

Johannine Studies

Lecture 2 Study Notes – February 3, 2008

What is the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel?

Some people have assumed that John's gospel was the last one to be written and that it was written to complement the others. However, there is no hint that the Fourth Gospel was either complementing or correcting the other three. What is clear is that the other three can easily be set along side of each other and compared while John's gospel does not really permit such point by point, or verse by verse comparisons. (*Synopsis of the Four Gospels* by Kurt Aland, p. 793)

There are major differences between the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel.

1. In Synoptic accounts of Jesus' ministry, He was only in Jerusalem the week of the Passover, at which time he was arrested, tried and put to death.
2. According to some scholars there are hints that a primary source of John's Gospel is of a person living in Judea during the ministry of Jesus and the story is being written from the viewpoint of one dwelling in Jerusalem (John 18:15-16). The account of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is told from the viewpoint of one in the city (John 12:9-18) in contrast to the Synoptics, which describe the event from the viewpoint of the Galileans entering the city (Mark 11:1-11).
3. There are chronological differences as well. Whereas in the Synoptic Gospels, the ministry of Jesus and the call of the first disciples is set after the imprisonment of John the Baptist (Mark 1:14-20). In John's Gospel, Jesus begins his ministry in Judea during the period of John's work, and his earliest disciples appear to be disciples of the Baptist (John 1:35-51). (*Synopsis of the Four Gospels* by Kurt Aland, p. 793)
4. The Synoptics give only one solitary trip to Jerusalem, while John mentions Jesus and three Passovers (John 2:13; 6:4; 12:1), which suggest that Jesus' ministry could have extended over two or three years. Journeys to Jerusalem in John are found:
 - a. first cycle (John 1:19-3:36)
 - b. second cycle (John 4:1-5:47)
 - c. third cycle (John 6:1-10: 42)
 - d. fourth and final cycle (John 11:1-17:26)
5. The cleansing of the Temple—the Synoptic Gospels tell us that it occurs as Jesus visits Jerusalem before the Passover, while John sets it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry after turning water into wine at the party of Cana (John 2:13-22). Where there two cleansings?
6. The date of the Last Supper is different as well. The Synoptics state that the last meal of Jesus with his disciples was a Passover celebration (Mark 14:12; Luke 22:15). John states the meal took place on the eve of the Passover (John 13:1; 18:28) and that Jesus died immediately prior to the Passover (John 19:31).
7. Notice that in John there is not a single exorcism. Instead, John calls Jesus' miracles signs and there are just 7 in John. (Three of them have to do with nature miracles: water to wine in John 2, multiplication of loaves in John 6, and the walking on water in chapter 6. Then we have three healings: chapters 4, 5 and 9, with resurrection of Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11).

8. The teaching style of Jesus in John is different than in the Synoptics. In the Synoptics, Jesus uses the parables to get his teaching across. In John, there are fewer parables and the Evangelist uses his own language to represent what Jesus is trying to convey to his followers. (see *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* by Raymond Brown, pages 17-19)
9. John also has a different understanding of the Judgment, or eschatology, than the Synoptic Gospels. In the Synoptics, God's judgment is entirely in the future. "The Son of man will come on the clouds of heaven and receive dominion. Matthew 25 has the Son of Man sitting upon the throne and judging all nations in the future (This is future Eschatology). In John, there are some references to what will happen in the future (John 5:28-29), but John sees God's judgment taking place not so much in the future, but in the ministry of Jesus itself. "He is the light that come into world, and that light reveals who is in the light and who is in darkness so that His first coming is already a crisis or a judgment." (*Jesus and Gospels* Vol. 2 p.125; see handout of the in-between times; see the Realized and Future Eschatology handouts)
10. The supreme theme of the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels is summarized in Mark 1:15. John's Gospel has one saying about the kingdom (John 3:3, 3:5) and an oblique reference before Pilate (John 18:36-37). Yet it underlines everything that John tries to say. The purpose of John's Gospel, according to the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, is that its readers might receive and be established in the life of the kingdom of God (John 20:31). Hence for John, his Gospel and his epistles deal a lot with light, "life", and eternal life. But the purpose of John seems best to be described in John 20:30-31. Notice also how many references there are to believing in the Father or in Himself in the Gospel. The purpose is to encourage his readers to believe.
11. Given the differences in the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel, many people don't see a direct connection between John and the other three. It is argued that John didn't use the Synoptics as one of his sources, yet it is also clear that John's Gospel didn't take shape in isolation either. Therefore, we shouldn't ignore the other Gospels in interpreting John because John must have dipped into the same oral traditions or the same stuff that were used by the Synoptics.
12. The Fourth Gospel is often seen as having a supplemental relationship with the other three. Meaning that John has three years to put what he does in his Gospel, while the rest have just one. So John gives the readers supplement or additional material that the other three simply don't have.
13. Luke Timothy Johnson sees John's purpose in writing as making explicit what is implicit in the Synoptic tradition (*Jesus and Gospels* Vol. 2 p. 127). The claims that Jesus makes in the other Gospels are put on the table and John says, "Here they are, this is really what Jesus meant." For example, in feeding of the 5000 which is in all the Gospels (How about the feeding of the 4000; is it in all the Gospels? No, not Luke and John. See Kurt Aland handout), it is only John who has Jesus to go on and say: "I am the bread of life; this is the bread that has come down from heaven." John raises the implicit teachings of Jesus to explicit and direct statements about whom and what He is meant to do. Therefore, John, more so than the other Gospels, is meant to be theology of Jesus and his teachings.