**Who Is the Ruler of This World?**

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***Introduction***

Recently I was shown an interpretation of “the prince of this world” in John 12:31, 14:30 and 16:11 that applied this expression to Christ. Here are my versions of the texts:

**12:30-31** Jesus answered and said, “This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is a judgment of this world (*tou kosmou toutou*); now the ruler of this world (*ho archōn tou kosmou toutou*) will be cast out outside.”

**14:30** I will no longer speak many things with you, for the of the world ruler (*ho tou kosmou archōn*) comes and he has not nothing in Me. {Gk. double negative for emphasis – this might be rendered idiomatically: “he has nothing at all in Me!”}

**16:7-11** But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go away, for if I should not go away the Encourager will not come to you. And if I proceed, I will send Him to you, and having come, That One will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment. Concerning sin indeed, because they do not believe into Me. And concerning righteousness, because I go away to the Father and you no longer see Me. And concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world (*ho* *archōn tou kosmou toutou*) has been judged.

Note that I have chosen to translate *archōn* as “ruler”, as is done elsewhere in John and other NT books. In John we have “Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews”, as we have elsewhere in John of the prevailing religious rulers (7:26, 48; 12:42). Also note that in 14:30 the adjective “this” (*toutou*) does not have good manuscript support.

If the view of “ruler of this world” as Christ be correct, then the judgment of 16:11 and casting out of 12:31 would refer to the false judgment brought upon Jesus, and His execution “without the camp”.

Although I found some of this interpretation plausible, its application to 14:30 seemed contradictory. How could Christ as Ruler of the world have nothing in Himself? This led me into several lines of inquiry in this Gospel.

***Survey of “This World” in John***

It is true that “the world” in John’s Gospel often means the Jewish religious system – i.e., their order, “order” or “orderly arrangement” being the underlying meaning of a *kosmos*. This meaning is obvious in the following passage:

**18:20** Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world. I taught always in synagogue and in the Temple where the Jews come together, and in secret I spoke nothing.”

Here “openly” and “to the world” are an apposition (i.e., synonymous terms), and the opposite of “in secret.” See also 12:19. In other texts the reference to the Jews and Jewish religion is probable, but not as conclusive. And John’s use of “world” in the following may have been widely misunderstood –

**1:9-10** He was the light the true, Who enlightens every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be by Him, and the world did not get to know Him.

On the surface “the world came to be by Him” seems to refer to the creation of Genesis1-2. But the world not getting to know Him rather limits this application too – to His Jewish hearers. So here “the world” makes better sense as a reference to the divine covenants, particularly the covenant of Law that He (Jesus), as Yahweh, made with Israel. The light enlightening “every man coming into the world” must be understood in the context of prophecy –

 **Isa.9:2** The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

This “every man” in John is the average Israelite. And in this way we must comprehend the Lord’s statement that, if He were lifted up He would draw “all *men*” to Himself (12:32) – this was all Israel.

But in John there is also the reference to “before the overthrow of the world” (17:24) that cannot refer to any Jewish order of things. Here the world can be understood merely physically, or it can be seen as a corrupted world system under Satanic authority. Thus, Satan’s tempting offer to Jesus of “the kingdoms of the world” (Mat.4:8; Luk.4:5) was a legitimate offer.

So, if we think we know what a word or expression might mean, we must search the context for the definitive answer.

Now, as for the particular expression “this world”, here are the texts in John –

**John 8:23** And He was saying to them, “You are from the undersides; I am from the aboves. You are from this world (*ek toutou tou kosmou*) ; I am not from this world (*ek tou kosmou toutou* – note the reversal of Greek word order, which may have been done to emphasize the diametric opposition of Christ and “the Jews”).” [Spoken to the Jews in the Temple treasury.]

