

Gospel of John



Authorship

- The early church father, Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp (who was himself a disciple of the apostle John) testifies on the authority of Polycarp that the apostle John was the writer of the fourth Gospel.
- Subsequent to Irenaeus, all the church fathers assume the apostle John to be the author (e.g., Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, etc.).
- The author claims to be an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry (1:14; cf., 19:35; 21:24,25), and exhibits an accurate understanding of Jewish customs. John was also identified as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:2; cf., 21:7), and this reference to him is further linked to 21:24 where John is identified as the "disciple who wrote these things."

Date

- Circa. A.D. 85-100
- The Gospel had to have been written after the life of Christ (A.D. .33) And before the earliest known papyrus fragment, p⁵² (ca. A.D. 125 – otherwise known as the Rylands Papyrus, which has a fragment from John 18:31-33 on front and verses 37-38 on the back).
- According to Irenaeus, John lived in Ephesus into the reign of Trajan (A.D. 98-117). Combined with the use of John's Gospel by Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 110), John likely wrote before A.D. 110.

Place of Composition

- Irenaeus wrote that John composed His "while residing at Ephesus in Asia."
- It is interesting that one of John's other writings, Revelation, has him addressing 7 churches in Asia, the first being Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7; 1:9-11).

Purpose

- The purpose of John's Gospel is explicitly stated in 20:30-31:

³⁰ Jesus' disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book.

³¹ But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life.

Purpose

- The purpose of John's Gospel is explicitly stated in 20:30-31:
- The primary purpose is evangelistic - to bring people to faith in Jesus
- John uses "believe" some 98 times compared with Matthew (11), Mark (15), and Luke (9).

Basic Literary Structure of Book

| | |
|---|------------|
| Prologue | 1:1-18 |
| John's witness to Jesus and the first disciples | 1:19-51 |
| The "Book of Signs" | 2:1-12:50 |
| The "Book of Glory" | 13:1-20:31 |
| Epilogue | 21:1-25 |

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- Carson introduces the Prologue as the “foyer” that one enters to the rest of the Gospel (pg. 111).
- Opinion differs on the function of the prologue. Some see it as the opening introduction of the Gospel, while others treat it as a hymn or a type of overture to Christ.
- However one views it – it is an intrinsic part of the Gospel because of the way it introduces all the key themes that unfold throughout the Book

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

Key Themes

- The pre-existence of the Word (1:1-2; see also 17:5)
- God/Word and Father/Son as distinctive but, at the same time, one (1:1; see also 17:21-22)
- Jesus as God (1:1, 18; see also 20:28)
- Life (1:4; see also 3:16; 5:21-39; 6:40; etc.)
- Light (1:4; 1:9; see also 8:12; 9:5)
- The struggle between light and darkness (1:5; see also 3:19-21)

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

Key Themes

- The power of the light over darkness (1:5; see also 12:35)
- The relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist (1:6-8; 1:15; see also 1:19-34)
- Rejection (1:11; see also 4:44)
- The miracle of our being able to see God's glory (1:14; see also 12:41)
- Jesus as the only Son of God (1:18; see also 3:16)

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

Carson on page 111 of his commentary writes this about the Prologue:

"But supremely, the Prologue summarizes how the 'Word' that was with God in the very beginning came into the sphere of time, history, tangibility -- in other words, how the Son of God was sent into the world to become the Jesus of history, so that the glory and grace of God might be uniquely and perfectly disclosed. The rest of the book is nothing other than an expansion of this theme" (Carson, 111).

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- It's interesting that the Prologue seems to be a clue to John's style of writing – introducing the major themes at the beginning then expanding on it later in the Book – This can be seen somewhat in 1 John as well as Revelation – the 7 letters to the churches are expanded upon further in the Book – for instance, all the promises to those who persevere are raised again later in the Book

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- The Prologue closely parallels the great hymn of Philippians 2:5-11, and also has much in common with Colossians 1:15-20 and the first chapter of Hebrews. These were written earlier than the Gospel of John, so this Prologue compliments the NT witness of Jesus.
- Use of “In the beginning” to open the Gospel mimics the creation account of Genesis 1:1.
- The Jewish people know the books of their scriptures by their first words -- in the same way that we know hymns by their first lines. "In the beginning" (Beresheeth) is their title for the book that we call Genesis. In the Greek Septuagint (LXX), the first words of Genesis are en arche. This Gospel begins with those exact words by design, because the Prologue models itself after the creation account:

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- Both Genesis and this Prologue are accounts of creation at God's word.
- Both present the dualism of darkness and light coming into being at the word of God to penetrate and to overcome the darkness.
- Both speak of life.
- In Genesis, God speaks, and that word brings man to life; in the Prologue, the Word of God brings eternal life to humanity.

