

**“THE HOUR COMES AND NOW IS HERE” (JOHN 4,23; 5,25)  
THE ESCHATOLOGICAL MEANING OF THE JOHANNINE ὥρα**

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**Abstract.** Several times, the Fourth Gospels announces and states the coming of a certain “hour”. While it is obvious that this “hour” is linked to Jesus’ Passion, this contribution argues that the link extends to the present of the believers which is understood to be part of the ὥρα. By the term ὥρα, the Evangelist links the Passion as a basic event in the past to the eschatological age determined by this event. This ὥρα concept could account for the “hermeneutische Horizontverschmelzung” stated in the Fourth Gospel as well as for some aspects of the Gospel’s juxtaposition of realized and future eschatology: The hour has already come, it is present; yet there is also a future within the hour that is still to be waited for. The ὥρα comprises both present and future and ties them back to the decisive initial event in the past: the Passion, the beginning of the ὥρα.

From its very beginning, Jesus’ story (as it is told by the Fourth Evangelist) moves rapidly towards a temporal target: Jesus’ “hour”. Three times the reader is informed about the hour “having not yet come” (2,4; 7,30; 8,20); four times one learns that “the hour has come” (12,23.27; 13,1; 17,1). Among a few other references to certain “hours” one finds some more texts where the “coming” of a particular hour is announced (4,21; 5,28) and/or stated: ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστίν (4,23; 5,25).

Few would doubt that the hour “not yet come” in 2,4; 7,30; 8,20 and “come” in 12,23.27; 13,1; 17,1 is the hour of Jesus’ Passion: It is the hour when it is possible to lay hands on Jesus (7,30; 8,20), the hour when the corn of wheat is to fall on the ground and die in order to bring fruit (12,24), when Jesus’ soul is troubled (12,27) and when he is about to leave the world to go to his Father (13,1).<sup>1</sup> In the context of the Fourth Gospel, the “hour” seems to be temporally situated in ch. 12; up to this point in the narrative, the “hour” is referred to as “not yet come”

<sup>1</sup> E. KÄSEMANN, *Jesu letzter Wille nach Joh 17*, Tübingen 1966, 39–40 distinguishes “die Stunde der Herrlichkeit Jesu” (referred to in 2,4; 4,21.23; 5,25.28) from “hour” sayings primarily referring to the passion (7,30; 8,20; 12,23.27; 13,1; 17,1), but sees the two lines bound together in 12,23; 13,1; 17,1. He concludes: “Die Stunde der Passion und des Todes Jesu ist darum in ausgezeichnetem Sinne zugleich die Stunde seiner Verherrlichung, weil in ihr Jesus endgültig die Welt verläßt und zum Vater zurückkehrt”. According to Käsemann, this is how the Fourth Evangelist came to understand Jesus’ incarnation as a projection of his pre-existent glory and his Passion as his return there. (See also note 2 on the subject of such distinctions, also to be found in L. VAN HARTINGSVELD, *Die Eschatologie des Johannesevangeliums. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Rudolf Bultmann*, Assen 1965, 8–13.)