**John 9:39** And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world (*eis ton kosmon touton*) , so that those not seeing might see, and those seeing might become blind.” [Spoken to the Jew born blind]

**John 11:9** Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of the day? If anyone should walk in the day, he stumbles not, because he sees the light of this world (*tou kosmou toutou*). [Spoken to His disciples after announcing He would go back to Judea]

**John 12:25** The one loving his soul destroys it, and the one hating his soul in this world (*en tō kosmō toutō*) will guard it unto life age-abiding. [Spoken to Andrew and Philip – and possibly to the Greek Jews who sought an audience with Him]

**John 12:30-31** Jesus answered and said, “This voice came not because of Me, but for your sakes. Now is a judgment of this world (*tou kosmou toutou*); now the ruler of this world (*ho archōn tou kosmou toutou*) will be cast out outside.” [Spoken to the people who heard the Father’s voice, confirming the glory of the Son]

**John 13:1** Now before the feast of the passover, Jesus having known that His hour came, so that He might remove from this world (*ek tou kosmou toutou*) toward the Father, having loved His own who *were* in the world, He loved them unto the end.

**John 16:7-11** But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go away, for if I should not go away the Encourager will not come to you. And if I proceed, I will send Him to you, and having come, That One will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment. Concerning sin indeed, because they do not believe into Me. And concerning righteousness, because I go away to the Father and you no longer see Me. And concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world (*ho* *archōn tou kosmou toutou*) has been judged. [Spoken to the Eleven]

**John 18:36** Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world (*ek tou kosmou toutou*): if my kingdom were from this world (*ek tou kosmou toutou*), my servants would struggle, so that I should not be delivered up to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from here.” [Spoken to Pilate]

I have highlighted in red some pertinent words above. Jesus said that He is not from this world (8:23) – and neither is His kingdom (18:36). *Ek tou kosmou toutou* could also be understood as “on the basis of this world.” If Jesus and His kingdom are not from this world, then in what sense can He be “the ruler of this world”? Unless some explanation can be brought forward to harmonize these contradictory statements, I have to take them at face value – Jesus’ kingship and the rulership of this world are in opposition.

My inference from all of the above is that John uses “ruler of this world” to speak of the old covenant Jewish order of rulers of the People. The “*kosmos houtos*” texts suggest an introversion along these lines:

1. a) you underneathers are from this world

 b) I am not from this world

1. for judgment I came into this world
2. for 12 hours - abides the light of this world
3. Entrance to kingdom: one hating his soul in this world
4. judgment of this world
5. Exclusion from kingdom: the ruler of this world cast out outside
6. Jesus’ hour – removal from this world
7. the ruler of this world judged
8. b) My kingdom is not from this world
9. in a kingdom from this world, servants would struggle

Whether we interpret “this world” to be the post-Fall Satanic order of rule, or the Jewish leadership, it is only a matter of degree – not of type! And judgment is engraved across the mid-section (**B.**, ***B.*** and *B.*) of this world.

If this division of the texts is right, then “the ruler of this world” is not an individual. It is a reference to the Jewish rulership – a generic use of the definite article (per *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, J.H.Moulton, vol.III, ch. 12, sec.2). However, the connection between a limited “this world” as seen in John, and the greater world-order and its Satanic leader can be deduced from Ephesians.

**Eph.2:1-2** … the trespasses and the sins, in which you once walked,

 according to the age of this world

 according to the ruler of the authority of the air,

 the spirit which now energizes in the sons of the rebellion

The ruler and his world-order (the age of “this world”) go hand-in-hand. “The sons of the rebellion” in Greek has both articles and is very specific. It looks backward to the Hebrew *benêy merîy* in Num.17:10, where it refers to the rebels Korah, Dathan and Abiram. There were those in the days of Jesus and the Apostles acting the part of Korah. Also consider:

**Eph.6:12** … not the wresting against blood and flesh, but … against the world-powers of this darkness …

“This darkness” alludes to the same corrupt system – “this world.” The world-rulers (*kosmokratōr*) are given a distinct title above, and they are the spiritual wickednesses (angels) supporting the Satanic kingdom. Against the Almighty (*Pantokratōr*) we find arrayed these “world-mighty” ones (*kosmokratōr*).

***Survey of “Casting Out” in John***

Because Joh.12:31 speaks of the ruler of this world being cast out, we ought to review those texts dealing with a casting out. Here are one set of texts (emphatic) in John –

**Structure of *ekballō exō* in John**

1. **6:37** All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and in no wise should I cast out outside he who comes to Me.
2. **9:34** They answered and said to him, “In sins you were born altogether, and you teach us?” And they cast him out outside.
3. **9:35** Jesus heard that they cast him out outside, and having found him …
4. **12:31** Now is a judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out outside.

