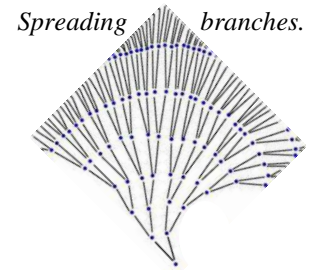


SO YOU MAY COME (OR CONTINUE?) TO BELIEVE (JOHN 20:31)
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Introduction

John 15:16

(The *explicitly* multi-generational evangelistic Great Commission):

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go forth and bear a great harvest [*karpos*], and that your harvest [*karpos*] should abide [*menō*], so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He would give you.”¹

1. Sixteen of 121 NT uses of *menō* (*abide*) appear in in John 14–15.² The first fifteen refer to a particularly close relationship between (1) members of the Trinity with each other, or (2) a potential close-relationship between believers and the Lord. From this consistent usage within thirty-eight verses (14:10–15:16), the great-harvest that-is-to-abide equals generations of believers, the sixteenth (15:16) would seem also to refer to a new generation of believers who learn to abide.

2. Abiding believers have role in harvest of next generation of believers.

	<i>Generation 1</i>			<i>Generation 2</i>					
Objective of John 15:16:	Abide in His word	⇒	Share His Promise	⇒	Promise is believed	⇒	Abide in word	⇒	Share His Promise

Early Christianity Spread Rapidly (until Constantine’s A.D. 313 *Edict of Milan*)

- A. **Acts 2:41** (3,000 new believers) **and 4:4** (5,000 new believers),
- B. **Fifteen** (or more) **congregations in Rome** in A.D. 56-57 when Paul wrote Romans,³
- C. **Many Christians in Rome** in A.D. 64, leading Nero to blame them for the great fire,
- D. **Christians everywhere** in A.D. 112, as Pliny the Younger complained to Trajan,⁴
- E. **Great size of Christendom** is what led Constantine to legalize it in A.D. 313.⁵

The Great Omission (Losing Sight of Great Commission to Evangelism: esp. John 15:16)

¹ All Scripture translations (unless otherwise noted) are by the author.

² John 14:10*d*, 16*a*, 17*d*, 25*bp*; 15:4 (*a* × 3), 5*a*, 6*a*, 7 (*a* × 2), 9*a*, 10 (*a* × 2), 11*r*, 16*r*. The NKJV renders these in four ways (*a* = abides(s), *bp* = being present, *d* = dwells, *r* = remains). Abide(s) would be fine in each.

³ John H. Niemelä, “Introduction,” to *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, by Zane C. Hodges, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: GES, 2013), 16*f*; Cf. John H. Niemelä, “Evidence for a First Century ‘Tenement Church,’” *JOTGES* 24 (Spring 2011): 99-116.

⁴ Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, trans. Betty Radice in *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London, ENG: Heinemann, 1915), 10:96:9.

⁵ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1996), 7, posits a 40% rate per decade for early Christianity (He documents Mormonism’s rate for 100+ years is 43% per decade. He underestimates numbers in A.D. 40 and overestimates for A.D. 350 (almost 34 million). Even at 20% per decade, his argument that Christianity’s rapid growth precipitated legalization (rather than vice versa) is quite plausible. It aligns well with data in the preceding notes.

Don Richardson laments the Great Omission that characterizes Christendom ever since the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 (shortly after Constantine legalized Christianity in 313):

...the Church Fathers' mission-less Creeds served as "pocket Bibles"⁶ for millions of Christians who had no access to Scripture. Mission-less Creeds thus misrepresented the Bible by telling Christians many wonderful truths to believe but saying absolutely nothing regarding truths to believe but saying absolutely nothing regarding what God might want them to do to advance his [future] kingdom [by evangelizing now]!⁷

One might imagine that the Reformation, that said much about *faith alone*, would urge believers to share the message of life with unbelievers. Such an expectation would be wildly over-optimistic. It is almost 1700 years since the Council of Nicea and the Great Omission is still with us. Christendom has tended to ignore or misinterpret John's purpose statement, John 20:30f:

Thus Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these *signs* are written so you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life by His name.

