

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

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LESSON FOUR

JOHN

The first three Gospels already considered are sometimes called the synoptics, from two Greek words which mean "*a view together*," the idea being that they set forth the same general view of the story of JESUS CHRIST, and contain pretty much the same material although variously arranged. They were the earliest Gospels published probably within twenty-five or thirty years of the date of the ascension, and did the work of an evangelist in carrying the knowledge of JESUS to peoples theretofore ignorant of Him. From among these peoples thus converted to JESUS, Jews, Romans and Greeks, the Christian church was founded, and to this latter body, composed of all three classes, the Gospel of John was addressed.

Thirty years, more or less, had elapsed, and with the growth and development of the church had come up certain questions for investigation and settlement that the fourth Gospel was particularly designed to meet.

These questions touched especially on the person and work of JESUS, as the Messiah, His nature and the character and significance of His death, so that in answering them John necessarily reveals to us the deepest and profoundest truth found anywhere in the Gospels. For the same reason John's Gospel is nearly altogether new in its facts as compared with the synoptics. This is not to say that John invented what he wrote, or that the substance of his Gospel was unknown to the other writers, but only that in the wisdom of GOD the relation of such things as he records was held back until the period when it was particularly needed and could best be understood and appreciated.

John was the last survivor of the twelve, dying somewhere near the close of the first century, kept on the earth by divine Providence, until, like his Master, he, too, had finished the work given to do.

The proof of the later date of John's Gospel is found in such references as 1:32, and 3:24, which assume a previous knowledge of the facts on the part of his readers. It is found also in the omissions of all the material of the synoptics down to the passion.

There is only one exception to this, the feeding of the five thousand, which was retained in John probably in order to introduce and show the occasion for the discourse following on the bread of life (chap. 6).

Further illustration of its profundity, if desired, could be found in the nature of the miracles it records, every one of which seems to show a higher degree of power, for example, than those in the synoptics, and thus testifying all the more emphatically to the divine origin of JESUS' message, and by inference to the deity of the Messenger.

Witness:

- the turning of the water into wine (chap. 2),
- the healing of the nobleman's son in the same chapter, and that of the impotent man in chapter 5.
- also the man born blind (chap. 9), and
- the raising of Lazarus (chap. 11).

The nature of the discourses in John's Gospel illustrates the same thing. They are the profoundest themes which fell from the lips of our Lord:

- the New Birth (chap. 3),
- the Living Water (chap. 4),
- the Honor of the Son (chap. 5),
- the Living Bread (chap. 6),
- the Good Shepherd (chap. 10),
- the Farewell Discourse (chaps. 13-16).

Consider, also, in this connection the character of the doctrines emphasized in John's record. For example, those related to the Godhead alone:

Observe how he speaks of GOD in the abstract, (1:18; 4:24; 5:37). No such teaching about the nature of GOD is found anywhere in the Bible outside of the epistles of this same evangelist and those of Paul.

Observe how he speaks of GOD as Father (3:16; 5:36; 6:37; 8:18; 10:30; 17:11);

- how he speaks of the person of JESUS CHRIST as related to the Father (1:1, 14, 18; 5:17, 18,26; 14:9, 10);
- and as related to man (1:4; 6:46; 8:40-46, etc).

Observe finally how he speaks of the HOLY SPIRIT (3:5; 4:14; 7:38; 14:12,16,26; 15:26; 16:7).

Of course, in these instances, it is frequently CHRIST Himself who is speaking and John simply reporting or quoting Him, but the point is, it was left for John of all the evangelists to do this, to report Him in these deeper and profounder utterances concerning the Godhead which are so important for the church to know.

Outline of the Gospel

The following outline of John's Gospel following the general lines of the preceding ones may be helpful:

I. Preface, 1:1-14

In the preface observe the earliest illustration of the depth and profundity of John's presentation of JESUS as the Son of GOD.

Nothing quite corresponding to these opening verses is found in any of the synoptics. John positively asserts the deity of JESUS, and shows Him to be the Creator of all things and the source of all life (vv. 1-5).

He emphasizes the point very definitely, moreover, by comparing JESUS with John the Baptist (vv. 6-9). He is careful, too, at the beginning, to proclaim JESUS as the source of the renewed spiritual life of man, the eternal life which is coincident with salvation (vv. 10-13).

