

# GOSPEL OF JOHN

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**Approximate date:** mid-to-late 80s C.E.

**Time period:** need to establish a doctrinal Gospel independent of the Synoptics (Mark, Matthew, Luke), focused on the relationship of Yeshua the Son to God the Father, and Yeshua to His Disciples and followers

**Author:** the Apostle John

**Location of author:** Ephesus

**Target audience and their location:** largely non-Jewish Believers in Asia Minor, and eventually throughout the Roman Empire

**People:**

Yeshua the Messiah, John the Immerser/the Baptist, Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael, (son of) Joseph, Nicodemus, a Samaritan woman, Judas (the son of Simon Iscariot), Lazarus, Mary and Martha, Thomas (Didymus), Caiphas, Greeks, Malchus, Annas, Pontius Pilate, Barabbas, Mary (wife of Cleopas), Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea

**People mentioned:**

Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jacob, Joseph, David, Abraham

**Places:**

Jerusalem, Bethany, Jordan, Galilee, Bethsaida, Cana, Capernaum, Aenon, Salim, Judea, Samaria, Sychar, Bethesda, Tiberias, Mount of Olives, Pool of Siloam, Solomon's Colonnade, Bethany, Ephraim, Kidron Valley, Stone Pavement (Gabbatha), Golgotha, Sea of Tiberias

**Places mentioned:**

Bethlehem

**Key Themes and Events:**

Yeshua the Messiah is the Word of God incarnated in human flesh / John the Immerser is sent to testify concerning Yeshua / Yeshua brings light to a dark world / John the Immerser is questioned about who he is; he denies being the Messiah / John testifies about the immersion of Yeshua / Yeshua begins to call followers to Himself / Philip testifies that Yeshua was written about by Moses / Yeshua changes water into wine at Cana / Yeshua clears the Temple complex of the moneychangers / Yeshua tells Nicodemus that he must be born again / John the Immerser testifies about the work of Yeshua / Yeshua speaks to a Samaritan woman at a well about the coming

Messiah / the Disciples question Yeshua about His involvement with the Samaritan woman / many Samaritans believe in Yeshua / Yeshua heals an official's son in Galilee / Yeshua tells a lame man at the pool of Bethesda to get up and walk / Yeshua enrages certain Jews for "breaking" the Sabbath and calling Himself the Son of God / Yeshua asks His critics to find Him written about in the Torah of Moses / Yeshua feeds the five thousand / Yeshua walks on the Sea of Galilee / Yeshua declares Himself to be the Bread of Life / many desert Yeshua because they cannot handle His teachings / Yeshua goes to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles / Yeshua admonishes the crowds to make righteous judgments / the people in Jerusalem demonstrate mixed responses to Yeshua's claims / the religious leaders reject Yeshua's teachings without considering them [ / Yeshua encounters a woman caught in adultery, admonishing her to sin no more / ] Yeshua says His testimony is a valid one, as His other witness is the Father / Yeshua admonishes His followers to have the faith of Abraham / Yeshua refers to some of His followers as children of the Devil / Yeshua declares His pre-existence and that He saw Abraham / some of those present pick up stones to kill Yeshua / Yeshua heals a blind man with mud and saliva / some Pharisees criticize Yeshua for healing on the Sabbath / the blind man who was healed believes in Yeshua / Yeshua declares Himself to be the Good Shepherd / Yeshua observes *Chanukah* or the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem / Yeshua declares that He and His Father are one / Yeshua raises Lazarus from the dead / the Sanhedrin is disturbed that Yeshua's actions may cause the Romans to do terrible things to the Jewish establishment / Yeshua is anointed at Bethany by Mary, and commends her for it / Yeshua enters into Jerusalem triumphantly on a donkey / Yeshua declares that "the time" has come / many Jews continue in their disbelief toward Yeshua / Yeshua washes the Disciples' feet prior to their Passover meal together / Yeshua predicts His betrayal at the meal / Yeshua tells Peter he will deny Him / Yeshua comforts His Disciples and tells them He is the only way to the Father / Yeshua tells His Disciples the Holy Spirit will come to them after He is gone / Yeshua declares Himself as the true vine, admonishing His Disciples to continue in His love / Yeshua converses with His Disciples about the hardships they will face for following Him / Yeshua prays for Himself and those who would come after Him / Judas leads a group of soldiers to arrest Yeshua / Peter cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant, only to be reattached by Yeshua / Yeshua is taken before Annas / Peter denies Yeshua the first time / Yeshua is interrogated by the high priest / Peter denies Yeshua the second and third times / Yeshua goes before Pontius Pilate, who believes Him not guilty of breaking Roman law / Yeshua is mocked and beaten by Roman soldiers / Pilate reluctantly allows Yeshua to be condemned, at the insistence of the crowds / Yeshua is painfully crucified / Yeshua's death fulfills key prophecies / Yeshua is buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea / Yeshua resurrects from the dead / Simon Peter, having gone into the empty tomb, is perplexed / Mary Magdalene encounters the resurrected Yeshua / Yeshua appears to His Disciples / Thomas does not believe Yeshua's claim to be resurrected, until He can feel His wounds / Yeshua tells His Disciples to catch fish, and a huge load is caught / Yeshua tells Peter to serve His followers and love them as He has demonstrated / the author attests to many more miracles and mighty deeds of Yeshua's that could have been recorded

