

Gospel of John / Introduction

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~ The Gospel of John has been called the simple Gospel; but the Gospel of John will contradict and utterly disqualify that statement. The seemingly over-simplified language can be misleading. There are myriad mono-syllabic word sentences constructing nearly incomprehensible truths in this book of the Bible. If you turn anywhere in this Gospel, you will see it's mostly single syllable simplicity throughout. A tri-syllabic word is rare and difficult to locate. This writing style is so basic that it quickly becomes overly complicated; if you ask a man like me with an overly simplistic mind, that is. So, let's begin this leg of our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God with one of the simplest statements found anywhere in Scripture or out; and it's found in chapter fourteen verse twenty.

"....ye in Me, and I in you." A sentence with three letter words or less; all of which could easily be defined by any beginning reader. However, when arranged together as they are, the most profound philosopher and the deepest theologian that can write or speak could never plum the depths of the meaning of this statement as given by Christ. Our safari mission from day one has only been to locate, look upon, worship and try to sort out just how wonderful the Lord Jesus Christ really is - and how blessed our lives can be if we will take the time to know Him in His Word properly, correctly and completely. This will be, by far, the most difficult series of reports to understand – equal to Hebrews – and the easiest; no, that's not a mistake. We only get the surface meaning on safari because we know the meaning of the words by definition, but the way they are structured forms a meaning that reveals we do not understand them on any level. If you have never asked the Lord Jesus to be Your Guide in a Bible study before; you need to do so now. We're setting sail on some high seas of Scripture, my beloved.

This report will examine introductory matters that are critical to a proper knowledge of the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ - and a sincere and correct background must be considered if we desire to know the

Gospel message and the cause of Christ completely. The apostle John wrote this message. John was the son of Zebedee and Salome, and James was his brother. The authorship of the Gospel has been seriously questioned. The Tubingen German Critical University first raised the question regarding authorship, and it was subsequently adopted throughout the church. The philosophy was "copy-catted," so the liberal could maintain the position that the Bible is not the Word of God. By the early nineteen seventies, fundamental conservative scholarship had fully and specifically addressed each of the points brought up in what turned out to be heresy; and the authorship today is received by competent and conservative level scholars as that written by John. There is simply no question in my mind about the authorship. I know God is in control of His Word. Too many people waste their entire lives struggling with the liberal viewpoint, because it can easily take people down the garden pathway – and people are taken today en masse. They may raise many objections and ask even more convoluted questions, but they have no regard for the genuine Biblical answer. They're simply not interested.

What is interesting is to note that the following early church fathers ascribe the fourth Gospel to John: Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch — A.D. 180; Irenaeus — A.D. 190, pupil of Polycarp, who in turn was pupil of John; Clement of Alexandria — A.D. 200; and the Muratorium fragment says the fourth Gospel was authored by John.

The dating of this book is very important, too - being written around AD 90-100. Some believe that this was the last book written in the New Testament. However, it seems appropriate to consider the writings of John in sequence: namely, the Gospel of John, the three Epistles, and Revelation. All were written evidently during the last ten years of the life of the "beloved apostle." My own private judgment is that the order is: The Gospel of John, Revelation and then the three epistles; although I do not feel they should be studied in that order.

There are several striking features about the structure of this Gospel: The first three Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels because they are written from the same viewpoint. The fourth Gospel is different. Matthew was

written to and for the Jew. Mark was to and for the Roman strong man. Both emphasize the miracles of Jesus. Luke, who was writing to the Greek man who had the same mindset that we find in the world today, gives attention to the parables.

John was written to meet the need of a great mass of people in the east. Everyone reading this report will find their ancestry here. Ham, Shem and Japheth all came out of that area; so that means all of us! Babylon was a Hamidic Kingdom. These were awful, wretched folk – just like you and me; but don't get me wrong – many of them were very, very rich – unlike me. Unfortunately, many were woefully, brutally and horribly oppressed amongst the poor and were severely mistreated by their own people. In that crowd a great need arose and some hungered; and that is likely the reason John is so universally received and studied today. Of course, it was out of the east that wise men came asking where the King of the Jews was. They said they had seen the star in the east, so they had come to worship Him. We will find that John meets the need of that type of mind.

John's Gospel is very different from the first three synoptic Gospels we have examined. The Gospel has been called good news - and here we have it. Matthew and Mark emphasize the miracles of Jesus, and Luke gives attention to the parables; John does neither. The miracles recorded by John are given as signs and were chosen with much discrimination in order to interpret certain truths. Remember, Jesus fed the 5,000, and following that, He gave His discourse on the Bread of Life. If the four Gospels were a newspaper this would be the editorial section with comments on the Bread of Life, the Water of Life, the True Vine and the Christian life.

