

OXFORD BIBLE SERIES

General Editors: P. R. Ackroyd and G. Stanton

Introducing the Old Testament

Richard Coggins

Second Edition

Narrative in the Hebrew Bible

David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell

The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible

S. E. Gillingham

Prophecy and the Biblical Prophets

John F. A. Sawyer

Revised Edition

Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament

The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism

J. Blenkinsopp

The Origins of Christianity

A Historical Introduction to the New Testament

Schuyler Brown

Revised Edition

The Gospels and Jesus

Graham Stanton

Second Edition

Variety and Unity in New Testament Thought

J. Reumann

Pauline Christianity

John Ziesler

Revised Edition

Biblical Interpretation

Robert Morgan with John Barton

BS
2555.5
573

THE GOSPELS AND JESUS

Second Edition

Graham Stanton



BIBLIOTECA

150.130

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

5 6 3 4 8 7

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© Graham Stanton 2002

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

First published 1989
Second edition 2002
Reprinted 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Data available

ISBN 978-0-19-924616-8



GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

There are many commentaries on individual books of the Bible, but the reader who wishes to take a broader view has less choice. This series is intended to meet this need. Its structure is thematic, with each volume embracing a number of biblical books. It is designed for use with any of the familiar translations of the Bible; quotations are normally from RSV or NRSV, but the authors of the individual volumes also use other translations or make their own where this helps to bring out the particular meaning of a passage.

To provide general orientation, there are two volumes of a more introductory character: one considers the Old Testament in its cultural and historical context, the other the New Testament, discussing the origins of Christianity. Four volumes deal with different kinds of material in the Old Testament: narrative, prophecy, poetry/psalmody, wisdom and law. Three volumes handle different aspects of the New Testament: the Gospels, Paul and Pauline Christianity, the varieties of New Testament thought. One volume looks at the nature of biblical interpretation, covering both Testaments. This is designed both to draw together some of the many themes touched on in the other volumes, and also to invite the reader to look further at the problems of understanding an ancient literature in the very different cultural context of the present time.

The authors of the individual volumes write for a general readership. Technical terms and Hebrew or Greek words are explained; the latter are used only when essential to the understanding of the text. The general introductory volumes are designed to stand on their own, providing a framework, but also to serve to raise some of the questions which the remaining volumes examine in closer detail. All the volumes other than the two general ones include discussion of selected biblical passages in greater depth, thus providing examples of the ways in which the interpretation of the text makes possible deeper understanding of the wider issues, both historical and theological, with which the Bible is concerned. Select bibliographies in each volume point the way to further discussion of the many issues which remain open to fuller exploration.

P. R. A.
G. S.

GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

There are many commentaries on biblical books of the Bible, but this series is meant to meet the needs of the student, with each volume intended to present the biblical text in its original language, with an introduction to the book, and a commentary on the text. The series is designed to be a work of reference, and to provide a basis for the study of the Bible. The series is designed to be a work of reference, and to provide a basis for the study of the Bible. The series is designed to be a work of reference, and to provide a basis for the study of the Bible.

In preparing these volumes, we have been guided by the following principles: (1) The text of the Bible is presented in its original language, with an introduction to the book, and a commentary on the text. (2) The text is presented in its original language, with an introduction to the book, and a commentary on the text. (3) The text is presented in its original language, with an introduction to the book, and a commentary on the text. (4) The text is presented in its original language, with an introduction to the book, and a commentary on the text. (5) The text is presented in its original language, with an introduction to the book, and a commentary on the text.

The series is designed to be a work of reference, and to provide a basis for the study of the Bible. The series is designed to be a work of reference, and to provide a basis for the study of the Bible. The series is designed to be a work of reference, and to provide a basis for the study of the Bible. The series is designed to be a work of reference, and to provide a basis for the study of the Bible. The series is designed to be a work of reference, and to provide a basis for the study of the Bible.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

For some time now I have been in two minds about a revised and extended edition of this book. This book has been reprinted many times and read much more widely than I ever envisaged. As I am a firm believer in the dictum, 'if it works, don't fix it', a new edition has been low on my agenda.

However, scholarly study of the gospels and of the historical Jesus has moved on apace over the last decade. So much so that a revised edition of this book became imperative. The new edition takes account of recent developments and includes a largely new Bibliography. In Part I there is fuller discussion both of literary approaches to the gospels and of the Gospel of Thomas. In nearly all the chapters in Part II there is additional material. In a number of ways I have tried to make this edition more 'user-friendly'.

On some points I have changed my mind, but I have not been tempted to change the main thrust of the book. When the first edition was published it was rather unusual to insist that the present form of the gospels should be studied *before* tackling issues concerning the historical Jesus. The unconventional has now become conventional! Although this edition gives more attention to current scholarly debates, I have not tried to catalogue opinions on all disputed points. In accordance with the aims of the Oxford Bible Series, I have focused on the text of the gospels. Scholars come and go, but the text remains for us to 'read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest'.

A number of readers made helpful comments on the first edition. I am particularly grateful to Professor Joel Marcus, now of Duke University, for sharing his suggestions and wisdom with me at some length.

During the preparation of this second edition my Alma Mater conferred on me an honorary D.D. degree. As a token of my deep gratitude, I dedicate this book to the University of Otago, New Zealand. During my visit to Dunedin for the conferral, I was delighted to learn from Professor Paul Trebilco that this book is used in the University's Department of Theology and Religious Studies, and also in distance learning courses all over New Zealand. I hope that the new edition will continue to interest readers in many countries in the gospels and in the One they portray.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

For some time now I have been in two minds about a revised and enlarged edition of this book. This book has been reprinted many times and read much more widely than I ever envisaged. As I am a firm believer in the saying, 'if it works don't fix it,' a new edition has been low on my agenda. However, scholarly study of the gospels and of the historical Jesus has moved on apace over the last decade so much so that a revised edition of this book became imperative. The new edition takes account of recent developments and includes a largely new bibliography. In Part I there is further discussion both of literary approaches to the gospels and of the Gospel of Thomas. In nearly all the chapters in Part II there is additional material. In a number of ways I have tried to make this edition more up-to-date.

On some points I have changed my mind, but I have not been tempted to change the main thrust of the book. When the first edition was published it was rather unusual to insist that the present form of the gospels should be studied before tackling issues concerning the historical Jesus. The conventional has now become conventional. Although this edition goes some way to counter scholarly debates I have not tried to cater for arguments on all disputed points in accordance with the views of the Oxford Bible Society. I have focused on the text of the gospels and merely 'digged' out the text remains for us to read, make sense and interpret again. A number of readers made helpful comments on the first edition. I am particularly grateful to Professor Joel Marcus, now at Duke University for sharing his suggestions and wisdom with me at some length.

During the preparation of this second edition my Alma Mater contacted me for an honorary D.L. degree. As a token of my deep gratitude I dedicated the book to the University of Otago, New Zealand. During my visit to Dunedin for the ceremony, I was delighted to learn from Professor Paul Jenkins that this book is used in the University's Department of Theology and Religious Studies, and also in distance learning contexts all over New Zealand. I hope that the new edition will continue to interest readers in many countries in the gospel and in the Christian heritage.

