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**Subject:** Highlights of MOB Studies Since September 2014

Over the past 20 months, we have shared together--as Men of the Bible (or MOBsters as we have been called)--more than 60 lessons from seven books of God's inspired Word, the Bible! It all started with the Gospel of John and "the beginning," with a Triune God and His plan and purpose for the world and its people--and ended with prophecies from the Book of Daniel, many already fulfilled to the letter, but with the most critical ones still to come! The seven books (which also includes II Peter, II and III John, and Jude) fit together "remarkably" and deal with the most important issues of life on this planet but also about "destiny" and an eternity that none of us would really want to miss out on! Here are just some of the highlights of things covered!

In the prologue to his gospel (in John 1:1-14), John introduces Jesus Christ as God in human form! He was "with God and was God (from all eternity!)...and then (at just the right time in human history) He became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth!" (and thus bringing about what are known as the doctrines of the "Incarnation," and of the Deity of Christ)! He was there, as part of the Godhead, "in the beginning"--when the world was created! John writes that "all things came into being through Him...!" John claims to have been an "eyewitness" of His glory and majesty, and that "many signs" that Jesus performed in the presence of His disciples demonstrated, without question, His Deity, as well as the reason for His coming. And John says that he only recorded some of them! And that "these were given so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you might have life through His name!" (John 20:30-31)

The "gospel" (or the "good news" of Christ) is clearly intended for the whole world! John writes that He was the "true Light, coming into the world...and that He was in the world, and the world was made through Him--and (yet) the world did not know Him! He came to His own (speaking of the Jewish nation), and His own did not receive Him! But that as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God..."! (John 1:9-12). Jesus told Nicodemus, a "ruler of the Jews," up close and personal, that he "must be born again, in order to see the kingdom of God!" And John added, in that same context, perhaps the most familiar of all Bible verses: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life!" (John 3:16)

Without question, the gospel of John is a great piece of "literally art"--and some readers would like to keep it at that! But, as Andreas Kostenberger reminded us (in his book, "Encountering John," which we used as a supplement to our study), John's gospel is not just a classic documents of Western civilization but a "divine revelation" that confronts every reader with his true sin nature and need for salvation and redemption: his (and our!) need to receive Christ's free gift of salvation, or to reject it! Readers, Kostenberger notes, are not merely dispassionate literary critics--they are "existentially addressed and engaged by the Biblical message, and must act in response to it!"

As you'll remember, John--writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (which II Timothy 3:16-17 claims is true of all Scripture)--said, and quoted Jesus as saying and doing, a lot of things that were (and are!) considered controversial to this day! These included seven miracles he performed (beginning with "turning water into wine"), along with seven "I am" statements! Jesus Himself said that "...the very works that I do testify that the Father has sent Me!" (John 5:36). He

even referred to Himself as "I am"--clearly identifying Himself with the name God gave for Himself (in Exodus 3:12) when Moses asked who he should say sent him when he confronted Pharaoh (a reference quickly picked up by Jewish leaders, to their horror!) John the Baptist correctly identified Him as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John makes it clear that Jesus was (and is!) the "Light of the world," and the only way to God, which makes His coming into the world so crucial and "life-saving"--and adds a sense of urgency to the proclamation of the Gospel! John quotes the words of Jesus Himself, speaking to Thomas (that would be "Doubting Thomas"), when He said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me!" (John 14:6)

And, among other things, in preparing His disciples for what was to come (His crucifixion!), He told them that He "was going to prepare a place for them" but that He would be "coming back" (doctrine of eschatology, or "things to come")! And that He would "ask the Father" and that He would give them "another Helper" (speaking of the Holy Spirit) who would "lead them into all truth" and "be with them forever"! (John 14:1-26) And who can forget Jesus' prayer for His disciples in the garden, just before the cross, when He asked the Father to "keep them in Your name...and from the evil one...and to sanctify them in Your word..."--and praying "not on behalf of these alone, but for those also who would believe in Me through their word" (John 17:6-21) And that would include us!

Well, there's so much more to the Gospel of John, that we could touch on, including the account of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ--and His appearance to His disciples, and to Peter, in particular, prior to His ascension to heaven! But on to our study of the Epistle of I John, which we began in the Fall of 2015, and which picks up many of these same issues!

I John was the perfect follow-up to our study of the Gospel of John! The key word is "know" or "knowing"--which is used some 30 times in his epistle. John's desire in writing the gospel was that people would know the real Jesus, whom he himself knew so intimately. He said he wrote the things he did "so they (we?) would believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they (we!) might have life through His name! (John 20:31) On the other hand, he wrote his epistle to those who now believed and had received Christ "...so that they might know that they had eternal life!" (I John 5:13)

But John had other reasons for writing I John as well--among them, that they might "have fellowship with God"--and with each other (as brothers in Christ)! Wow! Think of it! Restored fellowship with the God of the Universe! Which was severed by the "fall" in the garden! But also "that their joy might be full (I John 1:4); and that they would stop "practicing sin" (2:1); and that they would be able to spot and expose, and be guarded from false teaching! (2:21, etc.) John's idea (which again really came from God, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit), is that assurance of salvation produces joy--and joy makes you desire victory over sin! And having victory over sin, and being in fellowship with God and other believers, helps you to be able to identify and expose false teaching, and share your faith with others!

