

Introduction to John

Lecture by Steve Gregg

I. The Traditional Approach to Authorship, Date and Reliability of John

A. Authorship: The witness of the Apostle John; final form may show the hand of others

1. An eye-witness, equated with “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (19:26-27)
2. Present at the Last Supper (13:23/Mark 14:17), at the empty tomb (20:2-10), and at the lake (21:2).
3. John is not named in the Gospel, though Peter, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, Thomas, Judas Iscariot, Judas (not Iscariot), are. There is reference to “the sons of Zebedee,” but the author cannot have been James, who was dead before the Gospel was written.
4. Author closely associated with Peter (13:24/ 20:2-10/ 21:7, 20)
5. All church tradition from 2nd century identifies him with John, son of Zebedee

B. Date: Probably AD 80s or 90s (possibly later than Revelation)

C. Reliability: The reliability of eye-witness testimony

1. Graphic characterizations—Nicodemus, Samaritan woman, blind man, Mary and Martha, Thomas, Philip, Andrew, Nathanael and Mary Magdalene.
2. Memory of trivial details: six water pots and their capacities (2:6); barley loaves (6:9); three or four miles (6:19); the smell of the ointment (12:3); four soldiers (19:23); the weight of the myrrh and aloes (19:39).
3. Knowledge of Palestinian geography: Two Bethanys (1:28/12:1); location of Samaritan worship (4:20); Sychar near Shechem (4:5); the Sheep Gate, Pool of Bethesda and five covered colonnades (5:2); the Pool of Siloam (9:7); Solomon’s Porch (10:23); the Brook Kidron (18:1); the Pavement Gabbatha (19:13); Golgotha like a skull (19:17).

II. The liberal approach to authorship, date, accuracy

A. Authorship: Not a first-century Christian; composition of church of a later generation

1. John was not literate enough to write it;
2. A Galilean would not be familiar with Jerusalem;
3. A fisherman would not know the family of the High Priest (18:15-16)

4. Would John speak of himself as the one “whom Jesus loved”?

B. Date: Second century

C. Reliability: Little connection with historical events; mostly theological discourse

1. Different from the Synoptics: No birth narratives; no temptation story; no exorcisms; no parables; no Olivet Discourse, no Last Supper; no ascension. Different venue of ministry; different style of discourse. Different timing for cleansing temple, and for crucifixion.
2. Speaking style and characteristic vocabulary, even when Jesus is speaking, is similar to that of the three epistles.
3. The thought is Hellenistic, not Jewish

BUT...

1. The Gospel deliberately supplements the Synoptics, without duplicating them
2. Perhaps John rephrased Jesus’ discourses in his own literary style, though such style was not unknown to Jesus’ sayings in the Synoptics (Matt.11:25-27)
3. The same “Hellenistic” features (the light/darkness, life/death dualism) have now been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Israel Abrahams (reader in rabbinics, Cambridge University), an Orthodox Jew, said, “The fourth Gospel is the most Jewish of the four.” This assessment is based on the following:
 - a) allusions to the Old Testament (3:14; ch.10)
 - b) intimate knowledge of festivals and symbolism (ch.7; 10:22-39)
 - c) Jesus use of rabbinic-style arguments (e.g., 5:31-47)

III. The Distinctive features of the Gospel of John

- A. Supplies otherwise unknown activities of the first year of ministry
- B. Upper Room Discourse
- C. A “spiritual gospel” (said Clement of Alexandria)
- D. Emphasis on the deity of Christ
- E. Jesus speaks much about Himself
- F. Longer discourses—fewer miracles
- G. Seven Signs
 1. Water to wine (ch.2)
 2. Nobleman’s son (ch.4)

3. Impotent man at pool (ch.5)
4. Feeding the five-thousand (ch.6)
5. Walking on water (ch.6)
6. Man born blind (ch.9)
7. Lazarus (ch.11)

H. Seven “I AM...” sayings:

1. The Bread of Life (6:48)
2. The Light of the World (8:12)
3. The Door of the Sheepfold (10:9)
4. The Good Shepherd (10:11)
5. The Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
6. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6)
7. The True Vine (15:1)

I. Relation of the signs and the discourses:

Miracle	“I am” saying:
Turning water to wine	“I am the True Vine”
The nobleman’s son	“I am the Good Shepherd”???
The impotent man at the “Sheep Gate” pool	“I am the Door of the Sheepfold”???
The feeding of 5000	“I am the Bread of Life”
Walking upon the water	“I am the Way...”
The man born blind	“I am the Light of the World”
The raising of Lazarus	“I am the Resurrection and the Life”

IV. Purpose of writing

- A. To inspire belief and lead to eternal life (20:30-31)
- B. To document events and sayings neglected by the other gospels?
- C. To counter a “John the Baptist” cult? (see 1:6-8, 15; 3:27-30)
- D. To refute Cerenthus?
- E. To adapt the gospel to Greeks?