



Overview and Introduction

Clement of Rome called this missive a spiritual Gospel while others refer to it as a Theological Gospel. From this gospel emerges fundamental Christian Theology, especially the formation of the Trinity and Christological issues that produced the first great councils of the church [Nicea (325 A.D.) and Chalcedon (451 A.D.)]. The Gospel of John has more commentaries written on it than any other book of scripture. The Fourth Gospel brings the reader to a point of decision. The point of view leads to the purpose. The outcome: love wins, through sacrifice.

Written By?

Either John the beloved disciple or John bar Zebedee. These two figures have been blurred in retrospect and it is unclear which may have been the major influence. It is generally considered that the authorship was by a Community (most likely Essenes at Qumron) of John's followers and that much may have been dictated to them and placed in the gospel. It is well written so it is supposed that a fisherman could not have done it alone.

Written When?

The gospel was fairly well set by the turn of the century. It is generally understood that it is post-fall of the Temple in 70 A.D. and represents the views of the followers who were excommunicated from the synagogue. There are certainly references to things that happened well before the fall of the Temple, especially in Jesus' lifetime.

Written Where?

Although it could be attributed to the Essenes at Qumran, it is also possible that it emanated from Ephesus, and perhaps immigrated to Qumran.

Written To Whom?

It was written to an emerging Christian community and to non-Christians.

In What Language?

Koine, Greek

Purpose? The emphatic sole purpose of this Gospel was to prove conclusively that the son of God was sent by God to an earthly existence to usher in the Kingdom of God. That belief in Him is all that is necessary to have eternal life. Through his once and for all time expiation of sins, we could die sin-free and pass to eternity with the Holy Trinity.

Major Theme

This Gospel tells a familiar story in a new way. The author presumes that the reader or listener knows the basic story of Jesus of Nazareth. The author writes from an objective position, not as a part of the narrative.

Structure/Organization

The document can be divided into four major component areas:

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|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. The Prologue | 1:1-1:18 |
| 2. Public Ministry | 1:19-4:54 |
| 3. Object of persecution and unbelief | 5-12 |
| 4. The upper room | 13-17 |
| 5. Death, resurrection | 18-20 |
| 6. Conclusion and Epilogue | 21 |

Major Concerns

Engendering faith and discrediting the Temple-centered religious hierarchy.

Faith was engendered by presenting Jesus as “the only begotten son of God”, “King of Israel” “Holy one of God” “I am”. Jesus is also portrayed as basic elements of life on the favorable side of the dualism that arose during this time.

Jesus is depicted as the replacement of the Temple and Passover.

The incarnation, the “fleshy” Jesus is sent from God.

Jesus lacks the pedigree of the religious elite and provokes their wrath.

“The Jews”--not a derogatory or anti-Semitic term (see below)--were discredited as an obstacle to faith in Jesus, as haughty and condescending to the people, and were more concerned with worldly acclaim than divine favor.

Historical Perspective

Written during a time of conflict between the Jewish people and the other emerging sects of Christianity post-70 A.D., this Gospel sparks controversy and criticism.

The Christians were a group of like-minded believers who were expelled from the synagogue and forced to choose how and when to worship. Second century divisions saw Gnostics, Messianic Jews, Christians, and Essenes all battling to speak the Truth.

Key People

Jesus, John the Baptist, the disciples, Martha, Mary, Lazarus, Mother Mary and Mary Magdalene.

Key Places

Judean countryside, Samaria, Galilee, Bethany, and Jerusalem

Synoptics vs John

- The gospel of John offers a good chronology, whereas the Synoptic Gospels didn't try to follow a specific timeline except for the Passion.
- Brings the reader closer to the reality of the substance of what happened or was said.
- Divergences between Mark and John can be explained by the brevity of Mark.
- The reader of the Gospel of John is warned to be aware of Jesus' audience, i.e. the multitudes vs Sanhedrin vs the disciples.
- The living society—the church—was the primary witness to the world.
- Jesus speaks of temporal events rather than an eternal reality.

Common language/metaphors

bread, wine, water, light, life, word, shepherd, door, and way

Miracles

- There are eight miracles recorded, 6 are unique to John. 90% of John is unique material whereas the other Gospels build off and directly quote each other.
- There are no genealogy, childhood events, Temple actions, Transfiguration, calling of the disciples, parables, Ascension, or Great Commission.

Other Scriptures attributed to "John"

The Gospel of John, 3 letters of John and the book of Revelation to John

Anti-Semitism

Jesus refers to "The Jews" 21 times in 67 verses for a total of 71 occurrences. Generally these references are ethnically neutral and merely descriptive. Generally the reference is to the religious authorities in the Temple cult. They can also refer to those who magnify the Law.

To consider:

- Judeans—regional reference
- Sadducees—a Temple based authority that disappears after 70 A.D.
- Zealots and Saccarii—nationalists who oppose Roman occupation and favor civil war.
- Essenes—reformists ascetics residing at Qumran
- Pharisees—Torah-based teacher of the law whose power comes from being able to interpret the law. These men were best situated to take leadership of the religious Jews.

Anti-Semitism manifests in our placing our understanding of “the Jews” out of context with the time in which Jesus lived. It is an Easter vs Passover situation. (Easter leads to blame and Passover is marginalized.)

- The dualism of the time:

Grace

Light

Truth

Life

Above

Law

Dark

Falsehood

Death

Below

- This Gospel likens Jesus to Old Testament figures: Moses, Jacob, Abraham, and Sophia (wisdom)

Bibliography

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