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Beyond Membership Centrality: Operational Significance and the Conditions of Action in the Passion Narratives

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ABSTRACT

How do the Passion narratives represent consequential action by figures whose membership position or prominence does not explain their contribution? This article develops a two-axis analysis of operational significance: the narrated process by which a means becomes available and is mobilized, including intervening responses, and the effect of that means on a specified action (enabling, facilitating, or enhancing). It distinguishes membership centrality, narrative prominence, and practical contribution without reconstructing a historical network. Joseph of Arimathea's request, the centurion's verification, and Pilate's authorization in Mark 15:43–45 demonstrate a sequence of distinct decisions; the disciple known to the high priest in John 18:15–16 mediates Peter's entry without a settled identity or rank. Nicodemus's burial provision, the women's distinct roles, and upper-room arrangements test the limits of inferred necessity. Comparing Gospel episodes without harmonization, the study shows how specified resources and relationships shape narrated outcomes while leaving causal sufficiency and historical indispensability unproven.

Keywords: Passion Narratives; Conditions of Action; Operational Significance; Membership Centrality; Narrative Agency; Joseph of Arimathea

1. Introduction

Mark 15:43–45 presents Jesus' burial through a series of distinct actions. Joseph of Arimathea approaches Pilate and asks for the body; Pilate questions whether Jesus has already died, consults the centurion, and grants the body to Joseph after receiving confirmation. The scene is more than an account of a briefly mentioned figure doing something important: its practical intelligibility depends on the relations among an actor, a restricted channel of access, an official decision, and the action that follows. The narrative thus invites an interpretive question distinct from whether Joseph is an admirable disciple or a socially prominent benefactor: how does the story represent the means by which a particular action becomes possible? This article addresses that question through a two-axis account of operational significance, tracing how a specific narrated action becomes possible and how far an identified means affects its outcome.

Other Passion episodes raise related questions, though the answers differ. In John 18:15–16, Peter waits outside the high priest's courtyard until another disciple, known to the high priest, speaks with the gatekeeper and brings him inside. In John 19:39–40, Nicodemus brings myrrh and aloes for the burial, contributing an identifiable material provision without the text establishing that burial would have been impossible without it. Mark 14:13–16 and Luke 22:8–13 represent the location and preparation of a furnished room through instructions, messengers, and an unnamed host whose exact relationship to the disciple group is not specified. The women are represented in overlapping but distinct capacities: Luke 8:1–3 speaks of material support before the Passion, whereas the Passion and empty-tomb episodes emphasize observation, knowledge of the burial site, and particular burial preparations. These cases should not be harmonized into a single historical inventory of resources, nor should their differences be erased under the general designation of peripheral supporters.

The central question is how membership centrality relates to operational significance. Membership centrality concerns the position a narrative explicitly assigns a character relative to Jesus and the disciple circle; narrative prominence, how extensively or emphatically the character appears; and operational significance, a character's identifiable contribution to the execution, facilitation, modification, or obstruction of a specific narrated course of action. Being one of the Twelve neither guarantees nor precludes a particular task; appearing briefly does not prove weak membership ties; and a narrated contribution does not, without further evidence, establish historical indispensability or an exclusive resource.

Here, the means of an action refers to a resource, relationship, spatial provision, or form of access that a narrative connects to an identifiable practical requirement and whose contribution to the ensuing action can be explained. Not every socially valuable attribute of a character counts as such a means. The explanatory claim is stronger when the text makes visible a constraint, an enabling condition, and the concrete action through which that condition matters; it is weaker when the resource or its consequence must be inferred from an actor's wealth, presumed status, or unexplained presence. Crucially, operational significance is identified from the narrated action before the relevance of any means is assessed. This sequence prevents the analysis from defining a means as decisive and then treating that definition as independent evidence of decisiveness.

The research question is: in selected Passion episodes, how do represented membership position, narrative prominence, operational contribution, and access to resources relate to one another, and when does an analysis of the means involved in a narrated action explain something more precise than identifying a significant character? Three related questions follow. First, which actions and immediate practical constraints are explicitly represented, and which are only inferred? Second, what specific relation, resource, authority, command, or other condition is connected to the action, and how strong is that connection? Third, do the answers vary across evangelists when comparable events are narrated with different actors, procedural stages, or material provisions?

The article makes three related contributions. Explanatorily, its two-axis analysis distinguishes the process of a narrated action—available means, their mobilization, and any intervening response or decision—from the effect those means have on a specified step: enabling, facilitating, or enhancing. Conceptually, it assesses membership centrality, narrative prominence, and operational significance as separate dimensions rather than treating an actor's status or visibility as a measure of practical

contribution. Comparatively, it identifies which conditions each Gospel actually narrates and uses positive and boundary cases to test the reach of the explanation.

The main cases are Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, the host associated with the upper room, the disciple known to the high priest, and the supporting women. Their evidential support varies: Joseph and the other disciple offer comparatively explicit access relations; Nicodemus attests provision without strict necessity; the upper-room host remains uncertain; and earlier support for the women cannot be assumed to continue during the Passion. Countercases include disciples who perform practical tasks, Simon of Cyrene's compelled assistance, the Roman centurion's verification, Judas's knowledge of the place where Jesus met his disciples, and the care of Jesus' mother in John 19:26–27. Together these cases permit the analysis to distinguish genuine textual support from inference, and to avoid confusing an action's direction with its practical significance.

The unit of analysis is the relation of actor, constraint, means, and action within a narrated episode. In the analysis that follows, Section 2 places the problem in dialogue with narrative and social scholarship. Section 3 establishes independent criteria for membership, operational significance, and the means of action. Section 4 tests the framework against the principal cases and countercases; Section 5 assesses competing explanations; Section 6 sets out its interpretive implications and limitations; and Section 7 draws together the contribution of an episode-sensitive account of operational agency.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Minor Characters and the Narrative Criticism of Discipleship

Studies of minor characters provide the closest point of comparison. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's work on Markan characterization, including her study of the major importance of minor characters, made the relationship between major and minor participants a significant problem for narrative criticism.[1] Joel F. Williams's monograph Other Followers of Jesus makes the challenge especially direct.[2] His study relates minor characters to Markan discipleship and discusses Joseph's consequential actions in the Passion narrative. That contribution rules out novelty claims resting merely on the observation that minor figures act when prominent disciples fail. The present article builds on that established observation by asking a further, episode-specific question: which narrated relations, resources, interactions, and permissions make a particular action intelligible?

2.2. Johannine Characters, Ambiguity, and the Limits of Membership Labels

Studies of John likewise caution against identifying a character's place in the movement simply from anonymity, intermittent appearance, or a single action. Colleen Conway challenges interpretations that reduce minor characters in the Fourth Gospel to fixed traits or degrees of belief, arguing for the

[1] Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 190–94, 198–201.

[2] Joel F. Williams, Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel, JSNTSup 102 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 187–91; Joel F. Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel," Bibliotheca Sacra 153 (1996): 341–42.

interpretive importance of their ambiguity.[3] Raimo Hakola, from a social-identity perspective, treats Nicodemus's position between opposition and discipleship as persistently ambiguous rather than settled by a final univocal label.[4] These contributions supply an essential corrective to an argument that might otherwise classify Nicodemus as definitively peripheral and then treat his material provision as proof that peripheral actors possess decisive resources. For the present analysis, the implication is not that literary ambiguity makes an action indeterminate. Rather, characterization and episode-level operational assessment answer different questions: the former asks how John presents a character whose allegiance remains open to interpretation, whereas the latter identifies what the narrative explicitly assigns that character to do and how far the reported action affects a specified step.

John 19:39–40 explicitly narrates Nicodemus's provision of myrrh and aloes, but neither his social rank inferred solely from the quantity nor the indispensability of those materials is demonstrated. Their potentially royal symbolism does not negate their material role: the action may have practical and theological significance together.

John 18:15–16 similarly reports the other disciple's acquaintance with the high priest, speech to the gatekeeper, and Peter's admission. Neither the disciple's identity nor his marginality is established; disputed identification with the Beloved Disciple cannot settle membership centrality. The narrated intervention, however, provides an analyzable access mechanism without speculation about rank (Section 4.5).

2.3. Itinerant Followers, Local Supporters, and Household Infrastructure

Social historians have long recognized that the Jesus movement included more than the Twelve. Gerd Theissen's distinction between itinerant participants and locally situated supporters made logistical dependence and differentiated modes of participation integral to descriptions of the early movement.[5] Studies of families and households have similarly examined the material and social infrastructure within which Christian practices and assemblies were possible.[6] These studies are important precisely because provision of space and material support is not a newly discovered phenomenon.

2.4. Patronage, Social Capital, and Network Brokerage

The distinction between access and mobilization is well established and helps define this article's contribution. Nan Lin distinguishes resources embedded in social relations, access to those resources, and their mobilization in purposive action.[7] Its specific interpretive task is to identify when an

[3] Colleen M. Conway, "Speaking through Ambiguity: Minor Characters in the Fourth Gospel," Biblical Interpretation 10, no. 3 (2002): 324–25, 329–32, https://doi.org/10.1163/156851502760226293.

[4] Raimo Hakola, "The Burden of Ambiguity: Nicodemus and the Social Identity of the Johannine Christians," New Testament Studies 55, no. 4 (2009): 438–44, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688509990014.

