

Who is the Blinder of Eyes and Hardener of Hearts in John 12:40?

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After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them. Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.” Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him. (John 12:36–41)¹

In offering this summarizing explanation for why so many people did not believe in Jesus, John quotes Isaiah twice. The first quote is from Isaiah 53:1. The second quote, from Isaiah (6:9–10), is the one I will focus on. John uses this quote to say that to be saved, the people needed to understand with their heart who Jesus was and why he had come, but that they could not do this because their eyes had been blinded and their hearts hardened.² Isaiah 6 was central in early Christian apolo-

¹ Unless otherwise specified, biblical quotes are taken from the NRSV.

² Some manuscripts read ἐπώρωσεν (or other forms of this verb) while others read ἐπήρωσεν (or other forms of that verb). The UBS textual commentary favors the former reading, but ranks it “C” (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998], 203). Πηρώω is translated as “to cause physical impairment, disable, maim” by Fredrick W. Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 812, while πωρόω means to harden or petrify (Danker, ed., *Greek-English Lexicon*, 900). The difference in meaning is actually not great, and the two verbs are confused in other scriptural passages (cf. John Painter, “The Quotation of Scripture and Unbelief in John 12:36b–43,” in *The Gospels and the*

getics; the synoptic evangelists also quote it to explain why some people believed and others did not.³ But John's use of this passage deserves a closer look. Who is it that blinded people's eyes and their hardened their hearts? Commentators tend to assume that it is God that has hardened their hearts;⁴ this interpretation finds support in the Masoretic text for

Scriptures of Israel, ed. Craig A. Evans and W. Richard Stegner [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994], 429–458 [450]). Maarten J. J. Menken, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form* (Kampen, NL: Pharos, 1996), 104, argues that ἐπλήρωσεν is more likely to be original, but his interpretation of the passage does not hinge on this verb. I follow the UBS reading.

³ For a thorough study on the use of Isa 6:9–10 in the New Testament, see Craig A. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isa 6:9–10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989). I disagree with Evans' interpretation of John 12:40, however.

⁴ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 430–431: "It can hardly be questioned that John meant that the hardening of Israel was intended by God"; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36 (Waco: Word, 1987), 216; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, AB 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 486: "In John's rendition it is God who has blinded the eyes of the people"; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 448; Scott Celsor, "The Human Response in the Creation and Formation of Faith: A Narrative Analysis of John 12:20–50 and Its Application to the Doctrine of Justification," *HBT* 30 (2008): 115–135 (121): "verses 38–40 portray God as one who blinds the eyes of humanity, so that they cannot believe"; Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 132: "according to vv. 39–40 this unbelief is not only predicted, but is actually produced by God: 'For this reason they were unable to believe,' because again Isaiah has said, 'He [God] <sic> has blinded their eyes...'" ; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 883–885; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 234, 459; J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 710: "Not only has God not 'drawn' these people or 'given' them faith, but he has 'blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts' to make sure they would *not* repent and be healed!"; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 536: "The Divine sovereignty is strongly insisted upon," 537: "John makes it clear that the hand of God is in the whole process." Heikki Räisänen, *The Idea of Divine Hardening: A Comparative Study of the Notion of Divine Hardening, Leading Astray and Inciting to Evil in the Bible*

Isaiah 6:9–10 where God tells his prophet to dull the minds, stop the ears, and shut the eyes of the people, so that they do not believe. Their inability to believe appears to be in accordance with God's will.⁵

Go and say to this people: "Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand." Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed. (Isa 6:9–10)

In the Hebrew text, it is God who has willed that the eyes of the people be shut and their hearts hardened; this reading fits well with the use given the passage in Mark 4:11–12. John does not give a straight translation of the Hebrew, however. Rather he seems to combine expressions from the Septuagint and the Masoretic text, in addition to making other changes to the text.⁶ Silva's translation of the relevant passage in the Septuagint reads:

For this people's heart has grown fat, and with their ears they have heard heavily, and they have shut their eyes so that they might not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.⁷

In the Septuagint, God does not ask the prophet to make it impossible for the people to hear his word; here the people have closed their eyes all by themselves.⁸ In John's version of the quote, someone else is responsi-

and the *Qur'an* (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 1972), 92; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John. Volume Two: Commentary on Chapters 5–12* (Burns & Oates, 1980), 416: [the Johannine text] "attributes the blinding and hardening to God directly and without disguise."

⁵ Compare also Isa 63:17.

⁶ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 99–122.

⁷ Moisés Silva, trans., "Esaias," in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 823–875 (830).

⁸ Compare Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC 33A (Waco: Word Books, 1993), 374: "The LXX describes conditions for which the people are responsible... It is the unbelieving people who have shut their own eyes."

ble for the people not being able to see. The verbs “blinded” and “hardened” are in the third person singular, while the final verb “heal” is in the first person singular as in the Septuagint. While Barrett suggested that John may simply have been quoting from memory,⁹ John generally chooses his words with care. Thus, John drops the reference to ears and hearing, because in the immediate context his guiding metaphor is belief as seeing. John presumably changed the verb forms for a reason, perhaps to show that they refer to two different agents. Who would he then be speaking about? Most commentators who address this issue suggest that John is implying that God had blinded the people, and that Jesus is the one who would have healed them. This interpretation is developed especially carefully by Menken.¹⁰ But I will argue that John is implying that the people’s blindness was caused by the “prince of this world,” i.e., the devil. This interpretation was put forward by Blank in 1964 and by Painter first in 1974 and again in greater detail in 1994, but has since largely been ignored.¹¹ It deserves more attention. I begin by discussing Menken’s interpretation, and then present Painter’s explanation and explain why it is better. Finally, I briefly discuss theological implications of Painter’s interpretation that may have contributed to its being ignored.

