

Gospel of John

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This begins the study in the most spiritual book in the entire Bible, the Book of John.

This is one of my own personal favorites of all the sixty-six books of the Bible.

The Book of John is not like the Book of Matthew, Mark, or Luke which cover the same period of time.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell of the birth, life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, but they stress more what Jesus did than who He is.

In John, the entire book is showing that Jesus was, is, and always will be deity.

It shows that God took on the form of flesh and dwelt among us.

Title: The title of the fourth gospel continues the pattern of the other gospels, being identified originally as “According to John”.

Like the others, “The Gospel” was added later.

Author – Date: Although the author’s name does not appear in the gospel, reinforcing early church tradition strongly and consistently identified him as the Apostle John.

The early church father Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 130-200), was a disciple of Polycarp (ca. A.D. 70-160), who was a disciple of the Apostle John, and he testified on Polycarp’s authority that John wrote the gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia Minor when he was advanced in age (Against Heresies 2.22.5; 3.1.1).

Subsequent to Irenaeus, all the church fathers assumed John to be the gospel’s author.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150-215), wrote that John, aware of the facts set forth in the other gospels and being moved by the Holy Spirit, composed a “spiritual gospel” (see Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History 6.14.7).

A process of elimination may reveal his identity.

Surely, he was one of the inner three disciples (Peter, James, John), who were with Jesus at the Transfiguration, the healing of Jairus’ daughter, and in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He is distinguished from Peter in 21:20 (compare 13:23-24); and since James was slain about A.D. 40 (see Acts 12:2), long before this gospel was composed, this leaves only John as the “beloved disciple”.

Reinforcing early church tradition are significant internal characteristics of the gospel.

While the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), identify the Apostle John by name approximately 20 times (including parallels), he is not directly mentioned by name in the Gospel of John.

Instead, the author prefers to identify himself as the disciple “who Jesus loved” (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

The absence of any mention of John’s name directly is remarkable when one considers the important part played by other named disciples in this gospel.

Yet, the recurring designation of himself as the disciple “whom Jesus loved”, a deliberate avoidance by John of his personal name, reflects his humility and celebrates his relation to his Lord Jesus.

No mention of his name was necessary since his original readers clearly understood that he was the gospel’s author.

Also, through a process of elimination based primarily on analyzing the material in chapters 20 and 21, this disciple “whom Jesus loved” narrows down to the Apostle John (e.g., 21:24; compare 21:2).

Since the gospel’s author is exacting in mentioning the names of most of the other characters in the book, if the author had been someone other than John the apostle, he would not have omitted John’s name.

The gospel’s anonymity strongly reinforces the arguments favoring John’s authorship, for only someone of his well-known and preeminent authority as an apostle would be able to write a gospel that differed so remarkably in form and substance from the other gospels and have it receive unanimous acceptance in the early church.

In contrast, apocryphal gospels produced from the mid-second century onward were falsely ascribed to apostles or other famous persons closely associate with Jesus, yet universally rejected by the church.

John and James, his older brother (Acts 12:2), were known as “the sons of Zebedee” (Matthew 10:2-4), and Jesus gave them the name “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17).

John was an apostle (Luke 6:12-16), and one of the 3 most intimate associates of Jesus (along with Peter and James, compare Matthew 17:1; 26:37), being an eyewitness to and participant in Jesus’ early ministry (1 John 1:1-4).

After Christ’s ascension, John became a “pillar” in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9).

He ministered with Peter (Acts 3:1; 4:13; 8:14), until he went to Ephesus (tradition says before the destruction of Jerusalem), from where he wrote this gospel and from where the Romans exiled him to Patmos (Rev. 1:9).

Besides the gospel that bears his name, John also authored 1, 2 and 3 John and the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:1).

Because the writings of some church fathers indicate that John was actively writing in his old age and that he was already aware of the synoptic gospels, many date the gospel sometime after their composition, but prior to John's writing of 1, 2 and 3 John or Revelation.

John wrote his gospel ca. A.D. 80-90, about 50 years after he witnessed Jesus' earthly ministry.

Background – Setting: Strategic to John's background and setting is the fact that according to tradition John was aware of the synoptic gospels.

Apparently, he wrote his gospel in order to make a unique contribution to the record of the Lord's life ("a spiritual gospel"), and, in part, to be supplementary as well as complementary to Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The gospel's unique characteristics reinforce this purpose: First, John supplied a large amount of unique material not recorded in the other gospels.

Second, he often supplied information that helps the understanding of the events in the synoptics.

For example, while the synoptics begin with Jesus' ministry in Galilee, they imply that Jesus had a ministry prior to that (e.g., Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14).

John supplies the answer with information on Jesus' prior ministry in Judea (chapter 3), and Samaria (chapter 4).

In Mark 6:45, after the feeding of the 5000, Jesus compelled his disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida.

John recorded the reason.

The people were about to make Jesus king because of His miraculous multiplying of food, and He was avoiding their ill-motivated efforts (6:26).

Third, John is the most theological of the gospels, containing, for example a heavily theological prologue (1:1-18), larger amounts of didactic and discourse material in proportion to narrative (e.g., 3:13-17), and the largest amount of teaching on the Holy Spirit (see 14:16-17, 26; 16:7-14).

