

The Johannine Writings

The 4th Gospel

The 3 letters of John

© the Community of the Beloved Disciple

Intro

- Early church communities / relation to Judaism
- Who wrote the Johannine writings?
- Background of the Johannine community
- Other characteristics of their writings
- The plot of the 4th Gospel & the 3 letters
- The real “Spirit of Truth”
- Moral of the story

Detecting early churches & their relation to Judaism

- NT = 4 Gospels+Acts+letters (mostly Pauline)
- Col/Eph: Christ's Body; peaceful: "Jew & Gentile reconciled in one body to the cross" (Eph 2:11-22)
- 1P: People of God; Jewish Exodus applied to Gentile converts (former servitude, blood of a lamb, wandering towards promised inheritance, royal priesthood)
- MT: conservative Judaism, but Christ the authority. "You have heard... but I say..."; every iota of the Law; James even moreso.
- LK/Acts: Jews refuse while Gentiles accept Jesus: salvation is theirs
- JN/ I,II,III Jn: relationship with Christ: but Jews? A whole other religion! They're even the enemy! Their father is the devil!

Who wrote the Johannine Writings?

- Scholars give different answers:
- John the Apostle
- A disciple of John's
- A "disciple whom Jesus loved" alongside, but not one of, the 12
- A disciple of the disciple whom Jesus loved
- Either way, consensus: separate redactor
- What matters: a unique source!

Background of the community of the Disciple whom Jesus loved

- It's the 90s. Jews accepting Christ are kicked out of synagogues, so now there's enmity, and this influences the wording. Jews are "the enemy".
- High Christology (divinity of Jesus with his humanity)
- Most Trinitarian - shows the roles of the 3 - Father, Son, and Spirit - testifying to each other (St. Augustine's "Eagle")
- Secessionists - overemphasize Jesus' divinity, minimizing his humanity (possibly influencing later Gnostics?)
- Same Gospel, different interpretations

Other characteristics of the writings

- Mission Control: The hour. He lays down his life and commends his spirit. “It is finished”.
- Sacramental foundations: Baptism & Eucharist; “best wine”, “born of water and Spirit”, “unless you eat the flesh...”
- Mary from Cana to the Cross; becomes Mother of the Disciple Whom Jesus Loves (... new Eve?)
- Emphasis Peter: triple affirmation to correct denials
- Personal relationship with Christ
- Petrine, Trinitarian, Marian... but not vegetarian*; “Bread of Life”: the wheat becomes the meat* (both putrid jokes copyright Joe Tunon 2016)

Literary & Plot Devices of the 4th Gospel

- Central theme: Word coming down, being glorified at his “Hour”, then returning to the Father || OT Wisdom at creation; Word not returning until it accomplishes its purpose
- Opposing themes: truth/falsehood; darkness/light; those accepting him/those not
- Some reject; to those who accept: discourses
- 2/29 miracles of the Synoptics + a few new, like Cana, healing blind man from birth, raising of Lazarus
- “Many more... but these were written...”

Structure & Story behind the 3 letters of John

- I: overall address - themes of the 4th Gospel + criteria for orthodoxy: (1) commandments (2) love of brother (3) Word made flesh
- II, III: letters addressing communities with secessionists with lopsided Christology; now these are the enemies, or “the Jews”; “anti-christs”
- don’t accept missionaries or “teachers” just in case; but then appeals: “Now they’re denying *us!* (Diotrophes)
- Who’s the real anti-christ? John’s answer: “Test the spirits”

The Stamp of Truth

- The 3 criteria; need to keep *Koinonia* with the Apostles, so:
- Remember the Rock! “Feed my lambs...” “Peter and the Twelve”; Peter sees the empty tomb first
- My own personal stamp / criteria:
 - (1) destructive/constructive (greater good?)
 - (2) inner peace / anxiety? (Nothing can separate us from the Love of Christ)
 - (3) making my own rules? / remember the Rock!

On Eagles Wings

*You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord, who abide in his shadow for life
Say to the Lord, "My refuge, my rock in whom I trust."*

***And he will raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn
Make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of his hand.***

*The snare of the fowler will never capture you, and famine will bring you no fear.
Under his wings your refuge, his faithfulness your shield.*

*You need not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day,
Though thousands fall about you, near to you it shall not come*

*For to his angels he's given a command, to guard you in all of your ways
Upon their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone*

...and hold you, hold you in the palm of his hand.