

**TANGAZA COLLEGE  
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFICA**

**OSWALD MULENGA, SDB**

**“HE MUST INCREASE, I MUST DECREASE”  
(JOHN 3:31)**

*A new axiom for an ordinary Christian life Today  
An Exegesis of John 3:22-31 with Application to leadership*

**Supervisor**

**Rev. Fr. Mutinda Ambrose, C.S.Sp**

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Baccalaureate Degree in Sacred Theology (STB)**

**NAIROBI 2005**

## **DEDICATION**

I wholeheartedly wish to dedicate this thesis to my beloved Youth Groups of: Kibera Slums Christ the King Parish, Makadara Our Lady of Visitation Parish and the University of Nairobi St. Paul's University Chapel who ensued me to acquire an enormous quest for Scriptures resulting into my personal praxis of faith theology and real life. Thank you for allowing me to share my faith with you.

## EPIGRAPH

ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Σὺ εἶ ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ταῦτα οὐ γινώσκεις;

(John 3:10) [GNT]

Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this"?

(John 3:10) [RSV]

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to the lectures of Tangaza College (Catholic University of Eastern Africa) for their contributions in one way or the other in helping me to form and broaden my Christian world-view. In a special way from the Biblical Department, many thanks to Frs. Lacomara Aelred, C.P, Dr. Owezarek Christopher S.D.B. and my dedicated supervisor Fr. Mutinda Ambrose C.S.Sp, who set me aflame in choosing and constructing this thesis as they taught me various Biblical disciplines at different levels of my studies in Tangaza. Their passion for scriptures was indeed portrayed in their class presentations narrowing it to a real active living word of God.

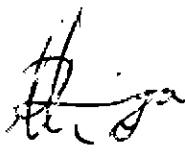
Many thanks and love to the Mulenga family especially Charles Zebby my brother, my beloved late sister bana Chileshe of Ndola, the late Christine Shatamuka, Christine Ntokwa, Bether Mumbi and Reginah Mulayamba. My early childhood and school friends Peter Mwaba and now Fr. Victor Mwansa O.M, among others from St. Joseph Kasama for their love and support on this taxing journey.

Thanks a million times to Don Bosco *Utume* for its support while in Nairobi as a student. Intellectually, the *Utume* brothers were my "Spin-doctors" always setting me aflame with new theological ideas and insights. I wish to acknowledge as well the effort and immeasurable love of Fr. Clement Mulenga Santi sdb, who generously accepted to proof-read my work, *Natasha my man!*

## STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research, method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Baccalaureate Degree in Sacred Theology (STB) with specialization in Scripture Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed:



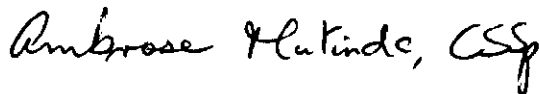
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Date:

24 - Jan. 2005

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed:



Name of Supervisor: Rev. Fr. Mutinda Ambrose, C.S.Sp.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Reading the gospel of John especially the book of signs which contains the text we are dealing with, the first impression is that chapter three is largely composed of different scantily misplaced episodes. Anyhow, the evangelist makes sure that one strong message comes out at the climax in verse 30 of the whole chapter three. This is why I find it necessary through this thesis with the help of the Jewish background and biblical exegesis to discover the meaning behind this text.

Through this thesis, I will attend to the four questions as addressed by the evangelist in chapter three, namely: (1) what was the role of John the Baptist and the baptism he administered in the ministry of Jesus? (2) Who was Jesus in the life of Israel (Judaism) and the kind of baptism he offered? (3) What is the difference between the baptism of John and that of Jesus? (4) For the one who is greater, what is the basis for his greatness? In the whole book of signs, John the evangelist tries to answer these questions using different motifs and symbolisms. However, in my work as I attempt to attend to them, I do not promise to be very exhaustive in my approach since the volume of this nature can not allow me.

My main preoccupation in this work is to bring to bare the obscure faith-theology of the author veiled in the statement of John the Baptist, "he must increase, I must decrease" John 3:30, for his community. The mention of the word honour immediately denotes shame as its opposite concept. However, in this case I do not intend to treat the two concepts side by side, instead I will focus on honour and the

notion of increase within the Jewish context since what is at stake in the statement of the Baptist is honour. My intention is thereafter, to give the same theology relevance to our contemporary world, particularly the context of the Church in Africa. Though my aim is not to offer solutions to African problems, at least through this work, I intend to raise some profound awareness in our African Christian way of living.

This thesis is composed of three chapters. With the general introduction at the very begin, each chapter starts with a short introduction and conclusion. The general conclusion then comes at the end of the third chapter. Systematically, chapter one deals with the Jewish background laying a foundation for a detailed exegesis in chapter two which will give us the theology for pastoral application in our last chapter.

Placed in its proper context the text will act as an eye opener to our readers. Besides, it will act as a window from which to look at the Jewish culture and its faith problems during the time of Jesus in comparison to our faith crisis today caused by similar structures. All this is to be done within the frame work and mindset of the author and his community for whose prospect he composed this episode.

This thesis comes at a time when our contemporary society is really in need of change. However, if we want to stand for that change as Christians, then we will have to be prepared as well to be rejected by the same society since any change will bring about disorder in the *status quo* of the beneficiaries. Here the message for Christians today is to remain open and receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit from within.

# Chapter One

## 1. Cultural context

### 1.1. Introduction

In our endeavour to get to the core of the Jewish culture and its value system, we will devote this chapter to the historical background or context which then will give us relevant context for the exegesis and the analysis of our text in John 3:22-30. In this regard, it becomes quite vivid that minute scanty textual elements be accorded the treatment they deserve in order to make it clearer on the part of the reader to comprehend the remark made by John the Baptist, "He must increase, I must decrease" when it is in its proper context. Having placed it in its proper cultural and historical *milieu*, chapter one will then act as a springboard to the second chapter in which we shall deal with the exegesis of the named text and illumine the faith theologies contained there in.

In a cultural environment like the first Century, Jewish people were more impelled to observe the external appearances more than anything else. For instance, a typical Jewish woman would always walk the streets dressed in black with her hair

honourably concealed with a *kerchief*<sup>1</sup>. Thus, it is fitting that we give an over view treatment to the notion of honour disguised in some flimsy cultural practices such as this; which often some readers take for granted when in the biblical text.

## ***1.2. Hebrew Bible Understanding of Honour***

Cultural anthropology and other social sciences have demonstrated that the Old Testament culture was such an environment without any exception, like any other culture, scholars like John Pilch<sup>2</sup> explain that the Jewish world was composed of certain values that provided patterns for human living. Numerous values acted as a criterion for making decision and a rule by which one measured his or her honour or right standing before God, neighbour and creation as a whole. By and large, the core value of the Mediterranean culture was the principle of honour and shame.<sup>3</sup>

As a predominant nucleus of the Mediterranean world, honour consisted in interpersonal contentment.<sup>4</sup> It was a notion which dictated that people should be content with what they had and not to worry about getting ahead or rather increase more than others. It did not encourage considering oneself better than others, worse still achieve anything at the expense of anyone.<sup>5</sup>

When the Hebrew people speak about honour, they use the word כבוד with a couple of nuances. Its literal meaning refers largely to being heavy, wealthy and

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<sup>1</sup> According to the UK English special use of the word *kerchief*, means the following: Keep your peace, keep your side of the bargain, keep your word, and keep yourself only to yourself.

<sup>2</sup> P. JOHN, *Introducing the Cultural Context of the Old Testament Vol.1*, 48.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. P. JOHN, 49.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. P. JOHN, 50.

<sup>5</sup> This, to a larger extent, made the people more cautious about not to infringe on others and not to allow others to infringe excessively on the rights of any member of the society. All these were nicely tied to the two concepts of honour and shame

renown.<sup>6</sup>In the Hebrew bible alone, this word is employed 34 times, 14 of them when referring to the glory and the same number used for honourable events and people. In the entire Scriptures, the word honour appears a hundred and forty six times in different contexts.<sup>7</sup> Its Greek translation  $\delta\omicron\zeta\alpha$  means as well the glory, honour respect and wealth.

