

Introduction to the Gospel of John

Like the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John's gospel discusses the life of Jesus, including His teaching, miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection. However, John's gospel focuses on certain events that are not recorded in the "synoptic gospels" (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and gives us a more complete picture of Jesus.

Basic Facts About the Gospel of John

The gospel of John was written by the apostle John approximately 20-30 years later than the other gospels. The majority of the book contains additional information that is not found in the "synoptic gospels."

John began with Jesus "*in the beginning*" (1:1-2), rather than at His birth. This opening reminds us of the opening to the first book of the Bible.

"In the beginning *God created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1).

"In the beginning *was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" (John 1:1).

This is significant because much of John's gospel emphasizes the deity of Christ and His unity with the Father.

Many of the events recorded in the gospel of John correspond with certain feasts during the public ministry of Jesus – the first Passover (2:13), another feast (5:1), the second Passover (6:4), the Feast of Booths (7:2), the Feast of the Dedication (10:22), and the third Passover (12:1).

Overview of the Gospel of John

The following is a rough outline of John's gospel:

- Introduction of Jesus (ch. 1-2) – His origin, His announcement from John the Baptist, His power, and His authority
- Jesus taught Nicodemus (ch. 3)
- Jesus taught the Samaritan woman (ch. 4)
- Jesus healed a lame man (ch. 5)
- Jesus fed five thousand (ch. 6)
- Jesus taught in Jerusalem (ch. 7-8)
- Jesus healed a blind man (ch. 9)
- Jesus taught in Jerusalem (ch. 10)
- Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (ch. 11)
- Preparations for Jesus' death (ch. 12)
- Jesus taught His disciples (ch. 13-16)
- Jesus prayed to the Father (ch. 17)
- Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion (ch. 18-19)
- Jesus' resurrection and appearance to His disciples (ch. 20-21)

Points to Notice in the Gospel of John

As we go through a study of the gospel of John, watch for the following points to appear periodically in the text:

- The deity of Christ
- Foreshadowing of the gospel going to the Gentiles
- Descriptions of Jesus
- Fulfilled prophecies
- Growing anger among the leaders
- Preparing the apostles

Chapter 1

Introduction of Jesus

The first chapter of John focuses on introducing Jesus to the reader. It includes two beginnings – the beginning of Creation (in which Jesus played a prominent role) and the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry.

The Deity of Christ

Read John 1:1-5

John began his gospel with the same words with which Moses began the book of Genesis – “*In the beginning*” (John 1:1; Genesis 1:1). From the opening sentence, emphasis is placed upon the deity of Christ. He was “*with God*” (indicating that there is more than one person of God) and “*was God*” (deity). It is important to note that although John said that Jesus “*was God*” (past tense), that is not an indication that Jesus is *formerly* God because He surrendered His deity. Other passages indicate that Jesus is still God today (Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 13:8). John used the past tense simply because he was emphasizing the time “in the beginning.”

We also learn here that Jesus was instrumental in Creation (1:3). Paul wrote, “*For by Him all things were created...all things have been created through Him and for Him*” (Colossians 1:16). As the Creator, Jesus is also the source of *life* and *light* (1:4; cf. 8:12; 14:6). Yet, as John pointed out, the world did not understand or accept Christ – “*the darkness did not comprehend it*” (1:5). Many rejected Jesus because, as Jesus would later point out to Nicodemus, they preferred the darkness over the light (3:19-21).

The Mission of John

Read John 1:6-8

John the Baptist was a prophet who had been sent by God. Later in this chapter, John the Baptist would quote the prophecy of Isaiah to explain who he was: “*I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'*” (1:23; cf. Isaiah 40:3). Jesus would later identify John as the prophet spoken about by Malachi (Matthew 11:10, 14; cf. Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6).

The mission of John the Baptist was to be “*a witness, to testify about the Light*” (1:7). John – the writer of the gospel – was careful to point out the fact that John the Baptist “*was not the Light*” (1:8) as it appears there may have been some who believed that he was or was claiming to be (cf. 1:19-27).

Jesus as the True Light

Read John 1:9-13

John identified Jesus as “*the true Light*” (1:9). Jesus would later call Himself “*the Light of the world*” (8:12). The text indicates that “*the world did not know Him*” despite the fact that He was the Creator (1:10). John also pointed out that “*His own did not receive Him*” (1:11; cf. 4:44; Matthew 13:57).