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

Each of the four Gospels traces Jesus back to a particular beginning:

- Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy to Abraham. Matthew 1:1 - A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: - then it continues from Abraham onward
- Mark begins his Gospel by saying, Mark 1:1 - The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" – in reference to John the Baptist
- Luke begins with the word of the angel to Zechariah announcing the coming birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-24) and the announcement to Mary of Jesus' coming birth (Luke 1:26-38).

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

Each of the four Gospels traces Jesus back to a particular beginning:

- The Gospel of John traces the Word back to the very beginning -- before time -- before the creation of the world. The Word is not part of the creation -- was not created -- but stood with God before the creation. This is important, because it is contrary to the prevailing Jewish thought of God working alone in creation.

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- “Word.” (Greek LOGOS) Its roots can be found in both Greek philosophy and Jewish wisdom literature.
- It was used widely in 1st century Greek
- To the Stoic Greeks they understood logos as the principle by which everything exists – to them, no other God existed without logos
- Some think that John borrowed from Philo who was influenced by Plato
- In Philo’s world, logos stood for the dualism of the ideal world against the real world, which was its copy.
- It could even mean “speech” or simply “message”

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- To the Jewish mind its primary allusion is from the OT
- In the OT the *dabar* (Word) was connected to God's powerful activity in creation
 - His revelation
 - His deliverance
 - The heavens were made by it
 - He would heal by it
- It was closely related to the concept of wisdom (Greek – *Sophia*)

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- Verses 4-5 introduce the themes of life and light shining in the darkness -- important themes in the Gen. 1 creation story -- and important throughout this Gospel. More than one-quarter of all the references to life in the NT are found in this Gospel, and usually refer to eternal life (Morris, 73) (see 3:15-16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:21-29, 39-40; 6:47, 51-54, 63, 68; 8:12; 10:1-28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2; 20:31). The life that Jesus offers is more than mere physical existence -- it is life in relationship with God.

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- “Life” – used some 36 times in John.
- “Light” – a prominent metaphor for Christ and the Gospel – used 23 times in John.
- The light in the creation story was the first step in bringing order to the formless void, and the light brought by the Word is the first step toward bringing order into the chaos of our lives.

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- John the Baptist renewed the prophetic tradition after four hundred prophet-less years. Because his ministry was so powerful, some people thought of him as the Messiah. This Gospel makes a number of references to John -- always clearly establishing that he was subordinate to Jesus. He was not the light but came to bear witness to the light (vv. 7-8).
- The other Gospels call him John the Baptist to distinguish him from John, the son of Zebedee, but this Gospel refers to him only as John -- and makes no mention of John, the son of Zebedee. The traditional explanation is that John, the son of Zebedee is the author of this Gospel and prefers not to mention himself by name (Carson, 120).

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- John's purpose was to bear testimony to the light -- to serve as a witness to the light (v. 7).
- The Greek word for witnessing -- *marturi*, a -- is the word from which we get the word martyr.
- To witness for Christ often provokes the forces of darkness to violence, and Christian witnesses often become martyrs -- a reality as true today in many parts of the world as it ever was in the Roman world. John died as a martyr because of his testimony regarding Herod's marriage (Mark 6:14-29).

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- “Darkness” – one of John’s main contrastive terms – over and against “life” and “light.” It serves as a metaphor for the state of mankind who fail to welcome the light.
- The promise is that the darkness did not -- and will not -- overcome the light. "Because, says the NT, this fight is not our fight, but God's; and he is in it with us...."
- "The true light...was coming into the world (*kosmos*)" (v. 9). This is quite a statement, because the *kosmos*, in this Gospel, is a world in rebellion against God -- a dark world.

