

Beyond Roman and Jewish Reckoning: Reassessing the Temporal References in John 1:39, 4:6, 4:52, and 19:14 in Dialogue with Adam Kubiś

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Abstract

This study reexamines the explicit temporal references in John 1:39, 4:6, 4:52, and 19:14 in dialogue with Adam Kubiś's influential reassessment of time reckoning in the Fourth Gospel. Kubiś challenges the long-standing assumption that John employed a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning, arguing that both Jewish and Greco-Roman societies generally divided daylight into twelve hours beginning at sunrise. While affirming the significance of Kubiś's historical critique, this study contends that the removal of a distinct Roman system does not resolve the exegetical questions raised by the Johannine temporal notices. Instead, Kubiś's work redirects attention from competing chronological systems to the literary, narrative, and communicative functions of time references within the Gospel. By examining the broader Greco-Roman context of the Fourth Gospel and analyzing each temporal reference within its literary setting, this study argues that Johannine temporal notices function not merely as chronological markers but as significant narrative devices that contribute to the Evangelist's theological presentation of Jesus.

Keywords: Gospel of John, Adam Kubiś, Time Reckoning, Johannine Theology, Greco-Roman Audience

Introduction

This study examines the explicit temporal references in John 1:39, 4:6, 4:52, and 19:14 in critical dialogue with Adam Kubiś's influential reassessment of time reckoning in the Fourth Gospel.¹ For much of the twentieth century, scholarly discussion of these passages was framed by the assumption that John employed either a Jewish system of hourly reckoning, beginning at sunrise, or a Roman system, beginning at midnight. This distinction became particularly important in attempts to explain apparent chronological tensions within the Gospel and between John and the Synoptic accounts. Kubiś has demonstrated that the traditional distinction between Jewish and Roman systems of hourly reckoning lacks firm historical support. Consequently, the discussion must shift from competing chronological systems to the literary and narrative functions of temporal notices within the Fourth Gospel.

The majority of commentators continue to interpret Johannine temporal references according to Jewish reckoning, a position represented by scholars such as Brown, Barrett, Beasley-Murray, Carson, Haenchen, Keener, Köstenberger, Kruse, Lindars, Moloney, Morris, Schnackenburg, Schulz, Schwank, Wengst, and Witherington.² Other scholars have proposed various forms of Roman reckoning,³ while still others have emphasized symbolic or

¹ This essay is a substantially revised and expanded version of my earlier study, "Understanding Time Mentioned in the Gospel of John: Focusing on John 1:39; 4:6, 52; and 19:14," published in *The Biblical Studies for the Church* 4, no. 1 (2006): 143–69. The revision has been undertaken in direct dialogue with Adam Kubiś's important reassessment of Johannine time reckoning, "Roman versus Jewish Reckoning of Hours in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical Misconception That Refuses to Die," *The Biblical Annals* 11, no. 2 (2021): 247–80, which has significantly reshaped contemporary discussion of the subject.

² R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols., New York: Doubleday, 1966–70); C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 2nd edn, 1978); G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John*. (Word Biblical Commentary 36, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2nd edn, 1999); D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); E. Haenchen, *John* (trans. R.W. Funk. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003); A.J. Köstenberger, *John* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); C.G. Kruse, *The Gospel according to John* (TNTC. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2003); B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCBC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Sacra Pagina. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998); L. Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. edn, 1995); R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (trans. K. Smyth et al. 3 vols. Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1968–82); S. Schulz, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987); B. Schwank, *Evangelium nach Johannes* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1996); K. Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium* (TKNT. 2 vols. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2000–2001); B. Witherington, *John's Wisdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

³ B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1908), 282; N. Walker, "The Reckoning of Hours in the Fourth Gospel," *NovT* 4 (1960): 69–73; R.A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 219; J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible* (Princeton: Princeton

theological dimensions of Johannine time.⁴ Kubiś's study, however, requires a reassessment of the assumptions underlying each of these approaches.

The present study does not seek to revive the traditional hypothesis that the Fourth Gospel employs a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning. Rather, it argues that Kubiś's historical critique, while persuasive, does not fully resolve the exegetical questions posed by John 1:39, 4:6, 4:52, and 19:14. These passages continue to present interpretive challenges that cannot be explained solely through appeals to a common ancient method of timekeeping.

