

Lesson 1 – Introduction to the Book of John

October 1st, 2017

What do we mean by a textual study?

Biblical studies typically fall into one of two categories; a) *topical* or b) *textual*...

- a) **Topical bible studies** typically explore a specific subject matter or theme. They're most often beneficial when we seek answers to questions about specific subjects such as "Sin", "Salvation", "Marriage" or "Love". The material studied can come from anywhere in the bible where the subject matter is discussed. And, although topical bible studies often draw from wide and diverse sources of scripture, all sources share a focused and common theme in nature...the subject at hand.
- b) **Textual bible studies** stand in contrast to topical studies in the scope of the subject matter examined. Instead of seeking answers to questions on specific subjects, textual studies provide us with the opportunity to dive more deeply into broad passages of scripture. And, in so doing, we are often rewarded with greater insight into the historical events, persons and stories found in scripture.

What Do We Mean by the Word "Gospel"?

The term gospel is found frequently within the text of the New Testament. In the Greek New Testament, gospel is the translation of the Greek noun euangelion (occurring 76 times), meaning "good news," and the verb euangelizo (occurring 54 times), meaning "to bring or announce good news." Both words are derived from the noun angelos, which means "messenger."

The Gospel is All About What God Did For Us

Although our sin deserves death, Jesus paid the price for our sins, defeating death so we too can live forever with God. God's grace is "good news" because it solves a foundational problem all of us have as human beings. We are fallen, rebellious and incapable of entering into a perfect realm without God's complete and total work in our lives.

Our faith in Christ alone saves us, and that's the good news! God doesn't merely contribute here, He does it all. His gift of grace is truly "good news" and that's why it's called the "Gospel".

When Was the Book of John Written?

The gospel of John was most likely written between A.D. 70 and A.D. 100. It is believed that John was written no earlier than A.D. 70 for at least several reasons...

- a) John 6:1 and John 21:1 make reference to the Sea of Tiberias which was a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the 1st century.
- b) John 21:19 makes reference to Peter's martyrdom (which according to patristic evidence occurred in A.D. 65 or 66).
- c) The book of John never references the Sadducees (who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after A.D. 70).

Historically, critics have argued for a later date for the writing of John. Some nineteenth century critics claimed the book of John had to be written as late as A.D. 150 to A.D. 200 based upon the book's alleged

similarities to Gnostic writings and because of its advanced church theology. Although these nineteenth-century critics claimed confidence in their late dating for the Book of John, the discovery early in the twentieth century of an ancient manuscript named “p52”, which was dated to no later than A.D. 130, dispelled these views.

“p52” contains a few hand copied verses from the book of John chapter 18, and to this day, remains the earliest known manuscript of any New Testament scripture. The fragment was found in a remote region of Egypt. And, when accounting for the amount of time it would take for John’s gospel to have circulated that far geographically, would push the date of John’s writing firmly back into the first century.



Fragment “p52” found in Egypt

Who Wrote the Book of John?

Like the other three gospels, the gospel of John does not name its author. The title (“According to John,” or “The Gospel According to John”) is not part of the original inspired text, but was added in later manuscripts.

Critics Argue against John the Apostle Being the Author of John

Critics, always desperate to assault the integrity of Scripture and to discredit its truth and authority, deny that the apostle John wrote the fourth gospel. The arguments they put forth are reflective of unbelief, unconvincing, and often highly subjective. Some of the arguments they make include:

- a) **John, like his brother James, was martyred too early to have written the gospel of John.** But that view is based on a misreading of Mark 10:39, which merely indicates that the two brothers would suffer, not necessarily that they would be martyred.
- b) **The Christology of the fourth gospel is too advanced for a first-generation Christian to have written it.** But John’s Christology was divinely revealed (which critics reject) and is in harmony with that of the rest of the New Testament (cf. Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; Col. 2:9; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1).
- c) **An uneducated Galilean fisherman could not have been fluent enough in Greek to have written the fourth gospel.** But Acts 4:13 does not mean that John was illiterate, but merely that he had not been trained in the rabbinic schools. Galilee was near the predominantly Gentile region known as the Decapolis, which was east and south of the Sea of Galilee. There is also evidence that Greek was commonly spoken throughout Palestine in the first century. In addition, John wrote this gospel after many years of living and ministering among Greek-speaking people in Ephesus.

