

Introduction to John

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Alright, today we're doing the introduction to the Gospel According to John. The Gospel of John was written during a time of severe persecution of the Christians. This Gospel was written to assure these persecuted Christians that Jesus really is the Christ, the Son of God. And there's one verse that we'll be looking at a couple of times during this study, and that's found in John chapter 20. And verses 30 and 31, where John writes, "Wherefore, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. But these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." And so, John, wants to assure these persecuted Christians, that they can rely upon Jesus. He really wanted to make sure that even in their confused and difficult circumstances, if they would remain faithful to Jesus, they would enjoy abundant life with Him. Remember, in John 10 and verse 10, that Jesus Himself said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, but I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it abundantly." And so here's the bottom line. Here's the introduction to this to this book.

Who was the author? Well, while the author's name is not mentioned specifically in the letter, he is referred to as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," no less than four times in this Gospel. In chapter 13, and verse 23, and chapter 20, and verse two, in chapter 21, and verses seven and 20. It is assumed that "the disciple whom Jesus loved" must be John the apostle, the son of Zebedee, the brother to James.

There are possibly three options. One might be that it would be James, or it might be Peter, or it would be John. These three seem to be the closest companions of Jesus, because these were the ones chosen to witness spectacular events in the life of Jesus that the other apostles were not invited to see. These three were the only ones allowed at the resurrection of Jairus. Jairus' daughter, Luke chapter 8 and verse 51. These three were the only ones Jesus invited to accompany Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, Mark 9 and verse 2. These three were the only ones Jesus took with him deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his arrest, Mark 14 and verse 33. We know that "the disciple whom Jesus loved" could not be Peter, because Peter is mentioned separately in all four accounts, where, that refers to "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Furthermore, John is the only apostle recorded as present at the crucifixion of Jesus, John 19:26-27. He is the one whom Jesus entrusted the care of his mother to in John 19, verses 26 and 27. Therefore, it is agreed by just about all scholars, that John, the apostle, is the author of this fourth Gospel.

What about the place and date for the Gospel according to John speak. Let's think, first of all, about the place. Some have suggested that it was written from Syria. This is primarily because of some references in the Odes of Solomon, which is just some poems that are recorded. The dating of the Odes of Solomon is somewhat debated. Some say it's in first century and other say in the third century. But there's some references to that, that have caused some to say, "Well, maybe the Gospel of John was written from Syria." And some comments by Ignatius of Antioch, also have caused some to say, "Well, the Gospel of John was written from Syria."

But the most accepted place for the writing of John is Ephesus of Asia. Ephesus is upheld by the tradition of the early church as the place from which John wrote his Gospel account. Irenaeus wrote this (and this is interesting), "Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who had even rested on his breast himself also gave forth the Gospel while he was living in Ephesus in Asia." And that kind of nails it down. That is a good idea. And the church fathers, most of them accepted Ephesus as being the place from which John wrote. And it makes perfect sense. It fits in with everything else. It fits in with the dating. It fits in with everything that is going on with whom the book is written, and other things.

For example, let's look at the date. The Gospel of John provides no explicit evidence regarding its date. Looking internally, it's really difficult to say, "This is any time frame for the writing of John." One suggestion for the Gospel of John is a pre-70 date. As a matter of fact, some have even dated it as early as in the 50s. If that's the case, and the way we have dated the Synoptics, then John would have been written prior to the Synoptic Gospels. And since John contains so much different material, and material that's not in the synoptics, it seems rather unlikely that John's Gospel would be dated prior to the synoptics.

Another date, and probably the traditional date for John's Gospel is in the late 80s, early 90s. Some have given it from 85 to 95. Irenaeus specified that John remained in Ephesus until the time of Trajan. Trajan began his reign over Rome about 98. If the date for John's exile is 94 to 96, as I subscribe it to be, this suggests that John was released from exile and returned to Ephesus before his death and around AD 100. Therefore, if the fourth Gospel is written from the commonly accepted Ephesus, and John returned to Ephesus after his exile, then the fourth Gospel could have been written anywhere between 97 and 100. On the other hand, if the fourth Gospel was written prior to John's exile, around 94, then it seems best to date this Gospel from the late 80s to the early 90s, somewhere in that timeframe. And this is the time in which I subscribe to the dating of the gospel of John: somewhere between the late 80s and the early 90s. And that fits in with it being written from Ephesus, because of Irenaeus' statement, that he went to Ephesus and he was in Ephesus until Trajan.

And then there's another thing that needs to be talked about, and that is: to whom did John write? Who was his primary audience? And this is something that is difficult, and it's difficult in the Synoptics, but not as much so in the Synoptics, I don't think it is in John's Gospel. Matthew, pretty clearly, his primary audience was Jewish Christians. Mark's primary audience was Romans, and Luke's primary audience was Gentiles. And I think just about everyone agrees with that. But when it comes to the Gospel of John, the primary audience is not so easily determined. And I think there's a good reason for this. And I think the reason for it is, is John's Gospel is written for everyone. It's just, it's not just for the Jewish Christians. It's not just for the Gentile Christians. It's for everyone. And I think this is the point. If John wrote from Ephesus, as I've suggested, then John's readers would have been Christians, all over Asia. And this, John's Gospel, would have been a circulatory letter going throughout Asia, just like Revelation would have been, or just like other of the epistles who would have been, going throughout the region. And so if that's the case, and many of these Christians would have would have escaped from Jerusalem, or would have escaped from Rome, and they're scattered throughout this area.

