

Introducing the New Testament

Worksheet for Week 8

The Gospel of John

This week, we turn to John's Gospel. Read the introductions to the books in your study bible and, if you have one, the entries on the books in your Bible dictionary. Then read through the daily passages suggested on this worksheet.

The Johannine Community

Paul's letters reflect the work of the "Pauline Mission," the effort by Paul and all of his co-workers to take the gospel to the Gentile world. Though all the letters bear Paul's name, it is possible that some of them were written by Paul's students and co-workers in this extended mission. Similarly, the Gospel of John, the three letters of John, and John's Revelation have been seen as a body of writings from a community of early Christians. The early church held that these were writings of John the Apostle, but, as we've seen, these claims speak as much to the writings' authority as to the exact identity of the person who penned the words – the gospel and letters are all actually anonymous! Based on these writings, we think that the Johannine community was centered in an urban area, perhaps Ephesus, and in some smaller surrounding towns. Though this Christian community had worshipped in the synagogue, they had been expelled and ostracized from the Jewish community. Thus, the gospel and letters emphasize unity and love within the community of faith. There is almost a sense that these Christians are circling the wagons!

John's Gospel

John's gospel is different! It bears little resemblance to the synoptic gospels. Very few of the incidents in John are also found in the synoptics. John's gospel has very little in the way of ethical teachings such as we find in the Sermon on the Mount. John writes so that "you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." (20:31).

In the synoptics, miracles are a means for Jesus to enact the reality of God's kingdom. In John's gospel, the miracles are signposts to Jesus' identity and nature. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus' true identity is often a secret to be protected until the right time. In John's gospel, Jesus' glory is revealed from the very beginning. For example, Jesus' first miracle is the changing of water into wine. John tells us that, "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." (2:11) In the synoptic gospels, Jesus takes Peter and two disciples to the mountaintop where he is transfigured (see Matt 17:1-9). The story of the transfiguration is not found in John – perhaps because we can best think of John's Gospel as the story of one grand transfiguration, revealing Jesus' eternal divinity while never surrendering Jesus' humanity.

Here are a few ideas to keep in mind as you read John's Gospel:

- John binds together the already/not yet we've discussed so often, emphasizing that God's kingdom has come already! Jesus says "Those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed" (3:17) and "anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life" (5:24) As Richard Hays notes, this means that "for those in the believing community, eternal life is now."¹ The glory of God's kingdom is fully revealed and present in Jesus.
- The immediate reality of God's kingdom is accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." (14:15) This Advocate/Helper teaches us, the community of believers, all things and reminds us of what Jesus said.
- In this community of faith, we are called to love one another just as Jesus has loved us. Rather than give us long passages of Jesus' teachings, John gives us the enacted parable of Jesus' washing the disciples feet (chapter 13), leading us to see Jesus' sacrificial love on the cross several chapters later.

¹ Hays, Richard. 1996. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco

Bible Readings for Week 8

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in this letter?

<p>Day 1 John 1:1-18 The prologue; The ministry of the pre-incarnate Christ!</p>	<p>Day 2 John 3:1-20 Jesus is visited by Nicodemus (see Numbers 21:4-9 for the story of Moses and the poisonous serpent).</p>
<p>Day 3 John 9 The sixth sign; Jesus heals a man who has been blind from birth.</p>	<p>Day 4 John 13: 1-20 Jesus washes the feet of the disciples.</p>
<p>Day 5 Chapter 17 Jesus' final prayer</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>