

John – Overview

Before I ever read a book, I want to know about the author. It helps me to know what perspective they are writing from – what are their life experiences which influenced their writings, what is their worldview, is it similar to mine or totally different, what is their purpose for writing the book – to teach, pass on knowledge, to share their opinion, try to change our thoughts and opinions, or just purely for entertainment. In much the same way, before we read a book of the Bible, we should inform ourselves of who the author is.....what life experiences have they had which makes their writings “come to life”give their writings credibility....what is their purpose in writing the book, what does the author want us to know or how should we be changed after studying their book. With this in mind, let’s look at John the author.

The John who wrote this Gospel of John, is not to be confused with John the Baptist. John the Baptist’s parents were Zacharias and Elizabeth. This John, who wrote the Gospel of John.... his parents were Zebedee, a fisherman, and his mother was Salome, (Sa-lo’-me) one of the women who followed Jesus until His death. As a side note.... When I looked up how to pronounce her name I found the grammatical spelling of Sa-lo’-me. I had personally pronounced it phonetically in English “Sal-ome’ “. I thought that sounds like a familiar Hebrew word – Shalom. And when I looked up the meaning of Salome – I found her name indeed means “peaceable” or “peacemaker” Shalom being the Hebrew word for peace.

We find that John first met Jesus as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. Mark 1:16 tells us that Simon (Peter) and Andrew were the first set of brothers that Jesus called to be his disciples. James and John were the second set of fisherman brothers that Jesus called.

Mark 1:19 – 20 states **“And going on a little farther, he (that is Jesus) saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were in the boat mending their nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed Him.”**

Just to clarify, James the brother of John, is not the James that wrote the book of James in the Bible. We learned from our study of James, a while back, that the author of James was the oldest half-brother of Jesus.

So here we see John in his livelihood of fishing....working hard, mending nets when Jesus calls him.....note that he leaves his father Zebedee and follows Jesus. He is committed from the beginning to following Jesus....I think in our study of this book of John we will discover why he wanted to follow Jesus....and hopefully will give us insight as to why we should follow Him, as well as the desire and commitment that John had!

We are not given very much information in the Bible about John’s father Zebedee. Most of the times he is mentioned, it refers to him as a fisherman, and the father of James and John.

As far as John’s mother Salome is concerned, some scholars believe that John’s mother Salome and Mary the mother of Jesus may have been sisters, and if that is the case, then John was a cousin to Jesus. We only see Salome’s actual name mentioned twice in Scripture and both are in the book of Mark where women are at the cross of Jesus when he died, and again at the tomb of Jesus ready to anoint Him with spices. Other references to Salome call her “the mother of Zebedee’s sons”.

In the book of Mark we are told that Jesus called these brothers, James and John, “The Sons of Thunder”. John MacArthur states that this name probably refers to their intense, outspoken personalities. An instance of their fiery personalities – literally! – is shown in Luke 9:51-58. This is a turning point in Jesus’ ministry – leaving behind Galilee, He has “steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem”.....ready to do His Father’s will Jesus is getting ready to go to the cross.....Jesus is focused on His mission.... At this point Jesus and his disciples are travelling through Samaria. The Jews and Samaritans did not get along - to say the least. We will learn more of this division as we study the book of John.

In Luke's account, the Samaritans "did not receive Jesus, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. Luke 9:54 says "And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" - There's that fiery personality!

But Jesus rebuked James and John in vs 55- 56 and said "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them".

Of these verses, commentator David Guzik states:

You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them: Jesus explained their failing at this point came in two ways.

- i. They didn't know themselves. Perhaps they thought they were being like Jesus, or showing the character of God. They were mistaken, and did not represent God and His heart. He loved the Samaritans and wanted them to repent and be saved.
- ii. They didn't know Jesus and His mission. He came to save the lost, not to burn them up with fire from heaven. (Blue letter bible.com)

I used this example to show that John is not perfect. He has spent three years following Jesus...closely...living day to day with him. Yet, he still has flaws, he still fails...even at this point it doesn't appear John really knows the complete "Mission" of Jesus Christ. He's still learning and taking correction from The Master.