CONTENTS

PART I: THE FOUR GOSPELS

1. FROM THE GOSPELS TO JESUS	3
Story and significance	4
The Lord's Prayer	6
2. WHAT IS A GOSPEL?	13
The gospels as biographies	14
The gospels as history: source criticism	18
<i>Marcan priority</i>	20
<i>The Q hypothesis</i>	23
The gospels as proclamation: form criticism	27
The evangelists as authors: redaction criticism	29
The gospels as stories: literary criticism	32
3. MARK'S GOSPEL: THE WAY OF JESUS	37
Tradition and redaction	38
A dramatic story	40
The Prologue: Jesus Christ, the Son of God: 1: 1–13	41
The disciples and discipleship	44
The way of Jesus	48
Confrontation with Jewish leaders	50
The final outcome	53
The origin and purpose of Mark	54
4. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL: THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS	58
The structure of Matthew's gospel	59
Sources and methods	62
Infancy narratives	64
The way of righteousness: the Beatitudes 5: 3–11	67
Use of the Old Testament	70
The commissioning of the disciples: 28: 18–20	73

The setting and purpose of the gospel	74
The origin of Matthew's gospel	77
5. LUKE'S GOSPEL: GOD'S WAY TRIUMPHS	79
Luke's Prologue: 1: 1-4	81
Luke and his sources	83
Lucan theology and artistry: 4: 16-30	86
Luke's central section: 9: 51-19: 27	90
Salvation history	92
The date and authorship of Luke-Acts	94
6. JOHN'S GOSPEL: 'I AM THE WAY'	97
John and the synoptic gospels	99
The composition of the fourth gospel	103
The Prologue: 1: 1-18	107
Johannine themes: 12: 44-50	110
The opening of the passion narrative: John 18	113
Purpose and setting	116
Date and authorship	120
7. WHY FOUR GOSPELS?	122
The Gospel of Thomas	123
The Gospel of Peter	130
The Egerton Gospel	132
Fragmentary 'gospels' and isolated sayings of Jesus	133
Infancy gospels	134
The fourfold gospel	135

PART II: JESUS IN GOSPEL TRADITION

Map of Palestine from AD 6 to AD 44	140
8. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT JESUS OF NAZARETH?	143
Did Jesus exist?	143
Literary evidence from outside the gospels	145
<i>Josephus</i>	148
<i>Further Jewish evidence</i>	150

The Dead Sea Scrolls	152
Archaeological evidence	154
<i>Galilee</i>	155
<i>Jerusalem</i>	158
9. ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE	164
The evangelists' redaction	167
Between the gospels and Jesus	170
Embarrassment, historical plausibility, and aftermath	174
10. JOHN THE BAPTIST	178
John 'the witness' in the fourth gospel	178
John the Baptist in Mark, Matthew, and Luke	181
What do we know about John the Baptist?	184
<i>John's baptism</i>	186
John and Jesus: similarities and differences	187
11. PROPHET AND TEACHER	190
According to the evangelists	190
Jesus as prophet and teacher	194
Prophetic sayings and actions	196
Disciples and discipleship	199
12. THE KINGDOM OF GOD	203
Jesus and the kingdom	204
Is the kingdom temporal or spatial?	207
The kingdom of God is among you: Luke 17: 20–1	210
The kingdom under attack? Matthew 11: 12–13 = Luke 16: 16	211
What did Jesus mean?	213
The kingdom of God is yours	214
13. PARABLES AND APHORISMS	218
The evangelists and the parables	219
Similitudes, narrative parables, and allegories	222
Modern interpretation of the parables	225
Aphorisms	228

14.	MIRACLES AND EXORCISMS	232
	The evangelists and the miracle traditions	232
	Did Jesus perform miracles?	235
	Why did Jesus perform miracles and exorcisms?	237
15.	MESSIAH, SON OF GOD, SON OF MAN	240
	Messiah—Christ	241
	Son of God	245
	Son of Man	247
	<i>Son of Man in Old Testament and later Jewish writings</i>	248
	<i>Three explanations</i>	250
16.	CONFLICT	255
	The evangelists	255
	Essenes, Sadducees, 'zealots', and scribes	257
	The Pharisees	260
	Sabbath, purity, and divorce	263
17.	THE LAST DAYS	269
	Passion narratives in the four gospels	269
	The Last Supper	274
	Why was Jesus put to death?	279
	The accusations against Jesus	281
	A crucified Messiah—King	286
	'On the third day'	288
18.	WHO WAS JESUS OF NAZARETH?	292
	Bibliography	300
	Index of Passages Cited	315
	General Index	323

KEY PASSAGES DISCUSSED

Matthew 1 and 2	64
Matthew 5: 3–11	67
Matthew 6: 9–13	6
Matthew 8: 23–7	30
Matthew 11: 12–13	211
Matthew 28: 18–20	73
Mark 1: 1–13	41
Mark 7: 15, 19	264
Mark 10: 1–12	265
Mark 11: 15–18	284
Mark 14: 17–26	274
Mark 14: 53–65	281
Mark 16: 1–8	53
Luke 1: 1–4	81
Luke 4: 16–30	86
Luke 11: 2–4	6
Luke 16: 16	211
Luke 17: 20–1	210
Luke 22: 14–20	274
Luke 22: 66–71	282
John 1: 1–18	107
John 2: 13–22	283
John 12: 44–50	110
John 18	113
John 20: 31	116

NOTE

The Scripture quotations in this book are normally from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Bibliography provides suggestions for further study and also gives details of publications referred to in the main text by the name of the author and the date of publication.

PART I

THE FOUR GOSPELS

necessary one; Luke may have been using an extended source or a diary for parts of the second half of Acts.

This latter view has been supported by some scholars who deny that the author of Luke–Acts could have been a companion of Paul. Luke’s presentation of Paul’s views, it is claimed, cannot have been written by a companion of Paul’s since it differs so markedly from Paul’s own letters. This question is still keenly debated; since passages in Acts rather than in the gospel are involved, we cannot pursue the discussion here. But two points may be mentioned briefly. On the traditional view Luke was not necessarily a close companion of Paul’s over a long period—and even if he was a companion he may not have grasped some of the more difficult aspects of Paul’s teaching.

Those who reject the traditional view find it hard to explain how the name ‘Luke’ came to be attached in the second century to the two volumes. Luke was not the only companion of Paul’s; there are several others who might have been deduced from the ‘we’ sections to be the author of the gospel and Acts. So although the traditional view is not without difficulties, it may be the most satisfactory solution of an intriguing puzzle.

6

JOHN'S GOSPEL: 'I AM THE WAY'

John's gospel is like a stream in which children can wade and elephants swim. For many readers this gospel's main themes are simple and clear, and the evangelist's dramatic presentation of the story of Jesus is compelling. The first half of the gospel is dominated by dialogues between Jesus and a handful of individuals who do not appear in the other gospels but whose portraits are finely drawn: Nicodemus, the leading Pharisee who came to Jesus by night (ch. 3); the Samaritan woman by the well at Sychar (ch. 4) who turns out to have had five husbands; the man who had been ill for 38 years, lying beside the pool with five porticoes (ch. 5); the man born blind whose sight is restored and who gradually understands who Jesus is (ch. 9).

The gospel is full of poignant and dramatic moments not mentioned in the synoptic gospels, as the following four examples illustrate. At the marriage feast at Cana in Galilee, Jesus says to his mother, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come' (2: 4). At the tomb of Lazarus Jesus weeps (11: 35). During his final meal with his disciples, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and then says, 'You also ought to wash one another's feet' (13: 1–20). Among those standing by the cross of Jesus are his mother and 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. Jesus says to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son!' He then says to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' 'And from that hour', the evangelist notes, 'the disciple took her into his own home' (19: 25–7).

Many of the sayings of Jesus found only in John's gospel are among the best-known passages in the New Testament. They often seem to have the power of a much-loved poem: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life' (3: 16); 'You will know the truth and the truth will make you free' (8: 32); 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' (14: 6).

The evangelist develops a small range of themes with great skill. His central theological points are repeated and explained in different ways. Indeed it has been said that the evangelist is his own best interpreter or commentator. If readers bury themselves in the gospel they often find that passages which at first seem obscure later become clear.

The structure of John's gospel is both simple and impressive. The Prologue is in two parts: 1: 1–18 (to which we shall turn in a moment) and 1: 19–51. In the latter part John (who is not called the Baptist in this gospel) bears testimony to Jesus as 'the Lamb of God' (1: 29, 36) and as 'the Son of God' (1: 34). Andrew tells Simon Peter (and the reader) that Jesus is the Messiah–Christ (1: 41). Nathanael confesses that Jesus is 'the Son of God, the king of Israel' (1: 49). At the end of the Prologue Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man; heaven will be opened and the angels of God will ascend and descend upon him as they did upon Jacob's ladder, for like the ladder he is the link between heaven and earth (1: 51).

