

Introduction to the Gospel According to John

Lesson One - Introduction

This is intended as a four lesson course on the Gospel commonly known the Gospel of John. The first lesson deals with the introduction to the concepts, origins and history of the text itself. The following three lessons, two, three and four, deal with the text itself. The intention is that study be undertaken in conjunction with reading the text, starting after you have finished the first lesson. In this way, you will be able to encounter the Gospel directly.

The Gospel According to John

This ancient text stands alone among the Gospels in its rich language and ordering of events. It is considered to be the most theological of the Gospels and its perspective is different from that of the other three Gospels. John, the author, takes us behind the scenes and more fully explains the mystery of the person of Jesus. The text opens not with a narrative about the physical birth of Jesus, but with an explanation of His eternal origin and Divine nature.¹ Jesus is unique in this Gospel because "he was in the beginning with God," and actually active in creation, the source of light and life (John 1.2-4). Jesus in the incarnation makes known to mankind the eternal God, whom "no one has ever seen" (John 1.14; John 1.18)

The Gospel according to John is also referred to by modern scholars as the Fourth Gospel. This is one of a series of writings said to be written by "John" and thus in the Johanne tradition. In addition to the Fourth Gospel, there are three letters and an Apocalyptic Document - Revelations, which are traditionally attributed to the Apostle and great Evangelist John. The actual authorship has been questioned, but whether the actual writing was by John or by his students and followers, these writings give the reader a deep insight into the learning of the early Church about the person, and purpose and meaning of the ministry of Jesus. While these Johanne writings were once regarded as separate, the current thinking is that the Gospel and letters were intended to be ended by Revelation in order to provide a historical anchor to the other writings.²

For many years this Gospel was thought to be less 'factual' as its story line and depiction of Jesus' path to the cross is very different from that set out in the other three Gospels. Scholars felt that one should look beyond the factual differences and concentrate on the interpretation of the events and the rich use of symbols from common experience - bread, water, light, life, word, shepherd, door, and way - to make the significance of Christ both clear and gripping. This traditional view has been subjected to growing dissension since roughly the middle of the twentieth century.³

In this most recent period support has been growing for the view that the basic tradition underlying John's gospel may be historically more reliable than previously acknowledged. The earlier position was based on an exhaustive study of sacred texts known as "Biblical Criticism" a trend started in the middle of the Nineteenth Century. As a result scholars, tended to regard this Gospel as a theological rewriting of the other Gospels. It was thought that the author knew about the

¹ Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved, Articles by Stephen S. Smalle.

² Page 522 - Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament; An Interpretation, Revised Edition, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999.

³ Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved., Articles by Stephen S. Smalle

text in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, but went his own way when he wished to interpret their meaning.⁴ However, that conclusion and the assumption that John knew and used the other Gospels in their finished form have now been seriously questioned. It is now thought possible that John drew more or less independently on common Christian sources about the life and teaching of Jesus. Further, archaeological discoveries in and around Jerusalem have upset some of the central assumptions about the lack of an ‘historic’ basis for John’s statement. The problem for nineteenth century scholars was that this Gospel makes reference to some place names that appear nowhere else. Until recently, it was assumed that there were no such places and were thus thought to be the result of the author’s imagination. As an example John uses place-names hitherto unknown such as Bethesda [John 5.2] and Gabbatha [John 19.13]). Now, these sites and place names have been actually found and excavated. Thus the stories associated with such sites need not be theological creations either and may well rest on an underlying historical tradition. Scholarly debate aside, this turn of events demonstrates that even after two thousand years of reading and contemplating the Gospels, that there is still new and fresh ground to cover and insight to be found.

The Gospel begins with a soaring prologue (John 1.1-18) in which the Gospel sets forth Jesus Christ himself as the object of faith (John 1.19-4.54), then depicts Christ's conflict with unbelievers (John 5-12), his kinship with believers (John 13-17), then deals with His death and resurrection (John 18-20), and finally concludes with an epilogue (John 21). Much of the Gospel deals not with a description of events but rather consists of discourses by Jesus. In contrast to the other Gospels, Jesus is often interrupted by questions or objections from the hearers. The Gospels attributed to Mark, Matthew and Luke, are known as the “Synoptic Gospels.” The basis for this grouping is that all three follow a similar outline of events. They are not the same, but follow the same basic order with differences usually in the presence of additional materials in some but not all three, rather than in contradictory materials. The standard “Christmas Story” is for example a combination of the three accounts. The Gospel of John stands in alone in its story order.

In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus starts his ministry in Galilee and moves dramatically toward Jerusalem for one fatal visit to the city. In John by contrast, the ministry of Jesus alternates back and forth between Judea and Galilee with short trips to Jerusalem [See 2:13-22- purification of the temple at Passover which is part of the climax in the others occurs earlier in John] and returns for other feasts in Jerusalem [5:1- not Passover as he was in Judea 6:4] Jesus returns again for the Feast of Booths [7:1-10]. Jesus then returns another time for the rededication of the temple. [10:22] At last, Jesus returns for the final Passover. [12:12]⁵ The order of events on the day of the death of Jesus is different as well. In the Synoptics, death occurs on the day of Preparation for Passover so that the last meal was not Passover. [19:31] Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb alone. [20:1 and other details such as the order of appearances are different [20:11-18 and 20:19-29]⁶ The order of events as given in John, with its periodic visits to Jerusalem, seems to be more natural than the order of events as laid out in the Synoptic Gospels.⁷

The basic teaching presented in John is a theology of life. John not only reveals Jesus, but also shows the possibility of life through Jesus. (John 1.4). The author of John makes this point by the repeated use of the symbol of light. The life offered by Jesus to every believer, through His revelation and His glorification for the world, is the same divine life of the Father himself (John 5.26). In John's gospel the author speaks of life through Jesus in all its fullness. The miracles, called

⁴ Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved., Articles by Stephen S. Smalle

⁵ Page 528, Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament; An Interpretation, Revised Edition, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999.

⁶Page 528, Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament; An Interpretation, Revised Edition, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999.

⁷ This is an entirely subjective thought of the current author supported by none of the scholars or publications.

“signs” in this Gospel also deliver a sub-text, to show the concern of Jesus for the physical dimension of human existence as well as its spiritual possibilities. This is shown through the illustration of the signs to the effect that all matter (not only water, bread, and wine as in the signs) are intended convey the abundance of life through Jesus (John 10.10). The first portion of the Gospel is an account of each of the seven miracles, the “signs” of Jesus. Though the Gospel’s author states that many others were performed only these are covered. Thus the question must be asked, why tell about these seven and not the many others. This question reveals the purpose of relating the seven signs which is to evoke faith by those who were witness to them, (see John 2.11 and John 2.23) starting with the disciples (John 2.11). The seven signs are: 1. Changing water into wine; (John 2), 2. Healing the official's son; (John 4); 3. Making the sick man well (John 5); feeding five thousand (John 6); 5. Restoring the blind man's sight (John 9); 6. Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11) and 7. The catch of 153 fish, and the recalling of Peter. Together these incidents point to the unlimited scope of the Christian good news, an idea retained throughout John's Gospel.

Two other features contrast this Gospel to the other three. The first concerns conflict with the Pharisees and the second relates to the sayings of Jesus. Just as in the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark and Luke] the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is given marked attention in John (for example, John 8.31-59; John 10.19-39) This conflict is no doubt the result of the heightened antagonism that developed in the latter part of the first century between the young church and the synagogue, with mutual recrimination arising. Second while it is thought that the Synoptic Gospels preserve the sayings of Jesus in words closer to their original form, in the fourth Gospel the Evangelist employs more freely his own modes of thought and language in reporting and interpreting the teaching of Jesus. The fact, however, that this Gospel was soon placed side by side with the other synoptic Gospels indicates that the early church realized that the promise of Jesus, as reported by John (John 14.26), had been fulfilled, "The Holy Spirit... will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you."

