

# Introduction to The Gospel of John

The New Testament begins with four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each gospel describes the life and teachings of Jesus from different perspectives. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have many similarities and are called the "synoptic gospels." (Synoptic is a Greek word that means "seeing together" or "having a common view.") The Gospel of John, however, is quite different. It records many events and teachings of Jesus that are not found in the other gospels.

## Author & Date

Most scholars believe that John, one of Jesus' disciples, wrote The Gospel of John. John and his brother James were fishermen. Their father was Zebedee and their mother was Salome. She served Jesus in Galilee and was present at the crucifixion. John was a cousin of Jesus. (At least 5, and probably 7 of the Twelve disciples were relatives of Jesus.)

John may have been a follower of John the Baptist until he was called to follow Jesus at the beginning of His ministry. Later John, James and Peter, who were fishing partners, were called to become full-time disciples of Jesus (Luke 5:1-11).

John was part of Jesus' inner circle of three (Peter, James and John). However, John was undoubtedly Jesus' closest friend. He referred to himself as, "**The disciple who Jesus loved**" (13:23, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20). The author of this gospel claimed to be an eyewitness of the events he described (1:14, 19:35, 21:24-25). John's intimate relationship with Jesus gave him a unique perspective on the Lord's life and teaching.

Jesus nicknamed John and his brother James, "Sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). Later John became a pillar of the Church in Jerusalem. Tradition says that later John went to Ephesus. The Romans eventually exiled him to the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). John was the last surviving apostle.

According to tradition, John wrote this Gospel between 80-100 A.D. from Ephesus.

## Purpose and Unique Characteristics

John wrote this gospel to communicate the truth about who Jesus is. He wanted people to grasp that Jesus was fully God and fully human. John wrote to make clear that Jesus is God but came into this world and lived in a human body. The eternal Word of God became a human being. John clearly stated his purpose for writing this Gospel in chapter 20:31:

These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

John wanted people to understand who Jesus was so that they would believe in Him. John wrote to give testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John affirmed that if you believe in Jesus, you have eternal life.

One probable reason for John writing his gospel was to oppose Docetism (from the Greek word *Dokeo* meaning "it seems to be so"), which was a false teaching that alleged that Jesus only appeared to be human, but they claim He was not. One central theme in John's gospel is that Jesus was fully God and fully human.

It has been pointed out that John included **Seven Signs** in his gospel to prove that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. These are listed below:

Turning Water Into Wine	John 2:1-12
Healing the Nobleman's Son	John 4:46-54
Healing the Man at the Pool	John 5:1-11
Feeding of the 5,000	John 6:1-15
Walking on Water	John 6:16-21
Healing a Man Born Blind	John 9:1-12
Resurrecting Lazarus	John 11

John wrote for both Jews and Gentiles. We know that John had Gentiles in mind because he often explained Jewish words or customs for his readers (John 1:38, 41-42; 5:2; 9:7; 19:13, 17; 20:16). For example, In chapter 1:38 John said that the word "Rabbi" means "teacher." Obviously Jewish readers already knew this. John explained this for non-Jewish readers.

John appealed to Jewish readers by showing that Jesus, not only fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, but also Old Testament types. For example, we see in John chapter 1 that Jesus is called the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and the Ladder connecting heaven and earth (John 1:51; and see Gen. 28). He is the serpent lifted up (John 3:14). John asserted that Jesus is the Bread of God that came down from heaven (John 6:35), which caused Jewish people to reflect on God's miraculous provision of mana in the wilderness after Moses lead them out of Egypt.

The first three gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) focus on describing events in the life of Christ. John emphasized **the meaning** of those events. For example, all four gospels record the feeding of the five thousand, but only John records Jesus' teaching on "The Bread of Life," which followed that miracle.

John's Gospel concentrates almost entirely on the ministry of Jesus in and around Jerusalem during the temple feasts. Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus on the ministry of Jesus in the northern part of Israel, around Galilee.

The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) begin with the human genealogy of Jesus. The gospel of John begins with a prologue declaring the divine nature and eternal existence of Jesus. The other gospels describe what Jesus did and what Jesus said. John explains who Jesus was.

John gives no account of Christ's birth and there is no mention of his baptism. The institution of the Lord's Supper is not mentioned. There is no record of Christ's birth, temptation, transfiguration, or ascension. And there are no parables in the Gospel of John.

John gives more attention to the personal encounters and private conversations Jesus had with people. For example, John chapter 1 tells how Nathanael met Jesus and came to believe in Him. Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman at the well are well known. John also recorded conversations Jesus had with the following people: The man born blind, Mary and Martha, the eleven apostles, Mary Magdalene, and Peter at Lake Galilee.