Those who “*received*” Jesus – this means they believed in Him as the Son of God – were given “*the right to become children of God*” (1:12). The word translated “*right*” means *power* or *authority*. Believing in Jesus does not make one a child of God; rather, it makes it possible for one to become a child of God. In other words, belief is a prerequisite to salvation. One becomes a child of God by being “*born...of God*” (1:13). Jesus explained to Nicodemus that one is “*born again*” through baptism (3:3, 5).

Jesus as the Word

Read John 1:14-18

The Word – identified in the first verse as deity – “*became flesh, and dwelt among us*” (1:14). This means that prior to coming to earth in the form of a man, Jesus existed in the form of a spirit (cf. 4:24). John the Baptist testified of the deity of Christ when he said that Jesus “*existed before me*” (1:15).

John then contrasted the word/law given by Moses and Jesus. “*The Law was given through Moses*”; and, in contrast, “*grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ*” (1:17, 14). Grace and truth were characteristics of the message delivered by Jesus. This is not to say that grace was absent from the Law of Moses (cf. Deuteronomy 6:10-11). Rather, this means that “*grace upon grace*” (1:16), or *abundant grace*, was given through Jesus as He perfectly “*explained*” the Father (1:18).

John Discussed Christ

Read John 1:19-34

As John preached in the wilderness, he was asked several questions. First, the priests and Levites asked him who he was; he simply said he was “*not the Christ*” (1:19-20). Second, to follow up on the first question, they asked if he was Elijah or “*the Prophet*”; John said he was not (1:21). Third, they asked John what he said about himself so they could “*give an answer to those who sent [them]*” (1:22). To answer this question, John quoted the prophet Isaiah: “*I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’*” (1:23; cf. Isaiah 40:3). Fourth, since he was not the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet, they asked him why he was baptizing (1:25). John explained that he baptized until the One who was to come after him – Jesus, who was already among them – would come (1:26-27).

The next day, John introduced Jesus as “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (1:29). He explained that Jesus was the one for whom he had been preparing the way. Even so, he did not recognize Him as the Son of God until God told him the sign that would indicate who would be coming (1:30-33). John was now able to give his testimony specifically that Jesus “*is the Son of God*” (1:34).

Jesus’ First Disciples

Read John 1:35-51

The following day, John was with two of his disciples and saw Jesus. He told them that Jesus was “*the Lamb of God,*” and they followed Him (1:35-37). One of these men was Andrew, Peter’s brother (1:40). He went to his brother and told him they had found the Messiah (1:41). Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, and Jesus said he would be called Cephas (1:42).

The next day, Jesus found Philip and told him to follow (1:43). Philip found Nathanael and told him, “*We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*” (1:45). Nathanael was skeptical, not believing that “*any good thing [could] come out of Nazareth*” (1:46). However, he accepted Philip’s invitation to go see Jesus and came to believe in Him after Jesus said that he “*saw*” him in a way that could not have been done by a mere human being (1:47-49). Jesus then told Nathanael that he would see greater things than these if he would continue with Him (1:50-51).

Questions on Chapter 1

1. How did John identify Jesus in the first verse?
2. How was Jesus involved in the Creation? (1:3)
3. For what purpose did God send John the Baptist? (1:6-8)
4. What was given to those who received Jesus? (1:12)
5. What different things were provided by Moses and Jesus? (1:17)

Chapter 2

Beginning of Jesus' Work

The second chapter of John records two “firsts” in Jesus’ public ministry – His first miracle and His first visit to Jerusalem (which included His cleansing of the temple).

Jesus Turned Water to Wine

Read John 2:1-12

John said this event occurred on “*the third day*” (2:1). This would have been the third day after John the Baptist announced that Jesus was “*the Lamb of God*” (1:29, 35, 43). On this day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It was attended by the mother of Jesus, as well as Jesus and His disciples (2:1-2).

