

## Worksheet #12: John 11:1–57

**Summary:** Having finished with the Festival Cycle, John's gospel takes an entirely unexpected turn in chapter 11 as it moves toward the close of the Book of Signs. John 11:1–3 suddenly introduces characters who are new in this gospel, yet well-known as intimate friends of Jesus to informed readers of the Synoptics. This sudden introduction of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha also introduces a disturbing problem—Lazarus (whom John's readers have only just met) is deathly ill.

As chapter 11 proceeds, there is frequently an element of surprise (often coupled with significant misunderstanding) that contributes to the elevated tension of the situation. We are kept in suspense throughout the story, up to the point where Jesus loudly “cries out” the words, “Lazarus, come forth!” (11:43). And to the surprise of all (except Jesus), Lazarus does exactly that (11:44).

The resurrection of Lazarus does not release all tension from this narrative, however. “Many” believe in Jesus, while “some” report this event to the Pharisees (11:45–46). In council, the high priests and Pharisees acknowledge that Jesus' signs will cause many to believe, which could potentially lead to their own removal from power by the Romans (11:47–48). It is at this moment that the high priest Caiaphas speaks, arguing with unwitting prescience that Jesus' death is *necessary* for the survival of the nation (11:49–50)—a statement which John interprets theologically to describe Jesus' substitutionary atonement for all peoples (11:51–52). The chapter then ends in a point of elevated tension, as the Jews in Jerusalem seek Jesus during the Passover feast (11:55–57).

### Abbreviated Outline<sup>1</sup> (current passage in bold):

- I. INTRODUCTION: THE WORD MADE FLESH (1:1-18)
- II. THE BOOK OF SIGNS: THE SIGNS OF THE MESSIAH (1:19-12:50)
  - A. *The Forerunner and the Coming of the Messiah* (1:19-51)
  - B. *The Cana Cycle: Jesus' Inaugural Signs and Representative Conversations* (2:1-4:54)
  - C. *The Festival Cycle: Additional Signs amidst Mounting Unbelief* (5-10)
    - 1. Sign 4 at an Unnamed Feast in Jerusalem: The Healing of the Lame Man (5:1-47)
    - 2. Sign 5: Galilean Passover: Feeding the Multitude and Bread of Life Discourse (6:1-71)
    - 3. Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1-8:59)
    - 4. Sign 6: The Healing of the Blind Man and the Good Shepherd Discourse (9-10)
  - D. ***Final Passover: Climactic Sign, the Raising of Lazarus, and Other Events* (11-12)**
    - 1. **Sign 7: The Raising of Lazarus (11)**
    - 2. Final Events of Jesus' Public Ministry (12)
- III. THE BOOK OF EXALTATION: PREPARING THE NEW MESSIANIC COMMUNITY AND THE PASSION OF JESUS (13-20)
  - A. *The Cleansing and Instruction of the New Covenant Community, including Jesus' Final Prayer* (13-17)
  - B. *The Passion Narrative* (18-19)
  - C. *Jesus' Resurrection and Appearances, Commissioning of Disciples* (20:1-29)
  - D. *Concluding Purpose Statement* (20:30-31)
- IV. EPILOGUE: THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF PETER AND THE BELOVED DISCIPLE (21)

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Academic, 2009), 307–308.

**Interpretation:** *Read through the passage, and then review and make notes under the questions below.*

1. On the surface, Jesus' statement in 11:14 appears to contradict his prediction in 11:4. If you did not have the benefit of hindsight, how might you have reconciled this apparent contradiction?  
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2. What might Martha expect Jesus to do, now that Lazarus has died in 11:21–22? Compare this statement with her responses to Jesus in 11:24, 27. Do you think that she expected Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead?  
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3. What does it mean for Jesus to *be* “the resurrection and the life” (11:25)?  
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4. Compare 11:27 with 20:31. What does this statement tell us about Martha's faith?  
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5. What does the statement in 11:37 tell us about the expectations of the crowd?  
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6. How could it be possible for people who had seen such a spectacular miracle to reject Jesus as sent from the Father and inform the Pharisees of this event (11:46–47)?  
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7. Consider 1 Corinthians 15:3–20, which describes the resurrection as central to the Christian faith. In what sense then, does this event have broader implications beyond merely motivating the Jewish authorities to seek Jesus' death?  
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**Application:** *Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today.*

8. What does this passage tell us about Jesus? How does it help us to understand “his place in the sweep of redemptive history”?<sup>2</sup>  
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9. What does this passage mean for your walk with the Lord?  
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10. How does this passage challenge the way you think about situations in daily life? What should you do about that?  
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<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 102.