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (v. 11). "We might translate (these) words, 'he came home.' ...The Word did not go where he could not have expected to be known. He came home, where the people should have known him.
- In this Gospel, Jesus is the Son (huios) of God -- and is the only one who is called huios. This Son is empowered to bring those who receive him and believe in his name into the family of God as children (tekna) of God -- adopted into the family, but full heirs -- entitled to all the rights and privileges of family members.

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- Brown writes that: "Verses 11 and 12 seem to be a summary of the two main divisions of John. Verse 11 covers the Book of Signs (Chs. i-xii), which tells how Jesus came to his own land...and yet his own people did not receive him. Verse 12 covers the Book of Glory (Chs. xiii-xx), which contains Jesus' words to those who did receive him and tells how he returned to his Father in order to give them the gift of life and make them God's children" (Brown, 19).

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- “Believe” – the verb is used some 98 times in John.
- "And the Word became flesh (sarx)" (v. 14a). This is a startling statement -- expressed in bold, nearly vulgar, language. Sarx is an ugly-sounding word that depicts an often ugly reality
- The Word becoming flesh is the zenith of God's revelation. God, who spoke earlier through the prophets, now speaks through his son (Heb. 1:1-2).

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- This word, *eskenosen*, "tabernacled," is quite familiar to Jewish readers. During their wanderings in the wilderness, God commanded the Israelites to build the tabernacle -- an elaborate and beautiful tent that served as the symbol of God's presence in their midst (Exod. 25-27) -- and the precursor of the Jerusalem temple. Verse 14 declares that the God who once dwelled among them in the tabernacle and the temple now chooses to dwell among them in Jesus' *sarx*. At 2:19-22, Jesus makes it clear that his *sarx* supersedes the tabernacle and temple.

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- Jesus enjoyed glory with the Father from the beginning, even before the creation (17:5). His works on earth reveal the glory of the Father and the Son (2:11; 11:4, 40). He will speak of his death as his glorification (12:23; see also 7:39; 13:31; 14:13; 17:4, 10).
- “Grace and truth” Hebrew background – see Psalm 26:3, often translated as “unfailing love and faithfulness.”
- "The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (v. 17). This is the first mention in the Prologue of Jesus' name. Until now, the identity of the Word has been a mystery.

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

- "Verse 17 does not disparage the previous gift, but points to the gift now available through Jesus Christ as something new" (O'Day, 523).
- John's "entire Gospel is in a sense an elaboration upon 1:18: 'No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known' " (Craddock, 43). "We might use an English word derived from the Greek verb and say that the Son is the 'exegete' of the Father" (Bruce, 45).
- Verse 1 declared that the Word was God, and v. 18 declares that the Son is God, thus forming an inclusio that brackets the Prologue, marking its beginning and its ending.

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

Explanatory note

- At the conclusion of each lecture there are two areas that will be highlighted – they serve as ‘section summaries’ as we go through the various lectures
- The first - Relationship to the Old Testament – John often borrows or uses Old Testament concepts etc. as backdrops for his Gospel

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

Explanatory note

- The second - Contemporary Application – Because of the evangelistic thrust of the Gospel we need to be aware of the present application of the text
- I argue that John's Gospel is probably more culturally relevant to North American society than maybe any other time in our history
- John spoke into a highly pluralistic society – especially in terms of religion. In John's time there was...
 1. Everything from emperor worship, to Greek and Roman cults, as well as a plethora of others

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

Explanatory note

2. Also, the pluralism of society – a great deal of moral vacuum where there are a whole host of philosophies that are vying for supremacy. For instance – low morality was something that sprang from idolatry, because of slavery, it gave license to cruelty and sexual sin
3. If you were to study Greek culture at this time they had an obsessive preoccupation with sex – a large catalog of words for sex - very similar to today
4. Homosexuality was common in Greek society and prostitution was often associated with religious fertility cults

Lecture 1 – Prologue 1:1-18

Explanatory note

5. In Corinth there were 1000 “sacred prostitutes” at the Temple of Aphrodite”
 6. And much of this was mimicked in Roman society – especially among the higher classes
- The point being that John is just as relevant in its evangelistic purpose – maybe more – to our world today, because our present North American society mimics what John spoke into – in terms of the religious climate and the social/cultural climate.