

# Notes on John 11

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When Lazarus fell sick, Jesus was far away in Batanea (see the notes at 1:28). During His last time in Jerusalem people attempted to kill Him (10:31,39). He was staying away from Judea and danger even though He could call for twelve legions of angels at any time (Matthew 26:53,54). This section shows a delay in going to see Lazarus followed soon by Jesus' return into danger. The delay would mean that Lazarus was dead for days so that his death and resurrection became well known. Later in John 11, we find that this is directly related to the Sanhedrin's urgent decision to kill Jesus. Raising Lazarus led to Jesus' own death. After this, Jesus would again avoid further public exposure (11:54) until just before His public entry into Jerusalem (12:12).

This miracle as intended and implemented by God would (like 9:4 & 2:11) put the glory of God on display and build the faith of His own. Signs are more than miracles; to be a sign it must signify and show something beyond the sign itself. Jesus will say He is the resurrection and the life; then He will act as One Who is both. Earlier, He said He was the bread of life and the water of life. In John 11 the Lord did not give Lazarus something symbolic of life (such as bread or water) but life itself.

The drama of redemption involved a crucial delay of time so that a death would occur, so that a spectacular miracle would happen which would precipitate the crucifixion itself. The plan of God in every life and in every age is predetermined and detailed. "...All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be," Psalm 139:16 That brief delay brought Martha and Mary great grief; later it brought them joy and a greater knowledge of their Lord and His resurrection power.

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## 11:1-6 The News that Lazarus Was Sick

Only in this Gospel is Lazarus mentioned. Luke 10:38-42 mentions his sisters. Bethany was a village where Jesus would rest (Matthew 21:17). Sometimes He was at the home of Simon the leper (Matthew 26:6). He took His twelve disciples to Bethany, though the Bible does not tell us where they slept. Jesus owned no property and had no residence (Luke 9:58). That Mary could anoint Him with such expensive ointment (12:3) is evidence that this family was not poor.

John wrote as if his readers already know that Mary was the one who poured perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. There are a number of Mary's in the Gospels, so the apostle makes clear which one is related to Lazarus. The name "Mary" is from the Hebrew name *Miriam*, the sister of Moses (Numbers 26:59). Christians relating the story of Jesus, often speak of the Mary who anointed Jesus' feet (Mark 14:9).

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| <p><b>Specificity!</b> The story of Little Red Riding Hood begins: "Once upon a time there lived in a certain village a little country girl; ... everybody called her Little Red Riding Hood. One day her mother, having made some cakes, said to her, 'Go, my dear, and see how your grandmother is doing...'" In this fable, we do not have the names of anyone, nor the country or village, nor the time in history. In contrast, note how specific this Gospel is. The family members are named; they live in a village well known to those of that day. We even know the name of Simon the leper of Bethany in whose house they had a big dinner (Matthew 26:6). God has given us an account that is sufficiently detailed that those who lived in that time could check on the Christian record. Note the care Luke took in assembling his material in Luke 1:1-4. Paul told of the number who had seen Jesus alive after His resurrection, most of whom were still alive when he wrote (1 Corinthians 15:6). Anyone in that time wishing to research the Christian testimony was welcome to do so; it could be verified.</p> |
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**11:2,3** The sisters were close friends of Jesus. Jesus had withdrawn to a safer place (10:40) a long distance away, yet they knew where to send word to Him about Lazarus being sick. Probably very few in Judea knew where He was. "Where is He?" (7:11) was a question His enemies were asking!

Married people ought not to fall into a pattern of social contact limited to other married couples so that single brothers and sisters are often left to fellowship only among themselves. God has many who will be single all their lives. Further, Jesus' close friendship was not limited by gender; He loved all three, the sisters and the brother (v.5).<sup>1</sup> It was natural for the sisters when sending word to Him to refer to Lazarus as "the one You love". (This is written by the apostle who referred to himself in 13:23 as one Jesus loved.)

**11:4-6** When the news of Lazarus' sickness arrived, Lazarus was still alive. After two days Jesus said he had died (vv.11-14). The sisters obviously wanted Jesus to come and heal Lazarus. God had a different and more wonderful plan. The healing of the man born blind was so that "*the works of God would be displayed in him*" (9:3). For such works of God to be evident, the man had to be born blind! Lazarus' death was necessary for the glory of God to be revealed. (See also v.40.)

**11:6** "*Yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick ...*" (v.6). It is better to translate this as "When therefore He heard ... " or as the ESV does below. It is not that Jesus did not care; John said in v.5 that Jesus loved them! There is a specific reason to delay going to Bethany. At news of the sickness, Jesus stayed for the situation to become what God had chosen. The plan of God was that He would be glorified by means of that death, yet this story would not end in death for Lazarus. Jesus' love for them would be shown even more by them having greater exposure to the glory of God. In other words, by Lazarus dying in that sickness, the benefit to all three close friends would be a greater knowledge of God. Mary Magdalene, weeping outside Jesus' empty tomb (20:11), was disappointed when she could not find His body. The Lord had disappointed her by what would later delight her. Likewise, the delay in going to see His friends in Bethany was a kindness of the Lord to them that they did not immediately understand.

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. (John 11:5 & 6, ESV)

According to v.15, the delay also benefited the disciples. The Lord said He was glad *for their sake* that He was not there. This indicates that had He been there, He would have healed Lazarus, but they then would not have seen the sign showing Him as the Resurrection and the Life. Raising Lazarus would encourage their faith.

