The Gospel of John:

A Biographical Sketch

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Abstract

This paper identifies and explores the Gospel of John in the Holy Bible. The paper will discuss the gospel's author, author's background/profession, and period the gospel was written. The paper will go on to examine the intended audience, purpose, relative themes, and historical influence on the writer, writing style, and readers. Additionally, this paper will discuss the later life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and his interactions with the Apostle John.

Key words: Holy Bible, Gospels, Gospel of John, Jesus Christ, The Messiah, Apostle John, Disciples, Crucifixion, Resurrection.

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Introduction

The Holy Bible is one of the most read and well know books in the world. Through the Old and New Testaments, the Holy Bible details the creation of the world, trials and successes of God's people, and the birth and death of Jesus Christ the son of God. The New Testament begins with a collection of books known as the Gospels. The Gospels contain the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In reviewing the book of John, an individual is introduced to the adult life of Jesus as seen through the eyes of the Apostle John who is believed to be the author as opposed to John the Baptist or another John in that period (Benware, 1995).

The historical background also influences its context leading the writer's purpose and style. Many historians and theologians believe that the Apostle John is most likely the author of the Gospel of John due to testimony of ancient witnesses like Iraneaeus and Theophilus of Antioch (Benware, 1995). These men lived between A.D 115-202 and Theophilus stated he had firsthand knowledge of John (Benware, 1995). It is likely that this is the period that John lived, even though the modern world may never know the specific years or dates of his life. The Gospel of John speaks about the Apostle John seeing events in the life and times of Jesus that support the fact that he was an eye witness and able to recount what he saw and put it into words for placement in the scriptures (John 2:23; 4:39-42; 8:30; 9:38; 12:11, 42 NIV).

John the Apostle, was a Jewish man who was one the sons of Zebedee and Salome and worked alongside his father in a fisherman business (Matthew 4:21-22 NIV; Mark 14:40-41 NIV). As John and his brother James fished in the Sea of Galilee they worked alongside Peter and Andrew (Mark 1:20 NIV) who later also would be disciples of Jesus Christ. The Apostle John's background as a fisherman and ethnic and social identity as a Jewish man were key as he navigated life with Jesus Christ, the disciples, and wrote the Gospel of John. As he was Jewish

he was familiar with customs and often described them for the readers benefit in the Gospel of John. These detailed descriptions of Jewish customs and ceremonies leads a reader to believe that the book was written in an area where many Jews were not living or frequenting much, like Asia Minor (John 2:13, 4:9, 19:31 NIV, Benware, 2003). Reading the Gospel of John, the reader can view that the gospel's tone, and content is indicative of the professional and social background of John as a fisherman and Apostle; while covering the basic themes of Christ's deity, Christ's ministry and salvation through Christ.

The Gospel's Structure

The Gospel of John is a book with twenty-one chapters that discusses the life and times of Jesus Christ. The Apostle John's intended audience for his evangelistic message were individual's not likely familiar with Jesus Christ or already following him. His purpose was to evangelize Christ's deity, Christ's ministry, and salvation through Christ. John was very deliberate in creating the Gospel of John. This gospel differs from the three other gospels in the New Testament. It differs because this gospel is written from the perspective of evangelism; while confirming that Jesus is Lord. This is supported by John's statement "But these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31 NIV).

Christ's Deity

This gospel dives directly into Christ's deity and established that he is the individual who is the Messiah (John 1:1-3; 1:18; 5:17-18 NIV). Through-out this gospel Jesus is shown to be not just a man but the true son of God. Apostle John states that, "In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." For this reason, they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:17-18 NIV). He further goes on to say

“that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (John 5:23 NIV). However, if the reader needed an additional prompt that Jesus Christ was indeed God’s son and the true deity spoke about in the Old Testament the Gospel of John states that Jesus said, “before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58 NIV). These verses not only informed the masses of his arrival, but these verses established that he was indeed the son of God who replaced Moses of the Old Testament as the leader of Gods people.