In essence, John wrote his epistle that every believer might be able to evaluate the reality of his (or her) faith, and be confident in his faith! And the evidences, or tests, are tied to the way he lives! True believers, according to John, don't "practice" sin! Nor "pretense"! Not that they're perfect and doesn't struggle with sin! (Or pretense!) In fact, sin in the life of a believer is a reality--and, John said, that "if we say we have no sin, we're deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us! But, if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all

unrighteousness!" John also says that we are an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous!" And it's in this way that we can "walk in the Light...and have fellowship with Him, and with one another!" (I John 1:5-9)

John basically makes the point in his epistle that true believers have a change in their lives that takes place when they are "born of God" and that they then have a desire to please their Father and grow through a process known as "sanctification"! This causes them to strive to live pure and holy lives--and, with the Holy Spirit living within them, they now have the resources to begin doing that!

John also adds that "we know that we have passed from death into life, because we love the brethren...and that His love is actually "perfected" in us as we "abide in Him" (I John 3:13 and 4:12-13). And that "the one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself"--that he has eternal life! But, even better! Not only do we have the "witness within" (which can change with our emotions), but we have an even more reliable witness in the written Word of God! John ends with the strongest of assurances in all of Scripture: "And the testimony is this: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life! These things I have written unto you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life!" (I John 5:13-14) All of which brings us back to the purpose for which John wrote his first epistle!

Well, then, rather than going on to II and III John at this point--on November 17, 2015--we actually went on to the first of four studies on the book of II Peter! I think to pick up on the warnings of I John about false teaching!

Peter wrote his second letter, again to believers and followers of Christ, as a kind of "last will and testament"! For four reasons: (1) to encourage them (and us too!) in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, (2) to remind them of the origin and trustworthiness of the Scriptures, (3) to warn them about "damnable heresies" that were already infiltrating the church--which would deceive many, and (4) to reassure them of the promise and reality of Christ's return!

Peter begins his epistle, chapter 1, with the assurance that believers ("those of like precious faith") have been "granted" everything we need "pertaining to life and godliness"--and he makes it clear that our faith is based on "true knowledge" (i.e., clear, objective, revealed, historical truth from God which is intended to be read, understood, believed, and taught)! He writes that because of His "precious and magnificent promises," we have become "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." And because of what we already have, he urges us, "with all diligence," to add to our faith seven specific qualities, as part of the process of "sanctification." These include: (1) "virtue" (moral excellence); (2) "knowledge" (of the Word of God); (3) "patience" (or self-control); (4) "perseverance" (or "spiritual staying power"); (5) "godliness" (as a way of life); (6) "brotherly love;" and (7) "love" (the "agape-type love of I Corinthians 13). Having these "virtues," Peter writes, will "render us neither useless nor unfruitful"--and practicing them will keep us from "stumbling" and give us assurance in our profession of faith!

As part of his "last words," Peter also wanted to assure us of the trustworthiness of God's Word! He states (in I Peter 1:16-21) that "we (speaking for the apostles) did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty--referring to the transfiguration of Christ, where God the Father declared

that He (Jesus) was indeed the "beloved Son of God!" But he goes on to say that we have a "more sure word of prophecy (speaking of the written Word)--and we "do well to pay attention to it as to a lamp shining in the darkness..." In other words, the Bible, the Word of God, is a more complete, more permanent, and more authoritative source than any experience of any person. Peter adds: "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of the Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation; for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God!" And note that Jesus Himself prayed to His Father (in John 17:13), just before the Cross: "Sanctify them in the truth: Your Word is truth!"

And this sets the tone for the rest of Peter's writing! It through the Scripture that we can "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..."(3:18). And it's only through knowing the Scripture that we are able to maintain doctrinal stability, and to recognize, expose, and thwart false teaching, which is the theme of the remainder of his epistle!

Peter warned that, among other things, false teachers would mock and question the promised return of Christ! "Where is the promise of His return? they would ask! For "ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it has from the beginning of creation!" (II Peter 3:3) They were, in effect, espousing the same "uniformitarian" view held by many in the scientific community today--that everything in the world, and in the universe, follows certain natural laws and processes and has evolved over billions of years, basically by chance without any direction or clear purpose--or certainly any intervention by God--and that it would continue to be like this in the days to come! Well, Peter didn't buy that! His response was that the false teachers are the ones out of touch with reality! It "somehow escaped their notice" that the world actually hasn't always gone on as it has in the past! Peter makes the point that, in a great "cataclysmic act," God actually "spoke" the world into existence! And, later, during the time of Noah, in another cataclysmic act (contrary to the uniformitarian presumption)--and as an act of judgment on the earth for sin--He destroyed the world He had created, through a great (universal) flood! And Peter then added (3:10) that "...the day of the Lord would come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up!" Sounds like "the end"! But more of all that when we get to Daniel!

