

A MAN CALLED JOHN (1 of 2)

INTRODUCTION

I have a confession: I have been looking forward to getting to this particular person in the Bible Character Series. John has always been a favorite of mine, but please don't ask me why. I was not named for John, I was named for my grandfather. My name is Johnny, not John. My son's name is Johnny, too, but family and most friends call him John, or they did until he went to Law School. There, he became Johnny and many attorneys still call him Johnny. But, regardless of that, I suppose one reason I love the Gospel According to John is John 3:16. Even when he was much younger my grandson Jacob has always wanted the two of us to take a tour of our church together. Since he was six years old he has often asked me to go across to the church with him and let him quote John 3:16 - before a live microphone, of course.

My son Mark died on April 11, 2015 and all day long our house was filled with church members, family, and friends from former pastorates. Mack Powell, for example, was on the pastor search committee for West Side Baptist Church, Bastrop, Louisiana many years ago. That committee invited me to preach in their church and called me to come as their pastor. During the years I served as pastor of that church, the Powells became like family to our family. Mack's wife Floy has been like a sister to my wife Rebecca. Our house was full of people and I was on the phone a good part of the day as people called to tell us they loved us and were praying with us. Many of Mark's friends came to visit and many others called to express their shock. Solon Smith drove from Indiana to West Monroe, Louisiana for the funeral, after picking up a friend in Greenville. His parents were also present for the service.

Jacob, now age seven and standing shoulder high to me, spent a lot of time with Uncle Mark's new English Shepherd puppy. However, at one point Jacob asked me to go into the church building with him. He told us how much he enjoyed being at our house, and as we entered the auditorium he looked around and began doing what he has done since he was four years old: his normal routine as we entered the facility. When he was little he would ask questions: "What's that? What's this?" This time he stood at the front and asked if I would like for him to quote John 3:16. I would, so he had me turn on the sound system, and then he took a live microphone and began quoting my all time favorite verse. How old was I when I memorized John 3:16? I don't remember, but my grandson loves to walk through our church facilities with me and ask questions, but his favorite thing is to quote John 3:16 into live microphone. Even though I preach from the Holman Christian Standard Bible, all the Scripture I have memorized has been from the King James Version. Jacob memorized John 3:16 from the KJV version.

My last Bible Character in this series was, A Man Called Mark. This one is A Man Called John, but I want to dedicate this one to A MAN CALLED MARK, our beloved son Mark.

SCRIPTURE. The translation used in this study of the Gospel According to John is the Holman Christian Standard Bible. For most of my ministry, I read from various translations and "versions" of the Bible, preached from the King James Version, and studied from the New American Standard Bible. I was pastor of the Forest Baptist Church, Forest, Louisiana for fifteen years, I would leave

my study and cross over to the nearest men's Bible class during Sunday School and listen to Lavelle Hammett, the principal of the Forest High School, teach the Bible lesson. Later, his son-in-law, Kenny Herring, a teacher and coach, taught at Oak Grove, LA, five to the north, taught that class. The Lord called Kenny to preach the Gospel and he is now a pastor in the same area, but back then Kenny Herring and I visited in my study every Sunday morning before Sunday School. Kenny and I were on the phone late last night as he, like so many others, talked about the shock of Mark's sudden, unexpected death.

Back then the Scripture in our Sunday School books was printed in both the KJV (the King James Version, and the NIV (New International Version). There were times when a question about a word or phrase would generate a discussion, with the men suggesting various solutions. Then, a very quiet member of the class, Robert Sanders, another teacher, would say, "I have the New American Standard Bible and it says...." He would read the verse and as I observed, I would see the men look at each other and begin to nod. They understood. That was a simple observation I noted with appreciation.

I was at one time, a member of the faculty of Cambridge Graduate School, whose founder and president, Dr. Gene Jeffries, has always required the New American Standard Bible for all classes. When I was elected to the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, I discovered that the Bible Society that owns the copyright to the NIV had pulled our right to publish that version. The Broadman and Holman Division (the Bible and book publishing branch) and LifeWay Church Resources (the division that publishes the literature) contacted the organization that owns the copyright to the NASB, but could not get permission to use it. It was then that LifeWay began the costly process of publishing a totally new translation, working with Dr. Ed Blum, the General Editor. Dr. Blum met with us for my first committee meeting as a member of the Broadman and Holman Committee, and later in the day Dr. Jimmy Draper, President of LifeWay Christian Resources at the time, brought him to my table to answer questions posed by a trustee from Miami. It was my privilege to sit on the Broadman and Holman Committee for several years, and finally to serve as the chairman before rotation off the board. One of our primary commitments was to produce an accurate translation, a word for word rendering rather than a phrase for phrase rendering (NIV and others). The HCSB is the latest translation and it is from the oldest Bible publisher in America (Holman). For the first time ever a translation was done by scholars who were in immediate contact with each other through the Internet. Also, for the first time, translators could use their computers to check for accuracy and consistency. The Scripture for this study of the Gospel of John will be the Holman Christian Standard Bible, except where otherwise noted. John 3:16, for example, will be in the KJV.

