

NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN FROM A DISPENSATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

By Jack W. Langford, September, 1996

These notes form a series of brief outline accounts of different aspects of the Gospel of John from a dispensational perspective. The other three Gospels are called "The Synoptic Gospels" because they are similar in telling the story of Israel's Messiah Who came to offer the Kingdom, which had been prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures, to the Jewish nation.

The Gospel of John is noticeably different; it stands in a class by itself. The Gospel of John reflects upon the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and emphasizes those things which point in an entirely different dispensational direction. Whereas the three Synoptic Gospels look forward to the Messianic Kingdom Age, John looks forward to the present Age of Grace. In fact, the truths that John emphasizes were things Christ spoke that would prepare the apostles and disciples for the spiritual truths that characterize this present Age, in which the Holy Spirit is residing upon the earth in believers.

John was probably the last of the four Gospels that was written. Many things had transpired in the early history of the Christian community by the time John wrote these pages. Christ had promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would bring many things to their remembrance (John 14:26). Many things that were brought to John's remembrance were especially meaningful to the present Church Dispensation. Actually, John records many events in the ministry of Christ which will better accommodate the acceptance (by the Jewish believers, especially) of the new revelations given by the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul was inspired to write of a change from the Law system into "the Dispensation of the Grace of God." This contrast from Law to Grace, and from Jew to Gentile, was revealed to Paul. The Gospel of John very definitely prepares the believers for accepting this revelation, for John will emphasize the same contrast in his Gospel. Therefore, Paul could write—

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if you have heard of the dispensation of the Grace of God which was given me to you-ward: How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote before in few words whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel" (Eph. 3:1-6).

Therefore, these notes will simply point out those distinctive truths that Christ gave in His earthly ministry, which were brought back to John's memory, and which will prepare the disciples, and especially the Jewish brethren, for the coming Dispensation of the Grace of God. These truths will fit perfectly with the distinctive ministry of Paul, and thus give credence to Paul's revelations for this Age of Grace.

I will list these distinctive truths under ten (10) headings—

- I. John will compare and/or CONTRAST Jesus Christ with Moses and the Law.
- II. John will give many DISTINCTIVE TRUTHS directly applicable to this Age.
- III. John will indicate DISPENSATIONAL CHANGES in the making.
- IV. John will emphasize the work and words about THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. John will emphasize personal BELIEF and REGENERATION.
- VI. John will present Christ as the SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.
- VII. John will emphasize the DEITY of Christ and FATHERHOOD of God.
- VIII. John will emphasize GRACE and TRUTH principles.
- IX. John will present a SPIRITUAL KINGDOM which is unworldly.
- X. John will present a HOPE that is Heavenly in nature.

Number I. *The Eight Comparisons and/or Contrasts between Christ and Moses.*

Moses is mentioned six times in Matthew, eight times in Mark, ten times in Luke, but twelve times in the Gospel of John. These 12 occasions are in 8 specific situations wherein the comparison or contrast is made. The purpose of these situations is to nearly always show the superiority of the “Grace” principle over the “Law” principle. These verses should be read in context:

- 1.) John 1:17— "For the Law was given by Moses,
but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."
- 2.) John 1:45— "...of Whom Moses in the Law and the prophets did write,
Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."
- 3.) John 3:14— "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."
- 4.) John 5:46— "Had you believed Moses?
you would have believed Me..."
- 5.) John 6:32— "...Moses did not give you the bread out of heaven,
but My Father gives you the True Bread out of heaven."
- 6.) John 7:22,23— "Moses has given you circumcision...
and on the sabbath you circumcise a man...
I have made a man totally whole on the sabbath."
- 7.) John 8:5— "Now in the Law Moses commanded such to be stoned,
but what do You say?"
- 8.) John 9:28,29— "...thou art His (Christ's) disciple,
but we are Moses' disciples."

To the reader of the Gospel of John, every one of these contrasts will better prepare the understanding to recognize the superiority of the Grace principle through Christ over the Law principle through Moses.

Number II. *Ten references to Distinct Peculiarities Emphasized in this Age.*

- 1.) In John 3— The new birth.
- 2.) In John 4— The worship in Spirit and Truth.
- 3.) In John 6— The Spiritual Bread and Drink.
- 4.) In John 7— The Spiritual Fountain of Living Water.
- 5.) In John 10— The Shepherd and the Sheep.
- 6.) In John 11— The Resurrection and the Life.
- 7.) In John 13— Washing one another's feet.
- 8.) In John 14— The believer's destination—"My Father's House."
- 9.) In John 14,15,16— The Comforter, "The Holy Spirit."
- 10.) In John 17— Prayer for the believers of this Age.

