Jesus as "Good Man" in the Gospel of John

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Abstract

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' kingly identity is characterised by many Christological titles: Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, Prophet, Saviour of the World, and Lord. However, the term "good man" has been neglected, because of its rareness in John's Gospel. This article studies the concept of ἀγαθός in the Greco-Roman world and finds that it is closely linked to benefactor and king, as well as to deity, which the Roman emperors adopted. In the Old Testament, ἀγαθός is closely linked not only to the character or essence of God, but also to the king as the representative of God. Drawing from these two worlds, the meaning of ἀγαθός in the Gospel of John reveals Jesus' identity as king. (*Keywords: Gospel of John, Greco-Roman World, Jesus as King, good man, benefactor*)

I. Introduction

The Christological titles have their own unique meanings in the Gospel of John which reveal the identity of Jesus as king. It is quite likely that John adapted several terms which were used to indicate the Roman emperors[1] and applied them to Jesus, as the real king to be followed throughout life. In addition, several titles employed to designate the identity of Jesus as king are also closely linked to the Jewish tradi-

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[1] About various forms of the title used for Roman rulers, see A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (trans. L. R. M. Strachan; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910); C. R. Koester, "The Savior of the World (John 4:42)," *JBL* 109 (1990): 667. R. J. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 1, argues, "In depicting Jesus' identity and mission within his Gospel, the evangelist John was concerned to present elements and themes that were especially significant for Christian readers facing Roman imperial claims and for any who faced Roman persecution." He also argues that John "*consciously chose* to include and even to emphasize particular elements and themes" to depict the identity and mission of the Johannine Jesus (p. 28).

tions, particularly the Old Testament. That is, among the Christological titles in the Gospel of John, the Messiah, the Prophet, the Lamb of God, and the Son of Man (cf. the Son of God, the Son) are much rooted in the Jewish traditions. However, because the Gospel of John was written for Greek-speaking readers including Jews and non-Jewish people, these titles overlapped to reveal the identity of Jesus.

From this point of view, I will argue that the term, "good man" (ὁ ἀγαθός), is employed as a Christological title to identify Jesus as king in the Gospel of John.

II. A Survey of the Meanings of ἀγαθός and καλός outside the Gospel of John

The Christological implications of the term ἀγαθός do not seem to have been a topic of special study in Johannine scholarship. One of the reasons for this omission in academic studies is that ἀγαθός is rarely used in the Gospel of John compared with other major Christological titles (ἀγαθός ἐστιν in John 7:12; τι ἀγαθὸν in John 1:46). I shall begin, therefore, to survey briefly the meanings of this term in Hellenistic Greek usage. Then, I will look into its meaning in relation to the kingship of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

ἀγαθός *in Hellenistic Greek Usage*

A survey of the standard lexicons and dictionaries shows that ἀγαθός has not simply been used in the moral and ethical sense, but also contains political, philosophical, and religious meanings.[2]

First, it is necessary to remark that when the neuter form signifies salvation, it significantly contains a religious meaning in Hellenism.[3] For

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[2] LSJ 4; BAGD 3. The word ἀγαθός as an adjective can be translated as "excellent, fine, good, or serviceable" in general Greek usage. It can also be translated as "fit, capable, or useful" in an external sense, and also means "good of inner worth" morally. In particular, when it is used as a pure substance, it means "the good," "what is intrinsically valuable," or "morally good." Accordingly, it expresses the significance or excellence of a thing or person. See Grundmann, "ἀγαθός," *TDNT* 1:13; Beyreuther, "Good," *NIDNTT* 2:98-99. In addition, one of the standard secular meanings of ἀγαθός is "beneficial" or "advantageous," according to J. I. Packer, "Good," *NBD* 3:424. F. W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Calyton, 1982), 318-19, argues "good man" functions as a dynamic equivalent of "benefactor." The substantive neuter form of ἀγαθός, τὸ ἀγαθόν or τά ἀγαθά, denotes "prosperity," "the good" or "goods," which relates to man's moral or material well-being (Rom 2:10; Gal 6:10 Eph 4:28).

[3] Grundmann, *TDNT* 1:11-13; Beyreuther, *NIDNTT* 2:99.

example, with reference to the Hermetic writings, the salvation brought by the deity is "the good."[4] The deities who grant salvation are also given the title of τὸ ἀγαθόν in the Hermetic writings (ὁ οὖν [τὸ] ἀγαθόν, καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν θεός).[5] We can also find the religious usage of ἀγαθός in the writings of Philo of Alexandria. To Philo, God is "good" (ἀγαθὸς γὰρ ὢν θεός),[6] and he particularly links the idea of ἀγαθός to the concept of God as the king (Philo, *Gig.* 1.45: "And the expression, 'I am the Lord,' must be listened to, not only as if it were equivalent to, 'I am the perfect, and incorruptible, and true good [πρὸς ἀλήθιαν ἀγαθόν],' . . . but also as equivalent to, 'I am the ruler, and the king, and the master' [ὁ ἄρχων καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ δεσπότης]").[7] This passage sheds light on the interpretation of the meaning of "anything good" in John 1:46.

