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WORDS FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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Dear ones,

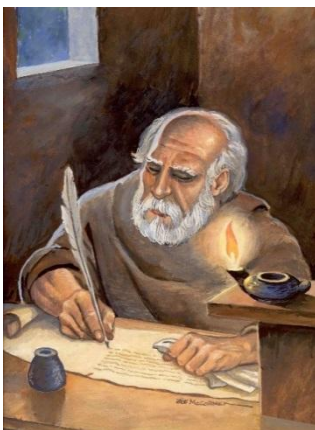
I have been in a long period of what John Bunyan, in Pilgrim's Progress, called "the Slough of Despond." I guess it was partly the result from my nearly fatal brain injury 2 1/2 years ago. I have finished two years of neuro-therapy, have passed an extremely difficult exam and am again allowed to drive, which is a milestone in what is left of my life. To cap off the long period in the "Slough of Despond," I was very sick with a form of dysentery for two months, in which I couldn't eat, didn't want to eat, and grew progressively weaker until I hit the bottom, physically and emotionally, until I was so weak that it was dangerous for me to walk without support.

That night, realizing that I was at the end of myself, I simply had a talk with God, telling Him that I didn't think I could go any farther. The next day I thought I was a little stronger than the day before. And the next day I knew that I was a little stronger than the day before. And, in 10 days from that night at the bottom, I was healed, in my body and in my attitude, and I have been doing better each day since. I am beginning to go back to work on my unfinished book that stopped 2 1/2 years ago when I went into a coma and have been continuing to make the final edit of my Survey of the Bible. Family members tell me that I'm close to being back to where I was 3 years ago.

Thank you for your prayers; they brought me through.

--Tom

p.s. The article below is taken from the Survey of the Bible; it is the Introduction to the Gospel According to John.



### The Gospel According to Saint John

As we have seen in the Introduction to the Gospels, John's Gospel is in a category all its own. Like the three synoptic gospels, it tells the basic story of the life and ministry of Jesus, but with its own, singular emphasis. Whereas Matthew and Luke concentrate on the

teachings of Jesus, and Mark emphasizes the deeds of Jesus, John emphasizes his divinity. For this reason, the validity of John's Gospel is attacked by skeptical, materialist scholars more than the other three gospels combined. The divinity of Jesus is made clear in the synoptic gospels; in John, however, it is the theme.

Repeatedly, in John, we find Jesus declaring himself to be the pre-existing, eternal Creator, the Christ, the Messiah, the only Redeemer. In fact, in John there are so many declarations of His divinity that, for the sake of brevity, **I cannot even select them all as highlights** in this study guide! Both Matthew and Luke took great care to identify Jesus as the one with legal claim to be the Messiah and King of the Jews; but John took great care to identify Jesus as God--not just King of the Jews, but King of the Cosmos.

**John's Unique Position for Writing His Final Gospel.** In a historical sense, John's great book is different from the other three gospel accounts in that John lived longer than the other three gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke (as well as Peter, Paul, James and Jude, the other authors of New Testament books, and the other 9 of the original apostles). Because of this, John had lived to see the martyrdom of the others, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the persecution and rapid growth of the Church throughout the Roman world in the 1st Century. He almost certainly lived well past the death of Mary the mother of Jesus, who lived with him after the crucifixion in his home in Jerusalem, for she was about 15 years older than John. There can be no doubt that, during those years before her death, John and Mary spent many hours discussing the life and ministry of her divine Son, for she lived with him, and Jesus was the most important conversation topic possible (then and now). He wrote from a vantage point unknown (and probably unimaginable) to the others. John was uniquely qualified and positioned to write his unique book, the final gospel.