[5] Gerd Theissen, Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 17–23 (section "The Role of Sympathizers in the Local Communities").

[6] Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), chap. 8 ("Family Life, Meals, and Hospitality"), 193–208.

[7] Nan Lin, Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 41–44, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815447.

evangelist narrates that transition: an acquaintance becomes consequential when the acquainted person acts; a request becomes consequential when an authority responds; and knowledge of a place becomes consequential when it informs subsequent movement. This attention to visible transitions provides a finer-grained account of a Gospel episode than merely assigning a character an elevated or marginal social location.

Studies of patronage and social capital explain how resources become available and are used. Bourdieu treats social relations as possible sources of accessible capital;[8] Granovetter explains the consequences of ties that connect otherwise separated social settings;[9] and Burt examines the advantages associated with brokerage across structural holes.[10] Duling's two-part application of social-network analysis to the Jesus movement, especially the social-network discussion in Part II, brings these questions directly into scholarship on Jesus' followers.[11]

2.5. Narrative Construction, Theological Design, and Practical Sequence

Because the evidence comes from narratives, the analysis begins with how each evangelist presents an episode. Culpepper's treatment of Johannine characterization explicitly distinguishes characters as presented in the story from the historical persons to whom those portrayals may refer.[12] An evangelist may present a figure as a theological sign and also specify what that figure does.

Structural narratology already distinguishes the possibility, enactment, and completion of a narrated process.[13] The question here is how a particular Gospel attributes available means, their use, and any controlling response to different participants—and how the specified means enables, facilitates, or enhances the relevant step. This account supplements rather than replaces established descriptions of narrative functions.

2.6. The Research Problem and the Specific Contribution

Narrative criticism of minor characters, especially the work of Malbon and Williams, has already established that figures outside the central disciple circle can perform consequential acts. Williams also describes Joseph's request, Pilate's verification, and the release of the body (Mark 15:43–45); Lyons examines the distinctive Gospel portraits of Joseph and relates his standing to Pilate's decision.[14] Social-historical and network approaches, including those of Theissen, Duling, and McClure, likewise investigate

[8] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 248–50.
[9] Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," American Journal of Sociology 78, no. 6 (1973): 1360–80, https://doi.org/10.1086/225469.
[10] Ronald S. Burt, Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 30–34.
[11] Dennis C. Duling, "The Jesus Movement and Social Network Analysis (Part II: The Social Network)," Biblical Theology Bulletin 30, no. 1 (2000): 3–14, https://doi.org/10.1177/014610790003000102.
[12] R. Alan Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), chap. 5 ("Characters"), 105–6.
[13] Claude Bremond, "La logique des possibles narratifs," Communications 8 (1966): 60–61, https://doi.org/10.3406/comm.1966.1115.
[14] William John Lyons, Joseph of Arimathea: A Study in Reception History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 10–13, esp. 11.

differentiated participation and relational possibilities.[15] The present article extends these approaches by asking a narrower comparative question: how does each Gospel distribute the availability and use of particular means, the intervening decisions of other actors, and the effects of these factors on identifiable steps within an episode? Its distinctive proposal is not the discovery of effective minor characters or the first recognition of these narrated actions, but the consistent two-axis assessment of their separate contributions and evidential limits across cases. The framework does not assume that membership centrality, narrative prominence, and operational significance coincide, nor that every effective actor controls an exclusive resource. Alongside narrative criticism's attention to character and plot, the process axis isolates the narrated availability, mobilization, and intervening decisions relevant to a specific action. Alongside social-historical studies of access and resources, the effect axis evaluates whether a specified means enables, facilitates, enhances, or cannot be credited with a particular narrated result.

3. Membership Centrality, Operational Significance, and the Means of Action

3.1. The Analytical Problem: Three Dimensions of Character Significance

The cases require three distinctions. Membership centrality refers to an actor's represented relation to Jesus and the disciple circle; narrative prominence refers to the extent and manner of the actor's presentation within the account; operational significance refers to the actor's contribution to a specific narrated course of action. These dimensions can coincide, but their coincidence cannot be presumed. A character may be prominent but unable to perform a particular task, briefly presented yet perform an identifiable task, or act decisively without possessing any distinctive resource. The analytical contribution sought here lies in explaining these configurations rather than treating 'central,' 'minor,' and 'important' as interchangeable designations.

3.2. Operationalizing the Three Dimensions

3.2.1. Membership Centrality and Narrative Prominence

Membership centrality is assessed from what the narrative says, rather than from an impression of importance. The strongest indicator is explicit inclusion among the Twelve; other indicators include explicit identification as a disciple, repeated participation in Jesus' activities, and a stated relationship to the disciple group. These indicators are not equivalent. Identification as a disciple, for example, does not establish membership in the Twelve, while absence from the Twelve does not establish the absence of discipleship. Cases with unresolved identity are coded 'indeterminate' rather than assigned a peripheral position by default.

Narrative prominence is considered separately by looking at how often a character appears, the attention given to the character, and the role the narrative assigns to speech, action, or characterization. A figure can have limited narrative visibility while occupying an important social

[15] Jennifer M. McClure, "Jesus's Social Network and the Four Gospels: Exploring the Relational Dynamics of the Gospels Using Social Network Analysis," Biblical Theology Bulletin 50, no. 1 (2020): 35–53, esp. 35–37.

location; equally, a character's anonymity does not establish insignificance or distance from Jesus. The unnamed disciple known to the high priest in John 18:15–16 is an important caution: the passage establishes a form of access, but neither settles the disciple's identity nor determines his rank within Jesus' followers. No argument for his peripheral membership will be built upon anonymity alone.

3.2.2. Operational Significance as an Independently Observed Outcome

The assessment of operational significance begins with the action the narrative reports and its immediate result, before evaluating any means or conditions associated with it. Its observable forms include initiating a request; arranging or preparing a setting; facilitating entry; transporting, procuring, or supplying material; verifying information for an authorized decision; carrying out an assigned task; and preventing or redirecting another action. This coding does not assume that an action supports Jesus or the movement. An operational contribution may be supportive, coercive, adverse, or institutionally neutral. Judas's knowledge of Jesus' customary meeting place (John 18:2), for example, is relevant to the operational logic of arrest even though it cannot be classed with actions of support.

The evidence falls into three levels: (a) an explicit action and explicit immediate result; (b) an explicit action with a plausible but unexpressed operational effect (enabling, facilitating, or enhancing) on a specified step; and (c) a merely hypothesized causal necessity. Only (a) and carefully qualified instances of (b) can support a positive conclusion about operational significance. The ability to imagine that an episode would change without a person is not itself a textual observation. Accordingly, 'operationally significant' must not be equated with controlling a distinctive resource, nor may the failure to identify an alternative within the narrative be treated as evidence of absolute indispensability.

3.2.3. Means, Mobilization, and Intervening Responses

Drawing on the distinction between access and mobilization in social-capital research, the process axis traces four distinguishable elements:[16] an available resource or relation, the actor's ability to reach or use it, an observable act of mobilization, and a narrated outcome that may depend on another party's response. Possession alone does not establish activation; attempted mobilization alone does not guarantee success. In John 18:15–16, being known to the high priest supplies a relational premise, speaking to the woman at the door is the narrated mobilization, and Peter's entry is the result. Neither the text nor this model requires the other disciple to have controlled the doorway or the gatekeeper. The operational mechanism is thus relational rather than a simple conversion of one individual's resources into another person's outcome.

For this analysis, relevant means may include a resource, relationship, space, institutional position, or form of access, provided that the narrative associates it with the execution or facilitation of a specific action under a practical constraint. The same relationship may also be described in terms of social capital, patronage, or brokerage, depending on the scholarly question; such a description does not by itself establish its operational effect. What matters is its demonstrated relation to the narrated action, not the presumed social importance of its holder.

[16] Lin, Social Capital, 41–44.

Because the action is assessed before any associated means, it remains possible for an action to be operationally significant although no distinctive means under the actor's control is narrated, as Simon of Cyrene's conscription to carry the cross illustrates (Mark 15:21). It also remains possible for a resource to be displayed without proof that the narrated event depended on it, as in Nicodemus's provision of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39–40). Those two configurations are not exceptions to be excluded: they are tests of how far the analysis of means and intervening conditions can explain a narrated action.

3.3. Resource Categories and Degrees of Evidential Support

Information can serve as an operative resource: specific knowledge, observation, or confirmation that a text makes relevant to a later action or decision. It need not be classified as property and should not be equated with the broad narrative category of eyewitness authority. The women who observe where Jesus is laid in Mark 15:47 are shown acquiring location-relevant information before their subsequent visit; Judas's knowledge of the meeting place in John 18:2 serves an adverse purpose; and the centurion's report of death in Mark 15:44–45 supplies information on which Pilate acts. These are different kinds of knowing, with different institutional settings and consequences.

For each proposed means or condition, the analysis distinguishes (1) textual attestation of the resource or relationship, (2) textual attestation of its use in the episode, and (3) the strength of the inference that its use materially shaped the action. These levels must not be collapsed. In Matthew 27:60, the tomb is explicitly identified as Joseph's; this ownership may not be transferred silently to Mark, Luke, or John. In John 18:15–16, the other disciple's acquaintance and intervention are stated, but the text does not specify wealth, priestly rank, or membership distance from the Twelve. In John 19:39–40, the provision of burial substances is stated, while their strict necessity for burial is not. Greek expressions cited in the case discussions follow Michael W. Holmes's edition of The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition (SBLGNT, 2010); the lexical observations concern the stated wording and do not purport to adjudicate textual variants.

