

John – Part 1

1. **Who is the writer? What do we know about him from this gospel account and others?**

The writer is John the apostle. John was one of the original 12 apostles called by Jesus. From the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we know that John was a fisherman by trade. He was one of those called by Jesus to become a fisher of men when Jesus went walking by the Sea of Galilee. According to the book of Acts chapter 4, the rulers, elders, and scribes of the Jewish people understood that John was an uneducated and untrained man. Because of the confidence exhibited by John along with Peter, they also recognized that these men had been with Jesus. We also see throughout the other gospel accounts that John was one of the special three apostles (along with Peter and John's brother James) who were privileged to be with Jesus in some of His most private encounters. From the gospel of John, we get the perspective of John himself -- that he was Jesus' best friend. John calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7,20,24). John was the one who was leaning up against Jesus' breast at the table of the Last Supper. Even Peter, who certainly was a special apostle, regarded John as very intimate with our Lord. Peter asked John to find out who Jesus was talking about when He spoke of the one who would betray Him. History tells us that John was the only apostle who was not martyred for his faith. He certainly endured some persecution himself as he was exiled to Patmos, presumably during the reign of Domitian around A.D. 95. John, who in his younger years was called by Jesus a son of thunder, was the loving elder in his latter years. John was no doubt transformed first by His time spent with Jesus in the flesh, and then through the work of the Spirit following Jesus' ascension to the throne.

2. **In what ways is this gospel account different from the others?** The synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very similar in the communication of events from Jesus' ministry, while John is substantially different. It is true that John covers some of the same information such as the feeding of the five thousand, and the details of the crucifixion, but the focus of John is certainly different. John records much more dialogue than do the other gospel writers. You get to see the verbal interaction between Jesus and His opposition. Jesus calls them out time and time again, communicating that the only reason they don't believe Him is because they don't really know God -- John 8:42-47. From this gospel account, you also get a very clear picture of why the ruling Jews wanted to put Jesus to death. John lays out the strategic efforts of Jesus to push the buttons of His enemies at the right times, which leads to His crucifixion at their hands in A.D. 30. Notice that Jesus gains major attention by cleansing the Temple at the first Passover of His ministry in chapter 2. He builds momentum early in that ministry by performing miracles, so that even the Pharisees are privately admitting that He must be from God -- see John 3:1. However, beginning with the healing of the man at Bethesda on the Sabbath (2nd Passover -- John 5:1), Jesus starts making enemies of the Jewish authorities -- see John 3:17-18. Jesus feeds the 5000 around the time of the 3rd Passover -- John 6:4. By chapter 7 (in the third full year of His ministry at the Feast of Booths), they send officers to arrest Him (though they come back empty-handed). In chapter 8, Jesus calls them out as sons of the devil. By the time Jesus heals the blind man in chapter 9 (again on the Sabbath), the Pharisees have already made it public knowledge that anyone confessing Jesus as the Christ would be thrown out of the synagogue. As time approaches for the fourth Passover of Christ's earthly ministry, He raises Lazarus from the dead (chapter 11), forcing the hand of those in political opposition to Him. During the last week leading up to His crucifixion (chapters 12-19), Jesus is anointed

by Mary (this pushes Judas over the edge), He enters Jerusalem riding on the donkey, He holds the last Passover supper with His apostles, and then is finally brought to trial. It is interesting to note that almost half of John's gospel deals with the final week preceding Jesus' crucifixion and the time He spent on earth following His resurrection.