Although John was aware of the synoptics and fashioned his gospel with them in mind, he did not depend upon them for information.

Rather, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he utilized his own memory as an eyewitness in composing the gospel (1:14; 19:35; 21:24).

John's gospel is the second (compare Luke 1:1-4), that contains a precise statement regarding the author's purpose (20:30-31).

He declares, "these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31).

The primary purposes, therefore, are two-fold: evangelistic and apologetic.

Reinforcing the evangelistic purpose is the fact that the word "believe" occurs approximately 100 times in the gospel (the synoptics use the term less than half as much).

John composed his gospel to provide reasons from saving faith in his readers and, as a result, to assure them that they would receive the divine gift of eternal life (1:12).

The apologetic purpose is closely related to the evangelistic purpose.

John wrote to convince his readers of Jesus' true identity as the incarnate God-Man whose divine and human natures were perfectly united onto one person who was the prophesied Christ ("Messiah"), and Savior of the world (e.g., 1:41; 3:16; 4:25-26; 8:58).

He organized his whole gospel around 8 "signs" or proofs that reinforce Jesus' true identity leading to faith.

The first half of his work centers around seven miraculous signs selected to reveal Christ's person and engender belief: Then the eighth shown below, was after Jesus' resurrection.

- (1) Water made into wine (2:1-11);
- (2) The healing of the royal official's son (4:46-54);
- (3) The healing of the lame man (5:1-18);
- (4) The feeding of a multitude (6:1-15);
- (5) Walking on water (6:16-21);
- (6) Healing of the blind man (9:1-41);
- (7) The raising of Lazarus (11:1-57);
- (8) The miraculous catch of fish (21:6-11), after Jesus' resurrection.

Historical – Theological Themes:

In accordance with John's evangelistic and apologetic purposes, the overall message of the gospel is found in 20:31: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God".

The book therefore, centers on the person and work of Christ.

Three predominant words ("signs", "believe", and "life"), in 20:30-31), receive constant reemphasis throughout the gospel to enforce the theme of salvation in Him, which is first set forth in the prologue (1:1-18; compare 1 John 1:1-4), and re-expressed throughout the gospel in varying ways (e.g. 6:35, 48; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11-14; 11:25; 14:6; 17:3).

In addition, John provides the record of how men responded to Jesus Christ and the salvation that He offered.

Summing up, the gospel focuses on:

- (1) Jesus as the Word, the Messiah, and Son of God;
- (2) Who brings the gift of salvation to mankind;
- (3) Who either accept or reject the offer.

John also presents certain contrastive sub-themes that reinforce his main theme.

He uses dualism (life and death, light and darkness, love and hate, from above and from below), to convey vital information about the person and work of Christ and the need to believe in Him (e.g. 1:4-5, 12, 13; 3:16-21; 12:44-46; 15:17-20).

There are also 7 emphatic "I AM" statements which identify Jesus as God and Messiah (6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5).

There is such a love oozing from every word in this book.

We see a young man so devoted that he laid his head upon Jesus' breast.

John was the very first of the men to realize that Jesus had truly risen from the grave.

The name of John translated is "Jehovah is merciful", or "the grace of Jehovah".

He received the information for the Book of Revelation while he was banished to this island.

He loved Jesus so much that even though he was alone, he was in the spirit on the Lord's Day.

I could write this whole series about this penman, but we are not looking at John, but at his work.

The Book of John shows a beautiful relationship between Jesus and the Father.

In the Book of John, Christ speaks of God as the Father over 100 times.

In the Book of John, we find that Jesus' ministry altogether was approximately 3-1/2 years.

In the Book of John, that we do not see in the other gospels is the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus, the conversation with the woman of Samaria, and many more.

There are eight miracles of Christ recorded (see above under Background – Setting), and all of them show Jesus' Godhead.

Six of these are mentioned only in the Book of John.

John's information is all first-hand knowledge.

He was there when it happened.

This is a book also, that shows the opposites of Jesus our Lord to Satan.

We see light and darkness, good and evil, truth and lies.

We see Jesus as the Light of the world, the Truth, the Way, the Life.

We will see Jesus as God in man's flesh in John.

The divineness of Jesus was more apparent in John's writings.

I believe this partially was because of John's close association with Jesus, and because of the occasion when he heard the voice of the Father saying, "This is my beloved Son".

John had also seen Jesus with His divine nature at the mount of transfiguration.

The one message that I see clearly throughout the Book of John which all the Scriptures focus upon is "the Word was made flesh" (see John 1:14).

In the first 18 verses, we find that these verses constitute the prologue which introduces many of the major themes that John will treat, especially the main theme that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God".

Several key words repeated throughout the gospel such as life, light, witness, and glory, they do appear here.

The remainder of the gospel develops the theme of the prologue as to how the eternal "Word" of God, Jesus the Messiah and Son of God, became flesh and ministered among men so that all who believe in Him would be saved.

Although John wrote the prologue with the simplest vocabulary in the New Testament, the truths which the prologue conveys are the most profound.