As I have mentioned, I grew up reading and memorizing Scripture from the King James Version of the Bible. Little did I realize in my younger days that there was anything but the KJV, and as a student at Mississippi College, and again at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary I was required to use the American Standard Bible. Later, I began using the New American Standard Bible. Today, I use the Holman Christian Standard Bible for most of my work.

Dr. L. Bracey Campbell was the typical absent minded professor. And he had been an absent minded pastor when he was pastor of First Baptist Church, Marks, Mississippi. I only had one class at Mississippi College under Dr. Campbell, an older and highly respected Bible professor.

Students and professors alike joked about his memory problems. One student was standing outside Nelson Hall when Dr. Campbell came out and asked him if he would drive him home for lunch. He did so, gladly. An hour later or so later, Dr. Campbell walked outside his home to return to the campus, but went immediately back into the house where he told his wife that someone had stolen his car. She said, “Bracey, you drove the car to school this morning. He often “lost” his car when he was pastor of First Baptist Church, Marks, MS.

Professor E. L. Douglas told one of my classes about the time they had a very popular preacher to speak in chapel and when he finished, students and professors were talking about what a dynamic preacher the visitor was. People were talking about the powerful message in the aisles, in the halls, and in the foyer. Professor Douglas said, “Dr. Campbell and I share the outer office and our offices are side by side, so we often see each other as we are entering or leaving the office. On this day, Dr. Campbell never said a word until they walked into the outer office, at which time Dr. Campbell turned around and said to Professor Douglas, “Yes, it was grand. But what did he say?!” Professor Douglas told us that he stopped and realized that he really had not said very much.

One day students and faculty went to chapel and discovered that the speaker that day was Dr. Campbell, the forgetful professor! They would hear the one about whom they told all those jokes. Dr. Campbell walked out to the center of the stage and, with no notes or even a Bible he began: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.....” When he had quoted the entire Gospel of John he closed the chapel service. He might forget car, coat, or hat, but when it came to something this important his memory was all but perfect.

AUTHOR

For an overview of debates as to the authorship of the book we commonly call The Gospel According to John, one may consult a variety of commentaries, dictionaries, and other reference works that deal with the introduction to various books of the Bible. In this study it is assumed that The Fourth Gospel was written by John, the brother of James, the son of Zebedee, who refers to himself simply as the disciple Jesus loved. Just think about that! When John thought of Jesus he had never heard the song, “Jesus Loves Me”, but when he mentioned Himself in the Fourth Gospel His first thought seems to have been, “Jesus loves me!” When you think of Jesus is your first thought, Jesus loves me? When we consider the attributes of God as they relate to us, is your first thought, God loves me? Is it just possible that John never forgot his own early ambitions as he followed Jesus as one of His disciples? With a little encouragement from their mother, John and his brother James sought a position of honor and power in the coming kingdom of Jesus. The other disciples understandably resented the brothers and their desire for such an honor.

I have often wondered if that is the reason John does not mention his own name in this Gospel. There is another, and a very profound answer to that question: the Holy Spirit inspired John to write the Fourth Gospel just as He inspired Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Luke, in his introduction to the Third Gospel, tells us that he had carefully researched every thing of which he wrote. I read somewhere years ago that William Barclay, author of numerous commentaries on the New Testament, was asked, “What is the greatest thought you have ever had?” His answer was simple: “Jesus loves me.”

This is the disciple who stood with Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the foot of the cross, the one to whom Jesus committed the care of His mother, rather than her own surviving sons. If some publisher had decided to publish a book on someone named Jesus who had been crucified in some remote part of the Roman Empire many years earlier, this John might well have been his first choice to write that book. All the other apostles had been martyred, leaving only John as the ideal person to give an eyewitness account of many of the things Jesus said and did. In fact, John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would begin the First Epistle of John by stating that he was writing about One he and the other disciples had seen with their own eyes, touched with their own hands, and heard with their own ears. John was uniquely qualified to write about Jesus, but that is not why he wrote the Fourth Gospel. This Gospel is the product of the mind of the Holy Spirit. John was the human instrument, the Holy Spirit the divine Author.

DATE. It is possible that those commentaries that place the date for his Gospel at or about A. D. 86 are right in that conclusion. If this is right, it is also probable that the three Epistles of John were written at the end of that decade, and that the Revelation was written about A. D. 96. This is what I was taught at Mississippi College where I majored in both Bible and Sociology, and at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Luther Rice Seminary (now Luther Rice University and Seminary).

Something that has captured my attention is a series of books written by my good friend, Dr. Bill Cooper of England. While he was not called by the Lord to preach or teach the Word of God in his younger days, he has done more intense research than many of our leading theologians, and he is convinced that most, if not all the New Testament was written during what he calls the “Eye Witness Period,” which we might place between the beginning of the Lord’s ministry (A. D. 30) to the time the Christians fled from Jerusalem before the siege by the Romans in A. D. 70. That would set the “eye witness period” between A. D. 29 and A. D. 68 (depending upon the date Jesus began His ministry - or His birth (was it 4 B. C, or 1 A. D.?)

