

Matthew: Jesus and His Promised Kingdom

Mark: The Servant Jesus

Luke: The Son of Man Among Men

John: Life in Jesus, the Son of God

Acts: The Beginnings of the Church

Today it is often the first New Testament book recommended to new Christians for study. That is because it has a combination of many desirable features that make it a primer for reading and study: it clearly presents foundational truths; it combines fact and interpretation; it presents the way of salvation succinctly and persuasively (e.g., 3:16); its very setting and atmosphere are universal; and it is picturesque and attractive in varied forms.

John's gospel also fits into the transitional scheme of God's revelatory program:

- (1) The Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the early disciples preached first to Israel.
- (2) Matthew's gospel was directed primarily to Jews; Mark's to Romans; and Luke's to Gentiles.
- (3) John's perspective was particularly worldwide, with references to Jew, Roman, and Greek kept more in the background.

what is perhaps the most-quoted verse in the New Testament? Do you see any significance that it is in this fourth gospel by John?

Read the opening verse of each of the synoptic gospels. (Read Luke 1:5 in place of Luke 1:1.) Then read the first verse of John. What are your thoughts? cf Gen1:1

John explains specifically in 20:30–31 why his gospel was written. It was primarily to win *unbelievers* (Jew and Gentile) to a saving faith. John also must have had in mind the confirming of *believers* in their faith, so that the church would have a stronger witness.

Read 20:30–31 for John's purpose in reporting the "signs" of Jesus in his gospel. The miracles were called "signs" by John because they *signified* vital spiritual truths. John wanted his readers not only to learn those spiritual truths, but to come to a personal relationship with Jesus through faith in Him as the Christ, the Son of God. The theme of his account may be stated as "Life in Jesus, the Son of God."

Keep in mind the words *believe* and *life* as key words of John's gospel.  
What is the connection between signs, belief, and life?

John also had other purposes in mind, subordinate but related to those mentioned above. One was to refute the heresy of Docetism, which denied the true humanity of Jesus (observe John's

“answer” in 1:14). Another was to expose the unbelief of Judaism<sup>8</sup> (e.g., “He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him,” 1:11, TEV).

