

The Gospel of John

Adult Bible Study

Rev. Msgr. Charles Pope

I. INTRODUCTORY NOTES

A. Authorship and Date - Who Wrote the Gospel of St. John? And When?

1. The Bible itself never identifies the author of the Fourth Gospel by name. In most Bibles, the Gospel is preceded by a heading such as “The Gospel according to John”, but this title was added many years later, by someone other than the author. The Gospel itself is divinely inspired; the title of the Gospel is not. But that does not leave us without any information about authorship. Internal evidence shows that the author is clearly a Palestinian Jew, fully acquainted with life in Israel before the destruction of Jerusalem. He writes as an eyewitness, with amazing detail. The writer obviously had an intimate place among Jesus’ followers. But it is the unanimous consent of apostolic tradition that provides certainty as to John’s authorship. It is Catholic history and tradition that provide such assurance. According to the Fathers of the Church, the Fourth Gospel was written by the Apostle John. St Irenaeus (ca. 120-ca. 200 AD), the bishop of Lyon, writes, “*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.*” Eusebius (ca. 260-ca. 340), referring to earlier sources, writes, “*When Mark and Luke had already published their Gospels, they say that John, who had employed all his time in proclaiming the Gospel orally, finally proceeded to write for the following reason. The three Gospels already mentioned having come into the hands of all there was lacking in them an account of the deeds done by Christ at the beginning of his ministry. John has in his Gospel an account of the period which had been omitted by the earlier evangelists, and of the deeds done by the Saviour during that period.*” We learn from St. Irenaeus that those who knew the disciple of our Lord, John, said he remained in Ephesus until the time of Trajan. Emperor Trajan reigned from 98-117. Thus, St. John would have lived and written his Gospel at the turn of the century. We can conclude, then, that the Fourth Gospel was written by the Apostle John, about the year 100, from the ancient city of Ephesus.

B. John’s Audience and Purpose in Writing

1. It has been said that St. Matthew wrote to show Jesus as the King to the Jews, St. Mark to present him as a servant to the Romans, St. Luke to point Jesus out as a man to the Greeks, and St. John to disclose him as God to the world. It appears that St. John wrote to both Jews and Gentiles. That Gentiles were at least partially a target audience seems the case because John translates Hebrew words and events that any Jew would understand. It can also be supposed that John had fellow Christians in

mind, and was concerned with mending and strengthening the Church. John made no secret of his reason for writing the Gospel: *so that you may come to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name*”(20:30-31).

2. Another reason John wrote was to fight a dangerous enemy—Gnosticism. The Gnostics said that matter is evil and spirit is good. John put the lie to their error by presenting the truth of the Incarnation----God taking on flesh. John also crossed swords with the Judaizers, who insisted on circumcision and compliance with all the ceremonial aspects of the Jewish law for Gentiles. No, said John salvation came through, “water and the Spirit”, not through circumcision and dietary laws.
3. John unabashedly announced to the pagan and Jewish worlds that Jesus was not only the Messiah---the Anointed One of God—but he was also the “I AM” of the Exodus (Ex 3:14). He was the prophet who was to come (Deut 18:15–18) and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. To the Greek, John sought to show that Jesus was the Logos, understood as the cosmic principle of the universe. To the Jews, the Logos, was God’s all powerful creative Word. And God said... Let there be light, and there was light.