3.4. Criteria for Explanatory Weight

On the effect axis, resources can contribute in three different ways. An enabling condition is represented as opening a route that the scene has blocked; a facilitating condition shapes the route or ease of performance without establishing strict necessity; an enhancing condition changes the form, scope, or quality of what is done. This distinction replaces the misleading assumption that every positive contribution must be indispensable. The disciple's intercession in John 18 is an enabling mediation for Peter's entry as narrated. Domestic preparation can facilitate a gathering while leaving Jesus' directions central to the story. Nicodemus's considerable supply of spices in John 19 is a material and potentially symbolic enhancement of burial rather than a demonstrated prerequisite for the existence of a burial. Classification follows textual linkage and does not rank persons by spiritual merit.

Five questions assess the evidential and explanatory relevance of a proposed means to an already identified action.

First, explicitness: does the narrator state the relevant relationship, property, space, or resource, or is it reconstructed from other passages? Second, action linkage: is the resource actually used in the narrated event, or merely possessed? Third, constraint specificity: does the scene establish a concrete obstacle—such as restricted access, permission to obtain a body, or the need for a suitable place—that the resource addresses? Fourth, explanatory increment: does an analysis of the specified means explain something beyond the plain fact that a character performs an action, and does it improve upon literary, theological, social-status, or administrative explanations? Fifth, bounded counterfactual dependence: does the narrative make the action conditional on this means, or does it merely show one available route without ruling out alternatives?

The strongest cases are those in which a practical constraint, a particular means of addressing it, and a resulting action are all narrated. Less secure cases will be retained as boundary cases where theological symbolism or plot construction may do more explanatory work than resources.

3.5. Analytical Procedure and Case Selection

For each episode, the analysis records (a) the action and immediate constraint explicitly narrated, (b) the actor's stated relation to Jesus or the disciples, (c) the resource, knowledge, relationship, instruction, or access route reported, (d) its narrated use and any relevant response by a second actor, and (e) whether the effect enables, facilitates, enhances, or cannot be attributed to an identifiable means. The term 'threshold' names a scene-specific obstacle or decision point, not a universal sequence that every story must contain. A doorway, a governor's permission, or a burial location counts only where the text makes it pertinent. A threshold may be a temporal or spatial constraint without an actor who controls it; the question of who controls the next step therefore applies only when an intervening decision is narrated. Inferences about actors' status, motives, ownership, or indispensability are recorded separately from what the narrative reports.

The study offers a qualitative comparison of selected episodes rather than an exhaustive survey of practical actions in the closing chapters of the Gospels. The principal cases offer different degrees of explicit access or provision; countercases involving central disciples, compulsion, hostile agency, and symbolic significance test what the two-axis analysis cannot explain. Each Gospel is first examined on its own terms before comparison, so details from parallel accounts are not silently combined. For inclusion in the principal comparison, a passage must narrate an identifiable practical act and outcome, specify a relevant means or constraint, and permit at least two distinguishable elements of the process to be assessed. Selection also seeks contrasting configurations of access, material provision, knowledge, authorization, and compelled action. Episodes such as the Bethany anointing, whose connection to burial is interpretive rather than a narrated practical step, are considered as boundary tests, while actions requiring Gospel harmonization or an unreported historical resource are not introduced as established cases.

Five cases form the main comparison: Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, the unnamed host or householder associated with the upper room, the other disciple known to the high priest, and the women who followed and supported Jesus. Their analytic functions are deliberately differentiated. Joseph provides an especially strong example of a formally requested action with access to authority; the other disciple illustrates access mediation while leaving membership centrality unsettled; Nicodemus tests the difference between an identifiable resource and a necessary one; the upper-room

episode tests whether spatial provision is better explained as an independently provided resource or as a narratively and christologically structured arrangement; and the women test the limits of transferring earlier support into a crisis setting. The Bethany anointing, the soldiers' actions in John 19:31–33, and the securing of the tomb in Matthew 27:62–66 are accordingly examined as boundary or comparative checks rather than silently excluded or added as equivalent primary cases.

3.6. Interpretive Expectations, Rival Explanations, and Limits

Three expectations guide the comparison. First, represented membership centrality will not by itself account for every practical contribution, although central disciples may also act effectively. Second, the strongest explanatory increment of the two-axis analysis will occur where a narrated constraint is linked to a specified access route, provision, or intervention rather than merely to a character's label. Third, resource effects will differ: some enable a narrated step, others facilitate or enhance it, while command, compulsion, and literary or theological construction may provide better explanations elsewhere. These are interpretive expectations to be assessed against the selected texts, not statistical predictions about all Passion episodes.

These expectations would be weakened if a proposed resource has no textually identifiable bearing on the relevant action; if a literary or theological reading accounts more precisely for the specified relation; or if the cases fail to distinguish represented group standing from observable performance. A result confined to one episode or Gospel counts as a bounded finding. For a case within the defined scope, the analysis fails to add explanatory value if it requires an unreported step to connect means and outcome, assigns an effect contradicted by the passage, or cannot specify a relevant contribution beyond an already adequate narrative or theological account. A process may be described even where the three effect labels do not apply; such an instance must be reported as a limit of that classification, not retrospectively counted as enabling, facilitating, or enhancing. Cases outside the inclusion criteria are designated before assessing the model's explanatory success.

4. Case Studies: Operational Agency and the Means of Action

This section applies the distinctions from Section 3 to actions described in the Passion accounts. Its guiding question is not whether minor characters matter—an established observation in Gospel scholarship—but whether the relation between a character's represented position, an assigned action, and the means enabling that action can be specified more precisely than through a general contrast between central and peripheral figures. The analysis must not mistake an important action for proof of an exclusive means or of indispensability.

The five cases selected in Section 3.5 provide different degrees of support; the countercases are examined in Section 4.6. Each Gospel is read as its own narrative: shared events do not warrant pooling details into a composite scene.

4.1. Joseph of Arimathea: Institutional Access, Burial Action, and the Limits of Ownership Claims

Mark's account becomes clearer when its decision points are separated (Mark 15:43–45). Joseph initiates the petition and reaches the governor; Pilate is the one empowered to grant the body; the centurion supplies the report required by Pilate's inquiry. Joseph's access does not replace the centurion's information, and the centurion's information does not itself authorize release. Mark's participle τολμήσας ('having taken courage') marks Joseph's approach, whereas ἐδωρήσατο ('granted') assigns the release to Pilate after the centurion's report. These distinctions do not add another administrative reconstruction to the Gospel but extract an interpretive point from Mark's own sequence: operational significance can be distributed across an initiating actor, an informational participant, and an authorizing actor, including persons outside Jesus' followers. This is a description of the narrated procedure, not an assertion that Joseph had an exclusive legal entitlement to approach Pilate or that the precise chain can be reconstructed independently as Roman practice.

The historical setting makes this request intelligible without establishing a uniform Roman release procedure. Josephus describes Jewish concern to bury even condemned persons who had been crucified before sunset (Jewish War 4.317), while Philo reports occasions when crucified bodies were returned to relatives for burial around a festival, alongside an instance in which the governor did not order their removal (In Flaccum 83–84). These texts attest burial concerns and the possibility of release, not an entitlement that would have compelled Pilate in this particular case. Comparative study likewise shows variation in Roman disposal of crucified bodies, including exposure and burial. The procedural claim made here remains narrower: Mark explicitly places Joseph's petition, the centurion's report, and Pilate's permission in sequence; it does not establish that this was the universal practice of provincial administration.[17]

In light of scholarship on the Gospel burial accounts, Joseph is a particularly useful test because his performed action is directly narrated in all four Gospels while the characterization of the actor and the specification of his resources vary.[18] Mark identifies Joseph as a respected council member awaiting the kingdom of God (Mark 15:43). Matthew describes him as a rich man who had become a disciple of Jesus (Matt 27:57). Luke portrays him as a good and righteous council member who had not consented to the council's decision and action (Luke 23:50–51). John identifies him as a disciple who remained secret because of fear of the Jewish authorities (John 19:38). Yet the descriptions are not interchangeable: Matthew's wealth, Mark's council status, Luke's dissent, and John's secrecy each contribute to that Gospel's presentation of his action in different ways. These accounts do not identify Joseph as one of the Twelve; they do not thereby establish the absence of discipleship or a uniformly low social standing.

Across the four accounts, Joseph requests the body and undertakes the burial or its immediate arrangements (Mark 15:43–46; Matt 27:58–60; Luke 23:52–53; John 19:38–42). This shared action

[17] John Granger Cook, "Crucifixion and Burial," New Testament Studies 57, no. 2 (2011): 193–213, esp. 213, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688510000214.

[18] Raymond E. Brown, The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1205–41, 1242–83.

does not justify importing Mark's distinctive verification stage into each parallel: access, verification, authorization, and execution must be identified where the individual narrative reports them.