There is also a wealth of information about Jesus that appears only in the Gospel of John including the wedding at Cana, the conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman at the well. The story of raising of Lazarus, the washing of the disciples' feet, and the farewell discourses in John 13-17 are only recorded in John. Also, John included teachings about the Holy Spirit that are not found in the other gospels. **More than 90 percent of John's Gospel is not found in the Synoptic gospels.**

Most of the events and teachings only found in the Gospel of John are listed below:

The prologue describing Christ's pre-existence and incarnation	1:1-18
Jesus' early ministry in Judea and Samaria	chapters 2 & 3
His first miracle, changing water to wine	2:1-11
His dialogue with Nicodemus	3:1-21
His encounter with a Samaritan woman	4:5-42
His healing of a lame man	5:1-15
His healing of a blind man	9:1-41
His Bread of Life teaching	6:22-71
His claim to be the living water	7:37-38
His encounter with the woman caught in adultery	8:1-12
His taking for Himself the name of God	8:24
His claim to be the Good Shepherd	10:1-39
The resurrection of Lazarus	11:1-46
The washing of the disciples' feet	13:1-15)
The Upper Room private teaching to His disciples	chapters 13-16
Jesus' High Priestly Prayer	chapter 17
The miraculous catch of fish	21:1-6
The recommissioning of Peter and prediction of His martyrdom	21:15-19

## Public Ministry, Private Teaching, Passion Story, Peter's Restoration

The first 12 chapters of John describe the public ministry of Jesus. Jesus made many claims concerning Himself, as explained above. These chapters record several conflicts and confrontations Jesus had with Jewish leaders who rejected His claims. John presented seven signs in his gospel, beginning with turning water into wine in chapter 2, to prove that Jesus is who He claimed to be.

Chapters 13-17 record private conversations Jesus had with His disciples. These conversations and teachings took place shortly before Jesus was crucified. During this time Jesus commanded the disciples to love one another like He had loved them. This is the sign that we are truly His disciples. Jesus also prayed that all believers would be one through His presence in them.

Chapters 18-20 give John's account of Jesus being arrested, His trial, His crucifixion and the resurrection. Chapter 21 is the wonderful account of Jesus meeting the disciples at Lake Galilee and the conversation He had with Peter. He asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" Jesus told Peter three times, "Feed My sheep." This is how Jesus restored Peter's relationship with Himself.

### Outline of the Gospel of John

I. The Public Ministry of Jesus	1-12
II. The Private Teaching of Jesus to His Disciples	13-17
III. The Arrest, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus	18-20
IV. The Restoration of Peter	21

### Message and Characteristics

John is more doctrinal than the other gospels. Many ideas and themes **reoccur** several times in the Gospel of John. There are five major themes in John's gospel:

Jesus is God, the "I AM."

Believe in Jesus and you will be saved.

Jesus commanded us to love and serve one another.

Jesus did everything through his relationship with His Father.

Jesus came to give us LIFE.

#### Jesus is God, the "I AM."

John emphasized that Jesus is both God and man. This is clear from the very first verse: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** (John 1:1). The Word (Jesus) is God and has always existed. However, He took on human flesh and became a human being. Jesus revealed to us who God is as stated in John 1:18:

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

John recorded many claims and statements that Jesus made affirming He is God. For example, Jesus said, **"Anyone who, has seen me has seen the Father"** (John 14:9). And, **"I and the Father are one"** (John 10:30).

Jesus made statements that were very hard for people to accept. For example, in John 6:53-55 Jesus said that if you do not eat His flesh and drink His blood you have no life in you:

"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

<sup>54</sup>Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>55</sup>For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.

This was hard for people to accept and many of them stopped following Jesus after they heard Jesus say this.

Jesus also made seven **"I am"** statements recorded by John:

**"I am the bread of life.** He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." John 6:35

**"I am the light of the world.** Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." John 8:12

**"I am the gate;** whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:9-10

**"I am the good shepherd.** The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11

**"I am the resurrection and the life.** He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26

**"I am the way and the truth and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6

**"I am the vine;** you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

Life is in Jesus. HE is our salvation and life. This is the heartbeat of the entire Bible and of what Jesus himself taught. Jesus taught that HE is our source of sustenance and our lives.

