

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

SIGNS, TO BELIEF, TO LIFE

JOHN

Many have called the Gospel of John the “Heavenly Gospel” because it is a book that has its beginnings directly in the realm eternal. John did not want anyone confused about what was happening or exactly who you were encountering as you read this Gospel. He wanted you to know that Jesus is God in the flesh, that He had eternal life coursing through His veins and that He came to this earth in order to share this life with the world.

The way John presents this Gospel is what makes it so compelling. Seasoned preachers, teachers, and faithful witnesses of the Word, all point to this gospel as their go-to book, as their primary sources for sharing with others the person and work of Christ. The reason is because it is so clear, simple, and instructive in its primary message that a person can have absolutely no background in the Bible at all, and pick up the themes of John, and respond to John’s call to believe in the Person of Christ. At the same time, even for the most seasoned theologian, this Gospel presents a profound and deep teaching that it simply falls past our ability to understand and comprehend some of the truth contained in John’s message.

In your New Testament, John wrote a total of five books (John, 1, 2, 3, John, and Revelation), but none of the other four come close to the literary depth and yet the overall simplicity that exists in this Gospel. Because of this profound dichotomy, famed Greek Scholar A.T. Robertson said, “The Gospel of John is the Supreme literary work of the world.”

Therefore, this book is a book for the world of believers, and a book for the world of the broken. It is a book for the skilled, and a book for the simple. It is a book for the public congregation, and a book for the private conversation. The Gospel of John that can do it all!

How to Think About John

This book is written by the apostle John, but you would never know that by reading it, as John never identifies himself as the author. The way we figure that out is because of a few clues that John leaves for us in the writing:

John 13:23 “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.”

John 18:15-16 “And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest.”

John 19:26 “When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, “Woman, behold thy son!”

John 20:2-4 “Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher.”

John 21:23-25 “Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? This is the disciple which testified of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.”

When we put all of this information together, and start doing some ‘process of elimination’ the author of this Gospel comes out to be none other than John the Apostle.

Why didn’t John just come out and say that he was the one who wrote this Gospel? You need to understand how ancient writings worked. In ancient literature, it was customary for the author not to mention their name in the writing. And John is simply following suit.

Furthermore, when considering the life of John, we can safely determine that he was a fairly young man when He heard those life-changing words from the Savior, “Follow Me.” He may have even been a teenager when he first started to be trained by Jesus, and then lived to be perhaps in his nineties by the time he was called up to heaven.

Lastly, in learning how to think about this writing, we see that it is broken up into five major sections.

The Introduction (1:1-18)— In literary terms, these verses are called the prologue, but we’ll do just fine calling it the introduction, because that is exactly what it is. John is introducing you to Jesus as He existed in eternity past. That was his entire purpose; to introduce Jesus as the preexistent God of the Ages, and then how the beginnings of His ministry began.

The Signs that Caused Surprise (1:19- 12:50)— What you will begin to notice right away is that John loved to use the word ‘signs’ as he describes the miracles of Jesus. This will be covered more fully in a moment, but this is John’s way of telling us that the miracles that Jesus performed were not done simply to impress a crowd. They certainly did cause a stir among those who watched in amazement, and for those to whom a miracle was performed, but Jesus used these miracles as a sign to point directly to His authenticity. And this section can actually be broken up into three other divisions.

Deity (Chapter 2— Chapter 5): The miracles Jesus performed were to prove His divinity.

Debate (Chapter 6— Chapter 9): Jesus’ miracles and teachings are being disputed about whether or not Jesus is the Messiah.

Disowned (Chapter 10— Chapter 12): Jesus is officially rejected by the leaders and the nation as the Messiah.

The Sayings that Caused a Stir (13—17)—In this section we start with the washing of the disciples’ feet and we find several discourses that began to trouble and stir the disciples. Jesus speaks of going away to heaven. We know that Thomas is particularly bothered by what Jesus has to say here, and it prompts Jesus to go even further about His relationship to God the Father, and His Oneness with Him. By the time we reach chapter 15 we find that mysterious and deep passage about the True Vine and the branches. Chapter 16 records information about the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, and then, by the time we reach chapter 17, we find that great High Priestly prayer offered by Christ on behalf of all of those who would follow after Him.

The Suffering that Caused Salvation (18—20)— Chapter 18 begins with Jesus’ betrayal in the garden and then the rest of the passage leads us into the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The Conclusion (Chapter 21)—Technically called the epilogue, this section deals with the conclusion of the restoration of Peter, and the close of the Gospel once Jesus was raised from the dead.

What to Look for in John

It is important to know that John specifically set up his Gospel in a certain way so that the mind would connect with the heart, and the heart would connect with God. That is why if you try to trace John’s Gospel chronologically, you’ll find yourself confused and frustrated instead of convicted and full.

However, because John set up this gospel in a certain way, if we can learn about the information he included in this work, and the purpose for that information, then we will have an exciting time studying this book.

Key Words—

Believe: This word occurs **98 times** throughout your reading and study of this book. You may want to underline or circle each time this word surfaces. You will be amazed at how many times John calls you to read and consider this word.

Life: Specifically a reference to eternity, this word is mentioned **55 times** in this work.

Witness: You’ll find this word a total of **50 times** and that it is used in a number of different ways.