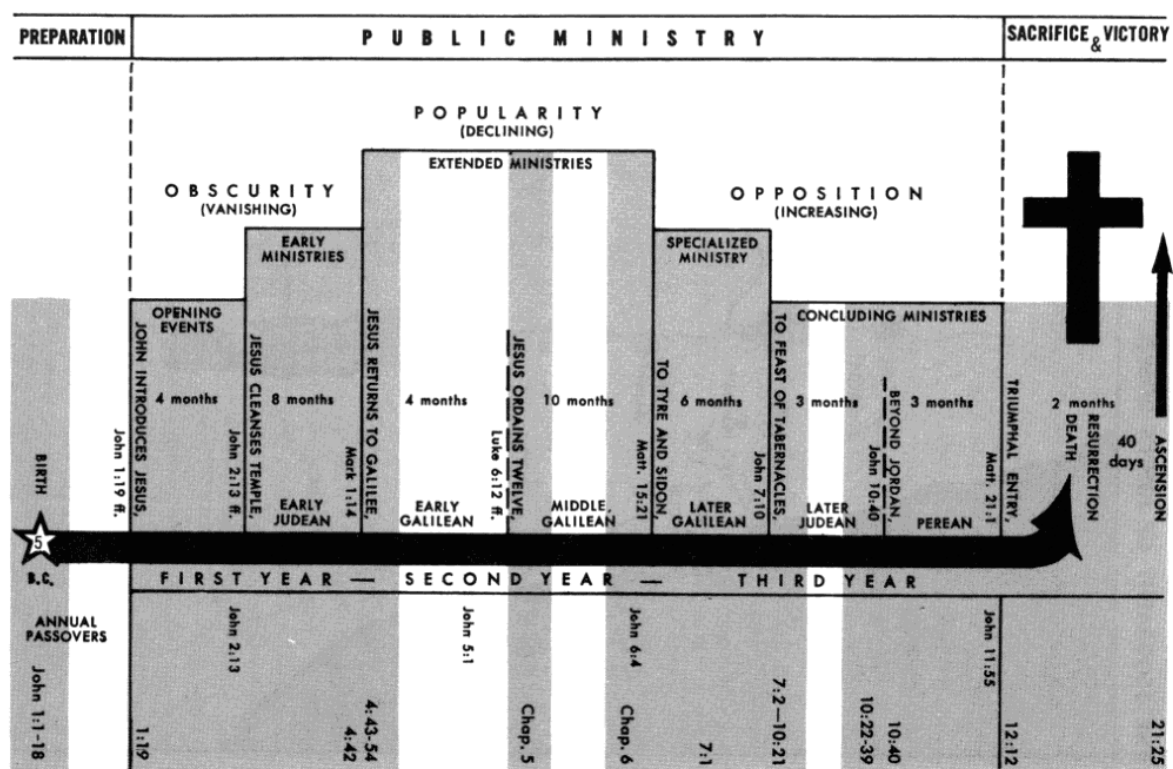
## THE SYNOPTICS AND JOHN

| The Synoptics                                                       | John                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| chiefly concerned with Jesus’ ministry in the north, around Galilee | gives more coverage to Jesus’ ministry in the south, around Judea                                                              |
| much emphasis on “kingdom” inheritance                              | more emphasis on the person of Jesus (“I am’s”) and eternal-life inheritance                                                   |
| Jesus as Son of David, Son of man                                   | Jesus especially as Son of God                                                                                                 |
| the gospel of the infant church                                     | the gospel of the maturing church                                                                                              |
| the earthly story                                                   | the heavenly meaning                                                                                                           |
| Jesus’ sayings generally short (e.g., parables)                     | more of the long discourses of Jesus                                                                                           |
| comparatively little commentary by the gospel writer                | much commentary by John                                                                                                        |
| only one mention of a Passover                                      | three, possibly four, Passovers cited (on this basis it is concluded that Jesus’ public ministry lasted 3½ years) <sup>1</sup> |

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<sup>8</sup> The word *Jew* appears about seventy times in the gospel.

<sup>1</sup> Jensen, I. L. (1981). *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament: Search and discover* (181). Chicago: Moody Press.



## FOUR MAIN SECTIONS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

|                             |                                 |                                |                         |       |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| 1:1                         | 5:1                             | 12:36b                         | 18:12                   | 21:25 |
| IDENTIFICATIONS             | CONFLICTS                       | PREPARATIONS                   | CRISES                  |       |
| <b>TRUE CLAIMS</b>          | <b>FALSE CHARGES</b>            | <b>INTIMATE FELLOWSHIP</b>     | <b>REDEEMPTIVE WORK</b> |       |
| INTRODUCTIONS TO THE PEOPLE | OPPOSITION BY THE JEWISH RULERS | INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DISCIPLES | EXPERIENCES IN TRIUMPH  |       |

#### IV. PROMINENT SUBJECTS

##### A. THE PROLOGUE (1:1–18)

This passage is unexcelled in the Bible for its compactness of the gospel message. The first three words repeat the first three words of Genesis, and two verses later John makes the summary statement that all things were made by the “Word” (v. 3). From that point on, however, John’s object in the prologue is not to expand on the matchless cosmogeny of Genesis, but to show how this Creator Jesus was involved in His Father’s plan of redemption for the fallen human race.

#### COMPARISONS OF JOHN 1:1 AND 1:14

| verse 1                        | verse 14                    |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| In the beginning was the Word, | And the Word was made flesh |
| and the Word was with God,     | and dwelt among us          |
| and the Word was God           | full of grace and truth     |

In 1:1–4:54 John shows Jesus as the object of belief (see Chart 46). Read the prologue and observe how Jesus is identified as the One to believe. The accompanying diagram of comparisons further illustrates such unique revelations. How do these verses make it clear that the “Word” must be Jesus Christ? Where in the prologue is Jesus Christ first identified by name? How does the title “Word” identify a main ministry of Jesus to this world? In answering this, consider the meaning of the phrase “he has explained Him” (1:18).