Like a great medieval cathedral, the main body of the gospel is in two sections. Chapters 2–12 with narratives, dialogues, and discourses with individuals and groups of opponents, is the 'public' part of the gospel, rather like a cathedral nave. In chapters 13–20, with the accounts of the last meal and the discourses with the disciples, and then the passion narratives, we move into the choir and on to the high altar. As we shall see, chapter 21 forms an appendix or epilogue.

This gospel can be appreciated (at least in part) by untutored readers, but it also engages minds well versed in the philosophical and religious ideas of the ancient world. Behind a veneer of simplicity lies profundity. The evangelist draws on two thought-worlds which partly overlapped one another in the first century: the Hellenistic, on the one hand, and the Jewish (and Old Testament) on the other. As we shall see later in this chapter, John's presentation of Jesus as the Word (*logos*) provides a good illustration of this point.

Fifty years and more ago it was customary to link John's gospel more firmly with Greek than with Jewish religious thought. But the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumran in 1947 has tilted the balance in the other direction. They have confirmed the extent to which John's gospel is indebted to some currents within first-century Judaism.

John's gospel is not only thoroughly Jewish, it is also profoundly anti-Jewish. The opponents of Jesus are repeatedly referred to as 'the Jews'. In

his discussions with them, Jesus appears at times to be argumentative and even to quibble. The polemic is, if anything, even stronger than in Matthew's gospel.

One example will suffice. We quoted above the words of Jesus: 'You will know the truth and the truth will make you free' (8: 32). But in its context this is not, as it is often taken to be, an aphorism of universal validity for people of goodwill. These words occur in the middle of a lengthy and ferocious dispute between Jesus and 'the Jews'. At its climax there is some rather unpleasant name-calling. Jesus says, 'Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth' (8: 43-4). The Jews retort, 'Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?' (v. 48). Bemused and outraged by what they take to be provocative and blasphemous claims, the Jews take up stones to throw at Jesus. But he 'hid himself, and went out of the temple' (v. 59). Why did Jesus and the Jews exchange such harsh words? We shall suggest a possible answer to this question below (pp. 117-18).

We have quickly discovered some of the reasons why this gospel is something of an enigma. But so far we have hardly touched on one of the most puzzling questions of all: why is this gospel in some ways similar to Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the synoptic gospels) and yet is in so many ways very different?

John and the synoptic gospels

In Mark's gospel Jesus spends most of his ministry (which seems to last about a year) in Galilee. He does not reach Jerusalem until 11: 1 and meets his death there a week later. In Matthew and Luke the overall pattern is similar. In John, on the other hand, Jesus begins his ministry in Judaea and Jerusalem and spends more time there than in Galilee. He makes at least three journeys to Jerusalem (2: 13; 5: 1; 7: 10) and his ministry lasts two or three years.

The synoptic gospels contain short traditions of the teaching and actions of Jesus which are loosely linked together. Even longer discourses such as Matthew's Sermon on the Mount are built up from a series of

shorter elements. In Chapter 2 we likened Mark's gospel to a block of chocolate which can easily be broken up into separate pieces. John's gospel, on the other hand, has been likened to a seamless robe! Both its thought and its structure are much more unified than the synoptic gospels.

John contains a series of extended discourses with the result that at times it reads more like a treatise than a 'story'. The second half of the gospel is dominated by the discourses of Jesus with his disciples in chapters 13–17. In the first half of the gospel there are a series of lengthy scenes which have a similar structure. An incident (often a miracle) leads into dialogue with an individual or a group of opponents; the dialogue is followed by a long monologue. Essentially the same pattern can be found in 3: 1–36 (Nicodemus); 4: 1–42 (the Samaritan woman); 5: 1–47 (the man lying ill by the pool called Bethzatha); 6: 1–71 (the feeding of the five thousand); 7: 1 to 8: 59 (Jesus at the feast of tabernacles); 9: 1–41 (the man born blind).

Many words which are prominent in the synoptic gospels rarely appear in John. In the synoptic gospels Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom lies at the heart of his teaching. But in John the word 'kingdom' is found in only two passages, 3: 3, 5 and 18: 36, 38. The word 'power' (*dunamis*) is used ten times in Mark, thirteen in Matthew, fifteen in Luke, but never in John. 'Tax collector' occurs twenty-one times in the synoptic gospels, but not at all in John. These are just a few of many examples which could be given.

On the other hand, John's favourite vocabulary is largely absent from the synoptic gospels: 'life', 'light', 'the world', 'the Jews', 'to witness' (and the related nouns), 'love' (as noun and verb) are all used very frequently in John, but no more than a handful of times in the synoptic gospels. John's vocabulary is much more limited in extent than Mark's. His Greek style is very simple but not uncouth.

While several miracle stories in John are not unlike synoptic miracle stories (e.g. 4: 46–54; 5: 1–9; 9: 1–7), exorcisms are entirely absent. In the synoptic gospels parables of Jesus are prominent. In John, although there are a few parabolic sayings, there are no parables comparable with the synoptic tradition. The extended allegories of the sheepfold and the door in 10: 1–18 and of the vine in 15: 1–11 are hardly even partial exceptions.

In the synoptic gospels Jesus rarely makes overt claims about his own significance: his teaching focuses on God. In John, on the other hand, Jesus repeatedly makes explicit claims about himself. The 'I am' sayings (which have no direct synoptic counterparts) provide a clear illustration: 'I am the

bread of life' (6: 35); 'I am the light of the world' (8: 12); 'I am the door' (10: 9); 'I am the good shepherd' (10: 11); 'I am the resurrection and the life' (11: 25); 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (14: 6); 'I am the true vine' (15: 1). In four further passages, 'I am' is used without a predicate (8: 24; 8: 28; 8: 58; 13: 19; cf. also 18: 5). Jesus is presented as speaking in the same manner in which God speaks in many Old Testament passages: 'I am Yahweh'. Exodus 3: 14 is particularly important; here God reveals himself as 'I am'. (Note also Isa. 41: 4.) No wonder, then, that when Jesus says 'Before Abraham was, I am', this claim was considered to be blasphemous, an offence worthy of death by stoning (8: 58–9).

The synoptic and Johannine portraits of Jesus differ markedly. In the synoptic gospels the 'glory' of Jesus is, as it were, glimpsed by Peter, James, and John only temporarily at the Transfiguration (Mark 9: 1–8 and parallels), and even then they fail to grasp the significance of this disclosure. In John the 'glory' of Jesus is revealed openly at the very outset of his ministry at the wedding in Cana in Galilee: this is the first of the 'signs' which Jesus does and in his concluding comment the evangelist notes that its outcome was that 'his disciples believed in him' (2: 11).

As a further example, we may compare the scenes which immediately precede the arrest and trial of Jesus. In Mark's account of the last meal of Jesus with the disciples, Jesus institutes what Christians later called 'the Lord's supper' or 'the eucharist'. Jesus then goes with them to Gethsemane to pray. He is 'distressed and agitated' and says, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death.' He then prays, 'Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup (of suffering) from me; yet not what I want, but what you want' (14: 32–6).

In John, however, four chapters of discourses with the disciples are set in the context of their final meal with Jesus (chapters 13–17) and there is no account of the institution of the Lord's supper, though 6: 53–8 is generally considered to be 'eucharistic'. Nor is there an account of the 'agony' of Jesus at Gethsemane. Full of serene confidence, Jesus takes the initiative and moves forward to meet his captors. When they state that they are seeking Jesus of Nazareth, he replies 'I am he'. This phrase is related to the 'I am' sayings to which we have just referred. At this allusion to his divine status his captors 'stepped back and fell to the ground' (18: 6). At the conclusion of this scene Jesus says confidently to Peter, 'Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?' (18: 11) Thereafter throughout the passion narratives

Jesus remains in control of events: there is no distress or sadness. In the synoptic gospels Jesus is on trial; in John it is his captors who are on trial. In John Jesus is not so much 'the man of sorrows' as 'the king of glory'.