"I AM" in the Greek translation of the Old Testament is the covenant name for God in the Hebrew Bible. This name was revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:24. Jesus claimed to be one and the same as the One who said to Moses, **"I AM."**

Jesus plainly said that people should honor Him as they honor the Father: **"That all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him"** (John 5: 23). The Jewish leaders wanted to stone Jesus because He claimed to be God as recorded in John 8:58: **"I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!"**

## **Believe in Jesus and You will be Saved!**

The word **'believe'** is used 98 times in John's gospel. As stated above, John wrote so people would believe in Jesus and receive life through His name. This message is clear from the first chapter of John:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.  
John 1:12-13

The message of John's gospel is simple and straightforward: Salvation is a gift of God and is received by believing in Jesus. John continually emphasized the importance of believing in Him. John 3:16 is the most well-known verse in the Bible. It summarizes John's message of salvation through faith in Jesus:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

## **Jesus Commanded Us to Love and Serve One Another**

Jesus was a servant. He washed the disciples' feet and told us to do likewise (John 13:1-17). He commanded us to love one another as He loved us. Jesus said that this is the sign that we are truly His disciples.

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." John 13:14-15

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." John 15:12

## Jesus did everything through His relationship with His Father

Jesus became a human being to reveal to us who God is. This is clearly stated in John 1:18:

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

This theme is repeated again and again throughout John's gospel. For example, Jesus said, **"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"** (John 14:9). And, **"I and the Father are one"** (John 10:30).

John emphasized Jesus' continual focus on His relationship with His Father. The word **"Father" is used in the Gospel of John more than 120 times**. Jesus did everything through love relationship with His Father. John 5:19 is one example of this:

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

Jesus came to reveal the Father to us. Jesus is the greatest revelation of the character and nature of God. Jesus modeled living in a love relationship with His Father so that we can also live in a love relationship with Him.

## Jesus Came to Give us LIFE!

In chapter 1:4 John stated, **"In him was life**, and that life was the light of all mankind." Jesus came to give us abundant life as Jesus said in John 10:10: "I came that they may have life and may have it abundantly." The Greek word for "life" (Zoe) is used 36 times in the Gospel of John. This refers to the life of God. He indwells us through the Holy Spirit and empowers us to live life as He originally designed us to have.

## Other Important Words in the Gospel of John: Glory, Logos, Holy Spirit.

The word **"glory"** is repeated often in John. In the Old Testament, this word was reserved for God alone. The word "glory" is first used in the first chapter of John:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his **glory, the glory** of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

This is the word used in the Old Testament when the shekinah glory of God was visible in the tabernacle of Moses revealing the presence of God. John used the word "glory" 16 times in this gospel. Jesus prayed in John 17 that people who believe in Him would have the glory of His presence and become one in Him.

The word **"logos"** is another interesting key word John used. He began his gospel using this word:

In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word (logos) was with God, and the Word (logos) was God. John 1:1

"Logos" describes Jesus in a way that made sense to the readers. Six hundred years before John, a man named Heraclitus used the word "logos" to mean the reason why (or the purpose behind) what is seen. John referred to Jesus as "Logos" because He is the ultimate reason "why" everything exists! All things were created by Him and for Him!

The **Holy Spirit** is another frequent theme in John's writing. No other gospel talks about the Holy Spirit as much as John. He wrote about John the Baptist seeing the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus. He stated that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He wrote that we can be born of the Spirit. John recorded Jesus' words about rivers of living water flowing from within us, referring to the Holy Spirit.

Just before His death, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit after He left. He explained how the Holy Spirit would help them and teach them. He told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come alongside of them, comfort them, and guide them into all truth.

Other words that reoccur in the Gospel of John include the following: light, darkness, the world, witness, and spiritual rebirth.

# Chapter Summaries

## I. The Public Ministry of Jesus 1-12

### John 1

Jesus, the Word of God, became a man. John testifies concerning Jesus. Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel follow Jesus.

### John 2

Jesus changes water into wine, cleanses the temple, and answers the Jewish leaders' demand for a miraculous sign.

### John 3

Jesus talks with Nicodemus. John the Baptist exalts Jesus.

### John 4

Jesus talks with the Samaritan woman about living water. Jesus talks to his disciples about the harvest. Jesus heals and official's son.

### John 5

Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath, describes His relationship with His Father, cites testimonies concerning Himself, and condemns the Jews for refusing to believe.

### John 6

Jesus feeds a great crowd with a boys' lunch, walks on the water, and claims to be the living bread from heaven: **"I am the bread of life."**

### John 7

Jesus goes to the Feast in Jerusalem and teaches at the Temple. The people wonder if he is the Christ. Jesus confronts the Jewish leaders. They try to arrest Him, but the guards return without laying a hand on Him.