And yet side by side with these declarations of and testimonies to JESUS' Godhead, see how he demonstrates His perfect humanity as well (v. 14).

II. Testimony of John the Baptist, 1:15-34

Every student will be impressed with the originality of the record in this Gospel concerning the testimony of John the Baptist. Nothing corresponding to it is found in the Synoptics.

Observe his testimony to the pre-existence and deity of JESUS CHRIST (vv. 15-18), and to the sacrificial nature of His death (v. 29).

These words as well as those of the preface stamp this Gospel as that which especially reveals the "**deep things of God**" concerning the person and work of the Messiah. It was questions of this character which arose for settlement in the early church and which John was retained on the earth to answer. Was JESUS GOD as well as man? Was His death a sacrifice for human guilt? How clearly the Baptist's witness bears upon these points!

III. First Visit to Judea, 1:35-2:12

It is a peculiarity of the fourth Gospel that it dwells at length upon the ministry of JESUS in Judea while the others mention more especially His ministry in Galilee.

In Matthew, for example, after the narrative of the baptism which took place there, there is scarcely any allusion to JESUS visiting Judea until that of the nineteenth chapter, which was evidently His last visit, coincident with His betrayal and crucifixion. Perhaps a convenient division of the present Gospel will be along the line of these different visits to Judea.

This first division really includes the event of the baptism, overlapping what we have described as the testimony of John, and might be said to begin at verse 29 instead of 35. Besides the baptism it includes the call of the first four disciples (vv. 35-51), a call preliminary or introductory to the later or more formal call referred to in the other Gospels.

This first visit to Judea at the opening of JESUS' ministry, in connection with His baptism and the calling of His disciples, ended with His return to Capernaum in Galilee, on which journey was wrought the marvelous work of creation in the turning of the water into wine at the wedding feast. The nature of this miracle and the bearing of its record upon the peculiar position of John's Gospel has been already alluded to.

IV. Second Visit to Judea, 2:13-4:54

- with reference to what occasion, and hence at what period of the year, did the visit take place (2:13)?
- with what display of JESUS' authority and power is it associated (vv. 14-17)? Comparing this with Matthew 21:12, 13, it would seem that this transaction was repeated at the last Passover.
- in what manner did He refer at this time to His death and resurrection (vv. 18-22)?
- what great discourse of JESUS is associated with this second visit to Judea (3:1-21)?
- where did this discourse occur presumably (2:23)?
- how does the theme of this discourse demonstrate the profundity of the thought of this Gospel, and bear out the theory that it was written for the church?
- how further does John the Baptist bear testimony to JESUS on this visit (3:25-36)?

An analysis of this testimony, like that also in the first chapter, would make an excellent sermon, or Bible-reading outline.

He testifies:

- (1) to JESUS' relationship to His people (v. 29);
- (2) His growing influence and authority (v. 30);
- (3) His exaltation (v. 31);
- (4) His truth (vv. 32, 34);
- (5) His supreme power and grace (vv. 35, 36).

- what reason is assigned for JESUS' departure from Judea at this time (4:1-3)?
- whence did He journey, and what route did He take (vv. 3, 4)?
- what exhibition of loving grace was associated with this journey (vv. 5-42)?
- how long did JESUS remain in Samaria, and where did He next go (v. 43)?
- what miracle is connected with this return journey to Galilee, and how does it bear on the general purpose of John's Gospel (vv. 46-54).

An allusion to this miracle was made in the introduction to our study of John.

V. Third Visit to Judea, Chapters 5, 6

This visit, like the second, was occasioned by the Passover, and hence seems to have been a year later (chap. 6).

- what miracle was wrought on this occasion (5:2-9)?
- with what effect on the unbelieving Jews (vv. 10-16)?
- how does JESUS justify such labor on the Sabbath day (v. 17)?
- on what two-fold ground did His enemies seek to kill Him (v. 18)?

The latter of these two grounds, because He said "**God was His Father**," is peculiar and deeply important. The Jews understood Him to declare GOD to be His Father in a unique sense, a sense in which He was not the Father of other men. This is why they said He made "**himself equal with God**."

The importance of this is seen in that it contains a direct claim on JESUS' part to be equal with GOD, i. e., a claim of absolute deity.