MENKEN’S INTERPRETATION

Maarten Menken, professor of New Testament at the Catholic Theological University, Utrecht, observed that John frequently quotes Old Testa-

⁹ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 431, also referred to in Keener, *Gospel of John*, 883.

¹⁰ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 99–122.

¹¹ Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 537, mentions Painter’s interpretation in a footnote but doesn’t do anything with it. Celsor (“Human Response,” 130–131) refers to Painter approvingly, but, as we shall see, only follows him halfway. Richard Bauckham, *The Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015) and Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) do not refer to Painter’s articles. For other authors that have advocated interpretations similar to Painter’s see Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 109, n. 37.

ment passages in a form different from the Masoretic text and the Septuagint. In a series of articles Menken tries “first to establish the source of the quotation as precisely as possible, and then to explain the changes the evangelist made in the source.”¹² In an article analyzing the Old Testament quote in John 12:40, Menken argues that John’s quotes Isaiah 6 the way he does for a reason. Menken argues that where the Septuagint uses κύριος in Isaiah 6, John takes it to refer to the pre-existent Jesus. Thus, it was Jesus’ glory that the prophet saw (Isaiah 6:1, cf. John 12:41 and 17:5), and it was with him that he spoke.¹³ Hence the first person verb form refers to the pre-existent Jesus; Jesus wished to heal the people, but it was not possible.¹⁴ The third person verb forms refer to God in Menken’s view.¹⁵ He explains: “In several passages in John, God is presented as the one who determines salvation, and Jesus as the one who brings or realizes salvation.”¹⁶ Menken implies that John teaches that God determines who will be saved and who won’t, who will be able to receive Jesus’ words and who will not. He writes, “the idea of a negative determination to unbelief by God does not only occur in 12:40, but it is also found in 6:64–65; 9:39; 10:26.”¹⁷ Menken notes how early Jewish interpreters reinterpret Isa 6:9–10 so as to lay the blame on the people (as in the Septuagint) rather than on God, but John goes completely

¹² Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 19.

¹³ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 119–120.

¹⁴ Compare Jesus’ laments over not being able to protect Jerusalem and give it peace (Luke 13:34; 19:41–42). The view that the first person verb form refers to Jesus is shared by many commentators, including Painter (“Quotation of Scripture,” 437); I do not question that interpretation in this article.

¹⁵ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 120 “The evangelist can distinguish in the words that the Lord, who is for him Jesus, speaks in Isaiah 6, between the 1st pers. sg. referring to Jesus, and the 3rd pers. sg. referring to God.”

¹⁶ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 120. He refers to John 6:37, 39, 44–45; 10:27–29; 17:2, 6, 9, 24; 18:9.

¹⁷ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 111. So also Catrin H. Williams, “Composite Citations in the Gospel of John,” *Composite Citations in Antiquity, Volume 2: New Testament Uses*, ed. Sean A. Adams and Seth M. Ehorn (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 94–127 (112).

against this trend and therefore chooses not to quote the Septuagint.¹⁸ Menken's interpretation also fits the Old Testament account of how God hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he wouldn't listen to Moses despite all the miracles God wrought through him (Exod 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, etc.). As Schnackenburg had pointed out earlier, John has previously mentioned that the people who would not believe Jesus asked him to prove himself by performing a miracle, just as Moses had miraculously provided his people with manna in the wilderness (John 6:31). The reader is therefore primed to read the lack of response on the part of the people to the miracles that Jesus carried out (John 12:37) in light of the Israelites' grumbling despite Moses' miracles.¹⁹ They could not believe because God had not given them eyes to see. We find the same explanation in Deut 29:2–4; the people did not believe because God had not given them a mind to understand, ears to hear and eyes to see:

Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear."

Menken's interpretation yields a theology that matches Pauline passages like Rom 9:18 ("So then he [God] has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses") and 2 Thess 2:11–12 ("God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned").²⁰ The belief that God determined who would and who would not believe is clearly attested in the early Church; it is not unreasonable to suppose that John may have shared it. Most commentators interpret the passage along lines similar

¹⁸ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 114.

¹⁹ Schnackenburg, *Gospel according to John*, 272.

²⁰ Cf. D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 196.

to Menken; see the references in footnote 4 above. But there is another way of reading this text, which I will look at now.

PAINTER'S INTERPRETATION

John Painter, professor of theology at Charles Sturt University, Canberra, argues that the only interpretation of John's modification of Isaiah 6:9–10 that fits the immediate context of the passage and the theology of the Gospel as a whole is the one that identifies the ruler of this world as the one who has blinded people's eyes.²¹ The notion that God would be the one to blind people and keep them from being healed by Jesus reflects an "opposition between the Father and the Son" that is "irreconcilable with Johannine thought."²² According to John's Gospel, the Son does his Father's work (cf. John 5:19);²³ they don't work at cross-purposes.²⁴ Menken's interpretation is consistent with the Masoretic text

²¹ John Painter, "Eschatological Faith in the Gospel of John," in *Reconciliation and Hope*, ed. Robert Banks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 36–52; and Painter, "Quotation of Scripture." According to Menken (*Old Testament Quotations*, 109) this interpretation is also found in Josef Blank, *Krisis: Untersuchungen zur johanneischen Christologie und Eschatologie* (Freiburg: Lambertus, 1964); R. A. Holst, *The Relation of John, Chapter Twelve, to the So-Called Johannine Book of Glory* (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1974). Loisy considers it. Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to John*, 531, notes that this interpretation is found in Cyril of Alexandria, but does not explain why he does not accept it.

