
UNIQUE MESSAGES OF THE FOUR GOSPELS

DAVID A. LEFEVRE, EDUCATION WEEK, PROVO 2014

DAY 4: JOHN

AUTHOR AND DATE

The book of John is likely written by John the **apostle**, or John the **Revelator** as he is known later. In the gospel, he is merely known as “**the disciple whom Jesus loved**” (13:23). He was one of the first disciples Jesus called to follow him and was an eyewitness to the events of Jesus’ ministry. He was a fisherman by trade, with father and his brother James, and his business partners Peter and Andrew. Like the other eyewitness, Matthew, John’s gospel receives the title “**The Testimony of John**” in the **Joseph Smith Translation**.

The date of John is difficult to determine, and many scholars place it between **AD 80 and 110**. It **cannot be later** than about **AD 125 because of P⁵²**, a papyrus fragment of part of John 8 which dates to that time and which is the oldest New Testament manuscript found. P⁵² is a copy and not the original John, therefore the writing must have been long enough before that for copies to be in circulation. But parts of it may be even earlier, such as John 1 which appears to be John the Baptist’s testimony (and John was one of his disciples)—in other words, the version we have is edited and is no later than about 110. John is not explicitly called out as the author (except in a late addition, 21:0-24), but early Christians and most today identify him with the disciple whom Jesus loved (13:23).

Some early leaders in the second-century church **rejected** John as authentic (Eusebius 3:28; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1; Dionysius, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 6:82), mainly because the **Gnostics** liked it so much. But today many details of John’s work have been **verified** by modern scholarship and the book is considered genuine. These details include:

- 1) The discovery of the pool of **Bethesda** (house of mercy or grace) in Jerusalem with its five porches (5:1-2).
- 2) John’s use of light and darkness also found in the (older) **Dead Sea Scrolls** (1:5; 3:19; 12:35-36), originally thought to be a late Gnostic doctrine only.
- 3) His knowledge of **Samaritan beliefs**, worship on Mt. Gerizim, and the site of Jacob’s well.

Clement of Alexandria said that John, “aware that the external details had been recorded in the Gospels, was urged by his disciples, and divinely moved by the Spirit, to compose a spiritual gospel” (Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.14.7; see also Muratorian Canon, 9-16).

AUDIENCE

John appears to be writing to **members** of the Church in Greece and Asia (Turkey) who already had a **testimony** of Jesus Christ. He was probably very familiar with the other gospels, and set as his goal to bring Saints to a “profound understanding of and appreciation for the redeeming mission of Jesus” (Griggs, 111).

As an **example** of this, turning the water into wine at the **Cana wedding**, the **loaves** and fishes feeding 5,000 men, and the **Bread of Life** sermon enhance our understanding of the sacrament but do not teach the basic principles of it. In fact, John does not give an account of the Sacrament at the Last Supper like Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

THEMES

1) **Jesus is the Word of God.** Introduced in John 1, this theme is carried through in several conversations (Mary, 2:1-4; Nicodemus, 3:1-13; the Samaritan woman, 4:7-25; the Pharisees, 8:12-59), where he teaches mortals who he is and how he speaks and acts the words and deeds of the Father (8:40; 14:10, 24; 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). D&C 93:8, 19 teach that the Word is the messenger of salvation because he reveals the Father to us (cf. John 6:40).

2) John contrasts **light and darkness**, starting in 1:4-5. Jesus is the light (and the life) while Satan is darkness and death. When Nicodemus comes by night (3:2; 7:50), it says something about Nicodemus at that time (later he is a disciple and supporter). When Judas goes out to betray Jesus, he goes out into the night (19:39). See also 3:19. In contrast, Jesus is the light of the world (8:12; 12:35-36, 46). With this contrast comes conflict—light versus darkness, starting with 1:5, which should be translated, ‘And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it’ (KJV “comprehend” is *katalambanō*, meaning overcome or seize).

3) John portrays Jesus not only in pre-existent terms as the Word, but in OT terms as “**I am.**” He tells the Jews that “Before Abraham was, I am [*egō eimi*]’ (8:39-58). This is the same name God gave to Moses in Exodus 3:11-14, so Jesus is claiming to be the same God. He says this at other times, too, but the KJV translation doesn’t make it obvious. To the Samaritan woman at the well, the *egō eimi* is hidden in the English text but not the Greek (4:26). When he walked on the water, he also said it (6:20). He also says “I am” with other things, such as the bread of life (6:35); the light of the world (8:12; 9:5); the door (10:7, 9); the good shepherd (10:11); the resurrection and the life (11:25); the way and the truth and the life (14:5); and the true vine (15:1). There is no messianic secret in John.

OUTLINE

- Prologue (1:1-18)
- The Book of Signs (1:19 – 12:50)
- The Book of Glory (13:1 – 20:31)
- Epilogue (12:1-25)

PROLOGUE (1:1-18)

The first 18 verses appear to be a hymn. The “**Word**” ties Jesus back to the creation account in Genesis: “And God said...” (e.g., **Genesis 1:3**). When God speaks, the universe obeys him. So Jesus becomes the Word of God, and the universe obeys him.