A second distinction concerns the tomb. Matthew explicitly says that Joseph placed Jesus in his own new tomb (Matt 27:60). Mark describes a rock-hewn tomb and Joseph's placement of the body there (Mark 15:46), but does not explicitly identify Joseph as its owner. Luke likewise identifies the tomb without assigning ownership to Joseph (Luke 23:53). John situates a new tomb in a garden near the place of crucifixion; the text does not say that it belonged to Joseph (John 19:41–42). Accordingly, 'Joseph's private tomb' can be used as a specifically Matthean datum, not as an across-the-board description of the four narratives.[19] The broader, cross-Gospel observation is that Joseph secures or performs a burial in an available tomb, not that the same property relation is narrated in every account.

What does the two-axis analysis add? Mere recognition that a council member performs the burial tells us who acts and something about his status. The proposed analysis distinguishes the practical constraint (the body must be released by the authority controlling it), the means narrated (Joseph's successful request and, in Mark, a separate confirmation of death), and the resulting action (release followed by burial). Joseph's social position makes institutional access plausible; the successful approach to Pilate is textually explicit. The stronger claim that his office was the necessary or exclusive condition of access remains an inference, not a narrated fact. Similarly, availability of a tomb explains the form of burial as depicted but, outside Matthew, cannot be equated with personally owned property. Mark's specification that it was Preparation Day, the day before the Sabbath (15:42), places Joseph's approach in a stated temporal setting; the further claim that this timing made his petition necessary is an inference rather than an explicit rule in Mark.

The texts also distinguish available access from its public use. Mark says that Joseph took courage in approaching Pilate (15:43), thereby marking the petition itself as a notable step; John describes Joseph's discipleship as concealed because of fear (19:38), yet still attributes to him the request for Jesus' body. These descriptions belong to different Gospel accounts and should not be blended into a single account of Joseph's motives. Their shared analytical relevance is narrower: the narrated ability to approach an authority cannot simply be equated with a costless, automatic conversion of social position into permission. The actual petition is an action, and the governor's response remains a separate action under another actor's control.

Other interpretations remain possible. Joseph may be read as a sympathetic disciple, a socially distinguished individual, a figure fulfilling burial obligations, or a character performing an indispensable transition in the evangelist's plot. These accounts are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The difference lies in this analysis's decomposition of the episode into distinct practical functions and its discipline about which character is textually assigned which function. Mark's centurion, especially, demonstrates that no single actor possesses every component of the narrated procedure. On this narrower account Joseph offers strong evidence for the operational value of narrated access, but weaker evidence for a general proposition about private ownership, elite causation, or the absolute incapacity of the Twelve.

[19] Brown, Death of the Messiah, 2:1249–53.

4.2. Nicodemus: Material Provision, Enhancement, and Narrative Meaning

Nicodemus appears in John's Gospel before the burial in two markedly different settings: the nighttime conversation with Jesus (John 3:1–21) and the exchange in which he raises a procedural question about judgment (John 7:50–52). He cannot simply be described as a 'minor supporter.' John 3 calls him a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews; the narrative provides neither an unambiguous identification with the disciple circle nor a simple trajectory from opposition to full allegiance. Interpreters of Nicodemus have accordingly stressed his ambiguity.[20] A study of operational action should retain this ambiguity rather than assuming that his appearance at the burial establishes a stable membership rank. His participation in John 19:39–40 therefore provides evidence for the burial materials and their use, not an independent resolution of whether his earlier encounters amount to a completed discipleship trajectory.

John 19:39 reports that Nicodemus brings a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about one hundred litrai; John 19:40 then describes the joint wrapping of Jesus' body with aromatic substances as a Jewish burial custom. The text thus directly attests both the supplied materials and their use in burial preparation (level [a] for these reported actions). It does not say that the approximately one hundred litrai were the customary amount. The conspicuous quantity may contribute to an interpretation of abundance, honor, or royal symbolism, but the particular symbolic effect remains an interpretation, not a separately reported action or a condition required for burial.

Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56 portray the provision or preparation of spices differently, but these differences do not establish what amount was required in John and should not be harmonized into a single burial procedure.

The analysis of narrated means helps explain how the burial is carried out: it asks not merely whether Nicodemus has become sympathetic, but what his narrated action introduces into the burial sequence. His resource makes a particular manner of honoring and preparing the body possible within John's presentation. This is an incremental explanation of the action's material form, not a claim to explain the historical occurrence of burial or the movement's survival. A satisfactory interpretation must hold this practical dimension together with John's theological and literary purposes. Nicodemus thus becomes a discriminating case: a character can demonstrably supply material while whether the event depended on that material remains uncertain.

4.3. The Supporting Women: From Antecedent Provision to Passion-Episode Agency

4.3.1. Distinct Gospel Witnesses

Studies of women in the Gospels have shown how varied their roles are.[21] The women require particular care because the evidence for material support and the evidence for Passion-period action do not occur in the same narrative statement. Luke 8:1–3 names women who accompany Jesus and the Twelve and provide for them from their own means. Mark 15:40–41 recalls women who had followed

[20] Jouette M. Bassler, "Mixed Signals: Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel," Journal of Biblical Literature 108, no. 4 (1989): 635–36, 643–44; Hakola, "Burden of Ambiguity," 438–44.

[21] Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 110–17, 277–83.

and served Jesus in Galilee. Matthew 27:55–56 likewise presents women who had followed Jesus and ministered to him. These statements establish antecedent participation and service. They do not, without a further argument, establish that a financial support mechanism remained continuously active at the cross or that its interruption would have obstructed the burial.

The Passion and empty-tomb accounts describe more specific actions. In Mark, women observe the crucifixion (15:40–41), two women see where the body is laid (15:47), and women later purchase spices and approach the tomb (16:1–3). Matthew depicts women at the crucifixion and two women seated opposite the tomb (27:55–61), followed by their visit to the tomb (28:1). Luke portrays women who observe and follow the burial sequence, see the tomb and the placement of the body, prepare spices and ointments, and later return (23:49, 55–56; 24:1). John supplies a distinct configuration: women stand near the cross (19:25), and Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb in 20:1. These accounts should not be flattened into a single continuous roster of identical persons performing identical actions.

4.3.2. Operational Roles in the Burial and Tomb Accounts

In Mark 15:47, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observe where Jesus is laid. After the Sabbath, Mark 16:1 names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome as purchasing spices with the stated intention of going to anoint him; 16:2 narrates their journey to the tomb. Observation of the burial place and purchase of burial materials are therefore two separately attested actions, rather than evidence of a single continuous financial operation. The overlap in names makes prior observation relevant to the return, but the differing maternal designations should not be silently resolved into an exhaustive identification of participants. Mark does not say that observation alone caused their ability to locate the tomb, and the narrated purchase establishes neither earlier financial patronage nor the eventual completion of anointing.

The sequence also distinguishes intention from accomplished outcome. The spices purchased in Mark 16:1 are means intended for anointing, but Mark 16:3 records the women’s question about who will roll away the stone. In 16:4 they find it already rolled back; Mark 16:5–8 then narrates their encounter and departure, not their performance of the intended anointing. The purchase is thus directly attested material mobilization for a proposed action, whereas successful use of the spices is not narrated. Prior observation makes the destination intelligible but does not itself remove the stone. The process axis can register each step without treating an intention as its achievement, and the positive effect axis cannot be used to claim that the spices enabled a completed anointing.

In Mark, observing the burial place, purchasing spices, traveling to the tomb, and confronting the unresolved stone problem are distinct stages. Luke 23:56 describes preparation of spices and ointments, not Mark’s purchase after the Sabbath; the accounts should not be conflated.

Observation and enabling action must also be distinguished. Observing a burial is an explicit action with an epistemic consequence in the narrative: the women know where the body has been placed. Yet that does not make their presence a material resource in the same sense as Nicodemus’s spices, nor does it show that their presence independently caused the burial to occur. Earlier evidence of financial support alone cannot explain the women’s specific burial and tomb actions. A more defensible inference is that the narratives differentiate practical actions—provision, observation,

preparation, return—and assign them unevenly among followers. The kind of narrated agency, rather than a hypothetical financial mechanism, remains the unit of interpretation.

4.3.3. Explanatory Result

The women provide a useful boundary case because the texts support strong claims about action and weaker claims about crisis-specific economic control. Their case shows why operational significance cannot be identified with wealth or privileged access. It also guards against a misleading opposition between the Twelve as 'central' and the women as 'peripheral': they are established followers in several narrative portraits, while membership in the Twelve is only one dimension of group position. The article's contribution is to identify the distinct grounds on which their roles become consequential and the limits of translating one form of action into another.

4.4. The Upper-Room Episode: Provided Space, Disciple Action, and Christological Design

Mark 14:12–16 and Luke 22:7–13 describe preparations for the final meal through instructions, movement, recognition, and the showing of a furnished upper room. The person carrying a water jar functions as an identifying sign whom the disciples are instructed to follow; the householder is the person to whom Jesus' message is addressed. The text does not identify these as the same person. Nor does it explicitly establish legal ownership of the room, a prior patronage relationship, or the householder's membership in Jesus' movement. The more secure observation is an ordered sequence of locating a house, conveying a message, being shown a prepared space, and preparing the meal. This division of tasks matters more for an account of operational agency than the unproved status of an 'owner.'

The spatial element is plainly part of the action sequence: the meal is prepared in a specified place. But the same passages attribute practical agency to members of Jesus' disciple circle. Mark sends two disciples (14:13–16); Luke identifies Peter and John by name (22:8–13). They follow the instructions and prepare the Passover. A model that contrasts a non-central host who acts with an inactive central core would therefore misdescribe these texts. The episode is better understood as distributed action within a scene: Jesus instructs; disciples search, speak, and prepare; a householder shows or supplies the setting. The relative social rank of the householder is not established.

