

Introduction to the Gospel of John

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Bible Text: John

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Welcome to the study of the gospel according to John. As you read and study this book of the New Testament you will have the opportunity many have wished for, to stand face to face with the historical Jesus and to probe into the mystery of his true identity.

Who was this man? What did he say? What did he do to change the course of history? And, most important, how can Jesus and his message impact us today, 2000 years later in a world that seems to have changed so much?

Well, before we begin to look for answers to these larger questions, let's ask a few preliminary questions. First, who wrote this book? Who was John?

John was Jesus' disciple, apparently from the earliest days of Jesus' public life and ministry. He was a ready disciple or follower of John the Baptist who preached of Jesus' coming just prior to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Hearing John the Baptist hail Jesus as Lamb of God, John left his old teacher to follow a new one and never turned back. In time he became Jesus' closest friend and disciple and was with him to the end.

You can be sure that John was in the best position to observe and explain the words and deeds of Jesus. He writes as an eye witness, a believer, a man well instructed in the way of Christ Jesus.

Second, why is this book called the gospel?

The English word means "glad tidings" or "good news." It represents the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on). The word presupposes a messenger or herald who has good news to announce or report.

What are these glad tidings? What is this good news?

Well, John himself provides the very best one sentence summary when he says, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."¹ It really is impossible to be more concise or to use simpler terms than John uses here. But beware! There are great depths of

¹ John 3:16

meaning behind these simple words. Many than any other writer in the New Testament, John's style was closely conformed to that of Jesus himself.

John's gospel is not intended for careless reading. You must commit yourself to careful study, meditation and prayer if you want to explore John's hidden depths.

Chapter one introduces us to the eternal Word or Son of God and announces the fact of the incarnation, that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This revelation of the eternal identity and pre history of Jesus is confirmed from the testimony of John the Baptist.

Chapter two presents a historical Jesus, a man with family and friends who is happy to honor marriage with his presence at a wedding feast. By turning water into wine Jesus manifests forth his glory and works the beginnings of faith in the hearts of his chosen disciples.

In Chapter three John presents God's redemptive purpose in sending the eternal Son of God into the world to dwell among sinners and evil doers as the wonder working Son of Man. He concludes with more testimony from John the Baptist, spelling out in plain terms the blessings that accrue to those who believe on Jesus and the wrath that abides on those who do not.

The balance of the gospel of John provides a history and commentary that confirms and elaborates six propositions in various ways. John draws upon the words and deeds of Jesus, the testimony of Scripture, the Father's witness of his Son, the witness of believers, the words of the multitude and even the unwitting testimony of Jesus' enemies, judges and tormentors.

The central portion of the book is devoted to Christ's claims—summed up in a series of statements—each beginning with the words, "I am."

"I am that bread of life."²

"I am the light of the world."³

"I am the door."⁴

"I am the good shepherd."⁵

"I am the resurrection, and the life."⁶

² John 6:48

³ John 8:12, 9:5

⁴ John 10:7, 10:9

⁵ John 10:11, 10:14

⁶ John 11:25

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”⁷

“I am the true vine.”⁸

Each of these statements is deeply rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures and can't be rightly understood apart from them. So, too, is the most majestic of all the “I am” sayings of Jesus. “Before Abraham was, I am.”⁹ Thus, asserting his identity with Jehovah, God of Israel, as he revealed himself to Moses.

Considerable attention is also devoted by John to the roots and development of the conflict between Christ and those who believed on him on the one hand and on the other, the unbelieving leadership of the Jewish Church, the scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees, the priests, the rulers of the people and their Gentile allies in the political order.

This conflict ends with the arrest, trial, condemnation crucifixion and death of Jesus and his ultimate victory over all his foes when he rose again from the dead on the third day. Good now triumphs over wickedness. Light triumphs over darkness. Life triumphs over death as Christ triumphs over the world, the flesh and the devil.

At the end of his account of the good news concerning Jesus is John's plain statement of purpose. He admits he has had to leave many things out of his book. “But,” he says, “these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”¹⁰

Your study of the gospel of according to John holds the promise of much more than mere intellectual profit. You are about to meet the one who has power to forgive your sins, heal your wounds, rebuild your shattered life, fill you with good things, lead you in path's of righteousness and bring you safe at last to the Father's house.

Are you ready for this life changing encounter?

⁷ John 14:6

⁸ John 15:1

⁹ John 8:58

¹⁰ John 20:31