Accordingly, this study proceeds in two stages. First, it examines evidence suggesting that the Fourth Gospel was composed for readers situated within a broader Greco-Roman cultural environment. Second, it analyzes each temporal reference within its immediate literary context, asking how these temporal notices contribute to the Evangelist's narrative presentation of Jesus. The central argument is that Johannine temporal references must be interpreted not only in light of ancient chronological practices but also in relation to the literary strategy, theological aims, and communicative context of the Fourth Gospel.

1. Roman influence and the Communicative Context of the Fourth Gospel

Any discussion of Roman influence in the Fourth Gospel must begin with Adam Kubiś's important observation that the ancient evidence does not support the existence of a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning. His analysis has demonstrated that the traditional opposition between Jewish and Roman methods of counting hours rests upon a fragile historical foundation. Consequently, the question is no longer whether John employed a demonstrably Roman method of reckoning hours, but whether the temporal references in the Gospel should be interpreted within the communicative context of a narrative addressed to readers living in the Roman Empire.⁵

Although Kubiś's critique undermines the historical basis for a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning, it does not diminish the significance of Roman political, cultural, and linguistic influence within the world of the Fourth Gospel.⁶ The issue, therefore, is not chronology alone but audience and communication. If the Evangelist composed his Gospel for

University Press, 1964), 8, 12-13. Cf. J.E. Bruns, J.E. "The Use of Time in the Fourth Gospel." *NTS* 13 (1967): 285-90; J.V. Miller, "The Time of the Crucifixion." *JETS* 26 (1983): 157-66.

⁴ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 100, 178, 208-209, 664; C.R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 1-31; D.A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (JSNTSS 95, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 11-22.

⁵ W. Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations*. (New York/ London, T&T Clark, 2008), 11-16, 52-82.

⁶ Carter, *John and Empire*. 52-82; M. Hengel, *The Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*. (London: SCM Press, 1989), 30-44.

readers situated within a broader Greco-Roman environment, the temporal references may reflect that communicative setting even if they do not presuppose a distinct Roman method of counting hours.

This perspective is supported by several features of the Gospel. First, John uniquely emphasizes Roman political realities.⁷ In John 11:48 the Jewish authorities warn that “the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation,” highlighting the pervasive influence of Roman power in Judea. While this passage does not address chronology directly, it demonstrates the Evangelist's awareness of the political framework within which the Gospel narrative unfolds.⁸

Second, John 19:19–20 underscores the multilingual character of the Roman world. Pilate's inscription identifying Jesus as “King of the Jews” is written in Hebrew (Aramaic), Latin, and Greek. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John explicitly notes these languages, thereby emphasizing the public and universal character of Jesus' crucifixion. The trilingual inscription reflects a world in which diverse linguistic communities coexist under Roman rule and suggests that the Evangelist was attentive to readers beyond a narrowly Palestinian setting.⁹

Third, the Gospel repeatedly employs geographical terminology recognizable within the wider Roman world. Particularly noteworthy is John's preference for the designation “Sea of Tiberias” (6:1; 21:1) and his reference to “Tiberias” in 6:23. The name derives from the city founded by Herod Antipas in honor of the emperor Tiberius and appears more prominently in John than in the Synoptic tradition.¹⁰ By adopting terminology familiar within the Roman imperial context, the Evangelist appears to frame aspects of his narrative for readers living beyond the immediate world of Palestinian Judaism.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the Fourth Gospel exhibits a pronounced awareness of Roman political, cultural, and linguistic realities. Such evidence does not establish a Roman method of reckoning hours, as Kubiś correctly observes. Rather, it demonstrates that the Evangelist frequently frames his narrative in terms intelligible to readers living within the Roman world. Nevertheless, it does indicate that the Gospel was composed within a Romanized communicative environment. Consequently, the temporal references in John should be examined not merely as chronological indicators but also as narrative elements addressed to readers living within the broader cultural world of the Roman Empire.

⁷ R.J. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 80-88.

⁸ Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective*. 40-53.

⁹ J.H. Neyrey, “‘Despising the Shame of the Cross’: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative.” in D.G. Horrell (ed.), *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 172-74.