²² Painter, "Eschatological Faith," 46.

²³ "Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.'"

²⁴ Schnackenburg has the same line of interpretation as Menken, but pretends that there is nothing contradictory in this reading. He writes, "God has ... deprived these people of the possibility of salvation and 'healing through his Son, the eschatological bringer of salvation. This allocation of 'roles' to God and Jesus, which at the same time shows their close cooperation, is so typically Johannine..." (*Gospel According to John*, 415).

of Isaiah, but as Painter asks, “If John did not want to change the meaning, why did he change the reading of the text?”²⁵ John could simply have quoted the MT, but he did not do so for a reason.

Painter writes that the interpretation of John 12:40 that he proposes is found already in Origen and in Cyril of Alexandria.²⁶ It should be noted however that in both cases the authorship of the extant texts is in question. Cyril of Alexandria deals with John 12:40 in book 8 of his commentary, which unfortunately can only be reconstructed on the basis of fragments found in catenae compiled by Nicetas of Heraclea in the eleventh century.²⁷ Their ascription to Cyril has been questioned. In this text “Cyril” also notes that John’s text differs from the Greek text,²⁸ and interprets the text which reads, in Randell’s translation, as follows:

... as the actual wording of the prophet goes, he has not said that “God” blinded them. And it is likely that some one else did this, in order that the Jews *should* not *convert* and find healing. But even though we should accept the supposition that God blinded them, yet it must be understood in this way—that He allowed them to suffer blinding at the hands of the devil..²⁹

The commentator thus believes that the one doing the blinding is the devil, but he adds that God allowed that to happen.

Painter also refers to a catena fragment attributed to Origen that offers a similar interpretation, reading this passage in light of 2 Cor 4:3.³⁰ That fragment supposedly comes from a part of Origen’s commentary on John that was otherwise not preserved. Heine does not in-

²⁵ Painter, “Quotation of Scripture,” 439.

²⁶ Painter, “Eschatological Faith,” 46.

²⁷ Thomas Randell, *Commentary on the Gospel According to S. John. By S. Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria*, Library of the Fathers (London: W. Smith, 1885), 160–161. The newer translation by David R. Maxwell (*Cyril of Alexandria: Commentary on John*, vol. 2., ed. Joel C. Elowsky, Ancient Christian Texts [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015], 111) does not differ substantially.

²⁸ Cyril incorrectly assumes that John is following the Hebrew text.

²⁹ Randell, *Commentary*, 160–161.

³⁰ For the Greek text see Erwin Preuschen, *Origenes Werke IV: Commentarius in Iohannem* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1903), 554–556.

clude this fragment in his translation of Origen's commentary, explaining, "where we have no corroborating evidence from other texts of Origen ... we can never be certain that we have his thoughts, much less his words, in a fragment from the *catenae*."³¹ In short, we have evidence that an interpretation of John 12:40 along the same lines as Painter's was put forward in the Middle Ages or earlier, but we don't know who it was that advanced this interpretation.

READING JOHN IN LIGHT OF THE COMBAT MYTH

Ten years ago, I wrote an article for this journal on the references to "the ruler of this world" in John's Gospel.³² I was guided by the assumption that John has used the combat myth to structure his narrative of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection. The Near Eastern combat myth is a narrative telling of the battle between a good god and a dragon or other evil figure; it has been retold and reformulated in a variety of religious traditions. Forsyth has traced the course of this myth as from Gilgamesh to Augustine and offers the following summary of a common Christian version of the plot:

A rebel god challenges the power of Yahweh, takes over the whole earth as an extension of his empire, and rules it through the power of sin and death.... This dark tyrant, the "god of this world" as Paul called him, is eventually thwarted by the son of God (or man) in the most mysterious episode of the Christian story, the crucifixion, which oddly combined both defeat and victory. As Luther would testify, the struggle with Satan continues, however, and we wait still for the end of his story in the end of history.³³

³¹ Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel of John, Books 13–32* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 10. On Origen's fragments, see further Ronald E. Heine, "Can the Catena Fragments of Origen's Commentary on John Be Trusted?" *Vigiliae Christianae* 40/2 (1986): 118–134.

³² Torsten Löfstedt, "The Ruler of this World," *SEÅ* 74 (2009): 55–79.

³³ Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 6–7.

Although he considers the combat myth central to many Christian traditions, Forsyth does not carefully examine its place in John's Gospel, where I find it receives one of its clearest expressions. I found that John uses the expression "the ruler of this world" to refer to the devil whom he treats as an independently acting supernatural being standing in opposition to God. John speaks of the ruler of this world being driven out of heaven and being condemned for having conspired to Christ's crucifixion. He no longer has any influence in the heavenly court over the followers of Jesus, but as evidenced in the high priestly prayer, he nevertheless remains a force to be reckoned with on earth.³⁴

In studying the immediate contexts of John's references to "the ruler of this world," I noted that when John (12:40) quotes Isaiah 6:9–10 he introduces a curious change in the verb forms. I wondered whether this passage should also be read in the light of the combat myth. Is it not possible that John is attributing to the devil people's inability to believe? I consulted commentaries but found none that interpreted the text in this way. Reasoning that other scholars were better informed than I was, I abandoned that line of reasoning. However, in the course of my continued research I have found that scholars have consistently downplayed dualistic tendencies in New Testament texts. Therefore I decided to revisit this passage. In so doing, I found more support for my interpretation in Johannine literature, Pauline literature and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Finally, I came across the aforementioned articles by Painter, which had been neglected by the exegetical community. In the pages that follow, I will once again read John in light of the combat myth and will argue for an interpretation of John 12:36–40 that builds on the one that Painter put forward.

