CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SUMMARY: JOHN, ARCHAEOLOGY, PHILO, PAUL, OTHER JEWISH SOURCES. JOHN’S INDEPENDENCE OF THE SYNOPTICS. WHERE MY JOURNEY OF RESEARCH HAS LED ME

The summary of the present book has grown into a final chapter. As a summary it will of necessity contain repetitions. The main theme is the question of John’s independence of the other written Gospels. The task is then to bring together observations from John’s Gospel itself, from archaeology, from Paul’s Letters and Philo’s treatises, and possibly from other sources. The aim is to give a better characterization of the place and setting of John.

The Question of Independence

To a large extent this chapter will build on research presented in the previous chapters. It will serve as a concluding summary, but a summary which has the chief aim of illuminating the question of John’s independence and setting. The studies done in the previous chapters are presupposed and some of the most relevant observations will be summed up here. At certain points, more material will be brought into the presentation.

In 1976 John A. T. Robinson published his book Redating the New Testament, based on his judgment that there is little textual evidence that the New Testament reflects knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. Accordingly, Robinson dated the four Gospels to the period prior to 70 C.E. As for the Gospel of John he placed it to sometime between 40 and 65. His early date for John has received little positive response from scholars.

Robinson misses a crucial point which could have led to further analysis: regardless of when the Gospel of John was written, did it build on transmitted oral and/or written traditions which were independent of the other three written Gospels or not? This question calls for a broad investigation of relevant aspects. The task is to bring together observations from the Gospel itself, archaeology, Paul’s Letters and Philo’s treatises, and other sources. Within this context the aim is to give a better characterization of the place and context of John.
As for archaeology, the present study will draw on publications by other scholars. No new contribution will be made. Nevertheless, this area of research is important because there are interesting agreements between archaeology and geographical and social information in John. Thus one question we will ask is: how far does available archaeological, geographical, and other factual information illuminate the study of John, and, correspondingly, how far does John illuminate archaeology and the historical context?

Briefly, some points from surveys and reports made by U. C. von Wahlde make clear the importance of this question. He discusses one of his surveys in his essay “The Gospel of John and Archaeology,” published in James H. Charlesworth (ed.) 2006, Jesus and Archaeology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 523–86. In the essay “The Road Ahead. Three Aspects of Johannine Scholarship” (in T. Thatcher (ed.) 2007, 343–53), Von Wahlde writes on page 351: “In the Gospel of John, there are thirteen geographical references not mentioned in the other Gospels. If we include in our list those places about which we learn details not mentioned in the other Gospels, the number increases to twenty. From what we know from archaeological and literary sources, these references are not symbolic creations, as once thought, but are accurate and detailed references that reveal aspects of Jesus’ ministry not otherwise known.” In the same survey, page 352, Von Wahlde refers to further knowledge gained on the pools of Bethesda and Siloam. At both places large miqveot have been found.

He gives a detailed report on the excavations of the Pool of Siloam in the chapter “The Pool of Siloam: The Importance of the New Discoveries for Our Understanding of Ritual Immersion in Late Second Temple Judaism and the Gospel of John,” in P. N. Anderson, F. Just, and T. Thatcher (eds.) 2009, John, Jesus and History, Volume 2, Atlanta; SBL, 155–73. J. H. Charlesworth has emphasized the importance of archaeology for “Jesus Research” in general and also more specifically on research in John. (J. H. Charlesworth 1988; 2003, 37–70). In a pointed way he maintains that a marked change has taken place, as seen in the title of his essay “From Old to New: Paradigm Shifts concerning Judaism, the Gospel of John, Jesus, and the Advent of ‘Christianity’” (2009, 56–72). He claims that “the Fourth Evangelist is exceptional among the four evangelists for his knowledge of pre-70 religious customs and especially of the topography and architecture of Jerusalem” (page 61). He lists five examples which support this view: (a) The Pool of Bethzatha (Bethesda) “does exist although only the Fourth Evangelist mentions it. Archaeologists have unearthed