

Background on the Gospel According to John

This account of the gospel is believed by modern scholars to have been written by the apostle John. While John assumes knowledge of basic Jewish concepts on the part of the reader, some Hebrew words and nevertheless translated into Greek (e.g. Cephase, Messiah, etc.) and the writing employs symbolism and abstraction which crease a Hellenistic style, so a dual audience is anticipated. The purpose of this book is stated by the author to be evangelism. The gospel according to John is unusual not only in its style, but also in its lack of parables which were, according to the synoptics, Jesus' preferred tool for teaching.

Background on John 1:19-51

Outline

1) Prologue hymn (1-18)

John begins with a three-stanza poem thought to be the words to an ancient Christian hymn. The first stanza related the Word to God, the second to the creation, and the third to the world. Like Hebrews, this book begins by establishing Jesus' attributes and credentials. This poem deliberately parallels the initial wording, the creation, and the light/dark dichotomy of Genesis.

2) John the Baptist (19-34)

- a) A delegation from the Sanhedrin interviewed JtB.
- b) He denied being the Christ, the Prophet or Elijah.
- c) He said instead that he is Isaiah's voice crying in the wilderness (Is 40:3).
- d) He is self-consciously the forerunner of someone great.
- e) John dubs Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Is 53:7).
- f) John Baptizes with water in order that Jesus might be revealed to Israel.
- g) John receives word from God that the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit is the one upon whom the Spirit will rest.
- h) John declares as a result that Jesus is the Son of God.

3) Calling of the first disciples (35-51)

- a) Andrew and Simon
 - i) Two of JtB's disciples (Andrew, Simon Peter's brother) swap allegiance and follow Jesus.
 - ii) Andrew understood JtB to be announcing the Christ, so he found his brother Peter and told him.
 - iii) Jesus renames Simon, Andrew's brother, Peter (Cephas).
- b) Philip and Nathaniel
 - i) Jesus personally calls Philip to follow him.
 - ii) Philip went and told Nathaniel that he had found
 - (1) The one Moses wrote about,
 - (2) The one the prophets foretold.
 - iii) Nate expressed doubt that the Messiah would come from Nazareth.
 - iv) Philip took Nate to see Jesus.
 - v) Jesus says Nate is a true Israelite, and that he saw him sitting under the fig tree.
 - vi) Nate declares him the son of God.

4) Notes on John

- a) John differs from the synoptics in
 - i) Style
 - (1) John uses a very small vocabulary, augmenting it with repetition.
 - (2) Nevertheless, John uses these words very expressively.
 - ii) Content

- (1) John records many discourses on various themes.
 - (a) These include interruptions by the hearers, which doesn't occur in the synoptics.
- (2) John's chronology differs from that of the synoptics.
 - (a) For instance, he records three Passovers, where the synoptics mention only one.
 - (b) Clearly John's focus is primarily theological.
 - (i) For example, in the first chapter alone John refers to Jesus with seven illustrative titles:
 1. The Word (of God) [Jesus as God's message to the world]
 2. the Lamb of God [Jesus as God's sacrifice for the world]
 3. Rabbi [Jesus as teacher]
 4. Christ [Messiah]
 5. the King of Israel [sovereign]
 6. the Son of God [son of God]
 7. the Son of Man [mortal]
 - (ii) In the synoptics these titles are accorded to Jesus throughout and even after his ministry.
 - (c) On the other hand, he records some historical accounts, e.g. the recruitment of the first disciples in the first chapter.
 - (i) As a result, scholars see John as preserving some historical information not found in the synoptics.
- iii) Theological emphasis
 - (1) Rather than beginning with Jesus' genealogy as the synoptics do, John initially focuses on Jesus' transcendent nature.
 - (2) "...John represents the mission of Jesus as the climax of God's self revelation, bringing to believers that light which consists of the highest truth and that life which consists of spiritual union with God." (Bruce Metzger)
 - (3) The person of Jesus is emphasized in John – e.g. Jesus revelation of himself as the bread of life, resurrection and the life, light of the world, one with the Father, etc.

Notes

- Nate believes because he sees a miracle. Philip because he is personally called.
- God called upon his people to annually repeat his laws in the context of his freeing them from Egypt. Why? Each of us was brought out of captivity to sin when we repented and chose to follow Christ (and were chosen by him). What do you find encouraging about the story of your deliverance? Many of us were raised in the church and don't have a conversion story per se. Consider on the one hand an Israelite raised in the promised land repeating the Exodus story, and on the other hand someone raised in the church remembering his or her youth; how are these two similar?
- Why didn't JtB follow Jesus?
- John the Baptist refers to himself as the voice crying in the wilderness. This is a reference to Isaiah's prophecy of the return from Babylonian captivity.
- Jesus renames Simon as Peter. Why just Simon? Who else gets renamed? Abram/Abraham, Sarai/Sarah, Saul/Paul, Jacob/Israel. What does renaming signify? Why don't the other apostles get renamed? Naming or calling accompanies creation – as in the naming of the creation in Genesis.
- The beginning of John describes seven days. This too parallels Genesis.