

NARRATIVE TEMPORALITY AND JOHANNINE SYMBOLISM

H. Ito¹

ABSTRACT

How does narrative temporality affect the understanding of Johannine symbolism? To investigate this is the purpose of this article. The notion of narrative temporality is not new in the study of Biblical texts. However, there have not been many studies which make this notion their main thrust. Rather, generally speaking, it has merely been used as a “guide” or framework by which one can investigate some other important aspects such as the interpretation of a certain piece of literature, narrative, or part of a narrative. Against this background, this article wishes to put more focus on the possibility and impact this notion can provide in Biblical studies. In order to do this, this article takes up the subject of Johannine symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, especially the symbol of light, simply because it is not easy to understand. The more difficult the subject is, the clearer this notion can display its impact and usability in the readings of Biblical narratives.

1. INTRODUCTION

How does narrative temporality affect the understanding of Johannine symbolism? To investigate this is the purpose of this article. In a literary approach, a narrative can be analysed from the viewpoints of the implied author, the implied reader, and characters.² How does these three participants’ understanding of Jesus’ story through Johannine symbolism, especially the symbol of light, vary with the use of this notion of narrative temporality? This is the main question addressed in this article.

Before answering this main question, there are two matters to be attended to. They are (1) the notion of narrative temporality and its past usage in Johannine studies, and (2) the reading process of the reader.

- 1 Rev. Dr. H. Ito, Research Fellow, Department of New Testament, Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State, P.O. Box 339, Bloemfontein, 9300, South Africa. E-mail: hito@privatebag.com.
- 2 From now on, when the terms “the author” and “the reader” are used in this article, they will always refer to the implied author and the implied reader, respectively. Furthermore, the pronouns he/his/him instead of she/her in this article, especially with reference to the implied author and reader, are used for the sake of convenience alone, and indicates no gender prejudice.

To begin with, the notion of narrative temporality and its past usage in Johannine studies are discussed. Critics such as Iser (1974), Rimmon-Kenan ([1983] 1994), Culpepper (1983), Resseguie (1982), Staley (1988), Van Tilborg (1989), Botha (1991), Tolmie (1995) and Ito (2000a; 2001) make note of and/or use this trait of linearity. This indicates that there have not been many works in Johannine studies which make this notion their main thrust. Rather, generally speaking, it has merely been used as a “guide” or framework by which one can investigate some other important aspects such as the interpretation of a certain piece of literature, narrative, or part of a narrative. However, this article wishes to put more focus on the possibility and impact this notion can provide in Biblical studies. The notion of narrative temporality can be best explained in relation to a significant difference between author and reader (Tolmie 1995:20, 39-40; 1999: 8-9). While the author knows the whole story at any given moment, the reader only knows what he has read up to the given time (Staley 1988:35).

There are a couple of interesting functions of narrative temporality. Firstly, in addition to the last remark, Staley (1988:47) makes the fascinating observation that one

of the major effects of a text’s rhetoric and of our enjoyment in reading comes precisely from the interplay between the characters’ knowledge and that of the implied reader.

This interplay becomes a logical basis where the author builds up most of the ironies in the text, though this aspect will not be discussed in this article.³ Secondly, this temporality or linearity creates the rhetorical devices of suspense and astonishment (Staley 1988:34). By using this notion, as will be seen, it will be possible to analyse the effect of powerful yet difficult devices such as Johannine symbolism.

The second item to be attended to concerns the reading process of the reader. As mentioned earlier, the basic premise is that the reader is perfectly aware of what has happened in the story up to the given moment.

An important issue is which chapter of John’s story should be selected for this article’s analysis. It was decided to take chapter 9 because of two reasons. One is that since the Gospel has 21 chapters, chapter 9 is located almost halfway through it. The other is that the researcher is very familiar with this text because of his previous studies (Ito 2000a). Of course, one can argue whether these are good reasons or not, but the present concern is whether the chosen chapter can do the proper job or not, and the answer to

3 For this topic, see Ito (2000c; 2000d).

this question is “yes”. Hopefully the validity of this choice will be shown as the analysis proceeds. For the sake of argument now, let’s suppose that chapter 9 is the place in the text up to which the reader has been reading at this moment. Thus, he is perfectly aware of what has happened in the story up to the ninth chapter, including the vast amount of information given in the Prologue.

