

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will do Bible study together from the Gospel of John, chapter by chapter, making use of “the five steps” method of Bible study. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

Today the two teachers will INTRODUCE THE GOSPEL OF JOHN. We will learn who wrote the Gospel of John, when and where he wrote it, how the Gospel may be divided into parts and what was the purpose of John.

(S) **POINT 1. THE WRITER OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.**

First. The writer was a Palestinian Jew.

He was acquainted with the topography of Palestine. For example, he knew places like Cana, Capernaum, and Bethsaida in Galilee, Aenon near Salim (3:23), the village Ephraim (11:54) and especially Jerusalem. He also knew that “the Bethany on the other side of the Jordan” (1:28) was different than “the Bethany that was only two miles from Jerusalem” (11:18).

(T) He knew the political conditions in Palestine during that time. For example, he knew that many Jews were living among the heathen nations (11:52), that “the Jews did not associate with Samaritans” (4:9), and that the Romans ruled over the Jews (11:48). He also knew that the Jewish Sanhedrin had no political power to condemn someone to death and that the Roman governor had to make such a decision (18:28,31).

(S) He was thoroughly acquainted with the Old Testament in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, because he used both in his quotations.

(T) He referred to Jewish and Samaritan religious beliefs, like “salvation is from the Jews” (4:22) and the Samaritans worship on Mount Gerezim and not in Jerusalem (4:20).

(S) He knew the Jewish religious Festivals, like “the Day of Preparation” (19:31), “the Passover Festival”, “the Feast of Tabernacles” (7:2) and “the Feast of Dedication” (10:22).

(T) He introduced and explained the Jewish customs in a natural way. For example, it was a Jewish marriage custom to first offer the choice wine to the guests and later the cheap wine (2:10). It was the Jewish burial custom to wrap the dead person with strips of linen with smelling spices in between, to tie a cloth around the face, and then to lay the body in a cave or tomb and to place a large stone in front of it (11:38,44; 19:40).

(S) **Second. The writer was an eyewitness.**

The writer saw the works of Jesus with his own eyes. He remembered when the events occurred, and many times he even recorded the exact hour. Because he wrote towards the end of the first century to Gentiles, he most probably used the Roman method of time calculation, that is starting to count from midnight or from noon. For example, he remembered that he met Jesus for the first time on the day after Jesus was baptised. It was about the tenth hour (1:35,39), that is, about 10 A.M. He remembered the exact words Jesus spoke to Simon when he gave him the name “Peter” (1:42), the exact words Jesus spoke to the other disciples when he called them, and the exact words of the many sermons Jesus preached. The Gospel of John leaves the impression that the writer not only heard the very words of Jesus, but might have made notes of what Jesus said shortly after hearing them or even memorised what Jesus said.

(T) **Third. The writer was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.**

The writer had intimate knowledge of the actions, words and feelings of the disciples of Jesus. For example, he knew that the disciples were *surprised* to find Jesus talking to a woman (4:27), or that they were *terrified* when they saw Jesus walking on the water (6:19).

(S) **Fourth. The writer was the apostle John.**

The writer never called himself by name, but called himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. He was the disciple who leaned back against Jesus at the Last Supper (13:23). And he wrote as a disciple of Jesus who testifies to what he had seen and heard (21:20-24).

The writer was one of the earliest disciples of Jesus: According to John 1:35-40 and Mark 1:16-20, they were Andrew and Simon Peter, and James and John. According to Acts 12, James was killed by Herod and according to John 21:18-

19, Peter had already been martyred. Therefore the only possible disciple who could have written this Gospel later as an eye- and ear-witness was the apostle John!

The writer, John was the son of Zebedee. According to Matthew 27:56, Mark 16:1 and John 19:25, his mother was possibly called Salome and she was probably a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. If this is correct, then Jesus and John were cousins. Before he became a disciple of Jesus, he was a follower of John the Baptist. According to John 1, he met Jesus on the day after the baptism of Jesus. He continued to work on the fishing boat of his father. About one year later Jesus called him to be a regular disciple. Then he left his job as a fisherman to become “a fisher of men” (Mt 4:19).