##### B. JESUS’ MEETING WITH NICODEMUS (3:1–21)

Before this point in the gospel John has not recorded many actual spoken words of Jesus. A few of Jesus’ commands (e.g., “Come, and you will see,” 1:39; “Follow me,” 1:43) and a few prophecies (e.g., “You shall see greater things than these,” 1:50; “In three days I will raise it up,” 2:19) appear. But any extensive treatment on the subject of salvation is limited to the words of the gospel writer (1:1–18) and of John the Baptist (1:29–34).

Now in the design of his gospel, John breaks forth with the story of one of the greatest confrontations of Jesus with an unsaved man. The man was Nicodemus, an influential leader of the Jews. The subject of the conversation was the urgency and way of salvation. Nicodemus’s informant was none other than the “teacher come from God.”

Little did John know that one of the verses (3:16) of this passage would become a universal “golden text” of Christians in the centuries to follow.

Read the passage and observe how Jesus reveals Himself to be both divine Teacher and Life Giver.

#### C. YEARS OF CONFLICT (5:1–12:36a)

At chapter 5 the author begins to record instances of open opposition to Jesus by the Jewish rulers.<sup>16</sup> A key sentence of chapter 5 is, “For this reason the Jews began to persecute Jesus” (v. 16, TEV). Refer to the survey chart of John (Chart 46, p. 187), and observe that the section 5:1–12:36a is called *Years of conflict*. The chapters of this conflict section cover about two years of Jesus’ public ministry, which were marked by a growing hate of the Jewish rulers against Jesus because of His claims to Messiahship and divine sonship. Those religionists had one goal: kill Jesus.

Many of the multitudes gave a sympathetic ear to Jesus’ claims, and demonstrated their support by giving Him a royal reception as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (12:14). There were many persons from the multitude who believed on Him.

And then there were Jesus’ close friends and disciples. For the most part they are in the background in John’s gospel during these chapters, but all references to them reveal a loyal group of followers. (Judas was the exception.)

Throughout this period of conflict with His enemies, Jesus faithfully performed His mission. He told who He was, He demonstrated who He was, and He invited all people to believe on Him to be saved. When that mission was over, He “no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews” (11:54), for He was ready now to accomplish a more private ministry to the twelve disciples.

The climax of opposition came in the hour of crucifixion, recorded by John in chapter 19. The antagonism of the rulers and people against Jesus during these last two years of His public ministry was incessant. Even some of Jesus’ disciples opposed Him on occasion.

After writing the *Conflicts* section John chose to include a long *Day of preparation* section (12:36b–17:26) dealing with Jesus’ intimate fellowship with His disciples just preceding His arrest and trial. The interrelationships of these four parts of John’s gospel are shown in the accompanying diagram.

## INTERRELATED PARTS OF JOHN’S GOSPEL

Compare this diagram with Chart 47, page 189.

#### D. FAREWELL DISCOURSES (14:1–16:33)

Anyone who asks the question, “What kind of person was Jesus?” will find innumerable answers in John’s gospel. This is particularly true in the section 12:36b–17:26. Chapters 14–16 contain three farewell discourses of Jesus, which were delivered to His disciples on the evening

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<sup>16</sup> In most instances in the gospels, the word *Jews*, in context of opposition to Jesus, refers to the Jewish rulers.

before His crucifixion. The first discourse, chapter 14, was probably spoken in the upper room where the Last Supper (chap. 13) was held.<sup>17</sup> The last phrase of 14:31 suggests that Jesus and His disciples left the house and started walking east toward the Garden of Gethsemane. The second discourse (15:1–16:4a) and the third (16:4b–33) may then have been spoken as the group moved quietly through the city.<sup>18</sup> The high-priestly prayer of chapter 17 was prayed before Jesus and His disciples crossed the Kidron Valley on their way to Gethsemane.

