

The Gospel of John

AN OUTLINED COMMENTARY

by

Barry E. Horner

Text and Outline

Copyright © 2000

by

Barry E. Horner

North Brunswick, New Jersey

All rights reserved

Printed in the U.S.A.

INTRODUCTION

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

WHEN Christian evangelism is undertaken it is common for precedence to be given to the proclamation of the Gospel of John, and the reason for this emphasis is not difficult to discern. There is something very distinct here in comparison with the Synoptic Gospels and probably it is the fact that John, while incorporating historic narrative, gives greater emphasis to the presentation of gospel truth in a way that constantly causes the reader to be confronted, in a most dominant manner, with the divine person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Further, the style of John has an engaging simplicity about it that leads to the subsequent and surprising realization that we are quickly transported from seeming shallows to depths that the Synoptics do not fathom. At this point the simplicity of the Greek language, so familiar to beginners of the Koine dialect, only adds to further misapprehension, whereas Leon Morris aptly declares: "I like the comparison of John's Gospel to a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim. . . . There are unplumbed depths in the limpid clarity of this writing."¹

A. WHY STUDY THE GOSPEL OF JOHN?

Because in its profound simplicity the person of Jesus Christ is set forth in such an arresting and forthright manner that the honest reader is certainly not given the latitude for indecision. If Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the supreme record of biblical soteriology, then The Gospel of John is the supreme record of biblical Christology. Granted that Jesus Christ has unique preeminence in the Word of God as a whole, then The Gospel of John provides us with sharper focus on this glorious incarnation than any other book of the Bible. But further, there is something very captivating about this distinctive record which John, in the purpose statement of 20:30-31, indicates is decidedly intentional. A. B. Simpson has expressed this captivating element in the chorus of a hymn:

What will you do with Jesus?
Neutral you cannot be;
Some day your heart will be asking,
"What will He do with me?"

1. Because of emphasis on the person of Jesus Christ.

The historic person of Jesus Christ is presented as the Creator, the God-man, the unique theanthropic person of the Trinity, especially in the theater of critical Judaism. In particular the Prologue gives an arresting doctrinal overture that uncompromisingly introduces the divine Eternal Word (1:1) and then designates his earthly title at Jesus Christ in 1:7. While his humanity is plainly stated (1:14; 20:27), yet it is his deity that receives emphatic focus as does no other book in the Bible. For a summary of this doctrine according to John, refer to Appendix I.

¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 7.

2. Because of emphasis on the gospel of sovereign grace.

John does not expound on the purpose of Jesus Christ's atonement to the degree that Paul does, nevertheless there is an emphasis on the saving power and love of God in salvation, both universal and particular, that is dominant. Certainly the invitation for unbelieving man to exercise saving faith is plainly stated, especially in 1:19-12:50, yet it is the sovereignty of God that transcends human blindness, inability, and unwillingness, as well as responsibility, in the individual saving of sinners. For a summary of this doctrine according to John, refer to Appendix II.

3. Because of emphasis on the person of the Holy Spirit.

There is distinctive revelation concerning the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son as in 15:26 where also His eternal procession is revealed. The regenerating influence of the third person of the Trinity receives major focus in 3:1-8 and is paralleled by the pervasive emphasis on "life," (1:4; 3:36; 8:12; 11:25). In private ministry the disciples receive substantial instruction concerning "another Comforter/Helper" (14:16-31; 15:26-27; 16:5-15). For a summary of this doctrine according to John, refer to Appendix III.

4. Because of emphasis on Christian sanctification.

It is a misunderstanding to simply regard the Gospel of John as an evangelistic tract for the reason that 13:1-17:26 is clearly a substantial section that addresses only believers and their call to discipleship. Furthermore, the purpose statement of 20:30-31 indicates John's desire that the believer "may be having [present tense] life in His name." For a summary of this doctrine according to John, refer to Appendix IV.

5. Because of emphasis on biblical glorification.

It is no overstatement to declare that the glory of the Triune God is the fundamental motif of the Gospel of John (2:11). There is a cyclical pattern that John 17 especially brings to the fore, that is the Father glorifying the Son, the Son glorifying the believer, the believer glorifying the Son that the Father might be glorified. However it is the glory of the person and work of Christ that receives the greatest prominence. For a summary of this doctrine according to John, refer to Appendix V.

B. THE STATED PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN – 20:30-31

There are good textual reasons for suggesting that John declares a dual purpose for the writing of his Gospel. There are *two* ἵνα, hina, purpose clauses here in 20:31, the first of which has the aorist subjunctive of πιστεύω,² pisteuō, "I believe," while the second has the present subjunctive of ἔχω, echō, "I have." Further, the structure of John naturally lends itself to such a division as the following basic outline indicates.

² Several manuscripts use the present tense here while a greater number support the aorist. Refer to the textual comment on 20:31 for more details.

1. *The evangelistic purpose*: “These things have been written that you may believe [with initial saving faith] that Jesus is the Christ [Messiah]” (30:31a). This is particularly the emphasis of 1:19-12:50.
2. *The sanctification purpose*: “These things have been written that . . . in believing [having ongoing faith following conversion] you may be having life in His name,” 30:31b. This is particularly the emphasis of 13:1-17:26.

C. THE AUTHOR OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

He is a Jew, who is familiar with Hebrew, an apostolic eyewitness, 1:14; 19:35; 21:24-25. He is the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” 21:20, 24. Thus he is, as the traditional view has rightly attested for over 1800 years according to weighty evidence, John the Apostle, a former Galilean fisherman, the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19; 3:16-17), a disciple of the Baptist and later of Jesus as the Christ. Further, this same tradition asserts that John wrote his gospel account at Ephesus where he was a senior bishop/elder until an extremely old age extending to the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan, 98-117 A.D.