Dr. Cooper credits the German Higher Critics for placing late dates on the various books in the New Testament. The more I think about what Dr. Cooper has written, the more I wonder why certain professors (when I was in college and seminary) insisted that students should learn German because so many of our New Testament commentaries were written in German. Had some of those professors embraced some of the theories of the higher critics at that time? One of my all time favorite professors, when pressed, admitted that he did not believe in a literal devil. Later, he told a group of pastors that he wished people would stop using the word Trinity. He justified his statement by saying that the word Trinity is not found in the Bible. I do not recall finding the words computer, printer, or copier in the Bible!

For years, I tried to read both sides of theological arguments, but after a few years of that I finally concluded that I had a general idea where liberal writers were coming from, and began to ask myself if I should not spent more time studying books and articles written by those whose theology is more consistent with mine. And besides - I am a slow reader. My son, John, is a well known juvenile prosecutor who has been asked how he can read as fast as he does. He answers, “I have learned what not to read.” By that he means that he can skim a page and gather the main points. He does not apply that principle when it comes to reading the Bible, however.

PURPOSE. It is a great advantage to us that John himself spells out very clearly the purpose of this Gospel account: “But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31, HCSB).

THE MAN CALLED JOHN

John and his brother James were working with their father Zebedee on his fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee, probably mending nets, or unloading fish, when Jesus of Nazareth walked by and said, “Follow Me.” They followed Him. When we are in heaven with them we may ask why they would have left their father and their work to follow One who offered them no earthly rewards or incentives. All we are told is that they, like their contemporaries, Peter and Andrew, left their nets and followed Him. Even though John does not call attention to himself, it seems likely that John was among those disciples of John the Baptist when he proclaimed Jesus to be the Lamb of God.

It is the opinion of this writer that John may have been the youngest of the apostles Jesus called, not that such speculation has any significance in the study of the Fourth Gospel, but I believe it fits. What is obvious is that John was divinely called to follow Jesus, intensively trained to serve Him, uniquely commissioned to take up the cross and follow the Lord, and miraculously inspired to write a great portion of the New Testament Scripture.

As mentioned above, The Sermon Notebook parallels The Bible Notebook. In The Sermon Notebook, I have eighteen sermons on the cross, one of which focuses on the cross John was called to bear. Those sermons may be read by anyone who turns to SermonCity.Com, clicks on Authors and then look under sermons posted by this writer. While the purpose was not to show that John was uniquely prepared to write this Gospel account of the life of Christ, a few excerpts from that sermon makes the point. In the first place, John could testify to what Matthew was inspired to write: “Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it” (Matt 16:24-25). He heard Him with his own ears, and took up his cross and followed Jesus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.” That is exactly what the cross meant to Bonhoeffer, and that is what it mean to John, the beloved disciple.

As a young disciple, John was far from the mature disciple who would be inspired to write the Scripture that the church and the world would read until Jesus’ return. In other words, he was young and immature and he had a long way to go before he would become the apostle Jesus called him to be. John and his brother James fished with their father Zebedee on the Sea of Galilee. We cannot be sure, but it seems that their mother was Salome, and that she may well have been the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 19:25). If so, Jesus was their first cousin.

In the Gospels, James is always mentioned first, probably because he was the older brother. They were usually listed first, along with Peter and Andrew, in the list of apostles. Actually, Jesus’ inner circle included only Peter, James, and John. Jesus gave the sons of Zebedee a nickname: “He appointed the Twelve: To Simon, He gave the name Peter; and to James the son of Zebedee, and to his brother John, He gave the name “Boanerges” [that is, “Sons of Thunder”] (Mark 3:16-17). Perhaps this brief account reveals the reason for that name:

When the days were coming to a close for Him to be taken up, He determined to journey to Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead of Him, and on the way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for Him. But they did not welcome Him, because He determined to journey to Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?” But He turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village (Luke 9:51-56).

In his youth, John, along with his brother James sought preeminence among the apostles. The Holy Spirit inspired writers to write the truth, not whitewash saints. If a human being had been trying to create a new religion, there would have been a temptation to leave out certain shameful episodes in the lives of both Abraham and David. There would have been the same temptation in revealing the character of James and John, but Mark was inspired to write the truth about them:

“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Him and said, ‘Teacher, we want You to do something for us if we ask You.’”

“What do you want Me to do for you?” He asked them.

“They answered Him, “Allow us to sit at Your right and at Your left in Your glory.”

“But Jesus said to them, “You don’t know what you’re asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

“We are able,” they told Him.

“Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. But to sit at My right or left is not Mine to give; instead, it is for those it has been prepared for.” When the [other] 10 [disciples] heard this, they began to be indignant with James and John” (Mark 10:35-41).

