

JOHN an overview

JOHN'S GOSPEL is an anonymous work. The author is nowhere named in the Gospel. The writer of the fourth Gospel is identified in the book itself only as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*" We do know that the author is clearly a native Palestinian Jew who was an eyewitness to the events described. We can see that he displays a personal knowledge of Jewish customs and a familiarity with the geography of Palestine.

The universal consensus of the early Church is that the writer was John the Apostle, one of the disciples that Jesus had named "sons of thunder."

Note: The early church father Irenaeus (ca. AD 130 – 200) was a disciple of the earlier church father Polycarp. Polycarp himself had been a disciple of John and Irenaeus quotes Polycarp as saying that John wrote his Gospel late in his life while at Ephesus. This would put the date of writing in the late AD 80's or the early 90's, probably before his exile on Patmos.

While John makes a point of mentioning the other Apostles, the omission of his own name only serves to identify him as the author. Since the Gospel's author is so meticulous about identifying the other characters in the narrative, if the author had been someone other than John, then John's name would not have been omitted.

John is also known as "*.... the brother of James*" Like his brother James, John rarely appears in the gospel record by himself. He is usually seen with his brother, as part of a group, or later on, with Peter.

He and his brother were among the Lord's very first disciples. He is most likely the unnamed disciple of John the Baptist (*John 1*). If John is this unnamed disciple in John 1, then he witnessed the Lord's early ministry in Galilee, the cleansing of the Temple at the first Passover, and the incident with the Samaritan woman. But even after the revival in Samaria, he still seems to have been prejudiced, especially against the Samaritans. At one point, he wants to call fire down from heaven upon a Samaritan village.

The only time he appears by himself in the Gospels, he wants to hinder some others who were doing the Lord's work because they were not part of Jesus' particular group.

This character trait of the two brothers seems to have prompted the Lord's nickname for them.

"*.... to them He [i.e., Christ] gave the name Boanerges, which means 'Sons of Thunder.'*" (Mk 3:17). The moniker seems to indicate a fiery zeal along with some very fervent and aggressive ambitions.

Note: James and John both shared the same insensitive hot-headed, prejudice. But they were nonetheless passionate, and fervent in their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Their hot-headed, zealous passion was usually demonstrated *on behalf of Christ*. James and John were both in Christ's "inner circle" — they were privileged to witness many things that the others did not. Because of this, they may have developed a little better sense of who Christ really is and the honor that is due Him.

THE UNIQUENESS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL.

The Gospel of John is totally unique from the Synoptics. The other three, Matthew, Mark and Luke are known for their similarities to each other. They each contain the same general information about Christ's life and ministry. Their structure and content are all pretty much the same, even though they each present the Lord Jesus Christ from a different perspective.

The Gospel of John, however, is completely different from the first three. John includes a large amount of information that is not found in the other three Gospels. In fact, more than 90% of the material in John's Gospel is unique to his Gospel.

All four contain a mixture of narrative and history and lengthy discourses by the Lord. But John's Gospel gives us a greater amount of discourses and verbal teachings from the Lord than do the other three.

- Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John contains no narrative parables, no eschatological discourses; nor is there any record of Jesus' dealings with demons or lepers.
- John doesn't give us a list of the twelve Apostles, and he gives us no account of the Lord actually instituting the Lord's Supper, even though John spends several chapters describing the events in the Upper Room that night (more than the other Gospel writers).

- Nor does John record for us the Lord's birth, baptism, transfiguration, temptation in the wilderness, or agony in the Garden.
- Although John joins the other Gospels in telling of the Resurrection, he doesn't mention the Ascension.
- John begins his Gospel with a lengthy discussion of Christ's deity — *i.e.*; His pre-existence and incarnation.
- John describes Jesus' early ministry in Judea and Samaria, His first miracle, His midnight visit with the leader of the Jewish teachers, Nicodemus.
- John tells us about the Lord's dealings with individuals on a personal level — Nicodemus (chap 3), the Samaritan woman (chap 4), a lame man (chap 5), and a blind man (chap 9).
- In John's Gospel, we find Christ presenting Himself as the Bread of Life and the Good Shepherd, and the Light of the World.
- We also have the resurrection of Lazarus, Christ's High Priestly prayer, and even the commissioning of Simon Peter into the ministry.
- Interestingly enough, John's Gospel also includes more teaching about the Holy Spirit than do the Synoptics.

Note: As we think of the differences between John and the Synoptics, we need to remember that these differences are not contradictions, as some would have us believe. Nothing in John contradicts Matthew, Mark, or Luke, and vice versa.

Rather, the differences serve to form a complete picture of the Lord Jesus Christ and all that He came to earth to accomplish. Each of the four Gospels provides background information that help support the narrative of the other.

QUOTE: DR. JOHN MacARTHUR, JR.

“For example, at His trial (Mk 14:58) and while He was on the cross (Mk 15:29), Jesus' enemies accused Him of having claimed that He would destroy the temple. The Synoptics do not record the basis for that false allegation, but John does (Jo 2:19). The Synoptics do not explain why the Jews had to bring Jesus before Pilate; John explains that the Romans had withheld from them the right of capital punishment (Jo 18:31). The Synoptics place Peter in the high priest's courtyard (Matt 26:58; Mk 14:54; Lk 22:54-55); John explains how he gained access (Jo 18:15-16). The call of Peter, Andrew, James and John (Matt 4:18 ff) becomes more understandable in light of John 1:35ff, which reveals that they had already spent time with Jesus. The Synoptics record that immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus sent the crowds away (Matt 14:22; Mk 6:45); John reveals why He did that: They intended to try to make Him king (Jo 6:15). From John's Gospel it's evident that when the Sanhedrin met during Passion Week to plot Jesus' arrest (Mk 14:1-2), they were merely implementing a decision that they had made earlier, after the raising of Lazarus (Jo 11:47ff).

