

## The Gospel of John

- Why do we have four Gospels?
  - Primarily because God appointed them
  - They reveal Jesus to us from four separate viewpoints
- The fourth Gospel
  - John is the author, attested by the early church and confirmed by internal evidence: i.e the writer is familiar with Jewish geography, history, the Talmud, the Temple, etc. He describes himself as close to Jesus (the one who Jesus loved) and leaves out any mention of John, a prominent disciple who otherwise would be expected to be named.
  - John makes much of being an eyewitness of Jesus. Cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4.
  - Likely written in the first century. Traditionally in the 90s, perhaps earlier. Supported by ancient manuscript evidence (A copy made its way to the Nile basin by very early 2<sup>nd</sup> century). Perhaps written before 70 A.D. since the Temple is mentioned in the present tense.
  - Personal, dialog-focused, profound themes running throughout a simple narrative
- Starting at the end: Jn 14:2-3: “I go to prepare a place for you...”
  - This is the very center of our hope as Christians living in this age
  - John shows us who it is who makes this promise, and why we can rely on him.
    - ♦ Jn 20:30: The Gospel is written so we may believe...and have life in his name
  - But how do we know that what we have before us is authentic?
- Obj: The Bible has been translated and copied so many times. There’s no telling what it contained in its original form
- Ans: By the criteria generally applied for assessing the accurate transmission of ancient documents, the Bible is in a class by itself
  - Number of extant copies of original Manuscripts:
    - ♦ NT: over 5,000 vs anywhere from a few hundred to one or even zero for classical works of antiquity (Homer’s works, Greek tragedies, Greek and Roman histories, etc)
  - Closeness in time of mss to the original work
    - ♦ For most ancient works, the earliest mss are from the Middle Ages, a thousand or more years distant from the original work. There are extant mss of NT fragments dated within several decades of the events of the NT, and two mss of the entire Bible dated in the first half of the fourth century.
    - ♦ The John Rylands ms, with several sentences from John’s Gospel, dated in the very early part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, comfortably dates the Gospel of John in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.
    - ♦ Bodmer Papyrus, dated near end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century, has maybe 75% of Gospel of John
    - ♦ Papyri with acts and epistles dated around A.D. 200. Quotations of NT from church fathers throughout the second century
    - ♦ Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus: entire Greek Bible written by the middle of the fourth century, possibly among the copies of the Bible commissioned by Constantine.
- Additional NT witnesses
  - Ancient versions: Syriac, Latin, Coptic. Begun by missionaries in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Important witnesses to the history of interpretation, and they shed light on variant Greek readings, but there are limitations because of translation.
  - Patristic quotations of the Bible. Enough to re-create the entire NT if we didn’t have it. Help to localize and date variant readings of the Greek mss.
  - Lectionaries: Scripture readings used in worship and for teaching.
- Writing of the NT

- Recorded on papyrus and parchment/vellum
  - Scrolls and codices. The latter was a distinctive Christian practice.
  - Early script was with rounded capital letters (uncials). By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, most mss written in minuscule script
  - In earliest days, copies made by individuals or churches for their use. After Christianity became official, copies were made in professional scriptoria. By the early Middle Ages, copying was done in monasteries.
- The corruption and recovery of the text
- Contrary to Jewish preservation of the OT (1,000 year gap in Isaiah mss with not a single word changed), the NT was copied more rapidly and in far greater numbers, as Christianity was growing and spreading rapidly. Errors of transmission were introduced.
  - Because of the vast number of copies that were made, we can recover a text which very closely approximates the original writings. The science of textual criticism arose gradually and is highly developed. Modern computer techniques and AI are being applied today to provide even more insight and assurance. No significant Christian doctrine is in dispute because of variant readings.
  - The Textus Receptus and its overthrow: A handful of late and haphazardly collected minuscule mss, in a dozen passages that came to be seen as the standard Biblical text, until gradually overthrown by four centuries of gradual discovery and collation of older texts. The modern science of textual criticism arose out of this.
- Marks of authenticity in the Bible
- Luke has been verified as an accurate historian again and again
  - Name frequency analysis: Common names are disambiguated in the scripture text. The names disambiguated in the canonical NT are consistent with historical analysis of names common in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. As opposed to the Gnostic Gospels, which are consistent with names in medieval Europe.
  - Absentee Landlord law explains the parable of the tenants (cf. Mt 21:33ff). Why would the tenants think the vineyard would be theirs if they killed the landlord's son? Because for a short time in Palestine, that was the law. If a landowner died and had no descendant, the property went to the tenants.
- Formation of the canon:
- Huff: It was customary among the Jews after a period of revelation to look for "the writings". Thus, they saved and collated the material produced by Jesus's apostles.
  - The canon was adopted organically by the church, according to three criteria ("generally adopted during the course of the second century, and never modified thereafter": Metzger)
    - ◆ Orthodoxy, apostolicity, consensus and use among the church
  - Metzger: "In the most basic sense neither individuals nor councils created the canon; instead they came to recognize and acknowledge the self-authenticating quality of these writings, which imposed themselves as canonical upon the church."
- Conclusion
- The Bible is the most reliable ancient ms by far. The only reason to doubt is an *a priori* assumption that miracles do not occur. This begs the question that we're asking (Can we trust the NT?)
  - The most reasonable conclusion from the evidence is that the NT is an accurate record of events in Palestine in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.