



## BIBLICAL TRAINING CENTER

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### Gospel of John

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## Overview

### 1. Distinctives

- a. The main theme is that **Jesus is the divine Son of God** who provides **eternal life** to those who **believe** in him. Key verses:

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and **only Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have **eternal life**.”

John 20:31: “But 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**.”

- b. **Key words and phrases** reveal John’s emphasis on **knowing** and being in **relationship** with God:

*Father (of God)* (122×), **abide** (41×), **believe** (100×), *eternal, eternity* (29×), **know** (ginōskō, 54×) **know** (oida, 83×), **receive, take** (48×), **life** (36×), *light* (23×), *glorify, glory* (42×), *heaven* (19×)<sup>1</sup>

- c. This gospel stresses **Jesus’ words**. Jesus’ words make up nearly **50%** of the book. There are **many long discourses** (14!).<sup>2</sup> There are also many **personal conversations** with Jesus (Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the blind man, Martha and Mary, Jesus and disciples, etc.)
- d. It uses **simple words** like *know, believe, abide, life, light, darkness, the world*. It is often recommended as a good **first Gospel to start with** for those not familiar with the New Testament. Yet, John is also **very deep and profound**.

<sup>1</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 95–96.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

- e. John contains **different** material than the other gospels. **90%** of John is unique compared to the other three gospels.
- The other three gospels are called **synoptics** (lit. “**seen** together”) because they have a lot of material that seems to **parallel** each other.
  - John was **supplementing the other gospels** with material they did not cover. This is according to the **early church fathers** Papias (AD 70-163), Irenaeus (b. AD 130), Jerome (AD 347-420) and Augustine (AD 354-430).<sup>3</sup>
- f. John was arguing against an early heresy called **Gnosticism**. This heresy denied Jesus’ full **deity** and full **humanity**. John emphasizes that Jesus was fully divine from before his baptism, and that he was fully human.
- g. John builds the first part of his gospel around **seven** miracles or signs (these are discussed below).
- h. John contains **seven** “**I AM**” statements (also discussed below).
- i. Scholars see four sections: (1) **prologue** (1:1-18) which might have been an early hymn; (2) **Book of Signs** (1:19-12:50) which record the seven miracles; (3) **Book of Glory** (13:1-20:31); and (4) **epilogue** which may have been added later (chap. 21).

## 2. Author

- a. The church has **traditionally** believed that the Apostle John wrote the gospel.
- b. **Internal evidence** for the traditional view:
- The author **claims to be** one of the disciples (21:24). He also claims to be an **eyewitness** (1:14; 19:35; 21:24, 25).
  - The author was a **Jew** in word, **customs** and **knowledge** of the Old Testament. Many **Jewish festivals** are mentioned (e.g., Passover, Tabernacles). He showed personal familiarity with the **places, region** and **topography** of the land (Samaria, Jacob’s Well at Sychar, Pool of Bethesda, Pool of Siloam, Solomon’s Colonnade). This is significant because

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<sup>3</sup> Geisler, *A Popular Survey*, 95.

somebody writing much later (esp. after AD 70) would not have known about the last three since they were destroyed.<sup>4</sup>

- We can figure out by process of elimination that ‘the **disciple whom Jesus loved**’ must have been John (13:23-25; 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

c. **External evidence** for the traditional view:

- The **John Ryland Fragment** (p<sup>52</sup>) is the **earliest** New Testament fragment we have discovered. It is dated to around AD 117-138.<sup>5</sup> Its **discovery location** in Egypt suggests it had been in circulation for quite some time, placing the original date of composition in the first century AD.
- **Irenaeus** (b. AD 130) knew **Polycarp** (AD 69-155) who was a **disciple** of John, and Irenaeus said John wrote it.
- **Tatian** (AD 120-180), **Clement of Alexandria** (AD 150-215), **Tertullian** (AD 155-220), **Eusebius** (AD 263-339) and the **Muratorian canon** (c. AD 180) all say John wrote it.

d. Over recent years, people have suggested a **different John** (the Elder), **Lazarus** (believed by some to be the Beloved Disciple) and even **Thomas**. However, “the most likely candidate for authorship remains the apostle John.”<sup>6</sup>

e. John was...

