

THE GOSPEL OF

JOHN

The Word
Became
Flesh

INTRODUCTION

John 1:1-18

Every semester on the first day of class I would sit in my seat with a feeling of dread. The professor would walk us through the syllabus as I desperately hoped not to hear the dreaded words term paper. When I had to write term papers, I distinctly remember my professors making a big deal about the thesis statement. The thesis statement gives the purpose of the paper. It's the point of the paper—what you're arguing for or attempting to prove. Everything in the paper is supposed to support the thesis statement. The Gospel of John is no different. The Gospel writer gives us a clear and distinct thesis in John 20:30-31:

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

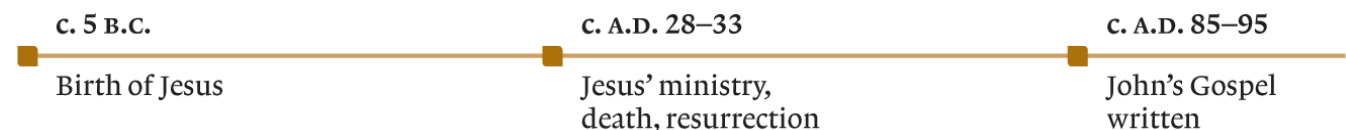
We can summarize John's thesis in one word: believe. He says, "I've written this book, including these particular accounts, so that you might believe." John witnessed nearly three years of stories, sermons, and conversations, but he didn't include them all. He selected certain ones—the ones that would help us believe.

The current religious culture in America loves to talk about belief and believing. Those spiritual buzzwords are often used generically and end up devoid of meaning. Contemporary spirituality trumpets not belief in an object or a person but rather a belief in belief. It goes something like this: "It doesn't matter who you believe or what you believe. All that matters is that you believe." There's a belief in belief.

John's Gospel doesn't call us to believe in belief or to put our faith in faith. His teaching on belief is much deeper and more robust and infinitely more life-giving than any modern, pop-culture philosophy. In the course of twenty-one chapters, the Gospel writer will answer three questions: What do we need to believe? What does it mean to believe? Why do we need to believe? ¹

Introduction to John ²

Timeline



¹ Carter, Matt; Wredberg, Josh. Exalting Jesus in John (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (pp. 14-15). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

² <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-john/>

Author, Date, and Recipients

John the son of Zebedee wrote this Gospel. He was a Palestinian Jew, one of the 12 disciples, and a member of Jesus' inner apostolic circle. He was referred to as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (13:23). John also wrote 1–3 John and Revelation. He likely wrote his Gospel account between A.D. 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and A.D. 100 (the reputed end of John's life). It was likely written from Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), one of the most important cities of the Roman Empire at the time. His original audience consisted of Jews and Gentiles living in the larger Greco-Roman world in Ephesus and beyond, toward the close of the first century A.D.

Theme and Purpose

The theme of John's Gospel is that Jesus is the long-awaited, promised Messiah and Son of God. By believing in Jesus, people have eternal life (see 20:30–31).

As evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, John relies on several selected messianic signs performed by Jesus and a series of witnesses to Jesus. These include the Scriptures, John the Baptist, Jesus himself, God the Father, Jesus' miraculous works, the Holy Spirit, and John himself.

Key Themes

- I. Jesus. Jesus is God, the "I am." He existed before the creation of the world, and he has supernatural knowledge. He fulfills the Jewish festivals and institutions. As the sent Son of God, he reflects the Sender. Signs and witnesses demonstrate that he is the Messiah.
- II. The Trinity. Father, Son, and Spirit are united in their work of revelation and redemption.
- III. Salvation. God is sovereign in salvation. Jesus' death is the basis of salvation, which is obtained through believing in the living Jesus as the Son of God.
- IV. Eternal Life. Jesus is the giver of eternal life. Believers can experience some of salvation's benefits during this present evil age.
- V. Mission. Believers are called to continue Jesus' mission.

Outline

- I. Prologue: The Incarnate Word (1:1–18)
- II. Signs of the Messiah, with Teaching about Life in Him (1:19–12:50)
- III. The Farewell Teaching and the Passion Narrative (13:1–20:31)
- IV. Epilogue: The Roles of Peter and of the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved (21:1–25)

OPEN IT

1. In your opinion, what makes for a great movie trailer? What movie can you think of that had a great trailer before it was released?

READ IT

John 1:1-18

EXPLORE IT

2. What titles or words does John use for Jesus in verse 1-5?
3. What was John the Baptist's role according to verses 6-8?
4. What responses were there to Jesus coming into the world?
5. According to verses 12-18, what do we receive in Jesus?

APPLY IT

But what is meant by ‘Word’? ... The Stoics understood *logos* to be the rational principle by which everything exists, and which is of the essence of the rational human soul... More generally, *logos* can refer to inner thought, hence ‘reason’, even ‘science’. That is one reason why some have advocated ‘Reason’ as a translation of *logos* (e.g. Clark). Alternatively, *logos* can refer to outward expression, hence ‘speech’ or ‘message’, which is why ‘Word’ is still thought by many to be the most appropriate term, provided it does not narrowly refer to a mere linguistic sign but is understood to mean something like ‘message’ (as in 1 Cor. 1:18).