Second, we can find a political concept of the term in the Roman world.[8] For example, Nero was called ἀγαθὸς θεός,[9] and "the *Good Divinity* of the world (ὁ ἀγαθὸς δαίμων τῆς οἰκουμένης)" because of his benefactions.[10]

In short, this term indicates the significance and excellence of a person in terms of both morality and materiality, including religious and political concepts. Accordingly, it is important to discover its usage in the Old and New Testaments, in order to identify the Johannine Jesus as "good man" in terms of kingship.

טב/ἀγαθός *in the Old Testament/Septuagint*

First, this term is employed to apply to a personal being in the Near Eastern world. For example, the Hebrew word, טב,[11] which could be equivalent to this Greek term ἀγαθός, indicates "right" words and deeds in terms of the relationship between human beings and gods.[12]

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[4] *Corp. Herm.* 1, 26; Beyreuther, *NIDNTT* 2:99.

[5] *Corp. Herm.*, 2, 16, 11, 17c; Grundmann, *TDNT* 1:12-13.

[6] Philo, *Legat.* 1.47; cf. *Opif.* 1.138; *Cher*, 1.29; *Det.* 1.93; *Congr.* 1.171; *Mut.* 1.46; *Decal.* 1.176; *Spec.* 1.209; *Aet.* 1.1; *Somn.* 1.149, 185.

[7] Cf. Philo, *Cher.* 1:27 (ἀγαθὸν εἶναι τὸν θεόν).

[8] BAGD 3.

[9] *OGIS* 666; Poxy. 1021; Poxy. 1449; *SIG* 3, 526, 1; 685, 1; cf. in the *Acts of Andrew and Matthia* 6, Jesus is called ἀγαθός θεός.

[10] *OGIS* 666; Mary E. Smallwood, *Documents Illustrating the Principates of Gaius Claudius and Nero* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 418; Danker, *Benefactor*, 225-26.

[11] BDB 373-76. In general, the Hebrew word טב denotes "good" or "pleasing" in verbal form; "pleasant," "agreeable," or "good" in adjectival; and "benefit," "welfare," or "good thing" as a noun.

[12] Höver-Johag, "טב," *TDOT* 5:296-303, esp. 300.

Moreover, the king's gracious will is expressed as his "good breath," according to Assyrian and Babylonian texts, and in terms of political alliances between rulers its noun form is translated as "benevolence, friendship."[13] Hence, this term takes on a religious sense also in the Ancient Near Eastern world. On occasion, טב is used to express the benefit to be gained through another person, thing, or action. In Old Testament usage, the passages involve subjective personal advantage of either economic or political benefit (Judg 9:2 cf. 2 Chr 10:7).[14] However, the concept of the good in the Old Testament is obviously linked to God. The Hebrew adjective טב "became the regular designation of the goodness of God's character or actions."[15] The Old Testament expresses more dominantly God's goodness toward human beings (Isa 52:7). The good is always a gift from God, because God himself is the one who is really and exclusively good in the Old Testament.

Second, when applied to the king, טב emphasises his inner quality. This term especially indicates one of the required qualifications of the king: goodness and uprightness (2 Kgs 10:3). This idea refers to the king's keeping of the covenant (1 Sam 15:26-38) rather than to his political abilities as a ruler.[16] In this case, the king's position in the religious-political history of Israel is under God's authority. Consequently, the basic idea of the good in the Old Testament is connected with the goodness of God.

Third, in the Septuagint, the word טב is translated by ἀγαθός, καλός, or χρηστός.[17] Among them, forms of ἀγαθός are used frequently as an equivalent of טב. In particular, the Septuagint employs the neuter form of ἀγαθός when טב refers to God.[18] This can be another indication that the neuter Greek form of ἀγαθός designates a personal being. It can also elucidate John 1:46: where Nathanael used "anything good" (τι ἀγαθόν) in order to refer to the Messiah. This seems to relate closely to the usage of the neuter form, τὸ ἀγαθόν in the Septuagint (1 Chr 16:34; 2 Chr 5:13, 7:3; Ezra 3:11). "This translation has its origin in the

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[13] Höver-Johag, *TDOT* 5:301.

[14] Höver-Johag, *TDOT* 5:307.

[15] Beyreuther, *NIDNTT* 2:99-100.

[16] Höver-Johag, *TDOT* 5:306.

[17] χρηστός is also used to charcterise a personal being. It is primarily used for the goodness of God in the LXX, almost exclusively in praise of God in the Pss (LXX: Ps 24:8; 33:9; cf. 52:11; 53:8; 68:17; 85:5; 99:5; 105:1; 106:1; 118:68; 135:1; 144:9; Jer 40:11; Nah 1:7), In addition, as an honourable title of rulers, it describes persons who make beneficent use of their power and influence (Ps 112:5; Jer 52:32).

[18] LXX: 1 Chr 16:34; 2 Chr 5:13; 7:3; Ezra 3:11; cf. ἀγαθός in Ps 72:1; 117:1, 29; 134:3; Lam 3:25.

