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THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Understanding the Purpose, Person and Message of the Fourth Gospel

"Matthew shows us the King. Mark shows us the Servant.
Luke shows us the Son of Man. John reveals the Son of God."

John's Gospel asks one question above all others:

"Who do you say Jesus is?"

Introduction

Why Study John's Gospel?

John's Gospel has been called "the simplest Gospel to read and one of the deepest Gospel to understand".

Studying John will teach us:

- Who Jesus really is — His eternal identity as the Son of God
- Why He came — to reveal the Father and give eternal life
- What eternal life actually means — not simply life after death, but knowing God personally
- How a person becomes a child of God
- The work and person of the Holy Spirit
- What it means to truly follow and "abide" in Christ

Unlike the Matthew, Mark and Luke (Synoptic Gospels), John spends less time describing events and more time explaining their meaning. He wants us not merely to know about Jesus — but to know Him personally.

The Author

The Gospel never names its author. Instead, he refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The early Church unanimously identified this person as John the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' twelve apostles.

John's unique qualifications for writing this Gospel include:

- A fisherman from Galilee, yet connected also to Jerusalem
- Member of Jesus' inner circle alongside Peter and James
- Present at key moments others did not witness — the Transfiguration, Gethsemane, the foot of the Cross
- An eyewitness who repeatedly declares: "We have seen" (1:14; 1 John 1:1–3)
- Likely the last surviving apostle when this Gospel was written

Unlike Paul, John writes as an eyewitness of the earthly ministry of Jesus. He had decades to reflect on what he had seen, heard, and handled. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he carefully selected and interpreted events to reveal Christ's deepest identity.

Occasionally while reading John, we must ask: is Jesus speaking directly, or is John expanding the meaning of what Jesus said? Either way, it is inspired Scripture.

Date, Place and Audience

Scripture itself does not identify when, where, or for whom John wrote. However, early Church writers — notably Irenaeus — consistently place the writing of this Gospel in Ephesus, probably between AD 85 and 95.

By this time:

- Jerusalem had been destroyed (AD 70)
- The other apostles had died
- The Church had spread throughout the Roman world
- False teaching about Jesus had begun to emerge rapidly

John appears to have written primarily for Greek-speaking churches made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers. He explains Jewish customs, translates Hebrew terms, and assumes his readers are familiar with the general story of Jesus — but need help understanding its deepest meaning. Nearly 90% of John's material appears nowhere else in the Gospels.

John's Purpose

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." — John 20:31

John is the only Gospel writer who explicitly tells us why he wrote. His purpose is both evangelistic — calling people to faith — and pastoral — calling believers to continue in faith.

The Greek verb translated "believe" appears in the present continuous tense throughout John. The emphasis is not simply: "Believe once." The call is: "Go on believing." The faith that saves is the faith that continues.

Whether someone is encountering Jesus for the first time or growing as His disciple, John's single aim is that every reader will recognise Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Son of God — and find life in Him.

Why John's Gospel is Different

The first three Gospels — Matthew, Mark and Luke — are called the Synoptic Gospels because they share a similar perspective on the life of Jesus. John deliberately writes from a different vantage point. Where the Synoptics largely look at what Jesus did and said, John looks at **who Jesus is**.

The Synoptics look at the outside of Jesus. John looks at the inside.

What John Deliberately Omits

John does not include many events familiar from the other Gospels. He omits the birth narratives, baptism, temptation, casting out of demons, transfiguration, institution of the Lord's Supper, and the ascension. These were not unimportant — they simply did not serve John's particular purpose.

What John Uniquely Includes

In their place, John records material found nowhere else:

- The wedding at Cana (water into wine)
- The encounter with Nicodemus
- Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well
- The raising of Lazarus
- The foot washing
- The extended Upper Room Discourse (chapters 13–17)
- The High Priestly Prayer of chapter 17

Everything John includes serves one purpose: to reveal who Jesus is.

The Problems John Was Addressing

John writes into a world where confusion about Jesus was rapidly increasing. At least four major problems required a response:

1. An Elevated View of John the Baptist

In Ephesus and beyond, some followers had continued to follow John the Baptist rather than recognise Jesus as Lord. Paul encountered this group in Acts 19:1–7. John the Evangelist responds throughout his Gospel by carefully positioning John the Baptist as the witness, not the one to whom witness is given. He records the Baptist's own words: "He must increase; I must decrease." Every mention of John the Baptist in this Gospel diminishes his role and magnifies Christ.

