

**Spong, *The Fourth Gospel*, Chapters 5-10**  
**Wesley Advocates 18 June 2017**

*Tracing the Jewish Roots of the Prologue*

Recall that Spong has already postulated three major writers for this gospel. As a parallel to what we know about the prose prologue and epilogue in Job, we learn from Spong here that he believes the prologue came from a later editor (as did chapter 21). What does he conclude about the prologue's sources, misinterpretations, and influences?

"In the beginning" should remind us of what OT passage? What is *logos*? What is "the light"? What is "the word"? How is "the word" important in Genesis? Note Spong's contention near bottom of p. 45 about "anonymous Jewish writers who . . . attributed to the 'word' of God enormous creative power, seeing it as separate from God, but of God's very essence." Do we understand what he means here?

How did early Hebrews see God as both transcendent and immanent? Why, if God is no longer the ultimate authority and judge, do we turn to law? What "word of God" is in the law? How is the "word of God" part of the Temple of Solomon?

What does the word *tabernacle* mean? How does it function as a verb?

How is the "word of God" related to and by the prophets?

Originally, who was a messiah? What was the Davidic monarchy? When did it begin and end? How is that monarchy important to the notion of a messiah?

*Permeating Wisdom: The Doorway into Jewish Mysticism*

What is *merkabah* mysticism? When was it especially important? What has it to do with the throne? According to Spong, how did this form of mysticism influence the John gospel?

On p. 53, Spong discusses how the Church fathers' Greek dualism, in particular, distorted the Johannine writer's intent. Explain this distortion.

What is the post-exilic wisdom tradition? What OT works belong to this tradition? Which of those works does this gospel most often refer to and draw on? Cite two or three examples.

What happened to the Torah during the Babylonian exile? For those writers during and after the exile, how was God immanent? How did wisdom literature address this immanence?

See long, long paragraph on page 57, near the end: How can we understand *God* as a verb? How does that notion derive from the wisdom tradition?

Spong cites several examples of OT figures experiencing visions and dreams of God—Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. How are these relevant to the Johannine gospel? To the writer's mysticism?

According to Spong, how does “the word of God” come to dwell among believers through Jesus? How is *logos* lived?

### *John the Non-Literalist*

In what ways are we ‘literalists’? Note Spong’s insistence on a fundamentalist continuum on which virtually every Christian fits somewhere. Where are we?

See p. 64: note what John the Baptist and Jesus did not do. How have Christians confused storytelling and parable with history? Cite some examples we have discussed in class.

How does Spong regard the Jesus Seminar? How much of Jesus’s actual language appears in this gospel—according to the Seminar? Why is that significant?

Whom does Spong suspect is represented by “Nathaniel”? Does that matter at all? To whom? How does this contention support Spong’s point about non-literalism, if at all?

### *The Mother of Jesus: Introduction to the Book of Signs*

What was the Book of Signs? What did we learn about it in earlier chapters? If it existed, which Johannine chapters relied on this source?

What do we learn from this gospel about Jesus’s mother? Why is that significant? Indeed, what do we learn about her from Matthew, from Mark, from Luke? What do we learn about her husband? Why are these details important?

What source does Spong identify for Mary's Magnificat? For the manger? For swaddling cloths? For Jesus's boyhood trip to Jerusalem? For the genealogy of Jesus? How do these sources influence our understanding of this gospel?

What actually happens at the wedding in Cana? (Do you remember Kaitey's sermon about this event?) What is old wine? And new wine? What is water? Why is the "hour" significant? Why does Spong conclude that Jesus is the bridegroom? What is Jesus's mother a symbol of?

*Nicodemus: What It Means to Be Born of the Spirit*

Who was Nicodemus? When did he visit Jesus, and what did he want?

Why did Nicodemus choose the darkness? What, where, how, according to Spong, did Nicodemus imagine God to be?

Why does Spong distinguish between "verily, verily" and "truly, truly"? Does it make a difference?

How does dualism lead to the classical heresies—Docetism, Nestorianism, others?

How does Johannine mysticism undercut classical dualism?

See pp. 90-91: what does Spong mean by "born of water"? How does he define the *human*? What do human beings do? What is "universal consciousness"?

*The Samaritan Woman by the Well: A New Dimension of the Jesus Experience*

Spong cites four wife-seeking expeditions involving meetings at a well, those of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Jesus. What is the significance of the well?

What do we need to know about Hebrew history—especially the revolt of the Northern Kingdom and its subsequent assimilation into the Assyrian Empire—in order to understand Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman? In what ways does Jesus attempt to woo her? What does she fail to understand initially? Her "five husbands" stand for what, according to Spong's reading of the Johannine writer?

When the Jews, two tribes formerly of Judah, returned after the Babylonian exile, how did they separate themselves from non-Jews? How are these Jews like the Samaritans?

How is the woman at the well a “mythological symbol of Samaria”? What does Jesus do and say to woo Samaria?

What is important about Jesus’s *I AM* sayings? Ultimately what happens to the Samaritan woman?