

PhT

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Guidelines for Studying the Gospel of John

INTRODUCTION

Date: *ca. 90 A.D. or earlier* Before end of first century. Tradition unanimous in 2nd century *J.A.T. Robinson* in ascribing it to John the apostle. Papyrus 52, Greek fragment *may be as early as any other* ca. A.D. 130-140, shows it circulated in Egypt in early 2nd. c. Qumran scrolls reflect Southern Palestinian milieu much like that behind John's Gospel; could have been written in lower Jordan area *by John in Palestine* as early as Mark. John's Gospel preserves a tradition independent of Synoptics and as early and trustworthy (cf. D. H. Dodd, Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel, 1963).

Book is Hebrew rather than Hellenistic? Type of thought is possibly Palestinian

Place: Tradition says Ephesus. Irenaeus: "John the disciple of the Lord and the one laying on his bosom, himself gave out the gospel while staying in Ephesus" (Haer. iii, 1, 1). Qumran scrolls reflect vocabulary and thought patterns which suggest possible Palestinian origin of John's Gospel. Open question. Cf. John A. T. Robinson, "The New Look on the Fourth Gospel," Twelve New Testament Studies, "Studies in Biblical Theology No. 34," 1962.

Author: Tradition says John the apostle (see above). Many prefer an "Elder John" in Ephesus (can neither be established or refuted). External and internal evidence suggest John the witness, others sharing in the writing. Cf. John A. T. Robinson, Ibid. for argument that author could have been John.

Problem groups: At least three groups in mind.

1. Unbelieving Jews. What they claimed for Torah, the Law, John claimed for Christ. Rabbis claimed Law was the preexistent daughter of God, instrument of creation, source of light (revelation) and life. John 1:1 reflects Genesis.
2. Followers of John the Baptist. Separate sect continued for some time (cf. Acts 19:1-7). John shows that true followers of the Baptist follow Jesus. Problem posed in that John the Baptist began ministry before Jesus and baptized Jesus.
3. Gnostics or their like. Dualists who believed matter evil and only spirit good. Held creation evil and incarnation unreal (docetic). John shows that the one God is creator and redeemer. Incarnation real, the Word made flesh. *Origin of Trinitarian difficult to nail down.*

Purpose: to answer three questions (20:30-31)

1. Who Jesus is: The Christ, the son of God. Chapter 1 identifies him as Logos, Lamb of God, Messiah, son of God, son of Joseph, king of Israel, son of Man.
2. What Jesus offers: salvation as eternal life. Eternal life is to know or have acquaintance with God through Jesus Christ (17:3).
3. How the gift is acquired: by faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is trust, openness to God. No stereotyped formula: must be

begotten from above, eat his flesh and drink his blood, abide in him, believe on him, die to live, hate one's life to find it, etc.

Method: discourses built around signs (20:30)

1. Seven signs (miracles) in the "book of signs" (chs. 2-12). Selected from many known to writer. A sign is actual occurrence pointing to something beyond itself.
2. Eighthth sign in epilogue (ch. 21).
3. Signs explicitly refer to miracles; yet non-miraculous acts, like cleansing of temple, also serve as signs. John may view whole incarnate ministry as "sign," real incarnation in which glory of God is manifested.

Theme: Jesus is the Word made flesh, manifesting the glory of God (1:14). The Logos (Word) is God himself uniquely present in a human life. The Word is God creating the world, revealing himself, redeeming man.

Glory: the glory of God is his character seen in redemption. Christ is the incarnate glory (cf. 1:14; 2:11; 13:31f.; 17:1).

BASIC STRUCTURE

I. Introduction:

Prologue (1:1-18)

The Word made flesh: God as creator, revealer, redeemer. Grace and truth (ultimate reality) appear in man's world of darkness as light and life.

The witness of John the Baptist (1:19-51)

Lamb of God: humble service. May blend ideas of scape goat, ram provided for Isaac, and servant of God in Isa. 53. Bears sin of world.

Messiah: God's anointed. Sovereign rule (kingdom of God) confronts man in Jesus Christ.

Son of God: Divine as well as human.

Son of Joseph: Human as well as divine.

King of Israel: The hope of Israel.

Son of Man: The hope for the world. The heavenly man (Dan. 7) who is judge, redeemer, creator of people, sovereign over universal and eternal kingdom.

