

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we introduce the Gospel of JOHN. We will discover who wrote the Gospel of John and when and where he wrote it.

POINT 1. THE WRITER OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

First. The writer was a Palestinian Jew.

One. The writer is acquainted with the topography of Palestine. He knows that one Bethany is on the other side of the Jordan (1:28), while the other Bethany is only two miles from Jerusalem (11:28). He knows places like Cana, Capernaum, and Bethsaida in Galilee, Aenon near Salim (3:23), the village Ephraim (11: 54) and Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, he knows the Pool of Bethesda near the Sheep Gate (5:2) and the Pool of Siloam (9:7). He knows the Kidron valley between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives (18:1). He knows that Jesus was crucified at the place called Golgotha, which means ‘the skull’ (19:17). He knows that the temple took 46 years to build (2:20), that a part of the temple was called ‘Solomon’s Colonnade’ (10:23), that people were selling animals in the temple courts (2:14) and that Jesus was teaching in the temple close to the place where the offerings were put (8:2,20).

Two. The writer knows the political conditions in Palestine during that time. For example, he knows that the Jews do not associate with the Samaritans (4:9) and that many Jews were living among the Gentile nations (11:35). He knows that Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the highpriest that year, and that Annas was really the most influential figure in the Sanhedrin (18:13). He also knows 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). He knows that every year at the Passover it was the custom of the Roman governor to release a Jewish prisoner (18:39).

Three. The writer is thoroughly acquainted with the Old Testament in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, because he uses both in his quotations.

Four. The writer refers to Jewish and Samaritan religious beliefs, like salvation is from the Jews (4:22) and the Messiah is coming from David’s family and from Bethlehem (7:42). He knows that the Samaritans worship on Mount Gerezim and not in Jerusalem (4:20).

Five. The writer knows the Jewish religious Festivals. He knows the Day of Preparation (19:31), the Passover Festival, the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2) and the Feast of Dedication (10:22). He knows that people from everywhere went up to Jerusalem a few days before the Passover for their “ceremonial cleansing” (11:55; 18:28).

Six. The writer introduces and explains 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 his face, and then to lay him in a cave or tomb and to place a large stone in front of it (11:38,44; 19:40).

Second. The writer was an eye-witness.

The writer saw the works of Jesus with his own eyes. He remembers when the events occurred, and many times he even records the exact hour. Because he writes towards the end of the first century to Gentiles, he most probably used the Roman method of time calculation. The Romans started to count the time from midnight or from noon. For example, he remembers that he met Jesus for the first time on the day after he was baptised at about the tenth hour (1:35,39), that is, about 10 A.M. and remained with him for the rest of the day. This left enough time to find Peter and introduce him to Jesus. He remembers that Jesus sat down at the well in Samaria at about the sixth hour, that is 6 P.M. and that Jesus stayed two days with the Samaritans (4:6,40). He remembers that Jesus was sentenced to death on the Day of Preparation of the Passover Week at about the sixth hour, that is 6 A.M. He remembers 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. The writer is acquainted with the high priest and knows the name of his servant whose right ear was cut off by Peter (18:15,10). At the crucifixion, he himself saw blood and water issuing out from the pierced side of Jesus (19:33-35).

Third. The writer was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

The writer has intimate knowledge of the actions, words and feelings of the disciples of Jesus. For example, he says that the disciples were *surprised* to find Jesus talking to a woman (4:27), that they were *terrified* when they saw Jesus walking on the water (6:19), that the twelve disciples *stayed* with Jesus when all the other disciples turned back and no longer followed him (6:66-71) and that they *stared* at one another in silence when Jesus predicted that one of them would betray him (13:22). The fact that he is closely associated with Peter and partook of the Passover meal proves that he was one of the Twelve disciples.

Fourth. The writer was the apostle John.

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

From John 1:35-40 we learn that the writer was one of the four earliest disciples of Jesus: Andrew and John, Peter and James (Mk 1:16-20). The writer was thus one of “the sons of Zebedee”. According to Acts 12, James was killed by Herod and according to John 21:18-19, Peter had already been martyred. The only possible disciple who could have written this Gospel is the apostle John!

John was the son of Zebedee. Matthew 27:56, Mark 16:1 and John 19:25 say that 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 for another year before Jesus called him to be a regular or fulltime disciple. Then he left his job as a fisherman to become “a fisher of men” (Mt 4:19).

John and his brother James appear to have been men with pent-up emotions and 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?”

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 A.D. 66, John and all Christians probably left Jerusalem and John went to live in Ephesus.

Fifth. The testimony of the early church fathers.

All the church fathers of the ancient Christian Church write that the apostle John was the writer of the Gospel of John.

One. Eusebius in A.D. 300 wrote that the Gospel according to the apostle John “is read in all the churches under heaven” and that “John relates what Christ did *before* the Baptist had been thrown into prison, while the other three evangelists narrate events *after* the imprisonment of the Baptist”.

Two. Clement of Alexandria in A.D. 190 wrote that while the other Gospels made the external facts plain, “John, urged by his friends and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel”.