The Jews whom He addressed so regarded His words, and JESUS took no pains to correct that impression, on the contrary, His words that follow are an argument, and the only one from His lips which I know, to establish the truth of that opinion, to prove that He was GOD.

Almost all the verses following, down to verse 31, prove this, but especially and directly verse 23. This discourse on the honor of the Son concludes with a kind of supplementary one on the four witnesses (vv. 32-47). We have here cited by JESUS Himself, the witness of John the Baptists (vv. 32-35), the witness of His own marvelous works (v. 36), the witness of the Father (vv. 37, 38), and the witness of the Holy Scriptures (v. 39), but how utterly vain so far as moving the wills of His unbelieving countrymen was concerned (v. 40)!

- leaving Judea again, where do we next find JESUS (6:1-3)?
- what miracle is associated therewith (vv. 5-13)?

This is the only miracle found in the other Gospels which is also recorded by John, and this for the reason doubtless of leading up to the important discourse following on the Living Bread.

- what effect had this miracle on those who saw it (v. 14)?
- what did they propose to do with JESUS in consequence of their opinion (v. 15)?
- what did the knowledge of their purpose lead JESUS to do?
- what bearing has His action at this time to the incident in 18:10, 11, and His words before Pilate in the same chapter, verse 36?
- to what place did JESUS depart?
- what miracle took place during the night (vv. 16-21)?
- where next do we find JESUS (vv. 22-24)?

It is at this point the great discourse is given to which reference has been made, and which is one of those which, like the others already referred to, gives to the Gospel its distinctively spiritual character.

- at what place was this discourse given (v. 59)?
- how does it seem to have been received by the people generally (vv. 41, 52)?
- how by the disciples (vv. 60, 66)?
- what foreshadowing of His death does He reveal at this time (vv. 66-71)?
- why did He confine His ministry to Galilee just now (7:1)?

VI. Fourth Visit to Judea, Chapters 7-19

We now reach, in John's Gospel, what I believe is the record of the last visit of JESUS to Judea (i. e., I do not believe He returned into Galilee after this prior to His crucifixion), but as the period covered is long, and the events many, we will, for convenience, subdivide the whole section as follows:

(1) *At the Feast of Tabernacles* (7:1-10:21).

- how did the brethren of JESUS regard Him at this time (7:2-5)?
- what hesitancy did He exhibit in going up to this feast (vv. 6-9)?

This feast, it will be recalled, took place not in the spring, like the Passover, but in the fall, corresponding to our October. This chapter and the next have always identified as those of the controversies in the Temple. They represent periods of sustained contention with enemies, and of nervous excitement (though the latter expression will not be regarded as applicable to JESUS personally), such as are described nowhere else in the Gospels.

The crisis so clearly indicated in each of the synoptics is now rapidly approaching. Examine in this connection verses 12, 13, 20, 26, 27, 30, 32, 43, of chapter 7.

- what effect had JESUS' answers to His opponents upon the officials (vv. 45, 46)?
- what authoritative person speaks on His behalf at this critical moment (vv. 50-52)?
- where did JESUS pass the night after this trying and exhausting day (8:1)?
- how, do we imagine, was He resting, by sleep or in prayer?
- where is He found again the next morning (v. 2)?
- with what work of courage and grace does the day begin (vv. 3-11)?
- who came off victor in that contest of light and darkness, JESUS or His adversaries (v. 6)?

The controversy now begins again by JESUS' bold declaration of Himself as "**the light of the world,**" a declaration which, if unsupported by the truth, makes Him to be an insane impostor, but otherwise establishes His right to be all that this Gospel claims for Him - even that He is GOD Himself.

Observe the features of the controversy all through this chapter, but especially at verses 13, 19, 25, 37, 48, 52, 59.

Observe, too, the repeated declarations of JESUS bearing upon the dignity of His person, as in verses 16, 18, 19, 23, 28, 36, 42, 46, 51, 56, 58.

It is comforting also to note that His testimony during the day was not fruitless in the increase of discipleship (v. 30).

- as JESUS passed through and away from this murderous crowd, what miracle is wrought (chap. 9)?
- what explanation does JESUS afford as to why this man was born blind (v. 3)?
- how does this work of power and mercy effect the enemies of JESUS, does it soften or harden their opposition (vv. 16, 28, 29)?
- what did they finally do to the man (v. 34)?
- what does "**cast him out**" probably mean? Compare verse 22, last clause.
- how does JESUS make a further claim of deity in subsequently addressing this man (vv. 35-37)?