John actually is a book designed for evangelizing unbelievers and expressly says so, yet many deny this. Is it surprising that leaders of Christendom, characterized by the Great Omission for the past 1,700 years would want to re-interpret a passage (John 15:16) that relates to Jesus commissioning not only the apostles, but every generation following them, to evangelize?⁸ Scholars are the ones who write commentaries. How many Christian scholars champion the evangelistic use of John's Gospel? How many actually speak with unbelievers about John's Gospel? Luke Timothy Johnson exudes sounds like the ringleader of the ten spies at Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 13). The message of life is a good one, but we are like grasshoppers in the sight of unbelievers. He presents evangelization as impossible. Unbelievers are vicious opponents who forever incapable of believing the message of life:

... if it is present tense, then the phrase would read, "that you might go on believing," and the purpose would be reinforcement and encouragement. The present tense is the reading better supported by the manuscript evidence, and the whole tenor of the Gospel suggests **less a document for proselytism than one of propaganda for the converted**... the very movement of the story corresponds to the perceptions of a community that defined itself through **opposition to unbelievers**, and that **the complex coding of the narrative prohibits understanding** by... [them].⁹ [emphasis mine]

If God were incapable of persuading people through signs, Saul would have been unimpressed by his miraculous encounter with Jesus. He would have continued terrorizing Christians. The message would soon have died out.

⁶ Literacy rates were low, but the ninety-five word Nicene creed could be memorized, so his point is valid.

⁷ Richardson, *Heaven*, 188. The words in brackets are added, so my understanding is made clear.

⁸ Not all holding this view minimize evangelism, but those who do would find the view attractive.

⁹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2010), 467f. The word in brackets replaces the wordy code-speak of academia ("those who do not share the symbolic system and convictions of the community."). Much of academia really pushes the idea that John writes to a community that shares his views. Academia brings a lot of baggage that (unfortunately) more conservative pastors fail to recognize. Going into the baggage that Johnson presupposes here would be a whole paper in itself.

Instead, the apostles (including Paul) went forth, tirelessly proclaiming the message of life, despite all opposition. Soon after the arrival of apostles, churches were planted, and new believers told unbelievers the message of life. In the city of Rome (only twenty-three years after Pentecost) Paul's epistle of Romans went to at least fifteen tenement churches in the city, perhaps numbering 1,000 believers. Remember how Nero (attempting to cut Christianity down to size) blamed Christians for the Roman fire. Also, Pliny the Younger complained about Christians being everywhere. No, Luke Timothy Johnson epitomizes what went wrong with Christianity 1,700 years ago, looking for excuses not to share the message of life with a lost and dying world.

It is no surprise that Christianity wants to re-interpret the book that indicts it for its failure to share the message of life. But if the nay-sayers were right, how do we explain the rapid growth of Christianity in its first three centuries. Remember that prior to Jesus' resurrection, the apostles hid behind locked doors. Jesus' message of life (as exemplified by John's Gospel) gave these men something worth sharing, something worth dying for. Their zeal for carrying the message that was soon written down by John underlies the rapid growth of early Christianity.

The Case for John Addressing Unbelievers

Before listing the main planks of this paper, it is of vital importance that to summarize how the audience issue tends to be presented. The pertinent part of John 20:31 reads:

These [signs] are written that you may believe:

Many mistakenly assume that the John sharply differentiates the present from the aorist. We will see that, even if the text had a present (which it does not) the book would still be evangelistic (many recognize this). However, the following is how the issue is often presented:

PRESENT ⇒ BELIEVERS continue believing in order to keep¹⁰ life by Christ's name.
AORIST ⇒ UNBELIEVERS come to believe in order to acquire life by Christ's name.

This paper will respond to those denying an evangelistic purpose (based on: 1. their acceptance of the present tense, and 2. their interpretation of the present). We will present three arguments:

Outline of the Paper

1. Both the Majority Text and Critical Text (properly understood) support the aorist,
2. The present tense (for those accepting it) should be understood as *coming to believe*,
3. Taking 20:31 as addressing believers is a revisionist re-interpretation of all eight signs.

Each of these is a stand-alone argument. In other words, if the text has an aorist (argument 1), Luke Timothy Johnson (and others) admit that their view would be untenable. Second, if John's use of present tense verbs in purpose clauses differs from what Luke Timothy Johnson (and others claim), their view fails. Third, if the view of Luke Timothy Johnson (and others) puts John 20:31 at odds with how John uses signs throughout the book, that view fails.

Why is it important that each of these is a stand-alone argument? My first point will deal with textual criticism, which faces two obstacles:

- A. Some hearing this message may say, "That is too complicated,"
- B. Some hearing it may say, "I hold a different textual theory."

If either applies, that is alright. I have two other stand-alone arguments. However, since there is a textual issue, we will consider it briefly.

¹⁰ Variations in expressing the purpose clause exist among those viewing this present as *continue to believe*.

John 20:31 in the Majority Text and in the Critical Text

Technically, this is not a Majority Text versus Critical Text issue. The aorist appears in the *Majority Text*_{1, 2} and both Greek texts of the *Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft* (German Bible Society): Nestle-Aland_{26, 27, 28} and United Bible Societies_{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}.¹¹ However, the level of confidence that each attaches to the reading differs.