I don't know about you....but this is encouraging for me!! I KNOW I have flaws....I still fail....and I still have a lot to learn!!! I pray I continue to have a teachable heart....learning from The MasterJesus Christ Himself.

Even with his imperfections, John was used by God to write 5 books of the Bible – This Gospel of John, the books of I, II, and III John, and the book of Revelation. The Gospel of John is a bit different from the other 3 Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all authored by the men they are named for, are called "the synoptic gospels". We have learned from our previous studies that the word "gospel" means "good news"....that is, the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of

Jesus Christ. Were it not for this “good news”, we would have no hope....nothing to base our faith on....and no reason to be here today studying God’s Word!

The word synoptic means “to see together” or “to share a common point of view”. According to John MacArthur (The MacArthur Study Bible; Introduction to the Gospels; pg. 1375), Matthew, Mark and Luke focus on Christ’s ministry in Galilee, while John focuses on His ministry in Judea. The synoptic gospels contain numerous parables, while John records none. John and the synoptic gospels record only two common events (Jesus walking on the water, and the feeding of the 5,000) prior to the Passion Week of Christ. These differences between John and the synoptic gospels, however, are not contradictory, but complementary. It is interesting to note that each gospel writer wrote from a unique perspective, for a different audience. As a result, each gospel contains distinctive elements. In totality, the 4 gospels form a complete testimony about Jesus Christ.

Matthew – written primarily to a Jewish audience – presents Jesus as Israel’s long-awaited Messiah and rightful King

Mark – targets a Gentile audience, especially a Roman one and presents Jesus as a Servant who came to suffer for the sins of many

Luke - addresses a broader Gentile audience and he portrays Jesus as the Son of Man who came to seek and save lost sinners

John was the last gospel written and he emphasizes the deity of Jesus Christ – that is, the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. John wrote this gospel to strengthen the faith of believers and to appeal to unbelievers to come to faith in Christ. In fact, in John 20:31 John tells us exactly why he wrote this Gospel...

“...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Another difference between the four Gospels is that while Matthew, Mark, and Luke all reference John by his name, John’s name is not directly mentioned in the Gospel of John. John instead prefers to identify himself as the disciple “whom Jesus loved”. John MacArthur states that his deliberate avoidance of using his name in the Gospel, reflects his humility **and** celebrates his relation to the Lord Jesus.

John MacArthur further states “Taken together, the 4 Gospels weave a complete portrait of the God-Man, Jesus of Nazareth. In Him were blended perfect humanity and deity, making Him the only sacrifice for the sins of the world, and the worthy Lord of those who believe.”

After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to His Father in heaven, John continued to live in Jerusalem. In the book of Galatians, the apostle Paul called John one of the pillars of the church. In later years he moved to Ephesus and this is where he lived when he wrote this Gospel – around 80 -90 AD – about 50 years after witnessing Jesus’ earthly ministry. Finally, we read in Rev. 1:9 that John was banished to Patmos where he wrote the book of Revelation.

An overview of the book of John gives us an idea of what was important to him, and what he wanted others to know.....as a matter of fact....that word **know** or **knowledge** is the most common word used in the book of John

Know or knowledge - occurs 142 times

Believe - occurs 99 times

Life -36 times

The Father – 121 times

Love – 54 times

Truth – 25 times

(Laurin, Roy L.; John – [Life Eternal; A devotional commentary](#); Moody Press; pg. 8)

I would encourage all of us, as we read and study this book, to be on the lookout for these words!

As already mentioned, the overall purpose of the Gospel of John is to present Jesus as God – to confirm his deity. With this purpose in mind, John presents 8 of Jesus’ miracles, all giving credence to Jesus being God Himself.....in our study this semester, we will be looking at 7 of these miracles....changing water into wine, raising the ruler’s son, healing the impotent man, feeding the 5,000, walking on the water, healing the blind man, and the raising of Lazarus.