While few exegetes interpret the devil as the one doing the blinding in this passage, the immediate context gives us reason to do so. The ruler of this world is referred to a few verses earlier (12:31): "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out."

³⁴ Löfstedt, "The Ruler of this World," 76–77.

The Gospel does not explain on what grounds the ruler of the world would be driven out of heaven,³⁵ but in light of verse 12:40, we may surmise that one reason may be that he had kept people away from God. The verse that follows upon the reference to the judgment of the world and its ruler is also significant: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (12:32). While the ruler of this world had kept people from seeing the truth of the Gospel during Jesus’ public ministry, that would change after Jesus had been “lifted up from the earth,” that is to say after he had been crucified and glorified; the two are portrayed as a single event in John: “When Jesus was lifted up the power of evil was broken (12:31f) and faith on a universal scale became possible.”³⁶ It was only now that the Spirit of truth could be given to people everywhere (cf. John 16:13).³⁷

This interpretation fits the way that the devil is characterized in John in general. In John’s Gospel sin is primarily unbelief (3:18; 8:24; 16:9) and the devil is characterized as a liar and deceiver, rather than as a tempter. The devil is the one who keeps people from believing:

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God. (John 8:43–47)

Belief in Jesus is both what God wants people to have and what he makes possible. John probably has both meanings in mind when he

³⁵ Löfstedt, “The Ruler of this World,” 64–68.

³⁶ Painter, “Eschatological Faith,” 47.

³⁷ Compare also John 16:8–11: the Advocate would prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment—sin is not believing in Jesus, righteousness is about Jesus going to the Father, and judgment about the ruler of the world being condemned. I suggest again that he is condemned for not having let people believe in Jesus and thus come to God.

writes, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (6:29). It follows that lack of belief is not God’s work, but rather the work of the one who ruled this world.

Our passage is framed with references to light and darkness (John 12:35–36, 46).³⁸ These are central symbols for John. He introduces his Gospel with allusions to the light of creation, the light that gives life. This light, he says, was coming into the world (1:9), and the reader is led to understand that somehow the primordial light of life is none other than Jesus (12:46). In the prologue and again in the twelfth chapter, the light stands in opposition to darkness. Considering that John uses the abstract noun “light” to refer to a person, we might suspect that its antonym could also refer to a person, especially when it used in the same sentence. In the prologue John wrote, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (1:5). Interpreters disagree as to whether *καταλαμβάνω* should be translated “overcome” or “comprehend,” rather like the English verb “to grasp,” *καταλαμβάνω* can have both meanings. It is likely that John is letting the verb have both meanings at once, allowing the sentence to be understood in two ways that are both true.³⁹ Jesus is the light that brings enlightenment; those who reject him lack understanding. But Jesus is also the light that brings life, and the devil, a murderer from the beginning, tried to defeat him. One way that he sought to defeat Jesus was by keeping people from understanding who Jesus really is. We meet the same verb *καταλαμβάνω* again in the immediate context of our verse in the twelfth chapter:

The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light. (John 12:35–36)

³⁸ So also Painter, “Quotation of Scripture,” 443.

³⁹ Cf. Carson, *John*, 138.

Here *καταλαμβάνω* is translated “overtake”; “comprehend” would not make any sense in this context. In his concluding account of Jesus’ public ministry in this twelfth chapter, John intentionally offers parallels to the prologue to the Gospel. This gives added support to the more physical understanding of the verb as ‘overcome’ in 1:5. Both in the prologue and in chapter 12, darkness is portrayed not only as the absence of light or the absence of understanding, but also as a force that actively opposed Jesus and those who would follow him. Those who do not walk with Jesus or believe in him are in the realm of darkness, that is, under the sway of the ruler of this world. Only those who believe in Jesus can become children of light, that is to say children of God (cf. 1 Thess 5:5; compare John 1:12).⁴⁰

John 12:35–40 should also be read in the light of 1 John 2:11. There are striking similarities in vocabulary, style and theology between the two texts and there are good reasons to believe that John’s Gospel and 1 John were written by the same man.⁴¹ These similarities include the use of the imagery of light and darkness and of the verb *τυφλόω* “to blind” in these two passages. *τυφλόω* is not an especially common verb, being only found three times in the New Testament. As was the case in John’s Gospel, darkness in 1 John is an active force.⁴² In this passage, darkness personified causes blindness: “whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to

⁴⁰ Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 705.

⁴¹ So also Donald A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 727, who remarks, “the language and theology of the two documents is the same.” Also Richard Bauckham, *Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 73; Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 9–14; Köstenberger, *Theology of John’s Gospel*, 86–93, and many other commentators.

⁴² Cf. Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to John*, 271, who writes regarding darkness in 1 John 2:11: “the active formulation allows darkness to appear as an active force” and regarding John 12:35: “the language ... suggests a view of darkness as attacking men like a wicked aggressor.”

go, because the darkness has brought on blindness” (1 John 2:11, NRSV).⁴³ The RSV reflects the original Greek better, even though it might grate on the ears of eye doctors: “the darkness has blinded his eyes.” In his first epistle and in the Gospel, John associates God with light, never with darkness (1 John 1:5). Darkness opposed the light sent by God, but did not manage to overcome it. As in John 1:5, John doesn’t care whether his metaphor is true to the laws of physics. For him darkness is a force, rather than just the absence of light. It tried to overcome the light, but without success. A few verses later, in 1 John 2, the author refers to his young readers as those who “have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:13, 14), because the word of God abides in them. John is associating unbelief not only with the metaphorical darkness of ignorance and sin but also with an evil agent, the devil.⁴⁴ He does not clearly separate the two; the devil blinds the people with ignorance and the people let themselves be blinded.⁴⁵ As Painter notes, John’s choice of verb is significant. While the Septuagint and Masoretic text speak of eyes being shut, John speaks of them being blinded.⁴⁶ Those who are blind cannot start seeing again simply by deciding to do so. In the first century context, it would take some form of divine intervention for them to see again.