Three. Irenaeus in A.D. 170 wrote that his teacher Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John and had known other eye-witnesses of the Lord Jesus. Polycarp said that they reported all things in agreement with the Scriptures. Irenaeus said that John, the disciple of the Lord, wrote the Gospel of John while he was living in Ephesus in Asia.

Four. Theophilus in A.D. 170 called the Gospel of John “a holy writing” composed by John who was “a man inspired” by the Holy Spirit.

POINT 2. THE WRITER OF JOHN CHAPTER 21.

There is uncertainty about who wrote John chapter 21. Although there will never be absolute certainty about this matter, it is possible that John dictated chapter 21 to another writer and this writer recorded whatever John dictated. Or it is possible that another person, inspired by the Holy Spirit and with full approval of the apostle John, added chapter 21 to the Gospel. The following are the reasons for this uncertainty:

First. The conclusion of the Gospel seems to be in chapter 20 and not in 21.

In John 20:30-31, the apostle John writes, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." This leaves the impression that the Gospel of John ends here. Therefore John or somebody else added chapter 21.

Second. The recorder of chapter 21 describes the author of the Fourth Gospel.

The apostle John never mentions himself or the members of his immediate family by name in John chapters 1 to 20. He only refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (13:23). However, whoever wrote chapter 21, refers to "the sons of Zebedee" (21:2), the father of James and John and describes John in length in John 21:20. He describes him as the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the Last Supper and as the one who had asked, "Lord, who is going to betray you?" This lengthy description stands in rather sharp contrast to the veiled manner in which the apostle John refers to himself in the first 20 chapters.

Third. The writer of chapter 21 adds the testimony of a group of people and a personal remark.

In John 21:24, he writes in the name of others and says, "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and wrote them down. *We* know that his testimony is true." Thus, another leader in the church at Ephesus, probably a disciple of John, wrote and added chapter 21 under the complete inspiration of the Holy Spirit and with the full approval of the apostle John. He and all the elders in the church of Ephesus, where John lived and worked, testified that this is the Gospel according to John and that everything written in it is the absolute truth. Finally, the writer of chapter 21 says in verse 25 that the apostle John knew of more words Jesus spoke and of more works Jesus had performed, but that the apostles had written down only what the Holy Spirit had commanded them to record.

Fourth. The purpose of John chapter 21

is the following: It emphasises that Peter had been fully re-instated by Jesus after his denial of Jesus. It stresses again the fact that whatever happens to Peter and John and our lives, has been ordained by the sovereign, wise and loving God. It gives the elders of the church at Ephesus an opportunity to present an official and united testimony with respect to the reliability of the things recorded in the Fourth Gospel. And finally, to explain to the readers of the Bible that everything God wanted people to know about Jesus has been recorded in the Bible. No more and also no less! Thus, we conclude that after the apostle John under the guidance of the Holy Spirit had written chapters 1 to 20, another leader at Ephesus, also under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with the approval of the apostle John, wrote chapter 21. He added a beautiful story, which he had often heard from his friend, the apostle John. This was the prediction of Jesus about the end of the life of Peter and the end of the life of John. He distinctly refers to "the disciple whom Jesus loved" as the author and records the united testimony of others with respect to the reliability of the things written in the Gospel of John.

POINT 3. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

First. The place of writing the Gospel of John.

According to the church father Irenaeus, who lived in A.D. 170, the Gospel of John was written while John lived in *Ephesus*, an important city, which lies in modern Turkey.

Second. The date of writing the Gospel of John.

One. It was written before A.D. 98.

In A.D. 170, Tatianus used all Four Gospels to write a harmony of the Gospels. About A.D. 140, Justin Martyr quoted from John 3:3-5.

Two fragments of the Gospel of John, chapter 18, verses 31-33 and 37-38, have been found in Egypt. They belonged to a papyrus codex of the Gospel of John, which circulated around A.D. 130 in that general region. Thus, if copies of the Gospel of John were already circulating in Middle Egypt in the early part of the second century, the original must have been written much earlier. Because the distance between Ephesus, where it was written, and Middle Egypt is very long, the Gospel of John was probably written in the latter half of the first century.

The writings of Ignatius, who was martyred in A.D. 110, shows clearly that he has read the Gospel of John. 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. Thus the Gospel of John was written before A.D. 98.

Two. It was written after A.D. 70.

The apostle John does not repeat what the three other Gospels narrate and he takes for granted that people know the other three Gospels. His purpose was to write especially about those things that were not yet recorded in the other three

Gospels; about things that caused people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah; and about the fact that Jesus Christ is completely divine. Thus the Gospel of John must have been written *after* the other three Gospels were written, thus, after A.D. 63.

In John 21:18-19 Jesus said to Peter, “When you are old you will stretch out your hands and some one else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. This seems to imply that the apostle Peter had already died. Because Paul nowhere mentions the work of the apostle John in Asia Minor, it seems that the apostle Paul had also died. Thus the Gospel of John was certainly written after A.D. 67. In the Gospel of John, the Jews have become the confirmed enemies of the Christian Church. Also the fall of Jerusalem is no longer mentioned, probably because several years had elapsed since it occurred. Thus the Gospel of John was probably written some years after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Three. 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.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read John 1-21. Next week we will introduce the book John - part 2.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on www.dota.net

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