

Gospel of John Introduction - John Karmelich

Greetings everyone! Welcome to my second study of the John's Gospel (The 2nd time I'm teaching it!) The last taught the Gospel of John over 20 years ago, so, hopefully, I'll get it right this time! Ok so why should we study the Gospel of John with you? Realize John the writer states why he wrote it: "So you may believe Jesus is the Christ (Messiah)." (Chapter 20, Verse 31). Yes I know most of us believe that. John (not the Baptist but one of the "12") wrote this to convince people that Jesus is God, and convince us of the fact He died for all of our sins. It is also written for believers so when we go through a period of doubt, we can study the Gospel of John to learn more about whom we worship! If you're not dealing with such doubts at the moment, this book is still worth studying. Remember if the purpose of our lives is to glorify God, obviously it's important to understand who we worship and why. That's motivates me to study this book again. Every time I study it, I learn new things and hopefully you'll pick up things as you study it as well.

With that promising introduction out of my system, let me ask the question, why are there four gospels and not just one? Why didn't each of the disciples write one? To answer in a weird way, realize there is a strange creature that the Bible says guards God's throne. If you study the first Jewish tabernacle in Exodus, or the temple in 2nd Kings (both structures were built to worship God), the main object was a box that represented God's presence. On top of that box were two statues representing a creature that's some sort of angelic being. Ezekiel 1:10 tells us this creature has four faces: the face of a lion, a human face, a face of an ox, and the face of an eagle. Okay, John, you're way out in left field now. What does that bit of Bible trivia have to do with the four gospels? Here we go: The lion represents "The lion of the tribe of Judah," in effect a nickname for the Messiah. I state that because Matthew's Gospel focuses on Jesus as the promised Messiah. Matthew was born in the tribe of Levi meaning he was trained in the scriptures. He was also one of the 12 apostles. He worked as a tax collector. Scholars believe he could write in shorthand (required for Roman tax collectors). Matthew records what Jesus actually said (the sermons) far more than the other gospels. Bottom line, Matthew's sermons do focus on the "The lion of the tribe of Judah" (the most powerful of the beasts). Now think of the lion (one of the four faces of the angelic creature): It represents God's presence. Final bit on Matthew: His Gospel has Jesus' genealogy back to the first Jew (Abraham) to prove His Jewishness! (Don't worry, it gets easier from here!)

Next, let me quickly discuss the Gospel of Mark. He wasn't one of the disciples, although he has subtle mentions of him in the Bible. He was historically known as "John Mark". History tells us Mark got his information taking to Peter. His emphasis is on what Jesus did. I always joke that Mark's gospel is like a "shooting script" for a movie. It's full of action, but not much dialogue. That leads us back to the four faces of the angelic creatures. One of them was the ox. That's the largest of all servant animals so the ox emphasis is on service. As a servant, Mark doesn't include a genealogy since being a servant means His genealogy isn't important!

Next is the Gospel of Luke. He wasn't a disciple. He became a believer under Paul's preaching. Luke subtly mentions himself in the book of Acts several times. Many scholars argue he wrote his Gospel as Paul's defense before Caesar (that event wasn't recorded in the Bible). To stand before Caesar in a trial as Paul did, required a written transcript in advance. Luke wrote his Gospel well after Jesus (probably 30 years after the resurrection). Luke focused on Jesus humanity far more than the other three Gospels. He wanted to validate that Jesus was fully human and fully God. His Gospel has the most details about Jesus' life, and is considered the most scholarly of the four Gospels. He includes Jesus' pedigree going back to Adam to prove Jesus' humanity (through Mary's side of the family). That is why the third face on the statue is a "man" and it ties to Luke's Gospel!

John's Gospel was probably written a few decades later than the other three, near the end of John's life. The best estimate is that it was written around 90AD. The only face left of the statue is the eagle. The eagle's considered the greatest of all the flying creatures. (Think in terms of looking up to the heavens!) What I'm getting at is John's Gospel focuses on Jesus as God (again looking up to heaven). This gospel has seven key miracles that tie to seven sermons and seven "I am" statements. It's meant to tie to God's most holy name "Jehovah," which essentially means "I am that I am." There's an implied genealogy in this book: The key point of that genealogy is Jesus and the Father are both God. The best evidence that the Gospel is authentic is based on a 2nd century pastor writings (preserved to this day). That guy was a student under a man who was a personal student of John. That 2nd Century guy wrote how John did live in Ephesus during the last few decades of his life and wrote his Gospel from there. (Ephesus was in what we refer to as Turkey today.) John was the only disciple not martyred for his faith, but he was exiled to the island of Patmos.

I went through all of this because to understand John's Gospel, it's important to understand the purpose of all four Gospels in order to grasp the significance of John's version. Shortly before I wrote this, I did read something that amazed me: Only 30% of those who claim to be Christians believe Jesus is God. I want everyone to remember that the main purpose of this Gospel is to prove that Jesus is fully God and fully human. I've always figured most of my readers are part of the "30% club"! Studying this Gospel is a great way to validate His deity as God. Going back to the four faces of the "God box" statute that is why John's Gospel is associated with the eagle, the last of the four faces. It is the greatest of all flying creatures one can see while looking up in the sky.

So how is this Gospel structured? The other three are called the "Synoptic Gospels" as they mostly do cover the same stories each with a different emphasis. John's Gospel covers a lot of territory the other three don't touch. All four, of course, spend chapters dealing with the death and resurrection. As I said John focuses on the "Jesus is God" aspect. John includes a detailed speech given Jesus gave to the "12" the night before the crucifixion. My point is, this Gospel was written by someone who was there, since a lot of details about what Jesus said occur in John's Gospel that the other three don't cover. The other three focus (for the most part) on Jesus' time in the Lake Galilee area. John mostly focuses on His time around the city of Jerusalem. John also refers to that lake by its Roman name, Tiberius, which wasn't in common use until after 70AD, which helps to date this book even more.

To give an example from this book, there is only one miracle told in all four gospel accounts. It's when Jesus fed 5,000 men, plus women and children, with a few loaves of bread and few fish. Why was this included here? Again, each Gospel has a different emphasis and sheds different details on this. John's Gospel is structured in "time order," but focuses on seven specific miracles (the "feeding" being one of them) tied to seven specific "I Am" statements (e.g. I am the bread of life, I'm the way the truth and the life and no one comes to the father except by Me.) Since Jesus fed all those people bread it is an ideal time to discuss Jesus as "the bread of life." (The idea that we "feed" on Jesus to grow closer to God!)

To state a classic expression, either Jesus was telling the truth, he was lying, or he was a nut job! The Gospels give us a great proof that He was telling the truth. To me the greatest proof is the resurrection itself! The fact that all the disciples were tortured and 10 died under torture, yet in spite of that none of them denied Jesus rose from the dead! That's a great proof that Jesus was telling the truth here. By the way, the Muslim view is that Jesus "fainted," but He didn't die on the cross. Mohammed lived roughly seven centuries later. Who's a better source, a person who was there and saw the whole thing (and was willing to be tortured and killed for that fact), or someone who lived centuries later? I'm just saying the

Gospels give us great proof of the fact that Jesus is God even though He became fully human and He remains fully human as well!

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! To read the other one, click on one of the two links on this page. Thanks again for reading this. John