Note that *ekballō exō* is redundant for emphasis. The B. elements are parallel and concern Jewish leaders excommunicating a righteous man, and Jesus receiving the outcast. The A. elements are also parallel, dealing with not casting out the righteous, but casting out the unrighteous from the kingdom of God . This would seem to be what the *ekballō exō* context demands, if I have rightly divided it. A related text is John 15:6, which uses a less emphatic expression –

**Joh.15:6** Unless anyone should continue in Me, he was cast out (*ballō exō*) as the branch and was dried up, and they assemble (*sunagō*) them and cast (*ballō* ) *them* into the fire and they are burning.

Although less emphatic, the thought is the same – exclusion from the kingdom. And note their assemblage – a synagogue of rejection and loss, as it were. This threat of being cast into fire was the warning of John the Baptist (Mat.3:10) to the Jews, but it is not recorded in John’s Gospel. The wider context of John’s Gospel must be sought from the other Gospels. From Matthew’s Gospel we gain greater insight into this “casting out” in John –

**Mat.8:11-12** And I say to you that many from east and west will come and will be seated with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens, but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out (*ekballō*) into the outer (*exōteros*) darkness. In that place will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.

Again, it is exclusion from the promised, restored kingdom of Israel. The Jews, “the sons of the kingdom,” who do not believe, will come to a grievous realization of what they have lost.

***Survey of “In Me” Statements in John***

Because one of our key texts, 14:30, says of “the ruler of the world” that he has nothing “in Me”, we need to review how John’s Gospel deals with Jesus’ pronouncements of “in Me.” Here are the pertinent texts, excluding those where Jesus said the Father is “in Me” (6 occs.) -

**6:56** He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood continues in Me and I in him.

**14:20** In that day you will come to know that I *am* in the Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

**14:30** I will no longer speak many things with you, for the of the world ruler comes, and he has not nothing in Me. {Gk. double negative for emphasis}

**15:2** Every branch in Me not bearing fruit He removes it, and everyone bearing the fruit He prunes it, so that it may bear more fruit.

**15:4** Continue in Me and I in you, even as the branch cannot bear fruit from itself, unless it continues in the vine. Thus neither you, unless you should continue in Me.

**15:5** I am the vine; you the branches. The one continuing in Me, and I in him, this one bears much fruit, because apart from Me you cannot do nothing. {Gk. double negative again}

**15:6** if anyone should not continue in Me, he was cast outside (*ballō exō*) as the branch and was dried up, and they gather them together and cast (*ballō*) into the fire and they are burned.

**15:7** If you should continue in Me and My words should continue in you, whatever you desire, ask and it will be done for you.

**16:33** These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but cheer up! I have conquered the world.

The 16:33 text is illuminating in its contrast of being **in Me (Christ)** and **in the world** – apparently both conditions applied simultaneously to the apostles. Also note the conflicting attributes of peace and tribulation, respectively. Then the 15:5 text contrasts two mutually exclusive conditions: being **in Christ** or **apart from Christ**. This distinction makes the difference between being fruitful or impotent. Also of interest is the 15:6 text, where those not **in Christ** will be cast outside (albeit the Gk. verb is less emphatic here than *ekballō* – see above). John, more so than the other Evangelists, shows Jesus teaching the principle of being “in Christ”, a precept developed more fully in the epistles of the apostles. So “the ruler of the world” (14:30) had nothing in Him, similar to an unwashed Peter, who would “have no part with Me” (13:8).

*Survey of Archōn in John*

The word *archōn*, at the very heart of the three subject texts, has its own place in this review.

**Structure of *Archōn* in John**

1. **A Ruler of the Jews knew Jesus as a Teacher from God.**

**3:1-2** And there was a man from the Pharisees, Nicodemus his name, a ruler of the Jews. This one came to Him at night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we have known (*oida*) that You have come a Teacher from God, for no one can do these signs which You do, unless God is with Him.”

1. **Did the Rulers of the Jews know that Jesus was the Christ?**

**7:26** And behold, He speaks with openness and they say nothing to Him. Perhaps truly the rulers knew (*ginōskō*) that this is the Christ?