From the use of the word honour, some scholars like Maril C.T.<sup>8</sup>.. verify that this value is really an enviable esteem and reward for excellence, character and service. Besides, it is to be paid in thought, words, deed and in substance. "Honour the Lord with your substance" (Isa. 29:13) reads. Also in Mathew 15:4-6, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Scribes for not honouring their parents with material necessities. In ancient Jewish laws, the death penalty was pronounced on those who dishonoured their parents in word or act. "Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death." (Exod. 21:15-17, Lev. 20:19)<sup>9</sup>

In wisdom literature, specifically the book of proverbs has used the word honour, severally, "The wise will inherit honour but the fool disgrace" (prov. 3:35). The fifth commandment as well is unambiguous about this usage "Honour your father and mother" (Exod. 20:12).<sup>10</sup> Coming to Pauline literature, honour is in use by St. Paul when talking to the Christians in Rome, "Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due,

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<sup>6</sup>  $\hbar\hbar$  has the following nuances. To be heavy, weighty, previous, hard, rich, honorable, glorious, burdensome, honored. Among other meanings, the other meaning for  $\hbar\hbar$  is to be wealthy.

The Bible Works 5, version 5.0.0.20w copy right 2001.

<sup>7</sup> C. T. MARI, *Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible Vol.iii*, 197.

<sup>8</sup> By and large, we see the same word used in connection with "Israel as a nation higher above other nations...in honour" (Deut. 26:19). Then for individuals considered as the elect of God chosen for a religious commission, the same word was applied, like for Samuel, "Samuel was held in honour" (1Sam. 9:6). In some cases it was employed for rulers like, King Jehoshaphat, "Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat; and he had great riches and honour." (2Ch. 17:5, 18:1).

C.F.C.T. MARI, 197.

and honour to whom honour is due." (Rom.13:7). Therefore, the Scriptures are very patent on who merits honour.

Amongst the Hebrews, whatever the status into which a person was born was espoused as honourable as anybody else's. Therefore, ones status was to be maintained and highly esteemed at all times. Consequently, being born into honour happened to be the easiest way of getting it than achieving it. This is why among other reasons; in scripture we have the genealogy which links people to their lineage.<sup>11</sup> According to Colin Brown, one of the writers whilst commenting on the genealogy, he notices that always it traces the family ancestry and the family tree and descent of some group of people.<sup>12</sup>

More often than not, in the genealogies only the first three and the last three names count. Whereas the first three are by and large, known to all people of the culture from its past, the last three are also known because they can very easily be traced, then those in the middle are put simply to expand the lineage of ancestry.<sup>13</sup>

In the Jewish world, the concept of one possessing a honourable reputation is very vital, but always connected with one's lineage. For instance, to be born of the lineage of David was to share into David's family honour.<sup>14</sup> However, without this

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<sup>11</sup> The genealogy always shows the reader what the person to whom this genealogy is about is honourable because the entire ancestral line is full of honourable people; as we read in I Chronicles 1:10. Cush was the father of Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth. As well in the gospels "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mathew 1:1). The word genealogy occurs a couple of times in the gospel of Mathew in the context of Jesus' genealogy. Its remote past is derived as in Hebrew bible and the late Jewish usage. It also alludes to the practice of searching back through one's family tree in order to establish its ancestry. On any straight forward exegesis, those doing this can only have been Jews who starting from Old Testament and other genealogies were propagating all kinds of "Jewish myths" quite probably a pre-Christian Gnostic speculation. However, it is also possible that the Ebionites were using similar arguments to attack the doctrine of the miraculous birth of Jesus. On the other hand, Genesis 14 presents us with Melchizedek without any such statements as is usual elsewhere in the Hebrew bible regarding a person's ancestry, "son of...". For that reason, Melchizedek is described in the later to the Hebrews 7:3 as having had no natural ancestry like others. He was of divine origin as well as a premodial figure.

<sup>12</sup> B. COLIN, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology vol.ii*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> E.D. FREDINA, *The Material Culture of the Bible*, 277.

<sup>14</sup> Ancient rhetoric of praise and blame and the progymnastic exercise called the encomium both indicate how off-spring were ascribed the same social status as their parents and ancestors.

family honour, one then had to work hard to build up and develop an individual honour. The best example is given by Ferdinar<sup>15</sup> when David's eldest son belonging to David's lineage, Amnon, had a claim to David's throne.<sup>16</sup> He shared in the honour that David amassed for the family name.<sup>17</sup>

There is as well a frequent mention of clans and tribal elders in various functions in Hebrew bible in connection with honour and respected accorded.<sup>18</sup> The elders would normally represent their people at certain occasions, and always accorded honour. The authority was therefore, tribal leadership based on age, grade, typically consisting of old men.<sup>19</sup>

Alternatively, the book of lamentations bemoans the fact that God showed no honour to the priests and no favour to the elders (Lam. 4:16).

Subsequently, any authority that rested in tribal elders and leaders was however, not absolute and permanent, but rather consisted in the honour and respect people had for them.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.3. Honour as a Value among the Jews

Whereas shame in a negative sense is what results when an honourable person is dishonoured, Bruce and Jerome<sup>21</sup> explain that it happens also when the person fails

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. I.D. FERDINA, 294.

<sup>16</sup> Plutarch writes in his works (*Old Men in Public Affairs* 787D), "And whereas men attack other kinds of eminence and themselves lay claim to good character, good birth, and honour, as though they were depriving themselves of so much of these as they grant to others".

<sup>17</sup> Cf. I.D. FERDINA, 296.

<sup>18</sup> The tribal leader was normally respected for his age and consequently considered and treated as a honourable man who was full of wisdom and integrity. "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt" (Exod. 3:16-18). As a matter of fact, an elderly man woman had been a trusted person of honour, "He deprives of speech those who are trusted, and takes away the discernment of the elders (Job 12:20)." The lamentations of Job to God's power to turn the human order upside down, reflects the normal position and honour of the elders.

<sup>19</sup> B. LAWRENCE, *Psalms and Wisdom*, 163.

<sup>20</sup> I.D. FERDINA, 293.

to guard their honour or to maintain it as a value for them to deserve the social honour scale. Honour as a value points to the very core of human existence to an extent that shame becomes its correlative which can be taken in two forms:

- (1) The first which is also considered as a positive view is when shame is taken as sensitivity to one's honour as well as to social honour rating.<sup>22</sup>
- (2) Another way of stating this is that a honourable person always has a sense of shame. People who behave dishonourably are often called shameless. Thus in the Jewish world, honour was taken as a person's or group's claim to worth accompanied by the public, social acknowledgement of that worth.<sup>23</sup>

The general conclusion to Jesus' mighty deeds and honour as a value in the Jewish culture is contrasted with disgrace and poverty.<sup>24</sup> However, instructions and reproof are presented as synonyms. Besides, honour in this context results from heeding instructions especially reproof. The advice presented in the book of Proverbs is intended by the culture to control behaviour and attitudes in order to live honourable lives. Therefore, heeding to the instructions is rewarding since it results in wisdom, and a wise person among Jews was highly esteemed.<sup>25</sup> Wisdom is a value tantamount to honour and both are compared to a garland, pendants and length of life.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> J.M. BRUCE, J.H.N. JEROME, *Honour and Shame in Luke Acts Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World*, Massachusetts USA, 1991, 26.

<sup>23</sup> JOHN, 53

<sup>24</sup> J.M. BRUCE, J.H.N. JEROME, 28.

<sup>25</sup> D. JOHN, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 70.

<sup>26</sup> J.M. BRUCE, J.H.N. JEROME, 32.

<sup>26</sup> In general, it is evident from wisdom literature that honour and wisdom go hand in hand and always likened to high esteem from society. "A gracious woman wins esteem, but she who hates virtue is covered with shame" (Prov. 11:16). Again we can say that in the Jewish world honour equals virtue. A virtuous life is what an ideal Jew would strive for. Sometimes it is equated to the virtue of humility as we read in Prov. 15:33, 18:12 and 22:4. Humility then is understood as very pleasing in the sight of God, and a humble person is one who is wise, honourable and, therefore having a right standing before God.

Thus in the biblical world humility with honour are values that directed people to stay within their inherited status without ever striving to get more. Honour enabled one to have self acceptance within the inherited worth. On the contrary it was shameful to presume on others or simply to load it over others for self achievement, even appearing to do so would not be condoned.<sup>27</sup> “To the humble God shows kindness” (prov. 3:34). “I am meek and humble of heart” (Matt. 11:21) Jesus said.<sup>28</sup>

The book of Prov. 28:7, talks about the son as one who should act honourably by observing the law, and points out that a son whose obsessed by gluttony brings about shame to both his father and the family at large. Here gluttony consists in having more than enough. An honourable son in this case must expose the idea that the first Century Jewish culture laid as an obligation, that when one had more than enough it was honourable to share with those who did not have enough.<sup>29</sup> To be gluttony entailed that one had refused to share and this behaviour was considered to be very shameful.<sup>30</sup> However, shame and honour in the Jewish context were not just personal matters to be ignored, there was always public acknowledgement attached to it.<sup>31</sup>

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D. JOHN, 71.