A careful study of each one of the subjects above will beautifully prepare the reader to an acceptance and understanding of the "Grace" principles of the present age.

Number III. *Five statements made by Christ during the Last Supper indicating dispensational changes in the believers' relationships with one another and with the Lord during this Age.*

- 1.) John 13:34,35— "A New Commandment"—
the Old is recorded in Matthew 22:37-40.
- 2.) John 14:7-9— "Henceforth you know the Father"—
as manifested in the Son (see 14:7-12).
- 3.) John 14:16— "Another Comforter"—
the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- 4.) John 15:15— "Henceforth...I call you 'Friends'"—
as Servants we take orders, our "friends"
we know intimately.
- 5.) John 16:24— "Hitherto you asked nothing in My Name—
ask in My Name."

Once again, these guiding words that Christ gave to the apostles on the night of His betrayal would show a new and abiding relationship with the believer for this age.

Number IV. *There is a strong emphasis in John on the work of the Holy Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit is mentioned four times in Matthew, two times in Mark, five times in Luke, but 15 times in the Gospel of John, and many more times with simply the personal pronouns. The following are the main subject categories about the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John.

- 1.) John 3— "Born of the Spirit."
- 2.) John 4— "Worship God in the Spirit."
- 3.) John 6— "Made alive in the Spirit."
- 4.) John 7— "Receiving the Spirit."
- 5.) John 14— "The Comforter will teach you all things."
- 6.) John 15— "The Comforter bearing witness of Me (Christ)."
- 7.) John 16— "The Spirit Convicting the world of sin (unbelief)."
- 8.) John 16— "The Spirit of truth...guiding you into all Truth."

The Gospel of John is not therefore, as some spiritually unintelligent historians would say, just a book borrowing from Greek mythology and superstition. Rather it is the carefully revealed truths that prepare the Jewish and Gentile believers for seeing the important place of the Holy Spirit in the operation of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Number V. *Note the Word "BELIEVE" in its various forms (D/EST/ETH/ING) in John.*

"Believe" in any of its forms is used 11 times in Matthew, 17 times in Mark, and 11 times in Luke. However, in the Gospel of John it is used 98 times. In John, personal, individual, spiritual, soul salvation is emphasized, and not the national conversion or hope of Israel.

This demonstrates once again the fact that John is inspired by the Holy Spirit to present those truths from Christ that would be meaningful for the personal soul salvation of people from all over the world through simple FAITH in Christ.

Number VI. *In John, Christ is presented as the Savior of the World.*

Of the four Gospel accounts, the Gospel of John is more surely the *International Gospel Messenger*. Far more ancient manuscripts of the Gospel of John have been found than all other Gospels combined. In John, Christ is clearly presented as the Savior of the world. Note the following—

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| 1:10— | Christ was in the WORLD. |
| 1:29— | Christ takes away the sin of the WORLD. |
| 3:16— | For God so loved the WORLD. |
| 3:17— | The WORLD through Him might be saved. |
| 3:19— | Light is come into the WORLD. |
| 4:42— | Christ is the Savior of the WORLD. |
| 6:51— | I will give Myself for the life of the WORLD. |
| 7:35— | Teach Gentiles. |
| 8:12— | I am the Light of the WORLD. |
| 10:36— | Sent into the WORLD. |
| 12:13— | Now is the Judgment of this WORLD. |
| 12:19— | Behold, the WORLD is gone after Him. |
| 12:47— | To Save the WORLD. |

- 14:31— That the WORLD might know.
 15:19— I have chosen you out of the WORLD.
 16:8— He (Holy Spirit) will reprove the WORLD.
 16:33— I have overcome the WORLD.
 17:6— Those given to Christ out of the WORLD.
 17:18— I sent them into the WORLD.
 17:21— That the WORLD may believe.
 17:23— That the WORLD may know.
 18:37— For this cause came I into the WORLD.
 21:25— The WORLD cannot contain the books
 that could have been written.

This illustrates for the believer the same principle that is stated in Paul's letter to the Romans, "*Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name*" (Rom. 1:5).