I. Chapter One : Prologue or “OVERTURE”: THE WORD BECOMES FLESH

A. *¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God; ³all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. ⁹The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. ¹¹He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. ¹⁵(John bore witness to him, and cried, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.’”) ¹⁶And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.*

B. Outline

1. When - 1a
2. Where - 1b
3. Who - 1c
4. What - 2-4
5. Win - 5
6. Witness 6-9, (15)
7. Why 10-13
8. Wonder 14-18
 - a. Humanity - 14a
 - b. Holiness - 14b
 - c. Divinity - 14c
 - d. Eternity - v. 15
 - e. Gifts

- (1) New Nature - 16a
- (2) Grace - 16b
- (3) Truth - 17
- (4) Revelation - 18

- C. St. John's Gospel is like an exquisite symphony, with many "musical themes" cascading throughout the Gospel. All of the Gospel's main themes are introduced in the prologue; the prologue summarizes the Gospel in a nutshell.
- D. "The Prologue has both structure and content. The structure has been partially determined by the presentation of 'wisdom personified' in the Old Testament books. There, as in Wis 9:9—12 or Pro 8:22—36, wisdom is first with God, then shares in creation, will come to earth, and there gift humankind. This same progression is found in our prologue. The other factor that has determined the structure is the Hebrew fondness for parallelism— notions being repeated in order—and for inverse parallelism, that is repeated in inverse order. Inverse parallelism is at work here.
- E. "The prologue is a magnificent hymn in praise of Christ. We do not know whether St. John composed it when writing his Gospel, or whether he based it on some existing liturgical hymn; but there is no trace of such text in other early Christian documents."
- F. "The prologue is very reminiscent of the first chapter of Genesis, on a number of scores:
1. the opening words are the same;
 2. there is a parallelism in the role of the Word: in Genesis, God creates things by his word ("And God said...."); in the Gospel we are told that they were made through the Word of God;
 3. in Genesis, God's work of creation reaches its peak when he creates man in his own image and likeness; in the Gospel, the work of the Incarnate Word culminates when man is raised—by a new creation, as it were—to the dignity of being a son of God."
- G. ***'In the beginning was the Word*** - 'The word *WAS*.' He must, therefore, have no beginning; since, He was, when everything else began; and, consequently, must be Eternal. "It is impossible not to comment on the word 'was', for in the Greek language it represents that part of the verb (the imperfect tense) which refers, not to isolated past event, but to a continuous condition. That Greek tense means that Christ dwells in a continuous, timeless existence. John the Baptist (who is older than Jesus) says, "He existed before me" in John 1:30. The Greek word for "Word" is *logos*.
- H. Greeks saw the Logos as the core of the universe. "In [Greek] thinking *logos* meant divine utterance, emanation. In the [Jewish thought] the word of God is God's manifestation, the revelation of himself, whether in creation, in deeds of

power and of grace, or in prophecy. “The term ‘logos’ was familiar in some Greek philosophical schools, where it denoted the principle of reason or order immanent in the universe, however, the true background to John’s thought and language is found not in Greek philosophy but in Hebrew revelation.” Compare Psalm 33:6; 107:20; Wisdom 18:14–15; Isaiah 55:11.

- I. **“And the Word was God’**. These words testify to the divine nature of the Word. In the Greek, no article is used before the word ‘God’. John 1:1 means that the Word share the very nature and being of God, “what God was, the Word was.” John wants us to read the whole Gospel in light of this verse. Realizing that Jesus share the very nature of God (Col 1:19; 2:9) is the linchpin to understanding John’s narrative.
- J. ***³all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.***
 - 1. This teaching echoes the teaching of Col 1:¹⁶*for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*
 - 2. It is bold affirmation that, while the Father is creator, he crated all things through the Word, his Son. For God SAID, “Let there be light....and there was light. Hence creation is through the Word, that is through the Son.
- K. ***Life and light*** - two fundamental themes that will be developed in this Gospel.
 - 1. Life - 40 occurrences
 - 2. Light 16+ occurrences
- L. ***he gave power to become children of God*** - the new life to which every Christian is summoned. Thematically John sees the world divided into those who grab hold of this through faith and those who do not. This is a Gospel of struggle between both camps.