Greek and Hellenistic spirit, for which Yahweh the good (adj.) becomes Yahweh the good (substantive)."[19] Furthermore, "the good which God has promised to his people will come to its real fulfilment in messianic, eschatological salvation (Isa 52:7; Jer 32:41)."[20] In this sense, טוב and ἀγαθόν are conceived of as messianic salvation in the Septuagint. In summary, not only by descriptions of God's attributes but also by his benevolent actions in history, God as the king is expressed as the one who is exclusively the highest good in the Old Testament.

ἀγαθός *in the Synoptics*

It is necessary to mention here that many of the concepts of the special terms employed in the Greek New Testament show both Hellenistic and Jewish influence. In this respect, the idea of ἀγαθός is not exceptional. Through the mixture of meanings across times and places through various cultures, this term had been changed in its meaning. The use of this term in the Gospel of John clearly shows this. It is necessary to survey briefly the use of this term in the Synoptics before studying it in the Gospel of John.

In the Synoptics, this term is applied fundamentally to God's essential goodness (Matt 19:17; Mark 10:17f; Luke 18:18f). A special theological significance of the meaning of ἀγαθός is given in these passages. The rich man kneels respectfully before Jesus and calls him "good" teacher (Mark 10:17-18; Luke 18:18-19). Although Jesus rebukes the rich man for calling him ἀγαθός, the use of ἀγαθός here does not reveal simply a moral aspect of Jesus or his generosity because Jesus does not allow himself to be called ἀγαθός, relating ἀγαθός with God's goodness and salvation alone. "To know God is to recognize him as the chief Benefactor."[21] It is, therefore, Jesus' response to the rich man that teaches "God alone is good."

III. Jesus as Benefactor in the Gospel of John

In the previous section, I argued that the term, ἀγαθός, can be read in terms of kingship. To enhance my argument, in this section I will deal with the concept of benefactor in relation to ἀγαθός.

A benefactor in Graeco-Roman society was recognised as the one who provided for others.[22] In general, one is recognised as a benefactor

[19] Grundmann, *TDNT* 1:14.
[20] Beyreuther, *NIDNTT* 2:100.
[21] Danker, *Benefactor*, 319.
[22] G. Bertram, "εὐεργέτης," *TDNT* 2:654, writes, "Gods and heroes, kings and statesmen, philosophers, inventors and physicians are hailed as benefactors

when he or she performs beneficent works with remarkable characteristics and deeds. In particular, "in the Hellenistic kingdoms, rulers held absolute power and could make benefactions that citizens of a Greek city-state could not (e.g., tax relief, amnesties, rights of asylum, jurisdictional privileges and immunities)."[23] In the Roman Empire, in terms of patron and client relationships, the benefactions appeared more formally. Thus, the emperor was the centre of patronage.[24] As a result, this very honourable title can easily be counted as one of the royal titles.[25]

The semantic word field for benefactor is very rich, and includes numerous technical terms and synonyms.[26] The term ἀγαθός was one of them. Danker examines particularly ideas of ἀρετή (virtue, excellence), ἀνηρ ἀγαθός (good man),[27] and καλοκἀγαθός (a perfect gentleman) which function as dynamic equivalents of benefactor.[28] Accordingly, it is meaningful to deal with the concept of benefactor in association with the term ἀγαθός in terms of kingship.

The benefactor was further acclaimed as a saviour (Act 4:9; 10:38) when he granted big favours like freedom or disaster relief.[29] The ancients

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because of their contributions to the development of the race." See also Danker, "Benefactor," 58-60. In this perception, Jesus is a benefactor. The readers in the Graeco-Roman world could identify him as benefactor according to his identification, words, and deeds in the Gospels. In Philo, *Plant*. 1.90, God is described as benefactor.

[23] D. D. Walker, "Benefactor," *DNTB* 157.

[24] Walker, *DNTB* 157.

[25] See Danker, *Benefactor*, 38-42, 223-36, 233; Walker, *DNTB* 157; Schneider, and Brown, NITDNT 3:217; M. P. Charlesworth, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Claudius and Nero* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 39-40.

[26] Neyrey lists technical terms for benefactor: εὐεργέτης, προστάτης, τρόζενος, δεσπότης, ἐπίκουρος, ποστασία, προστατεία, εὐεργεσία, ἐπικουρία; synonyms for benefactor: πάτηρ, σωτήρ, κτίστης, φίλος; *patronus, patrocinium, amicus, praeses, clientela; praesidium, benficum*; related attitudes: φιλάνθρωπος/φιλανθρωπία; μεγαλόψυχος, μεγαλοπρέπεια; *liberalis, benignus, beneficus*. See J. H. Neyrey, "God, Benefactor and Patron: The Major Cultural Model for Interpreting the Deity in Greco-Roman Antiquity," *JSNT* 27 (2005): 471, n. 22. On this, Neyrey argues, "While there is a technical Greek term for 'benefactor' (εὐεργέτης), it would be a mistake to collect instances of it alone and to conduct our examination of god as 'benefactor' based only on that term."

