





2018

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READING JOHN

2018

SEQUENCE

- Listen to John 1:1-18 / note reactions and questions
- Literary genre: prologue
- Literary structure: concentric
- Commentary
- Potential backgrounds
 - Creation story and Moses
 - Wisdom literature
 - Stoic Philosophy
- Its function in the Gospel
- And so...
- Prayer

READING AND REACTIONS



LITERARY GENRE: A PROLOGUE

- “Prologue” is literally a word *before* the word.
- It was a recognised form at the time for speeches, plays and musical performances.
- According to Cicero:
 - One’s opening remarks, though they should always be carefully framed and pointed and epigrammatic and suitable expressed, must at the same time be appropriate to the case in hand; for the opening passage contains the first impression and the introduction of the speech, and this ought to charm and attract the hearer straight away. (*De Oratore* 2.315)

LITERARY GENRE: A PROLOGUE

- Yet, this is different
 - It does not narrate pre-historical mythic episodes in the Word's pre-existence. In reality, this is a meta-narrative.
 - Neither it is a kind of overture. Some vocabulary is never take up elsewhere in the Gospel (e.g. logos, grace, fullness). Some is, of course, such as light, life and darkness.
 - Finally, it is not a historical resumé of the story to follow – for example the cross and resurrection are absent.

LITERARY STRUCTURE: CONCENTRIC

- ABA^*
- $ABCB^*A^*$
- The prologue is broadly concentric (i.e. not always precisely)
- See table.

<p>1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.</p>	<p>A. Word and God</p>
<p>3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.</p>	<p>B. Benefit from Word</p>
<p>6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.</p>	<p>C. John the Witness</p>
<p>9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.</p>	<p>D. Incarnation</p>
<p>10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.</p>	<p>X. (Pivot)</p> <p>Rejection/reception</p> <p>Result: divine filiation</p>
<p>14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth</p>	<p>D. Incarnation</p>
<p>15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ")</p>	<p>C. John the Witness</p>
<p>16 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>B. Benefit from Word</p>
<p>18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.</p>	<p>A. Word and God</p>

COMMENTARY

John 1:1 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.

- Gen 1:1 is evoked.
- Word – the means of creation.
- Wisdom also “pre-existed” (see later).
- He will pour forth words of wisdom of his own (Sir 39:6).
- With (= pros): Many rich meanings: chiefly a close authoritative relationship with God.
- Was God: unprecedented.
- Cf. “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

COMMENTARY

John 1:3 All things came into **being** through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** 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.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life."

John 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

- V. 3 evokes Gen 1:3-5 and also Lady Wisdom from the Old Testament (see below).
- Life: existence, of course, but also the fullness of life (10:10 – x36 in all; NB raising of Lazarus).
- Light: x23 in all; spiritual illumination almost always. NB healing of the man born blind.
- This light is for all humanity without distinction.
- Darkness: John 1:5; 6:17; 8:12; 12:35, 46; 20:1.

COMMENTARY

John 1:6 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.

- Switch from poetry to prose.
- First mention of John (not called the Baptist in this Gospel), bringing us to a particular historical context. NB No need to identify him – he is known.
- Sent from God.
- Witness and testify.
- Believe through (not in!) him.
- V. 8 is very clear, saying the same thing in a negative way.

COMMENTARY

John 1:9 The **true light**, which **enlightens** everyone, was **coming** into the world.

Isa 49:6 I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

John 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

John 9:5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

- True in the sense of faithful and reliable.
- Light is a metaphor for salvation, as we read in Isaiah 49:6b.
- Enlightens everyone – NB the story of the man born blind.
- Was coming into: this picks up quite traditional language about "the coming one", i.e. the Messiah.
- The world (*kosmos*): x78, so highly significant in this Gospel.

COMMENTARY

John 1:10 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.

- Two human responses to the coming of the Word
- (1) This text foreshadows the conflicts of the ministry to evident in John.
- “Know” in the strong sense.
- Irony of coming to “his own”, meaning Israel, this time.
- (2) By contrast, there is also a positive response.
- The privilege of Israel becomes that of all humanity. Cf. Paul and the language of adoption.
- Cf. 1 John 3:1-2; 4:7 and 5:2.

COMMENTARY

John 1:14 And the Word became (*egeneto*) flesh (*sarx*) and lived (*eskēnōsen*) among **us**, and **we** have seen his glory (*doxa*), the glory as of a father's only son (*monogenēs*), full (*plērēs*) of grace (*charis*) and truth (*alētheia*).

Sir 24:8 "Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent (*skēnē*).

He said, 'Make your dwelling (*kataskēnōson*) in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.'

- NB switch to first person plural.
- Sarx = human existence in its fragility, transience, mortality.
- NB for the portrait of Jesus in the rest of this Gospel.
- Lived = lit. "pitched his tent" (*skēnē*). NB the Feast of Tents (**skēnopēgia**) in chapters 7-10.
- Tent of meeting: Ex 33:7-11. Cf. Sir 24:8.
- Glory: just like Moses. Cf. Ex 40:3).