Here the strongest rival explanation arises from the evangelists' narrative design. The specified encounter with the man carrying water and the prepared room can underscore Jesus' foreknowledge and control of events; Mark 11:1–6 presents an instructive parallel in which Jesus predicts a recognizable encounter and gives detailed instructions. Spatial availability therefore cannot simply be isolated from christological portrayal. If the emphasis is on Jesus' knowledge of what will be found, the householder cannot be treated as an independently established provider. Nevertheless, the resource-oriented question remains meaningful when carefully constrained: what material condition is represented as already available, and how is its availability coordinated with the disciples' actions? The answer is a prepared gathering place, accessed through the steps Jesus specifies. The framework adds analytical clarity by disaggregating instruction, access, provision, and preparation. It does not establish that the householder possessed a rare, irreplaceable resource or that he was a peripheral

adherent. Accordingly, the upper-room episode offers limited evidence for independently supplied resources.

4.5. The Other Disciple Known to the High Priest: A Strong Access Mechanism without a Settled Membership Rank

John 18:15–16 represents a restricted entrance: Peter waits outside, the disciple known to the high priest goes out, speaks to the woman guarding the door, and brings Peter inside. The disciple's acquaintance with the high priest (γνωστὸς τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ), his speaking to the doorkeeper (εἶπεν τῇ θυρωρῷ), and his bringing Peter inside (εἰσήγαγεν τὸν Πέτρον) are narrated (level [a]); the words spoken and any permission granted by the doorkeeper are not reported, and the text does not expressly say that acquaintance with the high priest caused Peter's admission (a qualified level [b] inference). In John 18:17 she then questions Peter about being a disciple. The sequence associates acquaintance with entry, while disciple identity becomes salient in the question addressed to Peter. Neither discipleship nor Peter's membership centrality is narrated as causing his admission. Acquaintance with the high priest is a narrated access-related premise, the disciple's speech to the doorkeeper the reported mobilization, and Peter's being brought inside the local outcome; treating that acquaintance as a sufficient cause of admission would exceed the narration. Neither entry nor subsequent denial settles the intermediary's rank or his control over the gatekeeper.

Three distinctions sharpen its significance. First, the term 'another disciple' establishes discipleship, but does not settle whether this figure is one of the Twelve, the Beloved Disciple, or a person outside the inner circle. His anonymity cannot bear the weight of a claim that he occupied a peripheral membership position. Second, γνωστός ('known' or 'acquainted') indicates a relationship of recognition with the high priest, not automatically wealth, priestly office, hereditary standing, a patron-client obligation, or delegated authority over the doorway. Third, Peter's dependence in this Johannine sequence is localized: he needs assistance for this entrance in this telling. It does not follow that Peter lacked all possible access in every setting, still less that the same dependence is independently narrated by Mark, Matthew, or Luke. The identification of this "other disciple" with the Beloved Disciple remains debated; a further identification with John son of Zebedee is a separate and still more demanding claim. Myles and Kok survey arguments for and against identifying this figure with the Beloved Disciple and find a strong case for that identification, while challenging the separate identification with John son of Zebedee on socioeconomic grounds. Their argument concerns historical identification, not whether the Johannine narrative depicts the unnamed disciple as mediating Peter's entry. The present analysis therefore brackets identification rather than treating either anonymity or priestly acquaintance as evidence of membership rank.[22]

The comparison with Mark clarifies both the strength and the boundary of the case. Mark 14:54 simply says that Peter followed at a distance into the courtyard of the high priest. It neither describes the other disciple nor supplies an intermediate gatekeeper transaction. John's narrative, by contrast, explicitly represents entry as mediated by another person's recognized relationship. This is a difference in narrated access mechanics. It can be documented without claiming that John borrowed

[22]Robert J. Myles and Michael Kok, "On the Implausibility of Identifying the Disciple in John 18:15–16 as a Galilean Fisherman," Novum Testamentum 61, no. 4 (2019): 369–74, 377–84.

from Mark, deliberately diminished Peter, or recorded a more accurate historical scene. Such stronger historical or redactional proposals require their own argument.

The entry also serves the plot of Peter's denial; this literary function is compatible with the narrated access mechanism. The explanatory achievement of the two-axis analysis is modest but concrete: it identifies the narrated relationship by which Peter's entry is mediated, while narrative criticism explains why the evangelist may have chosen to narrate it.

4.6. Countercases and Boundary Conditions: Where Agency Does Not Depend on Controlled Resources

4.6.1. Central Disciples Performing Practical Actions

The preparation of the meal provides a direct correction to any dichotomy between a passive core and effective outsiders. Luke explicitly names Peter and John as the disciples sent to prepare the Passover, and says that they did so (Luke 22:8–13). Peter's localized dependence upon another disciple for courtyard entry in John 18 cannot be generalized into permanent operational incapacity. John 19:26–27 supplies a further boundary case: the Beloved Disciple receives responsibility for Jesus' mother and takes her into his own care or home. This scene has pronounced symbolic and theological dimensions, but it also reports an action with a practical relational consequence. It would be unsound to classify the Beloved Disciple as narratively important but categorically devoid of practical agency.

4.6.2. Practical Action without an Identified Controlled Resource

Simon of Cyrene sharpens another dimension of the framework. In Mark 15:21, unnamed agents conscript Simon to carry Jesus' cross (ἀγγαρεύουσιν … ἵνα ἄρῃ). The verse states the purpose of their action rather than separately narrating the completion of the carrying; the preceding context identifies soldiers (Mark 15:16–20). Mark also identifies Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus. This identification may suggest that the names had significance for the Gospel's intended readers, but the verse neither identifies the sons as members of Jesus' circle nor makes their possible recognition the reason for Simon's selection. The narrated circumstances of his selection are situational: he is passing by and coming from the country (παράγοντά τινα … ἐρχόμενον ἀπ' ἀγροῦ). No special property or prior connection is supplied as the operative condition of his conscription. The case thus distinguishes the person assigned a task from those who initiate it, without inferring a social network or discipleship status from the family names.

Luke 23:26 must be assessed on its own terms rather than supplied with Mark's details. Luke reports that, as they led Jesus away (ὡς ἀπήγαγον αὐτόν), the same unnamed plural agents took hold of Simon of Cyrene as he came from the country and placed the cross upon him (ἐπιλαβόμενοι … ἐπέθηκαν αὐτῷ τὸν σταυρόν). The infinitive φέρειν states the purpose of this imposition, with ὄπισθεν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ specifying that Simon is to carry it behind Jesus; the verse does not separately narrate the completed carrying. Unlike Mark 15:21, Luke does not name Alexander or Rufus, nor does this verse use Mark's verb ἀγγαρεύουσιν. The narrated seizure and placement support an externally initiated assignment, not Simon's voluntary mobilization of a resource or an inferred place in the disciple circle. The two accounts thus support the same bounded distinction between assigned action and control over its initiation, but through different narrated details rather than a harmonized scene.

The centurion in Mark 15:44–45 provides information to Pilate confirming death, after which Pilate grants the body to Joseph. Here a differentiated administrative function is narrated, even though the centurion is not a follower of Jesus and his action is not part of the movement's internal resource distribution. The episode shows that operational agency extends beyond the Jesus movement and that the action sequence can involve official verification as well as a petitioning supporter.

John 19:31–33 offers a separate and differently configured sequence: because it was Preparation Day, the petitioners ask Pilate for the legs to be broken and the bodies removed; the soldiers break the legs of the other two but refrain from breaking Jesus' legs when they see that he is already dead. John's account does not narrate Pilate's reply or the removal of the other bodies, and the soldiers' observation must not be equated with the centurion's report to Pilate in Mark 15:44–45. The observation explains a withheld action rather than an enabling, facilitating, or enhancing contribution to a completed step; it thus marks a limit of the effect-axis categories while remaining intelligible on the process axis.

4.6.3. Adverse Agency and Unsettled Identity

Judas supplies an adverse case. John 18:2 states that he knew the place where Jesus and his disciples often met; the following verses depict his arrival with the arresting party. His knowledge and participation are consequential for the arrest narrative, but cannot be placed on the supportive side of a binary contrast between disciples and helpers. Operational significance, as defined here, is analytically independent of moral approval or aid to the movement. The unnamed disciple of John 18 marks a different boundary: an explicit access mechanism without a settled membership rank (Section 4.5).

Matthew 27:62–66 provides a further adverse comparison within Matthew itself. The chief priests and Pharisees request that the tomb be secured, Pilate responds, and the tomb is sealed with a guard; these are narrated steps, although the precise force of Pilate's wording and the guard's institutional identity need not be resolved here. Set beside Joseph's request in Matthew 27:58, this episode shows that petition, authority, and execution also structure actions directed against Jesus' followers. The effect of the arrangements is restricted to securing the tomb as narrated, not proof that they could prevent the subsequent events of Matthew 28:2–4.