It's clear that there would be some Jewish Christians and some Gentile Christians in this area. Certainly, some of his audience were Jews and some of his audience were Gentiles. But just as prevalent in the Gospel According to John is the idea that his audience were Gentile Christians. And

let me explain what I mean by that. John uses the Greek word, “Christos,” more than any other writer. Mark and Luke use it 12 times. John uses it 19 times. Now why does he do that? Why does he use this Greek term? Now, Mark and Luke, and even John, occasionally uses the term, “Messiah.” But, John, even when he uses “Messiah,” at least twice, he explains to his readers that this Messiah is the Christ. If you look at John, chapter 1 and verse 41. Notice what he says, “He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which translated means Christ).” Why did he explain the translation of the Messiah to his readers, unless there were at least some Gentile readers in his midst? If you look in chapter four, and verse 25. He does it again, “The woman said to him, ‘I know that the Messiah is coming,’ and then she, the parenthetical phrase, says, “(He who is called Christ).” Why is that necessary? Why was it necessary to explain who this Messiah was, if there wasn't at least some Gentiles in his audience?

I think it's important that we understand that he even explains in some places, he even explains where things are located in Jerusalem. For example, in John, chapter 5, and verse number 2, he says, "Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called," watch this, “in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porticos.” Here again, he says, “This is called in Hebrew, it's called Bethesda.” This kind of information would have been unnecessary for Jews. He even opens it up and says, “This is in the Hebrew, it's called, Bethesda,” explaining not only for the Gentiles, but also for the Jews.

The topics addressed by John, and in the way that he addressed them, certainly suggested his letter was intended to be read and applied by all Christians. And I think this is one of the reasons why so many, even today, use the Gospel of John. And it's become a favorite of mine in all of the Gospels. John is my favorite. You know, you ask a lot of different people, "What's your favorite Gospel?" And I think most of them, or at least a lot of them, will say that it is the Gospel According to John.

But what's the purpose? What's the purpose, for the Gospel According to John? As an eyewitness to all that Jesus did and taught, John provides the most personal view of Jesus, the Christ. You know, when you read the gospel according to John, you see Jesus from the very beginning, when He was the Word with God, to the very end, when He is crucified, and risen from the dead, as the Savior of the world. It's the complete story of where He came from, and who He was.

John sets out to prove that Jesus is God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” From the very beginning, he sets out to prove that this Jesus, if you read on down to verse 14, and he says, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,” and watch it, “and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only, begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” He is set out from the very beginning to prove that Jesus is God. He shows that Jesus, though entirely God, came in the flesh, to reveal God to all people. He revealed God to everyone. I think about what he says, in John 3 and verse 16, “For God so loved...,” what? “...the world.” Not just one part of it: “but He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”

He also shows that Jesus is the Christ, and the only source of eternal life for all who believe in Him. In John 14, in verse 6, Jesus said, “No man comes to the Father except through Me.” And so He is the only way to the Father. And he sets out to do that, even in this Gospel.

And then John summarizes the purpose for his letter, as we've already looked, in John chapter 20. and verses 30 and 31. When he says, "Therefore many other signs, Jesus also performed in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these have been written..." Watch this. Here's what's important: “So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” There's the reason, there's the purpose, there's the

ultimate purpose for the writing of this Gospel. So that everyone would have life through the name of Jesus. And what a powerful study.

If you're going to do an introductory study of who Jesus is, there's no better Gospel to turn to than John, because you get the whole picture. You get everything of who Jesus was, and where He came from, who He was, what He did. And then, in the end, it was all for the purpose of giving us life.

So, as we think about this, how is this Gospel divided? I'm not going to take a lot of time and give you the detailed outline. I think that's, there's just too much here to do a detailed outline by video. But I'll only give you the four divisions. There are four ways to divide this book. And I think it's really easy. And the first one is the prologue. In John chapter 1, verses 1 through 34. There is the introduction to who Jesus is, and where He came from, and who He is.

Then there's the public ministry that began in verse 35, and goes all the way through chapter 11, and verse 57. Here's the public ministry of Jesus: where He went, what He did, what He was teaching. Even during this time, He shows some conflict with Jewish leaders in this. Something else that's interesting about the Gospel of John is oftentimes, when John writes and he's referring to the Jews, he will refer to the phrase "the Jews," referring to the religious leaders, but when he's talking about the people, he uses the phrase, "Israel" or "Israelites." And it's interesting in John chapter one. Remember what Nathaniel said. "Nathaniel said to him, 'How do you know me?' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip was called, when you were under the fig tree I saw you.' "Nathaniel answered him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God.'" Watch it: "You are the king of Israel.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you, that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You you will see greater things than these.'"

The whole idea is (verse 47 is what I was looking for), "Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no deceit.'" That's what Nathaniel said about Jesus. And so, a lot of times when you're talking about the people in the Gospel According to John, he refers to them as Israelites. But, when he's talking about the Jews, he's normally talking about the religious leaders of the time. Which helps us to kind of understand. And I think he does this for a purpose. I think he does this to show us that this Gospel is not written to just one, one group of people. It's written to all believers. And so you have this public ministry that goes through this. It's to everyone.

And then you have in chapter 12, verse 1 to chapter 20, and verse 9, you have the death, burial and resurrection section, that section that leads up to His death, to His crucifixion, His arrest and his trials. You have that, and then you have the crucifixion, and then you have his resurrection that covers about nine verses there in chapter 20. And then you have the epilogue. And the epilogue gives you the purpose, and the final conclusion for this letter that has been written. The gospel of John is one of these letters, that is so powerful, I would strongly recommend that we all read it, and read it with interest so that we can share it with other people, so that we can share who Jesus is, and get people to have life through him. Thank you.