¹⁰ J.F. Strange, “Tiberias” in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. VI (6 vols., New York: Doubleday, 1992), 547-49; S. van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 205-207; Morris, *Gospel according to John*. 302.

2. Readers within a Greco-Roman Cultural Environment

Adam Kubiś has persuasively argued that the ancient evidence does not support the existence of a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning fundamentally different from Jewish practice. His analysis rightly distinguishes between the Roman practice of reckoning the civil day from midnight and the widespread ancient convention of dividing daylight into twelve hours beginning at sunrise. Consequently, the intended audience of the Fourth Gospel cannot be invoked as evidence for a separate Roman method of counting hours.

Nevertheless, Kubiś's historical conclusions do not eliminate the question of audience reception. Even if Jewish and Greco-Roman societies largely shared a common method of reckoning hours, the communicative situation of the Fourth Gospel remains an important hermeneutical consideration.¹¹ The Evangelist repeatedly explains Jewish customs, institutions, and festivals in ways that suggest at least a portion of his readership was not fully familiar with Palestinian Judaism. These explanatory comments therefore provide important evidence regarding the cultural environment in which the Gospel was intended to be read.

First, the Evangelist frequently clarifies Jewish customs and practices. In John 2:6, for example, the six stone water jars are identified as being used for “the Jewish rites of purification” (τὸν καθαρισμὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων). Such an explanation presupposes readers who were not fully acquainted with Jewish purification customs. Similarly, John 11:55 and 18:28 contain explanatory references to purification rituals associated with Passover.¹² In John 4:9, the narrator explains that “Jews do not associate with Samaritans” (οὐ γὰρ συγχρῶνται Ἰουδαῖοι Σαμαρίταις), a social convention that would have required little explanation for readers thoroughly familiar with Jewish society. This statement is particularly significant because it represents one of the clearest examples of the Evangelist providing an explanatory comment for readers who were presumably unfamiliar, or at least not fully familiar, with Jewish–Samaritan relations. As such, it lends support to the view that the Fourth Gospel was addressed to a broader Greco-Roman readership.¹³

Second, the Evangelist regularly explains Jewish festivals and religious observances. John repeatedly refers to Passover as “the Passover of the Jews” (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), while John 7:2 speaks of “the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles.” Likewise, John 10:22 notes that the Feast of Dedication occurred during winter. Such explanatory comments suggest that the Gospel was not written exclusively for readers already immersed in Jewish religious traditions.¹⁴

These observations indicate that at least part of the Gospel's readership lived outside the

¹¹ S. Cho, *Jesus as Prophet in the Fourth Gospel*. (NTM 15, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 53–64.

¹² Keener, *Gospel of John*. vol. I, 509–13; vol. II, 858, 1145–47; B.J. Malina and R.L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 70–72, 204–208.

¹³ C.L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*. (Leicester: Apollos, 2001), 99–100; Brown, *Gospel according to John*. vol. I, 170; Schnackenburg, *Gospel according to St. John*. vol. 1, 425.

¹⁴ G.A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John*. (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989), 26–27, 83–92.

immediate cultural world of Palestinian Judaism. Although the precise location of the Gospel's composition remains debated, many scholars have proposed settings within the broader Greco-Roman environment of the eastern Mediterranean. Whether or not a specific location such as Ephesus can be established with certainty, the Gospel appears to address readers who required clarification concerning Jewish customs and institutions.¹⁵

At this point Kubiś's contribution especially relevant here. The presence of a Greco-Roman audience does not establish the existence of a distinct Roman method of reckoning hours. Such a conclusion would exceed the available evidence. Nevertheless, the repeated explanatory comments demonstrate that the Evangelist consciously adapted aspects of his narrative for readers situated beyond the immediate world of Palestinian Judaism. Consequently, the temporal references in John should be interpreted not only in relation to ancient chronological practices but also in relation to the communicative needs of the Gospel's intended audience.

The following sections therefore examine the explicit temporal references in John 1:39, 4:6, 4:52, and 19:14 within their immediate literary contexts. Rather than presupposing either a Jewish or a Roman system of hourly reckoning, the analysis seeks to determine how these temporal notices function within the narrative and how they may have been understood by readers living within the broader cultural environment of the Roman Empire.