Evidence Supports the View That the Author of John was the Apostle John

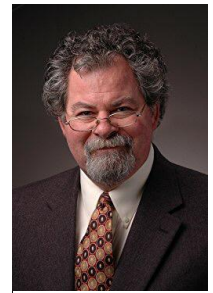
- a) **Early Church Leaders Claimed the Apostle John Wrote It.** Irenaeus (c. A.D. 130-200) was the first person to explicitly name John as author. In his work *Against Heresies*, written in the last quarter of the second century, Irenaeus testified, “Afterwards [after the Synoptic Gospels were written], John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia” (3.1.1).



Irenaeus - Early Church Apologist

b) No Manuscripts Have Ever Been Found that Attributes Authorship to Anyone Other Than the Apostle John.

Daniel B. Wallace, an American professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, notes that this unbroken stream suggests recognition (or at least acknowledgment), of Johannine authorship as early as the first quarter of the second century. Indeed, John's Gospel is unique among the evangelists for two early papyri (p66 and p75, dated c. 200) attest to Johannine authorship. Since these two [manuscripts] were not closely related to each other, this common tradition [of Johannine authorship] must precede them by at least three or four generations of copying.

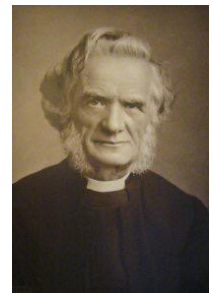


*Daniel B. Wallace-
American
Professor of New
Testament Studies*

c) The Content and Style of Writing is Consistent with Johannine Authorship...

B.F. Westcott a British bishop, biblical scholar and theologian (1825-1901), summarized evidence pointing to the apostle John as author including:

- **The author was a Jew.** He was familiar with contemporary Jewish opinions about a wide range of topics, including the Messiah (e.g., 1:21, 25; 6:14-15; 7:26-27, 31, 40-42; 12:34), the importance of formal religious training (7:15), the relationship of suffering to personal sin (9:2), and the Jews' attitude toward the Samaritans (4:9), women (4:27), and the Hellenistic Jews of the Diaspora (7:35). He was familiar with Jewish customs, including the necessity of avoiding ceremonial defilement from contact with Gentiles (18:28), the need for purification before celebrating Passover (11:55), as well as wedding (2:1-10) and burial (11:17-44; 19:40) customs. He was familiar with the great Jewish feasts of Passover (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), Tabernacles (Booths; 7:2), and Dedication (Hanukkah; 10:22).
- **The Author was an Eyewitness.** He gave specific details, even when they were not essential to the story. Many of those details could not have come from the Synoptics, which do not record them. They include the name of Judas Iscariot's father (6:71; 13:2, 26), how long Lazarus had been in the tomb (11:17, 39), how long Jesus stayed in Sychar (4:40, 43), the precise time at which certain events occurred (1:39; 4:6, 52; 19:14; cf. 13:30), and exact numbers (1:35; 2:6; 6:9, 19; 19:23; 21:8, 11). He alone recorded that the loaves the boy had at the feeding of the five thousand were made of barley (6:9), that after Mary poured the perfume on Jesus' feet the house was filled with its fragrance (12:3), that the branches the people lined the road with during the triumphal entry were palm branches (12:13), that Roman soldiers were in the party that accompanied Judas to Gethsemane (18:3, 12), that Jesus' tunic was seamless (19:23), and that His facecloth was separate from the linen wrappings (20:7).
- **The Author was an Apostle.** He was intimately acquainted with what the Twelve were thinking and feeling (e.g., 2:11, 17, 22; 4:27; 6:19; 12:16; 13:22, 28; 20:9; 21:12).
- **References to the Apostle John are Conspicuously Absent.** It is remarkable that the apostle John, mentioned some twenty times in the Synoptic Gospels, is not named once in his gospel. He observes, "It is not easy to think of a reason why any early Christian, other than John himself, should have completely omitted all mention of such a prominent Apostle". Further, only a preeminent person of unquestioned authority could have written a gospel that differed so markedly from the other three and had it universally accepted by the church.



