

Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries

The Apostle John

Lesson #7 for August 16, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 8:21,22; Mark 10:35-45; 1-3 John.

1. John is perhaps the most unique of the 12 disciples that we know about. What was John doing when he was first mentioned in the Bible? (John 1:35-42) There is some evidence to suggest that John might have been a cousin of Jesus. (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1) How might that have affected his relationship to the Lord?
2. Why do you think the Gospel of John is so different from the three synoptic Gospels? What do you appreciate most about the Gospel of John? The Gospel of John gives us the only full chronology of the ministry of Jesus. The other Gospels focus only on the year He spent in Galilee and the subsequent year in preparation for the final Passover and "the final week" while John includes the time Jesus ministered in Jerusalem and Judea as well as more about "the final week." At what point in his lifetime did John do most of his writing? What is the very last thing we know about the apostle John? In his later years, he was active in the church at Ephesus. He may have returned to Ephesus after the release from his banishment to Patmos where he had written Revelation.
3. What do we know about John's activities in his later life? There are a number of apocryphal gospels and letters that include stories about John! Some of them are unbelievable.
4. How many books of the New Testament were written by John and in what chronological order were they written? John wrote the Gospel of John, the three epistles, and the book of Revelation. What length of time transpired between the events of John 1 and the calling of the four fishermen as recorded in Mark 1:14-20; Matthew 4:12-22; and Luke 4:14,15; 5:1-11? What do you think Jesus and John were doing during that time? Were they together? Where was Jesus working at the time? Peter, Andrew, James and John accompanied Jesus during some of His ministry in Judea. (See handout, "Who Was John?" and *ST*, January 8, 1885 par. 3)
5. Near the end of his life, John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos. From there, he wrote the book of Revelation. Why was John exiled to Patmos? (See handout, "Who Was John?")
6. Read John 18:15-17. Almost everyone knows what Peter did in the courtyard during the trial of Jesus. Was John there too? What was John doing? (See handout, "Who Was John?")
7. Why do you suppose Jesus called James and John the "sons of thunder"? (Mark 3:17)
8. Did the four fishermen who left their nets and followed Jesus have any idea what they were getting into? Had they already spent time with Jesus? Was there already a firm foundation for trusting Jesus? Were they hoping to be part of an earthly kingdom?
9. Why do you think James and John asked their mother to plead with Jesus for better positions in His kingdom? (Mark 10:35-37; Matthew 20:20,21) Or did she convince them to ask Jesus for better positions?
10. Read Luke 9:51-55. Compare different versions. Why do you think they got such a rude reception from the Samaritans?
11. At the beginning of his Gospel, John referred to Jesus as the *Logos*. What do you think he had in mind when he used that term? To the Greeks everything in this material world was imperfect. Only the "mind of God" could represent the "real" and the "perfect." They called the material world "ethereal" but called the "real" world the *Logos*. John wanted to introduce his Gentile believers to the source and essence of that "real" world, Jesus Christ—the real Creator, Sustainer, and Savior of humans. But he went one step further and announced that this "real" Man who was also God become human! His story is the story of Jesus of Nazareth.
12. Why do you think John started the story recorded in his Gospel way back before there were any creatures in this universe—even before creation? Why do you think John as a Gospel writer left out so

much of what the other Gospel writers had included and, by contrast, put in so much that they had left out? John wrote about 30 years after the other Gospels were written. Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed, hope of a Jewish nation conquering the Romans had been abandoned, the Jews were scattered, and the Jews had fully rejected Christ as being their Messiah. John gave that conclusion in John 1. Stories that might even be “inflammatory” to the Jews were included in John’s Gospel.

13. Read John 1:1-14. When were these words written? Why do you think John chose to start out like that?
14. In his Gospel John never referred to himself by name. He called himself “the beloved disciple,” or “that other disciple,” etc. What should we learn from that? (John 13:23; 18:16; 20:2-8; 21:7,20) The form of the Greek word, “beloved,” implies that John was the disciple that Jesus “kept on loving.” In other words, John felt completely unworthy of Jesus’ love. But, incredible as it seemed to him, and despite his failings, Jesus kept on loving him.
15. John’s Gospel includes a number of very famous statements made by Jesus. Many of those statements deal with our relationship to Jesus and eternal life. God sent His Son so that we might have eternal life. (John 3:16) Jesus Himself is the Bread of Life. (John 6:35) His words give life. (John 6:63) He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (John 14:6) And to know Him is life eternal. (John 17:3) We live in an ephemeral world where our lives could come to an end at any moment. Jesus invites us into a relationship that means nothing less than eternal life. Is that relationship real to you? What difference does it make in your life?
16. In John’s day there was a growing heresy among Christians called by the broad name of Gnosticism. Gnostics had various heretical ideas about Jesus. The most prominent one was that idea held by a group known as the Docetists, namely, that Jesus only appeared to be human. They taught that Jesus was one of a large number of *emanations* of God that had certain miraculous powers but were far from divine themselves. Another group of Gnostics, the followers of Cerinthus, believed that Jesus was a very good human being who eventually was “adopted,” in effect, into the family of God.
17. John met those rising heresies with very strong words saying, “We write to you about the Word of life, which has existed from the very beginning. We have heard it, and we have seen it with our eyes; yes, we have seen it, and our hands have touched it.” (1 John 1:1, *GNB*) John confirmed that Jesus was absolutely a human being! But He was at the same time, absolutely, completely, and fully God!
18. Jesus is the only perfect human being who ever lived on this earth. But the life of John gives just about as good an example as could be given of the miraculous transforming powers of a relationship with Jesus Christ—what it can do to a person’s life. John lived to be very old and gave a continuing, glorious witness to his Cousin, his Friend, his Savior, and his everlasting Lord.
19. Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit desperately need witnesses like John living in our day who will stand up for the truth no matter what happens to them—to be the witnesses that can finish the gospel work and allow Them to come back again to rescue Their faithful children from this earth!

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