COMMENTARY

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John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the **truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

- The "only" Son is the sole image of the Father in the world.
- Full: only use in John but the verb to complete, to fill or to fulfil is frequent (John 1:14, 16; 3:29; 7:8; 12:3, 38; 13:18; 15:11, 25; 16:6, 24; 17:12-13; 18:9, 32; 19:24, 36).
- Charis: God's covenant grace in the OT (only here in John).
- Alētheia: God's covenant faithfulness in the OT.
- Truth: John 1:14, 17; 3:21; 4:23-24; 5:33; 8:32, 40, 44-46; 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:7, 13; 17:17, 19; 18:37-38).
- True: John 1:9; 4:23, 37; 6:32; 7:28; 8:16; 15:1; 17:3; 19:35.

COMMENTARY

John 1:15 (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.'")

John 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before **Abraham** was, I am."

John 1:19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

- Suddenly back to John the Baptist who "comments" on the theology. No parenthesis in ancient Greek.
- Testify or witness (slightly stronger).
- **John 1:19** This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"
- **John 1:32** And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."
- "Was" in the sense of ranks before me. But cf. **Jn 8:58**.
- Thus the pre-existence of the Word is affirmed.

COMMENTARY

John 1:16 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.

Exod 33:13 LXX If then I have found favour (*charis*) before you, disclose yourself to me. Let me see you recognisably in order that I might find favour (*charis*) before you and in order that I might know that this nation is your people."

- The interruption is over and the language goes back to "we" and to the (later) Christian confession of the benefit of the incarnation.
- The meaning of the phrase grace upon grace (*charin anti charitos*) could be:
 - (1) Love (grace) under the New Covenant in place of love (grace) under the Sinai Covenant, thus replacement;
 - (2) Grace "on top of" grace, thus accumulation;
 - (3) Grace corresponding to grace, thus correspondence.
- Meaning (2) is supported by v. 17.

COMMENTARY

John 1:16 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.

- The law/grace contrast is exclusively Pauline in the New Testament.
- In the OT, the Law conferred God's favour (*charis*) and his faithfulness (*alētheia*).
- Contrasting the Law with favour and faithfulness works only in the light of the revelation in Jesus.
- The definitive revelation occurs in **Jesus Christ** (= the full name which is rare in John).
- **John 17:3** And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and **Jesus Christ** whom you have sent.

COMMENTARY

John 1:18 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. (NRSV)

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God; the only **God**, who is at the Father's **side**, he has made him known. (NIV)

Exod 33:20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face; **for no one shall see me and live.**"

1 John 4:12 No one has ever seen **God**; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

- The conclusion matches the opening, underlining the Son's great intimacy with the Father.
- Only **Son** or only **God**? Balance of probabilities favours only God. GNT5 gives a "B" rating to "only Son", i.e. "almost certain."
- Cf. **John 13:23** The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus.
- The Greek say: "in the bosom of Jesus."

COMMENTARY

John 1:18 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. (NRSV)

- Heart/side is literally **bosom** – and why not keep the imagery? Cf. 13:23.
- **Ode Solomon 8:14** I fashioned their members, and my own breasts I prepared for them, that they might drink my holy milk and live by it.
- **Ode Solomon 19:2** The Son is the cup, and the Father is he who was milked; and the Holy Spirit is she who milked him; **3** Because his breasts were full, and it was undesirable that his milk should be released without purpose. **4** The Holy Spirit opened her bosom, and mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father.

DID YOU NOTICE?

- Narrative insertions in the poetry
- Occasional disturbance of the poetry
- Adjustments which seem not to be part of Johannine theology
- Adjustments which fit exactly the Evangelist's theology and concerns

DID YOU NOTICE?

- John 1:3b and without him was not any thing made that was made.
- John 1:6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.
- John 1:9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.
- John 1:12c who believed in his name 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

**Evangelist's additions
and modifications**

Wisdom = Logos
No dualism;
Baptist texts

Law v. grace
Antithesis
Wisdom = Christ

**Christian modifications
(Pauline / Gentile?)**

Wisdom

Jewish Hymn to Wisdom

PROLOGUE HYMN SOURCE	WISDOM PARALLELS
1 In the beginning was <i>Wisdom</i>	Prov 8:22-23; Wis 6:22; Sir 24:9
And <i>Wisdom</i> was with <i>God</i>	Prov 8:23,30; Wis 9:4, 9
And <i>God</i> (divine) was <i>Wisdom</i>	
2 The same (She) was in the beginning with <i>God</i>	
3a All things through her <i>become</i> (<i>egeneto</i>)	Prov 3:19; 8:30; Wis 7:21-27; 8:1; 9:12; 1QS X.11
4 What <i>became</i> in her was <i>life</i>	Prov 3:18; 8:35
And the <i>life</i> was the <i>light</i> of men	Wis 7:26; Prov 6:23; Test Levi 14:4; (Sir 17:11)
5 And the <i>light</i> in the <i>darkness</i> shines	
And the darkness did not extinguish it (<i>ou katelaben</i>)	Wis 7:29-30