Painter notes the striking similarities between our passage in John and 2 Cor 4:4: “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory

⁴³ Cf. Painter, “Eschatological Faith,” 46.

⁴⁴ Kruse, *Letters of John*, 86, does not identify the darkness with the devil: “In 1 John the expression ‘darkness’ stands for either sinful behaviour or the realm in which sinful behaviour predominates.” But that realm is the same realm that “lies under the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

⁴⁵ Compare Acts 26:17–18, where Jesus says to Paul in his vision: “I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” See also 1 John 5:19–20.

⁴⁶ Painter, “Quotation of Scripture,” 448–449.

of Christ, who is the image of God.”⁴⁷ This is the third instance where the verb “to blind” is used in the New Testament; the other two being our text (John 12:40) and the passage in 1 John that was discussed above.⁴⁸ The expression “the god of this world” (ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου), which only occurs here in the New Testament, clearly refers to the devil, and may be compared with John’s expression “the ruler of this world” (ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου) which was used as a reference to the devil just a few verses earlier in this chapter in John (12:31; see also 14:30; 16:11).⁴⁹ The terms used show how much power the devil was thought to have over mankind; he had the position God was supposed to have. In this context in 2 Corinthians, Paul also uses similar light imagery regarding Jesus as John does in his Gospel. 2 Cor 4:6 offers an especially striking parallel: “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” If the early church was closely knit, it would not be surprising to find that two of its leaders, Paul and John, had similar ways of explaining why some cannot believe the Gospel; the god or ruler of the world had blinded them. Unfortunately for my argument, Paul is inconsistent in his explanations for why some people do not believe. As was mentioned, in other places Paul writes that God is ultimately behind their inability to believe (Rom 9:18; 2 Thess 2:11).⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Painter, “Eschatological Faith,” 46.

⁴⁸ Recall that this verb was not used in the Septuagint of Isaiah 6:9–10, nor was its Hebrew counterpart used in the Masoretic text.

⁴⁹ See Derek R. Brown, *The God of This Age: Satan in the Churches and Letters of the Apostle Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 130–140. Brown does not note the potential parallel in John 12:40. See also Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 218–219. Compare also Eph 2:2, 6:12.

⁵⁰ Like Paul, Luke is not too clear on who is ultimately behind people’s inability to believe. Luke quotes Isa 6:9–10 at the end of his second book (Acts 28:26–27), where he follows the Septuagint; “This people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes.” No third party is blamed for this. In his version

If John is indeed attributing the blindness and hardheartedness of people to an evil power, he was not alone in his time to do so. In addition to the Pauline parallel noted above, we find similar thoughts in texts used by Essenes at about the same time. The Essene Community Rule similarly attributes people's blindness of eyes, hardness of hearing, stiffness of neck and hardness of heart, not to God, but to an evil power, namely the spirit of deceit (1QS 4 9–11).

To the spirit of deceit belong greed, sluggishness in the service of justice, wickedness, falsehood, pride, haughtiness of heart, dishonesty, trickery, cruelty, much insincerity, impatience, much foolishness, impudent enthusiasm for appalling acts performed in a lustful passion, filthy paths in the service of impurity, blasphemous tongue, blindness of eyes, hardness of hearing, stiffness of neck, hardness of heart in order to walk in all the paths of darkness and evil cunning.⁵¹

John uses the same dualistic terminology as the Community Rule in his First Epistle, speaking of the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6).⁵² In the context of this letter, the spirit of error is the same as the spirit of the antichrist (4:3), and is connected to “the one who is in the world” (4:4), which we may identify with the expression “the ruler of this world” in John's Gospel:

of the parable of the sower, Luke echoes the language of Isa 6:9–10 twice. In explaining why he interprets this parable for his disciples and not for others (Luke 8:10), Jesus paraphrases this passage in Isaiah, suggesting that peoples' inability to understand is in accordance with his intentions and the word of Scripture. But in his interpretation of the parable, Jesus says among other things, “[t]he ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12). The final words (“so that they may not believe and be saved”) is again an allusion to our passage in Isaiah, but here the devil is the one to blame for people not believing (cf. Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995], 116).

⁵¹ Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 77.

⁵² Cf. Painter (“Quotation of Scripture,” 454) who writes regarding the Spirit of Error, “This title is more or less a Greek equivalent of the Semitic Spirit of Falsehood.”

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:2–6)

Those who do not believe that Jesus had come from God are under the influence of the spirit of error. In the context of John's writings, there is no reason to assume that the spirit of error was sent by God, considering that John specifically writes "every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God."⁵³

Following this interpretation of John, it is God who gives belief, but he is not the one who causes unbelief. He gives his Word or light to the world; he is not the cause of darkness. He gave a select few individuals to his Son to keep already during his earthly ministry (John 6:37, 39, 44–45; 10:25–29; 17:2, 6, 9, 24; 18:9), but John says nothing about him consigning others to the devil, contrary to what some have asserted. Being under the devil is the default option for humanity in John; those who have not been drawn to God or chosen by Christ belong to the world and remain under the power of darkness (see John 15:19; 1 John 5:19–20).⁵⁴ Painter hints that a similar state of affairs is reflected in the Synoptic accounts of the Beelzebub controversy.⁵⁵ In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus explains his exorcisms by asking rhetorically: "How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his property, without first tying up the strong man?" (Matt 12:29; cf. Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21–22). Jesus'

⁵³ In 2 Thess 2:11 that it was God who sent the powerful delusion that caused people not to believe, but we are focusing on understanding John's theology, not Paul's.

