



## Overview of the Gospel of John

### Outline of Overview of John

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- II. Substance and Style
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- IV. Miracles and “I am” Statements

### I. Purpose of the Gospel

#### A. Five Great Truths

Like the other Gospels, John has the overall objective of presenting Jesus of Nazareth as the prophesied Messiah of the Old Testament. In addition, however, John distinctively emphasizes:

1. The dynamic, divine leadership of Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life;
2. The fullness and daily strength that emanates from Jesus as the Light of the world;
3. The incredible promise of an abundant, joyful life of peace in Jesus, the True Vine.
4. The divine capacity of Jesus to renovate the heart, transform the spirit and sustain the regenerated life here and now;
5. The true meaning of love and obedience that produces a life-long commitment to Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

#### B. The Nature and Substance of Jesus

John wrote his Gospel, not only to confirm believers in their trust of Christ and to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ, but also to refute the heretical errors being taught in some of the churches which claimed to be Christian. Some were teaching that Jesus was merely human; others that He was totally divine; and still others taught that His deity came to Him at baptism and left Him the eve of His suffering. John shows us emphatically that Jesus was truly divine and truly human - that He was of the same nature and substance as God with respect to deity, and of the same substance and nature of man with respect to humanity, except for sin.

While some may argue, it seems best to conclude that John had both an evangelistic purpose and an edification purpose in writing the Gospel. He wanted to convince unbelievers and skeptics that Jesus was the Son of God. He also wanted to give believers who needed affirmation, or who faced persecution, total confidence in their Savior.

#### C. The Gnostic Heresy

John was fully aware that Gnostic teaching of the time was confusing Christians, causing many of them to deny the deity of Jesus Christ. This Gnostic heresy boldly denied the actual humanity of Christ (Docetic Gnostics), or it separated the divine Christ from the man Jesus, teaching that Christ's divinity left Him when He was crucified (Cerinthian Gnostics). John was led by the Holy Spirit to combat these dangerous and destructive heresies by presenting a Gospel that emphasizes the Deity of Christ and at the same time unites His Deity with His humanity in One Person (1 Corinthians 15:47). We should recognize that the “Gnosticism” of John's day continues today in the form of post-modernism, new age, cults, and many worldly religious systems.

#### D. The Key Word is Believe

John states his purpose clearly in John 20:31: *“I have written these things that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”*

John's key word here is the verb “believe” which emphasizes the importance of an active, vital trust in the Lord. The word “believe” appears 98 times in the Gospel, and relates significantly with other words that he uses most expressively such as love, light, life, darkness, witness, truth, Counselor (Holy Spirit), prayer, glorify, and real. Each of these words is interwoven into the text to meaningfully describe the precise information that God wants us to understand and believe.

#### E. Overview

In the prologue (1:1-18), John is unique in providing an illuminating and profoundly deep theological understanding of the living Word. He carefully

describes Christ's nature and the mission of His incarnation, both of which are essential for a wholesome and abiding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This introduction sets the stage for the reader to encounter and enthusiastically receive Christ's fullness and grace upon grace. The remainder of the Gospel describes how a fulfilled, earthly life and a heavenly, eternal life can now be realized and experienced by those who join themselves to the Source of Life, Jesus Christ, and who are desirous of spiritual transformation into Christ-likeness.

## II. Substance and Style

### A. The Union of Godhead and Manhood

Within the pages of Holy Scripture, the Gospel of John stands out as an instructive, unfailing guide for articulating and explaining the life-giving, life-transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ. It deals convincingly and conclusively with the nature and mission of the second Person of the Trinity and the determinative meaning of faith and trust in Him. John brings us face to face with the physical actuality of Christ's humanity as well as the spiritual reality of His deity. This union of the Godhead and manhood is the most incredible, most unfathomable truth of all time. John captures it in one simple sentence: "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14). Christ's divine nature united with His human nature in an indissoluble, inseparable union and He became the one-and-only God-man. J.I. Packer writes, "Nowhere else in the New Testament is the nature and meaning of Jesus' divine Sonship so clearly explained as here" (Knowing God).

### B. Response to Jesus Christ

John presents Jesus in a distinctively magnificent way. He uses descriptive names and titles that Christ used Himself to validate His divine essence and supernatural attributes. The Apostle wants to facilitate our inner growth through increased sensitivity and responsiveness to Jesus Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit's presence and power.

### C. Transformation of Our Inner Being

As we prepare our hearts for the study of John, let's be very careful to keep in mind that all Biblical facts, theological doctrines and evangelistic admonitions are intended to center us on the absolute essentiality of denying self and following, obeying, emulating and serving the Lord Jesus Christ. The writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James and Jude all point us toward the continuing transformation of our inner being into an ever-clos-

er, continuous, interactive, love relationship with the Master and Keeper of our souls.

## III. Focus and Impact

### A. Believe, Trust and Obey

From the first verse to the final passage, John's preeminent focus is "*believe and trust*" in the Son of God. John's determinative intention is to so inspire and motivate every believer with saving faith that he or she will serve, influence and infect others with the incredible love of Jesus Christ. John was "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" (John 13:23, 20:2, 21:20) and he in turn indoctrinated his beloved "*little children*" (1 John 2:1, 12) with the reality of a loving God who wants us "to love Him completely, love ourselves correctly and love others compassionately" (Conformed to His Image - Kenneth Boa). John truly was the Apostle of Love.