[27] For example, Menas (Envoy, Gymnasiarch, and Supervisor of coinage), Menelaos (prince of a Macedonian canton), and Opramoas of Phodiaplois (Lycian Benefactor) were called "good men" as benefactors (see *OGIS* 339; *SIG* 174; Danker, *Benefactor*, 93, 87, 110, 114, 318-19). In the NT, Barnabas (Acts 11:24) was described as a good man (cf. Joseph in Luke 23:50).

[28] See Danker, *Benefactor,* 317-20.

[29] Walker, *DNTB* 157. Further, Neyrey, "God, Benefactor and Patron," 465-

linked the concept of saviour and benefactor to the Roman emperors in terms of their beneficent rule, which brought in a golden age of peace, order and prosperity.[30] The two terms, benefactor and saviour, are frequently expressed as a pair and are most commonly associated with deities, deified heroes, rulers and the immediate subordinates of rulers.[31] For example, when Vespasian returned to Rome as emperor, the people "styled him their benefactor, and Saviour, and the only person who was worthy to be ruler of the city of Rome."[32] Here, the term saviour is the practical equivalent of a benefactor in terms of kingship. Thus, we can find the concept of benefactor relating to the identity of the Johannine Jesus in terms of his kingship. For example, we can relate the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, which is reminiscent of Vespasian's return, to the beneficial act of Jesus in the raising of Lazarus. Just as when Vespasian returned he was welcomed as saviour and benefactor, so the Johannine Jesus was welcomed as the King of Israel by the multitude, although a different term is employed. Furthermore, in the Gospel of John, Jesus' works and death can be interpreted in terms of the concept of benefactor in relation to the concept of king. Jesus is described as the Great Benefactor far more than the Caesars throughout the whole Gospel: his healing works (John 5: healing a man who has been invalid for thirty-eight years at Bethesda, John 9: healing the man born blind),[33] miracles (John 2: at Cana; John 6: feeding five thousand[34] and walking on water), the raising of Lazarus (John 11), and his death on the cross for the salvation of the world. Danker points out that "John uses the inscription . . . to proclaim the death of Jesus as the performance of an exceptional

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92, esp. 471-76, deals with various equivalents of benefactor, e.g. king, father, saviour, creator, and also with the combination of benefactor with other titles.

[30] See Danker, *Benefactor*, 38-42, 223-36. Julius Caesar as "Saviour and Benefactor" *IGRR* IV 1677, 304; Augustus as "Benefactor and Saviour of the entire world" in *IGRR* III, 719; Claudius as "Saviour and Benfactor" in *ILS* 214; cf. Tiberius as "Observer and Savour" in terms of benefactor in *OGIS* 666.

[31] Plutarch, *On the Fortune of Alexander*, 338c (Barritt, LCL); Polybius, *The Histories*, 9.36.5 (Paton, LCL); Philo, *Leg.* 2.57; 3.137; *Spec.* 1.300; *Legat.*1.118; and *Decal.* 1.41. See Danker, *Benefactor*, 318-66, esp. 324.

[32] Josephus, *J.W.* 7.4.1, 70-71.

[33] On Vaspasian's healing, see Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.81, 5.13; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 65.8.1, 66.1.4 (Cary, LCL); Josephus, *J.W.* 3.399-404, 6.310-315; Suetonius, *Vesp.* 4.5. In Suetonius, *Vesp.* 7 (Rolfe, LCL), the second man was lame.

[34] J. van Bruggen, *Jesus the Son of God: The Gospel Narratives as Message* (trans. N. Forest-Flier; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 56. On the distribution of bread by Roman emperors, see P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (trans. B. Pearce; London: Penguin, 1992); P. Veyne, *"Bread and Circuses": Euergetism and Municipal Patronage in Roman Italy* (ed. K. Lomas and T. Cornell; London: Routledge, 2003).

person."[35] This understanding might stand somewhat on the basis that the Gospel of John would have been written for Hellenized readers. Danker concludes,

> Hellenically oriented public would further appreciate what sympathetic Jewish auditors and readers might readily conclude through acquaintance with their Scriptures: Jesus is the Great Benefactor, the unique gift of the Supreme Benefactor.[36]

In the Gospel of John, the death of Jesus means the hour when he will be glorified (John 12:20-33). This is the time for drawing all men to Jesus (John 12:32), a saviour, benefactor and king. This is also the time for the ruler (ἄρχων) of this world to be cast out (John 12:31). The words "the ruler of this world" could have a double meaning: it could indicate both the contemporary king[37] as well as Satan. Reinhartz remarks,

> Jesus is . . . portrayed in this gospel as the true ruler of this world (14:30; 16:11) in a cosmic sense. As such, he speaks against the present ruler of this world (14:30; 16:11) and casts him out (12:31; cf. 16:33). This implies that though he has no earthly army, Jesus is the ultimate victor in a struggle with the ruler of this world.[38]

The glorification of Jesus in his death, therefore, reveals the deed of a king as benefactor. We need to investigate now the meaning of ἀγαθός as indicator of the king in the Gospel of John.