The youthful John here is not the mature John whom the Lord kept alive long after all the other Apostles had been martyred to write that amazing Evangelistic Gospel, three powerful epistles, and the Revelation. The self-centered, ambitious John in the passage from Mark is not the same man as the Elder John who never uses his own name in the book that is identified by his name. He only calls himself the disciple Jesus loved. What was the difference? For one thing, he had seen the risen Lord.

In many ways John, the disciple the Lord loved, was the one who was closest to Jesus. Since he may have been the youngest disciple, Jesus may have “taken him under His wing” during His earthly ministry. We know that he was always in the first group mentioned. It was either Peter and Andrew, and James and John, or Peter, James and John. Who was it whom Jesus gave responsibility for his mother at the foot of the cross? It was John. Who was it who was in the position of honor at the Last Supper? It was John. Who is called the Beloved Disciple? It was John. Who was it who was inspired to write the Fourth Gospel, three epistles and Revelation? Again, it was John.

At the time of the arrest, trials, and crucifixion of Jesus, John was the disciple closest to Him in a physical sense. It was John who gained access to the courtyard of the high priest for Simon Peter, which may lead us to wonder if John might have been close enough to have heard Peter deny Christ. It was John who stood with Mary at the foot of the cross, watching Him suffer in agony, pain in sorrow for your sins and mine.

“Standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple He loved standing there, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home (John 19:25-27).

In addition to that, John was also the first to believe in the Resurrection (John 20:1-9). I have no proof that this disciple was John, but it would take some strong evidence to convince me otherwise. Why would he not look to His own brothers to take care for His mother? They were not believers at this point. Mary loved her sons, but they did not share her faith.

There is one other fact we should bear in mind as we begin a study of this unique Gospel account. When Jesus announced to Simon Peter the kind of death he would die, Peter he did what we all have a tendency to do: he asked, “But what about him?!”

“So Peter turned around and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them. [That disciple] was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and asked, ‘Lord, who is the one that’s going to betray You?’ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord—what about him?”

“If I want him to remain until I come,” Jesus answered, “what is that to you? As for you, follow Me.”

So this report spread to the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not tell him that he would not die, but “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?” (John 21:20-23)

John did not remain alive until our Lord’s return, but he did remain alive to serve a very special purpose in the service of the One who loved him in spite of his youthful sins and his youthful zeal.

JOHN’S UNIQUE POSITION

If we subscribe to the late date for the writing of The Gospel of John, the three epistles, and the Revelation of Jesus Christ, it will influence our understanding of John’s ministry. My good friend and scholar from England, Dr. Bill Cooper has made a strong case for an earlier writing of New Testaments than the higher critics claim. For example, he says there is proof that the Gospel of Matthew reached his island within ten years or so of the Resurrection of our Lord. That is amazing, and I accept it. At the same time, I am using here more traditional dates for John’ work. For example, John, in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, destroys the very foundation for the incipient Gnosticism that was making its way into the church toward the end of the first century. Paul did have something to say about, so that foreign, pagan, philosophy was beginning to influence some in Paul’s day. It may have been influencing more people in the church than it had earlier.

If John wrote the Gospel According to John somewhere around A. D. 86, it means that Paul and Peter had been dead some twenty years when John was inspired to write the Fourth Gospel. They would have been dead thirty years when John recorded the Revelation. All the other apostles were dead, including John's brother James, who was the first of the apostles to be martyred in A. D. 44. In a real sense, John had built on the foundation laid by Paul at Ephesus, but in reality John had his own ministry. Paul was dead, but John was a powerful influence in churches throughout the region of Paul's missionary journeys, especially in the area surrounding Ephesus and the other six churches Jesus addressed in the Revelation.

At the end of the First Century, if any Christian leader needed information about what composed true Scripture, they could go to Ephesus and talk with the Elder John. It seems reasonable that many would have done that. A generation later, when a question arose, there were leaders who could say, "I once asked John about that and he said" thus and so. A generation after that there were people who could address an issue by saying, "my mentor sat at the feet of the Apostle John, and he asked him that very question. He taught us what John said. I am convinced that this happened. It just makes sense.

One of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus was to seven disciples beside the Sea of Galilee. This was the time Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Peter insisted that he did - and as far as I am concerned you can forget those sermons, and the teachers who believe Jesus asked Peter if he loved him, and Peter supposedly said something like, "Lord, you know I like you." That is incomprehensible and it is not true to the original record.

At this time, Jesus gave Peter a prophecy concerning the price he would pay for loving Jesus. Peter then pointed to John and asked, "But what about him?" Jesus did not say that John would remain alive until His return, but that it was not Peter's concern what He had for John to do. John, once a youthful, ambitious, self-serving follower of Jesus, became the aged, mature, selfless disciple who would not even use his own name in this great epistle which would be read by millions before the Lord's return. He simply calls himself "the disciple Jesus loved".