The **JST version** of these verses is quite different, with every verse being changed. It is included in the Appendix in the back of the LDS Bible for further study. Major points are: that the **Word** is both the **gospel** itself and **Christ**, as the embodiment of that gospel; that all who receive Christ can **receive a fullness**, meaning **immortality** and **eternal life**; that the **law** of Moses was a **carnal** commandment, while the **gospel** of Christ is endless **life**.

A related scripture helps us understand that this prologue was probably written by John the Baptist and included at the beginning of his testimony by John the Beloved (see **D&C 93:15**; 93:1-22 for the full cross-reference; note also that John 1:19 gives a similar indication). Notice that “the fulness of the record of John” is promised to the faithful (**93:18**). This was given well after Joseph Smith had translated John 1, indicating that there is a greater record of John the Baptist that will still come forth.

THE BOOK OF SIGNS (1:19 – 12:50)

Progressive introduction of Jesus (1:19-49). After the Prologue, we are introduced to John the Baptist. We are also introduced to Jesus in stages, learning progressively with each day about his calling and ministry:

- Day 1: The crowd asks John if he is “**that prophet**,” referring to Deuteronomy 18:15, a prophet like Moses. He said no, and declares that another is coming, who is “**preferred** before me” (1:19-27).
- Day 2: John saw Jesus and declared him to be the “**Lamb of God**,” and declaring that the “**preferred**” one he mentioned the previous day is the same person (1:29-30). John further declares that when he baptized Jesus, the Spirit descended upon him as a sign that had been previously declared to him (John) from “he that sent me” that Jesus was the one who would **baptize “with the Holy Ghost”** (1:31-33). He concludes with his testimony that this is “**the Son of God**” (1:34).
- Day 3: Standing with two of his disciples (whom we later learn are Andrew and probably John, 1:40), John again declared as he walked by that Jesus was the “**Lamb of God**” (1:35-36). This caused the two disciples to follow him (1:37). Jesus asked them, “**What seek ye?**” (1:38). This question serves as a **bracketing** clause, tied to **John 20:15** when he asked Mary a similar question as she weeps at the tomb. It is the over-arching question in John (repeated at his arrest also in 18:4). This day ends with Andrew going to find his brother, Simon, declaring that they “have found the **Messias**” (1:41).
- Day 4: Returning to Galilee from the Jordan River valley, Jesus found **Philip** and called him to follow him (1:43). Philip found his friend **Nathanael**, declaring that they have found **the prophet** Moses spoke of (referring back to the crowd’s original question about John) and about whom all “**the prophets did write**” (1:45). When Nathanael met Jesus, Jesus told him about sitting under a **fig tree**, something it would have apparently been impossible for him to have seen. As a result, Nathanael declares him to be “the **Son of God**” and “the **King of Israel**” (1:49).

Marriage at Cana (2:1-11): Jesus' **first recorded miracle** in John (2:11; he only records **seven** total and only in these "sign" chapters—water to wine (2); nobleman's son (4); invalid at the pool of Bethesda (5); feeds 5,000 (6); walks on the sea (6); blind man (9); Lazarus (10)) is at a wedding to which Jesus, his disciples, and his mother have been invited (2:1-2). With a large crowd and over multiple days, the wine apparently ran out, so **Mary** appealed to Jesus for help (2:3). This is more than a social inconvenience, but could actually result in a **lawsuit** (Griggs 113). His reply sounds harsh to us in the KJV, but it was more like, "**Mother, why is that a concern for you and me? My time has not yet come**" (2:4) simply showing that he was thinking of his future **atonement**—a different kind of 'wine.' The **six waterpots** of stone were full of purified water, used for washing of guests according to the Mosaic custom. When they became wine, the ruler of feast declared it was the best wine ever (2:6-10). Knowing that the wine is symbolic of his blood (as we do), we see the symbolism in the miracle. The wine was provided in jars and with water used for the **purifying of the body**. Through the atonement, the **Bridegroom** of Israel "**would provide through the shedding of his blood the wine of eternal life and the means for cleansing the spiritual being**" (Griggs 114). Even the **number of vessels** is significant—six being just short of perfection (represented by seven), we must look to Christ to make up the difference and **compensate** for our **imperfection**.

Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman (chapters 4 and 5). These two chapters are meant to be read together, in a **compare** and **contrast** fashion. First, Nicodemus came to Jesus "**by night**" (in the **darkness**), **professing** that he sees Jesus as a teacher **from God** (3:1-2). But Jesus immediately invited him to be "**born again**" (or from above) so that he might "**see [receive light]** the kingdom of God" (3:3). Nicodemus got stuck on the **physical** nature of the metaphor, though Jesus tried to get him to see it spiritually (3:4-8), finally concluding that he just **didn't understand** (1:9). Alluding to his first declaration of who Jesus was, Jesus chides him for not knowing these things (3:10) and attempts to clarify his own role in the salvation of man (3:11-36). Nicodemus, who professed a **testimony** and who was a **great teacher** among the Jews, **remained in the dark**, just the way he came.