Truth: **35 times** this word is used in the Gospel of John and it is central to understanding the message of the book.

Light: The metaphor of light is another prominent theme in John’s Gospel and is expressed a total of **23 times**.

Darkness: This is the contrasting metaphor to light and John uses this word **9 times**.

Key Signs— There are a total of 35 miracles that Jesus performed as we add them all up in all four of the Gospels, but John only mentions 7 of them. Also, it is important to note once again that John calls them ‘signs’ not miracles. In other words, each miracle Jesus performed was special confirmation of Jesus’ message and Person. Furthermore, each of these miracles John selected had a deeper meaning than what was physically accomplished. All of these signs had a spiritual significance as well. This is John telling us, “I have selected special miracles for you for a specific reason.”

The verse to reference for this point would be John 2:11, “This beginning of miracles (signs) did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.”

Water into Wine (John 2): This represents the “Kingdom Imagery” of what will ultimately occur in the physical kingdom of Christ. In essence, it represents new life. What happens to the poor dead spirit of man once Jesus becomes involved? It is altogether changed from death to life. What happened to the water? It was altogether changed from water to wine.

Healing of the Nobleman’s Son (John 4): This, John said, was the second miracle that Jesus performed during His earthly ministry. And besides the miracle performed, the deeper message here tells us about the purpose and power of faith. The noble man came to Jesus, and wanted Jesus to come to his house to heal his son. But verse 50-51 says, “Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, “Thy son liveth.” When we follow Christ, we become a people of faith. We can’t see in the immediate what God is doing, but we trust Him and are met with the results later.

Healing the Paralytic (John 5): This passage highlights the greatness of God's grace toward us. We could not get to God; we were too broken and helpless. But, giving us what we don't deserve, God came to us so that we might be healed.

Feeding the Five- Thousand (John 6:1-15): It would be very difficult to state the deep spiritual significance of this passage. It is actually a good example of the incredible layered significance that exists below the surface of this passage. John just takes you deeper and deeper and deeper in terms of what Jesus taught. But at its most basic function, this passage teaches God's people about what it is actually like to work with God. Really, it is God who does the work, but He allows us to be involved in the process. When we share the Gospel with someone, that is all we do, we share the message. However, we know that it is God who actually saves a soul. We know God performed the miracle of bringing a dead spirit to life, we just brought the 'bread.' That's all the disciples did in this passage. Jesus multiplied the bread and fish— He did the miracle. But He allowed the disciples the privilege of working with Him and sharing it with everyone.

Walking On Water (John 6:16-21): In this passage, we see that the disciples are met with a physical storm, but if we follow this passage in a spiritual sense, we know that we can get caught in storms of our own. When we apply this passage in this way, we see that Jesus is there walking with us right in the middle of our trouble, and that He also has the power to bring ultimate peace in your life as He calms the storm.

Healing the Blind (John 9:1-7): This miracle had to have been the most incredible event that had ever happened to this man. But we also know that Jesus is the One who can take the blind eyes of the heart, and cause them to see spiritually. What an event that is!

Raising of Lazarus (John 11): The greatest miracle of them all happens right here. We would probably like to ask Lazarus a few questions once we get to heaven. But the entire reason we get to go to heaven and have an opportunity to meet with Lazarus, is because Jesus, by His power, is able to cause us to raise us from eternal death into eternal life.

It is also interesting to note that the first miracle that Jesus performed was done at a wedding, and the last miracle Jesus performed was at a funeral. There will be days when you will have glad times, and there will be days when you have sad times, but Jesus will be there in every situation.

Key Sayings— In addition to the key signs that display the power of Christ, we also have the sayings that confirm the Person of Christ. John is very intentional at this point to list out what are often referred to as the "I Am" sayings of Jesus. There are seven statements John records for us where Jesus specifically refers to Himself as a sinner's only hope for salvation.

These "I Am" statements can get lost in a contemporary audience if someone were to read this Gospel without any other background information, but there would be no question in the mind of the Jew of what Jesus was talking about when He applied the term "I Am" to Himself.

This was a term that expressly spoke of Deity. It is the name God used for Himself in Exodus 3. The name God uses for Himself translates to the "Ever-present One." There was never a time when He did not exist and there will never be a time when He will not exist. God is the "I AM" the Ever-Present One, and that is the exact name Jesus uses as He makes these sayings. The Jews would have understood, and did understand fully that Jesus was telling them He is God.

I Am The Bread of Life— John 6:35

I Am The Light of the World— John 8:12

I Am The Door— John 10:9

I Am the Good Shepherd— John 10:11

I Am The Resurrection and the Life— John 11:25

I Am The Way, Truth, and Life— John 14:6

I Am The True Vine— John 15:1

What to Gain from John

The Life Book—John really makes it easy for any who would want to know his purpose for writing, because in John 20:30-31 we read, “And many other signs true did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

John has just given you a map to follow if you look carefully. In these two verses you can draw a line in your mind from the word “signs” to the word “believe.” With each mention of the miracles, John stresses this over and over again— you are supposed to look at Jesus’ work and believe on Him.

Then, in your mind draw a line from the word “believe” in this passage to the word “life.” This is what belief in Christ leads to; it leads to life.

From signs to belief, and belief to life, John maps out clearly and simply how God made a way to heaven through Jesus Christ. John is the “Life Book” in the Bible.



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