High Confidence in the Reading by the Majority Text. It uses the siglum \mathfrak{M} here to indicate that not only is the Majority Family united, but von Soden's I-text also agrees. Wilbur Pickering estimates that 99½% of manuscripts agree with the form in the Majority Text.¹²

Tentative Acceptance of the Reading by N-A and UBS. These text place the aorist in brackets: *pisteu[s]ēte* (*pisteusēte* would be aorist; *pisteuēte* would be present). Three features show that N-A/UBS slightly prefer the aorist:

A. Each places evidence for the aorist in the location for accepted readings (N-A always puts the *txt* (text) reading last, which is the one the editors prefer. In John 20:31, evidence for the aorist is listed last. UBS puts evidence favoring their preferred reading first. In 20:31, they list the aorist first.

B. In explaining the use of brackets, N-A says, "The reading given in the text shows the preference of the editors."¹³ Since the text reads *pisteu[s]ēte* (aorist), the present *pisteuēte* does not show up in the text, but only in the apparatus. In other words, they prefer the aorist.

C. One of the Committee's members, Bruce Metzger, wrote on behalf of the committee:

20:31 *pisteu[s]ēte* {C}

Both *pisteuēte* [present] and *pisteusēte* [aorist] have notable early support. . . In view of the difficulty of choosing between the readings by assessing the supposed purpose of the evangelist (assuming that he used the tenses of the subjunctive strictly), the Committee considered it preferable to represent both readings by enclosing *s* within square brackets.¹⁴

The fact that the aorist received a {C} rating means that only three of five members of the Committee voted for it.¹⁵ N-A/UBS would have reason to increase their confidence level for the aorist (even from their Alexandrian prioritist standpoint), as the next section will show.

¹¹ Although this reading remains the same in each edition of each text (UBS, N-A, and the Majority Text); the appendices of each did change. Thus, it is useful to cite from more than one edition of each: Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th–28th eds. (Stuttgart, GER: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979–2012); Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 1st–5th eds. (Stuttgart, GER: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1966–2014); Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, 1st–2nd eds. (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1982–85).

¹² Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Greek New Testament According to Family 35* (N.p: n.p, 2014), 228, n. 5 (the apparatus for John 20:31).

¹³ Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart, GER: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 54*, explains brackets.

¹⁴ Metzger, *Commentary*,

¹⁵ I have considered all 1,431 textual problems listed by UBS₄ and can generally determine the vote tally.

The Manuscript Evidence. Of the three texts cited so far (UBS, N-A, and *MajT*) only the Majority Text reflects accurately on the reading of a key Alexandrian manuscript, \mathfrak{P}^{66} . The following comes from the apparatus for John 20:31. Note the parentheses around manuscript \mathfrak{P}^{66} . Note that the Majority Text also says ^{vid} [*videtur* = *apparently*].

[John 20:] 31 πιστευητε ($\mathfrak{P}^{66\text{vid}}$) \aleph^*B vs $\mathfrak{M}AC$, [Cr]

Everyone familiar with \mathfrak{P}^{66} in this passage recognizes that three of this word's letters are completely missing (due to manuscript damage) and that only two letters are completely visible. This is the reason all apparatuses say *vid*. However, the Majority Text explains its use of parentheses: "Of a manuscript cited is enclosed by parentheses — as (\aleph) or (B) — this means that the manuscript exhibits an orthographic [spelling] variation of the reading with which it appears."¹⁶ Now, the INTF (*Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung* = Institute for New Testament Textual Research), which is responsible for producing the UBS/N-A texts, lists the actual reading as: [*pis*]τευηται.¹⁷ Letters enclosed by brackets are completely missing. Those with dots underneath are partially missing. Every transcript I have seen indicates the ending as *-tai*, not as *-te*. This is why the Majority Text encloses \mathfrak{P}^{66} in parentheses.

Enclosing this in parentheses states a truth (it is not identical to *pisteuēte*), but more can be said. I believe that the scribe (of \mathfrak{P}^{66} or of the manuscript from which he copied) noticed the ending of the first verb in the verse: *gegraptai* (have been written). The scribe of \mathfrak{P}^{66} (and the scribe of manuscript Θ) attached the same ending to this word. Now, it would read:

But these have been written (*gegraptai*) so that they might be believed (*pisteuētai*)...

By enclosing \mathfrak{P}^{66} in parentheses, the Majority Text expresses the belief that the scribe may have intended to write *pisteuēte*, but wrote *pisteuētai* accidentally. However, three facts suggest to me that the scribe wrote what he actually intended:

- A. Manuscript Θ also has *pistuētai*, which has the same ending as *gegraptai*,
- B. Manuscripts L, N, and W also have forms with the same ending as *gegraptai*,
- C. The reading of Θ and the apparent reading of \mathfrak{P}^{66} (*pisteuētai*) do make sense.