The next issue concerns the identity of the author of this Gospel. Tradition says it was the apostle John. Many scholars, however, think that it actually was composed by a disciple of John who recorded John’s preaching as Mark did that of Peter. In any case, when the Gospel was published near the close of the first century, the church accepted it as authentic and apostolic testimony to Jesus (John 21.24), written that readers might "come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God," and thus "have life in his name" (John 20.31). Scholars theorize that John the apostle, who has been traditionally, identified as the "beloved disciple," transmitted orally to his followers an account of the deeds (especially the miracles, or "signs") and sayings of Jesus and of his death and resurrection. At some point, the beloved disciple and his circle of followers moved to Ephesus (a city associated, by strong tradition, with John). In that city a church developed around this disciple referred to as the ‘Johanine’ church. While resident in that city, John's followers or students, committed to writing these stories and traditions preserved in their community for the purposes of worship and instruction. In this theoretical ‘first draft’ of the fourth Gospel what may now be recognized as distinctively ‘Johanine thought’ emerged. These ideas were handed on by the apostle and theologically developed by his followers as they continued to study and discuss. Finally, after the death of John, his church at Ephesus published a final but edited version of the Gospel. This final edition included a summary introduction (John 1.1-18), based on a community hymn. The whole Gospel thus assembled then carried an authenticating postscript (John 21.24-25).

The final issue to discuss in this introduction is the date of the fourth Gospel. The prior discussion regarding accuracy means that the composition was an early one and that it is reliable. But even if the tradition on which the Gospel was based may be dated to the early first century, the further question remains concerning when the final version was published. The latest possible date is 150 CE. This is because of two manuscripts, written on papyrus and discovered in Egypt. The first is known as the Rylands Papyrus, and contains a few verses of John 18 and may be physically dated [because of the Papyrus] to 135-150 CE. There is a second papyrus (Egerton 2) which includes part of an unknown Gospel that is based on John as well as Mark, Matthew, and Luke. The second

manuscript may be physically dated to 150 CE. The existence of these sources partially quoting from the Fourth Gospel suggests that John's Gospel must have been written at the very latest by the beginning of the second century CE, and probably earlier.

Questions for reading

As you read the first section try to imagine, even though hampered by translations, that section as a hymn?

The symbol for the Apostle John is the eagle, because it said that this Gospel soars like an eagle. Do you see that, do you disagree? Or do you think this is an exaggeration.

See if you find the reference to the “beloved” disciple?

New Words and Concepts - What do you make of these terms?

Beloved Disciple
Biblical Criticism
Fourth Gospel
'Johanine'
Signs
Synoptic Gospels

Bibliography

[Basic Source: Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved, Articles by Stephen S. Smalle [Unless otherwise indicated.] These materials are intended as notes for a layman's study and to facilitate a discussion of the topics.

a. Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved, Articles by Stephen S. Smalle

b. Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament; An Interpretation, Revised Edition, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999.

Introduction to the Gospel According to John

Lesson Two –

“The Word of God”

This is intended as lesson two of a four lesson course on the Gospel commonly known the Gospel of John. The first lesson deals with the introduction to the concepts, origins and history of the text itself. The following lessons, including this one, deal with the text itself. The intention is that this be undertaken in conjunction to reading the text, starting after you have finished the first lesson. So, hopefully you have started your reading and have encountered the early part of the Gospel.

The Gospel According to John

In the first Lesson we discussed the text in general terms and looked at some of its broad outlines, now we will deal with the text itself. It would be helpful if by this point you have read at least the first Chapter. Because the first section is in many ways the most dense, theological discussion of the entire Bible, we will discuss this particular section in great detail. However, while the thoughts and comparisons of scholars are informative, nothing can replace your own reading of the text.

John starts off with the concept of the ‘Word of God’ as a definitive description of Jesus. John uses this illustration as a way to show Jesus in context with the Creator, the universe and mankind. In Greek, the verbal expression for God’s power was LOGOS, translated most often as ‘word’, and Jesus is referred to by this term. Jesus is referred to as the Word of God made flesh. By way of example, in Genesis, God spoke the words let there be light, and there was light.¹By New Testament times, Judaism itself had become Hellenized, which is to say had integrated with Greek modes of thought. So that in Hellenistic Judaism ‘Word’ or Logos had become a synonym for the Divine Wisdom, which concept consisted of God’s self-communication, the act of

¹ An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church: A user friendly Reference for Episcopalians, Armentrout, Do S. and Slocum, Robert Boak, Editors, 1999, Church Publishing, New York. Page 563.

creation, the providential governing of Creation and in the calling of Israel to be God's people.² The modern author, Luke Timothy Johnson, at Page 535 of his book, The Writings of the New Testament, restates this proposition as: "An element of the prologue not found in the FG narrative is the designation of Jesus as the "Word" (Logos). The prologue in this case gives explicit expression to the constant assumption behind the deeds and words of Jesus in this Gospel: He acts and speaks as the incarnate expression of God's speech. As word gives body to thought, so does Jesus give visible expression in the world to the invisible power and presence of God."³

².. An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church: A user friendly Reference for Episcopalians, Armentrout, Do S. and Slocum, Robert Boak, Editors, 1999, Church Publishing, New York. Page 310.

³ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament; An Interpretation, Revised Edition, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999. Page 535.

Much of what we now say about whom and what Jesus is is based on this single sentence of the text. It is said that the Johannine prologue is the only fully explicit statement of the theme of incarnation in the New Testament. The rest of the Gospel of John shows in narrative form what the coming of the logos meant. This description of Jesus from the prologue of the Gospel is echoed in 1 John 1.1 (“the word of life”). The imagery of Revelation 19.13, where Christ, “the Word of God,” appears as a warrior also echoes this description of Jesus. This concept is also consistent with the Old Testament, where the word of God is both creative (Genesis 1 and Isaiah 55.10–11) and commanding (Amos 3.1). These Old Testament concepts formed the background which contributed to the general usage of the term logos throughout the New Testament. In other New Testament writings the term “word” often signifies the Christian message (2 Corinthians 2.17; cf. 1 Corinthians 1.18).⁴ Jesus then is God manifested on the Earth as a fully complete human being, who lived, died and was resurrected in history at a set time and place.

This prologue anticipates many of the ideas expressed in the Gospel that will follow: Light and Life as a metaphor for God; Light locked in conflict with Dark and the assurance that Dark can never overcome Light. The ‘testimony’ of John in the opening anticipates the mission of Jesus which is about to be recounted in the balance of the Gospel.⁵ One way to peel away meaning in any text is to consider the audience and the circumstances that the author addressed. Now those questions about who was the author and when the Gospel was written addressed in the first lesson become relevant. The audience for John as we discussed last week was a group of Hellenistic Christians of a regional town called Ephesus. The issues they faced can be gleaned from the other writings attributed to John, in the Epistles, the three short letters {now thought to be a single Epistle with two letters of introduction}. These letters were written to John’s supporters and in them he described the group that he was struggling with as a group who deny the divinity of Jesus. 2 John states at verse 7, “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist!” The question of course is “What is that all about?”

When Jesus was alive, after he died and for 2000 years since people have been arguing about just what Jesus was - man, God or what. The various positions in classical times were referred to as Docetism, Arianism and Gnosticism. These same arguments reappear time and again even to this day, although often given other names. Each of these three positions, which

⁴ See *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved., Articles by William A. Beardslee “Logos”

⁵ Johnson, Luke Timothy, *The Writings of the New Testament; An Interpretation*, Revised

are heresies and thus erroneous, have at different times been the cause of great problems in the Church. In fact, these three heresies and the conflicts that they produced are reflected in the Nicene Creed which we recite each Sunday. The three concepts are Arianism, Docetism and Gnosticism.

Arianism was a teaching that Jesus was of similar substance as God *but not the same*. The implication was that Jesus was not fully Divine. The concept was named for its proponent who was Arius, a fourth century presbyter at Alexandria. The catch phrase for this position is “There was time when the Son was not.”⁶ The concern is that this waters down the nature of the sacrifice on the Cross. This particular teaching caused immense disunity and controversy in the early Church. This position was rejected at the Council of Nicene in 325 AD and remained a point of great contention until 381 AD. In the Nicene Creed the shadow of this debate remains in the form of the word included and which was finally agreed to be *homoousios* which means exactly the same substance in English and is translated in the creed we recite as “of One Being with the Father.”

