

READING THE GOSPEL OF JOHN TOGETHER

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Further resources: www.tarsus.ie

1. How to Read the Fourth Gospel

Welcome

1. How to read the Fourth Gospel
2. The Wedding Feast at Cana (John 2)
3. The Samaritan Woman (John 4)
4. The sequence of feasts (John 5-10)
5. The man born blind (John 9)
6. The washing of the feet (John 13)
7. Jesus's death (John 18-19)
8. Jesus' resurrection (John 20)

Introduction

- Your experience of the Fourth Gospel
- Curiosities
- Relationship to the Synoptic traditions
- Production
- Final edition

Experience

- The Gospel tells the story of Jesus of Nazareth, whose parents are known, who lived in Galilee, was crucified in Jerusalem and was buried.
- The Gospel adds the perspective of the pre-existent Word, who was made flesh. His death was his return to the Father.
- The Gospel adds into the story the later experience of the community; in particular the separation from the synagogue.

Curiosities

- Who baptised? 4:2 and 3:22
- When is an ending not an ending? 20:30-31 + 21:24-25
- How long is the last speech? 14:31 signals an end but it resumes!
- Wrong sequence: 11:2 - a story not told until ch.12
- Misplaced story: 7:53-8:11; added text: 5:3b-4
- Location: ch.4 (Galilee), ch.5 (Jerusalem), ch.6 (Galilee)
- Added "bits": 3:31-36; 12:44-50; 13:6-11 / 12:12-20.
- Glosses: e.g., 4:2, 4:44; 7:39b; 12:16 and so forth.
- Big addition: ch.21
- No birth stories
- No parables
- Long symbolic tableaux
- Long, involved speeches
- One-to-one encounters
- Unique characters / characters with special emphasis

Synoptic tradition

- Three-year ministry
- Five visits to Jerusalem
- Three Passovers
- The Twelve are not important
- The Beloved Disciple is more important than Peter
- The miracles are more dramatic
- No parables...but
 - I am the good shepherd
 - I am the true vine

- I am the light of the world
- Plus: always in dialogue with the Hebrew Bible

Production

- Key: John 21
- Origin of the Tradition: the Beloved Disciple (= BD)
- Origin of the Gospel: evangelist / redactors
- Origin of the present text: reception history
- Stage One
 - The tradition of words and works of Jesus originating with the BD whom Brown originally identified with John the son of Zebedee in an attempt to combine the tradition of authorship with the evidence of the gospel.
 - Later Brown move from this position, concluding that the internal and external evidence should not be harmonized and that the BD was an outsider from the group of best known disciples.
 - Brown suggests that the BD might have been one of the unnamed disciples of John 21:2 originally mentioned as the unnamed disciples of John the Baptist who follows Jesus in John 1:35ff.
- Stage Two
 - This stage saw the development of the oral tradition into its distinctive Johannine form
 - through its use in the teaching and preaching of the Johannine school
 - under the influence of a leading figure whom we may call the evangelist.
- Stage Three
 - This stage involved the production of a written Gospel by the evangelist.
 - This process involved a limited selection from available oral tradition
 - The tradition seems to have contained multiple versions of various traditions as well as traditions not included by the evangelist
- Stage Four
 - This stage was a second edition, also by the evangelist.
 - Indeed, there might have been successive editions to meet specific needs such as difficulties posed by the continuance of the disciples of the Baptist and the secret believers within the synagogue.
- Stage Five
 - This saw the edition of the gospel by another hand, as is indicated by John 21:24.
 - The intention was, consistent with the Johannine school, not to lose tradition developed in stage two and to meet new problems that had emerged.
 - Such problems relate, e.g., to the death of the BD and the relation of the Johannine Christians to the Petrine group (“catholic” Christians).

The Community

- The first phase began when a group of disciples of the Baptist became believers and conclude when the believers were excluded from the synagogue. It includes stages one and two in the development of the tradition.
- The second phase saw the writing of the Gospel by the evangelist about 90 CE and stages three and four in the development of the tradition.
- The third phase included the redaction of the Gospel and the writing of the Epistles in about 100 CE. It involved a schism within the community. This corresponds to stage five in the development of the tradition.
- The final phase concluded some time in the second century when the Johannine community and the schismatics both disappeared, absorbed into into the emerging great church or docetism, Gnosticism and Montanism.

The Synagogue

- Writing ca. 200 C.E. Tertullian noted, “the Jews call us Nazarenos” (Against Marcion 4. 8).
- A century later Eusebius switched to past tense: “We who are now called Christians received in the past the name Nazarenoi”.
- Writing about 375 C.E. Epiphanius condemns the Nazoraioi, who are not a newly founded group, as a heresy (Panarion 29). Jerome followed Epiphanius: “... since they want to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither Jews nor Christians” (Epistle 112.13 to Augustine).
- Epiphanius and Jerome also provide the first clear accounts of the practice in some ancient synagogues of condemning the Nosrim in the blessing or curse on heretics (birkat ha-minim): “... may the Nosrim and Minim speedily perish ...” (according to Cairo Genizah manuscripts).

Location

- The synagogue is important and powerful
- Marginal Judaism may flourish
- John the Baptist’s disciples may honour their mentor
- A place where “gnosis” (= knowledge) might develop
- Greek is spoken
- A place where Peter and Thomas are prominent
- Syria fulfills all the conditions
- The final redaction may have happened in Asia Minor

Manuscripts

- Most ancient: Papyrus 52 (125 ad)
- Earliest most complete: Papyrus 66 (2nd century)
- Also: the great codices (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Beza etc.)

Final edition

- A very considered text
- Two Parts
- 1-12: The Book of Signs
- 13-21: The Book of Glory