



Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Sixth Series: “The Top Edge” New Testament: Gospels
Lesson 21: John

I. Introduction

A. The Gospel according to John is unique

1. “John is the most selective, topical and theological of the gospels.” (Talk thru the Bible, p. 338)
2. “It is the simplest and at the same time the most profound book in the New Testament.” (Interpreter’s Bible, p. 437)
3. “The Gospel of John is a gospel apart. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic gospels because, despite their individual emphases, they describe many of the same events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. John draws mainly upon events and discourses not found in the other gospels to prove to his readers that Jesus is God in the flesh, the eternal Word come to earth, born to die as God’s sacrifice for human sin....No finer gospel tract has ever been penned than John’s inspired account of Christ’s life, death and resurrection.”

B. Note the comparison to the other gospels:

“Matthew surveys the Theocracy in its entirety. In other words, the whole camp is seen surrounding the King. In Mark we find ourselves in the outer court, in the place of service and sacrifice. In Luke we have passed into the Holy Place, where stood the seven-branched candlestick of witness, and the table of showbread, or communion. In John we enter within the veil, into the Holiest of all. If this warranted figure of speech be allowed, it at once becomes evident that any approach to this Gospel must be that of reverence and awe.” (The Gospel According to John, by G.D. Morgan, p. 9)

II. The Author: John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (21:20-24)

A. Internal evidence

1. An anonymous disciple who was an eye witness (compare 1:14 with 19:35 and 21:24-25) and closely acquainted with Jesus. (He reports private discourses and insights into Jesus. See 6:1, 61, 64; 13:1-3 and 18:4)
2. He is a friend of Peter’s. He was with Peter after the resurrection (see Act 3:1-11, 4:13-20, Gal. 2:9). Can’t be James, he was executed by Herod Agrippa I before 44 AD – see Acts 12:2). Thus, by process of elimination the author must have been John.

3. The author was a Palestinian Jew, very familiar with Jerusalem and Judea. His knowledge of the Palestinian topography was detailed and accurate (Example: pool with 5 porches near sheep gate 5:2).
4. The author had an accurate knowledge of Jewish customs. (Example: wedding customs – John 2). He was very acquainted with the Passover and other feasts.
5. John's family
 - a. He was the son of Zebedee – a family well off enough to have hired servants (Mark 1:19-20). His mother was Salome – (she may have been the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. See Matthew 27:56 and Mark 16:1). His brother was James (Mark 1:20). They both responded to the call in Matthew 4:21.
 - b. John was likely approximately 23 years old when he responded to Christ and between 80-90 years old when he penned his New Testament writings.

B. External Evidence

1. "The early Fathers did not hesitate to acknowledge the Johannine authorship of the Gospel, and from the time of Irenaeus there was almost unanimous agreement about this." (Expositor's Bible Commentary #8, p. 6)
2. Early church tradition ascribed this gospel to John.
Examples: Irenaeus (180 AD), Theophilus of Antioch (165 AD), Clement of Alexandria (220 AD).
3. "Especially important is the testimony of Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp, who was in turn a disciple of the Apostle John himself – a direct line of tradition with only one link between Irenaeus and John. (A Survey of the New Testament, p. 256)

III. Date

For a long time, scholars assumed a very late date for this gospel. However, the discovery of the Rylands Fragment of John sets the dating of the Gospel of John before 135 AD.

Since John's three epistles and Revelation were written after the gospel, scholars assume a "probably range for this work between 60-90 AD."

IV. Setting and Audience

According to tradition, John wrote his gospel from Ephesus (consider Rev. 1:4, 9-11). It is a logical choice: it was one of the largest Christian Centers in the Gentile world. The use of "logos" would have appealed to the Greeks. This gospel was written for Gentile Christians, the type of Greek writing supports this. It is for those who have a basic knowledge but need to have more confirmation/instruction in their faith.