Docetism another issue in the early Church is in some ways the opposite heresy. In this formulation Jesus only SEEMED to assume the flesh. The word was *dokein* “to seem”. This means it only looked like Jesus was here, suffered, died and was resurrected, as if by some religious special effect. The basis for this position was in the Greek understanding of the material world as “evil” and the spiritual world as ‘good’ and thus the two could never be together sort of theological matter /anti-matter for the Trekkie’s among us.⁷

Gnosticism the final of or three “isms”, was a loosely defined set of religious sects from about the time of Christianity it included Greek myths, philosophy and later some Jewish and Christian traditions. A Gnostic consistently regards salvation as deliverance from the material world and that this salvation would come through knowledge of “otherworldly things” usually secret.⁸ This was based on some Christian traditions which held that the Gospels were not complete and that there was secret knowledge passed on to the inner circle. A Gnostic believed

Edition, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999. Page 535.

⁶ An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church: A user friendly Reference for Episcopalians, Armentrout, Do S. and Slocum, Robert Boak, Editors, 1999, Church Publishing, New York. Page 27.

⁷ An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church: A user friendly Reference for Episcopalians, Armentrout, Do S. and Slocum, Robert Boak, Editors, 1999, Church Publishing, New York. Page 150.

⁸ An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church: A user friendly Reference for Episcopalians, Armentrout, Do S. and Slocum, Robert Boak, Editors, 1999, Church Publishing, New York.

that this non-scripture knowledge consisted of words or incantations which one could use to move from level to level in the afterlife. In pagan thought, the afterlife was a journey to a dark land on the other side of a river to be crossed by the dead. Those equipped with this secret information could conduct themselves anyway they wished in this life and were assured entry into heaven because they would know the right words to recite. This was a persistent problem for the early church and these may be the people hinted about in the Epistles of John.

Thus the Gospel's author had these questions in mind as he wrote and the task was a difficult one. With all of these competing understandings of just who and what Jesus was, John set pen to paper in order to put these concepts to rest and to explain to believers the true nature of Jesus, God and creation. The audience that he addressed did not live in a vacuum, but in the real world. As you read and consider the text, look for those parts that address these questions or positions. The question then is with these real world controversies raging around him, why start with a hymn? A hymn?! The reason may be that John unlike the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, who sought to link Jesus with history goes beyond history in search of 'reality.' The Gospel of Mark starts with the prophets, Matthew starts with Abraham and Luke starts with Adam. All historic figures, intended to link Jesus with the past. In John the Word is preexistent which refers to a time before there was a material universe in which to exist - at a time when one existed either in the mind of God or in Heaven.⁹

But, what about the hymn statement. Most Commentators agree that the first section in John's Gospel is a hymn to the Word - Gk Logos. Beyond this agreement that the first section is a hymn, there is little else that is agreed. There is no general understanding as to the length or form of the hymn.¹⁰ The 'hymn' in poetic, short hand foreshadows the themes to be developed later in the narrative parts of the Gospel. Bryan, Christopher, Education for Ministry, Year Two, Christian Testament, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 54, set out a system that divides the text into verses as follows:

⁹Bryan, Christopher, Education for Ministry, Year Two, Christian Testament, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 54, Page 256.

¹⁰Bryan, Christopher, Education for Ministry, Year Two, Christian Testament, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 54, Page 255.

First Verse

1 In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
2 He was in the beginning with God.
3 All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into
being.
4 What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
5 The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.

FOOT NOTE

6 There was a man sent from God, whose
name was John. 7 He came as a witness to
testify to the light, so that all might believe
through him. 8 He himself was not the light,
but he came to testify to the light. ¹¹

First Verse - Cont.

9 The true light,
which enlightens everyone,
was coming into the world ¹²

Second Verse

10 He was in the world,
and the world came into being through him;
yet the world did not know him.
11 He came to what was his own,
and his own people did not accept him.
12 But to all who received him, who believed
in his name, he gave power to become
children of God,
13 who were born,
not of blood
or of the will of the flesh
or of the will of man, but of God. ¹³

¹¹ Bryan, Christopher, *Education for Ministry, Year Two, Christian Testament*, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 54, Page 256.

¹² Bryan, Christopher, *Education for Ministry, Year Two, Christian Testament*, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 54, Page 265.

¹³ Bryan, Christopher, *Education for Ministry, Year Two, Christian Testament*, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 54, Page 256.

Third Verse

14 And the Word became flesh
and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a
father's only son,
full of grace and truth.

FOOTNOTE

15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") ¹⁴

Third Verse -Cont.

16 From his fullness we have all received,
grace upon grace.

17 The law indeed was given through Moses;
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has ever seen God.

It is God the only Son,
who is close to the Father's heart,
who has made him known. ¹⁵

The author of this Gospel has through the hymn, or introduction now told us, the reader, that Jesus is an entity that is very important and that the world was in fact made through him. Next in the text we are oriented as to where in the current world, Jesus fits. The division of the hymn text as shown above indicates that John the Baptist must have been a major figure on the landscape of the times. Clearly from the text of the Gospel one can guess that John the Baptist was an important and independent figure with a great following that at some point must have rivaled Jesus' own following. The apparent intention of the Gospel writer in the two prose interjections into the hymn was to show that while John was a man sent from God that he was nevertheless subordinate. [See JN1:19 and 3:22-30 [John the Baptist says "I must decrease and you increase;" 4:1 relates that the Pharisees heard Jesus was Baptizing more than John the Baptist.¹⁶] The Jews or Judeans send representatives to ask John the Baptist - in this statement

¹⁴Bryan, Christopher, Education for Ministry, Year Two, *Christian Testament*, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 54, Page 256.

¹⁵ Bryan, Christopher, Education for Ministry, Year Two, *Christian Testament*, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 54, Page 265.

¹⁶ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament; *An Interpretation*, Revised Edition, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999. Page 536.

John makes explicit his subordination to Jesus. In addition, the author's purpose is further advanced by the fact that in the story as told by the author of John's Gospel, there is no mention of the Baptism of Jesus so that there are no questions raised as in the Synoptic Gospels. One can also deduce from the Gospel of John and from the other Gospels that the message of John the Baptist fell on Israel like fire on stubble. The Gospels report that "all" went out to hear him (Mark 1.5; Matthew 3.5; Mark 11.32 par.; Luke 7.29; Acts 13.24). Josephus, a Roman historian who wrote a few centuries after the ministry of John the Baptist and the earthly ministry of Jesus, comments that John the Baptist was highly regarded by the whole Jewish people (*Ant.* 18.5.116–119). The crowds that attended him included tax collectors and prostitutes (Matthew 21.32; Luke 3.12; Luke 7.29). It should be noted that in Baptism, this simple act of immersion, unlike circumcision, made salvation accessible even to women. Scholars theorize that it was John the Baptist, not Jesus, who opened a way to God for those who before had felt themselves excluded from the religious community. And that John the Baptist by his dress and diet, even by the metaphors he chose (a tree cutter, a thresher), John identified himself, and the one whom he awaited, with the lowly.¹⁷ Some believe that John the Baptist was at some point a member of the Qumran community. However, in contrast to the Qumran community his ministry did not call for separation from society and welcomed the poor and morally compromised. Even with these differences John the Baptist may have at least been influenced by the thought and practice of Qumran prior to his public appearance.¹⁸ John was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah was a priest of the Jerusalem Temple. Elizabeth was a kinswoman of the Virgin Mary. Elizabeth was believed to be barren, until an angel told Zechariah that Elizabeth would be pregnant with a son. Zechariah responded with disbelief and was rendered unable to speak until John's Birth. In the Gospel of Luke, the relative positions of Jesus and John are illustrated by the incident in the Gospel when a pregnant Mary encountered the pregnant Elizabeth the baby John leaped in her womb. LK 1:39-44. From Luke we also learn that on the 8th day after John's Birth, Zechariah insisted that his name be John and uttered the hymn known as "*Benedictus Dominus Deus.*" see LK1:68-79, BCP pp 92-93¹⁹ The birth of John the Baptist is celebrated on June 24th

¹⁷ The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved., Article by Walter Wink. "John the Baptist."