The will of the Father had decided Jesus' delay. The way the Lord would use this sickness had large consequences in the history of redemption. Raising Lazarus after his death had been so well established in the community that it provoked the Sanhedrin to call a special meeting. In it they decided to put Jesus to death (11:45-57). That death was the salvation of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary! Furthermore, the sign related to the death of Lazarus made more clear to them (and to us as well) that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. God has chosen to be revealed in more than affirmations. He wanted the action (known to us only through the words of Scripture) of raising the dead man to be a visible acting out of the power Christ will use again at His coming! (1Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:42,43).

**The Glory of God and the Glorification of the Son** What the Apostle John says in v.4 is a major theme in the Gospel of John. In Christ's human flesh we see the glory of God (1:14). A glorious feature of God – mercifully saving His enemies by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9-11) – could never be known apart from Christ.

It was in His great hour, the time when He went to the cross, that the Son was glorified (17:1). That event showed what He was. It demonstrated God's love (Romans 5:8) and His own (15:13). In the cross, the words: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ..." take on their rich meaning. In the death of Christ, we come to see both the glory of the obedient Son and the glory of the providing Father.

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes Bible teachers draw a great distinction between two Greek verbs for love, as if *agapao* were a considerably different from *phileo*. There seems to be a difference in how they are used in John 21. *Agapao* is used more in the NT. Here in John 11 *phileo* is used in v.3 and *agapao* in v.5. This shows that they can be virtually interchangeable in the Gospel of John. In John 5:20 *phileo* is used for the love of the Father for Christ. This should make clear that *phileo* is not a word with less quality than *agapao*. It is also used of the love of the Father for the disciples because they have loved Christ (16:27). Greek is a language we do not speak, and it is difficult to catch many nuances of an old language. There must be some difference in the words, but I hope I have given sufficient reason to restrain making a sharp distinction that is not there.

God had planned a wonderful sequence: Lazarus would become sick and die; Jesus would delay going to Bethany, but would raise him after four days, and the news would shake up Jerusalem. The Jewish leadership would react with a decision to kill Jesus. Thereby, in their murderous act, our Great High Priest would offer the one sacrifice that would forever put away sin, satisfy God, and secure all the blessings stored in God's heart for His people. In John 10, Jesus, speaking as the Good Shepherd, said He would lay down His life for His sheep. The death of Lazarus was a crucial link in the chain of events in fulfilling that commitment. The will of God in the sickness and death of Lazarus would result in our praise of God's glorious grace (Ephesians 1:6). In fact, God works all things – not just the death of one of Jesus' dear friends and the wickedness of Caiaphas (11:47-53) – according to the counsel of His will to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:11,12).

## 11:7-16 The Return to Judea and Danger

**11:7,8** Two days after Jesus learned of Lazarus' sickness, Lazarus died. Jesus knew this supernaturally. The long journey by foot back from Batanea near the Sea of Galilee to the east of the Jordan (see the notes at 1:28) would take about four days.

This raises the matter of danger to Jesus' life. At His recent time in Judea the Jews there tried to stone him (see 10:31-39). They had tried earlier as well (8:59). Yet the Lord said, *"Let us go back to Judea."* He left to avoid opposition; He returned to raise Lazarus. It is not a contradiction that we should sometimes avoid and at other times ignore danger. The issue is that we should do the Father's will. The disciples felt the danger to themselves also.

**11:9,10** The Lord's analogy is that the world has the sun in the sky so that men may work in daylight. When Jesus refers to light as the kind the world has, that indicates that it is not the light by which He makes His decisions. He operated under the guidance of a different light – the will of His Father. It was His food to do His Father's will (4:34). Hours before His death, He would say to the Father that He has accomplished the work (note 4:34 again!) the Father had assigned to Him (17:4). Jesus being stoned and dying by a way that was not being lifted up on the cross (3:14; 12:32,33) was not the Father's will, so Jesus resisted it. But going to Jerusalem where He would be crucified during Passover was the Father's will, and thus walking in that light, He said, "Let's go!"

**Let us go!** Note the Lord said "us" in v.7, and in v. 11 that He was going. Repeating His "Let us" invitation to the disciples in v.15, Thomas thought this meant death and proposed that they all go to die with Him. Christ had said, "Let us" twice and said that He was going. A response was needed; Thomas spoke up bravely, "Let us also go". The "let us go" would be repeated by Christ in 14:31. There it meant leaving the Upper Room, going out to Gethsemane, betrayal, capture, and death.

To say there are twelve hours of daylight is a way to say there is still more time for Him to work. In a similar situation in Luke 13:32-33, Jesus announced that He would keep doing what He was doing, in spite of a death threat from Herod. In John 9:4 the Lord stressed that it was still daylight and the work must continue. Danger does not decide our lives. He had authority to lay down His life. The passions of wicked men would simply become the tool the Lord would use to accomplish His purpose (Acts 4:27,28). As one present for all of this discussion, Judas knew that the intent of those wanting to arrest Jesus was murder. Knowing that, he still took Jesus' enemies to where they could find Him! There was enough light left to go to Bethany and wake up Lazarus.