⁵⁴ Cf. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 196: "Jesus does not come to assign some neutral men to life and other neutral men to condemnation. He comes rather to a world already condemned (3.36) and proceeds to save."

⁵⁵ Painter, "Eschatological Faith," 45.

point is that all those people whom he had delivered from demons had been under Satan's power. In the Synoptic Gospels, exorcisms show how Jesus liberates people from Satan's dominion. John does not include any exorcisms in his Gospel, however, perhaps because his point is that Satan was *de facto* ruler of all people, not just an unfortunate few.⁵⁶

Evil in John's Gospel is the work of people and of the devil, not of God. There are elements of determinism and predestination in John,⁵⁷ but, with the significant exception of Judas (John 6:64; 13:11), there are no traces of God predestining people to destruction in this Gospel.⁵⁸ In the case of Judas, Jesus knew that he was the one who would betray him (John 6:64; 13:11), but arguably this speaks of Jesus' conviction that Scripture must be fulfilled and his knowledge of Judas' heart (cf. John 2:24–25; 13:11, 18), not individual reprobation strictly speaking. Jesus recognized that even though he had chosen him, Judas served the devil (6:70). He even speaks of Judas as “the devil” himself.⁵⁹ The devil is the one who lies behind apostasy in John's text. It was the devil, not God, who put it in the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus (John 13:2).

John 17:12 is somewhat problematical for my thesis, as it refers to Judas as “the one destined to be lost” in the NRSV.⁶⁰ The expression “the one destined to be lost” is literally “the son of perdition” or “the son of destruction” (ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας). The same expression is found in

⁵⁶ Graham H. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 196, 204. Other reasons John does not include exorcisms could be that he considered them “commonplace and of ambiguous origin” (Graham H. Twelftree, “In the Name of Jesus: A Conversation with Critics,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 17 (2008): 157–169 [162]).

⁵⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM, 2006), 326.

⁵⁸ Cf. Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to John*, 273: “the evangelist does not envisage absolute reprobation of individuals.”

⁵⁹ On the translation “the devil,” see Löfstedt, “The Ruler of this World,” 71, and Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 417.

⁶⁰ “While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.”

2 Thess 2:3 in reference to the man of lawlessness.⁶¹ As the NRSV translates it, Judas was destined to be lost, but we don't have to think of it in terms of double predestination. Carson explains that while "son of perdition" may designate someone who is destined to be destroyed, other translations are also possible. For example, "in Is. 57:4 MT's 'children of unrighteousness' becomes, in the LXX, *tekna apōleias*, 'children of perdition.'"⁶² Those who are unrighteous will be destroyed. Judas will be destroyed because he turned against Jesus, as scripture promised someone would do. Although scripture was fulfilled, it remains the case that it was the devil's work that Judas carried out.

DID JESUS CAUSE PEOPLE NOT TO BE ABLE TO SEE?

A case can be made against my interpretation if John 12:40 is read in the light of John 9:39, which also reflects Isaiah 6:9. In the Masoretic text of Isaiah 6, the prophet's preaching results in the doom of the people,⁶³ and in John 9:39 Jesus says that for some people blindness is the result of his coming to the world:

Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains." (John 9:39–41)

Blindness is not said to be the devil's doing here; on the contrary, Jesus knows that a result of his ministry is that some will become blind. Some have argued on this basis that it is God, or Jesus acting on behalf of

⁶¹ "Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction." The equivalent Hebrew expression is also found in the Essene Community Rule (1QS 9 17) and the Damascus Document (CD 6 15, 13 14).

⁶² Carson, *John*, 563.

⁶³ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 188.

God, that blinded the people also in John 12:40.⁶⁴ But unlike the Masoretic text, John does not say outright that God willed their unbelief, and I don't think he implies it either. John's language in 9:39–41 is intentionally paradoxical. It follows on the story of how Jesus healed a man who was born blind which John relates in considerable detail. Here he makes it clear that this blindness was not divine punishment for sin, contrary to what his disciples thought, but the reason he was blind was "so that God's works might be revealed in him" (John 9:3). Jesus heals the man, and shows how he truly is the light of the world (9:5). Is it now the case that Jesus actually causes blindness? As Carson notes, on the surface John 9:39 contradicts John 3:17 and 12:47, where Jesus says he did not come to judge or condemn the world.⁶⁵ The contradiction has been perhaps too readily resolved by commentators. Carson writes, for example, that Jesus did come to save; "but saving some entails condemning others."⁶⁶ The point is rather that people's reactions to Jesus show their true loyalties. Bultmann explains, "This is the paradox of the revelation, that in order to bring grace it must also give offence, and so can turn to judgment. In order to be grace it must uncover sin; he who resists this binds himself to his sin, and so through the revelation sin for the first time becomes definitive."⁶⁷ It is their servitude to sin (8:34), which amounts to servitude to the devil (8:44), that causes some people to reject Jesus' message and thus become blind.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ E.g. Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 710: "In some sense he who 'has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart'... is Jesus himself, or God acting through him. This is not as far-fetched as it sounds, given that Jesus earlier claimed for himself a role in this hardening process after the healing of the man born blind."

⁶⁵ Carson, *John*, 377.

⁶⁶ Carson, *John*, 377.

⁶⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 341–342, also quoted in Carson, *John*, 377.