II. The Issue of John The Baptist

A. *¹⁹And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²²They said to him then, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." ²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

B. Outline -

1. Interrogation - vv. 19-22
2. Identification - vv. 23-25
3. Inferiority - v. 26-28

C. A biblical tour on the questions and tensions about John the Baptist

1. Tensions -

- a. Mat 9:¹⁴*Then the disciples of John came to Jesus, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"*
- b. John 3:²²*After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized. ²³John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people came and were baptized. ²⁴For John had not yet been put in prison. ²⁵Now a discussion arose between John's disciples and a Jew over purifying. ²⁶And they came to John, and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, here he is, baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷John answered, "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. ²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full. ³⁰He must increase, but I must decrease.*

2. **John as Credible Witness** - John 10:⁴⁰*Jesus went away again across the Jordan to the place where John at first baptized, and there he remained. ⁴¹And many came to him; and they said, "John did no sign, but everything*

that John said about this man was true.” ⁴²And many believed in him there.

3. **Who was John the Baptist?** Mat 11: Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸Why then did you go out? To see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who wear soft raiment are in kings’ houses. ⁹Why then did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.’ ¹¹Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹³For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; ¹⁴and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵He who has ears to hear, let him hear.
4. **Come to Jesus** - Acts 19: ¹While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ²And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” ⁴And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. ⁷There were about twelve of them in all.

D. Words and terms:

1. **Testimony** - Greek word is martureo from which we get the word martyr. John uses this word more than 45 times in his Gospel.
2. **The Jews** - as John uses this term it almost always refers to the leaders of the Jewish religious establishment who opposed Jesus. It is not to be interpreted as an anti-Semitic slur against the Jewish race as a whole.
3. **The Pharisees** - see attached article
4. **I am not the Christ** - Christ is the Greek word for Messiah. The Old Testament is filled with reference to the coming Messiah but all the references go back to Moses himself who said in Deut. 18: ¹⁵“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed—...[The LORD himself says,] ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will make that one answer for it. Thus notice that the

Jewish leaders do not ask, “Are you a Prophet?” but rather, they ask, “Are you *the* Prophet?”

5. **Elijah** - Elijah was prophesied to come again. See quote in “a” just below. John was mistaken in saying he was not Elijah as we have already seen above (see also “b” just below)

a. Mal 4:⁵“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ⁶And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with doom.”

b. Mat 11: Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸Why then did you go out? To see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who wear soft raiment are in kings’ houses. ⁹Why then did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.’¹¹Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹³For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; ¹⁴and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

6. **I am the voice** : a clear allusion to Is. 40. John was the parting voice of the Old Testament!

a. Is 40: *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’S hand double for all her sins. ³A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” ⁶A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people is grass. ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever. ⁹Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” ¹⁰Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his*

arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

III. THE LAMB OF GOD - ²⁹*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* ³⁰*This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.'* ³¹*I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."* ³²*And John bore witness, "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him."* ³³*I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'* ³⁴*And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."*

A. Outline -

1. Portrait - v. 29

a. Gen 22:7 *And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"* ⁸*Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb*

2. Pre-existence - v. 30

3. Perception - vv. 31-33a

a. Matt 11:²*Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples* ³*and said to him, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?"* ⁴*And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:* ⁵*the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.* ⁶*And blessed is he who takes no offense at me."*

4. Proof - vv. 33b - 34

a. Matt 3:¹⁶*And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him;* ¹⁷*and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

IV. THE FIRST DISCIPLES - *35The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; ³⁶and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴²He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).*

- A. Embarking - vv. 35-36
- B. Experiencing - v. 38 - 39
- C. Evangelizing - vv. 40-42a
- D. Encountering - 43b

V. THE CALL OF NATHANAEL - *⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Beth-saida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathana-el, and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶Nathana-el said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathana-el coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" ⁴⁸Nathana-el said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹Nathana-el answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." ⁵¹And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."*

- A. Openings - vv. 43-45
- B. Odious - v. 46
- C. Overtures - vv. 47-48
- D. Odd reaction - v. 49
- E. Omnipotence - vv. 50-51