## 11:11-14 Waking up Lazarus

One way believers in the living Savior express faith is in our attitude to death. Death is an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26) that brings suffering and sorrow. It is the result of sin (Romans 5:12), yet salvation includes even a body that has died. Thus we speak of death as sleep. The Lord Jesus spoke this way. To Him it is as sleep because He can and will waken the sleeping person. Going to Bethany was to wake up Lazarus. The disciples did not understand; they missed the figurative language. For the Lord to say "Lazarus is dead" was to speak of his temporary condition, but that language does not imply future life, thus the Lord preferred the accuracy of the

figurative way of speaking. In four days Lazarus would return to mortal life. God speaks of the death of all His children as sleeping in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:18) as He looks forward to the day of resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

### **11:16 Courageous Thomas**

Many remember Thomas as “Doubting Thomas”. Here he shows courage and willingness to die like Peter in 13:36. (Usually it is Peter who speaks up for the disciples.) Thomas’ name Didymus means “Twin”; note the repetition in the name (Di Dy). When he said, “let us ... die with Him,” that reflects the kind of danger ahead. By going to Bethany, less than three kilometers from Jerusalem, Jesus was approaching the cross. (Luke 9:51)

### **11:17-20 Arrival in Bethany**

Lazarus had been in his tomb for four days. Jesus found this to be the case. One of the great mysteries about Christ is that He became fully man, and remained at all times fully God. He could know supernaturally that Lazarus had died (v.11) though He was not there. He could see what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree (1:48-50). It is too deep for us to grasp how Jesus’ infinite divine nature and His limited human nature functioned in one Person. So like the Psalmist in Psalm 131, we humbly accept truth about Christ, admitting our limitations in understanding. At all times we must hold with tenacity to all revealed truths about Christ, even when we do not know how to connect them.

The **four days** is significant because the Jews had their own odd notions about death. They felt that the spirit stayed around the body for three days and that death after four days was too late for a return to life. (We learn such things from those who research those times.)

**11:18,19** That Bethany was so close to Jerusalem and that many Jews went to comfort Martha and Mary is very important. Lazarus and his sisters must have been well-known. Remember that Bethany was a village, not a city. Probably every soul in the village knew them, but so did many in Jerusalem. Jesus was not present to heal and prevent death. He did not arrive to raise Lazarus so early that the comforters would have no occasion to provide comfort. This is the setting God arranged and intended. The light (not of this world, v.9) but the light of the Father’s wisdom (Romans 11:33-36) had decided when Jesus would arrive in Bethany. Then He could and would do all that was natural in His human heart for His dear friends. It would also cause a major reaction in Jerusalem. The irony is that raising Lazarus to life resulted in Jesus being put to death!

### **11:21-27 The Meeting with Martha**

John wrote in concise form not telling how Martha knew Jesus was nearby. She alone went to meet Him. The sisters had sent word to Jesus (v.3). They naturally hoped He would come right away and save His friend. (It is interesting that the verb *to heal* in Greek and the verb for *save* are the same word.) She stated the fact that if He had been there, Lazarus would not have died. She was not rebuking the Lord. We are allowed to express how the Lord’s decisions affect us while we groan under some of His decisions. (See Psalms 6, 35, 102 and many more.) The Father did not arrange a situation where Jesus would appear callous in refusing to heal Lazarus. God had simply arranged that Jesus would not be there, and Jesus understanding that was glad (v.15).

Martha knew that Jesus would have prevented her brother’s death, and she knew that any request He might make of God the Father would be granted. There is no such thing as Jesus interceding and the Father not granting all that He asks! This is foundational to the Bible’s doctrine of the intercession of Christ. Martha knew this but she did not expect to have her brother back that very day, as v.39 makes clear.

**11:23-26** The Lord said her brother would rise again. Martha believed this in the way any orthodox Jew would. It would happen on the last day. (In my opinion, that should make us cautious about thinking there may be multiple resurrections on different “last days”. Martha said “last day” since there is only one.)

**11:26** Martha had her theology correct. There will be a resurrection that includes the physical body of her dead brother. At earlier times, distracted Martha gave less attention to sitting at Jesus' feet to learn from His instruction (Luke 10:41,42). When the reality of death removed all other concerns, she really paid attention. The Lord turned the conversation from whether or not she believed in *what* would happen, to *who* makes it happen – thus Jesus' famous "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Standing before Martha was the Son of God, God in the flesh. Whatever the Father does the Son also does (5:19). Since the Father raises the dead and gives them life, the Son likewise gives life to whom He wishes (5:21). He can do this when He wishes as well, as in the case of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21-43) and the young man in Nain (Luke 7:11-17). The news from Nain had spread to Judea, so Martha was probably aware of it.

Jesus' words are far more personal than the doctrine Martha had just confessed. He said *I* and spoke of those who believe in *ME*. The future resurrection is not simply rising from the grave, it will be the appearance of the Lord Himself with His shout or loud command (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Jesus calling *with a loud voice* in v.43 is an intentional parallel to what He will do in the last day when the dead hear His voice (5:28,29).

The Lord asserts two things; He is both resurrection and life. This does not mean simply resurrection to a later life with nothing more now. The one who believes in Him possesses eternal life already. Such a person will never die in the sense of losing that eternal life. Unless the Lord comes while we are alive, all who believe will still die physically. Such death cannot interrupt the eternal life of the believer, because "*he who believes in Me will live even if he dies.*" Our Lord is personally both resurrection and life. He has promised both and no believer can be deprived of them. In John 6, Jesus will lose none the Father has given Him. In John 10 no one can snatch them from Him, and in John 11 every believer will live even if he dies! Those who belong to Christ are safe.