<sup>28</sup> Jesus thereafter warns his would be followers to avoid challenging the honour of others in Matt. 23:12, Luke 14:11. These texts show that humility is a claim to neutral in the normal Mediterranean competition of life. Again these texts demonstrate that such a disposition is a value and to act as such is to act honourably deserving public acknowledgement besides respect.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. J. MBRUCI – N. FEROME, 46.

<sup>30</sup> J.C. DAVID, *Social Scientific Old Testament Criticism*, 147.

<sup>31</sup> An ideal person in Israel was a wealthy one who owned property, controlled his household, kind and generous towards the poor and needy. It also implied one who would make a positive contribution at the City gate, where the elders gathered to discuss matters of common concern. In addition, the Jews considered honourable, a woman who could give birth to children, this is because children are supposed to give value to the family by bringing honour, especially if it were a male child. Thus, male children were a source of honour as well.

#### *1.4. Sources of Honour in Jewish Culture*

In the Jewish world, honour derives from many sources, mostly from things such as, family wealth and property in general. In a special way, children especially male children are a special source.<sup>32</sup>

#### *1.5. Inherited Honour*

When F.E. Deist<sup>33</sup> and other cultural and social anthropologists talk about ascribed honour they mean that it is obtained or rather attained passively, mainly through birth, by having family connections or by any endowment by noble people of noble power. In this case, honour is treated like a family wealth; therefore, ascribed honour is most like an inherited wealth of great value.<sup>34</sup> In this way, honour is hardly merited but only deserved since it flows from the family as some kind of right by birth better expressed by Jerome H. in the following quotation when he says:

Luke tells us about the family of Jesus' mother. Part of her family at least, belongs to priestly clans. Her kinwoman Elizabeth is a "daughter of Aaron" whose husband is a "priest of the division of Abijah" (Lk1:15). Priestly families enjoyed honourable status secondly, Jesus' father belonged to equally honourable stock, the family of David (Lk1: 27, 2:4). Jesus then, derives great honour by belonging to the two most honourable bloodlines in Israel, priestly and kingly. The Genealogy in (Lk3:23-38) only confirms Jesus' honourable kinship relations. Honour comes from endowment or ascription. The initial part of Luke's narrative emphasises again how Jesus was endowed with maximum honour by which Luke conditions the reader to perceive Jesus throughout the story as acting from a superior status of endowed honour, God's special agent, i.e., "Christ" and "Son of God". It is God who grants this honour to Jesus. It is both heralded by God's angels or prophets and is directly spoken by God himself. This "Christ" moreover is honourable to all peoples, both Israel and the Gentiles. He is then, no minor figure in backwater village, but someone who should command the respect of all peoples. His cousin John is likewise honourable, "he will be great" (Lk1:15).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> A Jewish woman was a source of honour if she could bear for instance, a son. Of course, the underlying element was the interpersonal contentment either as acquired or ascribed honour.

<sup>33</sup> F.E. DEIST, 279.

<sup>34</sup> Ascribed honour is generally more highly valued in the Jewish context, since it endures throughout one's life and in every aspect of that life. However, achieved honour comes in virtue of performance and it can and will inevitably be challenged by other performers. Challenge would normally arise in the context of speech events when they clarify their intentions.

<sup>35</sup> J. M. BRUCE N. JFROME, 47.

## *1.6. Merited Honour*

When it is acquired, it implies that honour is actively sought for, merited and achieved most often at the expense of one's equals in the social contest of challenge and riposte.<sup>36</sup> However, "acquired honour" was like wealth that is obtained through either a dishonourable or honourable manner.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, if honour was ascribed it was bestowed on someone only by a notable honourable person of power such as a king or a governor who could claim it for others and compel acknowledgement of that honour by virtue of his status.

In this regard, ascribed honour is to be understood as a kind of favour on a human being ascribed only by God. The best biblical example is from Acts 2:34:36, where God raised Jesus from the dead who was shamed and disgraced in his crucifixion and then enthroned him at his right hand in heaven. This shows God's pleasure and favour in Jesus. According to Rom. 8:17-30, Christians can also expect such ascribed honour from God.

In the context of the Jewish family honour would chiefly derive from kinship that is by right of birth into that family. Children have the same honour as their parents since it was attained from birth. "Like mother, like daughter" we read in Ezek. 16:44. Therefore, "like father, like son" is implied in Matt. 13:55. Therefore, belonging to an honourable family line makes one honourable automatically since the family is the repository<sup>38</sup> of the honour of past ancestors and their accumulated acquired honour.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. J.M. BRUCE & N. JEROME, 55.

<sup>37</sup> P. JOHN, 52.

<sup>38</sup> Challenge-riposte described a constant social tug of war, or a game of social push shore. Challenge-riposte is a type of social communication, since any social interaction is a form of

One of the purposes of the genealogies in scripture is to set out a people's honour lines and to set them on a social scale of prominence.<sup>40</sup> Conversely hostile questions about Jesus' family and origin look to the same thing; how can Jesus claim special honour as prophet or indeed son of God, if he is but the son of Joseph the carpenter (Luke 4:22), if his family includes an ordinary mother and brothers in the village (Mark 6:3). (Matt. 13:54-57) and if his roots are in a present village in Galilee? This is the situation in which people hassle each other according to socially defined values in order to gain the honour of another. Apparently, honour in this context like other commodities is envisaged to exist in limited amount.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, the first Century Mediterranean world was inclined to consider all social interactions outside the family biological fictive, as potential contest for honour, since honour and reputation like other goods are limited quantity.<sup>42</sup> In the same line, Philo expressed this thought in a brilliant sentence saying, "That the worse

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communication. Someone as the sender or source sends the message by means of a culturally recognized channel to a receiving individual and this produces an effect. The source here is the challenger, while the message is a symbolised thing such as a word, a gift, an invitation, or event. It could also be a slap or both. The channel of communication is always public, and the publicity of the message guarantees that the receiving individual will react since even non-action is publicly interpreted either as a riposte or a loss of honour. The whole intention of this claim is enter into the social space of another, whose reason is to gain in the social space of another or simply for mutual beneficial foothold. It could be also that one enter in order to dislodge another from his or her social space either temporarily or permanently. In this case the receiver must look upon the action from the view point of its potential to dishonour the receiver's self respect of self worth. It is important to not that according to the social patterns of the honour contest, not everyone can engage in the game. According to the rule or code, only equals can play. Only an equal can challenge another in such a way that all perceive the interaction as a challenge. This is so because the rules of honour contest require that challengers stand on equal social terms. Thus an inferior on the ladder of social standing, power and sexual status does not have enough honour to resent the affront of a superior. On the other side, a superior's honour is simply not committed as engaged by an inferior's affront, although the superior has power to punish impudence.

<sup>40</sup> H.N. JEROME, RICHARD, "I<sup>1</sup>k Must Increase, I Must Decrease" (John 3:30, *The Catholic Quarterly* vol. 63, (2001), 481-483, No.3

<sup>41</sup> Cf. P. JOHN, 52.

<sup>42</sup> It is the conception that there is so much to be had, or at least that is what people learn to perceive. Every interaction among non family members has undertones of a challenge to honour, either one has to defend what they have or to gain more

<sup>42</sup> Every social interaction of this type turns out to be an affair of honour, contest or game of honour in which players are faced with wins, ties and losses.

is wont to attack the better".<sup>43</sup> Both acquired and ascribed honour seems to have blood connections. However, the Jewish scholar Philo in one of his works in Latin translated by Yonyc rightly illumines this idea in the work, "*A treatise on the principle that the worse is accustomed to be always plotting against the better*".<sup>44</sup> Blood is significant since it signifies the relations of people from one to another, except that it is a purely biological relation. Thus, it is true when we say, "Blood is thicker than water".<sup>45</sup> To the contrary, the book of Genesis presents us with the uncouth situation of brotherly rivalry between Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:2).<sup>46</sup> The rivalry takes place on the level plane which Philo elucidates in the following quotation:

"We see that most contests, both in peace and in war take place in the open fields. In peace, therefore, all those who practise gymnastic contests, seek for level race-courses and plain fields; and in a war, it is not usual to have battles, of either infantry or rivalry on hills, for many more disasters arise from the unfavourable character of the ground, than from anything that the enemies do on one another".<sup>47</sup>

In Philo's opinion, Cain and Abel are on the same level ground of same blood lineage; nonetheless, wealth and honour creates a hill to separate them.<sup>48</sup> Villagers in some cases, to each other and even to their family members still find a more extended expression in that competition for honour called 'a good name'.<sup>49</sup> Thus, male children are known by the name of their fathers and their kinship groups.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>43</sup> C.D. YONGE, *The Works of Philo*, 112.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. C.D. YONGE, 112

<sup>45</sup> Therefore, honour always exists within one's own family blood. One can easily blood relatives outside that bond all people are regarded dishonourable, guilty unless proved otherwise.

