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Alastair Roberts

Ephraim's treachery and folly. 'I and the Father are one.'

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>). My reflections are searchable by Bible chapter here: <https://audio.alastairadversaria.com/explore/>.

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Transcript

Verses 3-7 are very difficult to interpret and several understandings of these verses have been advanced by commentators. Perhaps what is in view is a drunken royal banquet

employed by conspirators as an occasion for an assassination. There were a few assassinations in the Northern Kingdom in the course of Hosea's ministry to which this could possibly refer.

These verses contain a series of related metaphors drawn from baking. Baking would be done in a cylindrical clay oven, fed with its fuel at the bottom, with an opening at the top where bread and other items could be put in against the sides. While one would typically be concerned that a fire not die down, such an oven could easily overheat if unattended and be unsuitable for baking as a result.

The baker is supposed to guard the oven but in his negligence he allowed things to get dangerously out of hand. In their commentary on the book, Francis Anderson and David Noel Freedman raise the possibility that the baker might refer to the king or alternatively to someone close to the king who was responsible for his safety but who aided the traitors or assassins. The oven and the bread, for their part, may function as mixed metaphors, both relating to the conspirators in different ways.

The image is one of a consuming power, the devouring passions of Israel and the traitors at its heart, a power that has been dangerously untended. As Hans Walter Wolff comments, Israel had four kings overthrown within the period of twelve years leading up to 733 BC, yet despite this extreme instability they still didn't call upon the Lord. Metaphors of baking seem to continue in verse 8. Ephraim is mixed with the peoples like the mixing of dough or ingredients into dough.

Likewise, Ephraim is an unturned cake, not having turned to the Lord and about to burn in consequence. Ephraim's strength, vitality and youthful vigor is sapped by Arameans and Assyrians. Repeating the words of chapter 5 verse 5, Israel's pride is said to serve as evidence against them before the Lord.

They are recalcitrant and impenitent in their rebellion, not turning to seek the Lord's face. In their foreign policy they are dangerously naïve, at one moment calling to Egypt and at another fluttering to Assyria for aid, like a silly dove. We will return to this image in chapter 11 verse 11.

Some see in verse 11 here a possible reference point from which we could date the events being referred to, although it might be referring more generally to imprudent shifts in Israel's foreign policy over many years, as it flitted between the great northern and the great southern powers dominating the region. Wolff suggests that it best fits the period of 733 BC. Like a silly bird however, Israel would be snared by the Lord.

The second half of verse 12 is unclear, perhaps it refers to a prophetic word of judgment that was delivered before the assembly of the people. In verse 13 the prophetic message breaks out in a statement of woe on account of the hastening desolation of Israel due to its rebellion and its refusal to turn. The problem is not on the Lord's side, he would

readily redeem them, but they bear false witness about him.

Perhaps their lies are that the Lord won't bring them to account, that he is unmindful of their sins. In their trouble and for their provision they turn not to the Lord but to the Baals. They cut themselves like pagans, seeking grain and wine from false gods of fertility, but do not call out to the Lord.

The Lord had given Israel its strength, raising him as his son, but Israel had turned its strength against the Lord. Israel is treacherous and dangerously so, like an unreliable bow. However their sins would come back upon their own heads.

Perhaps their treachery, displayed in the breaking of a treaty with the suzerain, would be the occasion of the judgment described here. The chapter ends with the derision of Egypt. Israel had been delivered from Egypt in the exodus, but now they would either be returned to Egypt in judgment or would be ridiculed by them.

A question to consider. In this chapter we see the moral corruption and treachery in Israel's heart, shown in its behavior before the Lord, but also expressed in its internal life as a nation and in its foreign policy. What are some of the dynamics by which a rebellious posture towards the Lord can also play itself out in treachery towards our neighbors? John chapter 10 verses 22 to 42.

At that time the feast of dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter and Jesus was walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.

Jesus answered them, I told you and you do not believe. The works that I do in my father's name bear witness about me. But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.

My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the father's hand.

I and the father are one. The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, I have shown you many good works from the father.

For which of them are you going to stone me? The Jews answered him, It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy because you being a man make yourself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, you are gods. If he called them gods to whom the word of God came and scripture cannot be broken.

Do you say of him whom the father consecrated and sent into the world you are blaspheming because I said I am the son of God. If I am not doing the works of my father then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works that you may know and understand that the father is in me and I am in the father.

Again they sought to arrest him but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first and there he remained and many came to him and they said, John did no sign but everything that John said about this man was true and many believed in him there. The second half of John chapter 10 is set in the feast of dedication.

Chapter 7 verse 1 to chapter 10 verse 18 was set during the feast of tabernacles and so this is a shift to about two or three months later. Nevertheless we see something of a continuation of the conversation and the conflict that was going on between Jesus and his Jewish opponents at the earlier feast. The feast of dedication or Hanukkah was a seven day festival that celebrated the national deliverance under the Maccabees.

That had occurred in 164 BC after the temple that had been defiled by Antiochus IV Epiphanes was restored to proper worship three years to the day after that worship was halted. That Jesus celebrates this feast suggests that it is appropriate to set up new feasts and celebrations and that there are times when we can celebrate new deliverances of God in history in a fitting and appropriate manner. Jesus is walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon.

He's probably not just looking around rather he is there as it is a place of public discourse and dispute. It's an appropriate place for him to teach. Once again Jesus is challenged concerning his authority, mission and identity.

The question that the Jews ask is literally how long will you take away our life? In the present context this plays upon Jesus's own statements in verse 17 and 18. For this reason the father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my father. The meaning of this peculiar and rare expression is probably as it's translated in most English Bibles.

