

New Testament Survey:  
The Gospel of John

Source: Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997.

Of all the Gospels, the Gospel of John has given us some of the most beloved — and most debated — Scriptures regarding the person of Jesus Christ. Passages such as John 3:16 and 14:1-6 are known almost instinctively by many Christians. In the liturgy of Good Friday, John 19:1-37 is read before the sermon, with the congregation standing at verse 17 (the arrival of Jesus at Golgotha).

However, John is not like the Synoptic Gospels in many respects. John omits any mention of the Baptism, the Transfiguration, and the institution of Holy Communion. On the other hand, John contains some of the greatest sayings of Jesus, especially those He gave the disciples just prior to His time in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Given the differences between John and the Synoptics, we should examine reasons why John still stands with the Synoptics as a reliable record of Jesus' life.

### **Historicity**

1. John seems so different because Matthew, Mark, and Luke are so *alike*. John seems to have been composed independently of the Synoptic tradition.
2. Although John's Gospel seems independent of the Synoptics, the author is still aware of the works. However, for some reason, the author chose to include information not included in the Synoptics while including other information omitted by the Synoptics.
3. Some of the differences between the Synoptics and John's Gospel can be explained by considering the different intended audiences to whom Jesus spoke. John alone records Jesus' Farewell Discourse of chapters 14-17; these teachings would have meant more to the Apostles than to the crowds. On the other hand, John records many of the sayings of Jesus intended for the crowds as well (especially in chapters 5-11).
4. John wrote in a distinctive style from the Synoptics.
5. Several of John's longer sermons resemble Jewish *midrash* characteristic more of rabbis than of Christian preaching. (cf. John 6:26-59.)
6. John's Gospel contains more chronological detail than the Synoptics. John alone gives us the information necessary to determine the length of Jesus' ministry (3 years). The Gospel's information has been corroborated by archaeology (cf. pools of Bethesda (5:2) and Siloam (9:11), the Stone Pavement of Pilate's judgment seat (19:13).)

### **Circumstances of John**

Most conservative scholars date the Fourth Gospel at the end of the first century A.D., during the reign of Domitian in Rome (81-96). Domitian was so brutal he was murdered by members of the Senate and the Praetorian Guard.

According to Church history, John the Apostle wrote the Gospel while living in Ephesus. St. John identifies himself in the Gospel as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23).

## Theology of John

For the Greeks, St. John was the most profound New Testament writer. The early Church read St. Paul's letters, but John set the theological agenda, and his categories formed the agenda for the next 200 years. The reasons for this are:

1. John's treatment of the resurrection/ascension. John spoke of a physical Jesus who physically arose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Platonism, the dominant Greek philosophy, had a major problem with the physical Jesus ascending into heaven.
2. John's writings appealed to Greeks because Greek culture was very concerned with expressing the meaning of reality as profoundly and simply as possible. To the Greek Christians, St. John was considered one of the 3 greatest writers (with Homer and Plato).

St. John is the only New Testament writer to be called a theologian by the Greeks (although he earned the title with his Apocalypse (Revelation), not his Gospel).

What is St. John's theology?

1. Jesus is described as "the Christ," the "Son of God," and more importantly, "the Word (1:1-14)." The term "word" was used in Jewish and Greek thought to denote the way God or the gods revealed themselves and communicated with humankind. According to St. John, the Word "became flesh and dwelt among us;" Jesus physically lived with humanity in a human body.
2. Jesus is described as the "Lamb of God." St. John alone, of all the New Testament writers, uses this term to refer to Jesus (twice in the Gospel and 27 times in Revelation). In John 1:29, Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God; in Revelation, Jesus is the victorious Lamb that conquers His enemies and delivers Creation from sin.
3. Wisdom and Agent. John parallels Jesus with the personified "Wisdom" in Jewish literature, including extrabiblical literature.
4. God. Jesus makes 7 "I am" statements in this Gospel that tie Him directly to the Holy Name in the Old Testament:
  - A. "I am the bread of life (6:35)"
  - B. "I am the light of the world (8:12, 9:5)"
  - C. "I am the gate for the sheep (10:7)"
  - D. "I am the good shepherd (10:11)"
  - E. "I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)"
  - F. "I am the way and the truth and the life (14:6)"
  - G. "I am the true vine (15:1)"

Jesus also claims, "I and the Father are one" in 10:30. The Jews certainly understood this reference, because they immediately accused Him of blasphemy.