2. JOHANNINE SYMBOLISM VIEWED THROUGH NARRATIVE TEMPORALITY

2.1 An overview of Johannine symbolism

Let’s look at an overview of Johannine symbolism, with a special reference to John 9, which will help us to understand the author’s communicative strategy to the reader on the subject under consideration.

According to Culpepper (1983:149-202), symbolism is one of the ways in which the Fourth Gospel silently yet effectively communicates with the reader. Together with misunderstanding and irony, symbolism displays “the signature of the evangelist’s insight and art” (:199). Dodd ([1953] 1968:143) states that the Fourth Gospel is “bound together by an intricate network of symbolism”. Macgregor (1928:xxv) claims: “No understanding of the Gospel is possible without an appreciation of the part played by symbolism.” Similarly, the story of John 9 cannot be fully understood unless one can appreciate the way John interprets and uses symbols in this narrative, because “John 9 is particularly significant for an understanding of John’s symbolic discourse” (Painter 1986:55; cf. Lee 1994:11-12, 161-162).

Per definition, a symbol is basically a (concrete) element that expresses an abstract or transcendent concept, connecting two different realms (cf. Culpepper 1983:182, 187).

In Johannine terms, symbols span the chasm between what is “from above” and what is “from below” without collapsing the distinction (Koester 1995:4).

Du Rand (1994:250) states: “Symbolism is an attempt to present the divine communication in an understandable way.” It is important to note, however, that symbols must be distinguished from signs, metaphors, parables, allegories or motifs.⁴

⁴ For a more detailed discussion on this topic, see Ito (2000a:108-109).

The question of the classification of symbols does not enter into the discussion here.⁵ It will suffice to introduce the distinction between two types of symbols: core and supporting symbols. This distinction is suggested by Koester (1995:5) who points out:

Core symbols occur most often, in the most significant contexts in the narrative, and contribute most to the Gospel's message. For example, the repeated statements identifying Jesus as "the light of the world" (1:9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46) establish light as a core symbolic image with darkness as its counterpart. Other elements such as day and night and sight and blindness play an important supporting role in the text through their relationship to light.

Culpepper (1983:189) identifies light, water and bread as the three core symbols of the Gospel and suggests: "Each of these points to Jesus' revelatory role and carries a heavy thematic load." In contrast, Ashton ([1991] 1993:516) considers life as the central symbol of the Gospel, and light, water and bread as the three most important of the subsidiary symbols. The former coincides with the researcher's own understanding, because a symbol should be more concrete than abstract. "Life" as a symbol cannot be seen, touched nor consumed like the other three symbols. Either way, John uses the core symbols as one of the primary means to illustrate and convey the utmost significance of Jesus to the reader. Supporting symbols are, in turn, employed to reveal the significance of the core symbols (Koester 1995:6).

Furthermore, according to Painter (1986:52), the symbols bring a new understanding about God through Jesus to those who believe. In short, he states: "The symbols are the means by which Jesus is disclosed in such a way as to evoke faith or provoke unbelief" (:46). The symbols by nature contain the elements of both revelation and concealment as in the case of the parables (so Du Rand 1994:250).

Lastly, the central focus on Christ in Johannine symbolism has been widely recognised, as Culpepper (1983:189), among others (Schneiders 1977:373; Leon-Dufour 1981:454; Painter 1986:55; Du Rand 1994:35; Lee 1994:21), points out:

Jesus himself is the principal symbol of the Fourth Gospel, for he partakes of the being of God and reveals Him in this world.

However, from the standpoint of the underlying structure of the symbolic system in the Gospel, the thesis of Koester (1995) is worth noting. He

5 For this subject, see Culpepper (1983:184-190), and Du Rand (1994:251-253).

proposes a twofold structure of Johannine symbolism. The theme of Christology lies at the primary level of meaning, and that of discipleship at the secondary level. "The movement from Christology to discipleship is apparent in symbolic images and actions throughout the Gospel" (Koester 1995:13). He also calls attention to the story of the blind man to illustrate his thesis:

On a primary level the miracle is christological; by enlightening the eyes of a man blind from birth, Jesus demonstrates that he is truly "the light of the world" (9:5). On a secondary level the passage is about discipleship. Much of the chapter explores what it means to "see the light", both physically and through the eyes of faith (Koester 1995:14-15).

Now the main question is ready for scrutiny: How does three participants' understanding of Jesus' story through Johannine symbolism, especially the symbol of light, vary with the use of narrative temporality?

