

NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

* * * JESUS CHRIST AS THE INCARNATE WORD AND SON OF GOD * * *

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

"But these [signs] are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name." **John 20:31**

AUTHOR: The Apostle John (c. 85-90 AD)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE. The fourth Gospel does not explicitly identify its author, yet its authorship is not in question. The author refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20) or "the other disciple" (18:15-16; 20:2; 21:2). He was one of the twelve apostles (Jn13:23; cf. Mk14:17). His most intimate relationship with Jesus necessitates that he was one of the three disciples that comprised the inner circle of Peter, James, and John (cf. Matt17:1; Mk5:37; 14:33; Luk8:51). He is distinguished from Peter (cf., Jn13:23-24; 20:2), and James was martyred by Herod far too early (c. 42 AD) for him to have authored the fourth gospel (Act12:1-2). This leaves **John** as the obvious author, a conclusion with strong external support of early Church history.

Irenaeus (born 130 AD in Smyrna), a disciple of Polycarp (born 69 AD in Smyrna), who was a disciple of John himself, recorded that John wrote the Book of Revelation while exiled to Patmos (Rev1:9) "toward the end of Domitian's reign", which ended in 96 AD. Prior to (and after) his exile to Patmos, John lived in Ephesus and ministered to the churches of Asia (i.e., Asia Minor; cf. Rev1:4,11). The testimony of early Church writers is that John wrote his Gospel from Ephesus prior to his exile to Patmos, c. 85-90 AD.

WHO WAS JOHN? "John" is a contraction of the Hebrew name Jehohanan (Cp., Ezr10:28; Neh12:13,42), which means *Jehovah is gracious*. Originally disciples of John the Baptist (Jn1:35-40), John and his brother James were among the first disciples called to follow Jesus (Matt4:18-22). John's father Zebedee had a fishing business, in which both brothers participated, and the family may have been affluent (since John had a personal relationship with the high priest and his family; cf. Jn18:10,15). Peter, James, and John comprised Jesus' inner circle, often receiving private revelations from Him when the other disciples were not present. He was exiled to Patmos during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (81-95 AD), but was released by Nerva in 96 AD; after his release he resided in Ephesus and ministered to the churches of Asia until his death (which occurred during the reign of Trajan; 98-117 AD). It is possible that John was the youngest of the twelve apostles, he outlived all the others, and he died a natural death at a very old age.

PURPOSE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL. John's Gospel demonstrates the deity of Jesus Christ as the eternal incarnate Word and Son of God (Jn1:1; 8:58 10:30-33; 14:9; 20:28,31); it presents Him as the only way to God the Father (Jn14:6); and it asserts belief in Him as the only means to eternal life (Jn3:16; 20:31). It also provides the theological basis for understanding

the transformation of the Jewish disciples from exclusive ministers to the nation of Israel (before the death of Christ; cf. Matt10:1-15) into those who would become the apostolic foundation of the Church (after the death of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit; Eph2:20). While it would be the role of the Apostle Paul to formally reveal the mystery of the Church as the Body/Bride of Christ, with its new and unique doctrines, Jesus set the stage for Paul's "revelation of the mystery" (cf. Rom16:25-26; Eph3:1-2; Coll:24-27) by giving a prophetic preview of the coming Church Age to His apostles on the night before His crucifixion (cf. Jn13-17).

KEY WORD/THEME. The key word in the Gospel of John is "believe"¹ (e.g., Jn1:7,12; 3:16; 20:35). In contrast, the word repent/repentance is never used by John; rather, the N.T. concept of repentance (Greek, *μετάνοια*; i.e., a change of mind) is implicitly included in John's usage of "believe" (and Paul's; Cp., Act16:30-31). The contrast between "light" and "darkness" is a prominent theme in the Gospel of John (e.g., Jn1:4-5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35,46).

UNIQUENESS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL. Most of the content (>90%) in John's Gospel is not found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke (the so-called synoptic Gospels). The 7 public discourses of Jesus recorded by John are not found in the synoptics. Only 2 of the 7 miracles of Jesus recorded by John (i.e., feeding the 5,000 and walking on water) can be found in other gospels. John records no parables of Jesus, though these are prominent in the synoptics. John records nothing at all relative to Christ's birth, childhood, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, suffering at Gethsemane, or ascension. The Lord's Supper is not mentioned, although it is from John's Gospel that we understand Jesus' public ministry lasted three-and-a-half years (i.e., it included 3 Passover feasts; cf. Jn2:13; 6:4; 12:1). According to Andy Woods, "John obviously wrote to accomplish a particular literary purpose rather than to present a comprehensive biography of Christ".