IV. ἀγαθός as Indicator of the King in the Gospel of John

The concept of ἀγαθός in the Synoptics reveals the character of God and not that of a mere human. However, the character of God is expressed more clearly in relation to Jesus in the Gospel of John: Jesus as Logos is God (1:1); a man born blind *worships* him (9:38); he is the king (Saviour) as Yahweh is in the Old Testament; Jesus and God are one (John 10:30). Thus, the religious and political idea of ἀγαθός is employed in the Gospel of John (John 1:46; 7:12; cf. 10:1-18) to describe the identity and character of Jesus rather than that of God.

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[35] Frederick W. Danker, "Benefactor," *DJG* 59.

[36] Danker, *DJG* 60.

[37] Hadrian and Titus were honorary archons at Delphi (*CIL* 3,550; Danker, *Benefactor*, 71-72).

[38] A. Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 111.

Anything Good (John 1:46)

The word "king" (βασιλεύς) is one of the titles of the Roman emperor employed in the eastern part of the empire, to indicate his ambiguous position between gods and mortals.[39] In addition, the term "son of god" was also used to indicate the Roman emperor. Julius Caesar's adopted son and successor, Octavian, legitimized his rule with the title *divi filius* "son of the divine."[40]

Likewise, the title "king" is also used in the Gospel of John as a title of Jesus. John emphasises Jesus' kingly role (John 1:49–the Son of God and the King of Israel; John 12:13-15–the King of Israel; cf. John 6:14-15; 18:33-37; 19:19–the King of the Jews).[41] In John 19:15, particularly, the Jews declared Caesar to be their only "king," denying Jesus' kingship. In the Gospel of John, however, the author testifies that Jesus died as "the King of the Jews" (John 19:19-22). This motif is given to the Johannine readers from the beginning of the Fourth Gospel.

In chapter one, when Nathanael meets Jesus, he acknowledges Jesus' kingship: "You are the Son of God; the King of Israel" (John 1:49). These two designations are crucial titles in the Gospel of John. Nathanael's naming of Jesus as the Son of God as well as the King of Israel implies an attempt to reveal Jesus' identity as the king throughout the whole gospel.[42] To verify the meanings of the two titles we have to read them in the context of John 1:19-51.

There is a series of short scenes in John 1:19-51. The author of the Gospel, after having opened his account with statements regarding the eternal nature of Jesus (John 1:1-18), then proceeds with the testimony of John the Baptist and other witnesses as to who Jesus really is. When John the Baptist was asked his identity by the Jews of Jerusalem he replied by stating clearly that he was not "the Christ," nor indeed either Elijah or "the Prophet," but claimed merely to be "a voice of one crying in the wilderness" (John 1:23). This denial by the Baptist then opens the way for the author to show that Jesus himself is "the Christ" and "the Prophet" using the testimony of others.

For example, by using the confessions of two disciples of John the Baptist, Andrew and his companion, who could be Philip,[43] the author

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[39] D. E. Aune, "Roman Emperors," *DPL* 234.

[40] Aune, *DPL* 235.

[41] See Reinhartz, *The Word in the World*, 110-12; M. M. Thompson, "Gospel of John," *DJG* 378.

[42] C. Koester, "Messianic Exegesis and the Call of Nathanael (John 1.45-51)," *JSNT* 39 (1990): 27.

[43] M. É. Boismard, *Moses or Jesus: An Essay in Johannine Christology* (trans. B. T. Viviano; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 23-24.

reveals that Jesus is the Messiah and the one about whom the Old Testament has prophesied. Strikingly, through the lips of Andrew, Jesus is directly introduced as Messiah.[44] Philip's confession is even more striking, when speaking with Nathanael of Jesus not only as "the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote" but also "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (1:45)."[45] These descriptions of Jesus seem to be deeply rooted in the Old Testament, and the confessions of these two disciples seem to indicate clearly the kingship of Jesus.[46] However, Philip's confession cannot be regarded as plainly synonymous with that of Andrew. Rather, it does give a clearer description of Jesus. It is now necessary to deal with the terms which are given by the lips of Philip.

Jesus of Nazareth

First, the other phrases "Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph" must be considered to clarify whom Philip attempted to introduce to Nathanael. Why did Philip add several titles in order to introduce Jesus, while Andrew simply presented Jesus as the Messiah? Philip's presentation has a deeper theological meaning. Thus, the phrase "Jesus of Nazareth" should be examined. This term occurs four times in the Gospel of John (John 1:45; 18:5, 7; 19:19).

In John 18:5 and 7, when the detachment of the Roman soldiers and officials from the chief priest came with Judas Iscariot to arrest Jesus, they state twice that they are seeking "Jesus of Nazareth." The crucial point is that they drew back and fell to the ground when they heard Jesus identify himself as "I am." This image shows that Jesus is King and God[47] who has absolute authority and power. Furthermore, in chapter 9, when the blind man met Jesus[48] after his eyes had been opened, he believed in Jesus and worshipped (προσεκύνησεν)[49] him (John 9:38) just as people worshipped God or the emperors.