2.2 Looking at the symbols of light and darkness from the perspective of narrative temporality

2.2.1 The symbols of light and darkness in John's Gospel

It has been argued that the Fourth Gospel has a close relationship with Jewish thought (the Old Testament, Rabbinic Judaism, Qumran) and/or with thought systems other than Judaism (Platonism, Stoicism, Hermetic literature, Gnosticism, Philo, Mandaean writings). The connecting links are established through the similarity in terminology and/or images/concepts employed (e.g., dualism, light and darkness, knowledge, Logos, Wisdom, Word, brotherly love, etc.). This sub-section cannot and will not deal with all of these relations. Considering the symbols of light and darkness as well as Jewish orientation in John 9 (Barrett 1975:18, 69-70; also Ball 1996: 259, 268 in relation to the I am-sayings), only the possible Jewish influence on the text will be suggested.⁶

Firstly, the symbols of light and darkness are discussed from the author's perspective. The light and darkness imagery is one of the most striking

6 For the relationship of the Gospel to these philosophical and religious views, see Dodd ([1953] 1968:10-285), Meeks (1965), Yamauchi (1973), Barrett (1975), Lindars ([1972] 1981:35-42), Smalley (1978:41-68), Nickelsburg (1985), Beasley-Murray (1987:lxxx-lxiv), Painter ([1991] 1993:33-60), Scott (1992), Willett (1992), Du Rand (1994:42-49), Smith (1995:10-20), Neufeld (1997), Draper (1997) and Kanagaraj (1998:64-181).

motifs in the Fourth Gospel. This motif is introduced, from the outset, in the Prologue of the Gospel. There light symbolises the power and presence of God, and is closely associated with the life and Logos (1:1-5, and Dodd [1953] 1968:269). In Jewish thought Logos further points to the wisdom of God (Carter 1990:37-39; Johnson 1992:482), and Wisdom is in turn linked not only to God's creation (Pr. 8:22-31; Wis. 9:9, and Burnett 1992: 877; Koester 1995:128) but also to the Torah (Sir. 24:23, 25; 1 Bar. 3:36-4:4, and Dodd [1953] 1968:85; Painter 1986:49; Carter 1990:47).

Many Jews and Samaritans understood that the wisdom of God was localized in the Law of Moses, which was often identified as a source of light (Koester 1995:128-129).

The Torah, the Law of Moses, is further called the Word of God (Ps. 119:105; Is. 2:3; 5:24; Mi. 4:2, and Johnson 1992:482). In the Prologue again, Jesus is depicted as the incarnate Word, who is the light of all men (1:4, 14) as well as the agent for the revelation of God (1:18). This light gives life (1:12-13). It is important to note that in the Gospel all of these aspects signify the person and work of Jesus Christ (Shirbroun 1992:472).

Based on the relationship between Jesus and Wisdom above, it is probable that John also implies that Jesus is the new "Torah". There is some support for this view. In connection with the light image, David says in Psalm 27:1: "The LORD is my light and my salvation." Just as Carter (1990: 47) remarks that "in early Judaism...Torah was regarded as the dwelling place and embodiment of wisdom", Jesus was also described as the dwelling place and embodiment of Logos, the Wisdom figure (Jn. 1:14). Nickelsburg (1985:83) says:

The functional equivalence of Torah and Jesus, or the sage and Jesus the teacher, is not accidental. John underscores both the parallel and the contrast between his theology and traditional Jewish wisdom theology (cf. Dodd [1953] 1968:83).

Nickelsburg illustrates his point by quoting John 1:17: "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." This contrast is further displayed in some episodes of Jesus' controversies over the Torah such as in John 5:9-18, 7:16-24 and 9:13-34 (Nickelsburg 1985:83). Finally, the imagery of Jesus as the true vine in John 15 may strengthen this argument, for Wisdom is depicted as a vine bearing fruit (Sir. 24:17-19) and the vine is frequently used as a symbol of Israel (Ps. 80: 8-14; Jr. 2:21; 6:9; 8:13; Ezk. 15:1-8; Hs. 10:1, and Whitacre 1992:867). Now, in Jesus "the life of the new Israel (the true vine) has come to birth" (Smalley 1978:90; also Ball 1996:260). Through the symbols, as Painter

(1979:34) points out, “the evangelist implies that the expectations and hopes of Judaism are fulfilled in Jesus”.