However the Greek term is understood, there is a more readily available background than that provided by Philo or the Greek philosophical schools. Considering how frequently John quotes or alludes to the Old Testament, that is the place to begin. There, ‘the word’ (Heb. *dābār*) of God is connected with God’s powerful activity in creation (cf. Gn. 1:3ff.; Ps. 33:6), revelation (Je. 1:4; Is. 9:8; Ezk. 33:7; Am. 3:1, 8) and deliverance (Ps. 107:20; Is. 55:1).

In short, God’s ‘Word’ in the Old Testament is his powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation, and **the personification of that ‘Word’ makes it suitable for John to apply it as a title to God’s ultimate self-disclosure, the person of his own Son.**³

6. Consider the different ways that “logos” could be understood by different audiences. What significance do each of these understandings have in your own life?

Reason:

Message:

God’s self-expression:

³ Carson, D. A.. The Gospel according to John (The Pillar New Testament Commentary (PNTC)) Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

This phrase proves critical in distinguishing the Christian faith from other expressions of religion. When Jehovah's Witnesses meet to discuss their religion, they pick up a translation of Scripture called The New World Translation. If you opened that book, turned it to the Gospel of John, found verse 1, and looked at the last phrase, you would read, "and the Word was a god." Does that small change matter? Does a simple little monosyllable make any difference? By adding that little word a, they are making a statement that Jesus is something less than fully God. He may be a god in some sense. He may be one of many "gods," but he is not the true God. From the beginning of his Gospel, John argues that Christ is not one of many gods but is God himself. ⁴

7. If Jesus is not fully God, what would that mean for our faith and salvation?

8. What are some commonly held misconceptions about who Jesus is today? How might John's introduction help you respond to those misconceptions?

When the sun is shining in all its beauty, who are the ones unconscious of the fact? Who need to be told it is shining? The blind! How tragic, then, when we read that God sent John to "bear witness of the light." How pathetic that there should be any need for this! How solemn the statement that men have to be told "the light" is now in their midst. What a revelation of man's fallen condition. (John, 26) ⁵

9. Sin can be uncomfortable to address when witnessing to a lost world and is sometimes avoided when presenting the gospel. What happens to the gospel message if sin is omitted?

⁴ Carter, Matt; Wredberg, Josh. Exalting Jesus in John (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 22). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Carter, Matt; Wredberg, Josh. Exalting Jesus in John (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 28). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

10. How can you “bear witness of the light” today? What challenges prevent you at times from being a bold witness to the truth?

11. Read 2 Corinthians 4:4, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Acts 26:15-18, Ephesians 2:1-3. How do these passages describe the lost unbeliever? How do these spiritual realities change the way that you approach witnessing to these people?

Literally, the Greek for that last phrase says, “grace instead of grace.” What does John mean? Martin Luther put it this way:

“The sun is not dimmed and darkened by shining on so many people or by providing the entire world with its light and splendor. It retains its light intact. It loses nothing; it is immeasurable, perhaps able to illumine ten more worlds. I suppose that a hundred thousand candles can be ignited from one light, and still this light will not lose any of its brilliance. . . . Thus Christ, our Lord, to whom we must flee and of whom we must ask all, is an interminable well, the chief source of all grace. . . . Even if the whole world were to draw from this fountain enough grace and truth to transform all people into angels, still it would not lose as much as a drop. This fountain constantly overflows with sheer grace.”⁶

12. How does Jesus’ immeasurable grace affect how you view sin in your life on a daily basis? How does it affect how you view others?

⁶ Hughes, R. Kent. John: That You May Believe (Preaching the Word) . Crossway. Kindle Edition.

13. We often associate God's grace with salvation, but certainly His grace is more extensive than just the forgiveness of our sins. In what ways have you seen or experienced God's grace in your life?

The grace of the law was that it pointed people to Jesus, but how much more grace was given when Jesus came! The grace of God was seen in the law everywhere the shadow of Jesus Christ fell, whether in the Passover or in the temple sacrifices. But when Jesus came, the shadows no longer mattered; the light of Jesus Christ revealed completely what the shadows had revealed in part.⁷

14. Why do you think so many Christians today have a hard time reading, understanding, and appreciating the Old Testament? Do you think it's necessary to know the Old Testament in order to better understand the New Testament?

15. What value does the Old Testament bring to the New Testament? What might you miss about the gospel if you neglect to understand the New Covenant in relationship to the Old Covenant?

⁷ Carter, Matt; Wredberg, Josh. Exalting Jesus in John (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 38). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

John adds, the unique and beloved one, [himself] God, has made him known. That is probably the correct text. What it means is that the beloved Son, the incarnate Word (1:14), himself God while being at the Father's side—just as in v. 1 the Word was simultaneously God and with God—has broken the barrier that made it impossible for human beings to see God, and has made him known. This prepares the way for 6:46 and 14:9: 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'⁸

16. The song goes, "Christ is enough for me". In what ways do you find that statement to be true and in what ways do you find that statement difficult to claim?

17. In a world that seems indifferent (at best) to God, why is it so amazing that God is revealed in the person of Jesus? What things do these opening verses of John reveal to you about who God is?

18. One of John's primary focuses throughout his gospel is on the deity of Jesus. Reread this opening "prologue" to John's gospel and meditate on its deep and profound truths. Later in this gospel, Jesus will define eternal life as this: "that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." There is no greater beauty and fulfillment in life than to know God - full of grace and truth?

⁸ Carson, D. A.. The Gospel according to John (The Pillar New Testament Commentary (PNTC)) (p. 134). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition. This study was compiled and questions were written by Jeremy Anderson (Indian Creek Campus)—www.villagebible.church/smallgroup