1. **Did any of the Rulers believe into Him?**

**7:47-48** Therefore the Pharisees answered them, “Have you also been deceived? Did any from the rulers believe into Him, or from the Pharisees?”

1. **a) The Ruler of this world judged**

**12:30-31** Jesus answered and said, “This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is a judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out outside.”

1. **Many of the Rulers believed into Him**

**12:40-42** After a quote from Isa.6:9-10 … Nevertheless, however, even from the rulers many believed into Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not admitting it, lest they should become de-synagogued.

1. **b) The Ruler of the World comes.**

**14:30** I will no longer speak many things with you, for the ruler of the world comes and he has not nothing in Me.

1. **a) The Ruler of this world judged.**

**16:11-12** And concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

My headers for each element are rather self-explanatory. The trio labeled C. are the center of this inquiry. They are distinguished from the rest as being “rulers of the world” (or “this world”). Additionally, judgment is pronounced on “the ruler of this world” in both cases. Note that the Septuagint applies *archōn* to Israel in the role of the tribal chief (e.g., Exo.22:28), an aristocratic nobility who exercised judicial authority to the extent that foreign domination permitted. A word synonymous with *archōn* was *presbuteros* (“elder”), whose rulership dated from Mosaic times (Exo.24:1-9) and perhaps even before. It was the “elders” of the scribes and Pharisees who left first, when Jesus pronounced sentence upon the adulterous woman – and upon them (Joh.8:9).

Note that in the last, lengthy teaching session with His disciples, Jesus said He would no longer speak many things with them (14:30) – because time was running out. In the same monologue He said He had yet many things to say to them, which they were unable to bear – because they would need strengthening by the Holy Spirit the Encourager (*Paraklētos*) before they could hear it all. Also, the Encourager is in the context of both 12:31 (v.26) and 16:11 (v.7).

The judgment of “the ruler of this world” is spoken in the perfect tense (16:11) – as an accomplished fact. How is this to be understood? It can be interpreted from an earlier statement in chapter 3 –

**3:18-20** He who is believing into Him is not judged, but he who is not believing has been judged (perfect tense) already, because he has not believed into the name of the Only-begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come (perfect tense) into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were wicked. For everyone practicing the worthless things hates the light, and comes not toward the light, lest his works may be convicted.

The unbelief of the rulers brought automatic judgment. However, this was the pronouncement of judgment only. Like so many times in the past, when God dealt with rebellious Israel, the execution of sentence was postponed – sometimes again and again. For example, how many times in the New Testament is the accusation of Isa.6:9-10 spoken against Israel? There are 5 citations, on 3 occasions (Matthew, Mark and Luke cite the same occasion). Yet the axe did not cut down the tree until several years after the Acts period was completed – the A.D.70 destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Also note from 3:20 that light brings conviction of evil deeds. Similarly in 16:8 the Encourager will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment. John’s Gospel is a book of judicial conviction (of guilt) *par excellence*. I have sometimes wondered if this particular Gospel might have served as a judicial “exhibit for the prosecution” against the Jewish leadership, if the kingdom of God had been introduced during their lifetimes. Who else will the Twelve be judging in the kingdom, if not the unrepentant Jew whose sentence will be “Cast him into the outer darkness” or “Cast him into Gehenna”? And look at the frequency with which John uses “testify” (matureō – 33 occs.) and “testimony” (*marturia* – 14 occs.)! Is it any wonder how frequently he also uses “judge” and “judgment”? All these words convey a court-room atmosphere.

*Survey of Judgment in John’s Gospel*

The words for “judge” (*krinō*) and “judgment” (*krisis, krima*) are so pervasive in John, that it may be impossible to find a single doctrinal structure that captures them all. The best arrangement that I could find is an unsatisfactory jumble, perhaps consisting of multiple structures concatenating and overlaying one another.

**Structure of “Judgment” in John’s Gospel and Epistles**

1. **3:17-20**

a) Not judge, but save the world (1st sending)

**3:17-18** For God sent not the Son into the world so that He might judge the world, but so that the world might be saved by Him. The one believing into Him is not judged,…

b) Judged already

**3:18** but the one not believing has been judged already, because he has not believed into the name of the Only-begotten Son of God.

c) Sentence of Judgment: love of darkness and wicked works convicted

**3:19-20** And this is the judgment that the light has come into the world and mankind loved the darkness more than the light, for their works were wicked. For everyone practicing the worthless *things* hates the light and comes not toward the light, lest his works should be convicted.