3. Explicit Temporal References in the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John contains four explicit references to specific hours of the day:

John 1:39: “about the tenth hour” (ὥρα ἣν ὥς δεκάτη)

John 4:6: “about the sixth hour” (ὥρα ἣν ὥς ἕκτη)

John 4:52: “at the seventh hour” (ὥραν ἐβδόμην)

John 19:14: “about the sixth hour” (ὥρα ἣν ὥς ἕκτη)

Whether the sixth hour in John 4:6 should be interpreted in the same manner as the sixth hour in John 19:14 will be examined in the discussion of those passages. It is noteworthy that John 4:52 alone provides an unqualified hour, whereas the temporal references in 1:39, 4:6, and 19:14 are modified by the particle ὥς, indicating approximation. These references therefore function less as precise chronological markers than as indications of a particular period within the day.

The interpretation of these temporal notices has long occupied a central place in discussions of Johannine chronology. Traditionally, most scholars have interpreted them according to Jewish reckoning, while a minority have appealed to Roman reckoning, particularly where tensions arise between Johannine and Synoptic chronology. Adam Kubiś has significantly reshaped this discussion by arguing that the historical distinction between Jewish and Roman methods of hourly reckoning has been overstated. If Kubiś is correct, then the primary question

¹⁵ Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus*.

is no longer which chronological system John employed, but how these temporal references function within the narrative and communicative strategy of the Gospel.

Accordingly, the following analysis does not begin by presupposing either a Jewish or a Roman system of reckoning hours. Instead, each temporal reference will be examined within its literary context in order to determine how it contributes to the narrative presentation of Jesus and how it may have been understood by readers situated within the broader Greco-Roman world.

3.1. John 1:39 and the Tenth Hour

The first explicit temporal reference in the Gospel occurs in John 1:39. Although temporal terminology appears elsewhere in the Prologue and throughout the Gospel, the present discussion is limited to references that designate specific hours of the day.

John 1:39 reads:

“He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ So they came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about the tenth hour (ὥρα ἦν ὡς δεκάτη).”

The phrase “about the tenth hour” (ὥρα ἦν ὡς δεκάτη) has generated considerable discussion.¹⁶ If interpreted according to the traditional Jewish reckoning of daylight hours beginning at sunrise, the tenth hour would correspond approximately to 4:00 p.m. If interpreted according to the view traditionally described as Roman reckoning, the reference would correspond approximately to 10:00 a.m.

Recent scholarship, particularly the work of Kubiś, cautions against assuming that these alternatives represent two historically distinct systems of hourly reckoning. Nevertheless, the narrative context raises an important interpretive question: what temporal setting best explains the sequence of events described in the passage?

The narrative reports that two disciples of John the Baptist followed Jesus after hearing John's testimony (1:35–37). They asked where Jesus was staying (1:38), accepted his invitation to “come and see,” and then remained with him “that day” (τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην). The demonstrative expression “that day” highlights the significance of the encounter and suggests an extended period of association with Jesus.

For this reason, several scholars have argued that a morning setting provides a more natural reading of the narrative. If the meeting occurred around 10:00 a.m., the disciples could indeed have spent a substantial portion of the day with Jesus. By contrast, if the reference corresponds to approximately 4:00 p.m., the available time before sunset would have been considerably shorter. Barrett himself acknowledges that 4:00 p.m. is not an especially natural time at which

¹⁶ K. Hanhart, “‘About the Tenth Hour’... on Nisan 15 (Jn 1,35–40).” in M. de Jonge (ed.), *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, rédaction, théologie*. (BETL 44, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1977), 335–46.

“to begin to spend a day” with someone.¹⁷

At the same time, the narrative does not explicitly exclude a late-afternoon meeting. Ancient descriptions of a “day” need not imply a full daylight period, and it remains possible that the disciples continued their fellowship with Jesus into the evening. Consequently, the passage does not provide conclusive evidence for either interpretation.

