

The Gospel of John

Week 1

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OUTLINE

Course Logistics

Introduction to John

Purpose

Authorship & Audience

Historical Matters

Prologue: John 1:1-18

The Logos

Literary Features

COURSE DESCRIPTION

John's Gospel stands out from the other three in a variety of ways: style, historical content and theological emphasis. This class will examine the figure at the center of the fourth gospel (and indeed the whole of history), Jesus of Nazareth. Alongside examining John's portrait of Jesus, we will examine questions of historicity, dating and authorship. Finally, in cases where John appears to elevate Jesus more so than the other gospels, we will examine how to recover these same theological claims from the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke).

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- ▶ **Attendance** You must attend 4 of 5 classes to receive credit.
- ▶ **Readings** There will be weekly readings to keep in step with the material being covered each week. These are strictly completion based.

COURSE OUTLINE

Date	Week	Topic	Reading
1/4	1	Introduction & Prologue	–
1/11	2	Book of Signs I	John 1-7
1/18	3	Book of Signs II	John 8-12
1/25	4	Book of Glory I	John 13-17
2/1	5	Book of Glory II & Epilogue	John 18-21

IMPORTANCE OF INTRODUCTION

We will first examine introductory matters: Purpose, its Author and Audience, its date of authorship and other historically relevant concerns.

What benefit is there in investigating any of these?

IMPORTANCE OF INTRODUCTION

What benefit is there in investigating any of these?

- ▶ **Author** Authorship is connected closely to matters of authority (Cf. *Gospel of Thomas* and other pseudepigrapha)
- ▶ **Date** Like authorship, date is important for authority. Dating and general historical circumstance is important for interpretation (Cf. different Herods)
- ▶ **Audience** heavily constrain interpretation. (E.g. II Tim 1:5—I am reminded of *your* sincere faith, which first lived in *your grandmother* Lois and in *your mother* Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in *you* also—those aren't *my* family members!)
- ▶ **Purpose**, especially when explicitly stated, constrains interpretation. Cf. Luke's prologue: With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, *so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.* (Luke 1:3-4)

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PURPOSE STATEMENT

Sometimes the purpose of a book is left implicit (Genesis, Psalms) and the reader must infer its purpose from its themes and emphasis.

Fortunately, John is explicit:

John 20:30,31—Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Compare John's statement with Luke's:

John 20:30,31—Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Luke 1:1-4—Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Compare John's statement with Luke's:

- ▶ Both of them are for the understanding (“... that you may know...” and “... that you may believe...”)
- ▶ Both invoke eyewitness notions (“in the presence of his disciples,” “eyewitnesses”)
- ▶ Luke's purpose is probably more explicitly historical (uses almost forensic expressions, “account,” “eyewitness” “careful investigation”).
- ▶ John's purpose is more explicitly theological (“Jesus is... Son of God”).

Note: History and theology are not mutually exclusive. An emphasis of one does not abrogate other. Luke contains many unique parables with substantial theological import, notably the Prodigal Son.

Likewise, John gives some of the best mileposts for chronological study, viz. Jesus' trips to Jerusalem.

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EXTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR AUTHOR

1. The Gospel of John was received as authoritative from the earliest sources (quoted authoritatively by Tatian, Claudius Apollinaris and Athenagoras; cf. Marcion and anti-montanism). This unreserved acceptance indicates apostolic authority.
2. 2nd-3rd century patristic evidence bears unanimous witness to John as the 4th Evangelist (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian).

INTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR AUTHOR

John 21:20, 24—Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, Lord, who is going to betray you?)... This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down.

This implies that the *beloved disciple* (BD) wrote the 4th Gospel. Evidence suggests that BD=John, son of Zebedee:

- ▶ The Gospels record an inner three of Jesus: Peter and the Sons of Zebedee: James and John. The place BD plays in 4th Gospel suggests that he's one of the inner three:
 - ▶ BD is at least next to Jesus during last supper (13:23-25)
 - ▶ BD is asked to take care of Mary, Jesus' mother (19:26-27)
 - ▶ BD is associated with Peter (13:24; 20:2-8; 21:20), like John (Cf. Acts 3, 4, 8)
- ▶ The above passage indicates that it's not Peter; James was martyred too early to write any Scripture.
- ▶ John, James are only directly mentioned once, only then as "Sons of Zebedee" (21:2). In other words, the name 'John' never appears.

AUDIENCE

The audience of John is not explicit, as in Luke-Acts (Theophilus) or Paul's epistles (e.g. the church at Corinth, Titus).

Here are two issues:

1. What is the racial/religious background of the recipients? Are they Jewish? Gentile? Hellenistic Jews? Ethnically Heterogeneous?
2. Are the recipients already believers or not? In other words, does the expression "that you may believe" indicate that the recipients do not yet believe?

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

1. What is the racial/religious background of the recipients? Are they Jewish? Gentile? Hellenistic Jews? Ethnically Heterogenous?

Some factors that influence the answer:

- ▶ John transliterates semitic expressions (1:38, 42; 4:25; 19:13, 17)
- ▶ John freely alludes to OT concepts (sabbath, Jacob's well, "In the beginning...") and just as freely cites the OT explicitly (12:13-15, 38-41; 19:24).
- ▶ Much has been made of John's use of 'logos' and its relationship to Hellenistic philosophy. Evidence cuts in all directions: God's word is also prominent in the OT (Cf. Psalm 119 in LXX).

This combination of elements implies that the group probably contains a number of Hellenistic Jews and/or some Gentile proselytes.