<sup>46</sup> And Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go to the field. Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him" What Cain proposes to do is this: having by invitation led Abel on to a dispute, to convince him by main force, using plausible and probable sophism for the field to which he invited him to come, became a symbol of rivalry and contention between two blood brothers.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. C.D. YONGE, 112.

<sup>48</sup> The name Cain in Hebrew bible as interpreted above means, possession-can refer also to possession of wealth which became the source of contention between him and his brother Abel. Cain appears to possess all things while Abel is interpreted to refer to God. This is in relation to the sacrifices made by the two, in order to attain the right standing and honour before God and each other. Consequently Cain wants to infringe on his brother to claim honour and achieve it in a scheming way.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. J.C. DAVID, 48.

<sup>50</sup> This was more evident in Peter as Simon, son of John in Mathew 16:17, and James and John known as the sons of Zebedee in Luke 5:10. Thus to know the family name is to know the honour rating of its members.

In the same line, a good name comes from the pre-eminence of persons rather than from possessions like money, goods or any sort of wealth which are mere means to an honourable name. Jesus told the Pharisees, “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon” (Luke 16:9). There is no honour in simply being called the richest man in the world.<sup>51</sup> Any other use of wealth, therefore, is regarded as foolish.

### ***1.7. Conclusion***

We have seen in this chapter that the notion of “Increase and Decrease” is specifically about honour. In this chapter we intended to shade light on both the historical and cultural context of the saying of John the Baptist, which we now call an *axiom* for a Christian living “He must increase, I must decrease” (John 3:30). Having established that, it will now be easier for us in the next chapter to engage in the exegesis of the text in a more systematic way.

Moreover, we did not only investigate the Jewish biblical environment but we rather cautiously went to other avenues outside the bible since it would have limited our treatment of the text. What is important on our part is that we now have placed the remark of John the Baptist in its proper context which most often looks very anomalous and alien to the Mediterranean world where it originally belongs.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. C. L. MARIL, 98

## Chapter Two

### 2. Detailed Exegesis of John 3:22-31

#### 2.1. Introduction

In this chapter we are going to deal specifically with the exegetical questions that surround our text to enable us grasp the subject matter better. We shall deal with this chapter by first delimitating the text, establishing its literally context, its *Terminus a quo* and *Terminus ad quem* besides its remote and immediate contexts. Having done this, we shall then analyse the structure and the form used in the text.

Briefly we shall also consider the textual criticism of some verses, specifically verse 25 which raises varying opinions in modern biblical scholarship.

#### 2.2. Literally Context of John 3: 22-31.

The text that we are dealing with comes within the larger context of the book of signs<sup>52</sup> in the gospel of John. The first episode deals with the replacement of the Jewish purification rite accompanied by the reaction of the disciples during the changing of water into wine at Cana during the wedding (2: 1-11). The temple purification then replaces the Jewish temple which consequently provokes the reaction of the priests (2:13-25). Finally, the third episode presents the incidence of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night. In the Nicodemus-Jesus discourse, Jesus

<sup>52</sup> C.H. DODD, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 297.

replaces the physical birth into the people of God by begetting from on high through the Spirit and baptism (3: 1-36).<sup>53</sup> This made the Pharisees to react to Jesus ministry.

### 2.3. *Terminus a Quo*

It has often been supposed among biblical scholars that this section of chapter three or at least part of it is out of place since some verses are not in a natural sequence of the events being narrated. Therefore, it becomes very clear when it comes to the determination of both where the text begins and ends. Barrett, C.K.<sup>54</sup> among other scholars would opt for the conjecture that verses 22-30 mark the end of the Nicodemus-Jesus discourse with the introduction of the theme of the kingdom of God. However, verse 22 opens up a new discourse of the testimony of the Baptist interrupting the connection between verses 21 and 31. In Barrett's opinion this verse could be moved from here and instead read after chapter 2:12 much earlier.<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, in my opinion there is no prevalent reason why this structure should be changed since in its present form it maintains the original theological purpose of the author.

Regarding the *terminus a quo*, another group of scholars form the second theory regarding the delimitation of the text saying that verse 22-30 and 31-36 should be transposed. Verse 31 could thus be brought into immediate connection with verse 21 and then verse 30 would form a logical flow with the next chapter. The third opinion comes from another group of scholars who think that verses 31-36 should be placed between chapter 3:12 and chapter 3:13 and thus integrated into the dialogue and discourse which is initiated by the coming of Nicodemus in that the sequence of

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<sup>53</sup> A. LACOMARA, *The Gospel of John, a lecture for Third Year Students, Tangaza College-Nairobi 4*, April, 2003.

<sup>54</sup> C.K. BARRETT, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 219.

<sup>55</sup> C.K. BARRETT, 219.

verses as they stand is in some respect imperfect suggesting that in fact, a new source begins at verse 22.<sup>56</sup>

According to the general opinion of the majority, verse 22 indicates the change of theme, namely the heavenly birth marking the end but opening the new theme starting with *Μετὰ ταῦτα* which shows that the previous theme is now closed. Therefore, verse 22 makes an obvious interruption of the discourse on the heaven, the heavenly revealer and the divine judgement thereby introducing John the Baptist on the scene as a new figure after an interruption all the way from 1:35.<sup>57</sup>

#### *2.4. Terminus ad Quem*

There is a general view among scholars that verses 31-36 continue and generalise the theme of comparison between John the Baptist and Jesus, while verse 36 marks a natural demarcation showing the climax closing chapter three whilst acting as an introduction to the next theme of Jesus with a Samaritan woman. In this section, the intrusive narrative about the rivalry of John's disciples simply creates an environment for John's testimony of Christ; therefore, verse 30 ends our text since in verse 31 the author resumes the theme of verse 16-21 as an editorial commentary.<sup>58</sup>

#### *2.5. Structure*

A very clear and detailed structure of John 3:22-31 is suggested by Francis Moloney.<sup>59</sup> Now since his structure seems clear to me, I am therefore going to adopt the same structure which to a larger extent is helpful in the comprehension of my argument and presents the scenes in a more systematic flow in the narrative. Nonetheless, I may have to make some minor modifications here and there if need be. According to him, the whole structure is divided into three main sections, namely:

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<sup>56</sup> A. S. IAN, *A Psychological Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 76.

<sup>57</sup> C. E. C. K. BARRETT, 221.

<sup>58</sup> M. I. LEON, *International Commentary on the New Testament*, 236.

<sup>59</sup> M. I. FRANCIS, *The Gospel of John*, 104.

(a) Verses 22-24 serves as an introduction, the time, the two places and the baptising activity of the major characters of the narrative. Namely, Jesus and John the Baptist are introduced.

(b) Verses 25-30: John bears witness.

(i) Verses 25-26 is a statement from the disciples of the Baptist which brings into question the nature of the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist.

(ii) Verse 27-30 is the response of the Baptist and his final witness to Jesus.

(c) Verses 31-36 contain the discourse and the commentary of the narrator.

(i) Verses 31-35 are the revelation of the heavenly in the son who comes from heaven.

(ii) Verse 36, the salvation and condemnation that flows from the acceptance or refusal of this revelation.<sup>60</sup> This same view is also supported and used by Raymond Edward Brown in his presentation of the same text.<sup>61</sup>

## 2.6. Textual Criticism

3.25 μετὰ Ἰουδαίων {B}

Both Ἰουδαίων and Ἰουδαίω are ancient readings and textual support is rather evenly divided. On the whole, however, it is more likely that the singular which is unique in John would have been changed to the more customary plural than vice versa.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> C.F.M. FRANCIS, 104.

<sup>61</sup> R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John vol.1*, the Anchor Bible, 150.

<sup>62</sup> B. MELZGER, *A Textual Criticism on the Greek New Testament 2<sup>nd</sup> edit.*, 175.