Other scholars have proposed symbolic readings. Bultmann interprets the tenth hour as a symbol of fulfillment, while others have associated the number ten with completeness.¹⁸ Schnackenburg, however, rejects such symbolism and argues that the temporal reference primarily serves to underscore the historical vividness and personal significance of the disciples’ first encounter with Jesus.¹⁹

In light of these considerations, John 1:39 appears to preserve a vivid temporal memory of the disciples’ first encounter with Jesus. Although the passage cannot establish the existence of a distinct system of hourly reckoning, the narrative context may be more readily explained by a morning setting, although the evidence remains inconclusive. The reference to the disciples remaining with Jesus “that day” suggests an extended period of fellowship, which is more easily explained if the encounter occurred earlier in the day. Consequently, while the passage remains inconclusive with respect to the broader debate concerning time reckoning, it raises legitimate questions regarding the traditional interpretation of the tenth hour as approximately 4:00 p.m.

3.2. John 4:6 and the Sixth Hour

John 4:6 contains the second explicit temporal reference in the Fourth Gospel:

“Jacob’s well was there. Jesus, wearied from his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about the sixth hour” (ἦν δὲ ἐκεῖ πηγή τοῦ Ἰακώβ• ὁ οὖν Ἰησοῦς κεκοπιακῶς ἐκ τῆς ὁδοιπορίας ἐκαθέζετο οὕτως ἐπὶ τῇ πηγῇ• ὥρα ἦν ὡς ἕκτη).

The interpretation of the sixth hour has long been debated. Most commentators understand the reference according to the conventional Jewish reckoning of daylight hours beginning at sunrise, which would place the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at approximately noon. Others have proposed that the temporal setting should be understood differently. More recently, Adam Kubiś has questioned whether the traditional distinction between Jewish and Roman systems of hourly reckoning can be sustained historically. His

¹⁷ Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*. 181.

¹⁸ Bultmann, *Gospel of John*. 100.

¹⁹ Schnackenburg, *Gospel according to St. John*. vol. I, 309, “The time mentioned (the tenth hour, four in the afternoon) can hardly have a symbolic meaning. It serves to indicate the length and fruitfulness of the conversation, which went on all the evening - or does ‘that day’ mean the following day? It also suggests the importance of the hour for the disciples - the hour in which they enter into fellowship with Jesus”.

critique requires that the discussion move beyond appeals to a presumed Roman system and focus instead upon the literary and narrative features of the text itself.

The traditional noon interpretation has often been connected with the symbolism of biblical well scenes. Lincoln, for example, draws attention to parallels with Genesis 29 and suggests that John intentionally evokes earlier scriptural traditions associated with meetings at wells.²⁰ Likewise, Köstenberger accepts a noon setting while acknowledging that such a reading presupposes a particular understanding of Johannine time reckoning.²¹ These proposals rightly highlight the theological and intertextual dimensions of the narrative. Nevertheless, they do not entirely resolve the practical and narrative questions raised by the passage.

Several features of the narrative raise questions about the traditional noon interpretation and have prompted scholars to consider alternative explanations. The narrative emphasizes Jesus' physical exhaustion following a lengthy journey and his need for water. At the same time, the Samaritan woman arrives alone at the well. As Morris, Brown, and Keener observe, the collection of water at noon would have been unusual in the climate of Samaria.²² Although some scholars explain her presence by appealing to her personal history (4:16–18), the narrative itself never states that she was socially ostracized. Indeed, her subsequent interaction with the townspeople suggests that she remained integrated within the life of the community (4:28–30, 39–42). Consequently, the proposal that she deliberately came at noon to avoid social contact remains speculative.

Additional narrative details further complicate the traditional interpretation. The disciples have gone into the town to purchase food (4:8), and later urge Jesus to eat (4:31). While such details are not incompatible with a noon setting, they also fit naturally within a later stage of the day when preparations for an evening meal would become increasingly important. Taken together, Jesus' weariness, the woman's arrival at the well, and the disciples' concern for food create a narrative picture that is not easily explained by the conventional interpretation.

At this point Kubiś's contribution becomes particularly significant. If the ancient evidence does not support a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning, then the difficulties raised by John 4:6 cannot be resolved simply by appealing to "Roman time." Yet neither does Kubiś's critique remove the narrative tensions associated with the traditional noon interpretation. The question therefore remains not merely how ancient people reckoned hours but why the Evangelist chose to situate this encounter at the sixth hour and how that temporal setting contributes to the literary development of the narrative.²³

The symbolic dimension of the passage must also be taken seriously. John frequently invests

²⁰ A.T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John*. (BNTC. London/ New York: Continuum, 2005), 171-74.

