

The Gospel of John

Yale Divinity School Bible Study

September 2021

Approaching the Gospel

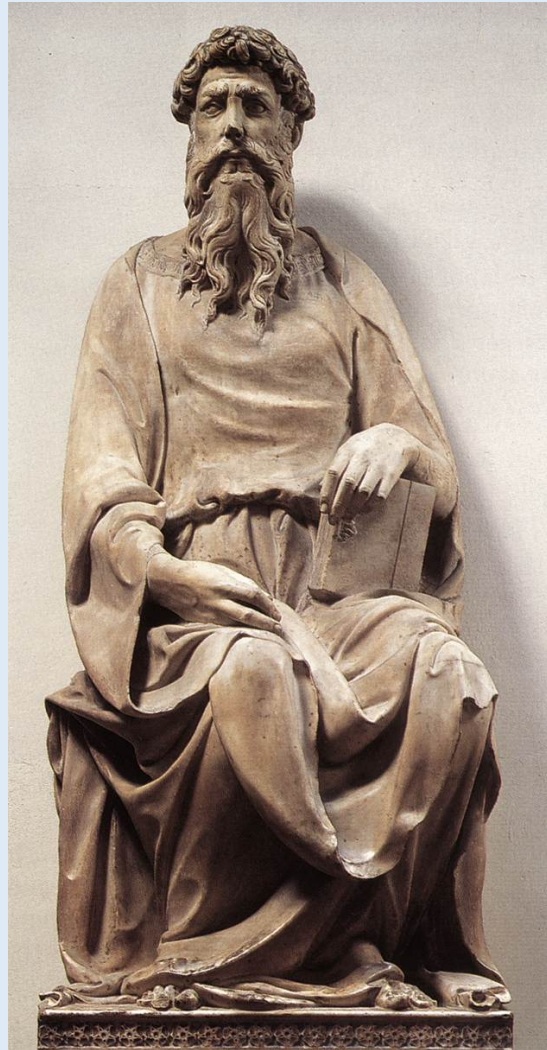
- As Historians
 - What are its sources? Gospels, oral tradition? Its environment?
 - What does it tell us about Jesus? Is it reliable?
 - Is it in dialogue with Judaism? Gnosticism? Philosophy? Imperial Rome?
- As Careful Readers of Literature
 - What kind of story is it? What kind of points does it drive home?
 - What's its plot? How does it portray characters?
 - What other literary features are worth noting?
- As Christian Believers
 - What does it mean for our faith in God, in Christ, in his Church?
 - Does its content help or perhaps hinder our faith?
 - Does it have a dark side? Its portrait of "the Jews"?
- What questions/interests characterize your approach?

Introductory issues

Authorship

- Tradition Attributes to John, Son of Zebedee
 - = “The Beloved Disciple”
 - 13:23 (supper); 19:26 (cross); 20:2-10 (tomb); 21:7 (Galilee)
 - 18:15? “another disciple” at house of High Priest
- A historical figure (who died: Jn 21:20-23) but with a literary function
 - The “elder” John mentioned in Eusebius, in Ephesus in early 2nd c.
- Anonymity plays a role
 - = the Reader, a character with whom to identify?
 - With Jesus “in spirit” at key moments
 - = A “hook” a reason to reread?
 - An “eyewitness” (19:35), seeking whom leads to the true Witness (18:37).

Images of the traditional Author: Donatello & Bosch



More



El Greco
(Damonikos Theotokopoulos, 1541-1614)



Date

- Probably late 1st or early 2d century: 90-110 CE
- Terminus post: Probably knows Synoptics (Matt, Mark, Luke)
 - Debated, but If so, post 90
- Terminus ante: Attestations
 - P⁵² (Jn 18:31-33; 37-38) – originally dated to 125, but possibly later: 2nd/3rd c.
 - Irenaeus (c. 180) explicitly cites the Gospel
 - Earlier writers, Ignatius (dies c. 110), Justin (140-150), reflect themes

Stages of Development

- Chap. 21, an epilogue, possibly an addition
 - Gospel ends nicely at end of ch. 20
 - “Rehabilitates” Peter
 - Explains possible death of BD
- 7:53/8:1-11, “Pericope of the Adulteress”
 - Missing in many MSS; Church Fathers note
 - 2d Century Addition
- Inner connections:
 - 7:19-24 naturally connects w 5:1-16: A source divided.
 - 10:40-42 naturally connects w 11:55: Martha, Mary, Lazarus an added layer
 - 14:31 naturally connects w 18:1: Two layers of Farewell Discourse
- How explain? Sources? Editions? Later additions?