“Not only does John's background information make passages in the Synoptics more understandable; the opposite is also true. John, writing decades after the others, assumed his readers were familiar with the events recorded in the Synoptics. The birth narratives in Matthew and Luke reveal how the eternally pre-existent Word (Jo 1:1) came to have a human family (Jo 2:12). In Jo 1:40, John introduced Andrew as Peter's brother, although he had not yet mentioned Peter. John's explanatory footnote that ‘John the Baptist had not yet been thrown into prison (Jo 3:24)’ assumes that his readers knew that he eventually would be. Yet the Gospel of John does not record the Baptist's imprisonment, which is described in the Synoptics (Matt 4:12; 14:3; Mk 6:4; Lk 4:24). John 6:67ff refers to the Twelve Apostles; but as noted above, John's Gospel, unlike the Synoptics does not have a list of the Twelve. From the way they are introduced, John evidently expected his readers to know who Mary and Martha were (Jo 11:1), even though he had not previously referred to them. They are, however, mentioned in Luke's Gospel (Lk 10:38ff). In that same connection, John noted that Mary was the one who anointed the Lord's feet (Jo 11:2). He would not relate that story until Chapter 12, but assumed his readers would be familiar with it from the Synoptic accounts in Matthew and Mark. John's account of Philip's hesitancy to bring the Greeks to Jesus until after he first consulted with Andrew (Jo 12:21ff) may have been motivated by the reader's familiarity with Jesus' command, ‘Do not go in the way of the Gentiles (Matt 10:5).’”

THE MacARTHUR NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY; © 2006 by John MacArthur; by Moody Publishers; p2

Since John wrote his Gospel late in the first century, he would have been familiar with the other three Gospels. He no doubt wrote his under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to supplement the others, as well as to complement them.

- The Lord Jesus Christ is presented to the world as the Divine Son of God, who came into to the world for the express purpose of saving the world from sin. This is the most theological and spiritual of the four Gospels. John focuses on events the Synoptics do not. As we noted earlier, more than 90% of John's Gospel is not found in the others. For example, John only mentions 7 miracles, which he always calls "signs." Five of those miracles are not recorded anywhere else. (*More on this later.*)
- Unlike the other Gospels, John spends 5 chapters describing the events that took place in the upper room on the night of the Last Supper.
- John uses various dualistic comparisons to help drive home his points about Christ. He refers to such contrasting things as life and death, light and darkness, love and hate, that which is from above vs. that which is from below. This seems to be in light of the Gnostic heresies that were beginning to surface towards the end of the first century.
- Christ's deity is emphasized heavily in John's Gospel. *John 1:1-5, 14*
- The Lord Jesus Christ Himself made His deity very clear in this Gospel. There are 7 very clear and emphatic "I am" statements made by Jesus. These statements identify Christ as God and Messiah. *6:35; 8:12; 10:7-10; 10:11-15; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5*
In each of these "I am" statements, Jesus used the linguistic equivalent of the Tetragrammaton — God's covenant name in the Old Testament. Everyone who heard Christ speak these words understood what He was claiming. In fact, it often got Him "into trouble." And then after these emphatic statements, Jesus would launch into an extended discourse on some spiritual aspect highlighted by each statement.

THE BOOK OF SIGNS

Part of John's Gospel is sometimes referred to as "the Book of Signs." This section, 2:1 — 12:50, contains seven specific miracles that Jesus performed. John calls these miracles "signs" because they point to the fact that Christ was exactly Who He claimed to be — the Divine Son of the living God; *i.e.*, the Messiah. Attached to each of these signs is a discourse by the Lord Jesus Christ explaining their significance.

The seven signs are:

1. Changing water into wine in Cana (2:1–11)
2. Healing an official's son in Capernaum (4:46–54)
3. Healing an invalid at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem (5:1–18)
4. Feeding the 5,000 near the Sea of Galilee (6:5–14)
5. Walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee (6:16–21)
6. Healing a blind man in Jerusalem (9:1–7)
7. Raising dead Lazarus in Bethany (11:1–45)

THE PURPOSE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

John's Gospel is not written to any specific individual or group, but rather to the entire world. At the end of the book, he openly states his theme and purpose.

John 20:30-31

Because of this, John's Gospel is known as "the Gospel of Belief." In his Gospel, John uses the Greek verb "*believe*" in its various forms 98 times, although the Greek noun for "*faith*" is not used at all.

Note: Two things to note about the use of the verb "*believe*." First, most of the verb forms that are found in John's Gospel describe a deliberate and continuous act of belief. Second, in the New Testament, this belief is always placed in Someone or something — most notably: God, or Christ.

Since John's Gospel is so overtly evangelistic, it's no wonder that it has been so widely used for that purpose throughout the Church Age.

Jo 21:24-25

Someone has estimated that the four Gospels could be read together in about 3 or 4 hours. John says that Jesus said and did much more than can be recorded. We only have a small bit of Christ's ministry here.

