

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN_Introduction – Part 1)

Interesting Tidbits: Before we delve into our introduction to the Gospel of John ('John' or the 'Fourth Gospel'), I thought that I'd list some interesting tidbits of information regarding John's Gospel that I've gleaned from various sources. We'll see the significance of some of these points today and others as we progress in the study:

1. The Gospel of John agrees with the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke) in less than 10% of its material. Yet, even John recognized that even what he did write was only a fraction of what could be said (Jn 20:30-31; 21:25).
2. John doesn't mention the virgin birth of Jesus.
3. John doesn't mention Jesus' human genealogy.
4. John doesn't contain the account of John the Baptist's baptism and there is no connection of John the Baptist with Elijah.
5. The Fourth Gospel does not contain an account of the temptations of Christ.
6. There is no record of the Transfiguration of Jesus – even though he was one of the three witnesses.
7. There is no record in John's Gospel of Jesus casting out demons.
8. No use of the verb "repent" or the noun "repentance."
9. The word "gospel" never appears in John.
10. The term "kingdom" only appears three times in John's Gospel.
11. There are no parables in the Gospel of John even though there are comparisons that are really metaphors such as when Jesus says in John 10:11 that "I am the Good Shepherd."
12. The discourses of Christ are heavily weighted with references to Himself verses focus upon the gospel of the kingdom through the use of parables.
13. There are no references to *gehenna* or hell as is true of the Synoptic gospel accounts. As we've seen in the Synoptic gospel accounts, *gehenna* is associated with exclusion from the kingdom.
14. In the Synoptic gospels, when Jesus does something amazing, it is called a wonder (*teras*) or a powerful or supernatural work (*dunamis*). In John, they are called "signs". John records eight signs – seven before the crucifixion and one after the resurrection. The signs are tied to the identity of Jesus in the Gospel of John whereas in the Synoptics the focus is the effect upon the individual and upon Jesus' compassion. In John, the sign focuses upon Who Jesus is – Deity.
15. Most of what is recorded in John is in Judea versus Galilee as in the Synoptic accounts.
16. There are three and possibly four Passovers recorded in John and only one recorded in the Synoptic gospels.
17. John doesn't record the agony of Jesus in the Garden the night prior to His crucifixion.
18. John includes the "I am" statements of Jesus which are not contained in the Synoptic accounts (e.g. 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5).

Author: While the writer of the John is anonymous, there is a great deal of evidence that points to the fact that the Fourth Gospel was written by John, one of the two sons of Zebedee (Matt 10:2; Mk 3:17; Lk 6:14).¹

¹ Some of the evidence of Johannine authorship is internal and some is external. For instance, some examples of internal evidence includes: 1) The disciple "who Jesus loved" is evidently the writer (Jn 21:24 cf. 21:7, 20); 2) the disciple who Jesus loved was seated next to the Lord at the Last Supper and Peter motions to him (Jn 13:23-24); 3) only the Twelve were with the Lord at the Last Supper, therefore the writer was one of the twelve (Mk 14:17 cf. Lk 22:14); 4) John is closely associated with Peter and one of the inner three (Jn 20:2-10; Mk 5:37-38; 9:2-3; 14:33); 5) John was Peter's co-worker in Jerusalem during the early years of the Church (Acts 3:1-4:23; 8:14; 12:1-2) and John was considered one of the pillars of the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:9). Some examples of the external evidence includes: 1) Polycarp, an early church father (ca.

Objections to the Johannine authorship have been raised from time to time. It has been suggested that a fisherman like John would have been incapable of composing a Gospel of such profound meaning. To be sure, the enemies of Peter and John characterized them as "unschooled, ordinary men" (Acts 4:1-3), but that does not mean they were illiterate or stupid. It does mean they had not received the formal education in the Law that was the prerogative of biblical scholars of their day. They were not lacking in knowledge of the content of the OT, nor were they devoid of the ability to apply their knowledge. If they can be judged by the fragmentary defense recorded in Acts, they made so good a case for themselves that their opponents had no resort left to them but violence. Furthermore, by the time he wrote this Gospel, John had possibly fifty or more years' experience after his early appearances before the Jewish council. In that time he could have gained greatly in knowledge, depth of insight, and facility of expression.²

Date: Most conservative scholars date this Gospel around A.D. 85 to 95. If the Gospel were written before the end of the first century, or even by A.D. 85, it would have been read by men only one generation removed from the contemporaries of Jesus. Therefore, it could have been verified or contested by those who had authentic information concerning the Fourth Gospel's contents and author.³

Place of Writing: Tradition holds that John wrote from Ephesus, where he had settled after leaving Palestine subsequent to the war of 66-70. Ephesus was a large cosmopolitan center of the ancient world, where the cultures of East and West mingled. The apostle Paul previously had founded an active church in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-20), having spent more than two years there, during which time he evangelized most of the province of Asia (v. 10).⁴ It is also interesting that when John was in exile on the isle of Patmos and received the Revelation (*apokalupsis*), he wrote to seven Asian churches, the first of which was Ephesus.