²¹ Köstenberger, *John*. 146-47.

²² Morris, *Gospel according to John*. 227-28; Brown, *Gospel according to John*. vol. I, 169; Keener, *Gospel of John*. vol. 1, 590-93.

²³ T.L. Brodie, *The Gospel according to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. (New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 219-21.

ordinary narrative details with theological significance, and themes such as water, revelation, worship, and mission dominate the episode. Nevertheless, the recognition of symbolic meaning does not eliminate the chronological question. Symbolic significance and temporal reference need not be mutually exclusive categories. The sixth hour may contribute both to the narrative setting of the encounter and to its theological presentation.

In conclusion, John 4:6 does not provide decisive evidence for either Jewish or Roman reckoning. Nevertheless, the traditional noon interpretation leaves several narrative features insufficiently explained. Kubiś has rightly cautioned against resolving these difficulties through appeals to a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning. At the same time, his historical critique does not eliminate the literary questions raised by the text itself. Consequently, the sixth hour should be interpreted within the broader narrative and theological framework of the Gospel, where its function extends beyond the mere indication of chronological time.

3.3. John 4:52 and the Seventh Hour

The third explicit temporal reference in the Fourth Gospel occurs in the account of the healing of the royal official's son. John 4:52 reads:

“So he inquired of them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him’” (ἐπυνθάνετο οὖν τὴν ὥραν παρ’ αὐτῶν ἐν ᾗ κομψότερον ἔσχεν• εἶπαν οὖν αὐτῷ ὅτι ἐχθὲς ὥραν ἐβδόμην ἀφῆκεν αὐτὸν ὁ πυρετός).

Unlike the temporal references in John 1:39, 4:6, and 19:14, this verse does not employ the particle ὥς (“about”). The narrator therefore reports a specific hour rather than an approximate time. The precision of the temporal notice is narratively significant because it enables the official to recognize the exact correspondence between Jesus' declaration and his son's recovery (4:53).

Traditionally, many interpreters have understood the seventh hour according to Jewish reckoning, which would place the healing at approximately 1:00 p.m. Others have proposed a later setting. More recently, Adam Kubiś has challenged the assumption that such alternatives should be framed in terms of distinct Jewish and Roman systems of hourly reckoning. His critique appropriately redirects attention from hypothetical chronological systems to the narrative logic of the text itself.

From this perspective, the most significant feature of the passage is not the seventh hour alone but the repeated emphasis upon “yesterday” (ἐχθὲς).²⁴ After receiving Jesus' assurance that his son would live (4:50), the official begins his return journey. Yet he does not arrive home on the same day. Instead, he encounters his servants on the following day and learns that the healing occurred “yesterday at the seventh hour” (4:52). The narrative therefore creates a temporal gap that requires explanation.

²⁴ Morris, *Gospel according to John*. 258-59; Brown, *Gospel according to John*. vol. I, 191.

If the seventh hour is understood as approximately 1:00 p.m., the delay becomes difficult to explain. Cana and Capernaum were separated by approximately twenty to thirty kilometers, a distance that could ordinarily be covered within a day's journey. Morris acknowledges the difficulty and suggests that the official may have felt sufficiently reassured by Jesus' promise that he did not hurry home.²⁵ Such explanations remain possible, but they also reveal that the traditional interpretation requires additional assumptions to account for the narrative sequence.

The narrative unfolds more naturally if the healing occurred later in the day. In that case, the official may have remained in Cana overnight and resumed his journey the following morning. Such a reconstruction provides a straightforward explanation for the servants' report that the fever had left the boy “yesterday.” While this observation does not establish a distinct Roman method of hourly reckoning, it does suggest that the traditional interpretation may not fully account for the chronology implied by the narrative.

Geographical considerations further support this conclusion. The repeated use of καταβαίνω (“to go down”) in 4:47, 49, and 51 reflects the substantial descent from Cana to Capernaum. As Keener and Brown note, travel in antiquity was constrained by terrain, daylight, and practical considerations.²⁶ These factors do not determine the meaning of the seventh hour, but they reinforce the narrative plausibility of an overnight stay before the official's return.

