



SESSION 2 | INTRODUCTION, PART 2

WHEN WAS THE GOSPEL WRITTEN?

- Along with the authorship of John, there was an almost universal acceptance of a “late date” of the writing of the Gospel, until about 1850 when a pre-70AD date was proposed.
- Arguments for a late date:
 - Early writings argue for a late date from Ephesus.
 - Irenaeus: “Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.”¹
 - Trajan began his reign in 98AD, so John must have lived at least until that time.
 - The style and argumentation are in line with later Greek writing.
- Arguments for an early date:
 - There is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - John 5:2 mentions Jerusalem in the present.
 - The argument that Paul was the last of the Scripture’s authors, based on Colossians 1:25.
- Analysis of the arguments:
 - Like authorship, neither side has a “smoking gun.” In the end, we must be comfortable not knowing when it was written.
 - Many of the arguments for an early date:
 - Stem from preterism (though not exclusively). Preterists want the Revelation to be written *before* the destruction of Jerusalem so that they can say that the Revelation was about this destruction. They connect the writing of the fourth Gospel with the writing of the Revelation and thus put both early.
 - Are arguments from silence, such as, “something as important of the destruction of Jerusalem would be written.” Such arguments are notoriously weak.
 - Are an error of interpretation. Colossians 1:25 tells us that the Word of God would be *incomplete* without the Pauline works, not that Paul was the last author. (Note: this argument comes from those who reject preterism and accept verbal plenary inspiration, but who make an error of interpretation).

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL?

- While the fourth Gospel is almost always presented as “our Gospel” (even among dispensationalists), we must consider Romans 15:8.

¹ Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 416.

- This clarifies the ministry of Jesus: He was a **minister of the circumcision** (i.e.: the Jewish nation under the Law) and His ministry was **for the truth...to confirm the promises**.
- This, in essence, was the purpose of the *life* of Christ (not of His death).
- The **fathers** of the Jewish nation were given **promises** (such as a New Covenant) that were confirmed in and by Christ (such as at the Last Supper). This would give the Jewish nation ample opportunity to base their acceptance or rejection of the Messiah and His Kingdom on visible and verbal evidence.
- Jesus repeatedly stated that His ministry was for **the circumcision** and not for the Gentiles (Matt 10:5-6, 15:24, etc.)
- If Jesus was a *servant* (diakonos) **of the circumcision**, then the testimony of Jesus' life must be first and primarily directed to the Jewish people and their nation.
- God wanted us to have *four* Gospels, not *one* Gospel. To attempt to harmonize the four into one is undoing the work of God.
 - Having *four* *suggests* that each Gospel presents a different aspect of the life of Jesus.
 - This suggestion should be taken carefully, because it invites eisegesis.
 - If there are four aspects of the life of Christ in the Gospels, then a harmony of these Gospels is virtually impossible (which is why no two "harmonies" of the Gospels agree).
 - The attempt to come up with a "theme" has set the fourth Gospel apart from the first three, as if it were Dispensationally different. Rather than a theme, we can ask (carefully), "How is Jesus presented differently in each Gospel?" Here is one suggestion (adapted from Bullinger's notes on "The Inter-relation of the Four Gospels" in *The Companion Bible*).
 - In Matthew He is the KING.
 - In Mark He is the SERVANT.
 - In Luke He is the HUMAN.
 - In John He is GOD.
 - If (as we suggest) the four Gospels comprise *one Savior* and all four are connected and necessary to the whole, then we are forced to abandon interpretive concepts that take the four to be four (or, more commonly, 3+1). This also forces us to drop the word *synoptic* ("seeing together") for the first three.
 - This study of the Gospel of John will be taught as it were Dispensationally equal to the first three (i.e., for and to those of the same dispensation).
 - How does this approach differ?
 - It differs from traditional evangelicalism, which takes all four gospels as giving instruction for our daily living (i.e.: written *to* us and not just *for* us, and thus directly applicable to the Christian life).
 - It differs from my own teaching of recent years in that I have taught that John was written with Pauline influence, selecting areas of Jesus' ministry which were applicable to a post-Pauline knowledge (and thus written *to* us and directly applicable to our Christian lives).