2. A Diminished View of Jesus

Greek philosophy divided reality sharply between the material and the spiritual, the physical and the divine. Many therefore concluded that Jesus could not be fully God and fully man. Early forms of Gnosticism taught that matter is evil and that God could not truly become flesh. John responds from his very first sentence: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Jesus is:

- **Fully God**
- **Fully Man**

Only as fully God could He reveal the Father perfectly. Only as fully man could He stand in our place and reconcile humanity to God.

3. Uncertainty About Faith

John uses the verb "believe" (Greek: pisteuo) and he identifies three dimensions of genuine faith:

- Believing that. Accepting the facts about Jesus. Necessary, but not sufficient.
- Believing in. Trusting Jesus personally. Trust always produces obedience.
- Continuing to believe. Holding to Christ. Faith and faithfulness are inseparable.

4. Unbelief Despite Evidence

Although Jesus performed many signs, many who witnessed them still rejected Him. John addresses this sobering reality directly, showing that unbelief is ultimately a moral and spiritual choice, not merely an intellectual one. Jesus Himself identifies the root: "Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness rather than light" (3:19).

How John Makes His Case

John constructs his Gospel like a carefully argued legal case. He presents evidence (signs) &, witnesses. His evidence is organised around three sets (signs, witnesses & I AM statements) of seven — a number signifying completeness in Hebrew thought.

The Seven Signs

John records only seven miracles (signs). A sign points beyond itself to a deeper meaning. Each sign asks the same question: what does this reveal about Jesus?

#	Sign	What It Reveals About Jesus
1	Water into Wine (2:1–11)	The old order gives way to something new and far better in Christ
2	Healing the Official's Son (4:46–54)	Authority extending beyond distance and death
3	Healing the Lame Man (5:1–15)	Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath
4	Feeding the Five Thousand (6:1–15)	The Bread of Life who satisfies completely
5	Walking on Water (6:16–21)	Divine authority over creation
6	Healing the Man Born Blind (9:1–41)	The Light of the World who opens spiritual eyes
7	Raising Lazarus (11:1–44)	The Resurrection and the Life who conquers death

The Seven Witnesses

In Jewish law, two or three witnesses were sufficient to establish a verdict. John presents seven: John the Baptist, Nicodemus, Samaritan woman, Martha, Thomas, Pilate, Peter. Each testifies from a different angle to the same conclusion: Jesus is the Son of God.

The Seven "I AM" Statements

These seven declarations are unique to John's Gospel and carry enormous theological weight. The phrase "I AM" deliberately echoes God's covenant name revealed to Moses: Yahweh ("I AM WHO I AM", Exodus 3:14). This is why the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy. Each statement reveals a distinct aspect of His divine identity.

Statement	Ref.	Meaning
I AM the Bread of Life	6:35	He alone satisfies the deepest hunger of the soul
I AM the Light of the World	8:12	He dispels spiritual darkness and shows the way to God
I AM the Gate	10:9	The only entrance into salvation and fellowship with God
I AM the Good Shepherd	10:11	He knows, leads, and lays down His life for His sheep
I AM the Resurrection and the Life	11:25	He has power over death and gives eternal life now
I AM the Way, the Truth, the Life	14:6	The exclusive path to the Father
I AM the True Vine	15:1	Remaining in Him is the source of all fruitfulness

The Logos — A Theological Study

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." — John 1:1–3

No passage in Scripture opens more profoundly than John 1:1–18. While Mark begins his Gospel at the start of Jesus' ministry, Matthew with Abraham, and Luke with Adam, John begins before creation itself. Before Genesis. Before time. Before anything existed. And in that eternal "before", John declares: the Logos already was.

A Name Given at Bethlehem

We are so familiar with the name "Jesus" that we rarely stop to ask: what was He called before He was born? The name Jesus — is a His human name, given at a specific moment in history when the eternal Son of God took on flesh. But He existed long before Bethlehem.

Before creation, before time, before anything was made, He was known as the Logos — the Word. And it was through this Word that everything came into being. Genesis 1 already hints at this: God said — and it was so. Creation happened through speech, through the Word. John now reveals who that Word was. Everything that exists was made through Him and for Him. He is not a product of creation; He is its author, its reason, and its goal.

When John writes "In the beginning was the Word", he is telling us that the One we now know as Jesus has always existed — and that the entire universe was made by Him, through Him, and for Him.
The name changed at Bethlehem. The Person did not.

What Does Logos Mean?

The Greek word Logos, translated into English as "Word," carried rich meaning for both John's Jewish and Greek readers — and John deliberately addressed both worlds.