Alongside these examples (and more could be added) of the differences between John and the synoptics must be set numerous striking similarities. There are some ten passages which occur *in the same order* in John and Mark. And in numerous passages there is very close verbal similarity over several lines of Greek text. Compare, for example, Mark 1: 7–11 with John 1: 26–34; in very different accounts of the preaching of John and of the baptism of Jesus a number of identical phrases are found.

The accounts of the anointing of Jesus with ointment at Bethany in Mark 14: 3–9 and John 12: 1–8 contain many differences, but also several particularly striking points of agreement in phraseology. In Mark 14: 3 and in John 12: 3 the nard ointment used is said in several modern translations to be 'pure'. But this is no more than an intelligent guess at the meaning; the adjective *pistikos* is so rare that we simply do not know what it means! It is found nowhere else in the New Testament and in only a handful of passages in the whole of ancient Greek literature. The occurrence of such an unusual word in these two verses (taken with the many other similarities) suggests that there is a relationship between Mark and John.

But precisely what kind of relationship? Does the fourth evangelist know Mark, and perhaps Luke, and use them and revise them very freely and extensively? If so, does he intend to 'correct' them? Or does he know the synoptic gospels, use them from time to time, but also frequently ignore them, preferring to develop his own independent traditions from his own distinctive viewpoint? Or is the fourth gospel not dependent at all on any of the synoptic gospels in their final form? If so, from where did he obtain the traditions he has welded together and developed into his gospel? Why are some of these 'pre-Johannine' traditions similar to synoptic traditions, but some not? These questions are still being keenly debated: there are no agreed answers.

In the early decades of the twentieth century the dominant view was that John knew and used at least Mark, perhaps also Luke. The similarities were so striking that this seemed the obvious solution. In 1938 P. Gardner-Smith challenged this consensus by claiming that the similarities could be accounted for by use of common or related oral tradition. (In the preceding decades the development of form criticism had placed more weight on

the importance of oral traditions in early Christianity.) Gardner-Smith also insisted that the differences between John and the synoptics were so considerable that John could not possibly have used any one of the synoptic gospels. On this view, which is now widely accepted, some of the traditions which lie behind parts of the fourth gospel are closely related to traditions on which the synoptic evangelists drew, but they have been developed independently and in quite distinctive ways within the Johannine 'wing' of early Christianity. Other scholars (most notably C. K. Barrett and F. Neirynck) continue to believe that John knew and used (at least from time to time) Mark's gospel and perhaps Luke's.

At the end of the second century Clement of Alexandria referred to John as 'the spiritual gospel', and since then it has been universally accepted that John contains a profound theological portrait of Jesus. If so, must we conclude that John is historically unreliable? While some scholars have drawn that conclusion, it is now generally recognized that in some respects John's gospel may be at least as *historically* reliable as the synoptic traditions and sometimes more so! Historical reconstructions of the life and teaching of Jesus now rarely ignore John's gospel. Examples will be given in several chapters in Part II of this book.

As we saw in Chapter 2 (pp. 29–32), the advent of redaction criticism has led to a new appreciation of the distinctive theological emphases of the synoptic evangelists. The older view that one went to the synoptic gospels for history and to John for theology has completely broken down. All four gospels contain both history and theology. All four gospels are a subset of Graeco-Roman biographies (see pp. 14–18). All four evangelists are concerned to tell the story of Jesus and to spell out his significance, though it can hardly be denied that there is much more 'significance' (Christology, to use the technical term) than 'story' in John's gospel.

The composition of the fourth gospel

We referred earlier to John's gospel as a 'seamless robe'. So in many ways it is, but there is a large number of loose threads! Chapter 21 is almost certainly a later appendix added by another hand. The main part of the gospel ends impressively at 20: 30–1: 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these

are written 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.'

After that grand finale addressed to the reader, one doesn't expect further material. Chapter 21, set in Galilee rather than Jerusalem (the setting for chapter 20), fits awkwardly, and ends with a 'finale' in verse 25 which reads like a pale imitation of the passage just quoted.

The verse immediately before the conclusion just quoted implies that there will not be any more appearances of the Risen Jesus: Jesus says to Thomas, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and have yet come to believe.' And yet in chapter 21 there *is* a further appearance. Close analysis of the vocabulary and style strongly suggests (but not quite conclusively) that this chapter was not written by the author of the main part of the gospel.

Why was this appendix added? The closing verses are concerned with the relationship of Peter and the 'beloved disciple'. In the second half of the gospel the 'beloved disciple' plays a prominent role (13: 23–5; 19: 26 f.; 20: 2–8; and, according to some, 18: 15 f. and 19: 35; see also below, p. 114). Both Peter and 'the beloved disciple' have died (21: 18–19 and 21: 23). Peter's pastoral authority is clarified, as is the unique authority of the 'beloved disciple'. The natural death of the latter does not make him less important than Peter who dies a martyr's death. So perhaps chapter 21 marks an acceptance of Peter's authority as long as the special authority of the 'beloved disciple' is not denigrated.

If chapter 21 is a later addition, then perhaps other stages in the composition of the gospel can be traced. There are in fact several other awkward breaks in sequence, known as *aporias*. At the final meal with his disciples, Jesus' discourse seems to reach a conclusion at 14: 31. After the disciples have been carefully prepared for the 'departure' of Jesus to the Father, Jesus says, 'Rise, let us go hence.' But no one goes anywhere until 18: 1! In chapter 15 Jesus continues to address the disciples and starts with a quite new theme. Similarly, chapter 16 reaches a conclusion at verse 33; chapter 17, in which Jesus addresses the Father (in prayer) rather than the disciples, contains quite different material and may have been added. So even the so-called 'farewell discourses' may once have existed as three originally independent discourses: chapter 14; chapters 15–16; chapter 17.

The turning of water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee is referred to as 'the first of the signs which Jesus did' (2: 11). The healing of

the son of the official from Capernaum is 'the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee' (4: 54). Between the first and second signs there is a reference in a summary to 'the signs' which Jesus did in Jerusalem (2: 23). This suggests immediately that the 'signs' carefully numbered 'first' and 'second' may once have belonged together. In his influential commentary Rudolf Bultmann went considerably further and claimed that these two 'signs', along with five further miracle stories (and some other material) from the first half of the gospel, once belonged together in a 'signs source' which ended with 20: 30–1. In this source, Bultmann suggested, Jesus is portrayed as a semi-divine miracle-worker. Although this hypothesis has been refined further more recently, it is no more than a possibility. The word 'signs' is used several times in the so-called 'signs source', but after the 'first' and 'second' signs there is no further enumeration and some of the miracle stories are not referred to as 'signs' at all.

If the miracle traditions may once have belonged to a source, what about the discourses which are such a prominent feature of this gospel? Bultmann proposed that they too once belonged to a separate source. On his view the discourses and signs (along with passion narratives) were brought together by the evangelist to form the gospel as we now have it. Some of the 'signs' are loosely related to the discourses to which they are now attached. The discourse recorded in chapter 5, for example, starts with a dialogue between Jesus and the Jews concerning healing on the sabbath (5: 10–47). However, the account of the healing of the man ill for thirty-eight years to which it is attached makes no reference to the sabbath. Only after we are told that the man was healed, took up his pallet, and walked, is there the rather unexpected note, 'Now that day was a sabbath' (5: 9b).

If all the 'signs' and discourses were linked together as awkwardly as this, then the case for a separate discourse source would be strengthened. But this is not so. The 'bread of life' discourse in chapter 6, for example, is very closely related to the 'sign' of the feeding of the five thousand. And in some chapters (for example, chs. 4, 9, and 11) narrative and discourse are woven together so closely that it is difficult to envisage that the discourse element was ever a separate tradition. The vocabulary and style of the miracle traditions, and of the narratives and the discourses, has been analysed very closely, but this evidence neither confirms nor denies that there was ever a separate discourse source. So we seem to be left with an open question.