**Key Scriptures:** John 1:1-3; 15:13; 20:30-31 / **The Prologue** (1:1-18); **Introductory Events** (1:19-2:12); **The Public Ministry** (2:13-12:50); **The Passion and Resurrection Narratives** (13:1-21:25)<sup>1</sup>

**Theological Summary:** The Gospel of John definitely stands out among the four Gospels, and certainly has a special place in the hearts of many Bible readers. John is one of the most significant texts in all of the writings of the Apostolic Scriptures, especially for formulating and defending theology. The Fourth Gospel also has an important place in understanding the history of emerging Christianity in the Second Century, as “The oldest extant portion of NT writings is a papyrus fragment (P<sup>52</sup>) containing bits of John 18 and dating from the first half of the 2nd century. John is well represented in other papyri, including such witnesses as P<sup>66</sup> and P<sup>75</sup>” (*ABD*).<sup>2</sup> The oldest fragments available of the Apostolic Scriptures come from the Gospel of John, and attest to how widely it was used. “The fourth gospel does not explicitly assert its author’s name: like the Synoptics, it is formally anonymous. As far as we can prove, the title ‘According to John’ was attached as soon as the four canonical gospels began to circulate together” (Carson and Moo).<sup>3</sup> The often-quoted John 3:16 summarizes the message of the Fourth Gospel quite thoroughly: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

That John the son of Zebedee was the author of the Fourth Gospel was established in early Church history, but this has surely been challenged in the more modern era. It is generally agreed among conservatives today that the author of the Fourth Gospel was John the son of Zebedee,<sup>4</sup> the brother of James, and one of the original Twelve Disciples. Internally from the text we see the attestation, “we saw His glory” (1:14), and associated with this can be the various “we” statements appearing in 1 John 1:1-4.<sup>5</sup> The author of the Fourth Gospel does claim to have been among a company of persons who had personally seen the Lord Yeshua. John the son of Zebedee was among the inner circle of Yeshua’s Twelve Disciples, being present at Yeshua’s Transfiguration (Mark 9:2; Matthew 17:1; Luke 9:28), and His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to His trial (Mark 14:33; Matthew 26:37). John is mentioned only twice in the Book of Acts, being present with Peter in Acts 4:1-22, and being sent to Samaria in Acts 8:14-15. According to early Church tradition, John escaped the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and spent his remaining years in Ephesus, although he did experience a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 348-350.

<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Kysar, “John, the Gospel of,” in *ABD*, 3:913; cf. M.M. Thompson, “John, Gospel of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 370; Craig R. Koester, “John, Gospel of,” in *EDB*, 724.

<sup>3</sup> Carson and Moo, 229.

<sup>4</sup> L. Morris, “John, Gospel According to,” in *ISBE*, 2:1098-1100; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 252-260; Carson and Moo, pp 230-246.

<sup>5</sup> “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Yeshua the Messiah. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete” (1 John 1:1-4).

period in exile on the island of Patmos where he was shown the material in the Book of Revelation.

The author of the Fourth Gospel is referred to in the text as being “the disciple whom Yeshua loved” (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). Was this actually John the son of Zebedee? “We should not pass over the curious fact that in this Gospel John and his brother James are never mentioned. The Synoptists make it clear that they were prominent in the apostolic band” (Morris, *ISBE*).<sup>6</sup> Seeing a reference to “the sons of Zebedee” (21:2) is about as close as one gets to seeing John actually mentioned in this Gospel. Genuine Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel was believed by all of the Church Fathers,<sup>7</sup> most notably Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. Irenaeus indicated in the late Second Century, “John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia” (*Against Heresies* 3.1).<sup>8</sup> Affirmations of Johannine authorship of this Gospel and John’s residence in Ephesus are witnessed in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* 3.23.1-4; 4.14.2-6. It is safe to say that Irenaeus had learned about the authorship of the Fourth Gospel from Polycarp, who himself had been tutored from John and learned about Yeshua from him (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.20.5-8).