Jesus’ mother – we know her as Mary (Matthew 2:11; Acts 1:14), though she is not named in John’s gospel – informed Jesus that they had run out of wine (2:3). Jesus’ response sounds almost like a rebuke of His mother: “*Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come*” (2:4). Yet it would be difficult to conclude that Jesus rebuked Mary for suggesting this, then changed His mind and did what she implied that He should do. Rather than a rebuke, Jesus was simply telling her not to worry about the fact that the wine was gone – it was none of her concern. Furthermore, by saying, “*My hour has not yet come,*” Jesus was indicating that the beginning of His miracles would be a matter of divine determination. It would not be something that would begin because it was Mary’s will, or because it would save the hosts of the feast from embarrassment, or because it would simply fulfill the desire of the guests to continue the feast.

After this conversation – how much time passed, we do not know – Jesus’ mother told the servants, “*Whatever He says to you, do it*” (2:5). Incidentally, this is an important reminder for us as well to do whatever the Lord has instructed us to do.

When Jesus performed this miracle, He required the servants to do all that they were capable of doing – filling the waterpots with water, drawing some out, and taking it to the headwaiter (2:7-8). Jesus did what the servants were incapable of doing – turning the water into wine (2:9). It is important to note that it was

undeniable for those who witnessed this that Jesus performed a miracle. The waterpots were filled to the brim, making it impossible for anything to be added and mixed with the water. Furthermore, these were used for “*purification*” or washing (cf. Matthew 15:2), not for storing or serving beverages, so there had not been any wine in these waterpots previously. Not only that, but the headwaiter recognized the wine as being *better* than what had previously been served (2:10). This showed that Jesus did not produce an inferior mix that appeared to be like wine but was of poor quality. In His miracle, He produced a drink that was of superior quality to what had already been served.

Some suppose that Jesus showed support for “social drinking” by His miracle on this occasion. It is important to note that the word *wine* is used in different ways in the Bible. When we think of wine in our age, we think of an alcoholic beverage. However, in New Testament times, wine could refer to either an alcoholic or a non-alcoholic beverage. Therefore, when we see the word *wine* in this passage, we should not automatically think of the wine with which we are familiar today. Rather, we must look to the context to determine the meaning.

If the wine here was alcoholic wine, then Jesus was present at an event where people were consuming alcohol. Further, He was present at an event where the people drank so much that it was more than the hosts anticipated because they ran out of wine. Then, after these people had “*drunk freely*” (2:10), He created *more* wine so they could continue drinking freely. If this passage is speaking about alcoholic wine, then Jesus not only condoned “social drinking,” He enabled these people in becoming drunk. Alcoholic wine does not fit with the context.

In contrast, non-alcoholic wine (unfermented grape juice) fits into the passage. It explains how the Lord was able to provide more wine to a group of people that had already “*drunk freely*” without contributing to drunkenness and debauchery. Non-alcoholic wine was also a common beverage for these people of this time. Albert Barnes comments: “The wine referred to here was doubtless such as was commonly drunk in Palestine. That was the pure juice of the grape. It was not brandied wine, nor drugged wine, nor wine compounded of various substances, such as we drink in this land. The common wine drunk in Palestine was that which was the simple juice of the grape.”

This was the first sign that Jesus performed (2:11). These miracles produced belief in His disciples. Following this wedding feast, Jesus went to Capernaum – a city in Galilee about 16 miles from Cana – with His mother, brothers, and disciples and stayed there a few days (2:12).

Jesus Cleansed the Temple

Read John 2:13-22

After the miracle in Cana, Jesus went to Jerusalem because “*the Passover of the Jews was near*” (2:13). This was one of the times in which all of the Jewish males were to appear before the Lord (Deuteronomy 16:16; Leviticus 23:4-8). When He arrived, He found merchants and money changers in the temple. These individuals were engaged in legitimate business – this had to be done somewhere. However, Jesus condemned them for conducting this business *in the temple*. He said, “*Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business*” (2:16). Though it does not receive much attention on this occasion, we will see that Jesus calling God His Father would be a point of contention with the Jews (cf. 5:17-18). The disciples recognized that Jesus’ actions in the temple were directly related to the Psalmist’s words: “*Zeal for Your house will consume me*” (2:17; Psalm 69:9).