- A **fisherman** (Matt. 4:21);
- Had a brother named **James** (4:21; 10:2);
- Possibly **Jesus’ cousin**;
- One of the Twelve Apostles (Matt. 10:2);
- One of the **first to follow** Jesus (Jn. 1:40);
- Probably the **youngest disciple**. ‘Beloved’ referred to a young person and he also outran Peter! (Jn. 20:1-4,8; 21:7).
- Part of the **inner circle** of apostles (Peter, James and John, Matt. 17:1).
- Banished to the **Isle of Patmos** under Domitian (Rev. 1:9).

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<sup>4</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 332–333.

<sup>5</sup> Geisler, *A Popular Survey*, 94.

<sup>6</sup> Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 334.

### 3. Date

a. John was written around AD **81**-96. Here are some reasons for this date:

- John wrote after AD 70. He does not mention Jesus' prophecy about the **temple being destroyed** in the future like the other gospels. This is because it was already destroyed AD 70.
- **Liberal scholars** try to push it as far back into 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD because they believe the followers of John wrote it (the Johannine community) to combat later Gnosticism. However, the discovery of the **John Ryland Fragment** (p<sup>52</sup>) makes this very problematic.
- Since there is much church testimony that the Apostle John wrote it, it must have been written **before John's death** in c. AD 100.

### Key Passages

#### 1. John's unique prologue emphasizes Jesus' **deity**.

a. One of the main themes is that Jesus is the **divine Son of God** who came to bring eternal life. This is seen right from John's opening (prologue).

##### John 1:1-5 – The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word [Jesus] was with God, and **the Word was God**.<sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning.<sup>3</sup> **Through him all things were made**; without him nothing was made that has been made.<sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...

<sup>14</sup> The **Word became flesh** and made his dwelling [lit. tabernacled] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- We see **simple words**, yet it is very deep and profound.
- The opening reminds us of Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Here it is Jesus who is identified with God the creator.
- And yet this creator **desires to be in fellowship** with his creation.

### John 1:9–12

<sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, **the world did not recognize him.** <sup>11</sup>He came to that which was his own, but **his own did not receive him.** <sup>12</sup>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...

## 2. Jesus demonstrates **control** over all things through specific miracles.

a. John builds his Gospel around seven miracles. These miracles show **Jesus' glory**:

1. Turning water to **wine** (2:1-11)
2. Healing the **royal official's son** (4:46-54)
3. Healing the **lame man** at Bethesda (5:1-9)
4. Feeding the **5,000** (6:1-14)
5. Walking on **water** (6:15-21)
6. Healing the **blind man** (9:1-41)
7. Lazarus **raised from the dead** (11:1-44)

(Post-resurrection, #8) The miraculous catch of fish (21:1-14).

b. The first miracle in John's gospel was turning water into wine. The point of each is that Jesus is the creator (is God) and **has control** over all things.

### John 2:7–11 – Jesus Changes Water into Wine

<sup>7</sup>Jesus said to the servants, **"Fill the jars with water"**; so they filled them to the brim.

<sup>8</sup>Then he told them, **"Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."**

They did so, <sup>9</sup>and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine...<sup>10</sup>and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but **you have saved the best till now.**"

<sup>11</sup>What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the **first of the signs** through which he **revealed his glory**; and his disciples believed in him.

- This and the other miracles in John all **reveal Jesus' glory** (his deity). The goal for John in giving these miracles is that his readers would **believe** in Jesus.

### **John 20:30–31 – The Purpose of John’s Gospel**

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But 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.

### **3. We see personal discussions with individuals in John’s gospel.**

We see **many private discussions** with many people in John’s gospel.

- a. We see a private discussion with **Nicodemus**, a ruler of the Jews.

#### **John 3:1–3 – Jesus Teaches Nicodemus**

**3** Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

<sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, “**Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.**”

John 3:16 (NIV)

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

- b. We see a private discussion with the **Samaritan woman** at the well.

#### **John 4:4-7, 13-15 – Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman**

<sup>4</sup> Now he [Jesus] had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> So he came to a town in Samaria... <sup>6</sup> **Jacob’s well** was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup> When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “**Will you give me a drink?**” ...

