

#6. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

1. **According to John** is the way the oldest manuscripts preface the fourth Gospel. Over time, *The Gospel* was added to give us the present title.
 - This Gospel was written after the Fall of Jerusalem, but almost certainly before the Epistles of John and the Book of Revelation.
 - Though John is not specifically named as the author, there are several strong arguments attributing the work to John.
 - Testimony of the early church leaders
 - John disciplined Polycarp (70-160AD), who in turn disciplined Irenaeus (130-200AD). Polycarp told Irenaeus that John wrote his Gospel in his old age while living in Ephesus (*Against Heresies* 2.22.5; 3.1.1).
 - According to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (loc. 6.14.7), Clement of Alexandria (150-215AD) gave testimony that under the Spirit's anointing, John wrote a *spiritual gospel* as a companion to the Synoptic Gospels.
 - Internal evidence
 - John identifies himself only as *that disciple whom Jesus loved*. This should not be understood as a criticism of other disciples, as though they were not also loved, but rather is to be understood as a statement of humility on the part of John. It is as though he felt unworthy to mention his name in the same sentence with Messiah. However, John is identified frequently by name in the three Synoptics, and the final chapters of the Gospel clearly reveal John's identity by process of elimination.
 - Acceptance by the earliest Christians
 - From the earliest days, the Gospel of John was attributed to the Beloved Disciple.
 - It is probable that John's Gospel is an attempt to supplement the Synoptic Gospels with a unique perspective on the life of Jesus. Over 90% of John's material is found only in the fourth Gospel. Also, John's material clarifies some settings in the Synoptics. For

instance, in John we learn that Jesus' ministry began in Judea and Samaria, before His dominant ministry in Galilee began (chapters 3 and 4). We also learn the reason for Jesus' hasty withdrawal after the feeding of the 5,000 and His insistence that the disciples cross the Sea of Galilee toward Bethsaida (Mark 6:45). John explains the compelling command was given because the crowds wanted to make Jesus King by force (John 6:26).

2. John's name means *God is gracious*. He was the son of Zebedee and the younger brother of James (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:17). He was also one of the original Twelve Apostles (Luke 6:12-16). He was one of the three disciples in the *inner circle* and became a strong leader in the Jerusalem Church (Galatians 2:9). In later years, he went to Ephesus where he eventually died, the only one of the Twelve to die a non-violent death.

- **John's Life**

- John and his brother James probably met Jesus as a result of John the Baptizer's ministry (John 1:35-37).
- They left their father's fishing business and followed Jesus for over three years (Matthew 4:21, 22).
- After Jesus' ascension, he worked with Peter to establish the Jerusalem Church (Acts 3, 4).
- During a banishment to Patmos, John received and recorded *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*.
- Church historians record that John's last years were spent in Ephesus.
- Tradition also indicates that Mary, the mother of Jesus, spent her remaining years in the care of John.

3. John's emphasis is a theological approach to the life of Christ. He focuses on:

- Seven *I AM* statements
 - In at least 23 passages, we see the Greek words *ego eimi*, which is translated *I AM*. (4:26; 6:20, 35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1, 5; 18:5, 6, 8). *This is reminiscent of the words to Moses "I AM THAT I AM."* In

seven of these statements, He expands to include metaphors which illustrate His saving ministry to the world:

- “I AM the Bread of Life” - (6:35-51)
- “I AM the Light of the World” - (8:12)
- “I AM the Door of the sheep pen” - (10:7, 9)
- “I AM the Good Shepherd” - 10:11, 14)
- “I AM the Resurrection and the Life” - (11:25)
- “I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life” - (14:6)
- “I AM the True Vine” - (15:1, 5)
- Seven special miracles designated as *signs*
 - Water is changed to wine - John 2:1-11
 - The nobleman’s son is healed - John 4:46-54
 - The man at the pool is healed - John 5:1-18
 - The miraculous feeding of the five thousand - John 6:1-14
 - Jesus walks on the water - John 6:16-21
 - A blind man is healed - 9:1-41
 - Lazarus is raised from the dead - John 11:1-44
- There are 26 interviews in the Gospel of John. Each of the encounters resulted in acceptance or rejection of Jesus by the persons involved. Participants include Peter (2

times), Nathaniel, Mary, a group of Jews (7 times), Nicodemus, the Disciples (4 times), the nobleman, a Samaritan woman, the man at the pool, His brothers, the blind man, Mary and Martha, the High Priest, Pilate, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas.

- There is an extensive use of symbols by John. There is extensive use of *light, darkness, life, vine, water, shepherd, door, and bread*. With the exception of *darkness*, each of these symbols was used to illustrate the ministry of Christ.

