

IN THE
BEGINNING
WAS THE...
WORD
A STUDY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

LESSON 1 – Introduction to the Gospel of John

FACILITATOR'S Note

The following lesson is designed to help class participants develop a rudimentary knowledge of the background and purpose for the Gospel of John. This is important, as it will set a foundation for all of our studies to come. Please realize that many volumes on the Gospel of John have been written over the centuries. There is no way that we will be able to adequately nor comprehensively provide all introductory material available. However, it is our intent to provide a cursory overview that will help class participants understand the reason for the overarching theme and purpose that “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 20:31 ESV).”

The study of the Gospel of John this semester has a two-fold purpose. First, we hope that all class participants will gain a better knowledge and understanding of the Gospel so that they may know Christ more intimately and develop a deeper relationship with Him. Second, we hope that this knowledge and understanding will lead our family members to demonstrate their wisdom of the Gospel by sharing it with those around them (i.e. – at school, at work, etc.). Having knowledge about a particular topic of study does not mean an internal change has been made that brings about action. The first step is to gain the knowledge (a matter of the HEAD). But then the longest journey begins, and it is only 12 inches. That 12-inch journey is going deeper with the knowledge to the point that you understand it (a matter of moving it from the HEAD to the HEART). The final step is to move from understanding to wisdom. This is demonstrated through people’s actions. When one takes what they know and

understand and puts it into practice, then they demonstrate Godly wisdom (moving from the HEART to the HANDS – Matt. 7:24-27). So, this semester we hope to provide material that will provide knowledge (HEAD); then ask questions that will bring us understanding (HEART); and then motivate participants to go and live the Word in the world and demonstrate Godly wisdom (HANDS).

HEAD → HEART → HANDS

Remember, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word became flesh. We hope that by these studies that your class participants will not only hear, know, and understand the Word, but that they will also be driven to become the “Living Word” to the world around us. Your role in this process as a class facilitator is very important. Go beyond these lessons to demonstrate how what the Gospel of John teaches us can and should be lived daily. Use your life and the lives of others as examples of this “Living Word” concept. We are all the 67th book of Scripture as we engage the world with the Word of God. God bless you as you partner with His Spirit to share His message of good news! Remember, don’t worry about what you will say or how you will say it. For at that time, the Spirit of your Father will be speaking through you (Matthew 10:19-20).

As always, we would encourage you to begin preparing for each lesson by digging into the Word and specifically the text for each of the weeks. As you move through the Word, jot down any thoughts that come to you and particular passages that stand out and speak to you. We assure you that these will come into play as you facilitate this discussion. It is then that you should approach this lesson plan and use it (and others) only as a guide for the weeks to come. Your group is different than all the rest and so your lessons should be adapted accordingly.

PRAYER



Begin your time with a prayer asking God for the guidance of His Holy Spirit as you and your class seek to encounter Him through His Holy Word.

FOCUS

- Presentation of introduction material for the Gospel of John.
- Develop an interest in studying the Gospel of John.
- Recognize that it is not only important to hear the Gospel message, but to understand it, live it, and share it with the world.

DISCUSSION STARTERS (OPTIONAL)

- Have any of you ever done an in-depth study of the Gospel of John? If so, what do you remember learning from the study (biggest takeaway)?
- What are some of the most well known passages in John and why?
- The Gospel of John is not like Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Although it remains consistent with the other Gospels, it provides a great deal of material the other Gospels do not. Let's now consider this Gospel in more detail...