## 2.7. A Detailed Exegesis of John 3:22-31.

Vs. 22. μετὰ ταῦτα ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν γῆν καὶ ἐκεῖ διέτριβεν μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἐβάπτιζεν.

*After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea, and there he stayed with them and was baptizing.*

After the events previously recorded, this sentence simply indicates that the previous incident is completed. The expression- εἰς τὴν γῆν τῆς Ἰουδαίας-( into the land of Judea) naturally implies that Jesus is on the move from Galilee, but then the Nicodemus incident which follows directly upon 2:23-25, seems to require the scene to have taken place either in or at least near Jerusalem.<sup>63</sup> καὶ ἐβάπτιζεν- (and baptized). There is no difference with - βάπτιζων-( baptized) in the previous verse. however, the evangelist is fond of the periphrastic construction of sentences. If the two verbs are made distinct from each other, consequently the thought would be that John the Baptist gave himself to baptizing more continuously than did Jesus. The verb- ἐβάπτι,εν- (baptized) the imperfect tense of the verb “baptizing” indicates that Jesus assumed a habitual practice of baptizing. As a matter of fact, it is only in this gospel it is mentioned that Jesus baptized. <sup>64</sup>

Vs.23. ἦν δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων ἐν Αἰνῶν ἐγγὺς τοῦ Σαλείμ, ὅτι ὕδατα πολλὰ ἦν ἐκεῖ, καὶ παρεγίνοντο καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο

*John was also baptizing in Eaon near Salim because there was much water, and they were coming and being baptized.*

The imperfect passive form of the verb “to baptize” reappears here to describe the fact that people came to John the Baptist and were being baptized. The two

<sup>63</sup> C.K. BARRETT, 221.

<sup>64</sup> M. LTON, *Gospel According to John*, 202.

characters John and Jesus have been located in the same place and both are described as practising baptism. However, there is no hint in these introductory remarks that there was any qualitative difference between the two baptisms. The focus in this whole scene is on the baptizers and not on their respective merits of their baptismal rites. - ἐν Αἰῶνι ἐγγυς τοῦ Σαλείμ- The place called Salim can not be established with certainty while Aeon can hardly be identified at all.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, Salim has been suggested to be about six miles south of Bethsham in the extreme near East of Samaria. There exists today a Salim about three miles East of Shechem. It is possible to find in the neighbourhood of each of the localities places which might have been called Aeon since they have many springs- ὕδατα πολλα. Some scholars have suggested that the name Salim is not to be taken as a corruption of - Σαλείμ- for Jerusalem. Some have thought that Salim was intended to signify the Hebrew (Shalom), for peace. Therefore, John's baptism brought men near to peace of God but could not confer that peace. Ultimately it is Jesus alone who can offer that peace.<sup>66</sup>

Vs. 24. οὐπω γὰρ ἦν βεβλημένος εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν ὁ Ἰωάννης.

*For John was not yet cast into prison.*

In the final introductory note, the reader is informed that all this took place before John had been put into prison. With the imprisonment of the Baptist, the ministry of Jesus begins.<sup>67</sup> The excursion of the Baptist and Jesus emerges as a figure with close links to the now executed Baptist but exceeding him in his claims concerning the kingdom of God, which raises further questions regarding his identity. The evangelist makes an additional theological message to the synoptic, namely that between the temptation of Jesus and the arrest of John the Baptist, there was an

<sup>65</sup> Cf. C. K. BARRI ET, 220.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. M. LEON, 237.

<sup>67</sup> M. FRANCIS, *The Gospel of John*, 380.

interval during which the two characters worked side by side as indicated also in Mark 1:13-14.<sup>68</sup> It is however true that the evangelist John portrays what the synoptic writers do not suggest. It suggests the parallel ministries of John and Jesus. There is nothing inherently improbable in this, but it seems probable that John's aim is not to furnish an interesting piece of historical information but to provide a background for verse 30.<sup>69</sup>

Vs. 25. Ἐγένετο οὖν ζήτησις ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν Ἰωάννου μετὰ Ἰουδαίου περὶ καθαρισμοῦ.

*Then arose a discussion between some of John's disciples with a Jew about purification.*

There is unresolved problem between the disciples of John and a Jew. The debate here is over purification- περὶ καθαρισμοῦ. - which is stated in most general terms (cf. 2:6), but in this context it must be related to verses 22-24. However, there is unresolved problem between the disciples and "a Jew"<sup>70</sup> concerning the baptism administered by Jesus and John in verse 25. This interpretation of the discussion makes sense of the question that the disciples later pose to their master, "Rabbi, he that was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bare witness is baptizing and all men are coming to him" (Vs. 26). The reductive involved here is subtle and one of the two characters is asked to give his own opinion. We notice that though all people are flocking to Jesus, John did not suffer envy at the success however, the Jerusalem elite did. This envy lies in the sociology of perception of "limited goods". John's disciples are on the verge of envying Jesus and his disciple.<sup>71</sup> Here the key word is- συζήτησις

<sup>68</sup> S. GERARD, *John*, 47.

<sup>69</sup> C. K. BARRETT, 221

<sup>70</sup> In this Gospel the term "Jews" is to be understood as a narrative device. The term indicates a specific group of characters in opposition to Jesus and as a narrative device these characters are to be distinguished from the historical people following Jewish religious beliefs. To highlight the narrative use of this term, I follow the convention of calling these opponents "the Jews". "A Jew" in Vs. 25 is to be taken as a representative of a specific Jewish group in opposing of Jesus.

<sup>71</sup> L. C. MARV, *God Dwells with Us*, 65.

- as a philosophical inquiry or investigation, but the sense in which it is used in verse 25 refers to controversy and envy.

As a matter of fact, people do not find it pleasant to give honour- τιμή- to someone else, for they suppose that they themselves are being deprived of something.<sup>72</sup> This is the manner in which John's disciples perceive the world, everything is limited in the world honour included.<sup>73</sup> In this context it is perceived that another's gain comes at one's loss whose common reaction is envy with an attempt to restore the *status quo*.

John's disciple's complaint clarifies their interpretation. They go to their master and voice their interpretation of the - συζήτησις- in terms of "all are going to him" (Vs. 26). Their complaint clarifies the subject of the - συζήτησις- now involving Jesus and his disciples and John and his disciples too. The contention resides in the perception that Jesus' growth, fame and reputation come at the expense of John and his disciples. In many ways, John's disciples voice the same remark as do Jesus' enemies in 11:47. They understand that their worth diminishes as Jesus gains greater respect and honour, in fact Jesus' increase causes their decrease.<sup>74</sup>

περὶ καθαρισμοῦ- (over purification Cf. 2: 6). The reference is not to the baptism by the two, but rather to Jewish purification in general. For this reason, it is not made clear about whom the controversy arose. What the evangelist has in view still is verse 30 to demonstrate that John the Baptist, great though he is, nonetheless, belongs within the world of Judaism, which Jesus is- ὁ ἰρχόμενος ἄνωγει-(he who

<sup>72</sup> B. HORST S. GERARD *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 44.

<sup>73</sup> H. N. JEROME, *Honour and Shame in the Gospel of Mathew*, 106

<sup>74</sup> R. HERMAN, *The Gospel of John*, 146.

comes from heaven) in vs.31, and their- Καθαρισμός -(purification), can at best point forward to the life giving activity of the son of God.<sup>75</sup>

Vs. 26. καὶ ἦλθον πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ, Ῥαββί, ὃς ἦν μετὰ σοῦ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, ᾧ σὺ μεμαρτύρηκας, ἴδε οὗτος βαπτίζει καὶ πάντες ἔρχονται πρὸς αὐτόν.

*And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you were bearing witness baptizes, and all come to him.*

Ἐλθον ... εἶποι-(They came...said), the subject may be the disciples of John mentioned in verse 25 or it maybe personal “people came and told John”. - ὅς

ἦν ... μεμαρτύρησας (He who was bearing witness) also cf. 1:26-34. John is now to repeat his testimony in fresh terms. The words of John’s disciples are often taken to be complaining and resentful. He was informed since the complaints of the disciples drew attention to John’s own prophecy, they may equally be taken as a joyful announcement of the fulfilment of their master’s word. However, the evangelist’s intention is to introduce the sayings that follow in the coming verses.<sup>76</sup>

Vs. 27 ἀπεκρίθη Ἰωάννης καὶ εἶπεν, Οὐ δύναται ἄνθρωπος λαμβάνειν οὐδὲ ἐν ἑάν μὴ ἦ δεδομένον αὐτῷ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

*John answered and said, a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.*

John’s reply reminds his disciples that first of all the principle that no one can “receive” in the sense of appropriate have, anything except what is given from heaven. This does not mean that everything a person manages to lay claim to has come to him as a gift from God (cf. 19:11), it means rather that a person has a thing at his disposal only if and to the extent that God permits. The point here is that Jesus “received” more people than his forerunner in accordance with God’s plan.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> S. RUDOLF, *The Gospel According to St. John, Vol. 3*, 386.