*B.F. Westcott-
British Bishop &
Theologian 1825-
1901*

What Do We Know About John?

- John is believed to have been the younger of the two sons of Zebedee. His brother James is almost always listed first when the two are mentioned together, suggesting he was the oldest of the two brothers. John's father, Zebedee was a prosperous fisherman on the Sea of Galilee who owned his

own boat and was well off enough to employ hired servants (**Mark 1:20 ESV**) . *“And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.”*

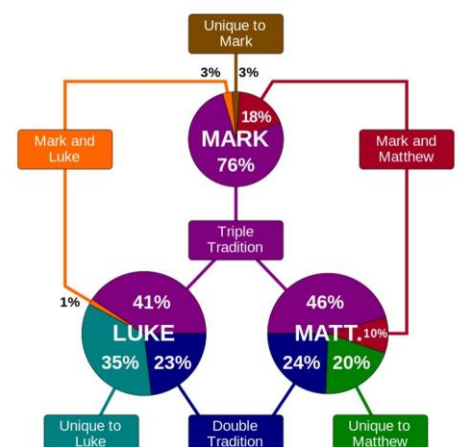
- John’s mother was named Salome and may have been the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 19:25). If so, John and Jesus would have been cousins.
- John first appears in Scripture as a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35-40; though characteristically, John did not name himself). When John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as the Messiah, the apostle John immediately left him and followed Jesus (John 1:37).
- Along with his brother, James, and fellow fisherman, Peter, John was one of the three most intimate associates of Jesus:
 - Matt. 17:1 - John was one of only three present during Christ’s transfiguration.
 - Mark 5:37 – John was one of only three Christ allowed to be present when raising the ruler of the synagogue’s daughter from the dead.
 - Mark 13:3 – Jesus confides in a small group of his disciples (which includes John), about signs of the end of the age.
 - Mark 14:33 – John is one of only three disciples Jesus took with him into the garden of Gethsemane when he was greatly troubled just prior to his crucifixion.
- After Christ’s ascension, John became one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church (Acts 1:13; 3:1-11; 4:13-21; 8:14; Gal. 2:9).
- John was known as “the apostle of love,” but despite this, was well known to have had a fiery temperament. Jesus named John and James “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17), and the two brothers lived up to that name. Indignant when a Samaritan village refused to receive Jesus and the disciples, and overestimating their apostolic power, they asked the Lord, “Do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54). Also, in the only place recorded in the Synoptic Gospels where John acted and spoke alone, he reveals the same attitude, saying to Jesus, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us” (Luke 9:49).
- But one of the things the apostle John is most well know for was his title of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20:24). His connection and bond with Christ was so deep that John was the one that the Lord committed the care of his mother to at his crucifixion (John 19:26, 27).

The Gospel of John is Unique Among the Four Gospels

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is comparatively distinct. The term synoptic comes via Latin from the Greek σύνοπτις, synopsis, i.e. "(a) seeing all together, synopsis".

The similarities among the three synoptic gospels in content, arrangement, and specific language is widely attributed to literary interdependence. The longstanding majority view favors Marcan priority, in which both Matthew and Luke have made direct use of the Gospel of Mark as a source, and further holds that Matthew and Luke also drew from an additional hypothetical document, called Q.