Peter ends his discourse with the following admonitions:

1--"Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness..." (3:11)

2--"...Since you look for these things, be diligent to be found in Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation..." (3:14-15)

3--"...Knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness!" (3:15)

4--"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the days of eternity! Amen!" (3:18)

Now back to II and III John!

As you might recall, John, the elder--in his second epistle--reemphasizes some of the most basic truths of the Christian faith, as taught in his gospel and first epistle, and particularly concerning the person and work of Christ. He's encouraged to find believers "walking in the faith" and wants to encourage "hospitality" and "true Christian fellowship"--and yet wants to assure separation from, and confrontation with, false teachers who "do not abide in the teachings of Christ"! (II John 9-11) The dangers of false teaching were clearly a great concern as John approached his latter days!

John's third epistle is a reminder not only of the "battle for truth," and against apostasy, in our homes and churches, but also of the importance of linking it all with Christ-like love, including a special brand of "hospitality"--and especially for "strangers" seeking to serve the Lord (through their travels) in accordance with the truths of the Gospel! And with that, he continues to be viewed affectionately as the "beloved apostle"! But now on to Jude!

Jude, the half-brother of Jesus--and a late convert to the faith--addresses his letter to fellow believers, who were now part of the "body of Christ," whom he describes as "called," "loved," and "kept" (secure!)(Jude 1) Interesting that his "spiritual connection" they now had together was apparently more important to him than any "earthly family" tie! His big idea is again focused on "certain persons who had crept into (the church) unnoticed...and turned the grace of God into licentiousness and denied or only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ!" (Jude 4) These men, he said were like "unreasoning animals, who have gone the way of Cain...rushed headlong into the error of Balaam...and perished in the rebellion of Korah" (all Old Testament examples). They were like "hidden reefs...clouds without water...wandering stars...for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever!" (Jude seemed to have a real problem with false teachers!) And he sent a special appeal for true believers to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints!" But he ends his letter with perhaps the greatest of all "benedictory doxologies" in the Bible--which should be especially encouraging to everyone who's ever had a question about the "security" of a believer!

"Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever! Amen! (Jude 24-25)

And now, finally, we're back to the remarkable Book of Daniel! Familiar territory, since we just finished his amazing story! And we've come full circle! From the "beginning" of the world (cited by John in his gospel)--and now to the prophecies from Daniel about the "end of the world" as we know it! But to a better future!

It's from the Book of Daniel that we learn about some "remarkable" prophecies about the rise and fall of four great, and successive, world empires--Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome--prophecies that have already been fulfilled and that are clearly recorded as well in the annals of history! It also depicts, or pictures, great rulers--including Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon; Cyrus, the king of Persia, Alexander the Great, of Greece; and the notorious Antiochus Epiphanes, all of who would rise and greatly influence their world, and particularly the nation of Israel! We can see how God, in particular, used Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus and Alexander the Great and the Greek and Roman cultures to allow, and even oversee, the return of God's people (the Jews) to their land, to rebuild the walls and the temple in Jerusalem; to bring about a universal language, and roads and infrastructure, and peace and order (for a time)--all in preparation for the coming of Christ (in Bethlehem of Judea!).

And it's through Daniel as well that we learn about prophecies still to be fulfilled! Prophecies concerning the "latter days...pertaining to the day yet future" (Daniel 10:14)--which picture, among other things, the reconstitution of the Roman Empire, the rise of the Antichrist (who, among other things, will replicate the evil act of Antiochus Epiphanes, by committing the abominable "abomination of desolation), the Battle of Armageddon, and--when linked with other Scripture--the second coming of Christ, and the establishment of the ultimate kingdom of God which will fill the earth and never be destroyed!

David Jeremiah, in his book "Agents of Babylon," puts it this way: "The prophecy reaches all the way from the heyday of the Persian Empire right down to the days of Antiochus Epiphanes to the deployment of Roman armies on the stage of the world. Then it takes a giant leap down the centuries of the end times and gives us details about the coming of the Antichrist."

Interestingly, it through Daniel's account that we see the likes of King Nebuchadnezzar brought to his knees and acknowledging Daniel's God--in a way all of us need to! "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and honor the King of Heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and he is able to humble those who walk in pride!" And, at the aftermath of his humbling experience: "How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation!" (Daniel 4:34-37) Wow!

And from our study, we'll always remember Daniel as one of the greatest of all examples in the Bible, a man who "knew" and trusted God! And as a man of prayer and great faith! But it's Daniel's God who really deserves our greatest esteem and exaltation! He's the God who "rules and overrules" in the affairs of both nations and individuals, and "changes the times and the epochs, and removes kings and establishes kings; and gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding" (Daniel 2:21). The Psalmist says it best! "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all!" (Psalm 103:19)

And so, after completing the Book of Daniel--and in context with our studies of the writings of John, and Peter, and Jude--we can see more clearly now, as Sam Ericsson used to say, that all of history is really all about "His-story"! And it began from the moment of the fall in the garden! And so, even though the world as we know it will be going through some great suffering and bloodshed--in the coming tribulation--and one day come to an end, we know that that is really not the end! As Peter wrote, "we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells!" (II Peter 3:13)

And for Daniel, and for every believer, the best is truly yet to come!

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