

106. What occupation did John follow, prior to his call to the apostleship?
107. Where in the apostolic writings do we find the account of John's call to the apostleship?
108. By what particular designation does John frequently allude to himself in his own writings?
109. With what special group of the Apostles was John identified?
110. What special designation did Jesus Himself give to James and John?
111. What additional facts are given us in the New Testament writings about the Apostle John?
112. What additional information do we have regarding the last years of John's life and ministry?

Lesson Sixty-three

**JOHN'S TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS
OF NAZARETH (Concluded)**

Scripture Reading: John 1: 1-18; 1 John 1: 1-4.

Scriptures to Memorize: "This is the disciple that beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true" (John 21:24). "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ: and these things we write, that our joy may be made full" (1 John 1: 1-4).

113. Q. What do we learn about John from his own writings?

A. We learn from John's writings that he was by temperament a mystic.

(1) By a *mystic* is meant a person capable of discerning through meditation and submission deep spiritual truths and of rightly interpreting profound spiritual experiences. That this trait was inherent in John is obvious from his writings, and the possession of it may have been the prime reason why he was divinely called to the apostleship. (2) This faculty was no doubt intensified, too, by his intimate association with Jesus. It enabled him at all times to correctly interpret the Master's inmost thoughts (cf. John 1:50-51; 2:11, 17, 22; 4:13-14; 6:5-6; 6:51; 7:37-39, etc.). (3) It was this faculty, too, which made John the outstanding interpreter of the mysteries of our faith (cf. Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:4, 6:19; Col. 2:2; 1 Tim. 3:9). "He rivals, even surpasses some would say, Paul as the greatest interpreter of Christ. His Gospel is the greatest book of all time in its profundity and spiritual elevation" (A. T. Robertson, *System Bible, Historical Digest*, p. 24).

114. Q. What does John himself say with regard to the trustworthiness of his own writings?

A. He expressly declares that his testimony is that of an eyewitness and therefore trustworthy.

1 John 1:1-4, "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our own eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also," etc. John 21:24—"This is the disciple that beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true." Rev. 1:2—"his servant John, who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw" (this last scripture alludes of course to what is written in the book of Revelation). Thus

John leaves us with no uncertainty as to his trustworthiness as a witness of Jesus Christ.

115. Q. What is the general theme of John's Gospel?

A. The general theme of John's Gospel is: The Deity of Jesus.

John portrays the *God side* of the Person known historically as Jesus of Nazareth (in striking contrast, by the way, with Luke's portrayal of His *human side*). John pictures Jesus as a Person *infinitely more and greater than an ordinary human being*. He discloses the identity of the Person known historically as Jesus of Nazareth, and describes His person and work, under such meaningful designations as the following: (1) *The Word of God*, who was before all things and through whom all things were created; The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:1-14). (2) *The Only Begotten* from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:18). (3) *The Lamb of God* that taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29, 36). (4) *The Only Begotten Son of God* (John 1:18, 3:16). (5) *The Fountain of Living Water* (John 4:13-14). (6) *The Bread of Life* which came down out of heaven (John 6:51). (7) *The Light of the World* (John 8:12), the true Light which lighteth every man (John 1:9). (8) *The I am* (John 8:58-59; cf. Exo. 3:14). (9) *The Good Shepherd* who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:7-16). (10) *The Resurrection and The Life* (John 11:25-26). (11) *The Way, The Truth, and The Life* (John 14:6). (12) *The True Vine* (John 15:1-7). (13) *The Christ, The Son of God* (John 20:30-31; cf. Matt. 16:16). Note also the following names as used by John, in the book of Revelation, to describe the glory of Christ in Heaven: (1) *Jesus Christ . . . The Faithful Witness, The Firstborn of the Dead, and The Ruler of the Kings of the Earth* (Rev. 1:5). (2) *The Alpha and the Omega, saith The Lord God . . . The Almighty* (Rev. 1:8). (3) *The First and the Last . . . The Living One* (Rev. 1:17-18). (4) *Holy, Holy,*

Holy . . . The Lord God, The Almighty (Rev. 4:8). (5) *The Lion that is of the Tribe of Judah, The Root of David* (Rev. 5:5). (6) *The Word of God* (Rev. 19:13). (7) *King of kings, and Lord of lords* (Rev. 19:16). (8) *The Root and The Offspring of David; The Bright, The Morning Star* (Rev. 22:16). It is impossible for the human intellect to grasp the full significance and sublimity of these Names. Suffice it to say that John, in all his writings, portrays the Person known historically as Jesus of Nazareth, in terms of *Incarnate Deity*.

116. Q. What are the outstanding characteristics of John's Gospel?

A. The outstanding characteristics of John's Gospel are: (1) its eternal outlook, (2) its spiritual elevation, (3) its profundity, and (4) its sublimity.