**11:26,27** Martha believed the truth that such things are guaranteed to God's people. Jesus then asked if she believed the truth as He just stated it, namely that life and resurrection are His to give. She linked the truth He stated with her clear confession of Who He is, the Christ, the Son of God Who was to come into the world (see Psalm 118:26). The Apostle John wanted this reported to his readers because that is the chief point of his Gospel in 20:30,31. By writing this Gospel, John was simply promoting the message Christ gave of Himself in 11:25,26.

Jesus was always the Son of God, so He is fully the eternal image of the Father. As One sent, the One Who came into the world in our human flesh, Jesus is the Christ with the assigned mission to be the Redeemer of God's people. To John it is so crucial that people understand Who Christ is and what He did. His coming into this world is a matter of history. Without it there is no Christian faith, no gospel; any belief that omits it is false. We believe at a specific time and for a specific duration that the Son of God as the Messiah (or the Christ) was in the world. Martha's belief was based on facts of history and truths of doctrine, and her trust was in the One she confessed.

**11:28-32** It is valuable to have a record of this conversation, the only one in the four Gospels with Martha alone. Mary is a woman noted for her devotion to Christ, yet it was Martha who just made this clear confession.

Martha carried to Mary the invitation from Christ for her to come to Him. The Lord Jesus is consistent in His love for these His friends. He did not come only to wake up Lazarus, but to restore him to his family. Mary's fast exit from the house was not understood by those present to comfort, thus they followed and came to the area where the Lord was. The account does not show Jesus heading to the house of Mary & Martha, but the meeting was outside the village. Since Jesus asked where Lazarus was laid (v.34), this meant that Mary, Martha and Jesus had those comforters follow to Lazarus' tomb AND thus more became witnesses of his resurrection. Had Mary and Martha met Christ together earlier and gone directly to the tomb, the number of witnesses would have been reduced.

That Christ is called *the Teacher* reveals that even in His resting in their home, He was not taking a break from His assignment to do the Father's work. He taught, and Mary especially was eager to learn from Him. Since teaching was an essential aspect of the Messiah's ministry (see 4:25 and Isaiah 50:4), the content taught is highly

treasured in our faith. To treat doctrine with disdain (a common response today) is to miss that Biblical doctrine is simply the teaching of Christ the Teacher! For this Mary had a great appetite.

Mary's words were the same as Martha's about the difference the presence of Christ would have made. It was like Mary, who would wash Jesus' feet and dry them with her hair, that she would fall at His feet.

**11:33 & 38** See below the Appendix 11A: Jesus' Emotion at the Grave of Lazarus. The difficulty here is first a matter of translation to establish the kind of emotion, and secondly, what it was that caused that kind.

No one expected a resurrection! It would be odd for Christ, in the setting of the recent death of His dear friend, to proclaim that He is the resurrection and the life, and then to give Martha and Mary only His words with no action to accompany them. There was not even an acknowledgment by either sister of a hypothetical possibility that He might raise Lazarus right away if He chose to do so. He had been dead for four days.

**11:32-37** The kind of mourning in that culture is shown in the word for weeping. Mary and those with her may have been *wailing*. When Jesus *wept* the word is different; it is a word for shedding tears.

The observation that Jesus loved Lazarus is accurate. The conclusion that He could have prevented the death is right. The memory of healing the man born blind (John 9) remained in the consciousness of the people in Jerusalem. The miracle related to Lazarus would have even more impact; no one expected Jesus to raise Lazarus!

**11:38-40** See Appendix 11A below. The objection by Martha is revealing. The Lord took a step closer to Lazarus' resurrection, yet Martha, at that moment thinking like an unbeliever, made an objection that showed no expectation of life for Lazarus. Her faith was not consistent with the truth that her Lord was the Resurrection and the Life, especially since He had indicated His intention to raise Lazarus before the Last Day.

The Lord either said expressly that she would see the glory of God or said things that made that clear earlier. (We never seem to have entire conversations reported in any of the Gospels.) Because God is a pardoning God (Isaiah 55:7), it is His glory to forgive quickly. It is also the glory of God in a new creation to undo the death man's sin has brought. It is the decision of God to wait till the Coming of Christ to raise His children to immortal life, but Christ gave a foretaste of that day in the case of Lazarus, even though poor Lazarus would die again.

**11:41-42 Jesus' prayer** This was not the beginning of a prayer for Lazarus. V.41 implies that this had been an earlier matter between the Father and the Son, because the Father had heard Jesus. Martha was right that whatever Christ would ask, the Father would do (v.22). By recording this theme twice, John is eager that this point should have our attention. *Anything Jesus asks for He receives*. He had asked for the life of Lazarus. By making public the content of His prayer, Christ shows Himself to be the effective Intercessor (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34). The words to His Father "*You always hear me*" are a wonderful way to grasp the intercession of Christ for His people. The answers Jesus has merited for us are as certain as the resurrection of Lazarus. The benefit to those who heard was that they should see that He has come from the Father and can speak to Him on behalf of His people. If we can believe Christ came from God, then we can believe everything else about Him!

**11:43-44** Christ called for Lazarus to come out. He said this in a loud voice. (See the notes at v.26.) In Greek the order is feet and hands, but in English we tend to say "hands and feet". The feet have a certain priority here; they affect Lazarus walking. Maybe Lazarus came out hopping with his feet tied together.