JOHN REVEALS JESUS. In my first survey class in New Testament at Mississippi College, when we came to the Gospel of John I heard my professor use a term I had not encountered before. He made the statement that an incipient Gnosticism was making its way into the church at the time John wrote this book. I had probably spent as much time in Bible study as any other student. I had been called into the ministry when I was thirteen and licensed when I was seventeen. I had preached at mission churches and I had taught children in Sunday School. I had been perfect in the memory work drills at the Mississippi state Training Union Convention, and the next year I had been the second place boy in the Sword Drills in the state. But I had never heard of Gnosticism. I was guessing at "incipient", but completely in the dark on Gnosticism. Then, when I learned what it was, I knew I had never seen a Gnostic. Nor, did I ever expect to see one.

Little did I realize that Eastern Mysticism had its roots in ancient Gnosticism. Nor, that I ever expected to see anyone who subscribed to Eastern Mysticism. Nor, did I realize that the impact that Humanism was having on America even at that time. I had never heard of the first Humanist Manifesto, let alone the second one. How could I have imagined that Eastern Mysticism had made

its way to America and would soon be manifesting itself through a new movement in America. It was called New Age. New Age movements were, and are rooted in Eastern Mysticism, but they were soon hidden under the umbrella of Post Modernism.

The prince of this world, Satan, is very subtle, so when Christians began to take a stand against Humanism, he injected that godless, evolutionary system with a dose of religion. Around 1990 there were reports that new polls showed that more Americans said they believed in God than in the 1980s. Evangelists declared, “We are reaching America for Jesus Christ.” We were optimistic at first, but then we read the rest of the story and learned that many Americans said they believed in a god, gods, or a god-like force, and that it was not having an impact on the way they lived. What was happening?

New Age was stepping in to provide answers for those who rejected Humanism but did not embrace Jesus Christ. Many pastors were convinced that New Age was a passing fad that faded away with the weird music once associated with it. They did not understand that before preachers began warning against New Age, New Age leaders began using a new term: postmodernism. Through the eighties and mid-way through the nineties, preachers often warned about “secular humanism”, but failed to warn against New Age movements. New Age movements and philosophies require a lot of time and effort to understand, so only a few summary statements will be made here. New Age was an umbrella term, and almost all religious groups could fit under that umbrella, so long as they were not monotheistic. They even talked about “Jesus”, but the New Age Jesus is not the biblical Jesus, any more than the Mormon Jesus is the Jesus of the Bible. The New Age Christ is not the Christ of the Bible. The New Agers taught that if you are searching for Christ, look within and you will discover that you are your own Christ. My brother in law, Jimmy Furr, served for a number of years with the Interfaith Witness Department of the Southern Baptist North America Mission Board. He traveled all over the United States teaching believers about New Age heresies. At one New Age celebration in California a woman came up to him and said, “I know you!” He asked, “Really? How do you know me?” She said, “I am you.” To those people, especially in the 1980s, they used the term, “all is one and one is all.” They meant that each person is also one with God.

New Age is rooted in Eastern Mysticism, which in turn is rooted in ancient Gnosticism. Gnosticism, according to some who have studied it, is rooted in the ancient Babylonian religious beliefs (some attribute them to Nimrod, the founder of both Nineveh and Babylon). In reality, the vile roots of New Age, Eastern Mysticism, and Gnosticism reach back to the Garden of Eden, and the very first satanic lie to a human being: “you shall be as God.”

There is another element of Gnosticism that we must hold before us as we read the Gospel According to John. The Gnostics taught that god is spirit and spirit is good. They believed matter is evil, and that if any god touched matter he would be contaminated by it. In order to explain the existence of matter (the world), they taught that the supreme god created a lesser god, who created a still lesser god, who in turn created a still lesser god, and so on, until they had created a god who had the power to create the world without contaminating the supreme god. He himself would be contaminated by the matter he created, but that contamination would not reach all the way up the chain to the supreme god. The Gnostics called that god Logos, which is translated “Word” in John 1:1. The pagan people believe it denotes a word, or that by which the gods communicate.

That is an oversimplification of the Gnostic heresy, which some Gentile converts were bringing into the church. Any heresy is serious and dangerous, and Gnosticism was but the first major “ism” to become a problem for the church. What is important is that the Holy Spirit inspired John to provide believers with the truth about Jesus, which answers all heresies. The Prologue to the Gospel of John destroys Gnosticism, Eastern Mysticism, as well as Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses teachings today. Right now, Mormons missionaries and Jehovah’s Witnesses are spreading out all over the country in an effort to proselytize members from traditional churches. They have been far too successful in their mission, primarily because church members do not know the Word of God. In the Jehovah’s Witness translation of the Bible, they do not say, “the Word was God...” (John 1:1); it says, “The word was a God.” I have insisted that Jehovah’s Witnesses begin by turning to John 1:1 and when they tried to turn back to Old Testament passages, I would say, “First, I would like for you to turn to John 1:1.” If you insist there is a strong possibility that they will leave.

The Holy Spirit inspired John to give us the answers we need. This same John was inspired to write: “This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. But every spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist; you have heard that he is coming, and he is already in the world now” (1 John 4:2-3, bold added by this writer).

