

The Gospel of John

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Introduction

The word Gospel means “good news”. There are four books in the New Testament called gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic gospels because of their similarity. The gospel of John is of a different style and content than the other gospels. The gospels are not strictly an exposition of the good news, but rather an account of the provision of the gospel for needy sinners in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Below are brief reviews of the writers of the gospels.

Matthew was an apostle, a Levite and son of Alpheus. He was from Capernaum and possibly the brother of the apostle James, the son of Alpheus. He was a tax collector in Galilee and entertained Jesus in his home. He ministered in Persia, Macedonia, Syria, Parthia, Media, and Theiopia. He died a martyr, possibly by fire. Matthew’s gospel addressed primarily Jews (probably written in the 60s) and presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophesied Messiah

Mark, also called John Mark, was a disciple of Jesus Christ and the son of Mary of Jerusalem. He was a cousin of Barnabas and accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary tour but left them at Perga. Later Paul and Barnabas separated because Paul refused to allow Mark on second tour. He was martyred in Alexandria, Egypt, and buried there. Mark’s gospel targeted primarily the Romans (dates in the late 50s or early 60s) and is a practical presentation of Jesus as the obedient servant of God.

Luke was a disciple and a physician. He was Greek who may have been a Jewish proselyte. He wrote the gospel and the book of Acts and traveled with Paul. Although there are conflicting accounts of his death and burial, it is generally accepted that he died in Constantinople and was buried there. Luke’s gospel was written primarily for the Greeks (probably written in 60 A.D.) and shows Jesus as the perfect man.

John was an apostle, the son of Zebedee, brother of James and the two men were called “sons of thunder”. He was a prosperous fisherman from Galilee, business partners with Peter and Andrew, and identified as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (5 times). His brother James was the first apostle martyred. He was given charge of Jesus’ mother at Jesus’ crucifixion. He was known to have been exiled to Patmos and later to have lived in Ephesus. He wrote this gospel probably to churches in Roman Asia, three short letters to churches, and Revelation. John’s gospel was written to the church (written in the late 80s or early 90s) to reveal Jesus as the divine Son of God. The Gospel of John covers the time period of Jesus’ ministry A.D. 26 - 30.

John’s purpose for writing the book is found in John 20:30-31:

“Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples

which are not written in this book; but these have been written **that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Four Passovers are mentioned in this gospel:

John 2:13	Passover of the first temple cleansing	Spring A.D. 27
John 5:1	Passover of the healing by the pool	Spring A.D. 28
John 6:4	Passover just before feeding 5,000	Spring A.D. 29
John 12:1, 12	Passover of the triumphal entry	Spring A.D. 30

Governing at the time of Jesus’ ministry:

In 63 B.C., Jerusalem was captured by Rome.

14-37 A.D. The ruler was Tiberius Caesar.

4 B.C.-39 A.D. Herod Antipas is Tetrarch of Galilee/Perea who killed John the Baptist.

26-36 A.D. Pontius Pilot was Procurator over Judea.

18-36 A.D. Joseph Caiaphas was the Jewish High Priest and head of the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin was composed of ranking Pharisees and Sadducees having some civil/spiritual/theological authority under Roman rule. Most cases before it would be charges of blasphemy, false prophesying, or deceiving the people. It maintained its own enforcement officers and could order arrests. Any sentence of death required ratification by the Roman Procurator.

The Gospel of John differs from the three synoptic gospels in the following ways:

<u>The Synoptic Gospels</u>	<u>The Gospel of John</u>
Chiefly concerned with Jesus’ ministry in the north around Galilee	Gives more coverage to Jesus ministry in the south, around Judea
Much emphasis on the kingdom	More emphasis on the person of Jesus
Jesus as Son of David, Son of Man	Jesus especially as Son of God
Anticipation of the church and references to the infant church	written to the maturing church
The earthly story	The heavenly meaning
Jesus’ sayings generally short e.g. parables	More long discourses of Jesus
Comparatively little commentary by the gospel writers	Much commentary by John
Only one mention of a Passover	Mention of four Passovers

Unique to John.

- Some miracles: water to wine; man born blind; Lazarus raised; nobleman's son healed; physical infirmity at Bethesda
- The "I am" sayings
- New birth discourse with Nicodemus
- Upper room discourse
- Meeting Samaritan woman
- Washing disciples' feet
- Jesus' High Priestly prayer (see Matt. 25:36-46; Mark 14:32-41; Luke 22:39-46)

John does not mention:

Jesus' birth, baptism, temptation, casting out demons, telling parables, or the Lord's supper.

Key Themes:

- **Jesus and the Father.**

This gospel is full of the ways in which Jesus is God's Son. He was involved in creation, He came into this world and then He ascended. He went back to His rightful glory.

- **Christ's death for sinners.**

More than any of the other Gospels, John tells us why Jesus had to die and of the love which made Him do it.

- **The Holy Spirit.**

There is more about the Spirit in this Gospel than in the others. He is described as the One who would replace Jesus on earth when Jesus returned to the Father.

- **Eternal Life.**

This is what the other gospel writers describe as the "kingdom of God/Heaven." It is connected with the new or second birth.

- **God's timetable.**

John gives us a picture of Jesus in control of the situation from first to last. He knew He was working out a master plan so that nothing, not even His death, took Him by surprise.

John's gospel may be outlined as follows:

- **Jesus is presented as divine Son of God and begins His ministry**

Chapter 1 Jesus' divine nature, His presentation and proclamation by John the Baptist

Jesus' first five followers

Chapter 2 Jesus' first miracle; cleansing of the Temple

Chapter 3 Jesus teaches Nicodemus about salvation

Chapter 4 Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at a well, heals an official's son

- **Opposition to the Son of God**
 - Chapter 5 Jesus heals a lame man and confirms He is the divine Son of God
 - Chapter 6 Two miracles: Jesus feeds 5,000; Jesus walks on water
Two messages: God’s sovereignty and God’s salvation of believers
 - Chapter 7 Disbelief and division among Jesus’ followers
 - Chapter 8 Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees
 - Chapter 9 Jesus heals a man blind from birth and confounds the Pharisees
 - Chapter 10 Jesus is the Good Shepherd; the Jews attempt to kill Him
 - Chapter 11 Raising Lazarus from the dead
 - Chapter 12 Jesus’ preparation for and entry into Jerusalem
- **Preparing the Disciples**
 - Chapter 13 Preparing for the Passover and revealing the betrayer
 - Chapter 14 Three questions answered
 - Chapter 15 Instructions for the disciples on fruit bearing, loving, suffering, witnessing
 - Chapter 16 Jesus teaches them about conflict, future events, clarity
- **Praying to the Father**
 - Chapter 17 Jesus’ High Priestly prayer
- **Betrayal, Trial and Execution**
 - Chapter 18 Judas betrays Jesus; Peter denies Jesus; three trials
 - Chapter 19 Jesus convicted and sent for execution; Jesus’ death and burial
- **Resurrection**
 - Chapter 20 The empty grave and appearance of Jesus
 - Chapter 21 Jesus meets with His disciples by the Sea of Galilee

Jesus’ final instructions and ascension are given in Acts 1:1-12.

References

1. Some of this material is based upon the writings of my wife, Carol, to whom I am very indebted.
2. For this course, the primary reference material will be “An Expository Commentary on the Gospel of John” by James Montgomery Boice, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005 (5 volumes).