

## Themes in John

### Vocabulary words

- **Christ:** Greek translation of Hebrew “Mashiah” or messiah, meaning anointed (a term for kings, especially the Davidic line).
- **Samaritan:** A northern version of Judaism regarded as a heretical cult by Judeans and hence the ruling Jewish aristocracy. Since Jesus comes from northern Galilee, he was bound to have sympathy for this group, much to the chagrine of the Pharisees.
- **Kerygma:** Oral teachings, thought to have dominated the early church
- **Parousia:** Second coming by Jesus, not present in John, except as a promise to collect the Johannine community. The emphasis in 16:4-11 is on Jesus’s return to heaven, not his return to earth.
- **Eschaton.** End-time.
- **Realized Eschatology.** Belief that events usually associated with the world’s end, are even now realized by Jesus’s spiritual presence among his followers. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” 1:14; “Now the son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him” 13:31.
- **Incarnation** spiritual Logos becomes physically human—makes notion of Jesus’s conception (immaculate or not) irrelevant. Highly platonic.
- **Paraclete:** John’s word for Holy spirit. It means “Advocate” and is the opposite of Satan or “Adversary.”
- **Trinity.** The concept, which does not appear in scripture, of the simultaneous existence of three “co-equal, co-substantial, and co-eternal” aspects, or emanations of God: Yahweh, Jesus, and the Paraclete
- **Gnosticism.** Focused on Jesus’s spiritual nature, free from human weakness. Typically dualistic: invisible, spirit world is good, while the physical world is evil. Some gnostic associated the physical world with Yahweh or the Demiurge.
- **Ego Eimi** (ἐγώ εἰμι). The “I am” statements of John are written in Koine Greek, and they deliberately use the emphatic form to echo Yahweh’s name, which the Septuagint translates from the Hebrew as ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν (“I am that I am”).
- **Logos.** A platonic term refined by Philo Judaeus of Alexandria. It synthesizes the Platonic idea of a transcendent creator or “mind” or “idea” with the Hebrew concept of Wisdom. Because Logos also means “Word,” it also incorporates the Hebrew god who “speaks” the cosmos into being.
- **Son of God:** A typical designation for royalty, including Roman Emperors. In Mark, only demons and centurions seem to recognize Jesus’ divinity.
- **Apocalypse:** a revelation of unseen realities and a disclosure of events designed to climax in God’s final intervention in human affairs.
- **Passion:** Jesus’ suffering and death. John does not portray Jesus’s suffering, only his victory.
- **Essenes:** An ascetic, withdrawn community at Qumran which secreted away the Dead Sea Scrolls. Held several “proto-Gnostic” beliefs, very close to John’s theology. John the Baptist was probably an Essene; many think he was Jesus’ teacher (see description of John in [Mark 1:6](#))
- **Book of Signs.** The first part of the gospel after the Prologue (John 2:1-11:57). Includes the miracles and other signs. May have been developed from a pre-existing Signs Gospel
- **Book of Glory.** The second half of John’s Gospel until the epilogue, so-called because it ends not in agony but in glorification (12:1-20:31).
- **Beloved Disciple.** Person to whom much of John’s gospel is attributed. First appears in 13:23 at Last Supper. Writes the last part: 21:20-25.

### Organization:

- 1.1-1.18: Prologue
- 1.19-12:50 Signs that Jesus is the revelation of the Father, structured as “miracle narratives” (a gk literary form):
  - severity of disease
  - cure by command or mud/spit
  - proof of cure
  - honor awarded healer
- 13:1-20:31 Book of J’s Glory (for those who accept him through crucifixion, resurrection, Ascension)
- 21:1-end: Epilogue (contains post-resurrection appearances as well as stuff about future of Peter & “beloved disciple”)

## Johannine Community

- Marginalized community of Jews connected to synagogues. Members of this school probably composed Johannine letters, gospel, and Revelation. Espoused ideas typical of the Essenes of Qumran, with their dualistic concepts of cosmic opposites: Light-Dark, Good-Evil, Truth-Lie, Spirit-flesh. Their identification of Jesus with the Heavenly Wisdom that created the cosmos probably angered Jews, who eventually expelled them from the synagogues. Group may have split into those that believed Jesus was fully man and those who believed he was both; hence the later additions of prologue and epilogue by editors. The Gospel of John addresses this group of believers regarding the nature of Jesus's divinity, and promises that Jesus will come again to collect only them, not all of mankind. This gospel spends less time concentrating on the facts of his life. The emphasis is on the relationship between this community and Jesus.

