

### Introduction to the Gospel of John

We are so thankful for each one who will be studying the book of John with us this year. It will be a rich time for all of us and for some life changing!

The Gospel of John is a beloved book. One commentator remarked, "*The Gospel according to John is the most amazing book that was ever written. 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.'* This may well be the attitude of anyone who steps upon the threshold of the study of this book."

The portrait of Jesus that emerges from the Gospel of John is the most profound of all the New Testament books and perhaps of the Bible itself. John reveals Jesus Christ as the Eternal Word, the fully Divine, fully human Messiah, the Creator of all things, the great "I Am," the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and the crucified and risen Savior who offers new LIFE to all who believe! Jesus Christ was "Emmanuel, God with us" for 33 years!

Another central revelation of John's gospel is the unveiling of the intimate relationships within the Godhead itself—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—each displaying an attitude of love and interpersonal communion as servants of one another, always glorifying and deferring to one another. The greatest teaching on the ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers is also found in the rich tapestry of this book (chapters 14-16).

John's purpose for writing is summed up in chapter 20:30-31. "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which were not recorded in this book. ***But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.***"

Two lines of evidence are used to establish the reality that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah. John proves his case through *miraculous signs* and *witnesses* (real live evidence) that are selected from Jesus' life and ministry. The evidence is so overwhelming, the proofs almost without number, and the effect of contemplating them causes us to bow our hearts in worship before our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

As you study this gospel you will notice that the concept of opposites or contrasts plays a large role. John has chosen this pattern to powerfully communicate the drama of opposition that surrounds the coming of the Word. The text is also filled with beautiful metaphors and imagery that grip the heart and draw us to a point of decision.

It is generally agreed that the John who penned this gospel was the Apostle John, son of Zebedee, one of the "inner circle" of Jesus' twelve disciples. John was therefore an eyewitness of what is written in his gospel. John was a Jew, a fisherman, and the brother of the Apostle James. According to well-established tradition, John's later years were spent in Ephesus from where this gospel was written, probably around A.D. 85-90.

## Historical background

After Alexander the Great conquered Persia in 332 B.C. the region of Judea belonged to the Greek/Hellenistic world. The Greek worldview created a crisis for the Jews in many ways since the lifestyle of the Greeks was fundamentally different from their own. It was during this period when Judaism was rapidly changing and adapting to a larger political and intellectual world that the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essene movements were formed. The rise of these groups was an attempt to preserve the national integrity of the Jews and counteract the tendency to embrace pagan Greek culture. (See a Bible dictionary for further information about these sects.)

Jewish life was further complicated when the Romans captured Judea in 63 B.C. Roman Judea was generally peaceful and self-managed, but riots and isolated rebellions were an ongoing threat. The conflict between the Jews' demand for religious independence and Rome's efforts to impose a common system of governance upon its entire empire meant there was a constant underlying tension alongside peaceful governance. This was the world into which Jesus our Messiah was born.

**Drawing Near:** Lord Jesus, we come before You now with humble hearts. We acknowledge there is much about You that is beyond our finite comprehension, yet we long to see You and know You in all of Your fullness and glory.

1. Take a few minutes to think about your personal hopes and expectations for this study. Write them out as succinctly as possible.

**Study Skill:** The inductive Bible study method is the most powerful and rewarding method of personal Bible study. Studying the Bible inductively draws you into personal interaction with Scripture itself and with the God of the Scriptures. This method involves three basic skills: observation, interpretation and application. **Observation** is discovering what the author is saying, **interpretation** is finding out what the author means, and **application** is the process of applying the truth to your own life. This is the method we will use as we study the Gospel of John.

2. The first step in the inductive study process is to observe the book as a whole. This step will enable you to see the "big picture" before you start looking at all the minute details. So, please begin by thoughtfully **reading** through the entire book of John. *It has been noted that John's well-crafted work is much like a symphony. It advances new themes, drifts into others, then returns with similar sounds yet fresh and alluring. Take time now to step back and comprehend the greater movement of this book.* Record your overall impressions.

The Gospel of John has four major sections to it: 1:1-18; 1:19-12:50; 13:1-17:26 and 18:1-20:31. An epilogue follows in 21:1-25.

3. To better grasp the book as a whole scan each section looking for patterns in the text, repeated words and phrases, major themes, major characters and events, and expressions of time. Note geographical locations on the map. Think about how each part fits into John's overall purpose for writing (John 20:30-31). Record your insights for each segment. Finish by giving a title to each of the following sections.

**1:1-18**

**1:19-12:50**

**13:1-17:26**

**18:1-20:31**

4. Identify one or two new thoughts about Jesus that caught your attention while surveying the Gospel of John.
5. List any questions that you would like to have answered as you study the book in more detail.

The Gospel of John is the fourth book of the New Testament. Matthew, Mark and Luke, the first three gospels, are often referred to as the synoptic gospels because of their similarities to each other. Even a cursory overview reveals that John's gospel is strikingly different from the first three in theme and content.

6. Scan the opening chapter of each gospel and comment briefly on why you think John opened his gospel as he did.

7. To better understand John's gospel we might consider the biographical sketch the New Testament gives of this man. The passages below provide insight into the life and development of this servant of Christ. Read and make note of what each text reveals.

Mark: 3:13-17

1 John 4:7-12

Mark 10:35-40

Galatians 2:9-10

Luke 9:51-54

Revelation 1:9-11

When John penned his gospel it had been about 50 years since he walked the dusty roads of Palestine with his Lord. It had taken a lifetime for John to absorb and understand all that he wanted to write about our Savior. (Note: John does not identify himself as such in his gospel, but there are allusions to him in numerous passages—13:23; 18:15-16; 19:26-27; 20:1-10; 21:7, 20-23, 24.)

If God can change a man like the "John of the Gospels" into the "John" we see later in the New Testament, He can surely transform us as well. We want to invite each of you to commit yourself to the study of this magnificent book. There is no more important message in the world than the message of this gospel.

8. How have these first glimpses of Jesus from John's gospel inspired and motivated you towards a deeper relationship with God?

9. What can you do this coming week by God's grace to nourish the work God has begun in you? Be as specific as possible about the action you want to pursue.

# Palestine in the Time of Christ

