

John

The Holy Writer

Though the holy writer never names himself in this account of the life of Christ, there is little question as to who the Holy Spirit used to record it. The holy writer was one of those who accompanied Christ, because he states that he was an eyewitness of the events which he describes: **“And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe” (19:35)**. In addition, the writer refers to himself as the disciple **“whom Jesus loved”** (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). In the last verses of this Gospel it is made clear that **“the disciple whom Jesus loved... is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true” (21:20,24)**.

The question then becomes, “Who is the disciple whom Jesus loved?” We learn that this disciple was a close associate of Peter; who had been very near to Jesus at the Last Supper (13:23); who had been at Jesus’ trial (18:15-16); and even at the cross (19:26-27). While many of the other disciples are mentioned by name, neither John or James (the sons of Zebedee) are mentioned in this Gospel. This is unusual considering they were part of Jesus’ closer circle of friends and were chosen by Jesus to witness the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13), the raising of the daughter of Jairus’ (Mark 5:35-43), and Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42). It could not have been James who wrote this Gospel because he was martyred very early (Acts 12:1-3), leaving John to be **“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”**

James and John were fisherman by trade, partners with Peter (Luke 5:10). John was a disciple of John the Baptist at first, until he was directed to Jesus. John was selected by Jesus to be an apostle (Luke 6:12-16), and followed Jesus throughout His ministry. John and his brother James were nicknamed “Sons of Thunder” by Jesus (Mark 3:17). Their intensity is revealed in forbidding the man who was casting out demons in Jesus name, but who did not follow them (Luke 9:49-50); and in desiring to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritan cities who would not receive Jesus (Luke 9:52-56).

John was also chosen by Jesus to care for His mother Mary after His death (John 19:26-27).

After Jesus’ ascension into heaven, John became a pillar in the early church (Galatians 2:9), working chiefly in Jerusalem. Later John was exiled by the Romans to the island of Patmos where he saw and recorded the many visions of the book of Revelation (Revelation 1:9). John died a natural death during the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan (98-117 AD).

Date & Audience

The majority of what we find recorded in this Gospel is not found in the other three “synoptic” Gospels. John records none of Jesus’ parables, only two miracles mentioned by the others, skips over those events and discourses which were mentioned by the other evangelists (especially the Galilean ministry), and supplements the previous details concerning the life of Christ with miracles, sermons and events not previously mentioned. In addition, John writes at a time when false teachings were appearing regarding the person and work of Christ. So, this Gospel would have been written much later than the others, and is usually dated at the close of the first century (80-95 AD).

Since John explains the Jewish customs of not dealing with Samaritans (4:9), of the Passover (6:4) and the Feast of Booths (7:2) as Jewish feasts, and explains Hebrew words like Rabbi (1:38), Messiah (1:41), Cephas (1:42), and Bethesda (5:2) we can assume that his intended audience must have been largely made up of Gentile Christians.

Purpose

The Gospel of John was not primarily a “mission Gospel” written to those who didn’t know about Jesus as the Savior of the world, or those who had just heard about Jesus Christ. Instead, this Gospel was written chiefly to those who were already Christians in order to build up their faith in the face of false teaching. John Himself tells us the intended purpose for his writing of this Gospel. Near the close of the book, he writes, **“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written**

in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:30-31).

Content

John shows that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of God” by revealing the answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?” John reveals that Jesus is:

- “The Word” - *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:1,14).*
- “The Lamb of God” - *“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (1:29).*
- “The Messiah” - *“He [Andrew] first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated, the Christ)” (1:41).*
- “The Son of God” and “The King of Israel” - *“Nathanael answered and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’” (1:49).*
- “The Savior of the world” - *“Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world’” (4:42).*
- This comes to a climax with Thomas’ confession after Jesus’ resurrection: *“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (20:28).*

John also demonstrates that Jesus is True God by using that very important phrase from the Old Testament, “I AM” (Exodus 3:14). In the Gospel of John we have recorded the seven “I Am” statements of Jesus:

- *“I am the bread of life” (6:35).*
- *“I am the light of the world” (8:12).*
- *“I am the door of the sheep” (10:7).*

- *“I am the good shepherd” (10:11).*
- *“I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25).*
- *“I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6).*
- *“I am the true vine” (15:1).*

The focus of John’s message can be seen in two words found throughout the Gospel: “believe” and “life.” In the Greek the verb “believe” occurs one hundred times in John’s Gospel, and quite often John connects “believing” with receiving “life” (cf. 20:31). This theme revolving around the word “believe” is followed consistently from beginning to end. In the very first chapter we are told about the Baptist, who, *“came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe” (1:7).* A few verses later we read again, *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (1:12).*

In Jesus’ discourse with Nicodemus (3:16) we read those familiar words, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* Jesus emphasized this same theme to Martha after the death of her brother Lazarus, saying, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (11:25).* On Maundy Thursday evening, Jesus prayed to His Father saying, *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (17:20).* This theme continues to the end of the book and Jesus’ resurrection appearance to doubting Thomas, saying, *“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (20:29).*

Outline

- I. The Glory of the Son of God (1:1-5)
- II. The Incarnation and Reception of the Son of God (1:6-18)
- III. The Revelation of the Son of God to Israel (1:19-12:50)
- IV. The Revelation of the Son of God to the Disciples (13-17)
- V. The Glorification of the Son of God in His Passion (18-19)
- VI. The Manifestation of the Son of God in Resurrection Power and Glory (20-21)