JOHN KNEW JESUS. “The disciple Jesus loved” was one of the first apostles chosen by the Lord, and he was a part of the inner circle of disciples: Peter, James, and John. Who was it who went with Jesus upon the Mount of Transfiguration? Right. Peter, James, and John. Whom did Jesus send into Jerusalem to prepare for the Last Supper? Peter and John (Luke 22:8). After the arrest of Jesus, who was it who followed from afar? It was Simon Peter, but that is not all of the story. Who was it who persuaded the servant of the high priest to open the gate so Peter could enter? It was John, but why was John in the yard and why was he able to persuade the servant to open the gate for Peter? It was John, who was known to the high priest (John 18:16. Don’t you wish you understood that connection?

We could go on and on with references to John by Jesus, or in connection to Jesus. Perhaps the most amazing references to John was when he was standing at the foot of the cross with Mary, the mother of Jesus.

(25) Standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (26) When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple He loved standing there, He said to His mother, “ Woman, here is your son.” (27) Then He said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.” (John 19:25-27, HCSB)

Who was it at the last supper Jesus shared with His disciples who reclined next to Jesus so that when he wanted to say something in confidence he could simply look back and he was close enough to whisper or speak in a low voice that others might not hear them? It was John.

“When Jesus had said this, He was troubled in His spirit and testified, “I assure you: One of you will betray Me!”

(22) The disciples started looking at one another—uncertain which one He was speaking about. (23) One of His disciples, the one Jesus loved, was reclining close beside Jesus. (24) Simon Peter motioned to him to find out who it was He was talking about. (25) So he leaned back against Jesus and asked Him, “Lord, who is it?” (26) Jesus replied, “He’s the one I give the piece of bread to after I have dipped it.” When He had dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas, Simon Iscariot’s son. (27) After [Judas ate] the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Therefore Jesus told him, “What you’re doing, do quickly.” (28) None of those reclining at the table knew why He told him this. (29) Since Judas kept the money-bag, some thought that Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival,” or that he should give something to the poor. (30) After receiving the piece of bread, he went out immediately. And it was night. (John 13:22-29) (Bold added by this writer)

JOHN’S LITTLE EXTRAS. John must have answered questions about the last hours of the life of Jesus for decades. After all, if you had an opportunity to question him about the last hours Jesus shared with his closest apostles, what would you do? You would ask questions. Can you not imagine what it would be like to sit with John and ask him to tell you about the last hours Jesus spent with His disciples? Will we have an opportunity to do that when we are all in heaven? If the Lord grants that privilege we will have something special to look forward to when we get t heaven. If not, it is because the Lord will have something much better for us to do.

John 3:16 tells us how to be saved. Few verses are quoted more than this great verse. Most older believers learned this familiar verse from the King James Version:

“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.” (John 3:16, KJV)

A modern translation states it like this:

“For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, (HCSB)

In addition to the references in John that tell one how to be saved, there is a special passage that offers us assurance that God saves us forever:

“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand. (29) My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. (30) The Father and I are one.” (John 10:28-30 (HCSB)

There are features that stand out in the Fourth Gospel. Let us look at the signs in John as well as well as other special features in John’s Gospel:

SIGNS IN THE JOHN’S GOSPEL

1. Changing water to wine, 2:1-11.
2. Healing of an official’s son from a distance, 4:46-54.
3. Healing the sick, 5:1-14.

4. Feeding 5000 men, plus women and children, 6:14.
5. Walking on water, 6:16-20.
6. Healing of a blind man, 9:1-34.
7. Raising of Lazarus from the dead, 11:38-44

THE I AM SAYINGS OF JESUS IN JOHN

1. I am the bread of life - 6:35.
2. I am the light of the world - 8:12.
3. I am the door of the sheep - 10:7-9.
4. I am the good shepherd - 10:11.
5. I am the resurrection and life - 11:25 -26.
6. I am the way, the truth, and the life - 14:6.
7. I am the true vine, 15:1ff

JESUS' SEVEN SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

1. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (Luke 23:34, NKJV)
2. And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)
3. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. (John 19:26-27)
4. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)
5. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" (John 19:28)
6. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (John 19:30).
7. And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.' "Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46).

Now, we will look at the first sign John was inspired to record: Changing water to wine.

2:1 - A WEDDING. "On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and..." (Third day after Jesus Baptism?)

JESUS' MOTHER. The Synoptic Gospels (the first three Gospels) state that the mother of Jesus was Mary, but John did not give her name anywhere in this Gospel (2:12; 6:42; 19:25-27). In this

Gospel, John never named himself or the mother of Jesus by name. (Jesus gave His mother's care to John - (John 19).

2:2 - JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES. "...Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding as well." Jesus was invited to the wedding, along with His disciples (Andrew and Simon; possibly John and James; and presumably Nathanael and Philip (1:40-49).

2:3 - "When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother told Him, 'They don't have any wine.' When Jesus' mother discovered that the host at this wedding ceremony had run out of wine, she did something natural called on Jesus! (She had to know He was beginning His ministry.