In the rest of John’s Gospel, the image of light corresponds to many of the concepts described in the Prologue. In 3:18-21, light brings judgement which may emphasise John’s realised eschatology (so Smalley 1978:236; Du Rand 1994:34). Von Wahlde (1995:382) remarks with regard to 3:19-21: “The image of light becomes the symbol of Jesus’ public ministry.” In 5:35, John refers to John the Baptist in connection with light again (cf. 1:6-8). The supporting lamp symbol here indicates “the role of the Baptist and the superiority of Jesus” (Culpepper 1983:191). Then, Jesus himself revealed explicitly that he was the light of the world in front of the Pharisees (8:12). This is the climactic point in the entire Gospel narrative in terms of the identification of Jesus as the light (Culpepper 1983:191). This is echoed in 9:5 where Jesus similarly revealed himself, but this time he spoke to his own disciples. In 11:9-10, John retrospectively refers to the images of light, day and night in order to link the two greatest signs (chs 9 and 11) in the Gospel (so Smalley 1978:183). After these signs, John puts on Jesus’ lips the words of exhortation to believe in the light in order to evoke faith (12:35-36), and the purpose of his mission as the light as a conclusion of the book of signs (12:46). The term light does not reappear explicitly after this, and only some allusions to “light” are made, such as torches, lanterns (18:3) and charcoal fire (18:13).

Likewise, the most striking similarity between Qumran and John 9 depicts God as light (1QH xviii.29 and Jn 9:5). *The Community rule* (cols 1, 3, 4) also mentions the dualism of light and darkness among other similar terminology (Smalley 1978:31; Du Rand 1994:48-49; Smith 1995:16). However, in the researcher’s opinion, the Old Testament, in which light is also a significant motif, provides a more satisfactory background for John 9. Without doubt John uses this rich heritage rooted in Judaism in order to convey his vital message about Christ to the reader (so Shirbroun 1992:472). For example, that Jesus is the light of the world can be viewed against the background of Isaiah 9:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined (NRSV Is 9:2).

With regard to 9:6-7, Koester (1995:138) states:

Christians regularly understood it as a prophecy concerning the Davidic messiah. They connected it with Isaiah’s references to the messianic servant of the Lord who was to be the “light of the nations” (Isa. 42:6; 49:6).

The following Old Testament passages further refer to the image of light: Genesis 1:3-5; Job 33:28, 30; Psalm 36:9; 104:2; 118:27; Isaiah 2:5; 9:1-2; 42:6-7; 49:6; 60:1-2, 19-20; Zechariah 14:7.

As the counterpart of light, darkness symbolises the powers which rebel against God, namely sin and evil (Koester 1995:125). Although these aspects of darkness are only implicitly indicated in the Prologue (1:5, 10-11), they are gradually exposed as the Gospel unfolds. In John, sin is perceived as unbelief and human opposition against God. The unbelief and opposition become more and more evident in the Jews' hostility toward Jesus along with the development of the story, and reach its climax in Jesus' crucifixion. Backstage, evil powers are also at work. John depicts these "dark" powers by using the term *devil* in 6:70, 8:44 and 13:2, the term *Satan* in 13:27, the term *the ruler of this world* in 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11, and the term *evil one* in 17:15. Furthermore, darkness captures an image of death which is the ultimate result of sin both physically and spiritually. Sheol or Hades is described as the place of deep darkness (Ps. 88, and Koester 1995:127).

Light and judgment are interrelated concepts in this Gospel, for light causes division or separation so that light and darkness cannot coexist (Resseguie 1982:302).

As noticed previously, Koester (1995:5) regards light and darkness as core symbols because of the recurring statements depicting Jesus as the light of the world. These symbols are further elaborated by other supporting symbols such as day and night, sight and blindness (:5), which also play a significant role in John 9. The symbols of sight and blindness in turn represent the realms of faith and unbelief, knowledge and ignorance (Stibbe 1993: 110, 127). These symbols, made up as pairs, are very significant for understanding the Gospel, and are especially referred to as Johannine dualism.⁷ They can be distinguished from the symbols without overt opposites such as water, bread, wine and so forth (Jones 1997:13; cf. Culpepper 1983:200).

In this way, the core symbol of light with darkness as its counterpart tremendously contributes to describing Jesus together with other significant motifs. Barrett (1955:296) states that

"Light" is not a metaphysical definition of the person of Jesus but a description of his effect upon the cosmos; he is the light which judges and saves it.