Several rather abrupt transitions have now been noted. There are more. In the discourse which follows Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, a quite separate short section concerned with John's baptism and his relationship to Jesus starts at 3: 22. At verse 31, however, the discourse addressed to Nicodemus seems to resume. If 3: 22–30 is removed, the order of chapter 3 is improved; if these verses are placed between 2: 12 and 13, the itinerary in chapter 2 becomes more natural.

It has often been suggested that chapters 5 and 6 should be reversed. In the present order of the gospel chapter 5 is set in Jerusalem, but in 6: 1 Jesus goes to the 'other side of the Sea of Galilee' without any indication that he has left Jerusalem! And 7: 1 is even more awkward: 'After this Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judaea, because the Jews sought to kill him.' This verse implies that Jesus has just been in Judea but for his own security he has decided to go to Galilee. But chapter 6 is set in Galilee and Jesus hasn't been in Judaea since 5: 47! If chapters 5 and 6 are reversed these oddities are removed.

There are other less striking awkward transitions. How are they all to be accounted for? Some claim that the evangelist has composed the gospel over a long period and has simply overlooked the awkward transitions. Others suggest that after the gospel was written, the original papyrus sheets were displaced; anyone who has dropped an unnumbered manuscript or typescript of fifty or more pages will readily concede that this suggestion is by no means absurd! Still others claim that the awkward transitions have arisen as the result of later insertions into the gospel.

In the final decades of the twentieth century several scholars developed further Bultmann's theories concerning the composition of this gospel. For example, Robert Fortna (1988) restated and elaborated Bultmann's theory concerning a 'signs' source. With differences in some details, Raymond Brown (1979) and J. L. Martyn (1968) distinguished separate stages in the evolution of the gospel and linked them to stages in the history of the Johannine community. John Ashton (1991) published a sophisticated interpretation of this gospel from a similar perspective. (See the Bibliography for details.)

However, in these same decades a very different approach began to attract support. This was closely allied to the literary approaches to the gospels referred to in Chapter 2 (pp. 32–6). It was claimed that students of John's gospel had paid too much attention to its loose threads, at the

expense of the 'seamless robe'. Questions were raised about the speculative nature of the reconstructions of both the stages in the composition of the gospel itself and of the history of the Johannine community. Attention was focused on the final form of the text: this is the only text we have, and it is this text which profoundly influenced later Christian thought and devotion. Detailed studies confirmed that the same stylistic features, the same literary devices such as irony and double-meanings, and the same theological motifs are found in all parts of the text. In spite of the awkward transitions, this gospel is a unity and its basic design and structure are simple and clear.

These two ways of approaching John's gospel are not quite like chalk and cheese. It is possible to adopt and appreciate the merits of both, as this chapter attempts to do. (In the first edition of this book, however, the balance was tilted towards 'reconstructions' rather than 'final form'.) It is time now to turn to the text itself, and to focus on three key passages, 1: 1–18; 12: 44–50; 18: 1–40.

The Prologue: 1: 1–18

In our earlier chapters we have seen the importance of the opening verses of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Like the opening lines of the synoptic gospels, John's Prologue is a lens through which the reader is intended to view the narratives and discourses which follow. But there the similarity ends. John's Prologue is the most sustained and profound exposition of the significance of Jesus found in the New Testament.

The Prologue functions rather like the chorus at the opening of a Greek drama: the reader or observer is not only introduced to the themes which will follow, but given the correct perspective from which to view them. The sending of Jesus the Word into the world was no afterthought: in the beginning was the Word (v. 1). The Word was associated with God in creation: all things were made through him (v. 3). He is the light of life for men (v. 4), a light which those who rejected Jesus were unable to master (vv. 5 and 10f.). Those who receive him and believe in his name are given the ability by God's grace (v. 16) to become 'children of God', to stand in a right relationship with God (v. 12). The Prologue ends on the same note on which it begins: Jesus Christ the only Son has made known, or—as the

Greek suggests—*interpreted*, the Father, for he is God's Word to all people. In short, Christ as the Word is associated both with creation and with redemption.

As with great poetry, the depths and riches of the Prologue can never be fathomed, and yet we can hardly miss the author's main concerns. The evangelist takes pains to spell out in the main body of his gospel nearly all the themes which are stated so succinctly in the Prologue.

There is one partial exception. In his later chapters the evangelist does not refer to Jesus as the Word of God. There are, however, some related passages which are relevant. The spoken words of Jesus (i.e. his teaching) are referred to as 'the word'. The one who hears the word of Jesus has eternal life (5: 24; and see also 6: 63, 68; 7: 31). At 5: 37ff. the evangelist stresses that although the opponents of Jesus know the actual words of the Scriptures, God's message to men (which the written words embody) does not 'abide in them'. God's word can be discerned in the Old Testament, but it is to be found supremely in the word of Christ. 'And the word that you hear', says Jesus, 'is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me' (14: 24). For the evangelist the spoken words of Jesus are in a specific sense a life-giving power by means of which he gives himself to men.

Why does the evangelist open his gospel by referring to Jesus as the Word or *Logos* of God? There are several reasons. *Logos* was used in Greek as a way of referring both to inward thought, and to the outward expression of thought in speech. For the Stoic philosophers the 'word' was the rational principle in accordance with which the universe existed.

Jewish readers steeped in the Old Testament were also familiar with the term. In numerous Old Testament passages 'the word of God' refers to God's communication with men, especially through the prophets. God's word is effective; it is full of life and power. In some passages God's word almost has an independent existence of its own. 'God sent forth his word, and healed them' (Psalm 107: 20). 'My word goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose' (Isa. 55: 11).

A second Old Testament theme lies behind the Prologue. In Prov. 8: 22–31 Wisdom is associated closely with God in creation and almost seems to be an independent entity. God's Wisdom says, 'The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago . . . When he established the heavens I was there . . . When he marked out the

foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker.' This theme is taken further in several later Jewish writings which are related to Proverbs. In Wisdom of Solomon 7: 22, for example, Wisdom is spoken of as 'the fashioner of all things' (Wisdom 7: 22). In 1 Enoch 42 Wisdom is sent forth by God to find a dwelling place among all the people. Many of the phrases of John's Prologue are strikingly similar to passages in these writings. The evangelist (and his Greek-speaking Jewish readers) would almost certainly have been familiar with them.

Old Testament and later Jewish writings which speak about God's Wisdom almost certainly lie behind the Prologue. But why do these verses speak of Jesus as God's *Word* rather than as God's *Wisdom*? Although Paul dared to refer to Jesus as the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1: 24), John may have been reluctant to do so because 'Wisdom' is a feminine noun in both Greek and Hebrew. In any case in earlier Christian usage 'the word' had been used to refer to the Christian message, with Christ as its focal point. (See, for example, 1 Thess. 2: 13; Col. 3: 16; Acts 10: 36; 13: 26; 15: 35, 36.)

The evangelist took an unprecedented step in referring to Jesus as the Word associated with God in creation and as the Word made flesh. He may well have been influenced not only by Greek thought and by passages in Old Testament and Jewish writings, but also by early Christian usage of 'the word'.

In the opening lines of the Prologue the relationship of the Word to God is presented in a paradoxical way, just as is the relationship of the Son to the Father throughout the gospel. The evangelist echoes the opening line of the Old Testament, 'in the beginning', but he does not start, as does Genesis 1: 1, with *God*; instead, we read, 'in the beginning was the *Word*'. This is indeed a bold opening line. But the evangelist emphasizes that the Word was not *independent* of God, for he was 'with God', or, we might translate, 'in God's presence'. The Word is dependent on God, and is not simply to be equated with God; this important point is brought out in the REB translation: 'what God was, the Word was' (1: 2). In the gospel itself Jesus claims, 'The Father and I are one' (10: 30), but he also insists, paradoxically, that his relationship with the Father is one of *dependence*. He refers to himself repeatedly as the one sent by the Father, and, as if to rebut any suggestion that he is a 'second God', he states, 'the Father is greater than I' (14: 28).