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[44] Appropriately, messiah "specifically referred to the act of pouring oil on the head of a king or high priest when he was installed in office." See J. B. Tyson, *A Study of Early Christianity* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1973), 107.

[45] John 7:3-4; 7:42; 7-52. Van Bruggen, *Jesus The Son of God*, 152, writes, "The use of the name "Nazarene" seems to reveal a certain displeasure with the fact that Jesus used neither the temple city of Jerusalem as his base of operations nor the city of Bethlehem, where David had come from."

[46] B. Witherington III, "Christ," *DPL* 95-96.

[47] This scene is reminiscent of the scene in Gen 17:3. "When Abram met God Almighty, he fell on his face. . ."

[48] Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man (Jn 9:35).

[49] Cf. Mark 5:6, where a man with an unclean spirit worshipped Jesus.

In John 19:19 the author records that Jesus died as "the king of the Jews."[50] Here, we need to examine the title put on the cross by Pilate the Roman governor, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS."[51] In the Gospel of John, the author uses this term as stated by Philip at the beginning of the gospel as well as towards the end of it as a literary device in order to reveal Jesus as the King. The title "Jesus of Nazareth," therefore, is closely related to the kingship of Jesus.

In the dialogue between Philip and Nathanael, Nathanael's immediate reaction seems to show that he is in doubt of Jesus' kingship, wondering if "anything good" may come from Nazareth. This term "anything good" should be interpreted in the light of Nathanael's confession about Jesus when he meets him: "You are the Son of God; the King of Israel." Collins regards "the King of Israel" as the final and climactic designation of Jesus in the literary unit.[52] Hence, "anything good" means the Son of God and the King of Israel. It is appropriate that in the context it indicates directly and more specifically a kingly figure. Jesus' identity would obviously be able to be revealed to Hellenised readers living in the early church era when they read or heard the confession of Nathanael. Nathanael's counter question to Philip by the use of the unique expression of "anything good," therefore, is a question whether Jesus is the king or not.

Son of Joseph

Second, the title "the son of Joseph" needs to be investigated. Some scholars interpret this title as referring to Jesus' physical father due to Philip's misunderstanding.[53] However, this must rather be a thoroughly

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[50] In the Gospel of John, the title, the king of the Jews, is used to refer to Jesus by the Romans, e.g., the Roman governor Pilate (Jn 18:33, 39; 19:19) and the soldiers (Jn 19:3). Rather, the title, the king of Israel, is used by the Jewish people in the Gospel of John, e.g., Nathanael (Jn 1:49) and the Jewish multitude (Jn 12:13).

[51] This title reflects the combined confessions of Philip ("Jesus of Nazareth") and Nathanael ("the King of Israel"). It reveals also an element of ironic contrast or tension in the combination of the two titles.

[52] R. F. Collins, *John and His Witnesses* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 91.

[53] The titles, "the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the Messiah/Christ, the King of Israel," given by John the Baptist, Andrew and Nathanel in John 1:18-51 are all used to identify the Johannine Jesus. Semantically, these titles imply kingship. He also says that Jesus "the son of Joseph" is only half correct when Philip introduces Jesus to Nathanael, because Jesus is "the only Son from the Father." His interpretation seems to be acceptable in some way, but the function of the term "the son of Joseph" is not only to declare his heavenly origin, but also to declare Jesus' royal origin. Whereas the genealogies in Matthew and Luke

intentional title. Boismard links "the son of Joseph" to one of the two messiahs who are mentioned in rabbinic traditions: Son of David, and Son of Joseph or Son of Ephraim.[54] However, the fates of the two messiahs are different. The Son of David will rule over the eschatological world, while on the other hand, the Son of Joseph will be killed in the battle which will open up the new world. In the Gospel of John, "the son of Joseph" is linked to "Jesus of Nazareth" and relates to the death of Jesus as the Messiah who is to be killed according to the rabbinic tradition. This interpretation of "son of Joseph" had developed in the Samaritan tradition. It is remarkable that the Samaritans had given the "son of Joseph" the title of king.[55]

Moreover, this term "son of Joseph" might be related to the genealogy of Jesus as the son of David in the Gospel of John.[56] Just as in the genealogies of both Matthew and Luke, this title functions to show Jesus' royal origin in the Gospel of John. According to recent research on family ties in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions, genealogy is a very important factor to prove someone's origin and social status.[57] Although in the Gospel of John, Jesus' origin is very controversial—for example, the Jews criticize Jesus' heavenly origin (John 6:42 "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?")—, at the very beginning of the Gospel, the author clearly reveals Jesus' heavenly origin, which implies his kingship. John 1:1-18 shows that Jesus is God, eternal and pre-existing. In addition to this introduction of Jesus' heavenly origin, his earthly origin is needed to verify his kingship. De Jonge remarks, "People who do not know of Jesus' heavenly origin keep debating about questions which are not essential."[58] Although his interpretation would indeed be correct, it seems to be true that the crowds do not know of Jesus' royal genealogy. Although the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem is not

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show Jesus' special origin, i.e. Davidic descent and heavenly origin, the title of "the son of Joseph" functions to indicate Jesus' royal origin.