⁷ For this dualism, see Ladd (1974:223-236), Barrett (1982:98-115), De Klerk & Schnell (1987:259-263), Ashton ([1991] 1993:205-237), and Du Rand (1994: 25-27).

All humanity will be judged based on their reaction to the Light, for “all who encounter him will be exposed under the searching light of truth” (Koester 1995:133).

Secondly, the symbols of light and darkness are discussed from the reader’s perspective. From his reading up to chapter 9, the reader is assumed to have knowledge of most of the important implications provided by the light imagery. He is aware of the related significant notions of life, Logos, Wisdom, Word, the Law of Moses and so forth in the Prologue, and of Jesus’ ministry (including judgement) and his identity described in terms of the light symbol in the first eight chapters. The reader also appears to understand the Old Testament background to the light motif well. However, the reader does not have knowledge of the use of the images of light, day and night to link the two miracle stories in John 9 and 11, and the use of light and darkness in Jesus’ summary of his ministry (ch. 12). Most of the expressions referring to dark powers are not available to the reader yet, either.

Lastly, the characters’ knowledge is assessed. When Jesus uttered the statement that he was the light of the world (9:5), he would have known the full implications of this symbol. His interlocutors were his disciples. They did not appear to possess the important information relating to the light imagery described in the Prologue and to know the references to the symbols of light and darkness in 3:18-21. The text does not state clearly whether the disciples were also listening to Jesus’ remark about John the Baptist in relation to light (5:35) and Jesus’ I am-saying (8:12). Since, however, they appeared to be very familiar with the Scripture (see, e.g., 1:45; 2:17, 22), they could recall the Old Testament background of the light symbol.

In this way, there are significant differences among the three participants in their understanding of the symbol of light, which can only be delineated by the notion of narrative temporality. Now in the next sub-sections, our main question will be further discussed in relation to more specific Johannine texts.

2.2.2 Text analysis: John 9:4

9:4 We must work the works of the one who sent me, as long as there is day, night is coming, when no one is able to work.

In Jesus’ utterance in this verse, there are basically two possible ambiguous expressions: one concerning the works, and the other regarding the words “day” and “night”, the supporting symbols for the light symbol. The latter is our focus here.

Since the expressions *day* and *night* may be a typical Johannine contrast⁸ and figurative usage, the exact meaning of the expressions may not be revealed only from the syntactic structures of the text. And it is undoubtedly very ambiguous because these expressions cannot be taken literally as referring to the 24-hour system. Relatively speaking, this verse is more difficult for modern readers than for people in the ancient world to comprehend, for ancient people knew that they could not do their works during the night time. What are the images of day and night referring to, then?

According to the researcher's calculations, the word *day* is used seventeen times with the general and usual meaning in John (e. g., 1:39; 2:1, 12, 19, 20; 4:30, 43; 5:9; 9:14). Regarding the various "symbolic" meanings of *day*, six occurrences refer to the last day (6:39-40, 44, 54; 11:24, 48) and two to Jesus' day of crucifixion (8:56; 12:7). As opposed to his post-resurrection days which are referred to three times (14:20; 16:23, 26), the days of his earthly ministry are alluded to only twice — where both day and night are used in the most figurative way possible. This is a striking usage of these words in John. In the instances in 9:3-4 and 11:9-10, the author seems to use them to link chapter 11 to chapter 9 (Smalley 1978:183). Moreover, as regards the word *night*, it is utilised four times in the usual way (3:2; 13:30; 19:39; 21:3). But, as mentioned just above, night is used figuratively in 9:4 and 11:10, implying the period in which Jesus would be physically absent from the earth. Most critics (Barrett 1955:295; Schnackenburg [1968] 1980:242; Domeris 1991:226; Von Wahlde 1995:382; Koester 1995:126) are satisfied with the view that *night* refers to Jesus' departure and death. Night "has a negative connotation throughout the Gospel of John" (Saayman 1994:7).

Enough has been said to indicate that the expressions *day* and *night* in 9:4 are difficult and ambiguous to understand for the reader who has only read the Gospel up to this verse. Consequently, Jesus' utterance here flouts the *Manner Maxim* (Be clear, or avoid obscurity of expression) in pragmatic terms.⁹ In other words, this flouting is an indication that the utterance should not be taken literally, because the

flouting of the...maxims result in a number of so-called figures of speech such as metaphor, hyperbole, meiosis, irony and so on (Botha 1991:69).