V. Purpose or Theme

- A. This gospel has a very clear purpose statement in 20:31 "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

“The purpose of the John’s Gospel is clearly stated in 20:31. It agrees with the general purpose of the other Gospel writers. They differ as follows: Matthew writes with the Jews in mind and shows that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Mark and Luke have the Gentiles in mind and show that Jesus is the Redeemer for whom the nations longed. John wrote when the difference between Jews and Gentiles had disappeared, after the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple, in Asia Minor, when the beginning of Gnostic and other heresies appeared, and thus showed that Jesus is the Son of God, and that salvation is found by faith in him alone.” (The Interpretation of John’s Gospel, p. 23)

- B. A thought regarding the key word “Believe.”
1. Belief requires both knowledge (8:32, 10:38) and an act of your will (1:12, 3:19, 7:17)
 2. Biblical belief is much more than “head knowledge,” it carries with it the idea of “clinging to” a concept. It is the idea of acting with full confidence. We believe and we trust in the outcome as if it has already occurred.
 3. “Belief is equated with receiving (1:12), following (1:40), responding (4:51), accepting (6:60), worship (9:38), obeying (11:39-41) and commitment (12:10-11).” (Expositor’s Bible #8, p. 18)

VI. The distinctives within the Gospel of John

- A. There are significant differences to the synoptic gospels:
1. John has a different account of the beginning of the ministry of Jesus (during the ministry of John the Baptist). Compare Mark 1:14, Luke 3:18-20, Matt. 4:12 and John 3 and 4.
 2. John’s geographic “scene” is focused on Jerusalem and Judea (as opposed to all the Galilean references in the other gospels).
 3. John focuses on the beginning of Christ’s ministry (before the imprisonment of John the Baptist).
 4. John outlines much more clearly the time frame of Jesus’ ministry, i.e. 3 years. He makes clear three passovers are articulated (2:13, 6:4 and 13:1)
 5. John adds a number of events:
Marriage feast at Cana (2), Nicodemus (3), woman at the Samaritan Well (4), raising Lazarus (11), teaching about the Holy Spirit (14-17), etc.
 6. He does not include the Birth of Jesus, His Baptism, His temptations, and His Ascension. He records no parables, and views the miracles without “the note of compassion” that the other gospel writers used.
 7. John gives us details regarding the individual disciples. We see Thomas speaking (11, 14, 20), we see Andrew’s personality (1,6, 12), we see Judas whining (12) and so on.
 8. John gives us important details. For example the crown of thorns (19:5), the soldiers grabbing for the robe (19:23) and the exact weight of the spices used to anoint His body (19:39).

9. But overall, John “was not so interested in the mere facts, but in the meaning of the facts. It was not facts that he was after but truth.” He records long discourses in order to convey truth not facts.
- B. John uses a number of personal interviews:
Nicodemus (3), woman of Samaria (4), the paralytic (5), the blind man (9), and Mary and Martha (11).
- C. John’s gospel is predominately theological. (See his prologue 1:1-18)
1. Christ’s Diety is emphasized. Note the use of the seven “I am’s.”
 - a. “I am the bread of life.” (6:35, 48; compare 6:41, 51).
 - b. “I am the light of the world” (8:12)
 - c. “I am the door” (10:7,9)
 - d. “I am the good shepherd” (10:11, 14)
 - e. “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25)
 - f. “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6)
 - g. “I am the true vine” (15:1, 5)
 2. The atonement is emphasized (1:29, 3:14-15, 10:11, etc.)
 3. Eternal life is emphasized (3:15-16, 10:10, 20:31)

VII. An outline

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| A. An introduction to Christ | 1:1-1:18 |
| B. Revelation of Christ | 1:19-4:54 |
| C. Rejection of Christ | 5:1-12:50 |
| D. Revelation from Christ | 13:1-17:26 |
| E. Rejection of Christ | 18:1-21:25 |

VIII. Key Bible Stories (See VI, #5)

IX. So what?

Consider the impact of John 20:31 in your own life.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the diety and the humanity of Christ as seen in John give examples in both.
2. Why do you think John referred to himself as the “beloved disciple.” Is he humble or arrogant?
3. Do you agree with this statement: John “has a wider appeal to a growing Christian experience and to an enlarging Gentile consistency than others.” Why or why not?