4.6.4. Symbolic Significance and Boundary Cases

Mary the mother of Jesus appears near the cross in John 19:25–27 and participates in a scene of family reconfiguration and discipleship. Although no resource controlled by Mary is specified as the practical means of another action, it would be reductive to describe her significance as 'merely symbolic' or to deny that she participates in an enacted transfer of responsibility. Similarly, the women at the crucifixion should not be dismissed as non-operational solely because they do not control the burial itself: in some Gospel sequences their observation carries explicit information into later actions. Boundary cases are better categorized by their narrated functions than sorted into a forced division between 'real action' and 'symbolism.' The symbolic, literary, and practical registers can coexist without being identical.

The Bethany anointing is a useful boundary test (Mark 14:3–9; Matt 26:6–13; John 12:1–8). The costly ointment is explicitly used in a material act, but the connection of that act to Jesus' burial is established by his interpretation, rather than by a later narrated burial procedure dependent on that

ointment. The episode therefore has substantial narrative and theological significance without warranting an additional claim that it practically enabled the subsequent burial. Its treatment as a boundary case distinguishes a narrated act from an unsupported transfer of its effects to a different episode.

4.7. Comparative Findings: What the Two-Axis Analysis Explains

The comparison identifies several kinds of practical contribution rather than an inverse ranking of core and peripheral disciples. A character may initiate a petition, provide information, mobilize a relationship, supply materials, or perform an action imposed by another. The explanatory question is therefore not simply who matters, but which specified condition makes which step intelligible, and where the text leaves the next step under someone else's control.

The cases support the first expectation, with qualifications: membership standing alone does not allocate practical roles, but not every effective actor can be classified as peripheral. John 18:15–17 additionally shows disciple identity becoming relevant at the entrance where another disciple's relationship mediates Peter's access; it does not establish that membership rank determines admission. The second expectation is supported most clearly by Mark's request–verification–authorization sequence and John's mediated courtyard entry. The third is supported by distinct effects: Nicodemus enhances burial preparation without demonstrated strict necessity; the women's knowledge helps make a return to the tomb intelligible without resolving the stone's obstacle; the upper-room episode couples prepared space with Jesus' instructions and disciples' execution. These are differentiated tests, not uniformly strong instances of the same resource mechanism.

The boundary cases show why this is more than a list of effective characters. Simon's compelled labor and the centurion's official report are consequential without implying that either controls a voluntarily mobilized personal resource; Judas's knowledge is operative in an adverse direction.

The cases reveal two limits on practical agency. One is an access boundary, as in John 18:15–16: a relationship can be put to use, but the outcome still requires interaction at a controlled entrance. The other is a decision boundary, as in Mark 15:43–45, where official verification and a decision intervene between petition and release. Simon's compelled carrying represents a different configuration, in which the performer of the act is not the agent who imposes it. These contrasts refine the explanatory claim: operational significance can attach separately to the initiator, intermediary, confirming official, authorizer, and performer within a single narrated episode. No one of these roles should be made a synonym for control over a distinctive resource.

Across these cases, the process axis locates different actors at different stages, while the effect axis specifies the reach of a particular means. That reach ends at the obstacle to which the narrative links it: Joseph's petition does not confer Pilate's authority, the other disciple's intervention does not establish control of the gatekeeper, and burial-site knowledge does not move the stone. Table 1 records these differences in evidential support.

Table 1. Comparative Assessment of Narrated Action, Means, and Effects

Case	Narrated action / outcome	Means and mobilization in text	Centrality evidence	Explanatory assessment	Effect axis (specified step)	Evidence level (bounded claim)
Joseph (Mark 15; parallels)	Requests body; burial arranged	Petition → centurion report → Pilate permission; owned tomb only in Matthew	Not identified among the Twelve; descriptions vary	Strong action/access; ownership and exclusivity limited	Petition initiates request; centurion's report informs Pilate; Pilate's permission enables release (Mark); not a single actor's effect	a: petition, inquiry, report, permission; c: hypothesized status-based advantage, excluded from positive effect coding
Other disciple (John 18)	Brings Peter through doorway	Acquaintance → speech to woman at door (content unreported) → Peter's entry; no gatekeeper permission narrated	Disciple; rank/identity unsettled	Strong specified access mechanism	Peter's entry follows the disciple's speech; enabling force inferred, not sole causation	a: acquaintance, speech, entry; b: acquaintance's causal force
Nicodemus (John 19)	Brings myrrh and aloes (about 100 litrai); burial cloths and aromatics used in preparation	Customary use of aromatics; conspicuous quantity distinguished from customary practice	Membership ambiguous	Materials and their use explicit; scale specified, necessity and symbolic import not established	Enhancing scale/form of provision (qualified); use in burial preparation narrated	a: provision and narrated use; b: inferred enhancing significance of quantity (provisional)
Upper room (Mark 14; Luke 22)	Room shown; disciples prepare meal	Jesus' directions → the man carrying a jar → shown room → disciple preparation	Householder unknown; core disciples active	Spatial provision narrated; explanatory increment assessed separately in Table 2	Facilitates preparation; not proven necessary	a: room shown and preparation narrated; b: facilitating role inferred; necessity not established
Women (Gospels)	Mark: observe burial place (15:47); purchase spices for intended anointing (16:1); travel to tomb, but no completed anointing narrated (16:2–8).	Observed location → location-informed return; separately purchased aromatics → intended anointing; stone is another constraint.	Followers; not Twelve	Observation and purchase explicit; successful anointing and continuous crisis funding unproved.	Qualified facilitation of location-informed return; purchased means for intended, not accomplished, anointing.	(a): observation, purchase, stated intent, journey; (b): functional link of observation to return; no evidence of completed anointing.
Simon (Mark 15:21)	Conscripted to carry cross; purpose stated, completion not separately narrated	Unnamed agents compel a passer-by coming from the country (Mark 15:21; soldiers in 15:16–20); sons are named without making identification causal	Membership not specified; sons named without a narrated group affiliation	Situational selection and externally imposed assignment; family names do not establish a social access mechanism	Not assignable as an independently mobilized means; compelled assignment, with completion not separately narrated	a: compulsion, situational encounter, assignment purpose, and sons named; no attested causal link from sons to selection
Centurion (Mark 15:44–45)	Confirms death for Pilate	Official report answers Pilate's inquiry; no authorization power stated	Roman official	Shows external administrative agency	Facilitates the authorization sequence by supplying the requested confirmation; Pilate's permission enables release	a: inquiry, report and permission

Case	Narrated action / outcome	Means and mobilization in text	Centrality evidence	Explanatory assessment	Effect axis (specified step)	Evidence level (bounded claim)
Peter/John (Luke 22)	Prepare Passover	Commission and practical preparation by core disciples	Core disciples	Central actors can perform effective tasks	Not assignable as a distinct means-based effect; commissioned preparation is directly narrated	a: sending and preparation
Judas (John 18:2–3)	Participates in arrest	Knowledge of place facilitates adverse participation	One of Twelve	Operational role can be adverse	Facilitates arrest involvement in an adverse direction; the contribution of place knowledge is inferred, not shown to be necessary	a: place knowledge and arrival with party; b: facilitating role of knowledge inferred, not necessity

5. Competing Explanations and the Interpretive Value of the Two-Axis Analysis

The analysis does not treat resources or relationships as a complete explanation of operational agency in the Passion narratives. Joseph's status, Nicodemus's burial substances, the prepared room, the other disciple's recognized relationship, and the women's earlier provision can all be approached using existing accounts of wealth, status, patronage, social capital, network brokerage, literary design, and theological characterization. The methodological question is narrower: what does each account explain, at what level, and with what evidential warrant? The two-axis analysis adds explanatory value where it specifies how a narrated constraint relates to a specified means and its effect on an action. Its value is therefore measured by an explanatory increment rather than by exclusive ownership of a phenomenon already studied in other terms.

5.1. Wealth and Material Capacity

Wealth may help explain actions involving a tomb, burial materials, or hospitality. Matthew explicitly identifies Joseph as wealthy and describes the tomb as his own (Matt 27:57, 60). John portrays Nicodemus bringing a substantial quantity of myrrh and aloes for burial (John 19:39–40). Earlier, Luke depicts women who support Jesus and his companions from their resources (Luke 8:1–3). Broader studies of the social and economic setting of early Palestinian Christianity and first-century Galilee supply context, but they do not independently establish Joseph's wealth in other Gospels, Nicodemus's individual economic position, or a continuous financial contribution by the women during the Passion.[23] The material dimension is therefore real in the passages that attest it, while the operational significance of any particular provision still requires scene-level analysis.

But wealth alone does not explain the specific action assigned to a character. In Matthew, the explicit ownership of a tomb makes property relevant to Joseph's burial action; it does not establish that all four evangelists characterize Joseph identically. In Mark, the decisive transition from request to release includes Pilate's inquiry and the centurion's confirmation (Mark 15:43–45). Possession of wealth, even if inferred, would not explain that narrated administrative sequence. In John,

[23]David A. Fiensy, "Introduction," in The Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus, ed. David A. Fiensy and Ralph K. Hawkins (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 1–4.

Nicodemus's materials contribute to the manner in which the burial is performed, but the account does not establish that no burial could have occurred without that quantity of substances. The Synoptic burial accounts, which narrate Jesus' burial without Nicodemus's provision, place a further limit on the claim of strict necessity.

5.2. Elite Status, Institutional Access, and Administrative Procedure

Joseph's standing offers a substantial status-based explanation. Although the Gospels characterize him differently (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50–51; Matt 27:57; John 19:38; see Section 4.1), Mark places him in a position from which his petition to Pilate is intelligible. Status can provide a plausible route of approach, and should not be treated as incompatible with access.