Many scholars accept that the Prologue originated as a hymn or poem

into which the reference to John's testimony to the light (vv. 6–8) was added at a later stage. Verses 1–5 and 9–12 (and parts of 13–18) can be set out as short lines of poetry. Many lines begin by repeating the end of the previous line, so that there is 'step-stair' parallelism; this is still partly visible in a translation of vv. 1–5:

In the beginning was the *Word*
 And the *Word* was with *God*
 And what *God* was, the *Word* was.
 The *Word* was in the beginning with *God*.

All things *came into being* through *him*,
 And without *him* not one thing *came into being*.
 What *came into being* in him was *life*
 And the *life* was the *light* of all people.
 And the *light* shines in the *darkness*
 And the *darkness* did not master it.

However the 'step-stair' parallelism is less clear in vv. 10–12 and not present at all in vv. 14 and 16, verses which are usually taken to be part of the original hymn or poem. And there is no general agreement on precisely which verses or phrases were inserted into the hymn.

Not surprisingly some (notably C. K. Barrett, 1978) have questioned whether this hypothesis is plausible. They reject the claim that the Prologue is (or was at an earlier stage) a hymn or poem, and insist that the evangelist himself wrote the whole Prologue in highly rhythmical prose.

As with the gospel as a whole, it is impossible to be certain about earlier stages of composition. Some would say that this is a matter of no consequence. We are faced with the two possible approaches mentioned above: reconstruction or final form. However, all would affirm the effectiveness of this opening chorus-like statement about the significance of the drama which is about to unfold.

Johannine themes: 12: 44–50

At the end of the first main section of the gospel the evangelist sums up nearly all the themes which have been developed in the preceding chapters.

In some ways this 'summary' is attached rather awkwardly to the preceding verses. In 12: 36 Jesus goes into hiding; in the verses which follow the evangelist comments on the unbelief of those who have seen his many signs. The summary at the end of the chapter opens without any indication of the context or of the audience: 'And Jesus cried aloud and said . . .' (12: 44).

But the present position of these verses is appropriate. They not only summarize neatly the whole of the first half of the gospel; they also turn out, on closer inspection, to be related to the immediately preceding verses. There the evangelist has noted that 'many even of the authorities believed in Jesus, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue' (12: 42). Two other verses in the gospel, 9: 22 and 16: 2, refer to expulsion from the synagogue of those who believe in Jesus. There is some Jewish evidence (though its dating and interpretation are disputed) that suggests that in about AD 85 a clause (the so-called benediction against heretics) was added to the synagogue liturgy which may have led to the expulsion of Christians.

So 12: 42 may well reflect strong tensions between Jews who accepted Christian claims about Jesus and others who did not. Several passages in the preceding chapters refer to the accusations made against Christians by Jews. Their most bitter complaint was that Christians had made Jesus equal to God. At 5: 18 we read that the Jews sought to kill Jesus 'because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God'. As we saw above, when Jesus refers to himself as 'I am' at 8: 58, this is taken by his opponents as a claim to divine status, and they immediately seek to stone him. In 10: 33 we read of a further attempt to stone Jesus for blasphemy, because, the Jews say to Jesus, 'you, though only a human being, are making yourself God'.

The evangelist responds to these accusations by stressing repeatedly that Jesus acts and speaks in complete dependence on the Father. Christians do not claim that Jesus is a 'second God'. This response is prominent both at the beginning and at the end of the summary with which the evangelist ends this section of the gospel. Verses 44 and 45 stress the close relationship between Jesus and God: *belief* in Jesus is belief in him who sent Jesus; *seeing* Jesus is seeing him who sent Jesus. These two verses contain the evangelist's characteristic way of referring to God: he is the one who has sent Jesus. Seventeen times in the preceding chapters Jesus refers to God as 'the one

who has sent me', thus stressing his complete dependence on the Father. At the end of this summary this point is underlined again. Jesus does not speak on his own authority. 'The Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak . . . What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me' (12: 49–50).

Verses 44 and 45 are closely related to 13: 20b: 'Whoever receives me receives him who sent me.' Believing, seeing, and receiving Jesus, are, for the evangelist, virtually synonymous. John 13: 20 recalls clearly Matt. 10: 40: this is one of several points at which the synoptic and Johannine accounts of the sayings of Jesus are closely related. There are two further examples in this summary. 'I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them' (12: 47a) recalls Matt. 7: 26; 12: 48, 'the one who rejects me . . .', recalls Luke 10: 16.

Verse 46 refers in summary form to the light–darkness theme which is so prominent in chapters 3, 8, and 9. In 8: 12 Jesus says, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' In the verses which follow (8: 15–16), as also in 3: 17–19 and 9: 38–41, the light–darkness theme is closely linked to judgement. So it is no surprise to find that verses 47 and 48 summarize the teaching on judgement found in earlier chapters. Whoever rejects Jesus and does not accept his words is judged by the word that Jesus has spoken. Jesus has not come to judge the world but to save the world (3: 17 and 12: 47). Those who do not respond to Jesus as the light sent into the world remain in darkness and, in effect, judge themselves (3: 18–19 and 12: 46). For the fourth evangelist judgement takes place in the present as people respond or fail to respond to the light sent into the world. Although the evangelist emphasizes strongly that judgement is a present reality, for him, as for other New Testament writers, there is also a future judgement 'on the last day' (12: 48 and 5: 27–9).

In the final verse of this summary there is a reference to 'eternal life' which is the gift of the Father through Jesus. This phrase is used fourteen times in the preceding chapters. For the fourth evangelist, those who believe in Jesus are given now, in this life, an anticipation of the life of the age to come. Perhaps the most striking passage is 5: 24: 'Very truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but *has passed from death to life*.' 'Eternal life', then, is not just 'life after death' (as it became in

the later Christian tradition); in Jesus future blessing becomes present reality.

Finally, it is worth noting how many of the themes of this summary are already found in the Prologue: light and darkness (cf. 1: 4–5, 9 and 12: 46); life (cf. 1: 4–5 and 12: 50); the coming of Jesus leads to his rejection (by some) (cf. 1: 10 f. and 12: 47–8); to believe in Jesus is to believe in God (cf. 1: 12 and 12: 44); seeing the Father (cf. 1: 18 and 12: 45). Some of these parallels are closer than others, but taken together they support our contention that the evangelist develops a small range of themes in his gospel and expounds them from many angles. He sets them out briefly in his Prologue and sums them up in these verses which close the first main part of his gospel.

The opening of the passion narrative: John 18

John 18 will seem to many modern readers to be similar to the synoptic gospels. Judas' betrayal and the arrest of Jesus are narrated (18: 1–12; cf. Mark 14: 43–6). The ear of the slave of the High Priest is cut off in an impulsive act (18: 10–11; cf. Mark 14: 47). Peter denies Jesus more than once (18: 15–18, 25–7; cf. Mark 14: 66–72). Jesus is taken to the High Priest (18: 12–14, 19–24; cf. Mark 14: 53–65). Jesus is brought before Pilate who asks, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' (18: 28–33; cf. Mark 15: 1–10). A reference to the custom of the release of a prisoner at Passover is followed by the crowd's insistence before Pilate that Barabbas, not Jesus, should be released (18: 38–40; cf. Mark 15: 11–15).

The similarities are striking, but a close reading of the narratives soon reveals many differences, some of which concern historical details. Several examples will be referred to in a moment. But first of all we must note the extent to which John 18, apparently so similar to narratives of the same events in the synoptic gospels, is impregnated with distinctive Johannine themes.