This ends this part of the story. The Bible is God's Word, and John under the Holy Spirit, did not do what so many journalists today would do. They would ask what it was like at the moment of dying, what it was like when he was dead for four days, and all the human interest angles they could think up. This sign was intended to reveal the glory of God in the ministry of Christ. The Bible was not written to satisfy our curiosity, so the Apostle John does not spoil the sign by deflecting attention away from Christ.

**The Grave Clothes** The raising of Lazarus was a sign, because it pointed to something greater than itself. The ultimate resurrection is what Christ will do for all men. First, He had to suffer and rise from the dead Himself. When John reports Jesus' resurrection in 20:5-7, he gave detail of the cloths in which Jesus' body and face were wrapped. The arrangement of these strips of linen and the cloth for the head revealed that Jesus had simply passed through them. No one unwrapped Jesus' body, for the cloths showed how He had simply passed through them in the same way He entered closed rooms (20:19,26). They had all sagged in place. John planned to report this in chapter 20, so he paid special attention in chapter 11 to the burial clothes of Lazarus.

Lazarus had a different kind of resurrection. He returned to mortal life. When Christ comes again, His people will rise to eternal physical life, unlike Lazarus, never to die again. The resurrection of Lazarus was a foretaste of what was to come. It was symbolic of Jesus' future conquest of death for Himself and His people. (Note Ephesians 1:16-21.) In John 10:18 the Lord said He would take up His life again. In John 11 He gave life back to Lazarus. God was glorified in the resurrection of Lazarus (v.4). It has provided us a limited, yet powerful, picture of the future deliverance from death, evil, Satan, and all the consequences of sin.

**John 11:45-57** This is the part of the Bible that tells where the decision was really made to have Jesus killed. In the Synoptics (i.e., Matthew, Mark & Luke) a trial before the Sanhedrin had Jesus present (Matthew 26:57-59). The purpose of that meeting was to make official the decision already made in John 11! By then they only needed some defensible charges as justification for their decision (Matthew 26:59,60). The reasons for Jesus' death at the trial were different (blasphemy according to Matthew 26:65,66) from the earlier decision here in John 11. The real reason for murder is given here: they saw Jesus as growing in influence; thus they were losing their power over the people. Pilate knew that the Jewish leadership were envious of the attention being given to Christ (Mark 15:9,10). Perhaps they did fear that a major messianic movement with many people proclaiming one person as the King of Israel, would provoke the Roman government to react. If Rome did, the members of the Sanhedrin and the Jewish people might lose their privileges as a semi-autonomous nation within the Roman Empire, and religious freedom centered in their temple.

**11:45,46** Many saw and believed; others knowing the Pharisees to be Jesus' opponents went to inform them of this miracle. The Jewish leaders had a major problem with the growing fame of Jesus. What He did in Bethany provided even more credibility that He was the Messiah. See [The Divided Response](#) below.

John shows again the opposition that viewed Jesus as evil for healing the man at the Pool of Bethesda, the blind man at the Pool of Siloam, and raising Lazarus. We have no indication that Lazarus was raised on the Sabbath to parallel the other signs in John 5 and 9. So that was probably not the ultimate irritation to the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. *"If we let Him go one like this everyone will believe in Him!"* (v.48). That people would follow Christ and turn away from them was justification in their minds for murder!

**The Divided Response** The Lord Jesus came unto His own people first (Romans 1:16). As a group, except for a remnant (Romans 11:1-6), they did not receive Him (1:11). Those persons who did receive/believe (1:12) among the Jews and Gentiles did not come in a united believing response to Christ as a group. It was only some Jews and later some Gentiles in every place the message was preached. The closest we see in this Gospel to a united response by a community, is in the village of Samaria. We never hear of this village again in the Bible. There *many* (4:39) and *many more* (4:41) believed.

After the various positive responses of faith in chapters 1-4, we find stiff rejection of Christ in 5:16-18,40. Many disciples abandoned Him in 6:66-69, and of the Twelve, even one of them was a devil (6:70,71). Members of His family did not believe in Him (7:5). The division about Christ continued in 7:12,13,30,31; 9:16; and 10:19-21. Of all the persons who spoke to Christ in John 8, the only response was rejection, including those who had "believed" in Him!! (8:31) Here in 11:45,46 a division appears again.

Lazarus had been raised after four days in his tomb. In these signs John stresses the element of difficulty: a man crippled for 38 years (John 5), a very large crowd to feed with so little food to spread to all (John 6), a man blind all his life (John 9), and a man dead and decomposing (John 10)! Three of these four signs happened in Jerusalem, the centre of what would soon be official and united resistance to Him. Clearly, miracles alone never sway the hard heart of unbelief (Matthew 11:20-24). We must be born of God (1:13).

The Lazarus incident was clearly the most spectacular of all. The evidence is that this family of three single adults in Bethany was very well known in Jerusalem. The death of Lazarus was well established as fact; then many comforters witnessed his resurrection and believed in Christ (v.45). Some who had seen the same event went off to tell the Pharisees what had happened. Jesus was again being believed in and rejected. Jesus Christ, the only unifier of the human race (Ephesians 2:14,19) is Himself One Who divides (Matthew 10:32-39). When sinners cannot accept the Creator Lord Redeemer Savior, they become estranged from those who do receive Him and eternal division results. In the future day, the Lord will exclude from the New Jerusalem all who would not believe (Revelation 21:6-8) and include all who do (Matthew 8:5-13). Thus it will be fulfilled that in Abraham all the peoples on earth will be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

**11:47** The powerful group that controlled the Sanhedrin was the Sadducee party. The chief priests were Sadducees. In their hatred of Christ, the Pharisee party joined them. Earlier a number with influence resolved to kill Jesus (5:18, and Mark 3:6), but John 11 gives the first meeting of the ruling council where they agreed in the highest level of Jewish authority to pursue His death. Note that they are unable to deny the fact of His many miracles. In the years after the New Testament was completed, they did not deny that He had done such mighty works. What they denied was that God was the source of His works (5:36; 10:37,38). Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, saw that the signs indicated clearly that Jesus was from God (3:2).

