

The Gospel of John

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The Good News According to John differs from the Synoptics (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) in style and content in several ways. John omits a large amount of material found in the Synoptic Gospels, like the temptation of Jesus, Jesus' transfiguration, and the institution of the Lord's Supper. The sermon on the mount and the Lord's prayer are also not found in John.

Symbolism in John is very important. We do not see proverbs and parables, as in the Synoptics, but symbolic discourses. Jesus' miracles, as reported in John, are designed to provide symbolic insight into Jesus' identity and his relationship to the Father. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is clearly the Wisdom of God, the source of eternal life, and still continually living within the community of faith.

Jesus speaks metaphorically throughout the Gospel of John to illustrate spiritual realities. Metaphors are found in nearly every chapter of the Gospel of John, that can at first confuse readers who interpret them literally, such as in the "Bread of Life" discourse in John 6, which we will look at in a few minutes.

Scholars like PHEME PERKINS (born 1945), professor of theology at Boston College, and a nationally recognized expert on the Greco-Roman cultural setting of early Christianity, emphasize that the author of the Gospel of John presumed that much of the narrative about Jesus and its people and places was already well known to John's audience. They would have been familiar with the various titles for Jesus, with Baptism, Eucharist, and the Spirit. They were already Christians, entering the second century of Christian life and experience.

The Gospel of John then is a call to the followers of the Risen Lord to re-examine their lives. That challenge of course rings true today, for all of us.

Jesus' public ministry, in John, appears to extend over a period of at least three years. During that time, he went, several times, from Galilee to Jerusalem. The Synoptics, on the other hand, have Jesus making only one journey to Jerusalem: the final one. And most of his public ministry took place within just one year.

The author of John uses a "post-resurrection" point of view, looking back on the Jesus events and emphasizing the inability of the apostles to understand what was happening at the time the events occurred. See for instance John 12:12-16: "The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So, they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!' And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion. Behold your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!' His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him."

The Gospel of John opens with a profound prologue, John 1:1-18, stating, "In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*)" which is reminiscent of Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The prologue was most likely an elaboration of an early Christian hymn. In the prologue, Jesus is identified as the Greek word *Logos*, a complex Greek term meaning "word," "reason," or "principle," which often represents divine wisdom, as the organizing principle behind creation. Many scholars suggest that the prologue was added after the Gospel of John had been completed.

Who wrote the Gospel of John? The old understanding, from the second century, was that the author was John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, a prosperous Galilean fisherman. Most contemporary scholars are not of this opinion.

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