KNOWLEDGE HEAD

Introductory Material

- **AUTHOR & TITLE**
 - The author of the Gospel is widely agreed to be the apostle John and is demonstrated by the title assigned to it "The Gospel According to John." From the Gospel itself, we find evidence that indicates that the author was:
 1. An apostle (1:14; cf. 2:11; 19:35)
 2. One of the 12 disciples Jesus' called ("the disciple whom Jesus loved"; 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 24)
 3. John the son of Zebedee (note the connection of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21:2–23; see also Luke 22:8; Acts 1:13; 3:1–4:37; 8:14–25; Gal. 2:9)
 - John was a prominent Jew in the early church but he never mentions himself by name in the Gospel. As mentioned before, he only refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Therefore, what we find in this Gospel is the memories of a close and intimate friend to Jesus. Jesus completely transformed John's life and John shares that within the pages of the text. This makes this Gospel unique in regards to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But we will discuss those differences in more detail later.
 - It is apparent that John knew Jewish life well. He makes multiple references to Jewish customs, geography, and Messianic expectations throughout the text:
 - Messianic Expectations (see, e.g., 1:21 and note; 7:40–42)
 - Hostility between Jews and Samaritans (see 4:9)
 - Jewish customs
 - For instance, the duty of circumcision on the eighth day, which takes precedence over not working on the Sabbath (7:22).
 - Geography of the Holy Land
 - He locates Bethany about 15 stadia (about two miles) from Jerusalem (11:18) and mentions Cana, which is a village not referred to in any earlier writing known to us (2:1; 21:2).
 - The Gospel constantly refers to things that reflect the memories of an eyewitness—an example is the recollection of the house at Bethany being filled with the fragrance of the broken perfume jar (12:3).

- **DATE**

- The dating of the Gospel is most likely between a.d. 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and a.d. 100 (the end of John's lifetime), but there is unfortunately not enough evidence to be very precise.
- Some have suggested an earlier date between the 50s, but no later than a.d. 70. However, there is more evidence to the contrary.
- A date after a.d. 70 is suggested by:
 - The references in 6:1 and 21:1 to the Sea of Tiberias (which is a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the 1st century)
 - The reference in 21:19 to Peter's martyrdom (which was probably between a.d. 64 and 66)
 - No reference to the Sadducees (they ceased to be a Jewish religious party after a.d. 70).
- The testimony of the early church also favors a date after a.d. 70 as Clement of Alexandria states, "Last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain [in the other canonical Gospels] ... composed a spiritual gospel" (cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.7).
- Assuming a later date is important as it tells us several things like:
 - If it is a later date, as most believe, then the other Gospels had been in circulation for some time. Therefore, John could be writing to add his unique perspective and to fill in some of the details that the other Gospel writers did not record.
 - A later date would make sense, as it appears John assumes his readers are familiar with the other Gospels. For instance, John does not mention the anguish of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Why would he need to if the other writers had already described that? However, John does give us the details of Jesus' conversation with His disciples in the upper room. The other writers mention it only briefly.

- **THEME**

- John focuses his Gospel on Jesus being the promised Messiah and Son of God. People may have eternal life by believing in the Messiah/Son of God. He emphasizes this by saying, "...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 20:31 ESV)
- His central theme is what you see posted on signs and waving from the stands during football games: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 ESV)

- **PURPOSE, OCCASION, BACKGROUND** (This section is from the ESV Study Bible *Introduction to the Gospel of John*)

- The Gospel of John was written by the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, a Palestinian Jew and a member of Jesus' inner apostolic circle during his earthly ministry. John's original audience consisted of both Jews and Gentiles living in the larger Greco-Roman world in Ephesus and beyond toward the close of the first century a.d. He frequently explains Jewish customs and Palestinian geography and translates Aramaic terms into Greek (see note on 1:38), thus showing awareness of non-Jewish readers. He also presents Jesus as the Word become flesh against the backdrop of Greek thought that

included Stoicism and early Gnosticism. But John also shows awareness of Jewish readers as he demonstrates Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah, the fulfillment of many OT themes, and the Son of God who was sent by God the Father to reveal the only true God and to provide redemption for humanity.

- The purpose statement in 20:30–31 makes it appear that John wrote with an evangelistic intent. However, his depth of teaching shows that he wanted readers not only to come to initial saving faith in Jesus, but also to grow into a rich, well-informed faith. John’s central contention is that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah and Son of God, and that by believing in him people may have eternal life. To this end, he marshals the evidence of several selected messianic signs performed by Jesus and of a series of witnesses to Jesus—including the Scriptures, John the Baptist, Jesus himself, God the Father, Jesus’ works, the Spirit, and John himself. It is also likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people, a concept that would be especially forceful if the date of composition (as seems likely) was subsequent to a.d. 70 (the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple).