Taken as a whole: Literary Character

- Two Distinct Parts
 - Book of “Signs”: 1-12
 - Book of “Glory”: 13-20 (21)
- Simple Prose: Sophisticated Technique
 - Dramatic Encounters
 - Lengthy Discourses
- Highly Symbolic Language
 - “Light,” “Bread of Life,” “Good Shepherd” etc.
- Drama and Irony abound
 - E.g., Nicodemus, “from above/again”; Caiaphas, “better to have one die...”
- As do Riddles
 - Accidental? From compositional stages?
 - Intentional? Designed to make readers think?

Distinctive Features

- Chronology: public ministry of 2 - 3 years
 - Passover: 2:13; 6:4; 13:1
 - Temple incident (Jn 2:13-22) early
- Christology: “High”
 - Jesus a “God Walking on earth”
 - Long discourses vs. witty parables
- Soteriology: Emphasis on Revelation
 - If not “Gnostic” why this emphasis?
- Relation to the heritage of Israel
 - A most Jewish Gospel: Festal cycle
 - Polemic against “The Jews”

The Prologue

Structure

- Vv 1-5 “Poetry” (balance, cadenced prose): Step-parallelism
- Vv 6-8 Prosaic interlude:
 - John the Baptist
- Vv 9-14 “Poetry”
- V 15 Prosaic interlude
 - John the Baptist, cf. v. 30
- VV 16-18 “Poetry”

Function

- Literary “Hypothesis”
 - The summary before the plot begins
 - Feature of ancient drama

- Shapes the reading of the narrative
 - Highlights key motifs
 - Focuses on transformative result of encounter with Jesus

Claims Laid out in Prologue

- 1:1: “in the beginning, ... Word ... God”
- 1:12: “gave power to become children of God”
- 1:14: “Word became flesh”
- 1:18: Jesus, more than Moses, “explained/exegeted” the Father

Themes: Light

- 3:19-21: Light came, but...
- 8:12: I am...
- 9:5: Healing of man born blind
- 11:9-10: Light of the day
- 12:35-36: Walk in the light
- 12:46: I have come as light

- Where's the Light after chapter 12?
 - "it was night" (13:30)

Life (Eternal) (vs. Kingdom of God)

- 3:15-16: Belief – Life eternal
- 4:14, 36: Water leading to
- 5:24-26: Resurrection on last day
- 6:35-54: Bread of Life
- 10:10: I came that they might have
- 11:25: I am Resurrection +
- 14:6: I am Way, Truth +
- 17:2: Father has given
- 20:31: Belief – Life eternal

Conflict Noted

- V 9: The world did not know him
 - Ch 15:18
- V 11: His own received him not
 - Ch 7-8
- V 17: Law through Moses ... grace and truth through Jesus Christ

Less Frequent Echoes

- Logos = Word
 - The theme absent, but the gospel is all about the “words” of Jesus
- Jesus as God: 10:30; 14:28; 20:28
- Birth from God: 3:3-6

The Word: Important Background

The Shekinah – Glorious Divine Presence

- Sinai, where the Lord's "glory" (*kavod*) settled, like "a devouring fire"
 - Exod 24:16: Moses entered the "cloud"
- The Tabernacle: a place where God will dwell (*shkn*): Exod 25:8:
 - Or where God's "name" will dwell (*shkn*): Deut 12:11
 - In John, Jesus will use a form of the Name "I am" for himself: Jn 8:58
- Targums (Aramaic translations of the OT) use the term extensively
 - Exod 25:8: "Let the Shekinah rest"
 - Targums will also use *Memra* (Word) for the same intermediary reality

Wisdom – Logos/Word

- Proverbs 8:22
- Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) 24:1-29
 - 24:8 “dwelt” = “tented” (Greek *eskenosen* = Heb *shkn*)- John 1:14.
 - 24:19-22 Satisfying food and drink
 - 24:23 = Torah
- Wisdom of Solomon 7:23-28
 - The Pneuma enters human souls, making friends of God and prophets

Philo's Logos/Word

- Jewish Philosopher of Alexandria 30 BCE-c. 45 CE
- Synthesized Jewish Wisdom, Plato, and Stoicism
- Plato: Creator (Demiurge) + Forms/Ideas
 - Philo: Forms in Mind of God
- Stoa: Pneuma: Rational (logikos) Force
 - Already in Wisdom of Solomon
 - Philo: Logos/Pneuma = God at work in world

Afterlife

- “Logos” Theologies of early Church
 - Christological tool
 - Logos “endiathetos” (Thought) = Son in God
 - Logos “prophorikos” (Speech) = Son incarnate
- Seeds of conflict: An image of change
 - Was the Logos always the same? If not, is he fully “God”?

Jesus as Word

- Agent of creation: “All came to be through him”
 - Cf. Heb 1:1-3; 1 Cor 8:6
 - Perhaps implied in “Christ hymn” of Philippians 2
- Agent of revelation: V. 18: “exegesato” = “explains” the Father
 - Is this the work of a “prophet”? Is that all Jesus is?
- Incarnate: V. 14: Is the flesh essential to the explanation?
 - If so, how?