4. The Date of writing is probably 80-90AD.

5. Key Chapters

- Chapters 1:1-2:12 discuss the eternal preexistence of Jesus, which sets the stage for understanding the significance of His birth. Jesus was fully God and fully man. This means He was as fully God as though He were not human, yet as fully human as if He were not God.
- Chapters 2:13-12:50 features selected glimpses of the message and ministry of Jesus.
- Chapters 13:1-21:25 is material that deals with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

6. Key Verses

- **John 1:9-13 NASB** -The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
- **John 3:16-18 NASB** - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
- **John 20:30 NASB** - Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- **John 21:24-25 NASB** - This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. ²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

7. Key People

- **Jesus the Messiah** - The Messiah (the same term as Christ - *the anointed one*). In Mark, Jesus is seen particularly as God's Servant; a true *man on a mission*.
- **Nicodemus** - a ruler of the Jews who came to Jesus by night in a quest to understand the nature of Jesus' mission. The great teaching of the New Birth is presented through Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (John 3).
- **The Twelve Disciples (the original Apostles)**
 - *Andrew*
 - *Nathaniel (also called Bartholomew)*
 - *James, the Elder*
 - *James, the Lesser or Younger*
 - *John The Beloved*
 - *Judas Iscariot*
 - *Jude (also called Thaddeus)*
 - *Matthew (also called Levi)*
 - *Simon Peter (also called Cephas)*

- *Philip*
- *Simon the Zealot*
- *Thomas (also called Didymus)*

8. Key Places - the events of John's Gospel comprise less than two weeks, so the varied locations are limited.

- **Bethany** - a village near Jerusalem; the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. A city of retreat and refuge for Jesus from time to time.
- **Golgotha** - a hill just outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. It is also known as *the place of the skull*.
- **Jerusalem** - the scene of intense confrontation between Jesus and the civil and religious leaders of Israel.
- **Galilee** - a large lake region in northern Israel; several locations were the scene of many miracles and teaching events by Jesus.
- **The Judean Countryside** - a mountainous region in southern Israel, known today as the West Bank.

9. Key Themes

- **Jesus Christ is the divine, preexistent, eternal Son of God** - In 3:16, Jesus is described as uniquely God's son. 1:1-14 are testimony to His eternal divinity.
- **Eternal Life** - the result of *belief* in Jesus is the gift of eternal life.
- **Belief** - a strong emphasis is placed on one's personal responsibility to *believe the Gospel*.
- **The Holy Spirit** - is the One who will fill and empower the Believers after Jesus is glorified.

10. The Contents of John

- *The Incarnation - 1:1-18*
 - Pre-Incarnate existence - 1:1-5
 - The Ministry of the Forerunner - 1:6-8
 - The Rejection of Jesus - 1:9-11
 - The Acceptance of Jesus - 1:12, 13
 - Jesus' Deity - 1:14-18

- *The Presentation of Jesus - 1:19-4:54*
 - Jesus is presented by John the Baptist - 1:19-34
 - Jesus is presented to His Disciples - 1:35-5
 - Jesus in Galilee - 2:1-12
 - Jesus in Judea - 2:13-3:36
 - Jesus in Samaria - 4:1-42
 - Jesus in Galilee - 4:43-54

- *Jesus is Opposed - 5:1-12:50*
 - Opposition at the feast in Jerusalem - 5:1-47
 - Opposition during Passover - 6:1-71
 - Opposition at the Feast of Tabernacles - 7:1-10:21
 - Opposition at the Feast of Dedication - 10:22-42
 - Opposition in Bethany - 11:1-12:11
 - Opposition in Jerusalem - 12:12-50

- *Jesus' Ministry to the Disciples - 13:1-17:26*
 - In the Upper Room - 13:1-14:31
 - Jesus washes the Disciples' feet - 13:1-20

- Jesus announces His betrayal - 13:21-30
 - An explanation about His departure - 13:31-14:31
- Enroute to the Garden of Gethsemane - 15:1-17:26
 - Jesus teaches His Disciples - 15:1-16:33
 - Jesus prays - 17:1-26
- *The Crucifixion of Jesus - 18:1-19:37*
 - The rejection of Christ
 - The arrest of Jesus - 18:1-11
 - The illegal trial of Jesus - 18:12-19:16
 - The Death of Jesus - 19:17-37
- *The Resurrection of Jesus*
 - His Burial - 19:38-42
 - His Resurrection - 20:1-10
 - His Post-Resurrection Appearances - 20:11-21:23
 - To Mary Magdalene - 20:11-18
 - To the Disciples (without Thomas) - 20:19-25
 - To Thomas and the other Disciples - 20:26-29
 - Excursus - The Purpose of The Gospel - 20:30, 31
 - To the Disciples in Galilee - 21:1-14
 - To Simon Peter - 21:15-23
- *Concluding Statements - 21:24, 25*

Worth noting

- Of the eight miracles recorded in John, six of them are recorded only in this Gospel account.
- The Upper Room Discourse (John 14-17) is unique to John's Gospel as well.
- The Synoptics are primarily concerned with Jesus' relationship to Israel, while John's emphasis is on the universal savior.

When reading the Gospel of John:

- Remember this Gospel is written from the perspective of a post-resurrection decades. It is clearly the most *theological* of the Gospels.
- With the exception of the prolog in chapter 1, John's Gospel is an account of less than two weeks in the life of Jesus.
- The scene is primarily in Jerusalem, not in Galilee as with the other Gospels. We see Jesus in Jerusalem during several feasts:
 - Passover (2:13, 23)
 - An unidentified feast, probably Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles (the three festivals requiring attendance in Jerusalem - 5:1)
 - Passover (6:4)
 - Feast of Tabernacles (7:2)
 - Feast of Dedication (10:22)
 - Passover (11:55, 12:1; 13:1)