¹⁸ *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church: A user friendly Reference for Episcopalians*, Armentrout, Do S. and Slocum, Robert Boak, Editors, 1999, Church Publishing, New York. Page 275.

¹⁹ B.C.P. [1979] Canticle 16 The Song of Zechariah =Benedictus Dominus Deus=

in the Episcopal Calendar.²⁰

Thus having placed Jesus and John the Baptist in context the 4th Gospel now establishes the rest of the members of the cast the Disciples. The Disciples are called one by one with each providing in his own introduction a means to a chain of acknowledgments of Jesus as the

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; *
he has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty savior, *
born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets he promised of old,
that he would save us from our enemies, *
from the hands of all who hate us.

He promised to show mercy to our fathers *
and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, *
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

Free to worship him without fear, *
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.

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You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, *
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation *
by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God *
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, *
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

²⁰ *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church: A user friendly Reference for Episcopalians*, Armentrout, Do S. and Slocum, Robert Boak, Editors, 1999, Church Publishing, New York.

fulfillment of history. In the following quoted section, notice how as the disciples are called: the first two are called but only one is named as Andrew the brother of Simon Peter and also note that both were formerly followers of John the Baptist which again shows subordination. The First Disciples of Jesus:

“35 The next day John again was standing with **two** of his disciples, 36 and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" 37 The **two** disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. 40 **One of the two** who heard John speak and followed him was **Andrew**, Simon Peter's brother. 44 He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed 1.). 42 **He brought Simon** 1. to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter 1.).”

There are three metaphors presented in this passage that need to be noted. First the title given here to Jesus as “Lamb of God.” While scholars differ as to what is meant by that title some of the possibilities are:

- a. The Passover lamb - Exod 12:21-27 43-47.
- b. The “tamid” lambs sacrificed daily in the temple. Exod 29:38-46
- c. The lamb God provided in place of Isaac Gen. 22 [This also hinted at JN 1:18 and JN 3:16]
- d. The apocalyptic Lamb, who represents the Messiah and who cleanses his people Rev 14:1
- e. The scape goat on the Day of Atonement Lev 16:21-22. [Please note that a lamb is not a goat even in theology.]

Jesus in a passage shortly after the quoted section when dealing with the call of Phillip refers to himself as the “Son of Man” and that verse concludes the first chapter with . . . “54 And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, ' you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." This is another example of the rich symbolic layers of meaning in this Gospel. In the fourth Gospel and well as the synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark and Luke] this is the name by which Jesus refers to himself and no one else calls him this.²¹ By the concluding sentence the author in the ascending and descending imagery looks back to the language of the Book of Daniel [As an example Chapter 7] and the Book of Genesis see Gen 28:10-17 - As angels of God ascend and descend a ladder²². In this final deft illustration Jesus then is established as the angelic way between God and Man He is Jacob, Israel in whom the angels leap from Heaven and earth.²³

We have now spent a considerable part our time on an introduction to the fourth Gospel and the first chapter. But, with the principal themes thus placed on the table for discussion, the rest of Gospel as it relates the story should be more understandable. It would be helpful at this point if you have not already started to read the balance of the Fourth Gospel.

Questions for reading

1. Which modern day radio preachers currently espouse the modern versions of

²¹ Bryan, Christopher, Education for Ministry, Year Two, *Christian Testament*, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 54, Page 258.

²² **Genesis 28** -Jacob's Dream at Bethel - 10 Jacob left Beer_sheba and went toward Haran. 44 He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. 42 And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 43 And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; 44 and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed 1. in you and in your offspring. 45 Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." 46 Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place and I did not know it!" 47 And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is *none other than the house of God*, and this is the **gate of heaven**."

²³ Bryan, Christopher, Education for Ministry, Year Two, *Christian Testament*, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 54, Page 258.

Arianism, Docetism and Gnosticism?

2. New Words and Concepts - What do you make of these terms?

Arianism

Docetism

Gnosticism

LOGOS

Hellenized

Introduction to the Gospel According to John

Lesson Three - “The Book of Signs”

This is intended as part three of a four lesson course on the Gospel commonly known the Gospel of John. The first lesson deals with the introduction to its concepts and the origins and history of the text itself. This lesson and those that follow deal with the text itself. The intention is that this be undertaken in conjunction to reading the text, starting after you have finished the first lesson.

The Gospel According to John

The second section of the Fourth Gospel is commonly called the Book of Signs by the commentators. It covers much more than the signs or miracles as it tells the story of the ministry of Jesus. Like the Book of Revelation, also called the Revelation to John, there is much disagreement about the meaning and context of this Gospel. It is markedly different than the others, even with regard to the basic time line. The overriding theme in this Gospel is the love of God for mankind and His desire that we in turn love each other. In reading an ancient book as this one is, there are some points to keep in mind. The means of expression and expectations of the 2nd century reader and author are very different from ours today. One may view John’s works as basic theological texts, but expressed in the manner of that time. In modern terms we might approach theological concepts in an abstract manner, using an occasional example. In those times such a discussion would be in very concrete terms, with only an occasional abstraction. As one reads through John you will find that it is composed of a concrete story or series of stories, followed by an exposition of Jesus or perhaps the narrator.

There are various ways to ‘organize’ a discussion of the Fourth Gospel. All of them seem to have some difficulties, but they are helpful in organizing the material in your mind. We have been using the ‘organization’ proposed by Luke Timothy in his the Writings of the New Testament. Another view or means of organization is presented by James L Price, in Interpreting

the New Testament.¹ Price divides the Gospel into a Prologue, The Book of Signs, The Passion Narrative and a Conclusion. That part of this Gospel which he calls the “Book of Signs” is our topic for today. The Price Outline for the Book of Signs divides the materials in Chapter 2 through Chapter 12:50 into Seven Episodes, which include the famous six signs or miracles- **Shown in Bold.**

The First Episode, entitled the ‘New Beginning.’ The sign at Cana **Water into wine.** - the cleaning of the temple, punctuated by discourses, and the conversation with Nicodemus [One must be born again.] [The discourse with and between John the Baptists and baptisms] and the conversation with the Samaritan woman.² (This series of stories concerns the relationship of Jesus to Judaism - *Wedding*- the water was from jars used for Jewish rites of purification, the *Cleansing of the Temple* - O.T. zeal for His father’s house. And *Nicodemus* - represents those in Judaism who are attracted to Him but are puzzled by Him. John then sees the Church of Jesus as a reform and renewal of Judaism³)

The Second Episode, entitled ‘The Life Giving Word’ covers the **second sign at Cana** [the Official’s son at Capernaum - this would not have endeared Him to the Jews⁴] the **healing at Bethzatha pool** [This was done on the Sabbath and caused controversy]- discourse on the authority and ability to judge of Jesus.

The third Episode entitled ‘The bread of Life’ includes the **feeding of the five thousand**, [Occurs on a mountain and people are fed and thus reminds one of Moses on Sinai and the

¹ Price, James L., *Interpreting the New Testament*, Second Edition, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. New York, 1971. Chapter 22, the Gospel According the John. Page 571-600.

² Bryan, Christopher, *Education for Ministry, Year Two, Christian Testament*, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 55. Page 266 - the story of the Samaritan woman represents Jesus’ contact with the fringes of society. Samaritan’s were deemed ‘unclean.’ Samaritans viewed themselves as separate from Jews and as more pure. They worshiped on a different and their opinion correct mountain and not the wrong mountain in Jerusalem.

³ Bryan, Christopher, *Education for Ministry, Year Two, Christian Testament*, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 55, Pages 261-263.