The question is how status functions in the episode. In Mark 15:43–45, Joseph requests the body, but permission follows Pilate's question about the timing of death and the centurion's confirmation. Initiative belongs to the petitioner, verification to an officer, and authorization to the governor. Neither general influence nor council membership alone explains the narrated steps.

5.3. Patronage, Social Capital, and Network Brokerage

Lin's distinction between access and mobilization is directly relevant here:[24] a relationship may be available without being activated, and activation can depend on how others respond. An episode-sensitive analysis of narrated means does not claim that network theorists overlooked action; it asks what action the narrator makes visible, what threshold that action addresses, and whether a recognized relation was translated into an actual encounter. Mark 15 offers another configuration, in which the applicant's approach to authority is not identical with the authority's verification and permission. The incremental explanation lies in this narrated conversion and differentiation, not in the assertion that social ties can have practical consequences.

Patronage and household studies illuminate relationships of hospitality, support, obligation, and material provision within early Christian settings.[25] Social-capital and network accounts identify how relational ties yield access to resources or connect otherwise separated actors.[26] It would be inaccurate to say that such theories address only the acquisition or static distribution of resources. Brokerage, in particular, already concerns practical advantages and the consequences of relational position. Any novelty claim based on an assertion that network theory cannot explain access would therefore be unsustainable.

The other disciple in John 18:15–16 tests these approaches rather than disproving them. A brokerage reading already explains the intermediary's recognized relationship. The two-axis analysis more specifically traces a documented constraint, a relationship, speech at the entrance, and Peter's

[24] Lin, Social Capital, 41–44.

[25] Richard P. Saller, Personal Patronage under the Early Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1–6; David A. deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 95–101, 151–53; Osiek and Balch, Families in the New Testament World, 193–208.

[26] Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," 248–50; Granovetter, "Strength of Weak Ties"; Burt, Structural Holes, 30–34; Dennis C. Duling, "The Jesus Movement and Social Network Analysis (Part I: The Spatial Network)," Biblical Theology Bulletin 29, no. 4 (1999): 156–75, https://doi.org/10.1177/014610799902900404.

entry (Section 4.5). This episode links a relation to action without identifying the intermediary as wealthy, a formal patron, a priest, or necessarily outside the Twelve.

The women present a different test. Luke 8:1–3 explicitly indicates prior material support; the Passion accounts explicitly report presence, observation, and in some cases later preparation of burial substances (Mark 15:40–41, 47; 16:1; Luke 23:49, 55–56). Patronage may illuminate the antecedent pattern of assistance. It cannot, without an additional textual bridge, establish that financial support continued to function as an indispensable crisis resource during the crucifixion. The case thus tests evidential restraint: a valid patronage account of one episode need not explain every later episode in which the same group appears.

5.4. Domestic Space and the Upper-Room Episode

Household studies make available a persuasive account of domestic space as a setting for hosting, gathering, and sustaining associations.[27] The room in Mark 14:13–16 and Luke 22:10–13 is therefore not socially meaningless. The accounts present a furnished or prepared upstairs room to which the disciples are directed, and the meal takes place in a setting arranged in advance within the story. But neither text securely identifies the room's legal owner or establishes that its provider was a member of Jesus' movement. The convenient label 'owner of the upper room' must not harden into a recovered social fact.

The strongest alternative is literary and christological: as with the colt (Mark 11:1–6), the fulfillment of Jesus' instructions may emphasize his foresight and authority rather than a discreet benefactor's resources. This remains possible even when the room facilitates the meal. The two-axis analysis specifies the role of the narrated spatial provision; christological interpretation accounts for the narrative's interest in Jesus' knowledge and authority. In this case the explanatory increment of the two-axis analysis is limited.

5.5. Narrative Construction, Characterization, and Theological Meaning

Narrative construction is not a rival historical cause. The primary evidence for this article consists of narratives; identifying an operational mechanism within a story is therefore compatible with asking why the evangelist assigned an action to that character. The question is whether the framework adds analytical resolution to a literary description rather than merely renaming a character's function. Work on Gospel characterization and minor characters, including studies by Malbon and Williams, already demonstrates that figures beyond the central disciple circle can serve important structural, exemplary, and contrastive roles.

Three levels can be distinguished without treating them as unrelated. At the level of plot, a character's act may advance the narrative. At the level of characterization or theology, the same act may signify discipleship, devotion, misunderstanding, kingship, or the fulfillment of Jesus' words. At the level of narrated enactment, the text may also specify a concrete route by which the act occurs: an official request, a recognized connection, a furnished room, or the provision of burial materials. The last level is the principal interest of the two-axis analysis. Such analysis becomes informative where

[27] Osiek and Balch, Families in the New Testament World, chap. 8, 205–8.

the narrator supplies a distinctive means; that means cannot be inferred solely from the event's narrative importance.

Joseph offers a clear example. The burial is narratively indispensable to the transition toward the empty-tomb accounts, but this does not prove that Joseph was historically the only person who could have performed it. Mark distinguishes petition, verification, and authorization; Matthew emphasizes Joseph's wealth and tomb; John narrates Nicodemus's contribution. These differing practical details and the literary role of burial must be read together without harmonization.

Nicodemus shows how the theological account may carry more weight than a necessity claim. The quantity of burial substances in John 19:39 can contribute to the literary presentation of the burial and the dignity accorded Jesus. It is a material contribution explicitly narrated, but neither a straightforward sign of Nicodemus's entire wealth nor proof that the burial depended on that amount. Symbolic abundance and practical provision can coexist. The former should not erase the latter; the latter should not be inflated into indispensable causation.

The other disciple in John 18 illustrates the converse relationship. The scene has a clear plot function, since Peter's entrance enables the ensuing courtyard sequence; nevertheless, John also depicts a distinct relational means by which that entrance occurs. To say 'the disciple is a narrative device' names a function of the scene but leaves its depicted access mechanics unanalyzed. To say 'the disciple has access to a useful relationship' without specifying recognition, gatekeeper intervention, and entry would be equally superficial. The analytical gain comes from keeping the literary purpose and the represented mechanism in view simultaneously.

5.6. Countercases and the Costs of Overextension

The countercases in Section 4.6 limit the framework's reach. Simon of Cyrene is conscripted to carry the cross (Mark 15:21); the task's completion is not separately narrated, nor is a distinctive resource under Simon's control. The conditions of compulsion belong to other actors (see Mark 15:16–20). Assignment must not be confused with control over the conditions initiating it.

Mobilizing access can also entail exposure: Mark describes Joseph's approach as bold (15:43), while John describes concealed discipleship through fear (19:38). These separate portrayals distinguish available access from its public use without constructing a shared psychology (see Section 4.1).

The centurion's confirmation in Mark 15:44–45 forms part of the administrative pathway to release. His official role demonstrates operational significance without implying membership in or support for Jesus' movement.

Judas's knowledge of the meeting place (John 18:2) contributes to an adverse action, showing that operational significance does not imply faithfulness or service. Conversely, Luke 22:8–13 depicts Peter and John effectively performing practical preparations, and John 19:26–27 depicts the Beloved Disciple receiving responsibility for Jesus' mother. Such cases defeat any claim of a stable inverse correlation between central membership and practical agency. The comparison preserves a distinction: membership position, narrated performance, and access to enabling means are different dimensions that sometimes coincide and sometimes do not.

5.7. A Comparative Test of Explanatory Increment

Applying the effect-axis categories defined in Section 3.4, a negative result is equally informative: if the mechanism is an imposed command, or if the scene does not disclose the means, the analyst need not invent an independently controlled resource. This differentiated account allows Nicodemus's material provision, the women's location knowledge, the other disciple's mediated access, and Simon's compulsion to be assessed within one coherent model without forcing them into one claim of absolute necessity.

Four questions make the comparison clearer: (1) what action and immediate consequence are narrated; (2) what account of social position, wealth, patronage, network ties, or literary design would explain the passage without the two-axis framework; (3) what additional constraint–means–action relationship, if any, the two-axis analysis identifies; and (4) what remains unproved. Table 2 summarizes the findings. Its High, Moderate, and Limited gradations judge the explanatory increment of the specified narrated mechanism, not the (a)/(b)/(c) evidence grade in Table 1, the importance of a character, or historical necessity. A negative-control entry records a case in which the positive means-based effect categories are inapplicable; the Peter/John and Judas rows in Table 1 serve as counterchecks and do not require separate Table 2 ratings.