⁶⁸ Compare also 1 John 3:8 "Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil." In Romans Paul also uses sin personified in the same contexts as others refer to the devil (Torsten Löfstedt, "Paul, Sin and Satan: The Root of Evil according to Romans," *SEA* 75 [2010]: 109–134).

The paradoxical language in John 9:39 (“I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind”) serves a rhetorical purpose. John has Jesus express himself in the way he does so that readers may ask themselves whether they too are in denial of their own blindness and their need of healing.⁶⁹ Rather than causing their blindness, Jesus’ words and deeds make the spiritual blindness of his opponents evident.

WHY HAS PAINTER’S READING BEEN REJECTED?

Painter’s interpretation of John 12:36–40 fits the theology of John’s Gospel quite well. One might ask why so few commentators have even considered this reading. Perhaps the main reason that scholars have not accepted Painter’s interpretation is that it goes against what they have been taught. Church tradition is strong. Scott Celsor agrees with Painter that John 12:40 should be read in the light of 1 John 2:11, but he seeks to combine this reading with the established reading that ultimately God determines which people will be blinded.

With the introduction of the fact that in 1 John 2:11 it is the darkness, as a personified force opposing God, that blinds people, one could understand John 12:40 as only an indirect action of God. It can be justly argued that God only indirectly blinds people by abandoning them, or perhaps better, that people are blinded as a result of abandoning God. Then, once unprotected by God, the forces of evil, the darkness, actually blind the people.⁷⁰

Celsor is on the right track, but I would argue that there is no reason to think John would consider blindness to be even an indirect action of God.⁷¹ Celsor claims to agree with Painter’s interpretation, but he cannot keep himself from saying that these verses teach that God “blinds the

⁶⁹ Compare 1 John 1:8 “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

⁷⁰ Celsor, “Human Response,” 130.

⁷¹ His interpretation is similar to the one ascribed to Cyril of Alexandria quoted above.

eyes of humanity.”⁷² Celsor is consciously writing within the Roman Catholic tradition;⁷³ this might constrain his interpretative freedom.

Another reason that this interpretation has been neglected is that there has long been a tendency to downplay the place of the devil in John’s theology.⁷⁴ The devil doesn’t take much space in this Gospel. As van der Watt notes, John focuses on “the positive side of the message”; he tells more about Jesus than about his enemies.⁷⁵ But that does not mean that the devil does not play a significant role here. The devil, also referred to as the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and the evil one (John 17:15; 1 John 2:13; 5:18), and as darkness personified, keeps people from God, from believing in God’s Word.⁷⁶ In John’s writings, the devil is not someone who does God’s dirty work, as some would characterize him based on Old Testament texts.⁷⁷ Rather he is the enemy of God; he is referred to as a sinner (1 John 3:18), a liar and a murderer (John 8:44). He is the opposite of God who gives life and truth, who loves humanity (John 3:16) and in whom there is no darkness (cf. 1 John 1:5). As the prologue implies, he tried to overcome the light of God but without success. As Twelfree writes, “the whole Johan-

⁷² Celsor, “Human Response,” 121.

⁷³ Celsor’s explicit goal is to defend the Roman Catholic view of the doctrine of justification; he concludes: “In this critical passage [John 12:20–50]... one discovers that John corroborates Catholic concerns that the gift of God’s grace, God’s light, empowers and requires a human response” (Celsor, “Human Response,” 115).

⁷⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament, With a new introduction by Robert Morgan*, vol. 2 (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 17, considered it “very doubtful” that the devil was “a reality for John in the mythical sense” I discuss this in Löfstedt, “The Ruler of this World.”

⁷⁵ Jan van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 39.

⁷⁶ That the evil one is the same as the ruler of this world is clearly implied in 1 John 5:19. Compare also the expression “the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev 12:9; 20:3, 10). See also “the world deceiver” (Did. 16:4). Apos. Con. 7:32 identifies the world deceiver with the devil.

⁷⁷ Cf. Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ryan E. Stokes, “Satan, YHWH’s Executioner,” *JBL* 133 (2014): 251–270.

nine ministry of Jesus remains a battlefield with Satan.”⁷⁸ Satan is a formidable foe; it is only through Jesus’ death and resurrection that he is driven out from his heavenly position of power (John 12:31).⁷⁹ Indeed, he evidently remains a threat to Jesus’ followers even after this, for John relates that Jesus intercedes for his disciples that they not fall prey to him (John 17:15).

Menken downplays Satan’s role as an independent character in John. He grants that there are passages in John that speak of the devil working through people, such as the Jews who had believed in Jesus (8:43–44) and Judas (6:70–71; 13:2), but he counters that these verses do not say anything regarding who it is that determines the devil’s actions.⁸⁰ He implies that John shares the view that ultimately God determines what the devil does; the devil does not act in opposition to God. In this view, God can influence people to make both good and bad moral decisions;⁸¹ there is thus no reason to think God is not the one who blinded people’s hearts. We can find support for such a view of the relationship between God and the devil in the prologue to Job or in Luke 22:31, but I do not find support for it in John.

If we follow Menken’s interpretation of our passage, God at one point intended for most people to not be able to believe, but then for some reason he decided to make it possible for them to believe again.⁸² Following Painter’s explanation on the other hand, God’s will was con-

⁷⁸ Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 196. Similarly, Graham R. Smith (who writes within the Charismatic Anglican tradition) notes, “for John the whole of Jesus’s ministry is a battle with Satan and the realm of darkness” (*The Church Militant: Spiritual Warfare in the Anglican Charismatic Renewal* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016], 194).

⁷⁹ For this interpretation see Löfstedt, “The Ruler of this World.”