II. Book of signs (chapters 2-12)

Supersession (ch. 2)

Water turned to wine: Introductory sign. Jesus fulfills and supersedes all that is foreshadowed in Jewish ritual.

Cleansing of temple: Jerusalem temple profaned and people exploited. Destroyed A.D. 70. True temple is his body. Dual sense: refers explicitly to Jesus' resurrection; probably implicit reference to church as body of Christ, true temple of God. This idea common to Qumran community and New Testament.

Universalism (chs. 4-5)

- Nicodemus: Best of Jewish legalism; yet must be begotten from above. Flesh: man's way to God (futile). Spirit: God's way to man. Whole system represented by Nicodemus is "flesh." Must have new whence if new whither. John's water baptism (requiring repentance) is valid but not enough. Only Jesus is bearer of the Holy Spirit.
- Samaria: The savior of the world (4:42). Offers water of life to despised Samaritans. Worship of God not bound to Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim.
- Nobleman: Roman (?) whose faith is respected.

More select signs: Point to aspects of Christ's ministry.

- 2 The lame walk (ch. 5). Lame 38 years may typify Israel's 38 years of wandering in indecision. One must wish (will) to be made whole (5:6, 40).
- 3 The bread of life (ch. 6). Must eat his flesh and drink his blood. Must accept incarnation and cross.
- 4 Safe at sea (ch. 6). Christ our peace. Able to rescue from storms of life.
- 5 The water of life (ch. 7). A spring of life within. This not one of miracle signs.
- 6 The blind see (ch. 9). The light of the world offers "eyes of faith" as well as eyes of flesh. Those who want to see may see. Those refusing light go blind.
- 7 Resurrection (ch. 11). Jesus the Resurrection and Life. Climactic sign.

(8th in ch 24)

Shepherd and flock (ch. 10)

Dies for sheep; knows and is known; holds his own securely.

His hour (ch. 12). Greeks would see Jesus. John lets us see him. His hour is that of the Cross (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

III. The Discourses of Jesus (chapters 13-17)

Washing one another's feet (ch. 13)

Peter must accept a Messiah who serves (washes feet). Disciples must wash one another's feet; not only humble service but daily cleansing from sin. There is an initial cleansing like a bath; once for all, requires no repetition (Judas lacked this). There is further cleansing like washing feet. Disciples must receive and offer this ministry. True church discipline.

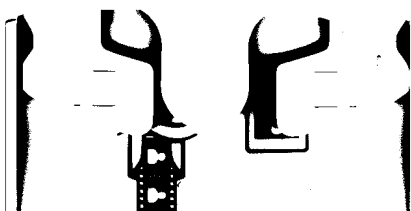
Holy Spirit promised (chs. 14-16)

Holy Spirit is God in his nearness and power.

Comforter (strengthens us); teacher, fruit bearer (cf. Gal. 5:22), witness, judge.

Convicts world of:

sin—that of failure to trust Christ
 righteousness—the one crucified as criminal is vindicated
 by resurrection and ascension to the Father
 Judgment—Cross is the overcoming of Satan



The Vine and the Branches (ch. 15)

Union with Christ gives life.

Except one abide in Christ he cannot bear fruit.

If one abides in Christ he cannot but bear fruit.

No fruit means no abiding. Fruit which Spirit produces not to be confused with results which man may achieve. Cf. Gal. 5:22 for meaning of fruit.

The Prayer of Jesus (ch. 17)

That his disciples be united; that they be one.

That his disciples be separated from the world: responsibly in world but as to character not of it.

That God's love bind them to him and to one another.

IV. The Passion: Death, Resurrection, Appearances (chs. 18-20)

Jesus drinks his "cup." Takes the way which seems to be false, futile, failure. Utter self-denial.

One whose kingdom is not of this world crucified as king of the Jews.

His work completed. "It is finished!"

He is risen!

Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" Book's climax.

Blessed are those not seeing with eyes of flesh yet believing (seeing with eyes of faith).

V. Epilogue (ch. 21)

Appearance to the Seven by the lake.

Love probed and commended. Peter now chastened makes no boast of his love; can only appeal to Jesus, "You know that I love you, despite all that seems to contradict it." Loving Christ is to find expression in taking care of his flock.

Individuality preserved. Peter and John each answerable to Christ; each has own way to fulfill his calling, even if one suffers martyrdom and the other be spared.

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