D. THE DATE AND DESTINATION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

1. The date of the Gospel of John.

The time of writing is not certain, but most probably, as Ireneus attests, between 66-98 A.D. when John resided at Ephesus as a senior bishop/elder, and before his authorship of Revelation on the Island of Patmos.

2. The destination of the Gospel of John.

Assuming the origination of John’s Gospel in Ephesus, the unidentified addressees indicated in 20:30-31 as “you” are most likely a predominance of Gentiles along with Jews who would come under the broad influence of this strategic church that extended throughout Asia Minor (Acts 19:10). Such an international audience would necessitate John’s strong informative emphasis concerning the Old Testament revelation (1:6; 2:13; 5:1, etc.).

E. THE CHARACTER AND STYLE OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

1. The Greek language.

The Koine Greek of John is an international language, introduced through the conquests of Alexander the Great, that perpetuated Greek culture in spite of subsequent Roman domination. During the first century, as the common commercial language of that day, the lingua franca of the western world, in Palestine it assimilated the influence of Hebrew, the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, and the dawning truth of Christianity.

2. The literary style.

Preeminently the Gospel of John possesses a style far more simple than that of the non-Johannine writings of the New Testament. There is also a more limited vocabulary as well as favorite words, such as “light,” “life,” “world,” “love,” etc., and the exclusive use of “only begotten” and “word” concerning Christ, as well as “Helper/Comforter” with reference to the Holy Spirit. John also focuses more on discourses, doctrinal themes, and selective order rather than chronological narrative.

3. The Hebrew style.

The Gospel of John is heavily reliant upon the Old Testament without the repeated use of proof-texts after the manner of Matthew. Leon Morris explains: “In his [John’s] treatment of the Good Shepherd (ch. 10) and of the true Vine (ch. 15) he has unmistakable allusions to the Old Testament without specific quotation. Again and again this is the case. It is clear that he knew his Bible very well indeed.”³ Further consider the Hebrew parallelism of 1:20; 3:11; 5:37; 6:35, 55, 56; 10:28; 13:16; 14:27; 15:20; 16:20.

4. The comparative style.

Origen, the third century Bible exegete and theologian of Alexandria, was asked why there were four Gospels. To this he responded that there were not four gospels, but one four-fold Gospel. The Gospel of John, as distinct from the other three or the Synoptics, focuses on the person of Christ with a more doctrinal perspective rather than the life of Christ with an historic perspective. Being acquainted with Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John provides a synthesis between history and theological content, yet he maintains an independence in alone emphasizing a number of significant incidents in the life of Jesus, such as the wedding at Cana, 2:1-11, the meeting with Nicodemus, 3:1-15, the meeting with the woman at the well, 4:1-45, the healing of the man born blind, 9:1-41, the parable of the Good Shepherd, 10:1-18, the raising of Lazarus, 11:1-46, the washing of the disciples’ feet, 13:1-20, the parable of the True Vine, 15:1-11, and the glorification prayer, 17:1-26,

F. THE BROAD OUTLINE OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

1. The *Prologue Ministry* of Jesus Christ, 1:1-18.

- a. The Eternal Word and his relationship to *God*, vs. 1-2.
- b. The Eternal Word and his relationship to *creation*, vs. 3-5.
- c. The Eternal Word and his relationship to *John the Baptist*, vs. 6-8.
- d. The Eternal Word and his relationship to *man*, vs. 9-13.
- e. The Eternal Word and his relationship to *grace*, vs. 14-18.

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 60.

2. The *Preparatory Ministry* of Jesus Christ, 1:19-51.
 - a. The testimony of John the Baptist to Jesus Christ, 1:19-34.
 - b. The testimony of the first disciples to Jesus Christ, 1:35-51.

3. The *Public Ministry* of Jesus Christ, 2:1-12:50.
 - a. *Sign one* – the glory of Christ displayed at Cana, 2:1-12.
 - b. The glory of Christ prefigured by the temple, 2:13-22.
 - c. The new birth discourse, 3:1-21.
 - d. The testimony of the Bridegroom’s friend, 3:22-36.
 - e. The great Samaritan awakening, 4:1-42.
 - f. *Sign two* – Christ heals the nobleman’s son, 4:43-54.
 - g. *Sign three* – Christ heals a lame man on the Sabbath, 5:1-18.
 - h. The witness of Christ’s relationship with his Father, 5:19-47.
 - i. *Sign four* – Christ feeds the hungry multitude, 6:1-15.
 - j. *Sign five* – Christ walks on the sea of Galilee, 6:16-21.
 - k. The bread of life discourse, 6:22-71.
 - l. The Feast of Tabernacles testimonies, 7:1-8:59.
 - m. *Sign six* – Christ heals the man born blind, 9:1-41.
 - n. The Good Shepherd discourse, 10:1-42.
 - o. *Sign seven* – Christ raises Lazarus from the dead, 11:1-57.
 - p. The closing ministry of Christ to a dark world, 12:1-50.

4. The *Private Ministry* of Jesus Christ, 13:1-17:26.
 - a. Jesus discourses on his impending departure from the disciples, 13:1-38.
 - b. Jesus discourses on his impending departure to the Father, 14:1-31.
 - c. Jesus discourses on future discipleship, 15:1-16:33.
 - d. Jesus discourses through prayer on glorification, 17:1-26.

5. The *Passion Ministry* of Jesus Christ, 18:1-19:42.
 - a. The prelude to the cross, 18:1-40.
 - b. The sacrifice of the cross, 19:1-42.

6. The *Perfected Ministry* of Jesus Christ, 20:1-21:45.
 - a. The resurrection, 20:1-31.
 - b. The reappearance, 21:1-25.