To Greek Readers

The philosopher Heraclitus (c. 535–475 BC) used Logos to describe the rational principle governing the universe — the reason why everything exists and holds together. Science has always searched for this underlying "reason why." Biology, psychology, sociology — each pursues the Logos within its own narrow field. John makes an astonishing claim: Jesus is the Logos behind everything. He is the reason the entire universe exists.

To Jewish Readers

For John's Jewish readers, God's Word was not merely a sound. It was active, creative power. *"God said... and it was so"* (Genesis 1). God's Word created, revealed, and accomplished His purposes. John's readers knew that the Word of God was the primary means by which God revealed and expressed Himself.

John's Revolutionary Claim

John unites both worlds in one extraordinary statement: the Logos is not an abstract principle, a philosophy, or merely a divine force. The Logos is a Person. Jesus Christ is the eternal Reason behind creation, the full self-expression of God, and the living revelation of the Father.

The Logos (The Word) is not an idea. The Logos is not a philosophy. The Logos is not merely doctrine. ***The Logos is a Person.***

Four Foundational Truths About the Logos

John 1:1–3 introduces four truths that undergird everything else in this Gospel:

1. His Eternity "In the beginning was the Word." The Logos was not created at some point in time. He already existed before time began. He did not come into being; He simply was. This pre-existence sets Jesus apart from every prophet and teacher who ever lived.

2. His Personality "The Word was with God." Literally: face to face with God. The Logos existed in an eternal, personal relationship of love with the Father. This is not the language of an impersonal force; it is the language of personal communion.

3. His Deity "And the Word was God." The Logos is fully divine. Not a lesser god, not a divine being below the Father — but God in the fullest sense.

4. His Incarnation "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (1:14). This is the great miracle at the heart of Christianity. The eternal, divine Logos — the One through whom all things were made — entered human history. He did not merely appear to be human. He truly became human, while remaining fully God. This is the doctrine of the Incarnation, and John's entire Gospel is an exploration of its meaning and implications.

The Great Themes of John's Gospel

As you study each chapter, you will encounter John's major themes returning again and again. The following table provides a guide:

Theme	Meaning
Believing	Faith is trusting Jesus completely — not merely accepting facts but ongoing, active trust in His person.
Eternal Life	Not merely life after death, but the life of God beginning now through personal knowledge of the Father and the Son.
Light	Jesus exposes spiritual darkness and leads people into the truth. Rejecting Him is choosing to remain in the dark.
Truth	Truth is not abstract philosophy or doctrine alone — truth is a Person. To know truth is to know Jesus.
Love	God's love initiates salvation. Believers, in response, must love one another as Christ has loved them.
Glory	God's glory is most fully revealed — paradoxically — at the Cross, where love and holiness meet.
Holy Spirit	The Spirit teaches, convicts, reminds, empowers, and glorifies Christ in the hearts of believers.
Witness	Every believer is called to testify.
Abiding	The Christian life depends on continual, living fellowship with Christ. Apart from Him we can do nothing.

How Should We Read John's Gospel?

John should not be read as merely a history of Jesus' life. It is an invitation. Every account, every conversation, every miracle has been selected and arranged to move the reader from encounter to belief, and from belief to life.

Three Questions to Bring to Every Passage

1. What does this chapter reveal about who Jesus is?

John's primary concern throughout is Christ's identity. Before we ask what a passage means for our lives, we should first ask what it shows us about Jesus.

2. How does this chapter call me to continue believing?

Faith in John is not a past event but a present reality. Each passage is an invitation to ongoing trust. Where is Jesus asking us to trust Him more fully, more obediently, more consistently?

3. What kind of life is Jesus offering?

John presents eternal life as knowing God personally, living in the power of the Holy Spirit, and walking in truth, light, freedom, and love. Every chapter offers a window into this abundant life.

Conclusion

"These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." — John 20:31

John's Gospel is more than a record of Jesus' life. It is a summons — to look at the evidence, to consider the witnesses, to hear the signs, to listen to the "I AM" statements — and to arrive at a verdict about who Jesus is.

John does not present evidence merely for the mind. He calls for a response from the heart. His desire is that every reader — whether encountering Jesus for the first time or deepening a relationship with Him built over years — will recognise Jesus as the promised Messiah, the eternal Son of God, and through believing in Him will receive and continue to experience the gift of eternal life.

As we study this Gospel together, may our aim be more than gaining knowledge. May we come to know Christ more deeply, trust Him more fully, and follow Him more faithfully each day.

John's Gospel asks every reader the same question that Jesus asked His disciples:

"Who do you say I am?"

How we answer that question changes everything.