

# Introduction to the Gospel of John

# Purpose

- What was the purpose of 1<sup>st</sup> John?
  - Written to those who believe that they might know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13)
- What is the purpose of John's Gospel (and where do we find it)?
  - John 20:31
  - Believe that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah)
  - Believe that Jesus is the son of God
  - Have life in his name
- What blessing does John record that Jesus gives just before John's thesis statement?
  - Blessed are those who believe having not seen

# John the son of Zebedee: Internal Evidence

- The gospel (like the other three) is anonymous
  - Why do we attribute the gospel to John?
- The author was a Jew
  - The work shows great familiarity with many aspects of Palestinian Jewish life:
    - Jewish customs, religious traditions, and legal regulations
    - Sects of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism
    - Geography of Judea and Jerusalem
- The “disciple whom Jesus loved” is said to be an eyewitness and the writer of these things (21:24)
  - It could be that he is the main source for the material or wrote a work off of which the gospel is based
  - But the most natural reading is that this is the author’s self-identification

# John the son of Zebedee: Internal Evidence

- Who is the beloved disciple?
  - Likely one of the twelve, given his presence at the last supper (13:23)
  - Three apostles are frequently marked out in Jesus' ministry:
    - Peter, James, and John
  - Peter is said to appear with this disciple (20:2), so it cannot be Peter
  - James was martyred very early (Acts 12:2), so it cannot be him as the gospel would have been written after his death
- This leaves John the son of Zebedee as the most likely candidate

# John the son of Zebedee: External Evidence

- Justin Martyr (First Apology, Ch. 61)
  - For Christ also said, “Unless you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” ... And for this [rite] we have learned from the apostles this reason.
- Irenaeus (Disciple of Polycarp, disciple of John; Against Heresies 3.1.1, C. 180)
  - Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.

# Muratorian Canon

- Muratorian Canon (c. 170)
  - Fragment written perhaps c. 170 that contains a list of books the church considered authoritative
- The third book of the Gospel, that according to Luke, the well-known physician Luke wrote in his own name in order after the ascension of Christ, and when Paul had associated him with himself as one studious of right. Nor did he himself see the Lord in the flesh; and he, according as he was able to accomplish it, began his narrative with the nativity of John. The fourth Gospel is that of John, one of the disciples.

# Date

- Tradition tells that John was the Bishop of Ephesus until ~98 AD
- Papyrus fragments containing portions of the gospel have been dated to 120/130 AD
- Allusions to the gospel are found in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (martyred ~110 AD)
- Traditionally been dated to the late first century (85-95 AD)
- But there have also been attempts to ground the work before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD (See John 5:2)

# Structure

- Introduction (Ch. 1)
  - Prologue (1:1-18)
  - Introduction to John the baptist (1:19-34)
  - Calling the first disciples (1:35-51)
- Book of Signs (Public Ministry, Chs. 2-12)
  - Cycle of claim/miracle, controversy, decision must be made
  - Seven miracles (Water to wine, healing a nobleman's son, healing at Bethesda, walking on water, feeding the five thousand, healing a man born blind, raising Lazarus)
  - Seven "I am" statements (Bread of life, light of the world, door of the sheep, good shepherd, resurrection and the life, way/truth/life, true vine)
- Book of Glory (Final Week, Chs. 13-20)
  - Last words to his disciples (13-17)
  - Death and resurrection (18-20)
- Epilogue (21)



# Themes

- Darkness and Light
  - Ex: Prologue (1:5); Nicodemus (3:19-21)
  - Saw this theme as well in 1 John (1:5-10)
- Belief
  - Thesis (20:31)
  - Thomas (20:29)
- (Eternal) Life
  - Thesis (20:31)
  - Prayer (17:3)
  - Bread and water (6:27, 4:14)
  - Abundantly (10:10)
- Messiah
  - Thesis (20:31)
  - Especially chapter 5, many statements about his relationship to the father
- Truth
  - Full of truth (1:14)
  - The truth (14:6)
  - What is truth (18:38)
- Creation Story
  - Prologue (“In the beginning”)
  - Bread of life (“Live forever”)
  - Resurrection (new creation)

# John and the Synoptics

- John is very different than the Synoptic Gospels
  - Think of all of John's unique content
  - Not only in content, but in form and emphasis

Synoptics	John
Birth narratives	Dwelling of God with men as man
Focus on the kingdom	Focus on life
Jerusalem only at the end	Jerusalem several times
Hiddenness of his Messiahship	Openness about who he is
Speaks to crowds	Has intimate conversations
More biographical in form	More reflective