**11:48** Just how John ever knew to be able to record the insider information we find in this section, we do not know for sure, except that he was known to the high priest! (See 18:15.) Possibly Nicodemus was the source. Almost all the rulers were certain that Jesus was not the Messiah. Some thought, perhaps sincerely, that the danger was real that the Romans might come to crush a messianic movement if crowds followed Jesus, proclaiming Him as King of the Jews. The Romans had installed Herod (by this time long dead) and Herod's sons as quasi-Jewish rulers, loyal to Rome. If the Romans reacted strongly, they might decide to revoke all the Jewish privileges in worship (centred in the temple) and the limited freedom the Jewish nation had in their land. With this viewpoint in mind, Caiaphas offered his solution: Jesus must be killed. When they said, "If we let Him go on like this..." they speak as if He is in their power. He was not! (Note 11:8-10). God is always in control; there is never an exception.

**11:49-53** They seemed to agree on a double threat: 1.) People believing in Jesus were not following them, and 2.) they supposed the Romans would react in a way that also endangered them. Obviously, they had selfish interests to protect. Caiaphas' simple solution was to kill the one man who was such a danger to them. The Pharisees should have objected that that would be breaking the law – something Jesus pointed out in 7:19. They did not; they agreed with Caiaphas. Caiaphas proposed a small act that would bring a huge benefit. It would be better "for you," a possible way John shows the self-interest in the Sanhedrin's action – better that one should die and not the nation. In this way he suggested a "small" twisting of obedience to God with a major good result. (Killing the Son of God is not small.)

By stating it as he did, Caiaphas the high priest of Israel<sup>2</sup> acted unknowingly as a prophet. God had Balaam's donkey speak, and He can use the words of an unbelieving high priest to highlight the benefits of Jesus' death. Caiaphas did not speak politely but arrogantly. He felt all were stupid if they missed his simple solution. The gospel was in his words but not in his mind. John switches from Caiaphas' speech to his own words. The good news from God really is that one man died for the nation, i.e., the people of God.

John did not want his readers to think the death of Christ was for Jews only, the way the sacrifices of the OT were for Israel alone. John said the propitiation for our sins was not only for our sins but also for the sins of the

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<sup>2</sup> V.49 says Caiaphas was high Priest that year. The high priest was to serve till his death. Caiaphas was high priest from 18-36 AD.



whole world (1 John 2:2). John meant not for Jews only but also for others who are not Jews. In 11:52 these others are called the children of God scattered abroad. It helps to read 11:52 and 1 John 2:2 together. I think they express the same point. Just as Jews thought of other Jews scattered throughout the empire, John here said that the death of Christ is for those children of God spread elsewhere in the world. He probably had elect Gentiles in mind, calling them *children of God* (1:12) before they were converted! This is similar to Jesus referring to Gentiles He had not yet saved as His sheep (10:16).

John 12 gives the real reason the religious authorities had for putting Jesus to death. Later they would need some explanation they could give to the public. They said it was for blasphemy, something not mentioned in the deliberations of the Sanhedrin in John 11. The charge of blasphemy suggests to the public that their great concern was to defend the Name of God. However, what really mattered the most to them was their privileged role as leaders. If they were concerned about the glory of God, they would have refused to break His sacred commandment about murder. In John 11 they decided to put Him to death; later they were looking for how to do it (Luke 22:2). They had a meeting in the palace of Caiaphas. Even though they were eager to have Him killed, they decided not to do it during the feast when so many pilgrims were in Jerusalem (Matthew 26:1-5). All the other times when people tried to stone Him, it was not God's time. When they had chosen to avoid Jesus' arrest during the feast, it was God's time. Eventually they followed the schedule of God.

### **The Movements of Jesus in the Face of Danger**

The death threats to Jesus were centered mostly in Judea. Mark 3:6 is an exception. He withdrew from the location of hostility (Mark 3:7). In Nazareth, when they attempted to kill Him, Luke reported that He simply went on His way (Luke 4:30). We never read of Jesus entering Nazareth again. He even withdrew from Judea when He heard that John had been arrested (Matthew 4:12).

In John 5, His opponents tried harder to kill Him. John does not say more than that. In John 6 Jesus was in Galilee; in chapter 7 the big question was whether He would return to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1-11). The Lord did not inform His brothers of the time He would go. In Judea the Jews were waiting to take His life (7:1). By the end of John 8 they attempted to stone Him. Jesus remained in Jerusalem (chapters 7,8,9,10) because He had work to do there (9:3-5) until the next attempt at stoning and arrest (10:31 & 39). At that time He traveled a long distance to a remote place beyond the Jordan in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee (10:40). Returning to Bethany to wake up Lazarus (11:7-11) was filled with such danger the disciples reacted to it (11:8-16) but went with Him expecting to die (11:16). Then when the news of raising Lazarus reached the authorities in Jerusalem, they called a special meeting of the Sanhedrin and decided to put Him to death. The decision was made; all that was needed was to find Jesus in some private location so they could arrest Him out of public view. They gave orders that His location should be reported (11:57), thus it would be an offense for people to know and not tell how to find Jesus. In response to this, Jesus withdrew to a location His enemies did not know about, a village called Ephraim (11:54), a place mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament. During Passion Week, Jesus hid Himself again (12:36). The murderous intent of the religious authorities was well understood by Judas, since he was present to observe all these precautions and the escapes from those who would seize Him. That Judas knew all this, makes His treachery more evident.