How long will you keep us in suspense? Nevertheless the actual wording of it given the context is worthy of note. They want a straightforward assertion of Jesus's claimed messianic identity from him. While Jesus has spoken cryptically to them on several occasions in ways that would suggest that he is making messianic claims for himself he gives them no such clear claim as he gives to the Samaritan woman in chapter 4 verse 29.

They clearly want to use this information against Christ but Jesus has already given them revelation that if they receive it by faith would give them true insight into his identity and mission. As he says the works that I do in my father's name bear witness about me. Back in chapter 5 in verses 17 to 20 after his healing of the infirm man by the sheep pool Jesus had said to them my father is working until now and I am working.

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because not only was he breaking the Sabbath but he was even calling God his own father making himself equal with God. So Jesus said to them truly truly I say to you the son can do nothing of his own accord but only what he sees the father doing for whatever the father does that the son does likewise for the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing and greater works than these will he show him so that you may marvel. As Jesus acts in his father's name and by his father's authority he demonstrates that he's the true son of God the messianic figure that according to the Davidic covenant would be like a son to God and God would be like his father.

Of course Christ is the son of God in a fuller deeper sense than just being a Davidic king however if they want to know that he is the Christ witnessing him acting with the authority of the father would be a pretty sure way of recognizing it. The wording of verse 26 might surprise us we probably think that the wording should be you are not among my sheep because you do not believe however the wording suggests that it's not the belief that makes one a member of the flock but rather that the response of belief or unbelief manifests whether you are one of the flock or not those whom the father has given into the hand of the son will reveal that fact in their display of faith in response to his voice. As Jesus expresses it in chapter 6 verse 37 all that the father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

The return to the imagery of the sheep recalls the earlier part of this chapter which we should bear in mind belongs to a discourse that occurred a few months earlier. Once again as in chapter 5 and elsewhere it's the voice of Christ that is singled out here. The voice of Christ is that which gives life.

It's the voice of Christ that the sheep recognize and respond to. Christ protects and guards his flock from all predators and leads them to their inheritance of eternal life. No one is able to snatch them out of his hand.

Ramsey Michaels notes that verse 29 literally reads my father that which he has given me is greater than all things and no one can seize it out of the hand of the father. This is typically translated or understood as a reference to the father being greater than all and hence no one is able to snatch the flock out of his hand. However we should observe that the wording of this statement as Michaels notes puts the emphasis upon the father and also that it is far from clear that that which is being referred to as greater than all is the father.

It might well be what he has given into the hand of the son. Michaels argues for such an interpretation. The gift that the father has given, the gift of the flock to Christ is that which is greater than all things as it comes from the father himself.

And the point of verse 29 is to parallel the action of Christ in verse 28 showing that the father and the son are engaged in the same activity. This demonstrates the father and the son are one. After his statement in chapter 8 verse 58 before Abraham was I am the Jews had picked up stones to stone him.

Now they once more seek to stone him. Jesus wants them to tell him for which work exactly they are stoning him. He has been doing the works of the father throughout.

They rightly perceive however that he is making himself equal with God. Jesus' response to this is a difficult one to understand. It's essentially arguing from the lesser to the greater but it works in a less than straightforward way and not every step in the reasoning is spelled out for us.

The statement that Jesus refers to is from Psalm 82. This psalm speaks about the divine counsel. In the divine counsel the Lord was surrounded by angels and heavenly beings but also by certain human rulers and by prophetic messengers.

Although they were human beings as prophetic recipients of the word of God they were described as gods. We might think as an example of this of Moses being described as like a god to Pharaoh and also as like a god to Aaron. As a nation and particularly its rulers Israel enjoyed something of this identity.

They were set up like gods to the nations around delivering the judgments of God and speaking in his name. Israel was described as the Lord's firstborn son and consequently could speak as his representative and was some of his authority. If the people to whom the word of God came as his prophetic messengers could be referred to as gods how much more the word of God himself who has come to human beings.

This is the one time in the gospel of John that Jesus speaks about the word of God in this manner and we must remember in chapter one that he has been described as the word that was with God and the word that was God. He is not just a recipient of the word like these people who are called gods. He is the word itself.

The term that he is called is not the most important thing. What really matters is the substance and that substance is revealed in the fact that the father works his works through Christ. Whatever they believe or don't believe about Jesus' own statements concerning himself they should believe the works of the father that are being wrought through him.

By them as Jesus has argued earlier the father is bearing testimony to Jesus' identity and in them it becomes clear that the father and the son are one. The son is in the father and

the father is in the son. Once again they seek to lay hands on him, this time to arrest him.

Once again he escapes from their hands. We know this is because his hour had not yet come. This explanation for their failure is given in chapter 7 verse 30.

At this point Jesus crossed the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at the beginning. We know from chapter 1 verse 28 that this site was Bethany. This reminder of the opening scenes of the gospel serves to bookend the intervening material.

It also provides a natural point where we see an end of a phase of Jesus' ministry and we might be encouraged to consider its import. One of the ways that the opening of the gospel of John is referred to here is in many people's confirmation of the testimony of John concerning Christ. John did no sign but everything that John said about this man was true.

The people are recognizing the connection between John's ministry and Jesus' ministry and we're seeing that John's witness has been successful and effective in many people's cases. The people were recognizing in Jesus what John the Baptist had been pointing to. A question to consider, I have suggested that at this point we have a natural juncture at which to look back to the beginning of the gospel and to think about the ground that we have covered since then before we move on to the next phase.

In this recollection of the ministry of John and his testimony and having considered the testimony of Jesus that has followed, what initial judgments do you believe that the gospel writer wants us to arrive at?