Key Themes in the Gospel of John (Taken from the ESV Study Bible)

1. Jesus is God.	1:1–2, 18; 5:17–18; 8:58–59; 10:30–33; 20:28
2. Jesus existed before the creation of the world.	1:1–2; 8:58; 17:5, 24
3. Jesus has supernatural knowledge.	1:48; 2:4, 19, 23–25; 3:14; 4:17–18; 6:51, 70; 8:28; 9:3; 10:15, 17–18; 11:4, 14; 12:24, 32; 13:10–11, 38; 21:18–19
4. Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.	1:36, 41, 49; 3:18; 4:25, 29; 5:25; 7:26, 27, 31, 41, 42; 9:22; 10:24, 36; 11:4, 27; 12:34; 19:7; 20:30–31
5. Jesus is the “I am.”	4:26; 6:20, 35, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1; 18:5–6 (cf. Ex. 3:14–15; Isa. 41:4; 43:10–13, 25; 45:18; 51:12; 52:6)
6. Jesus, the sent Son, reflects the sender.	3:17, 35–36; 5:19–26; 6:40; 8:35–36; 14:13; 17:1
7. Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish festivals and institutions (including the temple).	1:29, 36; 2:14–22, esp. v. 21; 4:23–24; 8:12; 9:5; 19:14
8. Jesus is the giver of eternal life.	1:4; 3:15–16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 26, 39–40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47–48, 51, 53–54, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 25, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2–3; 20:31
9. The signs of Jesus show that he is the Messiah (cf. also Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, above).	2:1–11, 13–22; 4:46–54; 5:1–15; 6:1–15; 9:1–41; 11:1–44
10. The witnesses to Jesus testify that he is the Messiah.	1:7–8, 15, 19, 32, 34; 3:11, 32–33; 4:39; 5:31–39; 8:14, 18; 10:25; 15:26–27; 18:37; 19:35; 21:24
11. Father, Son, and Spirit are united in their work of revelation and redemption.	14:17–18, 23, 26; 15:26; 20:21–22
12. Jesus’ death is the basis of salvation.	1:29; 3:14–15; 6:51–58; 10:15; 11:50–52; 12:24; 15:13
13. God is sovereign in salvation.	3:21; 5:21; 6:37–45, 64–65; 10:16, 26–30; 15:16; 17:2, 6, 9
14. Salvation is obtained through believing in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God.	1:12; 3:15, 16; 5:24; 6:29, 35; 8:24; 11:25–27, 42; 12:44; 17:8, 21; 20:31
15. Believers can experience the benefits of salvation already in the here and now, during this present evil age.	3:18, 36; 4:23; 5:24; 6:39–40; 10:10, 26–29; 11:25–26
16. Believers are called to continue Jesus’ mission (cf. also Jesus as the sent Son, above).	4:38; 15:16; 17:18; 20:21–22

- **WHY IS THIS GOSPEL SO DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER THREE?**

- Consider some of the differences:

1. John is different in **STRUCTURE**. Matthew, Mark, and Luke follow the same basic outline: various beginnings, John the Baptizer’s ministry, Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, Peter’s confession, onto Jerusalem, Jesus’ last week, Death/Burial/Resurrection. John’s Gospel begins in the beginning with a deeply theological *Prologue* and ends with a narrative *Epilogue*. Between them are two “books” —
 - a. **The Book of Signs (John 1:19-ch. 12)** — includes stories from Jesus’ ministry that are not connected by chronology or geography. In fact, it appears often to be out of order and in the wrong place. However, John organizes his stories according to themes surrounding Jesus’ signs and sayings. He emphasizes:
 - i. The peoples’ *responses* to Jesus words and works
 - ii. Jesus’ *controversies* with Jewish religious leaders.
 - b. **The Book of Glory (John 13-20)** — describes Jesus’ in-depth ministry to his disciples in the *upper room* as he prepared them for his departure, and then tells the story of his *death and resurrection*, bringing the drama to a climax with the account of his appearance to Thomas.
2. John is different in **CONTENT**. Around 92% of the content in John’s Gospel is unique. For instance, he records 8 miracles of which 6 of them are found only in the Gospel of John. Consider these other differences in content:

Some things NOT in John	Some things UNIQUE to John
Jesus’ birth and childhood	Cleansing of temple early in Jesus’ ministry
Jesus’ temptation	Jesus’ ministry of baptism in Judea
Teaching in parables	Teaching Nicodemus about being “born again”
Demon exorcisms	The wedding in Cana
Healings of lepers	The Samaritan woman
Teachings of the Sermon on the Mount	The “I AM” sayings
Stories about tax collectors	Raising Lazarus from the dead
The Sadducees	Jesus washing the disciples’ feet
Peter’s confession	The Upper Room discourse
The transfiguration	The Paraclete (or advocate/helper—the Holy Spirit)
Jesus’ prophetic discourse	Jesus’ prayer for his disciples
Institution of the Lord’s Supper	Jesus’ appearance to Mary in the garden
The agony in Gethsemane	Jesus’ appearance on the lake and Peter’s restoration

3. John is different in **VOCABULARY**. John does not focus on the “*kingdom of God [heaven]*” as Matthew, Mark, and Luke do nor does he record the parables of Jesus. Instead, he shares an entirely different vocabulary: light and darkness, life, truth, witness, abide, world, believe, Father and Son, Jesus’ “hour,” glory, etc.

4. John shows no **SECRET** about Jesus' **IDENTITY**. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all contain the Messianic Secret (Jesus telling people not to tell others about Himself) and then they use Peter's confession to announce that Jesus is the Messiah, halfway through the story. John, on the other hand, announces Jesus as the Messiah six times in the first chapter alone.
 - o John does not write a biography of Jesus as Matthew, Mark, and Luke do. Instead, he makes a theological and philosophical argument for Jesus being the Messiah and the Son of God. Each and every event that John records is intended to demonstrate Jesus' deity and His glory. They all point to the validity of Jesus' claims to be the Son of God. His goal is to help all his readers proclaim that *JESUS CHRIST IS GOD!*

UNDERSTANDING HEART

- So what? What does all this mean and why is it important?
 - o It is important to know because one of Jesus' closest friends was convinced He was the Messiah. His friend was not just a friend, but his Lord and Savior. John's life was forever transformed by the Messiah and he had to tell others about it. John wants others to believe and proclaim Jesus Christ is Lord! He also wants to show how that fact will change their lives in incredible ways. It is by believing in Jesus that we find REAL LIFE, ETERNAL LIFE, a WHOLE NEW LIFE!!!
- What makes you most nervous about this study? The most excited?
- John's Gospel calls us to live transformed lives, to live in love and obedience to God, and to be united in those efforts. Do you feel you have the passion that John did for his Lord and Savior? Why or why not? What is holding you back?

WISDOM HANDS

- What can you do this week, tomorrow, to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
- Who in your group of friends or family do you need to share the message with TODAY?

PRAYER

End your time together with a prayer. Ask God to help you in sharing His Gospel message of Love and Grace to a lost world. Ask Him to open the eyes of our hearts through this study so that we may know Him more and develop an intimate relationship with Him.

CLASS OUTLINE

"...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 20:31) The Gospel of John was written so that those who read its message may believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God, THE CHRIST. The following outline holds the major themes expounded on in the Gospel of John in order that its readers may believe in Jesus and have eternal life. (Adapted from the "Key Themes" outline in the ESV Study Bible):