But John's gospel is also different in its spirituality. Eusebius, a Roman historian writing in the late 3rd and early 4th Centuries, quoting Clement of Alexandria (2nd Century), wrote: .... *Clement has set down a tradition which he had received from the elders*

*before him, (emphasis mine) in regard to the order of the Gospels, to the following effect. He says that the Gospels containing the genealogies were written first, and that the Gospel according to Mark was composed... inasmuch as he had attended [Peter] from an early period, and remembered what had been said, to write down what had been spoken. On his [Mark's] composing the Gospel, he handed it to those who had made the request to him; which, coming to Peter's knowledge, he neither hindered nor encouraged. But John, the last of all, seeing that that which was corporeal [physical] was set forth in the Gospels [already], on the entreaty of his intimate friends and, inspired by the Spirit, composed a **spiritual** Gospel (emphasis mine).*

Merrill F. Unger has described John's great book as "the deepest and most wonderful book in the New Testament," observing that "in one sense of the word it is simple, direct...yet, in another respect, it is a sublimely profound revelation, fathomed only by the deeply spiritual scholar." Church historian Philip Schaff called this gospel "the most important literary production ever composed." I am not qualified to be mentioned in the same paragraph with Unger and Schaff; however, for whatever it may be worth, with the possible exception of Genesis, I consider John's Gospel to be the most important book ever written. In fact, in terms of providing a window into the spiritual realm, from eternity past to eternity future, and the triune nature of God, Chapters 14-17 would probably qualify for this distinction, without the rest of the book.

**A. Author.** As in the case of the other three gospels, the human author does not identify himself. Unbroken tradition, however, since ancient times, identifies the author as "John the elder," or "John the apostle." He is also referred to as "John the beloved," and his book is sometimes called "the gospel of love." His authorship of his gospel, and the circumstances of his writing it, are also included in the Muratorian Canon (also called the "Muratorian Fragment" because the first part is missing), the earliest known listing of New Testament books, circa 170 AD.

He was the son of Zebedee, and brother of James; he and James were, like their father, prosperous fishermen (they had servants who worked for them), and were partners in fishing with Peter. Like Mark, John seems to give us a not-too-subtle hint at his identity, five times calling himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and "the one who leaned on Jesus' bosom (shoulder/chest)" at the last Passover supper.

It is probable that John was first a disciple of John the Baptist, then was one of the first 5 disciples of Jesus (the unnamed "other" disciple with Andrew in 1:35-42). He was apparently a man of some means (Mark 1:20; John 19:27). Jesus gave him and his brother James the title "sons of thunder"; he must have been a

zealous, dynamic believer, as well as a deeply spiritual man.

After the crucifixion of Jesus, John lived in Jerusalem and cared for Mary until her death, the date of which is not known. It is generally believed that, after Mary's death, and probably following the martyrdom of Paul and Peter in Rome, John moved to Ephesus, circa 68-69 AD. He lived and ministered there for the rest of his life (about 30 years), except for about a year of exile on the island of Patmos, late in his life, 95-96 AD.

**NOTE:** *John probably wrote his gospel originally in Hebrew, while living in Jerusalem, with Mary in his home. It is generally believed that he moved to Ephesus after the martyrdom of Paul and Peter (AD 68 or 69) in order to assume the leadership of the churches of Asia Minor. Ephesus was the center of Paul's area of ministry and was the geographic center of the Church at the time. We know that his move to Ephesus was after 63 AD, for he is not mentioned in Paul's farewell meeting with the elders from Ephesus on the return leg of his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey; and, in that meeting, Paul speaks with the authority of the overseer. It was there that John wrote the Greek version of his gospel and his three epistles. He wrote Revelation either on Patmos (where he received the revelation) or after his return to Ephesus. His was the voice of the last of the original apostles to be silenced by death; and, during those closing decades of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, his was the dominant voice. According to Philip Schaff, "If it were not for the writings of John, the last 30 years of the First Century would be almost an entire blank."*

### Milestones

**Died:** 30 April 2019 – Chasity Thomas, wife of Jay Thomas, granddaughter-in-law of June & Jerry Thomas, daughter-in-law of Jeff and Valeria Thomas, and mother of Jay Jr. (6) and Kaylee Lynn Thomas (4).



*Words for Living Ministries Office*

### A FINAL WORD

Treasure and use each day as if it were your last, and never give up hope; God has a limitless supply of new beginnings, and He makes beautiful things out of broken pieces.