1. **5:22-29**

e) Father gave judgment to Son

**5:22** For neither does the Father judge no one, but He has given the whole judgment to the Son.

f) Life vs. judgment

**5:24** Verily, verily I say to you that the one hearing My word and believing the One Who sent Me, has life age-abiding and comes not into judgment, but has removed from the death into the life.

e) Father gave judgment to Son

**5:27** And He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is Son of man.

*f*) Life vs. judgment

**5:29** And they will come out, those having done the good things into resurrection of life, but those having practiced the worthless *things* into resurrection of judgment.

1. My Judgment - Righteous, True – not from Myself

**5:30** I cannot do anything from Myself. Even as I hear I judge, and My judgment is righteous, because I seek not My desire but the desire of the One having sent Me.

1. Apparent vs. Righteous judgment

**7:24** Judge not according to appearance, but judge the righteous judgment.

1. Mosaic Law (“our law”)

**7:51** Our law judges not the man, unless it may hear from him first and learn what he does.

1. Fleshly vs. True judgment

**8:15** You judge according to the flesh. I do not judge no one. But even if I do judge…

1. My Judgment - Righteous, True – not alone

**8:16** …My judgment is true, because I am not alone but I and the Father Who sent Me.

**F.** What things I heard from Him (the Father) – to speak and to judge

**8:26** I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He Who sent Me is true, and I – what things I heard from Him – these I speak unto the world. [Spoken to those who will die in their sins]

***F.*** One Who (the Father) is – seeking and judging

**8:49-50** Jesus answered, “I have not a demon, but I honor My Father and you dishonor Me. But I do not seek My glory. There is One seeking and judging.

**G.** Preview of Isa.6:9-10 judgment: not seeing

**9:39** And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those not seeing might see, and those seeing might become blind.”

***G.*** Preview of Isa.6:9-10 judgment: not hearing

**12:30-31** Jesus answered and said, “Not on account of Me has this voice come, but on your account. Now is a judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out outside.”

**H. 12:47-48**

f) I do not judge – but My words

**12:47** And if anyone should hear My words and should not guard *them*, I do not judge him, …

a) Not judge, but save the world (1st coming)

**12:47** … for I came not so that I might judge the world, but so that I might save the world.

f) I do not judge – but My words

**12:48** The one rejecting Me and not receiving My words has one judging him: the word that I spoke –

b) Judged at the last day

**12:48** – that will judge him at the last day.

**I.** The Encourager’s conviction

**16:8** And having come, That One will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment.

***I.*** The Encourager’s conviction

**16:9-11** Concerning sin, indeed, because they believe not into Me, and concerning righteousness because I go back toward the Father and you see Me no longer, and concerning judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged.

1. Mosaic Law (“your law”)

**18:31** Therefore Pilate said to them, “Take Him, you, and according to your law judge Him. The Jews said to him, “It is not permitted for us to kill no one.”

c) Day of judgment: love (of God) perfected

**1 Jn.4:16-17** And we have known and have believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and he who continues in the love continues in God, and God continues in him. In this the love has been perfected with us, so that we may have boldness in the day of the judgment, because even as That One is, we also are in this world.

There are so many connecting thoughts between these multifarious statements of judgment, that it is difficult to pin down one set of connections as the most significant for teaching purposes. Because John’s Gospel teaches us with such a small vocabulary (smallest of the four Gospels with 1,010 words – cp. Luke with 2,033 words), it can make for very subtle nuances, indeed.

The elements **I.** and ***I.*** concern judgment of “the ruler of this world” (16:8,11), and they appear in close context to each other without a strong structural link to another text. However, the word “conviction” does link these two elements with c) (3:19-20) and the ability of the light to convict men’s works. The equivalent 12:30 judgment of “the ruler of this world” is seen in ***G.*** as the hearing aspect, with **G.** the seeing aspect of events leading up to a judicial pronouncement. In 12:39-40 is a partial quote of Isa.6:9-10, which in its fullness declares blindness, deafness and dullness of heart upon Israel.