There are eleven specific signs in John - but no parables. The word "parable" occurs one time but is not the regular Greek word 'parabole' but 'paroimia.' These are two altogether different words. Translating these two words into English with the same meaning is a grave mistake. The story of the Good Shepherd is not a parable, but a discourse. The record of the lost sheep in Luke chapter fifteen is a parable. In John, the figures that Jesus used are in the nature of metaphors. It is altogether different.

The simplicity of language in this Gospel record is why many people label John's writing the "simple Gospel." As we said, the monosyllabic and disyllabic words deceive and, to some degree, even undermine understanding. This is the most profound Gospel, by far, and the most difficult to fathom the meaning of. Consider again the simple statement Jesus made when we started out and then try to probe its depths as you continue: "...ye in Me, and I in you."

John also gives a chronological order which we do well to note. In fact, if you follow it, you can actually climb a ladder in the three-year ministry of Christ. John uses the term, "... the next day," and he presents a very logical and chronological sequence of events. He also gives attention to places and cities, such as "Bethabara beyond the Jordan" and "Cana, of Galilee." The word 'Jew' occurs sixty times in John. One significant statement in this Gospel is when Jesus says, "I have come forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and I go to the Father!" So, when Jesus comes to the earth, John quickly ties Him into these geographical places.

The great theme of John is the deity of Christ; but although that is in the foreground, the humanity of Christ is peculiarly emphasized along the way. Only John tells us about Jesus sitting down at a well, "...being wearied with his journey..." Another very human thing is, "...Jesus wept." The name 'Jesus' is used almost entirely to the exclusion of 'Christ;' which is certainly strange in the Gospel that sets forth His deity. Jesus is His name on earth – Christ is a title of deity. The other critical factor to see is His Messianic character holding priority and authority.

It is important to understand why John wrote this Gospel and several explanations have been offered. Many have said it was to correct the Synoptic Gospels. This is invalid since John does not deal with their material. Secondly, it has been asserted that John wrote to correct a wrong view concerning John the Baptist. A third theory is that John hoped to refute errors of Cerinthus. Of course, these all ignore John's own reason he gives at chapter twenty verse thirty-one, when he says, "... these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God..."

That's the sole purpose of this Gospel writing. It should be the sole purpose for ANY Gospel writing.

During the life of the church there have been many glowing tributes paid to this fourth Gospel. Some have called this “the heart of Christ,” the “spiritual Gospel,” and in Europe it is called “the bosom of Christ.” Origen said, “The Gospel of John is the consummation of the Gospels as the Gospels are of the Scriptures.” Jerome said, “John excels in the depths of divine mysteries.” Culross said, “I believe the writings of John have been blotted by more penitents’ tears and have won more hearts for the Redeemer than all the rest put together.” Dr. A. T. Pierson said, “It touches the heart of Christ. If Matthew corresponds to the court of Israel and Mark, the Gentiles; then John leads us past the veil into the Holy of Holies.” I like that one very, very much, by the way. D. A. Hayes said, “As we read, we are assured that here, at last, is the worthy and adequate picture of the life of Jesus among men.” God became a man; this is the simple statement of a sublime fact. John Wesley expressed it, “God contracted to a span.”

These things are recorded to beget faith in the heart of man. “Believe” is used over one hundred times in John’s Gospel. “Believe” occurs fewer than forty times in the combined Synoptic Gospels. The noun “faith” does not occur in John where it is used repeatedly in the other Gospels. Faith is not a question here, friends. “Eternal life” occurs thirty-five times in John, but only twelve times in the Synoptic Gospels. Believe is an active verb and is generally used in connection with “believe upon,” “believe in” or “believe into.” “Believe” is an act of the will. Believing is not static nodding of the head concurring in intellectual ascent to the facts of the Bible, though. When we hear the facts of the Gospel, we recognize that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures. That means we trust Him as our Savior Who died to pay the penalty for our sins.

Our Spiritual Safari ends this report with a brief look at the first statement of this Gospel. "In the beginning was the Word...." Anyone who cares to date that, please do. The Biblical dating system that Ussher established can be discounted completely by that one sentence. When we start talking in

terms of five hundred billion years, eternity holds that several hundred trillion times to the tenth power, so, the question of the age of the earth simply becomes irrelevant for any useful purpose of knowledge. Let's just say the universe has been here a very long time and, in the beginning was the Word of God! Interestingly, the way the beginning here is mentioned, it is already past tense. "In the beginning was...." That's a beginning that is not a beginning at all! I think God knew you and I would need somewhere to begin – although we cannot understand it; actually, we can't even conceive of this. Wherever you begin time and the world as we know it, the Lord Jesus Christ is already past tense – the Ancient of Days – His hair is as white as snow! He saith, "before Abraham was, I am." Your hair would be white after billions of years, too. It may turn that way after studying this Gospel ~

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