

Dr. David L. Turner, John, Session 2,

Introduction Part 2

6-Min. Video Overview

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Alright, today we're cracking open a cold case that's nearly 2,000 years old: the Gospel of John. You know, it's one of the most famous and beloved books in the Bible, but it's also one of the most mysterious. So we're going to put on our detective hats and investigate it, following the clues hidden in the text and in history itself.

So where do we even begin? Well, with any investigation, you start with the big one. Who really wrote this thing? And maybe more importantly, how in the world can we possibly figure that out almost two millennia later? That's the puzzle we're going to try and piece together today. And believe me, there's a reason scholars call this the Johannine mystery.

For centuries, people have been debating who wrote it, who they wrote it for, and how it fits in with the other Gospels. It's a real head-scratcher. Now, to solve this, we're not just going to be throwing out theories.

We're going to do what actual biblical historians do. We're going to analyze the evidence, both from inside the book and from the historical record, to see what they can tell us about where this absolutely unique account came from. Okay, so first things first, let's look at our primary suspect, the author.

Who is the voice behind this Gospel? You know, when you're doing this kind of historical detective work, you're really looking for two types of clues. You've got your internal evidence. That's the stuff you find inside the text itself.

And then you have external evidence: what other historical witnesses were saying. We're going to need both to build a solid case. Let's start with the internal clues: what the book says about itself.

The author makes some really bold claims. He says he was an eyewitness, that we beheld his glory. And he says his main source is the disciple whom Jesus loved.

I mean, you can't get more of an insider than that. But here's the crazy part. He never actually gives a name.

It's this strange kind of qualified anonymity, giving us this incredibly specific profile without ever revealing the identity. So what about the external evidence? What do people on the outside say? Well, early church tradition, going way back to the second century, was pretty much unanimous. They all pointed to one person, John, the apostle, one of Jesus' original twelve.

But here's where it gets a little murky. An early writer named Hippius mentioned both John the disciple and a John the elder. Now, were these the same guy or two different Johns? It's a little detail, but it shows you that even back then, the story had some fascinating layers.

Okay, so we're starting to build a profile of the author. But that's only half the story. The next big question is, who is he even writing for? Because, you know, understanding the audience is absolutely key to figuring out the message.

And on this, scholars are really split. There are two big competing theories. First, you've got the community theory.

This argues that John was writing for a very specific group, Jewish Christians who are getting kicked out of their local synagogues, something the gospel actually mentions. Then there's the all-Christians theory, which says no, no, gospels like John weren't for some small niche group. They were written for everybody, meant to be circulated far and wide from the very beginning.

And just think about the difference there. One's a book for a community in crisis. The other is a foundational text for a brand new global movement.

Now this brings us to the actual content of the book. And this is where things get, well, really different. When you put John's gospels side by side with the other three, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which we call the synoptics, it's like you're reading a totally different story.

How different are we talking? Well, look at this number. Only about 10% of the stuff you read in John can also be found in the other three gospels. Let me say that again.

A full 90% of this book is unique. The stories, the miracles, the big speeches- you won't find them anywhere else. This isn't just a slightly different telling.

It's a fundamentally different account of Jesus's life. And one of the most obvious ways you see this difference is in the geography. In the other gospels, Jesus spends most of his time up in Galilee, and then he makes one final dramatic trip down to Jerusalem at the end.

But in John, he's bouncing back and forth between Galilee and Jerusalem multiple times, right from the start. The whole timeline is completely shuffled. So you have to be asking, why? Why is it so radically different? Well, people were asking that same question way back in the second century.

A guy named Clement of Alexandria had a really interesting theory. He said the other gospels gave us the outward facts. But John wrote a spiritual gospel.

He meant that John was often less focused on the literal blow-by-blow timeline and more focused on the deeper theological meaning behind everything. So for example, instead of telling simple farming parables, John's Jesus makes these huge symbolic declarations like, I am the bread of life or I am the light of the world. All right, for this last part of our investigation, we're going from the library to the forensics lab.

It's time to put the physical evidence, the ancient manuscripts themselves, right under the microscope. Now, the main tool we're going to use is something called textual criticism. And don't let the name scare you.

It's basically like forensic science for old books. Scholars compare thousands of these ancient hand-copied manuscripts. And by doing that, they can spot where scribes might have made changes, additions, or even just typos over the centuries.

And let them reconstruct what the original text most likely said with amazing accuracy. So let's put this tool to the test with probably the most famous case file in the entire gospel of John, the story of the woman caught in adultery. It's an incredible story, one of the most well-known about Jesus.

But was it actually part of John's original gospel? Let's check the forensics. So what does the manuscript evidence tell us? Well, it's pretty overwhelming, actually. First off, the story is completely missing from our oldest and best manuscripts.

It just isn't there. It only starts showing up in much later copies. And even then, it's kind of all over the place.

Sometimes it's here in John. Sometimes it's moved to a different spot. And get this, sometimes it even shows up in the gospel of Luke.

Some of the scribes who did include it even put little marks in the margin, almost like a little asterisk saying, hey, just so you know, this part's a little different. And the internal clues? They point in the exact same direction. The vocabulary, the writing style.

It just doesn't match the rest of the book. Plus, it kind of awkwardly interrupts the flow of the story right at that point. But, and this is a huge but, here's the catch.

The story itself? It sounds so much like Jesus. That incredible mix of calling out injustice while showing profound mercy? It fits his character perfectly. So what's the final verdict from the experts? Well, the consensus is that this is almost certainly an authentic, true story about Jesus that just wasn't an original part of the gospel of John.

The thinking is that it was probably a very popular story that was passed down orally for years. And eventually, a scribe decided to write it into the manuscript so that this amazing account wouldn't be lost to history. Okay, after all that, you might be wondering, why does any of this matter? I mean, who cares about investigating a 2,000-year-old text in this much detail? Well, it matters because peeling back these layers gives us a much more honest and, I think, a more fascinating picture of how these ancient stories were actually passed down.

It shows us how they were written, preserved, and treasured over generations. And this process doesn't weaken the history. It actually gives us a clear, more grounded window into what was really going on back then.

And all of this leaves us with one last big, kind of mind-bending question to chew on. If a story can be historically true, but not an original part of the document that we find it in, what does that change about how we read all ancient documents, whether it's the Bible or

any other text from history? That's something to really think about. Thanks for coming along on this investigation.