

The Gospel of John

An Introduction to the Fourth Gospel

Author - Origin - Date

Traditionally ascribed to John the son of Zebedee and identified as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20; cf. 1:35-42; 18:15-18).

Note the difference between 'author' and 'authority (behind)'.

Likely date of the Gospel is 85-95 CE.

Content

Prologue (1:1-18)

‘Book of Signs’ (1:19-12:50): account of Jesus’ public ministry, comprising his miraculous deeds (‘signs’), speeches, confrontations with ‘the Jews’.

‘Book of Glory’ (13:1-20:31): a series of discourses with Jesus’ disciples (13:1-17:25), followed by his arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection appearances (18-20).

Epilogue (21:1-24)

John: 'The Maverick Gospel'

'John, last of all, realizing that the physical facts had been set forth in the gospels, being urged by his friends and divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel' (Clement of Alexandria, quoted by Eusebius in *History of the Church* VI.14.7).

John and the Synoptics

- Many points of contact: 'gospel', outline of events, individual phrases (cf. Mark 2:11 and John 5:8).
- Many differences: chronology (length of Jesus' ministry; cf. 2:13; 6:4; 11:55), dating of Jesus' death (13:1, 29; 19:31); geography (Judaea).
- What is the nature of John's relationship with the Synoptic Gospels?
 - familiarity with oral traditions
 - literary dependence on one or more of the Synoptic Gospels
 - familiarity with one or more of the Synoptic Gospels.

The Johannine Community

Three distinctive references to believers being cast out of the synagogue (*aposynagôgos*: 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

Unlike Jewish Christian experiences of interrogation (Mark 13:9; Matt. 10:17-18; Luke 21:6) or physical beating (Acts 9:2; 26:11; II Cor. 11:24).

John as a 'two-level drama'.

John's Aim

‘But these [the signs] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name’ (John 20:31).

- Importance of faith (missionary or for ‘insiders’?)
- Importance of salvation (gift of eternal life)
- Importance of correct belief in the identity and role of Jesus (‘Messiah, the Son of God’)
- The Johannine Jesus is often in conflict about such claims with ‘the Jews’ (= probably the Jewish religious authorities; cf. 5:18-19; 10:33). This was either the cause or the result of the expulsion of believers from the Jewish synagogue.

John's Presentation of Jesus

- Jesus is God's unique Son (1:14; 3:16; 18) and 'the One who is Sent' (3:17; 10:36). Jesus is conscious of his eternal status as the Son sent from heaven by his Father (cf. 8:38).
- Jesus definitively reveals God: to see/know the Son is to see/know the Father (8:19; 14:7; 12:45; 14:9).
- He fulfils God's plan for the world (cf. 19:30: 'It is finished/completed').

John's Presentation of Jesus: The Divine I AM

'I am' (*egô eimi*) statements accompanied by a metaphor (life, bread, vine, shepherd): the focus is on Jesus as the one who offers eternal life.

Absolute 'I am' statements: echoes use of I AM by the God of Israel (Exod. 3:14; Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 46:4; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6). This is used by Jesus to convey the exclusiveness of his claim, his eternal existence, his role as the one who reveals divine salvation (cf. 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-8). He can use this form of self-declaration because of his unity with the Father as his incarnate Word.