EVANGELISM OR EDIFICATION

2. Are the recipients already believers or not?

Some factors that influence the answer:

- ▶ Some have made much of the manuscript difference in the purpose statement: *pisteusēte* (in the generic future, you will believe) and *pisteuēte* (in the future, you will believe in an ongoing way). But, John uses both words to mean both conversion and continual belief.
- ▶ Compare John 20:30-31 with I John 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe . . .”

Evidence suggests that his purpose at least *includes* an evangelical element.

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LATE DATING AND AUTHENTICITY

Skeptical scholars at one point held to the following timeline:

1. The Synoptics, especially Mark, were written on the early side before legendary accretions could appear.
2. Given that John has a “high Christology” it must have been written very late (late 2nd C) enabling time for legend to appear.

Laying aside John’s unusual style, the above timeline is implausible for the following reasons:

- ▶ Any patristic evidence already cited.
- ▶ Tatian’s *Diatessaron*— 2nd Century church father included bits of John in his gospel harmony.
- ▶ The *coup de grâce* is the manuscript evidence (more next slide)

MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

The manuscript evidence completely obliterates the late date hypothesis. In chronological order:

1. John Rylands fragment (P⁵²) contains portions of John 18. Most likely oldest portion of NT, dated to c. 130. Some even use the evidence that it was in Egypt to push the date of the autograph even earlier
2. Papyrus P⁶⁶ contains John 1-14 (later second C)
3. Papyrus P⁷⁵ contains John 1-11 and parts of 12-15 (later second C)

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WHY JOHN USES 'LOGOS'

Much has made of John's use of 'logos.' Here are some possible allusions:

1. Stoics philosophers used 'logos' to mean divine reason that is both seminal in creation and active in its ongoing maintenance.
2. Philo of Alexandria, Jewish neo-Platonist, used 'logos' to denote a number of things: the mind of God, the agent of creation, the mediator between God and creation, and even primal or ideal man.
3. The Old Testament widely uses the concept of God's Word and its function in creation, revelation, judgment and deliverance.

Very likely, John had a few of these in mind; nevertheless, we are primarily obligated pay attention to how John uses the word.

Although he might be invoking certain images, he departs from the secular sources in notable ways and expands upon the Old Testament concepts.

THE LOGOS AND THE TRINITY

The opening statement proffers a rhythmic and concise statement of monotheistic trinitarianism:

- 1:1a *In the beginning was the Word*—There is an instant sense that John is drawing the reader's attention to Gen 1:1, identifying the Word as the agent of creation. If any doubt remains, John continues in v.3, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."
- 1:1b *The Word was with God*—The word is not wholly identical with God, indicating at least some diversity within the God-head. (Trinitarian)
- 1:1c *The Word was God*—Again, if any doubt remained after 1:1a, John lays it to rest (Monotheism)

There is unity and diversity within the God-head which is a uniquely Christian concept.

THE LOGOS AND THE TRINITY

In line with the *logos* imagery, scholars have drawn out an analogy as follows—

Jesus : God-head : : Word (orthographic/phonetic particular) : Concept

The same way that words convey “hidden” ideas, a central function of the Logos is to reveal God’s nature and function as His agent within His creation.

Within the Prologue, we find this support:

- 1:3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.
- 1:18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

THE LOGOS AND THE TRINITY

Here are some parallel passages:

- ▶ Hebrews 1:1-3a—God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation [*charaktēr*] of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.
- ▶ Colossians 1:15-17—He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.
- ▶ I Corinthians 8:6—yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

What can we infer about our relationship with God from this teaching about the logos?

THE LOGOS AND THE TRINITY

What can we infer about our relationship with God from this?

1. If Christ's main mission was to reconciliation, then that suggests that love and reconciliation is at the core of God's values
2. God wants to be known.
3. God is willing to endure the *human* experience (1:14—*the Word became flesh*) in life, death and in receiving our due judgment
4. Jesus' life (and death) exhibit both God's love and God's commitment to His own righteousness and justice:
 - ▶ Jesus condemns Pharisees and accepts moral reprobates
 - ▶ Jesus' moral demands are scandalously high.
5. (More abstract) Jesus is the End of revelation he is the fullest and last Word from God.
 - ▶ All there was to learn before is summed up in Christ (1:17—*the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Christ.*)
 - ▶ There is nothing new to learn (Cf. Koran, Book of Mormon).
 - ▶ Warning: Barth and Neo-orthodoxy

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CONCENTRIC FORMAT

John's prologue exhibits a concentric format, sometimes referred to as a chiasm (shaped like the greek letter χ).

	John 1	Topic/Theme
A	1-5	The Word as God's Revelation
B	6-8	John the Baptist (Ministry)
C	9-11	The Word in the World
X	12-13	Believe+Receive=Become
C'	14	The Word in the World
B'	15	John the Baptist (Testimony)
A'	16-18	The Word as God's Revelation

Most notably, chiasms are constructed to draw one's eyes towards the center statement: how to become a child of God!

JOHANNINE THEMES IN PROLOGUE

Topic	Prologue	Gospel
Pre-existence of Logos/Son	1:1-2	17:5
In Him was life	1:4	5:26
Life was light	1:4	8:12
Light rejected by darkness	1:5	3:19
Light not quenched by darkness	1:5	12:35
Light coming into the world	1:9	3:19; 12:46
Christ not received by his own	1:11	4:44
Being born to God and not of flesh	1:13	3:6; 8:41-42
Seeing his glory	1:14	12:41
“One and only son” <i>monogenes</i>	1:14,18	3:16
Truth in Jesus Christ	1:17	14:6
No one has seen God except...	1:18	6:46

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