

John 9

Jesus heals a blind man and the Pharisees show that the eyes of their hearts are blind.

Background

The Purpose of John's Gospel: John 20.30-31

But, last of all, John perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the gospel, being urged by his friends, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual gospel¹

Jesus' Seven "I am" statements in John:

- *I am* the bread of life (6.35, 48, 51)
- *I am* the door of the sheep (10.7, 9)
- *I am* the good shepherd (10.11, 14)
- *I am* the resurrection and the life (11.25)
- *I am* the way, the truth and the life (14.6)
- *I am* the true vine (15.1)
- And, of course, here: *I am* the light of the world (8.12, 9.5)²

Setting of Chapter 9: The Feast of Booths

The Mishnah reports, "There was no courtyard in Jerusalem which was not made bright by the light" (Sukka 5.3b). With torches in their hands, people danced and sang in festal joy throughout the night, celebrating God's presence with them in the pillar of fire during the nights of the Exodus.³

Structure of Chapter: A Seven Act Play

"The message that Jesus is the light of the world [from chapter 8] is enacted in a series of seven interrogations in John 9:

1. John 9.1-7—Jesus and the blind man.
2. John 9.8-12—the neighbors of the man
3. John 9.13-17—The Pharisees and the man
4. John 9.18-23—The Pharisees and the parents of the man
5. John 9.24-34—The Pharisees and the man, again
6. John 9.35-39—Jesus and the blind man, again
7. John 9.40-41—The Pharisees and Jesus"⁴

¹ Clement of Alexandria *ca.* 150-215 A.D.

² See also 6.20; 8.24, 28, 58; 18.5

³ Kevin Quast, *Reading the Gospel of John* (NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 72

⁴ Quast, *ibid.*, p. 71

Notes

- Verses 1-7:** Jesus heals a man born blind
- Verses 8-12:** The man's neighbors question whether he was indeed the one born blind
- Verses 13-17:** The man who was healed is brought before the Pharisees who are divided since Jesus did this on a Sabbath.
- Verses 18-23:** The man's parents are brought in to verify the miracle; but fearful of the Jews they refuse any statement that might cause them to be expelled from the synagogue.
- Verses 24-34:** The interrogated becomes the interrogator—the facts prove Jesus is from God, but the Pharisees will not listen, and put the man out of the synagogue.
- Verses 35-41:** The man who was blind becomes a disciple of Jesus while the Pharisees through their own words show that they are the ones who are truly blind.

The transition from physical blindness to sight was only a precursor to this ultimate journey from spiritual blindness to the light of belief.⁵

John 8...deals with the way in which Jesus reveals the Father. John 9 shows the world's response.⁶

⁵ Quast, *op. cit.*, p. 75

⁶ Quast, *ibid.*, p. 76