Therefore, if I were looking at this problem from an Alexandrian prioritist's standpoint, the elimination of \mathfrak{P}^{66} and Θ as favorable to *pisteuēte* (the present active subjunctive form), the level of confidence in the aorist would necessarily increase.

Along a similar line, both Joseph Vogels and Hermann von Soden, in their Greek texts, favor the aorist active subjunctive. Both are Alexandrian prioritists.

Thus, from either a Majority Text standpoint or from a Critical Text view, the aorist should be accepted. This is a stand-alone argument. Those arguing against John addressing unbelievers recognize this as a make-or-break argument for their view.

However, acceptance of the present tense from a textual criticism standpoint would not (by itself) prove that John addressed believers. See the next argument.

¹⁶ Hodges and Farstad, *Majority Text*, xviii.

¹⁷ I have a photograph of the page from \mathfrak{P}^{66} in question. The following link shows INTF's transcription. The reader will need to select \mathfrak{P}^{66} and John 20:31 to see the transcription at this link: <http://nttranscripts.uni-muenster.de/AnaServer?NTtranscripts+0+start.anv>

The Present Tense Means *Coming to Believe*

My research on this issue involved considering every use of *hina* (*that*) in John's writings: his Gospel, 1 John, 2 John, and Revelation. My analysis included both the *Majority Text* and UBS/N-A.¹⁸ As a cross-check against my work, I also consulted every Johannine use of *hina* in A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*.¹⁹

The focus of my study was to isolate passages that closely resemble John 20:31a, the key passage of this paper. The criteria are:

1. The verb must be a **present subjunctive**. On two occasions John 3:17b and 12:47a forms appear that could either be present subjunctive or aorist subjunctive. These were omitted because of the parsing ambiguity.
2. The present subjunctive **must not be negated**. Negatives complicate the semantics. A sufficient population of non-negated examples exists without adding these.
3. Each must be in a **purpose clause**. Purpose clauses are necessarily subsequent (usually chronologically subsequent, but occasionally logically subsequent) to their main clause. In this respect, purpose *hina*-clauses can differ from other *hina*-clauses, so the restriction of the analysis to purpose clauses allows comparing passages that are truly analogous to John 20:31a.

Forty-one qualifying present subjunctives appear in John's writings in the *Majority Text*.

Robertson and Aspect of Present Subjunctives

A. T. Robertson was pioneer in the field of New Testament Greek grammar. His pronouncements carry weight in Christian scholarship today. Unfortunately, it is easy (to draw incorrect conclusions from his words. Before delving into some of his writings, a simple math illustration may help.

An algebra quiz contained the following problem:

$$x^2 = 4 \qquad \text{Solve for } x.$$

A student wrote his answer: $x = 2$

When the problem was scored as incorrect, the student complained. The teacher said, "If $x^2 = 4$, then x could be 2 or -2 . You did not consider the possibility of squaring -2 , so your answer is wrong."

Similarly, when A. T. Robertson renders various present subjunctives in purpose clauses with, "...so you would keep on _____ing," many interpreters assume that he means, "... so you would not stop what you are **already** doing." I have found examples in Robertson in which the purposed action has not yet begun, but he says, "...so you would keep on _____ing."

Let me illustrate: If a penniless university student says, "I work hard at school so I might keep on earning a six-figure income the rest of my life," we do not assume that the six-figure income has already started. Comparable examples exist for present forms in the NT.

As with the algebra problem, it is easy to assume that one possible answer is correct without even realizing that another meaning is even possible.

¹⁸ The Majority Text has 248 uses. UBS and N-A have a few less, due to omission or substitution variants.

¹⁹ For John's Gospel, I consulted A. T. Robertson, *The Fourth Gospel; The Epistle of Hebrews*, vol. 5 of *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1932). For 1–3 John and Revelation, I consulted, Robertson, *The General Epistles and the Revelation of John*, vol. 6 of *Word Pictures*.

Considering Two Possible Meanings for “...so you would keep on _____ing”

John 15:16a says:

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that [*hina*] you should go forth [present subjunctive] and bear [present subjunctive] a great harvest, and that your harvest should abide [present subjunctive]...”

Note that Jesus chose the Twelve with purpose. The purpose for choosing them was so they would (1) go forth, (2) bear a great harvest, and (3) that the harvest would abide.

Now, consider Robertson’s discussion of this verse:

Note three present active subjunctives with *hina* (purpose clause) to emphasize continuance (*hupagēte*, **keep on** going, *pherēte*, **keep on** bearing fruit, *menēi*, **keep on** abiding), not a mere spurt, but permanent growth and fruit bearing.²⁰ [emphasis mine]

Theoretically, two ways of interpreting the three uses of “keep on...” exist. One could say,

Even before Jesus chose the Twelve, they were (1) going forth, (2) bearing fruit, and (3) and their fruit was already abiding. Jesus chose them so that these

Forty-one Johannine Non-Negated Present Subjunctives

A. Thirty-five of forty-one (83%): are a consequence of the controlling verb:

John 3:15b, 16b; 4:36; 5:23; 40, 8:6; 9:39a; 10:10d-e; 13:15; 14:3, 16; 15:2, 16a-c; 16:4, 24, 33; 17:11, 13b, 19, 21b, 22, 23a-b, 24b, 26; 20:31b; 1 John 1:4; 2:28a; 2 John 1:12; Rev 3:18e; 12:6, 14.