The Jewish leaders questioned Jesus’ authority for His actions (2:18). This was a legitimate question. They had evidently overlooked Jesus’ statement, at least for now, in which He called God “*My Father*” (2:16). Rather than explaining specifically who He was, Jesus cited His future resurrection as proof for His authority: “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*” (2:19). The Jews did not understand this, thinking He was referring to the physical temple structure (2:20). However, John noted that Jesus was “*speaking of the temple of His body*” (2:21). This produced faith in His disciples after He was raised from the dead (2:22).

Public Response in Jerusalem

Read John 2:23-25

During the feast, many in Jerusalem believed in Jesus as they observed the signs He was performing. However, Jesus did not entrust Himself to them because He “*knew what was in man*” (2:25). He was aware of the fact that they would turn away from Him. If He committed Himself to them at this time, He may have been delivered over to the rulers before His hour had come (7:30; 8:20). Knowing this, Jesus acted in such a manner that God’s plan would be accomplished in the way it was intended to be accomplished.

Questions on Chapter 2

1. Who was present at the wedding feast in Cana? (2:1-2)
2. How did the wine created by Jesus compare with the wine that had previously been served? (2:9-10)
3. Does Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine justify "social drinking" today? Explain.
4. How many miracles had Jesus performed before turning the water to wine? (2:11)
5. When did Jesus cleanse the temple? (2:13)

6. Why did Jesus drive the moneychangers and those selling animals out of the temple? (2:14-16)

7. What did Jesus cite as His authority for doing this? (2:18-21)

8. Why did Jesus not entrust Himself to those who believed Him at this time? (2:23-25)

Chapter 3

Jesus Taught Nicodemus

This chapter begins a section in the book in which Jesus focused His attention on *individuals*. In this case, the individual was Nicodemus who came to Jesus and learned about the new birth and Jesus' mission. Following this is a discussion that John the Baptist had with his disciples about the roles of Jesus and himself.

Jesus Spoke with Nicodemus

Read John 3:1-21

Nicodemus was described as a ruler of the Jews (3:1), indicating that he was in a position of prominence. He was also a Pharisee, which meant he was a member of the “*strictest sect*” of the Jews (Acts 26:5). He came to Jesus by night (3:2). Many have speculated that the reason why he came by night was out of fear. While this is certainly possible, the Scriptures simply do not give us the reason why he came by night. It could have been due to fear as many suppose, though this would not be the only possible explanation (lack of crowds, insomnia, etc.).

After Nicodemus expressed a recognition that Jesus had “*come from God as a teacher*” (3:2), Jesus told him of the need to be born again: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (3:3). When Nicodemus questioned Jesus about this (3:4), Jesus explained further: “*Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*” (3:5).

What does it mean to be “*born of water and the Spirit*”? It is vitally important that we understand this since our entrance into the kingdom is dependent upon this new birth. Jesus was referring to water baptism that came as a response to the preaching of the gospel – which was delivered by the Spirit (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; 2:4). We can see this in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip “*preached Jesus to him*” (Acts 8:35) and in response to this, after “*they came to some water*” (Acts 8:36), the text says that “*they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him*” (Acts 8:38). When the eunuch was baptized into water in response to the preaching of the gospel, he was “*born again*” (3:3, 5). Just as physical birth requires the involvement of two parties – the mother and father – spiritual re-birth requires two parties as well – the water (baptism) and the Spirit (the word/gospel).

After explaining the need to be “*born again*” (3:3, 7), Jesus made a statement that has been wildly interpreted by some in the religious world: “*The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit*” (3:8). To properly understand this verse, we need to keep it in context. Jesus said this as He explained the new birth. He used the illustration of wind – through our physical senses we have evidence that it is there, even though we cannot determine where it came from or where it is going. To be “*born of the Spirit*” is not a physical birth (cf. 3:4-5). Therefore, although we cannot *see* it, we can see *evidence* of it – the repentance that is a prerequisite of baptism (Acts 2:38; Colossians 3:9-10).

