



The Gospel of John

Prologue

Like the “hypothesis” that introduces an ancient Greek drama, the Prologue to the Gospel introduces important themes that run through the Gospel. The opposition of light and darkness sets the stage for the dramatic confrontations that drive the plot. The promise of new birth, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man” holds out a hope of new life. The reference to God’s creative word offers a cosmic framework for understanding the significance of Jesus and provides the readers information that the characters in the text do not share, a situation that is ripe with dramatic irony. What many view as the central affirmation of the Prologue, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” (v. 14) provides a model of “incarnation” that shaped much of the Christian theological tradition that struggled to understand the relationship of Jesus to God. The conclusion of the prologue articulates nicely what it is that the evangelist thinks that Jesus does: he “explains” who God is. He is the “Revealer” par excellence.

Much of the prologue is in quasi-poetic form, with clauses in balanced parallelism, interconnected in a climactic fashion by key words that build in climactic fashion. Between sections so structured there are elements that have a more prosaic quality. These contain references to John the Baptist, who will dominate the first scene of the Gospel as the first witness to Jesus and the Spirit that dwells in him.

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