⁴ Bryan, Christopher, *Education for Ministry, Year Two, Christian Testament*, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 55. Page 266 - the Royal Official would have been attached to the hated Idumean monarchy imposed by the Romans.

Manna⁵] Jesus comes to his disciples on the sea and conversation concerning true bread and an appendix. A secret visit by Jesus to Jerusalem. The Feast of the Booths and the woman caught in adultery in some versions.⁶

The fourth Episode entitled 'Light and Life', contains an introduction and conversation during the feast of the Tabernacles.

The fifth Episode entitled 'Judgment by Light' contains the **healing of the man born blind**. A trial scene concerning the miracle and a discourse on the Sheppard of the flock.

Appendix.

The sixth Episode entitled 'The victory over Death' includes the **raising of Lazarus** from the dead, and an appendix or comment.

The seventh Episode entitled 'Life Through Death' contains the anointment at Bethany and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The first thing to notice about this 'organization is that it emphasize how different the story line is in the Fourth Gospel when compared to the other three or synoptic Gospels. In the other the identity of Jesus as the Messiah is revealed later, in John the Messiahship of Jesus is publically proclaimed from the first. This Gospel omits the Baptism of Jesus and the temptation stories. In John the early cleansing of the Temple and frequent visits to Jerusalem are completely at odds with the synoptics. In Mark for instance the cleansing of the temples was the event that infuriated the Sadducees and lead to His Crucifixion. In John the inciting incident was the raising of Lazarus, which is missing from the synoptics. ⁷ In the synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark and Luke] the 'story line' is one that builds toward a single, final and fatal visit to Jerusalem. As

⁵Bryan, Christopher, Education for Ministry, Year Two, Christian Testament, 3rd Edition, Sewanee, Tennessee, Chapter 55. Page 268.

⁶ In some ancient copies of the Fourth Gospel, this incident of the woman caught in adultery is not included. This incident is included but in []'s in the Oxford Annotated Bible.

⁷ Price, James L., Interpreting the New Testament, Second Edition, Holt, Rinehart and Winston,

noted in the first lesson, the time line as presented in John seems the more natural of the two ‘plots.’ With no independent way to verify the order of events, we are left to trust that the four Gospel writers felt there was something much more important to convey than just an order of events. The importance of these contrasts is really only to help us to draw the meaning from these texts.

Scholars have put forth various explanations for these contrasts with the synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark and Luke]. One is that John used a different set of pre-Johannine sources as his basic material. According to the Biblical Scholar Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) two of the theoretical sources were the ‘Sign Source’ which may or may not have included a passion narrative⁸ and the ‘Revelation - Discourses’ with a second source called the ‘Sign-Source.’ The sources would be either a preexisting written text or oral tradition. It is important to note that for these theoretical ‘sources’ propounded by biblical scholars that none claim to have found an actual ancient text, but rather they have attempted to deduce which parts of the New Testament might have come from similar sources. The means used for this exercise is the application of ‘literary criticism’ to New Testament Biblical writings.

There is of course much disagreement about the Fourth Gospel. Even on what would appear to be obvious points. The number of miracles for instance. Most sources say that in the “Book of Signs” there are six miracles. Except that Luke Timothy Johnson states that there are seven.⁹ He includes Jesus walking on water, which seems pretty miraculous to me, while most traditional sources [see Price above and the Oxford Companion to the Bible below] list six. None of these seem to count the ‘fore knowledge of Nathaniel one of disciples and the knowledge about the Samaritan woman’s early life, the resurrection itself, or the enhanced catch of 153 fish as miracles. These four events all seem pretty miraculous as well.

Miracles, which in John are called “Signs,” also occur throughout the Bible, in history

Inc. New York, 1971. Chapter 22, the Gospel According to John. Page 571-600. Page 578.

⁸ Price, James L., Interpreting the New Testament, Second Edition, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. New York, 1971. Chapter 22, the Gospel According to John. Page 571-600. Page 582.

⁹ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 538.

and in literature. In the Bible miracles are a means by which God discloses and fulfills his purpose in the World and for the redemption of those who respond in faith. In Scripture these are a number of different types of miracles - ¹⁰

- a. **Confirmatory** - The birth of Isaac to Sarah, The burning bush, safe passage through the sea and the manna [that God would free his people]
- b. **Judgmental** - the plagues, destruction of the cities of the plain, the walls of Jericho.
- c. **Acts of mercy** - healings
- d. **Divine Acts of Deliverance** - such as Daniel and his friends from the fiery furnace.
- e. **Divine Vision** such as Ezekiel's visions.
- f. In the **New Testament** - there are miracles which are essential to understanding who Jesus is and his role.[Jesus' to answer John's inquiry as to His identity replies only about healings and so forth]

¹⁰ The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved., Article "Miracles" by Howard Clark Kee.

A miracle is traditionally regarded or defined as a sensible fact produced by the special intervention of God for a religious end, transcending the normal order of things usually termed a law of nature. The possibility of miracles began to be questioned with the rise of modern science in the 17th and 18th centuries. The rationalists hold that the miracles were facts within the sphere of natural explanation, or were misrepresented by credulous contemporaries. Traditionalists hold the view that miracles are not only possible they are likely since if God is the supreme first cause of all, He is not subject to the laws of nature and it would be likely that from time to time He should act directly, free from secondary causes. As Science progresses it is moving away from hard and fast determinism which may indicate an approaching reconciliation of modern science and Christian Tradition.¹¹ Whereas Protestant orthodoxy confines the miracles to the scriptures. Catholic orthodoxy claims miracles at all times within the pale of the Church - see Lourdes as an example.

The Six signs in the Fourth Gospel, as stated in the Oxford Companion to the Bible are:

SIGNS, EXPLANATIONS, AND SAYINGS IN JOHN

Sign	Discourse	I am Saying
1. Changing water into wine (John 2 15.1)	New Life John 3	The true vine (John
2. Healing the official's son (John 4) the life (John 14:6)	Water of Life John 4	The way, the truth, and
3. Making the sick man well (John 5) (John 10.7)	Son, life-giver (John 5)	The door of the sheep
4. Feeding the five thousand (John 6) 6.35)	Bread and Spirit of life (John 6-7)	The bread of life (John
5. Restoring the blind man's sight (John 9) (John 8.12)	Light of life (John 8)	The light of the world
6. Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11) the life (John 11.25)	shepherd, life-giver (John 10)	The resurrection and

¹¹ The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Revised, F.L. Cross, Editor, Oxford University Press, 1983. Page 920.

If miracles make you uncomfortable, you are not the first. They have troubled Anglicans and others for centuries, one prime example was Richard Hooker. Richard Hooker, 1554-1600, the great Anglican theologian and defender of the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559. He was and is the most accomplished advocate Anglicanism has ever had.¹² Hooker's magnum Opus was "Of Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity" issued in eight volumes and never [he wrote four and may have left four volumes of notes] finished by Hooker. Hooker was motivated by the great debate of his age with the Puritans and he wrote in opposition to the Puritans. Hooker felt that the Puritans were wholly mistaken in regarding the Bible as a mechanical code of rules.¹³ If that has a familiar ring, you have now realized that this same debate, but without the powdered wigs or the lack thereof still rages today. Hooker used Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and others to deduct the existence of universal law and authority. He saw the universe as composed of a hierarchy of reasonable laws designed to serve fore-conceived ends composed by God for the sake of creation. The "First Eternal Law" - This is God's law by which he governs himself through his own voluntary act. The "Second Eternal Law" is divided into 'physical laws' governing nature, the 'law celestial' governing angels, the 'law of reason' governing rational creatures, 'Divine Law' - which is God's revelation through Scripture and 'Human Law' devised by humans through Reason and Divine Law. His basic theory was "correspondence" an understanding that inferior laws are derived from the supreme or highest law.¹⁴ His work was in opposition to the Puritan notion that "scripture is the only rule of all things which in this life may be done by men."¹⁵ Hooker in the area of Church polity argued that our Church and its authority should be based upon the authority of the first five or six centuries of the Church in addition to scriptures as a basic tenant of Anglicanism and Episcopal Government.¹⁶ Hooker's system was based on the belief that God desires the salvation of all creation and people.¹⁷

¹² The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Revised, F.L. Cross, Editor, Oxford University Press, 1983. Page 665.