<sup>76</sup> C.K. BARRILL, 221.

<sup>77</sup> R. HERMAN, 146.

The issue that determines the respective roles of Jesus and John the Baptist is not the rite of baptism but what is given to him from heaven. Although John is not the anointed one of God, he has been sent by God (1: 6), and his witness to Jesus corresponds with God's design.<sup>78</sup> One would expect John to defend his role, but because John's role is to bear witness to Jesus, he does not respond to his disciples' question regarding baptism. He instead shifts the discussion into the realm of revelation. Besides, the two baptizers received their authority from God (cf. 1:1-2, 3:13-14, 16-17).

Vs. 28. αὐτοὶ ὑμεῖς μοι μαρτυρεῖτε ὅτι εἶπον [ὅτι] Οὐκ εἰμὶ ἐγὼ ὁ Χριστός, ἀλλ' ὅτι Ἀπεσταλμένος εἰμὶ ἔμπροσθεν ἐκείνου.

*You yourselves bear witness that I said; I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.*

This probably refers to the disciples of John though others may be included as in vs. 26. However, his- ἐγὼ-(I) is emphatic. He wants there to be no doubt about his disclaimer. "I am sent"<sup>79</sup> is in the perfect tense, which may be meant to indicate that his permanent character was that of a man sent by God (1:6) to be the forerunner of the Messiah.<sup>81</sup>

Vs. 29. ὁ ἔχων τὴν νύμφην νυμφίος ἐστίν· ὁ δὲ φίλος τοῦ νυμφίου ὁ ἐστηκώς καὶ ἀκούων αὐτοῦ χαρᾶ χαίρει διὰ τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ νυμφίου. αὕτη οὖν ἡ χαρὰ ἡ ἐμὴ πεπλήρωται.

*He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled.*

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<sup>78</sup> Verse 27 in this text is reproduced in the words of Jesus to Pilate "you would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above" (19:11).

S.S. GERARD, *What Are They Saying About John?* 90.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. M. LEON, 240.

There are various views regarding this verse among biblical scholars, however, the general understanding is that the whole of this verse is to be taken as kind of a parable. There is an artistic use of the wedding imagery where the best man important though his functions may be,<sup>81</sup> gladly gives place to the bridegroom since he is the rightful owner of the wedding honour. Similarly John, important as his work may be must give way to Jesus and to do so is no pain or regret but much joy to him. In the Old Testament Israel is occasionally regarded as the bride of God (Isa. 62:4, Jer.2:2, 30:20, Ezek. 16:8, Hos. 2:21). Also in the New Testament the Church is often referred to as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2, Eph. 5: 25-27, Rev. 21: 2, 22:17). This expression is meant to mean that not John but Christ is the head of the new Israel. Therefore, John and his baptism could not offer eternal life unless Christ who is life itself.<sup>82</sup>

ὁ δὲ φίλος τοῦ νυμφίου ἐχωρῆ τῆν νύμφην (but the friend of the bridegroom) is Jesus by his teaching and baptizing is assembling his Church. ὁ δὲ φίλος τοῦ νυμφίου -(But the friend of the bridegroom), the expression is not a technical term in Greek, but corresponds to the hebrew word *shoshebin*. A friend or an enemy is disqualified from acting as witness or judge. By friend here is meant a man's groomsmen. Besides, *shoshebin* was the friend who acted as an agent to the bridegroom. It was a tradition in Judea to have two groomsmen one for each family. The saying in this context either envisages a different practice, most likely, a Galilean or simply an adoption of custom to conform to the situation in which only John and Jesus are involved as Barrett notices.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> B. COLLIN, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology Vol 2*, 57.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. M. LEON, 161.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. C.K. BARRETT 223.

ακούων (Hearing), in relation to the Hebrew word, *shema* which means to hear with an obedience implication of a servant as a normal attitude. In this case, the joy of John is an attitude of one who expectantly awaits the sound of someone with  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu$  (honour) such as his master. Not accidentally, the issue at hand here is honour and the perception of honour. This signifies that the suppression of John's ministry by that of Jesus completes John's joy because it means that his task is complete as well.<sup>84</sup> When Jesus comes on the scene he makes his weight felt in a fair manner without interrupting the plan of the one who sent them both. This, of course, provokes the change of mood, attitude and behaviour in the minds of the on-lookers.

Vs. 30. ἵκεῖνον δεῖ αὐξάνειν, ἐμέ δὲ ἐλαττοῦσθαι.

*He must increase, but I must decrease.*

This verse with its contrast between increase and decrease is not too far removed from the synoptic report of Jesus' estimation of the relative merit of John the Baptist in the crux<sup>85</sup> "Truly I say to you, among those born of women, there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist, yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11, Luke 7:28).<sup>86</sup> Here John acknowledges the honour of Jesus' and vice-versa bearing in mind that they were both sent for the same mission, however, one is greater not at the expense of the other. The greatness and honour of John consists in the fact that he closes the Old Testament prophets while Jesus opens the new aeon. The new Age of Jesus is the one characterised by the replacement and fulfilment of the old. In fact, he is the one to which the old points. We also belong to

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<sup>84</sup> Having prepared the bride for his appearance, John must now fade away into the background. His work is over and his destiny is now to decrease but with joy. In 2:5, the mother of Jesus became the first person in the narrative to place unconditional belief and trust in the word of Jesus. Although the term  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  (word) is not used however, there exists a similarity with the term *phone* in verse 29. It means now that John the Baptist demonstrates openness to the word of Jesus.

<sup>85</sup> A. MUTINDA, *A lecture for Third Year Students in the Gospel of Matthew Tangaza College*, 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2003.

<sup>86</sup> I. C. MARY, *God Dwells with Us*, 64.

the new aeon of Jesus, the new alliance therefore; the least in this aeon is greater than John the Baptist.<sup>87</sup> This is where this statement of John becomes an axiom for true Christian life for all aeons since we are greater than John though not by merit but by the times to which we belong. Our aeon is the witness to a fullness of grace that John could never have witnessed.<sup>88</sup> The Greek verb - ἐλαττωῖσθαι is related to another verb ἐλάττωω (inferior, make lower, become less important) the adjective which is used to decrease the ordinary wine at Cana in comparison to the extraordinary new good wine miraculously made by Jesus (2:10).

Vs. 31. Ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν· ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐστὶν καὶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς λαλεῖ. ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐρχόμενος [ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν·]

*The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all.*

ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐστίν ... (the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth) simply means that he who is earthly in origin is earthly also by nature.

Biblical scholars like Schnackenburg<sup>89</sup> draw attention to the two meanings of- ἐκ – to describe the origin and the kind in nature. He notices that implied here are the acts which are restricted to this world. Therefore, the one from above comes and sets

<sup>87</sup> W. P. JOHN, *The Evangelist of the Covenant People*, 173.

<sup>88</sup> There are a number of interpretations among modern biblical scholarship regarding the paradox implied in the crux when Jesus says, "Yet he who is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he". Some scholars say that it means the following: Firstly, that John is the greatest human being ever and yet unfit for the Kingdom of God. That being the case, then it follows that there are no human beings in the Kingdom of God. Now since John is lesser than the least, should he enter the Kingdom of God he would set lower standards than there are presently. Nonetheless, Jesus himself is the Kingdom of God, the new aeon to which we belong. Thus the Kingdom is greater than its antecedent consequently we Christians of the new age can live above the statement of the precursor since we are in the age of the fulfilment of grace. Besides, we must understand that the Kingdom includes both the past and present aeons therefore, John is not excluded from the Kingdom. The greatness of John lies in leading the people of God to greater standards of living contrary to the normosity of his contemporary times.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. S. RUDOLF, 382.

higher standards of living about which John spoke in his ministry of repentance.<sup>90</sup>

Jesus being the one from above is automatically above all the inhabitants of the earth who belong to the realm below and constantly at the mercy of human weakness.