B. Five of forty-one (12%): consider purposed continuation of what had begun:

John 5:20; 1 John 1:3; 5:13a-b.

A or B: Two of forty-one (5%): are ambiguous (Once could argue A or B):

John 6:28; 3 John 1:8.

In other words, one cannot argue that a present subjunctive in John 20:31a would require (or even expect) the idea of *continue to believe*. Occasionally, contexts exist where the purpose is for an ongoing action to continue (that is, not to cease). However, those arguing for the *continue-to-believe* interpretation of John 20:31a based the assertion on their acceptance of present tense (a variant lacking stellar support), not from contextual necessity. Thus, the argument could end here. However, after listing the forty-two passages, the third argument of the paper will demonstrate a contextual reason for understanding the verb as *come to believe*.

1. John 3:15: Start before Keeping on

“The Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so [*hina*] whoever believes in Him would ... have everlasting life.”

Lifting the Son leads to the consequence of giving everlasting life. Though temporally, there were people would received everlasting life before Jesus went to the cross, the giving of everlasting life was in anticipation of the cross. Surely, no one will argue that God could be just, if He were to have granted everlasting life with no intention of Jesus paying sin’s death penalty.

(Jesus is amplifying on the lifting of the bronze serpent illustration).

²⁰ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1932), 4:261.

2. John 3:16: Start before Keeping on

“[God] gave His ... Son, so [*hina*] whoever believes in Him would ... have everlasting life.”

Giving the Son leads to the consequence of giving everlasting life. Though temporally, there were people would received everlasting life before Jesus went to the cross, the giving of everlasting life was in anticipation of the cross. Surely, no one will argue that God could be just, if He were to have granted everlasting life with no intention of Jesus paying sin’s death penalty.

(Jesus is amplifying on the lifting of the bronze serpent illustration).

3. John 4:36: Start before Keeping on

“The reaper ... gathers the harvest, so [*hina*] the sower and the reaper may rejoice together.”

Gathering the harvest PRECEDES the rejoicing together of sower and reaper.

4. John 5:20: Keep on

“The Father ... will show Him greater works *than* these, so [*hina*] you may marvel.”

Did they already start to marvel at Him healing the lame man?

Yes. They have started marveling and will keep on marveling.

5. John 5:23: Start before Keeping on

“The Father ... has granted all judgment to the Son, 5:23 so [*hina*] all might honor the Son... The *one* not honoring the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

Did all humanity honor the Son before the Father granted all judgment to Him?

No. Some people (believers) **start and keep on** honoring Him **afterwards**.

6. John 5:40: Start before Keeping on

“You are not willing to come to Me so [*hina*] you may have life.”

Do these unbelievers have everlasting life already (does He say, “so you may stay alive”?)

No. The purpose of coming is to **start** having life so one would **keep on** having it.

7. John 6:28: Keep on or Start before Keeping on

“What should we do so [*hina*] we may work the works of God?”

Did these people think that they were already doing the works of God?

Maybe or maybe not.

8. John 8:6: Start before Keeping on

They said this..., so [*hina*] they might have an accusation against Him.

Did these scribes and Pharisees say this because they already had a basis for accusing?

No. They wanted to start having an accusation and to keep on having it.

9. 9;39a: Start before Keeping on,

“For judgment I came into this world, so [*hina*] those not seeing should see...”

We those not seeing able to see before He came into the world?

No. They started to see and continued to see afterwards.

10-11. John 10:10d-e: Start before Keeping on

“I came so [*hina*] they may have life and that [*hina*] they may have it abundantly.”

Did these people have everlasting life or abundant life before He came?

No. They started to have these and kept on having them after He came to earth.

12. John 13:15: Start before Keeping on

“For I have given you an example, so [*hina*] you also should do as I have done for you.”

Did the Twelve become one another’s servant before Jesus did so?

No. He became their servant so they would start and keep on doing so.

13. John 14:3: Start before Keeping on

“I ... will receive you to Myself, so [*hina*] where I am you also may be.”

Were the Eleven already present with Him in that future day, or just with Him in time.

They were not yet in that future day, so Jesus speaks of them starting to be and continuing to be with Him in the future.

14. John 14:16: Start before Keeping on

“He will give you another Advocate, the Spirit of truth, so [*hina*] He may abide with you forever.”