8 Cf. Dodd (1963:186 fn. 2) who suggests that this antithesis is primitive-Christian rather than Johannine.

9 For these terms, see Ito (2000a; 2000b).

In this particular case, the expressions *day* and *night* in 9:4 are examples of symbolism. Culpepper (1983:192) points out:

John 9 also confirms the symbolic use of day and night as subordinate symbols which evoke the core symbols, light and darkness.

It is therefore interesting that the additional meaning of the utterance can be attained not in the usual way which utilises an implicature deduced from the immediate co-text, but from, as seen above, an analysis of the usage of those words in the whole Gospel.

Why then did Jesus (or for that matter, the author ultimately) use the expressions *day* and *night*? An elucidation may be needed to justify the use of these symbols. According to the researcher's analysis, this has to do with the plot of the author concerning "Jesus' hour". The author has the definite plan to "build a drama" in his Gospel, and "Jesus' hour" is one of the devices he uses for that purpose (Culpepper 1983:92). All the references concerning "Jesus' hour" from 2:4 to 8:20 do not explicitly tell us what kind of hour is referred to by "Jesus' hour". He finally explains the meaning of the hour in 12:23, that the hour is the time when the Son of Man is glorified. The author tries to keep the reader suspended in understanding "Jesus' hour" until 12:23 in order to have greater dramatic impact on the reader's mind. Perhaps the same sort of dramatic effect is expected when the symbols (day and night) are used, especially when the reader encounters 11:9-10. Through the usage of such metaphorical language, the author describes the importance and urgency of the works of God (Carson 1991:362). Von Wahlde (1995:382) points out:

The image of light becomes the symbol of Jesus' public ministry (e.g., 1:4-5, 9; 3:19-21), and such light constitutes a day of twelve hours during which Jesus will not be arrested (9:4-5). When darkness or night comes, however, he will be put to death.

In conclusion here, Jesus intended to tell his disciples that he and they should do the works of the Father now, for the time was limited. His utterance therefore constitutes speech acts of both promise and requirement. The author may wish the reader to believe in Jesus as soon as possible while such an opportunity is given, because Jesus defined the work of God in such a way in 6:29. The author also wants the reader to participate in God's work himself. This utterance is therefore directed at both the disciples and the reader. The author may, moreover, intend to produce a great dramatic effect on the reader's mind by using metaphorical language such as the supporting symbols of day and night. This device makes the story more interesting.

2.2.3 Text analysis: John 9:5

9:5 *While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*

This utterance which contains Jesus' own claim that he was the light of the world observes the *Interest Principle* in the sense of having news value and unpredictability, especially for the disciples. When Jesus uttered the same statement in 8:12, it is likely that he primarily addressed it to the Pharisees. Even though it can be assumed that the disciples were there with Jesus and hence would have heard him making this claim, in this instance the disciples heard such a claim directly from their master for the first time. On the other hand, for the reader it is already the fourth time to be informed about Jesus being the light (1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12), and therefore the claim is not new to him. But it can still be accepted that Jesus' utterance as a whole possesses good news value, even for the reader because of the time indication mentioned in the subordinate clause in the beginning: while Jesus was in the world...

Jesus' utterance here involves symbolism or metaphor, and such figures of speech always come with the risk of flouting the *Manner Maxim*. Since the elements of revelation and concealment are, as previously noted, inherent in symbolism (and metaphor), the success of the utterance depends on that of the communication between the speaker and hearer. If the hearer fully understands the expression, the figures of speech become a powerful tool to communicate the profound meaning intended by the speaker. However, if the hearer fails to comprehend the expression, the utterance becomes not only meaningless but sometimes also harmful because the failure eventually affects the hearer's understanding of other utterances around that particular figures of speech. The question is: what happens in this case? At the first glance, his utterance seems to be easily understood: Jesus is the light of the world. Yet the real issue is not the overall comprehension of the utterance but the more specific understanding of the "meaning" contained in the expression of *light*. In what way does the *light* signify and describe Jesus?

Numerous scholarly discussions and investigations have been generated by *the theme of light* in the Fourth Gospel, especially in connection with the origin of this ancient document. Perhaps no single study can adequately describe the pregnant use of the concept of light in this Gospel. However, as an attempt, some of the important aspects of this concept have been already explored as a guide or introduction in the previous section. Particularly the usage of light in the Gospel and its Old Testament background are pointed out there. Based on these points, more specific insights in relation to this utterance of Jesus will be briefly examined.