At this point Kubiś's contribution is particularly important. His critique demonstrates that the narrative coherence of a later hour cannot by itself establish the existence of a distinct Roman system of reckoning hours. Nevertheless, neither does his historical argument eliminate the narrative problem created by the traditional interpretation. The central issue therefore remains exegetical rather than chronological.

Among the Johannine temporal notices, John 4:52 presents the most substantial challenge to interpretations based solely on conventional Jewish reckoning. The precise reference to the seventh hour, the repeated emphasis upon “yesterday,” and the geographical framework of the narrative together suggest that the temporal setting of the episode deserves further reconsideration. Accordingly, the significance of this passage lies not in proving a separate Roman system of reckoning hours but in demonstrating that the narrative logic of the story remains insufficiently explained by conventional interpretations.

3.4. John 19:14 and the Sixth Hour

The final explicit reference to a specific hour in the Fourth Gospel occurs in John 19:14:

“Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour” (ἦν δὲ παρασκευὴ τοῦ πάσχα, ὥρα ἦν ὡς ἕκτη).

Like the temporal reference in John 4:6, the expression is qualified by the particle ὥς and

²⁵ Morris, *Gospel according to John*. 258-59.

²⁶ Keener, *Gospel of John*. vol. 1, 630-33; Brown, *Gospel according to John*. vol. I, 191, 195-98.

therefore denotes an approximate rather than a precise hour. The notice appears at a climactic moment in the narrative immediately before Pilate delivers Jesus over for crucifixion.

Historically, discussion of this passage has been dominated by the apparent chronological tension between John 19:14 and Mark 15:25.²⁷ Whereas Mark states that Jesus was crucified at the third hour, John places Jesus before Pilate at approximately the sixth hour. Many interpreters have attempted to resolve this difficulty by appealing to a distinction between Jewish and Roman systems of hourly reckoning. According to this proposal, John's sixth hour would correspond to approximately 6:00 a.m., thereby allowing sufficient time for the events leading to the crucifixion described in the Synoptic tradition.

Adam Kubiś has fundamentally challenged the historical basis of this solution. Through a comprehensive examination of ancient Roman, Greek, and Jewish sources, he argues that the evidence does not support the existence of a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning beginning at midnight. Consequently, the traditional harmonistic appeal to Roman reckoning can no longer be accepted without substantial qualification. Kubiś's critique has redirected scholarly attention away from hypothetical chronological systems and toward the literary and historical contexts of the Gospel narratives themselves.

Yet the abandonment of the Roman-reckoning hypothesis does not entirely resolve the exegetical difficulties posed by the text. The narrative sequence of John 18–19 continues to raise chronological questions that are independent of attempts to harmonize John with Mark. Following Peter's final denial, marked by the crowing of the rooster (18:27), Jesus is brought before Pilate *πρωῖ* ("early in the morning"; 18:28).²⁸ The term naturally suggests the early hours of the day and establishes a temporal framework for the ensuing trial narrative.

The proceedings then unfold through a series of interrogations, accusations, and judicial exchanges before culminating in Pilate's final judgment (19:14–16). The combined force of the rooster's crow (18:27), the temporal marker *πρωῖ* (18:28), and the rapid sequence of judicial events continues to raise important chronological questions regarding the interpretation of the "sixth hour" in John 19:14. Although Kubiś has persuasively challenged the historical basis for a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning, these narrative features remain significant and invite further examination of the literary and chronological function of the temporal notice within the Passion narrative.

The narrative sequence itself invites further reflection. Following the reference to *πρωῖ* (18:28), the Passion narrative proceeds rapidly through a series of judicial encounters before reaching Pilate's final judgment at "about the sixth hour" (19:14). Whether this sequence should be read as a precise chronological account is uncertain. Ancient narrative frequently compresses temporal progression for literary purposes, and the Fourth Gospel appears to subordinate chronological precision to theological presentation. Consequently, the significance

²⁷ A. Mahoney, "A New Look at 'the Third Hour' of Mk 15:25." *CBQ* 28 (1966): 292–99.

²⁸ Brown, *Gospel according to John*. vol. II, 828, 844, 859–62; J.H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*. vol. I (ICC. 2 vols. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 603–604, 606.

of the sixth hour lies not simply in determining the exact time of Jesus' condemnation but in understanding how the Evangelist structures the Passion narrative to reveal Jesus' identity as the fulfillment of Israel's Passover.

