

**Spong, *The Fourth Gospel*, Preface and Chapters 1-4
Wesley Advocates**

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Preface

“The older I get, the more deeply I *believe*, but the less [sic] *beliefs* I have”—how many of us might agree with Spong’s friend? And what does he mean about having fewer beliefs?

What does Spong mean by “God is ultimate. Christianity is not”?

Setting the Stage

What does Spong make of those purported claims to pre-existence, clairvoyance, and crucifixion without suffering supposedly deriving from John’s Jesus?

How has the church, how has Christianity used and abused John’s gospel, particularly in its creeds and exclusions?

How might someone familiar with Christianity and its history find Jesus “locked into a pre-modern world” and God defined as “an invasive, miracle-working deity from outer space”?

Who is Rudolf Bultmann? Why does Spong stress that Bultmann never translates John’s Greek text, not into German, not into English? Why not?

What is atonement theology? What has its role been in church tradition? In Wesley tradition? Why would anyone consider Jesus, in John’s gospel, as “God enfleshed”?

What does Tillich mean by calling God “the Ground of Being”?

On page 10, please note in detail the penultimate paragraph.

John: One Gospel, More Than One Author

What is “low Christology”? What is “high Christology”?

What was the so-called Book of Signs? To whom was it important? How does Spong regard “lost” texts?

What does Spong's example of the adulterous woman (John 7:53-8:11 in KJV or AV) reveal to us about biblical scholarship, translation, inerrancy, especially when we consider the story in RSV and NRSV?

What are the Farewell Discourses?

Through this chapter, what evidence does Spong cite for multiple authors of John?

On pages 16 – 19, he delineates those four stages of authorship. What are they? And written when?

Spong finds that John is “not about religion, sin and salvation, but about life, expanded life and expanded consciousness.” Keep that in mind.

Separating John from Other Gospels

Early in this chapter, Spong reminds us about sources used for the synoptic gospels and about their settings amongst early Jewish-Christian churches: we recall that both Matthew and Luke used Mark and Q and at least one other source. What evidence do we see of these sources in John?

On page 22 ff., please note the convolutions of the Christmas story. What distinct differences do we find amongst the synoptic narratives? Which elements matter to us?

On page 24 ff. we find convolutions of the Easter story. Which elements truly matter to us?

What, supposedly, were the “seven last words” spoken by Jesus?

On pages 26-28, Spong succinctly identifies 12 significant differences between John and the synoptic gospels. Which are those especially significant to us?

The Work of a Palestinian Jew

Early in this chapter, Spong cites three main characteristics of this gospel. What are they?

What is *logos*? What does use of this term reveal about 1st- and 2nd-century language? About thinking habits? About obsessions?

What evidence do we find for an original Aramaic text as basis for the gospels, for the New Testament?

Can we identify three main ways Hebrew and Greek habits of mind differ as evidenced in the early church? Can we cite two or three examples of information accessible and useful to Jewish thinkers and writers, but not necessarily accessible and useful to Greek or other secular Mediterranean thinkers?

How does the John writer (yes, I know, at least three of them) incorporate and use the Jewish year and Jewish holidays? How does the John writer use geographic detail? How does the John writer use Hebrew scriptures?

Are you convinced so far?