

Prepositions... for example “after”

Prepositions (i.e. at, by, during, in, on, etc.) are words that usually precede a noun or pronoun and denote a relationship to a word or idea within the clause. It is important to recognize this so that one may understand what is being communicated. Here’s an example that illustrates its importance.

One of the more challenging passages in the Bible is understanding John 6:44. As one attempts to understand its context, it becomes apparent that the pericope begins with “after these things” (John 6:1), and with further examination, the prepositional phrase is seen earlier in John 5:1.

The phrase, “after these things,” indicates that there is a relationship of events in temporal sequence; however, the possibility that there is a relationship in thought must be evaluated as well. In this instance, there may be a connection to two prior events: John 4 to 5 and John 5 to 6.

One useful method is developing a chart in which one could experiment and discover if there are associations in thought. One immediate observation is seeing that the temporal sequence of two prior events occurs over a period of months and in different locations. This behooves the observer to carefully curate the events that took place and look for commonalities.

| | John 4 | John 5 | John 6 |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
| Location | Traveling from Judea to Galilee through Samaria | Jerusalem | Bethsaida |
| Sign / Miracle | Omniscience: Woman of Samaria (John 4:16-26) Healing: Nobleman’s son (John 4:47-51) | Healing: the man who was sick for 38 years (John 5:5-9) | Healing: many people (John 6:2) Feeding: the 5000 people (John 6:4-14) |
| Question | Woman of Samaria: Where can Samaritans worship? (John 4:20) Nobleman: Can you heal my son? (John 4:47) | The Jews: God is your Father?! You’re equal to God?! (John 5:18) | The Jews: What then do you do for a sign so that we may see and believe you? (John 6:30) |
| Jesus’ Response | To the Woman of Samaria: “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.” (John 4:22-23) “I who speak to you am He.” (John 4:25-26) To the Nobleman: “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.” (John 4:48) | John the Baptist testified (John 5:33-35) Works of Miracles testified (John 5:36) Scripture testified (John 5:37-46) You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. (John 5:38) But I know you, that you do not have the love (agape) of God in yourselves. (John 5:42) | The Bread of Life chiasm (John 6:35-51) All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. (John 6:37) No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44) It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught of God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. (John 6:45) |

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| | John 4 | John 5 | John 6 |
|---------------|--|--|---|
| Result | <p>The Woman of Samaria: “I know that when the Messiah comes, He will declare all things to us (John 4:25).” From that city, many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all the things I have done (John 4:39).”</p> <p>The Nobleman: So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives”; and he himself believed and his whole household. (John 4:54)</p> | <p>The Jews in Jerusalem wanted to kill Jesus. (John 5:18)</p> | <p>Many disciples left. (John 6:66)</p> <p>The Jews of Galilee wanted to kill Jesus. (John 7:1)</p> |

In reviewing the chart, it appears that there is a relationship and sequence of thought.

John 4: When the non-Jews (i.e. Gentiles) witnessed Jesus’ signs and heard His claim of Messiah, they believed in Him. Moreover, they testified of Jesus, and caused others to believe in Him as well.

John 5: “After these things, “when the Jews of Jerusalem witnessed Jesus’ signs and heard His claim of Messiah, they did not believe in Him. They denied the testimony of John the Baptist, the reality of Jesus’ works of miracles, and the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah. Moreover, the Jews of Jerusalem wanted to kill Him!

John 6: “After these things,” when the Jews of Galilee witnessed Jesus’ signs and heard His claim of Messiah, they did not believe in Him. They even asked for more works of miracles for proof! Here the Bread of Life chiasm confronts the Jews’ disbelief and reveals the real cause of their lack of faith – they never had it to begin with and could not accept the virgin birth of Jesus Christ; this was a rejection of the sign God would give them that would validate His Son (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:22-23). And the chiasm places an emphasis on the fact that the Jews convict themselves! The pericope ends with many of Jesus’ disciples deserting Him, and the Jews of Galilee desiring to kill Him!

Prepositions really matter. Here, one can see that the sequence begins with a contrast between faith with a lack of faith, to a confrontation and identification of the Jews’ core reason of disbelief.