PROLOGUE HYMN SOURCE

WISDOM PARALLELS

10 In the *world* she was

Wis 8:1; Sir 24:6

And the *world* through her become (*egeneto*)

And the *world* did not know her

Prov 1:29; Bar 3:23, 28, 31

11 Unto her own (*eis ta idia*) she came

And her own (*hoi idioi*) did not *receive* (*ou parelabon*) her

Sir 24:8-12; 1 Enoch 42:1-2

12a But as many as received (*elabon*) her,

12b She gave them authority children of God (*tekna theou*) to become (*genesthai*)

Wis 7:14, 27; Sir 6:20-22; 15:7


14ab And Wisdom tabernacled among us (*eskēnōsen*)

Sir 24:8,10 (*skēne*); Wis 9:10; Bar 3:37 (cf. Prov 8:31)

14c And we beheld her glory

(Cf. Sir 24:23); Br 4:1

AN ORIGINAL HYMN TO WISDOM?

- 
- 1 In the beginning was Wisdom
and Wisdom was with God
and God (divine) was Wisdom
- 2 The same (She) was in the beginning with God
- 3a All things through her became
- 4 What became in her was life
And the life was the light of men
- 5 And the light in the darkness shines
And the darkness did not extinguish it
- 10 In the world she was
and the world through her became
And the world did not know her.
- 11 Unto her own she came,
And her own did not receive her
- 12a But as many as received her,
- 12b She gave them authority children of God to become
- 14a/b And Wisdom tabernacled among us
- 14c And we beheld her glory

HELLENISTIC CHRISTIAN MODIFICATIONS

1. There is a concentration of non-Johannine vocabulary in 14e, 16-18.
2. The evangelist's addition of 15 severs 14 from 16, where the "we" confession is continued, indicating that the evangelist was editing a pre-existing ext.
3. The Law-Grace antithesis is not Johannine but Pauline, indicating that this editorial material was added in a Hellenistic community where the Pauline antithesis was known and affirmed.

DID YOU NOTICE?

- Hence, it is thought that the Hellenistic version of the hymn added 14e, 16-17, and thus identified Christ with Wisdom. The text would then further read:

14e full of grace and truth.

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

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

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**. What has come into being **4** 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. **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. 9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. **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. 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*. **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.'") **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.*

EVANGELIST'S ADDITIONS / MODIFICATIONS

Negatively:

- Opposition to Torah / Wisdom ideology
- Opposition a defective wisdom Christology
- *Loss: feminine imagery of God*

Positively:

- Creation and new creation
- Logos/Word – transcendence and wisdom
- Prophecy – Jesus was a prophet
- Gospel (“the word”)
- Jesus – God’s presence and revelation
- Dialogue with the culture (Judaism / Stoicism)

BACKGROUNDS

- The story of creation in **Genesis** 1, somehow perfect and completed.
- The narrative of the **Exodus**, the giving of the Law and the figure of **Moses**. Partially in fulfilment of; partially in contrast with.
- The figure of "**Lady Wisdom**". The key texts are: Job 28; Proverbs 1, 8, 9; Baruch 3:9-4:4; Sirach 24; Wis 7:7-9:18.
- The logos in Jewish Wisdom literature and in **Philo** of Alexandria.
- The logos philosophy of **Stoicism**, with its monotheism and pantheism.
- What **John** means by logos is clarified in v. 17.

FUNCTION IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

- New creation across the Gospel - esp. cross and resurrection
- Life - Lazarus story - I am the Resurrection and the Life
- Light - Blind man - I am the Light of the world
- Baptist - important early on the Gospel - In vocabulary
- Not know him - the rejection by most Jews - passim
- Children and being born - Nicodemus
- Flesh - cf. Thomas and Tiberias
- Glory - throughout
- Father's only Son - chs. 13-17
- Truth - Pilate and often elsewhere; I am the truth
- "He was before me" - Before Abraham was, I AM
- Made him known - revealed through actions and speech

AND SO...

- A fabulous Prologue to the whole Gospel.
- The Prologue possibly (only) had itself a pre-history.
- As it stands, it spoke to Israelite, Jewish and Stoic traditions.
- It prepared the Johannine community members to read the Gospel.
- It offered radical, breath-taking teaching on the identity of Jesus.

AND SO...

- Because extraordinarily rich, it can speak to us today as well.
- The quest for origins.
- The quest for God and God's own disclosure.
- The "beyond" (transcendence) of God.
- The "intimacy" (immanence) of God.
- The thrilling news of God's engagement with us through Christ.

PRAYER

We praise you, gracious God, for the glad tidings of peace, the good news of salvation: your Word became flesh and we have seen his glory. Let the radiance of that glory enlighten the lives of those who celebrate his birth.

Reveal to all the world the light no darkness can extinguish, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the splendour of eternal light, God for ever and ever. Amen.