Liberals have been the foremost among those to challenge genuine Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel, and in so doing they have to disregard all ancient Christian traditions which attest to it. While this does not always mean that the truth of the Fourth Gospel is disregarded, if John the son of Zebedee was not the original author of this text, then who was it? The most frequently suggested alternative candidate is that the author was an independent John the Elder from Ephesus,<sup>9</sup> possibly referred to by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.6). Yet, various Biblical scholars have contested the existence of a John the Elder/Presbyter from Ephesus.<sup>10</sup> Others who are proposed for the authorship of the Fourth Gospel include Lazarus (11:3, 5).<sup>11</sup> A fair assessment for the Fourth Gospel’s authorship, which denies genuine Johannine involvement, is that “the Beloved Disciple...is a person who heard and followed Jesus, although he was not one of the Twelve...He exercised a role of leadership in one group of early Christian congregations” (Thompson).<sup>12</sup> According to this, perhaps one of Yeshua’s closest disciples, outside of the Twelve, was responsible for composing the Fourth Gospel. And, given the fact that John (*Yochanan*, יְהוֹנָתָן or *Iōannēs*, Ἰωάννης) was a common name among First Century Jews, a certain John the Elder/Presbyter could have had his name associated with this text. There are conservative interpreters that one will find, intermittently at times, who will be sympathetic to such a scenario. The idea that a John the Elder/Presbyter was the author of the Fourth Gospel (even if his existence is a

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<sup>6</sup> Morris, “John, Gospel According to,” in *ISBE*, 2:1099.

<sup>7</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 269-272; Carson and Moo, pp 229-231.

<sup>8</sup> *BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers*.

<sup>9</sup> J.N. Sanders, “John, Gospel of,” in *IDB*, 2:945; Morris, “John, Gospel According to,” in *ISBE*, 2:1103.

<sup>10</sup> Morris, “John, Gospel According to,” in *ISBE*, 2:1103; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 278-281; Carson and Moo, pp 233-234.

<sup>11</sup> Kysar, “John, the Gospel of,” in *ABD*, 3:919; Koester, “John, Gospel of,” in *EDB*, 723.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, “John, Gospel of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 370.

bit hypothetical), and not the son of Zebedee, is preferable to the name John being associated with the text entirely by arbitrary means.

Many conservatives are agreed that the Gospel of John was composed in the mid-to-late 80s C.E., and was written around the vicinity of Ephesus.<sup>13</sup> Much of what perhaps guides conservative exegesis of the Fourth Gospel is seen in its closing word, "And there are also many other things which Yeshua did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written" (21:25). While liberals think that John is an entirely independent work that portrays teachings of Yeshua that are different than the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John is intended to be another witness to Yeshua's ministry, and its claim that Yeshua did many more things that have not been recorded in any human works, cannot be ignored. "John has a good deal to say about a variety of topics which receive little attention in the Synoptics" (Morris, *ISBE*).<sup>14</sup> The statement of Luke 1:1 need not be overlooked either: "many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us." A conservative like Morris guides us,

"[T]he apostle John, like other early Christians, preached the gospel. He may have written down some of the 'gospel' he preached and made it available to other people. Like every preacher, he would have used some sermons more often than others...In due course he worked up some of the signs and discourses and other material which seemed to him important and thus produced a fuller account of the 'gospel'" (*ISBE*).<sup>15</sup>

Guthrie's thought is also quite poignant and useful:

"If the three synoptics were already in circulation and were accepted as authentic accounts, it would need an author of no mean authority to introduce a gospel differing from them so greatly in form and substance as the fourth gospel. The only intelligible hypothesis is that an apostle was directly responsible for it, either as author or main witness...The best that can be supposed is that the [ancient] churches generally assumed that an apostle was author."<sup>16</sup>

In academic study, one will certainly see a variance of opinions present as to what degree the Gospel of John, and the three Synoptics of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, should be employed to reconstruct and synthesize an account of the ministry, actions, and teachings of the Messiah.<sup>17</sup>

There is undoubtedly a First Century Jewish character to the Gospel of John, but the degree to which John bears the signs of being originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic has certainly been debated.<sup>18</sup> Theologians such as C.F. Burney and C.C. Torrey have tried to advocate that the Gospel of John was originally written in Aramaic, but their sentiments have never been received well in the scholastic world at large. A more common perspective seen is, "It would seem a fair conclusion that the author was not unacquainted with Semitic idioms, although he does not allow glaring Semitisms to intrude into his Greek. If the author were the

<sup>13</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 272-275; Carson and Moo, pp 254, 264-267.