Only John records the Upper Room Discourse (Jn13-17), yet John omits the lengthy Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet Discourse (which are prominent in the synoptics). John emphasizes the deity of Jesus Christ (see THEME/PURPOSE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL) much more so than the other Gospel writers. Whereas the synoptic Gospels focus on Jesus' Galilean ministry, John focuses on His Judean ministry.

WHY IS JOHN'S GOSPEL SO DIFFERENT? Unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John's Gospel is written from the outset from the perspective of Israel's rejection of Christ (cf. Jn1:11). This is likely related to the fact that John wrote much later, after the other Gospels had been in circulation for decades (thus, no need to repeat what was common knowledge), and after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD (thus, if there was a window of opportunity for the nation of Israel to repent, it had closed). From John's perspective, God's priority had decidedly shifted from the prophetic program of Israel to the mystery program of the Church. Issues related to the preparation of the apostles to become leaders of the Church take priority over prophecy concerning Israel. The Sermon on the Mount and most of the parables concern the Kingdom, not the Church Age, so they are not relevant to John's purpose. The Olivet Discourse concerns the 70th Week of Daniel (i.e., the Tribulation), during which the Church is not present on earth, so it is omitted. Much more important to John's

¹ In the KJV, "believe" occurs 52 times, "believed" occurs 27 times, and "believeth" occurs 17 times.

purpose is the Upper Room discourse, in which the doctrinal preparation of the apostles for the Church Age begins. Thus, the very different purpose of John's Gospel accounts for its very different character.

ORGANIZATION OF JOHN. The Apostle John wrote both the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation. In the Book of Revelation, the use of the number 7 as an organizing principle is obvious (e.g., 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls). Though less obvious, a similar heptadic structure exists in the Gospel of John; John selects 7 messianic sign-miracles performed by Jesus, records 7 public discourses given by Jesus associated with those signs, and presents 7 metaphorical "I am" statements of Jesus. See the CHART: HEPTADIC ORGANIZATION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

OUTLINE OF JOHN.

I. INTRODUCTION	John 1
A. Revelation of Jesus as the Incarnate Word of God	Jn1:1-18
B. Calling of Disciples	Jn1:19-51
II. JESUS PERFORMS MESSIANIC SIGNS FOR ISRAEL	John 2-11
1) Turning Water into Wine	Jn2:1-12
2) Healing a Nobleman's Son	Jn4:46-54
3) Healing a Paralyzed Man	Jn5:1-16
4) Feeding the Five Thousand	Jn6:1-14
5) Walking on Water	Jn6:15-21
6) Healing the Man Born Blind	Jn9:1-41
7) Raising Lazarus from the Dead	Jn11:1-44
III. REJECTION OF JESUS BY ISRAEL	John 12
IV. JESUS AND DISCIPLES IN THE UPPER ROOM	John 13-17
(Prophetic Preview of the Mystery Church Age)	
V. PASSION NARRATIVE	John 18-21
A. Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus	Jn18:1-40
B. Crucifixion of Jesus	Jn19:1-37
C. Burial of Jesus	Jn19:38-42
D. Resurrection and Appearances of Jesus	Jn20:1-21:25

DISPENSATIONAL NOTE. An important caveat is in order before undertaking the study of any of the Gospels. The Dispensation of the Law ends with the death of Christ (Eph2:14-15; Heb9:16), *not His birth*. The Gospels are a record of the Lord Jesus Christ living as a Jewish Man under the Law of Moses (Gal4:4). Thus, direct application of the life of Christ as recorded in the Gospels to the believer living during the Dispensation of Grace must be considered carefully; Christ lived a life in absolute obedience to the Mosaic Law, keeping every provision, whereas the Apostle Paul makes expressly clear in his epistles that the Christian is not under the requirements of the Mosaic Law (cf. Rom6:14-15; Gal3:23-25).

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REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST AS THE INCARNATE WORD OF GOD

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--- S.D.G. ---

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