<sup>13</sup> Jesus answered, “**Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,** <sup>14</sup> **but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a **spring of water** welling up to eternal life.**”

<sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

- c. We see private discussions with **Mary and Martha**. In this one, their brother Lazarus had just died.

**John 11:23–27 – Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus**

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her [Martha], “Your brother will rise again.”

<sup>24</sup> Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

<sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

- d. We see a private discussion between Jesus and his disciples. The entire **Farewell Discourse** (chaps. 14-16) is **personal teaching** only contained in John’s gospel.

- Jesus describes the **coming Holy Spirit** (chap. 14).

**John 14:15–17 – Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit**

<sup>15</sup> “If you love me, keep my commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—<sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth...

- Jesus taught the importance of **abiding in him** to bear **fruit** (chap. 15).

**John 15:1, 4-5 – The Vine and the Branches**

**15** “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener...

<sup>4</sup> Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

<sup>5</sup> “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

- We get to see **Jesus’ high-priestly prayer** (chap. 17). This gives us insight as to how Jesus makes intercession for us.

**John 17 – Jesus Prays**

**17** After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed...

<sup>9</sup> I pray for them [his disciples]. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours...

<sup>11</sup> I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one...

<sup>20</sup> “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

#### 4. We see seven ‘I AM’ statements which show Jesus’ glory.

a. John gives us **seven ‘I AM’ statements**.<sup>7</sup> These are metaphorical descriptions that teach us something about Jesus or salvation.

1. I am the **bread** of life (6:35)
2. I am the **light** of the world (8:12)
3. I am the **door** (10:7, 9)
4. I am the **good shepherd** (10:11, 14)
5. I am the **resurrection** and the **life** (11:25)
6. I am the **way**, the **truth**, and the **life** (14:6)
7. I am the **true vine** (15:1)

b. The phrase ‘I AM’ was the name of God that God gave to Moses in Exodus 3:

##### **Exodus 3:13–14 – Moses and the Burning Bush**

<sup>13</sup> Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

<sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, “**I AM WHO I AM**. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘**I AM** has sent me to you.’”

Many believe **Jesus was applying this name to himself** through the seven ‘I AM’ statements above.

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<sup>7</sup> Other “I AM” statements occur in John (6:20; 8:24, 28).



- c. Regardless, Jesus clearly applies God’s name of ‘I AM’ to himself in John 8. His opponents understood what Jesus was doing because **they picked up stones** to kill him for blasphemy.

John 8:56–59 (NIV)

<sup>56</sup> **Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”**

<sup>57</sup> “You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”

<sup>58</sup> **“Very truly I tell you,”** Jesus answered, **“before Abraham was born, I am!”** <sup>59</sup> At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

## Gospel Recap

Here’s a recap to remember the distinctives of each Gospel:

Gospel	Theme	Emphasis
Matthew	Jesus is the promised <b>King</b>	Kingdom, Jesus’ fulfillment of OT scriptures
Mark	Jesus came as a suffering <b>servant</b>	Active, energetic Messiah, Christ's actions
Luke	Jesus is <b>Savior</b> of all humankind	Christ's humanity, reaching outsiders/outcasts
John	Jesus is <b>God</b> the Son	Jesus' glory revealed, eternal life for believers

The next two classes will be a survey of the book of Acts. Acts is important because it fills in what happened after Jesus’ resurrection and how we got the Christian church.

## Questions & Answers

### Why is Jesus called the “Word” or *Logos* in John 1:1?

At first, this seems like a strange title for Jesus. But it would not be so strange for people living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The Jewish teacher Philo of Alexandria (c. 25 BC - c. AD 50), following the Greeks, taught that physical matter was evil. God was thought to be so holy that he could not have a relationship with humans because we were physical. He proposed a mediating principle between God and man, a principle he called the *Logos*. This principle connected God and man. John seems to take this word from Philo (which people were already familiar with) and apply it to Jesus. By doing this he shows that:

*Jesus the one and only Son is the self-revelation of God, who through his incarnation brought life and light to humanity. The Logos title (God’s self-revelation) becomes John’s shorthand way of summarizing this theme.<sup>8</sup>*

### Bibliography

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<sup>8</sup> Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 305.