Was the Holy Spirit already abiding with the Eleven.

No. Jesus speaks of the Spirit starting to abide with them and continuing to abide.

15. John 15:2: Start before Keeping on

“Every fruit-bearing *one* He prunes, so [*hina*] it might bear a greater harvest.”

Have the Eleven already started bearing that greater harvest?

No. At Pentecost, they would start and continue bearing that greater harvest.

16-18. John 15:16a-c: Start before Keeping on

“I ... appointed you that [*hina*] you should go forth and should bear a great harvest, and that your harvest should abide.”

Did these activities (going forth, bearing, and abiding) precede Him appointing them?

No. These activities started and continued after He appointed them.

19. John 16:4a: Start before Keeping on

“I have told you these *things* so [*hina*] you may remember them whenever that hour comes.”

Did the Eleven already remember these things in that upcoming hour before He spoke?

No. They could recall them after He said these things to them.

20. John 16:24: Start before Keeping on

“You shall receive [what you request] so [*hina*] your joy may become fulfilled.”

Had the Eleven’s joy already become fulfilled prior to them requesting of the Father?

No.

21. John 16:33: Start before Keeping on

“I have told you these *things*, so [*hina*] in Me you may have peace.”

The disciples were in turmoil. Jesus wanted them to give them peace.

22. John 17:11: Start before Keeping on

“Keep them ... by Your name, so [*hina*] they may be one as are We.”

The disciples needed to acquire this oneness.

23. John 17:13: Start before Keeping on

“I speak these *things* in the world so [*hina*] they may have My joy fulfilled in them.”

His joy was not yet fulfilled in them.

24. John 17:19: Start before Keeping on

“I sanctify Myself, so [*hina*] they also may be sanctified by truth.”

They still needed to become sanctified by truth.

25. John 17:21b: Start before Keeping on

²⁰ “I ask ... ²¹ that in Us they also may be one, so [*hina*] the world may believe that You sent Me.”

The world still needed to believe this.

226. John 17:22: Start before Keeping on

“And I have given them the glory which You have given Me, so [*hina*] they (A) may be one as We are one ²³ ... so [*hina*] they (B) may be completed into one, so [*hina*] the world also (C) may know that You sent Me and that You have loved them as You have loved Me. 17:²⁴ “Father, I desire that those (whom You have given Me) may also be with Me where I am, so [*hina*] they (D) may see My glory.”

(A) The oneness of the Eleven was subsequent to the giving of glory.

(B) Ditto.

(C) The world did not know these things.

(D) The glory to which Jesus refers is the resurrection, which they had not seen.

30. John 17:26: Start before Keeping on

“I made Your name known..., so [*hina*] the love with which You have loved Me may be in them.”

This love was not yet given.

31. John 20:31b: Start before Keeping on

These *signs are written* ... so [*hina*] you may have life by His name.

The readers did not yet have life. Cf. John 5:40, which clearly speaks to unbelievers, using the same wording as here.

32. 1 John 1:3: Keep on

What we have seen ... we declare to you, that [*hina*] you also may have fellowship with us.

Everything in the book points to John addressing church leaders who were mature and had not caved in to the false teachers.²¹ Thus, John looks at continuing fellowship.

33. 1 John 1:4: Start before Keeping on

We write to you that [*hina*] our joy may be full.

John had joy already, but his joy would be enhanced by writing (and then reading it).

34. 1 John 2:28a: Start before Keeping on

Abide in Him, that [*hina*] when He appears, we may have confidence ... before Him at His coming.

Meeting Jesus at the *Bēma* is clearly subsequent to the time for abiding.

35-36. 1 John 5:13a-b: Keep on

These things I have written to you who believe ..., that [*hina*] you may know that you have eternal life, and that [*hina*] you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

See number 32 (1 John 1:3) and my article that is noted there.

37. 2 John 1:12: Start before Keeping on

I hope to ... speak face to face, that [*hina*] our joy may be full.

John had joy already, but his joy would be enhanced by meeting them again.

38. 3 John 1:8: Keep on or Start before Keeping on

We ought to receive such, that [*hina*] we may become fellow workers.

Gaius may have already been doing this exact ministry or it may have been a new nuance for him (different than that for which he has been praised in the letter).

39. Revelation 3:18e: Start before Keeping on

“I counsel you to ... anoint your eyes with eye salve, that [*hina*] you may see.”

The Laodiceans need to do this, so it is not a continuation.

40. Revelation 12:6: Start before Keeping on

The woman fled into the wilderness..., that [*hina*] they should feed her there.

The feeding is subsequent to the fleeing.

41. Revelation 12:14: Start before Keeping on

The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that [*hina*] she might fly into the wilderness.

The flight was subsequent to the receiving of wings.

