

Spong, *The Fourth Gospel*, Chapters 19-23
Wesley Advocates 9 July 2017

The Analogy of the Vine: God Is Indwelling, Not External

How does Spong interpret “God in heaven” for Noah, Moses, others?
What about God’s allowing Moses to see only his back?

Describe the various myths about Jesus’s apotheosis. Why are the differences significant to the story? What significant accretions develop to support and elaborate theories of and insistence on this apotheosis?

How significant are these accretions and descriptions of apotheosis to church dogma? To individual faith? To Christian tradition? To Spong’s reading of the Johannine writer?

If the death of Jesus was not punishment, not a price exacted for sin, then what was the purpose? And how is that purpose related to the metaphor of the vine?

On page 196, four lines from bottom, “They will almost inevitably seek to turn their religious life into a new security system”—what does that mean, and where do we see it happen?

Differentiate between “redemption of the fallen” and “transformation of the open.”

What does Jesus mean by saying God cannot be limited to one mediator, one advocate? How is that idea contrary to church dogma?

Discuss the importance of “a little while,” repeated seven times, to insistence on and anticipation of parousia. How does the Johannine writer undermine the synoptic gospels’ understanding of parousia?

Read closely the long, penultimate paragraph. What does Spong say about the “courage to be”?

The Prayer of Jesus: Gethsemane Transformed

What does *gethsemane* mean? How is that important to this story?

From the outset, how does the Johannine writer differ from writers of the synoptic gospels in understanding what Jesus actually says in this prayer?

Indeed, how does this gospel stress Jesus's acceptance of coming death? List two or three examples.

Identify the three main parts of this prayer. What does the prayer seek for the disciples? For Jesus himself?

"We are not fallen; we are simply incomplete," Spong says on page 206. Incomplete how?

Part IV: The Passion Narrative: From Darkness to Light, From Death to Life

A Brief Introduction to the Climax of This Gospel

At what two levels must we understand this gospel? Identify the three defining realities crucial to the Johannine community—and their importance in this gospel.

What specific historical events led to the Jerusalem community's closing itself against the Johannine community, excommunicating this group of believers?

How do the "Jews" in this gospel represent the enemy and, thereby, help Gentile Christians to lay blame upon all Jews as traitors to God and Jesus?

Judas: The Figure of Darkness

How does the Johannine writer use the mythological figure of Judas Iscariot to address the split between his community and the synagogue?

What elements of "traitor" literature does the gospel writer use? Whence in the Old Testament does he draw details to use in this myth?

What specifics in Paul and later in John's gospel indicate no one in "the twelve" betrayed Jesus? Indeed, who was Ahitophel, and what did he do?

In this myth, what does *Judas* stand for?

What should we understand about the importance of Judas's complaint concerning the rare, expensive nard? Why does John include both Temple officials and Roman soldiers in Judas's betrayal story? Why must they bring lanterns and torches in this gospel?

Why does Jesus repeat his question, “Whom do you seek?” In this gospel, why does no sudden darkness occur in the passion story?

Peter: The Struggle within the Soul

What do we know about Peter before this chapter? How did he come to follow Jesus? And what sort of disciple is he? How has the Johannine writer used Peter’s struggles, doubts, questions to illuminate Jesus’s transformative message? Cite three or four examples.

Why does a Galilean fisherman carry a sword? Why is he so adept at swordsmanship that he can quickly and easily slice off an ear?

Why is it important that Peter deny Jesus thrice during the passion events? What do these events involving Peter reveal about our desire to survive?

What does Spong mean when he says, on page 231, “The story of the cross is the story of Peter confronting the ‘word of God’”? Please read that entire paragraph closely. What does it mean?

Clarify what Spong means when he says, “. . . like Jesus, we re free to give our life away and that *this* is what the experience of God is ultimately all about.”

How are we like Peter? Can we be like Jesus?