

JOHN

In choosing which book to study this month, I (again) went with one of my favorites and stayed with my favorite author, John. His writing style makes study so much fun and so interesting because of the way he methodically forms his ideas by mixing in accounts with teachings. For example, notice how in John 8, Jesus declares Himself “the Light of the world” and one chapter later makes a physical connection to that teaching by healing a blind man. This month, I encourage you to read through his gospel at least twice (three times would be even better if you can manage it). In your reading, notice how the accounts of miracles directly support the teachings that surround them in the text. As John puts weights the evidence concerning Jesus as the Son of God, be sure to take notes and underline each of the many signs, descriptions, and testimonies of Jesus along the way.

Background Information

Like John’s first epistle, the date of writing is commonly listed as somewhere between 80-90 A.D. Also, John has been credited as the author from very early on and is rarely disputed as such. When studying a book in depth, the first thing to look for should always be the purpose the author has for writing. Some authors make you search hard for purpose statements, but John was very straightforward in 20:30-31. “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (NASB). John wanted his readers to believe in the deity of Christ, so he provided plenty of evidence to show them they could. Throughout the book he reveals the testimony of others concerning Jesus, Jesus’ claims about himself, and the divine acts of Jesus that backed those testimonies.

Key Themes

Since the purpose of the book is to establish belief in Jesus, the themes naturally revolve around that idea. We can break the purpose statement down to three main themes: first, belief in Jesus as the Christ; second, belief in Jesus as the Son of God; and third, the receiving of eternal life. Notice the recurring themes of testimony, belief, and signs. Throughout his writing John lists various names and descriptions for Jesus that others proclaimed after experiencing His presence. Another theme is the relationship that Jesus has with the Father, especially in John 6, 8, and 17:1-12. In his efforts to show that Christ was the Son of God, John showed the relationship they had as proof. Finally, John focuses on eternal life as a result of belief. The term occurs numerous times throughout the Gospel, perhaps most recognizably in 6:68.

Key Verses

While it’s hard to pick key verses in such a lengthy writing, some stand out as especially significant in light of the themes and purpose of the book. Obviously, we should definitely have 20:30-31 highlighted as a key verse. John opened with a section of very important verses, particularly 1:1-3, where he makes the claim of Jesus’ deity and eternal nature. John 3:16 (a verse we’re quite familiar with) is

important in the fact that it outlines what John is trying to get us to believe – God sent Jesus, and if we believe in Him we get eternal life. For this same reason, 6:40 is another key verse, in my opinion. Finally, Jesus Himself said in 5:31 that His testimony would not be true. I believe that’s important, because it is for that reason that John provides so many other testimonies.

Key Words

Another technique John uses in getting his point across is to pick a word and use it repeatedly. This is very helpful in study as these words serve as markers for the themes. While it’s impossible to discuss all of John’s key words in our limited space here, I think we have to start with “believe” and “testimony” (and the various forms each word takes in different places). Each of these words help display the purpose throughout the book. Notice, also, John’s use of “signs” and “works” to describe the actions Jesus performed which lead to belief. Naturally, “eternal life” is a term that pops up frequently as a key to understanding the book. Although this section could go on for a long time, I’ll leave you to find more key words. One final thing, though – in marking your key words, make sure to also mark the phrases that serve as claims about who Jesus is. His own claims are almost always marked by the words “I am.” The testimonies of others are usually preceded by “This is” or “You are” – but not always.

As you (hopefully) take this month to spend some time in John’s Gospel with me, I pray that our belief in Jesus is strengthened, and that our obedience of Him grows due to that belief. Keep looking for key words, themes, and verses. Look for the connections John makes between the action, testimony, and teaching of Jesus. Dig deep!