Relationships between the Synoptic Gospels



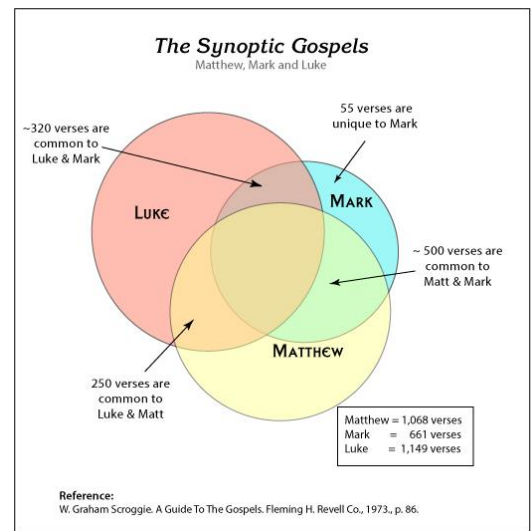
The Synoptic Gospels vs. John's Gospel

Synoptic Gospels:

- ▶ Synoptic means 'having the same view point'
- ▶ Matthew, Mark and Luke tell very similar stories and so are synoptic.
- ▶ Very focused on Miracles, Parables and the Kingdom of God
- ▶ Visits Jerusalem only once
- ▶ Focused on **what Jesus did**

John's Gospel:

- ▶ No Parables
- ▶ Kingdom of God is only mentioned once
- ▶ Jesus Visits Jerusalem a number of times
- ▶ Jesus performs just 7 'signs', no reference to exorcisms or Miracles
- ▶ Themes of Life and Love
- ▶ Focused on **who Jesus is**



The gospel of John is much more reflective in character about the events that transpired in the life of Christ. While the synoptic gospels are much more “narrative” in nature, the fourth gospel often pauses after its record of events to give a reason, at another to fix the attention, to deduce consequences, or make application.

John 2:20-23 (ESV) ²⁰ *The Jews then said, "It has taken forty- six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"* ²¹ **But he was speaking about the temple of his body.** ²² **When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.**

John 2:23-25 (ESV) ²³ *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.* ²⁴ **But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people** ²⁵ **and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.**

John 4:1-2 (ESV) ¹ *Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John* ² **(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples),**

John 7:37-39 (ESV) ³⁷ *On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.* ³⁸ *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'* ³⁹ **Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.**

John 11:11-13 (ESV) ¹¹ *After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him."* ¹² *The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."* ¹³ **Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.**

John 21:18-19 (ESV) ¹⁸ *Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go."* ¹⁹ **(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."**

John 21:22-23 (ESV) ²² *Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"* ²³ **So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"**

Purpose

John is the only one of the gospels that contains a precise statement of the author's purpose:

John 20:31 (ESV) *“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”.*

John's objective was both apologetic (“that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”) and evangelistic (“and that believing you may have life in His name”). The church, recognizing this apostolic character of John, has given out millions of little pocket Gospels of John in the last century.

But John is also one of the favorite Bible books—if not the very favorite —of mature and devout Christians. John does not merely give the facts of the life Christ, but long discourses and mature reflections of an apostle who has walked with him from (probably) late teenage years in Galilee to extreme old age in the Province of Asia. His Gospel contains the best known verse in the New Testament, what Martin Luther called “the Gospel in a nutshell,” John 3:16.



*William Temple Archbishop
of Canterbury*

If John's Gospel were the only book in the NT, it would still afford enough meat (and milk) of the Word for a lifetime of study and meditation. The late Archbishop William Temple wrote: ‘ . . . the point of vital importance is the utterance of the Divine Word to the soul, the self-communication of the Father to His children. The Fourth Gospel is written with full consciousness of that truth . . . ’

Here, indeed, is the distinctiveness of the Fourth Gospel. For here the Word of God is living and active. It is Jesus Christ.