²¹ See John H. Niemelä, “Initial Assurance or Reassurance? (1 John 5:13),” *GIF* 29 (May-June 2014): <http://www.faithalone.org/magazine/y2014/Initial-assurance-or-reassurance.pdf>

Summary of John's Usage of Present Subjunctives in Purpose Clauses

Eighty-three percent of the examples start as a consequence of the controlling verb. Thus, even if one were to accept the present tense in John 20:31 (not a good idea), John's usage of present subjunctives weighs heavily toward *come to believe* (not *continue to believe*).

Those arguing for the continue-to-believe approach have regarded an appeal to textual criticism and the present tense as sufficient. Therefore, the paper could end here, but another argument is ready-made to reinforce the whole issue.

A Revisionist Re-Interpretation of All Eight Signs.

John 20:30-31 says:

Thus Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these *signs* are written so you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life by His name.

There are eight signs in John; seven in the first eleven chapters, balanced by the supreme sign (the cross and resurrection). Consider with me the statement, "These signs have been written." Each of the signs were done for people present at the time of Jesus, so they might come to believe; John wrote those same signs (at various points in his Gospel) for his readers, so they might come to believe.

It is important to note that John uses a perfect tense here: These signs *have been* written. Some time has elapsed since John wrote the early chapters of the book. He had (for example) turning water to wine early in the process of writing. We should understand this as: Sign 1 (Water to wine) has been written in chapter two; Sign 2 (healing the son from afar) has been written in chapter four, etc. In other words, John is directing the reader to reflect on the eight signs of the book. He recorded each of those signs to persuade his readers.

However, there is more than that. Each of the eight signs has features within John's narrative that show that Jesus sought to persuade people that He is the life-giving Messiah, the Son of God, through each sign. John heeds that evangelistic emphasis, as he sets forth each of those persuasive signs over the course of his Gospel. The following chart summarizes:

Sign 1 (water to wine)	was done (2:1-12).	Disciples believed (2:11)
Sign 2 (heal son from afar)	was done (4:46-54).	Man and family believed (4:53).
Many signs in Jerusalem	were done (2:24; 3:1).	Many believed (2:24).
Sign 3 (heal lame man)	was done (5:1-15).	Led to message of life (5:24).
Sign 4 (feed 5000+)	was done 6:1-14).	Believe He is The Prophet (6:14)
Sign 5 (transport boat)	was done (6:15-21).	Led to message of life (6:47).
Sign 6 (heal blind man)	was done 9:1-34).	The man believed
Sign 7 (raise Lazarus)	was done (11:38-44).	Many believed (11:45).
Sign 8 (cross/resurrection)	was done (19–20).	Cross draws to believe (12:32).

What the chart seeks to show is that the statement, "These signs are written," refers back to the contexts in which each of the signs were written (chapters 2; 4–6; 9, 11; and 19–20). It is most difficult to see the eight signs in their contexts as pointing to people who were already believers, but were in danger of losing their faith. Let us consider each of the signs in turn.

Sign 1 (Water to Wine)

Jesus' mother and disciples were present. They (per John 1) were already believers; but there were disciples of Him who believed (2:11). This could speak of initial faith of some disciples other than those mentioned in chapter 1 or of that group of disciples believing more truth.

Jesus' brothers were also there as well as all the wedding guests. John 7:5 says that they were still unbelievers. The sign was done for their benefit, since 2:12 makes it clear that the brothers accompanied Jesus, His mother, and His disciples on a one-day walk to Capernaum. It is not hard to guess what the main topic of conversation. Signs are supposed to elicit faith.

Un-enumerated Signs in Jerusalem (2:23; 3:2)

Without detailing the signs mentioned in John 2:23 and 3:2, John indicates that they resulted in many believing in Jesus.

Sign 2 (Heal Son from Afar)

In addition to the father, who believed that Jesus could heal his son (and who even got a motel that night—based on a careful consideration of 4:52), his whole household believed. Signs are supposed to elicit faith.

Sign 3 (Heal Lame Man)

First there was the lame man, but there were also the religious leaders that Jesus sought to persuade via the healing. Signs are supposed to bring about belief.

Sign 4 (Feed 5000+)

Of course there were lessons for the disciples, but there were two groups of interest. The first recognized Him as the Prophet who is to come, others wanted to make Him king. Whatever one's view of these two groups may be, Jesus sought to persuade unbelievers through a sign.²²

Sign 5 (Walk on Water and Transport Boat)

Although only His disciples saw Him walk on water or transport the boat immediately to Capernaum, those who interrupted Jesus' teaching exclaimed, "Rabbi, when did You come here?" (6:25). His miraculous arrival astounded them, even though they did not see it happen. He had eluded them as they waited overnight and was already teaching. Signs are designed to elicit faith.