John's was not the baptism of the Spirit since it could not lift people to the higher values of the Kingdom.<sup>91</sup> We in the new aeon are lucky because we have the Spirit to help us live the higher standards of life for the Kingdom without compromising its values.<sup>92</sup>

## 2.8. Conclusion

Having done the exegesis of John 3: 22-31, it has become much clearer that what is at stake in the apparent grapple between Jesus and John the Baptist as perceived by John's disciples is honour. During our analysis of this text, it has come to our knowledge that Jesus, being the one from above, possesses divine honour which must be acknowledged by those who belong to the earthly realm. Thus John can not but acclaim: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3: 30).

Without this detailed exegesis in this chapter and the cultural notion of honour in the Jewish world as we have it in chapter one, it is very complex to interpret John 3: 22-31 and correctly get its 'faith theology' which will become our next objective in the third and last chapter. Furthermore, to better achieve the aim of this thesis, it is

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. W. P. JOHN, 173.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. M. JOHN, *St. John*, 195.

<sup>92</sup> The *πάντων* keeps to metaphor of *ἄνωθεν* (from above) and *πάντων* (all) must be masculine, on account of the masculine which takes it immediately. The special category implies a judgement of rank and value. He who is above all others is superior to them in principle, by virtue of origin unrestrictedly and absolutely. Now since the heavenly figure is in singular, one might be inclined at first to take him who is from the earth also as an individual. However, the emphasis is on the uniqueness of the heavenly revealer but then the *πάντων* brings in at once the whole human race on earth. Therefore, there is no difficulty in taking him who is from the earth generically to refer to all men and women as generally inferior and dependent on him from above and his revelation. He comes to earth and gives to all earthly born the power to become children of God (Jn. 1:12), by being born from above and they can have access to the heavenly world. The earthly is not valueless however by nature but merely in relation to the higher heavenly realm to which it is subordinated.

better that in the next chapter we apply the 'faith theology' of this text to our concrete context and consequently make the acclamation of John the Baptist an axiom for a true Christian living today in Africa or indeed elsewhere.

## Chapter Three

### 3. Theological Message of John 3:22-31 and its Pastoral Application

#### 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, we are going to use the Johannine theology as a window through which to analyse and point out few aspects for improvement regarding the perception of priesthood in Africa and its leadership element it imbibes in the Church as an institution. Then we shall consider our African political leaders and their role in leading the people of God. In our view, authority is of divine origin therefore, leadership is meant for service of our brothers and sisters in the community on behalf of God.

#### 3.2. Theological Message of John 3:22-31.

The literal context within which our text is placed namely, the book of signs provides the frame work for interpretation and its proper meaning. Looking at the Jewish community for which the author intended it, it was a community seeking their honour in the structures of religion and its customs beyond which they failed to go.

In this narrative, Christ is presented as God who dwells among his people.<sup>93</sup> He consequently produced a new community which he provided with a new form of worship that superseded that traditional worship of Judaism. John's baptism which is

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<sup>93</sup>M. COLE, *God Dwells Among Us*, 65.

but one more form of Jewish purification ritual is now superseded by the worship of the new Johannine community.

What is the picture of John the Baptist throughout the whole scene? He is pictured as a man from below while Jesus comes from above (cf. John 1:6). John is again presented as a witness to Jesus: he is the voice that cries out in the wilderness of Isaiah 40:3. Then regarding the baptism of John, nothing is said about it as being for the forgiveness of sins. This was so that Jesus' identity may be revealed to him when he comes. Consequently, John's witness facilitated a transfer of discipleship from himself to Jesus. In John 3:22, the Baptist denies being the Christ. Therefore, John's witness, though important, was not as significant as the divine witness of Jesus. Ultimately, in this whole episode, John the Baptist never did any sign like Jesus. However, everything he said about Jesus was true, thus he was a true witness.

As for the baptism of Christ which was for the forgiveness of sins it symbolized the eschatological cleansing of God's people by water and Spirit. John himself denied being an eschatological figure to suit the Jewish expectations. In this case, John's denial that he is such an eschatological figure has the effect of relegating his baptism to the same level as other Jewish purification rites (1:26). In the understanding of the author, the misunderstanding is not between John and Jesus but the on-lookers. It does not matter either for John or Jesus, because they understood that each person plays the role that is assigned to him by God. In this case, John's part is that of going before, while Jesus part is that of a bridegroom. John's joy comes because of having facilitated successfully the union between new Israel as the bride and Christ the bridegroom. Thus John can not but state, "he must increase, I must decrease" (John 3:30). This success ought to be God's doing which accords the assigned roles in the divine plan of God.

In the whole text Jesus is presented with superiority. What was the basis for his superiority? Here the author gives his interpretation of the superiority of Jesus' starting with the superior baptism that he administered. Again his superiority is based on his heavenly origin, when he is presented as one from above. The point of John's witness to Jesus' superiority is that Jesus who comes after him in time is before him in status, because he was before him in eternity. Moreover, Jesus' superiority is always connected with the permanent endowment with the Spirit. But to John just like to the other prophets, God gave his Spirit by measure (Num. 11:25, 1 Sam. 10:5). Unlike them Jesus has been given the Spirit not by measure but permanently. He does not therefore utter God's word occasionally but continuously. The last consideration for Jesus' superiority is the very fact that whereas John could do nothing but prepare for the judgement, Jesus himself comes as both the basis on which judgement is carried out as well as the agent of judgement itself for those who reject him. Consequently, his rejection resulted in the self damnation.<sup>94</sup>

The baptism offered by Jesus for the forgiveness of sins because of the power of the Holy Spirit is equivalent to being born again or being born from above. Nicodemus, a representative of the pharisaic class, was answered by Jesus that unless a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God (John 3:5-8). This was the baptism through water and Spirit which John could not administer since he was among those who received the Spirit by measure.<sup>95</sup> In the Johannine community, baptism meant repentance that goes with a radical change of heart, mind and everything that apparently define our human existence. This change was the one that shook at its foundation the Jewish traditional religion and all its structures.

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<sup>94</sup> H. I. CHARLES, *Reading John*, 106.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. H. I. CHARLES, *106*.

Unlike Nicodemus who was the figure of Jewish authority and its institutions, Jesus has come with authority to replace all these institutions of power and authority with the higher standards of living from above. In this way, for his followers making an internal change supported by the Spirit makes it possible to live the values of the kingdom. Apparently, John the Baptist with his baptism belonging to the realm below could not set standards higher than the Jewish standards of life that he had seen and experienced.<sup>65</sup> Anyone having received the baptism of Jesus can live up to the higher standards as presented by Jesus uncompromisingly.

However, Christian history and tradition took place on the realm below like the history of incarnation itself. Therefore, in this episode as meant by the author, the theology of below and above does not refer to literal geography but to inner or the spiritual geography as a reality in human life. Higher things in Johannine theology refer to insights and truths that transcend our present limited experience and if Jesus comes from above it is because he brings superior insights and power. This is not to mean that the realm below is sinful and valueless, only that the two realms comprise different values.<sup>66</sup> To come to true terms with the heavenly values, it implies the death of the old person and the emergence of a new person as St. Paul says in Rom. 6:1-7.

Another theological interpretation would be that the outer human nature falls away and then emerges the strengthened inner human nature (2Cor.4:16). In this new person, the centre of the entire personality is no longer the old ego and all its urges and craving for power and honour. Instead, Christ takes control of the whole being. This inner transformation is the essence of our Christian life. The only option a Christian has is to acknowledge that Christ must increase and we must decrease daily.

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. A.S. JOHN, 82.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. A.S. JOHN, 82.

### 3.3. *Ordained Ministers an example of Leadership in the Church.*

The Church, like any human institution, has the usual pattern and a certain manner of doing things. Here I will use the African priest only as an example of leadership. What is the role of an ordained minister in such a structure? Is it to serve or be served; is it to increase our interests or to help our brothers and sisters most in need and give them their dignity?<sup>98</sup> No one by nature has authority over another human being. As such, authority is God given to the community. The community decides then who exercises which authority for the service of the community. In the context of the community, authority is a *charism* and as a *charism* it is a free gift from God that is never merited or indeed sort for.