¹³ The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Revised, F.L. Cross, Editor, Oxford University Press, 1983. Page 665.

¹⁴ The Spirit of Anglicanism; Hooker, Maurice, Temple, Wolf William J., Editor, Morehouse-Ballow, Inc., 1979. Article Richard Hooker, Booty, John E. Page 9

¹⁵ The Spirit of Anglicanism; Hooker, Maurice, Temple, Wolf William J., Editor, Morehouse-Ballow, Inc., 1979. Article Richard Hooker, Booty, John E. Page 10.

¹⁶ The Spirit of Anglicanism; Hooker, Maurice, Temple, Wolf William J., Editor, Morehouse-Ballow, Inc., 1979. Article Richard Hooker, Booty, John E. Page 27.

¹⁷ The Spirit of Anglicanism; Hooker, Maurice, Temple, Wolf William J., Editor,

Richard Hooker was not the last person to struggle with the signs or miracles in the Bible, Old and New. Hans Kung is a noted modern theologian and ex-Roman Catholic seminary professor. His modern views and strict rationalist approach regarding Miracles earned him censure by the Roman Catholic Church. He is said by his detractors to disbelieve the Miracles of the scriptures. Interestingly in the long passages of his work relating to miracles in, On Being a Christian, while he never states that he accepts the miracles he also never actually states that they did not happen - at least not that I have located. His reasoning may be shortly summarized as follows. The working of Miracles may have been an aid to faith in the distant past. But as noted by Hans Kung, the miracle, once the dearest child of faith has become the weakest child of faith in the age of science and reason. One way people have gotten around the concept of miracles is to define them so broadly as to render the concept inoffensive. Everything in the world is seen as a miracle - sunsets, life etc. But a problem is; what about disasters? - Is God more involved in some events than others? Do we credit God for every accident that turns out well and excuse him for fatal accidents.¹⁸ The discussion in his book becomes even more curious in that Kung invites those who have no problem with miracles to skip over the section. But he described such persons as those to whom Jesus means much and the laws of nature mean very little.¹⁹ This is more in the nature of an incitement to actually read the section for 'such persons' than a true invitation to skip. First Kung notes that the people of Jesus time were just not interested in the same things as a modern man of the rational age e.g. the laws of nature. They lived in a time where such things were common place and did not see them as a breach of the laws of nature. A scientific investigation did not and would not have occurred to them.²⁰ The individual stories as told simply do not yield enough information to determine now, if these are historical facts. One need not accept or reject all miracles. For instance there must have been cures that seemed miraculous in that time. Perhaps the real initial story was embellished over time, or there have been translation errors and misunderstandings. One example according to Kung revolves around the Aramaic word **ligyon** which can mean **legion** meaning thousands or **legionary** a name or the

Morehouse-Ballow, Inc., 1979. Article Richard Hooker, *Booby*, John E. Page 44. Probably due to his objection to the doctrine of predestination.

¹⁸ Kung, Hans, On Being a Christian, Pocket Books, New York, 1978. Page 226.

¹⁹ Kung, Hans, On Being a Christian, Pocket Books, New York, 1978. Page 227.

²⁰ Kung, Hans, On Being a Christian, Pocket Books, New York, 1978. Page 228.

Geek word for walking at (near) the lake or on the lake is the same.²¹ Kung poses this question with regard to miracles regarded as supernatural interventions in breach of the laws of nature by God - "As Christians must we believe such miracles?"²² According to Kung the miracles alone prove nothing since even to contemporaries they were ambiguous. It depended on your attitude to Jesus whether they were due to the effect of God's power or were a diabolical snare.²³ As for instance the reaction of the Jewish authorities to the Sabbath day healings as opposed to the reader or the recipient. Could He expel demons because He was from God and pure or because as a demon himself he could command his own. In particular to Kung as the miracles are laid out by John, they are vivid events but are also symbolic - the loaves show Jesus as the bread of life, curing the blind that He is the light of the world, raising the dead a sign of the resurrection. "It is wholly and entirely a secondary question - which need not disturb anyone's faith - whether with the progress of science what was thought to have been a miracle has found or may find a scientific explanation."²⁴ What is demanded is not faith in Miracles but faith in Jesus - quoting John "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." "More important than the number of and extent of the cures, expulsions of devils and wonderful deeds is the fact that Jesus turns with sympathy and compassion to all those to whom no one else turns; the weak, sick, neglected, social rejects. People were and are always glad to pass these sorts by. Weaklings and invalids are burdensome. Everyone keeps his distance from lepers and the "possessed." Kung notes that the rule at Qumran excluded fools, the blind, maimed and lame from that community. "Jesus does not turn away from any of these, he rejects none of them. He does not treat the sick as sinners, but draws them to himself to cure them."²⁵ Hans Kung has created great furor in his own and other denominations. His views are offered here because, when we are honest, every serious Christian has at some point stumbled over the miracles. Whether not one agrees with Kung, he has tried to deal with the issue of miracles stringently, with intellectual discipline and vigor.

Another distinctive feature of the Fourth Gospel are the "I am Sayings" these are based

²¹ Kung, Hans, On Being a Christian, Pocket Books, New York, 1978. Page 232.

²² Kung, Hans, On Being a Christian, Pocket Books, New York, 1978. Page 227.

²³ Kung, Hans, On Being a Christian, Pocket Books, New York, 1978. Page 236.

²⁴ Kung, Hans, On Being a Christian, Pocket Books, New York, 1978. Page 237.

²⁵ Kung, Hans, On Being a Christian, Pocket Books, New York, 1978. Page 235.

on the Greek 'Ego eimi.'²⁶ A Greek person in hearing this phrase would have recognized an established formula attributed to one of the gods. This usage may also allude to Exodus 3:14 - "I am who I am," As told to Moses.²⁷

After multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus says 'I am the bread of life.' [6:35] in reference to the manna.

At the feast of Booths Jesus says 'I am the Light of the world' [8:12] before Jesus we lived in darkness.

In contrast to the thieves who steal the sheep [10:7] 'I am the door of the sheep.'

In a second contrast Jesus says 'I am the Good Sheppard' [10:11] who unlike the hireling lays down his life.

Jesus says 'I am the true vine' [15:1] and those cut off from me will wither and die. This stresses Jesus as the source of life.

In response to the crisis with Lazarus Jesus says 'I am the resurrection and the life.' [11:25]

At the last supper I am the way, and the truth, and the life.' [14:6]

A second type of "I am" statement is more mysterious.

When he responds the Samaritan woman's question Are you the Messiah the answer is "I am he."

²⁶ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 542.

²⁷ The Five Gospels: The search for the authentic words of Jesus Hoover, Frank and the Jesus Seminar, 1993, Maximilian Publishing.

At the arrest scene Jesus is asked ironically twice if He is one they seek and He answers “I am He.” 18:5 - 6

Another point to keep in mind as you read through the long discourses between Jesus and others who argue with Him is that the discourse is not really directed at those persons, but it is directed at you as a Christian.²⁸ If you still find this section of John and the miracle stories hard to digest, join the club. Even if you cannot accept the miracles as historic fact, you can deal with them as literature and use them to discern the author’s meaning. Fact, fiction, misunderstanding, or exaggeration, one must acknowledge that the effect on those who witnessed them was genuine. The plain fact is that something happened after the death of Jesus, which caused a number of rather ordinary people to undertake an extraordinary enterprise called Christianity.

Terms

literary criticism

Miracles

Questions for Further Understanding

Why are the miracles in the Fourth Gospel called Signs?

If God healed the sick and injured, why must we suffer? Why does God allow bad things to occur?

Does the fact that the miracles or signs related in the Fourth Gospel seem to contradict reason and nature make it more difficult for you to believe and accept the Gospels as true?