WINE. Someone says, "Jesus drank wine!" Of course He did. If diluted, three parts water to one part wine (as in the Greek society, and probably in the Jewish community), there was little danger of intoxication or addiction. On the positive side, it purified the water.

2:4 - WHAT CONCERN. "What has this concern of yours to do with Me, woman?" Jesus asked. 'My hour has not yet come.' The KJV renders it, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." Jesus was not being disrespectful in addressing His mother. But this may have been a gentle reminder....

MY HOUR HAS NOT YET COME. Interestingly, This phrase is used frequently in John (7:30, 39; 12:23, 24; 17:1) to designate the hour of Christ's glorification through death and resurrection.

2:5 - DO WHATEVER. "Do whatever He tells you,' His mother told the servants." It seems that Mary understands that she now must yield to her Son,

2:6 - SIX STONE WATER JARS. "Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained 20 or 30 gallons." (Bold added by this writer) 6 X 25 = 150 gallons. If mixed 3 parts water to one wine, as some did in that day, that would have given them 600 gallons for the wedding - after other supplies had been exhausted. For a wedding in a small village?!

2:7 - FILL THE JARS. "Fill the jars with water,' Jesus told them. So they filled them to the brim."

2:8 - NOW DRAW. "Then He said to them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the chief servant.' And they did." He Not say dip - He said "draw out" - as in to draw from a depth (well). Jesus did not tell the servants to dip water from the jars set there for ritualistic washing; He told them to draw some more, and the word means to draw from a depth. Some people today can remember when they drew their water from a well and poured it into a water bucket. Beside the water bucket on a shelf on the porch or in the kitchen there was a "wash pan" so that one might dip out of the water bucket with a dipper and pour it into the wash pan so they could wash their hands before sitting down at the table for a meal. Of course, we were more sophisticated than that when I was a little boy. We had a pump from which we would pump water into the bucket. I never saw one person mix up the wash pan with the water bucket. I never anyone drink from the wash pan or wash their hands in the water bucket. You can be sure those people at that wedding never confused those pots with the water drawn directly from the well. That water, drawn from a depth, was changed from water into wine.

2:9 -TASTED THE WATER. “When the chief servant tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it came from—though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He called the groom...” the seventh drawing, had come from the well (drawn from a depth).

Now, consider why this is called a sign. In fact, it is the first sign.

First, remember that the stone pots were there for cleansing or ceremonial purification. People did not drink from them. There were six water pots for purification. The # 6 stands for that which is almost perfect, but falls short. Judaism (the Law) was God’s gift to His people for centuries, but it was not perfect for all believers. What Jesus offers is far better and no one has ever been able to improve on it.

The # 7 is the perfect number (denoting perfection, completion, maturity). The grace of Jesus Christ is perfect. This first sign is our Lord’s sign that we are now under Grace and not the Law.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

1. There is the Prologue to the Gospel of John, 1:1-18. John was inspired to write the Fourth Gospel and the Prologue provides a rebuttal to the popular, but false religious beliefs of the ages. Gnosticism was trying to establish itself at the very time this Gospel account was written. Modern day Eastern Mysticism has its roots in First Century Gnosticism, and the New Age Movements were deeply rooted in Eastern Mysticism. Two thousand years ago, the Lord revealed the false claims of Gnosticism, which, some believe had its roots in the teachings surrounding the Tower of Babel. Whether true or not, these false religions find their roots in Satanic claims made in the Garden of Eden. John, in his older age, would be addressing the false claims of Gnosticism.

2. John knew John the Baptist. He heard him preach, and he heard Jesus proclaim that no one born of woman was ever greater than John the Baptist. Jesus also claimed that John fulfilled the prophecies concerning the coming of Elijah before the coming of the Messiah.

3. John was there when Jesus performed the first sign, the changing of water to wine (Ch. 2). The six water pots were for purification, not drinking. Guests would ceremonially wash their hands in water from these water pots, and slaves would wash the feet of guests from those water pots. Jesus told the servants to fill the six water pots to the brim - just as Judaism was filled to the brim. Judaism was the greatest religion in the history of the world, yet it fell miserably short of perfection (the number six denotes that). The seventh drawing was from the well (the word means to draw from a depth, not dip from a water pot). The sign was that the water of Judaism had been fulfilled and the New wine of Christianity. Jesus has declared His ministry at the wedding in Cana of Galilee.

4. John was there the night Nicodemus came to see Jesus (John 3). Dr. Bill Cooper, in his Authenticity series, reveals a lot about Nicodemus not commonly taught. According to his research, Nicodemus owned a large house in Jericho where he often entertained Pharisees, and no doubt made decisions concerning their issues with the Sadducees and other things concerning the

Law and worship. Nicodemus was very wealthy and he used his store of grain in Jerusalem to feed the citizens of that city when the Roman general, Titus, held the city under siege.