*An Interpretation of John 16:8-11*

**Joh.16:8-11** And having come, That One will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment. **9** Concerning sin, indeed, because they believe not into Me, **10** and concerning righteousness because I go back to the Father and you see Me no longer, **11** and concerning judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged.

The conviction (or reproof) of the rebellious Jewish nation (“the world”) by the Encourager (i.e., Holy Spirit) would come in three parts:

1. concerning sin, because of their unbelief
2. concerning righteousness, because Jesus went back to His Father and was seen by His disciples no longer
3. concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged

The Encourager would convict the Jews concerning sin because of unbelief. This is the third time that John’s Gospel speaks “concerning sin.” The first relates to blasphemy against Jesus:

**8:46** Who of you convicts Me concerning sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?

Sin is imputed to the Jews by these questions. In effect, “You dare to call Me a sinner, when your unbelief in truth is such an obvious sin?” A fuller context provides:

**8:42** Jesus said to them, “If God was your father, you would have loved Me, for I Came forth and have come from God, for neither have I come from Myself, but That One sent Me. Why do you not get to know My speech? – because you cannot hear My word. You are from the father the devil – and you desire to do the passions of your father. That one was a murderer from the beginning, and he stood not in the truth, because there is not truth in him. When one might speak the lie, he speaks from his own things, because he is a liar – also his father. And because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Who of you convicts Me concerning sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is from God hears the words of God. On account of this you do not hear, because you are not from God.”

This context shows the devilish nature of the Jews’ response to and treatment of Jesus. They were the ones guilty of sin. They were liars and murderers, like their fathers – including their devil-father.

The second text “concerning sin” is more directly in line with 16:8-9.

**15:22** If I did not come and speak to them, they were not having sin. But now they have not an excuse concerning their sin.

Jesus had said earlier that He had many things to speak and to judge concerning those who would die in their sins (8:24-26). Having spoken the truth to them, Jesus now speaks a judgment against those who did not believe in Him.

The next point of conviction, “concerning righteousness”, is based on Jesus’ return to the Father and not being physically with His disciples any longer. This is a bit obscure, but can be made clearer from the context. Verse seven was a statement from Jesus about the necessity of His return to the Father in order to send the Encourager. So that answers the “because” part of the statement. Now as to how the Encourager would convict the world of the Jews concerning righteousness, it would be through His endowment of believers with gifts of holy spirit – evidences of God’s righteousness being with His faithful ones.

When Stephen was hauled into the high court of the Jews, his testimony by holy spirit brought the Jews into legal conviction for killing the Righteous One, Jesus (Acts 7:51-54). Their rage at and stoning of Stephen proves the depth of their rebellion at the conviction. That generation continued to follow the pattern of old – resisting the Spirit of God and killing His prophets.

The ruler of this world has been judged. How ought this to be understood? I have used several lines of inquiry above to show that “rulers” in John were the ruling elite of the Jews – in distinction from their Roman overlords, who are not called rulers in this Gospel. “This world” was the current set of powers-that-be structuring the world of Judaism, with all their human additions to the sacred law given by Moses – and all their greed and hypocrisy.

John’s Gospel is a book of opposites. Here are several:

* Jesus vs. the Jews (the world)
* Jesus coming forth vs. Jesus going back
* from God vs. from the devil
* truth vs. lie
* light vs. darkness
* righteousness vs. sin
* good vs. wicked
* save vs. judge
* life vs. death
* love vs. hate
* belief vs. rejection
* seeing vs. blindness
* hearing vs. deafness
* joy vs. sorrow
* peace vs. trouble
* free vs. enslaved

All that Jesus spoke in judgment of the negative part of these pairs – the devil, the lie, death, darkness, sin, wicked, hate, rejection, blindness, deafness – applied to “the ruler of this world”, who was in Jesus’ day the same as he was in Ezekiel’s day – “woe to the shepherds of Israel” (Eze.34:2-11). Jesus’ calling Himself “the Good Shepherd” drew a sharp line between Himself and the rulers of the Jews, who were fit to be judged. And even as “the Good Shepherd” is a unique expression in John, so is “the ruler of this world”. To be properly understood, the Gospel of John must ever be interpreted in the light of the Law and the Prophets.