What finally happened to the Puritans of Hooker’s day?

²⁸ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 546.

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Introduction to the Gospel According to John

Lesson Four - “The Book of Glory”

This is intended as the final lesson of a four lesson course on the Gospel commonly known the Gospel of John. The first lesson deals with the introduction to its concepts and the origins and history of the text itself. The following three lessons, two, three and four, deal with the text itself. The intention is that this be undertaken in conjunction to reading the text, starting after you have finished the first lesson.

The Gospel According to John

This is the final lesson and covers that last segment of the Gospel. Like the other divisions, this concluding part of the Gospel has been given various names by its students over the years. Two of the more common such names are the “Book of Passion” and the “Book of Glory.” This part of the Gospel has been summarized in various ways over the years to help readers get an overall view. Just as with the preceding section, we will start with the Price outline of what he calls the “Book of Passion.” You will find that you are familiar with many of the incidents that are listed, but may never have thought about how or where the individual incidents fit in the whole. The outline of this final section is:

1. The farewell Discourses - 13:1- 17:26 - Washing the disciples feet; the betrayal foretold[13:1-30]; dialogue on Jesus’ departure and His return [13:31-14:31; discourse on Jesus and His Church [15;-16:33; and the prayer of Jesus.[17:1-26]
2. The Passion Narrative, [18:1-19:42] the arrest [18:1-11]; trial before the high priest and Peter’s denials [18:12-27; the examination before Pilate [18:28-19:16]; the crucifixion [19:17-30]; the burial [19:31-42].
3. The Resurrection Narrative, [20:1-31]: finding the empty tomb [20:1-10]; the appearance of Jesus to Mary [20:11-18]; the appearance of Jesus to the disciples without Thomas [20:19-25]; the appearance to the disciples with Thomas [30:26-69; the purpose of the Gospel [20:30-31]
4. Conclusion, [21:1-25] The appearance beside the Sea of Tiberias [21:1-23]; and a final testimonial [21:24-25].

This summary or outline should help you to get a comprehensive view of the sweep of the “Book of Glory.” By this point, you should have completed reading the Fourth Gospel.

This final part of the story is what we in modern times would view as act two of John's drama (John 13-20) which deals with the glorification of God's Word for the world. At its heart is the story of the passion and resurrection of Jesus, foreshadowed by the farewell address to the disciples (John 14-17), a discourse that deals with the life of the believer.¹

¹ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Pages 550-553.

The purpose for the long discourse section in the Passion Narrative is to allow the Gospel writer to interpret the story beforehand. Rather than appending each discourse to the telling of the individual incidents, the reader is allowed to see the drama of the last week of the life of Jesus uninterrupted by commentary to give maximum impact.²

Also a new character is introduced. During these discourses the Gospel writer makes reference to another entity - translated in the Oxford Bible as the “spirit” which will teach the disciples and help them remember. The actual Greek word used here for spirit is ‘Paraclete.’ The translation in the context of John is difficult. In one passage Jesus speaks of the Paraclete as a witness in Jesus defense, in another as a spokesman for Him, in another as a consoler of the disciples and in His coming absence as a teacher and guide for the disciples. There are differing views about the relation of the Paraclete to Jesus on the one hand and the Holy Spirit on the other. The close parallelism between the work of Jesus and of the Paraclete may suggest that through the Paraclete Jesus has continued his presence among us.³ The Oxford Dictionary of Christianity - defines the term ‘Paraclete’ as an ‘advocate’ used in the Gospel of John as an epithet for the ‘Holy Ghost.’ The early church father, Origen, the great second century theologian, translated the word as “Intercessor” where it related to Jesus and as “Consoler” where it related to the Holy Ghosts. But in regard to the “Holy Ghost” translation, that meaning as associated with that word appears nowhere outside of the New Testament. The translator of the Vulgate⁴ used “advocate” which is preferred by modern scholars. But due to translation problems many now advocate simply using or ‘transcribing’ the Greek word itself.⁵ But translation problems aside, we now have all three of the ‘facets’ of God present in the Fourth Gospel.

As ‘Trinitarians’ Anglicans, like other main stream western Christian traditions, see God as present in three persons Creator, Redeemer and Comforter. There are three entities each at the angle of an equilateral triangle. The latter is the active phase of God. This teaching from the early Church was challenged in the 17th and 18th centuries by among others the Unitarians. The contrast in positions is obvious from the name. The Eastern Orthodox view is that the three persons differed only in origin, God was ‘ingenerated’ the Son was generated by the Father and

² Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 596.

³ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 597.

⁴This was a translation of the Bible from its original languages into Latin by the Roman Church completed in 405 AD by Jerome.

⁵ The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Revised, F.L. Cross, Editor, Oxford University Press, 1983, Page 1030.

the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father through the Son. The symbol for the Trinity in the East was then an Inner-Trinitarian Procession or line. In Western thought as represented by the Counsel of Nicea the three entities were three persons of the same substance to safeguard Co-equality thus the Holy Ghosts proceed from both the Father and the Son. In the West the symbol for the trinity is the triangle.⁶

⁶ The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Revised, F.L. Cross, Editor, Oxford University Press, 1983. Pages 1394-1395.

We have in earlier discussions, focused on the points of contrast with the other or synoptic Gospels. The Passion narrative in John however contains a significant amount of similar materials to the synoptic Gospels.⁷

- a. The arrest in the garden [18:1-11] including Peter's slicing of the ear of the High Priest's Servant;
- b. Peter's denial [18:15-27];
- c. The trial before Pilate, [18:29-19:16] including the offer of Barabbas [18:39-40];
- d. The place of Crucifixion, [19:17];
- e. The title on the Cross [19:19];
- f. The execution of the two others, [19:18]; and
- g. The dividing of the garments [19:23-24]

However, even the shared elements are given a special spin from John. For instance Judas appears at the head of the mob in the garden immediately prior to the arrest [18:2] When Jesus identifies himself as "I am he." The crowd falls back [18:4-6]. Peter's denials as in the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are used as a contrast to the Witness of Jesus - however in John the contrast is enhanced since the stories are intermixed [18:15-27]. In a classic use of symbolism, John uses the contrast of the warmth of light and the cold of darkness. In the And for instance notice that Peter in his second denial reaches out to a fire and for warmth and at the same moment Jesus is questioned by the High Priest and thus the Light of World is captured by the power of darkness [18:18]⁸

An interesting bit of symbolism relates to the identification of Judas as the traitor. At Chapter 13:21-30. In this vignette, Peter asks the 'Beloved' disciple to ask Jesus who will betray him. Jesus answers that it will be the one to whom he hands the bread. As soon as Jesus hands the bread to Judas two things happen first Satan enters Judas and second Jesus says that Judas [Now Satan] should do quickly what he must do. The text then says no one knew why Jesus said this to Judas - well the 'beloved' disciple knew - Jesus had just told him. Perhaps we are to imply that no one else knew what this meant. But notice he hands the "bread" e.g. himself over to the betrayer. Is this a clear demonstration and affirmation that Jesus voluntarily submitted? The symbolism of the story is more important to John than the consistency of the story line.

⁷ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 550.

⁸ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 550.

