

**Spong, *The Fourth Gospel*, Chapters 11-16**  
**Wesley Advocates 25 June 2017**

*The Gentile Official's Son: The Meaning of God and Faith*

How does John use this story about the Gentile and his ailing son as a parallel to that of the Samaritan woman at the well?

What does Spong remind us of concerning our tribal fences? What religious formulae do we cling to that separate us from others?

What does Spong mean when he says on p. 109 that the “primary, primitive meaning of worship is to solicit divine protection for ourselves”? Do you agree? Explain.

What three religious traditions (or practices) did the Jews adopt after the exile to separate themselves from all others?

How effectively did those traditions (or practices) help the Jews maintain their identity as a people without their own place on a map?

Why is it important that Jesus never visit the Gentile's son? For Spong, that separation emphasizes what about Jesus?

See p. 115, paragraphs 1 and 2: how have we defined and limited God? How do scripture and creed lead us to do so? What specific language, often language we repeat so regularly we no longer even think about it, limit God and make us seem foolishly literal?

What does Spong mean when he says, “God was not and is not bound to the life of Jesus”?

How does he redefine *faith*?

In what ways does the story of the Gentile and his son underscore not religion, but life? In this story, how does “the word” operate through, without being bound by the flesh?

*The Man Crippled for Thirty-Eight Years*

What does this number of years matter? What excuses does the cripple offer for remaining unhealed beside Bethzatha pool?

Why makes Jesus seem clairvoyant in this story? Why is indecision a sin?

What “sin” does the cripple commit once healed? And what does he do in response to Jesus’s admonition? Does the man choose faith and new life? How do we know?

Why is choosing life such a costly decision for all of us?

### *Andrew and Philip: The Red Sea and Manna*

Who exactly were Andrew and Philip? How did each of them become Jesus’s disciples? What do we know about them and their personalities and values from this gospel and the synoptics? Please read closely on p. 126, paragraphs 2 and 3. What should we assume knowing only these two men among the disciples carried Greek (not Hebrew) given names?

In what ways do these disciples and their interactions with Jesus parallel Moses’s actions to save the Hebrew during their sojourn in the wilderness and their crossing the Red Sea? Why does that matter?

Specifically how did Andrew contribute to the “feeding of the multitudes”? Why does Spong call Andrew “the gatekeeper”?

What is the significance of dark and light metaphors in this gospel?

### *The Brothers of Jesus: A Debate on Origins*

What is Sukkoth? What are the chief symbols and purposes of this festival? How does the John writer use this festival to illuminate Jesus’s activities? Why is Psalm 118 important?

Who were Jesus’s brothers? In this context, what do they want Jesus to do? Why? How does this story parallel Jesus’s interactions with his mother in the wedding-at-Cana story? Ultimately what does Jesus do? Does it matter that Jesus has brothers? That his father is Joseph?

What are the I AM sayings? Why are they important to the Johannine writer? To our understanding of his Jesus?

On p. 141, paragraph 1, note the types of bondage we regularly enter into. What can we do in response to these kinds of bondage? Where lies freedom?

*The Man Born Blind: The Split from Judaism Is Complete*

Why does the Johannine gospel stress the man's blindness from birth? What does this blind man symbolize for all of us?

How does this story reflect the writer's concerns with his exclusion from the synagogue around 80 CE? Which Jews could see, and which remained in darkness?

What does this story say about retribution, specifically the sins of the fathers visited upon the sons? About God's cruelties? About Jesus as "the light of the world"?

Ultimately what happens to the blind man? Why?

*Lazarus: Breaking the Final Barrier*

Describe Lazarus and his family. Where do they live? How do we know about them besides the story here in John? How does Jesus regard this family?

Again, Spong stresses that Lazarus is not a person, but a sign and a symbol. Of what? And what is the "final barrier"?

Why does this writer insist Lazarus has been dead four days already, that the death stench has begun?

How exactly does Jesus call him from death? What "word of God" do we hear?

How does the priest Caiaphas respond to these events? Significant how?

How does this telling of the Lazarus death differ from those in Mark and Luke focusing on the beggar Lazarus and the rich man Dives?

How does the Lazarus story prefigure resurrection?

Supposing that you, like Lazarus, might repose eternally in someone's bosom, would you, like Spong, prefer that it be someone other than Abraham? Who? Why?

Did Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection bring utterly wonderful life to the Jewish-Christian community represented by the Johannine writer? What do we learn here about "the hour"?