5. Realized eschatology. St. John talks of eternal life and death as beginning in this life, not in the time after death (3:18). For an interesting perspective on this theme, see C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*, particularly in the introduction: "I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all

along, only a region of Hell; and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself.”<sup>1</sup>

6. Miracles as Signs and their relation to faith. Jesus refuses to give “signs” in the Synoptics; however, St. John records “signs” (same Greek word, *sēmeion*) as reasons to believe in Jesus (2:11, 4:53-54). On the other hand, Jesus never gives a sign on command; furthermore, He tells Thomas, “blessed are those who have not seen and have yet believed” (20:29).
7. Incipient Trinitarianism and the unity of Jesus’ followers. St. John records Jesus as saying, “I and the Father are one” (10:30). Jesus also says, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (14:11). When Jesus leaves, He will send “another Counselor” to guide the Apostles and those who believe their testimony (14:16). St. John does not confuse the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; he maintains their separateness as well as the classic Subordination of Son and Holy Spirit to the Father (14:28).
8. The election and security of the believer. St. John lays the framework for the doctrines of the security of the believer.
  - A. 6:39: “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.”
  - B. 10:29: “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”
  - C. Jesus chose the disciples, they did not choose Him. cf. John 15:16: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”
  - D. On the other hand, St. John balances the election and security with the term “abide” as if to emphasize the necessity of personal responsibility for the salvation received by the new believer (cf. chapter 15).
  - E. Furthermore, St. John gives us one of the classic passages for the universality of the gospel message in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The term for “world” is the Greek word *kosmos*, referring to mankind in general as well as the Creation.
9. The Holy Spirit as Paraclete. The Holy Spirit figures prominently in Jesus’ Farewell Address of chapters 14-17. John alone uses the term “*paraklētos*” to refer to the Holy Spirit. The word is best translated “advocate,” “counselor,” or “comforter.” The Holy Spirit as Paraclete will perform the roles of
  - A. helper (14:15-21)
  - B. interpreter (14:25-31)
  - C. witness (15:26-16:4)
  - D. prosecutor (16:5-11)
  - E. revealer (16:12-16)

### John 1:1

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

John’s wording in this verse is a compact statement of doctrinal orthodoxy of the divinity of Christ. In the last phrase, John’s wording says, “and God was the Word.” However, the word *λόγος* is in the nominative case,

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1. C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (original copyright 1946. New York: HarperCollins, 2001), ix

the case of the subject of the sentence. Furthermore, the word has the article (ὁ), definitively recognizing it as the subject of the phrase.

The word for God (θεός) is the first noun in the phrase, but this emphasizes its essence or quality. According to Bill Mounce, “the word order tells us that Jesus Christ has all the divine attributes that the Father has; lack of the article tells us that Jesus Christ is not the Father.” Mounce says of Martin Luther, “the lack of an article is against Sabellianism; the word order is against Arianism.”<sup>2</sup>

καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν ὁ θεός “and the Word was the God” (i.e. the Father; Sabellianism or Modalism)

καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν θεός “and the Word was a god” (Arianism)

καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος “and the Word was God” (Orthodoxy)

Jesus Christ is God and has all the attributes that the Father has. But He is not the first Person of the Trinity. All this is concisely affirmed in καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Bill Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 28-29.

3. Ibid.

## Outline

- I. Introductory Testimony (1:1-51)
  - A. Prologue (1:1-18)
  - B. The Testimony of John and the First Disciples (1:19-51)
- II. The Testimony of Signs and Discourses (2:1-11:57)
  - A. Jesus and Jewish Institutions (2:1-4:54)
    - a. Water into Wine — A New Joy (2:1-11)
    - b. Temple Cleansing — A New Temple (2:12-25)
    - c. Jesus, Nicodemus, and the Baptist — A New Birth (3:1-36)
    - d. Jesus, the Samaritan Woman, and the Official's Son — A New Universalism (4:1-54)
  - B. Jesus and Jewish Festivals (5:1-10:21)
    - a. Healing the Paralytic and Imitating the Father (5:1-47)
    - b. The True Passover: The Bread of Life (6:1-71)
    - c. The True Tabernacles: Living Water and the Light of the World (7:1-9:41)
    - d. The Good Shepherd and Oneness with the Father (10:1-42)
  - C. Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life (11:1-57)
- III. The Testimony of Death and Resurrection (12:1-20:31)
  - A. Actions in Preparation for Death (12:1-50)
    - a. Anointing in Bethany (12:1-11)
    - b. Entry into Jerusalem (12:12-50)
  - B. Teaching in Preparation for Death (13:1-17:26)
    - a. Servant Ministry vs. Betrayal (13:1-30) (Washing of the disciples' feet and the final decision of Judas)
    - b. Farewell Discourse (13:31-16:33)
    - c. High-Priestly Prayer (17:1-26)
  - C. Events Surrounding the Death Itself (18:1-20:31)
    - a. Arrest, Trials, and Crucifixion (18:1-19:42)
    - b. Resurrection (20:1-29)
    - c. Purpose of the Gospel (20:30-31)
- IV. Concluding Testimony (21:1-25)
  - A. The Reinstatement of the Disciples (21:1-23)
  - B. Epilogue (21:24-25)