It is to be observed in this connection that the sublime discourse on the Good Shepherd, following in chapter 10, grew out of this circumstance of the casting out of this healed man from the synagogue because of his confession of JESUS. The scribes and Pharisees are the "hirelings" JESUS has in mind in that discourse, who showed themselves to be such unmistakably in their treatment of this man.

Notice how this discourse also falls into harmony with the distinctive purpose of John's Gospel throughout, to present the highest, or if you please, the deepest aspect of CHRIST's person and work, for example, compare His utterances in verses 10, 11, 15, 17, 18. His work is clearly that of a substitute Saviour, and yet none other than GOD could speak of Himself thus. What opposite results were produced by this discourse (vv. 19-21)?

(2) *At the Feast of the Dedication* (10:22-42):

This Feast took place midway between that of Tabernacles just dealt with, and that of the Passover, or some time corresponding to our December or January. Where JESUS had been in the meantime is not revealed except that it is not stated that He returned to Galilee. We need not dwell on this period further than to call attention to the same features as prevailed in the previous one, viz., the putting forth of the boldest claims on JESUS' part, followed in every instance by intensest conflict with His opponents. For the claims consult such passages as verses 28 and 30, and the conflict, 31 and 39. What was the sequel of this appearance so far as JESUS was concerned (vv. 40, 41)? Notice that in the face of all the criticism and opposition, and in spite of all the efforts of the leaders of the nation to the contrary, the number of the disciples continually increased (v. 42).

(3) *At Bethany* (chap. 11).

Here occurs the great miracle of the raising of Lazarus.

In the synoptics we read of the raising of Jairus' daughter and the son of the widow of Nain. In the first case death had just ensued, and in the second but a single day had intervened. Here,

however, Lazarus had been four days dead. Of course, with GOD it is no harder to restore life in the one case than in either of the others, and yet all must be impressed with the gradation of difficulty illustrated in the three, and that the most difficult, humanly speaking, should be recorded only in John's Gospel. This, like so many other features alluded to, shows us with the distinctive purpose of this Gospel to set forth JESUS in the highest aspect of all, that of the Son of GOD - the Son of GOD giving life to the world. What a wonderful declaration that in verse 25!

Let us not pass from this incident in Bethany without observing its effect on the leaders of the nation (vv. 47, 48), and the nature of that prophecy, all unwittingly uttered, by Caiaphas, which so clearly set forth the precise character of the work JESUS came into the world to do (vv. 49-52). Nor let us fail to be impressed by the fact that the crisis is now rapidly drawing to a head (v. 53), in consequence of which JESUS withdraws Himself again (v. 54).

(4) *At the last Passover* (chaps. 12-17).

The note of time suggesting this sub-division of our lesson is found at the close of chapter 11, verses 55-57.

The last-named indicates the state of feeling towards JESUS prevailing at this time among the leaders of the people, and explains the conditions which made this the last Passover He ever attended.--

- where do we find JESUS at the beginning of chapter 12?
- what is the incident emphasized on that occasion (vv. 3-5)?
- what events on the day following hastened the plot of His enemies (vv. 12-19)?

The succeeding incident recorded is that of the visit of the Greeks, which some regard as the second great temptation in JESUS' life.

The considerations justifying such a view are found in the effect which the request of these Greeks to see Him made upon JESUS Himself:

- **"Now is my soul troubled,"**
- **"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die,"**
- **"Father, save me from this hour."**

Also in the heavenly testimony to His Sonship which was again afforded Him.

We should not pass to the consideration of the next leading topic without observing in passing, the additionally strong testimony John bears as his manner is to the deity of JESUS.

See, for example, the argument to be drawn from his words in verses 37-41, especially the last-named.

Look up the quotation in Isaiah 6, and ask yourself the question whether John's testimony must not be utterly dishonored unless JESUS is to be regarded as GOD incarnate. How corroborative

of this are JESUS' own words, moreover, in verses 44, 45.

Following the visit of the Greeks the next leading event is now described in chapter 13?

- what is the ostensible lesson taught in this transaction (vv. 12-16)? And yet is there not more than a lesson in humility here?
- what of the deep and mysterious teaching in verses 5, 9?