(T) John and his brother James appear to have been men with pent-up emotions and probably flying tempers, because they were called “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17). For example, in Luke 9:49-54, John not only interfered with another person’s ministry, but also liked to see judgement quickly executed. When a Samaritan village refused to give Jesus and his disciples lodging, the fiery anger of John and James flashed forth the words, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” (Lk 9:54)

(S) John was one of the most important apostles. John was very often in the company of Peter, both in the Four Gospels as well as in the book of Acts. After the resurrection of Jesus, he was regarded as one of the three “pillars of the church” together with Peter and James, the brother of Jesus (Gal 2:9; Act 15:6). When the Jews revolted against Rome in AD 66, John and all Christians probably left Jerusalem. According to Church history, John went to live and work in Ephesus.

(T) **POINT 2. THE PLACE AND DATE OF WRITING THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.**

First. The place of writing the Gospel of John. According to the church father Irenaeus, who lived in AD 170, the Gospel of John was written while John lived in *Ephesus*.

(S) **Second. The date of writing the Gospel of John.**

The Gospel of John was written before A.D. 110. The church father Irenaeus, who lived in A.D. 170, wrote, “The church in Ephesus was founded by Paul, and John remained among them permanently until the times of the Roman Emperor Trajan”. Trajan reigned from A.D. 98-117. The writings of the church father Ignatius, who was martyred in A.D. 110, shows clearly that he had read the Gospel of John. Thus the Gospel of John was probably written before the end of the first century.

The Gospel of John was written after A.D. 70. The apostle John did not repeat what the three other Gospels narrated and he took for granted that people knew them. His purpose was to write especially about those things not yet recorded in the other three Gospels and which caused people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that he is completely divine. Thus the Gospel of John must have been written after the other three Gospels were written, thus, after A.D. 63. Because John does not speak of such famous people as the apostles Peter or Paul anymore, it seems that they had already died. Also the fall of Jerusalem and its temple is no longer mentioned. Thus the Gospel of John was probably written some years after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Therefore we conclude that the Gospel of John was written between A.D. 70 and A.D. 98. The church father Clement of Alexandria, who lived in A.D. 190, wrote that even after his return from Patmos, the apostle John carried on a very active ministry as chief administrator of the churches located in the Ephesus district. We do not know whether the Gospel of John was written before or after his banishment to Patmos and we also do not know whether it was written before or after the book of Revelation.

(T) **POINT 3. THE DIVISION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.**

The Gospel of John may be divided into two parts, the public and the private ministry of Jesus. These two parts may be divided into seven sections:

Part one. The public ministry of Jesus.

This consists of John chapters 1-12. It may be subdivided into three sections as follows:

(S) **The first section consists of John chapters 1-6. Before the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2).**

The Word, Jesus Christ, reveals himself in ever widening circles and is rejected. John 1:1-14 describes the glory of the Word in the beginning, at the creation, after the fall and at the incarnation. John 1:15 to 2:12 describe “the Word”, Jesus Christ, revealing himself to John the Baptist and to his early disciples. This is part of “*the Inauguration of Jesus Christ*”, *the four months from December AD 26 to April AD 27*. John 2:13 to 4:42 describe the Word, Jesus Christ revealing himself to the crowds at Jerusalem including Nicodemus and to the Samaritans. This is part of “*the Early Judean Ministry of Jesus*”, *the eight months from April to December AD 27*. Finally, John 4:43-54 describes the Word,

Jesus Christ revealing himself to the Galileans. John 5 describes the Word, Jesus Christ, rejected in Judea after the miracle at Bethesda. John 6 describes the Word, Jesus Christ, rejected in Galilee, after feeding the five thousand. This is part of “*the Great Galilean Ministry of Jesus*”, *the sixteen months from December AD 27 to April AD 29*.

(T) The second section consists of John chapters 7-10. After the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Word, Jesus Christ, makes his tender appeal to sinners. John 7:1-9 is part of “*the Retirement Ministry of Jesus*”, *the six months from April to October AD 29*. John chapter 7 describes his appeal to the crowds in the temple, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (7:37-38). John chapter 8 describes his appeal to the woman caught in adultery, “Go now and leave your life of sin” (8:11). Also his appeal to the crowds, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8:12). John chapter 9 describes his appeal to the man born blind, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “You have now seen him; in fact he is the one speaking to you” (9:35,37) John chapter 10 describes his appeal to the Pharisees and disciples, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (10:11,27). John 7:10 to 10:39 is part of “*the Later Judean Ministry of Jesus*”, *the two months from October to December AD 29*.

