

Orienting Comments Re: John 5-10

- 4th Gospel is not simply an eyewitness memoir (despite 21:24-25)
- Comes from a group/school; traditions have been adapted & embellished
- Long process of reflection and articulation; final product: end of 1st century
- Should be read on multiple levels:
 - Texts about Jesus in his own time (approx 30 CE)
 - Texts about the early church
 - Texts about the community in and for which it was written (approx 90CE)
- Unlike for Paul, who affirms Jew and Gentile reconciled, both in one Spirit with access to the Father(cf Rom 11:17 & Eph 2:13-18), for Johannine Christians, the Christian community replaces Judaism
- Replacement theme is most prominent in the gospel's attitude toward the Temple and the feasts of the Jewish cult.

Importance of Celebration of Jewish Feasts:

A. Prologue affirms:

1. God's former gift of the Law is perfected in the gift of Jesus
2. The Two gifts are not in conflict
 - a. one leads to the other
 - b. gift of truth thru Jesus surpasses gift of Law thru Moses
 - c. Jesus is the fullness of God's gifts

B. In Cana to Cana (2:1 – 4:54):

1. Readers learn that belief is possible for both Jews and non-Jews
2. Yet, critical question at end of 1st cent. Involved relating Jesus to traditional celebration of "feasts of the Jews"

B. Significance of feasts in Judaism:

1. Celebration of a Jewish feast is a "**zikkaron**"
 - a. God's active presence in the past is recalled
 - b. He is "**rendered present**" in liturgical celebration of the feast
2. Following Temple destruction
 - a. Pharisaic Jews (precursors of rabbinic Judaism) had to rethink & restructure their celebrations of Israel's experience of God
 - 1.) working to establish their authority
 - 2.) working for wider acceptance
 - b. Johannine Christians
 - 1.) are working out how to worship God & believe in Jesus
 - 2.) in John 5-10, stories of Jesus' presence at feasts "of the Jews" show how Johannine community understood how God is present to God's people in the person of Jesus.
Who is Jesus? What kind of authority does He have?

John 5-10, the central part of the Book of Signs, is structured around important festivals in the Jewish calendar. In each episode the full meaning of an important Jewish festival is found in the person and activity of Jesus

Jesus and the Sabbath 5:1 – 47

- Jesus takes the initiative (v. 14a) in the healing
- Debate regarding Sabbath observance
- The beginning of persecuting and prosecuting of Jesus (v. 16-18)
- God can work on the Sabbath. Creation continued, people died and were thus judged; but this prerogative of God cannot be usurped by any creature: Sabbath was a “memory” (*zakor*; cf. *Ex 20:8*) of a creating people. It celebrated God’s sovereignty as creator and redeemer and called on the people to recognize this sovereignty publicly.
- What is Jesus’ relationship to the God of Israel? Is he controlled by traditional Sabbath laws?
- In calling God His Father Jesus thereby makes himself equal to God. Does that make Him another God? Does equality with God mean independence from God?

Jesus and the Passover (6:1-71)

- Jesus multiplies the loaves and feeds God’s people as God did in the wilderness in Moses’ time
- Barley loaves and young servant boy recall Elisha’s miracle (2 Kings 4:42-44)
- Details intended to remind Christians of the Eucharist
- The Word incarnate saves

Jesus and Tabernacles or the feast of Booths (7:2ff)

- Character of the 8 day festival celebrated at fall harvest to pray for early rain
 - People lived in huts to recall their ancestors’ sojourn in the desert;
 - To symbolize the need for rain, there was a daily procession from the pool of Siloam bringing water as a libation to the Temple;
 - The court of the women in the Temple was lighted by immense torches
- Jesus’ discourse taps into this symbolism: rivers of living water; light of the world

Jesus and the feast of the Dedication or Hanukkah (10:22-42)

- The feast celebrates the dedication of an altar and the reconsecration of the Temple by the Maccabees after several years of desecration under the Syrian rulers (164 BCE)
- Vs 34-5 The Father has consecrated Jesus; He is the new ‘altar’

References:

The Gospel and Epistles of John *a concise commentary* by Raymond E. Brown 1988

The Church According to the New Testament by Daniel J Harrington 2001

Signs and Shadows *Reading John 5-12* by Francis J. Moloney 1996

The Beginnings of the Church by Frederick J. Cwiekowski 1988

The Gospel According to John I-XII Raymond E. Brown 1966