Table 2. Rival Explanations and the Evidential Limits of the Two-Axis Analysis

Episode / actor	Principal rival reading	Possible explanatory increment	Bounded finding
Joseph / Mark 15:43–45	Status; burial plot; administrative procedure	Petition, independent death report, and permission are separate narrated functions	High for depicted sequence; exclusive access unproved
Other disciple / John 18:15–16	Brokerage; literary preparation for Peter's denial	Narrated acquaintance → speech to the doorkeeper → Peter's entry; the doorkeeper's response is unreported	High for narrated access sequence; causal sufficiency and identity/rank unresolved
Nicodemus / John 19:39–40	Wealth; honoring Jesus; Johannine symbolism	Distinguishes customary use of aromatics from exceptional quantity; enhancement concerns scale/form, not basic possibility of burial	Moderate for specified provision; necessity and symbolic interpretation unproved
Upper room / Mark 14; Luke 22	Hospitality; obedience; Jesus' foreknowledge	Named spatial condition of meal preparation	Limited; ownership and scarcity unproved
Women / Luke 8; Passion accounts	Support network; discipleship; witness continuity	Mark: separates burial-site observation from purchased spices for intended anointing; no narrated completion.	Moderate for distinct observed and purchased actions; location-facilitation is inferred; no completed anointing or crisis funding demonstrated
Simon / Mark 15:21	Compulsion by agents identified from Mark 15:16–20; Simon identified as father of Alexander and Rufus	No distinctive controlled means identified; familial naming is not an operative access route in the scene	Negative control; no inference of membership or family-network causality

Episode / actor	Principal rival reading	Possible explanatory increment	Bounded finding
Centurion / Mark 15:44–45	Administrative verification	Distinguishes official confirmation from Joseph's petition	High for the narrated verification sequence; authorization belongs to Pilate, not the centurion

5.8. The Positive Contribution and Its Boundary

The comparison supports a positive, but limited, conclusion. The two-axis analysis adds interpretive resolution by tracing when a narrated relation, material provision, or spatial capacity addresses a specific practical constraint, and by specifying how far its effect extends. It thereby links a character's action to the story's specified conditions of performance without inferring that membership centrality predicts agency, that status guarantees access, or that every important event depends upon a rare resource. In Joseph's petition and the Johannine courtyard entry, this relation is unusually explicit; in the Nicodemus and upper-room episodes, the contribution is more qualified; in the women's Passion actions, earlier support must be distinguished from what the crisis texts themselves report.

6. Interpretive Implications, Scope, and Limits of the Framework

6.1. Narrated Thresholds and Practical Dependence

Together, these cases show that a narrated threshold limits what can be attributed to a particular resource; such thresholds are scene-specific, not stages in a universal sequence. The analyst must identify the actor and condition at each reported step and leave unreported links open. This prevents a localized act of access or support from becoming an unsupported claim about comprehensive control or wider organizational capacity.

6.2. The Difference between Agency, Prominence, and Indispensability

The comparison also separates practical agency from indispensability. Initiating, facilitating, performing, verifying, or observing an action identifies a narrated contribution; none of these roles, on its own, establishes that the actor was the sole possible performer. This distinction matters especially when different agents occupy consecutive stages of an episode.

6.3. Gospel-Specific Configuration Rather than a Harmonized Social Map

Only Matthew 27:60 identifies the tomb as Joseph's own; its possessive pronoun (αὐτοῦ) cannot be transferred to Mark or Luke. By contrast, John 19:42 explicitly links the nearby tomb to the burial decision: Jesus was placed there because of the Jewish Preparation Day (διὰ τὴν παρασκευήν) and because the tomb was nearby (ὅτι ἐγγὺς ἦν τὸ μνημεῖον). Proximity thus facilitates the narrated choice of burial place under a stated temporal constraint, without proving that another tomb or route was impossible. This is not a transition from an inferior to a superior historical report. Each evangelist specifies different features: owned provision in Matthew, proximate availability in John, and verification before release in Mark. Comparison therefore clarifies what each narrator makes practically intelligible without producing a uniform profile of Joseph's resources.

This approach does more than avoid unwarranted claims. Gospel-specific comparison generates a positive question: what does a narrator choose to make intelligible about a consequential act? A narrative may present an achieved result with few enabling steps, or explicitly render a relationship, resource, official verification, or command as the condition of that result. The two-axis framework helps identify the latter pattern where it occurs, while the comparison prevents its absence in another account from being misdescribed as a deficiency in that account.

6.4. What the Two-Axis Analysis Adds—and What It Shares with Other Approaches

The two-axis analysis need not displace other explanations. Patronage studies examine structured provision and obligations; social-capital and network approaches illuminate access, ties, brokerage, and the practical effects of connections;[28] household studies make domestic resources and space intelligible; narrative criticism examines plot, characterization, and theological design. The present proposal is most useful as a disciplined conjunction of their insights at the scale of a narrated action: it asks which constraint the passage specifies, which means it identifies, who uses or provides that means, and what immediate outcome follows.

The model works best when the narrative supplies a specific constraint and a resource or relationship that addresses it. When it supplies action without a specified means relevant to the action, the analyst should stop at the action or adopt a better-supported explanation—command, compulsion, administrative office, narrative sequence, or theological characterization.

6.5. Theological Implications for Discipleship, Risk, and Authority

The distinction also has bounded theological implications. Discipleship cannot be measured simply by possession of a useful relationship or by visibility in a Passion scene: John calls Joseph a disciple who had concealed his affiliation through fear (John 19:38), while Mark narrates his bold approach to Pilate (Mark 15:43), without authorizing a harmonized account of his motives. These representations invite reflection on the exposure that may accompany action, but they do not quantify courage or establish a hierarchy of faithfulness. Authority likewise remains differentiated: Joseph's request does not replace the centurion's confirmation or Pilate's decision in Mark 15:43–45. Theologically, service and consequential action need not imply either formal decision-making power or exemplary allegiance; Judas's adverse knowledge and the centurion's official role make that qualification especially important. For New Testament ecclesiology and a theology of vocation, the positive cases suggest that provision, mediation, and petition may contribute to narrated outcomes alongside the Twelve without making these capacities equivalent to ecclesial office, institutional authority, or a uniform degree of discipleship. The framework thus clarifies which questions about faithful action and authority a Gospel episode raises, while leaving judgments about a person's ultimate standing to the narrative's own evidence.

[28] Lin, Social Capital, 41–44; Duling, "The Jesus Movement and Social Network Analysis (Part II: The Social Network)".

6.6. Limits of Evidence, Generalization, and Future Research

The evidence supports different levels of conclusion. A report of action, such as Joseph's request or Nicodemus's provision, has a stronger textual basis than a conclusion about exclusive control, social standing, motives, or hypothetical alternatives. Likewise, an explicitly narrated blockage and mediation of entry warrants a more focused account of enabling access than a scene in which the availability of an ordinary room is inferred from the completion of a meal. The study therefore distinguishes reported actions from qualified inferences about operational effects and from conjectures about social background or causal necessity.

Negative findings can also clarify the argument. The other disciple's exact membership location is unknown; this does not erase the observed act of mediation, but it blocks a categorical claim that a peripheral member outperformed a central one. Simon of Cyrene's action has no specified independently controlled resource; this limits a resource-control explanation without removing Simon from the field of operational agency. The supplied upper room does not establish a permanent hospitality network, nor do the women's prior resources establish indispensable support during the execution. A different limit appears in John 19:33: the soldiers' observation leads to the omission of a contemplated act, not to one of the three positive effects specified for the effect axis. Reporting that limitation preserves the distinction between describing the sequence of an episode and successfully assigning an effect category.

The selected episodes span different Gospel traditions and kinds of practical action, but they are a purposive comparison, not a quantitative inventory of all actions in the final chapters of the four Gospels. Their evidence is selective and literarily shaped. The study cannot establish how many unmentioned people possessed comparable resources, whether every narrated access relation existed historically, or whether the same result could actually have occurred by other means. Nor can narrative differences establish an organizational chart of the historical Jesus movement. These limits particularly constrain claims about scarcity, irreplaceability, or population-wide frequency. A separately designed, systematically sampled study could compare similarly situated actors with and without specified resources, and test how widely the proposed distinctions apply. The explanatory increment here remains local and may be limited where narrative or network analysis already identifies the same mechanism.

7. Conclusion

In the Passion narratives, membership standing and narrative prominence do not by themselves determine who can act. This article has therefore distinguished membership centrality, narrative prominence, operational significance, and the means that make an action intelligible. Its unit of analysis is not the character's status but the episode-specific relation between a practical constraint, the mobilization of a resource or access route, and the narrated outcome.

The clearest examples work in different ways. In Mark 15:43–45, Joseph petitions, a centurion confirms, and Pilate authorizes: initiative is neither verification nor permission. In John 18:15–16, the other disciple's acquaintance with the high priest is followed by his speaking to the gatekeeper and bringing Peter inside, without settling the disciple's identity or membership rank. Matthew alone expressly calls Joseph's tomb his own (Matt 27:60); John's account instead foregrounds a nearby

burial place (John 19:41–42). These are Gospel-specific narrative configurations, not pieces of a harmonized social biography.

Other cases show the model's limits. Nicodemus's burial materials enhance the Johannine account of preparation without proving that burial depended on their quantity. The women's observation establishes their knowledge of the burial location relevant to their subsequent visit but does not remove the obstacle of its stone (Mark 15:47; 16:3–4), while earlier support in Luke 8:1–3 cannot be presumed to continue financially throughout the Passion. A prepared upper room involves both available space and disciples' action; Simon's compelled carrying, Judas's adverse knowledge, and the centurion's official report show that consequential agency need not arise from a voluntarily controlled resource or service to the movement.

The result is a two-axis method that distinguishes the process by which an action unfolds from the effect a particular means has on it. Membership centrality, initiative, provision, and authority over a subsequent step can coincide or diverge; the narrative must establish their relation. Read in this way, the Passion accounts disclose not simply consequential characters but differentiated practical contributions whose effects are specific to narrated thresholds. The approach complements character criticism, social-resource analysis, and narrative interpretation.

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