[54] Boismard, *Moses or Jesus*, 33.

[55] Boismard, *Moses or Jesus*, 33.

[56] John might know the genealogies of Matthew and Luke. The possibility that John knew the Synoptics is quite high, because John was written last among four gospels. On this, see A. T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (BNTC 4; London: Continuum, 2005), 26-39; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCBC; rep.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 25-28; C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of John I* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 40-42.

[57] S. C. Barton, "The Relativisation of Family Ties in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman Traditions," in *Constructing Early Christian Families* (ed. H. Moxnes; London: Routledge, 1997), 89.

[58] M. de Jonge, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God* (ed. & trans. J. E. Steely; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 55.

directly recorded in the gospel, John implies that Jesus was a descendant of king David using this term, "son of Joseph" (cf. John 7:40-43). In short, the reference to the son of Joseph by the author in the Gospel of John indicates Jesus' royal kingship or his heavenly origin, although the son of Joseph is also used to indicate Jesus' filial relationship in John 6:42. Owing to the misunderstanding of Jesus' origin, the Jews do not realise the real meaning of "the son of Joseph," that is, his royal kingship. The author reminds the readers of what Jesus' kingship means by showing the misunderstanding of the Jews. "One should not *make* a man king, but accept the one who is more than a king in an earthly sense of the word, and who is sent by God from heaven."[59] In the narrative of John 1:45-51, therefore, the Gospel of John reveals Jesus as the king.

Good Man in John 7:12

The term "good man" is expressed only once in the Gospel of John. John 7:12 describes the crowds debating Jesus' identity, one party admits Jesus is a "good man" while the other party disagrees and calls Jesus a deceiver. There is a clear division in their opinions in John 7:12.

The debate comes after people have attempted to make him king by force (John 6:15) and follows the dialogue between Jesus and his family (John 7:2-5) in which they urge Jesus to show himself to the world. They want Jesus to go to Jerusalem to demonstrate his power. Their desire seems to be related to the political success of Jesus. They want Jesus to perform "works" (ἔργα) (John 7:3) in order to be more widely known. However, their intention and timing is different from that of Jesus. Jesus considered this kind of "works" (ἔργα) as evil (John 7:7),[60] but he mentioned that his own works were good (John 10:32). Accordingly, "works" in the Gospel of John are related to the mission of Jesus. When the Jewish leaders question Jesus regarding his messiahship, he indicates his works (τὰ ἔργα in John 10:25; cf. 7:31). The mission of Jesus is to complete the work (τὸ ἔργον) of the Father as stated in John 4:34 (cf. John 5:19, 36),[61] where Jesus is identified as Messiah and finally acknowledged as "the true Saviour of the World." Thus, his (good) works are employed to indicate his identity as Messiah/king in the Gospel of John. Furthermore, Jesus rejects his family's insistence that he go into Judea (John 7:3-8) because his time had not yet fully come; however, in John 12:13ff, Jesus as the King of Israel (John 12:13) enters Jerusalem to the great acclamation of the people. John, therefore,

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[59] De Jonge, *Jesus*, 58.
[60] See John 18:36.
[61] M. L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier Liturgical, 2001), 149-50.

reveals Jesus as the King of Israel, which is linked to the confession by Nathanael, while rejecting Jesus' kingship in earthly terms.

The meaning of a "good man" must be interpreted in the context of the debate which occurs among the crowds (John 7:12). First, the idea of a "good man," which might well have the opposite meaning to a "deceiver," must not mean merely that Jesus is good in an ethical and moral sense. The author may be indicating from the lips of the crowds that Jesus is the king. In order to examine this point it is necessary to ask, why were the crowds murmuring about him without speaking openly? The author points out that it was because they were fearful of the Jews (7:13). Why did those who were not hostile to Jesus not speak openly of him? Because they knew that this kind of debate would only exacerbate the displeasure of the Jewish leaders towards Jesus (cf. John 9:22b). John portrays the Jewish leaders as being afraid of losing their power and leadership. Brown suggests the basic point "is that the enthusiasm that Jesus aroused disturbed the Jerusalem authorities."[62] Carson comments on this verse that "they are prompted less by dispassionate concern for the well-being of the nation than for their own positions of power and prestige."[63] John reports that they mistrusted the people's debate about who Jesus was. To the Jewish leaders, Jesus would never be their king. In John 11:47-53, the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council to conspire to kill Jesus. They reasoned in John 7:48 like this: "If we let him go on like this, all men will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." This verse reveals the explicit political tension between Jesus and the leaders of the Jews, although Jesus does not have any political motivation in his ministry.[64] But in that case, why were the leaders of the Jews afraid that the Romans would come and take away both their place and their nation? Jesus' movement seems to have been understood as a new construction of an independent nation opposed to Rome, at least in their eyes. They seemed to worry that Jesus would be the king over the Jews, against Rome. The council in John 11:47 was the Sanhedrin,[65] which was a legal institution to deal with the internal problems of the Jews. As the chairman, the chief priest Caiaphas suggests putting Jesus to death so as to save themselves. He says that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation should not perish (John 11:50b). Here, we can find the reason for the

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[62] R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I: I-XII* (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966), 442.