Items that John omits in his Gospel, but are addressed in the other 3 synoptic Gospels, includes, the birth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration and ascension of Jesus. He does include the work of John the Baptist, the Last Supper, the anointing at Bethany, and the passion and resurrection of Jesus, which are found in the synoptic Gospels as well.

Commentator Roy Laurin says John's specific purpose for writing this Gospel is "the presentation of Jesus as Messiah by giving details of His life and work so that through faith in these things God might communicate eternal life to us. Of this specific purpose, John says, "Believe and live"again his purpose statement found in John 20:31 "**...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

To reinforce his main theme, John makes reference to contrasts such as **life and death, light and darkness, love and hate, from above and from below.** He uses these contrasts to "convey vital information about the person and work of Christ and the need to believe in Him". (MacArthur Bible Study, pg. 4).

John also includes 7 emphatic "I am" statements in his gospel and we will be studying five of these this year. These are wonderful "word pictures" of who Jesus truly is....Jesus states "I am"**The bread of life**, (John 6:35); **The light of the world**, (John 8:12); **The door**, (John 10:9); **The good shepherd**, (John 10:11, 14); **The resurrection and the life**. (John 11:25).

Commentators Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, in their Christ-Centered Exposition of John, state the Purpose of the Gospel of John in this way; "We can summarize John's thesis in one word: **believe**. (pg. 3)

John witnessed nearly 3 years of stories, sermons, and conversations with Jesus, but he didn't include them all. He selected certain ones – the ones that would help us **believe**. In this Gospel, John will answer three questions:

What do we need to believe?

What does it mean to believe?

Why do we need to believe?

As we will be finding out the answers to these 3 questions as we study John, briefly answering them here:

What do we need to believe?

- That Jesus is the **Christ** – Christ is a title, not a name, and is synonymous with **Messiah** – Jesus is the One who will fulfill all of the promises God made to His people.
- That Jesus is the **Son of God** – we’ve already discussed this – the deity of Jesus – That Jesus is God – “If Jesus were not divine, then he could not be the fulfillment of all the promises God made.” (Carter, Wredberg; pg 5)

What does it mean to believe?

The word **believe** from the Greek, translates “to trust” or “to put one’s faith into something or someone”. “John did not write his Gospel just so we could know facts about Jesus’ life. He wrote his Gospel so we would know facts about **who Jesus is, what he was sent to do and in response trust in him completely**”.

(Carter, Wredberg; pg. 6)

We should be studying with this in mind....I’m not just gaining more knowledge in studying the book of John....I should be asking “What should my response be to what I am learning”? And that is where our O-I-A method becomes helpful. How do I apply what I am learning to my life? Where do I need to change? It is a growing experience to be sure!!

Why do we need to believe?

“One of the dominant themes of John’s Gospel is our need for life, and it is always connected to the person and work of Jesus Christ.” (Carter, Wredberg; pg. 6)

John 1:4 “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

John 11:25-26 “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.’”

The spiritual and eternal life that we have comes through belief in Jesus Christ. Life in Christ is being drawn into an eternal relationship with Him. The eternal life that Jesus promises, is ours in the here and now.....not just after we die and live with him forever in heaven. Jesus said in John 10:10, “**I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.**” As Carter and Wredberg state, “When we truly **believe**, we truly begin to **live.**”

I like how Warren Wiersbe summarizes as we begin to study the Gospel of John;

“Please come to this book (the book of John) with the heart and mind of a **worshipper**. John did not simply write a book; he painted exciting pictures. Remember, **you are not studying a book – you are seeing a person.**” – (Our study is entitled after all - The Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ.) (Wiersbe; Be Alive; pg. 15)

“And we beheld his gloryfull of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

May we all behold the Glory of Jesus Christ as the Son of God – **“and that by believing have life in his name.”**

References:

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