In contrast, when Jesus stopped at Jacob's well at **Shechem** ("Sychar" in the text, 4:5) in **Samaria**, he met a **woman** there and asked her for **water** (4:5-7). She would appear to be an unlikely disciple—a **Samaritan**, a **woman**, and someone who had **lived in sin** with six men (*andra* in 4:18 can mean husband or man). She also, at first, is stuck on the **physical** metaphor of the water—how can Jesus supply such living water? (4:11-12). But when Jesus tells her something personal (about her moral state), she believes him to be a **prophet** (4:19), and when he declares his Messiahship, she not only **believes** him but goes to **tell the whole city**, bringing many out to meet him (4:25-30) who also believed (4:39-42). Thus the woman came out of the **darkness** of sin to the **light** of knowledge, and anxiously brought others with her.

Replacement (5-10). In the next chapters, John logically walks us through how Jesus is the replacement for the Law of Moses with its feasts and practices:

- **Chapter 5** says "there was a feast," but doesn't indicate which (5:1). More importantly for John, it was the **Sabbath** (5:9). On this day, Jesus **healed** a man at the pool of **Bethesda**. Skipping ahead to **chapter 9**, it is again the **Sabbath** (9:14) and Jesus **healed** a blind man. In both cases, the Jewish leadership challenged him as a result of this action, and in both cases John's point is that Jesus is the **new Sabbath** because he follows the will of the Father (5:18-20, 44-47).

- **Chapter 6** happens in conjunction with the **Passover**. Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 men (plus women and children, so perhaps 15,000-20,000 people), then taught them that he is the “**bread of life**” (6:35) and the “**living bread**” from heaven (6:51), thereby becoming the replacement for the Passover.
- **Chapters 7-8** are tied to the **Feast of Tabernacles**. As the priests are bringing the water from the pool of Siloam to the temple grounds as part of the impressive ceremony, Jesus declared that he is the “living water” (7:38). He further declared, while standing under the huge lampstands put up for the feast, that he is the “light of the world” (8:12). These declarations show he is the replacement of this feast also.
- Finally, in **chapter 10**, it was the **Feast of Dedication** (what we call Hanukkah). He the Jews ask for a plain declaration if he is the Messiah (10:24), and he declares his one-ness with the Father and his dedication to do the will of the Father (10:37-38). Thus he is the replacement for this feast as well.

Lazarus (11-12). The raising of Lazarus from the tomb is the **turning point** in Jesus’ ministry. It is the greatest sign of his authority, but also marks the end of the signs that he will give. It is the cause of the Jews gathering together to **plot** against him and seek his **death** (11:37-53). With the declaration that “the **hour is come**, that the Son of man should be glorified” (**12:23**), Jesus goes to Jerusalem and his eternal destiny.

THE BOOK OF GLORY (13:1 – 20:31)

We said that Mark had a large percentage of his work devoted to the Passion narratives. John has even more, with 14-1/2 pages about just the last two days of Christ’s life.

Last Supper (13-17): The Last Supper in John does not take place at the same time as the four gospels, but “**before the feast of the Passover**” (13:1). This difference has not been reconciled, nor can it. For John, the Passover lambs are being slaughtered at the same time Jesus is dying on the cross.

The purpose of these chapters is in the first verse: “having loved his own which were in the world, he **loved them** unto the end” (13:1). Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for what was about to happen. He washes their feet, including Judas’, leading to the statement that they were **clean**, “**but not all**” (13:10). We have a great **description of the room** through a conversation in chapter 13, with Jesus in the middle of the U-shaped table, John on his right, Judas on his left, and Peter at the other end (13:21-26). When Judas went out into the night/dark (13:30), Jesus opened up and taught them about love (13:34; 15:12, 17), eternal reward (14:2-3), that he is the Way, the Truth, and Life (14:6), and the Comforter (14:16-26; 15:26; 16:7).

Chapter 17 is the **Intercessory Prayer**. Many believe this was actually given in the temple, because the group had already departed the upper room (14:31) and were moving toward Gethsemane. Passing through the temple courtyard, it would have been the perfect time to offer such a prayer, with Jesus acting as the high priest in behalf of his disciples first (17:1-19) then all of us (17:20-26).

John’s **arrest** account (**18-19**) is unique, with the declaration of “**I am**” (18:6), somewhat obscured in the KJV. We also learn that Peter drew the sword and cut off the ear (18:10-11). We see both **temple police** and **Romans** involved in the arrest (18:12). The meeting with Annas is unique in

John (18:12-13, 19-24). When Jesus is taken to the “**hall of judgment**” (Pilate), the Jewish leaders hypocritically stayed just outside, lest they defile themselves just before the Passover (18:28). Jesus is with Pilate six hours, then sentenced and crucified. The unique message here is Jesus giving his mother to John’s care (19:25-27).

Resurrection (20): Mary Magdalene; Peace three times; Thomas’ experience of saying he must touch but then believing without doing so.

EPILOGUE (12:1-25)

Mary Magdalene: John uniquely tells the story of Mary at the garden tomb the morning of the resurrection. “Touch me not” should be “Hold me not.”

Peter’s ‘redemption’ – Chapter 21

John’s fate: D&C 7

Ichthus: Iesus Christos theos huios soter

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