view that is held by most scholars (Exod 3:14; Morris 1995, 419–420). The same phrase ἐγὼ εἰμί is used in the LXX by Yahweh as a self-designation (Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4, 10, 14; 43:1–3, 10, 13). Jesus uses the same self-designation of himself in John 13:19; 18:5–6, 8 (see discussion in Moloney 1998, 270–271).

Another possible place where Jesus uses the ἐγὼ εἰμί designation of himself is in John 4:26 where, in response to the Samaritan woman’s claim that she believes the Messiah will come, Jesus says: ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ λαλῶν σοι (“I am *He*, the One speaking to you”; NASB). This bears a striking resemblance to Isaiah 52:6b<sub>LXX</sub>, where the Lord says, ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι αὐτὸς ὁ λαλῶν (“for I am he the one speaking”; author’s translation). Contextually, Isaiah 52:6a speaks of God’s people *knowing his name*, thus connecting ἐγὼ εἰμί with the name of God.<sup>30</sup> It is also within the context of the Samaritan woman pericope that Jesus first speaks of the worship of God. God can only be worshipped in “spirit and truth” (John 4:24), and “the Father is seeking such people to worship him” (4:23). The implication here is that only true believers in Jesus can render such “spirit and truth” worship. The reaction of the crowds in John 8:59 that Jesus had committed blasphemy reinforces the understanding that Jesus was making a claim to deity (10:30–33; cf. Lev

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<sup>26</sup> On the pre-existence of Jesus, see McCready (2005). On the pre-existence of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, see Gathercole (2006).

<sup>27</sup> When Jesus admitted being the Son of Man as well as the Son of God before the Sanhedrin, he was charged with blasphemy (Mark 14:61–64).

<sup>28</sup> On the worship of Jesus and early high Christology see Hurtado (2000; 2001); Bauckham (1998); Costa (2013; 2021).

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<sup>29</sup> English translations render John 8:24 as “I am he” (ESV, HCSB, NET, NIV, RSV, NRSV), even though the third person singular pronoun “he” is absent in the Greek text. Other translations will render this text explicitly as “I am” (NASB, Wycliffe) or “I AM” (NABRE), “I AM who I claim to be” (NLT).

<sup>30</sup> See also the theophanic theme in Mark 6:50 where Jesus refers to himself as ἐγὼ εἰμι.

24:16). When this same phrase, ἐγὼ εἰμί (I am), is employed by humans as a self-designation, they are denounced in a context of blasphemy as objects of God's wrath (Isa 47:8<sup>LXX</sup>; Zeph 2:15<sup>LXX</sup>).<sup>31</sup>

It is interesting that Jesus made these self-claims to deity during the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (John 7:2, 37). In the Prologue (1:14), the Word is said to have become flesh and to have “tabernacled” or “pitched his tent” among us (Barrett 1978, 143; Bruce 1983, 39; Carson 1991, 127). The Feast of Tabernacles celebrated Yahweh's presence with the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings (Lev 23:33–36, 39–44). This feast was also known as the Feast of Ingathering (Exod 23:16; 34:22). It came to carry eschatological connotations of the nations coming to the knowledge and worship of the God of Israel (Zech 14:16–17) and the affirmation of Yahweh's universal rule (Moloney 1998, 233). This realization seems to be implied in the desire of some Greeks who wish to know Jesus during the Feast of Tabernacles (John 12:20–21). Those who worship Jesus are defined as true believers. With the entry of the Gentiles (10:16) into the sheepfold of Jesus, the realization of Yahweh's universal worship is fulfilled.

## 8. Unbelief and Divine Blinding and Hardening

While there are many places in John where it is difficult to immediately recognize and distinguish between true and false believers, there are other places in John where he is quite emphatic in identifying those who did not believe. Jesus's brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5).<sup>32</sup> The same sentiment is found in the Synoptics (Mark 3:20–21, 31–35). The unbelief of the brothers of Jesus would also possibly explain why Jesus, near his death,

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<sup>31</sup> MT also reads אֲנִי (“I am”).

<sup>32</sup> John never identifies the mother and brothers of Jesus by name. G. Thiessen referred to this as “protective anonymity” (cf. Bauckham 2006, 184–201).

committed his mother to the care of a believer in the beloved disciple (John 19:26–27).<sup>33</sup> The Pharisees also did not believe in him (12:37).

A passage where John sharply contrasts those who believed in Jesus with those who did not is the following,

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe [οὐκ ἐπίστευον] in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Lord, who has believed [ἐπίστευσεν] what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

Therefore, they could not believe [οὐκ ἠδύναντο πιστεύειν]. For again Isaiah said,

“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed [ἐπίστευσαν] in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that

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<sup>33</sup> I take the beloved disciple to be John, the author of the Gospel. On the question of authorship see Guthrie (1970, 241–271); Brown (1997, 368–371); Bauckham (2006, 358–383); Carson and Moo (2005, 239–254); McGrew (2021, 421–478).

they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. (John 12:37b–43)

Barclay (1964, 152) admits this is a troubling passage. This is the second time that Jesus is said to depart and hide himself from his opponents who first were said to believe in him (cf. John 8:31, 59). The theme of God departing (Gen 18:26; 1 Sam 4:21–22; 16:14; 18:12; Ezek 11:23) and hiding himself from his people (Pss 10:1; 55:1; 89:46), is thematically indicative of divine judgment in the OT. After this section, Jesus ends his ministry to his own people (Marsh 1968, 469). John then directs the reader into the passion narrative beginning with John 13. Jesus, from this point forward, will focus on his forthcoming glorification which will consist of his death and resurrection. Despite all the signs that Jesus performed, many still did not believe in him.