The distinctive theme in this Gospel is the Kingship of Jesus. This is accomplished by giving summary treatment to the appearances leading up to the appearance before Pilate. There is no trial before the Sanhedrin - only a private hearing before the Priests Annias and a mention of Caiaphas [18:19-23 and 24 and 28]. Jesus is then quickly sent to Pilate with his trial before Pilate presented as an extended dialogue on the reality and nature of his Kingship. Pilate, in this part functions as the Jews did in earlier parts as he asks rather dull questions [18:33, 35, 37, 38, 19:10] allowing Jesus to make it clear that his Kingship is not of this world [18:33]. Pilate asks the crucial question; Where are you from? To which Jesus then says nothing.[19:9]⁹ Finally Pilate places Jesus in his chair, the symbol of his authority and when he presents Him to the Jews they reply “We have no King But Caesar” - actually choosing to be ruled by humans, the Romans, as opposed to God.[19:13-15].¹⁰ This is a point of contact with the OT in the famous dialogue between the Lord and the people where they demand a king in replacement of God through his Priests acting as Judges. God relents and ultimately gives them Saul as a ruler.¹¹

In ages past the scenes of the Jewish authorities rejecting and turning Jesus over to the Romans was seen as justification for harsh treatment of Jewish peoples. In contrast, Luke Timothy Johnson, in his work on the Gospels sees as an important aspect of the figure of Pilate, that it indicates that this section of the Fourth Gospel is not a polemic against Jews. The action of Pilate makes certain that it is the entire world that has rejected Jesus.¹² In deed Pilate did not intend to ‘go out of his way’ to harm Jesus. But as is often the case when dealing with the helpless, it turns out simply to be easier for Pilate to be distressed, but yet take the path of least resistance and not interfere.

At the Crucifixion in contrast to the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, the disciples do not abandon Jesus but are dismissed by Him.[18:8] At the cross he is still surrounded by Mary, His mother [her second appearance in the Fourth Gospel e.g. see Cana [2:1-11]], his mother’s sister also apparently named Mary who was the wife of Cleopas, Mary Magdalene and the Beloved Disciple, thought to be John [19:25-26] As Jesus loved his family and friends until the end, so they loved Him. Mary his mother is important in that she represents

⁹ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 550.

¹⁰ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 550.

¹¹ 1 Samuel 8:4.

¹² Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 551.

the intimacy between Jesus and His followers.¹³

The final death of Jesus is better understood in the light of the OT. The soldiers come to break the legs of the prisoners. They do not break the legs of Jesus because he is already dead. But, his side is pierced and water and blood flow out [19:34]. John of course has to comment. The Fourth Gospel then tells us the importance is that “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”[19:37] A reading of the whole section of **Zechariah 12:10** and 13:1 says:

¹³ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 551.

“And I will pour out on the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him as one weeps for an only child, and weep over him as one weeps for a firstborn. . . . On that day, there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them of sin and uncleanness.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 551.

Now, open your New Testament to John 7:38-39. There is a dual symbolism here in that the blood signals atonement and the cleansing of sin and water signals the out pouring of the Spirit - see earlier references in the Fourth Gospel to water - Water of eternal life [4:14] Out of His heart shall flow rivers of living water which act as the spirit which those who believed in Him were to receive. [See 7:38-39]¹⁵ As you see in the earlier text the difference is that now Jesus has been Glorified.¹⁶ Also notice, the only disciple there is the Beloved disciple - John [19:25-26].

The first resurrection appearances in the Fourth Gospel are similar to the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, but with a particular spin. There is a foot race between Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Peter does not win and still goes in first, but notice that the Beloved Disciple is the first to “believe” [20:3-9]¹⁷ The failure of people to recognize Jesus in the appearances shows that He now lives in a new way and that He will be recognized by those who know His voice when he calls them by name.¹⁸ Now, remember that in the “Sheppard Stories” it is said that His flock will know his voice and that He knows his flock.

The drama ends with an epilogue, John 21, which may have been written later but is now firmly related to the body of the Gospel. This final section narrates the seventh sign, the catch of 153 fish, and the recalling of Peter. Together these incidents point to the unlimited scope of the Christian good news, an idea retained throughout John's Gospel, and provides an agenda for the church of the future. The mission of the disciples to the world can now begin on the basis of the revelation and glorification of the messianic Word of God.¹⁹

Conclusion

According to the Oxford OCB Teaching, John's theology is a theology of life. He bears testimony not only to Jesus, but also to the possibility of life through Him (John 1.4). The repeated symbol of light makes the same point. The life that He mediates to every believer, on the

¹⁵ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 551.

¹⁶ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 552.

¹⁷ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 552.

¹⁸ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, Page 552.

¹⁹ Johnson, Luke Timothy, The Writings of the New Testament, 2nd Revision, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999.

basis of His revelation to the world and His glorification for the world, is the divine life that ultimately belongs to the Father himself (John 5.26).²⁰ Moreover, John's Gospel speaks of life through Jesus in all its fullness. The seven signs make clear that Jesus, in his humanity, is concerned about the physical dimension of human existence as well as its spiritual possibilities. And since the Word became flesh (John 1.14), as the signs again illustrate, all matter (not only water, bread, and wine) can point to and convey the abundant life of the life-giver (John 10.10). Such is John's particular "sacramentalism."²¹ This eternal life is available to the faithful now in this presence as opposed to only after death. John's theology of salvation includes a future tense; so, for example, Jesus promises His disciples that He will eventually "come again" for them (John 14.3). But His emphasis is on the blessings of eternity that can be shared by the Christian in the present, when the judgment as well as the life of God are disclosed (John 3.16-18).²²

This understanding of salvation is determined by John's concept of sin. For writers of the **other Gospels sin is essentially personal and communal wrongdoing**: it is disobedience to God's law. Its consequence, as throughout the Hebrew Bible, is a breakdown of the covenant between creator and creature. Such a covenant relationship can only be restored by the sacrifice on the cross, echoed in the subsequent self-offering of obedience in the lives of the disciples (Mark 10.45; Matthew 7.21; Luke 9.23).²³ For the Fourth Gospel evangelist **sin is not**, as in the other Gospels and in Paul, primarily a personal ethical failure. **It stems from a cosmic state of alienation from God**, from a spiritual blindness, or darkness, or deadness (John 3.19; John 12.35). In other words it was the whole world and every one in it that was separated from God. This situation can be remedied only by restored sight (John 9.39) and a conscious return to the light through identification with, and incorporation into, the life of the Son who unites the dimensions of heaven and earth (John 12.46; John 15.4). So in John's Gospel the passion and crucifixion of Jesus are not seen as a sacrificial explanation for the forgiveness of sin but as a historical expression of the introduction of Light and Life into the World, by Jesus in whom heaven and earth are united. This gives us new life and new sight. In John's view, the cross is a

²⁰ Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved., Articles by Stephen S. Smalle

²¹ Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved.

²² Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved., Articles by Stephen S. Smalle

²³ Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved., Articles by Stephen S. Smalle

timeless expression of Jesus/God in the world, mediated through a historical event.²⁴ Those who are thus "drawn" to the now 'glorified' Christ are indwelt by the Spirit-Paraclete (John 14.16-17) and receive new life now from the vine; and this not only sustains believers individually but also unites them with every other "branch" in the Christian community (John 15.1-5). At this point, ethical sinfulness [misbehavior] can be eradicated by effecting the "new commandment" of love (John 13.34-35). The time of eternal life in Christ has yet to come; but through him, and decisively, it has arrived already.²⁵

The great differences between The Fourth Gospel and the others have been a problem for Christians from the earliest times. Conservative scholars explain the differences by an assumption that the author also made the assumption that the reader would already be aware of the synoptic Gospels, and that while the author intended to correct some details, he was not concerned with reproducing the already popular teaching of Christ as given by Matthew, Mark and Luke. The purpose of the Gospel was to relate the higher teachings reserved for his disciples and brought to the fore in John, but which were relegated to the background in the catechetical instructions contained in the other three.²⁶ In short John represents the advanced text and the others a more basic text. Clement of Alexandria called the Fourth Gospel the 'Spiritual' Gospel. "It is evidently not a simple account of the Lord's miracles and popular teachings, but a deeply meditated representation of His Person and doctrine by a contemplative person conscious of inspiration by the Holy Ghosts. It may be regarded as a necessary complement of the picture of Christ drawn by the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke."²⁷

²⁴ Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved., Articles by Stephen S. Smalle

²⁵ Smalle, Steven S., The Gospel According to John, an Introduction, The Oxford Companion to the Bible (c) Oxford University Press, 1996. All rights reserved., Articles by Stephen S. Smalle

²⁶ The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Revised, F.L. Cross, Editor, Oxford University Press, 1983. Page 744.

²⁷ The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Revised, F.L. Cross, Editor, Oxford University Press, 1983. Page 744.

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End Notes