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (January 4)
2. THE WORD IS...
GOD (January 11)
 - a. Jesus is GOD
 - b. 1:1–2, 18; 5:17–18; 8:58–59; 10:30–33; 20:28
3. THE WORD IS...
BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD (January 18)
 - a. Jesus existed before the creation of all there is.
 - b. 1:1–2; 8:58; 17:5, 24
4. THE WORD IS...
OMNISCIENT (ALL KNOWING) (January 25)
 - a. Jesus has supernatural knowledge that only God can possess.
 - b. 1:48; 2:4, 19, 23–25; 3:14; 4:17–18; 6:51, 70; 8:28; 9:3; 10:15, 17–18; 11:4, 14; 12:24, 32; 13:10–11, 38; 21:18–19
5. THE WORD IS...
THE MESSIAH AND SON OF GOD (February 1)
 - a. Jesus is the promised Messiah and Son of God prophesied in Old Testament.
 - b. 1:36, 41, 49; 3:18; 4:25, 29; 5:25; 7:26, 27, 31, 41, 42; 9:22; 10:24, 36; 11:4, 27; 12:34; 19:7; 20:30–31
6. THE WORD IS...
THE "I AM" (February 8)
 - a. Jesus is the "I AM" from the Old Testament. He is Yahweh/Jehovah.
 - b. 4:26; 6:20, 35, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1; 18:5–6 (cf. Ex. 3:14–15; Isa. 41:4; 43:10–13, 25; 45:18; 51:12; 52:6)
7. THE WORD IS...
THE SON WHO WAS SENT BY AND REFLECTS THE FATHER (February 15)
 - a. Jesus was sent by God and reflects the very essence of the Father.
 - b. 3:17, 35–36; 5:19–26; 6:40; 8:35–36; 14:13; 17:1
8. THE WORD IS...
THE FULFILLMENT OF JEWISH FESTIVALS/INSTITUTIONS (February 22)
 - a. Jesus fulfills the Jewish festivals and institutions found in the Law (even the temple itself).
 - b. 1:29, 36; 2:14–22, esp. v. 21; 4:23–24; 8:12; 9:5; 19:14
9. THE WORD IS...
THE GIVER OF ETERNAL LIFE (March 1)
 - a. Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe in Him.
 - b. 1:4; 3:15–16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 26, 39–40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47–48, 51, 53–54, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 25, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2–3; 20:31

10. THE WORD IS...

A MIRACLE WORKER (March 8)

- a. Jesus performs signs and wonders that demonstrate that He is the promised Messiah.
- b. 2:1–11, 13–22; 4:46–54; 5:1–15; 6:1–15; 9:1–41; 11:1–44

11. THE WORD IS...

TESTIFIED BY OTHERS TO BE THE MESSIAH (March 15)

- a. Witnesses testify that Jesus is the Messiah.
- b. 1:7–8, 15, 19, 32, 34; 3:11, 32–33; 4:39; 5:31–39; 8:14, 18; 10:25; 15:26–27; 18:37; 19:35; 21:24

12. THE WORD IS...

UNIFIED WITH FATHER AND SPIRIT IN THEIR WORK OF REVELATION AND REDEMPTION (March 22)

- a. Father, Son, and Spirit are united in their work.
- b. 14:17–18, 23, 26; 15:26; 20:21–22

13. THE WORD IS...

THE BASIS OF SALVATION (March 29)

- a. It is by Jesus' death that God brings His people salvation.
 - i. 1:29; 3:14–15; 6:51–58; 10:15; 11:50–52; 12:24; 15:13
- b. God is sovereign in salvation.
 - i. 3:21; 5:21; 6:37–45, 64–65; 10:16, 26–30; 15:16; 17:2, 6, 9

14. BELIEVERS MUST...

CONFESS AND BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH (April 12)

- a. Salvation is obtained by believing in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God.
 - i. 1:12; 3:15, 16; 5:24; 6:29, 35; 8:24; 11:25–27, 42; 12:44; 17:8, 21; 20:31
- b. The benefits of salvation can be experienced here and now (in this evil age), but will be fully known when He returns.
 - i. 3:18, 36; 4:23; 5:24; 6:39–40; 10:10, 26–29; 11:25–26

15. BELIEVERS MUST...

CONTINUE JESUS' WORK AND MISSION (April 19)

- a. Believers are called upon to continue the work of the Savior in order that all men may know and be saved.
- b. 4:38; 15:16; 17:18; 20:21–22

16. CONCLUSION TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (April 26)