When Judas brings soldiers and police to arrest Jesus, Jesus 'knows all that was to happen to him' and takes the initiative by identifying himself to the arresting party (18: 1–5). In the Johannine passion narratives Jesus is in control of events and others react to him (cf. 18: 6–8, 11, 20–1, 22–3, 34–7). There is no agony or tragedy (as in Mark), no pathos (as in Luke), and no

sadness (as in all three synoptic gospels). Jesus is the true Judge and the true King (18: 33–8; cf. 19: 14).

In vv. 15–16 there are references to ‘another disciple’ who is with Simon Peter. This is the ‘beloved disciple’ who is associated with Peter in 13: 23–4; 20: 2–10; 21: 20–4. A careful reading of this narrative is very revealing. Whereas Peter enters the courtyard only to deny Jesus, the ‘beloved disciple’ enters with Jesus and does *not* deny Jesus.

The significance of this becomes clear in the narrative of the discovery of the empty tomb (20: 2–8). The ‘beloved disciple’ outruns Peter and reaches the tomb ‘first’ (vv. 4, 8). Although Peter enters the tomb first, he does not believe. However, when the ‘beloved disciple’ enters the tomb, ‘he saw and believed’ (v. 8).

These two narratives (along with other evidence) strongly suggest that the ‘beloved disciple’ is carefully being given precedence over Peter. Perhaps John’s gospel is counteracting claims made on behalf of Peter in certain circles. What is clear is that this gospel is drawing attention to the claims of its founder and chief authority, the ‘beloved disciple’ (whose identity will be discussed below). So there is more to the apparently straightforward narratives in John 18 and 20 than meets the eye.

We turn now to two further examples of distinctively Johannine themes in chapter 18. In John 18: 9 and 32 the evangelist addresses the reader directly in an aside in order to make sure that the deeper significance of the incident just recorded is fully appreciated. At his arrest Jesus urges the arresting party to let his disciples go. The evangelist comments: ‘This was to fulfil the word that Jesus had spoken, “I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me”’ (cf. John 6: 39; 10: 28; 17: 12). When ‘the Jews’ tell Pilate that they are not permitted to put anyone to death, the evangelist informs the reader that ‘this was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die’ (18: 32; cf. 12: 33; 3: 14; 21: 19). (The evangelist’s aside is placed in brackets in the NRSV in order to assist modern readers!) From the evangelist’s perspective, the ‘lifting up’ of Jesus on a Roman cross (cf. 3: 14; 12: 32) rather than death by the Jewish mode of stoning was God’s will. The reader is being reminded that Jesus’ prophetic foretelling of the mode of his own death is now being fulfilled. Just like the Scriptures, the words of Jesus are authoritative and are fulfilled.

In John 18 there are eight references to ‘the Jews’. In the gospel as a whole there are about seventy! In stark contrast, in Matthew and Luke

there are only five such references, and in Mark, six. The only derogatory reference in the synoptic tradition is Matt. 28: 15. In John, nearly all the references to 'the Jews' are negative; some are neutral (e.g. 2: 6, 13; 3: 1; 5: 1; 6: 4) and only a very few can be considered to be positive (e.g. 4: 22).

The repeated use of this term has been studied intensively. Although various explanations have been proposed, several of the examples in John 18 confirm that in this gospel the phrase 'the Jews' has become almost a technical term for the religious authorities, especially in Jerusalem, who were hostile to Jesus. In John 18: 3 we are told that the arresting party moved against Jesus at the behest of the chief priests and the Pharisees; later in the chapter the arresting party becomes 'the Jews' (cf. vv. 14, 31). Similarly in chapter 8: in 8: 13, 19, and 21 there are references to the Pharisees; later in the same chapter they become 'the Jews' (cf. vv. 22, 48, 52, 57).

The evangelist's use of the phrase 'the Jews' keeps sounding like a gong right through the gospel. The term has undoubtedly fuelled Christian anti-Semitism down through the centuries, and this fact continues to embarrass Christians. However a careful reading of the text of the gospel confirms that it was not part of the evangelist's intention to pillory all Jews of all time. The evangelist depicts 'the Jews' as belonging to 'the world'—the terms are virtually synonymous; he has in mind Jewish leaders who expressed overt hostility to Jesus and his disciples. It is important to note that a positive note is also sounded. Some Jews do believe (8: 30; 10: 19), even 'many of the authorities' (12: 42). So if 'anti-Semitism' is taken to mean 'unremitting racial hatred', then the evangelist is not guilty, however much this gospel has been misused.

There are several historical puzzles in John 18. Who arrested Jesus? A 'detachment' of soldiers, a cohort (*speira*) of about 200 Roman soldiers (18: 3a; cf. 18: 12), together with Jewish temple police ('from the chief priests and the Pharisees', 18: 3b). So this gospel (unlike the synoptics) states that there was both Roman and Jewish involvement in the arrest of Jesus. Is this plausible historically? Or is the evangelist emphasizing that representatives of both the Roman and the Jewish authorities, i.e. all the forces of darkness, are arrayed against Jesus? It is possible that the Jewish authorities did request the support of some Roman soldiers who were stationed nearby in the Antonia garrison in order to quell disturbances. In that case, John's gospel preserves accurately a detail not found in the synoptic gospels. The evangelist, however, is primarily concerned with the deeper significance of

the opposition to Jesus: the world which does not know the Father who has sent Jesus into the world (17: 25–6).

Was Judas in charge of the arresting party (18. 3)? The REB (and some other translations) leaves the question open: 'Judas *made his way there* with a detachment of soldiers, and with the temple police.' One can visualize Judas mingling with the arresting party. The NRSV (and other translations) reflect the Greek much more accurately: 'Judas *brought* a detachment of soldiers.' Judas takes the initiative, leads the way, and hence is fully culpable.

John 18: 13 records that Jesus was taken first of all 'to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year'. Annas is then referred to twice as 'high priest' (18: 19, 22). Since there could only be one high priest in post at any one time, is the evangelist's reference to both Annas and Caiaphas as 'high priest' hopelessly muddled? Probably not. It is likely that the title 'high priest' continued to be used for Annas even after his departure from office: he held a 'patriarchal' position in high-priestly circles (cf. Luke 3: 2; Acts 4: 6), and still enjoyed the courtesy title, 'high priest', as did some other respected high priests (Josephus, *Antiquities* §34). The comment that Caiaphas was high priest 'that year' does not necessarily imply that the evangelist believed (wrongly) that the office was held for only one year: most scholars accept that the sense is 'that particularly memorable year'.

The preceding discussion of some of the issues raised by a close reading of John 18 confirms that this gospel is like a stream in which children can wade and elephants swim. My hope is that my readers will want to become elephants and wade further into other parts of this fascinating but enigmatic gospel.

Purpose and setting

In the final verse of the gospel proper, the evangelist seems to state his purpose very clearly: the signs written in this book are recorded 'so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (20: 31). But does the evangelist mean that these are written 'so that you may continue to believe' or 'in order that you may come to believe'? Is the gospel written to strengthen faith or is it intended to be a missionary tract? Unfortunately

the Greek is ambiguous. And to make matters worse two forms of the verb are found in the early manuscripts.

Most scholars accept that the evangelist writes with his own Christian readers and listeners primarily in mind. In 6: 68–9 Peter speaks for the reader: 'Lord . . . you have the words of eternal life. *We* have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.' Passages such as 8: 31 ('If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples') and 15: 4ff. ('Abide in me . . . those who abide in me, and I in them bear much fruit') are addressed to believers. At the climax of the Prologue in 1: 14, the faith not only of the evangelist himself, but also of Christians associated with him, is confessed in the words: '*we* have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father' (cf. also 1: 16).

What do we know about the recipients of this gospel? We have already noted passages which indicate that they are involved in fierce controversy with the Jewish synagogue. (See pp. 99 and 111.) This is a pervasive theme. The rejection of Jesus by 'his own people' is noted in the Prologue (1: 11). In the dialogue with Nicodemus there is a dramatic change at 3: 11. Up until that point Jesus and Nicodemus have been speaking as individuals. But suddenly the evangelist switches to plural pronouns: this change cannot be brought out in English translations unless we resort to 'thee' and 'thou' in the preceding verses. In 3: 11 we move to John's day and to discussion between Christians and Jews: '*We* (Christians) speak of what we know, and testify to what we have seen; but *you* (Jews) do not receive our testimony.' In chapters 5–9 there are repeated references to the theological disputes between Christians and Jews. The evangelist's readers are undoubtedly at loggerheads with their Jewish neighbours.