Recipients: The intended recipients of John's Gospel are not clearly identified. However, based upon the writer's habit of explaining Jewish usages, translating Jewish names, and locating Palestinian sites, it would appear that he was probably writing for a Gentile church outside Palestine.

An issue that we will examine later: If the translation of "believe" in John 20:31 is based upon the present tense, it would imply that the Gospel was written to Christians who needed encouragement and deepening of their faith. If the translation of "believe" in John 20:31 is based upon the aorist tense, it would suggest that the Gospel was addressed, at least in part, to unbelievers to bring them to belief in Jesus as Christ and the Son of God.

A.D. 69 – ca. A.D. 155) was a protégé of John and testifies to Johannine authorship; 2) Irenaeus (ca. 130-200), also provides testimony that "John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, had himself published a Gospel during his residence in Ephesus in Asia" (Against Heresies, 3.1); 3) other early church fathers support Johannine authorship. See Edwin A. Blum, "John" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 203.

² Frank E. Gaebelain, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976-1992), "Introduction to John."

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

It is very probable that the primary recipients were Gentile Christians who were beset by persecution from unbelievers and who were facing heretical teaching concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. Because of the rather defensive doctrinal position it takes, it may well have been written to combat the rising tide of Cerinthianism, which threatened the theological foundation of the church. "According to Irenaeus, Cerinthus was a teacher who contended that Jesus was merely a human personality who was possessed by the Christ-spirit at his baptism and who relinquished this spirit on the cross (Against Heresies 1.26.2)."⁵ In other words, Cerinthianism was an attempt to deny the deity of Jesus. John's stress upon Jesus' deity as the son of God implies that this was a very real and present threat to the church and prompts his warning in 1 John 2:22-23 that "such a man is the antichrist--he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also".

Other heresies in the early days of the church with which John contended included Gnosticism and a related heresy called Doceticism. In brief, Gnosticism was based upon the premise that matter is evil and spirit is good, thus how could a truly good God create matter? How could the divine take on human flesh? The dualistic views of Gnosticism were expressed in Doceticism which claimed that Jesus did not have a physical body, therefore He did not suffer pain and death on the Cross. Thus, Gnosticism and Doceticism challenged the humanity of Jesus. John deals with these hereies more fully in 1 John.

Literary Form and Structure: The Gospel gives an initial impression of discontinuity. Many of its episodes have little direct chronological or logical connection with one another. Nevertheless, they show a remarkable unity built on the one purpose of convincing the reader that Jesus was supernatural in his origin, powers, and goal. He was the Logos who had come into the world from another sphere (1:14).

The Gospel of John is a narrative composed of various scenes from the career of Jesus. It does not pretend to be a complete biography. The chronological gaps leave an impression of incompleteness for those expecting a complete chronicle of Jesus' career. Because the Gospel has an apologetic or possibly polemic purpose, it utilizes only the episodes that will best illustrate its presentation of Jesus as the object of faith.⁶

The peculiarities of vocabulary, which are evident in all the Gospels, are more pronounced in the Gospel of John. It is almost impossible to read a single paragraph in the fourth Gospel that does not identify itself as Johannine by at least one word or phrase.

Purpose & Theme: The key word in the Fourth Gospel is "believe." The verb "believe" (*pisteuo*) occurs 98 times. On the other hand, the noun – faith (*pistis*) – does not occur. The Greek verb is frequently used in the present tense or as a participle. Thus, John was stressing a continuous trust to his readers. This is especially important in view of the heresies that began to emerge once the original Twelve apostles passed from the scene. Most likely, John was the last apostle living at the end of the 1st Century.

The major portion of the book contains "signs" that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. John records seven "signs" that Jesus provided: 1) changing water to wine (2:1-11); 2) healing a man's son (4:46-54); 3) healing a lame man (5:1-9); 4) multiplying bread and fish (6:1-14); 5) walking on water (6:15-21); 6) healing a blind man (9:1-7); and 7) raising Lazarus (11:38-44). These miracles were designed to indicate that Jesus had power over nature.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Other indications of Jesus' deity include the testimonies of John the Baptist (1:32-34), Nathanael (1:49), the blind man (9:35-38), Martha (11:27), and Thomas (20:28) in addition to Jesus' own words (5:19-26). However, this emphasis upon the deity of Jesus was not meant to detract from the fact that Jesus was human. He grew tired (4:6), his soul was troubled (12:27; 13:21), and He groaned in His spirit (11:33).