When Jesus says that he is the light of the world, the reader is supposed to remember the Prologue which comprises a couple of important references to the *light*. There this light imagery immediately leads to other significant ideas such as Logos, Wisdom, God's Word, Torah, creation, life and revelation. If the reader understands these ideas correctly, he will eventually come to the conclusion that Jesus was talking about his unique role and divine origin (also Koester 1995:6). In addition, from his memory of reading the Gospel up till chapter 9 the reader can retrieve the information concerning Jesus' words and deeds, especially that which has something to do with the light imagery. The reader must recollect the information at least in 3:19-21 and 8:12. There the light is depicted in terms of judgement and salvation. Culpepper (1983:191) contends:

Light is not only the revelation of the *logos*; it reveals the nature of all who come in contact with it, and the judgment upon each person is determined by his or her response to it. Light shines in darkness. It reveals. It also exposes [Culpepper's italics].

It is important to note, however, that the information above did not appear to be available to the disciples, for the texts do not record their presence when the information was released.

When the disciples heard that Jesus was the light of the world in this verse, they would recall the Old Testament background of the light symbol. They appeared to be very familiar with the Scripture (see 1:45; 2:17, 22). The book of Isaiah might have helped them to understand Jesus' statement. Furthermore, Koester (1995:141) points out:

An important Biblical text that connects the presence of God with light and the feast of Booths is Zechariah 14.

He goes on to state that:

[A]ccording to John's Gospel, Jesus was the light of the world, the one in whom the hopes of the festival of Booths were realized. He was the light that manifested the presence of God, and he was the one in whom the nation of the world would come to know the power of God (:142).

In addition, looking from other relevant Old Testament passages (see sec 2.2.1), we can concur with Koester's (1995:139) remark that:

[B]y claiming the title "light of the world", Jesus announced that he was indeed the Messiah and the prophet like Moses foretold in the Scriptures. Through Jesus the Messiah, the righteous rule of God would extend to the nations; and through Jesus the prophet, the peoples of the world would come to know God's will and walk in his ways.

Of course, the reader is also meant to remember these information from the Old Testament, for one cannot afford to neglect the Old Testament background of this symbolism (also Brown 1966:535, 537).

The observations above have shown concisely the way in which *light* signifies and describes Jesus. To sum up, firstly, when Jesus uttered this I am-saying, he claimed his unity with the God of the Covenant in the Old Testament; and he claimed to bear the divine name. Secondly, Jesus was the true light which enlightens every man (Jn 1:9). Jesus as such judges and saves the world. Thirdly, Jesus identified himself as the long awaited messianic Servant of the Lord prophesied in the Old Testament, particularly in Isaiah 42-43. Hence, he was the bringer of salvation and revelation. Even though Jesus' earthly mission was restricted by the time frame mentioned above, obviously this time limitation could not restrict the essence of his claim. While the disciples did not have the information from the Gospel itself, the reader is expected to know the relevant information sufficiently in order to understand the "meaning" contained in the expression of *light*. This may create a great dramatic effect on the reader. In this way, the *Manner Maxim* in the light imagery is partially flouted in relation to the disciples, but is kept intact with reference to the reader.

3. CONCLUSION

How do the three participants' understanding of Jesus' story through Johannine symbolism, especially the symbol of light, vary in the light of narrative temporality? This question has been addressed above. As a result, the following has been found:

Symbolic expressions usually invite ambiguity. Yet, the fact that the author deploys the symbols in spite of this, indicates that the symbolic expressions can convey his message more effectively or significantly than the conventional expressions. In fact, for the reader a great dramatic effect is achieved by the use of metaphorical language such as the supporting symbols of day and night, not to mention the core symbol of light. It can therefore be concluded that the author employs symbols to enhance communication with the reader. In turn, the reader can comprehend the deeper meaning hidden in these symbolic expressions to understand Jesus' story better.

In this way, these results have demonstrated that the notion of narrative temporality can display its impact and usability in the reading of a Biblical narrative. The author has the most adequate understanding since he organises and tells the story. The reader has a limited understanding, but normally has more understanding than the characters. The best way to reach such a

conclusion, to highlight its significances and to explicate these processes would be by means of narrative temporality.

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Keywords

The Gospel according to John

John 9

Symbolism

Narrative temporality

Light/Darkness

Trefwoorde

Johannesevangelie

Johannes 9

Simboliek

Tydhantering in narratiewe

Lig/duisternis