When Nicodemus indicated that he did not understand, Jesus rebuked him: “*Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?*” (3:9-10). It is important to note that Jesus did not rebuke him for never having heard this before. After all, Jesus was teaching something new. However, Jesus rebuked Nicodemus because he as a “*teacher of Israel*” should have understood what Jesus was explaining to him despite the fact that it was new. After all, Nicodemus was a teacher (3:10) and a member of the sect that claimed to strictly keep the Law (Acts 26:5). Paul said the Law was a “*tutor to lead us to Christ*” (Galatians 3:24). Yet with Christ Himself teaching him, Nicodemus was slow to accept His teaching. Furthermore, Nicodemus should have been aware of John the Baptist’s work since he was a Pharisee (3:1). The Pharisees had sent people to John to find out who he was and he explained that he was there to prepare the way for Christ (1:22-27). So while this was new to Nicodemus, he was in a position that should have primed him to accept Jesus.

Jesus explained that He must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (3:14; cf. Numbers 21:4-9). This was so that people could have “*eternal life*” (3:15). Just as the salvation through the bronze serpent was *conditional* (they had to look at the serpent after having been bitten), salvation through Christ would be conditional as well (through faith, which would include being born again). This salvation was a demonstration of God’s great love for man (3:16).

God’s purpose in sending Christ was “*not...to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him*” (3:17). This means that Jesus came the first time to make salvation available. However, He will return a second time to judge the world (12:48; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27-28; Acts 17:31). In a sense, though the *final* judgment has not happened, there is a judgment that is being done now that relates to how people respond to Jesus. Jesus said, “*He who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*” (3:18).

This judgment would be based upon how people reacted to the Light (3:19) – Jesus (1:4, 9; 8:12). Those who prefer evil will hate and reject the Light (3:20). Those who practice the truth will welcome and come to the Light (3:21).

John Discussed Christ

Read John 3:22-36

After the discussion with Nicodemus about the need for people to be “*born again*” (3:3-7), John recorded that both Jesus and John the Baptist were baptizing in different locations (3:22-23) – Jesus in Judea and John in Aenon near Salim. John also indicated that this was before the time when John the Baptist would be put into prison (cf. Matthew 4:12) – this would eventually lead to the prophet’s death (Matthew 14:1-12).

At this time, while John’s disciples were discussing the topic of purification, they asked him about Jesus baptizing and the large crowds that were coming to Him (3:25-26). John then explained his role and Jesus’ role: “*He must increase, but I must decrease*” (3:30). John was not jealous of Jesus in any way. Instead, he knew that Jesus was from heaven (3:27), knew that his role was to prepare the way for Jesus (3:28), and rejoiced at His coming (3:29).

John then explained that Jesus came from heaven and was, therefore, “*above all*” (3:31) and that “*He testifies*” about “*what He has seen and heard*” (3:32), speaking the “*words of God*” (3:34). He also indicated that Jesus was in this position of authority because of the special relationship He had with the Father (3:35).

There is some confusion over the last verse of the chapter. The New American Standard translates it this way: “*He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him*” (3:36). Rather than using the words *believe* and *obey*, the King James Version has the word *believe* in both places. This seems like it would be helpful for those who believe in salvation by faith *alone*. Yet that is not what this verse is teaching. The first word is the Greek word *pisteuo*, which means *faith*. One must have faith to have eternal life. The second word is a different Greek word – *apeitheo*. It means to *not comply*. It is from a root word that means *not compliant* or *disobedient*. Jesus was certainly talking about *obedience*. If we do not obey Him, we will not see life; instead, we will receive the wrath of God. This is not a contradictory concept. If we truly *believe* Jesus, we will *obey* His words rather than finding excuses for disobedience while claiming to believe in Him (cf. Luke 6:46).

Questions on Chapter 3

1. Who was Nicodemus? (3:1)
2. Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus at night? (3:2)
3. Explain what it means to be born again (3:3, 5)
4. What did Jesus cite that foreshadowed Him being "*lifted up*"? (3:14)
5. Why did God send His Son? (3:16-17)

6. Why do people not come to the Light? (3:19-20)
7. When questioned by his disciples about Jesus baptizing, what did John say about the future of himself and Jesus? (3:30)
8. Who does John say will “*not see life*”? (3:36)

This is a sample of the material contained in

John Study Guide

by Andy Sochor

Copyright © 2018

All rights reserved

To order single copies, visit:

store.gospelarmory.com/product/john-study-guide/

To place a bulk order (10 or more copies)

and receive a special discount, visit:

www.gospelarmory.com/bulk/

Thank you!