The accompanying diagram breaks down passage 14:1–16:33 into the three discourses and suggests a title for each discourse. Use these suggestions as starters for further study. Among other things, study what the passages teach about the *Person* of Jesus.

#### E. HIGH-PRIESTLY PRAYER (17:1–26)

Jesus' high-priestly prayer in chapter 17 has been called the New Testament's noblest and purest pearl of devotion. A Christian cannot read this chapter without being warmed in heart over the tremendous fact that his Lord prays to the Father on *his* behalf.

We would like to be able to reconstruct the setting of this five-minute prayer of Jesus but no details are given in the account, other than that Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven (17:1), and spoke the words in the presence of the eleven disciples (cf. 18:1). Few details, but an awesome truth: the Son of God speaking to His Father in heaven about His disciples.

### THREE DISCOURSES OF JOHN 14:1–16:33

| FIRST DISCOURSE    |       | SECOND DISCOURSE      |       | THIRD DISCOURSE   |       |
|--------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
| 14:1               | 14:31 | 15:1                  | 16:4a | 16:4b             | 16:33 |
| The Father's House |       | Vine and the Branches |       | Promises of Jesus |       |

The prayer is clearly of three main parts:

1. Jesus prays for Himself (17:1–5)
2. Jesus prays for His disciples (17:6–19)
3. Jesus prays for the church (17:20–26)

When you study the chapter, think of the heart needs of the disciples at that time. Also, think how Jesus was feeling at that time, knowing what trying experiences were awaiting Him in the next hours. Let these studies be the background of applying the prayer to your own life.

<sup>17</sup> Some Bible students prefer to regard 13:31–38 as part of this first discourse. The content is not affected either way.

<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to say where the second discourse ends and the third begins because of the constantly recurring subjects that Jesus spoke about in this informal conversation with His disciples. Actually all three farewell discourses could be called one discourse, because they are so intimately related.

#### F. HOUR OF SACRIFICE (18:1–19:42)

After the high-priestly prayer of chapter 17 the succession of events was this:

Soul agony of Gethsemane<sup>19</sup>

Arrest

Trials

Scourging

Crucifixion

Death

#### G. RESURRECTION CHAPTER (20:1–31)

The resurrection of Jesus was both prescheduled of His Father and unanticipated by the disciples. Jesus had clearly instructed His disciples earlier about His forthcoming death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22), but they did not understand the meaning then, nor did they even remember the words later. Understanding would come through believing, and believing would come through signs. John 20 records some of the signs that restored the disciples to Jesus in a personal and new relationship to Him as the risen Lord. How utter defeat can suddenly and miraculously turn to victory is one of the glowing truths of this chapter.

Recall 20:30–31. The word *signs* is a key word of the verses. What signs are recorded in John 20? Observe in the chapter how often the word *see* (and related words) appears in the chapter.

*14:25-26. What Jesus said in the days of His earthly ministry was only partially understood. Three things were needed for the apostles to understand Jesus' person and mission: (1) His death had to occur. (2) He had to rise again to vindicate His claim and demonstrate His victory. [6 highlights] (3) The **Spirit** had to come (He would be sent by **the Father ... in My name**, i.e., in Jesus' place and for Him) and interpret the meanings of Jesus' words and deeds. The Spirit, Jesus said, **will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you**. This verse is addressed to the apostles. The context limits the "all things" to the interpretation and significance of His person and work. The Spirit worked in their minds, reminding them of His teaching and giving them insight into its meaning (cf. 2:22; 7:39; 20:9).*

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<sup>19</sup> John makes only the brief mention of Jesus' entering the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples (18:1).

i.e. *id est*, that is

cf. *confer*, compare