Many expositors think we have here a symbolic representation of CHRIST's intercessory work for His people. They are already "clean" as far as their salvation is concerned, because of their faith in Him, and on the ground of His finished work on the cross; but passing through the world brings daily defilement which requires daily cleansing, for which provision is made by His all-prevailing intercession as our high priest. Compare I John 1:9.

- what singular omission is found in this Gospel with reference to the events of this last Passover night as compared with the Synoptics?
- what additional details of the betrayal are given here (vv. 15-30)?

The washing of the disciples' feet and the departure of Judas on his wicked errand, are followed by what is frequently designated the "*farewell discourse*," covering chapters 13-16, and which, like almost the whole of this Gospel, is quite original in comparison with the others.

These chapters are described by Bernard as "the Central Teaching of JESUS CHRIST," and others call them the heart of the heart of the Gospel.

Observe the themes treated of:

- the preparation for the second coming (14:1-3);
- the identity of the Father and the Son (vv. 6-11);
- the office of the HOLY SPIRIT in the church (vv. 15-31);
- the source and the responsibility of fruit-bearing (15:1-17);
- the attitude of the world to the church (15:18-16:4);
- the office of the HOLY SPIRIT toward the world (vv. 5-15);
- the personal comfort of the disciples (vv. 16:33).

Perhaps there is nothing in the whole of this precious and sublime discourse of more practical value to us than what it teaches the disciple about prayer. See 14:13, 14; 15:16; 16:23-27. To ask the Father in CHRIST's name is something in advance of asking for his sake even. To ask in His name is the same as though He asked Himself with all the assurance of answer which such a fact implies. This is the privilege of the true believer who is thus a member of CHRIST's body, and it is a revelation of truth which CHRIST had at no time made known to His followers until now, doubtless, because they were not prepared to receive it.

This wonderful discourse is followed in turn by the equally wonderful prayer in chapter 17, its scope including His own glory and work (vv. 1-5), His disciples (vv. 6-19), and believers generally (vv. 20-26).

It seems almost sacrilegious to hasten over these so solemn and loving words, but we have time

only to call attention to the four petitions offered on our behalf:

- (1) our preservation (v. 11);
- (2) our sanctification (v. 17);
- (3) our unification (v. 21); and
- (4) our glorification (v. 24).

(5) *At man's judgment seat* (15:1-19:16).

It would be interesting and suggestive to read this chapter in comparison with the corresponding ones in the synoptics, in order to notice particularly what John omits and what he emphasizes.

- what illustration of JESUS' dignity and power is here mentioned in connection with the arrest (vv. 4-7)?
- what illustration of His tenderness and consideration for His disciples (vv. 8, 9)?
- what additional information is given by John in the story of Peter's rashness (v. 10)?
- who presumably was that "**another disciple**" mentioned in verse 15?
- what is original with John in the report of JESUS' trial before Pilate (vv. 28-40)?

(6) *On the cross* (19:17-37).

- while the different evangelists give different translations or versions of the three-fold inscription on the cross, in what particular expression are they a unit?
- how do the malevolent Jews seek to avoid the bearing of this expression (v. 21)?
- what is original with John as to the events occurring while JESUS was upon the Cross (vv. 23-37)?
- how many distinct Old Testament prophecies does he refer to as fulfilled thereby?

(7) *After the Resurrection* (chaps. 20, 21).

- what is original with John as to the burial of JESUS (19:38-42)?
- as to the details of the resurrection (20:1-18)?
- as to the first meeting of JESUS with His disciples (vv. 19-25)?
- what additional proof of the reality of the resurrection does this Gospel afford in verses 26-29?
- what is stated as the object for the writing of the Gospel (vv. 30, 31)?
- why, do you suppose, was the addendum given in chapter 21?
- what apparently, was the particular object in recording that appearance of JESUS to His disciples in detail?
- do you suppose the transaction of verses 15-17 explains it?
- was it not just like our Saviour to give Peter who denied Him thrice an opportunity to become restored in a triple confession of Him again?
- what prophecy of Peter's manner of death follows (vv. 18, 19)? Compare this with II Peter 1:14.
- what rumor subsequently became current about John, and why (vv. 20-23)?

~ end of Lesson 4 ~