Number VII. *The Gospel of John Emphasizes the Absolute Deity of Christ.*

John repeatedly refers to Christ as "the Son of God," and God as His "Father." See the following references—John 1:34,49; 3:16,17,18,35,36; 5:17,18,19,21,22,25,26,30,36,37,43,45; 6:32,37,69; 8:19,42; 9:35; 10:17,18,29,30,36,38; 11:4,27; 14:9,20; 17:1; 19:7; 20:31, (etc.).

In addition, the following seven references spell out Christ's Deity very clearly.

- 1.) John 1:1— "...and the Word was God."
- 2.) John 5:18— "...makes Himself equal with God."
- 3.) John 5:23— "If you honor the Son, you honor the Father."
- 4.) John 8:24— "If you believe not that I AM you will die in your sins."
- 5.) John 8:58— "Before Abraham was I AM."
- 6.) John 10:33— "Thou being a man, maketh Thyself God."
- 7.) John 20:28— "My Lord and my God."

For those who would try and say that Christ never claimed to be God, and that the Gospels do not expressly say that He was God, let them try to explain these passages.

Number VIII. *John reveals GRACE and TRUTH principles.*

The key verse in the Gospel of John is 1:17, "*The Law came by Moses, but Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ.*" "Grace" is not mentioned in Matthew, Mark or Luke, but *three times* it is mentioned at the very beginning of the Gospel of John—John 1:14,16 & 17. "Truth" is mentioned three times in Matthew, three times in Mark, five times in Luke, but 27 times in John.

As Christ stood before Pilate, He gave these amazing words—"*For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice*" (John 18:37).

Number IX. *The KINGDOM in the Gospel of John is Spiritual.*

The Kingdom is mentioned twice in the Gospel of John, once at the beginning of the book and once at the end of the book. In both cases it becomes clear that the Kingdom in view was not the earthly, prophesied Messianic Kingdom, but rather one of an entirely different nature.

1.) John 3:3—*"Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God."*

At first hearing, Nicodemus would be thinking of the literal, prophesied Messianic Kingdom, even as he thought of the new birth as another literal, physical birth. The Jews themselves knew of the overall, eternal Kingdom of God which was all inclusive over the whole universe (Dan. 4:28-35). Likewise they knew of, and greatly anticipated, the prophesied Davidic Kingdom that was promised to Israel when the Messiah came. Yet the question immediately arises, "What Kingdom is Christ speaking about here to Nicodemus?" It could not be the overall Kingdom of God because clearly unsaved mankind are members of that Kingdom. As to the Messianic Kingdom, it is true that only regenerate people will initially go into that Kingdom, yet it is also true that many being born during that Kingdom Age will not be regenerated. In fact, at the end of the Age there will be great rebellion against the King and Kingdom.

Therefore, in the strictest sense, the Kingdom Christ must be talking about is one that is exclusively made up of "born again" subjects. That means—the present Spiritual Kingdom, mediated by the Holy Spirit on earth (Rom. 14:17 & Col. 1:13). Absolutely the only way to get into that Kingdom is by the new birth! Likewise, we must understand that this message of Christ was directly applicable to Nicodemus. Were he to be "born again," and not be placed into that Kingdom, the words of Christ would fail.

2.) John 18:36— *"My Kingdom is not of this world."*

There is a very pointed discussion between Pontius Pilate and Jesus Christ about the Kingdom subject. It was long realized by the Roman rulers that Israel was expecting some sort of a King to come and deliver the nation and rule over the world. This was plainly written in the Jewish Scriptures and often talked about among the Jews. Herod of old knew about it and made sure that the newborn King did not survive, or so he thought. The present Herod most certainly knew about it through his encounter with John the Baptist and also since he was regarded as a proselyte to Judaism. Yet, his loyalty to Rome was unquestioned. Pontius Pilate also was probably well informed about this potential King and Kingdom (Acts 10:36-38).

Yet, both Herod and Pilate also knew that Jesus Christ was not going around stirring up strife against the Roman government. In fact, some Roman soldiers were disciples of Christ. The followers of Jesus carried no arms, they formed no secret militia, nor did Jesus form any kind of a subversive following. To the Romans, Christ's message was in the nature of moral tenants, great sincerity, good deeds, and even to love your enemies. This could hardly be a threat to the Roman government. However, they were keeping a watchful eye because the words "King" and "Kingdom" were being used quite freely.