### B. Completes the Biblical Record of Christ's Ministry

One of John's goals in writing the fourth Gospel seems to be to supplement the Synoptic Gospels with a deeper spiritual background by furnishing a record of Christ's early Judean ministry, which the others do not give. This theory presupposes that he had read the Synoptics or at least was acquainted with their contents. This would explain why he did not include much of the material found in the other three Gospels. For example: John has no coverage of Christ's genealogy; no story of His birth or childhood; no account of John the Baptist's preaching; no record on Christ's temptations in the desert; no Sermon on the Mount; no parables; no stories about the casting out of demons or healing of lepers; no discourse on the institution of the Lord's Supper; and no description of Christ's transfiguration.

### C. Wide Reception of John's Gospel

People of many diverse backgrounds have found John's Gospel intensely persuasive and profoundly effective. F.F. Bruce in his commentary on the Gospel points out that not only readers of a philosophical or mystical turn of mind have found it especially engaging, but also its message has spoken to the condition of very unlikely listeners. For example, the Christian Industrial League, an organization dedicated to Christian aid in Chicago's Skid Row, has said, "In their work they have found St. John's Gospel is the best for dealing with these tough, hard men. It's straight, unequivocal words about sin and salvation go home and carry conviction to the most abandoned, while its direct invitation wins a response that nothing else does."

#### D. Monumental Literary Work

W. Hall Harris III describes the Gospel of John in special, meaningful sentences:

“The fourth Gospel is a monumental literary work of incredible genius - one of the highest and fullest expressions of who Jesus is in the entire Bible.... (This has caused) Christian historical followers of Jesus Christ worldwide to turn to it for encouragement, edification and reassurance in their faith. Any Bible student who has taken more than a superficial glance at John’s Gospel realizes that it is filled with language, metaphor, and imagery which grips the reader and transports him to the world of the Evangelist. At the same time, the text engages the reader with a subtle pressure to adopt the viewpoint of the Evangelist about who Jesus is, forcing the reader to see the decision for or against Jesus Christ as an either/or which ultimately determines one’s eternal destiny.”

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association has for many years passed out the Gospel of John to every man, woman and child who responds to Graham’s altar call and comes forward to receive Christ’s forgiveness and accept Him as their Lord and Savior. John 3:16 is undoubtedly the most quoted verse in all of Scripture. The intensive study of this Gospel can be a life-changing experience for you as you wholeheartedly surrender yourself to Jesus Christ.

#### IV. Christ’s Miracles and Incredible “I am” Statements

More than any other Gospel, John records the miracles and words of Jesus intimately and completely, emphasizing the innermost thoughts and emotions of our Lord. John organized his gospel around 8 miraculous signs and 9 incredible “I am” statements.

##### A. Miracles

In describing Christ’s miracles, John is primarily concerned with the symbolism and significance of each supernatural sign. Thus, their meaning may be interpreted as follows:

1. Changing water into wine (John 2:1-11) symbolizes a replacement of the Jewish ceremonial washings and traditions with the creative work and transforming power of Jesus Christ and manifests His beneficent grace and glory;

2. Healing the royal official’s son (John 4:46-54) points out the healing power of Christ’s life-giving word, even at a distance of over twenty miles;

3. Healing the lame man (John 5:1-18) continues the theme of Jesus’ power over disease and reflects back to the Samaritan woman at the well where His life-giving word brings newness of life to those who have faith;

4. Feeding the multitude (John 6:1-15) proclaims Jesus as the Bread of Life to a needy and perishing world, and promises that nourishing and abiding intimately in Him (His body and blood) is the way to a fulfilled earthly and eternal life;

5. Walking on water (John 6:16-21) shows His providential Lordship and omnipotence over the elements of nature;

6. Healing the blind man (John 9:1-41) illustrates that Jesus’ power and light triumph over physical blindness and spiritual darkness;

7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-57) is a straight-away sign of Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life;

8. Catching a multitude of fish (John 21:4-11) once again demonstrates Jesus’ omniscience and omnipotence over the natural world.

These events and words demonstrate clearly Christ’s supernatural power and divinity. They validate His self-proclamation as the Son of God and each one reflects accurately the fulfillment of messianic prophesy. Seven of these miraculous signs are highlighted in the first half of the Gospel and the eighth after His resurrection in the last chapter.

##### B. “I am” Statements

Jesus’ supernatural works are complementarily coupled with and become humanly irrefutable by His incredible “I am” statements. Everyone who heard these words from Christ Himself, or who heard or read them later, is confronted with the most important conclusion of his or her life: Either Jesus is a madman with magical powers, or He is the most creative liar and arrogant imposter of all time, or He is telling the truth. John’s divinely inspired, historical account compellingly points the whole world to a Palestinian Jew who stated clearly, emphatically and authoritatively the following:

- “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35, 48)
- “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5)
- “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58)
- “I am the door” (John 10:7,9)

- *"I am the good shepherd"* (John 10:11,14) who would one day give His life for His sheep
- *"I and My Father are One"* (John 10:30)
- *"I am the resurrection and the life"* (John 11:25) who would raise the dead on the last day
- *"I am the way, the truth and the life"* (John 14:6) - the only Way to the Father
- *"I am the true vine"* (John 15:1 -5) - the proper object of our faith and trust
- In addition to these direct *"I am"* statements, Jesus asked the healed blind man in John 9:35-37, *"Do you believe in the Son of God?"* Then in response to the blind man's question *"Who is He, Lord?"* Jesus said, *"You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you."*

Christ's *"I am"* statements, like His miracles, demonstrate the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. Coupled with His divine teaching and miraculous signs, these self-revealing statements leave absolutely no doubt about the Roman centurion's statement in Mark 15:39, *"Truly this Man was the Son of God!"* William Hendriksen summarized Christ's *"I am"* statements well: "These are staggering, astounding claims that could only be made by the Son of God."