

Intro to THE GOSPELS, pt. III

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Author: It has been generally accepted throughout all theological circles that it is the Apostle John, who wrote the Gospel of John, even though his name is not explicitly given in the text. However, there are some clues that point to John being the writer. Five times in this text the phrase, “the beloved disciple,” or “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is used, referring to the author, himself. From his writing viewpoint, the author had a firsthand perspective of the actual events surrounding the life and ministry of Jesus, and there are several places in the narrative where this comes out. The Apostle John was part of the inner circle of the 12 Apostles, and was a key character in many of the significant events of the life of Christ. The consensus among scholars is that “the disciple whom Jesus loved” was, indeed, John, himself.

The Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John

It is clear that the Gospel of John, in content and in style, is different from the other three Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is thought that John wrote his Gospel much later than the other three, and there are some possible lines of thought as to why his narrative is different. If John knew of the other three books, which is quite possible, then it’s also possible that he wrote to supplement them. If he did not have copies of the other three gospels, then he obviously had enough material to choose from in constructing his own narrative that did not overlap the other three, and served to form an independent eyewitness account of the life and ministry of Jesus from another perspective. There are many unique characteristics that distinguish the Gospel of John from the other three Gospels which we will discuss below.

Obvious Omissions of the Book of John

John omits a large amount of material found in the Synoptic Gospels. Surprisingly, he doesn’t include some of the more “major” events that the other gospels include; such as, the temptation of Jesus, the transfiguration, and the institution of the Lord’s Supper. John mentions no examples of Jesus casting out demons. The sermon on the mount and the Lord’s Prayers are not found in the gospel, either. Nor are there any narrative parables in the gospel of John.

Material Exclusive to the Gospel of John

The Length of the Ministry of Jesus

According to John, the public ministry of Jesus extended over a period of, at least, three years, possibly longer. During this time, Jesus goes several times from Galilee to Jerusalem. The Synoptic Gospels appear to only describe one journey of Jesus to Jerusalem—the last one—with most of Jesus’ ministry taking place over the course of one year.

The Explicit Deity of Christ

In John’s prologue, he gives a clear and bold declaration that Jesus Christ is, indeed, the embodiment of God in the flesh. He presents Jesus as “the logos,” the word that became flesh. Where Matthew and Luke begin their Gospels with the birth of Jesus, and Mark with the baptism and early ministry of Jesus, John begins with eternity past, and establishes the preexistence of Christ—that He has always been.

John begins the very first verse in the same way the book of Genesis begins: “In the beginning...” He then connects the dots, making the case that not only was Jesus in the beginning with God, He was God. “The word became flesh and dwelt among us...” It is clear from the first verses of the Gospel of John that His premise is that Jesus is the embodiment of the Eternal God, and that they are one in the same. He also wants to establish that intimate personal relationship is possible with God, and that by believing in Christ, one can gain the privilege of becoming the bona fide children of the Holy God.

The “Kingdom of God” versus “Eternal Life”

Following that line of thought, it is interesting that the other Gospel writers use the phrase “the kingdom of God” quite frequently. This emphasis on the Kingdom of God in the synoptic gospels is, for the most part, missing in the Gospel of John. The phrase, “kingdom of God,” occurs only twice in John’s Gospel, and the noun, “kingdom,” only three times, all in 18:36. Instead, we find an emphasis on “eternal life” as a present reality, and is much closer to Paul’s emphasis of the eternal life to come than it is of the synoptic’s emphasis on the present “kingdom.”

Nicodemus and the Doctrine of Salvation

This passage in John 3 is exclusive to the Gospel of John and is the first time (and one of only two times in the scripture) that we are introduced to the doctrine of being “born again.” It is in this extended discourse with Nicodemus that we find the famous John 3:16 verse, which is the benchmark of the concept of New Testament theology of salvation and redemption.

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (John 4)

This is one of the most interesting passages in the scripture and one that is also exclusive to John. This marks the first place in John’s Gospel where Jesus revealed Himself to be the Messiah. It is also interesting because it portrays Jesus breaking the barriers of two strong social taboos—associating with women in public and associating with a Samaritan.

Jesus the Good Shepherd (John 10)

In another passage exclusive to the Gospel of John, Jesus uses an extended discourse to illustrate the relationship that he desires with his followers—that of Good Shepherd and His sheep.

Jesus and Lazarus (John 11)

Another story that we do not find in the other Gospels is the story of Lazarus. When Lazarus takes ill, Jesus is summoned by his sisters, Mary and Martha, to come and attend to him. Jesus intentionally waits until Lazarus is dead until he comes. It is here in John 11 that we find the powerful story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, and establishing Himself as “the resurrection and the life.” In this story we find two important verses: One where Jesus turns to Mary and Martha and asks, “Did I not tell you that if you would just believe, you would see the glory of God?” The other verse is “Jesus wept,” which is the shortest verse in all of scripture.

Jesus and the Father

In John 14, Jesus gives another extended discourse that establishes the unity of God the Father and Jesus the Son as being one in the same. He starts this 14th chapter with that famous verse concerning the reality of heaven.

The Vine and the Branches

Even though he uses strong word pictures and metaphors, most scholars do not regard John 15’s discourse about the vine and the branches a true parable. However, it is one of the more descriptive narratives concerning the relationship between Jesus and God and us. The Father, the Son and His Children. The vine, the vinedresser, and the branches.

The Extended Garden Prayers

In chapter 17, there is an extended discourse that contains a three fold “high priestly prayer” that Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. The three sections include a prayer for Christ and His Father in verses 1-5, Christ and His Disciples in 6-19, and Christ and His church in verses 20-26.

John closes his narrative with these words: *“And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world, itself, could not contain the books that would be written.”* and in 20:30 he says, *“but these were 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.”*