John sees this unbelief as a fulfillment of Scripture and cites two passages from Isaiah. The citation of Isaiah 53:1<sup>LXX</sup> addresses the unbelief of the people. The second citation from Isaiah 6:10 functions as a purpose clause to explain the reason for the unbelief of the people. The reason for the unbelief of the people seems to be attributed to a divine purpose in the context of judgment. The eyes of the people are blinded, and their hearts are hardened, so that they *do not* see or understand and repent which would bring God's healing and forgiveness. A major undercurrent in John is a strong emphasis on divine sovereignty. Marsh (1968, 473) correctly notes that, "John is certainly wanting to indicate that unbelief is within divine providence ... God has himself hardened hearts and blinded eyes."<sup>34</sup> Moloney (1998, 364) also argues that "God was responsible for their blindness and

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<sup>34</sup> See also Carson (1991, 448); Kruse (2005, 275).

hardness of heart, lest they should turn to Jesus for healing." Barclay (1964, 154) concurs that, "Even unbelief somehow fell within God's control and within God's purpose." While many were blinded and hardened, many were not, but came to believe in Jesus. John agrees with the Synoptics (particularly Q) at this point, where Jesus thanks the Father that he has "hidden" things from the wise, but "revealed" them to others (Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21; cf. Mark 4:10–12).<sup>35</sup> Here we see the distinction between those who are *in*—they receive God's revelation—and those who are *out*—those from whom God hides his revelations.

The presentation of Jesus as incarnate deity is heightened in the divine departure and hiding theme. This is further magnified in the fact that the one that Isaiah is said to have seen in his vision (Isa 6:1–8), was the pre-incarnate Jesus (John 12:41). If this is the case, then as Carson (1991, 450) argues it was Jesus himself "who has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts."<sup>36</sup> Notwithstanding the many who did not believe, there were many among the authorities who did believe in Jesus. The ministry of Jesus, like that of Isaiah, was one where he was sent to a rebellious people who would remain obstinate and unrepentant.

## 9. The Johannine Bookends

The last time the word "believe" appears in the Fourth Gospel is in John 20:31, "but these are written so that you may believe [πιστεύσητε] that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John uses the verb πιστεύω twice here. John reveals the reason why he wrote his gospel: that the reader(s) may believe. The content

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<sup>35</sup> Isa 6:10 is also quoted in Mark 4:12.

<sup>36</sup> See also Bruce (1983, 272).

of this belief is that Jesus is the Messiah—the Son of God. To believe this about Jesus is the equivalent of believing in his name, with the result that they may have eternal life. The gospel most likely ended with John 20:31. John 21 forms part of an epilogue appended later (Marsh 1968, 653–660; Barclay 1964, 324; Brown 1997, 360–361). John 20:31 appears to serve as a bookend with John 1:12, where those who received Jesus are those who are made the children of God and are described as those who “believed in his name.” The language of John 20:31 also appears to be creedal and confessional (Costa 2021, 66–69, 81). Those who have life are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, and the Son of God.<sup>37</sup> John himself asserts that he believed (John 20:8), and that he is telling the truth (19:35). His immediate readership audience knows his testimony is true, and some of John’s own disciples or community also added their approval “and *we* know that his testimony is true” (21:24; italics mine). As Messiah, Jesus is also accepted and acknowledged as king by true believers (Costa 2021, 63–69). Conversely, unbelievers reject the kingship of Jesus in their affirmation, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15).<sup>38</sup>

When Martha was asked if she believed the claim of Jesus to be the resurrection and the life (John 11:25–26), she made the same confession, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (11:27; cf. Matt 16:16). True πιστεύω involves accepting Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. While others demand that Jesus tell them plainly that he is the Christ (John 10:24), those who truly believe in Jesus acknowledge him as Christ and Son of God.

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<sup>37</sup> The creedal/confessional language of John 20:31 reflects the Petrine confession in Matt 16:16, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

<sup>38</sup> There is a parallel in the rejection of Jesus as King with Israel’s rejection of Yahweh as King. In Israel’s desire for a human king Yahweh said, “they have rejected me from being king over them” (1 Sam 8:7).

## 10. Conclusion

Throughout John many are said to truly believe, and some do not truly believe. John does not always disambiguate between true and false believers as he uses the same word πιστεύω to describe both groups. Several criteria are used throughout the gospel to indicate what constitutes a true believer in Jesus. Among these criteria are the various synonyms John employs to further expand the range of πιστεύω which would include the actions of receiving, believing in Jesus, God, and the Scripture(s), and doing the work and will of God.

True believers have become children of God, birthed by God’s sovereign will, born again. They have the right to be called children of God. They hear God’s words, and they believe what the Scripture says about Jesus. True believers do the will and work God requires, which is to believe in his Son and have eternal life. They are chosen and given by the Father to the Son. The Father enables and draws them to Jesus. True believers in Jesus are as branches to a vine, they will produce fruit, and show their faith by their actions.

They also receive the Holy Spirit, who guides, teaches, and reminds them of what Jesus said and taught. They are his sheep. They hear the voice of the Shepherd and follow him. He gives them eternal life and they shall never perish. As opposed to superficial believers, true believers will worship Jesus (John 20:28; cf. 9:35–38). In John, true believers are marked out with several qualifying traits that set them apart from counterfeit believers. All these actions and descriptors John subsumes under the word πιστεύω. The implications of John’s view of πιστεύω are a challenge to all who claim to believe in Jesus. While the relationship between belief and practice is more pronounced in the Johannine Epistles, the Gospel of John presents a tapestry of various actions that are determinative of what it means to believe. The verb πιστεύω is not a reductionist or univocal word or idea in

the Fourth Gospel. It is rather, a rich and multifaceted term which functions synonymously for other actions that describe a real, genuine, and vibrant relationship with Jesus.

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