At least some members of the evangelist's communities have parted company painfully with local synagogues. Down through history minority religious groups which have parted with the 'parent' group have tended to become inward-looking and isolated from the world 'outside'. This attitude is often said to be 'sectarian', though that term begs questions of definition. What is hardly in doubt is that the evangelist and his readers are at odds not only with Judaism but with the world in general. This is reflected clearly in the farewell discourses addressed by Jesus to the disciples—but on another level the evangelist is speaking to his own readers and listeners. In 15: 18–19 Jesus says: 'If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world,

the world would love you as its own. But because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you.'

This isolation from the world is also expressed clearly at the climax of the farewell discourses in chapter 17. Jesus does not pray for the world, but 'on behalf of those whom you gave me' (v. 9). The disciples are 'not of the world, just as I am not of the world' (vv. 14, 16).

Not surprisingly, the ethical teaching in this gospel is directed almost entirely to Christians. The 'new commandment' which Jesus gives his disciples is 'love one another' (13: 34). This is the central ethical principle in John: it is love for one's fellow-Christian which is being expressed, not love for one's neighbour or enemy. This is in strong contrast to Matt. 5: 44, 'I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you', and to the parable of the good Samaritan which is the reply to the lawyer's question, 'Who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10: 25–37; cf. also Mark 12: 31 ff.). The sayings of Jesus in the synoptic gospels on marriage, divorce, property, and the state are all missing in John. There is no sign of Luke's insistence that the story of Jesus is related in any way to world history (see above, pp. 80–1).

The recipients of this gospel, then, do seem to be decidedly at odds both with their Jewish neighbours and also with the world in general. What was their relationship to other strands of early Christianity? This is an interesting but difficult question: it raises numerous issues which we cannot pursue here. In his influential commentary Rudolf Bultmann (1971) argued that some passages in John were added by an 'ecclesiastical redactor' after its composition in order to bring it into line with 'mainstream' Christianity at the end of the first century. He claimed that in genuine Johannine thought there is no room for the sacraments; the passages which seem to allude to them most clearly were later additions. Similarly, the passages which refer to future judgement 'at the last day' (5: 28–9; 6: 39–40, 44, 54; 12: 48) are taken as additions. Bultmann insisted that the evangelist's primary emphasis was on the judgement which takes place in the present when people are confronted with the claims of Jesus, so there can be no room for future judgement.

If Bultmann's analysis is correct, then this gospel does represent a form of Christianity which is very different from most of the strands we can trace in the closing decades of the first century. But even if, with most

scholars, we judge his case for later additions 'not proven', his insistence that many of the evangelist's central emphases are quite distinctive is not refuted. John's attitude to the sacraments is, at best, ambivalent. And his emphasis is undoubtedly on judgement and eternal life as present realities.

Ernst Käsemann (1968) took Bultmann's approach still further, with special reference to the evangelist's portrait of Jesus. On Käsemann's view the climax of the Prologue comes at 1: 14b, 'we beheld his glory'. Jesus is a semi-divine being whose feet hardly touch the earth. The result is that John's portrait of Jesus is docetic: Jesus only *appears* to be fully human. John prepares for the later development of Gnosticism and is perhaps already influenced by it. This highly provocative interpretation has won few supporters. Most would agree that it is based on a small range of passages (especially 1: 14b and ch. 17).

But Käsemann's work does raise once again the question of the relationship of John to Gnostic thought. It is now clear that in the second century John's gospel was used extensively in Gnostic circles. (There are a number of parallels in the *Gospel of Truth*, for example.) This probably explains why it was used hardly at all in 'mainstream' Christian circles until the closing decades of the second century. Although some of John's distinctive vocabulary (e.g. light, life, knowledge, truth) is prominent in Gnostic writings, it is often used in different ways. And John's gospel is certainly far removed from the full-blown Gnosticism which the later church fathers attacked as heretical.

Finally, we must consider briefly the relationship of John's gospel to the three Johannine letters and the book of Revelation. There are sufficient similarities to suggest that all these writings come from the same circles. John's gospel and Revelation are such different writings that common authorship has rarely been proposed. The letters, however, do seem to be related much more closely to the gospel. However, most scholars now accept that the vocabulary, style, and ideas of the epistles all suggest that they were not written by the author of the gospel.

1 John 2: 19 informs us that there has been a split in the Johannine community: 'They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us.' 1 John 4: 5 strikes such a pessimistic note that it may suggest that the secessionists are having greater numerical success: 'They are from the world—and the world listens to them.' Most scholars accept that the letters were written

after the gospel: the split reflected in 1 John was caused by differing interpretations of the gospel. The group associated with the author of 1 John remained in touch with 'mainstream' Christianity, but the successors of the secessionists are to be traced to the Gnostic circles which valued the gospel so highly.

Date and authorship

As we saw in our chapters on Mark, Matthew, and Luke, the date of their composition is uncertain. So even if we could be confident that John has used one or more of the synoptic gospels, we would still find it difficult to date John. If John does reflect steps taken to exclude Christians from the synagogue then it may have been written about AD 90; however, as we saw on p. 111, this is disputed. Perhaps *c.* AD 90 is the most probable date, but it is important to note that this view is based on rather general assumptions concerning the length of time it would have taken for John's profound and sophisticated thought to have emerged in early Christianity.

We can, however, be reasonably certain that John was not written much after AD 100. The very earliest papyrus fragment of any part of the New Testament (P52, also known as Rylands Papyrus 457) contains a few verses from John 18; by analysing closely the writing, ink and layout, papyrologists date it at about AD 130. The 'Unknown Gospel' (Papyrus Egerton 2), which we shall consider briefly in Chapter 7 (pp. 132–3), depends (partly) on John and strongly suggests that John was circulating in Egypt well before the middle of the second century. So perhaps we can conclude that John was written between AD 80 and 100; it would be rash to be more precise.

At the end of the second century Irenaeus states that John the son of Zebedee lived to a great age in Ephesus and there wrote the gospel. Similar statements are found in other writers from this period and it quickly became an established tradition. However, it is difficult to accept its accuracy. There is no evidence in earlier writers that John resided in Ephesus; if he did so, this silence is surprising. The gospel itself does not make any explicit statement about its author.

In the second half of the gospel we meet the 'beloved disciple' (13: 23–5; 19: 26 f.; 20: 2–8; and, according to some, 18: 15 f. and 19: 35). Although numerous attempts have been made to equate the beloved disciple with

John the son of Zebedee, on the basis of chapters 1–20 the best that can be said is that this is a possible inference. In 21: 7 (a later appendix) the beloved disciple is identified as one of the group of disciples mentioned in 21: 2: Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples who are not named. Once again the beloved disciple *may* be linked with John son of Zebedee, but this is not a necessary conclusion. It is in fact unlikely. If the beloved disciple belonged to the circle of the disciples of Jesus from the beginning, why does the first reference to the beloved disciple come only at 13: 23?

The beloved disciple appears finally in 21: 24. 'This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.' At first sight this verse suggests that the beloved disciple wrote the gospel. But does 'these things' refer to the whole gospel, to the whole of chapter 21, or just to the immediately preceding incident? And even if 21: 24 does refer to the whole gospel, it may well be no more than an attempt from the time when the appendix was added to identify the beloved disciple as the author of the gospel. So we are left with a number of unresolved problems.

Nor can we be more confident about the place in which the gospel was written. Those who accept the reliability of the late second-century tradition propose Ephesus; some scholars do so on other grounds. Alexandria has been suggested, as has Antioch, but this issue too is best left open.