(1) *Its eternal outlook.* John presents the Person whom we know as Jesus, not with special reference to the *past* (as Matthew), nor with special reference to the *present* (as Mark), nor yet with special reference to the *future* (as Luke); but with general reference to *eternity*, which includes all past and present and future. He pictures the Redeemer as *The Word* who was with God from eternity, who became incarnate for a time, and who, no matter what His state may be, is *always* "in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18). John is the only New Testament writer who has preserved for us the words of the Intercessory Prayer, in which Jesus said: "Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5). In brief, John presents Jesus in His *eternal* and *pre-existent* and *spiritual* relations with God and the universe. (2) *Its spiritual elevation.* Whereas Matthew, Mark and Luke have much to say about what Jesus did, where He went, and how He acted, John puts the emphasis almost entirely on His *spiritual* teaching. John gives us Jesus' own definition of God and of true worship (John 4:24); His sublimely spiritual Farewell Discourses in the upper room, including

His teaching with regard to the advent and work of the Holy Spirit (chs. 14-17); His discourses on such subjects as The Bread of Life (ch. 6), The Light of the World (ch. 8), The True Children of Abraham (ch. 8), The Shepherd and the Sheepfold (ch. 10), The Vine and the Branches (ch. 15), etc. His is "the spiritual Gospel, abounding in symbolism," replete with references to the Hebrew Scriptures, and stern in its condemnation of those who reject Jesus as the Divine-human Redeemer and the Only Begotten Son of God. (3) *Its profundity*. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke exhibit the teaching of Jesus as simple, and for the most part moral, illustrated by frequent parables and narratives; John exhibits it as doctrinal and *spiritual*, and for the most part without illustration except by an occasional metaphor. The depth of these metaphors, however, cannot be plumbed by the human intelligence. In the teaching of Jesus as recorded by John, the most commonplace things, such as bread, light, a vine and its branches, a shepherd and his flock, etc. are used to illustrate and enforce the most profound spiritual truths. (4) *Its sublimity*. Whereas the Gospel by Matthew is essentially *historical*, and that by Mark eminently *practical*, and that by Luke exquisitely *beautiful*; it is universally conceded that John's Gospel is ineffably *sublime*. As the Gospels surpass all other books, so the first three Gospels are surpassed by John's Gospel. It has been rightly called "the most influential book in all literature" and "the greatest book of all time in its profundity and spiritual elevation."

117. Q. For what purpose was John's Gospel obviously written?

A. John's Gospel was obviously written to present and to preserve the true doctrine of The Person of Jesus Christ.

(1) That this is the design of John's Gospel is clearly indicated in the prologue (John 1:1-18), in which the One whom we know *historically* as Jesus is set forth as a pre-

existent and divine Person. The Word of God, the Creator of the universe, the eternal Interpreter of the nature of God, and the Fountain of light and life. The Word, as the prologue reads, became flesh and dwelt among us (in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth of course, who, in consequence of this mystery of Incarnation, is the only begotten Son of God); and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. The Apostle then, throughout the book, unfolds the Ministry of Jesus as that of the Incarnate Son and His Heavenly Father to mankind. (2) The Apostle's design in giving this presentation of Jesus to the world was obviously to set forth the *true doctrine of the Person of Christ* (as preached by all of the Apostles), as the *Divine-human Redeemer, The Christ the Son of the Living God* (cf. Matt. 16:16), and to refute all heresies which seek to reduce Him to the level of an ordinary human being; also to establish the truth once for all time that the Christian religion is infinitely more than a system of law, ethics, sociology, or philosophy, that it is in fact The Way and The Truth and The Life (John 14:6). (3) This design is expressly confirmed by the Apostle toward the close of His Testimony. "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of his disciples," he says, "which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). Language could not be more explicit.

118. Q. For whom was John's Gospel obviously written?

A. John's Gospel was obviously written for all subsequent ages, and especially for the visible Church.

This we conclude from its *nature* and *design*. It was written evidently to provide the visible Church in all ages with a testimony sufficient to oppose and refute all *heresies* respecting the identity, person and work of the Redeemer; and to supply orthodox Christianity with a means of defense against unbelief in all its forms. Tradi-

tion has it that John wrote his *Gospel* at the request of his fellow disciples and elders of the church at Ephesus.

119. Q. What are John's favorite terms?

A. John's favorite terms are: "Son of God," "light," "life," and "love."

(These terms occur so frequently in John's writings that we need not take the space here to give the numerous Scripture references).

120. Q. When was John's Gospel probably written?

A. John's Gospel was probably written from Ephesus about A.D. 90, or earlier.

By this time Christianity had come into conflict with certain cults and heresies which threatened the purity of the Gospel: (1) the *Nazarenes*, who accepted Christ's supernatural birth but denied His pre-existence; (2) the *Ebionites*, who denied outright the reality of Christ's divine nature and held Him to have been merely man; (3) *Docetic Gnosticism*, which denied the reality of Christ's human body, and held Him to have been an "eon," or sort of angelic spirit between God and man; and (4) *Cerinthian Gnosticism*, which assumed a distinction between the human Jesus (purely human) and the "eon" Christ, which was assumed to have come upon Him at His baptism and to have left Him at the Cross. John evidently wrote his Gospel in refutation of these heresies, and to present the true doctrine of the Person of Christ (*i.e.*, as the God-Man, the Divine-human Redeemer). The same general design is manifest in his Epistles. Cf. 1 John 2:22, 23—"Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, even he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also." 1 John 4:2, 3—"Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God," etc. Cf. also 1 John 1:5-10, 2:4, 2:18-29, 5:1-17; 2 John 9; 3 John 9-12, etc.

**REVIEW EXAMINATION OVER LESSON
SIXTY-THREE**

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