(S) The third section consists of John chapters 10:40 to 12:50. After the Feast of Dedication (10:22).

The Word, Jesus Christ, reveals himself clearly as the Messiah by two mighty miracles: the raising of Lazarus and the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. John 10:40 to 11:57 is a part of “*the Perea Ministry of Jesus*”, *the four months from December AD 29 to April AD 30*. He makes a journey to Bethany close to Jerusalem to raise Lazarus from the dead. At that time a meeting of the Jewish leaders in the Sanhedrin plotted to kill Jesus. John 12:1-50 describes the anointing at Bethany and the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

(T) Part two. The private ministry of Jesus Christ.

This consists of John chapters 13-21. This takes place during *the last seven weeks* of Jesus on earth. It may be subdivided into four sections as follows:

(S) The first section consists of John chapters 13. The Last Supper.

Jesus gives a new commandment to love one another and illustrates it by washing the feet of his disciples.

(T) The second section consists of John chapters 14-17. The discourses and prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper.

In John chapter 14, *Jesus comforts* his disciples. He promises the continuous presence of the Holy Spirit and the greater works, which the disciples will do. In John chapter 15, *Jesus exhorts* his disciples. He exhorts them to continually remain in him, to let his word continually remain in them, to pray, to bear much fruit, to love one another, to obey his commandments and to bear witness to the world. In short, he exhorts them to grow as disciples. In John chapter 16, *Jesus makes promises* to his disciples. He promises not to leave them alone, but to send the Holy Spirit and he promises that they will see him again after his resurrection. In John chapter 17, *Jesus prays*. He prays for himself (17:1-5), his disciples (17:6-19) and for the church in the world (17:20-26).

(S) The third section consists of John chapter 18-19. The suffering of Jesus.

In John chapter 18, Jesus is arrested, *tried* before Annas, denied once by Peter, tried before Caiaphas, denied twice more by Peter, and tried before Pilate. In John chapter 19, Jesus is *persecuted* by the Roman soldiers, rejected to be crucified by the Jews, crucified at “the place of the skull”, called “Golgotha”, and after his death, buried by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus in a new garden tomb.

(T) The fourth section consists of John chapter 20-21. The resurrection and appearances of Jesus.

In John chapter 20, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, to his disciples without Thomas and a week later to his disciples including Thomas. In John 20:30-31, the writer states the purpose of the Gospel. In John chapter 21, Jesus appears to seven of his disciples at the Sea of Galilee and reinstates Peter. Then the writer concludes the Gospel with a united testimony of a group of people with respect to the reliability of the things recorded in the Gospel of John.

(S) POINT 4. THE PURPOSE AND THEME OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

The apostle John clearly states his purpose in John 20:30-31. His purpose is that his readers may continue to believe that Jesus is “the Messiah” and that he is “the Son of God”, that is, completely divine. And that by believing they may have life through Jesus as the Mediator between God and man. The term “Son of God” does not mean that Jesus is a physical child of God, but rather that Jesus is the visible expression of the invisible God. In order to reveal himself to us and to save us, God took on the human nature without laying down his divine nature and lived amongst us in history.

In contrast to the other three Gospels, some examples of the very distinct accounts in the Gospel of John are the following.

In chapter 1, Jesus is revealed as God who became man, to reveal God’s truth, love, grace and mercy .

In chapter 3, Jesus reveals to Nicodemus that he is the one-and-only Son of God, through whom God gives eternal life to those who believe.

In chapter 5, Jesus reveals to the Pharisees that God is his Father and he makes himself equal with God (5:17-18).

In chapter 7, Jesus reveals to the crowds at Jerusalem that he only can quench the spiritual thirst of every man (7:37-39).

In chapter 8, Jesus reveals to the religious leaders of Israel that he only can set people free from sin and death. He says that he is without sin and that whoever does not believe in him, will indeed die in their sins (8:46,24).

In chapter 12, Jesus reveals to the crowd that he is the King who would draw all the people in the world to himself (12:13,32).

In chapter 13, Jesus reveals to John that God the Father had put all things under the power of Jesus (3:35; 13:3). Whoever accepts Jesus, accepts God the Father who sent him (13:20).

(T) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Make a commitment to do Bible Study every week. Making use of “the five steps” method of Bible study, prepare John chapter 1:1-18 for next week.

Second. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks “Go and build Christ’s Church” and Internet on www.dota.net.

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.