[63] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 421.

[64] H. N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John* (trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 408.

[65] Lindars, *Gospel of John*, 404.

death of Jesus: he died for his people as the king (John 11:51-52), and like the good shepherd he gave his life (John 10:11). This explanation in John 11:51-52 shows their hostile judgement of Jesus as a deceiver to be wrong. Jesus is the king who will die for the nation and the people; he will die so that he might gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. This portrait of Jesus is clearly designed to show that Jesus is the king.

Secondly, the word "deceiver" may contain a shepherd/sheep image in Old Testament usage.[66] The Israelites without their God in the wilderness were pictured as sheep which were deceived by false prophets and had gone astray. The hostile charge against Jesus as a deceiver could also allude to a false prophet[67] and unfaithful rulers[68] (Deut 13:1-6; 2 Kgs 21:9; 2 Chr 33:9; Isa 30:20, 21; 41:29; Jer 23:12, 32).[69] The opposite idea of this expression is also linked to the people's later acknowledgement of Jesus as the prophet in John 7:40 and the good shepherd who lays his life down for his sheep in John 10:11. The use of the adjective "truly" in John 7:40 clearly demonstrates the opposite concept to that of "a deceiver" in John 7:12. On the other hand, others take Jesus to be "the Christ" in John 7:41. In John 6:14, when the crowds experienced the signs which Jesus performed, they said, "This is *truly* the Prophet who is to come into the world" and then they intended to take Jesus by force to make him king. These two titles "the Prophet" and "the Christ" are interlinked here in terms of kingship.[70] Because they argue that "the Christ" obviously must come from the house of David (7:42) not from Galilee (John 7:41), the Jews admit Jesus as neither "the Christ" nor "the Prophet" (John 7:52) because of Jesus' Galilean origin.[71] The Jews deny Jesus' kingship when they deny that Jesus is the Prophet and the Christ, because the term "messiah" in the Gospel of John is maintained throughout as the one anointed as the king in the messianic kingdom.[72]

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[66] W. Günter, "Deceive," *NITDNT* 2:459-60. The Jewish polemic calls Jesus' Messianic claim a deception (Matt 17:64). See also Braun, "πλανάω," *TDNT* 6:250-51.

[67] G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 107.

[68] Braun, *TDNT* 6:234.

[69] The term, deceiver, could be linked to the terms, thief and robber in John 10:1-18. A. T. Hanson, *Prophetic Gospel: A Study in John and the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 140, argues, "The reference in 10.8 to all Jesus' predecessors having been 'thieves and robbers' may recall Hosea 6.11-7.1."

[70] Meeks clarifies that the two terms the prophet and the king are interrelated. See W. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovTSup 14; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 89-98.

[71] De Jonge, *Jesus*, 49.

[72] Thompson, "Gospel of John," 378.

Thirdly, John 7:40-44 describes three parties among the crowd in Jerusalem: one group regards Jesus as the Prophet, another regards him as the Christ, and the third is hostile to him. These verses are closely related to John 7:11-13 and show that the crowd is still debating amongst themselves during the time of the feast. In John 7:11-13 the crowd is divided into two parties: the one regards Jesus as a "good man," the other regards him as a deceiver of the people. These are similar to the group in John 7:40-44, who are of the opinion that the Christ cannot come from Galilee as he must be of the family of David, and come from David's town of Bethlehem. The party which claims Jesus as a "good man" is similar to the two parties in John 7:40-44 who acknowledge Jesus either as the Prophet or the Christ. This same use of the titles of the Prophet and the Christ occurs here as in chapter one (and chapter four, where it is not clear but alluded to). As in chapter one, the concept of ἀγαθός occurs in relation to "the Prophet" and "the Christ" in terms of kingship. Therefore, the debate concerning Jesus as a "good man" implies his kingship in the Gospel of John.

V. Conclusion

In order to examine how the meaning of ἀγαθός reveals Jesus' identity in the Gospel of John, the term ἀγαθός was investigated. The concept of ἀγαθός contained that of the benefactor and king in the Graeco-Roman world. Furthermore, it is linked to the concept of deity, which the Roman emperor adopted. It is related not only to the character or essence of God, but also to the king as the representative of God in the Old Testament. In the Synoptics, this term is only attributed to God by Jesus.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is described as a good man in order to reveal his kingship as greater than that of the Jewish Messianic king. In other words, Jesus is identified as a unique, unparalleled universal king. All of the works done by Jesus in the Gospel of John are good works, to be observed by its multi-cultural readers as the works of the benefactor and king. "Anything good" in John 1:46 points out that Jesus is the Son of God and the King of Israel when taken in the context. In John 7:12, the term "good man," employed in the debate of Jesus' identity, reveals that some of the crowd accepted Jesus as the Messianic King. Jesus, therefore, is described as the king by using the term ἀγαθός in the Gospel of John.