⁸⁰ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 109.

⁸¹ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 109: “The idea that God somehow causes morally wrong human decisions, occurs not only in some Johannine passages... but also several times in the OT and elsewhere in early Jewish and early Christian literature...”

⁸² Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 537, speculates (presumably inspired by Romans 11:25) that God kept Jews from believing so that the gentiles could be given the opportunity to respond to the Gospel.

sistently for all to be saved, but people's slavery to sin and the devil made that impossible. People's inability to believe was foretold in Scripture, but according to my reading of John's reading of Isaiah, that does not mean that it was willed by God.⁸³ Until he was deposed through Jesus' exaltation, the ruler of this world kept people away from God against God's wishes. As Painter notes, John has modified the tenses of the verbs in his quote from Isaiah; while the Masoretic text uses the imperative (the prophet is told to shut the eyes of the people), John uses the perfect tense, signifying a completed event in the past; "he has blinded their eyes."⁸⁴ John explains why it was people did not believe in Jesus when he was with them; but now after the exaltation the situation is different, Satan's firm hold over humanity has been broken.

Interpreters who are accustomed to seeing scripture as a whole read John in the light of other biblical authors, and therefore downplay its dualism. Menken rejects Painter's interpretation in part because "the substitution of God by the devil is too much at variance with the obvious meaning of Isaiah's text."⁸⁵ Menken argues that had John been referring to the ruler of this world, he would have made that clearer in the preceding context. But perhaps the problem is that we are too well acquainted with the Masoretic text of Isaiah and to Paul's references to predestination to read what John has actually written. John's words could be seen as his interpretation of Isaiah; he explains how it is that people became blind. It was not in accordance with God's will and it

⁸³ Contra Köstenberger, *Theology of John's Gospel*, 234: "the Jews' rejection of Jesus as Messiah fulfilled scriptural prophecy and thus occurred in keeping with the predestination and foreknowledge of God."

⁸⁴ Painter, "Quotation of Scripture," 447. According to Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 110, the Hebrew verbs may be interpreted either as imperatives or as *hiphil* perfects, depending on their vocalization; John chose to interpret them as *hiphil* perfects. According to R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 200, the Targum of Isa 6:9–10 "turns the whole of the first part of the pronouncement into a description of the antecedent state of the people..."

⁸⁵ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 109.

was not just their own doing. It was the work of the devil. Perhaps we are unwilling to appreciate the extent to which John's theology, and that of his original readers, is dualistic.

The Gospel according to John lies on the more dualistic side of a trajectory stretching from some brutally monotheistic Old Testament texts attributing the very existence of evil to God (see especially Isa 45:7) toward outright cosmological dualism, as we encounter later in Manichaeism.⁸⁶ In some forms of Second Temple Judaism we see a tendency over time to move away from attributing evil or temptation to God to attributing it only to people or to other spiritual powers. We find a classic example of such a shift when we compare how 2 Samuel (24:1) and 1 Chronicles (21:1) account for David's census. We can find another example in a retelling of the Exodus story. As was noted earlier, in Exodus it is clearly stated that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. But in a later retelling of this episode, it seems to have been Mastema who hardened the hearts of the Egyptians:

And on the fourteenth day, and on the fifteenth, and on the sixteenth, and on the seventeenth, and on the eighteenth Prince Mastema was bound and shut up from (coming) after the children of Israel so that he might not accuse them. And on the nineteenth day we released them so that they might help the Egyptians and pursue after the children of Israel. And he hardened their hearts and strengthened them. And it was conceived of by the Lord our God that he might smite the Egyptians and throw them into the midst of the sea. (Jub. 48:15–17)⁸⁷

Clearly, there were those in the late Second Temple period who avoided seeing God's actions in any way being behind unbelief and sin, preferring to attribute it rather to his enemy. I believe we can observe the same trajectory in how the Masoretic text of Isaiah was interpreted over

⁸⁶ On different kinds of dualism in relation to John's Gospel, see Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 109–129.

⁸⁷ Translation by O.S. Wintermute, "Jubilees: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. James Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 35–142, quote from p. 140. Michael Segal, *The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 218–222, argues, however, that in Jubilees 48:17, God is the one who hardened their hearts.

time. On a surface reading of the Hebrew text, God willed his people not to hear.⁸⁸ When the text was translated into Greek, the people themselves were made responsible for their lack of belief; they had decided to reject the word. If the interpretation that I argue for here is right, John follows this trajectory a step further. Now the people were unable to believe despite Jesus' signs because the devil had blinded them and hardened their hearts. As was noted earlier, this notion that an evil power (the god of this world or the spirit of deceit) lay behind unbelief is found also in 2 Cor 4:4 and in the Essene Community Rule. If John interpreted the blinder of eyes and hardener of hearts in Isaiah 6:10 as Satan, he may well have shared this interpretation with many contemporaries. Menken argued that this reading is so radically unlike the surface meaning of the Masoretic text that one would have expected John to specify more clearly that it was the devil that he was referring to, if that is indeed what he meant. But considering that John had just referred to the ruler of this world a few verses earlier, and considering his use of the imagery of light and darkness in the immediate context and his personification of darkness elsewhere in his Gospel and the First Epistle as an evil power, and considering that this kind of reinterpretation of Old Testament passages was not so unusual, I would argue that he saw no need to further specify who he was referring to: the devil was the blinder of eyes and hardener of hearts who had made it impossible for people to believe.

⁸⁸ It is of course possible that the prophet did not intend for these words to be taken literally, but that he, like Jesus in John 9:39, is speaking paradoxically. See discussion in France, *Gospel of Mark*, 200–201.