<sup>14</sup> Morris, "John, Gospel According to," in *ISBE*, 2:1098.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:1103.

<sup>16</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 266.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Thompson, "John, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 371, 375.

<sup>18</sup> Sanders, "John, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 2:942.

apostle John some Semitic influence would naturally be expected" (Guthrie).<sup>19</sup> "John's Semitic characteristics [may be] attributed to the use of originally Aramaic sources, or to the fact that its author was bilingual, writing in Greek but thinking in Aramaic" (*IDB*).<sup>20</sup> "[I]n all probability Jesus spoke in Aramaic, what He said is reported in Greek...and...there is Aramaic thinking behind [this] Gospel written in Greek" (Morris, *ISBE*).<sup>21</sup> "Modern scholarship has shown little interest in the proposal that the gospel was originally written in Aramaic and then translated into Greek but has tended to believe that the evangelist's Greek was strongly influenced by a Jewish background" (*ABD*).<sup>22</sup> When the Gospel of John was composed, its immediate audience was likely in the vicinity of Ephesus and Asia Minor, possibly even to the seven congregations written to in the Book of Revelation. They would have been a Greek-speaking audience.

For many of today's contemporary, evangelical Christians, the Gospel of John serves as a very deep, spiritual, and perhaps even reflective text. It is true that "There is more of our Lord's teaching about the [Holy] Spirit in this gospel than in any other" (Guthrie; cf. John ch. 3; 4:24; 7:39; 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:8-11, 13-14).<sup>23</sup> In scholastic examination, the inclusion of material in the Fourth Gospel, that does not appear in the three Synoptics, has always been a challenge on various levels for theologians and interpreters.<sup>24</sup> Conservatives like Carson and Moo suggest, "it appears likely that John had read Mark, Luke, and possibly even Matthew, but that in any case he chose to write his own book."<sup>25</sup> While considered to be canonical Scripture, there are questions raised about the narrative of the woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11), and various conservatives do not often consider it original to the Fourth Gospel.<sup>26</sup> The NIV/TNIV sets 7:53-8:11 apart in its text, whereas the RSV has transferred it to a footnote. Carson and Moo, who do not consider 7:53-8:11 to be authentic to John's Gospel, do advise that this material "includes numerous expressions and constructions that are found nowhere in John but that are characteristic of the Synoptic Gospels, Luke in particular."<sup>27</sup> No major doctrines of Messianic faith are challenged, however, by the material in 7:53-8:11.

The message of the Gospel of John does closely focus on the relationship of the Father and the Son. This has given rise to a great deal of discussion and speculation on the material of the Fourth Gospel needing to establish doctrine for the late First Century Messianic community. Some of the content of the Gospel of John is paralleled by that which is seen in the Epistle to the Colossians.<sup>28</sup> While it is something easy to overlook, John 13:1-17:26 is focused on what happened the night before the execution of Yeshua.

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<sup>19</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 337.

<sup>20</sup> Sanders, "John, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 2:942.

<sup>21</sup> Morris, "John, Gospel According to," in *ISBE*, 2:1098.

<sup>22</sup> Kysar, "John, the Gospel of," in *ABD*, 3:915.

<sup>23</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 249.

<sup>24</sup> Sanders, "John, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 2:935-936; Morris, "John, Gospel According to," in *ISBE*, 2:1098; Carson and Moo, pp 257-264.

<sup>25</sup> Carson and Moo, 260.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 273-274.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>28</sup> Sanders, "John, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 2:941-942.