There was a policy of careful protection of Christ's location, withdrawals from danger, and caution about when He would go to a feast. In light of this, we see more clearly how deliberate it was for Jesus to return to Jerusalem for His last public entrance, riding on a donkey, openly proclaimed as the King of Israel. Somehow the crowd had been informed of His coming (12:12). Jesus' bold public act meant His hour had come; He rode publicly and intentionally into His death, knowing exactly what was ahead as He entered the lion's den. Within that week He would be crucified outside the walls of God's city. This was Passover time and God's great Passover Lamb would be sacrificed for God's people. All who claimed protection from the wrath of God under the blood of this Lamb provided by God (1:29), would be eternally spared from the eternal death God imposes on sinners. Until the time God had appointed, Jesus avoided death that He might die on God's good schedule, where the timing of Passover for His sacrifice would make the gospel message clearer to us all.

**11:55-57** The time Jesus had been away from Jerusalem could not have been very long. He was in Jerusalem in the winter (10:22) and then He was back for Passover in the early spring. People wondered if Jesus would be present since there was so much opposition against Him. The order to report Jesus was well-known. The Greek wording shows that they did not expect Jesus to come to this Passover. People went early to the Passover to purify themselves in case they had, for example, contamination from a dead body or a grave. That

kind of contact would make them unclean. (See Numbers 9:1-14.) Later in 18:28, the Jewish authorities would not enter the palace of Pilate because that would make them unclean and not qualified to eat the Passover. To avoid uncleanness, pilgrims went early to Jerusalem so they could have time for cleansing rites if needed. It is a strange situation that there was great concern not to be unclean at this feast time, while the greatest murder in history was already the policy of the highest court in the Jewish nation.<sup>3</sup> A terrible blindness had come over Israel (Romans 11:8).

## Appendix 11A: Jesus' Emotion at the Grave of Lazarus

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That Jesus wept is one of the familiar facts of Jesus' life on earth. That skilful Bible teachers have many different interpretations of this section of John 11 is less well known. Likewise, credible translations differ.

When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.<sup>4</sup> And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept.

So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, deeply moved again,<sup>5</sup> came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" **John 11:31-40 ESV**

### The Two Difficulties:

1. How should a certain verb be translated, the one for "deeply moved"?
2. If it is translated that Jesus was angry, then what is the specific reason for His anger?

Many assume that Jesus' feelings were simply a matter of grieving. They conclude that His feelings were compassion for the grieving sisters weeping at His side and/or perhaps sorrow over Lazarus still in his tomb. How one crucial verb is translated decides what John meant in his account of the nature of Jesus' emotion. Both the NIV and ESV adopt the more generic stance of "deeply moved". That choice makes no definite commitment whether the Lord was also angry about something or simply moved with grief alone. Most recent translations soften the word to groaning, sighing, deeply moved or something similar. The sense of anger is not evident. Recent translations indicate intense emotion.

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<sup>3</sup> To say this is only to agree with what John 11 tells us. I am a Christian, but I do not state these facts as support for holding living Jews today accountable for the death of Christ. He also died at the hands of Gentile Romans after a trial in a Roman court. The entire world was united against Him. The chief issue in Judaism is whether they will continue to reject the Christ, the King of Israel, the Son of David, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the one men call Jesus of Nazareth. Denying Christ must not bring on them the wrath of Christians. No Christian knowing his faith or the assignment Jesus Christ has given, can reason that way. When any and all people refuse to believe in Christ, they are under the wrath of God (3:36) not the wrath of believers. Our gospel is to tell people how they can escape. We point all men to the Jesus Who has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26). When the Apostle Peter preached to Jewish leaders (Acts 4:8-12), he acknowledged their rejection of Christ and offered salvation to them in the Person they had crucified! To convey forgiveness in Christ for the sins that we and our neighbors have committed, is the real Christian policy.

<sup>4</sup> John 11:33 Ἰησοῦς οὖν ὡς εἶδεν αὐτὴν κλαίουσαν καὶ τοὺς συνελθόντας αὐτῇ Ἰουδαίους κλαίοντας, ἐνεβριμῆσατο τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτόν,

<sup>5</sup> John 11:38 Ἰησοῦς οὖν, πάλιν ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ,

## How some English versions translate this verb *embrimaomai*<sup>6</sup> in 11:33:

NEB \*: He sighed heavily and was deeply moved

JB (Jerusalem Bible) \*: ...Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart ...

KJV & NKJV: He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.

NIV: He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled

ESV: He was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled

\* (In these, I have guessed, probably correctly, which words in English correspond to *embrimaomai*.)

What does the Apostle John mean by this word, a word that does not appear many times in the NT? It is used by John only in John 11:33, 38. It appears in Matthew 9:30 and Mark 1:43 to indicate someone being sternly warned. In Mark 14:5 the disciples used it to scold Mary for using such expensive ointment on Christ.