There are those who condemn Nicodemus for visiting Jesus at night, as though he was ashamed to go to see him in the day time when people might recognize him. As far as we know, Nicodemus visited Jesus when he thought he might have an opportunity to talk with Him privately and ask Him some serious questions about his own relationship with the Lord. In time he would prove himself to be a true follower of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

John was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write The Gospel According to John, three epistles, and the Revelation. There are four Gospels, with Matthew, Mark, and Luke following basically the same order. These three Gospels are the Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic means seeing alike. All you have to do to see how well that title fits is to open a copy of A. T. Robertson's A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS (or some other Harmony of the Gospels) to see how closely those three Gospels, though unique in many ways, still follow the basic order. After all, they follow three years in the life of the Messiah. Matthew may offer a little more detail on one subject or incident than Luke, whereas Luke may cover another subject with a little more attention to detail. Mark follows the same basic order but it is a shorter version of the material we find in Matthew and Luke.

Then, there is John. The fourth column in any Harmony of the Gospels will have a lot of blank space opposite the Synoptic Gospels. It will have some areas in which John covers something in more detail than the first three Gospels. A good example is found in John 14-17.

John was also inspired to write three epistles and the Revelation. This writer has 50 sermons on Revelation posted on SermonCity.Com, and 29 sermons on First John. The Revelation is unique. A man I had visited, but seldom ever saw in church stopped by my house one afternoon and as we talked he said, "I may not know the rest of the Bible, but I can explain Revelations." Needless to say, Revelation is singular: the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ - not the "revelations of St. John the Divine," as some refer to it.

I made a point of stressing my commitment during the time I was preaching those 50 sermons on Revelation. I stressed that I do not have all the answers, and I did not expect our members to have all the answers when I finished the series. If I had preached that series when I began my ministry I would have been inviting attacks by friends who did not always agree. While I hold a pre-millennial view of the end time events, when it comes to certain passages or certain issues I have to confess that I do not have all the answers. I am equally convinced that the time is coming when I will have all the answers. I assured our members as I preached from Revelation that I did not expect them to have all the answers when I finished that series of sermons. I did expect them to know a little more at the close of that series than they had before I began that lengthy series of sermons. I also know that by the time we finish the Book of Revelation we, assuming that we are Christians, may well be saying with John, "Even so, come Lord Jesus."

John also wrote three epistles and I have sermons posted on SermonCity.Com from First John which cover the entire epistle. For my purpose here I would like to share a story from my

experience as pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas. Bob Moore was a committed Christian, faithful deacon, and committed head of our youth department in Sunday School. He was also my friend. He came by my study and told me that a lady named Kay had shared her testimony with the youth department - and it was a very large youth department. Bob asked if he could bring Kay by and let her share her testimony with me. I will never forget the day, and I have never forgotten Kay's testimony. I am still indebted to Bob for bringing her to my study to share her testimony.

Kay told me she had been a Catholic, married to a Baptist when they moved to Nederland. She said, "I considered myself dedicated and thought my husband didn't know what he believed. Kay told me she was warned by friends that she would be a target of her neighbors because "They are the biggest bunch of Baptists in Nederland. She saw them while they were moving into their new house. In fact, the wife saw them moving in and came across to meet her and to see if she needed any help. Joyce was gracious and considerate and not pushy at all. Still, Kay didn't want to get to know her. She would watch her and her husband to prove they were hypocrites. She watched them for several years before their daughter became a teenager and began dating. "Now," she said, "I will watch their teenage daughter. There are a lot of temptations for teenagers."

Kay watched the young teenager as she went on dates, as she received boy friends, and in general all she could find to judge. Kay said, I had watched that family for several years. Then I began to watch their teen age daughter. Then, one day I went into my kitchen and got down on my knees and asked God to give me what my neighbors have. She confessed her sin and need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and she was born again. I know she told her neighbors that she had been saved, but I wonder if she told them how she had watched them.

When I was her pastor I observed the daughter whose life had led Kay to call on Jesus to save her. She worked with younger children in Sunday School and church members who knew her were impressed with her commitment to the Lord. One Sunday morning, I was in our sanctuary when this lady walked by me and stop long enough to ask me to pray for her. She had been doubting her salvation. She said, I cannot take the time to talk with you now, but I want you to pray for me and I will talk with you next Sunday.

We are talking about the young lady who, as a teenager, had such an impact on Kay! Now, she doubted her salvation. Before she left me that Sunday morning I assured her I would be praying for her and I would look forward to talking with her. However, I asked her to read First John before we talked again.

The next Sunday, Billie walked by me with a warm smile on her face and said, "Never mind. I know I am saved." I cannot think of a greater help in finding assurance of one's salvation than prayerfully reading First John. If the person concludes that he or she is not saved, that person should find help in trusting Jesus Christ to save them.

The Gospel According to John presents God's provision for our salvation as clearly as you will ever find it stated anywhere. First John offers assurance for those who are saved. I have read the Gospel According to John numerous times and I have read First John many times. I know He has saved me and I love to share that Good News.