

GOSPELS: JOHN

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John was written by John, son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' twelve disciples. John was the brother of James. John writes as leader of the church in Ephesus. He knew Jesus, followed Jesus all three and a half years of his public ministry, and was an eyewitness to the things he wrote about Jesus. John likely wrote his Gospel last, probably in the A.D. 80s or 90s. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were likely written in the A.D. 50s or 60s, all before the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. John's Gospel differs from the other Gospels in that it contains more doctrine-based texts with long teachings of Jesus about being the bread of life, the shepherd who lays his life down for the sheep, and several chapters of a farewell address to his disciples (13:1–17:26).

The book of John is written to the world. John explicitly states why he wrote this Gospel in John 20:30-31. He says that Jesus did many other signs and wonders "not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John's goal for his audience—and for all people who read this book—is that they would believe in Jesus Christ and have life in his name.

In his account, John emphasizes the portrait of Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. There is a high emphasis on theology and Christology, showing Jesus to be the Messiah who has been spoken of throughout the entire Scriptures. Throughout the book, there is a theme of "behold and believe" or "look and live."

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

There are seven "I am" statements of Jesus in the book of John that are helpful to remember when studying the book of John.

- Jesus is the bread of life (John 6:35). He is the only one who can satisfy our souls and bring life.
- Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12). Rather than walking in darkness, whoever follows Jesus walks in the light and has the light of life.
- Jesus is the gate (or door) of the sheep (John 10:7-9). He is the only way to enter the "flock" of the Good Shepherd.
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14). He is the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 23 as the Good Shepherd who even lays down his life for the sheep.
- Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Whoever believes in Him, though he die, yet shall he live. He not only was resurrected bodily from the grave, but by His Spirit he makes us alive in him.
- Jesus is the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). No one comes to the Father except through him.
- Jesus is the vine (John 15:5). Apart from him, we can do nothing.

BOOK OUTLINE

Chapters 1 – 12: Presentation of the Son of God

Chapters 13 – 17: Preparation by the Son of God

Chapters 18-21: Passion of the Son of God

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF JOHN

The book of John has major Messianic significance. All of the Old Testament points to the coming Messiah who would be the ultimate answer of salvation. The overarching story of Scripture is about God redeeming humanity to be in right relationship with him, saving them from sin and death. Scripture starts in Genesis 1 when God speaks creation into existence and declares that it is good. In Genesis 3, humanity sins and is separated from the holy, perfect, righteous God. There, God promises that one day, the seed of the woman will crush the seed of the serpent. Here in the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ is revealed as the Word of God who has become flesh and dwelt among us. The word *dwelt* in John 1 literally means “to tabernacle.” Jesus is the fulfillment of the tabernacle where man could meet with God. Jesus is not a building but rather a person, fully God and fully man. It is crucial that Jesus came in the flesh. As St. Gregory of Nazianzus declares, “that which is not assumed is not healed.” This means that for Christ to redeem humanity, he had to become fully human. He could not just be fully God and partially human, for then only part of humanity would be healed. Jesus empties himself by taking something on, namely the form of a servant, fully human, while maintaining all of his deity.

The Gospel of John highlights the fact that the Messiah has come to redeem humanity by living a perfect life and crediting it to us as righteousness. He defeats death and sin by dying and taking the sin of humanity to the grave. Christ rises again so that in him, by his Spirit, we might rise again to new life. This eternal life of salvation is not merely a future reality upon death, but an ever present and near reality that believers experience in Christ today. Everything rises and falls on the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Praise be to God that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK OF JOHN

OBSERVATION

- Author: John the disciple of Jesus who was an eye-witness to Jesus’ 3 years of public ministry, death, resurrection and ascension
- Purpose: What is the author’s intent in writing? See John 20:30-31.
- People: Who are the main people mentioned? Jesus, the disciples, those Jesus interacts with.
- Location: Where do the events in this book take place? Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding Greco-Roman empire.
- What is the organization of the Gospel of John?
 - Introduction (Jesus is the Word become flesh) and beginning of his public ministry (1:1-51)
 - Jesus’ miracles (2:1–12:50)
 - Jesus’ interactions with his disciples before his betrayal (13:1–17:1-26)

- Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion, and burial (18:1–19:42)
- Jesus' resurrection, appearances, and purpose of the book (20:1-31)
- Jesus commissions Peter and John ("the disciple Jesus loved") (21:1-25)
- What are key themes you notice as you read through the Book of John? One key theme seen throughout the book of John is "behold and believe." John is calling his audience to see who Jesus is and respond rightly to him.
- What literary devices are used? What is the author emphasizing, contrasting, bringing attention to, and what is being repeated? John highlights key miracles and teachings of Jesus to shape this doctrinal gospel, convincing his audience that Jesus is the Messiah all history has waited for.

INTERPRETATION

How to interpret this book:

- Literary context: How do you read your passage considering the given genre: **Gospel**
- What is the significance of the literary devices used? What do they teach or emphasize? The Gospel of John is a narrative book. There are many story-like accounts throughout the book detailing Jesus' ministry and miracles. There are also long-form teachings of Jesus.
- Narrative context: Who is the author, who is the original audience, what was the intended message, and where/how does this book fit into the overarching narrative of Scripture? How does the author want the reader to respond? John is the author, and his audience is the world. See John 20:30-31 for his purpose.
- Historical context: What was happening at this point in history? John likely wrote his Gospel account after the destruction of the temple. For Jews in Jerusalem or scattered, this would have made sacrifices at the temple impossible, leaving them to attempt to follow the law without the temple. John emphasizes that Jesus is the fulfillment of the temple and its replacement. He is the center of worship and came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17-20).
- Cultural context: What customs, practices, actions, and attitudes were common then? (see above)

APPLICATION

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to repent from?
- Is there a promise to cling to?
- Is there an example to follow? Or one to avoid?

PRAYER

- John 1 reveals Jesus as the Word who has become flesh and dwelt among us. Take time to reflect on what it means that the Word of God became human and "tabernacled" and walked among humanity. Spend time thanking Jesus that he came to assume our humanity so that he could heal it.

- John lists seven “I am” statements of Jesus. Spend time reflection on who Jesus says he is and ask God to help you live out of the reality of these statements being true in your life.
- Ask God to give you fresh eyes to read the Gospel of John, behold Christ, believe him and follow him.

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF JOHN

“If the word was with God before time began, if God’s word is part of the eternal scheme of things, it means that God was always like Jesus. Sometimes we tend to think of God as stern and avenging; and we tend to think that something Jesus did changed God’s anger into love and altered his attitude to human beings. The New Testament knows nothing of that idea. The whole New Testament tells us, this passage of John especially, that God has always been like Jesus. What Jesus did was to open a window in time that we might see the eternal and unchanging love of God.”

William Barclay (1907-1978)

“The light of Christ shone many times amid the darkness that enshrouded the world before his coming to live here in the flesh, yet comparatively few recognized that light, and rejoiced in it. Christ’s light shines more brightly now, but the dark, benighted soul of man perceives not the brightness of our spiritual Lord until the Holy Spirit works the mighty miracle of regeneration, and so gives sight to those who have been blind.”

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“The temple that was standing in Jesus’ time was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. Many evangelical Christians are waiting eagerly for the Jews to build a new temple, seeing that as a sign of the end of the age. They fail to understand that the temple already has been rebuilt. Christ is the temple, the locus of the living presence of God in the midst of His people, and the rebuilding of the temple took place on the day of His resurrection.”

R.C. Sproul (1939-2017)

“He, the Mighty One, the Artificer of all, Himself prepared this body in the virgin as a temple for Himself, and took it for His very own, as the instrument through which He was known and in which He dwelt. Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished because, having fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was thereafter voided of its power for men. This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned back to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.”

Athanasius (~300s AD)

“[L]ast of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospel, being urged by his friends, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel.”

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215)

SOURCES

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