The Gospel of John definitely presents a high Christology of Yeshua,<sup>29</sup> pre-existing the universe (1:1, 14), being one with the Father (10:30), being both Lord and God (20:28), and possessing the authority to execute both judgment and eternal life (5:27; 17:2). One of the major accusations against Yeshua is, He “was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (5:18), and “You, being a man, make Yourself out *to be* God” (10:33). Yeshua is depicted as being fully Divine and fully human, but He is the Son and not the Father. Various “I am” statements of Yeshua (6:35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 28, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1, 5) are frequently thought to be a deliberate connection back to affirmations in the Tanach describing YHWH (Exodus 3:14; cf. Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4), and that Yeshua does identify Himself as God via such a usage.<sup>30</sup>

Liberal readers of the Fourth Gospel have widescale problems with the claim of John 14:6, where the Messiah says “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me,” which is undeniably a statement requiring Yeshua to be **the only means** by which eternal salvation can be attained. Those who hold to a low Christology tend to think that Yeshua only serves as a kind of newer manifestation of the figure of Wisdom (Sophia), as seen in ancient Jewish literature.<sup>31</sup> But, how much of an exact connection between Yeshua and the figure of Wisdom is actually seen, can surely be debated, as the work of Yeshua might be much different than the figure of Wisdom.<sup>32</sup>

The Jewish character of Yeshua is quite strong in John, as the author of the Fourth Gospel demonstrates a familiarity with Second Temple Judaism, and he knew of Messianic speculations from the Tanach (1:21; 7:40-42). This includes references made to various feast days, purification rites (2:6), the status of women (4:27), Sabbath regulations (5:10; 7:22-23), and the common Jewish attitude toward the Samaritans (4:9).<sup>33</sup> “In John the word νόμος [*nomos*], ‘law’ is used only in the same sense as the Hebrew Torah, in contrast to Paul, who occasionally gives it a Greek meaning...Moreover, in the allusions to the law in John there are many indications of the author’s acquaintance with rabbinic usage” (*IDB*).<sup>34</sup> Because of various other issues witnessed in Johannine scholarship, Guthrie is entirely correct to suggest “that the part played by Old Testament ideas has not always been fully realized.”<sup>35</sup>

John’s predominant audience was non-Jewish in Asia Minor, and this is partially seen by the numerous references made in the text concerning “the Jews,” and the explanations given of First Century Jewish customs. A few readers of the Gospel of John think that various

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Kysar, “John, the Gospel of,” in *ABD*, 3:923-924; Carson and Moo, 278.

<sup>30</sup> Consult G.M. Burge, “‘I am’ Sayings,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 354-356.

Burge’s concluding remark is most poignant: “In the many ‘I AM’ sayings Jesus is publicly applying the divine name of God—and God’s authoritative presence, to himself. No prophet or priest in Israelite history would ever have done this. For Judaism it is the most severe christological affirmation of all, leading audiences in the Gospel either to believe in Jesus or accuse him of blasphemy” (*Ibid.*, 356).

<sup>31</sup> J. Martin C. Scott, “John,” in *ECB*, pp 1161-1162.

<sup>32</sup> A useful study in this regard is offered by Ben Witherington III, *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 1995).

<sup>33</sup> Morris, “John, Gospel According to,” in *ISBE*, 2:1100.

<sup>34</sup> Sanders, “John, Gospel of,” in *IDB*, 2:943.

<sup>35</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 248.

statements regarding “the Jews” is anti-Semitic on some level.<sup>36</sup> This is something that various evangelical interpreters have opposed, as “the referent of ‘the Jews’ is ‘the Jews in Judea’ or ‘the Jewish leaders’ or the like” (Carson and Moo),<sup>37</sup> as the first Believers in and followers of Yeshua were all Jewish, including the Apostle John, and surely not anti-Semitic. Claims that the Gospel of John is anti-Semitic, because of various places where “the Jews” are referred to, might be explained on the grounds of how, “If John the son of Zebedee wrote this book while residing in Ephesus, then it might be inferred that he prepared the book for readers in this general part of the empire. But he may have hoped for the widest possible circulation” (Carson and Moo).<sup>38</sup> Referring to things as being of “the Jews” or “Jewish,” might very well be only because of an intended audience under-informed about Judaism.

There have definitely been parallels and associations suggested between the Gospel of John, and material in both the Dead Sea Scrolls<sup>39</sup> and Pseudepigraphal literature.<sup>40</sup> Other potential ancient religious influences, either as influencing John’s message or being refuted by John’s message, have also been proposed at various times.<sup>41</sup> The extent to which there are actually connections, either in terminology or in spiritual themes, to any of this, has also been debated. Liberal expositors, quite disturbingly, have been known to think that there are parallels between the Gospel of John and the Gnostic Nag Hammadi literature,<sup>42</sup> but if there are, it could very well be that the latter are speculating on concepts seen in the former. Gnostic ideas came from a much later period than the presumed window of possibility for the composition of the Fourth Gospel,<sup>43</sup> although “the author” could have “in mind the rising influence of pre-Gnostic thought” (Guthrie).<sup>44</sup> It is historically accurate that the Second and Third Century Christian Church used the Gospel of John to refute Gnosticism, even though proto- or incipient-Gnostic ideas may have been present in the First Century time of its author.