The theological dimensions of Johannine chronology must also be considered. Many scholars argue that the Evangelist intentionally aligns Jesus' death with Passover imagery in order to present him as the true Paschal Lamb.²⁹ From this perspective, chronological references may serve theological as well as historical functions. The sixth hour therefore should not be treated merely as a chronological datum but as an element within a carefully constructed narrative that advances the Gospel's christological and theological aims.

This theological perspective also helps explain the relationship between the sixth hour in John 19:14 and the Passover chronology. Although the slaughter of the Passover lambs in the Temple normally began later in the afternoon,³⁰ after the daily sacrifice, John does not appear to be concerned with reproducing the precise liturgical timetable. Rather, the Evangelist narratively compresses the sequence of Jesus' trial, condemnation, crucifixion, and death into the broader temporal framework of the Day of Preparation. In doing so, he invites readers to interpret the entire Passion narrative through the lens of Passover rather than through strict chronological precision. The sixth hour therefore functions less as an exact chronological marker than as part of a carefully constructed theological narrative that presents Jesus as the true Paschal Lamb whose sacrificial death fulfills the meaning of Israel's Passover.

At this point Kubiś's contribution proves most instructive. His critique rightly cautions against resolving the problem through appeals to a distinct Roman system of reckoning hours. At the same time, the rejection of Roman reckoning does not eliminate the literary and chronological questions raised by the narrative itself. The relationship between *πρῶτ'* in 18:28, the sequence of judicial proceedings, and the temporal notice of 19:14 continues to invite further investigation.

In conclusion, John 19:14 remains one of the most contested temporal references in the Fourth Gospel. Kubiś has persuasively demonstrated that the traditional Roman-reckoning solution rests on uncertain historical foundations. Nevertheless, the narrative sequence of John 18–19 continues to raise significant exegetical questions that cannot be resolved solely through historical reconstruction. Accordingly, the sixth hour must be interpreted within the broader literary, theological, and narrative strategy of the Fourth Gospel, where chronology functions as more than a simple record of time.

Conclusion

Adam Kubiś's study represents a significant turning point in Johannine scholarship. By

²⁹ Brown, *Gospel according to John*. vol. II, 882-84; Beasley-Murray, *John*. 341-42, 344-45.

³⁰ Danby, H. *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), Pesahim 5.1, 141-43.

demonstrating the lack of convincing evidence for a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning, he has fundamentally challenged one of the assumptions that shaped discussions of Johannine chronology for more than a century. His work has rightly redirected scholarly attention away from harmonistic appeals to competing chronological systems and toward a more careful evaluation of the historical evidence.

Yet the elimination of a distinct Roman system of hourly reckoning does not resolve the interpretive questions posed by the temporal notices themselves. The passages examined in this study continue to present literary, narrative, and theological problems that invite renewed investigation. John 1:39 raises questions concerning the temporal setting and significance of the disciples' first encounter with Jesus. John 4:6 presents unresolved tensions regarding the narrative setting of the Samaritan woman episode and the function of the sixth hour within the story. John 4:52 remains particularly significant because the explicit reference to “yesterday” (ἐχθές) creates a narrative problem that cannot be resolved solely through appeals to ancient methods of time reckoning. John 19:14 continues to generate debate concerning the relationship between Johannine chronology, Passion theology, and the literary shaping of Jesus' trial before Pilate.

The present study has argued that Kubiś's historical critique, while persuasive, does not fully explain the narrative function of these temporal references. Once the traditional opposition between Jewish and Roman systems of hourly reckoning is set aside, the central question becomes how these temporal notices contribute to the Evangelist's literary presentation of Jesus. The significance of Johannine time lies not merely in chronology but in the way temporal references structure narrative development, highlight key theological themes, and guide readers' interpretation of the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus.

The enduring significance of Kubiś's contribution therefore lies not in closing the discussion but in redefining its terms. Future research should move beyond the traditional debate concerning Jewish and Roman reckoning and focus more fully on the literary, theological, and communicative dimensions of Johannine temporality. In this respect, temporal references in the Fourth Gospel should be understood not merely as chronological data but as integral components of the Evangelist's narrative strategy and theological witness.

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