## Literary forms (author as sophisticated writer and rhetorician)

- **Encomium (Greek praise or blame biography) in five parts:**

Encomium Part	Condemnatory Encomium of J (crowd; Jewish aristocrats)	Praiseworthy Encomium of J (insiders)
Prologue		
Birth / upbringing	From Nazareth; father is peasant, no education	From Heaven; father is God; received God's instruction
acts	Deceives; violates Torah law; Sinner's death	Virtuous actions (obedience, courage, justice) and noble death
comparisons for the purpose of praise/blame		
Epilogue		

- **Farewell address (structures 14-17):** 1. Notice of death or departure 2. Review of life 3. Relationship to be maintained 4. Knowledge and revelations given 5. Predictions of upcoming events 6. Exhortations to virtue 7. Successor named 8. Legacy.
- **Forensic trials in Jerusalem** (form: accused; witnesses for and con; judgement; sentence and verdict). Elite accuse J of violating Sabbath and blasphemy.
- **Eight "unless" statements followed by consequences**—demands for group membership involve surpassing Israel's rituals.

## Important Themes

- Paraclete. Jesus is not a figure of the recent past, but an immortal being who still inhabits the author's community. Author blends past and present through the activity of the Paraclete (14:12-26) Blends Jesus's healing miracles with community's works.
- Realized Eschatology. Jesus frequently speaks, as in dialog with Nicodemus (3:9-13) as if he has already returned to heaven. John does not emphasize Jesus's imminent return because his Christ had already achieved his disciples' redemption and, in the guise of the Paraclete, is eternally present with all believers, who are spiritually reborn through their belief. Descent/ascent motif.
- Immortality of Jesus and his believers, who are "born from above."
- Relationship to "The Jews." Rather than attack a particular group, such as the Pharisees, the author of John's gospel equates all Jews with "the world." Around 70 CE, Jews expelled Johannine Christians from the synagogues for the sin of polytheism (this accusation stems from their conception of what would become the trinity). The author of John's Gospel is bitter over these attacks, and actually "retrojects" them back into Jesus's lifetime.
  - Some see believe "The Jews" is a class designation: Hereditary temple religious authorities and sympathizers.

- Connections between Hebrew Bible and John: Though “Jews” are equated with the world, the author of John’s Gospel stresses connections:
  - “Fulfillment of scripture”—“I am thirsty” (Psalms); passover lamb (exodus), suffering servant (Isaiah); enters Jerusalem on a donkey’s colt (Zeph. 3:16); Fulfillment of the law 5:39-46;
  - Bodily, not just spiritual nature of Jesus and the community’s partaking of his nature: 19:31 “Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.” Symbolically “blood” is communal partaking of the body, which Jews found heretical.
  - Reduction of commandments to one
  - “I am” sayings composed in Greek to echo Septuagint’s translation of the Yahweh’s name: “I am that I am” (ἐγώ εἰμὶ ὁ ὢν). (Below is a selection). So Jesus is “uncreated” and participated in God’s creation of the world.
    - John 6:35, 41, 48,51: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. [NRSV]
    - John 7:28, 29, 34, 36: 28 You will look for me but not find (me), and where I am you cannot come. [NRSV]
    - John 8:12, 16, 18, 23, 24, 28, 58: I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. [NRSV]; 16 I am not alone, but it is I and the Father who sent me. [NAB]; 23 He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. [NRSV]; 24 That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins. [NAB - In the NRSV and other versions, the "he" is added to the English text by the translators.] 58 Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am. [NRSV]
    - John 10: 7, 9, 11, 14, 36 7 I am the gate for the sheep.[NRSV];11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. [NRSV] 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, [NRSV]
    - John 11:25: I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, [NRSV]
    - John 14: 3, 6, 10, 11, 20: 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. [NRSV] ; 6 I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [NRSV]
    - John 15: 1, 5: I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. [NRSV]
    - 14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. [NASB, Revised]; 24 Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. [NRSV]
- Nature of Jesus’s divinity: See especially 1:1-18 Logos, 12:27-36
- Jesus as “broker” or interceder: No one can know YHWH except through him.

**Death scene: Chapter 15:16-end. Emphasizes triumph, not pathos, the future church, and the fulfillment of scripture.**