Sign 6 (Heal Born-Blind Man)

The blind man, friends, neighbors, family, and synagogue officials all heard this man's proclamation. If it had not been for the sign, who would have listened to him. In addition, the transition to chapter 10 is introduced in 9:41. Thus, Jesus used the healing of the man who was subsequently excommunicated as the basis for addressing religious leaders with the Good Shepherd passage. Signs were meant to minister to unbelievers, to bring them to belief.

²² See Zane C. Hodges, *Faith in His Name: Listening to the Gospel of John* (Corinth, TX: GES, 2015). John H. Niemelä wrote the portion of that commentary covering John 6:22-71 (pages 133-60). Some issues raised here receive more attention there.

Sign 7 (Raise Lazarus)

The sisters of Lazarus were already believers, but there was a large crowd. The sign caused many to believe. It also precipitated the huge crowds that came for the triumphal entry. It also led the Sanhedrin to plot to kill Jesus. Signs are designed to elicit faith.

Sign 8 (Cross and Resurrection)

In John 12:34, Jesus said that lifting Him up on the cross would draw all to Himself. There is no question that chapters 19–20 focus on this that would impact unbelievers heavily through the centuries, prompting belief.

A few words should be said about Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas. These are all ones who had believed Jesus' promise of everlasting life. However, they all fade into the background as one looks at what the cross and resurrection accomplished. The issue here is still focused on reaching unbelievers, as is demonstrated by the tone of the Last Discourse.²³

Literary Design of John

John 20:31 is right before the Epilogue (John 21). It forms an *inclusio* with John 1:11-13 that is in the midst of the Prologue (John 1:1-14). Thus, John 20:30-31 should not be seen as merely finishing out the discussion with Thomas. It is the purpose for the whole book.

As we look at the eight signs within the narrative of John, they all focus on bringing people to believe in Jesus for life everlasting. John urges the readers to respond by believing in Jesus Christ, as many did when Jesus actually performed the signs.

Conclusion

Mrs. Ironwill could deny people in three rescue boats that God sent to rescue her. Christianity for the past 1,700 years has ignored the evangelistic purpose of John's Gospel (John 20:30-31), reinforced by its own Great Commission (John 15:16).

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go forth and bear a great harvest [*karpos*], and that your harvest [*karpos*] should abide [*menō*], so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He would give you.”

That is the one Great Commission passage that is explicitly evangelistic and which points to succeeding generations abiding (and bearing great harvests of their own).

As we look at the first three centuries of Christianity, the growth rate was phenomenal. But with legalization came complacency and the Great Omission. From then on Christendom has run away from evangelism. It is no surprise that scholars attempt to remove evangelism from John's Gospel. Luke Timothy Johnson basically pronounced evangelism impossible, thinking that John and the apostles urged everyone to hide in air-raid shelters. No, all the apostles diligently spread the message of life. So did their followers. Grass-roots evangelism is the only way to explain the rapid growth of Christianity in the first three centuries.

²³ Cf. John H. Niemelä, “Jesus Props Up Unfruitful Believers (John 15:2-3),” *GIF* 29 (Mar-Apr 2014). Cf. also Zane C. Hodges, “Introducing John's Gospel [Part 1]: In The Upper Room with Jesus The Christ,” *JOTGES* (Spring 2008): 29-43; and Zane C. Hodges, “Introducing John's Gospel [Part 2]: Miraculous Signs and Literary Structure in John's Gospel,” *JOTGES* (Autumn 2008): 15-27.

We have refuted the argument that textual criticism leads to the present tense in John 20:31a. No. Whether one holds to the Majority Text or to the Critical Text, the best reading is the aorist. Even the UBS/N-A texts agree, but some of their evidence (namely \wp^{66} and Θ) do not belong as evidence for the other main reading.

We also saw that 83% of John's present subjunctives in purpose clauses refer to not-yet-begun purposes. That strikes at the heart of the contention of those who claim that the present tense should mean *continue to believe*.

Finally, when we look at John writing each of the eight signs in their contexts, each time the reason a sign was written was to persuade unbelievers.

We need to act like we are in the good-old days, back in the first three centuries of Christianity. Yes, each one of us can give out Gospels of John to unbelievers and talk with them about Jesus Christ. We also can give Gospels of John to believers and encourage them to hand them to unbelievers.

John wrote his Gospel so that people would come to believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, so that by believing this, they may have life in His name. God gave it to us for that reason, so let us not be like Mrs. Ironwill, whose theology got in the way of taking God at His word. He (through messengers) sought to communicate, but she brushed that aside three times.

The model that Jesus expresses in John 15:6 is that believers who abide in the word are able to share the word. Some who hear the word-based message of life believe (resulting in a new generation of believers). They are to abide in the word and share the word-based message of life.