It is uncommon among some of our African clergy to take priesthood as a position of honour and prestige rather than for service.<sup>99</sup> I think as Church Ministers in the position of service, our focus is to responsibly avail ourselves so that the ones we serve may one day have their lost honour in one form or another increased. However, as a priest, one should first decrease his egocentricism for it will increase in turn as a result of those that he truly serves. Whereas we have a good number of our African priests who avail themselves to the service of the people of God, we still have a handful of those who work in places of conflict where it demands that they uncompromisingly counter the conflicting values with the kingdom values yet they keep quiet for the sake of a good name and fame among the rich. They simply tell the people what they want to hear. Yet still few of our priests end up making choices for the urban parishes where the pastures are greener rather than the rural ones.<sup>100</sup> While we realize for our clergymen to work in both urban and rural parishes, our major

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<sup>98</sup> I. THOMAS, *A Priesthood in Time*, 76.

<sup>99</sup> A. ROI AND, *Mission Methods*, 62.

<sup>100</sup> J. B. JONATHAN, *Mission and Money*, 3.

concern now is the motivation. Grapples over who has more authority are a normosity among our clergy as a result; it is sometimes very hard in some cases for our clergy to work in a team along with others, lest they decrease their honour!<sup>101</sup>

It all comes back to the question of honour and the concept of authority and power as perceived by our society.<sup>102</sup> In fact it would be unhonorable for a clergy or indeed any Christian to challenge the honour of others or even seem to give any kind of riposte even when their honour is challenged. Using this Johannine axiom, as Church ministers we can break through the cultural concept of human greatness, authority, power and embrace the Spirit of service.

### ***3.4. Application to African Political Leadership***

In contemporary African politics it is not uncommon especially the Post-Colonial Africa to find leaders who assume offices through bloodshed.<sup>103</sup> With all the genocides that surround our continent, our leaders seem to have developed a culture of life-presidency. In some cases they lead until they can lead no more. This notion has raised some doubts regarding the quality of leadership that Africa has had in the recent past. With all the respect to good leadership that a handful of our selfless and hard working leaders have portrayed, the majority have simply increased the amount of misery and shame in their regions.

Leadership is a sacred duty which should never go with corruption or indeed wedging wars to attain it. As a matter of fact, all leaders, be it religious or secular, rule on behalf of God. However, no sooner do our politicians get into power than they concentrate on increasing their ego by first accumulating as much wealth as possible and serving their own interests and those of their closest family members and friends.

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<sup>101</sup> I. D. PAUL, *Priesthood*, Texas, 1996, 100

<sup>102</sup> M. JAMES, *The Diaconate*, 13.

<sup>103</sup> K. KENNEDY, *A Humanist in Africa*, 38.

Now misappropriation of public funds is a talk of the day in most countries in the world if not in all.

Among our politicians today, even dressing is more than mere body covering to shelter the body from heat or cold as would be the case with a poor man or woman. It instead has to display the worth and honour by signalling to a certain role or status in society. If our Spiritual eyes can open a little more and we start to perceive as God does, we would be able to see our poor people as God would love to see them. I think it is up to our leaders and every Christian to raise the standards of living of our poor people to the heavenly standards as proposed by Christ.

Talk about the third world countries in relation to the sanctions that they incur at the world market by the first world countries. In their economic plans most developed countries aim at maximizing their interest and profit at the expense of poorer countries with a population where an ordinary citizen hardly spends more than a dollar for their daily bread.<sup>104</sup> As much as the developing country tries to develop its economy, the more the sanctions increase just so that they decrease if not retard its economic growth.<sup>105</sup>

### **3.5. Conclusion**

In conclusion we can clearly affirm that indeed the Johannine theology and its application has widened our horizon to better understand the context of the Johannine community for whom this text was intended. However, what is even more appealing to our theological quest is the fact that the traditional Jewish structures as replaced by Jesus from the heavenly realm, is not any different from our contemporary African crisis over honour and power

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<sup>104</sup> Y. BEST, *African Challenge*, 35

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Y. BEST, 37.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

Having come to the conclusion of our thesis with its goal achieved, is the message of John to be left to the Johannine community alone? Certainly not! Instead, it is now up to each Christian community in any context to make this theology relevant to their situation.

It has come to our knowledge during this work that the apparent conflict between Jesus and John the Baptist over the purification rite is not due to the aggression of either Jesus or John as one would be led to think. Theologically speaking, each of the two characters simply plays the role assigned to him by God. However, their commitment is misinterpreted by the on-lookers as engaging in a game of honour and greatness. This was one of the objectives of this thesis to make unambiguous the message that John was endeavouring to put across through this text.

Whilst John plays the role of a witness, Jesus remains faithful to his father's mission fulfilling what was foretold by John the Baptist. Since the baptism of John could not remove the sins it was lacking in perfection. Consequently, when Jesus appears on the scene he brings forth what was lacking in John's mission making John to disappear into the background peacefully. Somewhat how, this allowed God to pitch a tent amongst his people as a bridegroom uniting with his bride Israel.

With the onset of the kingdom in the person of Jesus, if the new Israel is to consider entry into the kingdom automatically it has to adhere and meet the conditions of the kingdom as proposed by Jesus with hardly any compromise.

By and large, some of our leaders use authority to increase their own glory at the detriment of service to the needy in the community. Our African context like many others around is badly in need of a radical change.

Therefore, the faith theology of John 3:22-31, has helped us to come at crossroads with our contemporary African shortcomings. Making the message lucid, we can now take a step further and work towards faith solution to foster change in the world using the affirmation of John “he must increase, I must decrease” as an axiom. Being a Christian axiom this statement can be used as a truly Christian principle for an ordinary Christian living. Besides, we have reached the end of our thesis with a typical African faith solution showing out that our situation like in Judaism is subject to change. But how are we to achieve this change? This is a question that every committed Christian should answer for him or herself.

## **APPENDIX I: R. S.V ENGLISH TEXT OF JOHN 3: 22-31**

22. After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized. 23. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people came and were baptized. 24. For John had not yet been put in prison. 25. Now a discussion arose between John's disciples and a Jew over purifying. 26. And they came to John, and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, here he is, baptizing, and all are going to him." 27. John answered, "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven. 28. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. 29. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full. 30. "He must increase, but I must decrease." 31. He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth belongs to the earth, and of the earth he speaks; he who comes from heaven is above all.

## APPENDIX II: GNT TEXT OF JOHN 3:22-31

**3:22** Μετὰ ταῦτα ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν γῆν καὶ ἐκεῖ διέτριβον μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἐβάπτιζεν. **23** ἦν δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων ἐν Αἰνῶν ἐγγίς τοῦ Σαλεῖμ, ὅτι ὕδατα πολλὰ ἦν ἐκεῖ, καὶ παρεγίνοντο καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο. **24** οὐπω γὰρ ἦν βεβλημένος εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν ὁ Ἰωάννης. **25** Ἐγένετο οὖν ζήτησις ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν Ἰωάννου μετὰ Ἰουδαίου περὶ καθαρισμοῖ. **26** καὶ ἦλθον πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ, Ῥαββί, ὃς ἦν μετὰ σοῦ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, ὃ σὺ μεμαρτύρηκας, ἴδε οὗτος βαπτίζει καὶ πάντες ἔρχονται πρὸς αὐτόν. **27** ἀπεκρίθη Ἰωάννης καὶ εἶπεν, Οὐ δύναται ἄνθρωπος λαμβάνειν οὐδὲ ἐν ἑάν μη ἢ δεδομένον αὐτῷ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. **28** αὐτοὶ ἡμεῖς μοι μαρτυρεῖτε ὅτι εἶπον [ὅτι] Οὐκ εἰμὶ ἐγὼ ὁ Χριστός, ἀλλ' ὅτι Ἀπσταλμένος εἰμὶ ἔμπροσθεν ἐκείνου. **29** ὁ ἔχων τὴν νόμφην νυμφίος ἐστίν· ὁ δὲ φίλος τοῦ νυμφίου ὁ ἐστηκὼς καὶ ἀκούων αὐτοῦ χαρᾶ χαίρει διὰ τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ νυμφίου. αὕτη οὖν ἡ χαρὰ ἡ ἐμὴ πεπλήρωται. **30** ἐκεῖνον δεῖ αἰξάνειν, ἐμὲ δὲ ἑλαττοῦσθαι. **31** Ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν· ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐστίν καὶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς λαλεῖ, ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐρχόμενος [ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν].

## APPENDIX III: ABBREVIATIONS USED

R.S.V	Revised Standard Version
GNT	Greek New Testament [Biblical Greek]
Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Psalms	Psalms
Isa	Isaiah
Ezek	Ezekiel
Jer	Jeremiah
Hos	Hosea
Mal	Malachia
Prov	Proverbs
Matt	Matthew
Cor	Corinthians
Eph	Ephesians

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