

The Gospel & Letters of John

General Introduction

Biblical Context

- Bible
 - Old Testament
 - New Testament
 - Four Gospels
 - Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke
 - John
 - Acts
 - Epistles
 - Pauline: Romans . . . Philemon (13 in total)
 - Hebrews
 - James
 - 1,2 Peter
 - 1, 2, 3 John
 - Jude
 - Revelation

“Johannine” Books

- The early Church attributed authorship of five books to John, son of Zebedee:
 - Revelation
 - Gospel
 - Epistles (1,2,3 John)
- Between the 3rd and the 19th Centuries this view was rarely questioned.
- This view is still accepted by many in the Church today.
- Most modern scholars doubt that all of these books were written by the Son of Zebedee; there are many different theories regarding authorship.

Authorship

- The Bible Makes no Definite Claims
 - Revelation
 - The seer identifies himself as John by name.
 - But he does not specify which John he is.
 - Gospel
 - The name John is never used to describe the author.
 - All four canonical gospels are formally anonymous.
 - Epistles (1,2,3 John)
 - The name John never appears in any of these letters.

Authorship

- Therefore one is free to draw his or her own conclusions regarding authorship, in light of the inspired text that lies before us.
- For what it is worth, I have come to believe that the traditional view that John, the son of Zebedee, was the author of all five books is substantially correct.
- By this I mean, at least, that I think all five books probably are grounded on his testimony and authority.
- Having said this, I do not think that one's views on (human) authorship are of first importance. (The author of Hebrews for example is simply unknown.)

Dates

- The Johannine books were among the last in the New Testament to be written:
 - probably around the end of the First Century
 - after the Pauline Letters, synoptic Gospels, and most other New Testament books had already been written.
- Among the Johannine books:
 - The gospel seems to predate the epistles.
 - Revelation may possibly have been written first of all.

Our Study Series

- Having recently finished our study of Revelation, we are now in a better position to understand the situation of John and his readers.
- Today we will begin to study the Gospel, a study which will take us several months to complete.
- Upon completion of the Gospel of John we will be in a much better position to make sense of the Johannine Letters.

The Gospel of John

General Introduction

Genre

- Bible:
 - Gospels:
 - Biographies ... of Jesus
 - Historical Narratives ... of the life of Jesus
 - Proclamations ... of the good news concerning Jesus
 - John's gospel uniquely incorporates long discourses.
 - Many perceive John to be the most “theological” and “spiritual” of the four gospels.

Readers

- Greek speakers in Asia
 - Predominately Christians
 - Including both Jews and Gentiles
 - But perhaps addressed predominately to Jewish Christians
 - Also read by non-Christians
 - Especially Jews & Gentile “God Fearers”
 - But by some pagans as well

Literary Context

- Early Christian material, including some or all of the Pauline Letters and Synoptic Gospels and their underlying ideas and sources.
- Old Testament in Both Hebrew and Greek
- Rabbinical and other Jewish Literature
- Greek and Roman Literature

Composition

- Stylistic unity
- Difficult to identify underlying “sources”
- Some evidence of “redaction”
- Possible that more than one person had a hand in writing/redacting

Structure

- Prolog (1:1-18) – And introduction and summary of the work of the incarnate Word.
- Body (1:19-20:31)
 - The Book of Signs (1:19-12:50) – The Word reveals himself to the world but they will not accept him.
 - The Book of Glory (13:1-20:31) – To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory and communicates the Spirit of life.
- Epilog (21:1-25) – A series of resurrection appearances in Galilee.

Reading for Next Week

- John 1: 1-18
 - This Prolog is a summary of the whole theology and narrative of the Gospel, as well as an introduction. It can be fully understood only after the Gospel has been studied. (R.E. Brown)
 - Please read the prolog before next week, when we will read and discuss it for the first time.
 - At the end of our study of the Gospel, several months from now, we will return and review the Prolog to see how our understanding has improved.