3. **What are some physical things brought forth by John that Jesus used in His ministry to teach spiritual truths? What can we learn from this?** There are many physical objects that Jesus used in His teaching to communicate spiritual truths. Here are a few from the gospel of John. In His conversation with the woman at the well in chapter 4, Jesus used water to teach about our need for the living water (the Holy Spirit -- John 7:37-39) only He can give. He also used the topics of manna and bread in chapter 6 to teach us that He is the "bread of life." Jesus brought forth the topic of light throughout this gospel to teach about the illuminating effect of His coming into a world of darkness -- see John 1:5, John 3:19, John 8:12, John 12:46. He spoke of the vine and branches in John 15 to remind us that we need to abide in Him in order to bear fruit. In John chapter 10, Jesus called Himself the door, showing that He is the only way to the Father. In the same chapter, He also called Himself the Good Shepherd, communicating His care for the sheep. Jesus was the Master Teacher and we should pattern our teaching after Him. We are free to use everything from our current culture to make analogies and bring people to spiritual understanding. Let's be people who understand the times, and use this knowledge to get people focused on the things that really matter!
4. **What is the main point of this book?** The main point of the gospel of John is explicitly stated in John 20:31 which says, "but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the God, and that believing you may have life in His name." Truly this is the goal for all people everywhere -- that they may honestly believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The verbal acknowledgment of this statement is called the good confession and is an essential part of God's plan for salvation. Consistently throughout the Scriptures, we see that those who truly believe also obey -- see John 3:36, Hebrews 3:18,19!
5. **What points in this gospel are similar to points that John brought forth in his epistles?** Going through the gospel of John, we see many similar themes to those brought out in John's epistles. There is a definite point that Jesus came in the flesh -- John 1:14. John brings forth many of the human elements of Jesus throughout this gospel, culminating in his eyewitness account of Jesus' physical death in chapter 19. John also clarifies that Jesus had a bodily resurrection as established by His challenge to Thomas to "reach here your finger..." in John 2:27. John also emphasizes Jesus' teachings that God's people ought to love one another -- see John 13:34-35. The new birth of Christians is also brought forth in the gospel as well as in John's letters. In John 1:13 and 3:3-5, it is taught that Christians are born of God and are born "from above." This teaching runs throughout 1 John and is a point of emphasis in 1 John 3.
6. **Contrast the ways that John uses the terminology "Jews" and "people."** When you read through the entire book of John, it becomes very evident that there were two distinct groups within the Jewish nation. One of these groups consisted of the common person muddling his way through life. These people were generally interested in at least hearing what Jesus had to say. Some cared enough to respond by following Him, while most of them kind of ignored Him and continued to go about their business. The other group was

made up of those in power -- the elite of the Jewish people. These "rulers of the Jews" had a selfish agenda and thus had a particular interest in shutting the mouth of Jesus. The first group John mostly calls the "people," while the second group, He usually calls the "Jews."

Consistently throughout the gospel of John, the term "people" is used to describe the crowds consisting of the common Jewish people. One example is in John 3:23 where "people" were coming and being immersed by John. Another case in point is found in John 8:2, where all the "people" were coming to Jesus and He was teaching them.

There are a few times in this book that John uses "Jews" in the general sense of the word, that is, to mean the Jewish people. Some instances of that include speaking of the feasts of the Jews (John 2:13, John 5:1, John 6:4, John 7:2, John 11:55), Jesus Himself being a Jew (John 4:9), the Jews gathering at the synagogues and Temple (John 18:20), the Jews coming into Jerusalem for the Passover (John 19:20), and the burial custom of the Jews (John 19:40).

However, most of the time John speaks of the "Jews," he means the ruling elite that was at enmity with Christ. There are numerous places where this terminology is clearly used, so we will just look at a few. In John 2:18, the "Jews" challenged Jesus' authority for His cleansing of the Temple. In John 5:16 and 18, we see that the "Jews" were persecuting Jesus and intended to kill Him for "breaking the Sabbath" and for making the claim that God was His Father. In John 7:13, we find that no one would speak openly of Jesus for fear of the "Jews," and in John 9:22, we find that the parents of the blind man were also afraid of the "Jews."

If there is any question as to the difference between these two classes, the following passages bring definitive clarity to this. In John 11:47, we see that the rulers called together a council. Caiaphas says that it is expedient that one man die for the people. John 18:14 specifically says that "Caiaphas was the one who had advised the **Jews** that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people."