Christ’s Ministry

Christ’s ministry is introduced to the world in four stages in the Gospel of John. The writer, Paul Benware (2003) best describes these stages as The Ministry of Presentation to the Nation (John 2:1-12:50 NIV), the Ministry of Instruction to the Disciples (John 12:1-17:26 NIV), the Ministry of Redemption to the World (John 18:1-19:42 NIV) and the Ministry of Revelation to the Believers (John 20:1-21:25 NIV). In the first stage as Jesus is presented to the masses he is shown as a person living his life with a mission at hand to share God’s word and to bring people to walk with God. He is seen attending Jewish festivals and being among the poor and needy. He is not shown living with the wealthy or being high and mighty. He is seen as a person not looking for fame but purely on a mission to do his Fathers work. In the story of the man who had been infirm for 38 years in Jerusalem who Jesus healed by a pool, Jesus healed not for fame but to show the love and grace of God. This is evident because once Jesus healed the ill man, Jesus simply walked away into the crowd. When the man was asked who healed him he did not know (John 5:1-14 NIV).

As time progressed and Jesus ministry moved through the land he and his twelve disciples did the work of the Lord (Bock, 2002). As John records in the Gospel, Jesus Christ performed several miracles that not only demonstrated that he was indeed the Messiah, but truly

showed God's love and compassion for mankind. John reports that Jesus turned water to wine during a wedding celebration when wine was needed (John 2:1-11 NIV). Even as Jesus Christ, performed miracles and visually gave humanity a look into the love of God and advertised his ministry still many people did not believe he was indeed God's son. They looked at his living among the poor as something the Messiah would or should not do. Therefore Jesus, himself went on to say, "Even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." (John 10:38 NIV).

Salvation through Christ

The Gospel of John discusses the life of Jesus and goes on to discuss his humiliation and suffering due to his betrayal by Judas his disciple and his crucifixion, death, and resurrection (John 18:1-19:16; 19:17-42; 20:1-21:25 NIV). Moreover, the Gospel of John goes on to discusses how a person obtains salvation. The Apostle John is clear that salvation and eternal life is a gift to be received by those who believe and have faith in Jesus Christ (John 20:31; 14:16 NIV). John discusses that through prayer and a relationship with Jesus Christ one can receive whatever they ask for and feel the relief of his assistance (John 14:14 NIV). John goes on to detail that it is through belief and faith and not works that mankind receives salvation, because Jesus Christ ultimately died on the cross for the worlds sins and paid for redemption (John 19:30 NIV).

Historical Significance

The words of the Apostle John in the Gospel of John have great historical significance, because here is where the world sees that salvation comes through Christ and the price he paid on the cross (Bock, 2002). This directly contradicts the words of other leaders of the time (religious and political) who believed that salvation was something bought with silver or gold or worked for by hand. John's words established that those listening could hear God's truth for

themselves and become part of God's plan by following Jesus Christ just like the twelve disciples.

The Apostle John's words and writing style in the Gospel of John is geared to the people who may have never heard of Jesus Christ (Gentiles) and those who may have heard of Jesus Christ (Jews) but did not believe what they were told. John's words were the start of the evangelical message that the world has today. His words guided people and drew them to the truth without being difficult to understand. He wrote and spoke in the way he lived his life with Jesus; which was in a relatable common non-political manner. His intent was not just to evangelize Christ's deity, Christ's ministry, and salvation through Christ, but to make it understandable so that when his purpose was achieved people had the proper information to make the choice to walk with God. Without the fourth gospel laid out the way John intended Jesus Christ's words and deeds may not have fully been understood or embraced in his time or the modern time. Therefore, John's work is extremely influential, much needed, and essential to the continuation of the knowledge that Christ is Lord and the means to salvation.

Conclusion

The Gospel of John sought to do what John intended. His purpose was to create an evangelistic message establishing Christ's deity; while confirming that Jesus is Lord. In addition to detailing Christ's ministry and informing mankind that salvation is received through Christ and not works or money. John's writing which comes after the other three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John was relatable, structured, detailed, and powerful. He connected the masses to Jesus Christ not as a man but as the true Messiah. The fourth gospel gave a new understanding to who Christ was with a true historical account of someone who lived and walked with Jesus. John's work was highly effective and set forth the evangelical message that grew what is now known as the Christian Church.

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