### John 8

Jesus rescues a woman who was caught in adultery. Jesus answers the Jews who did not accept His claims about Himself. **"I am the light of the world."**

### John 9

Jesus heals a blind man who is then interrogated by the Pharisees.

### John 10

Jesus declares, **"I am the gate."** **"I am the good Shepherd."** **"I and the Father are one."** However, the Jews refuse to believe Him.

### John 11

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Jesus declared, **"I am the resurrection and the life."**

### John 12

Jesus is anointed by Mary a dinner Bethany. Jesus enters Jerusalem. Jesus responds to non-Jews. The Jewish leaders refused to believe. Jesus talks about his relationship with His Father.

## II. The Private Teaching of Jesus 13-17

### John 13

Jesus washes the disciples feet, tells them that one of them will betray Him, commands them to love one another and predicts that Peter will deny Him three times.

### John 14

Jesus assures His disciples, talks to them about His relationship with His Father, promises to send them Holy Spirit, and discusses what it means to live in a love relationship Himself. Jesus declares, **"I am the way, the truth and the life."**

### John 15

Jesus declares, **"I am the vine** and you are the branches. Remain in me and you will bear much fruit." Remain in my love and love one another. The world will hate you as it hates Me."

### John 16

"I am going to the Father. Then Holy Spirit will come to you. He will guide you into all truth. You will have sorrow when I go away, but your grief will be turned to joy. In the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!"

### John 17

Jesus prays for himself, for disciples, and for all believers.

## III. The Arrest, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus 18-21

### John 18

Jesus is arrested and questioned by the high priest and by Pilate. Peter denies Jesus three times.

### John 19

Jesus is crucified and buried.

### John 20

Jesus appears to Mary and to the disciples and to Thomas.

### John 21

Jesus appears to seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus restores Peter and tells him to, "Feed My Sheep."

# LOGOS

**"In the beginning was the WORD (LOGOS).**

From Boice Expository Commentary John 1:1

In a very brief way, then, we have seen what the description of Jesus Christ as the "Word" might have meant to a Jew. But we must remember that the Jews were not the only ones who would be reading John's Gospel. The Gospel would also be read by Greeks and by those who spoke Greek and were influenced by Greek thought. What would the word *logos* mean to them?

For the Greeks, the answer to this question is found, not in religion but in philosophy. Almost 2,600 years ago, in the sixth century B.C., **a philosopher by the name of Heraclitus lived in Ephesus.** He was the man who said that it is impossible to step into the same river twice. He meant that all of life is in a state of change. Thus, although you step into the river once, step out, and then step in a second time, by the time you have taken the second step the water has flowed on and it is a different river. To Heraclitus, and to the philosophers who followed him, all of life seemed like that. But, they asked, **"If that be so, how is it that everything that exists is not in a state of perpetual chaos?"** Heraclitus answered that **life is not a chaos because the change that we see is not mere random change. It is ordered change.** And this means that **there must be a divine "reason" or "word" that controls it.** This is the *logos*, the word that John uses in the opening verse of his Gospel.

However the *logos* also meant more than this to Heraclitus. For once he had discovered, as he thought, that the controlling principle of matter was God's *logos*, then it was only a small step for him to apply it also to all the events of history and to the mental order that rules in the minds of men. For Heraclitus, then, the *Logos* became nothing less than the mind of God controlling this world and all men.

By the time John came to write his Gospel, the age of Heraclitus was nearly seven hundred years in the past. But the ideas of Heraclitus had been so formative for Greek thought that they had survived, **not only in his own philosophy but also in the philosophy of Plato and Socrates,** the Stoics, and others who had built upon it. They were discussed by many persons much as we discuss the atomic theory or evolution today. The Greeks knew all about the *Logos*. Therefore, it was with a stroke of divine genius that John seized upon this word, one that was as meaningful to the Greeks as it was to the Jewish people, and said by means of it, "Listen, you Greeks, the very thing that has most occupied your philosophical thought and about which you have all been writing for centuries—the *Logos* of God, this word, this controlling power of the universe and of man's mind—this has come to earth as a man and we have seen him."

**Plato,** we are told, once turned to that little group of philosophers and students that had gathered around him during the Greek Golden Age in Athens and said to his followers, **"It may be that some day there will come forth from God a Word, a Logos, who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain."** Now John is saying, "Yes, Plato, and the *Logos* has come; now God is revealed to us perfectly."