It is hard to evaluate the current Messianic approach to the Gospel of John, aside from it serving as a kind of deep spiritual text for personal reflection, as is seen by many evangelical Christian laypersons. It is safe to say that the Gospel of John has presented various teachers and leaders in our faith community some interesting puzzles to solve, and that some heated discussions and studies involving John are forthcoming.

There is a steadily-growing Messianic difficulty with the presentation of the Last Supper in the Gospel of John, with Yeshua being executed on the Day of Preparation (19:31), when compared to the Synoptics of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Was the Last Supper a Passover *seder*

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. D.N. Smith, “John, Gospel of,” in *IDBSup*, 485; Kysar, “John, the Gospel of,” in *ABD*, 3:918; Thompson, “John, Gospel of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 371-372.

<sup>37</sup> Carson and Moo, 272.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Morris, “John, Gospel According to,” in *ISBE*, 2:1100-1101.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, “John, Gospel of,” in *IDBSup*, 484.

<sup>41</sup> Carson and Moo, pp 254-255.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, “John, Gospel of,” in *IDBSup*, pp 484-485.

<sup>43</sup> Morris, “John, Gospel According to,” in *ISBE*, 2:1100.

<sup>44</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 289.

meal?<sup>45</sup> To argue that the Last Supper was not a Passover *seder*, without some innovative solution, requires readers to assume that one set of witnesses is wrong. Generally speaking, today's Messianic Believers have too high a view of the integrity of Scripture to assume that such a glaring error would be present in the text.<sup>46</sup>

There are contemporary Christian debates over the Gospel of John, suggesting that John presents a kind of supersessionism where the work of Yeshua replaces Israel with the Church, and various Torah practices, with His own salvation work.<sup>47</sup> Properly engaging with these ideas, **while maintaining a steadfastly high view of Yeshua's atoning work**, might be difficult for some Messianics who place the Torah ahead of the Messiah in their spirituality.

Today's broad Messianic movement can struggle with the concept of Yeshua having additional sheep to add to His predominantly Jewish fold, during the time of His ministry (10:16), a definite indication of the good news going out to the nations at large. Concurrent with this, there are definitely degrees of agony present with the implementation of Yeshua's John 17 prayer for unity among His followers. *What does this mean in an increasingly diverse Messianic movement?* None of these, however, are perhaps as critical and vital as the growing debates over the nature of Yeshua present in the Messianic world. While many rightly affirm Yeshua as the Divine Son of God, who pre-existed the universe, who is the "I am," and who is indeed Lord and God—it is not surprising why those who believe Him to only be a supra-human agent of the Father<sup>48</sup> tend to dismiss the Gospel of John as being relevant to the discussion. It is safe to say that the Gospel of John will have a growing importance for Messianic Believers who affirm Yeshua as the Divine One.

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 310-314; Kysar, "John, the Gospel of," in *ABD*, 3:926; Koester, "John, Gospel of," in *EDB*, 724.

<sup>46</sup> Consult the author's article "The Last Seder and Yeshua's Passover Chronology," appearing in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics. It is argued there that the Last Supper meal of Yeshua was indeed a Passover *seder*, but that it was deliberately held early because of emergency circumstances, with Yeshua's arrest and execution to soon follow.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Sanders, "John, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 4:942-943; Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," in Wayne G. Strickland, ed., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp 372-373.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Thompson, "John, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 376-377.

Tenney, Merrill C. "The Gospel of John," in *EXP*, 9:3-203.

Thompson, M.M. "John, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 368-383.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON JOHN:

- 1. Compared to the three Synoptics of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, what do you think makes John's Gospel unique?**
- 2. Of all the teachings in John, which one would you like to study and examine in more detail?**
- 3. How significant does the Divinity of Yeshua feature throughout the Gospel of John?**
- 4. Have you considered the significance of John chs. 13-17, a sizable portion of this Gospel, pertaining to the final hours of Yeshua's ministry before His arrest and execution?**
- 5. Having just surveyed the text of John, how much of an emphasis does it place on the love of God as demonstrated through Yeshua's example for us?**

## REFLECTION ON JOHN'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

*Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Gospel of John:*