Pilate knew that the real reason the Jewish leaders delivered up Jesus for crucifixion was because of "envy" (Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10). Therefore, the threat of Jesus being a rival king was not a real problem to Pilate, at first. When it became public that Jesus did regard Himself a King, it placed Pilate in a precarious position as to what he would do with a rival

King. Unless Pilate was to deal with Jesus as a rival to the Roman rule, he would jeopardize his own place as a ruler under Caesar. Certainly Pilate did not want to appear disloyal to Caesar! Consequently, it was a clever move on the part of the Jews since they realized the phobia that Roman rulers had about any rival Kings or Kingdoms. This public accusation against Christ, that He claimed to be a King (Luke 23:2), left Pilate with no alternative but to take up the issue. Here the discussion begins.

Pilate turns back from the accusing crowd and asks Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews?" However, instead of just saying "yes" or "no," Christ challenges the real motivation in Pilate's question. This tells us that Jesus knew something that no one else knew. We sometimes wonder what was really in the heart and mind of Pilate. Apparently down deep inside Pilate was the belief and respect that Jesus was, indeed, a great man and possibly even some kind of a "King." Thus, Christ asked Pilate if he was just asking this question because of the Jewish accusation, or because he really thought it was in some way possible. This obviously caught Pilate off guard. It seems to almost embarrass him. No doubt others are listening. Pilate quickly and loudly affirms that he is not a Jew expecting a King! "It is Your own people that accuse You, not me!" he affirms.

Pilate actually now finds himself in a very awkward situation. His quick response to Christ also means that he, Pilate, has no reason to believe that Jesus is some kind of a dangerous King—and therefore, Jesus should go free. In other words, the Roman authorities, themselves, have no reason to suspect Christ as a subversive person.

Now that this is clear, Christ does not at all deny that He is a King. In fact, he explains it very precisely to Pilate—*"My Kingdom is not of this world,"* Christ said. *"If it were, My servants would fight so that I would not be delivered to the Jews,"* He affirms. This simple truthful logic is overwhelming. Then Christ continues, *"But now is My Kingdom not from hence."* This seems to be a strange statement to make, because the words *"but now"* imply a **change**. It implies that at one time earlier His Kingdom was of this physical world, *but not any longer*. However, Pilate realizes that if Christ's Kingdom is not of the cosmos (earthly, worldly order) yet it is, in some other way, true that He is a King! Therefore Pilate responds, "So, You are a King then!" To which Christ responds with more clarity—

*"You say rightly that I am a King.
For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world,
that I should bear witness unto the truth.
Everyone who is of the truth hears (submissively) My voice."*

So then, the Kingdom that Christ portrays to Pilate is obviously no threat to the Roman government. Therefore, Pilate still wants to free Christ. However, Pilate finds that he cannot do that. As a last resort the Jews cried out, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a King speaks against Caesar." These words force Pilate to send Christ to His death. And Pilate thought that he was the all-powerful potentate, but in reality he is only a poor helpless figure that cannot do his own will, even though he rules over the whole land.

In conclusion, the Kingdom that Christ portrays to Pilate is—

- 1.) "Not of this world [physical universe system]."
- 2.) Not a Kingdom that His subjects will physically fight for.
- 3.) A Kingdom whose aim is the proclamation of Truth.

- 4.) Its subjects are those who submissively respond to the Truth.
- 5.) Christ had said earlier, "You shall know the Truth,
and the Truth shall set you free."

It becomes quite evident, therefore, that the Kingdom in view is most certainly not the prophesied Messianic Kingdom, because that King and Kingdom will fight and destroy all earthly Kingdoms and physically bring the whole world into subjection. Obviously, the Kingdom in view is the present spiritual Kingdom of God as described in Romans 14:17 and Colossians 1:13.

Number X. *In John's Gospel, Christ presents a HOPE that is heavenly in nature.*

John 14:1-6. Herein Christ reveals that He is leaving to go to His "Father's House." There, in that great mansion, He will be preparing quarters for the disciples. Then He will return and collect the disciples and take them to their prepared quarters in His Father's mansion. (See also John 17:24).

Some have thought that this mystery of the heavenly hope was only revealed through the distinctive revelations given to the apostle Paul. Therefore they think this passage cannot refer to the Rapture of the Church. It is true that the Rapture of the Church was clearly spelled out through the apostle Paul. But it is not true that Paul is only one who mentions it.

This revelation that is given in the Gospel of John could only be understood and interpreted clearly by the disciples after the distinctive revelations given to the Apostle Paul. And, no doubt the Gospel of John was published after some of Paul's epistles were already in circulation. Therefore, this does not contradict the fact that to Paul were given the clear revelations about the unique Rapture of the Church into the air, to ascend to heaven with Christ (I Thess. 4 & I Cor. 15, etc.).

The End