In 11:33 *embrimaomai* is joined to a different word that means that Jesus was *troubled*. Some translations add “greatly” in English to ensure that the readers is informed that this word also is a strong word. This word for being troubled is used: of the disciples being terrified (ESV) when they thought they saw a ghost (Mark 6:50); of Herod’s consternation In Matthew 2:3; of Jesus announcing His betrayal by Judas John 13:21; and also when He spoke of His impending death (John 12:27); of people being troubled by false doctrine (Galatians 1:7 & Acts 15:24).

**Conclusion A** From the other uses of the verb, even though they are few, I conclude that *embrimaomai* in this text is not confined to the emotion of grief. It is used here to show the indignation of Christ.

If indeed Jesus’ reaction to the weeping of Mary and others shows a sense of anger, what specifically is the object of that anger? Many can see that the verb *embrimaomai* conveys a sense of anger, but they find it strange to think Jesus was angry with a sorrowing sister who had just lost her brother. The word alone may be clear, but it may be the setting that makes translators soften the verb. Those who think Jesus was not indignant do not need to explain the object of Jesus’ anger! What stirred Jesus’ anger? Some suggestions:

1. Was it the sorrow of Mary? This is plainly preposterous! Jesus wept and as a “Man of Sorrows” He could not be angry at her sorrow. We are commanded to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).
2. Was it the nature of their mourning? In those days, people often had flute players and professional mourners who were very good at making a loud scene of sorrow with great demonstration of agony, whether sincere or not. See Luke 8:52. (Admittedly, the Greek words for their weeping (v.33) and His (v.35) are not the same.)
3. Was it sorrow over the loss of a friend? In a matter of minutes, Jesus would raise Lazarus from the dead. He began in v.4 by saying this sickness was not unto death. It is more likely that Jesus shared the sorrow of the sisters than that this is His sorrow over Lazarus, but I am not sure of this.
4. Was it that a miracle was forced on Him by friends? This misses the mark, since Jesus announced in advance that the sickness would not end in death and that He would go and wake Lazarus up. The miracle was for the glory of God. It was not forced on Jesus. He never indicated that He was being manipulated.
5. Was it anger at the destruction Satan had brought on humanity through sin? This is a theological explanation that brings to John 11 much truth from other passages of Scripture. It may well be a factor in Jesus’ indignation, but nothing John 11 says requires this explanation. Jesus’ response was connected to the weeping of Mary and those with her.

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<sup>6</sup> From Strong’s concordance: βριμάομαι *brimaomai* (to *snort* with anger); to have *indignation on*, that is, (transitively) to *blame*, (intransitively) to *sigh* with chagrin, (specifically) to sternly *enjoin*: - straitly charge, groan, murmur against.

6. Was it a reaction to unbelief? I agree with D. A. Carson that this is the best explanation. The Lord had traveled in what was probably a four-day journey to arrive at Bethany. He did not disagree with the response of both Martha and Mary, that if He had been present, their brother would not have died. He told Martha that He was the resurrection and the life (v.25). This was not said simply to affirm a doctrine and a future resurrection; *it was explicitly connected to a promise that her brother would rise again*. According to a later verse (v.40), He had told her that if she believed she would see the glory of God. Did Jesus, Who had raised two others from death that we know of, make a trip into the dangerous area of Judea to see His close friends Mary and Martha, with no other purpose than to comfort them? Did He proclaim His ability to raise Lazarus with no intention to do it until the day at the end of the world when He raises all other men?

If their sorrow was of the wailing sort, as it seemed to be, that indicates a sorrow akin to the world's despair. The Apostle Paul said we do not mourn for believers the way the world grieves (1 Thessalonians 4:13). John 11 shows a great contradiction. The overwhelming sorrow was oblivious to the presence of the Resurrection and the Life. It is a terrible expression of unbelief. Just as faith pleases God (Hebrews 11:6), unbelief angers Him. Because of what Jesus encountered at the cave of Lazarus, He was indignant.

The word for Jesus' emotional distress is used twice, once in connection with Mary's weeping and the other just prior to Martha's objection against moving the stone. Would not Jesus' order to move that stone be a wonderful sign that He was about to remedy their sorrow? Why reply to the Lord, the Resurrection and the Life, that moving the stone would just allow the stench of a cadaver to escape? Jesus had a different purpose for taking away that stone. His response to Martha was a rebuke that she did not believe (v.40). The Lord did not say such things to rebuke her grief. I suggest that His anger in v.38 was in response to her unbelief. "*Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?*" Here is Jesus' explanation in the context. We need look no further.

**Conclusion B** We have plenty of reason to be careful to interpret Scripture with humility. Astute exegetes differ on this passage. Köstenberger notes that there is a "bewildering array of interpretations". Some scholars have been cautious not to treat *embrimaomai* as expressing Jesus' indignation. Then those who do, differ on what made Jesus angry. Certainly Jesus, who loved the sisters, had feeling for their sorrow. I think He also had indignation at their unbelief. The Lord is angry at every sin while He still loves His children. For us, divine wrath fell on Christ on the cross. It was love and grace that made God direct His anger in that way. Mary and Martha are examples of early believers in Christ. Mary especially is exemplary in devotion, but here the Bible shows even the most devoted souls are frail in faith. Thankfully, it is not our faith that wins heaven for us, but the strong Savior in Whom we place our weak faith.